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

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Chapter 5.

FRENCH INDOCHINA AND THAILAND.

5.1. Introduction.

This chapter deals with the colonies of two Western powers (France and Portugal) and an independent Asian state: Thailand, all three situated in Southeast Asia and therefore coming under Japanese pressure during the thirties. All three were geographically of great importance. Northern French Indochina was a gateway to Southern China, and was therefore very important for Japan in its struggle with the Nationalist Chinese. Southern Indochina and, to an even larger extent Thailand, were important for Japan if it was to threaten Singapore and the Dutch possessions on Borneo. From the airfields in Southern Indochina, both Singapore and the British and Dutch oilfields and air bases in Borneo were within range of their bombers. Portuguese Timor lay astride the important airway between Java and Northern Australia. Whereas Thailand and French Indochina were more or less a problem for British diplomacy, Portuguese Timor was a thorn in the side for both the NEI and the Australian government, and, to a lesser extent for the British.

Things were complicated even more by the fact, that there was strong antagonism between Thailand and French Indochina, which led to a short war in 1941 between the two countries. Notwithstanding Japanese intervention in that war to their advantage, all Western powers involved tried to maintain the status quo, but Great Britain and the Netherlands on one hand and the United States on the other hand had different views on how to accomplish that. Specifically for Britain, much was at stake in keeping Thailand at least neutral, and if possible to bring it into the allied camp. Thailand was interested in keeping its freedom, and performed a masterly balancing act between the Western powers and Japan. This chapter will narrate, how the diplomats of the countries involved tried to realise the foreign policy objectives of their governments in an extremely complicated interplay of forces.

For Dutch historians the study of the French strategy in coping with the Japanese threat is very interesting, because the French opted for a completely different strategy than the Dutch with regard to the Japanese. Both coping strategies will be compared and commented upon in this treatise. An invaluable source of documents in this respect were the letters and telegrams of the Dutch chargé d'affaires in Bangkok, A.J.D. Steenstra Toussaint. He was an industrious and well-informed diplomat, with access to, and good contacts with, policymakers up to the highest levels in the Thai government.

Fascist-ruled Portugal was traditionally allied with the British, and suspicious towards the Dutch. When the Portuguese government did not take adequate measures to avoid further Japanese penetration, the Dutch had to react. Under the strong leadership of the Dutch Governor-General, they acted militarily, provoking a rift with the Dutch government in exile in London which, under British influence, was far more cautious. The episode is important, because it illustrates the growing dominance of Dutch foreign policy by the Governor-General in Batavia, and because the flawless execution of a coup de main against
Portuguese Timor by the Dutch Colonial Army highlights the fact that this was a professional Army and not the ragtag kind of police force which some Dutch historians have tried to describe. Therefore, Portuguese Timor should not be left out of a treatise such as this.

All three geographic entities discussed here lacked oil resources, and were therefore dependent on imports of crude oil and oil products from British possessions, the Netherlands East Indies or the United States, which gave these countries an edge in their dealings with Thailand, FIC and Portuguese Timor. A recurrent theme in this chapter will be the way this economic weapon was used by all parties concerned.

### 5.1.1. The French approach.

The study of the political and military attitude of the French Government towards its colony in the Far East is interesting, because this government had to answer the same difficult questions as the British and Dutch Governments with respect to their colonial possessions in the Far East. Yet we know that the French chose a different strategy than the two other colonial powers: a strategy of accommodation towards the Japanese in place of confrontation. Their first priority was the maintenance of French sovereignty over their colony, French Indochina\(^{243}\). It was a strategy of cohabitation, with a minimum of collaboration, with the Japanese, a policy which had as a result that compared with Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, thousands of lives were saved which otherwise would have been lost directly or indirectly as a result of war and enslavement both of the Europeans and the Indigenous people.

To the Dutch Government, the idea of cooperating with the Japanese after years of Japanese economic interference in the NEI was unacceptable, and it was therefore never considered a viable option. Where the British at least understood French pragmatism, the U.S. Government despised the way the French dealt with the Japanese, which in the opinion of the U.S. Government was clearly immoral. It was really afraid that the NEI Government would follow the example of the French Colonial Government, and therefore fall within the Japanese sphere of influence. Strangely enough, Dutch historiography has not busied itself with a comparative study of French and Dutch options in the face of the Japanese threat. This chapter attempts to be the first explorative study of these aspects.

Ultimately, French diplomacy toward Japan in the interwar years failed, because there were a number of underlying continuities which also were discernible in Dutch-Japanese and English-Japanese diplomatic relations. These factors were an impotence intrinsic to a vastly over-extended imperial commitment, an inability to reach meaningful accords with other powers with responsibilities in the Far East, and a combination of arrogance and fear deeply rooted in white racism\(^{243}\).

### 5.1.2. A short history of Indochina.

French Indochina (FIC) has always been strongly influenced by the two dominant cultures of Southeast Asia: China and India. This is recognized in its name. The country consists of three entities, which were more or less sovereign states during much of its history:

\(^{243}\) For reasons of efficiency the term "French Indochina" will be abbreviated to "FIC" in the text of this chapter.

Vietnam along the coast, Cambodia and Laos in the interior. The French, however, had split up Vietnam in three historical provinces: Tonkin in the North, bordering China; Annam along the coast of the South Chinese Sea, and Cochin-China in the South. The total area of the five provinces of which FIC consisted was 737,880 square kilometres (1.5 times larger than continental France), with a total population of 24 million people in 1940, of which 400,000 were Chinese and 50,000 were Europeans (of whom 40,000 were French).

Before the French, were the Chinese. The first Chinese Emperor, Shih Huang-Ti, subdued what is now called Vietnam in 221 B.C. This started a cycle repeating itself time after time: lax and weak Chinese Emperors were successfully challenged by local chieftains. After regaining power, Chinese Emperors of a new dynasty reconquered Vietnam. The successful revolt of the Jeannes d'Arc of Vietnam, the sisters Trung (Trung Trac and Trung Nhi) against their Chinese overlords in 40 A.D., became famous, illustrating already then the martial qualities of the Vietnamese. These qualities were proved again when the Vietnamese defeated a Mongolian invasion under Kublai Khan in 1282 - 1283, and another in 1287 - 1288. The Emperors of the Ming Dynasty eventually reconquered North-Vietnam in the 16th century. Thereafter the Chinese established a lasting cultural domination over the local cultures.

Around that time the first Europeans arrived: the Portuguese and the Dutch in the 16th, followed by the English. The French followed with Jesuit missionaries in Tonkin under Alexander of Rhodes in 1627. In 1660 a trading Company, the Compagnie de Chine, was founded, with offices in Tonkin and Southern China. The Annamite prince Nguyen Anh closed the Treaty of Versailles with France in 1787, in which he obtained French military assistance to consolidate his empire, in exchange for French sovereignty over the island Pulau Condor.

Trade had become more interesting after prince Nguyen Anh had reunited the Empire of Vietnam in 1802 with French military assistance after a series of bloody wars, and ascended to the throne as Emperor Gia Long (1802 - 1820), bringing peace and stability to the land. French missionaries and traders expanded their activities over the whole of Vietnam in the middle of the last century. Emperor Thieu Tri started the harassment of these missionaries, which was stepped up by his successor, Tu Duc (1847 - 1883). The execution of French missionaries (Père Borie, 1838) caused a public outcry in France, resulting in French naval expeditions in 1842, 1845 and 1847. The French Government, under Emperor Napoleon III, started a more audacious policy of colonisation, resulting in the bombardment of the coastal city of Tourane in August 1858, followed by the military occupation of Saigon in February 1859 by French marines under Admiral Rigault de Genouilly. For the British, it was obvious that the French were trying to undercut British expansionism in India and China by interposing themselves in Indochina.2440

Under the strong leadership of the French Navy Minister, Chasseloup-Laubat, the French rapidly expanded their Saigon bridgehead into Cochin-China. On 31 July 1861, Admiral Charmer proclaimed the formal annexation of three provinces of Cochin-China into the French Empire, which annexation was formalized with the Treaty of Saigon of 5 June

2440 Nicholas Tarling: "The British and the first Japanese move into Indochina" Journal of Southeast Asian Studies, 21:1 (1990), 35. To be referred to subsequently as Tarling: "First Japanese Move".
Cambodia accepted a French protectorate in 1863.

The reason for this frantic expansionism was the hope that the Mekong river would prove to be navigable to the Chinese frontier, which then would open the immense Chinese market for French industrial goods. The exploratory expedition of 1866 - 1868 along the Mekong under Doudart de Lagrée however discovered that the Mekong was not usable as a corridor of trade into China, like the Yangtse River. The only usable corridor was that along the Red River, in Tonkin further to the north. Therefore, Admiral Dupré briefly occupied Hanoi in 1872, but under pressure from the newly-installed Republican Government in Paris had to withdraw. However, a commercial treaty was concluded with the Annamite government in 1874, and at the Treaty of Saigon of 15 March 1874 the Annamite Government acquiesced to the cession of Cochinchina to France.

When the Annamite Government concluded a treaty with a Chinese-British company for the exploitation of the Hon Gay coalmines, the French government decided to intervene. Hanoi was reoccupied in April 1882, and Hon Gay in March 1883. Under the colonial administration of Jules Ferry the delta of the Red River was occupied, as was the old imperial city of Hué. With the treaties of Hué in August 1883 and June 1884, France proclaimed both Tonkin and Annam a protectorate.

China however did not agree with these treaties, and threatened to occupy Tonkin. Clashes with French troops at the border resulted in an undeclared French-Chinese war (1884 - 1885). A French Naval Squadron under Admiral Courbet bombarded Chinese and Formosan harbours, and even occupied the Pescadores in the South China Sea. The French Foreign Legion under General Brière de l'Isle occupied Northern Tonkin and the Chinese forts at Langson, which forced the Chinese to the negotiating table, and with the Treaty of Tientsin of 9 June 1885 the Chinese agreed to the establishment of a French protectorate over the whole of Vietnam. China however has always considered this as a temporary loss, and General Chiang Kai-Shek would later successfully convince American president Roosevelt that the French should never be allowed to return to FIC.

At the time of French expansion in the North, Cochinchina was a French Colony, administered by the Ministère de la Marine et des Colonies. The two protectorates Tonkin and Annam however were administered by the French Foreign Office. This situation was redressed on 17 October 1887 with the founding of the Indochinese Union, which brought the three territories together with Cambodia, and later with Laos. The competent Governor-General Paul Doumer (1897 - 1902) unified the country like his Dutch contemporary Van Heutz did in the NEI, establishing a powerful and unified internal administration. The emperor at Hué lost all political power, remaining a symbolic force. The same happened with the King of Cambodia in Phnom Penh, and the King of Laos at Luang

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Claude Hesse d’Alzon: La présence militaire française en Indochine, 1940 - 1945, Vincennes 1985, 9. To be abbreviated in subsequent notes to ”Hesse d’Alzon”.
As has been noted hereabove, the French Colonial Administration had split the old Vietnamese Empire into three distinct provinces: Tonkin, Annam and Cochin-China. All three provinces were inhabited by Vietnamese, who strongly preferred the return of a unified Vietnam. It were the Japanese, however, who reunited the three provinces into one Vietnam again in August 1945.

The French covered FIC with railways and roads, and laid out Saigon and Hanoi like French cities, with tree-lined boulevards. In Tonkin the two railways to the Chinese border were very important. The Chinese provinces Kwangsi and Yunnan had no outlet to the sea, and therefore depended on the well-equipped harbour of Haiphong. To transport materials to and from Kwangsi, a government railway line had been laid between Haiphong and the Chinese border at Dong Dang. Between 1938 and 1940 this railway line was extended towards Nanning, the capital of Kwangsi. More important however was the railway line from Haiphong to Kunming in Yunnan, which was owned by the private Society "Compagnie francaise des chemins de fer de l'Indochine et du Yunnan". The line, with a total length of about 900 km, was opened in 1910. When the Japanese occupied Canton in 1938, this railway line became one of the most important lines to get weapons and strategic materials to the Nationalist Chinese, who had been driven back by the Japanese to the Chinese interior. In June 1940 more than 25.000 tons a month reached China over this line alone.

Under the competent rule of Governor-General Albert Sarraut (1911 - 1914, and 1917 - 1920), the French raised an army of 140.000 Annamites (i.e. Vietnamese) who served in France as colonial troops in the First World War. The French Colonial Army counted only 2.000 European soldiers in FIC during those years. Sarraut could only succeed in preserving peace by promising more autonomy after the war. His successor, Maurice Long, implemented the system of cadres lateraux, in which indigenous and French civil servants worked side by side, resulting in a well-trained indigenous corps of civil servants. He introduced a Chambre consultative and limited franchise in Annam and Cochin-China in 1920, and in Tonkin in 1925. The Chambre Consultative was comparable to the "People's Council" in the NEI. (See Chapter 3, pages 276 - 279)

The indigenous élite sent their sons to France and Japan to study, and these sons founded the first nationalist movements. Phan Chau Trinh was a moderate nationalist, willing to cooperate with the French. Phan Boi Chau, born in the same Mandarin class as Phan Chau Trinh, was far more radical. He founded the Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi in June 1912. In 1923 the Parti Constitutionnaliste was founded in Saigon by the moderates Bui Quang Chieu and Nguyen Phan Long. The Vietnamese National Party (Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang) was founded in 1927 along the lines of the Nationalist Chinese Kuo Min Tang Party of Chiang Kai Shek by Nguyen Thai Hoc, and was far more radical. It encouraged the garrison at Yen-Bai to mutiny on 10 February 1930, resulting in its disbandment.

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2446 Haas, 2.

2447 Haas, 19.

2448 The mutiny resulted in 10 dead, under which 2 French officers. See Hesse d'Alzon, 15, note 6.
by the French authorities. Communist-inspired insurrections by farmers (the Sovjet of Nghe Tinh) were bloodily repressed in 1930. It were the first actions of the Parti Communiste Indochinois (Dang Cong San Duong), established in 1930 by Ho Chi Minh (Nguyen Ai Quoc). Driven underground by the French, it grew in strength, especially after the entry of the Japanese into Indochina in 1940. In 1941 he established a National Front for the Independence of Indochina, the Viet-minh. It was the Vietminh, which proclaimed in Hanoi an independent Vietnam on 2 September 1945.

The French did however respond in kind to the Nationalist aspirations. In 1926 the leftist government in Paris appointed a socialist as Governor-General. Alexandre Varenne (1926 - 1928) was more competent than his conservative predecessor Merlin, and succeeded in pushing through a number of democratic reforms. He lost the support of the French colonists, however, when he proposed equal access to all positions for both Indochinese and French subjects, and was recalled in 1928. His successor, Pierre Pasquier, was confronted with the insurrection at Yen-Bai. Pasquier died in 1934 in a plane accident, and was replaced by René Robin, who had to step down two years later due to the scandalous treatment of Indochinese Nationalists by members of the French Foreign Legion in Vinh. The victory of the left in France in the elections of 1936 resulted in more liberal Governors for Indochina. Therefore it can be safely stated that the French administration was far more relaxed in dealing with Nationalist aspirations than were the Dutch in the NEI.

Economically, the colony was totally integrated within the French Empire. Imports from France and French colonies in 1938 had a value of 1.095 million francs, against imports from other countries valued at 825 million francs. Of the exports in 1938, France took for 1350 million francs, the other French colonies for 162 million francs, all other countries for 1.347 million francs. FIC had a positive balance of payments in 1938 of 897 million francs. The economy was based on agricultural products, predominantly rice, rubber, maize, coffee and sugar, and minerals like coal and tin. Imports consisted of oil and oil products, machinery and luxury goods.

5.1.3. A short History of Thailand.

Thailand (i.e., "the Land of the Free") was the only South East Asian state, which escaped becoming a colony or protectorate of a major Western Power, by skillfully playing them off against each other. Before 1938 the country was called officially Siam. Bordering in the West by British-held Burma, and in the East by French Indochina, it required considerable diplomatic skills to balance the English and French against each other and, in doing so, to remain free. The Thais did not escape unscathed, however. In the eighteen eighties and nineties they lost the so-called Shan States and Tenasserim to the British in Burma, and in the South in 1909 four sultanates (Kedah, Kelantan, Perlis and Trengganu) to what later would become the Federated States of Malaya. In the East they lost parts of Cambodia (Battambang) to the French in 1893 and small parts of Laos in 1904, also to the French.248

Thailand has a surface of about 514.000 square km., and had in 1940 a population of about 15 million people. The country has a rich soil and a tropical climate. It has no coal or oil, but it is rich in tin and tungsten. It is an agrarian country, with rice as the most important export item. In 1938 Thailand exported for a value of $ 76.000.000 and imported

for $55,000,000. The exports consisted mainly of rice (65%), tin (19%), rubber (13%) and teakwood (3%). There is no oil, which has to be imported.

The Thais are a homogenous people of South-Chinese stock. There are sizeable minorities however of Chinese (ca 500,000) and of Indians and Malays (500,000). The State religion is Buddhism. Due to compulsory education for both sexes since 1921 the percentage of analfabetes was decreasing, but was still around 60% in 1940. Bangkok had two Universities.\(^{240}\) Like everywhere in S.E. Asia, the Chinese were the middlemen in trade and distribution, and therefore envied and hated by the local population.

Siam (the traditional name for the kingdom) has a long history as a kingdom which reached its apogee in the 14th century. Afterwards it lost the disastrous wars against the Burmese, and it refound its freedom again in the 16th century. In the 17th century Siam established embassies in The Hague and Paris, after many commercial contacts were made with both the Dutch and the French. In 1688 however, all Western aliens were expelled from Siam, which closed itself off from outside influences until the middle of the last century. There are parallels with the self-imposed isolation of Japan between 1637 and 1853. It was King Mongkut (Rama IV, 1851 - 1868) who realized that Thailand had to open its doors, and he signed a treaty with the English in 1855 and with the French in 1856, opening the Siamese ports for external trade. He is the Siamese king in Rodgers and Hammerstein's musical "The King and I". In signing the Bowring-Parkes agreement of 1855/1856 King Mongkut accepted extraterritoriality and tariff restrictions, without giving up his sovereignty.\(^{241}\) He cleverly understood that the French in Indochina would reinforce British desire to have Siam as a buffer state, and in the second half of the 19th century it were the British who were interested in keeping Siam independent. The Siamese themselves saw Great Britain as their protector, and the élite sent their sons abroad to British schools.

Siam at the turn of the century was an absolute monarchy, with a sparkling court life in Bangkok, the capital. The King was King Rama VI (1910 - 1925), who ensured that Siam declared war on Germany in 1917 in order to avoid an English/French protectorate. Thailand even sent troops to the Western Front in 1917. The war years and the years immediately after were prosperous years. In 1925 Rama died and was succeeded by King Prajadhipok, who introduced a Crown Council and a Cabinet. On 24 June 1932, under social pressure because of the depression, the Army staged a bloodless coup d'état, and the King had to accept a Constitution and a Parliament. In November 1932 a counterrevolution took place which ended the progressive government of Luang Pradit, and which adopted a far more conservative Constitution. An insurrection of the aristocratic party against the ruling coalition of conservatives and army officers failed. The King departed, and abdicated in 1935. His nephew, Ananda Mahidol, at that time six years of age, was appointed to the throne, and is known today as King Bhumibol.

In the mid-thirties, Siam was certainly not a part of the British Empire, but it was locked into the British trade system. British ports like Hongkong, Singapore and Penang handled three-quarters of her imports and exports. For their main export (rice) the Siamese were completely dependent on the import of gunny bags from British India. British ships carried


\(^{241}\) Nicholas Tarling: Britain, Southeast Asia and the Onset of the Pacific War. Cambridge Univ. Press, 1996, 48. To be referred to as Tarling: Onset.
its imports and exports. Siam's foreign debt was held in the City of London. The banking system was in British hands. Almost all imported capital goods came from the British Empire, and were being paid for by British-controlled agrarian and mineral exports; i.e. rubber, tin, and tropical hardwoods.

As from 1936, the Siamese government became more and more nationalistic, agitating against France and England in order to recoup the "terra irredenta". An ambitious rearmament programme for the armed forces was launched. The Japanese steadily increased their influence. In 1938, Colonel Pibul Songgram became Premier and the country was renamed Thailand. Pibul Songgram had received his military training in Fontainebleau, France. In effect, Thailand had become a militarist state along the lines of the Japanese model. Army, Airforce and Navy were strengthened. But Thailand was not yet ready to join the Anti-Comintern Pact. In talks with the British Minister in Bangkok, Sir Joshua Crosby, Thai officials increasingly asked what the British, without a fleet at Singapore, would do if Japan invaded the country. The events in Czechoslovakia and Albania shook Thai trust in British ability to maintain the status-quo in S.E. Asia. Crosby therefore advocated a kind of guarantee to the Thais, in order to diminish further Japanese penetration. And indeed, for the British the neutrality of Thailand was essential for the defence of Malaya and Burma.

The British Minister in Bangkok knew only too well the weakness of his government, and knew also that the Thai government was aware of it. In 1940 he wrote to the Air Officer Commanding Far East: "They [the Thai government] have no faith at all in our power to assist them. And how could we assist them? ...even before the [First World] war we were never in a position to keep a fleet of capital ships based on Singapore." Notwithstanding this lament, however, Crosby was personally dedicated to the Thais, even in such a way that the new American Minister Willys R. Peck remarked in October 1941 upon his arrival in Bangkok, that "it was hard to say whether these men [of the British Legation] are more devoted to Thai or to British interests."

5.2. Diplomacy and Regional Stability.

In this subchapter the efforts of the British, U.S. and Dutch governments to maintain the status-quo in the geographical area covered by FIC and Thailand will be described. These efforts were doomed by the Japanese, who were bent on maximising the opportunities offered to them by the disastrous events in Western Europe in the spring of 1940. The Japanese were assisted by the Thai government which also saw opportunities, which did not exist before. The complex diplomatic interaction between all these governments is the subject of this subchapter.

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52 Tarling: Onset, 52.
53 Tarling, Onset, 53.
54 Crosby to Air Officer Commanding FE, 18 July 1940, PRO FO 371/24573[F23/149/40].
5.2.1. French Far Eastern Policy.

The policy of the French was to use their colonies as export markets for the industrial products of the motherland, which in lieu imported agrarian products from her colonies. Therefore FIC was not industrialised by its colonial masters, and it remained primarily an agricultural region. Most important export products were rice, maize, rubber, and coal (See also this Chapter, page 521). The largest part of this export went to France. In contrast with the NEI, the FIC economy was a closed economy, integrated with the motherland in the framework of the French Empire.

Externally, the danger to French sovereignty over its colony was perceived to come not only from Japan, but more so from China, at least until the late thirties.2406 A unified China presented a real danger on the very borders of FIC.2407 Therefore, the French government watched the efforts of Chiang Kai-Shek to unite his country in the early thirties with dismay. With respect to Japan, the French government manoeuvered with considerable sensitivity on the question of the Japanese involvement in Manchuria after the Mukden-incident. It had scant interest in provoking the Japanese. This went so far that within the Foreign Office the Far Eastern section warned against the dangers of a French-Russian rapprochement made imperative by the rise of the Nazis in Germany. A French entente with Russia would provoke a Japanese threat to French possessions in the Far East which France was not as yet ready to defend.2408 Therefore, the French Naval Staff proposed that the government declare to favour either Japan or the Soviet-Union, and conclude a Treaty with one of the two potential allies.2409 The Naval Staff recommended concluding a treaty with the Russians, and reinforcing FIC for the inevitable Japanese attack. At the Naval Conference in London in 1935 the French kept themselves as much as possible out of the debates on ratios, and were rather relieved when the ratio system as encoded in the Five Power Treaty of 1922 disappeared altogether.2410

The Amagou Declaration of 18 April 1934 took the French by surprise. In it, the Japanese government bluntly warned the Chinese not to seek foreign aid, and cautioned foreign powers that even technical or financial assistance by those powers to China would be interpreted in political terms. The new French Ambassador to Japan, Fernand Pila, interpreted this declaration as a Japanese Monroe Doctrine2411, which was bound to nullify the Washington Treaties of 1922 and therefore would upset the status quo in the Far East.

On 27 February 1936 the French Chamber of Deputies ratified the Franco-Soviet Pact, causing bad feelings against France in Japan. The French Ambassador assured the Japanese Prime Minister, Koki Hirota, that France tried to be both "an influential friend of


\[2407\] Memorandum of the Asia-Oceania Section of the Foreign Ministry, 15 June, 1933. Documents diplomatiques francais, 1932 - 1939. Vol.I (9 juillet - 14 novembre 1932), Paris 1964, 145. These documents will henceforth be cited as DDF with Volume number and date of publication.

\[2408\] Laffey, op. cit., 124.

\[2409\] Note of the Naval Staff, 11 October 1934. DDF, VII (1979), 712.

\[2410\] Laffey, Ibid., 128.

\[2411\] F. Pila to Louis Barthou, Foreign Minister, April 23, 1934. DDF, VI (1972), 330 - 332.
Japan and a quasi-ally of Russia.2462 The Japanese responded in kind with naval manoeuvres in the Gulf of Tonkin, which caused the French considerable anxiety.2463 It also provoked the French government to a more conciliatory attitude towards China, specifically after the incident at the Marco Polo-bridge on 7 July, 1937.2464 Thereafter the Chinese started to order war material brought in via Haiphong and the Yunnan railway, to the chagrin of the Japanese. It was only then that the FIC government realized its weakness in terms of fighting a combined Japanese-Siamese attack.

In April 1938 Georges Mandel became Minister of Colonies in the Daladier-Cabinet. He expected a war in Europe within a short time, and started to increase agrarian production in the colonies. Rice production was increased, resulting in an overproduction of rice in 1940, when shipping to France was no longer possible. It was all bought up by Japan, which, in 1940, imported 25% of its rice from FIC, from almost zero in 1939.2466

A few weeks after the outbreak of the "China Incident" the French Government was approached by the Japanese with an urgent request to stop shipments to China over the FIC railways. On 13 October 1937 the French government forbade the movement over the Tonkin railway system of weapons and munitions purchased by China after the outbreak of the incident.2463 This did not satisfy the Japanese, and caused a sharp increase in bureaucracy at Haiphong harbour, where in the middle of 1939 around 200,000 tons of goods and materials was waiting for rail transfer to Kunming. This considerably angered the Chinese government, which accused the French of complicity with the Japanese arch-enemy.2467 The French discussed their dilemma with the other Western powers during the Brussels Conference of November 1937, but their efforts towards a coordinated response was rebuffed by the American delegation leader, Norman Davis. The situation was not alleviated by an informal assurance, given the French chargé d'Affaires in Washington by President Roosevelt, that "a Japanese attack against Hongkong, or Indochina, or the Dutch Indies would also constitute an attack on the Philippines.2468 As expected, the Brussels Conference achieved nothing, and French-Japanese relations gradually soured due to Japanese suspicion that arms for China were still being transported to Yunnan.

The Japanese in their turn secretly occupied the Spratly Islands, which was discovered after a visit of a French naval vessel. The French officially protested on 9 December 1937, but the Japanese rejected the French protest and told the French ambassador that they

2463 Laffey, ibid., 131.
2464 A week before the incident at the Marco Polo Bridge, the French military attaché at Nanking had suggested closer military cooperation with China. Lt.Col. G. Sabatier to War Minister E. Daladier, 30 June 1937, DDF, 2e s., VI (Paris 1970), 252.
2465 Haas, 7.
2466 Haas, 19.
would protect the occupying force if needed.\footnote{C. Arsène-Henry to Delbos, 13 January 1938, DDF, Ibd., 903.} An even greater shock to the French was the discovery in February 1938, that the Japanese had occupied the Paracel Islands. A Japanese heavy cruiser was near the islands to cover the Japanese occupying force. Notwithstanding the more aggressive-sounding advice of the Governor-General, the French government reminded him of his pessimistic outlook half a year before, and left the affair with a formal protest in Tokyo.\footnote{R. Laffey, Op. cit., 139 - 140.} Meanwhile, under the energetic Minister of Colonial Affairs, Georges Mandel, FIC was reinforced and strengthened.

While in Europe the Czechoslovakian crisis kept everyone spellbound, the Japanese occupied Canton on 21 October 1938, and with that came closer to FIC. This was followed by the occupation of the Chinese island of Hainan on 10 February 1939, which gave the Japanese the possibility of cutting off overseas supplies to Haiphong by a close naval blockade. The official annexation of the Spratley Islands south of Hainan by the Japanese followed on 31 March 1939. As the Western world was transfixed by the Sudetenland crisis, almost nobody noticed this move. It was the first clear and unambiguous signal that Japan intended more than only a war against China, and was including the possibility of a war with the Western powers in the South China Sea. The French retaliated by easing the flow of goods to China via northern Indochina, and by halting the export of coal and iron ore to Japan.

The German-Soviet agreement of August 1939 made a Japanese move against Indochina less likely, and therefore French diplomacy sought for a kind of agreement with the Japanese. The ban on exporting iron ore from FIC to Japan was lifted, and the Japanese obtained permission to establish a consulate at Nouméa in New Caledonia, which of course worried the Australians. The problem of China, however, still remained and because of that the evident American displeasure with too conciliatory moves of the French towards Japan in that respect.\footnote{Tarling, Onset, 100.} The American Consul in Hanoi, Charles S. Reed, indicated to his government the French dilemma of balancing Chinese and Japanese interests without jeopardizing the security of FIC.\footnote{Reed to Cordell Hull, 3 October 1939, FRUS 1939 Vol. III, 273 - 274.}

The next move of the Japanese did not help the French position. It was an offensive in the province of Kwangsi, which caused international incidents. Japanese naval planes bombed That Khe on the Indochinese border on 26 August 1939, resulting in the deaths of 30 civilians. The Japanese apologised, and paid an indemnity of 62,550 piasters to the French.\footnote{Haas, 25.} Japanese aggression in Kwangsi continued, however. The provincial capital of Kwangsi, Nanning, was occupied by the Japanese in November 1939. The French government realized, that the next move would be into Yunnan, and therefore on 30 November 1939 the French Ambassador in Tokyo Charles Arsène Henry saw the Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Abe-Cabinet, Admiral Kichisaburo Nomura. The admiral stressed that indeed the Japanese would bomb the Yunnan railway if the French did not stop all railway shipments to China. He suggested a French - Japanese conference in Hanoi to hammer out any differences between the two countries. The French govern-
ment declined the offer. Thereupon the Japanese launched their aerial bombardments on the Yunnan line on 30 December 1939.

Notwithstanding French protests the bombardments continued. On 1 February 1940 a train was hit, and 5 French citizens killed as a result of the bombardment. The French protested again, backing it up with military maneuvers along the border and signalling to the Japanese that all ports in the French Empire would be closed to Japanese ships. In subsequent talks between Ambassador Arsène Henry in Tokyo and the Japanese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Masayuki Tani, it became painfully clear that the Japanese suspected that the French still transported war materials to China, while the French were denying any breach of the proclamation of 13 October 1937. Suggestions by the Japanese to have observers at Haiphong were rejected by the French however, who rightly suspected that the Japanese government did not control the Japanese commanders of the Kwangsi-Army who had initiated the bombing. When the bombardments continued and no indemnity for the 1 February bombing was forthcoming, the French government blocked the opening of an airline between Bangkok and Tokyo by refusing a permit for Japanese airliners to fly over French territory. The Japanese government gave in and, after negotiations, the indemnity to be paid by Japan was fixed at 175,000 piasters.

5.2.2. The Japanese squeeze (May - December 1940)

The Japanese watched the unfolding of events at the Western Front from 10 May, 1940 with more than casual interest. What they saw was the development of a golden opportunity, one which would probably not recur: the destruction of the Allied Armies in the West by the German juggernaut, leaving France exhausted and prostrate. They were quick to take the opportunity presented. If they could occupy FIC militarily, it would mean an almost certain end to the regime of Chiang Kai-Shek because of the severing of his supply lines from Indochina. Moreover, from FIC they could bomb the Burma-road and even threaten Singapore. As General Shunroku Hata, the Japanese War Minister who was considered a moderate, declared: "We should not miss the present opportunity or we shall be blamed by posterity." Economically, the rice, tin and rubber exports of FIC would be very welcome, as would be the FIC market for Japanese textiles. The French government had always blocked the imports of Japanese goods in order to protect the FIC market for French metropolitan products. Therefore, one of the Japanese aims was to break open this market.

With the Japanese Southern Army in Kwangs i close to the border, more than 200 Japanese planes operating from Hainan, and the Japanese Navy ruling the waves of the South China Sea, Governor-General (and General) Georges Catroux decided not to give the Japanese any excuse for intervention. Therefore, he forbade the shipments of

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2474 Haas, 27.
2475 Haas, 30.
2477 Haas, 32.
gasoline to Free China over the Yunnan railway on 16 June 1940. On the urging of the Quay d'Orsay, he also decided to call for help from the U.S.A., referring to the Four Power Agreement of Washington of 13 December 1921, in which Japan had agreed to respect the rights of the other three signatories. (pages 25,307). Moreover, almost all of the goods which moved over the Tonkin railways towards China were of American origin. Therefore he contacted the French Ambassador in Washington on 18 June 1940.2479 On 20 June, the French Ambassador in Washington (René Doyen de Saint-Quentin) informed him that the American Undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, had declined any involvement of the USA in FIC, and had advised the French government to acquiesce in the Japanese demands to close the FIC-Chinese border.2480 Next day, the Ambassador spoke to the State Department's chief adviser on Far Eastern Affairs, Stanley Hornbeck, and was also turned down.2481

In order to improve the airforce situation, the G.G. sent Colonel Henri P. Jacomy to the U.S. to obtain modern fighters, and he asked the military commander in the Levant to send him some fighter squadrons. These actions proved fruitless, however. Jacomy was one of the two Brigade Commanders in Cochin-China, and departed in early June 1940 to Washington, accompanied by the Director of the Faculty of Law in Hanoi, Kamerling, and a captain of the colonial artillery. In Washington they contacted the French military attaché, Colonel Emmanuel E. Lombard, who arranged meetings with general Marshall, with officers of the U.S. Army Airforce and with Sumner Welles. Jacomy had orders to obtain 200 modern American warplanes as fast as possible. The Americans gave the French a cordial reception, but could give them no firm commitments on the delivery of warplanes. The situation deteriorated when the French Ambassador St. Quentin was replaced by the Vichy Ambassador Henri Haye, who was disliked by the Americans because of his defeatist attitude. Haye more or less blocked American supplies destined for FIC, as he did not believe in an Allied victory.2482 Disappointed, Jacomy departed to FIC in September 1940, where he would become one of the commanders in the land war against the Thais in January 1941.

Catroux had informed the Minister of Colonies in the Daladier Cabinet, Rollin, about the situation as he saw it.2483 He pressed upon Rollin that continuing cooperation with the British ally was a necessity, in the interest of FIC, because only the Royal Navy could guarantee a safe line of communication to the U.S. and other sources for weapons. This pro-British attitude would cost him his job when Pétain took over the French government.

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2480 No documents have been found about this conversation. But there is enough evidence to support the outcome. See F. Charles-Roux, Cinq mois tragiques au Affaires Etrangères 921 mai - 1 novembre 1940), Paris 1949, 71; and Jean Chauvel: Commentaires, Vol. 1: De Vienne à Alger (1938 - 1944), Paris 1971, 232.


2482 An interesting French Memorandum titled "La mission Jacomy et la défense de l'Indochine" was given to the Dutch chief of the Diplomatic Section Van Vredenburch during a meeting with the Free French representative Dejean in London on 7 March 1944. Archives MinBuZa, London Archives, Secret Archive, DZ/GA, G ll Frankrijk 21, file 1195.

2483 G. Catroux, 2.
On 19 June 1940 the Japanese posed an ultimatum. The Japanese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Masayuki Tani, informed French Ambassador Charles Arsène-Henry in Tokyo that military means would be used against FIC, if the border with China was not closed before 2000 hours of the next day. Moreover, Japan demanded to have inspectors in place to ensure that the French indeed complied. Thereupon, Arsène Henry advised Catroux to give in to the Japanese ultimatum.

After consultation with the Army Commander, general Maurice Martin, the G.G. decided that although the French might exact a considerable toll on the Japanese aggressor, they would not be able to avoid a Japanese occupation. Giving in to the Japanese demand would assure French sovereignty over FIC, allowing him to secure further assistance from the outside. Therefore Catroux decided to accept the Japanese demands, including the admittance of Japanese inspectors. Next day, Arsène Henry signed an agreement with Tani, which was word for word identical to the Arita-Craigie agreement of 21 June 1939. It remains speculative however, whether Catroux had to accept all the Japanese demands. The admittance of Japanese inspectors was especially damaging for the future of French sovereignty over FIC. His successor as G.G. certainly did not agree with the way Catroux handled the Japanese ultimatum.

To complicate matters, the new French Minister of Colonies in the Pétain Cabinet, Albert Rivièrè, informed Catroux that he was against this agreement. In his view, Catroux should have consulted the French government before giving in to the Japanese demands. Evidently, Rivièrè was out of touch with reality. Catroux explained to him that he wanted to buy time in order to reinforce his defence, and he stressed the necessity of close cooperation with England. Only England could guarantee a free flow of weapons from overseas to reinforce FIC. On the other hand, the occupation of FIC by the Japanese would threaten Singapore. Rivièrè however remained against the admission of Japanese inspectors on FIC territory, and Catroux's reaction to this telegram did not improve his relationship with the G.G. The French government thereupon decided on 25 June to relieve Catroux of his position and to appoint Vice-Admiral Jean Decoux as the new Governor-General. Decoux was the Commander of the French Far Eastern Naval squadron and headquartered at Hanoi. News of this decision did not reach Hanoi until 30 June, 1940 but was known beforehand in Tokyo, which weakened the French position considerably. Catroux, on his side, refused to give up his command, and continued governing and negotiating with the Japanese as if nothing had happened. Only on 20 July did Catroux transfer his position to Decoux.

Catroux, 4.

Catroux, 4. See also telegram Grew to Hull, 20 June 1940, FRUS, 1940, IV, 31.

Haas, 37.


See for a discussion of this issue Taling, Onset, 102.

Catroux, 5. See also Telegram Henderson to FO, 20 June 1940, FO371/24327[C7343/7327/17].

It is evident, that the reason that Catroux was relieved had nothing to do with his reaction to the Japanese ultimatum, but was a result of his pro-British attitude. The Vichy government distrusted his willingness to carry out their policy of collaboration with the Axis powers. Therefore, he had to go.\textsuperscript{2482}

The effect of the military tragedy in Western Europe on the morale of the European populace of FIC was devastating in itself. When the French Bordeaux Government sued for an armistice, the reaction of public opinion in FIC was to fight alongside Great Britain. That was not what the Vichy Government wanted. General de Gaulle, who had established his Free French Government in London after his famous \textit{Appel du 18e juin} (which was not broadcasted to FIC), sounded out all the French colonial governors about continuing the struggle on 24 June. Almost all colonial governments declared their support to Maréchal Pétain, including Governor-General Catroux, although he was rather pro-British (See below). This was a disappointment for the British, who had hoped that Catroux would line up with De Gaulle, setting an example of courage to other influential French colonial governors.\textsuperscript{2483} The British government considered it unwise however to extend a British guarantee towards FIC; the only measure which would have kept the French in Indochina on the allied side. The Japanese, however, had also no complete freedom of action, as Germany might interpose itself as a protector of French colonial interests. This fluid situation made diplomatic moves in the Far East at that time in history very, very risky for all parties concerned.

On 20 June the British government declared its support and assistance to any French colony which wanted to continue the struggle against the Axis. General Catroux reacted immediately, informing the English Consul-General in Saigon Henderson that he intended to continue the cooperation with the British both militarily and economically.\textsuperscript{2484} A meeting was arranged with the C-in-C China Station, Vice-Adm. Sir Percy Noble, who arrived in Saigon on board the merchant cruiser KANIMBLA. On 28 June 1940 in the afternoon Governor-General Catroux and Vice-Admiral Decoux had a last discussion with Sir Percy Noble on board the French light cruiser LAMOTTE PICQUET in Saigon. Afterwards Noble discussed the results of this meeting with the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore, who duly reported the contents of the conversation.\textsuperscript{2485}

According to Noble, both Catroux and Decoux declared themselves to be on the English side, but they asked for the support of the Royal Navy in case of a Japanese action against FIC. General Martin, also present, asserted that in the event of a Japanese attack the French "would fight to the last soldier". Noble informed the French flag officers that Great Britain would withdraw its naval forces from Hongkong and concentrate on Singapore, therefore leaving the South China Sea to the Japanese. Moreover, to compensate for the naval losses, he had to send units of his fleet to Western Europe, including all his submarines. He could not promise air support either, as he informed the French comman-

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\textsuperscript{2483} Tarling, \textit{Onset}, 104.

\textsuperscript{2484} FRUS, Vol. IV, 36.

\textsuperscript{2485} Letter Fein to Van Kleffens, 6 July 1940, no 200/XIX. MinBuZa London Archives, Secret Archive, DZ/GA, G II Thailand, box 84, file 1410.
\end{flushright}
ders that the British had too few planes even to assure the defence of Singapore. Nevertheless, Noble tried to convince the French that in the long run FIC would be better of if the French sided openly with the British, and distanced themselves from Pétain. The G.G. declined such a move, pointing out that it would mean a change in the status quo of 1922 (the Washington Treaties) and therefore would induce Japan to attack. Decoux informed Noble that the French Navy would remain loyal to the legal government of France. As a consequence, he turned down the offer of Noble to have the French squadron based at Singapore. Such a move would have exposed the FIC coast to the Japanese Navy, and therefore made no sense. It was agreed however that the liaison officers would remain in place at the respective naval staffs.

To bolster the French in FIC against the Japanese, Britain also offered economic incentives like credits for the Banque d'Indochine to support the local currency, the easing of import restrictions on products from FIC, and a continuing supply of products needed in FIC from the Dominions by allowing coaster traffic between Singapore and FIC. Moreover, the F.O. would mediate with the Dutch to continue supplying FIC with oil products, on which FIC was very dependent. A gentleman's agreement was also reached between the two Naval Staffs in Saigon and Singapore that the Royal Navy would not interfere with French shipping to the motherland and the French colonies, provided that the French squadron did not interfere with British ship traffic to Hongkong. This agreement, to which both parties adhered strictly, would be upheld even after Mers el-Khebir, and would have political consequences at the end of 1941.

According to Hesse d'Alzon, the evident weakness of British forces in the Far East was the main reason that France had no other choice than to seek an accommodation with the Japanese, as their naval and air forces were insufficient to withstand a determined Japanese assault. It leaves open the question as to what would have been the French position, if England had bluffed and had assured the wavering French of British naval and military support. Catroux might well have been able to secure FIC for the Free French Movement of De Gaulle. But the British themselves, reeling from the defeat in Flanders had no coherent Far Eastern policy at that time. (See Chapter 2). Therefore, in order not to upset the apple cart, the British took no risks in giving the Japanese an excuse for occupying FIC. Gaullist broadcasts from Singapore were even halted.

Not everybody in the colony was happy with this conclusion. Many officers called at the British Consulate, offering their services in the event that the local administration would not defend FIC. The crew of the LAMOTTE PICQUET for example clamored to join the

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240 Catroux, 6. Decoux, 43.

247 Haas, 42.

248 Haas has pointed out, that with this refusal Decoux antedated the refusal of Admiral Darlan to join the Royal Navy with the French Fleet just before Mers-el-Khébir. Haas, 54.

249 FO to Henderson (Saigon), 20 June 1940, FO 371/24328 [C7405/7327/17].

250 Hesse d'Alzon, 62.

251 Dreifort, op. cit., 285.

252 Dreifort, ibid., 284.
Allies in Singapore.\textsuperscript{2503} The firm position of its commander, Captain Marie D.R. Bérenger, refusing the thought of disobedience, and especially the wave of anti-British feelings after the events at Mers-el-Khèbir on 3 July 1940,\textsuperscript{2504} ended all thoughts of joining the Allies. It resulted also in the recall of the French naval liaison-officer from the staff of China Station in Singapore. When Japanese pressure on the colony increased, it edged the politically strongly divided colony to a position of accepting the Vichy régime for better or worse.

The British did not help by enforcing a blockade of French shipping all over the world which isolated the colony even further, excepting only traffic over the South China Sea, which was covered by the Gentlemen’s Agreement between Noble and Decoux. The French freighter ESPÉRANCE was even brought up on its way from Madagaskar to Djibouti, were it was scheduled to transport 4 battalions of Senegalese troops to FIC\textsuperscript{2505}. The French Government then ordered all French vessels into French-controlled harbors, again with the exception of FIC itself. An understanding was reached, however, and from 5 September 1940 one ship each ten days was allowed to depart from Marseilles to FIC. This line of communication remained open until September 1941. The British however did not allow any substantial reinforcement of FIC for reasons which will be explained below. The French used the opportunity to ship as much German and Central European members of the Foreign Legion from France and North Africa to FIC, in order to keep them out of German hands.\textsuperscript{2506} In FIC they rejoined the 5e R.E.I. (See sub-chapter 5.3.3.1 below).

British sources (including Tarling) have not given an explication, why the British did not allow French weapons and troops destined for FIC to be transported to FIC. A strong French defence would have made a Japanese take-over of FIC more difficult, thereby gaining time for the British. It was implied by the French government, and also reported by the American Ambassador (Murphy) at Vichy to the State Department, that the English government did not risk a conflict with Thailand by allowing the French to reinforce FIC\textsuperscript{2507}. Murphy had a discussion on this subject with Jean Chauvel (Chief of the Far Eastern Section of the French F.O.), in which Chauvel accused the British of assisting in Thai aggression against FIC by withholding French reinforcements.\textsuperscript{2508} There may be more than a kernel of truth in these allegations, as the relations between Thailand and Great Britain always had been very cordial in the past. It was a well-known fear of the British military that by occupying Thailand the Japanese would be enabled to march to Singapore through the back door of Siamese Malaya. When the British persisted in their

\textsuperscript{2503} Hesse d’Alzon, 62.

\textsuperscript{2504} At the French naval base of Mers-el-Khebir in Algeria the British Mediterranean Fleet under Admiral James Somerville tried to force the French Fleet into internment. When its ultimatum went unheeded on 3 July 1940, the Royal Navy bombarded the French warships in the harbour, with much loss of life. This event was one of the most painful in a very painful war, as the English had to fight their erstwhile allies. The English determination convinced the Americans, however, that England was serious about continuing the war, and started American support. See Warren Tute: \textit{The deadly stroke}, New-York 1973, and Barrie Pitt: "Mers-el-Kebir: the unnecessary showdown" \textit{MHQ}, Vol. 6, no 2 (1994), 104 - 111.

\textsuperscript{2505} Haas, 106. \textit{FRUS}, 1940, Vol.IV, 172.

\textsuperscript{2506} Hesse d’Alzon, 64.

\textsuperscript{2507} Telegram Matthews to Hull, 11 November 1940, \textit{FRUS}, 1940, Vol. IV, 205.

\textsuperscript{2508} Telegram Murphy to Hull, 17 December 1940, \textit{FRUS V}, 1940, 241 - 242.
refusal to ship the Senegalese battalions to Saigon, even the American Minister at Vichy, Murphy, asked the State Department: "Any light which the Department can throw on this aspect of British policy in the Far East will be helpful to the Embassy as background here".

Next to the Senegalese battalions, the French had 90 modern planes shipped from the U.S.A. and intended for France, on board the French aircraft carrier FRS BÉARN. After the armistice, the ship was holed up at Martinique however, and not allowed by the British to proceed any further. Early in September 1940, the British blockade of Martinique was lifted, but then the French Government interpreted the Armistice conditions with Germany as not allowing the use of these planes to reinforce FIC. The American government was well-informed however, and as the Americans were unwilling to ship weapons to FIC, because they expected those weapons to fall into Japanese hands anyway, this French unwillingness gave them a perfect excuse not to deliver any weapons to FIC. As has been covered in Chapter 3, the Americans harboured similar fears with respect to the Netherlands East Indies.

Therefore, when the French Ambassador again came asking for American weapons, the Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, stated according to his report on the conversation: "I took occasion to state that it seemed to me amazing that the French Government would continue to permit the 100 new military planes purchased in the United States to go to pieces in Martinique when these planes would be of enormous value in Indochina". According to his report: "The Ambassador thereupon burst into a state bordering upon frenzy. He shouted that he had sent 10 telegrams to his Government on that subject insisting that the terms of the Armistice made possible the shipment to Indochina of the planes in Martinique, and that each time he had been turned down flatly with the statement that the terms of the Armistice would not permit".

Therefore, one can only conclude that it was the Vichy Government which expressly did not use the opportunities given by the Armistice agreements to reinforce FIC, because it did not want to antagonize the Japanese.

The result of the signing of the Tani- Arsène Henry agreement was the arrival in Hanoi of a Japanese military mission of around 60 persons under Lt. Gen. Issaku Nishihara on 29 June 1940. Nishihara was accompanied by the French Military Attaché in Tokyo, major Paul M.A. Thiébaud. After a very positive discussion between Catroux and Nishihara on 30 June, the Japanese observers fanned out towards the Chinese border, where they established observation posts at the border towns of Moncay, Lamgson, Cao Bang, Haigiang and Lao Kai and also in Halphong on 2 July. An Air France plane, en route from Hanoi to the French enclave at Kwang-Chou-Wan in Kwangsi province, with Japanese and French officers of the combined control commission on board was shot down by a Japanese fighter. On the combined remembrance service Nishihara referred to the


210 For this, see especially Cordell Hull, Memoirs, I, 907.

211 Conversation between Sumner Welles and French Ambassador, 11 December 1940. FRUS, 1940, Vol. IV, 232.

212 Ibid, 233.
deceased as "victims of the weather conditions" This caused much resentment with the French in FIC.

Kwang-Chow-Wan was a French enclave in Kwangsí province, which had been leased to France by the Chinese government for a period of 99 years on 19 February 1900. The area comprised a beautiful natural harbour, on which was situated Fort Bayard, a city with 230,000 inhabitants, of which about 100 were French. Like Hongkong, the harbour was a Free Port. Air France maintained a weekly flight between Haiphong and Fort Bayard. After the outbreak of the Chinese-Japanese War, Kwang-Chow-Wan became an important but less well-known import harbour for war material, which was brought from Hongkong. The Dutch Honorary Consul of Canton, J.J. Wierink, visited Fort Bayard between 22 and 25 June, 1940 and reported that a Japanese take-over was feared, resulting in a stream of refugees to the interior of Kwangsí and to Hongkong.

Catroux departed on 20 July 1940, and joined the Free French of De Gaulle in September 1940. The new Governor-General, Decoux, was presented with new Japanese requirements by the Chief of Staff of the Japanese Kwangsí-Army, colonel Kenryu Sato, on 2 August. This happened after Nishihara had temporarily left for Tokyo. Sato was a hardliner, compared to Nishihara. In order to finish off the "Incident" with China, the Japanese Army wanted the right of passage for its Army through Tonkin to the Chinese province of Yunnan, and in addition, the usage of French airfields for the Japanese Army Airforce. They also wanted logistics support for their Kwangsí Army over the shorter route via Langson. If the French would not give in, the Japanese could not guarantee French sovereignty any longer. On the same day, Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka presented the same ultimatum to Arsène Henry in Tokyo. Considering the fate of his predecessor, Decoux refused direct negotiations between Hanoi and the Japanese, which now started between the Japanese and Vichy Governments. At the same time, it has to be remembered, the Japanese had succeeded in pressing the British Government into closure of the Burma Road for a period of 3 months as from 18 July. (See page 142). The Japanese really wanted to finish the "China Incident" by robbing the Nationalist Chinese of all their supply routes. But the one road through the Gobi Desert towards the Soviet Union was outside their grasp. And the Burma Road was not closed completely. The English allowed the passage of non-military goods, food, but also trucks, lubricating oil and other oil products except gasoline.

The British Government understood that the only way that FIC could be saved for the Free French movement then establishing itself in London under De Gaulle, would be by

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2513 Letter H. Bos to Van Kleeffens, 17 July 1940, no 429/59, Archives MinBuZa, London Archive, Secret Archive, Political reports from Foreign Posts, Peking/Chungking, box 18, inv. nr. 188.

2514 Letter Consul-General D.G.E. Middelburg in Hongkong to Dr. R. Flaes at Peking, 10 July 1940. MinBuZa London Archives, Political Reports from Hongkong no 3, inv. nr. 148: "Kwang-Chow-Wan".

2515 Tarling, Onset, 152.


2518 See Letter H. Bos to R. Flaes, Kunmin g 3 August 1940, no 437/62, Archives MinBuZa, London Archive, Secret Archive, Reports from Chungking/Peking, inv. nr. 188.
guaranteeing French sovereignty over FIC.\textsuperscript{251} This the British were unwilling to do, because the Japanese might interpret such a move as a change in the status quo, leading to war with Japan. In those hectic and fateful days just before the Battle of Britain, the British government could not possibly give such guarantees. But the British were willing to give diplomatic and economic support to keep Indochina at least French, even if it would mean the support of a colonial régime instructed by Vichy-France. It was a rather embarrassing situation.\textsuperscript{252}

The Vichy-government (via their new ambassador in Washington, Henri Haye) undertook all it could to keep the Americans informed about the Japanese ultimatum. French Foreign Minister Paul Baudoin even instructed his Ambassador to ask the Americans to inform the British government about the French predicament.\textsuperscript{252}1 He also personally informed Murphy about the Japanese ultimatum and the French response, and asked if the American government was willing to increase pressure on the Japanese government.\textsuperscript{252}2 The only measure the Americans undertook was for Foreign Secretary Cordell Hull to instruct Ambassador Joseph Grew in Tokyo to inform the Japanese, that the U.S. attitude on the preservation of the status quo in the Indies ‘applied in equal measure to the entire Pacific area including FIC’\textsuperscript{252}3. It was not very helpful, and gave the French the pretext to surrender to the Japanese demands as was accurately observed by the Englisch Consul-General in Saigon, Hector Bruce Henderson.\textsuperscript{252}4 Craigie was also instructed by his government to inform the Japanese that the British supported the Arita-declaration of 15 April 1940 on the maintenance of the status-quo in S.E. Asia, and Henderson had to inform the French government in Hanoi about the British position.\textsuperscript{252}5 Alas, the FO was against releasing the aircraft carrier BÉARN in Martinique and the ILE DE FRANCE in Singapore, both with American airplanes for FIC on board,\textsuperscript{252}6 as the French had requested. But, in accordance with a request by the Hanoi government, the British military liaison officer in Hanoi, Captain Duncan (who had been sent to Singapore after Mers-el-Khebir) returned to Hanoi and conferred with General Martin on 17 August 1940, which of course did not escape Japanese attention.

The Vichy Government was divided over the Japanese ultimatum. The “doves” wanted to accept it in order to preserve French sovereignty. The “hawks” were the new Minister of the Colonies, Henry Lemery, the Head of the Far Eastern section of the FO, Jean Chauvel, and specifically the Chief of the Colonial General Staff, general Jules Buhrer. He argued, that with 100.000 troops and sufficient ammunitions for three month’s fighting, in combination with the FIC terrain that favoured the defence, and a high morale, the French could

\textsuperscript{251} Tarling, \textit{First Japanese Move}, opus cit., 41.

\textsuperscript{252} Tarling: \textit{First Japanese Move}, op. cit., 50.

\textsuperscript{253} Baudoin, 187 - 189.

\textsuperscript{254} Murphy to Cordell Hull, 17 August 1940, FRUS, 1940, IV, 80 - 81.

\textsuperscript{255} Sumner Welles to Grew, 6 August 1940, FRUS Japan II, p. 290. Dreifort, \textit{Ibid.}, 290.

\textsuperscript{256} Telegram Henderson to FO, 6 August 1940, no 54, FO 371/24719 [F3710/3429/61].

\textsuperscript{257} Tarling, \textit{Onset}, 156.

hold on for a considerable time. He therefore advised rejection of the Japanese ultimatum. However, the doves carried the day in the Council of Ministers. Baudouin and Arsène-Henry fought a successful rearguard action, in that the Japanese ultimatum became subject to intense diplomatic activity, resulting in a Japanese guarantee of French sovereignty.

The results of the extended talks between the French Foreign Minister Paul Baudouin and the Japanese Ambassador in Vichy, Renzo Sawada, and between the Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka and French Ambassador Arsène Henry in Tokyo were placed in an agreement signed 30 August 1940 in Tokyo, which gave the Japanese more or less a free hand in Tonkin, with France recognizing the political and economic mastery of Japan in S.E. Asia. In return, the Japanese government guaranteed French sovereignty over FIC. To spare French dignity, it was agreed that the exact number of Japanese troops to be allowed into Tonkin would be a matter of negotiation between the French and Japanese in Hanoi.

It has to be noted that up to the signing of that agreement, Decoux resisted any agreement which would allow the Japanese to station troops inside FIC, because in his view that would doom the defence of the colony. On 30 August he had a meeting with the American consul in Hanoi, Reed, whom he implored to release modern fighters to FIC. He was overruled by his government, but his position and subsequent attitude of very reluctant cooperation with the Japanese would "save his skin" after the war, when he had to defend his conduct in the French high court. The Haute Cour de Justice absolved him.

The details of the August 30 agreement had to be worked out in a conference between French and Japanese military officers. General Nishihara, however, presented the G.G. with a document ready for signing, and an ultimatum, on 31 August. Decoux told him that he had not yet received instructions from Vichy. Moreover, in the Conseil du Gouvernement held on 2 September, General Martin told Decoux that in case of a Japanese invasion from Kwangsi with three divisions he could engage them for at least a couple of weeks at the forts of the Tonkin border. Martin based this optimistic view on intelligence reports which informed him of tired Japanese troops with low morale. Strengthened by this assessment, Decoux rejected the ultimatum, and told Nishihara that the conference would start on 3 September. The provisional agreement reached next day encompassed the encampment of maximum 25,000 Japanese soldiers (two thirds of the French Forces in Tonkin) in the region between the Red River and the Chinese border, the use of three

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2527 Dreifort, Ibid, 287, note 35.
2529 Haas, 68, Decoux 102.
2530 FRUS, Diplomatic Papers 1940, Vol.IV, 92.
2531 Haas, 55.
2532 Haas, 71, Decoux, 103.
2533 Decoux, 104. Dreifort, Ibid., 290.
airfields by the Japanese,2534 and the permanent stationing of a Japanese destroyer at Haiphong harbour.2535 But the French retained administrative control over the areas occupied by the Japanese, and Japanese soldiers were forbidden to enter Hanoi with their arms, and the date at which the Japanese troops would enter Tonkin was left open. Decoux tried to gain time, in the hope that the U.S. would intervene.2536

On 4 September Cordell Hull indeed stated in a press conference, that the U.S.A. wanted the status quo in FIC to be retained. The day before, he had instructed Grew to inform the Gaimusho that allowing Japanese forces to use FIC military bases would have "an unfortunate effect on American public opinion".2537 In reaction the Gaimusho informed the U.S. Ambassador in Tokyo, Joseph Grew, that Japan only wanted free passage through Tonkin for its troops, and not a continuous occupation of Tonkin.2538 Moreover, it was denied that the Japanese had handed over an ultimatum to the French in Hanoi. It was clear to the Japanese that the French wanted to gain time, and to involve the U.S.A.

Notwithstanding the provisional agreement - the so-called Martin-Nishihara agreement - the Japanese Southern Army in Kwangsi Province launched an unprovoked attack against the French fortification at Dong Dang on 6 September. The attack was beaten off by the French, and Decoux broke off negotiations for a definitive agreement. Nishihara declared that the attack was unauthorized, and apologised.2539 The attack however was a clear warning signal that the patience of the Japanese military was running out, especially at the headquarters of the Southern Army in Kwangsi. They also came up with new demands. The French however insisted on a Japanese guarantee of their sovereignty over FIC. Both Decoux and Baudouin kept their American counterparts in Hanoi and Vichy well informed on the negotiations,2540 and Decoux even directly informed the British Consul-General, Henderson, who happened to be in Hanoi at the time of the incident.2541 According to Henderson, the French Governor-General even had talks with the despised Chinese via their Consul-General in Hanoi to obtain support against the Japanese.

The Vichy Government informed the American Ambassador about the agreement of 30 August about a week later. Hull expressed his feelings of disgust with "the French capitulation" to the new French Ambassador, Gaston Henry-Haye, in a meeting on 11 September 1940.2542 On 16 September Cordell Hull had an important meeting with the British and Australian ambassadors in Washington, in which the situation in FIC was

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2534 At Phu Tho, Ving Yen and Laokay, all three located north of the Red River.

2535 Hesse d’Alzon, 69, Haas, 75. All other Japanese warships had to stay at sea at least 6 miles out of the coastline.


2537 Hull to Grew, 3 September 1940, FRUS, Japan, 1931 - 1941, II, 291 - 292.

2538 Baudouin, 334 Cordell Hull, memoirs 903, FRUS, Diplomatic papers 1940, Vol. IV, 100 - 101.

2539 Decoux, 108.


2541 Henderson to FO, 7 Sept. 1940, no 7, FO 371/24719[F4204/3429/61].

2542 Cordell Hull, Memoirs, I, 904.
discussed. Lord Lothian declared that the UK was willing to give some military assistance to the French in order to avoid Japanese occupation, but he insisted on American support. Hull stated that it was not the policy of the U.S. to support a colonial government against aggression, when its motherland was unable to give military support. This applied to both France and The Netherlands.254 The U.S. would however staunchly support the Chinese, and would encourage the British and French to win time by negotiations.

It is not unreasonable that this attitude gave the Vichy government the perfect excuse to lay the blame for their capitulation to Japanese wishes on the U.S. government. They did so in a memorandum, handed by Baudouin to the American chargé d'Affaires at Vichy, in which the French government stated that “Since the only power in a position to intervene effectively in the Far East made it known to the French Government that it was not in a position to do so......the latter could not but consider itself justified in defending its position by adopting the only line of conduct which took into consideration the factual situation with which it was faced.”254 It should be noted, that the French indeed recognized that their old Ally, Great Britain, was no longer in a position to assist them in the Far East, and that the only country which could get them out of their predicament, were the United States. For the U.S. however, although the fate of FIC was important, it was of no vital interest, meaning that the U.S. would not risk war with the Japanese if they occupied part or the whole of FIC2545. One is struck by the parallel in U.S. attitudes towards the NEI in this respect.

The foot-dragging of Decoux caused the Japanese to increase pressure on the French. According to Craigie in Tokyo, this was also caused by Japanese anxiety over Germany, which was rumored to dislike any expansion of Japan into FIC.2546 The Dutch chargé d'affaires in Bangkok learned from the French Ambassador to Thailand, Paul Lépissier, that the Germans had declared both FIC and NEI as being extensions of states subjugated by the Germans, implying German irritation at Japanese meddling in these territories.2547 On 19 September, vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Ohashi informed Arsène Henry that, with or without agreement, Japanese troops would cross into Tonkin from Kwangsi on 22 September 1940. Nishihara gave the same message to Decoux. The Japanese Consul-General in Hanoi, meanwhile had informed all Japanese civilians that they had to leave FIC with the utmost speed. The Japanese citizens in Saigon left on board the ARIZONA MARU on the 20th of September; those in Tonkin left Haiphong in the morning of 22 September on board the SURABAYA MARU and the HACHIKAI MARU.2548 Meanwhile, the Japanese Navy concentrated warships in the Gulf of Tonkin, and one Japanese Division (the 5th Infantry Division) arrived in force at the border near Langson. The French therefore had to negotiate under increasing pressure, and at three o'clock in the afternoon of 22 September 1940 an agreement was signed. The French concession, compared to the 3 September agreement, was that the Japanese were allowed to enter Hanoi, that the

254 Cordell Hull, Memoirs, 906.
2544 Matthews to Cordell Hull, 19 September 1940, FRUS, 1940, IV, 134.
2545 Valette, op. cit., 48 - 49.
2548 Haas, 79.
Kwangsi divisions were permitted to move over the Tonkin Railway system to Haiphong, and that Japanese troops intended for an invasion of Yunnan were to be transported through Tonkin to Laokay. The limit of 25,000 Japanese troops also applied. The maximum number of Japanese troops allowed North of the Red River had been fixed at 6,000 soldiers. The Japanese concession was a confirmation of French sovereignty over FIC. Moreover, the French still had been able to limit the total number of Japanese troops on FIC soil, and therefore could still claim that there was no question of a Japanese military occupation of Tonkin.

The ink of the signatures was not yet dry, when the Japanese Southern Army attacked the French border posts in the evening of 22 September, as its commander and staff disagreed with the agreement signed that day in Hanoi. The military events of what was the first clash between European ground-based troops and the Japanese Imperial Army in the Second World War has been described in more detail in subchapter 5.5.2. After a few days of fighting, the French lost Langson, and Generals Buhrer and Martin had been put to shame for their over-optimistic estimate of French military superiority over the Japanese in actual combat. The French over-estimation of their fighting prowess over the Japanese proved to be an embarrassment even to the French diplomatic missions in the Far East. According to this source, the French colony had maintained unreasonably high expectations about its defence capacities for years; expectations which had been brought down to earth due to the Langson debacle.

The Chinese government meanwhile had blown up the bridge near Laokay, which isolated the Yunnan railway from the Indochinese railway to Haiphong. They also took over management of the Yunnan railway on Chinese territory, but retained the French and Annamite personnel of the French railway company until 1943.

Not mentioned by Hesse d’Alzon and other French historians is the interesting fact that in September/October 1940 there was a window of opportunity to send reinforcement directly from France to FIC. According to the French Ambassador in Washington, Gaston Henry Haye, the German Armistice Commission had given permission to send troops and weapons from metropolitan France to FIC by way of the Cape of Good Hope or the Panama Canal. The French Ambassador asked the United States to mediate with the British to leave these transports unhampered. The American Undersecretary Sumner Welles thereupon asked the French Ambassador to explain to him why the Germans and Italians would allow the reinforcement of FIC, while they had just concluded a Tripartite Pact with Japan. Flustered, the Ambassador stated “that he had reached the conclusion that the permission to transport troops and munitions to Indochina had been given because of the desire of Germany and Italy to prevent Japan from extending herself too far in Southern Asia and thus facilitating a Japanese attack upon the Netherlands East Indies which Germany desired to retain for

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254 Decoux, 111 - 112. Also Reed to Cordell Hull, 22 September 1940, FRUS, 1940, IV, 141 - 142.


256 Communication of French chargé d'affaires in Peking to his Dutch colleague. Letter Dr. R. Flaes to Minister of Foreign Affairs, 24 September 1941, no 1416/129. Archives MinBuZa, London Archives, Secret Archives, political reports from Foreign posts, Peking/Chungking, box 18, file 15.

257 Haas, 31.
This was interesting information, which was passed to the Dutch.

The French historian Valette\textsuperscript{2564} has noted that Roosevelt was so occupied by his re-election campaign, that he did not intervene with Hull's policy towards Japan and FIC. In his view, there was an inexcusable lack of diplomatic exchange of information on the highest level, because Roosevelt refused to see the new French Ambassador Henry-Haye for almost six months. The first meeting between Roosevelt and Henri-Haye took place on 21 December 1940. As can be seen from the above, Cordell Hull and the undersecretary of State, Sumner Welles, had a number of meetings with Henry-Haye, and therefore it is doubtful whether that was the reason for explaining the American lack of interest for their cause, as perceived by the French.

The result of the improved French-Japanese relationship after the resolution of the Langson Incident was the signing of a trade agreement between France and Japan, in which it was acknowledged that FIC would be part of the Yen-bloc. Moreover, the French agreed to export surplus rice to Japan at prices equal to the price of rice imports from Burma, which was in Japan's advantage, because the Burmese rice was inferior to that of Indochina. Moreover, FIC would deliver 14,000 tons of rubber and 500 tons of tin yearly to Japan.\textsuperscript{2555} It was the delivery of rubber which caused anxiety to the Dutch East-Indian government, because that would free part of the Japanese rubber import from the NEI for re-export to Germany via the Transsib railway through the Soviet-Union.\textsuperscript{2556} We now understand that this Dutch fear was well-founded, as on 23 February 1941 the German Foreign Minister Von Ribbentrop complained to the Japanese, that the 6,000 tons of rubber from FIC which were promised, had not yet arrived in Germany.\textsuperscript{2557}

Although the British government had forbade all British shipping to FIC on 31 August 1940, there were still ships plying their trade between FIC harbours and other countries. French ships, in combination with Greek and Panamese trampships had a regular schedule between Haiphong and Hongkong, and between Saigon and Singapore, with no interference from the Royal Navy. The only mailboat of the Messageries Maritimes still in service, the MARÉCHA L JOFFRE, even maintained the service between Saigon, Manila, Shanghai and Japan.\textsuperscript{2558} Dutch ships of the KPM and KJCJL shipping companies were no longer calling at FIC harbours, however.

\textsuperscript{2553} Memorandum of conversation between S. Welles and French Ambassador, 9 October 1940. FRUS, 1940, Vol. IV, 173.

\textsuperscript{2564} Valette, op. cit., 44.

\textsuperscript{2555} The official text of the Trade Agreement was forwarded to the Dutch Foreign Ministry by Minister Pabst in his letter of 10 July 1941, no 1626 H.H. 21 (G)/276, in Ibidem.

\textsuperscript{2556} Telegram Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Kleffens to Minister Loudon in Washington, 14 November 1940. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Archives Legation Washington, file Indochina, no 2899.


\textsuperscript{2558} Report J.J. Wierink, honorary consul at Canton, attached to letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 28 December 1940, no D.1697/78. Ibid, file no 120.
A Dutch observer, travelling in FIC in March 1941, found no trace of rationing, not even of petrol for cars. Chinese traders were employing junks to carry goods to and from Singapore. Trading with Manila and even with Australia was flourishing. The KNIL M was still maintaining its flight schedules between Singapore and Saigon. The observer reported the presence of two Japanese bombers at the airport of Saigon (Than Son Nut), guarded by Japanese troops. This military presence was far in advance of the Japanese occupation of Southern FIC. It was also reported that the Chinese quarter of Saigon, Cholon, was dangerous for Japanese, as a couple of Japanese soldiers there on leave had been killed by a Chinese mob.

The Dutch chargé d'affaires in Bangkok rightly concluded that the French despised the Thai even more than the Japanese, and therefore were inclined to give more facilities to the Japanese when pressed. The French were realists, not to say defeatists. As he noted, "the French excuse is that "Il nous manque les moyens militaires de nous défendre." Therefore he warned that further Japanese encroachments to Southern FIC had to be expected. His opinion was confirmed when a detachment of French marines arrested, in his house in Shanghai, the leader of the Free French in the French community in Shanghai, M. Egal. Egal was imprisoned on board the French gunboat FRANCIS GARNIER in Shanghai, and thereafter transported, with Japanese assistance, to Hanoi to be judged for high treason. His arrest caused considerable commotion in the French colony at Shanghai, which was predominantly pro-Gaullist.

5.2.3. Thailand's choice between East or West.

Richard Aldrich has correctly stated that despite the evident importance of the events of 1941 for Thailand's relations with the Western powers, her role in the outbreak of the Pacific War is still not yet clearly understood. Had the Thai government, as the American Ambassador Dr Hugh Gladney Grant in Bangkok maintained, already chosen for an alliance with Japan before Pearl Harbor? Or were the Thais staunch friends of the West, to be supported with weapons and oil against the encroaching Japanese, which was the position of the British ambassador in Bangkok Sir Josiah Crosby. Even after the war, this has resulted in two schools of thought about Thai diplomacy in that fateful year.

As has been discussed in subchapter 5.1.3., Thailand became a rather nationalistic state under the government of Marshall Luang Pibul Songgram after 1932. The deterioration of the Western position in Europe gave the Thais the long-sought after opportunity to reclaim the territory that had to be ceded to France and Britain in the early part of the century. It

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258 J.J. Wierink, honorary Consul in Canton, travelling on instruction of the NEI Society for the sale of Sugar in Surabaya.


261 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 28 May 1941, no C.751/38, Ibid.

262 Telegram Reuters, Shanghai 5 April 1941. In Ibid, file 1410.

263 Aldrich, 209.
has been the merit of Flood to have shown that the Thai demands on the French for the return of the lost territories did not arise in 1940 after the defeat of France in Western Europe, but have been discussed frequently with the French in the interwar period.

In order to improve their relationship with the Thai, the French government offered, via the Minister in Bangkok Lépissier, to sign a non-aggression pact between the two countries at the end of 1939. Pibul Songgram thereupon agreed to sign two identical non-aggression agreements with France and Great Britain. The proposal was greeted with relief by both Western governments, because it would mean that Japanese influence in Thailand would be undercut. For the French, it had the added advantage that they would have secure western borders in FIC. The agreements were signed in Bangkok on 12 June 1940. The British signature was by Sir Josiah Crosby, the British Ambassador to Thailand. The French Minister in Bangkok, Paul Lépissier, signed for the French government. All signatories declared that they would not attack each other, nor seek mediation of a third party (i.e. Japan). The agreement with the British was formally ratified on 31 August 1940. The agreement with France was never ratified.

The reason for this was on one hand a fiery anti-French publicity campaign in Thailand which started after the French armistice in Western Europe, and on the other hand the replacement of the French government by the more pro-Axis Vichy regime. Lépissier became isolated, as the French colonial authorities in FIC were adamantly opposed to any border corrections, and got the backing of the Vichy regime. This coincided with Japanese moves against FIC. The position of Thailand in this situation could be compared to that of Italy versus France in June 1940, as the Thai government sensed a once-in-a lifetime opportunity to recover the territory lost to France. The Thai government however was unsure whether the Japanese would allow any French administration over FIC, and therefore they clamoured for the return of the whole of Cambodia and Laos within their borders, if possible even before FIC was militarily occupied by Japan. To find out the Japanese intentions, a Thai military mission under Prom Yothi (Deputy Minister of Defence) accompanied by the Japanese military attaché in Bangkok, Hiroshi Tamura, left for Tokyo on 4 September 1940.

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2565 Flood, op. cit., 306, 309.

2566 Tarling, Onset, 108.

2567 For the text of the agreement, see letter from chargé d'Affaires A.J.D. Steenstra Toussaint to Foreign Minister E. van Klaffens, 23 June 1940, no Ot.790/39, Archives MinBuZa, London Archives, Secret Archives, Reports from Bangkok 1940, box 14, inv. nr. 116.

2568 Flood, op. cit., 309. According to Flood, the new FIC Governor-General Decoux considered Minister Lépissier in Bangkok almost as a traitor for having suggested territorial concessions to the Thai in 1939. Flood ibid., 311.

2569 Haas, 100.

2570 Flood, op. cit., 312.

2571 Tarling, Onset, 181.
Relations with the British remained friendly, however, as the British government, urged on by Sir Josiah Crosby, had arrived at the conclusion that acquiescing to the Thai request for the return of parts of FIC to Thailand would at least keep Thailand outside Japanese hands. The loss of Southern FIC to the Japanese would be very dangerous to Singapore, but the occupation of Thailand by the Japanese would bring the Japanese Army within 500 km of Singapore in the Siamese part of the Malay peninsula and ensure a catastrophe. Therefore, the Japanese had to be kept out of Thailand as long as possible.

On 14 September 1940 the Thai government confronted Lépissier with a request for returning those parts of Laos and Cambodja which had been annexed from Thailand in 1904. The Thai ambassador at Vichy did the same. The French government rejected the Thai claims on 19 September 1940. When the Langson Incident (See pages 25 and 26) ended without a collapse of the French governmental and military structure in FIC, the Thai government backed down. It was, moreover, not in Japan's interest at that time to support the Thai claims too openly. The British Government reminded both Thailand and Japan about the guarantee of territorial integrity, given to the French, thus precluding any change of the borders. The Americans correctly suspected secret dealings between the Thai and Japanese governments in order to change the status-quo, and forbade the re-export of 12 North-American divebombers, which had just arrived at Manila and which had been ordered and paid for by the Thais. To keep a closer watch on the local situation a naval/air attaché (Cdr Thomas) was dispatched to Bangkok to assist Ambassador Grant. As was pointed out by the Dutch envoy, Thailand was extremely vulnerable to an American oil embargo, because they had obtained all their oil and oil products from the U.S. since 1939.

Notwithstanding Allied pressure, the Thai Government decided otherwise. On 28 September 1940 Songgram gave orders to inform the Japanese military attaché that Thailand would offer the Japanese free passage in order to attack Singapore, if Japan would support Thai territorial claims against FIC. He declined however, to put the deal in writing. By signal intercepts, however, the British were well informed about the secret Thai - Japanese contacts. It was now the Japanese General Staff, which put pressure on Matsuoka in order to occupy FIC in order to march to Singapore.

Meanwhile, Decoux was not happy with the actions of Lépissier in Bangkok, whom he considered to be too Anglophile. In his view, Lépissier had not acted forcefully enough against the Thai troop concentrations at the FIC border, and therefore he asked Baudouin to replace the French Minister. Lépissier was indeed replaced in November 1940 by the French Minister Roger Garreau, whereafter Lépissier joined the Free French. It was around that time that Japan changed course with respect to the Thais. Due to French

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258 Baudouin, 345, 348.

259 Haas, 104.


262 Decoux, 137.
intransigence, it now became an aim of the Japanese to further weaken the French in FIC. By siding with Thailand on the condition that the Thai's would join the co-prosperity sphere, Japan hoped to establish a foothold in Thailand in order to threaten Burma and Malaya. In lieu, the Thai were to be offered part of their terra irredenta, as had already been proposed by Songgram.

From 23 November 1940 onwards, Thai military incursions into FIC and bombardments of French border positions increased steeply. Evidently, the Thai's had been "given the green light" by the Japanese. Hastily, the French transferred their battalions from Tonkin to Cambodia. On 28 November 1940 Matsuoka informed Arsène Henry that the Japanese government was willing to mediate in the conflict. The French did not take the bait, in order not to come under Japanese influence and to save the non-aggression pact, concluded with the Thai's. Again, they tried to involve the Anglosaxon powers. Captain Jouan of the French Navy was sent to Singapore, where he had lengthy discussions with Vice-Admiral Layton, who had replaced Noble, between 15 and 21 December 1940. Jouan secured a certain amount of trade between FIC and British possessions, specifically India. A protocol was signed on December 26 in Singapore, in which agreements were listed with respect to frequency and number of French and British ships allowed on the traffic lanes between Saigon and Hongkong/Singapore. It was even agreed, with concurrence by General De Gaulle, to stop propaganda for the Free French in FIC. Meanwhile, Decoux also talked to the U.S. Consul-General in Hanoi. The Japanese protested on 14 January 1941 against these French démarches as they suspected, not without reason, that the French were trying to use the Anglosaxon powers as mediators.

The aggressive Thai position towards FIC made the British reconsider the possibility of a pre-emptive strike against the Kra Peninsula in case the Japanese would, by force or agreement, occupy Thailand. The problem was the non-aggression Treaty closed with Thailand. But doing nothing would result in giving the Japanese a headstart in occupying Southern Thailand close to the Malay border. The dilemma was temporarily solved by agreeing not to move against Thailand, as long as the Japanese respected its integrity. Moreover, on the urging of Crosby, the Foreign Office decided not to protest too loudly if Thailand invaded FIC. This information would cause U.S. Minister Grant to state his belief that Crosby had even given the Thais the green light to attack Indochina in 1941. Crosby was aware of Grant's opinion, and worked hard to have Grant replaced by another American Minister. The United States and Great Britain thus were decidedly not on the same track in this affair.

Early January 1941 the American Minister informed Hull, that the Thais had received a number of weapons and planes from the Japanese. This proved to be only partly true. He also had been informed by the Dutch Minister that Thailand had asked the NEI to

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257 Tarling, Onset, 240 - 242.
258 Haas, 109, Decoux 142 - 143.
259 Tarling, Onset, 248 - 251.
260 Aldrich, op. cit., 214.
261 See Letter Grant to Hull 371, 28 July 1941, FRUS, 1941, V., 236 - 237.
262 Telegram Grant to Hull, 4 January 1941, FRUS, V (1941), 1.
resume delivery of oil products as Thailand was critically short on essential products, like aviation gasoline.

Notwithstanding their oil situation, the Thai opened an offensive into Cambodia in mid-January (for the military campaign and the outcome see subchapter 5.4.3). They failed however to occupy their objective, the city of Sisophon, and the French scored a decisive naval victory over the Thai fleet at Koh-Chang on 17 January 1941. Therefore, the Japanese government decided to intervene, and on 21 January, in a speech to the Diet, Matsuoka offered Japanese mediation. The Thai’s agreed, and the Vichy-government gave in, and negotiations started on a cease-fire.

On 31 January a cease-fire agreement was signed, lasting upon 11 February, which date had to be postponed to 23 February. The Dutch Chargé d’affaires was able to send his government the verbatim text of the armistice, which had been signed on board the Japanese cruiser NATORI in Saigon harbour on 31 January at 1800 hours local time. French and Thai landforces would each withdraw 10 kilometers from their existing positions, naval units and airplanes would remain at their base, postal and diplomatic relations would be re-established, a mixed commission of arbitration established, and a Japanese armistice commission would oversee the execution of the armistice. The negotiations for a permanent peace began in Tokyo, under direct supervision of Yosuke Matsuoka, with, on the French side René Robin, ex-Governor-General of FIC from 1934 - 1936 and Gouverneur-Général Honoraire des Colonies, and Charles Arsène-Henry, the French Ambassador in Tokyo. The Thai delegation was led by Prince Vamvadiyakara.

The Japanese negotiators tried to scale down Thai claims on the whole of Laos and Cambodia, which Matsuoka was unwilling to endorse, because he knew that the French would not accept the loss of Cambodia and Laos. The Japanese Army GHQ on the other hand fully backed up the Thai claims. It needed a liaison conference on 30 January 1941 to sort out this internal Japanese conflict between Gaimusho and the Army. On 17 February the Japanese proposed to let France cede to Thailand parts of Laos and Cambodia, for which the Thais would pay France 10 million ticals (around 7 million guilders). The areas on the right bank of the Mekong river to the old Thai border, at Luang Prabang and at Paksé would be ceded from Laos. The northern part of Cambodia, north of a line from Sisophon to Stung Treng onto the Mekong River would be ceded too. The city of Siem Reap would therefore remain French. Moreover, the whole border zone would be demilitarized. Vichy balked however, because this would have as a consequence that French fortifications on the northern border of Cambodia would fall in Thai territory. When on 21 February no answer had been received from Vichy, Matsuoka gave them an ultimatum expiring on 23 February, expecting only a "Yes" or "No".

It still took some hard bargaining before agreement was reached. The end of the armistice was postponed from 25 February to 17 March, against Thai wishes. The French reminded Matsuoka of the Japanese guarantee given on 30 August 1940 for the integrity of the

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254 Tarling, Onset, 260.
256 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 28 February 1941, no C.310/18. Ibid.
257 ibid, 262.
whole of FIC, including the areas now to be ceded to Thailand. After 33 separate sessions, an agreement at last was signed on 11 March 1941 in Tokyo, with some small corrections to the border as proposed by the Japanese on 23 February 1941.250 The northern border in Cambodia became the 15th degree of Northern latitude. The French had to cede to Thailand an area of 69,420 km², (twice the size of the Netherlands!) for which the Thais agreed to pay an indemnity for the French investments in infrastructure. The French however delayed signing until agreement was reached on a Thai compensation of 6 million ticals, to be paid over a period of 6 years, and total demilitarisation of all ceded territory. A condition which raised eyebrows everywhere was the article forbidding Thailand to close treaties with third countries which might be harmful towards Japan. On 9 May the representatives of the three governments signed the agreement.250

Songgram was not at all happy with this outcome. Notwithstanding jubilant official proclamations, he felt the Japanese had let him down. That was indeed what had happened, as the Japanese were not yet ready to sacrifice their influence on FIC by agreeing on even larger territorial concessions to the Thais, as the whole of Cambodia and Laos.250 The Thai government had taken Japan's propaganda as "the saviour of all Asian peoples" a little too literally. Therefore, the Thai government avoided all references to a "Greater East-Asia co-prosperity sphere", or to a "New Order", much to the chagrin of the Japanese.250 But, as Pibul Songgram told Crosby frankly on 27 February 1941, he needed armaments, and especially oil, in order to stay neutral and not to fall into Japan's orbit. Thailand had stockpiled oil before the war, but its aggression towards Indochina had dwindled the supplies, and it needed oil desperately. In effect, the Thais had already approached the Dutch chargé d'Affaires, Steenstra Toussaint, about the possibility of acquiring oil products such as aviation gasoline, diesel and kerosene directly from the Netherlands Indies.250 The following months would be witness to a lot of diplomatic activity, as Thailand tried to secure a reliable supply of oil, in lieu for a share of its export of rubber, tin and rice. The Thai government indicated to the Western powers that Japan was willing to absorb all its rubber and tin exports in lieu of oil, but this would make the Thai government a "puppet" regime, and Thai government was all too aware of this.250

A complicating factor was that the United States government took a far more moralistic position, as, in the view of its Minister in Bangkok (Howard Grant), the Thais had already sold out their country to the Japanese. Therefore, the Americans considered Thailand already a stooge for the Japanese, and were unwilling to reconsider the supply of weapons, planes and oil. Certainly, the Thai's provided some ground for American suspicions. On 6 April 1941 Pibul Songgram declared publicly, that "he desired to promote

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250 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 14 March 1941, no C.403/24. Ibid.
250 Tarling, Onset, 263.
251 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 2 April 1941, nr C.483/28, Ibid.
252 Telegram Grant to Hull, 4 January 1941, FRUS, 1941 Vol. V. 1.
253 Tarling, Onset, 274.
cooperation between Thailand and Japan to the highest pitch”.  A Thai scheme to initiate uprisings in Burma, in which Pibul Songgram himself was implicated, was uncovered and caused Crosby much embarrassment when it became known within the U.S. State Department. There were rumours of a pre-emptive British strike into Southern Thailand, and the Thais were stepping up their military strength around Singora from 6 to 25 battalions, under command of the pro-Japanese general Luang Prom Yodhi. Crosby however still believed that the Western Powers could neutralise Thailand by being reasonably open to Thai requests. In a telegram on 17 June 1941 he indicated, in veiled wording, that he would step down if the F.O., the Ministry of Economic Warfare and the oil companies would not be more forthcoming with respect to the Thai’s request for oil. This dramatic telegram persuaded Eden to support Crosby. Of course, the difference of opinion between England and the U.S. did not help the Western cause.

Japan expedited an economic delegation to Bangkok in order to secure Thailand’s place in the “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity sphere”. The Thais resisted, however. The Japanese also urged the recognition of the Wang-Ching-Wei regime by the Thais, and demanded two new Japanese consulates, one at Chieng-May near the Burmese border, and another one South at Singora, near the border with Malaya. The Thai government however declined for the moment, and still pursued a more or less pro-Western course.

5.2.4. Japanese penetration into Southern FIC.

The Japanese mediation of the Thai - French conflict resulted in an even stronger economic position for Japan in FIC. But before Japan could penetrate further South, it had to cover itself in the North against a Soviet surprise. The battle of Nomonhan in June-August 1939, during which the Russians had destroyed a complete Japanese infantry division, had not been forgotten. Therefore, on 13 April 1941 Minister Matsuoka signed a non-aggression treaty with the Soviets in Moscow. That took care of the Russians, and freed Japan to penetrate further South.

On 4 July 1941 the Director of the Banque de l’Indochine signed an agreement with Toshikato Okumbo, Director of the Yokohama Species bank, about the free exchange between Franc and yen. This was needed because of payments to be made to FIC due to exports to Japan. It was agreed that Japan would get 700.000 tons of rice yearly. Moreover, it would buy 150.000 tons of rubber (to be paid in U.S. dollars!) and 700.000 tons of

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2004 Reuters Press release, 8 April 1941. MinBuZa London Archive, Secret Arcive GA/DZ, A l 14(g), file 435 "Relations between Thailand and Japan 1941".


2006 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 28 May 1941, no C.751/38. Ibid.

2007 Aldrich, op. cit., 222.

2008 Taring, ibid, 275.

2009 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 2 April 1941, ibid.

2010 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 28 May 1941, nr C.751/38. Ibid.

2011 Haas, 128.
The failure of the economic negotiations with the Netherlands East Indies' government on 7 June 1941 (See Chapter 3) caused the Japanese to hasten their penetration to the south, in order to bring Dutch territory within range of Japanese bombers. The airfields around Saigon provided this possibility, with, as an additional bonus, that Singapore could also be bombed. The unexpected German invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 however caused considerable confusion in Japan, and caused the downfall of Matsuoka, after he had proposed an immediate Japanese attack on the Soviet-Union. The Imperial Conference on 2 July 1941 (See Chapter 6) decided otherwise, however. Therefore, the Japanese ambassador at Vichy, Sotomatsu Kato, opened direct negotiations with the Vichy government, and Arsène-Henry in Tokyo was bypassed, as the Japanese suspected that he was sympathetic towards the Free French. The leak about Japanese intentions, however, came from Shanghai, and the Daily Telegraph of 4 July carried the story that Japan wanted bases in Southern FIC and Thailand. On the basis of this report, the British F.O. started to look into options to contain the menace. On 10 July, Sumner Welles showed Lord Halifax intercepted diplomatic Japanese messages indicating that Japan was planning the acquisition of bases in Southern FIC. Thus the Americans were informed too. A military reaction was impossible, with the exception of moving Australian troops into Timor and Ambon, which required Dutch consent. However, actions in the field of economics and propaganda were possible, and were studied immediately by both Anglosaxon countries.

In a memorandum addressed straight to Marshal Pétain on 14 July 1941, the Japanese asked for the use of 8 airfields around Saigon and of the naval facilities of Saigon harbour and the Camranh Bay. Moreover, Japanese troops had to be allowed to be stationed in Southern FIC, without any upper limit on the number of troops. The French had to respond by 20 July, at which date the Japanese would invade southern FIC anyway. The Vichy government had been forewarned by Decoux on 7 July that Japan would present new proposals.

Pétain and his Minister of National Defence, Admiral Darlan, came to the conclusion that they had no other option than to accept the Japanese demands. If the French rejected the Japanese ultimatum, the Japanese would invade FIC and French sovereignty would be lost, perhaps forever. To comply with the Japanese demands would mean that France would be driven to even closer cooperation with the Axis states, but at least it would

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2002 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens. Bangkok 9 July 1941, no CDI 959/51, MinBuZa ibid.
2003 Haas, 130.
2004 Haas, 132.
2005 Haas, 135.
2006 Tarling, Onset, 319.
2009 Decoux, 151.
guarantee French sovereignty. Obviously, this was the lesser of the two evils, as French military power in FIC would remain intact. Darlan informed the US Ambassador in secret about the French position on 19 July, 1941. On 21 July 1941, the Japanese ambassador was informed accordingly. At the signing of the "Protocole concernant la défense en commun de l'Indochine française" at Vichy on 29 July 1941, the Japanese government again guaranteed French sovereignty and respected the French viewpoint that the French would use their military force in FIC only for the defence of FIC, in cooperation with the Japanese, but would not join the Japanese in any offensive operation. Decoux had been left out completely from these negotiations, and was informed of the results on 23 July. The day before, Nishihara's successor, Lt.-Gen. Raishiro Sumita, had presented the ultimatum to Decoux.

The Western Powers were well-informed about the Japanese diplomatic démarches, even before Darlan had discussed those with Murphy in Vichy. The Dutch Minister in Washington informed his Government on the 17th of July, the Dutch Minister in Tokyo one day later (See subchapter on Thai-Dutch relations). On 23 July the possible economic measures which the U.S. Government planned to take, had been discussed with the British and the Dutch. In an important telegram on 24 July, the Dutch G.G. urged the announcement of an embargo on oil exports to Japan by Great-Britain, the U.S. and the Netherlands if the Japanese occupied Southern FIC. On 26 July the G.G. informed his government and the Minister in Bangkok that Japanese ships were leaving NEI waters, and that Japanese companies in the NEI were firing their native workers. He inquired about the possibility of evacuating Japanese women and children in the NEI to FIC on board French ships. On 31 July, the Dutch declared a freeze on payments to and from FIC, which measure made trade (including oil exports) between FIC and the NEI virtually impossible.

The Japanese went public on the agreement with Vichy on 26 July 1941. They justified their move by saying that, by occupying southern FIC, a British and Free Gaullist take-over of FIC had been averted. The Vichy government did not protest this evidently false information. The Japanese pointed to the British and Gaullist take-over of Syria and Lebanon in June 1941 in defending their "defensive" move. Neither the FIC government nor the Anglo-Saxon powers were fooled by this explanation, however, as the Japanese landed 25,000 troops in Saigon and the Camranh Bay. Decoux and the new FIC Army Commander General Mordan considered the possibility of armed resistance, but came to the conclusion that it would not bring Britain or the U.S.A. to their side, and therefore was a suicidal policy. The Japanese occupation troops were grudgingly welcomed.

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2810 Haas, 140.
2811 Tarling, Onset, 328.
2813 Telegram G.G. to MinKol., 24 July 1941, OM/QR, in MinBuZa, Ibid.
2815 Haas, 142.
2816 Haas, 144.
5.2.5. The last six months of peace.

After the move into Southern FIC, there was only one country left which the Japanese could occupy without being dragged in a major war: Thailand. All other territory south and east of FIC was either British, Dutch or American territory. The three countries responded all three with economic and financial sanctions against Japan, resulting in a drying up of the oil export towards Japan. The Japanese government had not expected this response, still explaining their move into Southern FIC as legal self-defense, in full agreement with the French government. Because the Americans had cracked the Japanese diplomatic code, the American government knew, from 15 July onward, all the details of the Japanese ultimatum to Vichy. The American government did not like the way the Vichy-government had handled the Japanese demands. Vichy did not publicly acknowledge that it had been put under strong Japanese military pressure, thereby giving Japanese propaganda the opportunity to declare that the occupation of Southern FIC had been agreed with the French government, in order to forestall a Gaullist take-over. When French ambassador Henri-Haye visited Hull on 16 September to ask him to take the interests of FIC in consideration during the ongoing Japanese-American negotiations, Hull exploded in anger. Nevertheless, the Americans did not break off diplomatic relations with Vichy, since they received valuable information via their Consul in Hanoi (Reed) and the Ambassador in Vichy (Leahy) on Japanese infringements of the accord with Vichy. This information was used in the Nomura-Hull talks in the Autumn to pressure the Japanese.

However, to the annoyance of the French government, the American embargo on oil also included FIC, which was considered by the Americans as completely within the Japanese sphere of influence. The Americans did not inform the Vichy government in advance about this move. When the French were left out of the Hull-Nomure talks, the relationship between France and the U.S. cooled considerably. The Dutch Foreign Minister, Eelco van Kleffens, confirmed the anti-French attitude of President Roosevelt and the State Department (Cordell Hull) to Dejean, representative of the Free French in London, and warned him of things to come. As we know today, the anti-French attitude of Roosevelt also extended to the Free French and their leader, De Gaulle.

British diplomacy however remained very pragmatic with regard to the question of FIC. Of course the F.O. did not share the growing anti-colonial feelings of Roosevelt, and remained in diplomatic contact with the FIC Government. On the urging of Captain Jouan, agreements were reached for a certain level of trade between Saigon and the British ports of Singapore and Malaya (See page 540). In August, the Americans even secured an order

2617 Cordell Hull, Memoirs, 1039.
2618 Cordell Hull, Memoirs, 1041 - 1042.
2619 Tarling, Onset, 339.
2620 Valette, op. cit., 52.
2621 Valette, op. cit., 56.
2622 See Valette, op. cit., 52 - 56. The State Department was very upset by the unannounced occupation by the Free French of the tiny islands of St. Pierre and Niquelon off the New Foundland coast.
for 10,000 tons of rubber,\textsuperscript{282} to be shipped out via Hongkong.

The Japanese, however, against the agreements they had reached with the French, did not allow this rubber export to the U.S., after which the British government decided to halt even the limited trade with FIC by ordering the stopping by the Royal Navy of a French convoy bound from FIC to the motherland south of South-Africa on 2 November 1941. It was discovered that the convoy transported sizable quantities of rubber from FIC.\textsuperscript{283} The "Decoux-agreement" of January 1941, reached between the Admirals Layton and Decoux in Singapore (See above) was an understanding that within the borders of China Station, the Royal Navy would not search French ships for contraband. After this incident, the Commander of China Station was instructed to stop and search all French ships. The English government approached the Dutch government with the request, to stop and search French ships in the Sunda Straits.

The issue had been addressed already beforehand in May 1941. The Dutch commander Naval Forces in NEI had noted heavy French seafare between FIC and Madagascar and Réunion. He proposed to the G.G. to start searching the French ships for contraband.\textsuperscript{284} The G.G. passed the request on to the Dutch government in London,\textsuperscript{285} stressing that the Royal Navy in the Far East, due to political reasons, was not able to search the French ships themselves (because of the "Decoux-agreement"). The request caused many discussions between the Dutch Foreign Office and the Department of Colonial Affairs, due to the international legal implications of the request.

The French Navy, meanwhile, now even provided escorts for the freighters. At a Dutch cabinet meeting on 30 September 1941, the decision was taken that the British would be asked whether, in their opinion, this could be tolerated.\textsuperscript{286} In the Cabinet meeting of 7 October, it was decided not to stop French vessels because of the possibilities of a conflict with the French.\textsuperscript{287} It was not a very heroic decision, because French escorts consisted of submarines only, but it was a pragmatic decision in the light of the approaching conflict with Japan. The decision however was revoked on British request (see above) by a telegram from Welter to the G.G. on 7 November 1941.\textsuperscript{288} Due to the fast approaching conflict with Japan, no French ships passed the Sunda Straits in that last month of peace.

The French in FIC were quite unhappy with the Japanese "occupation" of their territory. After a meeting with his French counterpart in Peking, the Dutch chargé d'affaires reported that his French colleague complained about the arrogance of the Japanese troops, saying "Ils sont impossibles". He quoted the French diplomat as saying, that if possible, the Dutch government should try to avoid at all costs arriving in a comparable situation as the French

\textsuperscript{282} Tarling, Onset, 341.
\textsuperscript{284} Memorandum Van Vredenburch, 23 May 1941. DBPN, C, II, doc. 429, 429.
\textsuperscript{286} Minutes Cabinet meeting, 30 September 1941. DBPN, C, III, doc. 308, 62-63.
\textsuperscript{287} Minutes Cabinet Meeting of 7 October 1941. DBPN, C, III, doc. 318, 426.
\textsuperscript{288} Telegram Welter to G.G., DBPN, C, III, doc. 404, 537.
The Dutch envoy in Bangkok reported that, notwithstanding French complaints about Japanese arrogance, the Japanese forces respected French sovereignty. The French Civil Service remained intact, and they had even replaced general Sumita by a civilian, Kenkichi Yoshizawa, whom we know from his fruitless talks with the Dutch on economic cooperation. Steenstra Toussaint therefore drew the conclusion that the Japanese recognized that interfering with the French Civil Service and financial institutions would ruin FIC economy. His letter was also sent to the Dutch G.G., and may have reinforced the widely held belief in Dutch government circles both in London and in the NEI, that if the Japanese would occupy the NEI, they would not interfere with the Dutch Civil Service and trade Houses and leave them intact. Subsequent events would prove that this opinion was totally wrong.

When the Japanese-American talks started in Washington in the fall of 1941, the French harboured considerable anxieties about their position in FIC in the event of a successful conclusion to these talks. Charles Rochat, Secretary-General of the French Foreign Office, strongly urged the evacuation of all Japanese troops from FIC as one of the conditions of an eventual agreement with the Japanese. In effect, however, France had ceased to exist as a power to be reckoned with in East Asia, and the plea of Rochat was pitiful, considering the fate of the once glorious French Empire.

5.2.6. The dilemma of Thailand, July - December 1941.

Thailand remained, almost to the end, a dilemma for both Japan and the Western Allies. At the Liaison Conference in Tokyo of 12 June 1941, Consul-General Renzo Asada from Bangkok had stated that an occupation of southern FIC by Japan would cause Thailand to "cease vacillating in her determination to oppose Britain and thus seek emancipation from British power". And indeed, it remained difficult for Pibul Songgram to decide which party would win the coming war in S.E. Asia. He had sent a special military mission to talks in Singapore, where Thawi Chunlasap and Lang Suranarong talked to Sir Robert Brooke-Popham on 9 July 1941. Sir Robert informed them that as long as Singapore remained in British hands, Thai security lay ultimately with the British. The message did not sound very convincing, and Brooke-Popham reported that the Thai officers had returned rather disappointed.

After the Japanese occupation of southern FIC, Thailand was the only non-aligned country in the path of Japan to Burma, Malaya and the East Indies. Its diplomatic and military importance grew correspondingly. The Japanese move into Southern FIC angered the

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2630 Letter Dr. R. Flaes to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Peking 24 September 1941, no 1416/129. Archives Ministry of Foreign Affairs, London Archives, Secret Archives, Political reports from Foreign Posts, Peking/Chungking, box 18, file no 15.

2631 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 14 October 1941, CDI 1405/71 Secret. MinBuZa Ibid.

2632 Telegram Leahy to Hull, 15 September 1941, no 1184, FRUS, 1941, Vol.IV. See also Valette, op. cit., 51.

2633 Tarling, Onset, 343.

2634 Sir Robert Brooke Popham to FO, 4 August 1941, PRO FO 371/28158 [F7221/7221/40].
Thai ss  becau se  they  sa w  that  the  Japanes e  forces  no w  occupie d  part  s  o f  FIC (Cambodia),
which Japan  as  a  mediator  ha d  withhold  from  Thai  annexation. Moreover,  the  Japa-
nese  pressure  on  the  NEI  government  for  economic  concessions  filled  them  with  fe-

An interesting  British  initiative  unknown  to the  Thai's  was the  penetration  in  Thailand  of
political  and  sabotage  units  of  the  Special  Operations  Executive  SOE,  with  the  objective  of
overthrowing the  Thai  Government  replacing  it  with  a  more  pro-British  government,  and  the
bolstering of  Thai  defences  against  a  Japanese  invasion  by  sabotage. Crosby  was
very  much  opposed,  when  he  was  informed  about  these  objectives  by  the  SOE  comman-
der in  Singapore,  Valery  St.  Killery.  A  second  British  plan  which  was  now  being  brought  to
life  again  was  Operation-MATADOR:  a  pre-emptive  strike  from  Northern  Malaya  into
Southern  Siam  to  occupy  Thai  landing  beaches  and  bases  and  deny  them  to  the  Japane-
se.  But  the  execution  of  that  plan  would,  without  a  shadow  of  doubt,  bring  the  Thai's  onto
the  Japanese  side,  and  therefore  it  was  politically  very  risky.  Moreover,  it  might  alienate
the  United States.  Therefore,  Crosby  was  not  informed  of  the  planned  operation.

Not  only  the  British,  but  also  the  Japanese  used  Bangkok  as  a  base  for  subversive
activities,  both  in  Thailand  and  in  other  S.E.  Asian  countries.  A  report  by  the  Dutch  Chargé
d'Affaires  is  revealing  on  information  received  from  an  Indonesian  barrister  and  member  of
the  executive  council  of  the  Parindra  Nationalist  Party,  who  had  been  invited  to  Bangkok  in
October  1941  by  a  Chinese  trader.  The  trader  turned  out  to  be  the  Japanese  M.  Takarada,
who  proposed  the  establishment  of  a  secret  scheme  to  transfer  large  amounts  of  guilders
from  Japanese  trading  firms  to  banks  in  Bangkok.  Due  to  the  Dutch  freeze  order,  such
transfers  were  evidently  illegal.  Takarada  turned  out  to  be  quite  familiar  with  a  number  of
Indonesian  Nationalists,  and  was  actively  recruiting  secret  agents  in  Indonesian  Nationalist
circles. Without  doubt,  he  was  a  Japanese  agent.

Through  the  Thai  Foreign  Minister,  Direk  Chaivanam,  Crosby  remained  in  communication
with  Pibul  Songgram.  Songgram  indicated  to  both  Crosby  and  Grant,  that  Thailand  would
resist  a  Japanese  invasion,  but  urgently  required  airplanes  and  weapons. The  United
States  turned  this  request  down;  the  British  Government  gave  it  some  consideration.  Both
governments  however  decided  to  support  Thailand  by  purchasing  its  rubber  and  tin,  in

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2826  Aldrich,  op.  cit,  229

2827  Communication  Thai  Ambassador  to  Minister  Pabst  in  Tokyo.  Telegram  Pabst  to  Van  Kleffens  no  131,  3

2828  Tarling,  Onset,  344.

2830  Ibid,  no  6,  file  119 "Japanese  espionage  on  Java,  1941".

2831  Telegram  Crosby  to  FO,  2 August  1941,  F0371/28123 [F7206/210/40].
order to deprive the Japanese of these strategic materials. The Thai's cooperated by refusing a Japanese proposal on 21 August 1941 to buy all their rubber and tin against oil, and integration of the Thai economy within the Yen-bloc. It was the second time that the Japanese were rebuffed economically, after the abrogation of the economic talks with the NEI on 17 June 1941, and as such this was a clear diplomatic triumph for Crosby. Furthermore, the new American Minister to Thailand, Willys R. Peck, started to back up Crosby, informing the State Department that Thailand was still neutral, and wanted to stay neutral. Thailand's position against the Japanese therefore was reinforced, when the first American orders for rubber and tin were placed in October 1941.

The Thai Government however remained adamant on the issue of weapons. They wanted fighters, if possible American Buffaloes. The F.O. was divided. It had been British policy to keep wavering neutrals in line by delivering planes to them, as had happened with Turkey in 1940 (See Chapter 2). But these were American planes, and the production facilities were already overburdened. In July, the Thai military mission which visited Singapore at that time made enquiries about the possibility of acquiring heavy artillery, together with British instructors. The military could spare 24 4.5 inch howitzers and 12 75 mm field guns from Malaya. The guns would be accompanied by 9 officers and 23 other ranks, the aim being infiltration of the Thai armed forces. But for reasons which are unclear the offer was not made.

In October, Pibul Songgram in desperation, but also in deep secrecy, asked both the British and the Americans directly, what he should do in case of a Japanese attack. Evidently he wanted to involve the Anglosaxon countries in sharing responsibility for Thailand's decision whether to resist, surrender or collaborate in case of a Japanese attack on Thailand. A quick answer was needed.

The demands of Pibul Songgram were discussed between Hornbeck and Sir Ronald Campbell of the British Embassy in Washington on 7 November 1941. Hornbeck defended the American position, that it would be best for Britain to send Buffalo fighters from Malaya and/or Burma into Thailand, which would cause the least publicity. The US Government would replenish the British with new planes. It would be the quickest way to reinforce Thailand and perhaps even Nationalist China. Hornbeck stated to the British envoy: "In the light of the combined British, Dutch and American preparations of the past few months in the general area under consideration, the likelihood of a Japanese attack upon Singapore or the Malay peninsula has been greatly diminished. At this point the British might well move planes from Singapore into China and into Thailand, with some arrangement for a recall in certain

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2642 Aldrich, op. cit., 225.

2643 Tarling, Onset, 349.

2644 Telegram Crosby to FO, 9 September 1941, FO371/28147 [F9220/1281/40].

2645 Tarling, Onset, 349.

2646 Telegram Crosby to FO, no 725, 15 October 1941, FO371/28125 [F10827/210/40]. Telegram Peck to Hull, 15 October 1941, FRUS V, 320-322.

eventualities, without great risk so far as Singapore is concerned. It is unclear from the report of this discussion, whether the British Buffaloes would be flown by British pilots in Thailand. The discussion reveals however a cooperative attitude of both Western powers to help the Thai’s.

Now that the Japanese had occupied Southern FIC, a Japanese invasion in force on the Thai beaches of the Kra Isthmus was a real possibility. The area had been reconnoitered in 1940, and on the basis of the growing threat, the British prepared Operation MATADOR, in which British troops along the Malayan-Siamese border would rush northwards to Singora/Patani and even farther North, in order to forestall a Japanese landing. The F.O. sounded out the COS on the question of informing the Thai government of Operation MATADOR. The COS advised against it, as they feared Thai complicity with the Japanese. But how to keep Pibul Songgram off from an accommodation with the Japanese, who had promised the Thais sizable chunks of Burma and Malaya, if the Thai’s would join them. The decision was made to wait until the two British capital ships en route to Singapore had reached their destination. Moreover, because of the rainy season, neither the British nor the Americans considered a Japanese attack on Thailand as very probable. Even on 2 December, Churchill pointed out to Eden that “an attack on the Kra Isthmus would not be helpful to Japan for several months.”

The Japanese however had already made their decision. On the Liaison Conference of 5 November 1941 the question was debated as to whether Thailand would be informed ahead of time of the Japanese Invasion at the Kra Isthmus. Like the British with Operation MATADOR, the Japanese military objected. At the Liaison Conference of 12 November it was decided to invade Thailand irrespective of Thai response, but it was expected that the Thais would not fight. Due to Pibul Songggram’s double-dealing and unpredictability, the Japanese decided to press hard for closer military relations, but not to divulge anything about the coming operations. It is a compliment to Thai diplomacy that it caused so much head-ache both to the Anglo-Saxon powers and to the Japanese.

On Eden’s suggestion, Crosby offered Pibul Songgram a joint defence of the Kra peninsula in a meeting on 10 November. Songgram was deeply disappointed by this meagre and self-serving British offer, however.

At the end of November, a number of leads indicated to both the English and Americans, that something was at hand. Large concentrations of Japanese ships moved into the Gulf of Siam, but it was unclear whether they would strike at Malaya, or at Thailand. Japanese troops were massed in Southern FIC. The British wavered about launching Operation MATADOR. It would give Japan an excuse to invade Thailand, but more serious still, it would give ammunition to the isolationists in the USA in branding Great Britain the aggressor, withdrawing American support in case Japan attacked Malaya. Therefore Churchill ordered his Ambassador in Washington, Lord Halifax, to discuss the matter with

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284 Ibid., 338.
285 Aldrich, op. cit., 234
286 Churchill Minute to Eden, M 1078/1, 2 December 1941, PRO FO 371/27913 [F 13114/86/23]
287 Crosby to FO telegram no 798, 12 November 1941, PRO FO 371/28126 [F 12040/210/40].
288 Aldrich, op. cit. 236.
the President after meeting Eden on 29 November. On 1 December President Roosevelt gave the British Ambassador the guarantee that the U.S. would declare war if the Japanese invaded Thailand, Malaya or the NEI. In effect, Roosevelt suggested that Great Britain “should give Thailand undertaking that if they resisted Japanese attack or infiltration we would respect and guarantee for the future their full sovereignty and independence”. It was a formula not unlike that given to the Netherlands East Indies by Eden on 1 August, 1941 - in effect a posthumous award for gallantry.

Churchill and Roosevelt however agreed on a message on 5 December, to be delivered on 8 December to Pibul Songgram. The message informed him, that if the Thai's would resist a Japanese invasion, the UK and US would assist the Thai in their struggle to the best of their abilities, and both would guarantee the restoration of Thai sovereignty after the war. Pibul Songgram again saw Crosby on the same day, Friday 5 December, presenting stark evidence of a coming Japanese invasion. Crosby told him in effect, that a guarantee was coming, but that its wording was still being discussed in Washington.

Indeed had Roosevelt objected to the wording of the proposed British-American guarantee to Thailand, as Hull had pointed out to him the constitutional difficulty for a President of the United States to extend such a guarantee.

The result of this deliberation was a redrafted and more ambiguous message from Churchill to Pibul Songgram, assuring him that “we shall regard an attack on Thailand as an attack upon ourselves.” The message was sent late on 7 December 1941, and arrived too late. On the morning of 8 December, a tearful Direc Janayama explained in person to Crosby, that Japanese Ambassador Tsubokami had presented an ultimatum at 2300 hours the previous evening, allowing the Thais only two hours to reply. As Prime Minister Pibul Songgram had disappeared and could not be contacted, Janayama had not reacted to the ultimatum, and the Japanese had started the invasion. In the morning of 8 December, Pibul returned to Bangkok and ordered a cease-fire, with the Japanese moving into Bangkok and landing at Singora-Patani.

Aldrich has rightly pointed out that the official diplomatic history of the United Kingdom erroneously states that Churchill sent a guarantee to the Thais in the night of 6-7 December. The telegram with the guarantee arrived 24 hours later, however. He states that the Thai Airforce should have resisted the Japanese invasion, but that the planes remained on the ground on 7 and 8 December. According to him “There was no equal to the Thai Air...”

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265 Halifax to FO, No 5519, 1 December 1941, PRO FO 371/27913 [F 13114/86/23].
266 Aldrich, op. cit., 237.
267 Tarling, Onset, 352.
268 Crosby to FO no 890, 5 December 1941, PRO FO 371/28163 [F 13279/9789/40].
269 Aldrich, op. cit., 239.
270 Aldrich gives the full text of the telegram in note 129, page 239.
Force between Tokyo and Iraq", which is a gross overstatement. The British airforce in Malaya may indeed have been inferior to the Thai Airforce, but at that moment in time both the Dutch Army Airforce and the US Airforce in the Philippines were in reality far more modern and powerful than the Thai Airforce, which might also have been critically hampered by the lack of aviation gasoline.

Looking back with all the hindsight we have now, it is clear that Thai foreign policy was agile and realistic, using Thailand's strategic position to its utmost, leaving both Japan and the Western Powers guessing about what would be the Thai attitude in case of a conflict. For an insignificant and weak country, Thai diplomacy was admirable, forcing both the State Department and Whitehall to spend more time on the Thai question than would be considered appropriate for a fourth-rate country. Although allied with Japan, the Thai's remained cautious up to the end of the war, nurturing the most effective intelligence-gathering organisation for the Allies in the whole of S.E.Asia. After the war, Thailand lost the ill-gotten Indochinese provinces, but it was quickly restored to its status as a free country, to become a bulwark for the United States during the subsequent Indochina war. Pibul Songgram retained his position as Prime Minister, to retire in 1948 as a much respected statesman.

5.2.7. Dutch - Thai diplomacy, 1940 - 1941.

Holland had long and amicable relations with Siam going back to the time of the VOC presence in South-East Asia. Trade between the NEI and Siam however has never been very important; most products of the two countries were in direct competition with each other on the world markets. The main imports in Siam from the NEI were oil products, sugar, coffee and tea. The main export product of Siam to the NEI was teak.

The Dutch maintained a legation in Bangkok, which also coordinated the consulates in French Indochina. The Bangkok legation was not well staffed; in the period 1940 - 1941 the chief diplomat was Chargé d'Affaires A.J.D. Steenstra Toussaint. He maintained an excellent relationship with the Siamese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Direck Jaiyanama and other influential persons at the Court, and he was therefore very well-informed about what was happening behind the bamboo screen of Thai politics.

In effect the reports of Steenstra Toussaint in general tend to support those of Crosby, and less so those of Grant. In his opinion, the Thai government was manoeuvering very skillfully between the opposing powers, and was absolutely not pro-Japanese, a viewpoint which he shared with Crosby, but not with Grant.280

The Thai government was shocked by the invasion of Holland by the Germans, and the subsequent occupation. In a letter to the Minister, the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Direck Jaiyanama wrote in the name of the Thai government: "While confirming the neutrality of this country in the present war, I beg at the same time to you and your Government of

280 Aldrich, op. cit., 239, note 131.

281 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, no C.1036/45, 8 August 1940. London Archives, Secret Archives, political reports Bangkok, box 14, inv. nr. 116 . This file will be subsequently referred to as political reports Bangkok.
During the month of August 1940, Steenstra Toussaint observed a gradual shift in Thai attitudes towards France. The Siamese sensed the opportunity to win back the provinces lost to France in 1893 (Battambang) and 1904, and therefore increased pressure on the French. Catroux had passed through Bangkok on his way back to London, and had a conversation with French Minister Lépissier. According to Lépissier, Catroux had informed him that originally the Japanese had demanded the use of the French naval bases of Camranh and Saigon, to drop this demand in further negotiations. Lépissier told Steenstra Toussaint, that in his opinion Japan had definitely chosen for a drive southward into the Nanyo, which would also threaten Singapore and the NEI. In a later conversation, Lépissier told him that the Germans had intervened in the French-Japanese negotiations by informing the Japanese government that both FIC and NEI could not be considered as autonomous regions, but were colonies of states in Europe, which had been subjected by Germany.

Steenstra Toussaint faithfully reported the new Japanese demands to the FIC government, and the slow pace of negotiations between France and Japan. Thailand in its turn was increasing its demands; it now asked France the return of the whole of Laos and Cambodia, as those provinces were tributaries to King Rama I in the 18th century. When the French did not react, Steenstra reported a steep increase in border incidents on the Thai-FIC border. He informed his Government of the arrival of the new American Ambassador, Dr. Grant, followed by an American Naval Attaché, Cdr Thomas. He also noted the strong dependence of the Thais on American oil imports, and reported the dwindling supply of aviation gasoline for the Thai Airforce and the American embargo on the transit of 12 North-American divebombers destined for Bangkok but requisitioned by the Americans in Manila. Notwithstanding an American offer to refund Thai expenditure on these bombers, the Dutch Minister reported that Japan had made an offer to the Thai government to replace the 12 divebombers with similar Japanese planes. Obviously the Japanese were trying to take advantage of the anti-American attitude due to the American embargo.

The British on their side did everything to placate the Thais. In contrast to the Americans, they allowed the re-export of 5 American Fairchild fighters which had arrived at Singapore with destination Bangkok. The Thai government compensated the British by maintaining friendly relations with them. The American Minister however was very critical about

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2662 Letter Jaiyanama to Steenstra Toussaint, 20 May 1940, no 2978/2483. Political reports Bangkok, 1940, file 3.


2665 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kieffens, 19 September 1940, nr. C.1216/54, Political reports Bangkok, inv. nr. 116.


2667 Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kieffens, 30 October 1940, nr. C.1421/63, Political Reports Bangkok.

2668 Letter to Van Kieffens, 14 November 1940, nr. C.1478/66. Ibid.
the Thais, whom he suspected to have made secret deals with the Japanese. The British Minister was more pro-Thai than pro-French, as can be seen by a remark about the French in FIC which he made to Steenstra Toussaint. Crosby noted that "the gentlemen in Hanoi are anti-British, anti-Japanese, anti-Thai, and of course also anti-German, and in effect also anti-Vichy but are powerless against the growing Japanese might. But no help from outside will be forthcoming, and the consequence will be that before the end of the year Cochin-China will be Japanese, and Cambodia will be in Thai possession". Obviously, Crosby did indeed consider keeping Thailand neutral more important than berating it on its aggressive policy with respect to FIC.

The tactics of Crosby were evidently correct, for Steenstra Toussaint reported in December 1940, that notwithstanding heavy air bombardments by Thai and French airforces on the airfields, the Thais did not get support from the Japanese. This may have been caused by the fact, that notwithstanding heavy Japanese pressure the Thai government did not revoke the non-aggression Treaty with Great-Britain of August 1940. Moreover, the Thai government had refused entry into the Yen-bloc and therefore into the Japanese Greater East-Asiann Co-Prosperity Sphere.268

On his departure from Hanoi, the British Consul-General, Henderson, had a frank conversation with Governor-general Decoux. Afterwards, Henderson talked to Steenstra Toussaint and informed him that the French would hit hard at the Thais whenever the Thais would attack. Politically it would be very dangerous for the French to give in to Thai demands, because Germany had recognized French souvereignty over its colonies, including the right to defend them. Moreover, even Japan had recognized French souverainty over FIC after protracted negotiations about Tonkin. French Indochinese borders therefore were sacrosanct. Giving in to the Thais would also increase the risk of indigenous uprisings in FIC and would violate treaties closed with the Cambodian and Laotian Royal Houses. Therefore, if not stopped by the Japanese, the French would counterattack. According to Henderson, the French Army in FIC was intact and well-armed. In his opinion the French were able to occupy Bangkok without too much difficulty. They would make far-reaching concessions to the Japanese, but not to the Thais. The French had already closed down all Thai consulates in FIC. Henderson would be proved correct.

Early January, even before the Thai attack on FIC, the Dutch Minister passed a request by Thai authorities to the NEI Government asking for a resumption of oil shipments. Thailand had built a small oil refinery, with Japanese assistance, in 1938 in order to break the monopoly of the Western oil companies BPM (Shell Oil) and NKP (Standard Oil) which both had an extensive distribution network in Thailand. In 1939 both companies had withdrawn their involvement in the Thai marketplace, resulting in acute shortages the year thereafter. The director of the NEI Department of Trade, H.J. van Mook, suggested to the G.G. to mediate with the Thai government in order to give both companies a maximum share of 50% of the Thai oil market.270 He proposed to send one of his civil servants, mr. W. van Ernst, to Bangkok. The G.G. concurred, and Van Ernst went to Bangkok on 19 January 1941.

On the basis of his report, the G.G. was inclined to assist the Thais and to supply them

268 Letter to Van Kleffens, 13 December 1940, no C.1621/74, Ibid.

with monthly rations of oil products, to be handled by the two oil companies. His decision caused a bitter row within the Dutch government as well as between the Dutch and the British, who themselves were divided on this question. The outcome of this paper battle was that the F.O. instructed Crosby on 1 May 1941 to inform the Thai government that the British government would support Dutch oil deliveries within certain limits, in lieu of Thai exports of rubber and tin to Malaya instead of to Japan. The G.G. concurred with this position, thereby making the official Dutch policy with respect to Thailand. The Americans, which had been approached by Minister Loudon, had no problems with limited deliveries to Thailand of Dutch oil. Van Kleffens, the Dutch Foreign Minister, however was not happy with the proposed deal of oil against rubber and tin. The reason was the ongoing negotiations with the Yoshizawa delegation, in which the Dutch had already proposed to limit exports of rubber and tin to Japan in order to avoid re-export to Germany. An additional reduction of Thai exports would in his view anger the Japanese. Therefore he proposed that the English would have to buy Thai rubber and tin to the detriment of their export to Japan. The British demurred, however. A representative of the Asiatic Petroleum Company at Singapore, mr. E.N.C. Woolleton, was sent to Bangkok where he met Thai officials between 1 - 13 July 1941. At last agreement was reached on the limited quantities of oil that the Dutch would supply to Thailand. Thailand would receive monthly 2700 tons of kerosene, 2600 tons of gasoline, and 3000 tons of diesel oil. In addition, aviation gasoline would only be supplied for civil aviation purposes. The British would buy 3000 tons of Thai rubber per month at a price 30% higher than the Penang rubber price.

Steenstra Toussaint was able to report fully on the naval battle of Koh-Chang on 17 January 1941, even enclosing the French and Thai reports on the battle. The Japanese offer for mediation thereafter was reported, accompanied by a Japanese naval show of force in the Gulf of Siam. The British thereupon decided to evacuate British women and children, 260 people in all, from FIC to India and Australia on 15 February 1941. Steenstra asked his government whether he should give the same advice to the Dutch colony of 31 people in Bangkok. He also reported the presence of about 2000 Javanese in Thailand, without making clear what they were doing there. The Dutch Government’s answer on the evacuation question was negative.

The Japanese mediation to end the Thai-French conflict was closely watched by Steenstra Toussaint. He pointed out to his government, that the Japanese tried to convince Thailand not to overstate their demands. To back up that advice, Steenstra Toussaint reported that

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Footnotes:
2672 See DBPN, C, II, doc. 226 (281), doc. 290 (376 - 377) and doc. 384 (510-511).
2673 Letter G.G. to Welter, 7 May 1941, doc. 391, 519 - 520, Ibid.
2677 Michiels van Verduyven to Van Kleffens, 18 July 1941, DBPN, C, III, doc. 152, 206-207.
the Japanese had stationed 2 heavy cruisers and 2 destroyers just 9 miles off the coast near Bangkok.* The French envoy in Bangkok, Roger Garreau, told him at the end of February, that the negotiations were collapsing because his Government in Vichy had refused the Japanese-proposed new borderline in the north of Cambodia. Garreau expected the resumption of French bombardments of Bangkok. Vichy gave in, however, and the Dutch chargé d'affaires reported the Thai relief when the Japanese clinched an agreement on 15 March 1941.

His letter of 22 July 1941 is very important, in which he warned his government and the Governor-General that the Japanese occupation of Southern FIC was very close and would be executed in a matter of days. Therefore that occupation did not come as a surprise to the Dutch Government, which had also been forewarned by Minister Loudon in Washington and Pabst in Tokyo.

Early in August 1941 Steenstra Toussaint reported a conversation he had with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Direck Jaiyanama, who assured him that Thailand would remain neutral and that the Thai Government rejected any thought of an alliance with the Japanese. To make this point, the Thai government called up technical reservists, reinforced the Bangkok garrison, and started a campaign of civil defense in Bangkok. According to Jaiyanama, the best guarantee Thailand had against a Japanese attack would be that this would expose to the whole world the real meaning of the Japanese promise of "peace and prosperity for all Asiatic people".

Early November 1941 Steenstra Toussaint warned his government about increasing Japanese pressure on the Thai government. Japan wanted to use Thai airfields for six months in order to make cartographic photographs of the demilitarized zones in FIC. Thailand had refused the request. Later in the month the Dutch envoy informed his government that the Thais were becoming nervous, because no weapons or guarantees had been obtained from the Western Powers. The Japanese had offered military protection, but this was declined by Pibul Songgram on the grounds of the existing non-aggression treaties with England and Japan. Early December he reported Japanese troop concentrations on the FIC-Siamese border. According to the English Minister, Japan had about 60,000 troops in FIC ready to strike. Therefore, measures were taken for a

* ACCORDING to JAIYANAMA, the best guarantee Thailand had against a Japanese attack would be that this would expose to the whole world the real meaning of the Japanese promise of "peace and prosperity for all Asiatic people".

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* Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 13 February 1941, nr. 4, MinBuZa London Archives, Secret Archive, DZ/GA, G II, box 84, file 1409.

** Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens nr 8, 25 February 1941, ibid.

*** Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 22 July 1941, no C.1005/56. Ibid.


***** Telegram Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens no 18, 5 August 1941. MinBuZa, London Archives, Secret Archive, GA/DZ A I 14(g), file 435.

****** Telegram Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, no 24, 22 August 1941, ibid.

******* Telegram Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, no 35/36, 24 November 1941, ibid.

quick evacuation of Westerners from Thailand to Malaya and the NEI.

The Thai oil situation remained serious. On the hint of the possibility of importing oil from the NEI, the Thai Finance Minister implored the Dutch envoy to lift the requirement of the NEI government to pay for the delivered oil in U.S. dollars. When it proved impossible to deliver the oil with a Dutch tankship, Steenstra again warned that the Thai Airforce would not be able to react if the Japanese invaded Thailand.

The report of the Dutch Chargé d’Affaires on the last hours of peace in Bangkok is very interesting. In effect, his observations corroborate the reports of Crosby. He mentions that the Thai government was certainly not pro-Japanese: the entire gold bullion treasure of the Bank of Thailand, with a value of 200 million Baht had been shipped to banks in England and the U.S.A.. The State Shipping Company had sent 6 of its 8 ships to allied ports. The two sons of Marshal and Prime Minister Pibul Songgram were both overseas, the eldest serving as sub-lieutenant in the Royal Navy, the youngest was a cadet at the Military Academy at West-Point, USA. On Sunday 7th December the Prime Minister disappeared. Officially he was inspecting the troops at the borders, but that was not true, as he was in Bangkok at a secret address. The Japanese Minister Tsubokami made a telephone call at 2200 hours to the private address of the Foreign Minister, Direck Jaiyanama, and presented to him, in person, a Japanese ultimatum around 2300 hours, which would take effect at around 0200 hours on the 8th of December. In the ultimatum, the Japanese Government asked for a droit de passage of Japanese troops from Singora/Patani to Malaya and from FIC to Burma. Only when the Thais accepted the ultimatum, would the Japanese government would respect Thai sovereignty.

As Jaiyanama could not act for the Prime Minister, the ultimatum passed, and the Japanese indeed landed at Patani, where the Thai garrison offered fierce resistance, resulting in more than 800 dead. The big surprise for the Thai Government however was the Japanese landing at Bang Pu, 25 km south of Bangkok. These troops marched almost unopposed into Bangkok, resulting in a cease-fire called by the Thai government at 0730 hours on 8 December.

Crosby had received the “guarantee” of Churchill late in the evening of 7 December, with the order to deliver the message in person to the Prime Minister. Due to the absence of the P.M., Crosby was not able to fulfill his mission. This corroborates the reconstruction of Aldrich in his article about the actions of Crosby (See note 2658 on page 556).

Steenstra Toussaint was exchanged at Beira, Portuguese East Africa, for Japanese diplomats later in 1942, and only then he was able to inform his Foreign Minister about the last hours of peace in Thailand.

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2687 Telegram Steenstra Toussaint to Van Kleffens, 3 December 1941, ibid 6819 GA.
2688 Telegram Steenstra Toussaint to G.G., no 50, 6 December 1941, Ibid.
5.3. French and Thai Defence Organization.

5.3.1. Introduction to French defense planning.

French Indochina is a vast country, albeit smaller than the NEI. The distance between Point Coumou in the South and the most Northern frontier post, Dong Van, is about 1700 kilometers, the distance between Paris and Rome. In the middle the country is reduced to a breadth of 200 kilometres. The North has a depth of about 800 kilometres, the South of more than 700 kilometres. The coastline has a total length of 2600 kilometres, and the continental borders have a total length of 3200 kilometres. The country is rugged, with a jumble of mountains along its central axis and northwestern borders, and two extensive plains, forming the delta of the Red river in the North and of the Mekong in the South.

The prospective enemy since 1905 was Japan. Already then it was recognized by two French experts that Indochina could be defended only if the French gave its inhabitants a reason to fight for the regime by treating them as partners. This observation applied as well to the other colonial empires in S.E. Asia, but it was only the Americans who took heed. For the French in the interwar years, Japan was far away, and tied up in China after 1937. China was weak, as was Thailand, which still smarted from the loss of two Provinces to FIC in 1904. Under the energetic leadership of the new Minister of the Colonies, Georges Mandel (1938 - 1940), France started to mobilise its reservoir of 55 million indigenous people in the colonies on five continents, not to defend those colonies, but in order to defend the motherland against a renewed German attack. For that purpose, it was Mandel’s intention to raise an Colonial Army of 2 million soldiers, to be raised, trained and equipped by the colonies themselves. He partly succeeded in FIC.

The French followed a line of reasoning not unlike that of the Dutch in the NEI. They considered Germany to be the most serious challenge to their existence as a Great Power, and therefore the French concentrated almost all their resources - including the colonial resources - to the defence of their homeland in Europe. Certainly, Japan was recognized as a danger for the French position in the Far East, but they counted a Japanese invasion of FIC unlikely as long as the Anglo-Saxon powers held their mastery of the seas. As long as Britain ruled the waves, with American backing in the Pacific, it was estimated by the French that the Japanese would not risk a military adventure against FIC.

5.3.2. French defense organisation.

In 1889 the FIC colonies and protectorates were removed from the Ministère de la Marine and placed under the Ministère aux Colonies, together with other French possessions. The Governors remained responsible for the defense of their respective colonies, both internally and externally. The law of 7 July 1900 laid down the organisation of the colonial army. Colonial troops consisted of a mixture of French troops raised in the motherland, and native volunteers. Both conscripted and voluntary serving French soldiers could be sent to the colonies without much ado. On the other hand Indigenous volunteers were expected to

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200 Tarling, Onset, 58.
201 Hesse d’Alzon, 11.
202 See also Yves Gras: "L’intrusion Japonaise en Indochine, juin 1940 - mars 1945". Revue Historique des Armées, Vol.10 Nr 4 (1983), 87. This publication will be subsequently referred to as "Gras".
serve in the motherland when needed. The Ministère de la Guerre (Section 8) was responsible for personnel, discipline, training and morale, and in case of colonial troops stationed in France, for their employment. The Governors were responsible for the employment of the colonial army, and its logistics and support. Compared with the Dutch colonial Army, the French colonial Army was thus strongly integrated with the metropolitan forces, even to the point of using the same weapons and tactics.

Before the mobilisation of August 1939 the Colonial Army all over the French Empire counted 130 battalions, 61 independent companies and 49 regiments of artillery. Less than half of it was stationed in the colonies: 60 battalions and 12 artillery regiments, with in total 65.000 men of which 40.000 were indigenous. The largest part of the Colonial Army was stationed in France (4 divisions with 41 battalions), 2 divisions and a brigade were in North-Africa, and two infantry regiments in Syria. On the other hand, elements of the French Armée de Terre (like tank units, scouting units) also served in the colonies, as was the larger part of the Legion Étrangère.

In 1908 the French established an Imperial Staff organisation reporting to both the Minister of War and the Minister of the Colonies. It included the Inspectorate for the Colonial Army, and had the familiar sections of each Staff Organisation: Operations, Personnel, Logistics, Intelligence, and Training. It was based in Paris, but worked closely with the French Army État major. The Chief of the Colonial Army Staff reported directly to the Minister for the Colonies. The Intelligence Section was the Service des Renseignement Intercolonial (SRI), a well-staffed and well-equipped organisation with three group headquarters in the Pacific (at Shanghai, Hanoi and Nouméa), four in Africa (Dakar, Brazzaville, Tananarive, Djibouti) and one in the Caribbean (Fort-de-France).

The French did not discriminate with respect to race within their colonial army. No color bar existed, like in the British Army. Starting in 1927 indigenous officers were selected from the ranks of indigenous non-commissioned officers. Only from 1938 onwards indigenous youth were allowed to apply for a commission by passing an entrance examination for the French officer's schools. As the education of young indigenous officers started in effect too late, however, there were few indigenous officers of senior rank within FIC. The best-known and highest-ranking indigenous officer was artillery colonel Nguyen Van Xuan, a graduate of the École Polytechnique. In 1938 6 indigenous lieutenants and 20 sous-lieutenants served with the colonial army in FIC. At the end of 1939 this number had increased to 20 indigenous officers and 2000 indigenous non-commissioned officers.

It should be noted that the French Naval and Airforce Services were not integrated into the Colonial Staff. That integration however was foreseen at the local staff level directly under the Governor or Governor-General. The influence of local Governors over those two Services (which were separate Services like in the United Kingdom) was therefore limited to the operational use of warships and airplanes within the territorial framework of the colony in question. Therefore, the Governor-General of FIC had three service chiefs reporting directly to him. Together the three service chiefs formed the Conseil de défense.

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2603 Hesse d'Alzon, 11.
2604 Hesse d'Alzon, 12. Organigram on page 273.
2605 Hesse d'Alzon, 27.
The main task of this small staff was the updating of the existing plan d’ensemble de défense, which had been reviewed by the Colonial Staff and was signed by the Ministers of War and Colonies. Therefore, there was no integrated combined HQ at the level of the Governor-General, and this was widely admitted to be a weakness in the French defence organisation. On the other hand, neither the Dutch or the British colonial defence organisations possessed such an integrated staff (at least until the arrival of ABDA Command). In the case of FIC, this was mitigated somewhat by the fact that as from 1 September 1939 the colony was administered by two military men as Governor-General: first General Catroux, after his replacement Admiral Decoux.

5.3.3. French defence planning.

Up to 1938, the French plan de défense ensemble was based on four scenario’s: aggression in the North from Chinese forces, aggression in the West from Siamese forces, a combined attack by Chinese and Siamese forces, and aggression by a Power which controlled the seas. The first scenario was considered the most probable. The Chinese-Japanese "incident" from July 1937 changed all this, as Japan emerged as the most dangerous Power, with an Army operating in South China along the Northern borders, and a Navy which dominated the South China Sea. The Siamese government also turned towards Japan, and an alliance between the two could no longer be ruled out any longer. In September 1937 Governor-General Brevié warned his government: 'If Indochina one day finds itself in face of a Hainan occupied by the Japanese and before a Siamese army equipped and officered by them, it will be in an even more dangerous situation than at present when we have a 150 day supply of Lebel cartridges, a 75 day supply of grenades and a 80 day supply of light artillery munitions.' In November 1937 he warned against a Japanese blockade of the FIC coast.

The 1938 "plan" therefore foresaw four scenario’s in terms of decreasing probability: a combined attack by Japanese and Siamese forces, a purely Japanese attack, a purely Siamese attack, and an attack by Chinese forces. In order to confront these possibilities, the disposition of the French Armée de Terre in FIC was as follows in 1939: 21 battalions were used to guard the continental frontiers, 9 battalions covered the three most probable landing beaches at Haiphong, Hué and Cam-Ranh, a powerful reserve of 12 battalions was kept around Hanoi, 6 battalions were kept in reserve along the Annamite coast and 4 battalions around Saigon. Therefore, around 45% of the French Empire's colonial army was concentrated in FIC. Moreover, a system of forts had been implemented along the Northern frontier between Langson and Hagiang.

According to Mandel's plans, at the outbreak of war in Europe a full mobilisation was announced, and all reserve-personnel were called up. The plan-Mandel envisaged the stationing of one Indo-Chinese division in the motherland, and another one in Syria. A big problem however turned out to be the mobilisation of European reservists in the colony. There were 5578 French reservists present in the colony, of which 2749 were civil servants. Most of the reservists were crucial in keeping the economy of the colony

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308 Hesse d'Alzon, 22.
309 R. Laffey, op. cit., 134, note 58.
310 Hesse d'Alzon, 26.
running, and therefore the G.G. objected against their removal from their workplace. A number of them were therefore demobilised.

Anyway, the mobilisation resulted in an increase of the number of troops from around 30,000 men to 90,000 men, of which 75,000 were Indochinese. Moreover, between September and December 1939 more than 16,000 Indochinese workers were transported to France to serve as a militarised labour force. Also the police, the Navy and the Airforce increased their numbers, bringing the total number of military personnel to 120,000. The problem however, was equipping this large number of soldiers with proper and modern weaponry.

The plan-Mandel also envisaged a certain degree of industrial autonomy for the French colonies. For FIC an industrial base was planned making it possible to manufacture small arms, small arms ammunition, airplane bombs, and in a later phase assembly of airplanes being imported from the motherland in parts, to a production of 150 planes per year. Of course, this industrial base did not yet exist when France declared war in Europe.

Already before the outbreak of the War in Europe, a Staff Conference took place between the highest responsible French and British service commanders in the Far East. This Staff conference took place in Singapore from 22 to 27 June 1939. Attendees were from the side of the French the Army Commander Lieut.-General Maurice Martin, Naval Commander Rear-Admiral Jean Decoux, and Air Commander Colonel Devèze. British representatives were Admiral Sir Percy Noble, C-in-C China Station, General-Major Grasset (garrison commander of Hongkong) and Lieut.-General Dobbie of Malaya Command. Dutch and American observers had been invited in joining this staff conference, but their respective governments had politely declined the invitation.

The conference recognized the importance of FIC in the defence of Singapore, and the importance of Singapore in defending the FIC coast. The French also expressed their fears for Thailand, which was quickly rearming. For the British, the integrity of Thailand was even more important than for the French, because of the British-Thai borders at Malaya and Burma.

When the war in Europe was declared, German merchant ships escaped towards neutral ports in Thailand, the NEI and Japan. The French Navy, in conjunction with the Royal Navy, patrolled the entrances of the NEI and Thai harbours. This had been pre-arranged at the Singapore Staff Conference. Because it also had been agreed to assign liaison officers of each Navy at the other Navy's headquarters, naval cooperation was indeed very close. This was highlighted when the German pocket battleship SCHEER appeared in the Mozambique Channel in November 1939. The French then dispatched the heavy cruiser SUFFREN from Saigon to Singapore, to form a chasing squadron with the British heavy cruiser HMS KENT. Other French naval units also used the Singapore naval base in conjunction with convoying British troopships between Australia and the

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269 Tarling, Onset, 47. Tarling, First Japanese Move, op. cit., 38.


Middle East, and French freighters between Djibouti and Saigon.

5.3.3.1. French Land Forces.

Just like its Dutch counterpart, the French colonial regiment was large in comparison with European regiments. In FIC a regiment consisted of four, and sometimes even five battalions. Three regiments were homogeneous European regiments (régiments blancs). These were the 9th, 10th and 11th Régiments d'Infanterie Coloniale (RIC), stationed respectively in Hanoi, Hué and Saigon. A fourth European Regiment was the 5e Régiment Etranger d'Infanterie (REI), a regiment of the French Foreign Legion. Equipped with more firepower than the Regiments of the colonial Army, this "Régiment de Tonkin" was the mainstay of the French defence of the Tonkin delta.

Two regiments were mixed: the 16 and 19 RMIC. (Régiment Mixte d'Infanterie Coloniale). Each battalion of a RMIC consisted of one company of Europeans and two companies of Indochinese. The 16 RMIC was evacuated from Shanghai in December 1939, and was as such a very welcome reinforcement. It was stationed in Annam. All the other regiments were completely indigenous. In Tonkin were stationed 3 RTT's (Régiment de Tirailleurs Tonkinois). The indigenous regiments were each based in a certain region and recruited in that region. In Cochin-China the two Regiments of the RTA (Régiment de Tirailleurs Annamites) were stationed, which were in fact the oldest existing colonial regiments in FIC. In Cambodia the Régiment de Tirailleurs Cambodgiens, or RTC, was stationed. The RTC consisted of 3 battalions.

The FIC Army possessed two artillery Regiments, the 4th and 5th Régiments d'Artillerie Coloniale (RAC). The 4th RAC was posted in Tonkin, the 5th in Cochin-China. Both regiments consisted of mixed batteries of mountain artillery and field artillery. The total number of mountain guns was 22 of 85 mm calibre, 51 of 75 mm calibre, 28 of 80 mm, and 12 of 105 mm divided over 4 sections of mountain artillery. The field artillery sections were equipped with 42 guns of 75 mm, 9 of 80 mm, 13 of 95 mm and 8 of 155 mm. The coast defence possessed 42 guns of 75 mm, 4 guns of 105 mm, 24 guns of 138 mm, 3 guns of 140 mm and 12 guns of 155 mm. Those pieces were installed around the entrances to Haiphong and Saigon harbours, Tourane and Danang/Cam Ranh, and Cap St. Jacques.

The Anti-Aircraft Artillery consisted of 20 guns of 75 mm, 8 guns Skoda of 76.2 mm, and 2 guns of 90 mm. Anti-tank guns were also present: 37 of 25 mm calibre. Moreover, the infantry troops had for fire support 85 mortars of 60 mm and 165 mortars of 81 mm. The tirailleur battalions were equipped with in total 2046 light machineguns and 858 Hotchkiss heavy machineguns from 1914. Both the standard rifle and the machineguns used 8 mm ammunition, so there were no problems of standardisation. Modern tanks were nonexistent in FIC, but the army possessed about 20 old Renault tankettes FT of WW I vintage. Scoutcars of the manufacturers White model 1918 and Panhard model 1928 were used by the reconnaissance squadrons. Motorisation was almost non-existent, which made the battalions not very mobile. This was partly compensated by the extensive use of mules and of the small but sturdy mountain horses. The lack of an extensive road network made fast displacements difficult anyway. The coastal road and the parallel railway between Saigon and Hanoi were the only means of fast overland communication, and were intensively used.

On the whole, the French Armée Coloniale as deployed in FIC was larger in terms of men,
and better armed in terms of firepower, than any other colonial Army in S.E. Asia. It was, however, less mechanized and motorized than the Dutch and English battalions. Nevertheless, especially in static defense, it was a force to be reckoned with.

5.3.3.2. French Naval Forces.

Far less powerful were the French naval and airforces in FIC, notwithstanding the fact that Indochina in the 19th century was "l'Indochine des Amiraux". It was naval officers like Rigault de Chenuilly, Charner, Doudart de Lagrée, Francis Garnier and Rivièr who had conquered the territory. The Navy had its headquarters in Saigon, where the main base was also situated. The naval presence consisted of two organisations: the Forces Navales d'Extrême Orient (FNEO), and the Marine d'Indochine, consisting of small river and coastal patrol boats. The area of the FNEO encompassed the Western Pacific and the Eastern Indian Ocean, including the Yangtze river flotilla. To execute the responsibility of protection of the French lines of communications in this immense area, the FNEO had available nine seagoing warships and four riverboats, under command of rear-Admiral J. Decoux. The core of the naval squadron consisted of one heavy cruiser and one light cruiser, 4 large gunboats and 2 submarines. Four river gunboats patrolled the Yangtze river between Chungking and Shanghai, where there were small naval bases. For local defense, the Marine d'Indochine had available two small gunboats, the MARNE and the TAHURE, in addition to smaller patrol craft.

The SUFFREN was a modern Washington-cruiser of 10.000 tons, entering service in 1927. Its main armament consisted of 8 guns of 203 mm and 8 anti-aircraft guns of 75 mm. The LAMOTTE PICQUET was a somewhat older light cruiser (1925) of 8000 tons, with a main armament of 7 guns of 155 mm, and 4 anti-aircraft guns of 75 mm. No French destroyers were present in the Far East, but the French possessed 4 large seagoing gunboats of 2000 tons, each equipped with 3 guns of 138 mm. These were the DUMONT D'URVILLE, AMIRAL CHARNER, SAVORGNAN DE BRAZZA, and RIGAULT DE GENOUILLY. The submarines available were the ESPOIR and the PHENIX. However, because of the war in Europe, the SUFFREN was withdrawn to the Mediterranean on 18 May 1940, the ESPOIR had already been withdrawn at the end of 1939, and the PHENIX was lost during an exercise off the coast of Toulon on June 15, 1940. The gunboats RIGAULT DE CHENOUILLY and SAVORGNAN DE BRAZZA also disappeared towards the Mediterranean. It was therefore a very small naval squadron which was left to defend FIC in the years 1940/1941.

5.3.3.3. French Air Forces.

The Ministère de l'Air established an Airdefence District (region aérienne), the Sixth, in FIC in 1937. The Commander, Colonel Devèze, installed his HQ in Hanoi. When war broke out in Europe, the organisation disposed of 98 planes and about 3000 men, of which 2000

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\textsuperscript{270a} Hesse d'Alzon, 45.


\textsuperscript{270d} J. Decoux: A la barre de l'Indochine, 10.
were Indo-chinese. The planes were divided over two Groupes Aériens Autonomes (GAA), each consisting of a bomber squadron and a reconnaissance squadron. GAA 41 was stationed at Tong airfield in Tonkin, GAA 42 was stationed at the airfields of Bien Hoa and Tan Son Nuth, both near Saigon. The French Airforce did not possess any fighters at that time, but was able to confiscate 17 Morane 406 fighters at the quais of Haiphong, ready for transport to Nationalist China. These planes formed the nucleus of two other Groupes Mixtes Aériens (GMA), GMA 595 and 596 based respectively at Bach Mai near Hanoi and at Tourane. Moreover, a reconnaissance squadron was formed from existing seaplanes, which was installed at Cat Lai in Cochin China.

With the exception of the modern Morane Saulnier fighters, none of the planes of the French Airforce in FIC could be classified as modern. The four reconnaissance squadrons were each equipped with 15 outdated Potez 25 biplanes from the late twenties. Their maximum speed was 210 km/h. One bomber squadron was equipped with Farman 221 bombers, the other with the Potez 542. The Farman 221 was a heavy 4-motor monoplane bomber with fixed undercarriage, a range of 1000 km and a bombload of 2.3 tonnes. It possessed 6 guns of 7.5 mm. There were only 4 of them, based at Tong airfield. The Potez 542 was a 2-motor monoplane bomber from 1934 with a range of 500 km and a bombload of 900 kg. Maximum speed was 310 km/h. Sixteen of these bombers were based at Tan Son Nuth. The seaplane squadron used the modern Loire 130 seaplane, of which it possessed 10 planes.

The Morane Saulnier 406 was a modern air superiority fighter with a 860 HP Hispano Suiza watercooled motor, a maximum speed of 500 km/h and a range of 1100 km. Its armament consisted of 1 canon of 20 mm and 2 machineguns of 7.5 mm. Alas the 20 mm guns of the Morane Saulnier planes grabbed from the Chinese had their 20 mm guns already shipped to the Chinese, leaving each plane with an armament of only the 2 light machineguns. Nevertheless, the French expected much of this fighter. They did not possess any information at all about the Japanese Zero fighter. The Dutch military attaché in Washington, Col. Weijerman, reported a discussion he had with the French Commandant-Aviateur Louis Castex on 18 April 1941. Castex was in Washington from FIC to lobby the Americans into selling more planes to the French airforce in FIC. He told Weijerman, that in the French view, the Japanese airforce was inferior in quality, but had a quantitative edge over the French. At the same meeting, he informed Weijerman that De Gaulle was a fine officer, but unsuitable to be the leader of the Free French, because he was too arrogant!

Next to the four large airfields already mentioned there was a small airfield near Pursat in Cambodia, and in addition there were a large number of airstrips all over FIC, which could be used by the Potez reconnaissance planes. These planes, with their maneuverability, slow speed and one 7.5 mm machinegun, were used extensively for close cooperation with the Armée de Terre in protecting and guiding column formations, close tactical support, air reconnaissance ahead of army columns, and communications in general. In effect, they were helicopters avant la lettre. This explains their large number in an otherwise very small airforce, which lacked transport planes, and torpedo- and divebombers.

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2708 Hesse d'Alzon, 50, 347.

The G.G. of FIC, General Catroux, planned an expansion of the Airforce to 18 squadrons in March 1940, consisting of 6 bomber squadrons, 6 fighter squadrons, 4 reconnaissance squadrons and 2 long-range seaplane squadrons. A flying school was established, and 7 English Tiger Moth training planes were ordered, which were unloaded at Hongkong on 29 June 1940, and therefore never reached FIC. Physically cut off from its motherland, FIC had to make with what it had.

Reviewing the French plans for the defense of FIC, the casual observer is struck by the French fixation of their Eastern frontiers in Europe, the planned use of the resources of their Empire for the defence of the motherland, and their total underestimation of Japanese forces, until it was too late to redress the balance. At least the English and Dutch governments clearly saw the danger from Japan in the first decade of the century. The French local commanders however were more worried about a Chinese or Thai invasion in FIC than about a Japanese military threat. This may explain the vacillating attitude of the Pétain government, when it was confronted with an aggressive Japan.

The Japanese threat to FIC developed rapidly after the outbreak of open warfare between Japan and China in July 1937. In October 1938 the Japanese reached the Chinese-FIC border, in February 1939 they occupied Hainan. This completely upset the French timetable for reinforcement of FIC. The French Navy in FIC moreover lost most of its deterrent power when the SUFFREN was withdrawn to Europe. The sad story of the airplanes on board the carrier BÉARN, which the Vichy government did not allow to reinforce FIC, has been told already on pages 19 and 28.

5.3.4. Thai Defence organisation.

As has been discussed previously, the Siamese never got over the forced loss of their Eastern Provinces to the French in 1904. The return of this "terra irredenta" would be the foundation of their foreign policy and the driving force behind the armament and modernisation of Thai forces after 1936.

Thai defence measures were stepped up after 1936, when conscription was introduced. Moreover, paramilitary training was started at Secondary Schools and Universities for both sexes. Therefore the Thais were able to raise an Army of 60,000 after mobilisation in 1940.

The basic unit of the Thai Army was the "Khong Phan", which consisted of around 1000 soldiers and was roughly equivalent to a western battalion. The Thai Army counted 44 infantry-battalions, 13 sections of Artillery, 9 Cavalry Squadrons, 6 battalions of Engineers, and 3 regiments equipped with tanks. The Thais possessed 4 heavy tanks of Danish manufacture (Landsverk), each about 8 tons and equipped with a 100 mm gun. One regiment was equipped with 20 Vickers Armstrong medium tanks of 6 tons, equipped with one 47 mm gun and one 8 mm machinegun. Another regiment was equipped with 35 Ford light tanks of 3 tons with one 8 mm machinegun. Their tankforce was next to the Japanese the most powerful in the whole of S.E. Asia.

The Thais also possessed one mechanised Anti-Aircraft Regiment equipped with half-

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270a Hesse d'Alzon, 52.

270b Hesse d'Alzon, 284.
tracks, each armed with a 40 mm A.A. gun, and a regiment of 75 mm Bofors A.A. artillery of 3 batteries with 4 guns each. This group defended Bangkok against aerial attacks.

The modernisation of the Army started in earnest after 1936, when new equipment was ordered in both the U.S.A. and Japan.\textsuperscript{270} Japan delivered to the Army 3 batteries of 75 mm field guns, 300 machineguns and 100 mortars. The modernization effort was most obvious in the Airforce, counting at the end of 1940 about 250 planes of which around 130 were modern planes. Japan delivered 33 fighters, 42 bombers and 12 seaplanes. The United States delivered 36 Vought Corsairs fighters, 48 Curtiss Hawk fighters and 6 Glenn Martin bombers. The Thai Government allowed the British air attaché an extensive tour of their airfields in August 1941. The report of the attaché was handed over to Steenstra Toussaint, who sent the report to his superiors\textsuperscript{271}.

According to this Report, the RTAF (Royal Thai Airforce) consisted of 300 officers and 4500 non-coms and men. Called into active service were 350 pilots, and the flying schools were delivering 50 new pilots yearly. The RTAF had 165 frontline planes in 6 Wings. On the airbase of Don Muang near Bangkok were stationed the 1st and 6th Wings. The First Wing consisted of 2 squadrons of each 12 light single-motor bombers of Japanese manufacture, the Mansyu Ki-79a, and one squadron of Curtiss Hawk fighters. Wing 6 was the strategic bomber force, consisting of a squadron of 8 Japanese 2-motor bombers Ki-48 (Allied codename Lily) and 4 Glenn Martins B-10 type 186 model 139W, which was the same type and model as used by the Dutch military airforce in the NEI.

The third Wing was stationed at Korat near the FIC border, consisting of 3 squadrons of each 9 Vought Corsairs fighter-bombers. At the Kokatheu Airbase near Lopburi in the center of the country were based the 3 squadrons of the 2nd Wing with in total 36 Curtiss Hawk model III fighters, and the 4th Wing with 3 squadrons of each 9 Vought Corsairs reconnaissance planes. The planes were all assembled and equipped at the Arsenal in North Bangkok, which also manufactured air bombs of 50, 100 and 250 kilogrammes. The Curtiss Hawk fighters were built here on license, with only the airplane motors being imported from the U.S.A.

Next to the four large airbases the country was dotted with more than 20 airstrips, which could be used by the bombers in the dry season, but certainly not in the rainy season. The air attaché reported that the RTAF made a reasonably efficient impression. The anti-aircraft defense of the airfields was weak however, due to the lack of A.A.-guns. Moreover, due to a serious lack of aviation gasoline, there were not enough training flights. Staff and officers of the RTAF were certainly not anti-Western or even anti-Japanese after the Japanese occupation of Cambodia and Cochinchina.

This report is important because it illustrates the excellent co-operation in Intelligence sharing between British attachés and Dutch diplomatic personnel, as this also happened in Chungking and other Asian diplomatic posts. Even when lacking military attachés on the spot, the KNIL thereby still received valuable military intelligence.

Moreover, the report highlights the strong orientation of the RTAF on the United States.

\textsuperscript{270} Hesse d'Alzon, 89.

\textsuperscript{271} Letter Steenstra Toussaint to Governor-General, 16 September 1941, no C.1281/67 Top Secret. MinBuZa, London Archive, Political Reports from Bangkok no 4, file 119 "Thai Airforce 1941".
The RTAF was smaller in number of planes than either the Dutch or the American Airforce in S.E. Asia, but it was decidedly more modern than the RAF in Malaya. Moreover, the Thais had been more forwardlooking than the Dutch, because they were building airplanes with U.S. licences in their country, which made them less dependent on American plane manufacturers. Their air doctrines were also more realistic than those of the Dutch: their percentage of fighters was high. The RTAF counted 138 fighters and 36 bombers.

The Navy, under Rear-Admiral Luang Sindhu Songgramjaha, was fiercely pro-Japanese. The largest units were two modern (1938), heavily armoured and Japanese-built Coast-defence ships of 2,200 tons displacement, the DHONBURI and the AYUTHIA, armed with 4 guns of 8 inch. With maximum 16 knots they were slow ships, however. Moreover the Thai Navy possessed 9 fast, Italian-built torpedoboats of the TRAD class. The ships, all modern (1936/37) had a displacement of around 500 tons, were armoured with 3 guns of 3 inch (76.2 mm) and 6 torpedolaunchers for 18 inch torpedoes. They were fast (32 knots) but completely unarmored, and therefore only suitable for hit-and-run tactics. Moreover, the Thai Navy possessed 4 modern coastal submarines of 370 tons, built in Japan and equipped with 5 tubes. The Marine Battalion of "Chanthaburi Command" was an elite formation.

The Thai Navy at that time was a coast-defence navy with modern ships, bound however to the coasts of Siam along the Gulf of Siam with its tranquil waters. It was certainly not a high-seas navy. The French squadron was inferior in number, but not in the quality of ships. It is therefore unrealistic, to call the Thai Navy much superior over the French squadron, as has been done by Haas.

5.4. The Japanese military penetration in FIC.

In this subchapter the military aspects of the Japanese penetration in FIC as from August 1940 will be discussed. The French military staffs did not have a high opinion of Japanese fighting prowess, due to the uneven performance of Japanese Army units in the war against China since 1937. This fooled the French military commanders into considering the Japanese as only marginally better than other Asiatic armies. (See pages 535 - 539) The actual performance of the Japanese troops during the border clashes was a real shock to both military and colonial officials.

5.4.1. The Japanese attacks of September 1940.

In Chapter 6 we will discuss the worrisome development in Japan during the ninetenthiries in which the Japanese Army no longer accepted political control over it, to the embarrassment of the Japanese Government. One of the examples of this aberrant behaviour, caused by Japanese militarists in Japan themselves, was the attitude of Lieut.-General Rikichi Ando, Commander of the Southern Army, and of his Staff based in Canton. Frustrated by the Chinese resistance in Kwangsi Province, China, the Japanese Southern Command planned a flanking movement through Tonkin, and considered French foot-dragging to be a nuisance. Therefore, on 4 September 1940 the Japanese made a demonstration against the French frontier post at Dongdang, to increase pressure on the negotiations going on at Hanoi. Later on, with negotiations still dragging along, an ultimatum was announced by the Southern Army. The Tonkin border would be penetrated

\(^{27a}\) Haas, 110.
if the negotiations were not resolved before midnight 22 September 1940.

As we have seen, the French made the deadline. (See page 527). Unknown to the French, the Japanese 5th Division under Lieut.-General Nakamura moved from Lung-chou to Ping-Hsian near the French border, followed by Chinese troops who thought the Japanese were retreating. At the same time, the Japanese had assembled a fleet in the Gulf of Tonkin consisting of one heavy cruiser and 8 destroyers escorting 8 troopships with on board the 6000 troops which would occupy positions in Tonkin as outlined in the agreement, which was finally signed on 4 September 1940.

At the Langson sector the French had stationed the 2nd Brigade under General Mennerat, consisting of 5 battalions, a squadron of light tanks and one artillery regiment with 75 mm field guns and a battery of 155 mm mountain guns. Haiphong was defended by the 1st Brigade under Colonel Benard reinforced by 3 battalions of the 19th R.M.I.C. and 3 brigades of the Garde Indochinoise. (The militarised FIC field police). The seafront near Haiphong was defended by 5 batteries of 155 mm and 138.6 mm guns and nine A.A. batteries. In reserve were a battalion of 4 R.T.T. and the 4th battalion of the 19th R.M.I.C.

On Sunday 22 September 1940 around 2200 hours local time, the Japanese 5th Division attacked over a length of 70 km along the border near Langson on three points. They invested the fortifications at Dong Dang near Langson, attacked the frontier post at Chima 40 km to the East, and the frontier post at Bin Hi 30 km to the North. The attack on Dong Dang was supported by tanks. The French staff officer Lt-Col. Louvet tried to reach the Japanese in order to inform them of the agreement which had been reached the same day, but he was killed near Dong Dang. The following day, at first light, a mixed French-Japanese mission consisting of Colonel Kolke and Captain Valas tried again to impose a cease-fire on the 5th Division, but to no avail. In the East the Japanese overran Chima and occupied Loc Binh, then turned North in the direction of Langson. In the North they overran Bi Nhi and proceeded towards That Khe, threatening to isolate Dong Dang from the rear. In the center they outflanked Dong Dang and marched along the Kwangsi Railway towards Langson. Two Japanese reconnaissance parties were virtually destroyed by French antitank fire near Langson and the Japanese reconnaissance party withdrew. Another Japanese column bypassed Dong-Dang and went straight East into the direction of Khanh Khé. The French meanwhile rushed reinforcements to Khanh Khe and to Langson, but decided not to use their airforce to attack the enemy, although the Potez 25 reconnaissance planes were not engaged by Japanese planes.

The 24th September brought a number of nasty surprises for the French. The Japanese forced their way into Kham Khe, dispersing the 4th battalion of the 3rd R.T.T. The Tonkinese deserted their French officers in droves, who had no alternative than to surrender to the Japanese. It was a forewarning of what would happen with indigenous troops in Malaya and the NEI, but the warning was not noticed and therefore went unheeded. But an attack on the 10th Company of the 9th R.I.C. under Captain Carl at Na Cham, North of Dong Dang, was repulsed, with the Japanese retreating. The Japanese approached Langson from the North and the South in confused fighting. In the morning of the 25th the Japanese artillery started firing into the Langson perimeter. This resulted in panic, orders

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271a Hesse d'Alzon, 73.

and counter-orders. The 4 battalions in the Langson perimeter withdrew into the Ky Lua redoubt, in the process of retreating the soldiers shot at each other in wild confusion. A battery of 155 mm artillery was abandoned, with the culasses being thrown into a river. General Mennerat signalled to French Headquarters that the situation became untenable, after which he was instructed to surrender to the Japanese. Thereafter General Mennerat contacted the Japanese commander, Colonel Oka, and after some hesitation signed a document of surrender. In the afternoon of the 25th the Japanese disarmed the remaining French troops in Langson. It was a strictly local surrender, and the French General Staff had already taken measures to block the road from Langson into Tonkin. But with the fall of Langson, the road to Hanoi was open to Japanese motorized columns, equipped with tanks, and therefore Hanoi was well within grasp of the Japanese.

At Na Cham however in the 10th Company of Captain Carli stood its ground. Only after a bombardment by dive-bombers did the Indochinese soldiers desert their posts. The mostly white soldiers of the 10th Company however did not panic, and a second Japanese attack on the 24th was beaten off with heavy Japanese losses. The 81 mm Stokes mortars of the company proved very effective. Preparing a new attack, the Japanese started shelling the position at Na Cham with a 75 mm mountain gun. Before the attack came, the French withdrew in good order, leaving their wounded with one noncom officer. All were murdered upon capture by the Japanese. This too was a forewarning of things to come. Carli and his company escaped and were transported to Hanoi a few days later.

The combat resulted in around 300 French and indigenous dead and wounded and about 700 Japanese dead and wounded. Looking at these numbers, the fighting had indeed been fierce. Nevertheless, the French were shocked by the unexpectedly sudden fall of Langson, and General Martin in particular was surprised by the aggressiveness of the attacking Japanese.

At Haiphong, General Nishimura had left the harbour on board the destroyer NENOHI in the night of 23 to 24 September. He contacted the Japanese Naval Commander on board the light cruiser SENDAI, and agreed with the French that the Japanese troops would disembark at Haiphong in the night of 24 to 25 September. But evidently the Japanese Naval Commander did not trust the French, as the approach to Haiphong was very narrow, covered by heavy French coast-artillery, and possibly mined. Without informing the French, he decided to land his troops near Do Son around 0300 hours in the morning of 25 September. From here a Japanese column regained the road towards Haiphong, guided and helped by the local population who received them as liberators. A second Japanese column marched to Do Son and threatened the French artillery positions on the South bank of the Red River. By the evening of the 25th the Japanese had 4500 troops and 12 tanks in Haiphong.

The Southern Army had obviously taken matters in its own hands, causing much embarrassment in Tokyo. Prince Kanin, Chief of General Staff and younger brother of Hirohito,

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2716 Gras, op. cit. 89.


2717 Gras, op. cit. 89. Fonde gives a lower figure for the French: 170 dead and wounded, of which 64 were Indochinese. See Fonde, op. cit. 219.
contacted the Emperor, who thereupon issued an imperial rescript declaring an end to the hostilities on the 25th of September, as the commander of the Southern Army, General Rikichi Ando, obviously did not follow orders from Tokyo IGHQ. This disconcerting fact was confirmed by the Japanese ambassador Sawada to Baudouin on 24 September. General Nishimura arrived at Haiphong again on 29 September and tried in vain to implement the agreement of the 22nd September. The Japanese Minister of War, Hideki Tojo, had him replaced by General Sumida, and also fired the commander of the Southern Army, General Ando. The troubling 5th Division of the Southern Army was evacuated as fast as possible from Kwangsi via Haiphong to Formosa. On 2 October, Do Son was handed back to the French again. The prisoners of war at Langson were read an imperial message on 5 October, praising French-Japanese friendship and announcing their immediate liberation.

After the war, General Hideki Tojo declared before the International Military Tribunal in the Far East (IMTFE), that as Minister of War at that time, he had been very embarrassed by the undisciplined behaviour of the senior Japanese commanders in Kwangsi. He had demoted or moved the commanders most involved, and acknowledged that in doing so he had the full support of the Emperor, who insisted on maintenance of a strict discipline.

The Japanese moved into Tonkin during the entire month of October according to the agreement of 22 September. They occupied the airstrips of Gia Lam, Lao Kay and Phu Lang Thuong. In order to comply to the agreement about the 6,000 men, a number of Japanese troops were shipped back from Haiphong. In addition, 30,000 men with 2,000 mules (sic!) and 2,000 tons of equipment were transported by train and auto transport from China (Kwangsi) through Tonkin and Haiphong to other destinations. In Hanoi the commander of the invasion forces, General Nishimura, installed himself with his staff and 600 troops. On 25 October the French Civil Service and military were again allowed to enter Langson and the other frontier posts along the Chinese border. Early November Decoux reported to Vichy that the Japanese bombers had left the Tonkin airfields, and that Kwangsi had been re-occupied by the Chinese.

Eventually, the losses on the French side proved to be low (40 dead, of which 34 were Europeans, and around 260 wounded), but the impact of the events was considerable. The Japanese Army and Navy had demonstrated their organisational and technical superiority and their fighting prowess. The Colonial troops on the other hand did not have much to be proud of. Specifically the presumed attachment of the indigenous soldier to French rule proved to be ephemeral, and as they comprised more than three quarters of total French troop strength, this was not very reassuring. The conduct of the Indochinese was in sharp contrast to experiences with Indochinese units in France in 1914 and 1940, and their use

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272 Baudouin, 354.
274 IMTFE, Records 36.203 - 36.204.
275 Decoux, 120 - 121.
276 Telegram Matthews to Hull, 4 November 1940. FRUS, 1940, IV, 200.
between the wars in Syria and Morocco. The Langson incident exposed the illusion of European superiority over Asians, and therefore destabilised French influence all over FIC and encouraged the Thais in the aggression towards the French they were planning. It was evident that more problems were in store for the French.

Instigated by the Japanese, the deserters of specifically the 3rd R.T.T., joined by rebels which had previously fled to China, formed armed groups in the region around Langson. Their stated purpose was the ejection of the French from Tonkin and the establishment of a constitutional monarchy under Prince Cuong Dé. When the French reoccupied the Langson region, they had to fight these armed bands, which attacked the newly occupied post of Loc Binh in the night of 29 to 30 September. The French first re-occupied the border posts, and then started chasing the rebels commanded by Tran Trung Lap. After a series of sharp skirmishes, Tran Trung Lap was captured on 26 December 1940, after which the rebellion along the frontier was effectively suppressed. The Japanese did not interfere at all.

During the night of 22 to 23 November 1940 French troops could avoid a Communist coup in Saigon by the timely arrest of a number of ringleaders. In the suburbs of Saigon (Cholon in particular) and the provinces of Hiep-Hoa and Mytho (in Cochin-China) the rebellion manifested itself in sabotage of powerlines and of the rural infrastructure. Police forces and the Garde d’Indochine were able to handle this Southern emergency, dispersing the rebels who found no support with the local population. The Communist Party discovered, that Langson indeed was a loss of face for the French Colonial Administration, but that it was as yet not possible to topple that administration. The uprising cost the French 33 dead, against a few hundred of the rebels, of which around 6,000 were arrested.

5.4.2. The Thai attack of January 1941.

Siam (or Thailand as the Siamese called their country) had always considered the provinces lost to the French in 1904 as “terra irredenta”. When the French Government in FIC showed certain weaknesses with respect to Japanese demands, the Thais sensed an opportunity.

Since 1936, the Thai Government had spent considerable sums of money in reinforcing its defence. Modern weapons had been bought from both the Americans and the Japanese. In 1940 the Thai had 5 divisions ready, with a considerable airforce of around 250 modern planes.

Almost immediately after the Langson incident the number of frontier incidents along the French-Thai frontiers of Cambodia and Laos increased steeply, with Thai planes flying over French territory, and Thai patrols crossing the border. The French therefore started reinforcing West-Cambodia, where they concentrated 16 battalions under General Martin at the end of 1940. Seven battalions were deployed along the long FIC-Siamese border to

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274 Hesse d’Alzon, 99.
275 Hesse d’Alzon, 81 - 83, Gras, op. cit. 90.
276 Hesse d’Alzon, 84 - 85.
277 Gras, op. cit., 90.
cover points of entry into FIC. The Airforce concentrated almost all its planes on the new and expanded airstrips at Pursat and Angkor in Cambodia and Séno in Laos. Those dispositions were made just in time, because on 10 January 1941 the Thai's attacked in force.

The Thai attacked in four places. In Southern Laos they forced the Garde Indochinoise to retreat to the Mekong River, which was reached near Paksé on 19 January. The Thai penetrated also in the Dangrek Mountains along the Northern border of Cambodia with Thailand, and conquered the village of Samrong on 23 January 1941. The main attack came along Highway 1 between Bangkok and Phnom Penh, where the 1st battalion of the R.T.C. fought an orderly retreat until near Sisophon around 15 January. A fourth axis of attack was in Northern Laos towards Luang Prabang, but this was not pursued with much fervor.

Expecting the main offensive along Highway nr 1, the French Army Command had concentrated the 2nd Brigade under command of Colonel Jacomy south of Sisophon. This Brigade consisted of 4 battalions, 2 artillery regiments and a motorised detachment of the 11th R.I.C. North of Sisophon were concentrated 3 battalions of the 11th R.I.C. and a battery of artillery under the command of Lt.-Col. Natte. In the early morning of 16 January 1941, the French counterattacked with two columns along the Highway, and enveloped the Thai along Highway 1. A fierce fight developed, with Thai attack planes bombing the advancing French columns, who used their A.A. guns to the utmost, and shot 6 planes out of the air. But the ground forces did not break through the Thai defence, and were thrown back when the Thai used their tanks in a counter-attack. However, the Thai offensive lost its momentum. At that time news reached the Thai about the brilliant naval victory of the French over the Thai Navy in the Gulf of Siam, near Koh Chang.

On 16 January a French seaplane discovered a Thai naval squadron anchored near the Island of Koh Chang, at the South Coast of Thailand. The Thai fleet commanded by Rear Admiral Luang Phrom Wiraphan consisted of the two Coast Defence vessels DHONBURI and AYUTHIA, the fast torpedo-boats TRAD, RAYONG, CHONBURI and SONGKHLA and the minesweeper NONGSARAI. The French observer missed however the presence of the DHONBURI, and reported only one Coast Defence vessel. Thereupon, the French naval squadron commanded by Captain Bérenger of the LAMOTTE-PICQUET departed hastily from Cam-Ranh, rounded the Cochin-China peninsula and attacked from the Southwest in the early morning of 17 January. A French plane had bombed the anchored ships at dawn, resulting in heavy A.A. fire, which disclosed the position of the Thai ships to the approaching French squadron. This squadron consisted of the light cruiser LAMOTTE PICQUET, the gun-boats AMIRAL CHARNER and DUMONT D'URVILLE, and the light gunboats MARNE and TAHURE. Only then did the French discover that both Coast defence vessels were present. In a confused action of less than an hour's duration, three Thai torpedo-boats, the TRAD, SONGKHLA and CHONBURI were sunk, with the two Coast defence Ships DHONBURI and AYUTHIA trying to escape to the North. The next hour was spent in chasing the two slow, but heavily armed coast defence ships, which ducked fire between the islands and islets which formed the Koh Chang archipelago. The DHONBURY was hit and sunk, the AYUTHIA escaped with numerous hits. Notwithstanding the 8 inch guns of the two Coast defence ships, the 6 inch guns of the French cruiser and the lighter guns of the gunboats got the better part of the engagement, because the Thais could not use their superior torpedo-launching capacity in those confined waters. When retiring, the Thai

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272 Decoux, 141.
airforce dive-bombed the French ships, but scored no hits. It was a clear French naval victory, which resounded through the whole of S.E. Asia. The French had almost annihilated the Thai Fleet which was no threat anymore, and had stopped the main Thai offensive into Cambodia. The Japanese therefore thought it was time now to impose a cease-fire on the warring parties, and offered their good offices to both parties on 20 January 1941.

On 28 January the cease-fire went into effect, with the armistice convention being signed on board the Japanese cruiser NATORI in Saigon on 7 February 1941. The negotiations on a full peace treaty took another few months, because the French refused the handing over of territory to Thailand. The armistice, which was foreseen to end at 25 February, had to be extended. The Japanese got the French in line by threatening to revoke the guarantee of French sovereignty over FIC. On 11 March the Vichy government accepted the Japanese proposals, resulting in the Peace Treaty of Tokyo between France and Thailand being signed on 9 May, 1941. According to this Treaty, the French handed over to the Thai the districts of Bassac and Pakse west of the Mekong in Laos. Cambodia lost the whole province of Battambang and part of the Province of Siem Réap to the Thais. But in comparison with the whole of FIC, this was an affordable price to pay for the French, who now could consolidate their hold on the rest of FIC, under the ever watchful eyes of the Japanese.

Both at Langson and at the Cambodian frontier, the quality of French military leadership in the higher echelons proved to be insufficient. Specifically the battalion commanders proved to be worrisome: too old, no initiative, physically easily exhausted, not in control of the situation. Therefore, on 16 December 1940, Admiral Decoux telegraphed to Vichy: “J’estime plus que jamais indispensable d’infuser un sang nouveau à l’armée d’Indochine par l’envoi rapide de métropolitains, la relève du haut commandement, d’officiers et de cadres que je vous demande de hâter par tous les moyens. Seule l’arrivée de chefs nouveaux est susceptible de donner l’impulsion nécessaire à la rénovation de l’armée de la colonie”. After the armistice, the Army Staff worked hard in replacing commanding officers who had failed, but the size of the problem was a nasty surprise to the French.

It must be said that during the whole crisis, the British had lifted the blockade of FIC as a consequence of the Decoux-accord (see pages 540 and 552), which made it possible for the French to send considerable reinforcements by ship to FIC. These consisted of cadres which were very much needed in FIC.

Another problem concerned French intelligence on both the Japanese and the Thai. This intelligence was almost non-existent. It was assumed that the Japanese units from China were tired and exhausted by fighting the Chinese. In the contrary: they were well-

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274 Hesse d’Alzon, 100.

275 Hesse d’Alzon, 104, note 8.

276 Gras, op. cit., 91.

277 Hesse d’Alzon, 103.
led, well-equipped and had a high morale. The Thai were well informed in advance about the French counteroffensive of 16 January 1941; the French however did not even know the extent of the Thai attack until it happened. Tactically, the French used the same doctrines as in France itself: the so-called Maginot-line mentality. The frontier posts at Tonkin were static forts, which were easily bypassed by the Japanese, with a few exceptions.²⁷³⁴ Command was too centralised, with general Martin in Hanoi trying to fight a defensive battle 300 kilometres from where it happened, without the means of communication to do so. In retrospect, it is still amazing that notwithstanding the échecs at Langson and the Thai border, the French Army did not collapse, and the French Navy even won an unexpected victory over the Thai.

5.5. Portuguese Timor.

5.5.1. Introduction.

Located in South-East Asia were two remnants of another European colonial power, Portugal. These were Macau, close to Hongkong and a Portuguese colony since 1557, and Portuguese Timor, a leftover from the Portuguese Empire in the Moluccas in the 16th century. The colony occupied the Northern part of the island of Timor, of which the southern part was Dutch. The borders between the two parts of the island were fixed by the Dutch-Portuguese Treaty of 1859. The colony had a surface area of 18.900 km² with a population of around 300.000 inhabitants in 1940. The capital was Dilly with a small harbour. Dilly counted about 6.000 inhabitants in 1940. The island is very mountainous, with as the highest peak Mount Ramelau (2.950 m.) The economy was not well developed. Exports consisted of copra, beeswax, cotton, rubber and coffee. Coffee was the main export earner. There was some export of Manganese ore. In short, Portuguese Timor was a sleepy colonial backwater in S.E. Asia, cared for by almost nobody.

All that changed in the thirties, with Japanese expansionism on the rise. Japanese economic penetration in Portuguese Timor alarmed Australia and the Dutch government, resulting in plans for an occupation of the colony in case of Japanese aggression in S.E. Asia. The geographic position of Timor, on the air route between Java and Northern-Australia, caused both governments to be wary of any Japanese initiative. The KNIL-Commander, Lieut.-Gen. Berenschot, first proposed such plans to the G.G. around June 1941.²⁷³⁵ These plans and their execution in December 1941 are important, because they illustrate that the KNIL was not the police army, which has been the qualification given to the KNIL by many Dutch (military) historians. The KNIL Staff proved to be capable of planning and executing an operation, together and in cooperation with the Dutch Navy and Australian forces, which could be best described as a coup de main. It is not expected normally of police armies to be able to launch succesful coup de mains in a combined operation.

This subchapter deals with the growing political and military challenge by Japan in this part of the NEI archipelago, and the plans to contain Japanese penetration in case of war. As such it fits well within the framework of this study.

²⁷³⁴ Hesse d’Alzon, 103.
²⁷³⁵ Stafwerk KNIL, VI, 24.
Dilly had a small airfield, and facilities for handling seaplanes. As indicated above, the place was strategically very important. The distance between Dilly and the military airfields at Kendari and Makassar (Southern Celebes), Amboina and Port Darwin was between 600 and 800 km. With the Dilly airfield in Japanese hands, they could bomb those airfields. Moreover, they would be able to intercept all planes flying the important communication route between Java and Australia.  

5.5.2. Diplomatic efforts to counter Japanese penetration.

In 1934 the Portuguese, eager to break the unpopular transport monopoly of the Dutch Steamship Company KPM ("Koninklijke Paketvaart Maatschappij"), decided to admit Japanese freighters to Dilly Harbour, giving the Japanese a foothold in the economy of the colony. Japanese firms bought a 40% share in the Sociedade Agricola, the only Portuguese firm which exported the agricultural products of the colony. In the late thirties Japan approached Portugal in order to obtain rights for prospection of oil. Shell Oil had already obtained a concession for the eastern part of the island. A Japanese company obtained a concession for the Western part, considered to be less promising. Japan also obtained the right to have a Consulate in Dilly. In 1940 the Portuguese government gave the Japanese the right to open an air service between Palau (a Japanese possession in the Mandated Islands of Micronesia) and Dilly. The Dutch government protested against it, as Japanese planes would cross Dutch territory (New Guinea), and refused the Japanese landing rights at Amboina. The Japanese however, with Portuguese agreement, started trial flights between Palau and Dilly, the first being flown by a four-engine Kawanishi flying boat on 23 January 1941. The distance of 2500 km was flown in one stretch, flying time was 9 hours and 30 minutes.

In order to counterbalance the Japanese airline trials, the Portuguese had allowed the Australian government to start an air service between Darwin and Dilly. By so doing the Australians hoped to forestall a Japanese request to extend their air service to Darwin. On the urging of the British government, Australia also undertook to have an official representative in Dilly to watch over Japanese affairs. In view of the Qantas airservice to Dilly, they stationed David Ross of the Department of Civil Aviation in Dilly not as a consul, but as a representative. The British government also despatched a British consular officer, Clement John Archer, on a fact-finding mission.

Archer spoke with the Portuguese governor, Ferreira de Carvalho, and other dignitaries. According to his report, the colony had almost no defence force worth mentioning. Forty dedicated commandos could occupy Dilly in a couple of hours. The recent arrival of an escorting vessel, the GONCALO VELHO, with 150 men on board, had improved the situation somewhat. The reasonably modern (1933) ship of 1.000 tons possessed 3 guns

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2738 KNIL-Stafwerk, VI, 24.

2737 Tarling, Onset, ibid, 277.

2736 See ARA, Archives Ministry of Colonies, inv.nr. 2.10.45., file nr. 109.


2740 Letter Archer to Foreign Secretary, Report enclosed, 3 May 1941, PRO, FO 371/27794 [F7403/222/61]. An early version of this Report had been handed over by the F.O. to the Dutch Minister, see letter Van Kleffens to Welker, 29 April 1941. MinBuZa, London Archives, Secret Archive, DZ/GA, A I 78, file 417.
The Portuguese disliked the Japanese, but considered themselves relatively safe behind British and Dutch colonial possessions, which in their opinion the Japanese would find difficult to conquer. In order to stop further Japanese penetration, Archer suggested that his government buy the main export crop, coffee, thereby securing a financial base for the colony's expenditures.

After the Japanese occupation of Southern FIC, the possibility of a Japanese coup de main against Dilly could not be ruled out anymore. At the secret Singapore conversations it had been already agreed, that in case war broke out with Japan, Australia would take over the defence responsibilities for Dutch Timor with its main city of Kupang, and for Amboina. The Australian government was sounded out by the British on the possibility of sending additional troops to Portuguese Timor if the Portuguese government would agree to such an arrangement. The Australian government however preferred to have a larger advance party (in uniform) at both Timor-Kupang and Ambon, and the Foreign Office approached the Dutch Minister in London with this request on 1 November 1941. As has been discussed in the Chapter on the Netherlands, the NEI Government was not at all enthusiastic about this British démarche.

At a meeting with Foreign Secretary A. Eden on 4 November 1941, the Portuguese Ambassador in London, Dr. Armando Monteiro, indicated that Portugal did not want an Australian occupation force, and would resist a Dutch one, as the Japanese might otherwise retaliate by occupying their colony of Macau. Secret staff conversations between British and Portuguese officers were an option, however. A meeting between staff officers was therefore arranged in London on 12 November. That meeting was cancelled by the Portuguese government, however, which proposed in turn sending a high-ranking officer to Singapore in December to confer with the British C-in-C Far East.

The Dutch wanted to participate in the British-Portuguese staff meeting, but the Foreign Office disliked that suggestion, knowing full well Portuguese feelings towards the Dutch. The Dutch were informed accordingly at a meeting between Cadogan and the Dutch Minister Michiels van Verduyken on 4 December. During the same meeting Michiels informed Cadogan, that their Minister in Lisbon had already approached the Portuguese government about co-operating with the Dutch in the defense of Portuguese Timor. The Dutch government wanted British support for their approach of the Portuguese. Michiels informed Cadogan that the Dutch Army was ready for a coup de main, and Cadogan reached the conclusion, that "if however war breaks out in the Far East, it is fairly evident that the Dutch will act without waiting on Dr. Salazar".

This observation was correct, but evidently Cadogan had also warned the Dutch about the political consequences, for the same day a rather strongly-worded telegram was sent to the G.G. by the Dutch premier (acting as Minister of Colonies ad interim) in which it was stated that "a sudden attack on territory of a friendly neutral neighbour was not exactly..."
according to Dutch traditions and opinions.\(^\text{[2746]}\) The G.G. was instructed to hold back the KNIL General Staff until the results of the Portuguese-British talks in Singapore were known.\(^\text{[2746]}\) Nevertheless Foreign Minister Van Kleffens directed his Minister in Lisbon, Van Pallandt, to discreetly stress the importance of a Dutch presence at these talks.\(^\text{[2747]}\)

Indeed it is clear that the KNIL Commander-in-Chief was ready to invade Dilly, and in effect wanted to do it immediately, before the Japanese would. He had convinced the G.G. of the wisdom of his arguments, and it was solely the unwillingness of the otherwise rather timid Dutch Government in London to take such a drastic and unprecedented step in Dutch foreign policy that for the moment prevented such a coup de main. The events described also emphasize that the KNIL was not the weak and defensive-minded "police army" of postwar lore. In the next subchapter more information is given about the arguments exchanged between the G.G. and the Dutch government on this issue.

The Dutch Minister in Lisbon, Van Pallandt, met Dr. Salazar on 5 December 1941. The Portuguese head of state was very friendly, but did not want to see Portugal be involved in military talks with a belligerent power (i.e. the Dutch) with whom it was not allied (unlike with the British). The Dutch Minister got the impression that Salazar was willing to cooperate with the Dutch and Australians for the defense of Portuguese Timor, as long as that co-operation remained secret from the Axis Powers.\(^\text{[2748]}\) Dr. Salazar however expressed his opinion, that the Japanese, in the coming conflict, would not be able to wrest control of the seas from the Anglosaxon Powers, and therefore he doubted whether there was any danger of a Japanese invasion of Dilly. On 5 December the F.O. informed the Dutch Minister in London, that according to the Portuguese Minister in London, Monteiro, there was no objection anymore for a Dutch representative in Singapore to have conversations with the Portuguese envoy to be sent over there.\(^\text{[2748]}\) The G.G. was informed accordingly, who then appointed the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore as the prospective talking partner with the Portuguese envoy.\(^\text{[2748]}\) This was a most unusual move, because normally the G.G. did not interfere with the diplomatic or consular corps, which was the responsibility of the Foreign Minister. In the same telegram, which was sent a few hours after Pearl Harbor, the G.G. however declared to wait for an occupation of Portuguese Timor notwithstanding the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and Malaya.

No Portuguese officer however arrived in Singapore. The Dutch Consul-General in Singapore, H.M.J. Fein, informed the G.G. directly that both Duff Cooper and Sir Robert Brooke-Popham had urged a swift occupation of Portuguese Timor to safeguard the Dutch

\(^{2746}\) Telegram Gerbrandy to G.G., cipher ATV/ATW, 4 December 1941: MinBuZa London Archives, Secret Archive, DZ/GA A I 7B, file 417, subsequently to be referred to as MinBuZa, Timor file 417. See also DBPN, C, III, doc. 500, note 1 on page 656.


\(^{2747}\) Telegram Van Kleffens to Van Pallandt, cipher 322/324 of 4 December 1941. Ibid.

\(^{2748}\) Letter Van Pallandt to Van Kleffens, no 4028/1001, 6 December 1941, Ibid. Also in DBPN, C, III, doc. 514, 668 - 670.

\(^{2748}\) Memorandum Texeira de Mattos, 6 December 1941. In MinBuZa Timor file 417.

\(^{2750}\) Telegram G.G. to Gerbrandy, AJC, 8 December 1941. Ibid.
lifeline to Australia. The Portuguese might play into Japanese hands by delaying the talks in Singapore. Under British pressure, the Portuguese had agreed that their Governor in Dilly would agree to receive the Dutch and Australian commanders based in Kupang, as long as they travelled to Dilly disguised as civilians. Time was, however, running out. Japanese submarines had been spotted in the Sawu Sea, and the armoured warship SOERABAJA, which was kept near Timor with the Dilly landing party already on board, was not protected against submarines by destroyers. Therefore, the G.G. decided not to wait any longer, and he gave the order to start the coup de main against Dilly on 15 December.

The invasion took place on 17 December 1941. In the following subchapter more details are given about the execution of this classic coup de main. Dilly was occupied within a few hours. This occupation went against the express wishes of the Dutch government, and clearly illustrated the growing frustration of the G.G. with the timid and pro-English cabinet, as perceived by him. It is obvious that he considered the political and strategic arguments of his government against a Dutch-Australian action to be less important than the local military requirements now that he was faced with a real war. His decision caused bitter recriminations in the Cabinet Council of 16 December, where Van Kleffens offered a way out by proposing to ask the Portuguese to reinforce their colony with troops from Angola and Mozambique. The Dutch and Australian troops could be withdrawn afterwards. The G.G. rejected this proposal, mainly because he deeply mistrusted the Portuguese with regard to the Japanese.

5.5.3. A pre-emptive occupation.

The NEI Government was indeed very worried about the gradual Japanese penetration, which has been described above. As there was no consular presentation in Dilly, the Dutch were dependent on information from outside sources as to what happened in Portuguese Timor. The contacts with the Japanese, and their growing trade presence in Dilly, diminished the almost total dependence of the Portuguese on the ships of the KPM (the monopolist Dutch shipping company entrusted with all transport in the NEI archipelago), and therefore reduced the Dutch stranglehold on the small colony. It is therefore not surprising that the Dutch Naval Commander, Vice-Adm. C. Helfrich, urged the G.G. to have a consul appointed in Dilly. Van Mook was against this proposal, as it would

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275 Telegram G.G. to Gerbrandy, cipher AJL/AJJ, 11 December 1941. Ibid. Also in DBPN, C, IV, doc. 16, 19.
276 Telegram G.G. to Gerbrandy, 13 December 1941, cipher AKB/AKD. Ibid. Also in DBPN, C, IV, doc. 23, 24.
278 Stafwerk KNIL, VI, 28.
280 Telegram G.G. to Gerbrandy, 22 December 1941, cipher ALU/ALV, MinBuZa Timor file 417. Also in DBPN, C, IV, doc. 68, 73.
281 Letter Helfrich to G.G., 1 April 1941, nr S.207/2G 1/2, in ARA, Archive Ministry of Colonies, inv.nr. 2.10.45, file nr. 652.
give the Japanese a precedent to have their own consul in Dilly. A compromise was reached by asking the resident petroleum geologist for Royal Dutch Shell at Dilly, Mr. L.E.J. Brouwer, to act as intelligence officer. He was asked to report weekly by airmail.

In February 1941, the Dutch government was informed by the Minister in Lisbon (at that time Mr. J.G. Sillem) that the Portuguese government was seriously contemplating the possibility of a Japanese invasion of Portuguese Timor.2736 As the total army force consisted of one infantry company of European soldiers with native supporting troops, the Governor planned to evacuate Dilly in case of a Japanese attack, and to retreat to the mountains, defending as long as possible a reinforced blocking position near Maubise. Considering its policy of strict neutrality, the Portuguese would only ask for Dutch or Australian military aid after a Japanese invasion. Van Kleffens asked Loudon to inform the American government about this Portuguese viewpoint, which of course caused the Americans to ask what would be the position of the Dutch in case of such a Japanese attack.2790

Van Kleffens stated the Dutch position. Due to the rainy western monsoon (October - April) the Japanese would be constrained in invading Singapore or the Western part of the Archipelago during the western monsoon. That did not apply to the eastern part of the archipelago, where Timor was situated. Such an invasion could indeed happen as a surprise operation, and was considered by the Dutch government as almost as serious as an attack upon Singapore. As explained, the reason was Timor's strategic position on the air route between Java and Northern Australia.2790 The telegram did not contain any proposal for Dutch preventive action in Portuguese Timor, and therefore did not directly answer the question posed by the State Department.

Two civil servants of the Dutch administration based in Kupang visited Dilly on 30 September 1941. They were Mr. J. Koster, assistant resident, and Mr. E.A. de Neve, Chief Civil Engineer at Kupang. Their report was sent by the Dutch Resident, F.J. Nieboer, to the G.G.2791 They had a conversation with the Portuguese Governor, and as they had been able to look around in Dilly and at the airport, they reported that Dilly was almost undefended and could be taken by a KNIL-company. According to their report, there was a weekly air service between Dilly and Kupang flown by a small Portuguese plane, which gave the Portuguese a connection to the weekly KNILM air service between Batavia and Kupang en route to Australia.

On 14 October 1941 a Treaty was signed in Lisbon by the Japanese Minister, giving Japan permission to open a fortnightly air service between Palau and Dilly.2792 On 12 October the Japanese had already installed a consulate in Dilly occupied by 8 Japanese officials. The Dutch answer was to cut off the supply of oil products to Dilly, and the refusal to

2736 Telegram Sillem to Van Kleffens, no 37, 16 February 1941. MinBuZa Timor file nr 417.
2736 Telegram Loudon to Van Kleffens, no AG.116 of 17 February 1941. MinBuZa Timor file nr 417.
2736 Telegram Van Kleffens to Loudon, no 152/153 of 17 February 1941. MinBuZa Timor file nr 417.
provide weather reports from Amboina radio station to the Japanese.2763

With rising tensions in October 1941, and in order to be able to do something when the Japanese invaded and the Portuguese asked for help, the Dutch government informed the G.G. that he should increase Dutch troop strength in the Dutch part of the island, and that he could expect an Australian request to start sending Australian reinforcements to Dutch Timor too.2764 According to the agreements made at the Singapore Staff conversations, Australia would be responsible for the defence of Timor and Ambon after the Japanese had started the war.2765 The G.G. responded that the Dutch Army had about 380 soldiers in Dutch Timor, and could fly in at short notice another 340 troops from Java, when needed. He was adamantly against allowing Australian troops on Dutch territory as a preventive measure, at least before a Japanese attack.2766 The KNIL General Staff had however already prepared a plan for an sea-born invasion near Dilly by Dutch troops, because an occupation force starting from Dutch Timor would find an offensive along the coastal road from Kupang to Dilly extremely difficult, as monsoon rains had destroyed a number of bridges.2767

This information was given to the G.G. in a report signed by the KNIL Chief of Staff, General R. Bakkers. In the same report it was mentioned that there were about 80 male Japanese present in Dilly, of which around 20 were military flyers.2768 The Portuguese were reported as being rather pro-Japanese. It was this report which caused the G.G. much concern. A second report dated 21 November 1941 stated that before the end of November, 6 Japanese schooners would arrive in Dilly with Japanese war material on board.2769 After the occupation of Dilly it was discovered that the sources for these reports had been unreliable and that the Intelligence Department had failed to sufficiently cross-check the available information. The information had been obtained from a single source, the retired KNIL infantry-major H. Agerbeek, who was disguised as a native trader.2770

Obviously, the KNIL wanted to occupy Dilly by a sea-born invasion ahead of the Japanese, in order to increase its defensive strength together with the Portuguese. The KNIL plan was enthusiastically supported by the Naval Commander, Helfrich.2771 There were sound

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2765 Telegram Welter to G.G., cipher ALR, 28 October 1941. MinBuZa Timor file 417.
2766 G.G. to Welter, cipher ABL, 30 October 1941, Ibid.
2770 Statwerk KNIL, VI, 25.
military reasons for such a pre-emptive occupation. If the Japanese would be the first to reach Dilly, they could cover the harbour with artillery and could mine possible landing sites. The small airport near Dilly could be used by their airforce to wreak havoc upon a Dutch invasion force. It would therefore save lives to be first in Dilly. The G.G. thus asked the Dutch government permission for such a pre-emptive coup de main, which could be executed within 48 hours.  

The Dutch Government however considered the political disadvantages of such a strike to outweigh the military advantages. (See also the previous sub-chapter). The Portuguese government would consider such a pre-emptive invasion as a casus belli, which would be most unwelcome due to the delicate conversations with the British ally about the use of the Azores as a base against German U-boats in the Atlantic. Therefore, the Dutch Prime Minister informed the G.G. of the reluctance in Dutch government circles, using the argument that the arrival of the Eastern Fleet at Singapore would make an Japanese coup de main much less likely. He was supported in this by the Minister of the Navy, Furstner, who questioned the wisdom of such a coup de main. In his view it would be very difficult for the Japanese to maintain themselves in Dilly, as long as the Dutch had a bomber/fighter airforce stationed at Kupang. The old controversy between KM and KNIL obviously influenced his viewpoint.

The G.G. responded on 29 November by expressing doubts as to whether the Dutch airforce could suppress Japanese activities in Dilly. The reverse could also be true: that by an occupation in force the Japanese airforce would interdict the very important air route between Java and Australia. The G.G. pointed out, that Japanese flying boats from Palau were already flying barrels with aviation fuel into Dilly, which was new information for the Dutch Foreign Office. The G.G. pressed therefore for a blank approval from the Dutch government to start the occupation of Dilly whenever he considered the Japanese penetration in Portuguese Timor to be too alarming. Moreover, he pointed out that reinforcement of the airplane strength at Kupang would be dangerous, as long as it was not known what would happen around Singapore. The small airforce at Kupang could easily be destroyed by a Japanese sneak attack. The clinching argument of the G.G. however was, that a fast and bloodless coup de main at Dilly, combined with an offer of protection to the Portuguese would be more effective than a Japanese coup de main followed by Dutch and Australian military assistance to the Portuguese. Last but not least, the G.G. suggested that the Portuguese colonial authorities had already proved themselves to be too lenient towards the Japanese, requiring fast action. The telegram also contains a somewhat mysterious reference to the use of bacterial weapons against the indigenous people in Malaya and the NEI by the Japanese in case of war. From this

2772 Welt to Van Kleffens, 14 November 1941. DBPN, C, III, doc. 424, 566.


2776 See especially the English-language Memorandum with the G.G. arguments, which was handed over by Van Kleffens to the British Foreign Minister Eden in London on 4 December 1941. Letter Van Kleffens to Gerbrandy, no 6747 GA, 4 December 1941. MinBuZa Timor file 417.
it might be deduced that the Dutch at least had received information about Japan’s leading position in bacteriological warfare.

Gerbrandy however remained unconvinced, advised against a coup de main by referring to the coming British-Portuguese staff talks in Singapore and asked the G.G. to restrain his commanders. Gerbrandy however remained unconvinced, advised against a coup de main by referring to the coming British-Portuguese staff talks in Singapore and asked the G.G. to restrain his commanders. The G.G. decided otherwise, and gave the order to invade.

The invasion itself was carried out by the reinforced 3rd Company of the 8th Infantry-Battalion from Malang, under command of Lieut.-col. N.L.W. van Straten, in total 616 troops. The Australian part of the invasion force consisted of Nr 2 Australian Independent Company commanded by Major A. Spence, with around 270 troops. The troops were transported to Dilly on board the warships SOERABAJA and CANOPUS, and the KPM-ship PIJNACKER HORDIJK. The supporting units of the invasion force (Artillery and Engineers) had been brought on board the SOERABAJA between 17 - 19 November 1941 at Surabaya, after which the ship had been cruising in the Sawu-sea. As we have seen, it was the security of this ship threatened by Japanese submarines which had been given as the reason to start the invasion of Dilly.

The invasion itself took place on 17 December 1941 at 1300 local time, with soldiers landing with sloops at a spot on the coast about 4 km West of Dilly. There was almost no resistance at the beach, and the Dutch rushed Dilly an hour later, interning 28 male Japanese and 2 male Germans. Their families were, however, not interned.

5.5.4. Conclusions.

Portuguese Timor was a backwater in colonial S.E. Asia. After the Portuguese government, under Japanese pressure because of Macau, allowed Japan to penetrate economically in Portuguese Timor, diplomatic efforts were undertaken by Britain, the Netherlands and Australia to contain the Japanese.

After the Japanese started trial flights to Dilly from Palau, the KNIL General Staff devised plans for a coup de main against Dilly. First an invasion over land was considered. This proved not to be a viable option, therefore a seaborne invasion near Dilly was planned. From mid-November 1941 onwards the military were ready.

Dutch intelligence about Japanese penetration proved to be inaccurate, and unduly alarmist after the occupation of Dilly. However, these reports caused the G.G. to press the Dutch government for a quick diplomatic solution. If that could not be realised, the military plans would be put into effect.

The British opposed Dutch military intervention, because that would anger their centuries-old ally, with whom they were in delicate discussions on the use of the Azores for allied purposes. The Dutch government, to the dismay of the NEI government, took the British
side. The ensuing conflict between the two governments only ended when the G.G., on his own authority, ordered the invasion of Timor-Dilly against the express wishes of his government in London.

The whole episode highlights the degree of freedom in the execution of Dutch foreign policy in the Far East which the G.G. had created for himself, due to the weakness of the Cabinet in London. The appointment by the G.G. of the consul in Singapore for talks with the Portuguese without prior approval by the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs is a mere illustration of the G.G.’s attitude.

Another conclusion from this subchapter is that at least the KNIL General Staff did not consider the Dutch colonial army to be a defensively-oriented police force, but planned and executed a rather complicated combined operation (with the Dutch Navy and the Australian Army) in a competent way. However, it must be admitted that the few Portuguese soldiers and sailors did not display any craving for a heroic death. Nevertheless, the coup de main was executed without a hitch. For the Portuguese however, there was the bitter realisation that, notwithstanding the well-known rather moralistic Dutch neutrality policy in the interbellum, now that there was a war, the Dutch proved to be willing to strike when that was in their best interest.

5.6. General Conclusions.

This chapter enables us to draw a number of important conclusions.

With respect to the Grand Strategy of France concerning FIC, it might be concluded that the French government was bent on maintaining its sovereignty over FIC as long as possible. Because of its mistrust of the Chinese and the Thai’s, an understanding with the Japanese, as long as they respected their sovereignty, was considered acceptable. The French policymakers believed that only by keeping its sovereignty would France be able to fulfill its mission civilatrice in FIC, and in doing so contain the growing independence movement. It must be inferred from their policy that the Vichy government considered their treaties with Japan to be of a temporary nature, in the framework of an expected German victory. The Tripartite pact of 27 September 1940 induced the French government not to send reinforcements to FIC, even considering the fact that the articles of the Armistice with the Germans and Italians, dealing with the French colonies, allowed measures to ensure their adequate defence. By not using those opportunities, the Vichy government played inadvertently into British hands, as this policy also weakened FIC with respect to Thailand. French historians like Hesse d’Alzon and Valette have tried to shift responsibilities for the loss of FIC to the Western Allies, especially the U.S. (See for example page 539). From the above, it is obvious that the Vichy government must also carry part of that responsibility.

French policy towards the Japanese could be called defeatist, but it had a certain pragmatic logic, and it saved the French colonialists in FIC years of internment in Japanese concentration camps. It is interesting to compare this with the defiant Dutch attitude towards the Japanese, even without formal backing of the British and Americans. It must be added, however, that geopolitically, the Dutch had less to fear from the Japanese because the Royal Navy, the South China Sea, FIC and the Philippines were still between them and the Japanese in Hainan. That situation changed drastically when, because of Dutch intransigence over Japanese economic demands, the Japanese felt compelled to
occupy Southern FIC in order to bring at least Borneo and Malaya within bombing range. The French faced the Japanese in Hainan and Kwangsí directly since early 1939.

It might be concluded that whenever the British and/or the Americans had offered the French in FIC a kind of guarantee around July/August 1940, the FIC government might have broken away from Vichy. The FIC military commanders still woefully underestimated the Japanese land forces until September 1940. A very close naval cooperation had been established between the French and British Far Eastern squadrons since June 1939. A showing of the Royal Navy in the South China sea in combination with some American measures like weapons delivery might have brought FIC in the Allied camp - but not necessarily in the Free French camp. After the Soviet-Japanese non-aggression Treaty of April 1941, the Japanese would have interfered in any case with FIC, and at that time neither Britain nor the U.S. had been ready to support FIC militarily. The French would then have lost their sovereignty over FIC altogether at an early stage.

Militarily, the French experience in fighting against both the Japanese and the Thai could have provided invaluable lessons for the prospective Allies, as these experiences were gained before Pearl Harbor. Alas, a way of communication no longer existed for the French to share their experience with the British, Americans or Dutch, and as far is known, the French military authorities in FIC did not try to open such a communication channel.

Japanese fighting prowess had been very much underestimated by the French commanders. The Japanese proved to be disciplined, tenacious, determined, and well-led. They did not respect any conventions concerning Prisoners of War, towards whom they proved to be very cruel (See page 574). In itself this came as a rude shock. Even more embarrassing however was the low quality of French leadership at the battalion level, and the lack of steadiness of the indigenous troops under fire. This phenomenon was going to wreck the allied effort to defend Malaya and Burma by the British and of the NEI by the Dutch. When badly led, indigenous troops under fire just tended to disappear into the countryside. As was proved by the indigenous assistance to Japanese invasion forces near Haiphong (page 574), the French had overestimated the loyalty of the indigenous population to their cause.

Like in Malaya and later on in Java, the presence of a few tanks could wreak havoc on the morale of the troops, as the French experienced in Cambodia against the Thai (See page 577). An inadequate tank defence and lack of training in handling enemy tanks by infantry aggravated the problem. French high command itself did not escape criticism either. Specifically during the Langson fighting, French overall control of the battle was lacking because the commanding general was too far removed from the actual battle. Moreover, French tactical doctrines proved to be too static, perhaps under influence of a Maginot-line mentality.

However, there was also a bright side to French military performance. The French High Command never panicked, and kept its troops in hand. First the Japanese threat was skillfully countered, thereafter troops were rapidly switched to the South over primitive roads to confront the Thais, who were stopped in their tracks. At least on the operational and logistic level, the French High Command proved to be aggressive and competent. The outmoded airforce was used to good measure against the Thais, but also proved invaluable in reconnaissance over the Langson sector in September 1940, providing desperately needed intelligence.
The French Navy performed extremely well. The battle of Koh-Chang was an unexpected French naval victory, which uplifted French morale considerably. The Japanese grudgingly admired the aggressive leadership of French forces, both on land and on the high seas. In summary, the military events of 1940 and 1941 proved French toughness, and may have been the main reason why the Japanese scrupulously respected French sovereignty over FIC until March 1945.

Considering the Japanese diplomacy, one has to concede that the Japanese government stuck scrupulously to the text of the treaties closed with the French authorities in FIC. The only exception in fact is their treatment of the Vichy government, which cannot be called gentlemanly, if one remembers that after the occupation of Tonkin in September 1940, the Japanese again posed an ultimatum to Vichy in July 1941 in order to gain access to Southern FIC. The commanders of the Japanese land forces proved to be an unruly bunch, to the embarrassment of the military commanders and the politicians in Tokyo. It took the strong hand of General Tojo as Prime Minister and Minister of War to restore a semblance of order in the état-major of the Japanese land forces. Japanese field commanders had exhibited this attitude before, at Mukden in 1931, at the Soviet-Manchurian border, and with the sinking of the PANAY, but the Langson incident was the nadir in this basic weakness within the Japanese military command structure.

Thailand played a disturbing role in the maintenance of the status quo in S.E. Asia, specifically after the fall of France. Thai Grand Strategy foresaw the repossession of the lost provinces to France and Great Britain since the early part of the 20th century. The Thai government therefore had invested considerably in its armed forces, and used British complicity and perceived French weakness, to chase its own interests, i.e., the regaining of the provinces lost to FIC when France was beaten by the Germans. Thailand, nominally neutral, played on both the Japanese and the British to achieve this goal. It provoked a war with FIC, but had to accept Japanese mediation when FIC military resistance was stronger than anticipated. The Japanese mediation failed however in winning over the Thais to the Japanese side. Specifically the occupation of Cambodia in July 1941 angered the Thais, because they felt themselves betrayed by the Japanese.

British diplomacy towards Thailand was masterfully staged by the British Minister in Bangkok, Sir Josiah Crosby. Notwithstanding the Thai attitude towards Japan and FIC, Crosby and the F.O. followed a policy of conciliation, which successfully kept Thailand neutral, if not pro-Western, until the Japanese invasion of 8 December 1941.²⁷⁰ This conciliation went so far that the British blocked French reinforcements towards FIC in the Autumn of 1940. The British were also willing to reinforce the Thai forces with weapons, and appealed to the Dutch to provide oil to Thailand. The reason for this policy was that Thailand, even more than FIC, held the key towards Japanese entry to Singapore. The policy however restrained the British from executing Operation MATADOR, a pre-emptive strike into Southern Thailand to occupy the landing beaches on the Malay peninsula, which had been targeted by the Japanese. A British guarantee of Thai independence was also outside British capabilities due to the American attitude towards Thailand.

American policy towards FIC and Thailand can be considered a failure, because Hull and Roosevelt interpreted the actions of the Vichy-government and of Thailand as moralistically objectionable. In the case of the Thais, this resulted in an economic and military embargo against both Thailand and FIC, which brought American diplomacy in conflict with the

²⁷⁰ Tarling, Onset, 367.
British, and did not contribute to the effort to maintain the status-quo. It took over a year for the F.O. to get American policy in line until the Japanese forged a British-American understanding by their occupation of Southern FIC. Specifically Roosevelt would never forget French defection, as he saw it in the case of FIC, and during the war his anti-French attitude would bring him on a collision course with the British.²⁷²

The Dutch government in fact followed a policy which supported British foreign policy with regard to Thailand and FIC. Dutch diplomacy was aimed primarily at avoiding the export of strategic materials like rubber and tin from both Thailand and FIC to Germany via Japan and the Soviet-Union. The Dutch were therefore willing to offer the Thai some of their oil in exchange for restrictions on rubber and tin exports to Japan. Up to the Japanese occupation of Southern FIC the Dutch maintained limited trade with FIC. When British attitudes hardened with respect to French shipments of strategic products to the motherland, the Dutch government supported the British government.

For the NEI the events in FIC were important for two reasons. Firstly the Dutch, like the Americans, loathed French pragmatism. The accommodating attitude of the French towards the Japanese was condemned as morally wrong by both Dutch government authorities and public opinion. The unbending attitude of the Dutch during the Kobayashi and Yoshizawa missions in Batavia (pages 316 - 321) was perceived as a more correct way to deal with Japanese demands. The Japanese did not expect such an intransigent Dutch attitude (See Chapter 6, page 679), which resulted directly in the Japanese occupation of Southern FIC.

Secondly, the fact that the Japanese scrupulously left the French administration intact in FIC, strengthened many Dutch authorities in their opinion that the same would happen in case the Japanese overran the NEI. This conclusion would prove to be completely wrong, but influenced the Dutch government’s attitude towards its own corps of civil servants.

With regard to Portuguese Timor, the Dutch government also followed British advice, while the NEI government wanted its own pre-emptive strike: a coup de main against Dilly in order to forestall an expected Japanese move. In this, the Governor-General followed his own judgment, with resulted in an invasion, and an acrimonious policy debate with his government in London. The Timor case is an interesting study in internal relations between the NEI government and the ineffectual government in exile in London.

Geopolitics runs as a red thread through this whole chapter. Because Japan could not subdue China militarily, it tried to isolate it from the Western powers. That was the driving force behind Japanese efforts to get control over the Tonkin railways into Yunnan and Kwangsi. When the Burma Road took over the traffic from those railways, Thailand became the next Japanese target. But it was an Asian state, no colony, and because of their slogan “Asia for the Asians”, Japan had to walk carefully with regard to Thailand. When the Dutch refused further Japanese economic penetration into the NEI, the Japanese decided to occupy Southern FIC to increase military pressure on them. This however backfired at the Japanese, as an oil embargo now threatened its existence, and made war with the three Western powers unavoidable.

Geopolitics also played a major role in the Timor case. Portuguese Timor happened to be situated astride the important Java - Australia link, and therefore had to be protected against a Japanese invasion. The way this was handled was embarrassing to the Dutch,

who had always been champions of the inviolability of small states. This chapter vividly illustrates that, at least at that period in history, each and every state pursued its own policies, based on what were seen as its own raison-d'état. At least it made for very interesting interactions in the framework of South-East-Asia prior to Pearl Harbor, the study of which has been the purpose of this chapter.