Fool-proof Relations

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Fool-proof Relations: The Search for Anglo-American Naval Cooperation During the Chamberlain Years, 1937–1940

MALCOLM H. MURFETT

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Abbreviations

A	American Files (Foreign Office: American Department)
A.C.N.S.	Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff
Adm	Admiralty
AFC	Anglo-French Staff Conversations
Alusna	All U.S. Naval Activities (Naval Attaché, London)
Cab	Cabinet
CHT	Chatfield
C-in-C	Commander-in-Chief
C.I.D.	Committee of Imperial Defence
Com Nav Eu	Commander of Naval Forces in Europe
C.N.O.	Chief of Naval Operations
C.O.S.	Chiefs of Staff
C.P.	Cabinet Paper
D.B.F.P.	Documents on British Foreign Policy
D.C.N.S.	Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff
DMV	Commonwealth Conferences: Minutes and Memoranda
D.N.I.	Director of Naval Intelligence
D.O.	Dominions Office
D. of P.	Director of Plans
D. of T.D.	Director of Tactical Division
DP(P)	Defence Plans (Policy) Committee
DRC	Defence Requirements Committee
E(P.D.)	Empire (Principal Delegates)
F	Far Eastern Files (Foreign Office: Far Eastern Department)
FDR	Franklin Delano Roosevelt
FE	Far East (Avon Papers)
F.E.S.	Cabinet Sub-Committee on British Shipping in the Far East
FO	Foreign Office
FP	Foreign Policy (Avon Papers)
FP(36)	Foreign Policy Committee of the Cabinet
F.R.U.S.	Foreign Relations of the United States
Hansard	Parliamentary Debates
J.B.	Joint Board (U.S. Army & Navy)
J.P.C.	Joint Planning Committee (U.S. Army & Navy)

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N.I.D.	Naval Intelligence Division
N.C.	Neville Chamberlain
O.P.C.	Admiralty Plans Division: Operational Planning Documents.
Op. Nav.	Office of the Chief of Naval Operations.
Op. Nav. Arch.	Operational Naval Archives (Naval Historical Center)
PAS(S)	Principal Assistant Secretary (Supply)
P.D.	Plans Division
Prem.	Prime Minister's Office
PPF	President's Personal File
PSF	President's Secretary's File
R.G.	Record Group
SAC	Strategic Appreciation Committee
T	Treasury
US	United States (Avon Papers)
WM	War Cabinet Meeting
WO	War Office
WP	War Cabinet Paper

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Preface

Despite the fact that a wealth of literature exists on Anglo-American relations in the late inter-war period, the aspect of the interaction between naval strategy and foreign policy, which is the subject of this book, is not one which has been dealt with in detail so far. In essence, *Fool-proof Relations* reveals the background to and development of Anglo-American naval relations throughout the Chamberlain premiership and the various attempts that were made during this period to extend and broaden the existing level of cooperation between the two governments in the hope that it might be used for politico-strategic purposes. Because of the potential benefits which could accrue to British foreign policy as a result of close naval cooperation with the United States, a number of individuals in the British Government were prepared to go to great lengths and take calculated risks to secure the support of the Roosevelt administration and put their own ideas on strategy into practice. In this connection, the somewhat ambivalent role performed by Chamberlain and the enthusiastic part played by Eden in searching for a common naval policy with the United States in the Far East offers an interesting and rewarding contrast in methods, style and policy and is the subject of a good deal of attention in the first part of the book.

In the period after Eden's resignation, however, the British Government's attitude towards the dictatorships was such that Anglo-American naval relations underwent a short period of reappraisal. It was only later in 1938 in the aftermath of Munich when Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler and Mussolini began to falter that naval cooperation with the United States was resurrected as a goal of British foreign policy, more in desperation than in early expectation of success. Faced with the possibility of a triple alliance of Germany, Italy and Japan being formed against them, and because of their overall military weakness, the British, aided and abetted by the French, attempted to ease their strategic dilemma along the lines set earlier by Eden of encouraging the Americans to deploy their fleet in the western Pacific in order to counter the threat of the Japanese in the Far East. Although unsuccessful in these efforts, a fact which in reality surprised few people, the government did become the unexpected beneficiary of a major international development which split the Anti-Comintern Pact in August 1939. The momentous announce-

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ment of the signature of the Nazi-Soviet Pact provoked the Japanese into declaring their neutrality in September 1939; thereby reducing the scale of Britain's strategic problems at a stroke. Anglo-American relations were directly affected by this decision; their roles began to change and naval cooperation became increasingly important to the United States as time wore on.

Although the three year period covered by this book is notable for the failures of many diplomatic initiatives, the Chamberlain premiership does witness a considerable advance in basic Anglo-American naval relations. This does not mean that all or even many of the schemes for naval cooperation were successfully implemented, but it does indicate that the two powers were prepared to discuss naval affairs in a way which, given the strength of congressional isolationism, is not without interest. *Fool-proof Relations* examines the naval staff conversations which were held in 1938 and 1939 and assesses the significance of these and other schemes for technical and strategic cooperation which were proposed. It also explains why most failed to be used by the two powers. In a study of this nature, close attention has been paid to the influence of leading figures in the Admiralty and Foreign Office in an effort to demonstrate how their opinions were crucial in shaping policy and the views of their respective ministers. By the same token, the work of the Chiefs of Staff and the range of committees which gave advice to the government on strategic matters has also been studied in detail and the effects each had upon Anglo-American relations noted.

Although this book is predominantly concerned with British naval strategy and foreign policy, extensive use has been made of the official American records and in particular those belonging to the U.S. Navy Department and State Department. In addition, the records of the Joint Board and the Joint Planning Committee have proved to be of considerable importance in supplying detailed information on war planning and naval policy. Moreover, the reports of the U.S. Naval Attaché in London to the Chief of Naval Operations in Washington have helped to show the extent to which Anglo-American naval cooperation had reached during this period.

By drawing extensively on the public records to supplement the material available in the private collections, this book has attempted to fill an important gap caused by the lack of the officially commissioned biographies of Chamberlain and Eden. It is clear that both men performed major roles in the history of Anglo-American relations in this period, although their contribution to the actual development of naval cooperation between the two powers is relatively small.

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It is perhaps for this reason that historians have failed to examine this topic in the depth it deserves.

Apart from using the various collections of edited documents relating to British and American foreign policy, I have also read a vast amount of secondary source material and a number of unpublished theses for background information. While some have proved to be most useful and informative on various aspects of Anglo-American relations and Far Eastern strategy, none has provided a detailed account of the extent to which naval cooperation between Britain and the United States was sought by Chamberlain's government. Even James Leutze's book *Bargaining for Supremacy* only provides a sketchy and incomplete picture of the extent of naval cooperation in the period before Churchill took over as Prime Minister.

Whatever achievements were made in naval relations between the two countries in the Chamberlain years, however, many other far more potentially important schemes for strategic cooperation were either neglected or declined. In examining the proposals that were made, this book reveals the factors which lay behind the catalogue of failures and wasted opportunities, all of which arguably give substance to Lindsay's pertinant observation in March 1937 that Anglo-American relations were fool-proof and only in danger when attempts were made to improve them.

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Acknowledgements

My first attempt at acknowledging publicly my debt to the many individuals who have supported me during the research, writing and production phases of this book amounted to four pages, a figure which even I had to admit was rather excessive. Consequently, a slimmer version of the original is offered instead, although the reduction in terms of length has not been made without incurring a few casualties. I only hope that if I have overlooked someone they will forgive me, brevity was never my strongpoint!

On the financial front, my research in the United Kingdom was funded initially by a Department of Education and Science Scholarship and subsequently from a generous grant awarded to me by the National University of Singapore. Research in the United States was made possible by my appointment as Principal Research Assistant to the second Earl of Birkenhead and after his untimely death to his son and heir Robin, the present Earl.

In terms of library assistance, the Bodleian structure at Oxford is staffed by some of the most helpful people I know. Whether it be in Bodley itself, or at the other smaller university libraries in the city, courtesy and assistance go hand-in-hand.

Elsewhere, the same degree of concern and cooperation was forthcoming from the other archivists and librarians whose records I sought to use in connection with my research. I must mention in this regard Benedict S. Benedikz, the Sub-Librarian of Special Collections at Birmingham University Library. His knowledge of the Avon and Chamberlain papers is unparalleled and I much appreciated his incisive comments about both men *en passant*.

Most of my research, however, was done at the Public Record Office in London where the research and counter staff were always ready to cope with my enquiries and demands. Their constructive assistance made research an infinitely more attractive and congenial pursuit than it might otherwise have been.

My good fortune at home was to be matched by similar experiences abroad. My initial diffidence and ignorance of the American system was swiftly overcome thanks to the unfailingly helpful and considerate attitude of 'Sandy' Smith, Dean Allard and Bill Emerson and their colleagues at the National Archives, Naval Historical Center and FDR Library respectively.

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During the time I was at Oxford during the 1970s my academic base lay at New College, a choice largely determined by the presence there of Herbert Nicholas, the distinguished Rhodes Professor of American History and Institutions at Oxford. His teaching and scholarly advice helped to improve my methodology and his eye for stylistic inconsistency never ceased to find blemishes in my written work which I had overlooked. Above all, his knowledge of the American scene was unrivalled in my experience.

Of all the academics who have guided me in these years of research and writing, however, Professor Norman H. Gibbs, Emeritus Fellow of All Souls College, has been my most important source of inspiration. Both as a doctoral supervisor and subsequently as a teaching colleague he has displayed a quiet mastery befitting his status as a historian of the front rank.

By lucky chance, one of Norman's former students Professor John Hattendorf of the U.S. Naval War College at Newport, Rhode Island also spent two years as a colleague of mine at the National University of Singapore. John kindly read my thesis and was instrumental in helping me to think constructively about turning my manuscript into a book. His suggestions were taken up when I embarked upon further research and writing in this field.

Once I had decided to do further research on this topic I was granted several weeks study leave by the National University of Singapore. I was supported throughout by the Dean Professor Edwin Thumboo, the late Professor Wong Lin Ken and latterly by his successor as Head of the History Department Professor Ernest Chew.

Upon completion of the final draft, a close friend David Ralston, Visiting Professor of Military History from M.I.T., inspected it and helped in various ways to tidy it up.

At the business end of things, Susan Fryer, Robert Hodges and Terence Pepper of *The Associated Press*, the *Radio Times Hulton Picture Library* and the *National Portrait Gallery* respectively found time to attend to my requests for photographs. Miss Blaney and Mr. Hanham of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office Library were also helpful in this regard, as was Miss Chloe Otto, the former private secretary to Anthony Eden.

I was also delighted to be able to call upon the services of an excellent cartographer in Dr. John W. Humphrey, a close friend and former colleague of mine who supplied the maps from his new home in southern Florida.

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My two uncomplaining and vigilant proof-readers Richard Burton and Lena Qua deserve special mention, as does my enthusiastic editor Rosalind Chan. Working with her and our printers Patrick and Tony Fong has been a privilege and a joy.

Last, but by no means least, my family deserve an honourable mention for supporting this project from the outset. I owe both wings of the family, my mother and father in Grove and Ernst and Helga Kaltner in Abtenau, a tremendous debt of gratitude. I cannot find words enough to express my thanks to my wife Ulrike or indeed to my two blonde-haired, blue-eyed girls Marianne and Caroline.

Singapore, 4 July 1984

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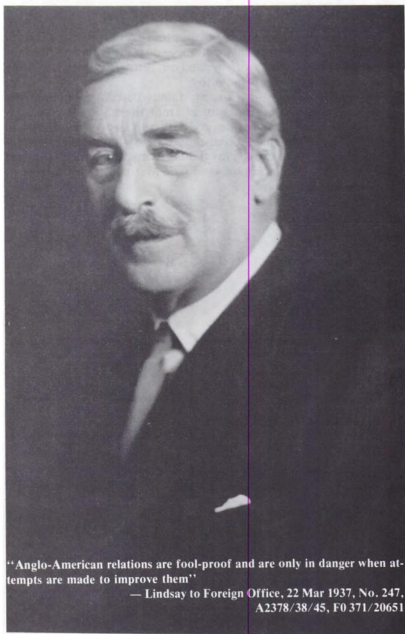

Sir Ronald Charles Lindsay
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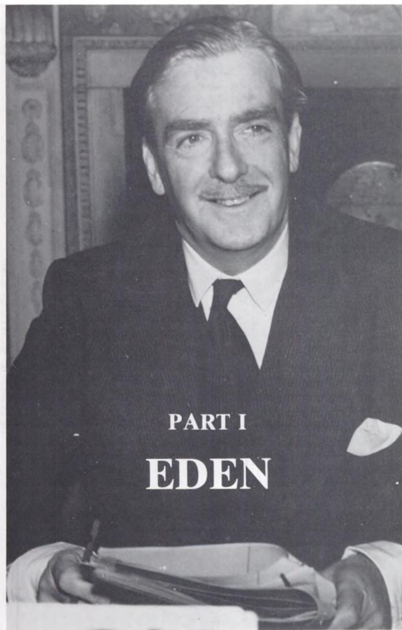

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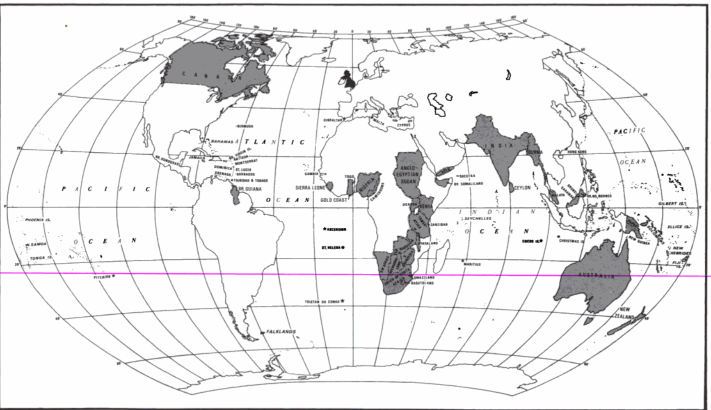

The Extent of the British Empire in 1937

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1
The Singapore Strategy

Whatever else the Washington Conference of 1921–22 achieved, it finally confirmed the end of an era of undisputed naval supremacy enjoyed by the Royal Navy since its historic victory over the French and Spanish fleets at Trafalgar. In signing the Five Power Naval Limitation Treaty in February 1922, the British Government tacitly accepted the fact that the First World War had profoundly altered the balance of economic, industrial and strategic forces in favour of the United States.[1] By the time the powers conferred at Washington no one seriously doubted that the Americans had the means to build and maintain a navy second to none if they so desired.[2] Britain, lacking both the financial resources and the political will to embark upon a competitive naval building programme with the United States, had little choice but to surrender its old two-power standard, which it was in any case manifestly incapable of preserving, in exchange for naval parity with the Americans.[3]

Throughout the 1920s the Admiralty in London was charged with the task of streamlining the navy by scrapping its older vessels and effecting economies in its departmental estimates. Planning for the future was circumscribed by the notion, accepted by the Cabinet on 15 August 1919, that the British Empire would not be involved in war on a grand scale for at least ten years.[4] While this assumption was

[1]N.H. Gibbs, *Grand Strategy*, vol. i, *Rearmament Policy* (London, 1976), pp. 19–24.

[2]*Ibid.*, pp. 6–24. According to the General Board, the United States Navy had dropped from second to third place by 1911 if the measure of power used lay in the displacement of ships built. Josephus Daniels, the U.S. Secretary of the Navy, was the first to begin building up the fleet to rival that of the premier sea power. President Wilson encouraged him in this policy. J. Daniels, *The Wilson Era*, vol. i, *Years of Peace — 1910–1917* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1946), pp. 326–29.

[3]Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 6–24, 117–20. Paul Haggie in his book *Britannia at Bay* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 7–8, suggests that in the years after Washington Britain still had a *de-facto* two-power standard. He argues that as a result of the war and the scuttling of the German High Seas Fleet, the Royal Navy had no European rivals worth worrying about. His contention is that the United States was never regarded as a potential enemy. He admits, however, that the *de-facto* two-power standard was whittled away with the rebuilding of the French and Italian navies, the results of the London Naval Conference of 1930, Britain's naval disarmament and Japan's reluctance to be restricted to an agreed level of naval building.

[4]P.R.O., War Cabinet 'A' Minutes, 616A, 15 Aug. 1919, Cab 23/15. Unless otherwise stated, all British primary documents will have been drawn from the Public Record Office (P.R.O.). Hereafter, the prefix P.R.O. is dropped in favour of the relevant file number or description, see footnote 5, p. 4 as an example.

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borne out by experience in the first decade of its existence, the ten-year rule was abandoned unofficially in March 1932 when, in the aftermath of the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, such optimism about the future seemed unrealistic.[5]

There was a sad irony in the fact that after spending a decade disarming more thoroughly than its other wartime partners, Britain was now forced to abandon this policy, make good its deficiencies and be ready, should circumstances warrant it, to fight a war against its old ally Japan. Those who appreciated the value of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance during the 1902–1922 period might well reflect in a melancholy way that its abrogation had led to a general deterioration in Britain's strategic position in the world. Instead of being able to concentrate its undivided attention on European affairs, leaving a sympathetic and friendly Japan to look after its interests in the Far East, as it had been able to do in the First World War, Britain now had to contemplate a situation fraught with potentially serious military and strategic complications.

In short, how could the conflicting claims of empire and home defence be satisfied if there were inadequate resources at the disposal of the British Government? It would be inconceivable for a maritime trading nation such as Britain not to guard its interests in China, South and Southeast Asia, the Australasian dominions and the trade routes in between. On the other hand, it could not denude home and Mediterranean waters to build up a massive fleet in the Far East. Finding a solution to this strategic dilemma was to prove extremely difficult in the years to follow.

At the root of the problem lay the question of reconciling the need for a larger navy with the government's policy of economic and financial restraint designed to reduce the effects of the long running world depression. Striking an agreeable balance between the two was to be a matter which would tax the ingenuity of successive chancellors and first lords in both the governments of MacDonald and Baldwin.

While it was hoped initially to keep expenditure on new vessels down to a minimum level consistent with national security, the Admiralty could claim with considerable justification that the navy must still be large enough to divide its forces between European and Far

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[5]Cab. Mtg., Cab 19(32), 23 March 1932, Cab 23/70. See also S.W. Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. ii, *The Period of Reluctant Rearmament 1930–1939* (London, 1976), footnote 5, pp. 144–45. Roskill repeats his earlier conclusion reached in the third volume of his life of Sir Maurice Hankey that the ten-year rule was formally cancelled only on 15 Nov. 1933. S.W. Roskill, *Hankey: Man of Secrets*, vol. iii (London, 1974), p. 537.

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Eastern waters without jeopardising British interests in either area. Whereas in the previous decade confidence had been high that the Admiralty possessed such a navy, the same could not be said of the situation in 1932 nor less still in 1936.

It was with this in mind that the Defence Requirements Committee recommended that the government should adopt a new standard of naval strength.[6] This was defined as enabling the British to send a fleet to the Far East capable of acting on the defensive and serving as a strong deterrent against any threats to their interest in the area, while at the same time maintaining in all circumstances a force in home waters able to meet the challenge of the German Navy in war.[7] Naturally enough acceptance of the DRC report would involve an increased rate of naval rearmament and a progressively larger annual outlay on new construction for the Admiralty until the agreed level of security defined by the committee had been reached. Beset as it was by difficulties on all sides, for which there were no easy solutions, the government sought with conspicuous success to avoid making any long term commitment to the new standard at this stage.[8]

But this did not mean that the DRC report was shelved and nothing was done to accelerate the naval building programme. On the contrary, the First Lord of the Admiralty Sir Samuel Hoare was able to add an aircraft carrier, two 5,300 ton cruisers, nine destroyers and four submarines to the existing 1936 naval building programme; the changes being passed in the second Naval Supplementary Estimates for the year.[9] The decision to approve Hoare's proposals can best be gauged in the light of several ominous events which had occurred recently on the international stage; namely, the refusal of the Japanese to be bound by the terms of the London Naval Treaty, the Italian invasion of Abyssinia, German reoccupation of the Rhineland and growing instability and threat of civil war in Spain.

A progressive deterioration, of such a marked nature, in international affairs plainly worried the government of Stanley Baldwin. In

[6]Defence Requirements Committee, Paper D.R.C. 37, 21 Nov. 1935, Cab 16/112. For a lucid description of the background to this change of emphasis see Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 117–27, 177–80 and 254–61.

[7]D.R.C. 37, 21 Nov. 1935, Cab 16/112.

[8]Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 259–61, 336–57.

[9]House of Commons Command Paper 5385, pp. 529 ff., as cited in Gibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 338. Roskill covers the same ground in his book *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. *ii*, p. 279. He shows that as a result of the first Supplementary Estimate of 28 April 1936 funds were allocated to begin construction of two capital ships (*King George V & Prince of Wales*), one aircraft carrier, five cruisers, nine *Tribal* class destroyers, four submarines, six sloops and some other minor vessels.

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acceding to the First Lord's request for increased naval construction, including the laying down of seven new capital ships in the next three years and four aircraft carriers by 1942, the government was serving notice to the other powers that Britain's rearmament programme could be speeded up to take account of unfavourable developments on the world stage.[10] A firm response was both diplomatically and strategically sound; it made good sense to improve the state of Britain's senior service in the short term without unconditionally accepting the concept of a new standard of naval strength as being a necessary requirement for the foreseeable future.

It did not take either the Admiralty or the Chiefs of Staff long to draw a distinction between the two. Dire warnings about the state of Britain's preparedness to meet all external threats to its interests throughout the world had been given in a Review of Imperial Defence written by the C.O.S. in February 1937.[11] In the following April the Admiralty prepared a memorandum for the Defence Plans (Policy) Committee which made it quite clear that unless the government implemented the new standard without delay grave consequences would follow.

> When the capital ships now building in Europe are completed, it would not be possible, on our existing standard of naval strength, to safeguard the Empire in the Far East if already engaged in war in Europe; even with Germany limited to 35 per cent of our own strength, we could never take the risk of despatching to the Far East a sufficient fleet to act as a deterrent to Japanese aggression. The Defence Requirements Sub-Committee stated, moreover, that "it would be suicidal folly to blind our eyes to the possibility of a simultaneous, or practically simultaneous, threat on both fronts".[12]

In other words, the Admiralty was saying that the pillar of Britain's system of imperial defence, based as it had been on its ability to send the main fleet to any particular area of the world at any time, was put at risk unless the new standard was passed to enable the navy to fulfil its proper range of functions throughout the world.

> Recent indications have shown clearly that there is doubt whether under existing political conditions in Europe and with the rise of the German navy, we should in fact, be able to send

[10] Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 334–35.

[11] Chiefs of Staff Memorandum COS 560, "Review of Imperial Defence", para. 56, 22 Feb. 1937, Cab 24/268.

[12] Admiralty Memorandum "A New Standard of Naval Strength", 26 April 1937, submitted as a paper for the Defence Plans (Policy) Committee, DP(P)3, para. 10, Cab 16/182.

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an adequate fleet to the Far East if a menace were to arise in that area.[13]

Once again the distinction between what is said and what is implied is a fine one. What, for instance, would constitute a menace? Surely, a menace was something short of war, for if it meant war why didn't the Admiralty say it? And yet hadn't British strategy from 1919 onwards been predicated upon the assumption that if they became involved in war with Japan the navy must be sent to the Far East forthwith? Did the Admiralty memo mean that the Singapore Strategy was a hostage to fortune and might no longer hold good? If so, shouldn't the dominions be informed about it? The Admiralty did not seek to spell out in a totally unambiguous way just what it meant. It was sufficient perhaps to draw the attention of the government once again to the danger of having inadequate resources with which to mount operations on a world scale.

Apart from this one vague feature, the memorandum was quite specific in spelling out exactly what it wanted in terms of new ships. There were to be twenty capital ships, fifteen aircraft carriers, one hundred cruisers, twenty-two flotillas of destroyers and eighty-two submarines.[14] This represented an appreciable increase in cruisers, destroyers and submarines in addition to adding five new capital ships to the peacetime fleet and almost trebling the number of operational aircraft carriers.

TABLE 1
ESTIMATED STRENGTHS OF THE DRC AND NEW STANDARD FLEETS IN PRINCIPAL TYPES OF SHIP

	DRC	New Standard
Capital Ships	15	20
Aircraft Carriers	10	15
Cruisers	70	100
Destroyers	16 flotillas	22 flotillas
Submarines	55	82

Source: Gibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 340.

[13]DP(P)3, para. 13, Cab 16/182.
[14]*Ibid.*, Appendix to Enclosure and para. 21.

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But it did not end there; for the Naval Staff sounded a warning about the fact that the DRC had not taken into account the possibility of a hostile Italy when drawing up its report of November 1935 in which the call had been made for a new standard of naval strength.[15] If, as now seemed likely, Italy might be regarded as a potential enemy, a distinction it would share with both Germany and Japan, the Royal Navy would either need to be still further increased or supplemented by a naval combination with another power.

Apart from the huge capital sums needed to finance the building, equipping and maintenance of the new standard fleet, the programme, if approved, would still take several years to achieve the level of security which the Admiralty desired. In the interim period the disparity between Britain's naval needs and its actual forces would grow larger.[16]

TABLE 2
PROJECTED NEW NAVAL CONSTRUCTION PROGRAMMES 1939–41

	DRC (Autumn 1937)			New Standard (Autumn 1937)			Modified New Standard (Summer 1938)		
Year of Building	1939	1940	1941	1939	1940	1941	1939	1940	1941
Capital Ships	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	1	1
Aircraft Carriers	1	—	—	3	1	1	1	1	1
Cruisers (8,000 tons)	2	—	—	4	4	4	4	4	4
Cruisers (5,300 tons)	—	—	—	2	2	1	—	—	—
Destroyer Flotillas	—	—	—	2	1	1	1	1	1
Submarines	6	—	—	7	7	5	4	4	4
Minesweepers	7	3	—	8	4	4	8	4	4
Patrol Vessels	5	3	—	5	3	3	5	3	3
Escort Vessels	4	1	—	4	2	2	4	2	2
M.T.B's.	—	—	—	2	3	2	2	3	2

Source: Adm 116/3631 '1937–1938 Naval Policy & Expenditure'.

[15] The case of a hostile Italy was mentioned in D.R.C. 37, para. 28, 21 Nov. 1935, Cab 16/112. No additional provision was made for such an eventuality, however, and it was not until 24 Feb. 1937 that the Cabinet accepted the recommendation of the Committee of Imperial Defence regarding the unreliability of Italy, Cabinet Conclusions 9(37)4, as cited in Gibbs, *op. cit.*, p. 386. Nonetheless, Italy was not seen as a probable enemy. This was to change within a few months. Eden raised the matter again at the first meeting of the Defence Plans (Policy) Sub-Committee on 19 April 1937 and called for a reassessment of the situation. He followed this by suggesting at the 295th meeting of the C.I.D. on 1 July 1937 that Italy must for an indefinite period be regarded as a possible enemy. This recommendation was formally approved by the C.I.D. at its next meeting on 5 July 1937, Cab 2/6. Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 386–88.

[16] C.I.D. 288th Mtg., 11 Feb. 1937, Cab 2/6.

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This point had been made clear by the Chiefs of Staff in their Review of Imperial Defence issued a mere two months before. A grim and sobering document, the Review earned the wrath of the Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain, who thought it expedient not to form too pessimistic a conclusion about Britain's ability to defend the Commonwealth, as this could lead to trouble with the dominions whose representatives were coming to London for the Imperial Conference due to begin in May.[17] In their much criticised report, the Chiefs of Staff had pointed out that of Britain's existing total of fifteen capital ships three would be undergoing modernization until the middle of 1939.[18]

The Admiralty had used this material to good effect in the memo on the new standard fleet referred to above. In the light of the modernization programme, the period before the summer of 1939 would be when the navy was at its weakest. It also meant that should hostilities occur in the Far East before that date was reached, the British Government would only be able to send a fleet to this area approximately equal to that possessed by Japan. It was an accepted fact that even with only nine capital ships at their disposal, the Japanese would have an inbuilt advantage over the British by operating relatively close to their home bases. This was assessed by the Naval Staff as being worth an equivalent of two capital ships, since on average the British could not rely on less than two ships being absent from the fleet under their command at any one moment.[19] It was the Admiralty's considered opinion that in order to accomplish its defensive and deterrent role successfully the British capital ship force should be of such strength that Japan's chances of obtaining victory in a fleet action would be so slight that it would not seek one. It was further believed that such a condition would prevail, if on average, the British force was numerically inferior by only one capital ship to that of the full quota of Japanese battleships, i.e., eight to nine.[20]

The Admiralty was also well aware of the fact that the Singapore base might not be all that it seemed to be when the proposal for building it was first approved by the Cabinet on 16 June 1921.[21] By the spring of 1937, for example, the assumption was made that the

[17] *Ibid.*

[18] COS 560, para. 56, 22 Feb. 1937, Cab 24/268.

[19] DP(P)3, Appendix to Enclosure, paras. 6–14, Cab 16/182.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Cabinet Cons. 50(21)3, 16 June 1921, Cab 23/26.

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TABLE 3
COMPARISON OF BRITISH, GERMAN AND JAPANESE ESTIMATED CAPITAL SHIP STRENGTH IN 1937–40

Period	German Fleet	British Fleet in Home Waters	Japanese Fleet	British Fleet for Far Eastern Duty	Modernizing & out of action (British ships)
Summer 1937 to Spring 1938	3 *'Deutschlands'*: 1) *Deutschland* 2) *Admiral Scheer* 3) *Admiral Graf Spee*	2 Battle-cruisers: 1) *Hood* 2) *Repulse*	9 Battleships: 1) *Nagato* 2) *Mutsu* 3) *Yamashiro* 4) *Fuso* 5) *Ise* 6) *Hyuga* 7) *Kongo* 8) *Kirishima* 9) *Haruna*	10 Battleships: 1) *Nelson* 2) *Rodney* 3) *Warspite* 4) *Malaya* 5) *Barham* 6) *Royal Oak* 7) *Revenge* 8) *Royal Sovereign* 9) *Resolution* 10) *Ramillies*	2 Battleships: 1) *Queen Elizabeth* 2) *Valiant* 1 Battle-cruiser: *Renown*
Spring 1938 to Summer 1939	3 *'Deutschlands'* (as above) 2 *'Scharnhorsts'*: 1) *Scharnhorst* 2) *Gneisenau*	2 Battle-cruisers (as above) 2 Battleships: 4) *Malaya* 5) *Barhan*	9 Battleships: (as above)	8 Battleships: 1), 2), 3), 6), 7), 8), 9), 10),	2 Battleships 1 Battle-cruiser (as above)
Summer 1939 to Spring 1940	3 *'Deutschlands'* (as above) 2 *'Scharnhorsts'* (as above) 2 × 35,000 ton Battleships: 1) *Bismarck* 2) *Tirpitz*	3 Battle-cruisers: 1) *Hood* 2) *Repulse* 2 Battleships: 1) *Nelson* 2) *Rodney*	10 Battleships: 1) – 9) (as above) 10) *Hiei*	9 Battleships: 3), 4), 5), 6), 7), 8), 9), 10) 11) *Valiant*	1 Battleship: *Queen Elizabeth*

Note: Of the 12 battleships in the Royal Navy in the period 1937–40, 2 were of the *Nelson* Class (*Nelson* and *Rodney*); 5 were of the *Queen Elizabeth* class (*Q.E., Valiant, Warspite, Malaya and Barham*); 5 were of the *Royal Sovereign* class (*R.S., Royal Oak, Revenge, Resolution* and *Ramillies*). Of these, *Warspite* was fully modernized, *Malaya* and *Royal Oak* were only partly modernized.

Sources: Far East Appreciation 1937 para. 330, DP(P)5, Cab 16/183A. A. Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies* (Oxford, 1981), p. 18.

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restricted repair facilities in Singapore were worth a net loss of two capital ships to the Royal Navy in relation to the Japanese force.[22] This fact alone altered the naval situation considerably. Instead of having to send eight capital ships to face the nine of the Japanese, the British would now have to supply ten in order for the fleet to perform the defensive and deterrent function ascribed to it in the government's strategic plan.

Unfortunately for the British, this was to have a knock-on effect since the Far Eastern situation could not be seen in isolation. Events in Europe and the naval building programmes of potential enemies, such as Germany and Italy, were to affect the computation of the naval equation. Clearly, the British could not disregard the growth of the German Navy, even if they were to rely on the French, as they did increasingly in the late 1930s, to offset the strength of the Italian Navy in the Mediterranean. It was, therefore, essential for the Royal Navy to establish at all times an absolute superiority of at least three capital ships over that of the German Navy.[23] If this were so, then in 1939 when the Germans were expected to have the equivalent of five capital ships in active service, the British would need to retain at least eight capital ships in home waters. But even that was not the end of the matter, for complications arose because of the tonnage clause in the 1935 naval agreement which had given Germany permission to build up to six capital ships when the British force was fifteen. Once the sixth battleship or battle-cruiser was added to the German fleet the British would have to leave nine of the same class in home waters and hold another ten in reserve for despatch and action, if necessary, in the Far East. A total of nineteen capital ships would, however, allow the Germans to build a seventh capital ship themselves. For this reason the Admiralty had supported a new standard fleet that would contain twenty capital ships.[24] Further complications were bound to arise, however, as soon as either the Japanese added more battleships to their fleet, or the Germans renounced their naval agreement with the British and began building in an unrestricted fashion. One could expect the British to respond to such important decisions as these by increasing the scale of their own naval building programme. Without wishing to belabour the point any longer, either or both of these actions on the part of their potential enemies was likely to have a direct

[22]DP(P)3, Appendix to Enclosure, paras. 6–14, Cab 16/182.
[23]*Ibid.*
[24]*Ibid.*

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effect on the size of force which the British would need to send to the Far East.

Before ships could be sent to this region, however, there would have to be a first class naval base in the area capable of servicing the fleet. Until the late 1930s no such base existed. From 1919 onwards the fundamental axiom of British naval strategy involved sending the main fleet to the east if war with Japan broke out. One could well ask what the fleet would do once it arrived in Far Eastern waters, particularly if the Sembawang naval base in Singapore was not yet ready to handle such a force? The reluctance of the government to address itself to this pertinent question may be understandable given the limited range of options available. It was assumed, for instance, that the fleet would not be able to use the facilities at Hong Kong on the ground that the base was likely to be extremely vulnerable to a determined Japanese thrust and would probably be overrun before the fleet arrived from home and Mediterranean waters to afford it relief.[25] Moreover, Trincomalee could only be used as a supply depot and was too far away from the South China Sea to be an effective forward base for naval operations against Japan. It would seem that for the same reasons Sydney could be safely ruled out.[26] In the absence of Commonwealth bases, therefore, one could reasonably ask whether any other alternative naval facilities existed in the area and what steps, if any, had been taken to lease or use them in an emergency. Unfortunately, neither the American base at Subic Bay in the Philippines nor the one at Guam had been brought up to first class standard during the twenties or thirties because of the restrictions laid down at the Washington Conference.[27] Moreover, it is extremely unlikely, given the political climate of the time, that the Americans would have allowed the British to use either of these bases even if they had been available. In these circumstances, it is not surprising that the government in London was forced to play a waiting game, hoping that events in the Far East would not turn critical before the Singapore base became fully operational.

After being subject to the delays and hesitations of previous governments, the Singapore graving dock was opened officially on 14

[25]Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 375–76, 409–412. J. Neidpath, *The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire 1919–1941* (Oxford, 1981), pp. 11–12. W. David McIntyre, *The Rise and Fall of the Singapore Naval Base* (London, 1979), pp. 105–107, 112–15.

[26]I.C. McGibbon, *Blue Water Rationale* (Wellington, 1981), p. 96.

[27]S.E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. iii, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific* (Boston, 1968), pp. 32–34.

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February 1938 by the Governor of the Straits Settlements Sir Shenton Thomas.[28] But the graving dock by itself did not make the base operational. In order to be fully equipped to deal with a massive task force, the Sembawang yard would have to have completed the assembly of its repair facilities, accumulated large stocks of fuel and munitions, as well as have food and water supplies available and an adequate pool of skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour which could be tapped to keep the base running efficiently. It was quite clear that this was not the case in the early months of 1938. Indeed, it would be many more months and certainly not before the summer of 1939 at least before the base could become fully operational. Even then its limited capacity was such that doubts were raised concerning its ability to handle large-scale repair work, as would be necessary if a number of ships were damaged in action.[29]

Despite the fact that its mere existence would not solve many of the problems associated with an active policy east of Suez, the value of the Singapore base was still considerable. Without it, the nearest first class naval base to the Far East which the British could use lay at Malta in the Mediterranean.[30] Whatever its shortcomings were, the Singapore base could be reinforced during an emergency and so help prevent the fall of the island to a seaborne attack from the Japanese. If Singapore fell, the Japanese would be in a position to cut the trading links of the Commonwealth and expose both the Indian sub-

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[28]P. Haggie, *Britannia at Bay*, pp. 119–20.

[29]There is some dispute over the degree to which the naval base could be said to be operational. Ian Hamill using material drawn from the minutes of the 373rd meeting of the C.I.D. on 3 Aug. 1939, Cab 2/9, as well as a note by the Director of Plans on 13 Jan. 1939, Adm 116/3922, suggests that in the event of a crisis the full range of services provided by the base could be brought into operation quickly. I. Hamill, *The Strategic Illusion* (Singapore, 1981), p. 224. Neidpath, *op. cit.*, p. 271, suggests that at the time the graving dock was officially opened in Feb. 1938 the base facilities were not expected to be ready until 1941. This is the interval used by McIntyre, *op. cit.*, p. 135. The Chiefs of Staff were inclined to be more optimistic, although they conceded that difficulties surrounded the use of the base. DP(P)3, Appendix to Enclosure, para. 7, Cab 16/182. In COS 596, 'Far East Appreciation 1937', 14 June 1937, DP(P)5, para. 316, Cab 16/182, the C.O.S. indicated that Admiralty policy was to maintain the Singapore dockyard on a peacetime footing from 1 April 1939 onwards, this being the projected date of completion. By peacetime footing, the Admiralty meant that the dockyard should be capable of docking and undertaking refits of nine cruisers a year. The C.O.S. warned, however, that as it would take approximately one year from the date of completion to get the dockyard functioning properly the government could not expect to have the Sembawang base at peacetime status before 1940. Cab 16/182.

[30]The route from London to Singapore via Malta is 8,222 nautical miles in total length whereas the distance between Malta and Singapore is 5,926 nautical miles.

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continent and the Australasian dominions to attack and future threat of invasion. Without a large British force based permanently in the area, therefore, the problem of defending Singapore was made much more difficult. It is, for instance, a moot point whether a long distance deterrent can ever be very effective; this was especially true of the 1930s, since virtually anything could have occurred at that time to delay or even prevent the despatch of the fleet to the Far East. The events of 1941–42 were to provide eloquent testimony to the fact that a southward offensive was a plan the Japanese would use when it suited them best and the British worst.

Apart from the possibility of receiving a limited amount of aid from the dominions, the British had few other options which they could take up. An alliance with France, for example, would neither ease their problems in the Far East, nor necessarily lead to a reduction in their naval strength in home waters. Its value lay in other directions, principally in serving as a deterrent to Italian ambitions in the Mediterranean. On the other hand, the power with whom the British would prefer to come to some form of naval agreement, the United States, would probably be unwilling to make even the most informal arrangement covering the Pacific Ocean and the Far East with Baldwin's government in London. This was definitely the opinion of the British Chiefs of Staff; they regarded the possibility of a naval agreement between the two powers as being so remote that they did not even bother to mention it in their Review of Imperial Defence issued in February 1937.[31]

While most politicians and their senior advisors felt similarly, the idea of educating the Americans to appreciate the seriousness of the situation in the Far East and to act accordingly was not lost on everyone. Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, was by no means as pessimistically inclined on this question as many of his colleagues in the Cabinet, service departments and Foreign Office seemed to be and his policy throughout the latter half of 1937 fully supports this view. In many ways it made good strategic sense for the British to explore the possibilities of using subtle diplomatic persuasion on the Americans to accept a more active role in world affairs than they had

[31] The C.O.S. did not significantly change their attitude on this point in the years before the outbreak of the war in Europe. They took their cue from the feeling prevalent in Admiralty circles that isolationism and the neutrality acts would make it politically impossible to arrange such a naval pact. No agreement could be expected to remain secret for long and an unofficial arrangement was utterly worthless since it would have to be officially recognized and sanctioned by Congress before it could be implemented.

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been willing to do for much of the period since the ending of the First World War. In the absence of a naval agreement between London and Washington, it was not totally unrealistic or unreasonable to try and persuade the Americans, in the interests of world peace and safeguarding their own investments in East Asia, to upgrade their naval presence in the western Pacific and assume a watching brief over developments in the area. One way of doing this would be to increase the size of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet sailing off or along the China coast. This method would have the advantage of being a visible sign of American interest in the region, a fact which could not go unnoticed in Japanese naval circles. Another possibility, if more politically volatile, would be for Congress to provide funds for the rapid build up of American bases at Subic Bay and at Guam. If Congress could be persuaded that these facilities needed major improvement, in the light of the Japanese refusal to be bound by the restrictions of the London Naval Conferences, it would bring closer the day when the United States could respond directly to any further crisis in the region by stationing a capital ship squadron at either base if it so desired.[32] It was conceivable that either action might deter the Japanese from embarking upon a southward advance into China or Southeast Asia and from waging war against the British Empire. An agreement by or with the United States would, therefore, be invaluable to the British and ease their strategic dilemma considerably. It is my contention that Eden saw these strategic advantages and was prepared to go to great lengths in the coming months to secure them.

But the process of educating the Roosevelt administration to accept the need to move away from old fashioned isolationism towards greater participation in world affairs, a task which would have been difficult at the best of times, was made more so by the distinct lack of commitment to this goal on the part of the British establishment. While it would not be true to say that Eden was isolated in Cabinet on this issue, few, if any, of his colleagues expected the campaign to succeed and none believed it would yield positive results in the short term. In the absence of a concerted diplomatic offensive designed to

[32]Although fortifications at Guam and in the Philippines were not allowed under the terms of the Washington Conference, the fact that this treaty lapsed in 1936 without agreement between the signatories on any extension of the building restrictions meant that the United States would have the legal right to improve the base facilities at either or both places if it possessed the political will to do so. For a short summary of the negotiations leading to the London Naval Treaty of 1936 see Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 323–32. For a detailed study of the effects of this conference as seen from the Admiralty's point of view, see Adm 116/3376; Adm 116/3382.

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breach the wall of American isolationism, the failure of one man's efforts to bring about a radical change in the foreign policy of the United States is hardly astounding. The prophets of doom, they would have preferred to have been called realists, of which there were many within the government service, were not in the least surprised when the Americans rejected Eden's overtures and sought to distance themselves from all talk of joint initiatives with the British on the Far East or elsewhere.

Leaving aside the question of gaining American support for the maintenance of peace in the Far East, the only other power to which the British could turn to for help was Japan. Far from being illogical, a revival of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance on mutually satisfactory terms, could bring about a return to the spirit of friendship that had characterised relations between the governments in London and Tokyo during the early years of the twentieth century. Many of the leading policymakers in Britain canvassed the idea during the late 1930s as the most effective alternative to sending the fleet to the Far East in time of trouble. An alliance had several obvious attractions; the principal one being that of sharply reducing the threat to British interests and position in the region by removing the spectre of war with Japan, so there would be no need to send the fleet east in the first place. A secondary consideration lay in the hope that it would help to exercise a moderating influence over the Japanese Government and restrain its military from the worst excesses of adventurism.

What made discussion of this subject of immediate importance was the decidedly grim outlook for Britain in Europe. By the spring of 1937 it had become a recognized fact that Britain's overall situation would be much improved if something could be done to relieve its Far Eastern complications. The Naval Staff had certainly come to this conclusion and in preparing its paper on naval strength for the Defence Plans (Policy) Committee had repeated the view that only a revival of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would justify the British in relating the size of their navy to purely European responsibilities.[33] In short, the controversial new standard fleet would not be necessary if the alliance existed. Citing the words of Sir Edward Grey in a Commons speech in 1912, the Admiralty paper stated:

> When you get further afield into other parts of the world it is a very different matter; then foreign policy and naval strategy do and must depend upon each other to a large extent. Take the

[33]DP(P)3, paras. 32–34, Cab 16/182.

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> question of the Far East. Of course, the relation between the Japanese Alliance and naval strategy is a most intimate one. I should like to say this about the Japanese Alliance. . . . In the last few years, while we have been in office . . . the Japanese Alliance has worked nothing but good.[34]

Despite its many advantages, the alliance would be difficult to reactivate, a fact acknowledged by the Admiralty in its memorandum. In conceding that the most which could be expected from the Japanese would be some form of gentleman's agreement, analogous to that recently concluded with Italy, the Admiralty warned the DP(P) Committee that such an arrangement would not be anything like as valuable as a full blown alliance. Furthermore, an understanding with the Japanese, though welcome, would not in itself justify the scale of reductions in naval strength which might result from an alliance, since such a diplomatic accommodation could never be relied upon to withstand the stress of war in Europe. It is made abundantly clear in this paper that the Admiralty believed the Japanese would be unwilling to resist exploiting even a temporary weakness of other powers and would not hesitate to use war in Europe to further their own objectives in the Far East at Britain's expense.[35]

What strategic merits an Anglo-Japanese Alliance might have in the future were offset to a large extent by other considerations. Sir Alexander Cadogan, the Deputy Under Secretary of State in the Foreign Office, pointed this out vividly in a minute on 6 May 1937.

> It maybe that in no circumstances could we count on any assistance from the U.S. But by an alliance with Japan we should forfeit all chance of it, and it seems to me that that has to be weighed in the balance against the chances of securing the assistance or at least the neutrality of a very undependable ally in Japan.[36]

Cadogan's remarks were fully endorsed by Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office.

> It must be the U.S.A. every time I think. Public opinion will always come down on that side in the end and rightly. We shall never be able really to count on *modern* Japan in the case of war in Europe.[37]

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[34] *Ibid.*, para. 33.
[35] *Ibid.*
[36] Minute by Sir Alexander Cadogan, 6 May 1937, A5459/6/45, FO 371/20649.
[37] Minute by Sir Robert Vansittart, 6 May 1937, A5459/6/45, FO 371/20649.

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Anthony Eden professed himself to be in general agreement with these views. He believed that the best result that the British could hope to realise, or indeed should attempt to realise, in their relations with the Japanese would be some form of agreement which, while falling short of an alliance, would nevertheless rest on a real reciprocity of interests, based in turn on a new era in Sino-Japanese relations.[38] Vansittart's marginalia left one in little doubt where he stood on this question. "This is more conceivable. But far off and speculative."[39]

In the absence of such an alliance and with little imminent likelihood of American assistance in the Pacific, the possibility of sending a capital ship fleet out east remained a most important feature of British policy. According to the Chiefs of Staff, the security of the United Kingdom and of Singapore were the keystones on which the survival of the British Commonwealth would depend.[40] It was for these reasons they had stressed that no anxieties or risks connected with British interests in the Mediterranean could be allowed to interfere with the despatch of a fleet to the Far East.[41] The First Sea Lord and Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Sir Ernle Chatfield pointed out that even if the Mediterranean position was lost it could be recovered, whereas if the British lost their position in the Pacific it was doubtful whether it could ever be recovered.[42] He repeated his view that the basis of British strategy lay in the establishment of the naval task force at Singapore at the earliest possible moment after the outbreak of hostilities; a fact underlining the paramount importance attached to there being a Singapore base available and capable of dealing with the arrival and stationing of the fleet.[43]

Vital though the defence of Singapore would be to Britain, its ability to send a large number of vessels to the Far East under all circumstances was already the subject of much discussion, as indeed it deserved to be. In his notes for a speech he was to deliver in Cabinet on this issue, the First Lord of the Admiralty Sir Samuel Hoare wrote of the role he expected to play in the forthcoming Imperial Conference scheduled for May 1937.

[38]Minute by Anthony Eden, 8 May 1937, A5459/6/45, FO 371/20649.

[39]Marginalia by Vansittart on Minute by Sir R. Craigie, 6 May 1937, A5459/6/45, FO 371/20649.

[40]COS Review, C.I.D. 1305B (Revise), paras. 79–81, 22 Feb. 1937, Cab 4/25.

[41]*Ibid.*

[42]C.O.S. 209th Mtg., 1 June 1937, Cab 53/7.

[43]*Ibid.*

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> I suggest that on no account should I say anything that would imply that we shall not have a fleet capable of action in the East as well as in the West, but that I should emphasise the almost intolerable strain that such a fleet imposes upon us, point out that for the present we are almost entirely occupied with replacement and leave them under the impression that any New Standard must inevitably depend on their fuller and further cooperation (e.g. more cruisers and destroyers).[44]

Hoare was implying that though Britain might feel the need for a new standard fleet, she could scarcely afford the capital outlay necessary for the construction, supply and maintenance programme which it would entail. This was one of the main reasons why the Admiralty had welcomed the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and had done so much to persuade the Americans and the Japanese particularly to agree on the need for restraint in naval building and acceptance of the revised London Treaty of 1936.[45] Japan's unwillingness to be bound by this treaty's provisions, or to accept any limitation placed on its naval strength, had, however, naturally complicated the problem for the British. They simply could not afford to ignore any acceleration in the Japanese naval construction programme and plans would have to be made for keeping pace with it. Whether the proposed new standard fleet would be able to afford such security against the Japanese in the future or not was, of course, still an open question. Much would ultimately depend upon the building programmes of Britain's other European rivals. In the meantime the Admiralty had much preparatory work to do in convincing the Cabinet and the Treasury that the new standard fleet was a vital component of Britain's defensive strength and, despite its large cost, ought to be approved at the earliest opportunity in the interests of the nation's security.

Sir Thomas Inskip, the Minister for Coordination of Defence, looked at the strategic problem in another way. He believed that in the long run Britain was manifestly incapable of maintaining its position in the Far East.[46] If this were so, the impetus for a new standard fleet, or indeed for the despatch of the fleet to the Far East in time of war with Japan, would be drastically changed. Inskip's views were by no means extremist or unrepresentative of his colleagues in Cabinet.

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[44]Cambridge University Library, (Templewood Papers), Notes for Cabinet Speech, Mar.-Apr. 1937, IX 2.

[45]Gibbs, *op. cit.*, pp. 133–70, 323–32.

[46]Templewood Papers, IX 3.

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In fact, Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary of State for the Dominions in both the Baldwin and Chamberlain administrations, has subsequently confirmed that the majority of his ministerial colleagues were inclined to form the same opinion.[47]

These reservations were not to be disclosed to the principal delegates or their advisors at the Imperial Conference. According to the DP(P) Committee, at its second meeting on 11 May 1937, the British representatives were not to adopt a negative attitude and say it was impossible for the navy to implement its agreed strategy on the Far East for such candour would, it was thought, almost inevitably lead to the dominions abandoning the idea of imperial defence and concentrating instead on local defence measures.[48] But by the same token it was deemed to be equally wrong to let the Australasian dominions, in particular, think that there was no question of Britain's ability to defend its interests in the Far East, irrespective of their cooperation, since that would also lead to the governments in Canberra and Wellington contenting themselves with local defence measures. In fact, as Hoare had outlined in his notes, the dominions should be left guessing as to what measures the British would take in an emergency.[49] Unsatisfactory though this compromise may have been, it reflected the real concern felt in government circles about making any definite commitment to future action. Malcolm MacDonald has actually admitted that the reservations held by ministers were so strong that any promise made to the dominions about coming to their assistance was a disingenuous expedient to reassure them while buying time to find some more satisfactory alternative policy.[50] In essence, this boiled down to two possibilities; either an alliance with Japan or an agreement with the United States, both of which seemed a long way from being realised at this time.

If further confirmation of this latter point had been needed, fresh evidence was readily at hand. On 1 May 1937 the United States Neutrality Act received presidential endorsement and came into law.[51] Although it undoubtedly expressed the wish of the majority of the American people to avoid the pitfalls of becoming entangled in European affairs and being dragged against their will into a future war, the provisions of the neutrality legislation left a good deal to be

[47]Interview with Malcolm MacDonald, London, 10 Oct. 1978.
[48]DP(P) Sub-Committee Second Mtg., 11 May 1937, A5460/6/45, FO 371/20649.
[49]*Ibid.*
[50]Interview with Malcolm MacDonald, London, 10 Oct. 1978.
[51]Sir Ronald Lindsay to Eden, 10 May 1937, No. 391, A3388/448/45, FO 371/20666.

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desired. For instance, by placing a total prohibition on arms supplies from the United States, the Americans were effectively denying to those nations who had not been stockpiling weapons and who were themselves the victims of aggression, the opportunity of making up their deficiencies in arms and war materials from this source. The British Government strongly believed that by failing to provide the President with the opportunity of differentiating between the aggressor state and its victim the legislation in its existing form aided those nations who wished to resort to aggression and penalised those who sought to maintain peace.[52]

It was with this in mind that both Anthony Eden and Neville Chamberlain had tried vainly in March to get the Americans to amend their neutrality legislation before it reached the statute book. As both readily appreciated, however, the chances of securing such an amendment were minimal in view of the strength of congressional isolationism at this time.[53] In this respect, at least, the Foreign Office appeared to take a much more realistic attitude than that adopted by the Admiralty. While British dissatisfaction with the neutrality provisions was raised at all levels before the legislation became law, the Foreign Office, unlike the Admiralty, was against continuing the campaign after 1 May 1937. Showing remarkably little sympathy for the Admiralty's position, Sir Alexander Cadogan summed up the opinion of the Foreign Office in a minute for the Foreign Secretary drafted on 23 June 1937.

> The law is passed and we couldn't get it altered now. And it's no sort of use nagging at the Americans *now* as to the manner in which it might be applied in the case of a war arising out of circumstances, and in a manner, which it is impossible to foresee. Even on the very unlikely assumption that we could obtain now some assurances (assuredly of the vaguest character) they would be likely to be of no value when the time comes, and meanwhile we should only irritate the Americans. As Mr Troutbeck says, we should concentrate on *not* irritating them but on keeping their goodwill.[54]

[52] There is a considerable amount of information in the British records concerning the background to the U.S. Neutrality Act of May 1937. In addition, there are a number of files which show the degree of concern felt within government circles over the legislation. See Prem 1/261; Adm 116/4102; FO 371/20666. For the American perspective on this question, one need look no further than R.A. Divine, *The Illusion of Neutrality* (Chicago, 1962).

[53] For details of the Chamberlain-Morgenthau correspondence see Prem 1/261. It is clear from this file that Eden was responsible for drafting much of the text of the message sent in March 1937 referring to the forthcoming neutrality legislation.

[54] Minute by Cadogan, 23 June 1937, A3992/448/45, FO 371/20666.

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If little could be done to alter the Neutrality Act, the British Government was clearly anxious to improve other aspects of Anglo-American relations. Fortunately, the Americans seemed to be of the same opinion. Inspired no doubt by the measure of cooperation which had so marked the negotiations leading up to the London Naval Treaty of 1936, the United States was now prepared to widen the sphere of existing cooperation to encompass an exchange of information, even of a very secret nature, between government departments in the two countries. Ambassador Lindsay, who first disclosed this strong desire on behalf of Washington for such an exchange in January 1937, was convinced that it was the outcome of friendly feelings felt by the Roosevelt administration for the British.[55] He advised the government in London to encourage this development by responding cordially and promptly to any invitation or proposal from the United States. By March 1937 Lindsay was able to assure Eden that there was a new found warmth in American feelings for the British.

> Never in history have Anglo-American relations been so friendly and cordial as now, except during the eighteen months when the two countries were associated together in war.[56]

He ascribed the improvement, for such it was, to the elimination of the sources of friction which had so bedevilled relations between them during the 1920s and early 30s. For much of this period the two former wartime allies had failed to retain the close, confidential and constructive partnership which had been so successfully developed by them in 1917–18 in response to a common threat posed by the Central Powers. In fact, the fifteen years following the Washington Conference of 1922 had been witness to a good deal of mutual mistrust, recrimination, acrimony and hostility in Anglo-American relations. It was a relief to those in Whitehall who valued the existence of the link with the United States that the years of difficulty and misunderstanding were at last at an end.[57]

Although Chamberlain had informed his American counterpart, the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, jnr., that the British Government would be interested in anything which would help to stabilise the situation in the Far East, the deliberately non-committal nature of the reply he received from Cordell Hull on 1 June could accurately be described by Vansittart as being "warm and

[55] Lindsay to Foreign Office, 26 Jan. 1937, No. 25, A665/38/45, FO 371/20951.
[56] Lindsay to Foreign Office, 22 Mar. 1937, No. 247, A2378/38/45, FO 371/20651.
[57] *Ibid.*

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woolly''.[58] In his memorandum, Hull made it fairly clear that the U.S. Government intended to preserve its full independence of action and would not assume any fresh obligations.

> In the event of resort by any country or countries to measures of aggression in the Far East, we would expect to endeavour to afford within the limits of our general policy appropriate protection to our legitimate interests, but we are not, as we assume the British Government would not be, in position to state in advance what methods of protection this country would employ. It is the traditional policy of this country not to enter into those types of agreement which constitute or which suggest alliance.[59]

Hull's memo was, as Troutbeck would call it, ''a masterpiece of negation''.[60] It failed to spell out what steps the Americans would take in the event of a serious situation arising in the Pacific; but the impression gained was that some form of consultation among the interested powers would take place, followed by a parallel and concurrent response. If this interpretation was correct it was just a reaffirmation of the old policy followed by the two countries in the past.[61] Cadogan was moved to note: ''I don't think this really gets us any further than any of us expected.''[62]

Although unsatisfactory from the British point of view, Hull's message, evasive on some issues and wordy on others, did clear up the confused muddle left behind after a visit to London by President Roosevelt's roving envoy Norman Davis in April 1937. At a meeting with both Cadogan and Eden in the Foreign Office on 9 April, Davis had raised the question of the neutralisation of the Pacific as a means of removing the danger of war in this strategically vital area.[63] He had gone on to say that the United States would be willing to neutralise the Philippines and Guam and expressed the hope that the same treatment might be extended to the Dutch East Indies and Hong Kong. From what Davis had said it appeared that Roosevelt, whose favourite project this was supposed to be, wished to include Japan in any agreed scheme that could be worked out by the interested powers.[64] Whatever his personal inclinations may have been,

[58]Minute by Vansittart, 23 June 1937, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.
[59]Lindsay to Eden, 1 June 1937, No. 492, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.
[60]Minute by J.M. Troutbeck, 17 June 1937, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.
[61]*Ibid.*
[62]Minute by Sir Alexander Cadogan, 23 June 1937, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.
[63]Eden to Lindsay, 16 Apr. 1937, No. 329, F2214/597/61, FO 371/21024.
[64]*Ibid.*; see also ''Annual Report on Japan in 1937'', para. 135, F2286/2286/23, FO 371/22190.

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Eden took a cautious line on this proposal and with good reason; he simply did not know whether the approach was official, tentative, or and what was more to the point, practical. In the circumstances, the Foreign Secretary, without venturing to commit himself in any sense, asked for more information about the proposal and the line that was expected to be taken with Japan.[65] It was just as well that Eden adopted a wait-and-see attitude because it became quite obvious within a matter of weeks that Davis did not really know what a neutralisation scheme would involve. Having said that it might be extended to Hong Kong he soon began to prevaricate on the issue, a point which did not escape the attention of the Foreign Office.[66] Eden sensibly decided not to take the initiative on this occasion, leaving the Americans to raise the matter again should they wish to follow it up with a more concrete proposal. Hull's disappointing essay confirmed, however, that the neutralisation of the Pacific was far from being a solid plank in United States foreign policy, let alone an important one.[67]

Did this suggest a breach between the President and the State Department on the question of foreign policy? The answer was a qualified no. Hull, unlike Roosevelt, was by nature a cautious man, not given to acting on sudden impulse or whim. He sought by quiet, undemonstrative means an improvement in diplomatic relations between states by facilitating progress towards a more effective system of international trade. He was also a consummate politician who knew, or at least had a fair idea of, what could be pushed through Congress and those items which would cause an enormous stir. Far from being an idealist, Hull was a conservative, practical and, his critics would argue, a limited man. His views carried weight in the administration and it was he above all who succeeded in keeping American foreign policy on the rails when occasionally the President made one of his bold initiatives. It was not surprising, therefore, that he had squashed the neutralisation plan, for apart from its indefinite nature it opened up all sorts of possible scenarios that would be calculated to infuriate the isolationists in both Congress and country and perhaps spoil his chance of obtaining agreement on matters of trade with the developed nations of the world.[68]

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[65] *Ibid.*

[66] Eden to Lindsay, 22 May 1937, No. 434, F2586/597/61, FO 371/21024.

[67] Memo by Department of State, undated but handed to Lindsay on 1 June 1937, attached to Lindsay to Eden, 1 June 1937, No. 492, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.

[68] For an interesting discussion of Hull's economic diplomacy see T.K. McCulloch, "Anglo-American Economic Diplomacy and the European Crisis" (Oxford University, D.Phil. thesis

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While American foreign policy does bear the appearance of being somewhat enigmatic at times, the British were not alone in experiencing difficulty in distinguishing correctly between what the President might like to do and what he would be allowed to do by Congress, public opinion or both. As they awaited confirmation on these matters, the British followed Lindsay's sagacious advice on the best method of working with the United States. This was to respond sensibly and rationally to all overtures from the Americans and not to give the appearance of being either aloof or disinterested in any proposals which they might care to make.[69] As an experienced observer of the American scene, Lindsay knew what he was talking about and no remark was more accurate than that which he offered to the Foreign Secretary in March 1937 to the effect that Anglo-American relations were fool-proof and were only in danger when attempts were made to improve them.[70]

If the existing strategic situation was not already sufficiently complex and intractable, a further variable factor was about to be introduced by the British themselves. Stanley Baldwin had announced his decision to retire from active politics and resign as Prime Minister before the end of the Imperial Conference.[71] Although Baldwin could hardly claim to be an internationalist, he made, for instance, little secret of his overwhelming preference for domestic as opposed to foreign affairs, his departure inevitably raised the question of whether British policy would be much altered by his successor the capable, if dour, Neville Chamberlain.[72] On the face of it, little upheaval was likely, particularly since Eden had been asked to stay on as Foreign Secretary, and continuity of policy seemed reasonably assured at least for the time being.

It soon became obvious, however, that Eden, though responsive to the need for support from his Prime Minister, resented any encroachment upon what he saw as his own sphere by Chamberlain and others equally inexperienced in the realm of foreign affairs. According to

1978); further light can be thrown on this subject by consulting L.C. Gardiner, *Economic Aspects of New Deal Diplomacy* (Madison, 1964); J.W. Pratt, *The American Secretaries of State and their Diplomacy*, vols. xii & xiii, *Cordell Hull* (New York, 1964); D. Junker, *Der Unteilbare Weltmarkt, Das ökonomische Interesse in der Außenpolitik der USA 1933–1941* (Stuttgart, 1975). A.W. Schatz, "The Anglo-American Trade Agreement and Cordell Hull's Search for Peace 1936–1938", *Journal of American History*, 57 (1970):85–103.

[69]Lindsay to Foreign Office, 22 Mar. 1937, No. 247, A2378/38/45, FO 371/20651.

[70]*Ibid.*

[71]J. Barnes & K. Middlemas, *Baldwin* (London, 1969), pp. 1018–19.

[72]Earl of Avon, *Eden Memoirs*, vol. i, *Facing the Dictators* (London, 1962), pp. 444–45.

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Malcolm MacDonald, Eden did not like sharing his duties or dividing his power with the Prime Minister.[73] His growing disaffection with this aspect of his ministerial responsibility becomes evident as the degree of interference by Chamberlain increased as the months went by. Unlike Baldwin, Chamberlain could not be regarded as someone who would rubber-stamp Eden's handling of foreign policy. He came increasingly to interpose a different approach to that of the Foreign Secretary; sometimes countermanding Eden's instructions, while on other occasions deciding upon a course of action without reference to or even consent from his colleague. As a working partnership, therefore, this relationship left much to be desired. Eden did not sympathise with Chamberlain's developing policy towards the dictatorships and the Prime Minister felt little warmth for his Foreign Secretary's overtures to the Americans. In the end, neither felt that the other's policy was truly realistic and each remained steadfastly convinced of the justice of his own. While both continued the search for a different instrument capable of realising their major objectives, policies which were to appear later as being mutually exclusive, Chamberlain and Eden came to display a far from united front in the months which followed. Although one should resist the idea of "inevitability" in history, the case for saying that these two senior politicians would find it extremely difficult to work together amicably for a long time seems irresistible.[74]

Before any of these fears could be realised, however, it was very much a case of "business as usual". In May 1937 this meant the long awaited opening of the Imperial Conference, the principal delegates of which began arriving in London a few days before the conference was due to begin on 14 May. It should not be forgotten that these dominion representatives had come together to discuss world problems and their response to them at a time when Britain had more worries than it might care to admit to and fewer options for improving its strategic situation than it would prefer to have. What it would make of this predicament was anyone's guess.

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[73] Conversation with Malcolm MacDonald, London, 10 Oct. 1978.

[74] Chamberlain's attitude can be gauged from a letter he wrote to his sister Ida on 8 August 1937 when he noted the difference between Cabinet portfolios.

> As Ch. of Ex. I could hardly have moved a pebble: now I have only to raise a finger and the whole face of Europe is changed!

N. Chamberlain Papers, N.C. to Ida Chamberlain, 8 Aug. 1937, NC 18/1/1015.

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2
A Way out of the Mess

In the course of a long speech reviewing world events and British policy since 1930, which he delivered at the first meeting of the principal delegates to the Imperial Conference on 19 May, Anthony Eden painted a glowing picture of Anglo-American relations. Apart from describing them as never having been better and closer than at the present time, he went on to declare that there was no doubt that the United States was ready to work in agreement with Britain and in ways which would be agreeable to it.[1] While it was not a distortion of the truth to say that Anglo-American relations were on a much sounder footing than they had been for some years, Eden's statement does seem to have exaggerated or misinterpreted the extent of American willingness to embark upon a working agreement with Britain. By mentioning the possibility of cooperation in a speech dealing with foreign policy issues, Eden had implied a degree of involvement which exceeded American intentions, a fact which would be outlined in Hull's message of 1 June.[2]

Eden was not alone in occasionally being guilty of wishful thinking in his relations with the United States. Joseph Lyons, the Australian Prime Minister, had some direct experience of President Roosevelt's personal commitment to a more effective policy in the Far East. In advocating a non-aggression pact in the Pacific, Lyons disclosed to the principal delegates at their meeting on 22 May that he had earlier mentioned the possibility to Roosevelt. He pointed out that the President, far from being reluctant to comment on the plan, had instead admitted he would be quite ready to enter into an agreement with Japan or any other country to ensure the preservation of peace in the Pacific. Moreover, Lyons revealed that Roosevelt had gone on to declare that if serious trouble arose in the Pacific the United States would be prepared to make common cause with the members of the Commonwealth concerned.[3]

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[1]E(P.D.) (37) First Mtg., 19 May 1937, Cab 32/128.

[2]In a conversation Eden had on 10 May with Mr. Gerard, the chief U.S. representative at the coronation, the Foreign Secretary found confirmation of his view that Anglo-American relations had never been better. Gerard went further still. In his opinion, there was a definite tendency for an ever friendlier attitude to be adopted by the general public in the United States towards the western democracies. Eden to Lindsay, 14 May 1937, No. 417, A3519/228/45, FO 371/20660.

[3]E(P.D.) (37) Fourth Mtg., 22 May 1937, Cab 32/128.

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At the same conference session on 22 May, Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister, supported the view that Roosevelt would prefer effective action being taken in the Pacific as opposed to leaving matters well alone. According to the Canadian Premier, Roosevelt had spoken to him of his desire to see the fortifications of the Pacific islands dismantled as a means of furthering the cause of peace in the Pacific.[4] From the evidence which had already been accumulated it was clear that Roosevelt had more than a passing interest in the affairs of this region. This fact notwithstanding, Eden was heard to comment that it was important to distinguish between what was a personal expression of opinion by Roosevelt in private and the extent to which he would be prepared to go on the same issue in public.[5] Judged by the very considerable lengths to which Eden was prepared to go himself in pursuit of American action over the next few months, it is ironic that he was to be the person responsible on this occasion for introducing a moderate, precautionary note into the proceedings of the conference.

Despite his words of warning about reading too much into what the President had said, Eden was not unsympathetic to the idea of a regional pact of the type which Lyons had described. If such a plan could be agreed upon, implemented without too much fuss and prove to be successful in regulating affairs in the Pacific and promoting the aims of peace, the pact would dramatically improve Britain's vulnerable strategic position by removing the necessity of gearing its naval strength to the contingency of action in two oceans simultaneously. Apart from anything else, the regional pact had more attractions than the idea proposed by M.J. Savage, the New Zealand Prime Minister, to the effect that there ought to be a Commonwealth foreign and defence policy.[6] While there was a value in exhorting the member nations to sink or swim together, the proposal was likely to offend those dominions who jealously guarded their right to decide their own policy and who would not, therefore, be willing to give up their independence for the sake of establishing a common front with Britain. Even if this problem could be overcome, the effectiveness of the common policy would ultimately and predominantly rest upon the strength of the Royal Navy which would be required to support it.

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[4] *Ibid.*
[5] *Ibid.*
[6] E(P.D.) (37) Sixth Mtg., 25 May 1937, Cab 32/128.

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When Sir Samuel Hoare, the First Lord of the Admiralty, addressed the seventh meeting of the principal delegates on 26 May, he reminded them of Sir Archdale Parkhill's statement that the backbone of the defence of the Commonwealth was essentially naval.[7] Hoare recalled that in recent months doubts had been publicly expressed as to Britain's ability, in the face of its European commitments, to despatch a fleet to the Far East, if Japan decided to embark upon hostilities against its possessions and interests in the area. Outlining the consequences for the dominions should the British fleet not be on hand to control any southward offensive launched by the Japanese Navy, the First Lord confirmed the fact that the government remained convinced that the existence of the Commonwealth rested ultimately on the ability of the Admiralty to send the fleet to the Far East if the need arose.[8] He added, however, that whether the British Government could put its intentions into practice or not, would depend to some extent upon the capital ship situation, as this was seen as being the ultimate factor in naval strength.

> At the present moment we are satisfied that our naval strength would allow us to despatch an adequate fleet to the Far East whilst retaining sufficient strength in Home Waters to cover our European commitments. Looking ahead we appreciate that there will be a period, from the Spring of 1938 to the Summer of 1939, when we could only retain forces in Home Waters barely adequate to meet the naval forces of Germany and must rely on being assisted by the French Navy. We could still send to the Far East a Fleet, but it would be, from a purely material point of view, slightly inferior to the full Japanese naval strength. By the adoption of a defensive policy, and, relying on the superior fighting qualities of the British race, this Fleet should achieve its object of assuring the Dominions from serious aggression.[9]

For the short term at least, therefore, Hoare had reaffirmed the commitment to sending a fleet out east. His plan to keep the dominions guessing as to British policy in the future was only operative in the longer term. He estimated that after 1940 the despatch of a fleet to the Far East would be a hazardous undertaking, unless the British battleship strength was increased above fifteen ships. At the same time the problem of maintaining the necessary standard of naval strength beyond 1940 would call for effort and expenditure of unpre-

[7] E(P.D.) (37) Seventh Mtg., 26 May 1937, Cab 32/128.
[8] *Ibid.*
[9] *Ibid.*

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cedented magnitude.[10] He also intimated that the colossal burden of naval rearmament was too much for Britain to carry alone and went on to call for a dominion contribution, such as providing the money for one capital ship.[11] Though making it obvious he thought the safety of the Commonwealth would depend on increased naval support from the dominions, Hoare significantly did not mention the possibility of gaining any assistance from the United States.[12]

Chamberlain was not so reticent. In his last major speech as Chancellor, he informed the conference on 27 May that Anglo-American relations were moving forward in a positive way. In his opinion, a far greater opportunity existed for drawing the Americans into sympathetic cooperation with the British at this time than had been the case at any stage during his lifetime.[13] He felt that if the U.S. Government was persuaded to draw nearer to the countries of the Commonwealth the arrangement would have the additional advantage of imposing a steadying influence as well as a deterrent effect upon the policies of the totalitarian states of Europe.[14] He reverted to this theme again on 2 June, expressing the forlorn hope that the United States would not recoil from the Pacific non-aggression pact as it habitually did from European entanglements.[15] Hull's message of 1 June demonstrated perfectly that it did not seem to matter which theatre of operations was being discussed, the traditional American policy of independence remained the same.[16]

At the same meeting on 2 June, the new British Prime Minister spoke of his fear that despite an encouraging tendency to become less aggressive, Japan still possessed the ability to use a troubled situation in Europe to take steps to Britain's disadvantage in the Far East. He remarked that as things stood at the moment the British would be quite unable to counter such a step and that it was impossible to say where things would stop.[17] This disclosure of Britain's current inability to defend its possessions in two oceans simultaneously contrasted sharply with the reassuring statement given to the conference on this matter by Hoare only a week before. As Chamberlain was not

[10] *Ibid.*

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.* Hoare relinquished his post at the Admiralty on 28 May 1937 when Chamberlain asked him to become Home Secretary. Alfred Duff Cooper was appointed the new First Lord. He had formerly been at the War Office.

[13] E(P.D.) (37) Eighth Mtg., 27 May 1937, Cab 32/128.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] E(P.D.) (37) Eleventh Mtg., 2 June 1937, Cab 32/128.

[16] Lindsay to Eden, 1 June 1937, No. 492, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.

[17] E(P.D.) (37) Eleventh Mtg., 2 June 1937, Cab 32/128.

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in the habit of saying things he did not mean, one can only assume he was tàking deliberate steps to correct the impression which Hoare had previously given of Britain's capacity and willingness to defend its Pacific dominions in the short term.[18]

Chamberlain's point was endorsed by the Chiefs of Staff who had prepared the latest Far East Appreciation, a copy of which had been passed to the Australian, New Zealand and Indian representatives at the conference. In paragraph 112 of their report, the C.O.S. pointed out that if war broke out with Japan when Britain, allied with France, was already at war with Germany, the fleet that could be sent would only be decided in the light of conditions at the time.

> We cannot accurately forecast the delay which might occur before we could despatch a fleet to the Far East, since it must depend on the naval and political situation at the time. If Japan undertakes deliberate operations against Singapore, unless we have been able to reinforce the garrison and to raise the reserve supplies beyond 60 days, a situation may occur in which we shall have to risk seriously prejudicing our naval operations against Germany in order to despatch a fleet to the Far East in time to relieve Singapore.[19]

Frank though this admission was, it stopped short of saying that the Far Eastern commitment was strategically inadvisable under certain circumstances. It did not question the need to send the fleet to Singapore, but merely raised the issue of its strength, i.e., how many capital ships, aircraft carriers, cruisers, destroyers and submarines would be making the six-week journey from their home bases.[20] By deliberately omitting any estimate of the likely size of the force, the Chiefs succeeded admirably in their task of making the dominions guess as to what the outcome might be. Whatever the composition of the fleet to be based at Singapore in an emergency, it was designed to perform a defensive role with the hope of defeating the Japanese eventually by the exercise of economic pressure. Assuming the United States would remain neutral, and because of the difficulties and dangers of conducting a war in the Far East, the C.O.S. recommended that no effort should be spared by Britain to re-establish good relations with Japan so as to avoid or lessen the chances of a war between them.[21]

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[18]E(P.D.) (37) Seventh Mtg., 26 May 1937, Cab 32/128.

[19]COS 596, "Far East Appreciation 1937", 14 June 1937, also circulated as DP(P)5, para. 112, Cab 16/182.

[20]Neidpath, *op. cit.*, pp. 88–89.

[21]DP(P)5, paras. 128–29, Cab 16/182.

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TABLE 4
STRENGTHS OF FLEETS IN JUNE 1937 AND AT THE END OF 1939

Class of Ship	British Empire		France		Germany		Japan		Italy		Russia	
	1937	1939	1937	1939	1937	1939	1937	1939	1937	1939	1937	1939
Battleships	12	12	9	7	—	2	9	9	4	5	3	3
Battle-cruisers	3	3	—	2	—	2	—	—	—	—	—	—
Armoured Ships	—	—	—	—	3	3	—	—	—	—	—	—
Aircraft Carriers	5	8	1	1	—	2	5	7	—	—	—	—
8-in Cruisers	15	15	7	7	—	3	12	12	7	7	—	3
6-in Cruisers	35	60	10	13	6	8	23	25	15	16	5	3
Contre-Torpilleurs	—	—	30	36	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Large Destroyers	146	190	26	40	12	28	76	95	46	51	18	17
Small Destroyers	14	10	10	19	12	12	23	30	60	47	39	60
Submarines	52	62	80	88	36	70	57	66	84	83	111	160

NAVAL STRENGTHS: The C.O.S. felt able to forecast naval strengths up to 1940 with some confidence. Beyond that date strengths would be governed by foreign building programmes which had not yet been disclosed. The above table shows the naval strengths of Great Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia in 1937 and as forecast at the end of 1939.

Notes on 1939 figures:

1. Table excludes pre-*Dreadnoughts* and pre-war cruisers.
2. Table assumes normal building and scrapping programmes.
3. 36 German submarines are of 250 tons. About 60 Russian submarines are of 150 tons.
4. 1 British aircraft carrier and 2 British 8-in cruisers will be undergoing long refits.
5. Table includes ships being built in 1939 that are within 8 weeks of completion.
6. The second German battleship will probably not be available until the spring of 1940.

Source: Far East Appreciation, para. 315, DP(P)5, Cab 16/183A.

In fact, the figure for Japan's battleship fleet in 1939 was incorrect. The figure should be 10. This arose because the *Hiei*, which had been demilitarized under the terms of the Washington Treaty, was reconverted from being a training ship into that of a battleship and modernized during the 1937–1939 period.

Marder, *op. cit.*, pp. 15, 18–19.

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In both the Review of Imperial Defence and the Far East Appreciation a black and sobering picture had been drawn of the difficulties facing Britain in defending its Pacific dominions from the threat of a Japanese attack. A proposal such as the regional non-aggression pact, therefore, had much to recommend it providing the United States, Russia, China and Japan agreed to become members. But given the fact that the Japanese thought that negotiations for such a pact were premature, it was not surprising that the Technical Committee, set up by the Imperial Conference to consider the scheme, reported pessimistically on the difficulties of arranging it.[22]

While Eden felt able to reassure the delegates on 8 June that the trend towards an improvement in the Far East and a relaxation of tension in the Pacific was being helped by recent Japanese diplomacy, the reaction of the government in Tokyo to the idea of a pact argued forcibly against placing too much optimism in its gestures.[23] Welcome though any improvement would be to the dominions, their concern about the apparent contradictions in British policy towards dealing with the problems of the Far East had increased.[24] Admittedly, the British had agreed to send out a fleet to Singapore at the earliest possible moment after the outbreak of hostilities against Japan. But the guarantee of naval reinforcement given by them was not unconditional, as Chamberlain had implied, and they appeared to reserve the right, if embarrassed by war or threat of it in Europe, to act according to the requirements of the situation. What this would mean for the dominions, of course, was obscure and deliberately so.

Although the Imperial Conference may have been successful in developing the spirit of kinship, as Malcolm MacDonald suggested in Cabinet it did, the results, particularly in the fields of naval and foreign policy, were less outstanding.[25] What fresh initiatives had been made in an attempt to devise an effective safeguard for the Pacific dominions proved ultimately to be unsuccessful; the Pacific pact came to nothing, ruined by suspicion and unwillingness of the powers to cooperate; the more amiable attitude of the Japanese was soon to be the subject of radical change; and despite earlier statements to the contrary, the Americans seemed just as far away from active assistance in the Far East as they had been for several years.

[22] E(37)33, "Report of Technical Committee", referred to by Eden at E(P.D.) (37) Fifteenth Mtg., 8 June 1937, Cab 32/128.

[23] E(P.D.)(37) Fifteenth Mtg., 8 June 1937, Cab 32/128.

[24] McGibbon, *op. cit.*, pp. 282–96.

[25] Cab. Mtg., Cab 24(37), 16 June 1937, Cab 23/88.

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All of this meant that unless some alternative could be found, Britain would remain solely responsible for defending the Pacific dominions, with a navy shorn of at least three capital ships for approximately fifteen months and in a situation where it was possible it could be simultaneously embarrassed by action or the threat of it in home waters, the Mediterranean and the Far East by Germany, Italy and Japan.

Despite the discouraging signs of American unwillingness to cooperate with Britain in the Far East, Eden was not disposed to rule out the possibility completely. His reluctance to accept Hull's thesis as being the final word on U.S. foreign policy for the foreseeable future was not an attitude born merely of a stubborn optimism. He was much more concerned with the strategic and military aspects of Anglo-American relations and was alive to the great advantages which could be gained from closer ties between London and Washington. It made good sense for him to try and convince the Americans that the interests of world peace demanded an active as opposed to passive or quiescent role for them in foreign affairs. If only the Roosevelt administration would agree to help in policing the western Pacific in time of trouble, the British naval position in the Far East would be greatly enhanced. Eden strove to gain this type of agreement for the rest of the year without any marked success. In a sense he had nothing to lose by trying to persuade the U.S. Government to align itself more closely with the western democracies in framing its foreign policy. If these efforts came to naught little would be lost, since Britain would still be responsible for looking after its own interests throughout the world. Whereas an acceptance by the Roosevelt administration of the need to assist other nations in maintaining the *status quo* in the Far Eastern region, whether by naval policing methods or by some other means, could only improve Britain's already rather embattled position in world affairs. Anything which would lead to a reduction in the naval force that might have to be sent to the Far East in time of emergency would be welcome given the existing state of Britain's relations with Germany and Italy. Although an American commitment to this type of assistance appeared to be out of the question at least in the immediate future, it did not necessarily mean that their policy would remain unchanged in the years ahead. Active U.S. involvement overseas, while unlikely, could not be ruled out as being impossible in the long term, particularly if the Japanese became more threatening and began interfering with American interests in the region. Eden's dogged refusal to be dissuaded from achieving an Anglo-American accord on the Far East

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was not, therefore, totally unexpected. It is my contention that such an accord would have been part of a comprehensive plan involving the French to improve the security of the democracies, as well as being a strong counterpoise to the activities of the Germans, Italians and Japanese. But whatever grand strategy Eden may have been thinking of in the distant future, the tenor of Hull's remarks to Ambassador Lindsay about American foreign policy indicated that the most the British Foreign Secretary could reasonably expect to achieve in the short term was an economic agreement and even that still needed a good deal of negotiating.[26]

TABLE 5
THE STRENGTH OF THE U.S. FLEET AT 30 JUNE 1937

	Total Built		Under Age As of 1/1/1937		Building or Appropriated for	
	No.	Tons	No.	Tons	No.	Tons
Capital Ships	15	464,300	15	464,300	2	70,000
Aircraft Carriers	3	80,500	3	80,500	3	54,500
Cruisers a)	17	161,200	17	161,200	1	10,000
b)	10	70,500	10	70,500	9	90,000
Destroyers	197	232,240	39	53,780	55	86,380
Submarines	83	74,590	29	38,950	17	24,715
Total	325	1,083,330	113	869,230	87	335,450

Source: Annual Report on the United States for 1937, para. 281, FO 371/21544.

By mid-June Eden's hopes for closer Anglo-American relations were to receive a further setback when his projected visit to the United States was deferred in favour of a presidential invitation to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.[27] Once again the meddling of

[26]Minutes by Holman, Troutbeck, Orde, et al., on despatch from Lindsay to Eden, 1 June 1937, No. 492, A4165/228/45, FO 371/20660.

[27]For further details on the visit of Davis and the invitation controversy see Prem 1/261 and A3417/228/45, A4370/228/45 & A4411/228/45, FO 371/20660; A4412/228/45, A4880/228/45, FO 371/20661; A5473/228/45, FO 371/20662. C.A. MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement, 1936–1939* (London, 1981), pp. 22–31. R. Ovendale, *'Appeasement' and the English Speaking World: Britain, the United States, the Dominions and the Policy of 'Appeasement', 1937–1939* (Cardiff, 1975), pp. 15–19.

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Norman Davis had been responsible for frustrating the arrangements which he himself had promised to set up in the first instance. The idea that Eden should visit the United States had first been mooted during a conversation he had had with Norman Davis in the spring of 1937.[28] The Foreign Secretary, though anxious to avoid giving the impression of being a gatecrasher, was fully attuned to the need to put Britain's case directly and more effectively to the Roosevelt administration, Congress and American public opinion at large. This could be done if he received an official invitation from, say, the U.S. Secretary of State to pay a courtesy visit to Washington and perhaps a few selected centres elsewhere in the country. No such invitation was forthcoming. It is debatable, of course, whether his visit could have done much to have altered the flood tide of American isolationism, but he was never given the chance to succeed. Instead Norman Davis suggested to the President that the offer of a visit should first be made to the Prime Minister.[29] This invitation managed to embarrass Anglo-American relations at a sensitive time, suggest further inconsistency and provide more ammunition for those within the British Government who regarded the United States with disfavour. If Davis could be accused of distortion and misrepresentation, as Ambassador Bingham was prepared to allege, Neville Chamberlain's chilling reply left the President in no doubt what the Prime Minister thought of the invitation.[30]

Writing on 8 July, Chamberlain asked for a postponement of the visit because he did not think the time would be ripe for such a meeting. He set out his principal objection in unmistakable terms.

> Nothing would be more disastrous than that a conference which would inevitably attract the utmost publicity should fail to produce commensurate results and I do not see at the present moment how we could expect to achieve the purpose we have in view.[31]

Although he felt justified in rejecting the opportunity of meeting Roosevelt, in doing so the Prime Minister undoubtedly tossed aside an opportunity to explain British policy and aspirations personally and seek the establishment of a much improved basis for Anglo-American relations. This seems to me to be a rather unfortunate, if characteristic, error of Chamberlain's. No matter how strong and

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[28] *Ibid.*
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] N. Chamberlain to N. Davis, 8 July 1937, Prem 1/261.

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valid his objections may have been, by delivering such an unenthusiastic answer and by deferring action on the invitation, the Prime Minister could not fail to have given a poor impression of the current state of Anglo-American relations. As it appeared unlikely that he would be going on a visit to the United States, unless some dramatic event took place which would improve the chances of a successful conclusion to the proposed talks, it might have been preferable for him to have suggested that Eden, or perhaps a minor government figure, might go to the United States as Runciman had done earlier in the year to discuss current problems.[32]

While Chamberlain's unresponsive answer seems to me to have been both extremely unhelpful and regrettable, the Admiralty was reaching a similarly unimaginative decision over the question of establishing an exchange of military information with the U.S. Navy Department. Hindered as it was by a decision taken in conjunction with the Foreign Office in the previous year affecting its rights to pass on this type of technical information, the Admiralty, cautious as always, refrained from taking any responsibility for setting that decision aside.[33] This was particularly unfortunate in the light of what Ambassador Lindsay had to say on the subject in a most important despatch which he had sent to Eden on 22 March 1937.

As one of the most gifted and perceptive observers of the American scene, Lindsay had written that as war between the United States and Britain was all but inconceivable, an exchange of military secrets had much to recommend it, especially as the Americans could be trusted to keep the information confidential and not pass it on to any third party.

> In these circumstances it seems to me that for us a nice balancing of information given against information received is entirely unimportant. What we want is the good will of the American General Staff just as much as their information. That good will can be fostered by exchanges and discussions if they are not overdone. It would probably be of crucial importance if we were at war.[34]

Despite support for these views from the Foreign Office, who had informed the Admiralty Board of its wish to respond positively to any

[32]For further details on Roosevelt's role in this affair see F.D.R. Library, Hyde Park, New York (President F.D. Roosevelt's Papers), PSF Box 46.

[33]Minute by J.A.G. Troup (Director of Naval Intelligence), 9 June 1937, MO3421/37, Adm 116/4302. He cited M02649/36 as the minute covering this decision.

[34]Lindsay to Eden, 22 Mar. 1937, No. 247, A2378/38/45, FO 371/20651.

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advances made by the U.S. authorities in the future, the Admiralty had done comparatively little to promote and encourage a special type of naval collaboration between London and Washington. In its defence, the Admiralty had been placed in an extremely difficult situation. If it granted certain privileges to the Americans how could it refuse similar requests from other friendly countries? If potential embarrassment was not sufficient to overturn the 1936 decision on what could and what could not be exchanged, there were always the terms of the London Naval Treaty to restrict further the Admiralty's freedom of manoeuvre. It had been hoped that final ratification of the treaty would have been completed by 1 July 1937, in which case a fuller exchange of information, provided for under Article 12, would have come into force. Until such an event occurred, however, the Admiralty was restricted from making any arrangement specifically directed against a third power. This ruled out the possibility of exchanging information and the latest intelligence reports on Japanese naval construction, one of the subjects in which the Americans were most interested.[35]

Captain Russell Willson, the U.S. Naval Attaché, was well aware of the Admiralty's dilemma, but he was not the sort of person to let such matters bother him for long. There was an irrepressibility about the man. This meant that despite rebuffs he would always bounce back into the picture at some later date, optimistic that a new approach would succeed where previous attempts had failed.

Willson arranged to meet J.A.G. Troup, the Admiralty's Director of Naval Intelligence, on 4 June in order to discuss the need for closer cooperation between the two navies. It soon became clear from this meeting that Willson was seeking to obtain preferential treatment for the Navy Department from the Admiralty.[36] Troup was evidently not averse to such a condition, for he could see as well as anyone that it might prove to be valuable in the future. Despite his desire to maintain and foster good relations with the U.S. Navy Department, he could not take the decision on his own without reference to the Board of the Admiralty. As often happens in these situations, an issue becomes more complicated and involved the further it is passed up the line. In the end and unless one is extremely careful, a type of diplomatic inertia wins out at the expense of a more enlightened, if

[35]Minute by Capt. T.S.V. Phillips (Director of Plans), 29 June 1937, MO3421/37, Adm 116/4302.

[36]Note on conversation with Captain Willson (U.S. Naval Attaché), 4 June 1937 by J.A.G. Troup and minute by Lawson of M. Branch, 23 June 1937, MO3421/37, Adm 116/4302.

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slightly more risky decision. Troup was a senior official in the Admiralty, he knew what was likely to happen and though responsive to Willson's ideas he could not and dare not commit himself either way.

Whatever one felt about establishing a good rapport with the Americans, a practical and close liaison was still some way from being achieved. Indeed it seemed that an improvement in any significant aspect of Anglo-American relations could only be achieved by a mutual willingness to dismantle and remove some of the obstacles which were strewn in the way of a closer understanding between the two powers. Despite the encouraging signs of progress being made in developing economic ties with one another, relations between Britain and the United States on improving naval cooperation and forming a closer alignment on foreign policy issues looked destined to mark time or crawl forward at a much slower rate. It would take a major event to bring about any speedier transformation, but this was not long in coming.

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China before the July 7th Incident

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3
Beyond the Marco Polo Bridge

Barely three weeks after the Imperial Conference had ended a new phase in the Far Eastern crisis began. During the night of 7 July shooting broke out between Chinese and Japanese troops drawn up along the Yungting Ho River bank near the Marco Polo Bridge at Lukouchiao outside Peking.[1] Each side blamed the other for causing the dispute, which was to have far more profound implications than those traditionally associated with a small border skirmish. What has since become known as the July 7th Incident was to lead to the outbreak of an undeclared war between China and Japan and to the extension and then consolidation of the Japanese military position in China. By their actions in striving to gain military, economic and political domination over China, the Japanese were destined to pose a considerable threat to western hopes for an overall balance of power in the Far East.[2]

The British reacted to the first news of the outbreak of hostilities in China by making representations to the Japanese Government in Tokyo and Eden saw Ambassador Yoshida in London in the forlorn hope that the incident might yet subside without developing into a major international crisis.[3] Within a few days, however, it had become evident that the situation in north-eastern China was critical. Since the British regarded an unchecked Japanese expansion in the Far East as unthinkable, a plan for bringing about a return to the *status quo ante* had to be devised. Apart from the fact that any plan designed to limit Japanese involvement in China was bound to carry an element of risk for those making the proposal, its success or failure would probably depend ultimately upon the degree of persuasion or force that could be exerted by those nations opposed to the Japanese invasion.

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[1]Library of Congress, (Admiral Yarnell's Papers), Box 13, p. 8. D. Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933–1938* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), pp. 276–83. D. Wilson, *When Tigers Fight* (London, 1982), pp. 14–29.

[2]Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1937*, vol. iii, H. Johnson to Sec. of State (C. Hull), 17 Aug. 1937, No. 1377 (Washington, 1954), pp. 432–37. All further references to these documents will be treated in the following manner, e.g., *FRUS 1937, iii*, etc.

[3]Avon, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 531. For the Foreign Office view of Mr. Yoshida see F570/28/23, FO 371/21029, C.W. Orde described him as an accomplished blunderer and Vansittart wrote witheringly that he was plainly no good and should not be taken seriously.

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Despite his previous record of support for the League of Nations, Eden chose on this occasion to approach the United States for direct assistance. While he did not abandon the League machinery entirely, he was well aware of its critical shortcomings. The past failures and ineffectiveness of the League had lowered its prestige in the eyes of the world and made states less inclined to use it for the resolution of contentious international disputes.Rather than place much, if any, reliance upon the League members to bring about a restoration of the *status quo ante* in China and not wishing to take independent action, if this could be avoided, Eden regarded a working relationship with the Americans as being vital to his plans.[4] It is not difficult to see why he did so. The United States had large interests in the Far East and was also Japan's most important trading partner. Consequently, if any country could influence the Japanese to moderate their policies, the United States was the most likely of all to succeed. As potentially the most powerful military and industrial nation in the world, the United States could not be lightly dismissed or treated with impunity by the Japanese. Eden's choice, therefore, was logical. Its chief drawback and major weakness lay in the need to persuade the Americans to do as he wished. This was to prove far more difficult than even he might have imagined.

He began by cabling Ambassador Lindsay asking for the views of the Roosevelt administration on the new situation in China and whether it was considering taking any action in the crisis, such as the possibility of a joint *démarche* with Britain.[5] Lindsay discovered that the State Department had no wish to implement this type of co-operation. Apart from the criticism it could expect from the isolationists, joint action was likely to increase the possibility of the United States becoming entangled in a formal relationship with the British, which could have grave repercussions for its foreign policy, if conditions deteriorated in the Far East. As this was contrary to Hull's conception of traditional American policy, as restated in a speech on 16 July, Eden's proposal was hardly likely to succeed.[6] He remained undeterred by Hull's opposition to a joint undertaking with Britain, however, and cabled Lindsay on 20 July outlining a proposal

[4]Avon, *op. cit.*, pp. 546, 614–15.

[5]Eden to Lindsay, 12 July 1937, No. 224, FO 436/1.

[6]Hull's statement on foreign policy included the classic definition of where the United States stood on international questions. "We avoid entering into alliances or entangling commitments, but we believe in cooperative efforts by peaceful and practicable means in support of principles hereinbefore stated". Lindsay to Foreign Office, 17 July 1937, No. 189(R), A5091/448/45, FO 371/20666.

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for bilateral mediation in the Sino-Japanese dispute.[7] His plan envisaged an approach being made to both the Chinese and Japanese Governments asking for all further movement of their troops to be suspended and for them to await Anglo-American proposals designed to end the existing deadlock.

His confidence in a joint initiative was certainly boosted by a conversation he had had with Ambassador Bingham; during which the U.S. Ambassador had gone so far as to raise the prospect of a joint trade embargo against Japan, with the object of bringing about a complete cessation of trade with it. He had told the Foreign Secretary that unless something was done, trade with China would end and the Japanese would take over both British and American interests in the Far East. It was for this reason that Bingham had suggested that here was an issue on which the United States could provide a greater measure of cooperation than would be possible in Europe.[8]

Lindsay's reply quickly disabused Eden of the likelihood of such a possibility occurring in the near future. On the contrary, while agreeing with the desirability for cooperation, the State Department's contention was that efforts to avert further hostilities should be conducted on parallel rather than on joint lines.[9] This was not altogether unwelcome news for Chamberlain. While sharing the opinion that joint representations were likely to prove more effective than individual protests in halting the Japanese invasion of China, his main concern was that a major war should not result from the Sino-Japanese conflict. It was for this reason that he hoped Ambassador Bingham's proposal would go no further.

> It smacks very much of sanctions: it will certainly strongly antagonise Japan and might so damage our relations with them as to cost us millions in defensive measures in the Far East. Our proposal is not open to these objections.[10]

As yet, the Foreign Secretary had not ventured to propose a strategic commitment to bolster western representations in the Far East. But on the same day that the British Cabinet met and discussed the worsening situation in China, Eden despatched a further enquiry to Lindsay, in which he asked whether the Americans would now

[7] Eden to Lindsay, 20 July 1937, No. 239, FO 436/1.

[8] University of Birmingham, (Avon Papers), Eden to Lindsay, 21 July 1937, US/37/17.

[9] Lindsay to Eden, 21 July 1937, No. 196, FO 436/1. For details of Hull's objections to Eden's plan see C. Hull, *Memoirs*, vol. *i* (London, 1948), p. 538.

[10] Avon Papers, Minute by N. Chamberlain, 21 July 1937, FE/37/2; Cab. Mtg., Cab 32(37), 28 July 1937, Cab 23/89.

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agree that the time had come for making joint rather than parallel representations. This latest call for cooperation also found little favour with the State Department who referred it back to the Foreign Office for clarification.[11] This meant, in effect, that it suffered a fate similar to those of the previous two appeals which Eden had already submitted to the Americans.

By this stage the U.S. Government had come to regard recent British policy in China in a rather poor light. Ambassador Grew in Tokyo was one of the sternest critics, referring to attempts by the British to deal with the Japanese as being both naive and inept.[12] As the Americans were evidently not prepared to entertain the possibility of a joint venture with the British in the Far East, the question of closer cooperation on these matters was shelved for the time being.

Although the Foreign Office had continually drawn a blank in its wish to concert joint action with the State Department, the Admiralty Board now took up the running. It addressed a letter to the Foreign Office warmly endorsing a proposal from Admiral Sir Lewis Bayly recommending that the British Government should offer the small U.S. naval squadron, currently on duty in the Mediterranean, the use of Gibraltar and Malta as bases for its force.[13] In addition, the Board suggested that the free use of dockyard facilities in both places should be extended to the one cruiser and two destroyers making up the American contingent. According to its letter, the Board was well disposed to Bayly's idea because of the impact Anglo-American naval cooperation was likely to have on world opinion.[14] After soft-pedalling on the means to achieve this goal in the past, the Admiralty's action on this issue was a significant pointer to a new phase in its relations with the U.S. Navy Department. Since neither the Foreign nor the Colonial Office had any particular objection to the request, Cadogan was able to write to Mallet, the Counsellor at the British Embassy in Washington, confirming the decision and asking him to convey the information to the U.S. Government.[15]

Captain T.S.V. Phillips, the Director of Plans at the Admiralty, followed up this initial approach with a further suggestion for improving Anglo-American naval relations. In a secret message to A.

[11] *FRUS 1937*, vol. *iii*, Hull to Bingham, 29 July 1937, 793.94/9043, pp. 289–90.

[12] W.H. Heinrichs, jnr., *American Ambassador* (Boston, 1966), p. 243.

[13] S.H. Phillips to Under Secretary of State, Foreign Office, 26 July 1937, M3811/37, A5298/228/45, FO 371/20662.

[14] *Ibid.*

[15] Cadogan to Mallet, 10 Sept. 1937, No. 362, A6519/228/45, FO 371/20662.

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Holman of the American Department of the Foreign Office, Phillips suggested that it would be advantageous to both powers if information on Japanese naval construction was exchanged between the British and United States Governments.[16] Holman thought the idea made good sense and could indeed be extremely useful, provided secrecy was maintained at the highest level. He suggested, therefore, that the Admiralty should sound out the U.S. Naval Attaché in London and ask him to ascertain the views of the Navy Department. If it approved in principle, Holman was in favour of setting up the system of exchange on a purely informal basis without any written agreement.[17] Vansittart was enthusiastic about the scheme, as his minute "let us so proceed at once" implies.[18] The Admiralty took up Holman's suggestions and the system was adopted in due course. Within eight days a proposal had been made, considered and approved; such speed in decision making was unusual and reflected the growing anxiety on the part of the British about the threatening situation in the Far East and what the future might hold in store for them if they had no friends upon whom they could rely in an emergency.

Within a few days the extent of the problem facing the British in Asia was shown in sharp relief with the beginning of a fresh crisis in China. After a series of sweeping victories, the Japanese Army stood at the gates of the international city of Shanghai, where both the British and the Americans had considerable investments. On 18 August, Eden, fearing what might happen if the Japanese began interfering with the rights of other nations, resolved to try and do something about it. He decided upon a further approach to the Americans. On this occasion it would take the form of asking for their support for a proposal to neutralise Shanghai, by calling upon the two belligerents to withdraw their forces from the city.[19]

Hull rejected this plan on the grounds that it was impracticable and impossible to enforce against an unwilling party to the conflict. He

[16] T.S.V. Phillips to A. Holman, 6 Aug. 1937, PD/NID.0716/37, A5649/6/45, FO 371/20649.

[17] Minute by Holman, 11 Aug. 1937; Holman to Phillips, 14 Aug. 1937, A5649/6/45, FO 371/20649.

[18] Minute by Vansittart, 12 Aug. 1937, A5649/6/45, FO 371/20649.

[19] B.A. Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937–1939* (Stanford, 1973), pp. 34–38. Harold Ickes records that the Sino-Japanese dispute and particularly the crisis at Shanghai had been discussed at a Cabinet meeting in Washington on 13 August. After discovering that 1,050 American marines were nearest the point of danger, President Roosevelt wanted to know why they were there instead of the British. He was told the British were smart! H.L. Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold L. Ickes*, vol. ii, *The Inside Struggle 1936–1939* (London, 1955), pp. 192–93.

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pointed out in his reply that the Japanese had reacted unfavourably to the suggestion and were not interested in participating in such a withdrawal.[20] What seemed such a ready acceptance of a *fait accompli* was hardly the answer the British wished to receive. It also implied that unless the Japanese were willing to make a voluntary withdrawal, the Americans were certainly not prepared to force them to do so. Should this be the case and if non-confrontation with the Japanese was going to remain a keystone of American policy in the Far East, this would have serious repercussions for the safeguarding of Britain's interests and for its overall strategic policy in this area.

Hull was well aware of the fact that the strength of isolationism in both Congress and country would almost certainly preclude the forging of any Far Eastern pact with Britain. He seized the opportunity, therefore, to remind the British Government that joint action was contrary to the interests and independence of the United States and warned it not to make constant demands for cooperation which his government would be unable to fulfil. Actually, this firm rebuke, for it was nothing less, merely confirmed what the British already knew about American attitudes on these matters.

Admiral Leahy, the United States Chief of Naval Operations, did not subscribe to this particular thesis. Writing of the situation in China, he stated:

> If it were possible to obtain an equitable agreement with Great Britain to share the effort and the expense, this appears to be a wonderful opportunity to force Japan to observe Treaty agreements and to depart from the mainland of Asia, which would insure western trade supremacy in the Orient for another century.[21]

Apart from the possibility of a different interpretation of the term "equitable agreement", this was basically the position adopted by Eden in dealing with this problem. Leahy never spelt out quite what he meant by this phrase, but had his view prevailed in American policy an accommodation of sorts with the British would probably have been forthcoming. And he was by no means alone in believing that a tougher course could be pursued in the Far East. Admiral Yarnell, Commander of the American Asiatic Fleet, though not

[20]*FRUS 1937*, vol. *iii*, Aide-Mémoire, British Embassy, Washington, D.C., to Dept. of State, 18 Aug. 1937, 793.94/9756, pp. 444–45; Dept. of State to British Embassy, Washington, D.C., 19 Aug. 1937, 793.94/9756, pp. 449–50.

[21]Library of Congress, (Admiral W.D. Leahy's Papers and Diary), Diary entry for 24 Aug. 1937, p. 104.

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wanting war with the Japanese, still believed that some action was necessary to redress the balance of advantage in the Pacific. He urged the sending of four cruisers to supplement his existing naval force off the Chinese coast.[22] He did so ostensibly to facilitate the withdrawal of American civilians from China, should this necessity arise. Clearly, the presence of American warships off the coast of China would exercise an influence upon the Japanese, but the vital question of whether they would restrain or inflame them was impossible to predict. Dr Stanley Hornbeck, the State Department's Far Eastern Advisor, agreed with Leahy and Yarnell that a small detachment of cruisers should be sent; he believed two ought to be sufficient.[23] At a conference of State Department officials, however, this idea was rejected on the basis that it could have an irritating effect on the Japanese.[24]

While the major powers discussed what to do, nothing was in fact done to stop the situation in China from deteriorating still further. An example of just what that meant could clearly be seen in the provocative attack on the British Ambassador to China Sir Hughe Knatchbull-Hugessen. He had been travelling from Nanking to Shanghai on 26 August when his car, though boldly marked with a large Union Jack measuring 30" × 18", was set upon and strafed by Japanese aircraft. Badly wounded, he had been rushed to hospital where it was found that a bullet had fractured his spine.[25] Events

[22]Leahy Diary, entry for 29 Aug. 1937, pp. 106–107. The U.S. Asiatic Fleet consisted of a South China Patrol (comprising 19 destroyers based at Chefoo), a Yangtse River Gunboat Flotilla (of which the U.S.S. *Panay* was one) based at Shanghai, 12 submarines and a few auxiliary craft. Its primary function was to protect American lives, property and commerce in China. Admiral Yarnell also had responsibility for the 4th Regiment, U.S. Marines which was stationed in the International Settlement at Shanghai. S.E. Morison, *History of United States Naval Operations in World War II*, vol. 3, *The Rising Sun in the Pacific 1931–April 1942* (Boston, 1968), pp. 28–29. According to J.H. Herzog, *Closing the Open Door* (Annapolis, Md., 1973), p. 14, the Asiatic Fleet was really only in existence to 'wave the flag' in East Asia, it could not be seen as being a balanced or even an operational fleet. His account of its strength conflicts with that of Morison. Herzog claims it consisted of one heavy cruiser (U.S.S. *Augusta*), the flagship of Admiral Yarnell; approximately 12 destroyers, 6 submarines and 6 specially-built shallow draft river gunboats and auxiliaries.

[23]Leahy Diary, pp. 106–107.

[24]According to the Leahy Diary, Hull was anxious for the Chief of Naval Operations (CNO) to meet the President and discuss the possibility of sending cruisers to the Far East. Leahy admits that by 31 August he was in favour of sending them and that both Hull and Roosevelt were against the idea. Leahy Diary, p. 108.

[25]He managed to survive the ordeal and was invalided out of China. Churchill College, Cambridge, (H. Knatchbull-Hugessen Papers and Diary), Diary 1937, 1/11, Correspondence 2/61–80. Craigie to Eden, 7 Sept. 1937, No. 439, F7655/5727/10, FO 371/21013.

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such as this seemed to demonstrate a want of propriety on the part of the Japanese and did much to convince the Foreign Office that some action ought to be taken to arrest the slide into anarchy in the Far East. Whereas Eden was in favour of withdrawing Craigie from Japan, Chamberlain preferred the less extreme measure of sending the Japanese Government a sharp note about the deliberate wounding of Hugessen.[26] He had no wish to bring Craigie home from Tokyo, because this would seriously reduce the opportunity for contact with Konoye's ministry at a time when the need for peaceful negotiations was of paramount importance. Apart from wishing to avoid doing anything that might worsen Anglo-Japanese relations, Chamberlain's relatively moderate response was dictated to a certain extent by the belief that the Americans were unlikely to take an active role in the Far East even if the situation continued to deteriorate. In a letter to his sister Hilda on 29 August, Chamberlain observed that the Americans still had a long way to go before they could become helpful partners of the British in world affairs.

> I tried to get them to come in on China and Japan but they were too frightened of their own people though I believe if they had been willing to play there was an off chance of stopping hostilities. Now this stupid and outrageous attack has occurred upon our Ambassador and it is to be hoped that the Japs will accept without demur the very reasonable and moderate demands we are making upon them.[27]

Although by this stage it had become obvious that the State Department was not eager to collaborate with the British, the Foreign Office did not show any signs of giving up. A further message was sent to Lindsay on 30 August asking for American cooperation in preventing the Japanese from extending their naval control activities off the coast of China to involve British or U.S. registered vessels.[28] On the following day Victor Mallet raised the issue with Hornbeck at the State Department. Hornbeck wasted little time in suggesting that it was a mistake to do anything which could force the Japanese to become still more bothersome in the region. In addition, he thought

[26]Avon Papers, Eden to Chamberlain, 9 Sept. 1937, FE/37/7.

[27]N. Chamberlain Papers, N. Chamberlain to Hilda Chamberlain, 29 Aug. 1937, NC 18/1/1018. After refusing to admit liability at the outset, the Japanese eventually said they mistook the Ambassador's car for a Chinese military bus or truck. Hirota to Craigie, 21 Sept. 1937, F7973/5727/10, FO 371/21013. The Foreign Office in London found the reply satisfactory. F.O. Memo., 23 Sept. 1937, F7976/5727/10, FO 371/21013.

[28]F.O. to Lindsay, 30 Aug. 1937, F5769/9/10, FO 371/20954. Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 41–42.

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there was a danger that the British might become compromised by responding negatively to the Japanese, especially if the authorities in Tokyo provided a statement about their proposed shipping measures which was unacceptable to the government in London.[29]

In his letter to Orde, at the Foreign Office, Mallet, the Counsellor at the British Embassy in Washington, sought to explain the reasons why a lack of accord existed in Anglo-American relations over Far Eastern matters.

> The real difference between our points of view seems to be that we think that by enquiries and notes and requests for explanations we may be doing something to control the Japanese, more especially if we can get the Americans to act with us. The Americans think that no amount of gestures or even threats are likely to move the Japanese just at present and that even if the Japanese Foreign Office were to be impressed by our efforts it would have no effect upon the military authorities.[30]

He concluded:

> American public opinion is so strongly non-interventionist that the State Department are terrified of being dragged out of their depth or even of wetting the tips of their toes. They don't like joint action for several reasons, one of which I think is that they are afraid of criticism here that they are being dragged along by us.[31]

As expected, the Americans, who had no desire to become involved in any maritime dispute with the Japanese, rejected the British initiative.

Despite his repeated failure to gain endorsement from the State Department for his views on what ought to be done in the Far East, Eden remained convinced of the need to draw closer to the United States. As far as he was concerned, it was impossible to exaggerate the significance of Anglo-American relations to the pursuit of world peace.[32] An experienced minister, Eden could not fail to recognize the constraints under which public policy had to be made in the United States by the Roosevelt administration. In order to defeat the entrenched isolationism, the President and his Cabinet would have to make the electorate aware of the enormity of the task facing the free

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[29]Mallet to Orde, 31 Aug. 1937, F6303/9/10, FO 371/20955.

[30]*Ibid.*

[31]*Ibid.*

[32]For this reason he thought it was vital to meet Hull on the question of arranging an Anglo-American Trade Agreement. Avon Papers, Eden to Baruch, 1 Sept. 1937, US/37/20.

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world, threatened as it was by hostile and potentially dangerous totalitarian regimes.

At dinner with Winston Churchill on 31 August, Eden met an American financier Bernard Baruch. During the course of a conversation they had that evening, the idea was mooted for a joint declaration by the governments of the United Kingdom and United States to the effect that under no circumstances would they resort to war against one another in the future. Eden wrote a memo on his talk with Baruch and passed it to his senior officials in the Foreign Office for their comments.[33] Despite having reservations about Baruch, who was thought to be a rather arrogant and self-opinionated fellow, J.M. Troutbeck felt the scheme had some attractions.

> From the United States point of view it would have the merit of leaving the United States free to keep their whole fleet in the Pacific. From our point of view it would have the merit of showing a common Anglo-American front to the dictator powers, who would doubtless read far more into the agreement than was actually said.[34]

On the whole, however, Eden's enthusiasm for a coordinated strategy with the Americans was not shared by many of his senior advisors in the Foreign Office. They preferred realism to optimism and as such, thought that the pursuit of the Americans on the Far Eastern question had gone far enough. Sir Alexander Cadogan was one of several officials who urged the Foreign Secretary to stop looking wistfully at the United States for signs of a willingness to assist the British in dealing with the Japanese in China.[35] There is little to indicate whether Eden paid much, if any, attention to this advice. He was after all a self confident, intelligent politician, quite capable of framing his own opinions and sticking to them through thick and thin. Strange though it may seem, if anyone was to change and reverse his opinion it was to be Cadogan himself.

Sir Robert Craigie, the British Ambassador to Japan, agreed that the British ought to act independently of the Americans. In a despatch to the Foreign Office on 6 September, he noted:

> . . . I have been struck by the flow of press telegrams originating allegedly in Washington the general burden of which is that while Great Britain is constantly trying to arrange for joint Anglo-

[33]Memo by Eden, 1 Sept. 1937, A6550/228/45, FO 371/20663.

[34]Minute by Troutbeck, 3 Sept. 1937, A6550/228/45, FO 371/20663.

[35]Minutes by Thyne Henderson, 10 Sept. 1937, Ronald, 11 Sept. 1937, Cadogan, 13 Sept. 1937, F6303/9/10, FO 371/20955.

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> American cooperation at Japan's expense, the United States Government are firmly rejecting all such overtures. Impression conveyed is that Japan's real enemy is Great Britain with whom United States is refusing to cooperate except in joint action with which other interested powers are also associated. . . . I cannot help feeling that this turn of affairs is not altogether unwelcome to the United States Government.[36]

Referring to Hull's statement reemphasising the American stand in avoiding joint action with any foreign power in the current Far Eastern situation, Craigie concluded:

> While not underestimating enormous value of cooperation with United States whenever this can be made a reality I venture to think that any further initiative on our part to secure such cooperation will in present circumstances tend to diminish influence which we can exercise here on our own without any corresponding advantage to our relations with United States.[37]

On the same day that Craigie sent his message to London, the Japanese announced they were setting up a blockade against Chinese shipping from Sanhaikwan on the Manchurian border to Swatow in the south.[38] As part of the enforcement procedure, the Japanese reserved the right to verify the identity of all vessels sailing in the disputed area. This latest news was a provocative enough gesture for the British Cabinet to set up a special sub-committee to look into the feasibility of sending two capital ships to the Far East as a reinforcement for the British naval units in the area.[39] The seven man committee, consisting of Hoare, Eden, Malcolm MacDonald, Oliver Stanley, Duff Cooper, Sir Thomas Inskip and the Attorney-General met for the first time on 8 September, when it was agreed to sound out the naval staff on the question of reinforcements.[40]

In the meantime, a further and curious twist to the Anglo-American story had occurred. On 7 September, the Chinese Ambassador to London Mr. Quo Tai-chi called on the Deputy Under Secretary of State at the Foreign Office Sir Alexander Cadogan in order to discuss the situation in China. In his memo of the proceedings, Cadogan wrote:

> Mr Quo Tai-chi added that Nanking had informed him that Mr C.T. Wang, the Chinese Ambassador in Washington, had

[36] Craigie to F.O., 6 Sept. 1937, No. 354, F6169/9/10, FO 371/20955.
[37] *Ibid.*
[38] Cab. Mtg., Cab 34(37), 8 Sept. 1937, Cab 23/89.
[39] *Ibid.*
[40] Minutes of Cabinet Sub-Committee on British Shipping in the Far East, 8 Sept. 1937, Cab 27/634.

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> reported that certain 'influential persons in Congressional circles' had suggested that it might be desirable to hold joint British and American naval manoeuvres in the neighbourhood of Singapore, the Philippines, or Hawaii, but was unable to indicate who these persons were, and I could only express my doubt as to whether they were voicing the sentiments of the U.S. Administration, and also as to the possibility of any demonstration of the kind.[41]

It may have been just an isolated incident, but for all that it was an interesting development. As there was nothing else for him to go on, however, Cadogan was not disposed to take the matter too seriously. He did not need reminding how unpromising the political situation was in Washington, even with an amiable President.

Shortly afterwards, as though to confirm his suspicion that the Roosevelt administration was as far away as ever from active involvement with the British Government in the Far Eastern theatre, a decision was announced in Washington to the effect that no merchant ships belonging to the United States Government would be permitted to carry any war materials to China or Japan, and that other vessels flying the American flag, continuing these activities, would do so at their own peril. Cadogan wasted few words on the reported announcement, apart from describing it as being "a poor performance and a warning — if such were needed — of what to expect from the Americans in the future".[42]

Mallet tried to explain what was going on behind the scenes in Washington. In his opinion, the press was greatly to blame for inhibiting the State Department from cooperating more closely with the British on Far Eastern matters. Strangely enough, he did not think that Hull was unwilling to work with the British at this time.

> I have, indeed, had it from Mr Hull's own mouth that our invitations to cooperate are not embarrassing him. The difference between 1932 and now is that we must not expect any initiative from America at present.[43]

Cadogan did not pretend to be convinced by Mallet's reassuring tone, and minuted caustically that the Secretary of State had made it quite

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[41]Memo by Cadogan, 7 Sept. 1937, F6356/9/10, FO 371/20955.

[42]Minute by Cadogan, 15 Sept. 1937, F6557/130/10, FO 371/20977. Admiral Yarnell was not inclined to take such a back seat. He wrote to Leahy on 12 Sept., bemoaning the fact that little was being done to pull the Japanese up short. As he noted with some feeling, ". . . a few squadrons of our carrier planes would clear these river of Japs in 24 hours." *The Chiefs of Naval Operations*, ed. R.W. Lowe, jnr. (Annapolis, Md., 1980), p. 103.

[43]Mallet to Eden, 15 Sept. 1937, No. 846, A6896/448/45, FO 371/20667.

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clear in the past that repeated British requests for joint action had embarrassed him.[44] C.W. Orde, of the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, came to the defence of Hull and tried to put the record straight.

> Mr Hull expressed embarrassment at being asked to cooperate in our final attempt to get the Japanese and Chinese forces moved from Shanghai leaving Japanese nationals to be protected by third parties, a responsibility which we agreed to undertake if other Powers would join us. Evidently the U.S. Government disliked such responsibility, and they evaded our invitation on specious grounds. In doing so they conveyed that they didn't like being faced with a decision taken by us . . . and then asked to cooperate. "In general" and "in suitable cases" they approve of cooperation, but for the most part prefer parallel action ("each in his own way") to joint action. We can therefore when there is time for prior consultation ask for cooperation without offence, but when immediate action is necessary we have to be careful how we suggest cooperation.[45]

A chance to test American policy in the Far East came with the arrival in London of the U.S. Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles. As Eden and Vansittart were both out of the country attending the Nyon Conference, it was left to Cadogan to see one of the most important figures in the Roosevelt administration. They met on 17 September and had what proved to be a rather unsatisfactory discussion on world problems. It was apparent from the desultory conversation that Welles had nothing specific to report or to advance and the interview, which consisted mainly of generalities, provided no clue as to what the Americans were trying to do in China, or even what they could be approached upon.[46]

Within five days of their talk, a watershed in both the Far Eastern crisis and the handling of it by the western powers had arisen, following the Japanese bombing of Nanking on 22 September. Apart from the strategic objectives which they were seeking, the Japanese air raids signalled an increase in the tempo of the military campaign in China. It also proved that quiet diplomacy was having little effect on the Japanese Government and even less on its military forces. By rejecting western appeals not to intensify their activities in China, the Japanese were serving notice that unless a more effective deterrent

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[44]Minute by Cadogan, 28 Sept. 1937, A6896/448/45, FO 371/20667.
[45]Minute by Orde, 29 Sept. 1937, A6896/448/45, FO 371/20667.
[46]Memo by Cadogan, 17 Sept. 1937, A6793/6793/45, FO 371/20673.

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