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

Bussemaker, H.Th.

Citation for published version (APA):
Chapter 7
CONCLUSIONS

7.1. Introduction.

History never repeats itself. Nevertheless history does provide insight into why things went
as they did. History provides warnings which could be relevant, even today, for statesmen,
the military profession and social scientists. The history of S.E. Asia in the interbellum
contain such warnings, or "lessons" as some would like to call them. I would like to
highlight some of these warnings in this concluding chapter of my study.

The period between the two World Wars in S.E. Asia was historically very complex
because of the interactions between a large number of countries and their dependencies.
Around 1900 the colonial situation was frozen. The Netherlands were responsible for
perhaps the richest colony of all: the NEI. Bordering it in the North were other western
colonies: (British) Malaya and British North Borneo and Hongkong on the China coast,
French Indochina on the Asian mainland, and the Philippines, which was at that time in
American hands. Between the NEI and the British Dominion of Australia lay the tiny, but
strategically very important, Portuguese colony of East Timor. Bordering Hongkong was
also Portuguese Macao. These were the colonial possessions of the western states, which
wished to maintain the existing status quo, with the exception of the United States.

Japan, China and the Soviet Union however were not at all happy with this imperialist
status quo. All three wanted the status quo changed to suit their purposes. Japan wanted
free access to raw materials like oil and unlimited export of finished goods to the world
markets. Moreover, Japan wanted the psychologically important recognition of the major
Western powers that Japan and its subjects were to be treated as equals. The Japanese
demand to have its subjects recognized as equal to Europeans and Americans however,
had been politely rejected as recently as the Versailles Peace Conference of 1919. When
in addition to this the export markets disappeared in the late thirties, Japan started on its
long road towards Batavia.

During the 19th century China had been the subject of a humiliating treatment by the
western countries, which were militarily and organisationally very much superior.343
After the First World War China more or less consolidated itself after about a century of
internal turmoil and foreign domination, and started on the long road towards becoming a
modern power, which threatened both Japanese and Western interests vested in China
itself. In this, China was aided by the Soviet-Union, which in so doing hoped to weaken
both the Western Imperialist Powers and Japan, which was regarded anyway by the Soviet
Union as an Eastern Imperialist Power.

In this respect Stalinist Russia was not far off the mark, because Japan had indeed
conquered an Empire itself in the previous fifty years: the Ryu-Kyu islands, the Bonin

343 See for example William R. Thompson: "The Military Superiority Thesis and the Ascendancy of Western
Islands, Formosa, Korea, Southern-Sakhalin and the Mandate Islands in the Central Pacific. The Japanese government was not content to leave this as it was: in the early twenties its burgeoning industry needed iron and coal as raw materials, and these could be obtained from Manchuria. In the thirties oil became indispensable to further Japanese industrial expansion. Japan, therefore, had no interest in maintaining the status quo. Economically expanding Japan was without doubt the most dynamic of the trio of states which tried to upset the status quo in S.E. Asia, and was therefore more of a threat to colonial stability in prewar S.E. Asia than either China or the Soviet-Union.

In all fairness it has to be noted, that the United States too were not in for maintenance of the status quo either. Of course the Americans feared Japanese meddling in S.E. Asia, but the Americans by their history were also opposed to colonial possessions. Even before the First World War the U.S. were a safe haven for Indian nationalists who fled British repression. The United States also supported Gandhi and his Congress Party between the wars. Moreover, in 1934 the Americans had declared by law, that the Philippines would gain independence by 1945. (Chapter 1, page 24). Unlike the three other western colonial powers, the U.S. indeed was therefore changing the status quo in S.E. Asia, be it in a less dramatic way than Japan had in mind.

Also bent on a change of the status quo were the fledgling indigenous independence movements within all three colonial territories, of which the independence movements in Malaya were the least developed, compared to those in FIC and NEI. All would however be involved in economic and militaric actions against their colonial oppressors before the Second World War, but it was specifically after the end of that war, that they were to become effective agents of change.

Returning to the issue of "Grand Strategies" as formulated by each of these powers in the interwar period, reference is made to the Introduction, pages 2 - 3. It should be borne in mind, that Grand Strategies are formulated and implemented by statesmen and defence planners, who have to coordinate political intentions and military capabilities effectively. The study presented here gives critical examination of those Grand strategies in several areas: in vital interests of each country involved, in national leadership, in foreign policy, in military strategy and interservice relations, and in civil-military relations including the mobilisation of the indigenous masses for imperial purposes. Lastly a review is to be undertaken of the Intelligence aspects of the interwar period in the Far East.

7.2. Vital Interests.

At the core of any "Grand Strategy" are the vital interests of a State: those interests which are considered so important for a number of reasons, that infringement of these interests by another State is a casus belli in itself.

The one and only Far Eastern vital interest in the opinion of President, Congress and the American public were the Philippines. An unprovoked Japanese attack on the Philippines would therefore surely have resulted in war. Contrary to British beliefs however, China was not an American vital interest, as the PANAY-Incident indeed proved. Neither were the NEI, a vital American interest, although the Dutch government hoped for American intervention in the case of a Japanese attack. This hope however was unrealistic until the

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Singapore Staff talks of 1941. (Pages 244 - 254). Moreover, large sections of the American population, represented by an isolationist Congress, and surely the powerful Trade Unions, were not even slightly interested however in the preservation of the English and Dutch Empires. Europe was far more important to American policy and public opinion. As Britain was actually fighting totalitarian States like Germany and Italy, it enjoyed the highest priority in the delivery of American weapons and goods. Thus, the Western European colonies in South-East Asia were important, but decidedly not an American vital interest.

British vital interest were also in Europe, and not in the Far East, particularly after the demise of the British Expeditionary Corps in the sands of Dunkirk. This was a rather dramatic change from the late thirties, when Australia - and by implication the Netherlands East Indies too - were considered British vital interests. In the view of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, the Far Eastern Theatre should not detract the British war effort against the European Axis powers, and reinforcement of the Far East therefore got a very low priority, even lower than the theatres of war in North-Africa, East-Africa and Russia. (See note 1206, page 257). In this war both the American and British vital interests (and as such also their Grand Strategies) coincided after May 1940. This also explains the growing integration of British and American war planning in the year 1941, on the basis of a "Germany first" strategy.

Dutch diplomacy in the Far East was confronted with diverging vital interests. It was vital for the Dutch to preserve their colonial empire, but pre-war Dutch governments found financial frugality and balanced budgets far more important than spending money on a strong defence. The Dutch believed they had received a kind of British guarantee during the Washington Conference (see page 97), which informal guarantee was reflected in the Dutch Defence Foundations for the NEI in 1927. (Pages 351 - 352). This premise was checked by PM Colijn in 1937, and found wanting. Therefore, it has to be concluded, that Dutch foreign policy and defence policy with respect to the NEI in the interbellum had been founded on quicksand.

Contrary to British and American evaluations however, the Dutch were prepared to fight any Japanese attempt to capture the archipelago to the end. For them there was no possibility of retreat to another part of the Empire, like the British had. In contrast to the French, there was no public support at all for an economic compromise with the Japanese, as long as they respected Dutch sovereignty over the archipelago. Instead, the Dutch political goal, after the German occupation of the motherland together with a recovery period thereafter was the formation of an united front with Great Britain and America against Japan, which they believed would in itself probably avoid war altogether.

Dutch foreign policy however failed in achieving this objective because it did not recognize the divergent British and American vital interests in the Pacific, and the converging ones in the Western Theatre of War. Moreover, the foreign policy as advocated by the Dutch Governor-General of the NEI did not coincide with the policy aims of the Dutch Cabinet in London. The legacy of the policy of aloofness for so many years made impossible a completely different, but still consistent foreign policy.

The important role of the Dutch Governor-General in the formulation and execution of Dutch foreign policy in the period between May 1940 and December 1941 has been generally overlooked in contemporary Dutch historical publications. The G.G. was instrumental in the continuation of a policy of aloofness towards the European ally, Great-Britain, in the Far East. (Page 427). This policy ran counter to the urgent need for American weapons to defend Dutch neutrality. American foreign policy wanted a strong British-Dutch cooperation in the face of the threatening attitude of Japan, but it was constitutionally unable to give both countries a guarantee of their territorial integrity. Therefore, by using the Dutch dependence on American weapons, American diplomacy gradually led the G.G. towards a more cooperative attitude to the British ally in the Far East. The strongly pro-British attitude of the Dutch Cabinet in London at last resulted in the abandonment of traditional Dutch aloofness in the NEI by even the G.G. in early 1941.

As has been elucidated in Chapter 4, the British Europe-centred grand strategy resulted in deteriorating relations between Great Britain and Australia. The vital interests, and therefore the grand strategy of Australia coincided with those of the Netherlands. The region of prime strategic importance for both the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand included the whole Malay barrier, from Malaya to Melanesia. (Page 510). Both dominions were prepared to fight an invader of this island arc, making them the natural allies of the Dutch. Dutch foreign policy in 1939/1940 did not recognize and exploit this fact however, because of its aloofness. Australian foreign policy on the other hand however pursued a policy of actively supporting the NEI government. Of all the prospective Dutch allies, Australia proved to be the most positive and helpful in assisting the Dutch in the NEI during the difficult period between May 1940 and December 1941.

The French vital interests were the integrity of the motherland and North-Africa. All the other colonies, including FIC, were not a vital interest. Nevertheless, the French Vichy-government clung to its sovereignty over FIC, and was willing to sacrifice everything else towards this goal, resulting in a close co-operation with the despised Japanese against the former ally, Great Britain. Nevertheless, a "gentleman's agreement" between the two Naval Commanders in the Far East enabled the French to keep lines of communications to the British and the Dutch colonies open for a year, up to July 1941. (Pages 540, 550). British Foreign policy towards FIC was not very consistent, i.e. because of British interests in keeping Thailand within the Western sphere of influence, in turn resulting in a British refusal to sent French reinforcements to FIC from other French colonies. This policy as pushed by Sir Josiah Crosby in Bangkok (Page 590) was unsuccessful in the end because of a correct estimate by the Thai government of the strengths and weaknesses of the British military position.

7.3. National leadership.

Good national leadership focusses on the formulation and execution of a grand strategy, which has the consensual support of the majority of the national élite. In democracies, this needs the creation and maintenance of bipartisan support for Grand Strategy goals, because Grand Strategies cover a longer timespan that the normal 4-to 5-year cycle for democratic governments. Following the ravages of the economic world crisis in the thirties, and the inadequate political answers to these challenges, democracy was strongly threatened in that period by the rising flood of totalitarian systems such as Fascism, Nazism and Communism. In view of their absolute nature, these systems were believed by many to react faster and more decisive to the challenges of the time than a traditional democracy.
One remarkable man, who indeed provided excellent national and international leadership, and in doing so might have saved our Western lifestyle, was Franklin Delano Roosevelt, president of the United States between 1933 and 1945. In his first term, he had to give his countrymen back the faith in their own destiny, by tackling the economic and social problems in the U.S. with his "New Deal". Meanwhile, he started to increase the strength of the U.S. Fleet within the limits of the Treaty of Washington as a means of increasing American influence in Asia. In his second term, he had to manoeuvre carefully because of the strong position of the isolationists in Congress; the same isolationists who had voted against the U.S. joining the system of collective security as defined by Wilson and other statesmen with the founding of the league of Nations in 1920. Very gradually, he prepared his populace, and public opinion, to the fact that the United States had a duty to combat the totalitarian states. In his second term that vision, or Grand Strategy, was not yet shared by Congress. Moreover, he lacked the means, both economically and politically, to combat those expansionist states effectively. That came after the fall of France and the Netherlands in 1940, when frightened Americans started to support a more active foreign policy. Roosevelt was a visionary, who knew that he had to be careful to remain just one step in front of his nation. Step by step, the nation was prepared for the inevitable war, and it was Roosevelt who provided national leadership, thus ensuring the place of the U.S. as a superpower after 1945.

Moreover, it should not be forgotten, that Roosevelt was in effect waging two battles in his foreign diplomacy. The first was against the totalitarian states, resulting in military campaigns which in the end would defeat these states. The second, less clearly understood, was an ideological battle against (Western) Imperialism. This "second front" in his foreign policy emerged more strongly in the last years of his Presidency, but it can already be discerned in a number of foreign policy actions before the second world war. It gave his foreign policy in the later years the image of duplicity, as it was aimed at his allies in the military fight.

In the interwar years Great Britain lacked a charismatic national leader of power, who could inspire the war-weary nation. Winston Spencer Churchill was such a man, but he was out of politics and thus out of power during almost the whole decade of the thirties. British governments of the day had to contend with a strong anti-war sentiment, and British public opinion and political parties were in unison in their determination to avoid a recurrence of the last, bloody war. The attitude of "peace at almost any price" in combination with military unpreparedness based on financial constraints did not form a solid foundation on which to build a strong foreign policy. The Britons therefore had a leadership crisis on their hands up to May 1940.

Churchill earns his position in history specifically because of his courage in withstanding Hitler's hordes. Without his leadership in those frightful days of the summer and autumn of 1940, democracy as we know it today might have disappeared from a sizable part of the globe. As we have shown in Chapter 2, he dominated his military and naval commanders, who were more or less shoved aside in deciding the pursuit of the war. Churchill however had not always a lucky hand in deciding military strategic questions. He squandered his fleet reserves in the Greek campaign early 1941, although that campaign might have resulted in the delay of the German attack on the Soviet-Union. Churchill was fixated on keeping the Soviet Union in the war, and therefore he sent most of his newly produced weapons towards the Soviet Union after Germany invaded that state, and therefore he was also politically responsible for the loss of Singapore due to his lack of understanding of the Japanese fighting spirit. After that disastrous loss, Great Britain would never more regain
its pre-war eminence as a European Power with a worldwide Empire. It is the irony of fate, that Churchill who had sworn that he would maintain the Empire, would be instrumental in its break-up by his political acts. Churchill was no military genius, but at least he provided charismatic leadership and he was a sound political strategist.

The same lack of pre-war national leadership was very evident in Australia - a dominion which placed all its faith in the maintenance of the British Empire. The Australians were lured to believe that the first line of defence of Australia was the Suez-canal. An Australian/New Zealand corps fought magnificently in Greece and North Africa. In the subsequent acrimonious conflict between the British and Australian governments, Australia was victorious, and Australian divisions were sent back hastily to their almost undefended country. The Japanese calling of British bluff caused the Australian Government of John Curtin to count on the Americans to save their hide. When the Americans and Australians proved themselves superior over the fierce Japanese in the jungles of New Guinea and the Solomons, that also meant that Australia was now part of the American Theatre of Operations, thereby considerably loosening the filial bonds most Australians maintained with "the old country".

The situation in France was even worse. Here too, as in Great Britain, the swings between progressive and conservative governments weakened resolve and determination. French government circles had foreseen the employment in France of sizeable numbers of young men from the colonies against the German foe, but they failed to rearm FIC adequately against the Japanese menace. The Pétain-régime which started in June 1940 was defeatist and pro-German. No adequate political resistance was therefore offered in Vichy against Japanese demands, resulting in the occupation by the Japanese of Northern FIC in September 1940, and of Southern FIC in July 1941.

The same applies to the Netherlands. A rather inward-looking, fiscally conservative power élite started an accelerating rearmament after 1935. Mr. Colijn was the dominant politician in the Netherlands at that time. However, he lost the premiership to somebody with less international stature in 1939. Mr. de Geer proved to be weak and defeatist after fleeing with the Cabinet to London. He was replaced by Queen Wilhelmina in 1940. The Queen was the strongest leadership figure, but her stewardship came too late to enable the NEI to be saved.

In the NEI the Governor-General proved to be a strong leader. Dr. Tjarda van Starkenborgh Stachouwer was the last prewar Colonial Governor. Starkenborgh however proved too cautious to involve the indigenous masses in the defence of their own territory. (Page 427). Specifically in the period between the occupation of the Netherlands and the outbreak of war after Pearl Harbor he in effect determined Dutch Foreign Policy in the Far East - a foreign policy which sometimes went against the foreign policy objectives of the Dutch cabinet in exile in London.

Japanese culture is averse to strong personalities, and Japan therefore decided its destiny by consensus. The Constitution had been written for a strong Emperor, not for the weak and vacillating Hirohito. The Japanese defence élite presented a united front when decisions had to be approved by the Emperor. Those decisions were often shaped by very junior officers. Formally the Emperor took responsibility for all deeds undertaken in his name, but in reality that responsibility was a shared collective responsibility.
7.4. Foreign Policy.

In the area of foreign policy, the glaring failure of the thirties was alliance policy between the two Anglo-Saxon powers. Both Great Britain and the United States had the same objective interest in the preservation of the Far Eastern status quo. Both states were committed to upholding (through the Washington Treaties of 1922) the same conception of peace and stability in the Far East. This particular failure in alliance policy was therefore even more disastrous. In that respect, the failed Geneva Conference of 1927 on further naval disarmament and the London conferences of 1930 and 1935 exposed deep-seated suspicions of each others' objectives between the two naval delegations.

The same mutual suspicions and misunderstandings, however, between the statesmen of those two powers made it possible for Japan - which as a country was considerably less powerful than the combined strength of Britain and the U.S.A. - to risk beginning a war against both powers simultaneously. It was a desperate gamble, but basically it should be regarded as a Japanese recognition of the lack of Anglo-American cooperation. It was not only a case of American isolationism versus imperial British "overstretch", but American suspicion that the British wanted them to "pull the British chestnuts out of the fire" against British dédain over excessive American moralizing about what other countries like Britain should do to contain the Japanese menace. Moreover, after they had granted the Philippine independence within 10 years, American foreign policy became decidedly more anti-colonial, although this attitude would emerge as part of the U.S. foreign policy, specifically in the later years of the Second World War. Therefore, throughout the interwar period up to 1940, Anglo-American relations were normally bad. This made a coordinated approach by the western democracies towards the totalitarian states an impossibility, to the detriment of all concerned.

Another weakness in Western foreign policy towards Japan was the lack of recognition of Japanese sensitivities in the areas of equal racial rights. The racial discrimination which the Western Powers displayed by their refusal at the Versailles peace talks to bestow equality on the Japanese, caused many bad feelings in Japan. This was increased by the discriminatory laws and practices allowed in California and Australia. The Washington and London Naval Disarmament Conferences gave the Japanese the impression that the Western powers conspired to keep the Japanese in a subservient position permanently, with the 10 to 6 fleet ratio. In hindsight it would have been better to grant the Japanese equal ratio's. Moreover, because Japanese production capacity was limited, the Japanese could not have launched more warships than they actually did.

The thirties saw the exclusion of Japanese exports towards colonial markets, which became reserved for the western powers themselves. It caused a "seige mentality" in the Japanese, and a paranoid feeling of insecurity because of the encirclement of Japan by the Soviet-Union and China on the mainland, and the four western powers Great-Britain, the U.S.A., the Netherlands and France in S.E. Asia. It should be remembered that in the late thirties Japan had almost completely isolated itself. The only nations which could be called "Japan-friendly" were Thailand, Afghanistan, and the South-American Republics. Western diplomacy did not sufficiently recognize the need to build trust in order to avoid a potentially hostile power like Japan feeling isolated and insecure. Given the actual situation


\[349\] P. Calvoocoressi, op. cit., xxii.
however it would indeed have required superhuman efforts on the part of Western diplomats.

An illustration of this has been the Manchurian crisis. Japan "acquired" Manchuria by unquestionably amoral means, but it was pursuing a policy to secure an area which it considered a vital national interest. Western opinion however reacted rather hypocritically, by accusing Japan of indulging in the kind of gunboat diplomacy of which they had been the chief practitioners only a few decades before. Western powers - in contrast to China and the Soviet Union - had only minimal interests in this Chinese province. Both Great Britain and the U.S. lacked the power at that time to do anything about the situation. The U.S. started moralizing about the situation, and proclaimed the Stimson-doctrine of non-recognition, which policy was also adopted by Britain. (Page 30). The policy of exhibiting righteousness without power proved however to be dangerous, as the Tientsin crisis of 1939 illustrated. The acrimony which this self-righteousness produced, took away even that limited amount of influence which friendly relations normally give each other as leverage.

Within the League of Nations the subject of economic sanctions against Japan was discussed many times. With the U.S. not being a member of this body it remained academic. The U.S., with its traditional support of free trade, and an "Open Door" for the Chinese market, balked at first. Moreover, growing isolationism at home and British appeasement of Japan abroad did not give the American President much room to manoeuvre as executioner of his country's foreign policy. With his quarantine speech of 1937 he held out the possibility of a distant naval blockade of Japan, which idea was not supported by Britain. (Page 34). At the end of the thirties, American foreign policy turned, in frustration, to the one non-military weapon which had not been tried to influence Japan: trade embargoes. The Americans applied this economic weapon very gradually, until July 1941, when an oil embargo exposed the weak spot of Japan's economic and military might. Its selective use in a time of nominal peace with respect to a commodity without which modern war could not be waged, proved to be a brilliant stroke.

A specific failure of British foreign policy in the interwar years was the failure to find potential allies and/or simultaneously to reduce its number of potential enemies, because militarily Great Britain could not afford all of them simultaneously and single-handed. In this respect the handling of the Abyssinian crisis by the British was truly catastrophic, because it brought Italy into the Axis camp - a move which could have been avoided. An alliance with France could have neutralized the Italian Fleet, but was not contemplated. Churchill at least realized that he had to bring the United States in the war in order to survive, and laid the groundwork even before Pearl Harbor with the Arcadia Conference in August 1941. In the months thereafter a gradual and peaceful transfer of power from Great Britain to the USA took place in the Far East, a few years before such a transfer of power was also realized at the Western front. Britain's price for survival, however, would be the loss of her Empire.

Some words have to be said about appeasement, as tried by all Western powers in some degrees in the interwar years, but most strongly by England. Britain had some forces at the ready in the Far East. There was the China Squadron, and British forces were detached to certain areas like Shanghai to protect British interests. However, these forces were clearly inadequate; they were not powerful enough to risk a major confrontation with Japan, and were therefore arguably more of a provocation to the Japanese than a real deterrent. This also applied to the American forces in the Philippines and in particular in China (the Yangtse gunboat squadron). The old adage still holds, that appeasement before
threats are developing is a wise policy; appeasement in face of threats and from a position of weakness however, is not such a wise policy, because it will never satisfy the aggressor. It was a lesson learned in Western Europe, but also in the Far East, were Japanese military were able to humiliate British residents of the Tientsin concession without reprisal. (Pages 140 - 141).

Both Western Powers moreover had moreover to be cautious in their moves towards Japan to avoid giving the Japanese a pretext for interference in the NEI. Specifically in the period 1939 - 1941 American diplomacy took into full account the Dutch military weakness in the NEI. Of course there were direct American interests at stake: the U.S. was still dependent on the rubber and tin from the NEI and Malaya, and American investments specifically in the oil exploration and production of the NEI were considerable. Synthetic rubber was produced in increasing quantities, and the Bolivian tin mines increased their output, thereby making the U.S. less dependent on the NEI. The American anxiety about the integrity of the NEI was political, and not military. The US Navy had written off the Philippines in case of a war with Japan, and the NEI had never been considered of such importance for the U.S., that its integrity should be guaranteed militarily. For Great Britain, overstretched as it was, a military guarantee of the NEI without American backup, was completely out of the question.

The Western oil embargo resulted in Japan being confronted with a crucial choice: to comply, or to go to war. It eventually choose war, but not because of the oil embargo itself. The Two-Ocean Navy Act of Congress of July 1940 which guaranteed Japanese naval inferiority at the end of 1943 was a far more serious time bomb. If Japan ever wanted to deal with the U.S. adversary on somewhat equal terms, it had to conquer the Indies in order to obtain a negotiated peace, and it could not wait too long in starting hostilities. The oil embargo was the motive to go to war, the strategic necessity however was the Two-Ocean Navy Act.

Dutch diplomacy in the Far East was confronted with diverging vital interests. It was vital for the Dutch to preserve their colonial empire and its sizable population of Dutch nationals - in fact the largest concentration of white settlers in the whole of S.E. Asia. Therefore the Dutch were prepared to fight to the end any Japanese attempt to capture the NEI archipelago. For them there was no possibility of retreat to another part of the Empire, like the British. Of course they hoped for some Anglo-Saxon assistance, and specifically in the last six months before Pearl Harbor their political goal was the formation of a united front with Great Britain and America against Japan, which united front in itself they believed would probably avoid war altogether.

The Dutch however failed to achieve this objective because they did not recognize the divergent British and American vital interests in the Pacific, and because the legacy of the policy of aloofness during so many years made impossible any completely different, but consistent foreign policy.

French foreign policy in the Far East stressed a close naval cooperation with the Royal Navy. When the French armistice, and in particular the Incident at Mers-el-Khebir, considerably soured Franco-British relations and even resulted in a pro-Vichy government in Hanoi, French-British naval cooperation remained. Japan however used French military weakness to interfere in North French Indochina, although that interference became a messy affair because of insubordination by Japanese field commanders. The Americans however considered French attitude towards the Japanese as too compliant, and American
foreign policy became decidedly anti-French.

Meanwhile Great Britain pursued a policy of friendliness towards Thailand, in order to avoid Thailand joining the Axis. This even went so far that the British government blocked transports with reinforcements for FIC. It was a pragmatic policy, based on the fact that Japanese penetration of Thailand would bring them to the backdoor of Malaya and thus of Singapore. For the U.S. however, Thailand was a lost cause.

The strategic importance of Portuguese Timor placed both the NEI and Australia in a quandary. A Japanese occupation of this territory would cut the air ferry route between Java and Northern Australia. Therefore it was decided, that in the case of the outbreak of war, a pre-emptive strike would be executed in which Portuguese Timor would be occupied by Dutch and Australian troops. The Dutch Cabinet in London was against such a coup de main, but the G.G. insisted on its strategic necessity, and Dutch and Australian troops occupied Portuguese Timor in December 1941.

Japanese diplomacy during the interbellum was directed primarily towards camouflaging military actions undertaken by irresponsible staff officers, and explaining them to the rest of the world as rational acts of a competent government. However, it also resulted in the withdrawal from the League of Nations in 1933. In 1934 the aims of Japanese foreign policy were made clear by the so-called Amau declaration, which declared China off-limits for the Western Powers. In 1937 hotheads from both sides started the undeclared Chinese-Japanese War, which would encompass the period 1937 - 1945, and sucked in large amounts of Japanese power. Urged to do so by the Japanese Ambassador in Germany, Hiroshi Oshima, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact in 1940.

Diplomatically however, war was not inevitable. Prince Fumimaro Konoye wanted a summit on board a Japanese vessel in the autumn of 1941. Moreover, he was inclined to remove Japanese soldiers from FIC, and in a later stadium from China proper. The War Ministry however did not approve this proposal, after which Cordell Hull, the American Secretary of State, upped the ante. The new premier, Hideki Tojo, was unwilling to pay the price of an evacuation of China, however. It is still not clear why Cordell Hull increased considerably the chances on war by his new offer. Any possibility to delay the onset of war by some months was squandered away, and with that the possibility of reinforcing the Philippines and the NEI.


Looking back upon American military strategy in the Far East, it is clear that from the American perspective the war against Japan would be a naval war. However, there was a certain degree of planning and cooperation between Navy and Army in the General Board, which existed since 1903, and was unique at that time. Within the General Board, the (Army) Defence of the Philippines was placed in a total framework of a war strategy against Japan, concretized in the famous ORANGE War Plans. Central to these plans was a recovery of the Philippines, which the Navy considered indefensible against a Japanese onslaught, followed by the final defeat of the Japanese Navy and a maritime blockade of the island Empire.

Although strategic errors were made - like the rejection by Congress to reinforce Guam in 1938 in order to appease Japan - Congress gradually approved higher budgets for the
U.S. Navy during the Roosevelt Presidency, resulting in a rather powerful fleet in 1941. The Two-Ocean Navy Act of June 1940 ensured the U.S. Navy global dominance at the end of 1943, and was therefore watched with horror by the Japanese. The US Marine Corps - part of the US Navy - meanwhile had perfected its amphibious doctrines almost unnoticed by the rest of the world, and was ready for the coming war. The Naval Airforce had perfected dive-bombing as a new technique in air warfare against ships, and had developed an offensive aircraft carrier doctrine.

The problem however was the U.S. Army. Due to a too rapid demobilisation and meagre budgets, it had shrunk to 17th place among world army forces in 1930. Almost all available funds went to the Army Airforce, which developed novel techniques, and worked closely with private aircraft building industries. At the end of the thirties American companies therefore had an almost absolute lead in quality of civil and military airplanes over their British, French and Dutch counterparts, with the exception of fighters. Nevertheless, in 1940 the Army was as yet not ready for a large war, be it in the Pacific or in Europe. In that year the groundwork was laid however for the rapid expansion of the Army, and for its weaponry - including its considerably firepower which would surprise the Japanese during the Pacific War. As from September 1941 the Army also started reinforcing the Philippines, and deploying the B-17 strategic bomber, in the vain hope that it would deter the Japanese. War Plan ORANGE at that time had been superseded however by the RAINBOW Plans, which were far more oriented towards a “Germany First”-strategy, which did not help to stabilise the situation in the Pacific.

British military strategy in the Far East was in a far worse shape, due to the “Main Fleet to Singapore” strategy of the interwar years. Britain’s Far Eastern naval strategy after World War I was based on the assumption, that with the elimination of European naval threats as a result of the war, it was militarily not necessary, and therefore politically possible and economically very favourable, to abandon the two-Power standard for fleet strength. It was therefore decided, to hold the one-Power fleet in a central position, in Mediterranean waters, from which it could reinforce the Far East as and when required. This was the basis of the “Main Fleet to Singapore” strategy.

In itself, the Singapore strategy as mainstay of British naval planning during the interbellum was not unsound. Indeed it would have been better to have stationed a few battleships at Singapore, or at least a squadron of heavy cruisers. That in itself might have influenced Japanese foreign policy in the early and middle thirties. Lacking such a fleet, the strategy in itself was viable up to 1936. After the Abyssinian crisis the strategy became unsound, when a clumsy British foreign policy added Italy to the list of potential enemies, without containing it by an alliance with France. The consequence was the captivity of the British Mediterranean Fleet (intended as the main fleet to Singapore) in the Mediterranean. The assumption of no threatening European war fleets was therefore untenable. Due to the long lead times involved in naval shipbuilding, Britain’s Far Eastern Strategy was hopelessly in disarray in the late thirties, when the empire’s maritime communication lines were threatened by both Germany and Italy in the western hemisphere and, with the U.S.A. still isolationist, by Japan in the eastern hemisphere.

The main drawback of the Singapore strategy was its inflexibility. The basic assumption was that the Singapore fleet should be capable of destroying the Japanese battlefleet. The increasing strength of that fleet made such a large concentration of British battleships at Singapore more and more problematical. The British Chiefs of Staff however clung to the illusion that only a fleet superior to the Japanese fleet should be despatched, with as a
result that they painted themselves in an increasingly tight corner. Tentative ideas to send only a battle-squadron as deterrent were taboo, until Churchill forced this solution on an unwilling CNS. Then, however, the Japanese played an unexpected trump card: their deadly naval aviation.

The Singapore strategy, which was of enormous importance for the security of the NEI, came close to being implemented at times. This almost happened in January 1938, and again in July 1939. At the end of 1941 its implementation started again, but only piecemeal. Where deterrence might have been effective at the time of the China Incident, it was not effective anymore, however, under the changed circumstances at the end of 1941.

In conclusion it was British unwillingness (and not inability!) to provide the Singapore base with a battle-squadron in the mid-thirties that sounded the end of the once-proud British and Dutch colonial empires in South-East Asia. It remains ironical, that Churchill's share in responsibility for this state of affairs was indeed rather large.

In Chapter 3, it has been elucidated, why the Dutch Navy was so woefully small at the end of the thirties. Political provincialism, as well as lack of naval organisation, resulted in a pitifully small navy defending an island empire which had the same dimensions as the whole continent of Europe! Morale was severely affected by the depression, resulting in the DE ZEVEN PROVINCİEN mutiny. Nevertheless, after 1936 Admiral Furstner as responsible Fleet Commander was able to start a limited rearmament, and to lift morale. Notwithstanding all odds, the Koninklijke Marine fought well against the Japanese, losing almost all its ships in the process.

It was up to the British Army to defend Malaya. The Army had become a colonial army. Complacency and apathy, factors which it clearly exhibited, are the destroyers of an army's efficiency, and with it, of morale. The Malayan campaign, in terrain well suited for defence, exposed glaring failures in British training, morale and leadership. The treatment of the ideas of Major-General W.G.S. Dobbie, G.O.C. Malaya in the late thirties, illustrates this point. (Page 190). He challenged the cherished assumption, that an attack on the Singapore base would come only from the sea. In 1937 Dobbie concluded that the attack on the base would not come from the sea, but from the Malayan mainland. His warnings however fell on deaf ears, because they contradicted the cherished and long-held views of the Staffs in far-away Whitehall.

The Dutch colonial army between the wars had an excellent Staff, but as it was directly financed by the colony itself, it suffered from the extreme weakness of the NEI open economy against the effects of the worldwide depression. However, the increasingly aggressive Japanese stand enlarged the estimates for the KNIL. Moreover, it won the battle over the bombers from the Navy, resulting in a rapidly expanding Army Airforce.

The German successes in Poland and France resulted in a reorganisation, which stressed mobility. Alas, it was not recognized that the terrain conditions on Java were not the same as in Western Europe, and the inherent advantages of the Javanese landscape for defence operations went un-noticed. Even more serious was the unbalanced Grand Strategy of the NEI, which on the one hand assumed a loyal and obedient native population, but on the other hand refused to let the natives defend their own homeland by introducing conscription, either voluntary as in British India, or compulsory. Only then would the Dutch government have been able to raise an army of sufficient size and strength to defend the island empire, which counted the fifth largest population on earth. It was feared
however, that a native army of that size would no longer be obedient to the Dutch government, and therefore be a threat to the continuity of Dutch rule. Moreover, there were not enough infantry weapons and there were not enough training facilities to accommodate a large native conscript army.

Another part of the NEI's prewar grand strategy was absolute neutrality. As a small power in the face of a strong and aggressive enemy, absolute neutrality however was a dangerous policy. Therefore in the late thirties both the Dutch Navy and Army started to sound out the British on increased and closer cooperation, which was only accomplished between the respective secret services. Even before the war the relations between the two navies were cordial and fruitful, while in deep secrecy contacts were cultivated between the KNIL on one side and the Indian Army and Malaya Command on the other. The fact that these contacts existed, has been one of the best-kept secrets in the history of both Great Britain and the Netherlands. (Pages 226 - 244).

The Singapore Staff Conferences of 1941 - 1942 did much to broaden the high-level contacts between the defence organisations of what would be later called the ABDA-countries: America, Britain, Dutch East Indies and Australia. Responsibilities for area defence were defined, with Australia taking for example the responsibility for the defence of the Moluccas and Timor, which were an integral part of the NEI! The staff conferences, which were conducted in deep secrecy, were successful in more than one sense. As the Japanese did not know the extent of reciprocal agreements made, they had therefore to assume that a kind of entente had been reached. They had to base their attack plans therefore on an attack on all the four countries involved.

Australia had a different problem. In the interwar years, it had gradually expanded its political horizon, constrained as it was by its dominion status. An Australian Goodwill Mission visited the NEI in 1935, to be followed by a succesful visit by the Australian Governor-General and his wife to the NEI (Pages 495 - 496). It remained a trustworthy member of the British Empire however. When the motherland asked for its small but balanced fleet and for its divisions to defend the Suez canal, Australia responded in kind, baring its own defences against Japan in the process. When war broke out, it lay wide-open to Japanese aggression.

Japanese military strategy was at one hand well-defined, but inherently weak on the other. It was based on an Army strategy, recognizing the Soviet-Union as the principal adversary. The Navy's duty was to defeat the Americans. However, the two Services were strictly independent of each other, and therefore there was never a government body to integrate Army and Naval Strategy into a comprehensive national strategy. Navy and Army met each other at the Liaison Conferences, at the top decision making level, and at the few Imperial Conferences needed to get the Emperor's seal of approval.

A weak Emperor in combination with the typical Japanese attitude of *gekokuyo* (See page 713 - 714;) resulted in decisions made on too low a level, which were not sufficiently challenged at upper levels. This bereft Japanese war planning any rationality, as was proven by the China Incident of 1937, which resulted for Japan in a war fought at the wrong place, at the wrong time, and against the wrong enemy. The China Incident isolated Japan even further, as it threatened Western investments in the Chinese markets. The opportunistic actions undertaken in North French Indochina by Field Army officers and its signing of the Tripartite Pact isolated Japan even more. Seeing that it could not win in China, Japan's military strategy was to choke all supply routes to Free China, which
resulted in a Japanese move into S.E. Asia, first into FIC and later into Thailand. In order to have the ability to threaten the NEI by air, the Japanese in July 1941 moved into Southern FIC following the failure of the Yoshizawa-Mission to Batavia, which move resulted in an economic confrontation with all three major Western Powers.

7.6. Interservice relations.

In the approach to the onset of the Pacific War good interservice relations were essential for survival. It was not much recognized as such by all participants, but it was vital, as the subsequent Japanese conquest illustrated.

The prize for the worst interservice relations in the interbellum has to go to Japan. As we have shown in Chapter 6, the separation between the two Services was almost insuperable, resulting in policies and strategies which were sometimes conflicting, and sometimes self-defeating. Where the two Services had to work together, however, as in planning and executing the landing operations on the China coast, and later in the Nanyo, they worked together reasonably harmoniously. Procedures for a clear definition of territorial responsibilities resulted from the experience gained in China, resulting in a de facto separation of Army and Navy fronts, each Service being king in its assigned territory. The lack of good interservice co-operation was one of the main factors in Japan's eventual defeat.

Next to Japan was interservice rivalry between the British Services. Rivalries were more complex, because the English had three equal Services: Navy, Army and Air. Tensions between these Services in the interbellum were increased by the extreme financial stringency of most of the interwar years. In the Far East, British strategy was ill-defined in the early thirties because of the acrimonious interservice battles between the Army and the Air Force as to whether aircraft or fixed heavy guns would provide the cheaper and more effective defence of Singapore against seaborne attack. This controversy was fought out over a period of ten years, and it not only delayed the completion of the base, but did not in addition encourage cooperation in other areas. The siting of the airfields in Northern Malaya is an example. The RAF wanted these airfields close to the coasts to extend the radius of operation of its planes. Malaya Command however, which was responsible for ground defence, pointed out that whenever an enemy had landed on the nearby coast, airfield defence was almost impossible. Moreover, coastal airfields also reduced the possibility of early air-raid warnings. Nevertheless, the RAF constructed a number of airfields close to the coast in Northern Malaya.

The situation within the Dutch defence establishment was almost as serious. Strategically and operationally, there was almost no contact between the two Services. The Defence Foundations of 1927 had defined each Service's role and boundaries. The appearance of the strategic bomber however changed all that. An acrimonious debate commenced at all levels of NEI society and public opinion, as to whether the KNIL airforce should be enlarged with long-range bombers or the navy should be reinforced in number and tonnage of warships. The Navy lost this battle, and the KNIL acquired a bomber force. The bitterness of interservice rivalry did not disappear until war broke out.

Compared to the three cases above the interservice rivalries in the American, Australian and French defence forces seems to have been manageable. In all three defence forces the same debate about the proper role of an airforce has taken place, with some ferocity in the case of the United States (the courtmartial of W. Mitchell, see pages 65 - 66). But where the Australians and the French followed the example of the RAF and founded a
separate Airforce, the U.S.A. had no separate Air Force up to 1941.

Interservice squabbles in the interwar period have certainly been of influence upon the subsequent chain of events when war broke out. Since both Japan and its adversaries were affected by these squabbles, it is hard to pinpoint failures due to these rivalries. Two cases emerged from this study: the siting of the airfields in Northern Malaya, and the (mis)use of KNIL-ML medium bombers against Japanese warships and troop transports.

7.7. Military-civil relations.

The relations between the colonial forces and the populations they were supposed to protect against foreign aggression were very important within the framework of their Grand strategies for the Far East. This was the more so, as a large part of the civilian population in S.E. Asia was of Asian origins, and the aggressor country was an Asian country, raising indigenous sympathies with the slogan “Asia for the Asians!”

In the Philippines, the indigenous élite had developed a rather strong sense of nationality even before the American occupation. The Americans had won over this élite, and had promised independence in 1945, with a ten-year bridging period. Compulsive conscription had begun and a national Philippine Army began to take shape. The population therefore did not see the American troops as colonial troops, but as allies. Moreover, the American civil population present in the Philippines had never exceeded 30,000 persons, and had been reduced due to the evacuation of women and children in 1940/1941. This factor in combination with good leadership of McArthur is the one and only factor, why the Americans of all western troops, were able to hold out against the Japanese until early May 1942. Even after the fall of Corregidor however the Japanese during their whole occupation period had to confront a lively guerilla, which was supported by the local populace.

In the case of Malaya and British Borneo, there was almost no indigenous nationalism, but either little sense of a national identity. The large Chinese population was anti-Japanese, but split in its support of either the Chinese Communists or the Chinese Nationalists. The British colonial masters did not exploit the anti-Japanese feelings of this large part of the population. The British colonial army consisted mainly of Indian troops, which were not part of the local population. Two battalions of Malay volunteers proved to be reliable in battle. The Japanese appealed on the nationalistic feelings of the Indian soldiers by the way of the Fujiwara-kikan covert organization, and had some success with it.

The British civil community in S.E. Asia was small, about 35,000 people, mostly concentrated in the Straits Settlements. Again, before the outbreak of war most women and children were evacuated. Relations between the civil administration and the British Services were not optimal, as the civil administration was too involved in maximising the output of strategic war materials such as rubber and tin, which were strong dollar-earners for the British war chest. However, vital defence arrangements were obstructed by this attitude of the civilian government.

After the Japanese occupation, the British did not succeed in starting an indigenous guerilla movement due to the apathy of the local Malay population. The situation was different with the Chinese, however, who started to fight the Japanese oppressor both within Singapore and in the Malayan jungle. Many of the POW's of Indian origin became defectors by going over to the Japanese-led INA, the Indian National Army, which would invade India from Burma in 1944.
In the NEI, a small but vocal group of nationalist dissenters had developed in the twenties and thirties. Nationalist feelings within the peasantry however were still weak. By suppressing the nationalists, the Dutch government was not aware of the rapid spread of nationalist feelings under the populace. Things were made more complicated by the large group of ethnic Chinese (1.5 million) who shared the same attitude with their brethren in Malaya. The Dutch government did not mobilise their anti-Japanese feelings. Moreover, the NEI had the largest group of white settlers in the whole of S.E. Asia, more than 350,000, most of whom had lived in the NEI for generations. They could not be evacuated. As already indicated above, the Dutch considered the indigenous people as loyal to their "benign" government, but did not trust them enough to start mobilising the indigenous masses against the Japanese menace.

Here too, Japanese propaganda made severe inroads in the presumed loyalty of the indigenous people, resulting at best in an indifferent attitude of the masses towards war, and in many instances active collaboration with the Japanese. An intended guerilla movement in Java was therefore quickly choked by the Japanese with the aid of the Javanese. Most poignant was the effect of Japanese propaganda on the indigenous volunteer soldiers serving in the KNIL: they deserted in droves when contact with the enemy was made. Dutch precautions against this propaganda underestimated its potential effect on civilian morale.

Total mobilization was accomplished with respect to the European and Eurasian communities in the NEI. Almost everybody, from boys and girls to elder people and women served in the defence forces or in a militarised supporting organisation. Morale was broken however by the fall of Singapore and the subsequent losses in the air and at sea (the battle of the Java-Sea).

French Army experiences were almost identical to those of the KNIL. In the heavy fighting around the Indochinese border fortresses (e.g. Langson) the indigenous troops melted away on contact with the Japanese enemy. The French government too had overestimated indigenous loyalty. Even more than in the NEI, nationalism had become a powerful sentiment in FIC, as a number of local mutinies in the interwar years proved. However, after the bruise of September 1940, the French Defence Forces were still able to fight the invading Thai's to a standstill, at the same time suppressing local Communist mutinies. Like in the NEI, the subsequent total occupation of FIC by Japanese troops after July 1941 provided the nationalists under Ho Chih Minh with the platform they needed to challenge the French in 1945.

7.8. Intelligence.

In the Far East, considerably less has been divulged about Intelligence operations during the Second World War than in the European Theatre. In particular with respect to British Intelligence, files have been closed for 50 years, and some important files will even remain closed 75 years. Nevertheless, specifically in the last decade, a number of interesting publications on Far Eastern Intelligence aspects have appeared.

American Intelligence concentrated less on Human Intelligence, but far more on Signals Intelligence and Documentary Intelligence. It was not only the Japanese, which was studied, but also the Chinese, French and Dutch. After 1937 the cooperation between British and American Secret Services became much more close, resulting even in the
hand-over of the hardware and software for PURPLE, the codebreaking of the Japanese Diplomatic Code, by American cryptographers to their British counterparts. Therefore, from April 1941 onwards, the British were as well informed about Japanese diplomatic moves as the Americans.

The quantity and quality of Intelligence gathered by the ONI was more impressive than that of its British counterpart. The Americans surely did not make the mistake of considering the IJN a second-rate Navy. The ONI had even information on the Japanese long-lance torpedo, and on the qualities of the Zero-fighter, but by the mental processes of ethnocentricity and mirror-imaging, this information was not assessed properly and subsequently lost.

While open-mindedness was a distinct problem within the American Services, it was disastrously lacking in the British Services. We have mentioned the biased Vivian-report, (See page 150) which was embraced within the Royal Navy. The assessment of Vivian was wrong, of course, but more disturbing was that it was taken seriously at all by the British Admiralty. In the late thirties, a consensus began to develop among Naval policymakers that Japan was considerably overrated as a military and naval power and that its bluff was waiting to be called, a judgment that was to have disastrous effects in 1941. It did not help, of course, that Prime Minister Churchill shared the feelings of his Naval top about Japanese pretentions.

British Intelligence, and specifically the FECB in combination with the GCCS, scored some notable triumphs however in decrypting the Japanese Naval Code up to 1938, and the Japanese Diplomatic Code during almost the entire interwar period. The F.O. therefore was well aware of the real driving forces behind the Mukden-, Shanghai- and Marco Polo Bridge-incidents. It failed however, like its American counterpart, in detecting the building of the Japanese superbattleships. Neither did both Intelligence services succeed in breaking the IJA code, which was far more complicated than the other codes due to the close collaboration between Polish and Japanese Army Intelligence personnel.

Dutch Signals Intelligence before the war was excellent, as the Dutch had also broken the Japanese Naval Code up to its change in 1938. The same applied to Dutch counter-intelligence against Japanese espionage. Dutch counter-intelligence from 1935 onwards exchanged information on Japanese espionage and Communist infiltrations by the Comintern with its counterparts at the FECB, all in the deepest secrecy of course.

Sigint gives no information on enemy doctrines, tactics, operational procedures, or strategy. Although difficult, clues about these aspects are normally gathered by military and naval attachés, and (reserve-)officers attached at consular posts. The American attachés did their work well in this respect, and that applies also to the British attachés with the exception of Vivian. The Dutch however blinded themselves by not having attachés stationed in Japan. The language officers stationed at the Tokyo legation after 1937 compensated for this partly.

Just like the Germans misinterpreted Red Army capabilities due to its poor showing in the Finnish-Russian Winter War of 1939/1940, so did the Western Powers misinterpret Japanese capabilities during the four years of conflict in China. Almost all reports from that theatre between 1937 - 1941 mention poor Japanese discipline, poor planning and sloppy execution of operations against an enemy, who was in Western ethnocentric eyes really at the bottom in the scale of military prowess: the Chinese. That the Chinese scored a
military victory at Tai-erh-Hwang in 1939 could only mean in Western expert opinion, that the IJA troops must have been third-rate or worse. Notwithstanding excellent Chinese reports on the appearance of the Zero fighter above South-China in the summer of 1940, it was only the Flying Tigers of Chennault's AVF who appreciated those reports. The Dutch KNIL also failed to gather available information from the Chinese battlefields, to the detriment of its operational readiness and tactics. This is all the more remarkable, as the KNIL had an excellent observer stationed in China, whose reports are far more reliable than those of his British counterparts.

Japanese Intelligence, although considered the best in the world, also had its failings. It was humint-based and strongly operation-oriented. It failed to crack Allied codes, and was therefore left guessing about important arrangements made between the prospective Allies at the Singapore Staff conferences. At that time, the COS Assessment of the Far Eastern situation dated 15 August, 1940, was already outdated. It had fallen into Japanese hands via the German interception of the British liner AUTOMEDON on 11 November 1940. Information was gathered on the huge industrial potential of the United States, but not unlike the ethnocentricity and mirror-imaging of the Western Services, Japanese decision-makers rejected the alarming conclusions of those studies, because it did not suit their frame of mind.

In conclusion it can be stated, that both Japanese and Allied Intelligence failed, because the staffs on both sides lacked the open-mindedness to evaluate correctly the information available. Cultural ethnocentricity and racial discrimination played a very important part in the distorted images of reality which each side maintained about the other. Intelligence is only effective if it is evaluated without bias, and there was plenty of bias within the adversaries!


One of the striking conclusions of this study is about the rapid evolution of Grand Strategies of the countries involved in this study between 1931 and 1941. In 1931 the Grand Strategy of any Western nation with colonies in the Far East precluded any close political and economic co-operation against the Japanese danger, which was distant in any case. Britain had its eyes on its Empire, the U.S.A. was primarily occupied with the effects of the Depression. Holland was aloof, France busy with its Maginot line, and Japan was arming to the teeth. The Mukden-incident of 1931 was the start of a whole chain of events, which gradually brought the British and French together, also in the Far East. The Japanese were dragged into a war with China which was not foreseen by the ruling élite, but which the Japanese military tried to win at almost all costs, in the process taking over the government of their country. The Chinese-Japanese war brought about secret talks between Britain and the U.S.A., but still no formal alliances.

The situation changed dramatically after the occupation of The Netherlands and France by the Germans in the spring of 1940. The French went their lonely way towards collaboration with the Axis, including Japan, in the vain hope of maintaining their sovereignty over FIC. The Netherlands were drawn closer to Great Britain and the U.S.A., withstanding the Japanese demands to become part of their Greater East-Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere.

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Grand Strategies of all four countries: the U.S.A., Great Britain, The Netherlands and Australia coincided with Pearl Harbor: all four countries were now indeed in the same boat!

The Japanese Grand Strategy was based on peaceful economic penetration of China and the Nanyo, shielded by military preparations to face the two most menacing Powers: the Soviet-Union and the U.S.A. The incident at the Marco Polo bridge in 1937, that really should have been brought under control, resulted instead in a war at the wrong time, place and against the wrong adversary. Japan, bogged down in this quagmire, tried to get out of it by cutting Chinese lines of communications. Inevitably this brought both Army and Navy to the South. The danger of isolation from strategic materials like oil started the Japanese on their road towards Batavia: only the conquest of the NEI could bring autarky. In order to achieve that goal, a limited war had to be fought against the Anglo-Saxons. The economic blockade by the U.S.A., Great Britain and the Netherlands brought desperation to the Japanese decision makers. They were cornered, and had to act quickly, because the Two-Ocean Navy Act would make the American Navy supreme at the end of 1943. Deterrence by the U.S. Pacific Fleet in Pearl Harbor, and by Force Z steaming into Singapore proved illusory due to the power of the Japanese naval air weapon. Therefore the Japanese attacked - as prisoners of their own aggressive acts during the thirties. They indeed finished the road to Batavia over Singapore, but their limited war turned into a protracted war, was to doom pre-war Japan, because Japan could never win a protracted war.