

Failure of the Light:

Britain and the Acrimonious History of the Democratic Axis, 1936-1940



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Abstract

Rather than being yet another study on British appeasement, this research is an illuminating study of the most popular alternative, namely the policy of alliance-building with France and America to resist the revisionist powers during the 1930s. Chamberlain has long been criticised for choosing the policy of appeasement. However, this thesis offers a bold reinterpretation which highlights the sheer infeasibility of an alliance-building alternative through an in-depth analysis of the *highly-acrimonious relations* between Britain, France and America throughout the interwar period; their continuous *failure to collaborate* diplomatically or militarily on the world stage; and *British intelligence* on their military, economic, political and social troubles between 1936 and 1940. In short, this research exonerates Chamberlain. Britain's acute awareness of America's military incapability also has particularly powerful implications for the existing historiography, which only recognises American isolationism as a sole restraint on Roosevelt, preventing him from intervening in European or Far Eastern affairs.

This thesis uses six archival sources to explore British intelligence on the military, economic, social, political and diplomatic strengths and weakness of France and America between 1936 and 1940: the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Foreign Office, Cabinet and Chamberlain's private documents. Collectively, the author's primary and secondary research reveals that the three great democracies were incapable of political collaboration on the world stage and were increasingly handicapped militarily, strategically, economically, socially, politically and diplomatically. These negative trends set the conditions for Chamberlain's premiership from 1937 onwards, leaving him without a feasible alliance-building alternative to appeasement. Whilst Steiner and most other historians stress the *Triumph of the Dark*, this thesis underlines the *Failure of the Light*.

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Abbreviations

AA	Air Attaché
AI	Air Intelligence Directorate
AM	Air Ministry
BOT	Board of Trade
CAS	Chief of Air Staff
CID	Committee of Imperial Defence
COS	Chiefs of Staff Committee
CNS	Chief of Naval Staff / First Sea Lord
CNO	Chief Naval Officer
CPDN	Permanent Committee of National Defence
DB	Duèxième Bureau
DCAS	Deputy Chief of Air Staff
DCNS	Deputy Chief of Naval Staff
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
DOP	Director of Plans of the Admiralty
DRC	Defence Requirements Sub-Committee
FO	Foreign Office
FPC	Foreign Policy Committee
GCCS	Government Codes & Cypher School
IIC	Industrial Intelligence Centre

IJA	Imperial Japanese Army
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
MA	Military Attaché
MID	Military Intelligence Directorate
NA	Naval Attaché
NID	Naval Intelligence Directorate
ONI	Office of Naval Intelligence
PUS	Permanent Under-Secretary
SIS	Secret Intelligence Service
SR	Service de Renseignements
WO	War Office

Introduction

In early December 1937, almost exactly six months after Neville Chamberlain became Prime Minister, the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COS) advised him that Britain either needed to increase her number of friends or reduce her number of enemies as a solution to the rising threats of Germany, Italy and Japan.¹ Britain was simply too weak singlehandedly to fight against three totalitarian powers in three different theatres across the globe, and the other alternatives of isolationism, collective security through the League of Nations, rearmament and pacifism were deemed infeasible. Chamberlain has long been criticised by historians, politicians and journalists for choosing appeasement over the pursuit of alliances with France, America and Soviet Russia to secure Britain's survival. Yet, rather than being yet another study on appeasement, this research is an illuminating study of *the most espoused alternative* – alliance-building. Significantly, this study exonerates Chamberlain's appeasement strategy by revealing that the alliance-building alternative was infeasible. This conclusion is reached through an in-depth examination of the *acrimonious relations* between the democracies of Britain, France and America during the interwar years; their continuous *failure to collaborate*; and Britain's awareness of their rising relative *military weaknesses*. Whilst Steiner stresses the *Triumph of the Dark*, this thesis underlines the *Failure of the Light*.²

As the German Army swept through France in May 1940, three journalists – Michael Foot, Peter Howard and Frank Owen – decided to write a book entitled *Guilty Men*, under the *nom de plume* of Cato. This book had one objective: to disparage

¹ Cabinet Conclusions of 8 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 655; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

² Zara Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark, European International History, 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 1.

Chamberlain for his appeasement strategy and failure to strengthen the nation sufficiently in the 1930s. Whilst this book 'was erratic, without chronological structure or coherence... its extraordinary popularity clearly spoke to a nation reeling under the withdrawal from Dunkirk'.³ *Guilty Men* sparked an avalanche of similar, polemic narratives from contemporary politicians such as Eden, Cooper, Churchill, Bevin and Rothstein, and historians such as Namier, Wheeler-Bennett, George, Wiskemann, Rowse, Gilbert, Gott and Middlemas. A consensus soon emerged confirming Chamberlain as a guilty man, responsible for the cowardly policy of appeasement at a time when the democracies held the upper hand over the revisionist powers of Germany, Italy and Japan in both the economic and military spheres.⁴

According to Kennedy, appeasement can be defined as 'the policy of settling international... quarrels by admitting and satisfying grievances through rational negotiation and compromise, thereby avoiding the resort to an armed conflict which would be expensive, bloody, and possibly very dangerous'. In British politics, it is notably a strategy that predates Chamberlain's premiership and, indeed, the entire 1930s, stemming back to at least 1865. Significantly, in the Victorian era, appeasement was seen as 'a positive policy, based upon certain *optimistic* assumptions about man's inherent reasonableness, as was clearly the case when executed by Gladstone in the 1880s or Lloyd George in 1919'.⁵ However, from September 1938, appeasement lost its respectability and was dressed purely in negative terms.

In the political realm, the negative elements of appeasement have since been vocalised by Presidents Johnson, G.H. Bush and G.W. Bush to justify Washington's military intervention into Vietnam in the 1960s, Iraq in the 1990s, and Afghanistan and Iraq in the 2000s. Johnson claimed that America's abstention from war would 'be

³ Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 3 (2008), pp. 443-480 (p. 445).

⁴ Louise Grace Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939* (London and Portland, OR: Frank Cass, 2003), p. 1; Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', pp. 449-50.

⁵ Kennedy, 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939', *British Journal of International Studies*, 2 (1976), pp. 195-215 (p. 195).

doing exactly what Chamberlain did in World War II... giving a big fat reward to aggression'. Similarly, G.H. Bush argued that 'if history teaches us anything, it is that we must resist aggression or it will destroy our freedoms. Appeasement does not work. As was seen in the 1930s'. Years on, G.W. Bush similarly claimed that appeasement had 'been repeatedly discredited by history'. As Bush contemplated retribution for the "9/11" terrorist attack, he was warned by the Israeli Premier to 'not repeat the dreadful mistake of 1938... Do not try to appease the Arabs at our expense – this is unacceptable to us. Israel is not Czechoslovakia'.⁶

Similar anti-appeasement rhetoric was used by Thatcher and Blair to justify the Falklands War of 1982, the intervention over Kosovo in 1999, and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 respectively. 'We have learned twice before in this century that appeasement does not work,' Blair declared in 1999. 'If we let an evil dictator range unchallenged, we will have to spill infinitely more blood and treasure to stop him later'.⁷ All these speeches calling for various interventions – interventions which have since either been praised (Kosovo) or demonised (Iraq) – disparaged Chamberlain's appeasement policy and thereby amplified the orthodox consensus that Chamberlain was a guilty man.

However, a wave of revisionism led by Beloff, Medlicott, Watt, Dilks, Taylor, Northedge, Vyvyan, Braubach, Roos, Eichstadt, Conze, Celovsky, Kluge, Duroselle, Michel, Toscano, Klein and Robertson followed from the 1960s, challenging the orthodox view as official documents became available both in Britain and abroad.⁸ These historians attempted to exonerate Chamberlain's appeasement strategy by highlighting structural arguments about British military weakness, imperial over-extension and economic decline to stress that appeasement was a reasonable response to the totalitarian menace and an attempt to gain time for British

⁶ Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', p. 444 and 466.

⁷ Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', p. 467.

⁸ D. C. Watt, 'Appeasement: The Rise of the Revisionist School', *Political Quarterly*, 36 (1965), pp. 191-213 (p. 195-8); Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', p. 451.

rearmament.⁹ In the decades that followed, these arguments were reinforced by the works of Salerno, Newton, Maiolo, Tarling, Best and Forbes.¹⁰

Yet, these revisionist scholars were themselves challenged by a counter-revisionist wave from the mid-1970s, which criticised Chamberlain for rejecting an alliance-building strategy to oppose the emerging aggressive nations.¹¹ The “guilty men” verdict was thus refashioned by Grenville, Murray, Fuchser, Adamwraithe, Cockett, Mckercher and Kennedy – and then supported by Dutton, Parker, Grayson, McDonough, Aster, Roi, Boyce, Ruggiero, Finney and Neville – who criticise ‘the focus on [structural] determinism over the influence of personality and policy’.¹² Chamberlain, in their opinion, had a feasible alternative: he could have partnered Britain and France with either America or Soviet Russia.

Carley, Leibovitz, Shaw, Rothstein, Ruggiero and Nielson in particular have stressed the viability of the Russian option, though they have had to sidestep the obvious counter-argument of the purges, which temporarily destroyed Russia’s military capabilities between 1937 and 1939.¹³ Similarly, Watt, Rock, Reynolds, Leutze, Kennedy, Churchill and Dilks have emphasised the feasibility of the grandiose American option, painting the continent-sized nation as a divine solution to the

⁹ Keith Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement, 1919-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 7; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939*, p. 1; E. R. May, ‘Conclusions: Capabilities and Proclivities’, in *Knowing One’s Enemy: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, ed. by E.R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 503-542 (p. 519); David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937-1941. A Study in Competitive Cooperation* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), pp. 8-9.

¹⁰ Aster, ‘Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism’, p. 443 and 457.

¹¹ Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939*, p. 2.

¹² Aster, ‘Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism’, p. 444 and 453-4.

¹³ Leibovitz, *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal* (Edmonton Alberta, 1993), p. 497; Carley, *1939*, p. xviii; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 9; Louise Shaw, ‘Attitudes of the British Political Elite Towards the Soviet Union’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 13, 1 (2002), pp. 55-74 (p. 70); John Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler, Neville Chamberlain and the Origins of the Second World War* (Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, 2015), p. 63; Watt, ‘Appeasement: The Rise of the Revisionist School?’, 197.

totalitarian challenge.¹⁴ Others have focused on France's latent strength and the allegedly favourable military balance in September 1938.¹⁵ According to these counter-revisionists, Chamberlain was wrong to focus his energies on appeasement instead of alliances.¹⁶ Whilst the viability of appeasement has been intensely scrutinised by historians, as has the alternative of an Anglo-Russian alliance, little scrutiny has been applied to the most popular option of a democratic axis between Britain, France and America. Indeed, Stedman argues that 'most writing about alternatives to appeasement... remain vague, fragmentary and, ultimately, unsatisfying'.¹⁷

In his war memoirs, which solidified the orthodox consensus, Winston Churchill criticised Chamberlain for disengaging from 'the two mighty nations [America and Russia in the late 1930s] whose extreme efforts were needed to save our lives and

¹⁴ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; William R. Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt: British Foreign Policy and the United States, 1937-1940* (Columbus, OH: Ohio State University Press, 1988), p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; David Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', in *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Dilks (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 139-169 (p. 142); D. C. Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', *International Journal*, 28 (1973), pp. 185-204 (p. 186); Greg Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War' in *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II*, ed. by Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millet (Oxford: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 19-59 (p. 41); J.R. Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1937-1941* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), p. 26; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

¹⁵ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled: British Policy and World Power in the Twentieth Century* (Harlow: Routledge, 1991), p. 128; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p. 288; Steven Ross, 'French Net Assessment', in *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II*, ed. by Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millet (Oxford: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 19-59 (p. 160); John Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', *Journal of the Royal United Services Institute*, 127, 2, (1982), pp. 56-61 (p. 56-61).

¹⁶ For a full account of the appeasement historiography see: R. J. Caputi, *Neville Chamberlain and Appeasement* (London: 2000); D. J. Dutton, *Neville Chamberlain* (London: 2001); or Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 19, 3 (2008), pp. 443-480.

¹⁷ Andrew David Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement: Neville Chamberlain and Hitler* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), p. vii.

their own', believing that history might otherwise have 'taken a different turn'.¹⁸ According to Watt, Churchill's war volumes 'had not only the authority and scholarship of Britain's leading historians but bore also the magisterial stamp of the man who was at once historian and politician, a successful Thucydides, the Cassandra of the 1930s, and the Carnot of the 1940s.¹⁹ Thus, orthodox and post-revisionist historians were influenced by these works to share the author's 'breathless... amazement' at Chamberlain's reluctance to pursue alliances during his first two years in power.²⁰

This thesis seeks to understand Chamberlain's reasoning for discarding Churchill's alliance-building alternative between May 1937 and March 1939 – particularly a democratic axis between Britain, France and America. Chamberlain died on 9 November 1940, only months after resigning as Prime Minister and too soon to defend his criticised policies. Therefore, this thesis seeks to draw on British intelligence as to France and America's military, political, financial and economic power during his tenure – the very documents which would have shaped Chamberlain's perceptions of these nations – as well Chamberlain's own papers and perspective on the long history of acrimonious relations between the three democracies since 1919 – to understand why he rebuffed this alliance-building alternative. Chamberlain himself wrote in 1938, 'I talked about it [the alliance-building alternative] to Halifax and we submitted it to the Chiefs of Staff and F.O. experts. It is a very attractive idea... until you come to examine its practicality. From that moment its attraction vanishes'.²¹

Mirroring Chamberlain's examination, this thesis analyses the practicality of the alternatives, with a special focus on the option of alliance-building with France and America, instead of the less popular options of isolationism, pacificism, collective security via the League of Nations, economic and colonial appeasement and rearmament. It is also a study of British interwar relations with France and America in its own right. Stedman argues that 'in order fully to understand why Chamberlain

¹⁸ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

¹⁹ Watt, 'Appeasement: The Rise of the Revisionist School', p. 198.

²⁰ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

²¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 214.

pursued appeasement, it is necessary to consider which alternatives he rejected and why'. When Chamberlain's appeasement strategy collapsed in 1939, he turned towards pacts and alliances as 'the next best option available to him', making this option the most important one to examine. Indeed, according to Stedman, 'the verdict of history suggests that alliances were the most promising of all the alternatives to Chamberlain's policy'.²² Whether this alternative was in fact more feasible than Chamberlain's appeasement strategy has astonishingly not been examined in depth. Even Stedman's valuable work only spares a chapter on this subject and does not mention America's military weakness as a factor in Chamberlain's decision-making.

In 1948, Horace Wilson, who was in Chamberlain's inner circle, concluded that 'in none of the books and articles that I have read have I found a coherent answer to the question: given the circumstances of 1937 and 1938, what alternative was practical?'²³ This thesis argues that Wilson's conclusion still stands true today. Moreover, this argument has serious ramifications for orthodox and counter-revisionist historians, who have built careers on the illusion of a superior foreign policy alternative. This verdict in favour of appeasement undoubtedly comes as a surprise – especially to the author of this thesis, who has two Jewish grandparents who escaped Nazi Germany and is thus someone for whom appeasement and the passivity of the democracies would naturally be anathema.

The timeframe for the primary research of this thesis has been restricted to material produced or spoken between 1936 and 1940 to allow an in-depth analysis of Chamberlain's premiership and the preceding twelve months, which would have been significant in shaping his world view upon assuming power. Similarly, the breadth of primary material investigated has been restricted to six archival sources: the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Foreign Office, Cabinet and Chamberlain's private documents concerning France and America. These six sources have been carefully selected to produce well-rounded perspectives of the British military and political elite – and of Chamberlain himself – on the power of America and France – or absence

²² Stedman, *The Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 6, 136 and 156.

²³ Stedman, *The Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. i.

thereof. The perspectives that arise from these sources will be referred to as “British”.²⁴

The arguments of this thesis are spread across twelve chapters. Chapters 1 to 4 explore the acrimonious relations between Britain, France and America between 1919 and 1936 and the historiographical *myth* of a functional global democratic order built on moral supremacy, economic power, diplomatic collaboration, military might and strategic cooperation. Whilst the democracies had a chance to build a brave new world, the magnetic repulsion of rivalry proved too powerful for the three democracies and the chance was missed to forge a functional global system before the military balance of power shifted away from the democracies towards the aggressive powers.

Chapters 5-10 explore Chamberlain’s rising belief in the futility of alliance-building and the understandable reasons why he pursued appeasement between April 1936 and September 1938 as a means to secure Britain’s short-term survival. This is done by investigating British intelligence on France and America’s military weaknesses, domestic woes and their continuous failure to collaborate with Britain during Chamberlain’s first eighteen months as Prime Minister, which left him with no alternative to appeasement. Chapters 11 and 12 investigate the events of Munich, the failure of Chamberlain’s appeasement strategy, his eleventh-hour attempt to join hands with France, the fall of France, the belated transition of Anglo-American relations from friendship to partnership to save the world from tyranny, and the author’s concluding remarks.

*

Given that this thesis examines British intelligence on France and America, a preliminary understanding of intelligence is vital. Intelligence can be classified as either ‘overt’ or ‘covert’. The former refers to information openly gathered by British officials – namely attachés, consuls and ambassadors.²⁵ It was the attachés who

²⁴ Any reference to the British public will always have the words “society” or “public” to differentiate from the above usage.

²⁵ Wesley Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1985), p. 25; Dilks, ‘Appeasement and Intelligence’, p. 139.

typically answered the diplomatic and military questions emanating from London, through regular reports and through their 'scrutiny of the technical press, careful reading of the newspapers, and conversation with those who knew the foreign regime well'.²⁶ These 'systematic and authoritative' reports were reinforced by *ad hoc* reports from visiting businessmen, secret agents and radio decrypts.²⁷ As the threat of the aggressive states rose in the 1930s, the number of British attachés serving in Europe and gathering intelligence for London more than doubled from seventeen to 37.²⁸ This overt intelligence-gathering was not classed as 'espionage'. In fact, attachés were 'strictly forbidden' by diplomatic decorum from interacting with spies.²⁹

Given their crucial role in the intelligence cycle, British attachés were expected to meet demanding criteria, the most important of which was 'a gift for languages'.³⁰ A memorandum by Captain Hillgarth further demanded attachés to possess a natural sympathy for the country in which they served; to be well-read on history and current affairs; to be 'a good mixer, with good manners, tact, and sound judgment, and a man of common sense, and human understanding, sober without being a teetotaler, possessing a good digestion, and a presentable wife'.³¹

Conversely, 'covert' intelligence refers to any clandestinely-obtained information. In the political realm, this covered decrypts by the Government Codes and Cypher School (GCCS); and any secret information gathered by MI5, MI6 (also known as SIS) and the Christie-Vansittart Network. MI6 was responsible for secret informants

²⁶ The attachés would watch closely for changes to the military's academies, curriculum, recruitment, fortifications, training, raw materials supply and transport networks, and keep an eye on 'press reports, assembly debates, government publications... [and] specialised periodical literature'; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 139; Robert Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938-1939', in *Knowing One's Enemies, Intelligence Assessments Before the Two World Wars*, ed. by Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 271-309 (p. 273).

²⁷ Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 23.

²⁸ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 25.

²⁹ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938-1939', p. 273; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the French-Italian Alliance, 1933-39', p. 145.

³⁰ Captain Hillgarth, 'Qualities Needed by a Naval Attaché', ADM 223/474; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 23.

³¹ Captain Hillgarth, 'Qualities Needed by a Naval Attaché', ADM 223/474

outside British territory, whilst MI5 oversaw those within British territory.³² All political intelligence – whether overt or covert – was forwarded to the Foreign Office, which sat at the top of political intelligence ‘pyramid’.³³

Simultaneously, any economic or military intelligence was handled separately by the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC) and the three Service Intelligence Directorates. Intelligence on foreign land armies was assessed by the Military Intelligence Directorate (MID) within the War Office; intelligence on foreign navies was examined by the Naval Intelligence Directorate (NID) within the Admiralty; and intelligence on foreign air forces was analysed by the Air Intelligence Directorate (AI) within the Air Ministry.³⁴ Economic intelligence was handled by the IIC.³⁵ These organisations forwarded their reports and conclusions to the Chiefs of Staff Committee (COS) – the highest point of the military and economic intelligence pyramid. This was the ‘point at which some synthesis of the military and economic picture could be achieved’, though only a ‘limited coordination of this material’ was ever accomplished.³⁶

This dearth of intelligence coordination was one of the British intelligence community’s most serious shortcomings.³⁷ Lamentably, the Service Intelligence Directorates had little contact with each other or other agencies, whilst the Foreign

³² Christopher Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm: The Authorised History of MI5* (London: Penguin, 2012), p. 129.

³³ Indeed, the Foreign Office funded the SIS and provided cover for its agents ‘in the passport offices of the British embassies and legations overseas’, where they took on fabricated identities as passport control officers. D. C. Watt, ‘British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe’, in *Knowing One’s Enemies, Intelligence Assessments Before the Two World Wars*, ed. by Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 237-270 (p. 243); Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 21; Kennedy, ‘British “Net Assessment” and the Coming of the Second World War’, p. 33.

³⁴ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 20-1.

³⁵ Watt, ‘British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe’, p. 244.

³⁶ Wesley Wark, ‘British Military and Economic Intelligence: Assessments of Nazi Germany Before the Second World War’, in *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by C. Andrew and D. Dilks (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 78-100 (p. 78); Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 20.

³⁷ Dilks, ‘Appeasement and Intelligence’, p. 142 and 162; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 20; Christopher Andrew, *Secret Service: The Making of the British Intelligence Community* (London: Heinemann, 1985), p. 341.

Office 'jealously guarded its near monopoly over political intelligence'.³⁸ Indeed, one official complained that any estimates of a regime's strength by the three military services 'were made quite independently', and solely for their own use. This 'pigeon-hole' style of reporting meant that the Service Intelligence Directorates and the IIC were all assessing 'the same phenomenon' – a regime's rearmament – but were denied a full picture of that rearmament, examining each foreign armed service in isolation.³⁹ This often led to overly optimistic or pessimistic verdicts about the strength of that armed service since surrounding military, economic and political factors were not considered.

The intelligence community's 'fragmented structure' has also often been criticised for encouraging duplications – the Service Intelligence Directorates and the IIC frequently received the same raw data for analysis, which meant multiple reports on the same phenomenon.⁴⁰ However an attempt in 1936 to establish two committees to coordinate intelligence backfired. The unfunded Inter-Services Intelligence Committee 'sank quickly without leaving any records', whilst the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) 'suffered severely' when its first serious report was dismissed and re-written by the Deputy Chiefs of Staff.⁴¹ The JIC was quickly banished to the periphery until 1939, without a secretariat or intelligence staff.⁴²

The British intelligence community also suffered from long-term staff and funding shortages.⁴³ With limited resources, British intelligence organisations were forced to

³⁸ Peter Jackson and Joseph Maiolo, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations Before the Outbreak of the Second World War', in *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, ed. by M. S. Alexander and W. S. Philpott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 121-56 (p. 125); Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 77; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 141

³⁹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 20-1.

⁴⁰ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 341, 387 and 409.

⁴¹ Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe', p. 265.

⁴² Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 208; Anthony M. Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia, 1914-1941* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 2002), p. 6.

⁴³ Peter Lowe, 'Great Britain's Assessment of Japan before the Outbreak of the Pacific War', in *Knowing One's Enemy: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars*, ed. by E.R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 456-475 (p. 457);

prioritise certain threats – communism in the 1920s and Germany in the 1930s – to the detriment of intelligence-gathering on France, America, Soviet Russia, Japan and Italy.⁴⁴ Lowe states that ‘people collating and analysing information’ on nations other than Germany ‘occupied inferior or subordinate posts’.⁴⁵ However, even those focused on Germany were ‘starved of resources’ and ‘most seriously handicapped’ since the British intelligence budget languished at £180,000 in 1935 and only increased to £500,000 in 1939.⁴⁶ Admiral Sir Hugh Sinclair and Major Desmond Morton, the heads of the SIS and IIC respectively, were so financially constricted that they occasionally had to ‘appeal to relatives for money’.⁴⁷

Despite these funding and staff problems, the British intelligence community was actually ‘elaborate, relatively sophisticated, and bureaucratically well-developed’, whilst those of other great powers were often ‘splintered, provisional and parochial’.⁴⁸ For example, America’s intelligence network was almost non-existent, possessing ‘no National Security Council, no Joint Chiefs of Staff, no Central Intelligence Agency, and certainly no office of net assessment’. One senior British intelligence officer even observed in 1942 that ‘the whole [American intelligence] organisation belongs to the days of George Washington’.⁴⁹ In fact, Intelligence communities were still evolving all over the globe with many organisations and

Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 25; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 340 and 407; Wark, ‘British Military and Economic Intelligence’, p. 78; Dilks, ‘Appeasement and Intelligence’, p. 142 and 168; Watt, ‘British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe’, p. 269; Richard Thurlow, ‘Soviet Spies and British Counter-Intelligence in the 1930s’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 19 (2004), pp. 610-631 (p. 611).

⁴⁴ Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 70; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 307.

⁴⁵ ‘Programmes of the Defence Services’, Third Report by the DRC, 21 November 1935, CAB 24/259/26, p. 30; Lowe, ‘Great Britain’s Assessment of Japan before the Outbreak of the Pacific War’, p. 456.

⁴⁶ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 307.

⁴⁷ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 408; Dilks, ‘Appeasement and Intelligence’, p. 142.

⁴⁸ John Ferris, ‘“Indulged in All Too Little”? Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (1995), pp. 122-75 (p. 127); Kennedy, ‘British “Net Assessment” and the Coming of the Second World War’, p. 19.

⁴⁹ Calvin Christman, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment’ in *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II*, ed. by Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millet (Oxford: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 216-257 (216).

sections within these communities not founded until the 1930s.⁵⁰ This gave an inherent advantage to the old, established sections over their newly-born rivals in funding, experience and influence.

Deciphering was the oldest form of Government-sponsored intelligence in Britain. It began in the last years of the American Revolution only to disappear for seventy years between 1844 and 1914.⁵¹ Deciphering was re-established after war erupted in 1914 at the Admiralty and the War Office – ‘Room 40’ and ‘MI-16’ respectively – before Admiral Sinclair combined these departments to create GCCS in 1919.⁵² GCCS had notable successes decrypting Russian telegrams in the 1920s and American and Japanese telegrams in the 1920s and 1930s.⁵³

The War Office intelligence branch also had old roots.⁵⁴ It was established in 1873 and survived peace-time retrenchments between the Franco-Prussian War, the Boer War and the First World War.⁵⁵ From 1903, the War Office was also responsible for foreign intelligence and counter-espionage – MO2 and MO3 respectively – before these sections evolved into MI6 and MI5 in 1919.⁵⁶ Naval intelligence was similarly well-established, the Admiralty considering itself almost entirely ‘self-sufficient’ in intelligence, with officers stationed at every major foreign port in the world.⁵⁷

⁵⁰ The IIC and AI were yet to be established, whilst the SIS and MI5 had to fight off a proposed merger in 1925. Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 115 and 122.

⁵¹ Andrew, ‘Code-breakers and Foreign Officials: The French British and American Experience’, in *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by C. Andrew and D. Dilks (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 33-53 (p. 33).

⁵² Andrew, ‘Code breakers and Foreign Officials’, p. 42

⁵³ Anthony Best, ‘Constructing an Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall’s Perception of Japan, 1931-1939’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 11 (1996), pp. 403-423 (p. 404); Watt, ‘British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe’, p. 261; Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 136; Christman, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment’, p. 229.

⁵⁴ Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 122.

⁵⁵ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 23; Ferris, “‘Indulged in all too Little’”, p. 123.

⁵⁶ Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 3.

⁵⁷ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 124.

In contrast, the AI and IIC were much younger organisations and thus had fewer resources and influence during the 1930s. The Air Ministry was denied intelligence funds by the Treasury until 1935 and told instead to rely on the 'more-established' MID and NID for intelligence-related material.⁵⁸ In fact, the only reason that the Air Ministry handled intelligence before 1935 was because it ignored the Treasury, instructing some of its planning staff to focus entirely on intelligence.⁵⁹ Given the widespread fears in Britain about air bombardments, it is surprising that a European Air Intelligence Section was only founded in 1936 and explains why Britain's greatest intelligence misjudgement was the overestimation of the Luftwaffe's capabilities.⁶⁰

The IIC fared better than AI, though as a new organisation it still had to establish its influence in Whitehall and refine its analytical methods.⁶¹ Formed in 1931 by Desmond Morton, it was initially a 'one man bureau' under the CID's auspices.⁶² Significantly, it was the first and only industrial intelligence organisation in the world during the interwar period.⁶³ The IIC was swiftly recognised for shedding light upon the enemy's strategic raw material imports and reserves, production capacity and labour resources. Indeed, it reminded the British military elite 'that the resources required for modern warfare had to be reckoned as much by petrol dumps, railway yards and chemical refineries as by tanks, aircraft and destroyers'.⁶⁴ As such, it expanded quickly to a staff of twenty-five by 1938. Morton was also given his own

⁵⁸ Andrews, *Secret Service*, p. 342.

⁵⁹ Wing-Commander R.G.S. Payne was one such member of the Air Ministry's planning staff who devoted all his time to intelligence. Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 342.

⁶⁰ The Air Ministry was also not given a representative at GCCS until 1936. Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 341; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe', p. 261.

⁶¹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 48.

⁶² It was initially funded by the Foreign Office 'secret vote' and then sponsored by the Department of Trade from 1935 onwards. Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 160; Young, 'Spokesman for Economic Warfare: The ICC in the 1930s', p. 476.

⁶³ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 159-160; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe', pp. 244-245.

⁶⁴ Young, 'Spokesman for Economic Warfare: The ICC in the 1930s', p. 473.

building at 70 Victoria Street in 1936, a significant improvement on his cramped office at SIS headquarters on Broadway.⁶⁵

Whilst Britain's intelligence community was highly-sophisticated comparatively, its organisations all had troubles distinguishing between accurate and misleading reports.⁶⁶ Kennedy points out that 'for every report from a secret source that proved accurate, there were three or four totally misleading or mischievous ones'.⁶⁷ An embarrassing example of this occurred on Easter Sunday in 1939. The British believed 'unfounded intelligence reports' of an imminent Luftwaffe attack on the fleet, and simultaneously dismissed 'accurate warnings' of an impending Italian attack against Albania. One senior official complained that he was 'daily inundated by all sorts of reports', and found it almost 'impossible to separate the wheat from the chaff'.⁶⁸

This problem was exacerbated by the increasing secretiveness of the four totalitarian regimes in the 1930s. Germany, Italy, Japan and Russia not only kept their military and budgetary data secret but tried to 'deceive foreign analysts' with false information.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, attachés were often denied access to military units, factories, arsenals, and shipyards, whilst the strict control of the political and technical press ensured that 'normal opportunities to gather good intelligence did not exist'.⁷⁰ These physical and political obstacles meant that British attachés 'often had to fall back upon rumours, tips, anecdotal evidence, and fleeting impressions'.⁷¹ May argues

⁶⁵ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 355; Young, 'Spokesman for Economic Warfare: The ICC in the 1930s', p. 478.

⁶⁶ Peter Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace. Intelligence and Policy Making, 1933-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 8.

⁶⁷ Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 33.

⁶⁸ Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 208.

⁶⁹ R. W. Davies, 'Soviet Military Expenditure and the Armaments Industry, 1929-1933: A Reconsideration', *Europe-Asia Studies*, 45, 4 (1993), pp. 577-608 (p. 581); May, 'Conclusions: Capabilities and Proclivities', p. 509.

⁷⁰ Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 140; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 107; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 50; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939*, p. 55.

⁷¹ Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 24.

that, considering the excessive secretiveness of the totalitarians, the ‘intelligence services did surprisingly well’.⁷²

Until the 1970s, the study of intelligence – or “the missing dimension” – remained on the periphery of historical research, with scholars tending ‘either to ignore intelligence altogether, or to treat it as of little importance’.⁷³ This changed from 1974 with the declassification of the ‘ultra-secret’, which sparked ‘an explosion’ in intelligence studies in the 1970s and 1980s.⁷⁴ By the 1990s, intelligence studies ‘had genuinely entered the mainstream’ of international history and international relations, becoming a recognised ‘sub-discipline’ of these fields.⁷⁵

During these decades, intelligence studies focused almost exclusively on the potential enemies of any given country. Indeed, Alexander claims that there remained a ‘missing dimension to the missing dimension’, which was the ‘crucial matter of intelligence work towards friends and allies’.⁷⁶ He states that ‘few academics or erstwhile intelligence professionals have considered the issues raised by assessments about potential or actual allies’, not just on military aspects, but also in the realms of politics, public opinion, economics, finance, industrial production, technological breakthroughs, and the like.⁷⁷ Whilst this sub-category has very recently become a ‘flourishing genre’ of intelligence history, it still has a ‘way to go to achieve its full place in general histories of diplomacy, crises and war’.⁷⁸ This is a process towards which this thesis hopes to contribute by examining the ample intelligence at Chamberlain’s disposal on France and America.

⁷² May, ‘Conclusions: Capabilities and Proclivities’, p. 509.

⁷³ Christopher Andrew, *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), p. 1.

⁷⁴ M.S. Alexander, ed., *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 1.

⁷⁵ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 2; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 2.

⁷⁶ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 2 and 6.

⁷⁷ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 6; M. S. Alexander, ‘Safes and Safe Houses: William C. Bullitt, Embassy Security and the Shortcomings of the US Foreign Service in Europe before the Second World War’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 2, 2 (1991), pp. 187-210 (p. 189).

⁷⁸ Alexander, ‘Safes and Safe Houses’, p. 189; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 14.

Intelligence-gathering on a friendly country is arguably the most 'sensitive' type of intelligence-collection because, whilst one's enemies expect it, one's friends certainly do not.⁷⁹ In 2013, recent history showed as much when the National Security Agency of America bugged Chancellor Angela Merkel's phone, causing outrage and indignation throughout Germany. Friendly relationships can rupture if one gets caught. During the inter-war years, the French secret service (SR) was conscious of this danger and so kept secret agents 'in every European capital, with the notable exception of London'.⁸⁰

Regrettably for intelligence historians, when espionage on a friendly state has occurred there is 'often no written record for the scholar to trace', the secret documents either 'destroyed' or 'withheld from declassification'.⁸¹ This has certainly been the case with British espionage on America and France. This author was personally told by staff at the London National Archives that most secret intelligence papers on America had been destroyed, sometimes at American request; whilst other documents, such as Military Attaché reports during the winter of 1940-41, remain classified even today.⁸² Similar troubles exist for researchers exploring British intelligence-gathering on France. Many papers on this subject were burnt by the British Embassy in Paris in June 1940 as the Wehrmacht swept through the country. However, many valuable documents on both countries remain accessible.

British Intelligence-gathering on France and America occurred both overtly and covertly during the interwar years, though the former kind dominated proceedings. The Service Intelligence Directorates received a regular supply of information from their respective military, naval and air attachés serving in Paris and Washington. These attachés also contributed to the Embassies' annual reports on their respective countries, detailing political, diplomatic, social, financial, economic and military developments. These reports were widely distributed throughout Whitehall to

⁷⁹ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938-1939', p. 275; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 124.

⁸¹ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 9.

⁸² I was not able to access these Military Attaché reports held in: WO 106/6111.

various departments including the Foreign Office, the three Service Ministries, the Treasury, and the Board of Trade.

In the Naval Intelligence Directorate, Section NID-5 (which later became NID-18), led by Commander A. C. Stanford, was responsible for America and all its possessions as far as Hawaii. France fell under the auspices of NID-2, which was also known as the 'French Section', and was led by Commander Tower in 1936, and then by Commander Tupper-Carey. This section was also responsible for France's overseas possessions, something which caused much duplication with the Far East section.⁸³

NID-18 and NID-2 were regular recipients of Naval Attaché (NA) reports. They also tried to cultivate productive relationships with foreign NAs serving in London. NID-2 was particularly successful at this, fostering an 'extremely cordial' and cooperative relationship with Capitaine de Vaisseau Comte de Tour, the French NA to London.⁸⁴ NID-2 was also praised for cultivating intimate relations with the War Office, Air Ministry and IIC.⁸⁵ Not dissimilarly, NID-18 was praised for successfully 'courting the friendship of Captain A.G. Kirk', the American NA to London, which allowed the section to receive 'up-to-date information on new naval construction and the disposition of the various fleets'.⁸⁶

There is little evidence of British naval espionage on potential allies. On America, Rear-Admiral J.H. Godfrey, the Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI), 1939-42, commented that 'at no times were serious attempts ever made to obtain intelligence concerning the United States themselves, or their possessions'. Since America was regarded 'as the ultimate salvation' in the 1940s, Godfrey believed that there was 'a

⁸³ Godfrey, American Section (NID-18), ADM 223/491

⁸⁴ Regrettably, he was relieved at a critical time by Capitaine de Vaisseau de Rivoyre who's 'suspicious nature' rendered co-operation much more difficult; Morgan, 'North West Europe and Africa', ADM 223/487

⁸⁵ NID-2 expanded greatly in personnel from 1936 onwards as tensions rose throughout Europe, though it shrunk again after the fall of France, once the Low Countries and occupied-France were transferred to the German Section, NID-1. Morgan, 'North West Europe and Africa', ADM 223/487

⁸⁶ Godfrey, American Section (NID-18), ADM 223/491

feeling that any sort of underground...intelligence work... was out of place and out of order'.⁸⁷

On the French and American armies, the main source of information was the Military Attaché (MA), who would regularly attend the French and American annual manoeuvres, converse with French and American officers, and pay visits to the army and high command.⁸⁸ These MAs sent monthly and annual intelligence summaries to the War Office, 'although these do not seem to have survived', and were further used for the creation of handbooks on the French and American armies, and for the Foreign Office's annual reports.⁸⁹ The collection of air intelligence worked similarly, the AI regularly compiling information from its Air Attaches (AA) in Paris and Washington into monthly and annual intelligence summaries.⁹⁰ These findings were bolstered by *ad hoc* British aircraft purchasing missions to America, which toured American aircraft factories and examined American prototypes.⁹¹

With regards to British industrial intelligence, the IIC had six geographical sections, of which sections 4 and 5 were concerned with America and France respectively. The principal officers of these sections were C.H Davies and E.L. Mercier. Unusually for intelligence organisations in this period, the IIC 'paid almost comparable attention to the economic warfare potential of anticipated allied or neutral states' as to its potential enemies. Between late 1936 and 1938, comprehensive surveys of thirty-three countries were completed, which included France, whilst *ad hoc* memoranda were also produced on subjects such as the American aircraft industry or French titanium tetra-chloride purchases.⁹²

⁸⁷ Godfrey, American Section (NID-18), ADM 223/491

⁸⁸ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 127; M. S. Alexander and W. J. Philpott, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', *Intelligence and National Security*, 13 (1998), pp. 53-84 (p. 57-59).

⁸⁹ Alexander, *The Entente Cordiale and the Next War*, p. 59.

⁹⁰ 'Air Intelligence Summaries, 1937', AIR 8/219

⁹¹ 'Air Mission to USA and Canada, 1938', AIR 19/30; 'Aircraft Potential in the United States of America', AIR 8/293

⁹² Robert Young, 'Spokesmen for Economic Warfare: the IIC in the 1930s', *European Studies Review*, 6 (1976), pp. 473-489 (p. 479-480 and 486).

Covert espionage on France and America did occur, albeit on a much more limited scale. GCCS successfully broke American diplomatic cypher codes during the inter-war period and 'regularly' listened in on US diplomatic traffic.⁹³ In London, the US Embassy was also 'subjected to bugging and safe-cracking' by its British hosts.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, secret intelligence-gathering in France was limited to SIS officers posted at the Paris Embassy under the cover of passport-control officers. Their chief objectives were to gather intelligence on communist and revolutionary organisations operating in France and to report on her domestic situation.⁹⁵ One of the best sources of information, however, was intelligence collaboration with France and America and *ad hoc* military staff conversations.

The knowledge acquired from these overt and covert sources was paramount in shaping Chamberlain's world view and thus in influencing the direction of British foreign policy. The vivid political, military and economic picture painted by the intelligence community allowed Chamberlain to judge the feasibility of an Anglo-French-American axis to resist the revisionist powers. Ultimately this picture appeared increasingly bleak during the 1930s and was compounded by the antagonistic relations between the democracies between 1919 and 1936, as the following chapter reveals. These adverse trends, which were illuminated by intelligence, set the conditions for Chamberlain's premiership, leading him to the verdict that appeasement was the only feasible strategy open to him to ensure Britain's survival.

⁹³ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 229.

⁹⁴ Due to the ease with which the British acquired clandestine information on America, a 'strong concern' arose about America's 'lax' security; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 229; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 3.

⁹⁵ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 126.

1

The Myth of a Functional Global Democratic Order

1919-1935

History is often distorted by the failure of scholars to realise that people's thinking at any given time is governed by what has gone before, rather than what is about to come. Chamberlain's perceptions and calculations in the twilight years of peace cannot be examined without understanding the history which shaped them. This thesis therefore begins with an analysis of London's acrimonious relations with Paris and Washington between 1919 and 1935 and their failed attempt to build a new world order on the foundations of moral supremacy, diplomatic collaboration, economic power and military might.

For much of the nineteenth century, British relations with France and America were desperately bitter. Beginning with the Napoleonic Wars, the century ended with the Fashoda Incident of 1898, where Anglo-French imperial squabbles over the Upper Nile region almost led to war as the twenty-year Scramble for Africa climaxed. Yet, these colonial quarrels and clashes in North Africa and the Middle East were quelled in 1904 with the signing of the Anglo-French Entente Cordial, allowing a long-lasting diplomatic understanding to be kindled.¹ London and Paris worked together from this moment onwards, their newfound friendship strengthened by the rising threat of Germany to Europe.

From the turn of the twentieth century, Britain and America also began to reconcile; forgive past tensions, clashes and quarrels; and recognise their cultural similarities.²

¹ Wilson, Keith M., *The Policy of the Entente: Essays on the Determinants of British Foreign Policy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 6.

² Brechtken argues that Britain's shift from splendid isolation to reconciliation with America between 1895 and 1907 was catalysed by Germany's rising threat in Europe. Magnus Brechtken, *Scharnierzeit 1895-1907. Persönlichkeitsnetze und internationale*

During the early 1900s, President Theodore Roosevelt often expressed his belief in ‘a certain Anglo-American racial uniqueness’ when writing to his English confidantes. Indeed, his letters reveal his firm belief in ‘the superiority of the Anglo-American way’, which had its roots ‘in a set of principles that included the tenets that God was an English gentleman, the Anglo-Americans his chosen race, the English law his dispensation’.³ Roosevelt regularly corresponded with the likes of King Edward VII, Cecil Spring Rice, Arthur Hamilton Lee, Edward Grey, James Bryce and St Lou Strachey of *The Spectator*, his words showing ‘a consciousness of a great historical past shared by both nations and a studied deliberation of what the future held for the Anglo-American race’.⁴ Roosevelt was essentially an Atlanticist or someone who believed that ‘joint Anglo-American economic, diplomatic and naval efforts could safeguard international peace and security’, and within his letters can be found ‘the intellectual roots’ of the “special friendship” between Britain and America, which would dominate most of the twentieth century.⁵

During these years, the idea of Atlanticism flourished, its tentacles reaching far into the Foreign Office and the Labour Party and, on occasion, into the Tory and Liberal parties, capturing prominent figures such as Churchill, Cecil and Kerr. America was seen by British Atlanticists as ‘somewhere in between a Dominion and a foreign country’ and as a natural partner in international affairs in light of their ‘shared history and common political and cultural ties’.⁶ These ties were epitomised by the ‘hundreds of channels of contact’ between the two democracies, which ranged ‘from the

Politik in den deutsch-britisch-amerikanischen Beziehungen vor dem Ersten Weltkrieg (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2006), pp. XVII–454.

³ David H. Burton, ‘Theodore Roosevelt and His English Correspondents: A Special Relationship of Friends’, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, 63, 2 (1973), pp. 1-70 (p. 19).

⁴ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 26; Burton, ‘Theodore Roosevelt and His English Correspondents: A Special Relationship of Friends’, p. 19.

⁵ B. J. C. McKercher, ed., *Transition of Power. Britain’s Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 4; Burton, ‘Theodore Roosevelt and His English Correspondents: A Special Relationship of Friends’, p. 5.

⁶ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 12; McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 4; McKercher, “‘The Deep and Latent Distrust’: The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-1929’, pp. 210-12; Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 126.

plutocratic oligarchic level of the Pilgrim Society, through the middle-class English Speaking Union, through the Rotary Club network, through the links between the Royal Institute of International Affairs and the Council of Foreign Relations', not to mention through the universities.⁷

The growing bond between Britain, France and America was strengthened during the cataclysmic First World War.⁸ The French and British fought together over four harrowing years, their dead buried beside one another in graveyards spanning Europe, Africa and the Far East, whilst America joined the fray from 1917. The superior manpower, economic and industrial might of the democracies brought Germany to her knees on 11 November 1918.

The stunning collapse of the time-honoured German, Austro-Hungarian, Russian and Ottoman Empires during the war paved the way for the democratic victors to shape the emerging world order, with new foundations and pillars to replace the decrepit ones of previous centuries.⁹ Indeed, Britain, France and America had a unique opportunity to mould the world according to their philosophies, morals and democratic principles. Seizing the chance, the three victors attempted to transform the old international system into a brave new world through the establishment of radical institutions and a succession of treaties.

In theory, the new world order was to be held up by four pillars: the moral authority, political unity, economic superiority and military supremacy of the victors.¹⁰ President Wilson's famous *Fourteen Points* speech of 8 January 1918, which called for a League of Nations, national self-determination, free trade, freedom of navigation, open diplomacy and a spirit of internationalism was akin to a tsunami, washing away the old world order. It also sparked visions of an irresistible partnership between the three victors that would secure peace across the globe. Whilst the British and French Governments had misgivings about Wilson's points, they accepted the majority of his

⁷ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 20.

⁸ E. R. May, 'Nazi Germany and the United States: A Review Essay', *The Journal of Modern History*, 41, 2 (1969), pp. 207-214 (p. 207).

⁹ Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 9.

¹⁰ Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of Global Order, 1916-1931* (London: Penguin, 2014), p. 8.

demands in return for an amicable settlement at Versailles.¹¹ 'Give him a League of Nations,' the Australian Prime Minister advised Lloyd George, 'and he will give us all the rest'.¹²

Due to the common cultural, political and moral ties between the three powers, the Atlanticists in London assumed that America would 'willingly join with Britain [and France] in preserving the new international order' once it had been established.¹³ After all, it was the impetus of two million American troops which had arguably determined the outcome of the First World War.¹⁴ Following victory, British and French prestige reached new heights in America, as did the White House's desire to collaborate with the wider world.¹⁵

Wilson's vision for a new global system built on morality started impressively. The establishment of a League of Nations in 1920 was the first act of moral-political collaboration between London, Paris and Washington, transforming Wilson's moral principles into a global political institution. The new organisation was designed to prevent wars by encouraging collective security and disarmament, and designed to settle international disputes through arbitration and negotiation.¹⁶ Yet, this political collaboration was undercut by the US Senate in Washington, which twice refused Wilson's requests for America to become a League member.¹⁷

¹¹ Benjamin Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', in *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, ed. by B.J.C. McKercher (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 187-207 (p. 191); Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 109.

¹² Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 109.

¹³ McKercher, "'The Deep and latent Distrust': The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-1929", pp. 210-12.

¹⁴ May, 'Nazi Germany and the United States: A Review Essay', p. 207.

¹⁵ Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', p. 187.

¹⁶ Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', p. 191.

¹⁷ Donald Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality, 1937-1941* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), pp. 20-5; N. H. Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', *Naval War College Review*, 30, 1 (1977), pp. 50-63 (p. 51); McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 4.

Whilst the Democratic Party continued to campaign for America's League membership during the presidential race of 1920, the Republican Party won control of both the legislative and executive branches, having promised isolation and a withdrawal from international entanglements to the electorate.¹⁸ The British resented the new US Government for leaving Britain 'to foot the bill' of the League, whilst the French felt betrayed by America's failure to sign the Versailles Treaty.¹⁹ Washington's retreat into isolationism 'left a bad taste in the mouth' for the British and French.²⁰ Unfortunately, this was the start of a pattern during the interwar years where the democracies would propose some kind of collaboration only for the suggested scheme to fall at the last hurdle.

Relations between London and Paris also plummeted after 1918. France hoped to eternalise her temporary military association with Britain and America, but both powers spurned a peacetime alliance.²¹ Prime Minister Clemenceau's failure to secure a peacetime alliance, despite receiving verbal pledges to the contrary during the war, spawned the saying that 'the French army had won the war but Clemenceau had lost the peace'.²² This betrayal poisoned Anglo-French relations, which were further damaged by Anglo-French naval friction in the Black Sea during the Allied Intervention to stop the Russian Revolution.²³

¹⁸ McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 15; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 25.

¹⁹ Anthony P. Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War* (London: Cass, 1977), p. 5; Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 51; B. J. C. McKercher, ed., *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), p. 5.

²⁰ Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 51.

²¹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 5.

²² Ferris, 'The Theory of a French Air Menace', p. 65; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 17.

²³ Anthony Clayton, 'Growing Respect: the Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-39' in *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, ed. by M. S. Alexander and W. S. Philpott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 26-48 (p. 231).

Naval relations further deteriorated at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921-2.²⁴ France refused to consider a multilateral scrapping of submarines despite British pressure. Furthermore, their wishes to share Germany's battleships between the victors were opposed by the British in the months before the German fleet was scuttled.²⁵ This caused a rupture in military relations. From the early 1920s, Anglo-French military conversations abruptly terminated as Britain shifted her focus from European matters to her troubled and over-stretched Empire.²⁶

According to Rostow, the traumatic experiences of the First World War did not breed 'affection strong enough to replace traditions of rivalry' between Britain and France.²⁷ In fact, 'relations between politicians and officials in Paris and London were rarely warm' following the war, and at times were 'openly hostile', establishing a frostiness which 'must not be underestimated'.²⁸ As early as 1919, Clemenceau confessed to Lloyd George that 'within an hour after the armistice I had the impression that you had once again become the enemies of France'. Lloyd George retorted, 'has that not always been the traditional policy of my country?'²⁹ Clashes of personalities erupted thereafter, most infamously between Curzon and Poincaré, the former reduced to tears on one occasion and whimpers of 'I can't bear that horrid little man'.³⁰ Meanwhile, the French constantly criticised the non-committal British governments 'as feckless, unfaithful and short-sighted' during the early 1920s.³¹

²⁴ John Ferris, "'The Theory of a "French Air Menace", Anglo-French Relations and the British Home Defence Air Force Programmes of 1921-1925', *Journal of Security Studies*, 10, 1 (1987), pp. 54-91 (p. 65).

²⁵ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: the Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-39', pp. 28-29.

²⁶ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', pp. 53-54.

²⁷ N. Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations, 1934-1936* (London: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 134-36.

²⁸ Richard Davis, '*Mesentente Cordiale: The Failure of the Anglo-French Alliance. Anglo-French Relations During the Ethiopian and Rhineland Crises, 1934-1936*', *European History Quarterly*, 23 (1993), pp. 577-608 (p. 514).

²⁹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 109.

³⁰ J. F. V. Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?" French Perceptions of Britain as an Ally After the First World War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 13, 1 (1998), pp. 37-52 (p. 47).

³¹ M.S. Alexander and W.S. Philpott, eds, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), p. 2; Davis, '*Mesentente Cordiale: The Failure of*

Anglo-French relations remained uneasy in the years prior to 1925, with the British particularly apprehensive about the potential menace of the French Air Force, which surpassed the Royal Air Force in quantitative terms in 1921. The following year, Lloyd George warned that 'if we quarrelled with France' her 220 air squadrons 'would be across the Channel in a few hours'.³² Whilst the British did not seriously believe that the French would bomb London, they did fear that her capability to do so would strengthen her political leverage. As the French air menace peaked in 1925, any lingering British enthusiasm for the shared sacrifice of the First World War petered out.³³

Anglo-American relations also left much to be desired in the immediate years after Versailles as the two nations struggled for supremacy. Despite the emergence of a new world order, Anglo-American relations were dominated by antagonisms.³⁴ As one empire gradually superseded the other, something which traditionally has resulted in bloodshed, the transition of power inevitably ushered in tensions and disagreements, especially in the absence of a unifying, first-class threat to the new global democratic order, which might have bound them closer together.³⁵

According to Murfett, the 1920s was 'witness to a good deal of mutual mistrust, recrimination, acrimony and hostility in Anglo-American relations'.³⁶ In the three years following the war, resentment spiralled as America pressured Britain to abandon her traditional 'diplomatic methods and goals only for Britain to be left trying to work an American-inspired system from which America had pusillanimously

the Anglo-French Alliance. Anglo-French Relations During the Ethiopian and Rhineland Crises, 1934-1936', p. 518; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 53.

³² Ferris, 'The Theory of a French Air Menace', p. 66, 67 and 72.

³³ J. C. Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-40', *American Historical Review*, 79, 3 (1974), pp. 710-743 (p. 727).

³⁴ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 3-4.

³⁵ Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12.

³⁶ M. H. Murfett, *Fool-proof Relations: The Search for Anglo-American Naval Cooperation during the Chamberlain Years, 1937-1940* (Singapore: Singapore University Press, 1984), p. 22; Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', p. 187.

withdrawn'.³⁷ This betrayal produced a long-lasting bitterness. 'We played up to America over the League Covenant, abandonment of the Japanese alliance and so on, always making concessions and being told that the next step would change their attitude,' Hankey complained years onwards. 'Yet they are, as a result, more overbearing and suspicious against us than anyone else... I would make no more concessions to the Americans... You can't do business with them'.³⁸ The bitter relations between London and Washington were meanwhile stretched to breaking point by the struggle for naval supremacy, with 'anxiety and even talk of possible war' emanating from both sides.³⁹ Tensions were only temporary quelled by the Washington Naval Disarmament Treaties of 1921-2.⁴⁰

Throughout the 1920s, the two Anglo-Saxon cousins squabbled over questions of economic policy, war debt payments, reparations, Irish independence, and naval limitations.⁴¹ According to Rhodes, the heated quarrelling 'continued practically unabated', souring Anglo-American relations.⁴² More specifically, McKercher contends that the most serious disagreements centred around the questions of

³⁷ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 72.

³⁸ Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 56.

³⁹ McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, p. 2 and 83; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 50

⁴⁰ These treaties established a fixed-ratio for the possession of capital ships amongst the world's foremost powers to prevent future naval arms races and also included the Nine Power Treaty and the Four Power Pact. The former was an agreement between nine major nations to honour China's administrative and territorial integrity, settling the widespread competition for territory and influence in China which had riddled the previous century, whilst the latter was an accord between Britain, France, America and Japan to honour the status quo in the Pacific, removing rivalry, competition and potential clashes from the region. M. K. Doyle, 'The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy, 1931-1941', *Naval War College Review*, 3 (1977), pp. 52-60 (p. 55); Joseph Maiolo, *Cry Havoc: The Arms Race and the Second World War, 1931-1941* (London: John Murray, 2010), p. 117.

⁴¹ The two powers also argued over smaller issues such as cable network rights and oil rights in Venezuela, Iran and Iraq. J. H. Maurer, 'Fuel and the Battle Fleet: Coal, Oil and American Naval Strategy, 1898-1925', *Naval War College Review*, 34, 6 (1981), pp. 60-77 (p. 60); Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', p. 205; Burk, 'The House of Morgan in Financial Diplomacy, 1920-1930', p. 126.

⁴² Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 50; Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', p. 187.

financial and naval power: the sources of British strength for centuries past and the fuel for America's emerging supremacy.⁴³

Naval power was 'the most visible issue' in the Anglo-American struggle for dominance.⁴⁴ Whilst the two nations agreed to share supremacy in capital ships in 1922, it was over the question of cruiser ratios 'that the difficulties of the next 10 years was to hang'.⁴⁵ The Americans favoured large cruisers with heavy guns, whilst the British wanted light cruisers with lighter guns.⁴⁶ Even more problematically, the British stressed that the number of cruisers required for their vast imperial responsibilities far surpassed America's needs and that 'their ships for trade protections should [therefore] be more numerous'.⁴⁷

Tensions mounted at the Coolidge Naval Conference of 1927. Before long, the negotiations between the British and American delegations 'degenerated into shouting matches, as each side refused to budge and attitudes hardened'.⁴⁸ This hostility was mirrored by a 'most bitter press war' between Britain and America.⁴⁹ The Coolidge Conference collapsed amidst an 'atmosphere of national hostility and bitterness which was not exhibited in public again'.⁵⁰ As the two countries poured 'fuel on the raging fires of Anglo-American discord', blaming one another for the conference's failure, the Foreign Office once again weighed the imminence of an

⁴³ McKercher, "'The Deep and latent Distrust": The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-1929', p. 210; McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, p. 1.

⁴⁴ McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, p. 5.

⁴⁵ Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 52.

⁴⁶ McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, p. 83.

⁴⁷ Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 52.

⁴⁸ McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, p. 105.

⁴⁹ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 53.

Anglo-American war.⁵¹ By 1928, anti-Americanism was so rampant in London that even famous Atlanticists such as Churchill temporarily shunned their ties and allegiance to Washington, whilst Baldwin 'was said to have come to loathe the Americans so much that he could not bear meeting them'.⁵²

Whilst these naval tensions caused Anglo-American relations to reach 'the lowest point' during the interwar years, these antagonisms were soon soothed by the conciliatory efforts of Hoover and Macdonald from 1929, which were mirrored by Atlanticists in Britain and America.⁵³ Within a year, the flaming tensions over war debt payments, Irish independence and cruiser limitations were successfully extinguished.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the Washington Treaties had helped to settle various conflicts of interests in the Americas, the Middle East and the Far East.⁵⁵

However, an undercurrent of financial tension remained. During the 1920s, finance was 'at the centre of the geopolitical stage', required for the reconstruction of a war-ravaged Europe, not to mention reparations, war debts payments, currency stabilisation and trade. These needs created a heightened demand for private finance, which spawned fierce competition between London and New York, the world's foremost financial centres.⁵⁶ Finance was also the fuel propelling the transition of power from Britain to America. This shift was catalysed by the First World War as Europe's traditional creditors – London and Paris – fell into debt with New York money lenders under the demands of total war.⁵⁷ American financial institutions, such as JP Morgan, gave substantial loans to Britain and France and

⁵¹Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 50; McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, p. 2 and 83.

⁵² Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 58.

⁵³ Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', pp. 55-56; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 50.

⁵⁴ Rhodes, 'The Image of Britain in the United States, 1919-1929: A Contentious Relative and Rival', p. 205.

⁵⁵ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 50

⁵⁶ Burk, 'The House of Morgan in Financial Diplomacy, 1920-1930', in *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, ed. by B.J.C. McKercher (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 125-157 (p. 125).

⁵⁷ Ian Cowman, *Dominion or Decline: Anglo-American Naval Relations in the Pacific, 1937-1941* (Oxford: Berg, 1996), p. 118; McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 3; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 26.

'bought... investments sold off by the European powers', allowing New York to emerge as 'a new, internationally important, money market', unashamedly 'awash with money'.⁵⁸ By late 1918, Britain and France respectively owed 4.5 and 3.5 billion dollars to America.⁵⁹ 'When the war is over we can force them to our way of thinking,' President Wilson wrote on 27 July 1917, 'because by that time they will, among other things, be financially in our hands'.⁶⁰

Imperial isolationists in London such as Hankey equally feared America's economic challenge, which included competition for Britain's imperial markets, especially in the Americas. Between 1915 and 1920, the British watched on nervously as America's foreign trade quadrupled. The British also panicked about Washington's ambition to make the dollar the world's foremost currency at the pound's expense.⁶¹ By 1916, America had overtaken the British Empire in industrial output, producing half the world's manufactured goods only two years onwards through giant corporations such as Ford, General Motors, Westinghouse, Firestone, US Steel and Du Pont.⁶² America also surpassed Britain in wealth, its treasury gold reserves stacked almost four times as high.⁶³ As the British struggled to tackle post-war economic problems, such as unemployment, demobilisation and the winding down of armament factories, the Americans began to throw their weight around by using 'foreign economic policy as their main instrument of diplomacy', something which 'aroused suspicion and resentment in London'.⁶⁴

Yet, finance also helped to heal the rising Anglo-American hostility. Following hyperinflation in Germany and the Ruhr Crisis of 1923, a rare act of financial

⁵⁸ Burk, 'The House of Morgan in Financial Diplomacy, 1920-1930', p. 126.

⁵⁹ Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12.

⁶⁰ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 32.

⁶¹ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 118; McKercher, "'The Deep and latent Distrust": The British Official Mind and the United States, 1919-1929', pp. 213-14; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 34.

⁶² Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 281; Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12; McKercher, *The Transition of Power*, p. 3.

⁶³ Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 2; McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 3; Callum A. MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement, 1936-1939* (New York and London: Macmillan, 1981), p. 21.

collaboration stabilised Europe through the Dawes Plan of 1924, which removed some of the Versailles Treaty's harsher clauses.⁶⁵ According to Langer, Washington collaborated extensively with Paris and London to encourage the 'economic reconstruction' of Europe in the decade after 1918.⁶⁶ The Americans once again proved themselves capable of collaboration in 1929 by brokering the Young Plan, which softened Germany's reparation payments.⁶⁷ Despite these successes in economic collaboration, Burk exaggerates when she describes these events as the birth of an 'Anglo-American political and financial axis', which proved to be 'the predominant phenomenon' of the 1920s.⁶⁸ Burk's claim overlooks the almost-unabating financial, economic and naval tensions, resentments and ruptures during the 1920s as America and Britain wrestled for supremacy. The notion that a *functional* new world order arose after 1918, led by Britain and America in harmonious spirit, is a *myth*.

Across the Atlantic, sour Anglo-French relations were soothed by the Locarno Agreement of 1925. Such was the extent of reconciliation that the British Government ruled that war with France was now impossible.⁶⁹ Austin Chamberlain and Aristide Briand went on to create a close partnership in the late 1920s, which temporarily 'restored cordiality to Anglo-French relations', though this 'era of relatively good feelings' was short-lived.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Britain and France's stewardship of the League bore fruit initially, the organisation resolving several small border disputes and facilitating disarmament discussions during the 1920s.⁷¹

⁶⁵ McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 18; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 111.

⁶⁶ William Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolationism, 1937-1940* (New York: Harpers, 1952), p. 15.

⁶⁷ Arnold Offner, *American Appeasement. United States Foreign Policy and Germany, 1933-1938* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), p. 8.

⁶⁸ Burk, 'The House of Morgan in Financial Diplomacy, 1920-1930', p. 126.

⁶⁹ P.M.H Bell, *France and Britain, 1900-1940* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 165; Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940', p. 726.

⁷⁰ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 165; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 28; Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940', p. 726.

⁷¹ Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 11.

The French also morally collaborated with America in the late 1920s, sponsoring the Kellogg-Briand Pact of 1928.⁷² This was an agreement between 62 countries, including every significant power bar Russia, to use negotiation and arbitration to settle future disputes.⁷³ The Kellogg-Briand Pact epitomised the growth of the pacifist, disarmament and internationalist movements in Britain, America and France, and kindled hope that these democracies might yet be able to overcome their rivalries.⁷⁴

However, relations had too often been strained to breaking point during the 1920s and would be tested again as the Great Depression wreaked havoc across the globe, destroying the “baby steps” taken by London, Paris and Washington to settle their many clashes since the war. The dominant phenomenon of the 1920s was undoubtedly the acrimonious relations between the three great democracies – contrary to Burk’s claim that it was financial collaboration – as each sought to fill the power vacuum left by the collapse of four European empires.

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Of all the powers affected by the Wall Street Crash of 1929, America suffered the second most after Germany, with one in four American workers becoming unemployed and her banking system experiencing a succession of collapses, which paralysed the nation socially, financially and economically.⁷⁵ Since finance was the source of American strength, her power was essentially ‘eclipsed’ for a decade.⁷⁶ Consequently, Roosevelt was compelled to focus his attention on the social and economic problems ravaging America throughout the 1930s instead of on

⁷² Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 27.

⁷³ Bell, *Chamberlain, Japan and Germany*, p. 6; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 27.

⁷⁴ Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 101; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 16; Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 168; Adamwraith, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 22; Cairns, ‘A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940’, p. 728; M. Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement: Anglo-French Relations in the Popular Front Era* (Oxford and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 1996), p. 7.

⁷⁵ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 25; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 65; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 288.

⁷⁶ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 61.

rearmament to meet the rising threat of the revisionist powers – Germany, Italy and Japan.⁷⁷ According to Radar, it was the Great Depression, with its attendant unemployment, homelessness, shantytowns, hunger, desperation and fear of revolution, that ‘ushered in the halcyon days of twentieth century isolationism’ in America and prevented the democracies in subsequent years from rearming in response to Hitler.⁷⁸

As the financial storms swept across the globe, the democracies did not collaborate economically, but ‘chose divergent economic policies to deal with the Great Depression’. Whilst the British opted for protectionism and imperial preference, penning the Ottawa Agreements of 1932, the Americans demanded lower tariffs and free trade.⁷⁹ Indeed, Hull believed that free trade was ‘the greatest civilising force in world history’, capable of ending wars and ushering in global prosperity, whilst protectionism was ‘the supreme threat to world peace’.⁸⁰ This clash of economic ideologies left Britain and America at odds. The British were deeply suspicious of Hull’s push for lower tariffs, believing it to be a thinly-veiled ‘device for American economic domination’ over Britain’s imperial markets.⁸¹

The British refused to support lower tariffs, seeing the philosophy of imperial preference as ‘a kind of glue holding the empire together’.⁸² This glue would not be dissolved to foster friendship with America – a strategy which had borne little fruit and caused much headache during the 1920s.⁸³ Runciman, the President of the Board of Trade, promised to prioritise Britain’s protectionist policies ‘as long as I am where I am’, as did his successor, Stanley, both men winning praise from the Tory Party, the

⁷⁷ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 66; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 2; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 294.

⁷⁸ F. J. Radar, ‘The Works Progress Administration and Hawaiian Preparedness, 1935-1940’, *Military Affairs*, 43, 1 (1979), pp. 12-17 (p. 12).

⁷⁹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 13.

⁸⁰ J.D. Doenecke and M.A. Stoler, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Foreign Policies, 1933-1945* (Lanham, MD, and Oxford: 2005), p. 11; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293.

⁸¹ MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 21; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 22.

⁸² Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 22

⁸³ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 22; MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 21.

National Association of Manufacturers, the Federation of British Industries, and many government ministers.⁸⁴ Likewise, Neville Chamberlain ‘never wavered in his own commitment to a preferential system’ in all the years that he orchestrated Britain’s economic policy between 1931 and 1940.⁸⁵

As old wounds reopened between London and Washington over their clashing economic policies, the financial storm forced America to turn off the financial tap which had hydrated Europe since 1918. As investors ‘ran for cover’ across the continent, it was actually Paris, not London, which became the money haven of Europe, since it was yet to be affected by the Great Depression.⁸⁶ When the French were eventually hit by the Great Depression in the mid-1930s, the government opted for fiscal orthodoxy and austerity over the rival policies of British protectionism, American free-trade and German deficit financing, but could not avoid the ensuing industrial slump, the French nation paralysed at the precise moment when all-out rearmament was required to resist the totalitarian threat.⁸⁷

As London, Paris and Washington each pursued conflicting solutions to the Great Depression, the emerging world system continued to splinter as relations deteriorated. Anglo-French relations suffered as Paris became awash with gold and the Bank of England became dependent on the franc, something which caused great resentment.⁸⁸ The British also begrudged Paris ‘for failing to help the pound’ as the banks of Central Europe collapsed in quick succession in 1931.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the

⁸⁴ MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 21

⁸⁵ MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 21; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 22.

⁸⁶ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 62

⁸⁷ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 171; Michael Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936-1940* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1999), p. 69; Imlay, ‘Paul Reynaud and France’s Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940’, p. 500; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 160.

⁸⁸ T. C. Imlay, ‘Paul Reynaud and France’s Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940’, *French Historical Studies*, 26, 3 (2003), pp. 497-538 (p. 500); Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 29; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, pp. 83-4.

⁸⁹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 112.

Americans resented the French for defaulting on their war debt payments and the British for reducing their payments to a 'token' contribution.⁹⁰

The World Economic Conference of 1933 provided a singular opportunity for the democracies to bury the hatchet, start afresh and strengthen the creaking, global democratic order by collaborating financially before a great audience – the international press and the 66 foreign delegations in attendance. No sooner had the conference convened in London, backroom discussions began between Chamberlain, Bonnet, and senior members of the American delegation, as the democracies attempted to seize the opportunity triumphantly to lead the world out of the Great Depression.⁹¹ Almost immediately, these private discussions led to a financial agreement for currency stabilisation, which would help to combat the storm. However, when news of this agreement leaked and rocked America financially, Roosevelt repudiated the pact and devalued the dollar, torpedoing the entire conference.⁹² Chamberlain concluded that 'there has never been a case of a conference being so completely smashed by one of the participants'. 'It is really wicked,' he declared again, 'that when such important issues are at stake... we have the misfortune to be dealing with a nation of cads'.⁹³ According to Offner, Nazi diplomats were 'delighted' by the show of discord between the three great democracies who were once again at loggerheads.⁹⁴

Watt argues that Roosevelt's actions at the World Economic Conference caused an inevitable rupture between London and Washington.⁹⁵ Similarly, Langer claims that Roosevelt's backtracking on the tripartite agreement and shipwrecking of the conference 'was certainly a case of almost unpardonable bungling'.⁹⁶ Roosevelt had prioritised America's economic recovery over a singular opportunity for financial collaboration with Britain and France. Chamberlain was most certainly 'stung' by

⁹⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 56.

⁹¹ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 67.

⁹² Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 41; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 67.

⁹³ Greg Kennedy, 'Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the United States during his Chancellorship', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 13, 1 (2002), pp. 95-120 (p. 109).

⁹⁴ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 41.

⁹⁵ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 67.

⁹⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 16.

Roosevelt's self-serving actions, and from this unsavoury saga formed a long-lasting, 'negative view of the Americans, as an unreliable, manipulative, self-centred nation, governed by amateurs and incompetents', which influenced his decision-making throughout the 1930s.⁹⁷

As the torpedoed World Economic Conference sank to the ocean floor, economic competition increased between Britain and America. Indeed, the British feared a reactionary spike of Anglophobia in Washington, which might push her to seize British markets in South America as a remedy for the Great Depression.⁹⁸ These fears were compounded by an untimely clash over Britain's war debt payments and the sudden resignations of Dean Acheson and Oliver Sprague, which 'were taken as ominous evidence of the victory of the Anglophobes, William Bullitt and Louise Howe, in Roosevelt's entourage'.⁹⁹ These tensions culminated with the American Gold Reserve Act of 1934, which established a rival organisation to the British Exchange Equalisation Fund, and pointed towards a 'gigantic struggle' between the two bodies in the future.¹⁰⁰

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The sudden breakdown in financial and economic relations between the three democracies was mirrored in the diplomatic realm as infighting arose over the issues of disarmament, American neutrality legislation and Japanese aggression in the Far East. On 18 September 1931, the Japanese invaded Manchuria and ignored League and American calls to cease hostilities.¹⁰¹ On 7 January 1932, Henry Stimson, the US Secretary of State, sent the Japanese a letter of non-recognition of Manchuria and

⁹⁷ Kennedy, 'Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the United States during his Chancellorship', p. 109; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 7.

⁹⁸ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 67; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 7.

⁹⁹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 7; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 67.

¹⁰¹ Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in East Asia*, p. 99; Dorothy Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), pp. 3-6.

hoped that the other great democracies would follow suit. However, the British refused to support Stimson's demarche.¹⁰²

According to Churchill, the British were far more concerned about maintaining cordial relations with Japan given their over-stretched imperial position than with saving Manchuria and so proved reluctant to act with America outside of the League's auspices.¹⁰³ For Langer, the British 'failed to make the most of the opportunity [to collaborate with Washington] and thereby assumed the chief responsibility for what in retrospect appears as little short of a tragedy'.¹⁰⁴ Perhaps the British would have acted differently had they anticipated the 'strong sense of disillusionment' that flooded the White House.¹⁰⁵ The American decision-makers were deeply scared and consequently opposed collaboration with London during the 1930s, despite the existential threat to the new world order.

The breakdown in Anglo-American diplomatic relations was twinned with a crisis of leadership following the release of the Lytton Report – the League's investigation of the Manchurian Crisis – in October 1932, with neither Britain nor America willing to take the lead in sanctioning Japan, whether morally, politically or economically. Despite many requests for Washington to take the lead, the Americans were adamant that the responsibility for leadership rested with the League's 56 member states, not the one outsider nation. A stalemate ensued, with neither Washington nor London willing to assume command. According to Borg, the Manchurian Incident was 'the first great attack upon the peace system that had evolved in the post-war years'.¹⁰⁶ This assault went unanswered.

¹⁰² Clifford, 'Britain, America, and the Far East, 1937-1940: A Failure in Cooperation', p. 137; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 31; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 9; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 68.

¹⁰³ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 68; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 99.

¹⁰⁴ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 15.

¹⁰⁵ N. R. Clifford, 'Britain, America, and the Far East, 1937-1940: A Failure in Cooperation', *Journal of British Studies*, 3, 1 (1963), pp. 137-54 (p. 137); Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 33.

¹⁰⁶ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 2 and 519.

As tensions mounted between the democracies over the Manchurian Crisis and the catastrophic financial storm, the international community began to discuss disarmament. These negotiations represented yet another opportunity for the leading powers of the global democratic order to show a united front to the world. However, disunity was rampant and the disarmament negotiations soon became deadlocked.¹⁰⁷ Whilst France, Britain and America each had vocal disarmament movements, the French refused to contemplate a disarmament pact 'without cast-iron guarantees against renewed German aggression'.¹⁰⁸ On 16 March 1933, Macdonald attempted to break the deadlock by unveiling an ambitious five-stage programme for European disarmament, which included a home army limit of 200,000 men for both Germany and France.¹⁰⁹ The French were appalled. Two months onwards, Roosevelt dramatically waded into the debate, delivering a speech in favour of the Macdonald programme, which was praised by the *New York Times* as 'even more bold than any proposal made by Woodrow Wilson'.¹¹⁰ Six days later, Roosevelt offered to join in with League sanctions against any states who acted aggressively in the future, despite his fears that it would undermine America's tradition of isolationism.¹¹¹ Hitler responded by praising Roosevelt's 'magnanimous proposal', which made an 'extraordinary impression on everyone'.¹¹² A disarmament pact 'seemed nearer than ever'.¹¹³

However, France believed that 'she would be signing her own death warrant' if she allowed Germany equal military status.¹¹⁴ Thus, over the next twelve months, these

¹⁰⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 77.

¹⁰⁸ Peter Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-1934* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), p. 6; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 172; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 6; G. C. Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury, 1932-1939* (Edinburgh: Scottish American Press, 1979), p. 3; Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-38*, p. 100; Peter Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', *Historical Journal*, 41:2 (1998), pp. 795-824 (p. 803).

¹⁰⁹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 23.

¹¹⁰ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 32.

¹¹¹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, pp. 33-4.

¹¹² Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 4; Offner, *American Appeasement*, pp. 33-4.

¹¹³ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 35.

¹¹⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 29.

disarmament 'proposals and counter proposals all foundered on the same rocks'.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, Germany rearmed relentlessly, arousing French suspicions. On 17 April 1934, after global consternation about Germany's soaring military budget, Paris informed Berlin that she would abandon the disarmament conversations to concentrate on her security needs.¹¹⁶ Within two months, the World Disarmament Conference was adjourned indefinitely.¹¹⁷ London accused Paris of shipwrecking the conference, whilst Paris retorted that London and Washington had refused to guarantee her security, compelling her to abandon the conversations.¹¹⁸ As the democracies bickered, Roosevelt's self-confidence was shattered by his failure to influence the Geneva discussions. He no longer felt certain that he could save Europe from sliding into political and military chaos.¹¹⁹

The deep wounds caused by the collapse of the disarmament conference did not heal quickly. As Hitler pursued an aggressive foreign policy from 1936 onwards, the British blamed France's stubbornness over disarmament for having unleashed a virulent nationalistic spirit in Germany. Eden continually pointed his finger at 'the merciless Clemenceau generation' and their desire 'to ruin and humiliate Germany' as the cause of the disarmament deadlock and Germany's subsequent aggression.¹²⁰ Similarly, after the Rhineland Crisis, Pownall pondered that the German 'Kettle has been seething for years, now it has boiled over. The French are to blame for trying to keep the lid down' at Geneva.¹²¹

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Although the democracies failed to broker a disarmament agreement, the military balance in Europe remained in their favour in the early 1930s. In fact, the military

¹¹⁵ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: the Royal Navy and the Marine nationale, 1918-1939', p. 38.

¹¹⁶ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 7; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 87.

¹¹⁷ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 167.

¹¹⁸ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 7; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 103.

¹¹⁹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 18.

¹²⁰ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 179.

¹²¹ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 227.

superiority of the democracies was so overwhelming that an alliance to sustain the emerging world order did not seem necessary in British eyes. In Europe, their naval supremacy was unquestioned, the Versailles Treaty having stripped Germany of her dreadnoughts, naval aircraft, heavy cruisers and submarines.¹²² As Hitler took power, the German fleet merely consisted of five cruisers and twelve torpedo boats in modern tonnage, accompanied by a handful of obsolete vessels, whilst France and Italy were friendly.¹²³

In the Far East, the naval situation was more precarious. Although on paper, Washington and London had an overwhelming combined naval superiority over Tokyo, the Japanese could concentrate all her forces in one theatre, whilst the democracies would have to fight a war on the far side of the world, with a dearth of adequate naval bases in the region.¹²⁴ Perhaps more importantly, the past fifteen years of antagonism and distrust between London and Washington meant that any naval combination between them was unlikely. This disunity gave Japan a unique window of opportunity for expansion in East Asia, an opportunity which was aggravated by America's naïve decision not to build up to her authorised naval ceiling set by the Washington Treaties of 1921-2. Instead of spending on armaments between 1919 and 1931, the Americans believed that 'it was enough that everyone knew they could'.¹²⁵ According to Tooze, economics 'was the pre-eminent medium of American power', not battleships.¹²⁶ Thus, for most of the inter-war years, the world

¹²² Wesley Wark, 'In Search of a Suitable Japan: British Naval Intelligence in the Pacific before the Second World War', *Intelligence and National Security*, 1 (1986), pp. 20-38 (p. 191); Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 127; Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 80.

¹²³ Bagnasco, *The Littorio Class*, p. 20; Wark, 'In Search of a Suitable Japan: British Naval Intelligence in the Pacific before the Second World War', p. 191; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 127.

¹²⁴ Christopher Bell, "'Our Most Exposed Outpost": Hong Kong and British Far Eastern Strategy, 1921-1941', *Journal of Military History*, 60, 1 (1996), pp. 61-88 (p. 62).

¹²⁵ Given the absence of a serious foreign menace at this time, it was believed that America could maintain her global influence by simply emphasising 'the nation's *potential* for construction', which would be enough to kill off any potential challenge, just as it had immediately after the war, when it had brought the greatest maritime power to the negotiating table; Italics added; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 84; Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12.

¹²⁶ Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12.

feared America's vast economic potential, rather than her limited military capabilities.¹²⁷

America's policy not to convert her vast wealth into military power – something known as “disarmament by example” – peaked during the Hoover years of 1929 to 1933, when not one warship was authorised for construction, and was no doubt compounded by the financial crash, which over-shadowed Hoover's presidency.¹²⁸ The US Navy Department tried to resist this weak policy in 1929, proposing an enormous naval-building programme which would raise the fleet to its authorised ceiling within seven years. However, the battleship replacement programme alone was priced at \$1.1 billion, something which neither Hoover nor the Senate could not justify in light of the Great Depression.¹²⁹

Thus, by the time Roosevelt was sworn into office in 1933, the US Navy was still embarrassingly below its authorised naval ceiling.¹³⁰ The US Navy had only built 65 percent of its permitted vessels, whilst it was chronically short of personnel, needing 8,500 officers and 137,557 men to reach treaty standards.¹³¹ Meanwhile, Japan had raced towards her authorised naval ceiling, giving her approximately the same naval strength as America.¹³² Hugh Wilson, the senior US arms negotiator at the naval disarmament conferences of the 1930s, bitterly acknowledged in 1933 that he ‘had nothing but potential building strength to offer against their [Britain and Japan's] real ships’.¹³³

Fortunately for the Navy Department, Roosevelt was considered both a friend and sympathiser of the fleet, having previously served as Secretary of the Navy.¹³⁴ The President acted quickly, announcing three days after his inauguration the use of

¹²⁷ McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s*, p. 61.

¹²⁸ Brian McKercher, “‘Our Most Dangerous Enemy’: Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s”, *International Historical Review*, 13, 4 (1991), pp. 751-83 (p. 757); Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-38*, p. 100.

¹²⁹ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 84.

¹³⁰ Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-38*, p. 100.

¹³¹ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, pp. 84-5.

¹³² Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-38*, p. 100.

¹³³ McKercher, ‘Our Most Dangerous Enemy’, p. 766.

¹³⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

special emergency funds for the construction of new capital ships.¹³⁵ A year later, he also supported the Vinson-Trammell Bill, which aimed to bring the navy up to its authorised treaty limit.¹³⁶

Yet, the construction of warships and the training of personnel would take years to accomplish. By 1935, the US Navy's cruisers were still languishing at only 70% of complement, whilst its capital ships sat at 81% of complement. This shortage of manpower was not helped by the unpopularity of the navy as a career, something caused by 'poor salaries, bad working conditions and inadequate housing'.¹³⁷ More concerning still, the US Navy remained well-below its authorised naval ceiling by the time the naval disarmament treaties lapsed in 1936, with many of these vessels floating towards obsolescence.¹³⁸

Thus, America entered the turbulent 1930s as a deficient naval power. This was especially problematic since her navy was regarded as her greatest armed service. The US Army Air Corps was but a fraction of the size of the air forces of Soviet Russia, Germany, Britain and France throughout the 1930s.¹³⁹ Meanwhile, the US Army languished at around 115,000 men, making it only marginally larger than Germany's disarmed army, which was capped at 100,000 troops by Versailles.¹⁴⁰ Worse, the US Army was even more deficient in equipment than it was in personnel.¹⁴¹ As such, London discounted the US Army as a serious military factor during the interwar period, believing it to be a third-rate force.¹⁴²

¹³⁵ Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-38*, p. 102.

¹³⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 122; Borg, *The United States and the Far East Crisis of 1933-38*, p. 102; Doyle, 'The US Navy-Strategy and the Far East', p. 56.

¹³⁷ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 85.

¹³⁸ Fred Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', *American Historical Review*, 66, 2 (1961), pp. 354-377 (p. 360); Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 86.

¹³⁹ 'Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation', June 1936, WO 190/433

¹⁴⁰ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 359; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 283; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 18.

¹⁴¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹⁴² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544; *Annual Report on the*

What the Americans (and indeed the British) lacked militarily, however, was compensated for by the French Army, which reigned supreme in Europe as the bastion of democracy. Germany's forced military disarmament, twinned with the disintegration of Austria-Hungary, the Ottoman Empire and Imperial Russia, not to mention Britain's preference to rule the waves, paved the way for France to become the unquestioned military power in Europe for the next fifteen years.¹⁴³ Indeed, by 1925, the French peacetime army was 640,000 strong, and far better equipped than Germany's miniscule army, which was forbidden from owning tanks and heavy artillery.¹⁴⁴ 'The French Army, resting upon its laurels,' Churchill wrote years later, 'was incomparably the strongest military force in Europe'.¹⁴⁵

Together, the three great democracies were just as dominant in the air. France's Armée de l'Air was second only to Russia's air force, with Britain's not far behind.¹⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Versailles had forced the disbandment of the German Air Force.¹⁴⁷ In 1933, British intelligence reported that Germany only possessed 127 military aircraft, which were sheltered and flown in secret, whilst the German air general staff had shrivelled 'to a clandestine and embryonic unit within the Reichswehr troops department'.¹⁴⁸ Unsurprisingly, the British concluded that they enjoyed an 'overwhelming air superiority' over Germany, and predicted that London would remain safe from a German air armada until at least 1945.¹⁴⁹

Thus, on land, sea and air, the democracies were unrivalled by their enemies, individually and collectively. Despite the great financial crash, the rising discord

United States of America for 1938, FO 371/22832; *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹⁴³ Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 822.

¹⁴⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159; Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 822.

¹⁴⁵ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 12.

¹⁴⁶ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 37; Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 20

¹⁴⁷ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 167; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 35.

¹⁴⁸ Junkers, the German aviation company, had an aircraft plant near Moscow illegally to produce a small amount of planes in secret; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 37; Earl F. Ziemke, 'Soviet Net Assessment in the 1930s' in *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II*, ed. by Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millet (Oxford: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 19-59 (p. 189).

¹⁴⁹ Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 20; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 35.

between the democracies, Japan's invasion of Manchuria and the collapse of the world disarmament conference, the new world order appeared safe from the totalitarian storm that was amassing on the horizon. Yet, this rosy outlook was to be transformed in favour of the aggressive powers with astonishing speed over the coming years.

As the democracies rested on their laurels, both Germany and Japan poured their resources into rearmament. Within three years of Hitler taking power, his arms programme threatened to reverse France's land and air hegemony over the Third Reich. In the air sphere, Hitler accorded the Luftwaffe around 47 percent of the total military budget between 1933 and 1938.¹⁵⁰ Germany's ruthless air rearmament programme took the democracies by surprise and was exacerbated by French intelligence, which grossly overestimated Germany's air strength and industrial capabilities.¹⁵¹ On 25 March 1935, Hitler announced the Luftwaffe's air parity with the RAF. It took many months for London to realise that Hitler was lying.¹⁵²

Over the next twelve months, Hitler poured his resources into building up the Luftwaffe to transform his lie into a truth.¹⁵³ To support this drive, the German aircraft industry underwent an eye-watering expansion, with airframe production trebling to 200 a month, engine production increasing fivefold to 500 a month, and the labour force more than tripling to 28,000 men. Simultaneously, the British upscaled their predictions of the Luftwaffe's future numerical strength from a first-line force of 1,640 aircraft within ten years to 1,500 aircraft within two years.¹⁵⁴ As fears of the Luftwaffe's power reached fever-pitch in London, the perceived importance of the French Armée de l'Air increased in tandem.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans, November 1936 – April 1939', *English Historical Review*, 90 (1975), pp. 778-797 (p. 790).

¹⁵¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 53; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 156; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 42.

¹⁵² Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe', p. 255; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 53; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 156; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 42.

¹⁵³ Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft Production Plans, November 1936 – April 1939', p. 790.

¹⁵⁴ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 51; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe', p. 257.

Whilst the French still had the world's second largest air force in 1935, much of its equipment was either obsolete or swiftly becoming obsolete, a problem heavily compounded by the technological air revolution from wooden airframes to all-metal machines in the early 1930s.¹⁵⁵ France's aircraft industry was artisanal in its production methods and plant, making it inept for the mass production of all-metal aircraft.¹⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Hitler's Germany had invested in modern plant and introduced totalitarian methods of production.¹⁵⁷ Thus, both Germany's aerial industrial capacity and the Luftwaffe itself soared in British estimations, whilst the French Air Force and its supporting industries plummeted.

The French Air Force also suffered from a lack of autonomy from the French Army, remaining under its auspices until 1933, both chronically undervalued and under-utilised.¹⁵⁸ For most of the inter-war period, the French Army did not believe that aviation 'could decisively alter the course of war'.¹⁵⁹ 'As long as we observe a defensive position,' proclaimed Gamelin, 'enemy aircraft cannot exercise a decisive influence on the land battle'.¹⁶⁰ This view was popular in France, even amongst renowned military visionaries such as Colonel Charles de Gaulle.¹⁶¹ In the minds of the French military elite, the last conflict had primarily been won on land and so would the next conflict.¹⁶² Given this conviction, the French Army demanded tactical

¹⁵⁵ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159; Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 20; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 163; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 35.

¹⁵⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 16, 147 and 163; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 128; Robert Young, *In Command of France: French Foreign Policy and Military Planning, 1933-1940* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), p. 19.

¹⁵⁷ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 195.

¹⁵⁸ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 6; Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 63.

¹⁵⁹ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 16; Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 59.

¹⁶⁰ Robert Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', *Journal of European Studies*, 2 (1972), pp. 155-172 (p. 170).

¹⁶¹ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 16; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 162.

¹⁶² Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 57.

support from the Armée de l'Air on the battlefield and opposed a strategic bombing role, which would target the enemy's industrial capacity.¹⁶³

However, the French Air Force desired a strategic role, wishing to mirror the daring doctrines of other European air forces.¹⁶⁴ As it gained *de jure* autonomy from the army in 1933, a battle for its *de facto* independence erupted and refused to subside before September 1939.¹⁶⁵ This debate caused a damaging compromise on the type of planes constructed between 1933 and 1936. As Hitler rose to power, the French Government launched Plan 1, which aimed to produce 1,010 planes by January 1936, sparking the doubling of the French aviation industry to 32,000 labourers within two years.¹⁶⁶ One of the main aircraft types constructed was a multi-purpose machine known as the BCR – an acronym for bombing, combat and reconnaissance.¹⁶⁷ Problematically, this jack-of-all-trades machine was soon exposed as a master-of-none, 'suited neither to effective strategic strikes nor to tactical operations undertaken in liaison with the ground forces'. The BCR, carrying five men, three machine-guns and a mammoth bomb-load, soon proved to be slow and without manoeuvrability.¹⁶⁸ Thus, it crippled the French Air Force's strategic and tactical capabilities.

It also became clear that air rearmament Plan 1 'was an abject failure' in terms of production speed, which soon slowed to a crawl.¹⁶⁹ This untimely collapse in

¹⁶³ Jackson 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 128; Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 59.

¹⁶⁴ Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 63.

¹⁶⁵ In practice, the French Air Force remained subservient with 86 percent of its machines reserved for army cooperation, rather than strategic bombing missions. This limited tactical role caused the French Air Force to suffer financially and to be nicknamed 'France's Cinderella Service'. Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 162; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 35; Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 64.

¹⁶⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 163.

¹⁶⁷ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 128; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 36.

¹⁶⁸ Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 65 and 68.

¹⁶⁹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 198.

production caused the air service to fall 'appallingly short on modern bombers, fighters and reconnaissance aircraft', just as the Luftwaffe spread its wings.¹⁷⁰ The British were shocked to see the French Air Force plummet from being the bastion of democracy to being a major chink in its armour by mid-1936.

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The French Army was also swiftly challenged by the German Army, which was surprising given that Hitler had inherited 'a disarmed state' in January 1933, completely 'shackled by the arms limitations' of Versailles. Indeed, it was utterly incapable of posing a threat to its weak eastern neighbours of Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, let alone to France.¹⁷¹ Whilst the British War Office underestimated Germany's military strength and future potential in the years preceding 1936, several influential civil servants – particularly Vansittart and Fisher – sounded the alarm from the beginning.¹⁷² In 1933, Vansittart warned his more nonchalant peers that the 'present regime in Germany will... loose off another European war just as soon as it feels strong enough'.¹⁷³ Similarly, Churchill warned of Europe's darkening totalitarian shadow, proclaiming, 'Thank God for the French Army'.¹⁷⁴ The Foreign Office agreed that Germany's aggressive spirit was 'worse than at any time before 1914'.¹⁷⁵

Although the British believed that Hitler wished to reverse the Versailles Settlement and alter the map of Central Europe, the War Office believed that Germany was not militarily strong enough to bring about such dramatic geo-political changes through force, and would not be for a decade.¹⁷⁶ This feeling of relative security was only heightened by the friendship of France and Italy and Soviet Russia's warming

¹⁷⁰ Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 68.

¹⁷¹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 18.

¹⁷² Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390.

¹⁷³ Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁴ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 155.

¹⁷⁵ Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 17.

¹⁷⁶ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 81; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 251.

attitude.¹⁷⁷ Germany and Japan stood isolated as revisionist powers, and the former would have to build up its armed forces almost from scratch. This gave the democracies ample time to rectify their own military deficiencies.

Despite this, a five-year deadline for British war readiness was accepted both by the Cabinet and the Defence Requirements Committee (DRC), after pressure from Vansittart and Fisher, who used extracts from *Mein Kampf* to emphasise Hitler's aggressive intentions.¹⁷⁸ However, both the Admiralty and the Air Ministry 'ignored the five-year deadline and opted for longer periods of rebuilding', which demonstrates just how distant the Nazi threat seemed.¹⁷⁹ Indeed, the British were convinced that it would be five years before Germany could even build an army of 300,000 troops.¹⁸⁰ This complacency was no doubt reinforced by the comparative might of the French Army.¹⁸¹

However, Britain's complacency was shaken in 1935 when Hitler announced his intention to expand the Reichswehr from 100,000 to 500,000 men and to introduce conscription.¹⁸² Despite being taken aback, the MID believed that a 500,000 strong army was not 'excessive in view of the strategic position of Germany, the length of her frontiers and the armed strength of neighbouring powers'.¹⁸³ Even this expanded Reichswehr would not be strong enough to upset the European land balance.

¹⁷⁷ Michael Carley, 'Down a Blind Alley: Anglo-Franco-Soviet Relations, 1920-1939', *Canadian Journal of History*, 39 (1994), pp. 147-172 (p. 157); Carley, 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances: the Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-1936', p. 29; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 81.

¹⁷⁸ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 32-33; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 251.

¹⁷⁹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 30.

¹⁸⁰ The Reichswehr's initially-slow rate of expansion before 1935; Germany's shortage of raw materials for the mass production of armaments and military equipment; Germany's economic troubles; and the competing raw material needs of the Navy and Luftwaffe together led the War Office 'to underestimate the dynamism of German rearmament'; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 82-4; Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 84.

¹⁸¹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 86 and 99.

¹⁸² Norton Medicott, 'Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1930-1937', in *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Dilks (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 78-101 (p. 88); Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 83.

¹⁸³ Alexander, *Anglo-French Relations Between the Wars*, p. 5.

Moreover, Hitler had promised not to exceed this new figure.¹⁸⁴ The Reichswehr (which was renamed the Wehrmacht in 1935) was also seen as a stabilising factor, free from political contamination, which might restrain Hitler from aggression.¹⁸⁵ Even so, the French cautiously responded by doubling to twenty-four months the length of their compulsory military conscription.¹⁸⁶

Following these announcements, Hitler began to boast about, rather than downplay, Germany's military power, creating alarm abroad.¹⁸⁷ 'Germany is said to have borrowed over £1,000 million a year to get herself rearmed,' Chamberlain remarked in 1935. 'With... Great Britain disarmed, the temptation in a few years' time to demand territory etc. might be too great for Goering, Goebbels and their like to resist'.¹⁸⁸ The IIC and WO agreed.¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Vansittart prophesied that Hitler's true intentions would 'soon become evident to all but the biased and the blind'.¹⁹⁰

As the German Army established itself between 1933 and 1935, the French Army experienced alarming cuts in the wake of the World Disarmament Conference of 1932-34 and the delayed impact of the Great Depression on France.¹⁹¹ By 1933, France's national income had fallen by 30 percent, forcing the Government to slice fourteen percent from the French Army's budget, the severe cuts leading to the loss of 500 officers and 28,000 troops.¹⁹² These cuts led to shortages of armaments, equipment and tanks and to insufficient training.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁴ Medicott, 'Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1930-1937', p. 88; Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 85; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 86.

¹⁸⁵ This opinion was held by General Dill, the Director of MID; Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 84; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 86.

¹⁸⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82 and 88; Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 84.

¹⁸⁷ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 165.

¹⁸⁸ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 142.

¹⁸⁹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 84; Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 84.

¹⁹⁰ Carley, 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances: the Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-1936', p. 42.

¹⁹¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 84; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 23.

¹⁹² Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 817; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 37.

¹⁹³ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 10.

Deeper military cuts followed in 1934, which outraged General Weygand and compelled him to gather signatures from France's generals towards 'a formal note registering alarm at the tilting military budget'.¹⁹⁴ Weygand was furious that the French Government had made military cuts without first gaining assurances from other delegations at the World Disarmament Conference that they would follow suit.¹⁹⁵ However, Weygand's protests proved ineffective.¹⁹⁶ 'Financial considerations must take precedence over military policy', explained Daladier. 'Once [the Great Depression] is overcome, in 1936, we will be able to view things differently'.¹⁹⁷

These military cuts were accompanied by an untimely slump in French munitions production, the armament industry proving itself 'incapable of handling even the meagre orders for equipment placed by the military in 1934 and 1935'.¹⁹⁸ As military orders dwindled, France's munitions manufacturers refused to buy modern plant for mass production, fearing that they would receive no worthwhile return on the expensive machinery.¹⁹⁹ Gradually, serious production backlogs ensued in armaments, tanks and anti-tank weaponry.²⁰⁰

Nevertheless, Nazi Germany was not deemed threatening enough for France to prioritise rearmament over her growing financial and economic woes. Gamelin believed that it would take years for an isolated Germany to rival the world's most powerful army, especially since she had been worst hit by the Great Depression. Meanwhile, France had many friends who could offer her financial, industrial and military assistance, such as Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland, Yugoslavia, Italy, Soviet Russia, Britain and America. 'The French army staff believes that it has a considerable margin of superiority over Germany,' remarked Gamelin in 1935. 'We will see how long it will take for the Germans to catch up with the 20 billion francs we

¹⁹⁴ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 4; Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 25.

¹⁹⁵ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 83.

¹⁹⁶ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 164; Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 138.

¹⁹⁷ Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 822.

¹⁹⁸ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 168.

¹⁹⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 149.

²⁰⁰ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 168.

have spent on armaments!’²⁰¹ These military and diplomatic advantages fermented complacency in Paris and London, blinding the democracies from appreciating just how quickly the military advantage could be lost, especially if France was abandoned by her fair-weather friends and opposed by new enemies.²⁰² Unbeknown to the democracies, the time was approaching when they would no longer be powerful enough to stand alone – or perhaps even together – against the rising aggressor states.

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The covert shift in the military balance away from the democracies in Europe was overtly mirrored in the Pacific. During Roosevelt’s first term as president, the Japanese worked tirelessly to strengthen their fleet in the hope of leapfrogging America navally.²⁰³ Qualitatively, four *Kongo*-class battleships were modernised, whilst quantitatively the Japanese Navy secretly built new capital ships and naval aircraft.²⁰⁴ Despite Japan’s secret shipbuilding, her increased shipyard activity aroused the suspicions of London and Washington, who reported on the curious expansion of her dockyards.²⁰⁵ Equally suspicious was the erection of ‘large fences’ and ‘huge hemp curtains’ to hide the construction of two gargantuan, 64,000-ton battleships at the Kure Naval Arsenal and the Mitsubishi shipyard.²⁰⁶ In comparison, the largest British and American warships had a displacement of 35,000 tons.

Whilst the British and American intelligence organisations correctly reported that the Japanese were constructing large battleships and aircraft-carriers, they ‘greatly underestimated’ the tonnage of these vessels, ‘the power of their new weapons and the efficiency of their personnel’, which embarrassingly outshone those of the

²⁰¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, pp. 87-88.

²⁰² Jackson, ‘French Intelligence and Hitler’s Rise to Power’, p. 822.

²⁰³ T. G. Mahnken, ‘Gazing at the Sun: The Office of Naval Intelligence and Japanese Naval Innovation, 1918-1941’, *Intelligence and National Security*, 11 (1996), pp. 424-41 (p. 427).

²⁰⁴ Best, ‘Constructing an Image’, p. 427; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 118; Mahnken, ‘Gazing at the Sun’, p. 427.

²⁰⁵ Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 91 and 118.

²⁰⁶ Mahnken, ‘Gazing at the Sun’, p. 431.

democracies at the outbreak of hostilities in December 1941.²⁰⁷ On one occasion, Admiral Chatfield confessed that he had little intelligence on Japan, and that 'for all we knew she might be constructing battleships of 40,000 tons with 20-inch guns', which in the end proved a gross underestimation.²⁰⁸

Despite under-estimating Japan's naval strength and intentions, the British nevertheless responded to her suspicious naval activity by launching their own programme in 1934 to modernise six battleships over five years. The British also approved plans for the construction of five capital ships and six aircraft-carriers in 1936, following the lapse of the naval disarmament treaties.²⁰⁹ The Americans, however, chose to abstain from the global rearmament race, allowing their naval superiority over Japan to be cut to a dangerously low margin by 1939.²¹⁰ Whilst London and Washington together held a naval advantage over Japan, this was undermined by the distrust, resentment and rivalry between the democracies. If London and Washington continued to abstain from international collaboration with likeminded democracies, Japan would be free to expand her empire without fear of chastisement. By the mid-1930s, the dysfunctional, global democratic order was being challenged in Europe and the Far East by the relentless rearmament drives of the revisionist powers. As these secret rearmament drives became apparent, following an abrupt intelligence awakening in 1936, the cumulative effect was to shake the global democratic order to its core.

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The titling naval balance in the Pacific and the rising tension between London and Washington were aggravated by the Tydings-McDuffie Act of 1934, which promised

²⁰⁷ S. W. Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, 2 vols (London: William Collins Sons & Co Ltd, 1976), 2, p. 212.

²⁰⁸ Kennedy, 'British 'Net Assessment' and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 26.

²⁰⁹ Wark, 'In Search of Suitable Japan', p. 200; A. J. Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies: The Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy, Strategic Missions, 1936-1941* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), p. 18

²¹⁰ Mark Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization for World War II: The U.S.A, U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938-1945', *The Economic History Review*, 41, 2 (1988), pp. 171-192 (p. 174); Wark, 'In Search of Suitable Japan', p. 200; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 18.

independence to the Philippines by 1944. This withdrawal from East Asia was something which Roosevelt had demanded in only his second cabinet meeting as President.²¹¹ British concerns of America's untimely retreat into isolation were reinforced by reports from the British Embassy that the American public was being prepared for a military, economic and political retreat from the Philippines and China.²¹² In short, it was feared that Britain was being left to police the Far East singlehandedly. Alarming, this American withdrawal also coincided with Japan's decision in 1934 *not* to renew the naval limitation treaties so as to challenge the maritime dominance of Britain and America. From Tokyo, Ambassador Grew anticipated that Japan would probably advance into East Asia and 'might even suddenly try to seize some of the island possessions of the United States'.²¹³ Yet, Washington continued to think only of withdrawal, driven by the many impracticalities of her war plan to subdue Japan (see chapter two).²¹⁴

Adding insult to injury, the Americans also passed the Johnson Act of 1934, which prohibited nations which had defaulted on war debts from acquiring loans in wartime.²¹⁵ This added fuel to the fires of discord between Washington and the democracies of London and Paris. Whilst the British did not expect US military assistance in any future conflict, the sudden inability to borrow money from Washington came as a serious blow.²¹⁶ Yet, Robert Craigie, the Assistant Under-

²¹¹ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 82.

²¹² M. K. Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange, 1933-1940', *Naval War College Review*, 3 (1980), pp. 49-63 (p. 52); Doenecke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies*, p. 120; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 25 and 83.

²¹³ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 524.

²¹⁴ Louise Morton, 'War Plan Orange: Evolution of a Strategy', *World Politics*, 11, 2 (1959), pp. 221-250 (p. 222); Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 239; Doyle, 'The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy', p. 53; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 80; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 234; Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. II, p. 236; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 120.

²¹⁵ M. L. Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', *Canadian Journal of History*, 39, 2 (1994), pp. 331-351 (p. 343); Doenecke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies*, p. 120.

²¹⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 61;

Secretary at the Foreign Office, optimistically pointed out that the Americans would still supply belligerents with war material, if not financial loans, 'as happily as they have done in the past'.²¹⁷

However, even this was ruled out by America's neutrality legislation of 31 August 1935, which banned the selling of war material to belligerents in response to the Abyssinian Crisis.²¹⁸ Unfortunately for Britain and France, Roosevelt had lost the battle to acquire discretionary powers to distinguish between victims and aggressors, meaning that any arms ban would be a blanket one.²¹⁹ Vansittart vented that America's new stance represented 'a completely immoral and cowardly attitude', whilst the DRC concluded that she was now 'more isolationist at heart than ever before'.²²⁰

The British chargé d'affaires in Washington rightly believed that the Senate's new isolationist attitude represented the 'majority opinion of the country'.²²¹ The President desperately wished to nudge America towards internationalism.²²²

Calvin Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment' in *Calculations: Net Assessment and the Coming of World War II*, ed. by Williamson Murray and Allan Reed Millet (Oxford: Macmillan, 1992), pp. 19-59 (p. 222); Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 343; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 189.

²¹⁷ Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 343

²¹⁸ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 110; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 46; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293.

²¹⁹ Wayne S. Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', *Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 46, 4 (1960), pp. 644-662 (p. 654); Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293; Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 341.

²²⁰ DRC, Third Report, 'Programmes of the Defence Services', 21 November 1935, CAB 24/259/26; Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 347.

²²¹ Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 654; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293; Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 341; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 15.

²²² Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', pp. 652-3; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 334; Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 341.

However, his political capital could not be spared to fight America's embedded isolationist spirit. It was exclusively reserved for his New Deal legislation to revive America's economy, which faced a tricky passage through Congress and strong opposition from the Supreme Court.²²³

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The principle of isolationism was as old as America itself, dating back to 'the first English settlements on the North American Continent', which thrived under their newfound geographical isolation, thousands of miles away from a tumultuous Europe.²²⁴ The merits of isolationism had been proclaimed by Thomas Paine as revolution beckoned in America in 1776, and were upheld by Washington, Adams, Jefferson and Madison as Europe was ravaged by both the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars that followed the violent overhaul of the French *Ancien Régime*. President Monroe had cemented America's isolationist tradition in 1823, declaring America's strict neutrality unless and until the Western Hemisphere 'is invaded or seriously menaced'.²²⁵ American isolationism went unchallenged during the nineteenth century and peaked in 1904 when Theodore Roosevelt reaffirmed the Monroe Doctrine. America's acquisition of the Philippines, her observance of the "Open Door" Principle in China, and her war entry in 1917 were rare deviations from her isolationism, which were deeply regretted. Indeed, throughout the interwar period, American scholars disseminated research on how industrialisation, finance, trade and the greed of arms manufacturers had dragged America into the war.²²⁶

Despite the obstacle of isolationism, Roosevelt hoped to join the World Court, something which seemed like 'a safe bet with little risk' given the Senate's ardent

²²³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 2.

²²⁴ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, pp. 1-2.

²²⁵ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 6, 12 and 15.

²²⁶ David G. Anderson., 'British Rearmament and the "Merchant of Death": The 1935-1936 Royal Commission on the Manufacture of and Trade in Armaments', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 29 (1994), pp. 5-37 (p. 9); Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 283; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, pp. 18-19 and 40.

approval of the Hague.²²⁷ Yet, when Roosevelt requested to join the World Court, a storm of public indignation rose up, encouraged by the Hearst newspaper conglomerate, Senator Long and Father Charles Coughlin, who was an influential Detroit priest.²²⁸ Their disapproval saturated the radio airwaves and the press, reaching every nook and cranny of America and arousing fears that a deeper association with the wider world could drag America into another conflict.²²⁹ The public outcry swayed the Senate, which defeated Roosevelt's bill by seven votes.²³⁰ Venting his frustration, Roosevelt wrote that the Senate's isolationists 'are willing to see a city burn down just so long as their own houses remain standing in the ruins'. 'If they ever get to Heaven', he wrote angrily to Senator Robinson, 'they will be doing a great deal of apologising for a very long time – that is if God is against war – and I think He is'.²³¹

This defeat was a shock for Roosevelt, who had just secured 'the greatest congressional victory' in American history. If the President could not convince a Democrat-laden Congress to support his gentle internationalist agenda, 'what likelihood was there now of its being able to sponsor... more serious legislation or action to support treaties or halt aggression?'²³² Roosevelt's reeling advisors prophesied that this defeat would deprive 'the President of his freedom to act in foreign affairs' for years, whilst Roosevelt predicted that as a consequence 'we shall go through a period of non-cooperation [with London, Paris and the League of Nations] in everything... for the next year or two'.²³³

²²⁷ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 108; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 18; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293; Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. 95.

²²⁸ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 95.

²²⁹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 18; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 96.

²³⁰ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 108; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 18; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 293; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 96.

²³¹ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 96.

²³² Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 110.

²³³ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 96-7.

In reaction, Roosevelt shelved his idea to appoint an American Ambassador to the League of Nations.²³⁴ Roosevelt's personal secretary was also privately warned by Senator Pittman in 1935 that the President had ignored his advice regarding the World Court which had 'failed' and that if he pursued the fight for discretionary powers concerning the neutrality laws he would 'be licked as sure as hell'.²³⁵ Roosevelt heeded Pittman's advice and saved his political capital for his New Deal legislation.²³⁶

Although Roosevelt had failed in his attempts to push through his internationalist legislation, his endeavours conjured up hope in London and Paris that he was a genuine friend. As Roosevelt's New Deal programme dragged America out of depression, many Europeans, wary of the rising German threat, 'believed that Roosevelt alone had the capacity to avert another world war'.²³⁷ Indeed, when Roosevelt won re-election in 1936, Ambassador Bullitt recalled that the ecstatic French Prime Minister 'seized me and kissed me violently' in celebration. Bullitt informed Roosevelt that he was 'beginning to occupy the miracle man position' in Europe, with its peoples singing 'war is inevitable and Europe is doomed to destruction unless President Roosevelt intervenes'.²³⁸

However, others remained sceptical, arguing that American isolationism was embedded in its laws and public opinion. Following the recent history of failed collaboration and increased discord between London, Paris and Washington since 1919, Lindsay confessed to an American official that 'the U.S. Government was a hopeless proposition to play ball with'.²³⁹ Meanwhile, in London, Baldwin was accustomed to saying that 'you will get nothing out of the Americans but words. Big words, but only words'.²⁴⁰

²³⁴ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 33.

²³⁵ Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 654.

²³⁶ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 30.

²³⁷ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 65; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 374.

²³⁸ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 134.

²³⁹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 106.

²⁴⁰ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 20.

According to Tooze, the failed experiment of the emerging liberal world order between 1919 and 1931 'opened a strategic window of opportunity' for the totalitarian powers to challenge the status quo.²⁴¹ Thus, as the economically wounded democracies entered the turbulent 1930s, their constant quarrelling and clashing made the new international system resemble a house of cards, ready to topple at the next gust of wind. Indeed, the notion that London, Paris and Washington had birthed a *functional* global democratic order after 1918 is undoubtedly a myth, created by orthodox and counter-revisionist historians to reinforce their argument that a feasible alliance-building alternative existed to appeasement between 1936 and 1939. On the contrary, the pursuit of alliances seemed far-fetched in these years given the acrimonious relations between the democracies since 1919, which included clashes and quarrels over America's withdrawal from the League, the disastrous Naval Conference of 1927, their conflicting economic strategies to overcome the Great Depression, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the disastrous World Economic Conference of 1933, and the collapse of the World Disarmament Conference in 1934. Instead of transitioning from rivalry into friendship, the democracies had instead wrestled to fill the power vacuum left by the collapse of four empires during the First World War, becoming more estranged rather than bound together as the storm clouds of totalitarianism gathered on the horizon.

Only by understanding the atmosphere of bitterness and discord between the democracies from 1919 to 1935 can one understand their decisions to forsake collaboration and embrace appeasement in the 1930s. As the Abyssinian and Rhineland Crises shook the world, the idea of conjuring up a makeshift partnership seemed completely alien to the democracies, who had consistently failed to collaborate on the world stage since 1919. As the balance of power abruptly swung away from the democracies after 1936, each realised that they would have to embrace either appeasement, isolationism or the pursuit of alliances to survive. However, their camaraderie on the Western Front in 1918 had become a distant memory by this point, buried under years of discord and suspicion.

²⁴¹ Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 511.

Flawed War Plans

Until 1936, the democracies held the military advantage across the globe both individually and collectively. Whilst each nation's war plan had certain impracticalities, these flaws could be addressed through collaboration. Yet, each democracy was confident that the aggressive powers would not have the military capability to exploit these flaws for years. As such, these vulnerabilities were regarded as moot points. However, as the military picture darkened dramatically following an intelligence awakening in 1936, this feeling of relative security evaporated. The democracies realised the true extent of German and Japanese rearmament and witnessed a series of alarming geo-political tremors in quick succession, which shook the democracies to their core (see chapters 3 and 4). Understanding these flaws and how they tragically coincided with the discord between the democracies since 1919 is vital to understanding why Chamberlain dismissed as infeasible the alliance-building alternative to appeasement after assuming power.

From 1936, the realisation dawned on the democracies that they could no longer unilaterally police the world, given the systemic weaknesses in their respective war plans and the triple threat of Germany, Italy and Japan. Whilst the leading democracies increasingly recognised the need for military collaboration, they observed that their bitter history of discord since 1919 was blocking the path to military partnership. Unable to stand alone against the aggressive powers, the democracies found themselves at a crossroad. Each had to choose between the policies of isolationism, appeasement and collective security (either through alliances or the League of Nations) to secure their survival.

However, the feasibility of the alliance-building option waned as the aggressive powers rearmed, destroying the option of collective security without America's

participation. The roadblock of embittered democratic relations was further compounded by the fact that 'the pursuit of alliances, variously formed and constituted, had limited support in Britain in the 1930s', often being seen as a major cause of the First World War. Indeed, it was only after the Munich Crisis that the pursuit of alliances 'ceased to be the unpopular policy of a radical minority'.¹

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America's war plan to protect her Far Eastern interests was deeply flawed. Whilst these flaws could be addressed through UK-US collaboration, this solution went against America's isolationist principles and also seemed far-fetched given the increasingly embittered UK-US relations since 1919. At the turn of the twentieth century, the US Joint Army-Navy Board, created a succession of colour-coded war plans for *unilateral* conflicts against Japan (Orange), Britain (Red), Germany (Black) and an Anglo-Japanese combination (Red-Orange).² Of these war plans, only Orange was seriously developed and frequently updated during the inter-war period.³

These war plans were constructed to allow the Americans to fulfil their key international objectives. Primarily, they wished to defend their newly-acquired Philippines colony, protect their oceanic trade routes, defend the Western Hemisphere from external interference, uphold the "Open Door" principle in China, avoid alliances, and remain isolated from Europe and her troubles.⁴ However, the undesired policy of brokering alliances was increasingly required to guarantee the security of the Philippines and America's economic stake in China as Japan grew in power, compelling America to address the widening dichotomy between her Far Eastern interests and her military capability to protect those interests.

¹ Stedman, *The Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 155.

² During the inter-war years, America had no equivalent organisation to either the British COS or CID, both of which met regularly to coordinate British military strategy. The Joint Board, which was established in 1903, only ever met sporadically. Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 58; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 224; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 221; Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 357.

³ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 222 and 225.

⁴ The "Open Door" principle in China called for equal privilege amongst the countries trading with China and respect for China's territorial and administrative integrity; Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 362; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 224.

American military planners first recognised the Japanese threat in 1904-5, when the Japanese surprised the entire world by humiliating Russia in war. Japan's stunning victory served as an announcement to the wider world that she was not to be reckoned with lightly.⁵ It also shifted the naval balance in the Pacific in Japan's favour.⁶ Washington observed these events with anxiety, fearing for her Far Eastern interests and possessions.⁷

Japan had sparked the Russo-Japanese War by attacking the Russian fleet at Port Arthur on 8 February 1904, several hours before declaring war.⁸ Following these disturbing events, the American Orange plan assumed that war with Japan would begin with a Japanese surprise attack on the Philippines.⁹ The US garrison on Corregidor Island in Manila Bay was given the responsibility of holding off any Japanese attack until the US fleet arrived weeks later.¹⁰ Upon arrival, the US fleet would destroy the Japanese invaders, relieve the American garrison and secure Manila Bay. If Japan did not surrender, the US fleet would then attack Japan's homeland.¹¹ By 1914, these objectives had been firmly cemented into the Orange plan.¹²

The British war plan against Japan was remarkably similar.¹³ In the event of a Japanese surprise attack against Singapore and Hong Kong, the British would send their fleet to relieve these islands, and then use the naval bases there to launch a

⁵ John Ferris, 'Worthy of Some Better Enemy? The British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1919-1941, and the Fall of Singapore', *Canadian Journal of History*, 28, 2 (1993), pp. 223-256 (p. 226).

⁶ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 222.

⁷ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain', p. 189.

⁸ This attack badly damaged Russia's two heavy battleships, the *Tsesarevich* and the *Retvizan*, as well as the 6,600-ton cruiser, *Pallada*. The Americans hoped to avoid a similar fate – somewhat ironically, given the events of Pearl Harbour.

⁹ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 239; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 247.

¹⁰ Doyle, 'The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy', p. 53; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 222.

¹¹ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 239.

¹² Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 222.

¹³ Naval War Memorandum (Eastern), January 1938, ADM 116/4393; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 60.

large-scale naval offensive against Japan.¹⁴ Singapore and Hong Kong, therefore, played an almost-identical role for the British as Hawaii and the Philippines played for the Americans. Yet, the British war plan was much more feasible because their Far Eastern naval bases were much more developed than America's bases by the late 1930s, boasting better supplies and shore-based defences and, even more importantly, docking and repair facilities fit for a large fleet.

The Americans faced several glaring problems with their Orange plan, which they unwisely swept under the carpet. Firstly, it was imperative that the US fleet secured its lines of communications between Hawaii and the Philippines. Yet, to achieve this, the fleet required extensive use of the naval bases at Hawaii and Guam, which were either incomplete or seriously underdeveloped respectively. In fact, Guam was incapable even of docking a significant naval force.¹⁵ Equally problematic was the unrealistic expectation that Manila could repel 300,000 Japanese troops until the US fleet arrived, when the US garrison only consisted of 11,000 men.¹⁶ The US fleet also had further to travel than the invading force, with America being 7,000 miles away and Japan's nearest naval base only 1,500 miles away.¹⁷ Until the late 1920s, the US fleet was also unhelpfully stationed on the US east coast given the dearth of naval facilities on the US west coast and Hawaii, with not one harbour capable of hosting a major fleet.¹⁸

Another problem ignored by American strategists was the impossibility of using the Philippines as a staging point for a naval offensive against Japan. The naval bases at both Manila Bay and Subic Bay were miniscule, incapable of docking capital ships, let alone repairing these gargantuan vessels.¹⁹ The building of a major naval base with adequate facilities in the Western Pacific was thus urgently required to make the Orange war plan feasible. However, whilst the US Army wished to develop Manila

¹⁴ Naval War Memorandum (Eastern), January 1938, ADM 116/4393

¹⁵ Doyle, 'The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy', p. 53; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 222.

¹⁶ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 80; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 234.

¹⁷ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 232.

¹⁸ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 77.

¹⁹ Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, vol. II*, p. 236; Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange', pp. 54-55; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 223.

Bay, the US Navy preferred Subic Bay or Guam. Tempers flared over the issue in 1908, leading to a rupture and the suspension of Joint Board meetings for over a year.²⁰ In 1916, Congress compounded matters by promising independence to the Philippines once it achieved political stability, a promise that froze the army's plans for the development of a major naval base and enormous garrison at Manila Bay.²¹

Despite the infeasibilities of the Orange war plan, the Americans believed that these shortcomings were a moot point given Japan's relative naval weakness and could be rectified in the future, should the Japanese threat grow.²² Yet, the dawning of a more aggressive Japanese attitude from 1914 onwards failed to shake Washington out of her idleness. Japan's desire to dominate East Asia and to free it from western colonialism became evident after the outbreak of the First World War as Japan pursued interests in China, Siberia, Manchuria, and the Central Pacific.²³ After making "21 demands" for increased territorial rights in China, the Japanese seized German-occupied Tsingtao and Germany's colonial islands in the Central Pacific – the Marshalls, Marianas, Carolines, and Palau.²⁴ Control of these islands was officially transferred to Japan in 1919, despite President Wilson's protests that she might utilise them in a future war with America to harass the US fleet as it sailed to relieve the Philippines, making its successful defence nigh-impossible.²⁵

As the Japanese threat increased, illuminating the flaws of the Orange war plan, Admiral Sims, President of the US Naval War College, concluded that 'the retention of Manila Bay cannot be counted upon and that any plans on its retention are in error'. Similarly, Captain Yarnell, a Joint Board member, revealed that the relief of the Philippines would not be attempted if war erupted with Japan and was certain that

²⁰ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 223.

²¹ Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange', p. 55; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 226.

²² Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 223.

²³ Perkins, *Japan Goes to War*, p. 92; Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 22; I. H. Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alienation, 1919-1952* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 3; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 5; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 88.

²⁴ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 5; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 23; Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, p. 3.

²⁵ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 224.

‘whatever forces we may have there will be captured’.²⁶ For America’s strategists, ‘it was patently obvious that America lacked sufficient bases, auxiliaries, repair facilities and fuel to provide even the minimum necessary support’ for the execution of war plan Orange.²⁷

However, the decision-makers in Washington took no action to remedy the problem, unilaterally or collaboratively, believing that Japan only posed a moderate threat, insufficient to justify either the costly construction of a major naval base in the Western Pacific, or an undesirable alliance with Britain to gain access to her naval bases at Singapore and Hong Kong. This wait-and-see attitude was naïve, as a substantial naval base could not be built overnight. Britain’s own development of a major naval base at Singapore took twenty years to build after gaining approval in 1919.²⁸ Even more naïve was Washington’s decision to surrender the option of building naval bases altogether in the Western Pacific at the Washington Naval Disarmament Conference of 1921-22, which proved a catastrophic misjudgement.²⁹

Traditionally, historians have used the Washington Naval Treaties to pinpoint America’s rise and Britain’s decline as the world’s greatest power.³⁰ According to Ferris, this was ‘a turning point in modern history’, when America superseded Britain economically and militarily. At this time, London was in awe of America’s unrivalled industrial power and feared her ambition for a navy ‘second-to-none’.³¹ London was convinced that if the Americans challenged her naval supremacy, she would eventually lose the arms race – albeit after a cataclysmic struggle which would

²⁶ Morton, ‘War Plan Orange’, p. 224 and 227.

²⁷ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 96.

²⁸ Lowe, ‘Great Britain’s Assessment of Japan before the Outbreak of the Pacific War’, p. 462.

²⁹ Greene, ‘The Military View of American National Policy’, p. 361; Doyle, ‘The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy’, p. 53; Morton, ‘War Plan Orange’, p. 224.

³⁰ John Ferris, ‘The Symbol and Substance of Sea Power: Great Britain, the United States and the One Power Standard, 1919-1921’, in *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s: The Struggle for Supremacy*, ed. by B.J.C. McKercher (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 55-80 (p. 55); Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 3; McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s*, p. 6; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 34.

³¹ Ferris, ‘The Symbol and Substance of Sea Power’, p. 55 and 62.

demand 'full economic mobilisation' for America to emerge victorious.³² To avoid another devastating arms race, a naval agreement was struck between Britain, America, Japan, France and Italy, where by each could build up their navies to an authorised limit in the respective ratio of 10:10:6:3:3.³³ Traditionally, this arrangement has been interpreted by historians as marking 'the end of an era of undisputed naval supremacy enjoyed by the Royal Navy' since its victory at Trafalgar in 1805.³⁴

McKercher offers an alternative opinion, arguing that the British lost 'little at Washington in terms of the substance of sea power', her fleet remaining the same, but instead 'compromised on the symbol', by sharing her maritime predominance with the Americans on paper.³⁵ This argument can be taken further. What America gained symbolically through these naval treaties, she lost in substance – losses which have been gradually buried under grandiose accounts of America's rise to pre-eminence. Firstly, the Washington Naval Treaties permitted Japan to build a navy nearly two-thirds the size of America's.³⁶ It was soon realised that this was problematic for America, as Japan could concentrate all her naval forces in one oceanic region, whereas America had two seaboard. This miscalculation enabled Japan to become 'the foremost naval power in the Pacific'.³⁷

More importantly still, the Americans agreed not to build, develop or fortify their naval bases at Guam or the Philippines.³⁸ Guam was so underdeveloped that it immediately lost all military value, whilst the Philippines only had a minor naval base

³² Walter Long, the First Lord of the Admiralty, 1919-21, admitted that if America 'chose to put all their resources into the provision of a large Navy, the competition between us would be impossible, and we should in the end be beaten from the point of view merely of finance'. Ferris, 'The Symbol and Substance of Sea Power', pp. 61-2.

³³ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 117.

³⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 3.

³⁵ McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s*, p. 6.

³⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 117.

³⁷ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 13; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 19.

³⁸ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 238; Doyle, 'The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy', p. 53.

and garrison making it unviable as a staging point for an offensive against Japan.³⁹ America's decision indefinitely to freeze the military development of these islands came back incessantly to haunt her during the 1930s when Japan emerged as a menace.⁴⁰ America could no longer threaten Japan with a naval attack, nor defend her possessions in the Pacific from a Japanese incursion, let alone her economic interests in China.⁴¹ America's only remedy for her miscalculation was an alliance with Britain, which would allow her to use the naval bases at both Hong Kong and Singapore. This solution, however, remained anathema to America, given her isolationist tendencies and dislike of alliances. Moreover, relations between Washington and London had become deeply acrimonious since 1919 – a poor foundation for any military partnership. It was soon realised in America that the Washington Treaties had created an alarming dichotomy between her Far Eastern interests and her military capability to defend them, with no obvious remedy except an unpalatable alliance.

The situation failed to improve by 1928, at which point the Philippines would only be defended by 4,000 American soldiers, 7,000, Filipino troops, and 6,000 native policemen, aided by an air component of nine bombers and eleven pursuit planes against 300,000 Japanese troops. Morton argues that 'so great a discrepancy made any hope for a successful defence mere self-delusion'.⁴² Indeed, it is not hard to understand why the US Army 'lacked enthusiasm for the plan', since it was they who would have the impossible task of holding off the Japanese.⁴³

³⁹ By 1931, Guam had no aircraft, zero artillery, and only 146 marines. The Navy Department advised President Hoover that Guam had no military value whatsoever, and the island's priority-ranking consequently plummeted to "Category F", which meant that it would not be reinforced, even if war broke out. Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 227; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 64.

⁴⁰ These clauses dictated that 'only such repair and replacement of weapons and equipment as were customary in time of peace were to be permitted'. Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', pp. 238-9; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 224; Doyle, 'The United States Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy', p. 52.

⁴¹ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain', p. 189; Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 362; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 224.

⁴² Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 234.

⁴³ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 239; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 224.

The question of how to protect Manila continued to plague Washington into the 1930s.⁴⁴ With the emergence of the aircraft and submarine, the infeasible plan quickly to relieve Manila came under increasing attack.⁴⁵ Indeed, Japan could use these new war machines to harass the US fleet as it crossed the Pacific and slow its approach. To neutralise this threat, Japan's naval and air bases in the mandated islands would have to be captured, but America's armed forces did not have 'the necessary troops to seize them'.⁴⁶ Once again, this threat could be avoided if the Americans aligned with Britain as the routes to Sydney and Singapore were much safer.

The threat posed by Japan's aircraft and submarine forces was observed by the American Naval War College, which tested the Orange plan more than 120 times during the interwar period via its war games.⁴⁷ In the early 1920s, the US fleet crossed the Pacific without trouble. However, by 1933, only seven out of fifteen capital ships survived the dangerous journey to the Philippines. Even more embarrassingly, by 1935, the US fleet failed to rescue the base in Manila Bay altogether after heavy losses in the Central Pacific, particularly to its oil tankers.⁴⁸ Even if the US fleet could somehow reach and relieve Manila in time – an unlikely eventuality with Manila now expected to fall within a few months – the 'island facilities would have to be developed [to hold a significant fleet], demanding a profligate expenditure of time and money'.⁴⁹

The worsening performance of the US fleet in these war games sparked intense criticism of the Orange plan. In 1933, one war game student commander asked whether it was 'a good thing for us to give so much thought to this crossing... when it is pretty well established that it cannot be done'.⁵⁰ Meanwhile, the 1933 war games

⁴⁴ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 238.

⁴⁵ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 74.

⁴⁶ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 240.

⁴⁷ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 74; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 240.

⁴⁸ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 87.

⁴⁹ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 240.

⁵⁰ Similarly, Captain Andrews, COS of the Naval War College, wrote that any naval representative speaking optimistically about a Pacific offensive would be 'giving a very

report starkly warned of ‘the difficulties of amassing enough ships at Hawaii’; of ‘defending a slow fleet train from repeated air and submarine attacks’; and of relieving Manila Bay ‘without a secure base and facilities for repairing underwater damage’ during the struggle.⁵¹

After absorbing these criticisms, Admiral McNamee, President of the Naval War College, advised the Chief Naval Officer that it was ‘highly questionable’ whether America, with its ‘Treaty Navy’, could complete its war plan objectives ‘against determined ORANGE opposition’.⁵² McNamee was convinced that a war with Japan ‘would involve us in losses entirely out of proportion to any possible gain’.⁵³ Moreover, the American public was unlikely to support a long, expensive war in the Far East, especially given its ‘lackadaisical response’ to recent acts of Japanese aggression.⁵⁴ According to the Ambassador Lindsay, American public interest in the Philippines was ‘practically nil’.⁵⁵

From 1934, the US Army openly rebelled against the war plan. The Asiatic Fleet Commander and the Philippine Department Commander wrote a memorandum declaring that ‘they could not carry out their mission under the ORANGE plan with the forces assigned’.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Brigadier-General Stanley Embick, head of the War Plans Division, described the Orange plan as ‘literally an act of madness’.⁵⁷ Embick knew first-hand its deficiencies and suicidal chances of resisting a determined Japanese attack, having previously commanded the garrison in the Philippines.⁵⁸

false impression of what we could actually do’. Doyle, ‘The US Navy and War Plan Orange’, p. 54.

⁵¹ NB: quotes are in Doyle’s own words. Doyle, ‘The US Navy and War Plan Orange’, p. 55.

⁵² Doyle, ‘The US Navy and War Plan Orange’, p. 54.

⁵³ Christman, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt’, p. 240.

⁵⁴ Doyle, ‘The US Navy and War Plan Orange’, p. 55; Doyle, ‘The US Navy-Strategy and Far East Foreign Policy’, p. 53.

⁵⁵ Lindsay to Foreign Office, 28 May 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd series, Vol. XXI*, p. 133.

⁵⁶ Morton, ‘War Plan Orange’, pp. 238-9.

⁵⁷ Christman, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt’, p. 239; Doyle, ‘The US Navy and War Plan Orange’, p. 50 and 58.

⁵⁸ Morton, ‘War Plan Orange’, p. 242; Christman, ‘Franklin D. Roosevelt’, p. 239.

Using economic arguments, Colonel Walter Krueger challenged the navy with a memorandum attacking the assumed economic importance of the Philippines to America, which he claimed had 'never materialised'. He argued that, by acquiring Manila, the American nation had unwittingly produced 'a clash with a power into whose natural domain of expansion we had accidentally strayed'. He advised 'washing our hands of the Philippines..., and not to retain even a coaling station, to say nothing of a naval base there'.⁵⁹ The army's rising criticisms were driven by genuine misgivings, but also by a rising resentment of the Orange plan, which had given financial and strategic primacy to the navy.⁶⁰

By 1935, there was growing consensus in Washington 'that the Philippine Islands could not be held'.⁶¹ According to Doyle, the mounting criticism put Washington 'in a predicament not so very different from the good burghers confronted by a young boy's announcement that the King was wearing no clothes'.⁶² Finally, the Joint Board decided to reassess war plan Orange and concluded that America's position in East Asia had become 'so weakened' that victory against Japan was no longer assured.⁶³ Its verdict was the cumulative effect of fifteen years of military 'cutbacks', which had left an irreconcilable difference between America's national strategy and military capability in the Far East.⁶⁴

The US Army demanded that the infeasible Orange war plan be replaced with a defensive war plan, in which American forces would hold a defensive line along the Alaska-Hawaii-Panama triangle, relinquishing to Japan any island possessions to the west.⁶⁵ The navy members of the Joint Board, however, wished to retain the Orange plan, despite having extended the minimum time required to relieve Manila from

⁵⁹ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', pp. 370-1.

⁶⁰ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 239; Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 373.

⁶¹ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 241.

⁶² Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange', p. 54.

⁶³ Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 241.

⁶⁴ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 88.

⁶⁵ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 370; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 242.

several months to over a year.⁶⁶ Unable to reach a compromise, the Joint Board entered a two-year deadlock, which ended with the removal of Orange from America's military playbook in November 1937.⁶⁷

Most studies on Anglo-American relations in the 1930s exclusively focus on the political handicaps that blocked the path to Anglo-American collaboration, such as the stringent isolationism of Congress and of American public opinion, and the unreliability and indecisiveness of Roosevelt himself, rather than on America's astonishing military shortcomings. By absorbing the insurmountable flaws of the Orange plan one can fully understand the reasons why America abstained from challenging Japan during the 1930s. America's inability to fight a war in East Asia made starting down that road extremely hazardous. The diplomatic ostracising of Japan, or the imposition of economic sanctions, risked war – a war which America looked unprepared to fight.

Whilst America wished to defend her position and possessions in East Asia, her isolationist attitude, dislike of alliances and acrimonious relations with Britain prevented her from addressing the many impracticalities in her war plan through military collaboration with Britain. This isolationist spirit endured even after America forfeited the right to develop naval bases in the Western Pacific in 1921-2. The impracticalities of the Orange plan only deepened into the 1930s as Japan's submarine and air forces added to its obstacles. As the totalitarian threat became existential from late 1936 – and with none of the democracies able to fight alone – each would have to choose between the policies of isolationism, appeasement and alliance-building to secure their futures. Tragically, Roosevelt was compelled by America's military shortcomings to choose isolationism, as will be shown in subsequent chapters.

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⁶⁶ Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange', p. 59; Morton, 'War Plan Orange', p. 244.

⁶⁷ Lawrence W. Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations of January 1938 and the Far East,' *International Affairs*, 47, 4 (1971), pp. 745-63 (p. 753); Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 97.

In Europe, the successful execution of France's war plan was wholly dependent on collaboration with Britain. Throughout the interwar period, France was inferior to Germany in demographic, economic and industrial terms. Given this fact, her strategists readily accepted that she required British – and perhaps American – assistance in wartime to bridge the gap with Germany. This realisation was underlined by the fact that the First World War had changed the rules of conflict, demonstrating that victory depended as much on raw materials, industrial capacity and economic organisation as it did on military strength and tactics.⁶⁸ As an example, Britain's total war economy enabled Britain to fire a million artillery shells on the Western Front in a single day on 28 September 1918.⁶⁹

After victory was won in 1918, the irresistible combination of Britain, France and America was cemented into French memories and influenced their war manuals thereafter, which focused on the total war doctrines of 1914-18, despite the emergence of the aircraft and submarine.⁷⁰ From a French perspective, a national strategy which emphasised superiority in raw materials, industry, firepower and defences, and which had already been successfully trialled in 1914-18 'under actual battlefield conditions... seemed tantamount to a winning hand' in any future conflict.⁷¹ Yet, in 1914, France was flanked by powerful allies, which reversed her demographic, industrial and economic inferiority vis-à-vis Germany when fighting unilaterally.

⁶⁸ M. S. Alexander, 'Preparing to Feed mars: Anglo-French Economic Co-ordination and the Coming of War, 1937-40', in *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, ed. by M. S. Alexander and W. S. Philpott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 186-208 (p. 186).

⁶⁹ It was with this vision of total war in mind that Henry Ford, the prominent American industrialist, promised to produce for his mobilising country: '1,000 two-man tanks per day, 1,000 midget submarines, 3,000 aero-engines per day and 150,000 complete aircraft'. However, these extraordinary figures failed even marginally to materialise – in fact, American troops ironically ended up using French weapons, not the other way around. Tooze, *The Deluge*, pp. 200-2.

⁷⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World*, p. 166; Young, 'Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrines in the inter-war period', p. 156.

⁷¹ Young, 'Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrines in the inter-war period', p. 156.

According to Maiolo, years 'before the arms race began, France had lost the population race', with 40 million citizens to Germany's 60 million in 1933.⁷² Furthermore, France only had 4.3 million men of military age to Germany's 8.3 million.⁷³ This was a disproportionate shortage, which was expected to widen. Indeed, France accurately calculated that Germany would have 13.1 million mobilisable men by 1940 compared to France's 6.7 million.⁷⁴ France's demographic deficit was further aggravated by a phenomenon known as *les années creuses* – the lean years – which stemmed from a plummet in France's birth rate during the First World War. This fall in births caused the number of new military conscripts to plummet from 240,000 to 120,000 men per year between 1935 and 1940.⁷⁵ Gloomily, British military analysts recognised that France did not have sufficient manpower to field a large army of over 40 divisions and simultaneously keep her agriculture and industry working at full capacity to support the war effort for more than '2 to 5 months'.⁷⁶

France also had an obvious industrial deficit, her industrial capacity being less than half that of Germany's by the 1930s.⁷⁷ This disparity was the culmination of a long trend of relative industrial decline vis-à-vis Germany, which had begun in 1880 when the Germans had overtaken her in coal, iron and steel output.⁷⁸ This trend was compounded by the Great Depression's delayed impact on France at a time when the revisionist powers were recovering economically and starting their rearmament drives. Thus, whilst France's production retracted by 25 percent and her exports

⁷² Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 80; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 161; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 16; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938-39', p. 292.

⁷³ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 143.

⁷⁴ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 185; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938-39', p. 292.

⁷⁵ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82; Young, 'Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrines in the inter-war period', pp. 160-1.

⁷⁶ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433; 'Note on Strength of Foreign Armies', 3 March 1937, WO 190/520

⁷⁷ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 143; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 164; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 17; Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 802.

⁷⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 4.

halved between 1930 and 1935, German production comparatively rose by seventeen percent.⁷⁹

Equally concerning was the 'antiquated' state of France's armament industries.⁸⁰ In 1936, the Minister of National Production complained that France's rearmament drive was plagued by 'industries organised and equipped as they were in the Middle Ages'.⁸¹ Meanwhile, Germany's armament sector became famed for its efficiency.⁸² The French soon realised that they 'lacked the depth in armament to win a single-handed fight against Germany'.⁸³ To bridge this gap, they would need to find powerful wartime allies – preferably Britain and America.⁸⁴

Another industrial problem was that France lacked indigenous raw materials for war.⁸⁵ During the inter-war years, France suffered acute shortages of rubber, petroleum, manganese, copper, lead, tin, raw wool, cotton, sulphate, and pyrites, and therefore had to import between 87 and 100 percent of these materials. She further had to import 35 percent of her coal and 40 percent of her zinc, though she produced all her own wheat, fertilizer, iron ore and aluminium.⁸⁶ France did not build up sufficient reserves of these strategic raw materials, which meant that France's industry could only operate for five months without imports after being mobilised for war.⁸⁷ Meanwhile, most of France's heavy industry was located in north-eastern France, a mere hour's flight from German air bases, including 60 percent of her aircraft industry, 70 percent of her oil refineries, 75 percent of her coal and textile production,

⁷⁹ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 23; Young, 'Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrines in the inter-war period', p. 166.

⁸⁰ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 143.

⁸¹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 182; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 187.

⁸² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 170.

⁸³ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 81 and 86; Young, 'Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrines in the inter-war period', p. 166; Young, *In command of France*, p. 169.

⁸⁴ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 164.

⁸⁵ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 5.

⁸⁶ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 19.

⁸⁷ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 147.

and 90 percent of her steel, iron ore and pig-iron output.⁸⁸ The exposure of these industries to a German aerial attack was recognised by the British.⁸⁹

The unpalatable truth for France was that if she fought Germany in a long, unilateral war, she would surely lose.⁹⁰ Indeed, Beaumont-Nesbitt warned London that the industrial disparity between France and Germany 'must never be forgotten'.⁹¹ Recognising this danger, France's strategists theorised that she either needed superior armed forces, strong enough to deliver an immediate knock-out blow before Germany's industrial and demographic superiority could fully be mobilised; or she needed powerful allies to compensate for her inferiorities, as in 1914-18.

In the early interwar years, the French initially favoured an immediate knock-out blow, believing that they would be fighting alone in a future war given the acrimonious relations between Paris and London since 1918. They therefore prioritised plans for 'a strong attack against Germany, using the Rhineland as a springboard'.⁹² By the mid-1920s, the French Army had a peacetime strength of 640,000 men and was thus capable of defeating a disarmed Germany with a swift offensive.⁹³

However, the French switched tack in 1925 after securing powerful allied support through the Locarno Agreement, which saw Britain and Italy promise at least moderate military assistance to France, Belgium or Germany if either nation was attacked by one of the others.⁹⁴ The French henceforth believed that if Germany

⁸⁸ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 5; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 18 and 170.

⁸⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433; 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy', 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

⁹⁰ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 185.

⁹¹ 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy', 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

⁹² France's offensive strategy was implemented during the Ruhr Crisis of 1923, when the French Army occupied the industrially-rich Ruhr region to enforce Germany's reparation payments. Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 5 and 24; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 5.

⁹³ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159.

⁹⁴ The Locarno Treaty only committed Britain, not the Dominions of the British Empire. Brian McKercher, 'Deterrence and the European Balance of Power: The Field Force and British Grand Strategy, 1934-1938', *English Historical Review*, 123, 500

made the first aggressive move in any future dispute, British help would be guaranteed.⁹⁵ From this moment onwards, French strategists prepared to fight as part of a “democratic axis” of vastly superior power to Germany, centred on an alliance with Britain.⁹⁶ In the long-term, this strategy seemed rational, as Germany would not stay disarmed forever and her rearmament would destroy France’s advantage in a lightning war.

According to Maiolo, France’s new national strategy wholly depended on the imperious Maginot Line holding off a German advance, ‘while France and its major allies, above all Britain, mobilised their superior military and industrial strength’.⁹⁷ Victory would then be achieved through a gargantuan counter-offensive. This strategy was not without risks, especially when set against the present discord between the democracies and the isolationist tendencies of both London and Washington. If France failed to secure Britain’s wholehearted support, rather than just the minimal military assistance demanded by the Locarno Treaty, she would essentially be left alone to fight against a superior Germany.

Although fully aware of these grave risks, France was encouraged by the Locarno Treaty to switch from an *offensive* to a *defensive posture* and foreign policy. Indeed, within six months of the agreement being penned, French strategists officially proposed the construction of the Maginot Line – a 5.5 billion franc project to

(2008), pp. 98-13 (p. 102); Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 28; Bell, *Chamberlain, Japan and Germany*, p. 2; Norman Hillmer, ‘The Foreign Office, the Dominions, and the Diplomatic Unity of the Empire, 1925-1929’, in *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain’s Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Dilks (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 64-77 (p. 64).

⁹⁵ Young, ‘French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period’, p. 158.

⁹⁶ On this subject, Ambassador Phipps wrote in 1938 that the French ‘feel that American help is only a desirable contingency, whereas help from Great Britain is “beyond per adventure” [or doubt] in case of a German attack’. *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Davies, ‘*Mesentente Cordiale: The Failure of the Anglo-French Alliance. Anglo-French Relations During the Ethiopian and Rhineland Crises, 1934-1936*’, p. 517; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 160 and 193; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 237; Lord Strang, ‘The Moscow Negotiations, 1939’, in *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain’s Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Dilks (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 170-186 (p. 171).

⁹⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 237.

construct over 200 kilometres of fixed-fortifications along the Franco-German frontier.⁹⁸ The Maginot Line also supported France's new military doctrine established after 1918 which stressed the importance of material, *couverture*, firepower, and a two-staged strategy in any future war.⁹⁹

Couverture referred to an impenetrable curtain of fixed-fortifications along the Franco-German border, which would protect the key industrial region of north-eastern France.¹⁰⁰ These industrial areas had to be kept from German hands, as 'to lose the battle for northern France was in all likelihood to lose the war' – especially in the age of total war, where those with the greatest industrial might reigned supreme.¹⁰¹ Another lesson taken from the First World War was the importance of French firepower. During 1914 and 1915, the Germans had enjoyed firepower superiority, with the French 'in the humiliating and disastrous position of being unable to reply in kind'. However, the balance shifted in 1916, when the French repelled waves of German offensives at Verdun using new heavy artillery. This lesson of firepower, 'learnt at the expense of an appalling number of French and German dead, could not be forgotten'.¹⁰² In the following decades, the French constructed the artillery-laden Maginot Line in the hope that any attacking Germans 'would be decimated in their headlong plunge against the massive firepower of an enormously long Franco-Belgian defensive system'. After this massacre of German invaders, the

⁹⁸ The project was approved by the government in 1927 and the first payment was appropriated in 1930, the project named after its sponsor, the Minister of War, André Maginot. Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 81; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 157.

⁹⁹ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 159.

¹⁰⁰ These regions were Lorraine, Champagne, Longuy, Nancy, Brieg, Alsace, Lens and Valenciennes. Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 157; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 29.

¹⁰¹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 5; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 29.

¹⁰² Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 159.

French hoped to win the conflict 'with a well-prepared, massive and irresistible offensive'.¹⁰³

The final piece of France's complex defensive puzzle was her "Eastern Alliance System". During the early 1920s, France made a succession of military pacts with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia in the hope that they would collectively form a second front against Germany in wartime to relieve the pressure on France and split Germany's forces.¹⁰⁴ Combined, these states could field 100 divisions. However, these states only had one foot in the French alliance system, and were often 'divided amongst themselves', too set on mutual squabbling to concentrate on the German threat.¹⁰⁵

In the early 1920s, France sponsored the emergent armed forces of these small Eastern European states, sending training missions to Poland and Czechoslovakia, as well as substantial help to Yugoslavia and Romania in the form of arms supplies and officers on secondment.¹⁰⁶ France's military bond with Poland was the strongest, constituting of a full military alliance, which was penned in 1921. Similarly, France's treaties with Czechoslovakia, signed in late 1924 and early 1925, promised mutual 'assistance in the event of a threat to common interests'.¹⁰⁷ However, France's pacts with Romania and Yugoslavia, signed in 1926 and 1927 respectively, contained no such pledges.¹⁰⁸

In fact, only the alliances signed *before* the 1925 Locarno Agreement contained mutual assistance pacts. After the Locarno Agreement, and the historic promise of British assistance, France lost interest in seeking further binding alliances in Eastern Europe which might drag her into a distant conflagration. This explains why the French Government denied the Yugoslavian Government's request for staff

¹⁰³ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 153; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 159.

¹⁰⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 61; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 216.

¹⁰⁵ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 146.

¹⁰⁶ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 55.

¹⁰⁷ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. xv, 1 and 23; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 9.

¹⁰⁸ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 10.

conversations in 1928.¹⁰⁹ It was only after the breakdown in Anglo-French political relations in the early 1930s that the French revived their pursuit of military pacts, securing one with Soviet Russia in May 1935, despite Britain's vocal disapproval.¹¹⁰ As cordial Anglo-French relations returned in 1936, these pacts once again lost emphasis.¹¹¹ Thus, the pursuit of military pacts with Eastern European nations was always a "Plan B" for France. 'As useful as these states might be in a war against Germany,' explains Maiolo, 'they could not replace the formidable manpower and economic strength' of Britain and America.¹¹²

Fundamentally, France's national strategy rested on two main pillars: the Locarno Agreement and the Maginot Line. These pillars would allow the French to repel a determined German attack and mobilise the superior resources of the great democracies. The French war plan was risky, since it was dependent on the willingness of London and Washington to join hands with Paris. If they demurred, France would fall, and, even if they did join forces, the French still believed that they would be 'bled white' from the gargantuan task of defeating Germany.¹¹³

Ominously, the British did not seem remotely close to committing themselves wholeheartedly to French security between 1919 and 1939. Indeed, there is a historical consensus that Britain was an exceedingly-reluctant friend during these decades, continuously keeping France's political and military leaders at arm's

¹⁰⁹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 24.

¹¹⁰ Simon Bourette-Knowles, 'The Global Micawber: Sir Robert Vansittart, the Treasury and the Global Balance of Power, 1933-1935', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 6, 1 (1995), pp. 91-121 (p. 114-115); John E. Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-1937: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11 (1976), pp. 217-36 (p. 223); Robert Manne, 'The Foreign Office and the Failure of Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 16 (1981), pp. 725-755 (p. 727).

¹¹¹ Carley, 'Down a Blind Alley: Anglo-French-Soviet Relations, 1920-1939', p. 166; Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-1937: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy', p. 221; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, pp. 49-50; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 142; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 249.

¹¹² Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 81.

¹¹³ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 153.

length.¹¹⁴ Yet, behind closed doors, the British privately acknowledged their obligations to French security – both morally and legally through the Locarno Agreement – along with their military inter-dependency and strategic, moral and ideological compatibility. Even before the Locarno Treaty, Hankey stated that it ‘seems inconceivable, after so much blood and treasure which has been spent in the last few years, that Great Britain could remain neutral and not go to the assistance of her late ally in the event of a further unprovoked attack by Germany’.¹¹⁵ A decade onwards, Eden was convinced that ‘Anglo-French cooperation had to be’, whilst Vansittart argued that ‘if we are engaged in a struggle for existence, it will almost certainly be on the same side as France’.¹¹⁶

The British military elite thought identically to Vansittart in their strategic appreciations during the 1930s, concluding that the British would naturally find themselves ‘ranged on the side of France’ in any conflagration with Germany.¹¹⁷ In one instance, the CID even commented that Britain and France were ‘assuming a mutual commitment which is even more clear and binding than those existing with some of our Dominions’.¹¹⁸ Equally frankly, the Director of MID remarked that

¹¹⁴ Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations*, p. 247; Cairns, ‘A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-40’, p. 720; Keiger, ‘“Perfidious Albion?” French Perceptions of Britain as an Ally after the First World War’, p. 40; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 51; Alexander, ‘The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939’, p. 61; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936-40*, p. 96; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 128; Jackson and Maiolo, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 121; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 215.

¹¹⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 34.

¹¹⁶ Vansittart, minute, 29 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 347; Richard Davis, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War: Appeasement and Crisis* (Basingstoke and New York: Macmillan, 1999), p. 188; Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 1*, p. 118.

¹¹⁷ Inskip, ‘Review of Imperial Defence’, 25 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Inskip, ‘The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in relation to certain other Powers by May, 1937’, 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Inskip, ‘Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at January 1938’, 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; CID, ‘Situation in Far East’, report, June 1939, ADM 205/57; Ingersoll, Memorandum for Captain Philipps, ‘Summary of Talks’, January 1938, ADM 116/3922

¹¹⁸ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 222.

‘support of France is Home Defence – if France crumbles we fall’.¹¹⁹ According to Bond, even the most ardent British isolationists – including Liddle Hart and Burnett Stuart – did not seriously believe that Britain could avoid assisting France in war.¹²⁰ Ultimately, both democracies ‘knew they would be allies in war’, even if this conclusion was frequently reached with ‘bad grace and reluctance’.¹²¹

However, the British refused to admit this in their conversations with their French counterparts, despite observing France’s conviction that they would be wartime allies.¹²² ‘The French have always held that the fate of England and France are inseparably linked,’ Beaumont-Nesbitt observed, ‘and that only by mutual assistance can the two countries resist German pretensions’.¹²³ Gamelin even declared to Beaumont-Nesbitt that ‘there was no need for any written agreement’ of British military assistance, as he had ‘absolute confidence that at the appointed time this force would be there [northern France]’.¹²⁴

Convinced of British military help, Gamelin believed that there was little risk in building France’s war plan on the rock of British friendship. This strategy, however, underestimated the impact of deeply embittered Anglo-French relations between 1934 and 1936. France’s war strategy – and her very survival – depended upon London and Washington’s willingness to collaborate militarily and forgive past animosities. Yet, if relations did not improve and the military picture continued to darken, both nations were liable to dismiss calls for an alliance and choose the alternative strategies of isolation or appeasement to secure their futures. Thus, France’s war plan had put her in perilous danger.

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¹¹⁹ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 286.

¹²⁰ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 217.

¹²¹ Davis, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 17.

¹²² *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324; Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy, 18 February 1938, WO 106/5413

¹²³ Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy, 18 February 1938, WO 106/5413

¹²⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

Britain's war plan against Germany was remarkably compatible with that of France. Both nations emphasised the economic, financial and industrial superiority of the democracies as the key to victory.¹²⁵ Indeed, just as the French planned to mobilise the economic resources of the democracies behind the Maginot Line, the British hoped to employ the same strategy behind the English Channel. Yet, unlike France, Britain's economy was stronger than Germany's, which meant that she was considerably less dependent on France than vice versa to secure victory. This put Britain in the driving seat when it came to determining the tone, scope, level and frequency of military conversations with France during the interwar years.

However, as the German air threat spiralled dramatically from 1936 following an intelligence awakening, Britain feared that Germany might attempt a knock-out blow at the start of hostilities by bombing London from the skies. Thus, the success of the British war plan became increasingly reliant on French assistance to close the numerical gap with the Luftwaffe and on access to France's early-warning air attack system.¹²⁶ All the while, British plans to strangle Germany's war economy with a naval blockade relied on France's willingness to protect Britain's interests and communication lines in the Atlantic and Mediterranean as Britain concentrated her warships in the North Sea.¹²⁷ Britain's rising aerial vulnerability and military dependency on France would soon force her to choose between alliances and appeasement as a way of securing her survival.

The first major component of Britain's war strategy was to utilise her economic superiority over the Axis powers. Indeed, the British military elite regarded this 'as

¹²⁵ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 76.

¹²⁶ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 335; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 76; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, pp. 282-3; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 127; Uri Bailer, *The Shadow of the Bomber. The Fear of Air Attack and British Politics, 1932-1939* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1980), p. 133; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 164; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 160; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 6.

¹²⁷ 'British Strategic Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

the highest card in their hand'.¹²⁸ Consequently, the British prioritised the health of their peacetime economy over costly rearmament programmes, believing that this would allow them in wartime to outproduce the totalitarians in munitions, and perhaps even deter the dictators from waging war altogether.¹²⁹ Indeed, Inskip ardently believed that a strong economy would cause the totalitarians 'to rate our powers of resistance at something far more formidable than is implied merely by the number of men, aeroplanes and battalions.. at our disposal'. Britain's strength would instead be found in the 'resources of manpower, productive capacity and the powers of endurance possessed by this country'. In fact, Inskip argued that the economy was so essential to Britain's war effort that without it a 'purely military effort would be of no avail'. It could therefore be 'regarded as a fourth arm of defence,' alongside Britain's land, sea and air forces.¹³⁰

For the British Cabinet, the fear of financial instability also 'exceeded the fear of external aggression'.¹³¹ Indeed, the Government, Treasury and Bank 'were haunted by 1931' and feared that a full-throttled rearmament programme might provoke another Great Depression or a German attack, should Hitler detect 'signs of strain'.¹³² Indeed, Walker argues that 'the debilitating effects of the Depression upon Britain's socio-economic and political life' should not be under-estimated as a factor for appeasement.¹³³ Given these apprehensions, the Cabinet strongly believed 'that economic recovery must take precedence over defence preparations' and that

¹²⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 243; Young, 'Spokesmen for Economic Warfare: The Industrial Intelligence Centre in the 1930s', p. 479.

¹²⁹ Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 243; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 76.

¹³⁰ Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41

¹³¹ Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization for World War II: The U.S.A, U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938-1945', p. 174.

¹³² Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 118.

¹³³ Stephen G. Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', *British Journal of International Studies*, 9.3 (1980), pp. 219-246 (p. 240).

nothing should ‘interfere with the normal operations of British industry or threaten the balanced budget, which was seen as the cornerstone of economic stability’.¹³⁴ As a consequence, British munitions spending was restricted, whilst deficit financing and financial loans for rearmament were frowned upon, as was the placing of the economy on a semi-war footing.¹³⁵

Britain’s reluctance to borrow money and to requisition skilled labour from civilian industries to help the rearmament effort put Britain at a distinct disadvantage to Germany.¹³⁶ This disadvantage was recognised by the military and political elite in London.¹³⁷ Indeed, it was hard to ignore as, during Hitler’s first five years of power, Germany spent three-times more on armaments than Britain.¹³⁸ From the mid-1930s, perceptions of Britain’s disadvantage were compounded by the Industrial Intelligence Centre, which painted an intimidating picture of ‘an efficient, centralised Nazi “command economy”’ geared towards rearmament. It soon became doctrine that ‘a liberal, democratic Britain had no real chance of matching the Third Reich’ in peacetime rearmament and would therefore be vulnerable at the start of any future war.¹³⁹ Indeed, Baldwin publicly lamented that ‘a democracy is always two years

¹³⁴ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 35; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12.

¹³⁵ In 1936, the Treasury showed a ‘deep-seated reluctance to have recourse to anything in the nature of deficit financing’, whilst the Cabinet chose to count pennies and virtually abolish the BEF rather than borrow money for its rearmament. Likewise, in 1937, the Government again prioritised the economy over rearmament by capping military spending at £1,500 million over a five-year period. R. A. C. Parker, ‘British Rearmament, 1936-1939: Treasury, Trade Unions and Skilled Labour’, *English Historical Review*, 96 (1981), pp. 306-343 (p. 306); Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 42.

¹³⁶ COS Report, ‘Role of the British Army’, 28 January 1937, CAB 24/267/42; Inskip, ‘Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence’, 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 180; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 144; Parker, ‘British Rearmament, 1936-1939: Treasury, Trade Unions and Skilled Labour’, p. 306.

¹³⁷ Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 1*, p. 163; COS Report, ‘Role of the British Army’, 28 January 1937, CAB 24/267/42; Inskip, ‘Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence’, 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23

¹³⁸ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 118.

¹³⁹ Kennedy, ‘British “Net Assessment” and the Coming of the Second World War’, p. 34.

behind the dictator' in rearmament.¹⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the CID criticised the policy of non-interference with trade as 'a serious handicap when we are competing with potential enemies whose whole financial, social and industrial system has in effect been mobilised on a war footing'.¹⁴¹ Nevertheless, the Cabinet was not prepared to sacrifice its democratic principles – nor the health of the economy – for all-out rearmament, fearing that it would result in an economic downturn which would encourage German aggression.¹⁴²

Although Inskip designed the economy-first strategy, he also believed that strong forces had to be maintained 'to ensure us against defeat by a sudden blow'.¹⁴³ This stance was reinforced by the Air Ministry's predictions that 'an all-out air attack could well result in a quarter of a million casualties in the first week of the war and a breakdown in public morale'.¹⁴⁴ Yet, Inskip was equally adamant that 'if the British and French empires could withstand the early assaults of Germany... they would eventually be able to make their greater resources prevail'.¹⁴⁵

Inskip thus proposed that Britain's defence planning should be geared towards repelling a German aerial attack. The money previously earmarked for a large BEF would instead be poured into strengthening the air force and anti-aircraft defences, whilst the Territorial Army would be converted into anti-aircraft divisions.¹⁴⁶ Essentially, the French would be left to see to their own security. This abandonment of France became known as the policy of limited liability. Proponents of limited liability – including Chamberlain, Simon, Inskip and Hore-Belisha in the Cabinet, the COS, the Treasury, the Admiralty, the Air Ministry, a majority of Parliament and many

¹⁴⁰ Churchill, *The Second World War, Vol. 1*, p. 163.

¹⁴¹ 'Military Preparations in Relation to Imperial Defence Policy', Memorandum, 11 February 1938, COS/CID, ADM 205/57

¹⁴² 'Military Preparations in Relation to Imperial Defence Policy', Memorandum, 11 February 1938, COS/CID, ADM 205/57; Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 180; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 144; Parker, 'British Rearmament, 1936-1939: Treasury, Trade Unions and Skilled Labour', p. 307.

¹⁴³ Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 29/273/41

¹⁴⁴ Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 267.

¹⁴⁵ 'British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 51.

¹⁴⁶ Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 181.

other influential figures such as Burnett Stuart, Liddell Hart, Sir Auckland Geddes and Lord Weir – opposed the establishment of a large BEF and a binding commitment to French security from 1935 onwards.¹⁴⁷

The last piece of Britain's complex war puzzle was her plan to impose an economic blockade on her enemies. Inskip believed that Britain and France's overwhelming naval superiority 'should enable us to exercise decisive economic pressure in a prolonged war'.¹⁴⁸ This economic weapon was so great that Inskip believed that it would deter the Axis powers from war unless and until 'they could achieve victory quickly'.¹⁴⁹ To counter this weapon, Germany strove for autarky. Yet, the COS remained adamant that British economic pressure would still 'prove her undoing' in the long run.¹⁵⁰ To complement the economic blockade, the British would bomb the Ruhr region and Germany's fuel reserves at Hamburg. As 'the steady and rigorous application of economic pressure' reduced Germany's powers of resistance, the British and French would intensify their industrial output to assume the offensive as soon as possible, with confidence of victory.¹⁵¹

Ultimately, this grand strategy proved to be the correct choice. In 1946, a study by Raymond Goldsmith on the war production of the major belligerents of the Second World War concluded that the Allies had produced 'more, and vastly more, munitions than the Axis'. Whilst Germany and Japan spent a combined £18 billion on munitions in 1943 and \$23 billion in 1944, the Allies spent a combined \$64.5 billion and \$70.5 billion in these years. However, between 1940 and 1944, the British only spent \$41 billion on munitions to Germany's \$52 billion, and Germany also spent considerably

¹⁴⁷ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 216, 258 and 290; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 39; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 52.

¹⁴⁸ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937: Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Inskip, 'The Preparedness for war of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21.

¹⁴⁹ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for war of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8.

¹⁵⁰ 'British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

¹⁵¹ 'British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

more in the years prior to 1940.¹⁵² This strongly intimates that a triple alliance between the great democracies was just as vital for Britain as for France.

Britain did not just rely on French help to out-produce Germany in armaments, she also required French assistance to close the numerical gap with the Luftwaffe. Moreover, the British were desperate for access to France's early-warning air attack system in the pre-radar years to maximise her chances of surviving a German knock-out blow attempt.¹⁵³ France would also take on Britain's naval duties in the Mediterranean, whilst Britain imposed a naval blockade on Germany in the North Sea and strangled her wartime economy. Without French assistance, Britain would therefore struggle. Problematically, however, Anglo-French relations had hit rock bottom with the collapse of the World Disarmament Conference in 1934, casting grave doubts on their ability to collaborate against the revisionist powers. With the moment fast approaching when Britain would no longer be able to oppose the aggressive powers alone, she found herself facing a stark choice between appeasement and alliance-building on poor foundations as the only strategies remaining to ensure Britain's survival.

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In conclusion, between 1919 and 1936, the great democracies held the military advantage individually and collectively. However, their respective war plans had systemic flaws, which could only be remedied through cooperation. Recognising these flaws and how they tragically coincided with the discord between the democracies since 1919 is key to understanding why Chamberlain rejected as impracticable the policy of alliance-building as Prime Minister. As discussed, America's military incapability to relieve the Philippines and attack the Japanese mainland could only be remedied through naval collaboration with Britain. Meanwhile, the success of the French war plan to outproduce the Germans in armaments behind the Maginot Line wholly depended on British industrial assistance.

¹⁵² Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization for World War II: The U.S.A, U.K., U.S.S.R., and Germany, 1938-1945', p. 171.

¹⁵³ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 164; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 160; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 6.

Finally, the British themselves were reliant on French air assistance to combat the rising Luftwaffe threat and on the French Army to protect the Channel ports in northern France. Nevertheless, whilst each democracy had a flawed war plan, each was confident that the aggressive powers were not yet strong enough to exploit those weaknesses, nor would they be for many years. Thus, a spirit of complacency dominated their military assessments in the early 1930s and was backed by an optimistic intelligence picture.

Mistakenly, orthodox and counter-revisionist historians have maintained that an alliance-building alternative to appeasement existed during the 1930s and should have been pursued at the earliest opportunity. However, the urgency for anti-German alliance bloc could only have been known through hindsight, as will be discussed. The extent of the threat was not fully recognised by British decision-makers before 1936. Whilst the war plans of the democracies were certainly compatible, their complacency about the military capabilities and intentions of Germany – and their non-stop quarrelling since 1919 – meant that the policy of alliance-building was seen as unnecessary, unsavoury and even infeasible before 1936.

As will be shown, the feeling of relative security amongst the democracies disintegrated in the mid-1930s as the triple totalitarian threat spiked following an intelligence awakening. Unable to stand alone suddenly, the democracies found themselves at a crossroads from 1936. Each had to choose between the diverging policies of isolationism, appeasement and alliance-building to secure their survival. However, time was running out for the alternative of alliance-building. Soon, the military balance would collectively swing against the democracies and destroy the alliance-building option. This left little time for their embittered relations to be overcome to open the door to military partnership. The adverse impact of the Abyssinian and Rhineland crises on this healing process is the subject of the next chapter.

Last Chance?

In the sixteen years leading up to 1935, the democracies failed to actualise the powerful democratic axis that had initially been envisioned in 1919. Instead of drawing closer together, the democracies had grown further apart, their constant antagonisms causing an untimely deficit in trust. Quarrels had erupted over the disastrous Naval Conference of 1927, the conflicting economic policies of the democracies after the Great Depression, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the shipwrecked World Economic Conference of 1933, the collapse of the World Disarmament Conference in 1934, and numerous smaller issues since 1919.¹

These constant antagonisms created a bleak outlook of the world for Chamberlain, who could see little fruit from his predecessors' attempts to collaborate with Paris and Washington. The final eighteen months before his appointment as Prime Minister would either consolidate this negative perception, or disintegrate it, should the democracies prove themselves able to partner together as the fresh storms of the Abyssinian and Rhineland Affairs hit the world. This in turn would determine from May 1937 whether Chamberlain concentrated his foreign policy endeavours on appeasing his enemies or pursuing partners.

Whilst orthodox and counter-revisionist historians recognise the discord between London and Paris that arose from the Abyssinian and Rhineland Affairs, they mistakenly do not regard it as a serious obstacle to the alternative British policy of alliance-building in the late 1930s. Moreover, they fail to observe that alliance-building against Germany was not deemed necessary in British eyes at this time, due

¹ These issues included squabbles over America's League membership and France's desire for an alliance, not to mention disagreements over questions of economic policy, war debts, reparations, Irish independence, naval limitations, cable network rights and oil rights in Venezuela, Iran and Iraq.

to France's pleasing military position and Hitler's previous pacific overtures and seemingly peaceful intentions.²

Thus, whilst these scholars correctly calculate that the Rhineland Affair was the *last favourable opportunity* to stop Germany by force without sparking a gargantuan European war, they mistakenly criticised France and Britain for not seizing this chance.³ Their hindsight-fuelled argument fails to consider the contemporary British mindset. Rather than being seen as *the last opportunity* to stop Germany, the Rhineland Incident was regarded as *the first opportunity* for an all-encompassing peace settlement with Hitler.

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The fall out between London and Paris over the collapsed World Disarmament Conference was still fresh when Hitler announced the Luftwaffe's existence and military conscription in March 1935. In reaction to Hitler's provocative announcements, Britain, France and Italy gathered at Stresa in April 1935 in an attempt to join hands against the growing menace. The Stresa powers published a declaration of solidarity, which promised to maintain the status quo in Europe and to oppose any further unilateral revision of the Versailles Treaty by Hitler.⁴ This declaration was also preceded by an Anglo-French agreement in January 1935 always to hold '*joint negotiations with Germany on armament questions*'.⁵

² Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 128; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Steven Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 160; John Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', pp. 56-61; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 37; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 129; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 355; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 128; Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 5 and 11; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p. 1.

³ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. viii; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 37; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 355; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 226; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 128.

⁴ Davis, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War*, p. 4; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 33.

⁵ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 187.

Meanwhile, Paris and Rome drew closer politically and militarily.⁶ The two powers struck a political accord to guarantee Austrian independence from any German annexation attempt.⁷ This political accord was followed by a military agreement penned by Gamelin and Badoglio in Rome.⁸ Unsurprisingly, the French were overjoyed to add another power to their flowering alliance network in Europe.

The Stresa declaration, the Paris-Rome political and military accords and the Anglo-French pledge together seemed to break the spell of disunity which had epitomised relations between the WW1 victors since 1919 – though it should be noted that America was not invited to Stresa, ‘nor did American diplomats wish to go’.⁹ A new flame of cooperation had been sparked between the Stresa powers, who seemed on the cusp of embracing partnership. Yet, within months, the storms created by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and Abyssinian Affair blew out this flame, causing yet another bitter rupture between these powers.

Nevertheless, in the few months before these storms, France’s military and geo-strategic strength peaked, minimising the German threat in the minds of the democracies and undermining the sporadic pleas in Britain for an anti-German alliance, not to mention the hindsight criticisms of orthodox and post-revisionist historians for Britain’s failure to pursue alliances during these years.¹⁰ The military

⁶ Robert Young, ‘French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939’, *Historical Journal*, 28, 1 (1985), pp. 143-168 (p. 152).

⁷ R. Salerno, ‘Britain, France and the Emerging Italian Threat, 1935-1938’, in *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, ed. by M. S. Alexander and W. S. Philpott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 72-91 (p. 72); Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 32.

⁸ These ‘highly-prized’ accords promised: concerted action to defend Austria from unprovoked German aggression; an exchange of technical information, an exchange of military and political intelligence; a commitment to periodic staff conversations; and an agreement to plan joint military operations against Germany. Young, ‘French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939’, p. 148; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 31 and 33; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 65

⁹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 115.

¹⁰ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; David Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 128; Brian Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Steven Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, p. 160; John Terraine, ‘The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation’, pp. 56-61; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second*

picture in Europe, as painted by the British intelligence community, was rosy in 1935. Indeed, it placed the French Army as second-to-none and the French Air Force as second only behind that of Soviet Russia.¹¹ Meanwhile, the French Navy matched the combined naval strength of Germany and Italy, whilst being friendly with the much superior British and American fleets.¹² The impressive Maginot Line was also near completion, protecting France's land, cities, resources, industry and peoples from German aggression.¹³

By 1936, the Maginot Line ran for more than 200 miles along the Franco-German frontier from Montmédy to Mulhouse, linking Belgium to northern Switzerland.¹⁴ To the north, Belgium was naturally protected by the marshlands of southern Holland and by the Ardennes forest, these obstacles reinforced by formidable Belgian fortifications.¹⁵ To the south of the Maginot Line ran the Franco-Swiss border, which was barricaded by the Jura mountains between Basle and Geneva. The only route through these mountains was the Belfort Gap, a twelve-mile-wide plain, which was secured by heavy French fortifications.¹⁶

World War, p. 37; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 355; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 128.

¹¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 12; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 36; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 62.

¹² Clayton, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 30; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149; Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 800; Wark, 'In Search of a Suitable Japan: British Naval Intelligence in the Pacific before the Second World War', p. 191; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 127.

¹³ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Colonel Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy', 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 14 and 169; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', pp. 162-3; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82.

¹⁴ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 163; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82.

¹⁵ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 14 and 169; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 162.

¹⁶ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 13.

Altogether, this continuous front of natural obstacles and artificial defences ran for 600 miles across France, Belgium and Switzerland, and would be manned by 300,000 men in wartime, making a German outflanking manoeuvre 'virtually impossible'.¹⁷ Terraine calculates that the Maginot Line was worth eleven additional infantry divisions.¹⁸ The French believed that the frontier was impenetrable and that any German offensive would only result in 'one long cemetery'.¹⁹

In 1936, General Schweissguth was so confident of the Maginot Line's power that he officially advised the British that France 'was well able *without assistance* to defend the French frontier, and that... he would prefer to see the British troops lend assistance to the Belgians'.²⁰ Similarly, Gamelin frequently told Beaumont-Nesbitt 'that any British contribution should be sent to Belgium'. Beaumont-Nesbitt concluded that 'France looks for no help from England for herself – a token force, showing British participation in a common effort, is all that is required'.²¹ France's forthrightness about the inviolability of her frontiers contradicts the claims of Alexander and Philpott that the French emphasised their defensive deficiencies in order to secure British land assistance.²² On the contrary, the British were continuously 'treated to the most sanguine and comforting assessments of French military preparedness – always... with reference to the famous Maginot Line'.²³

France's sanguine military outlook was reinforced by a series of alliances across Europe. To the north, the Locarno Treaty committed Britain to French security, should Germany attack without provocation.²⁴ To the east, France had recently signed a military pact with Soviet Russia and had reaffirmed her pacts with the Little

¹⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 162; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 31.

¹⁸ Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 59.

¹⁹ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1938-1939', p. 304.

²⁰ Italics added; 'Anglo-French-Belgian Conversations of 15th and 16th April 1936', WO 106/5412

²¹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

²² Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 66.

²³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 269; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 5.

²⁴ McKercher, 'Deterrence and the European Balance of Power: The Field Force and British Grand Strategy, 1934-1938', p. 102; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 28.

Entente.²⁵ Now, to the south, France had an alliance with Italy. These various pledges and pacts left Germany encircled on three sides.²⁶

Vitally, the consolidation of Italian friendship would allow France to redeploy infantry divisions from the Franco-Italian frontier to the Rhine, and make similar military redeployments from her colonies in North Africa, which would have no need to fear Mussolini's forces in Libya.²⁷ According to Thomas, the Franco-Italian military accords released 'seventeen divisions... for service on the border of Germany'.²⁸ The safe transfer of eight colonial army divisions from North Africa to the Rhine upon the outbreak of hostilities was also guaranteed, as the Italian Fleet would no longer threaten France's sea lanes in the Mediterranean.²⁹

The Franco-Italian military accords also gave France new offensive options. The French hoped that Italy would serve as a land-bridge in the event of war, allowing France to transfer troops and advisers to help the Little Entente establish a second front against Germany, whilst Italy would create a third front to the south, running from the French alps to Yugoslavia, Greece and the Dardanelles. Italy was 'the linchpin' for this plan of encirclement, 'thanks to her geographical station and her rail communications'.³⁰

The military picture in Europe was therefore pleasing for France in 1935, even accounting for Germany's rearmament drive and France's deepening economic troubles as the Great Depression wreaked havoc domestically. Indeed, France's rosy position seemed to remove any need for an anti-German alliance in British eyes.

²⁵ Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-1937: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy', p. 223; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 61; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 55; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 146.

²⁶ N. Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe: The Dilemmas of French Impotence, 1918-1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 2.

²⁷ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 157; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 32.

²⁸ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 44.

²⁹ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 147; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 158.

³⁰ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 147; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 158.

However, within twelve months and against all expectations, France's complex alliance network and military pre-dominance would crumble, leaving her highly vulnerable. The first security pillars to collapse were her friendship with Italy and the Franco-British pledge to always jointly negotiate with Germany on armament questions.

Although Britain and France had only agreed the principle of joint negotiations in January, this pledge was broken by London by the summer. Hitler's unexpected request for a naval agreement with Britain, which would limit Germany's naval strength to 35 percent of Britain's, was irresistible. Thus, the British accepted Ribbentrop's condition of *secrecy*, even though it contradicted the spirit of the Versailles Settlement, Stresa, and the principle of joint negotiations.³¹ The talks culminated on 18 June 1935 with a historic naval agreement, at which point the French were informed. The French angrily sent a protest note to London and criticised the agreement as 'a betrayal of the Stresa declaration'.³² Laval was also furious that the naval agreement failed to restrict Germany's land and air forces, which threatened French security far more than Germany's miniscule navy ever could.³³ This fall-out was swiftly compounded by the Abyssinian Crisis which, according to Ambassador Phipps, caused 'unrivalled bitterness'.³⁴

Over the summer of 1935, rumours spread that Mussolini was preparing to invade Abyssinia.³⁵ Whilst the British and French were not concerned with the fate of Abyssinia, her membership to the League, the domestic popularity of this pacific institution in an election year and Mussolini's use of poisonous gas compelled the British and French to condemn Mussolini's invasion. This was despite a gentleman's understanding between Laval and Mussolini that gave the latter a free hand in

³¹ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 188

³² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 8.

³³ Bell, *France and Britain*, pp. 189-190.

³⁴ Salerno, 'Britain, France and the Emerging Italian Threat, 1935-1938', p. 72; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 117; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 202.

³⁵ Roi, "'A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 337.

Abyssinia in exchange for Italian support in opposing Germany in Europe.³⁶ Disingenuously, Britain and France opposed Mussolini in public whilst seeking a morally dubious settlement behind closed doors.

As the League debated the question of whether to impose sanctions on Italy in November, France had to choose between Britain and the League on one hand and her military accords with Italy on the other.³⁷ Jordan incorrectly argues that France prioritised her alliance with Italy over her friendship with Britain during the mid-1930s. Indeed, she denies that the French were 'obsessed with Great Britain', controversially arguing that France only 'hoped for benevolent British neutrality' because 'Britain, whatever its strength, could never altogether supplant the Italian factor in French military planning'.³⁸ However, the events of the Abyssinian Affair show where France's loyalties truly lay, since she was forced to choose a side. 'The least unpleasant solution,' the French Naval Minister advised, 'is the one which does not separate us from England'.³⁹ As discussed in chapter two, France's war plan to defeat Germany was dependent on Britain's wholehearted industrial and military assistance. This trumped France's military accords with Italy, despite their obvious benefits.

Nevertheless, in the hope of keeping intact her new alliance with Italy, France was slow to support both Britain and the League. France hoped that a half-hearted response would satisfy both camps. Unfortunately, her hesitancy undermined the League's collective security system, which had already allowed Japanese aggression against Manchuria to go unsanctioned. It also caused a lasting bitterness in Anglo-

³⁶ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 129; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 191; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 32.

³⁷ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 35.

³⁸ Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 2.

³⁹ During the Ethiopian crisis, France was forced to choose whether to support Britain or support Italy in their stand-off over the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. Reluctantly, the French agreed to assist the Royal Navy against Italy if it came to war. Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 195; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 35.

French relations, as each government disparaged the other for failing to offer support.⁴⁰

As Paris and London bickered, the Americans worked quietly behind the scenes on their behalf. Without British knowledge, Hull attempted to scare the Italians into a peace settlement, warning them that America would only enforce an arms embargo on Italy, *not* Britain, if a conflict erupted.⁴¹ Italy already had little hope of defeating Britain and France in war, and none whatsoever if they were backed materially by America. In a parallel demarche, Roosevelt pleaded with Mussolini to make peace with Abyssinia.⁴²

When these American initiatives failed to halt the invasion, Roosevelt enforced a trade embargo on war materials to Italy several months before the League even debated the question of imposing sanctions.⁴³ Whilst oil was vitally not included in Roosevelt's list of contraband war materials, the British were informed that the US Government would introduce more extensive measures once the League imposed economic sanctions of its own.⁴⁴ In the meantime, Roosevelt discouraged American companies from exporting oil to Italy by calling for a morally-enforced oil embargo.⁴⁵

However, it soon became apparent that 'American oil was fuelling Mussolini's war machine' with oil exports to Italy tripling within three months of war.⁴⁶ This was compounded by the League's decision in November only to impose ineffective sanctions on Italy in a last-ditch bid to avoid alienating Mussolini from the anti-German, Stresa bloc. These ineffective League sanctions neither included an oil embargo nor the closure of the Suez Canal, measures which Mussolini privately

⁴⁰ Davies, 'Mesente Cordiale: The Future of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1934-36', p. 518; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 9; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 34.

⁴¹ Roi, "A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 349.

⁴² Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 126.

⁴³ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 44.

⁴⁴ Roi, "A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 344.

⁴⁵ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, pp. 44-5.

⁴⁶ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 127; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 118.

admitted would have forced him to make peace within twenty-four hours.⁴⁷ Instead, these sanctions proved the worst of all worlds, too mild to halt Mussolini's invasion and too strong to save the Stresa bloc from collapse.

As tensions mounted between the Stresa powers in the winter of 1935-36, France redeployed fourteen divisions to the Franco-Italian frontier and Tunisia – a force which amounted to one-fifth of her peacetime army – fearing that Italy might react violently to the sanctions.⁴⁸ For the same reason, the French and British also held naval staff conversations for the first time in over a decade. At first glance, these naval conversations appear to be a significant step towards the Anglo-French partnership that sprang up in 1939, and exactly what was required to alter Chamberlain's conviction that the three great democracies were incapable of collaboration on the global stage. Instead, they did precisely the opposite. France initially refused Britain's offer of naval conversations, causing a swell of British resentment.⁴⁹

According to Thomas, there is a historical consensus (which is supported by this thesis) that France's refusal to hold naval conversations with Britain seriously poisoned Anglo-French relations, which dipped to their lowest ebb during the interwar period and took years to recover.⁵⁰ Even Francophiles such as Vansittart accused the disloyal French of engaging in 'treachery in its dirtiest and blackest form'.⁵¹ This mutual Anglo-French resentment reached fever-pitch after secret discussions between Laval and Hoare were leaked to the press, revealing a plan to cede part of Abyssinia to Italy. Given the embittered relations, only the Foreign

⁴⁷ Salerno, 'Britain, France and the Emerging Italian Threat, 1935-1938', p. 74; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 36.

⁴⁸ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 39.

⁴⁹ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 160; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War*, p. 190; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 195.

⁵⁰ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 19; Davies, 'Mesente Cordiale: The Future of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1934-36', p. 518 and 520; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 131; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, pp. 9-10; Imlay, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 39; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 197; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 36.

⁵¹ Davies, 'Mesente Cordiale: The Future of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1934-36', p. 518; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 9.

Office, of all the Whitehall departments, 'sought to maintain friendly relations with France' in subsequent years.⁵²

After immense pressure from London, the French reluctantly agreed to hold naval conversations over the winter months in a belated show of solidarity.⁵³ At these conversations, they agreed to exchange information 'about dispositions of warships, base facilities, fuel supplies, seaplane bases, aerodromes, harbour defences, W/T stations and their routines, inter-allied cyphers and liaison officers'. However, France's initial reluctance was not forgotten and once the Abyssinian Affair subsided Britain ceased these exchanges, despite France's desire to maintain them after the Rhineland Affair.⁵⁴

The timing of these dwindling exchanges suggests that the British were prepared to collaborate with France against Italy, but *not* against Germany. This certainly undermines the claims of Alexander and Philpot that the Anglo-French staff conversations during the 1930s 'took place... to ensure effective Anglo-French coordination' against Germany.⁵⁵ In fact, Britain tried to make sure that these conversations – forced upon them by the Locarno Treaty – did the exact opposite by rendering them as menial as possible. Indeed, whilst the Italians could easily be handled, victory over Germany would demand a gargantuan effort. Thus, Britain stringently opposed Anglo-French planning, coordination, commitments and pacts against Germany until 1939.

At the Anglo-French naval conversations in December 1935 – and in subsequent conversations in 1936 and 1938 – Chatfield refused even to discuss British naval assistance to help transfer France's colonial army from North Africa to the Rhine in the event that Germany sided with Italy during the Abyssinian Crisis.⁵⁶ Nor would

⁵² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 11.

⁵³ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 39;

Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 9.

⁵⁴ DNI, 'Anglo-French Naval Staff Collaboration, 1936-1939', ADM 223/487

⁵⁵ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Cooperation, 1928-1939', p. 55.

⁵⁶ Admiral Roberts told Chatfield that British naval assistance in transferring troops from North Africa to France would be 'badly needed' if Germany appeared hostile.

Chatfield guarantee France against a German attack for fear that it might set a dangerous precedent.⁵⁷ Fundamentally, the naval conversations of 1935, far from being a step towards the Anglo-French Alliance of 1939, only revealed two facts: Britain's refusal to collaborate with France against Germany; and France's deep-seated reluctance to support Britain against Italy.

Fundamentally, neither power was ready for an all-encompassing partnership to sustain the global democratic order. Each was only willing to police the world with the other democracies if it were not a serious inconvenience. As the period of anti-collaboration and discord between 1919 and 1935 demonstrated, the democracies would put their own needs ahead of upholding the new world order, as shown by their meek responses to the Japanese and Italian invasions of Manchuria and Abyssinia respectively. This was in spite of the democracies possessing both the collective and *individual* power to stop those aggressive moves.

Unsurprisingly, the League's half-hearted economic sanctions failed to stop Mussolini's military campaign. By January 1936, Roosevelt was equally displeased with the failure of his oil embargo and sought to gain 'significant discretionary powers', which would allow him to penalise Italy whilst assisting friendly belligerents.⁵⁸ However, his bill was quashed by the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.⁵⁹ With Roosevelt's hands tied by his legislative branch, he could only renew the neutrality laws of 1935, which 'no one felt satisfied with'.⁶⁰ Outside of Congress, the President could only bolster his moral oil embargo by pleading with firms not to increase their oil exports to Italy.⁶¹ In Lindsay's opinion, it was also

Unhelpfully, Chatfield frankly replied that the scenario of German military intervention was not up for discussion, and he would 'only consider the first case' – a war against Italy; Record of meeting held in CNS's Room, 15 January 1936', ADM 116/3398

⁵⁷ 'Record of meeting held in CNS's Room, 15 January 1936', ADM 116/3398

⁵⁸ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 118.

⁵⁹ Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 655; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 118.

⁶⁰ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 655; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 45; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 141.

⁶¹ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 120.

'doubtful whether Mr. Roosevelt will have his way' in acquiring presidential discretionary powers in future years due to the 'innate hostility between the Legislature and the Executive'.⁶²

On 12 February 1936, a League report concluded that a League-wide oil sanction would only be effective if America restricted its oil sales to Italy to peacetime levels. Given the recent tripling of oil exports from America to Italy, the League was dissuaded from imposing an oil embargo, which was expected to be futile and dangerous in equal measure, with Italy liable to react aggressively.⁶³ Despite the failure of the democracies to coerce Italy into a peaceful settlement, Lindsay optimistically noted that 'a wide underlying scepticism' had emerged following Roosevelt's collaborative actions 'as to whether, in the event of a major war, it will be possible for the United States to remain untangled'.⁶⁴

However, Roosevelt poured cold water on this speculation, instead prioritising re-election with a wave of speeches to win over America's isolationist Midwest. In August 1936, he proclaimed that 'we shun political commitments which might entangle us in foreign wars' and 'we avoid connection with the political activities of the League' in order to 'isolate ourselves completely from war'.⁶⁵ Roosevelt was following American public opinion, 95 percent of which believed that the nation 'should not take part in another conflict like the world war'.⁶⁶ As the election climaxed, Lindsay gloomily reported that the issue of neutrality 'almost entirely dominates the outlook of America on world affairs' and it was 'impossible to find anyone who is not determined that... America shall remain aloof' during the next European war.⁶⁷ Thus, despite some mild efforts to stop the Abyssinian Crisis, America remained an absent global partner in the period before Chamberlain's

⁶² *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁶³ Roi, "A Completely Immoral and Cowardly Attitude": The British Foreign Office, American Neutrality and the Hoare-Laval Plan', p. 345; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 118.

⁶⁴ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁶⁵ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 16.

⁶⁶ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670

assumption of power, no doubt cementing his belief that she was a fair-weather friend.

Across the Atlantic, the Abyssinian Crisis faded into the background in early 1936, leaving behind a devastating trail of bitterness between Britain and France. Instead of drawing closer together during crisis season, London and Paris had grown further apart, ingraining Chamberlain's view that their embittered friendship had little utility.⁶⁸ The humbling events of the Abyssinian Crisis also sparked global concerns about the durability of the League and its system of collective security, which had already been undermined by the Manchurian Crisis.⁶⁹

After the affair subsided, Ambassador Clerk concluded that, as a result of France's actions, 'Great Britain had been offended, without Italy having been placated; France's smaller allies had been disgusted and a severe blow struck at the League system on which France had relied for so great a measure of her security'.⁷⁰ Likewise, Inskip observed that the affair was a 'severe blow' to the League's authority.⁷¹ Chamberlain and Eden also lost all confidence in the League after this second unanswered attack on the liberal world order, with Eden labelling it a 'sham'.⁷² The League's flaws had been exposed to the world by the disregard shown by Tokyo and Rome, with each revisionist power winning 'an amazing victory' against the established order.⁷³ For many critics, it was obvious that the League lacked a legally-binding system of collective security, an independent military force to enforce sanctions, and the permanent membership of America, Japan, Italy, Soviet Russia and

⁶⁸ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 160; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War*, p. 190; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 195.

⁶⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁷⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁷¹ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference 1937: Review of Imperial Defence', 25 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23

⁷² Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 10; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*, p. 227.

⁷³ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 128; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 71.

Germany, to give it the highest possible levels of authority and legitimacy.⁷⁴ Until these handicaps were addressed it would remain a hollow institution.

The League's failure to stop Italy 'led many of the smaller nations to rethink their policies', with Spain, Switzerland, Holland and the Nordic States declaring in July 1936 that 'as long as the Covenant was applied "so incompletely and inconsistently" they no longer felt obliged to participate in sanctions against an aggressor'. Estonia, Lithuania and Romania also felt 'disillusioned' with the League, though remained as active members.⁷⁵ Tragically, the League was unable to bounce back, with Ambassador Phipps noting in 1937 that 'the ideas and authority of the League... remained in almost total eclipse'.⁷⁶ The alarming trend of smaller states disassociating themselves from the League and the new world system had unfortunately begun and would continue until the Second World War. In 1938, Roosevelt remarked that this trend towards totalitarianism in Europe was being fuelled by the declining gravitas of Britain and France and had to be stopped if the dissolving new world order was to survive.⁷⁷

Perhaps most significantly of all, the Stresa bloc had collapsed, as had France's friendship with Italy, leaving France in a weak geo-strategic position. 'The Gamelin/Badoglio Agreement of 1935 has been brought to nought,' reported Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'and the French can no longer count on employing against Germany those formations normally stationed on the Italian frontier', nor can she utilise Italy as a land bridge to connect France to her allies in Eastern Europe.⁷⁸ This

⁷⁴ Donald S. Bird, 'The League of Nations Union and Collective Security', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 9, 4 (1974), pp. 131-60 (p. 138); Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*, p. 12.

⁷⁵ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 131.

⁷⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611.

⁷⁷ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 726.

⁷⁸ After France's surprise capitulation in 1940, General Schweissguth rued the decision to sacrifice the Franco-Italian alliance during the Abyssinian Affair, writing that 'the change in Italy's attitude in 1936 deprived France and England of any possibility of action in the countries situated to the east of the Rome-Berlin Axis', which ultimately sealed the fate of France; Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy', 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413; Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 307.

threatened France's war strategy to compel Germany to fight on two fronts. Beaumont-Nesbitt also warned that France's plan to transfer army divisions from North Africa to Europe to fight Germany could be threatened by a hostile Italian navy.⁷⁹ Despite France's hopes for a Franco-Italian rapprochement, relations only worsened after the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, as the ideologically-charged conflict pitted communists, fascists and liberal democrats against one another.⁸⁰

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As the Abyssinian Affair subsided in the spring of 1936, the world was immediately confronted by another storm. On 7 March 1936, Hitler took advantage of the discord between the Stresa powers and abruptly reoccupied the Rhineland. The Rhineland Affair has often been labelled by orthodox and counter-revisionist historians as the last chance for the democracies to fight Hitler on favourable terms, as argued by Parker, Churchill, Bond, Adamwraithe, Davis and numerous others.⁸¹ Whilst the military balance in Europe at this time supports this view, these historians fail to observe that the Rhineland Affair was never seen as a "crisis" by the great democracies, nor a last chance to defeat Germany militarily. In fact, the great democracies saw it as a first opportunity to secure a peace settlement. This opportunity was seized by Britain at the expense of nursing to health embittered Anglo-French relations. Britain's decision to neglect France was encouraged by Hitler's past pacific actions, which allowed him to be portrayed as a man of peace internationally during the mid-1930s, as oppose to a 'devil' – a label teleologically assigned to him by orthodox and post-revisionist historians.⁸²

⁷⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁸⁰ W. C. Frank Jr., 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', *International History Review*, 9, 3 (1987), pp. 368-409 (p. 378); Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. II, p. 372.

⁸¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. viii; R. A. C. Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', *World Politics*, 7 (1956), pp. 355-373 (p. 355); Bond, *British Military Policy between the Two World Wars*, p. 226; Davis, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War*, p. 128; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, 37; Watt, 'Appeasement: Rise of the Revisionist School', p. 195.

⁸² Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 176.

Hitler's military reoccupation of the Rhineland breached Articles 1 and 2 of the Locarno Treaty and Articles 42 and 43 of the Versailles Treaty.⁸³ In reaction, the French demanded military conversations with the British as an alliance-building strategy. The British were compelled by the Locarno Treaty to oblige against their better judgement. The Locarno Treaty also compelled Britain to prepare to send military assistance to France should Germany attack – although the weight of this assistance could range from a mere token force to the entire might of the British Empire.⁸⁴

Simultaneously, the French approached Washington for diplomatic help. However, the Americans refused to condemn Germany for the venial sin of walking into its backyard.⁸⁵ Behind closed doors, the State Department cautioned Roosevelt that Washington 'could not concern itself' as it was not a signatory to either of the breached treaties.⁸⁶ Nor did Washington wish to concern itself. Whilst anti-Nazi feeling had been prominent in America in the early 1930s, Ambassador Lindsay observed that this had 'noticeably decreased', with American public opinion sympathising 'with the restrictions which were still imposed upon German sovereignty'. Ultimately, 'no real feeling of uneasiness was displayed' in America during the Rhineland Incident.⁸⁷ In fact, only a handful of America's political elite were alarmed: Messersmith, Dodd, Bowers and Morgenthau.⁸⁸ Not only did the

⁸³ Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 355.

⁸⁴ Bell, *Chamberlain, Japan and Germany*, p. 2; McKercher, 'Deterrence and the European Balance of Power: The Field Force and British Grand Strategy, 1934-1938', p. 102; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 28.

⁸⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 140.

⁸⁶ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 141 and 144.

⁸⁷ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Frank Friedel, 'FDR vs. Hitler: American Foreign Policy, 1933-1941', *Massachusetts Historical Society*, 99 (1987), pp. 25-43 (p. 27-28).

⁸⁸ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 141, 144, 166 and 278.

White House stay inauspiciously silent, but the President 'went so far as to write an editorial condoning the occupation'.⁸⁹

Neither London nor Paris wished to respond to the Rhineland Incident – though France put on a wonderful show to the contrary – despite both democracies possessing the collective and individual power to stop Germany.⁹⁰ From a British perspective, Hitler was only righting an injustice, all be it forcefully.⁹¹ 'Leaving aside the breach of faith,' Liddle Hart wrote, 'the right thing has been done in the wrong way'.⁹² Moreover, the Cabinet had ruled in 1935 that the Rhineland zone was not a vital British interest.⁹³ Nor could Eden cry foul, since he had just made an untimely offer to Hitler, tendering the Rhineland zone in return for a European air pact. Ultimately, both democracies merely regarded the territory as a useful bargaining chip.⁹⁴

Shrewdly, Hitler turned his flagrant actions into a peace proposal, suggesting a dramatic return to the League of Nations, an air pact and a 25-year non-aggression treaty on the condition that the democracies renegotiated the Versailles Treaty and settled Germany's colonial claims.⁹⁵ Hitler's peace proposal seemed genuine. Moreover, the democracies had little reason to doubt him, given his pacific track-record and 'self-portrayal as the "man of peace"'.⁹⁶ Indeed, his support for Macdonald's global disarmament plan in 1933, the Germano-Poland non-aggression pact of 1934, and the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935, convinced the British

⁸⁹ F. W. Marks III, 'Six Between Roosevelt and Hitler: America's Role in the Appeasement of Nazi Germany,' *Historical Review*, 28, 4 (1985), pp. 969-982 (p. 971).

⁹⁰ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 139; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 150; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 120. Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 39; Bell, *France and Britain*, pp. 205-6; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 364; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 177; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 142; Davis, *Anglo-French before the Second World War*, p. 20; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 31.

⁹¹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁹² Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 227.

⁹³ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 225.

⁹⁴ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 142.

⁹⁵ Medicott, 'Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1930-1937', p. 95.

⁹⁶ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 144.

Government that he could be trusted, even if his domestic agenda caused revulsion.⁹⁷ These examples of Hitler's peaceful actions answer Ruggiero's challenge for the revisionists 'to identify a single tangible and corresponding instance of peaceful intentions on Hitler's part that gave peace a chance' and made Chamberlain's appeasement strategy seem 'worth a try'. In fact, the notion of a peaceful Hitler forged by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement is evidenced even in late 1938. The Naval Agreement was jointly referenced by Chamberlain and Hitler at Munich as 'symbolic of the desire of our two countries never to go to war with each other again'.⁹⁸

Whilst historians correctly argue that the Rhineland affair was the *last favourable opportunity* to stop Hitler militarily without a major European war, many scholars have mistakenly criticised France and Britain for not seizing this chance.⁹⁹ Their argument is fuelled by hindsight and fails to consider the contemporary British mindset. Rather than being seen as *the last opportunity* to stop Hitler, the Rhineland Incident was regarded as *the first opportunity* for a lasting peace settlement with Germany – a belief held by the Foreign Office until early 1937.¹⁰⁰ This widespread hope in Hitler's sincerity for peace was *understandable* and even *logical*. As Walker remarks, British decision-makers 'were reasonable men and expected Hitler to be reasonable and satiable in his demands'. A.J.P Taylor even argues that Hitler 'was both deterrable and appeaseable', despite his evil nature, 'but inept British leaders bungled both opportunities'.¹⁰¹

These hopes for a peace pact, twinned with Britain's belief that Hitler's actions were justified, help to explain their reluctance to enter into *meaningful* military staff

⁹⁷ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 220. Offner, *American Appeasement*, pp. 33-4; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 188.

⁹⁸ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 11 and 99.

⁹⁹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. viii; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 37; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 355; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 226; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁰ Medlicott, 'Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1930-1937', p. 99.

¹⁰¹ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 220.

conversations with France. Whilst the terms of Locarno obliged the British to hold conversations with France on 15-16 April 1936, the British plotted to make them as meaningless as possible. Indeed, the CID advised the Cabinet that these military conversations should be 'strictly limited in their scope' and be void of any military commitments beyond the smallest possible contribution to France demanded by Locarno – two infantry divisions. Unrestricted discussions were thus 'out of the question' as they risked capsizing Hitler's peace proposals.¹⁰²

In essence, the British were willing to neglect France in order not to derail the opportunity for a peace settlement with Germany, even if this provoked feelings of bitterness and betrayal in Paris. This argument challenges the claims of Young and Adamwraithe, both of whom believe that these military conversations were a significant step towards the Anglo-French Alliance of 1939.¹⁰³ In fact, these military conversations only proved a slippery slope towards mutual mud-slinging and recriminations. According to Davies, the significance of this nadir in Anglo-French relations should not be underestimated. He observes that the arising hostility extended far beyond the political echelons and was 'clearly visible in the press, financial institutions and... public opinion'.¹⁰⁴ Alarmingly, these poisoned relations also had grave implications for the direction of British foreign policy, which steered towards appeasement, not the pursuit of alliances, in the Chamberlain years thereafter.

Fearing that France might act rashly if Britain showed any willingness militarily to collaborate against Germany, the CID warned against making inadvertent or tacit commitments to French security and even ruled out hypothetical discussions on cooperation against Germany. The CID reminded the Cabinet of the Anglo-French naval agreement of 1912, which had morally compelled Britain to intervene on

¹⁰² Hankey, 'Staff Conversations with the Locarno Powers', CID Minutes, 6 April 1936, CAB 24/261/35

¹⁰³ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 124; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 40.

¹⁰⁴ Davies, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War*, p. 13.

France's behalf in 1914.¹⁰⁵ This mistake could not be repeated in the upcoming military conversations.¹⁰⁶

Another entrapment of 1914 had been the division of Europe's powers into two alliance blocs, each of which was bound by secret treaties and interlocking military obligations. It was believed by the British that this "old way of diplomacy" had inadvertently caused Europe's spiral towards war, by provoking a succession of mobilisations, and had also fuelled German fears of encirclement by France and Russia.¹⁰⁷ The British wished to avoid repeating these errors, and so refused to ally themselves to France in peacetime – or any other power, alliance network, or security system.¹⁰⁸ Britain did not wish to lose another golden generation of British men on the battlefields of Europe.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, Walker argues that the painful memories of 1914 to 1918 'made it difficult for British leaders to justify rapid rearmament, alliances, and military intervention when a policy of negotiations existed as an alternative'.¹¹⁰

These historical lessons of past entrapments dictated British policy in the 1930s and caused the British to become blind to their seemingly obvious military interdependency with France. In fact, the very notion of pursuing an anti-German alliance bloc with Paris and Washington was anathema to most Britons, who feared that this policy might rekindle German fears of encirclement. This in turn might

¹⁰⁵ The naval agreement of 1912 encouraged the French fleet to patrol the distant Mediterranean on the assumption that Britain would guard the English Channel from piracy and aggression, enabling the Royal Navy to outnumber the German Fleet in the North Sea. This arrangement had conveniently freed up British Dreadnoughts to resist Germany's maritime challenge in the North Sea. Since the French Navy had been wholly concentrated in the Mediterranean at the time of the July Crisis, Sir Edward Grey had argued that the British were morally obliged to protect France's northern coast and trade routes from a German incursion, an argument which convinced Parliament to vote for war; Kennedy, *The rise of the Anglo-German antagonism*, pp. 451-2; Simon, Minutes of 276th Meeting, 3 April 1936, ADM 116/3379

¹⁰⁶ Simon, Minutes of 276th Meeting, 3 April 1936, ADM 116/3379

¹⁰⁷ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 175; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, pp. 13-14.

¹⁰⁸ Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 14.

¹⁰⁹ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, pp. 260-1.

¹¹⁰ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 220.

provoke a European war, shipwrecking Hitler's offer for a long-lasting peace settlement.¹¹¹ In the words of a contemporary British diplomat, 'alliances were out of fashion'.¹¹²

The CID's warnings were taken to heart by the Cabinet, which warned the military establishment that they had 'no authority to undertake any naval, military or air commitment', nor to enter into hypothetical discussions of Anglo-French military cooperation against Germany.¹¹³ To reinforce this message, the CID astonishingly warned that there was 'no certainty as to the side on which we might be fighting' in a future European war.¹¹⁴ Hearing of these severe restrictions on the impending military conversations, the French wore cloaks of scepticism as they crossed the English Channel in April 1936 for the conversations almost destined to lead to nowhere. Cold-heartedly, the French were shunned at these military conversations.¹¹⁵ Beyond Britain confirming their legal requirement to offer the minimum military contribution possible under the Locarno Treaty, the British delegates refused to discuss any hypotheticals with the French, stressing that they were merely permitted to exchange military information on army strengths, defences, ports and other facilities.¹¹⁶ Deservedly, the French naval minister described Britain's behaviour at these talks as 'almost hostile'.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 155.

¹¹² Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 14.

¹¹³ 'Instructions to British Service Representatives taking part in Conversations with French and Belgian Staff Officers', AIR 9/74; Hankey, 'Staff Conversations with the Locarno Powers', CID Minutes, 6 April 1936, CAB 24/261/35; Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, First Meeting, 14 April 1936, AIR 9/74

¹¹⁴ Hankey, 'Staff Conversations with the Locarno Powers', CID Minutes, 6 April 1936, CAB 24/261/35

¹¹⁵ Whilst the British accepted that the terms of Locarno obliged them to offer military assistance to France if the crisis spiralled and Germany attacked her, they repeatedly stressed their 'full liberty' to decide the *form* and *extent* of that assistance in their own time. The French were advised to assume that Britain would only send the minimum assistance required by Locarno. Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, First Meeting, 14 April 1936, AIR 9/74

¹¹⁶ Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, First Meeting, 14 April 1936, AIR 9/74; Hankey, 'Staff Conversations with the Locarno Powers', CID Minutes, 6 April 1936, CAB 24/261/35

¹¹⁷ Davis, *Anglo-French Relations Before the Second World War*, p. 21.

Historians have since debated whether these conversations should be regarded as significant. Whilst the discussions were certainly superficial – or, in Cairn’s words, ‘nearly empty of content’ – several months onwards, the French naval attaché to London remarked that it was not the dynamism of the shared information that he valued, ‘but the fact that *contact* and *communication* between the British and French Naval Staffs’ was established and maintained *ipso facto*.¹¹⁸

The conversations between the French and British arguably also had value in their own right, something Young, Dockrill, Alexander, Philpot and Adamwraithe have emphasised.¹¹⁹ The two navies exchanged sensitive information on the disposition of British and French warships, base facilities, and means of communication in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and English Channel.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, the two armies exchanged information on the forces available to each side, on French port facilities, railways, road, telegraphic and telephonic communications, French mobilisation plans and transportation plans for the BEF once convoyed to France.¹²¹ Finally, the two air forces exchanged information on each other’s strengths and discussed the availability of Franco-Belgian aerodromes for use by the RAF.¹²²

These staff conversations also established an infrequent exchange of information at the military attaché level, which continued until the outbreak of war in 1939.¹²³ Thomas argues that the French ‘geared their tactics to the presentation of such a volume of mundane questions that closer co-ordination would develop by default’. These tactics countered Britain’s strategy of deliberate equivocation to avoid an

¹¹⁸ DNI, ‘Exchange of Information between Naval Staffs: Interviews with Admiral Durand-Viel, CNS,’ 27 November 1936, ADM 116/3379; Cairns, ‘A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940’, p. 734.

¹¹⁹ Alexander, ‘The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Cooperation, 1928-1939’, p. 55; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 127; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 38; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 66.

¹²⁰ DNI, ‘Exchange of Information between Naval Staffs: Interviews with Admiral Durand-Viel, CNS,’ 27 November 1936, ADM 116/3379

¹²¹ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 127; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 38; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 66.

¹²² ‘Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, First Meeting,’ 15 April 1936, AIR 9/74; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 38.

¹²³ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 127.

explicit or tacit commitment to French security. Indeed, Thomas concludes that 'unambitious coordination such as this... did much to blunt the outright hostility with which the British military establishment had greeted the prospect of discussions'.¹²⁴

Young and Adamwraithe also argue that Britain's promise to send two infantry divisions to France was deeply significant as it represented a tangible military commitment to France and 'laid the foundations of a defensive alliance'.¹²⁵ In France's delusional eyes at least, this military commitment seemed to justify her defensive war plan and costly construction of the Maginot Line. Hence, Beaumont-Nesbitt reported that the French believed these conversations to be 'valuable', because their occurrence *ipso facto* testified to Britain's 'determination' to abide by her Locarno commitments.¹²⁶ However, this view should be tempered by the explosion of Anglophobia across France after the Rhineland Affair.

Meanwhile, Thomas has tarnished Britain's commitment to send two infantry divisions as a 'farce' and claims that these military conversations were merely a political sop to the French, a view that this thesis supports.¹²⁷ Indeed, Hankey dismissed these military conversations as 'merely a makeweight thrown in to ease matters for the French', whilst Colonel Pownall described them as 'a political gesture to please France than as of any real practical value'.¹²⁸ Ultimately, Britain was compelled into these military conversations by the Locarno Treaty and, if legally-permitted, would have avoided them altogether. Britain's attempt to make these conversations as meaningless as possible – and her unconscionably severe body language towards France – shows that she prioritised a peace settlement with Germany over the soothing of her embittered relations with France. Indeed, she fulfilled her obligation to hold staff conversations with the greatest display of reluctance.

¹²⁴ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, pp. 41-2.

¹²⁵ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 124; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 40.

¹²⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

¹²⁷ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 156.

¹²⁸ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 38; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 27.

This frosty attitude fuelled the rift in political relations between London and Paris, reignited by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement and the Abyssinian Crisis.¹²⁹ France's feathers were further ruffled by the British Cabinet, which 'unanimously rejected' sanctions against Germany, fearing that it might spark a war or shipwreck Hitler's peace proposals.¹³⁰ France's sour accusations of disloyalty and betrayal mirrored Britain's accusations during the Abyssinian Crisis.¹³¹ René Massigli, the assistant political director of the Quai d'Orsay, complained bitterly of British treachery, whilst Francois-Poncet, the French Ambassador to Berlin, raged about 'the clergymen, the old ladies, the pacifist organisations, the intellectuals, and the socialist electors across the channel', criticising their 'Germanophilia, [and] their desire to recover the sheep [Germany] strayed from the fold', while 'France alone... would be left to foot the bill'.¹³²

Likewise, Prime Minister Sarraut disparaged the British for refusing to consider sanctions against Germany.¹³³ Most of France felt similarly betrayed.¹³⁴ 'Opinion in all circles is converging towards the same point', reported Hugh Lloyd-Thomas, a British minister in Paris, 'indignation at the alleged failure of His Majesty's Government to carry out their obligations to support France in this critical hour'. It would not be long, Lloyd-Thomas predicted on, before the French Government told the nation: 'We told you so... We always knew that British enthusiasm for collective security and the sanctity of treaties was rump'.¹³⁵ Contrary to the claims of Adamwraithe and Young, these events were the opposite of a foundation for an alliance.¹³⁶

¹²⁹ Davis, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 190.

¹³⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 31.

¹³¹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 142; Davis, *Anglo-French before the Second World War*, p. 20; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 206; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 31.

¹³² Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 52; Davis, 'Mesentente Cordiale: The Future of The Anglo-French Alliance, 1934-1936', p. 515.

¹³³ Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 368.

¹³⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

¹³⁵ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 30.

¹³⁶ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 124; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 40.

Whilst France's anger with Britain was widespread, there is a consensus amongst historians that London did not stop her from responding militarily to Germany's coup.¹³⁷ France's political and military leaders had no enthusiasm for war over the Rhineland zone, nor did the French public, a large contingent of which even decried the cautious manning of the Maginot Line as an unwarranted act of provocation against Germany.¹³⁸ In fact, the French Government only proclaimed their desire for military retaliation to save face after reaching the conclusion that London would surely refuse their requests for joint military action.¹³⁹ The French Government shrewdly calculated that Britain's refusal would give them the *perfect alibi* for the passive response that they themselves craved, not to mention an opportunity to seek compensation from London for defaulting on her Locarno obligations to sanction Germany.¹⁴⁰

According to Young, France, disinclined to respond with a show of force to the Rhineland affair, 'managed to *manufacture* a crisis as a means of drawing closer to Britain'.¹⁴¹ In the decades since, orthodox and counter-revisionist historians have failed to recognise that this crisis was indeed *manufactured* when criticising the democracies for not stopping Hitler whilst the military balance was highly favourable.¹⁴² As mentioned above, most contemporaries regarded the Rhineland affair as an opportunity for a peace settlement with Germany, rather than as an excuse to launch a pre-emptive war. The diary of André Beaufre, a contemporary

¹³⁷ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 206; Davis, *Anglo-French before the Second World War*, p. 20; Davis, 'Mesentente Cordiale: The Future of The Anglo-French Alliance, 1934-1936', p. 522.

¹³⁸ Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 139; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 150; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 120. Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 39; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 205; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 364; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 177.

¹³⁹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 37.

¹⁴⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 123; Davis, *Anglo-French before the Second World War*, p. 22.

¹⁴¹ Italics added; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 131.

¹⁴² Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. viii; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 37; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 355; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 226; Davies, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 128.

French military strategist, summarises this mindset. 'We had missed our last opportunity to nip in the bud the rise of Hitler's Germany... through... political blindness or simply through thoughtlessness, people in general experienced these serious events, which were bound to end in disaster, as though they were sleepwalking'.¹⁴³ One British MP observed that 'on all sides one hears sympathy for Germany', whilst even Churchill's reaction was low key.¹⁴⁴ From the view point of London and Paris, there was no existential crisis, just an injustice righted in an unsavoury way.

Nevertheless, the French tried to manufacture a crisis in the hope that Britain would feel "guilt-tripped" into offering compensation for defaulting on their Locarno commitments – hopefully in the form of a military alliance.¹⁴⁵ At the military conversations in London, General Schweissguth played his part in the deception by claiming that it was only 'out of deference to... Britain that France had refrained from marching into the Rhineland'.¹⁴⁶ The British, however, remained convinced that underneath France's hawkish exterior she opposed a military solution to stop Germany. Hitler 'will get away with it,' Colonel Pownall scribbled. 'We are certainly in no position (even if we wanted to) to use force – nor are the French though they will squeal and sulk and ask for help'.¹⁴⁷ The cost of France's stratagems was the further poisoning of Anglo-French relations, 'at the very moment when their closest co-operation was more than ever necessary'.¹⁴⁸ Rather than being a step towards an alliance, these military conversations were a slippery slope to poisoned relations.

In the aftermath, the British military elite continued to shun the French with their frosty body language. In August 1936, after the Spanish Civil War erupted, CNS Admiral Darlan crossed the Channel in a spontaneous attempt to meet senior Admiralty officials to propose an increase in intelligence exchanges. Rudely, he was

¹⁴³ Davies, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 127.

¹⁴⁴ Carley, 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances: the Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-1936', p. 64; Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940', p. 732.

¹⁴⁵ Davis, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁶ 'Anglo-French-Belgian Conversations of 15th and 16th April, 1936', WO 106/5412

¹⁴⁷ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁸ Davis, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, p. 190.

refused audiences with both Hankey and Hoare and 'forced to visit the Admiralty in plain clothes without a formal introduction', at which point his proposal was rebuffed.¹⁴⁹ In Young's words, 'one is frequently impressed by the restraint shown by French officials in the face of tactless British behaviour'.¹⁵⁰

In November 1936, Darlan repeated his request for closer naval relations. The British DNI suspected that Darlan perhaps wished 'to make the contact between the two Naval Staffs, which is gradually dying, more real and vital'.¹⁵¹ More harshly, the DOP advised that the recent Abyssinian and Rhineland crises 'should be considered closed and that staff conversations should cease'.¹⁵² The DCNS agreed, claiming that he did 'not see any grounds for re-opening staff conversations with France... when the ground is being prepared for a bigger event', a peace settlement with Hitler.¹⁵³ The French were duly informed.¹⁵⁴

These persistent French requests for closer naval relations were twinned with requests for military and air conversations. These were also rejected.¹⁵⁵ The COS cited the danger of a press leak on the French side, which might spark fears of encirclement in Germany and push her into the arms of other aggressive powers. This would ruin Britain's chance to broker a peace pact with Germany.¹⁵⁶ Britain's opposition to conversations was only strengthened after Schacht intimated in late 1936 that Hitler would consider arms limitations if Britain discussed colonial concessions.¹⁵⁷

The French, for their part, continued to treat British military and political officials warmly. In September 1936, Churchill was shown the Maginot Line, 'which no foreign

¹⁴⁹ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 140.

¹⁵⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 128.

¹⁵¹ DNI, 'Exchange of Information between Naval Staffs: Interviews with Admiral Durand-Veil', 27 November 1936, ADM 116/3379

¹⁵² Director of Plans, minute, 1 December 1936, ADM 116/3379

¹⁵³ Deputy Chief of Naval Staff, minute, 2 December 1936, ADM 116/3379

¹⁵⁴ DNI to NA Paris, telegram, 7 December 1936, ADM 116/3379; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁵ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 160

¹⁵⁶ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 232.

¹⁵⁷ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 17.

civilian, and only a small number of foreign officers, have been allowed to inspect'.¹⁵⁸ Of these foreign officers, Beaumont-Nesbitt had been the first to inspect the fortifications.¹⁵⁹ However, this warmth was not reciprocated. Tragically, Anglo-French relations had reached rock bottom at the precise moment when collaboration was most needed – though, of course, this would not be realised for some time to come.

¹⁵⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

¹⁵⁹ Beaumont-Nesbitt also reported on the favourable treatment of British officers serving in France, claiming that 'the greatest friendship has prevailed and on several occasions exceptional facilities for visits, or items of information, have been provided not normally available to foreign officers'. *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 66.

France's Military Decline

Whilst the French had held the military advantage during the Rhineland Affair, the incident revealed a systemic weakness in their defensive national strategy and provoked a gargantuan shift in the geo-political balance of Europe in favour of Germany. This shift was compounded by rising political, social and economic tribulations in France (see chapter seven) and by an intelligence awakening in Britain about Germany's true military strength in late 1936. Together these adverse factors caused a mental awakening amongst the British military and political elite, who suddenly regarded France as a liability instead of an asset. Chamberlain's appeasement strategy from 1937 can largely be attributed to these adverse shifts, since they left him without a viable foreign partner with whom to oppose the aggressive powers. Indeed, in British eyes, France was the cornerstone for any alliance bloc or pact to deter the aggressive powers. Lamentably, this cornerstone lost its power and utility after March 1936, making infeasible the alternative of alliance-building so espoused by Chamberlain's critics, including Churchill, Eden, Cooper, Bevin, Rothstein, Naimier, Wheeler-Benet, George, Rowse, Wiskemann, Gilbert, Gott, Middlemas, Shaw, Ruggiero, Nielson, Carley, Leutze, Kennedy, Watt, Dilks, Reynolds, Rock, Terraine, Ross, Bond and many others.¹

¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 128; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 160; Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', pp. 56-61; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Leibovitz, *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*, p. 497; Carley, *1939*, p. xviii; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 7; Shaw, 'Attitudes of the British

Prior to the Rhineland Affair, the imperious Maginot Line had only been seen as a positive, protecting French territory from German aggression.² However, the Rhineland Affair revealed that the Maginot Line – along with the defensive French doctrine that inspired it – had handicapped France from acting offensively against Germany. This fault was spotted by the British CIGS who observed that the French Army had ‘no offensive doctrine whatsoever’.³ According to Jackson, France ‘surrendered the military initiative in European affairs’ from the moment she approved the Maginot Line, since the French Army was no longer ‘trained nor equipped to mount a punitive strike into Germany’.⁴ The consequences of this surfaced in March 1936.

Since the early 1930s, the French Army’s inability to launch a quick offensive was regarded as an alarming handicap by only a few men, including Colonel Charles de Gaulle and Paul Reynaud. Both men denounced the French Army’s defensive war doctrine and its refusal ‘to create a force capable of rapid offensive operations that was not dependent upon full national mobilisation’.⁵ They believed that only with such a force could France react to potential German treaty violations without triggering the military escalation, expense and societal disruption that came with a general mobilisation. However, most of France’s military elite believed that a defensive stance was ‘the safest and the surest’ road to victory, with Gamelin regularly exclaiming, ‘all our intelligence reports show that it is our doctrine which is

Political Elite Towards the Soviet Union, p. 70; Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler*, p. 1; Aster, ‘Appeasement: Before and after Revisionism’, p. 445.

² Inskip, ‘The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937’, 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Colonel Beaumont-Nesbitt, ‘Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy’, 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 14 and 169; Young, ‘French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period’, pp. 162-3; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82.

³ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 96.

⁴ Indeed, around 80 percent of French conscripts from 1928 onwards spent at least half their one-year service training to man the Maginot Line; Jackson, ‘French Intelligence and Hitler’s Rise to Power’, p. 819; Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, p. 153; Young, ‘French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period’, p. 158.

⁵ Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, p. 152.

the best'.⁶ The Rhineland Affair poured cold water on this view by showing contemporary observers just how emasculating this defensive doctrine was for France.

Two months before the Rhineland Incident, Gamelin warned the Haut Comité Militaire that Germany would seize the Rhineland zone in order to 'neutralise the French army by constructing on its western frontiers a fortified barrier comparable to our own' Maginot Line, which would allow her 'to settle the fate of the Little Entente Powers', free 'from any fear of an offensive from us'.⁷ Despite this warning, the French saw the Rhineland Coup as an inevitability not worth resisting.⁸ Once Germany's forces moved into the zone, Gamelin therefore became a voice for inaction, deliberately exaggerating intelligence on the strength of the German occupation force to convince France's civilian leaders not to respond with military force.⁹

Whilst it has already been shown that the French did not wish to respond to the Rhineland Coup, it is also abundantly clear that the French were *incapable* of launching a military offensive to stop it – *unless* of course they were willing to mobilise the entire French Army in a complex, disruptive and financially draining operation.¹⁰ The costs of mobilisation influenced French decision-makers at a time when the government was battling financial crisis and economic depression. Unhelpfully, before general mobilisation could be ordered, the French first had to summon the *couverture*, a force of 1.2 million men, to secure the French frontier.¹¹

⁶ E. Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler: France and the Limits of Military Planning* (Lawrence, KA: University Press of Kansas, 1996), p. 172; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 165 and 170.

⁷ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 119.

⁸ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 150; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 119.

⁹ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 205; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 364; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 169; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 157; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 128.

¹⁰ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 163; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 226.

¹¹ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 226.

This was a costly, two week process, which would damage the economy as France's transport systems were requisitioned by the French Army.¹²

After this phase, the French still had to complete a general mobilisation in order to launch an offensive.¹³ This drawn-out process would have 'far-reaching economic, social and political consequences' and so proved a measure which the French Government was unwilling to sanction.¹⁴ 'The situation would have been entirely different,' lamented one French commander, had France possessed a strike force of 100,000 men 'ready to march at the first signal'.¹⁵

France's decision not to respond militarily to Hitler's coup had grave short-term ramifications. The first was the increased danger posed to France by a remilitarised Rhineland zone. Marshall Foch once claimed, 'when one is master of the Rhine, one is master of the whole country. When one is not on the Rhine, all is lost'.¹⁶ This proverb rang true for French and British strategists who found themselves rueing Germany's newfound ability to position her armed forces within a stone's throw of France. Inskip correctly concluded that this 'increased the practicability of a sudden attack on France'.¹⁷

France's passivity also shocked her allies, catalysing the collapse of her complex alliance system.¹⁸ The Little Entente began to drift away from France towards neutrality, propelled by the belief that France no longer possessed the iron will and offensive capability to protect them against a German attack. This belief was aggravated by Germany's rapid construction of fixed-fortifications along the Rhine – a

¹²Young, *In Command of France*, p. 39; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 163; Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 364.

¹³ Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 364.

¹⁴ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 205; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 177.

¹⁵ Parker, 'The First Capitulation: France and the Rhineland Crisis of 1936', p. 364.

¹⁶ Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?'" French Perceptions of Britain as an Ally after the First World War', p. 40.

¹⁷ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937: Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Alexander, 'The Military Consequences for France of the end of Locarno', p. 564.

¹⁸ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider the World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 167; Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 1.

network interchangeably known as “the Siegfried Line” or “the Westwall”.¹⁹ Inskip asserted that this wall ‘rendered it more difficult for France to launch an offensive attack to assist her allies if they are attacked by Germany’. Moreover, this realisation had ‘sparked alarm throughout Europe’.²⁰

To make matters worse, the Germans launched a propaganda campaign, which Jackson argues was ‘aimed at intimidating the west into believing the Westwall was much further advanced than was actually the case’. Thus, Gamelin soon advised Daladier that an offensive against the Westwall would bring about a ‘modernised Battle of the Somme’. According to Jackson, ‘in the minds of French officials psychologically committed to a defensive posture... Germany’s western fortifications were unbreachable long before they even existed’.²¹

It was obvious to foreign observers that France had lost her open pathway into Germany.²² On 4 April 1936, the French Premier warned his peers that if Germany built fixed-fortifications along the Rhine, ‘we would find it impossible... to assist our eastern allies’.²³ Likewise, the vexed Romanian Foreign Minister summed up the concerns of the Little Entente, stating that ‘if on 7 March you could not defend yourself, how will you defend us against the aggressor?’²⁴ Even more sharply, Beaumont-Nesbitt advised that France’s inability to assist her eastern allies had reduced her ‘to the level of a second-rate Power’.²⁵

¹⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 41.

²⁰ Inskip, ‘Imperial Conference, 1937: Review of Imperial Defence’, 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23

²¹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 285.

²² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Conference of Military Attachés to Consider the World Situation,’ June 1936, WO 190/433; Carley, ‘A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances”: The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-1936’, p. 64; Davis, *Anglo-French Relations before the Second World War*, pp. 3-4; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 225.

²³ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 41.

²⁴ The Austrian Foreign Minister was equally defeatist, declaring, ‘if Germany is allowed to fortify the Rhineland we are lost’. Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 41.

²⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Conference of Military Attachés to Consider the World Situation,’ June 1936, WO 190/433

On 14 October 1936, an even more alarming crack appeared in France's alliance network. Without warning, Belgium severed her military ties with France and declared neutrality. France had long planned to send her armed forces to an advanced defensive line in Belgium to resist a German attack at the outbreak of hostilities. However, this would no longer be possible without consent from the Belgian Government. If this was not forthcoming, France would be forced to make her stand along the Franco-Belgian frontier, which had 'no defences whatsoever'.²⁶

According to Adamwraithe, it was both too expensive and too late for the French government to extend the Maginot Line to the sea.²⁷ Worse, this wide-open region 'lacked the natural lines of defences' of eastern Belgium. Indeed, 'it was congested with heavy industrial centres; and the soil conditions were not satisfactory for the deep fortifications envisaged by the military engineers'.²⁸ This sudden weakness proved to be 'the fatal flaw in France's defences in 1940'.²⁹

However, the British military elite remained strangely unshaken in their conviction about the invulnerability of France's defensive network, despite recognising the breach in France's defences and the elevated possibility of a German offensive through the Low Countries.³⁰ In the months that followed, Beaumont-Nesbitt observed that France had reacted swiftly to Belgium's move to neutrality, with 'a great deal' of construction occurring between Lille and Montmédy, which had remedied the defensive weaknesses in the region.³¹ Likewise, France's defences between Lille and Dunkirk had been bolstered by inundations, which were 'capable of

²⁶ Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy,' 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 167; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 161.

²⁷ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 162.

²⁸ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 161.

²⁹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 161; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 155.

³⁰ COS, 'Role of the British Army', 28 January 1937, CAB 24/267/42; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 65; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 199.

³¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

prolonged resistance'.³² Meanwhile, Colonel Fraser stressed that in any event Belgium's defences would probably be manned if Germany showed signs of aggression. Thus, he concluded that the French had simply built a secondary defensive line between Montmédy and Dunkirk to reinforce the primary defensive line in Belgium. Even if Belgium's advanced defences were not used, Fraser maintained that France's defences would still be 'impregnable'.³³ Of course, this proved wishful thinking.

The collapse of France's complex alliance network was compounded by a rise in border threats caused by the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War, which increased the pressure on France. As tensions mounted with Italy, France had to accept the redundancy of the Franco-Italian alliance and a sudden threat to Tunisia and south-east France.³⁴ Meanwhile, the eruption of civil war in Spain caused an ideological split, which widened the rupture with Rome. General Franco and his Spanish Nationalists were supported militarily by Germany and Italy, whilst the Spanish Republicans were supported militarily by Soviet Russia and morally by France.³⁵ Gloomily, Eden warned Chamberlain that a victory for Franco 'would create a third Dictator State' in Spain, establishing for France 'a third frontier to be defended', which 'would increase the likelihood of some early adventure elsewhere by the Dictator States'.³⁶

As General Franco gained the upper hand in Spain, France was forced to relocate troops from the Maginot Line to the Pyrenees.³⁷ Beaumont-Nesbitt observed that Spain used to be regarded as 'a negligible quantity', demanding almost no French

³² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

³³ Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy,' 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

³⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 39.

³⁵ Frank, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 378; Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, vol. II, p. 372.

³⁶ Eden, Cabinet Conclusions, 29 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 342.

³⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Frank, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 388; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 45; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 137.

security measures, but now the war had 'brought about a decided change'.³⁸ Ultimately, the French Army had become thinly spread.³⁹ A hostile Italy and Spain also meant 'the closing, to all intents and purposes, of the trans-Mediterranean routes', blocking the transfer of colonial divisions from North Africa to the Rhine to increase French security against a German offensive.⁴⁰ The French had expected 121,000 trained and 158,000 untrained North African troops to travel from Oran, Algiers and Bizerte to France at rate of 45,000 soldiers per month once hostilities erupted.⁴¹ Meanwhile, the French colonies of Madagascar, French West Africa and Indochina 'could contribute manpower as well as foodstuffs, iron ore, phosphates, nickel and lead'.⁴² This war plan, however, was now under threat.

The Rhineland Incident, the Abyssinian Crisis and the Spanish Civil War were all external events, which transformed France's geo-strategic situation. These events converted Italy and Spain from friendly neighbours into potential enemies; they sparked the disintegration of France's alliance system; and they caused the League's demise.⁴³ Though the absolute strength of the French Army increased during 1936, these external events and the additional responsibilities they heaped upon France made her army appear overstretched. Fundamentally, the Spanish Civil War maintained the rupture between the Stresa powers first caused by the Abyssinian Crisis. This in turn gave Hitler a window of opportunity to seize Austria, the Sudetenland and Czechoslovakia.⁴⁴

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France's disintegrating geo-strategic position and the recognition of her offensive incapability explains the gloom that settled over France from 1936 onwards. Whilst the French Army was still regarded by the British as second-to-none, these two

³⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

³⁹ Vansittart, minute, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 351.

⁴⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁴¹ M. Thomas, 'At the Heart of Things? French Imperial Defence Planning in the Late 1930s', *French Historical Studies*, 21, 2 (1998), pp. 325-361 (p. 334).

⁴² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 20.

⁴³ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 146.

⁴⁴ Frank, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 383; Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 307.

adverse trends, along with France's weak air force, her economic, financial and social troubles and Germany's intense rearmament drive, combined to dampen British enthusiasm about the French Army's power.

When examining British reports and perceptions of the French Army, however, it is vital to remember "the pigeon-hole" style of reporting that occurred within the intelligence community. Indeed, the War Office *only* considered information on the French Army, not France's unrelated domestic and geo-strategic troubles. Thus, France's profound confidence in her military strength was mirrored in British intelligence reports, without mention of the wider context. For example, the French Army was described as 'an incomparable machine', but her weak air force was not considered as a counter-factor in the same report.⁴⁵ From examining these intelligence reports, it is apparent that the British were impressed with the French Army's re-equipment, mechanisation and motorisation drives, the army's imperviousness to communist penetration, and its formidable Maginot Line.⁴⁶

France's defences had recently been bolstered by the army's increased firepower. According to Beaumont-Nesbitt, the entire Maginot Line was now equipped with thunderously-powerful 75-mm guns, whilst French anti-aircraft units were currently being equipped with a new breed of 75-mm gun, which was 'a great improvement on the old model'. The French Army was also receiving modern artillery weapons, allowing it to establish two new artillery regiments in 1936.⁴⁷ French strategists placed great stock on firepower, believing that their infantry units must be 'preceded, protected and accompanied as much as possible by artillery' to be victorious.⁴⁸ In this area, France continuously outclassed Germany throughout the 1930s. Paris was so defensively assured in light of this advantage that she informed London during the

⁴⁵ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 41; Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 67.

⁴⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 41.

⁴⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁴⁸ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French Interwar Strategy in the Interwar Period', p. 159.

Rhineland Affair that a German offensive could be repelled 'without British assistance'.⁴⁹

In search of enhanced mobility, the French were also transitioning from horse-drawn transport to motorised vehicles and striving for mechanisation (tank divisions).⁵⁰ However, the British believed that France's progress with armoured tanks was undermined by her purely defensive doctrine. Lamentably, the French believed that tanks were unsuitable to spearhead offensives due to their struggles on difficult terrain and the rise of anti-tank weaponry.⁵¹ According to Beaumont-Nesbitt, French tanks would only ever be used offensively in support of infantry, but never to lead offensives as General Guderian, a German military strategist, theorised in *Achtung Panzer*.⁵² In French opinion, tanks were better utilised as a rapid response force to German breaches in the Maginot Line.⁵³ Although the British criticised this defensive doctrine, they were satisfied with France's numerical tank strength. By late 1936, the French possessed two light tank divisions, and were working hard to create another light division and a heavy division. The French had also developed a new medium tank, which they believed to be 'vastly superior to anything yet produced anywhere'.⁵⁴

The British were also pleased with the *peacetime* strength of the French Army, which towered above their German and Italian rivals. The French Army stood at 28,608 officers and 571,806 soldiers, of which 21,130 officers and 382,039 soldiers were based in metropolitan France.⁵⁵ In comparison, the German Army had only recently

⁴⁹ 'Anglo-French-Belgian Conversations of 15th and 16th April 1936', WO 106/5412; *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 38.

⁵⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁵¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁵² *Achtung Panzer* was stolen by French intelligence but did not convince the French to alter their defensive tank doctrine; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 166; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French Interwar Strategy in the Interwar Period', p. 160.

⁵³ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French Interwar Strategy in the Interwar Period', p. 170; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 40.

⁵⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 151.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

begun expanding from a mere 100,000 men to 500,000 men.⁵⁶ The French Army was also growing annually, having added 1,201 officers and 87,723 soldiers in the previous two years – an increase almost akin to the whole US Army. The French had also doubled the length of military conscription to two years in 1935. Aside from the obvious numerical advantages, Beaumont-Nesbitt noted that this allowed ‘more time to train the individual soldier, so that on transfer to the reserve he is more efficient’.⁵⁷

Despite this, Alexander and Philpott claim that the rise of a socialist French Government in 1936 led to ‘unfounded’ British concerns about communist penetration and defeatism within the French Army.⁵⁸ However, there seems to be little evidence of this view coming from the British Embassy in Paris. Beaumont-Nesbitt regularly reported that the French Army was proving impervious to communist penetration, whilst its morale was ‘sound’. Indeed, it was ‘practically untouched’ by the political tensions prevalent across France. This, he argued, revealed its ‘outstanding loyalty’. The morale of the High Command was equally impressive, giving ‘the impression of a body of officers outside political influences, and imbued with only one idea – that of service to their country’. Over the coming year, morale was only expected to improve in tandem with the army’s re-equipment drive, ‘since up-to-date weapons and equipment must enhance the confidence of those called upon to use them’. Meanwhile, during recent tribulations, France’s civilians had also ‘shown themselves ready to sink their [political] differences and to unite in face of any external threat’.⁵⁹

The most significant moment for the French Army in 1936 was the announcement of an ambitious 14 billion-franc re-equipment programme.⁶⁰ Gamelin had initially requested 9 billion francs for ‘modern tanks, guns and tracks to blunt a German

⁵⁶ Medicott, ‘Britain and Germany: The Search for Agreement, 1930-1937’, p. 88; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 83.

⁵⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁵⁸ Alexander, ‘The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939’, p. 65.

⁵⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁶⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 165; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 163; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 145.

attack', a figure which Daladier swiftly raised to 14 billion francs.⁶¹ Of this sum, however, 40 percent was given towards artillery and infantry, and 24 percent towards the production of 3,200 tanks and the motorisation of infantry divisions.⁶² Blum's socialist Government had effectively prioritised rearmament over social welfare, proving to France and the wider world its commitment to security.⁶³

The success of this programme, however, depended on France's armament industry, which had become sluggish in recent years. According to Thomas, the shortage of government munitions orders over the previous fifteen years 'had not encouraged producers to modernise or expand their factories'. The munitions industry had therefore become antiquated and lethargic because of this 'structural neglect'. Indeed, its low production levels effectively capped the War Ministry's spending on armaments. Consequently, The French Army struggled to convert its funding into weapons, tanks and equipment.⁶⁴ France's sluggish arms production was further compounded by administrative delays caused by a long-winded approval process for any new weaponry.⁶⁵ These problems persisted between 1936 and 1939, undermining the new four-year re-equipment programme.⁶⁶ Consequently, the British assumed that France's munitions industry would in wartime fail to supply 'more than 40 divisions without considerable outside help'.⁶⁷

Indeed, France desperately lacked equipment reserves, a weakness sparked by military cuts in the early 1930s.⁶⁸ After observing the French Army in 1936, CIGS Deverell painfully observed that most of its equipment dated 'back to the Great

⁶¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 162.

⁶² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 182.

⁶³ M. Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 27 (1992), pp. 659-670 (p. 667).

⁶⁴ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 149 and 153.

⁶⁵ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 185.

⁶⁶ Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936', p. 662; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, pp. 229-30; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 168.

⁶⁷ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433

⁶⁸ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 168.

War'.⁶⁹ Whilst suffering from all kinds of equipment shortages, the French Army especially lacked modern tanks and anti-tank weaponry.⁷⁰ Gamelin duly warned Daladier that unless it 'acquired the modern tanks and guns to form a mechanised reserve behind the Maginot Line, then each year France would become more vulnerable'.⁷¹ The French Army's highly ambitious re-equipment programme was billed as the solution by Beaumont-Nesbitt, destined to make it even 'more efficiently prepared than in the past'.⁷²

However, this four-year re-equipment drive would not solve London's foremost concern: France's manpower shortage.⁷³ The British believed that an army's size in wartime depended not just on the fighting manpower available but also on 'the requirements of industry, agriculture, transportation, administration, commerce, etc'. to sustain the war effort and the population.⁷⁴ Given that France was entering the "lean years", her conscriptable men would be thinly spread across these sectors.⁷⁵

British Intelligence on the French Army's wide-ranging problems reached the highest echelons of the British Army. 'Not only are [French] reserves of armament stores and aircraft still quite inadequate, but her plans of wartime manufacture appear to have broken down,' CIGS Deverell wrote in 1936. 'Even if a remedy could rapidly be found, French manpower appears to be insufficient to mobilise the large forces contemplated, and at the same time maintain the output of industry and agriculture'.⁷⁶ The British concluded that France's armed forces would be supplied with weapons, equipment and food on 'such restricted dimensions' in wartime 'that even the present size of the German army must cause her grave anxiety'. Whilst France hoped that she would receive substantial war supplies from Britain and

⁶⁹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 95-96.

⁷⁰ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 168.

⁷¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 161.

⁷² *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁷³ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82.

⁷⁴ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433

⁷⁵ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 163; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 82.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 148; Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433

America, the British believed that they would 'not be in a position [for several years] to provide for more than our own requirements', whilst the Americans could not offer war materials because of their neutrality laws.⁷⁷ France was therefore in a grave predicament. Although she possessed the world's strongest army, this would count for little if she could not supply it for a sustained period without foreign assistance. Nor could she win a short war with an impromptu offensive given her defensive doctrine, training, equipment and organisation. In short, France had lost the military initiative, unable even to fight a defensive war without support from Britain.

To make matters worse, the German Army was re-equipping and expanding at a ferocious speed, closing the gap with the French Army. In June 1936, the Conseil Supérieur de la Guerre advised Daladier that Germany military power had now overtaken that of France 'and that the gap would continue to grow'.⁷⁸ The situation worsened in September 1936 when Hitler announced that the Wehrmacht now had 39 divisions, surpassing its revised cap of 36-divisions in act of betrayal to the international community.⁷⁹ In numerical terms, it was now superior to the metropolitan French Army, having been merely a quarter of its size only eighteen months previously. Although these additional Wehrmacht divisions still needed fully to be trained and equipped, Britain and France were stunned by how quickly the military tables were turning.

Germany's armament industry had also expanded well 'beyond what the War Office regarded as a legitimate and acceptable size', and could now equip 10-15 divisions a year, up from eight divisions in 1935. 'The only lesson which I can draw from this', remarked Wigram, the head of the Foreign Office Central Department, 'is that the Germans intend to have the biggest army which they can'.⁸⁰ Before a host of diplomats and journalists at Nuremberg in September 1936, Hitler confirmed

⁷⁷ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433

⁷⁸ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 185.

⁷⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 165.

⁸⁰ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 89-90.

Wigram's suspicions by announcing a fresh wave of ambitious, four-year rearmament and self-sufficiency programmes to prepare Germany for total war.⁸¹

Despite the Wehrmacht's rapid expansion, the British believed that the French Army remained superior, given its training, equipment and network of fixed-defences.⁸² In early 1937, Inskip advised that the Germans still did 'not have either a sufficient number of divisions, or the tank units and artillery, necessary to undertake an offensive against France' and her Maginot Line.⁸³ Similarly, Churchill remarked that 'to-day, for this year... the French army is strongest in Europe'.⁸⁴ Even as the year waned, Vansittart proclaimed that the French Army 'has never been in better shape. It is probably still superior to the German, and certainly superior in heavy artillery'.⁸⁵

Despite the Wehrmacht's impressive numerical and industrial advantages, the British believed that Germany's relentless rearmament pace would soon slow to save the German economy, which would otherwise collapse under the pressure. Indeed, the IIC flagged Germany's shortage in raw materials and rising balance of payments deficit as potentially crippling rearmament bottlenecks.⁸⁶ From mid-1936, Germany's shortage of raw materials reduced her armament output to 70 percent of capacity, leading Blum to declare that 'Germany is on the verge of an economic and financial catastrophe because of rearmament'.⁸⁷ However, this hope that Germany's rearmament drive would falter proved wishful thinking.

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In conclusion, the tremors caused by the Abyssinian Crisis, Rhineland Affair and Spanish Civil War caused France's geo-strategic outlook to deteriorate rapidly. Indeed, these external events caused the unravelling of France's eastern alliance system, the rise of two new enemies on her doorstep and the alarming remilitarisation of the Rhineland, all of which added to France's military

⁸¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, pp. 129-130; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 93.

⁸² Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 100; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 185.

⁸³ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

⁸⁴ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 163.

⁸⁵ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 59.

⁸⁶ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 90; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 125.

⁸⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 127 and 165.

responsibilities and overstretched the French Army. German rearmament and France's domestic troubles only compounded these negative trends, allowing a pessimistic cloud to settle over France.

Whilst the British recognised that the French Army was 'powerful' when staring through horse-blinkers at its size, training, equipment, modernisation drives and defensive capabilities, they could not help but absorb those negative surrounding factors, not to mention France's stalling armament industries.⁸⁸ The French Army itself was also deemed incapable of fighting a lightning, offensive war. She neither had the special strike force, offensive doctrine, nor the offensive training and weaponry required to break the Siegfried Line. Ultimately, France had lost the military initiative. Without Britain she could not act against Germany. If these negative trends continued unabated, the military balance before long would swing decisively in Germany's favour, tying London and Paris to the risky policy of appeasement for the remainder of the 1930s as the window of opportunity for a collective military response closed. Of course, these negative military trends did continue, leaving Chamberlain with no choice but to pursue appeasement upon assuming power in May 1937.

In the interim, a military option seemed undesirable for Britain, given Hitler's expressed wish for a peace settlement, America's rising neutrality and military weakness (examined in chapter five) and the spirits of animosity and anti-collaboration that haunted relations between the democracies. It is vital to remember that, in the words of Keith Robbins, 'very few had detected in Hitler an insatiable thirst for blood' before the Munich Crisis of 1938.⁸⁹ Once it became apparent that Hitler had no intention of striking a peace agreement, the British political and military elites realised that the last opportunity to stop him had been missed during the Rhineland Affair.

As they watched the military picture darken across the world, they solemnly concluded that there was little viable alternative to the emerging policy of

⁸⁸ Beaumont-Nesbitt described the French Army as a 'well-trained, efficient and powerful weapon'; *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁸⁹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 22.

appeasement, especially given that the British Empire itself faced 'simultaneous grievances from Irish, Indian, Egyptian and Palestine nationalists, demands for more autonomy from the Dominions, and provocations from Germany, Italy, and Japan', whilst itself being dangerously 'over-extended and under-equipped'.⁹⁰ France's weaknesses meant that on top of all this Britain had no viable international partner. Counter-revisionist historians nevertheless believe that 45 million British folk were well-capable of controlling and protecting some 400 million subjects spanning six continents from the grasping hands of the aggressive powers. On the contrary, revisionists aptly argue that from 1937 Britain had 'no choice but to do what it did' being severely 'hamstrung by global overreach, a crippled economy and other structural constraints', as will be shown in the ensuing chapters.⁹¹ In Liddle Hart's paraphrased words, the British Empire was becoming 'the greatest example of strategical over-extension in history', and was, to all intents and purposes, friendless.⁹²

⁹⁰ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 221.

⁹¹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 3.

⁹² Kennedy, 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939', p. 196.

Roosevelt's Good Intentions

Across the Atlantic, Roosevelt became increasingly alarmed by the volatility of the international climate in Europe and the Far East from January 1936.¹ However, historians have failed to recognise that his reluctance to intervene in Europe's squabbles was not just because of the isolationist spirit of Congress and public opinion, but equally because of America's military weakness – a phenomenon frequently observed by the British. This incomplete picture has resulted in an incomplete narrative on Anglo-American relations in the 1930s and an incomplete explanation for Roosevelt's hesitancy to inject his bold peace initiatives into the diplomatic hubs of Europe. It also challenges the claims of orthodox and post-revisionist historians, such as Ruggiero, that the British Government ignored 'conventional wisdom and prudence', which shouted from the rooftops for 'a concerted effort to acquire allies'.² On the contrary, the French and American democracies, suffering from political restraints, economic woes and military weaknesses – not to mention their history of discord with one another – were becoming ever more infeasible as partners against the aggressive powers. Thus, Walker and other revisionist historians claim that appeasement was 'a realistic strategy that was dictated by geopolitical circumstance'.³ Indeed, it was the *only* realistic strategy available to Britain after the Rhineland Affair, as this chapter will show.

Over the winter of 1935-36, Roosevelt received an avalanche of doomsday warnings from diplomats across Europe.⁴ 'We are back where we were before 1914,' warned

¹ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 369; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 221.

² Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, 177.

³ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 221.

⁴ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, pp. 1-2; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 122.

Ambassador Bullitt from Paris, 'when the familiar true remark was, "peace is at the mercy of an incident"'. Roosevelt concurred, replying that 'the whole European panorama is fundamentally blacker than at any time in your life... or mine'.⁵ From Warsaw, Ambassador John Cudahy prophesied that, 'if the Hitler Government is not overthrown, a war in Europe is as certain as the rising sun'.⁶ Meanwhile, from London, Davies observed that 'nearly all the political leaders in Europe... are now thinking of how best to prepare for the war' with Germany.⁷

Equally disturbing – and much closer to home for Roosevelt – was the deteriorating Far Eastern situation. A military coup on 26 February 1936, during which young Japanese army officers assassinated several ministers, including two former Prime Ministers, was seen both by Washington and London 'as a victory for aggressive militarist policy'.⁸ It was believed by the US Ambassadors to Tokyo and Peking – Ambassadors Grew and Johnson – that this incident would add fuel to Japan's ambitions to dominate China economically and politically, and that her endeavours would soon bring victory.⁹

Washington's greatest concern, however, was Japan's rising naval challenge. Once the naval disarmament treaties expired in 1936, Japan could construct a navy powerful enough to drive the British and Americans out of the Western Pacific. 'There is a good deal of anti-Japanese sentiment among [American] naval and military authorities' as a consequence, Ambassador Lindsay observed, and rising apprehensions in the White House 'of Japanese designs in the South Pacific, whether directed towards the Philippines, the Dutch East Indies or elsewhere'.¹⁰

Indeed, most of America's decision-making elite, press and public distrusted Japan. Lindsay believed that this distrust was more influential on the Roosevelt

⁵ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 122.

⁶ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, pp. 1-2.

⁷ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 122.

⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; S. O. Agbi, 'The Foreign Office and Yoshida's Bid for Rapprochement with Britain in 1936-1937: A Critical Reconsideration of the Anglo-Japanese Conversation', *Historical Journal*, 21, 1 (1978), pp. 193-9 (p.177).

⁹ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 530.

¹⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

Administration than ‘their platonic disapproval of other aggressive countries [Germany and Italy] in as much as the political menace of Japanese policy to the United States is more plain to see’.¹¹ Whilst Washington anticipated that Europe might soon descend into war, this conflict would not threaten American interests. Conversely, a Japo-American war seemed very possible and directly threatened America’s overseas territories.¹²

Ever the dreamer, Roosevelt could not observe these global tensions without daydreaming of how he might dramatically intervene to broker a lasting and prosperous peace. In mid-1936, he contemplated gathering the heads of the great European powers for a conference aboard a battleship to hammer out a political settlement.¹³ However, Arthur Krock of *The New York Times* got wind of his bold scheme and published a front-page article on 26 August 1936 with the headline, ‘Roosevelt if Elected May Call Kings, Dictators and Presidents to Great Power Conference’.¹⁴ This “breaking news” was followed both by rumours of Hitler’s willingness to attend and by a widely disseminated interview in Rome, in which Mussolini welcomed the idea.¹⁵

Roosevelt panicked, fearing that news of his scheme would damage his re-election campaign, especially in the mid-west, where isolationism was canon and attacks on his administration by the *Hearst* newspapers and the *Chicago Tribune* were commonplace. In the name of political expediency, Roosevelt claimed that the initiative was a ‘figment of Krock’s imagination’.¹⁶ Nevertheless, rumours persisted that Roosevelt wished to settle the political and economic quarrels of the wider world.¹⁷ Indeed, the President privately considered many schemes, including the

¹¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹² Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. v.

¹³ Dorothy Borg, ‘Notes on Roosevelt’s “Quarantine” Speech’, *Political Science Quarterly*, 72, 3 (1957), pp. 405-33 (p. 409); Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 29; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 369; Watt, ‘Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers’, p. 187.

¹⁴ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 369; Borg, ‘Notes on Roosevelt’s “Quarantine” Speech’, p. 409.

¹⁵ Borg, ‘Notes on Roosevelt’s “Quarantine” Speech’, p. 409.

¹⁶ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, pp. 369-70.

¹⁷ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 175.

diplomatic quarantining of aggressors, economic blockades, and the military neutralisation of the Western Pacific, though none of these schemes saw daylight before October 1937.¹⁸

Roosevelt had a colourful history of hatching wild schemes in his private quarters without ever bringing them into fruition. In April 1934, at the crescendo of the European disarmament discussions, Roosevelt considered sending investigators to Germany to see if she had illegally rearmed. If Hitler refused to comply, Roosevelt would impose a joint economic blockade with Paris and London.¹⁹ However, the President abandoned this scheme for fear of dragging America into a European conflict. Similarly, after Hitler announced military conscription in March 1935, Roosevelt plotted to make him choose between disarmament or an economic blockade.²⁰ However, the meek response of the Stresa powers snuffed out the President's scheme.²¹ Whilst the President was an idealist and visionary, Christman stresses that 'caution, indecision and procrastination were not unknown elements of Roosevelt's leadership', especially when it came to the policy of intervention.²²

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The root cause of Roosevelt's hesitant nature was not just America's isolationist tendencies, as historians believe, but also the shortcomings of America's armed forces, which were not strong enough to intervene in Europe or the Far East if Germany or Japan reacted violently to sanctions.²³ As mentioned, America's power and influence traditionally came from her economic strength and her unrivalled potential to produce weapons, aircraft and warships, rather than from her present

¹⁸ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 536.

¹⁹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 104.

²⁰ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 103; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 116.

²¹ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 103.

²² Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Net Assessment', p. 221.

²³ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Net Assessment', p. 221.

military capability. Problematically, the Great Depression removed for almost a decade America's ability to convert its wealth into military power. Furthermore, unlike Britain and France, the Americans did not possess a strong armed service, which might have served as a military safety net, maintaining her international influence during these difficult economic years. Washington's sudden loss of economic power and diplomatic influence challenges the opinion of Paul Kennedy's "London School" that America was the pre-eminent power during the interwar period.²⁴

In fact, Hitler often ridiculed America's weak armed services during the 1930s, convinced that she could play no role in policing the world. In Hitler's opinion, America was just a nation of 'millionaires, beauty queens, stupid records, and Hollywood', who's chance of greatness had been ceded when the South lost the American Civil War.²⁵ Likewise, the British military elite perceived America as militarily inept. Surprisingly, this has not been observed by the mainstream historiography with profound ramifications for how one interprets the history of Anglo-American interwar relations. It also has profound ramifications for how historians interpret Roosevelt's tendency to backtrack from implementing his peace schemes.

Of America's armed services, the US Army was regarded as the weakest. In 1920, the National Defence Act capped the US Army's strength at 280,000 men and the National Guard at 500,000 men.²⁶ Whilst these figures were unimpressive given America's population, size and wealth, the US Army did not even exceed 120,000 men before 1939. Similarly, the National Guard lingered at less than half its permitted strength.²⁷ Consequently, by 1929, the US Army was barely larger than Germany's forcibly disarmed army.²⁸ Ten years on, the 200,000 strong US Army was only ranked as the nineteenth largest in the world, sandwiched in between the armies of Bulgaria and

²⁴ Mckercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 1.

²⁵ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 14.

²⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 282.

²⁷ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 359; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 283.

²⁸ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 281.

Portugal.²⁹ Thus, the Joint Board deemed it incapable of securing South America from a possible Axis incursion, yet alone of traveling to Europe or the Philippines as an expeditionary force.³⁰

The US Army's meagre size was compounded by its chronic shortage of equipment throughout the 1930s. According to Doyle, the US Army 'languished like a poor relation barely maintaining its dignity on the grudging charity of Congress'.³¹ America's armed forces ailed on despite the world's sudden obsession with rearmament. The British MA to Washington, Colonel Torr, thus described the post-war picture of the US Army's development as 'one of almost complete neglect'.³² Likewise, his successor, Colonel Read, concluded that the US Army was categorically 'unfit to play its part' in the coming global conflict between democracy and totalitarianism.³³

According to Torr, it was only from 1934 that America tried to remedy 'the obsolescent state into which the nation's military preparedness had drifted' since Versailles.³⁴ In early 1934, General MacArthur spelled out to Congress the 'serious deficiencies in manpower and material which then existed in the Army', and in doing so attained funding for a five-year modernisation programme both to replenish obsolete equipment and to mechanise and motorise a small part of the US Army's cavalry and infantry divisions.³⁵ Yet, by late 1936, Torr observed that little of this mechanisation and motorisation programme had been carried out.

In his reports, Colonel Torr poured scorn on the US Army for refusing to renounce the horse in favour of the tank – a process long since started in Europe. Underwhelmingly, MacArthur's five-year plan was only meant to mechanise one Cavalry Division.³⁶ In comparison, the French then possessed three light tank

²⁹ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 243.

³⁰ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 360.

³¹ Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange', p. 51.

³² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

³³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

³⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

³⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

³⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

divisions, with more being built.³⁷ Similarly, the financially-restricted British Army planned to mechanise its entire cavalry arm.³⁸ More alarmingly, the Germans possessed four armoured divisions and four motorised infantry divisions.³⁹

Ironically, given the US Army's refusal to renounce the horse, the cavalry arm was 'considerably handicapped' by an acute shortage of steeds and modern weapons. Embarrassingly, the cavalry arm was equipped with light machine guns modified and refurbished from the First World War. Meanwhile, the new tanks brought in by MacArthur's re-equipment drive were 'nearing the end of their useful life due to obsolescence in design and wear in test'.⁴⁰ The British also noted that the employment of special engineer troops with America's few mechanised formations was 'practically non-existent'.⁴¹ A silver lining was that the Americans had built speedy tank prototypes, which would soon be ready for mass production.⁴² Summarising this limited progress, Colonel Torr informed London that the US Army was 'very far behind those other major powers in the matter of mechanisation', despite it having received 'more attention and more generous financial support' through MacArthur's re-equipment programme in recent years.⁴³

It was also noted that the high command had developed 'no tactical doctrine whatever' for the employment of tanks, nor sufficient doctrine for the US Army generally, due to constant changes to its divisional strength. The army was undergoing changes in its divisional organisation, trialling a new, 'more mobile and hard-hitting formation' consisting of 10-13,000 men instead of its 'more cumbersome' 22,000 men. Yet, until this new divisional strength was finally decided upon – something which did not happen before 1939 – the US Army could not develop a tactical doctrine for its employment.⁴⁴ Colonel Torr concluded that 'the absence of

³⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20696

³⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy Between Two World Wars*, p. 172

³⁹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 100.

⁴⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁴¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁴² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁴³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁴⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

any up-to-date doctrine' meant that the US Army was 'definitely a lower standard' than the grand armies of Europe.⁴⁵

The US Army fared better in its infantry motorisation programme, though still languished behind the major armies of Europe in this area and continued to be plagued by deficiencies. By December 1936, 'practically all animal-drawn vehicles' belonging to the infantry divisions had been replaced. The artillery arm had also made some strides transitioning from horse-drawn to motor-drawn guns.⁴⁶ However, the US Artillery was still '40% horse-drawn' in 1937 and its reserve equipment still included a vast amount of light artillery *on wooden wheels*.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the US Army only received one million dollars for purchasing tactical and administrative automobiles.⁴⁸ In short, the US Army lagged behind the major European armies in motorisation.

Even after several years of MacArthur's re-equipment drive, every artery of the US Army continued to suffer from equipment shortages, despite extra spending and improvements. To the shock of British observers, the US Artillery was forced to 'simulate' their modern 8-inch and 105-mm howitzers in field tests, since only a handful existed. The only modern weapons possessed by the US Artillery in reasonable quantity was the 75-mm field gun, which at least allowed 'high speed transportation and great flexibility of fire'.⁴⁹ The US Artillery had at least made improvements in recruitment, training and morale. Similarly, the US Army's coastal artillery units had seen its enlisted strength increased by fifty percent and had also received \$7 million through Congressional appropriations for the modernisation of defences at Hawaii, Panama, and along the American west coast.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, the overall picture remained one of chronic equipment shortages.

⁴⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁴⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁴⁷ Italics added, *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁴⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁴⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁵⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

A similar lack of equipment haunted the infantry divisions. According to Colonel Torr, America's plans to mobilise 400,000 men within the first four months of war, and one million men within the first year, was impossible before 1940 because of equipment shortages.⁵¹ Colonel Read was equally pessimistic, advising London that 'it seems unlikely that this... [equipment] objective will ever be achieved in peace-time'.⁵² However, MacArthur's five-year plan had at least made 'a steady improvement in organisation, training and equipment' for the peacetime army, not to mention a 'marked improvement in... automatic weapons, tanks and combat cars'.⁵³ Even so, the US Army lacked any startling innovation in these areas to rival the first-class armies of Europe.⁵⁴

Like the army, the US National Guard also suffered from 'considerable shortages' of equipment. Indeed, every tank company was 'insufficiently supplied with modern tanks' even for training purposes. More alarmingly still, Torr observed that only by pooling equipment from its ten anti-aircraft regiments was it possible 'to equip one of them completely on mobilisation'.⁵⁵ Given the rising danger of a German attack from a penetrated South American state, the War Department judged the 'existing shortage of anti-aircraft guns and equipment to be the most acute problem confronting' the National Guard.⁵⁶ By late 1937, little had been done to bolster America's air defence. Torr noted that, except for San Francisco, New York, Los Angeles, Chicago and Galveston, 'all other harbour defences and inland cities' were 'completely unprotected from aircraft attack', and that even these ports and cities were each 'very inadequately protected' by a single anti-aircraft regiment, almost completely devoid of armaments.⁵⁷

⁵¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁵² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁵³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁵⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁵⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁵⁶ David C. Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 15, 4 (1980), pp. 745-760 (p. 747); *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544.

⁵⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

The leadership of the US Army also came under fire. According to Colonel Torr, the efficiency of the High Command and of senior officers more generally 'left much to be desired'. Torr added that 'a lack of co-ordination and cohesion' plagued the War Department, whilst no way existed 'of getting rid of inefficient officers, as compulsory retirement cannot occur until they are 64'. The MA also described General Craig, the new COS, as 'somewhat "colourless"', and as someone who 'lacks the drive and power of expression of his more brilliant predecessor', General MacArthur.⁵⁸

Lower down the chain of command, the US Army suffered from 'a serious shortage of officers', especially in the artillery and harbour defence units, and in the Organised Reserve.⁵⁹ On the whole, the US Army was short of 2,000 officers in 1936, the establishment of which represented the 'the bare minimum essential for the Army's peacetime responsibilities'.⁶⁰ Given the lack of officers, it is no surprise that the US Army was criticised for its poor efficiency, training and dire performances both in its annual manoeuvres and smaller exercises. In 1936 in particular, the National Guard was scorned for its performance in recent manoeuvres.⁶¹ Whilst the National Guard made serious improvements in its performance in subsequent years, the regular army seemed to slide backwards from 1937, with Torr observing that the standard of training and efficiency exhibited by the US Army 'was disappointing and definitely below' that attained during previous years.⁶²

A silver lining was the *ad hoc* snippets of good news in Colonel Torr's reports. Significantly, given the dearth of equipment and training, the morale of officers was pronounced to be 'excellent', and the MA observed a 'greater contentment' among the enlisted men of the US Army, who also demonstrated a marked improvement in their efficiency and morale, whilst their physiques were described as 'magnificent'.⁶³ Significantly, Colonel Torr also concluded that the US Army 'has now reached a higher

⁵⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁵⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁶⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁶¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁶² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁶³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

standard of efficiency than at any period in its peace-time history'.⁶⁴ Notably, the establishment (or permitted) strength of the US Army also rose by 46,250 men to 165,000 men of all ranks.⁶⁵ Away from the army, public opinion was also 'becoming more military minded and armaments conscious', with the US War Department receiving full public support 'in the development of their programme of military preparedness' – an impressive feat given the country's isolationist and pacifist leanings.⁶⁶ These improvements, however, were minimal for a service that had continuously been disparaged as tiny, immobile, weak, obsolete, deficient and ill-trained since 1918. Ultimately, the British concluded that the US Army was in no position to influence the outcome of a major war in Europe or the Far East.⁶⁷

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The American air force – known as the US Army Air Corps – suffered from a similar reputation of weakness.⁶⁸ In the twenty years before the Munich Crisis, the American air force lacked a distinctive voice in the creation of American military strategy. It was overshadowed by the army and navy and severely restricted by a lack of finance, political backing, equipment, pilots and production capability.⁶⁹ The air force also lacked independence as a service, falling under the army's auspices. The air force's long-term neglect was not surprising given America's geographical isolation, the country being separated from the tribulations in Asia and Europe by oceanic moats, over which no aircraft could fly with a full bomb load. In fact, during the interwar years, the Luftwaffe did not possess the range to bomb London, let alone Washington.⁷⁰ In short, America was impervious to air attack. Moreover, she was a defensive-minded power, reluctant to involve herself in distant conflicts. Given these

⁶⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁶⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁶⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁶⁷ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy', p. 360.

⁶⁸ NB: the Fleet Air Arm is examined as a separate force to the Army Air Arm further below.

⁶⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 297.

⁷⁰ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 68; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 128. Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265;

facts, America's military strategists believed that there was no need for a great air force or supporting industry.

As Roosevelt ran for re-election in 1936, the American Air Force only had 1,400 aircraft, including first-line, reserve and trainer planes.⁷¹ In comparison, Russia, France, Germany and Italy had first-line strengths of 4,000 aircraft, 1,600 aircraft, 1,500 aircraft, and 1,200 aircraft respectively, *excluding* reserve and trainer planes, which would typically double these figures.⁷² The shortage of machines was compounded by extensive obsolescence, with fewer than 1,000 aircraft being under five-years of age by late 1937.⁷³

These problems particularly affected the American GHQ Air Force, the metropolitan contingent of the Army Air Corps.⁷⁴ The GHQ Air Force was created in 1935 and, within a year, Congress authorised a grand expansion to 2,320 serviceable aircraft.⁷⁵ However, by late 1937, the GHQ had expanded little. On paper at least, it had an establishment strength of 589 planes, consisting of six attack squadrons, eleven bomber squadrons, nine pursuit squadrons and two observation squadrons. However, in practice, the GHQ only possessed 310 aircraft, a miniscule force unlikely to impress the revisionist powers. In particular, it had a 'very serious shortage' in reconnaissance aircraft, only possessing 95 planes from an establishment strength of 143.⁷⁶ A similar dearth of planes existed for certain types of bombers and pursuit planes, which even by the time of Munich languished at around 50 percent of establishment.⁷⁷

This alarming dichotomy between present and permitted strength also adversely affected its training and efficiency. In December 1936, the British Air Attaché to Washington, Group-Captain Pirie, claimed that the situation of aircraft shortages had become so bad that American pilots were frequently having to 'wait their turn or else

⁷¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁷² 'Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation', June 1936, WO 190/433

⁷³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁷⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁷⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁷⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁷⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

double up with another pilot to keep themselves in flying trim'.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the GHQ only had a few squadrons with 'the requisite number of aircraft to enable them to practice collective squadron training in an effective manner'.⁷⁹ More embarrassingly still, whilst only a third of the GHQ Air Force was required for air manoeuvres in California – a force amounting to 430 officers, 2,500 enlisted men and 244 aircraft – due to aircraft and pilot shortages, the Americans had to assemble together 'practically all of the officers, men and aircraft' from the GHQ in order 'fully to man and equip' the squadrons involved.⁸⁰

To bring the 28 squadrons of the GHQ Air Force up to establishment strength, Pirie calculated that an additional 500 officers, 2,300 enlisted men and 400 aircraft were required.⁸¹ This was *before* the expansion of the GHQ to 2,320 aircraft. Whilst the manpower shortage was not obvious given the deficiency in aircraft, Pirie cautioned that the failure to recruit enough pilots would be felt to an increasing extent once America's aviation factories began to deliver aircraft in larger batches.⁸²

Qualitatively at least, America had developed promising prototypes such as the B-17 bomber. Greene claims that this plane 'effected a strategic breakthrough in flying range and carrying capacity' during the late 1930s.⁸³ The B-17 certainly caused excitement amongst foreign observers when it entered the service in 1937. By the year's end, seventeen had been delivered to the Army Air Corps, and were described by Pirie as 'outstanding' additions.⁸⁴ Nicknamed the "Flying Fortress", the B-17 had 4-engines, a cruising speed of 220 mph, a range of 3,000 miles when carrying 1,000-lb of

⁷⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁷⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁸⁰ USA, May 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

⁸¹ USA, May 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

⁸² For example, the Air Corps Training Centre at Randolph Field had only filled up a third of available spaces for its flying school beginning in March 1936; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁸³ Greene, 'The Military View of American National Policy, 1904-1940', p. 369.

⁸⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

bombs, and handled 'very well'.⁸⁵ Pirie thus believed that the American aircraft industry was leading the way in 'launching the world's largest aircraft'.⁸⁶

However, the delivery of these planes was hit by alarming delays in production.⁸⁷ America's industrial capacity was its greatest weakness in the air sphere. Even the most promising prototypes, such as the revolutionary B-17 bomber, could only be assembled in small batches, which was unacceptable in an era of total war and mass production. The Assistant COS of the US Army lamented this weak industry in September 1937, declaring that there could be 'no such thing as a rapid and vast wartime expansion' of the air force until the industrial sector itself was strengthened.⁸⁸

Gloomily, Pirie reported on an enormous backlog of deliveries, citing the TBD-1 torpedo aircraft and the Seversky P-35.⁸⁹ In the former case, none of the 114 machines ordered in December 1935 had been delivered by early 1937, whilst in the latter case, some machines ordered in 1935 were still undelivered by early 1938.⁹⁰ This was concerning for the British and French, given Roosevelt's idea to make America 'the arsenal of democracy' in wartime.⁹¹ If the Americans could not even equip their own air force on schedule, how would they simultaneously mass produce aircraft for London and Paris?

Despite this 'handicap in personnel and material', Pirie praised both the morale and efficiency of the GHQ Air Force as 'high', something helped by the vast, uninhabited areas over which pilots could hone their skills in navigation, bombing and gunfire.⁹² However, even this opinion plummeted after he observed an aerial exercise in June 1937. Whilst the attackers in this exercise 'scored numerous direct hits on important

⁸⁵ USA, August and December 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544.

⁸⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁸⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁸⁸ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 298.

⁸⁹ USA, February-March 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁹⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁹¹ MacDonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 98.

⁹² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

objectives' and 'the principal aircraft factory was considered to be completely destroyed', the defending air forces were disparaged by Pirie and the American military elite. The target city of Los Angeles was hopelessly defended and considered 'almost completely destroyed', with the defending fighters struggling to intercept the Boeing and Douglas bombers 'in spite of the efficient warning system which included telephone, radio and teletype'. The Chief of the Army Air Corps concluded that America's aerial defence 'was inadequate'. Meanwhile, the commander of the attacking force, General Andrews, admitted that given America's aerial frailties an urgent 'recommendation for more men, aircraft and inland bases would be made to the War Department'.⁹³

Despite Pirie's alarm about the size, obsolescence, defensive weakness and equipment and manpower shortages of the air force, he noted several positives. The air force had made a number of significant technological breakthroughs. The most revolutionary of these was Black Ray, an aircraft detection device. In 1936, Black Ray was used to detect vessels without lights up to ten miles from the shore in the darkness 'with ease'. Practice tests showed that Black Ray was 90 percent accurate. Pirie explained to London that the device was 'not actually a ray, but the most delicate heat detector ever developed', which could 'locate the slightest trace of heat' at a range of twenty miles.⁹⁴

After further testing in 1937, the US military leadership claimed that Black Ray was 'the most potent defensive weapon yet discovered'. The Americans were, of course, unaware of Britain's radar detection system, which used radio-wave reflection to detect planes approaching from a distance of 100 miles – giving it five times the range of Black Ray.⁹⁵ After radar was discovered in 1935 by Sir Robert Watson-Watt, the first radar warning stations were installed on the south coast of England in 1937.

⁹³ USA, June 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

⁹⁴ USA, May 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

⁹⁵ USA, May 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

Within a year, a chain of radar stations extended from East Anglia to the Isle of Wight, giving Britain 'the best air defence system in the world'.⁹⁶

Aside from Black Ray, the Americans also developed high-calibre aircraft guns, explosive shells, electronically-operated bomb racks and mechanically-operated flexible gun mounts.⁹⁷ America also invented a new automatic landing system, allowing 'blind landing', with which the aircraft 'repeatedly landed under adverse weather conditions without human assistance'.⁹⁸ The US War Department enthusiastically commented that 'the perfection of this device makes it possible to land a plane in a dense fog, in absolute darkness, or under other adverse conditions... with amazing accuracy'.⁹⁹

Elsewhere, the purchase of 18 million gallons of super-grade, high-octane fuel was expected 'to increase the performance of aircraft by 30 percent'.¹⁰⁰ The Americans also made some impressive gains in the sphere of aircraft maintenance. The AA reported that American achievement in this area had 'gone far beyond our wildest dreams', with over 8,000 hours of use for airframes now a formality.¹⁰¹ However, these praiseworthy developments would matter little if America could not reach establishment strength for its GHQ Air Force, yet alone expand it to a total of 2,320 aircraft as authorised by Congress. As things stood, America would not be counted as a significant aerial power by the aggressive nations, leaving Roosevelt powerless to reinforce his peace initiatives with aerial force.

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⁹⁶ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 155; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, pp. 8-9.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁹⁸ USA, September 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

⁹⁹ This automatic landing system included: i. 'relay connection between the direction finder on the aircraft and the rudder control of the gyro pilot; ii. radio and sensitive altimeter control of throttles and elevators; and iii. the automatic application and release of breaks; USA, September 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹⁰⁰ USA, October 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹⁰¹ Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

America's most respected service was the US Navy, which *on paper* had joint naval supremacy with the British.¹⁰² However, Washington did not seek to reach her allotted treaty strength in warships in the 1920s and, after the Great Depression, Washington had to prioritise economic recovery over rearmament, even as the aggressive powers moved to absorb China, Manchuria, Abyssinia and the Rhineland.¹⁰³ Thus, in 1936, Roosevelt was even forced to reject the Navy Department's request to replace two obsolete battleships to prevent its naval strength from declining further. Roosevelt made it clear that he wished to wait until 1937 before approaching Congress for extra naval funds, given the ongoing battle over legislation to ensure America's economic recovery.¹⁰⁴

Alarming, when the proposal to replace these obsolete battleships became public knowledge in 1937, an avalanche of protest letters forced Roosevelt to delay the programme until 1938, despite the expiry of the naval treaties in 1936 and the ensuing naval arms race that had exploded in Europe and Asia.¹⁰⁵ Fundamentally, Washington restricted its military spending throughout the 1930s, its political influence suffering as a consequence.¹⁰⁶ Even in the late 1930s, the US Navy only received finance sufficient to build towards its allotted treaty limit, even though America's rivals had long surpassed their own expired treaty limits. America's greatest armed service thus had little finance to remedy its deficiencies in warships, manpower and developed naval bases, all of which were considered a minimum requirement for a naval offensive against Japan.¹⁰⁷

Cowman argues that 'there was little understanding within the Royal Navy of conditions existing in the US fleet' during the 1930s, nor any knowledge of America's shortage of naval 'auxiliaries, bases, dry docks or fuelling facilities' to allow the implementation of war plan Orange. In Cowman's opinion, the British were unaware

¹⁰² Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 118; McKercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 3; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 26.

¹⁰³ McKercher, 'Our Most Dangerous Enemy', p. 757; Tooze, *The Deluge*, p. 12. McKercher, *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920s*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁴ Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁵ Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 233.

¹⁰⁶ Harrison, 'Resource Mobilization for World War II', p. 174.

¹⁰⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

that the US Navy was 'in no fit state or condition from a supply and personnel standpoint to reach Manila'.¹⁰⁸ However, Cowman is mistaken. Documents from the British Embassy in Washington, the Naval Intelligence Directorate in London, the Plans Division of the Admiralty, and other Admiralty files, reveal that the British were undoubtedly aware of America's naval deficiencies. Significantly, this has major implications for how one interprets Britain's reluctance to partner with America against Japan during the Panay and Tientsin Crises (see chapter seven and ten).

In 1936, the British Naval Attaché to Washington, Captain F.C. Bradley, reported to London that the US Navy had at long last "laid down" enough cruiser and aircraft-carrier vessels to reach the tonnage limits allowed by the recently expired naval treaties. Whilst this was welcome news, Bradley emphasised that the US Navy remained far below its expired treaty quota in capital ships, destroyers and submarines, and that these deficiencies would not be remedied until 1945. By this time, however, America's rivals would have built far beyond their own expired treaty quotas if they continued on their present frenzied trajectory. Meanwhile, all but ten of America's 192 destroyers were verging upon obsolescence, as were 43 of her 86 submarines, whilst three of her fifteen capital ships were over-age or nearing obsolescence.¹⁰⁹ Contrary to Cowman's claims, the British were fully aware that the US Navy was not only languishing behind its expired-treaty quotas, but that much of its fleet was becoming obsolete.

Although America was making progress in aircraft carriers and cruisers, she still languished behind Japan and Britain. Bradley observed that America only had four aircraft carriers to the five of both Britain and Japan. While the US Navy had won the blessing of Congress to build another three aircraft carriers, their construction would take several years and would not make up ground on Japan or Britain who were likewise constructing aircraft carriers. Similarly, whilst the US Navy had 27 cruisers and would soon construct another eleven, Japan and Britain had 35 and 50 cruisers respectively, and were also implementing construction programmes, which would

¹⁰⁸ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 134.

¹⁰⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

maintain their cruiser superiority over America.¹¹⁰ It is also vital to remember ‘the two ocean responsibilities of the United States, who could never move all she had into the Pacific’. This placed the advantage ‘clearly on the side of Japan’, who’s forces were concentrated in Pacific waters.¹¹¹

Bradley was also concerned about America’s miniscule merchant marine, conscious of the relationship between merchant vessels and national defence during wartime. If the Japanese proved aggressive in the Pacific, many merchant vessels would be requisitioned by the US Navy to serve as auxiliary ships. They would make a vital contribution towards any convoy to relieve Manila from a Japanese siege. Bradley informed the Admiralty of an economic survey conducted by the US Maritime Commission in 1937, which claimed that the replacement requirements in America’s mercantile shipping were ‘enormous’, and that the labour crisis was ‘deplorable’, if not positively ‘evil’. Meanwhile, the US Maritime Commission advised with despair that ‘subsidies and new ships will be of little use until efficiency of crews is increased and discipline established’.¹¹²

Along with a shortage of warships and auxiliary vessels, the US Navy also suffered from a famine in manpower. In 1937, Bradley informed the Admiralty that the US Navy only had 88,000 sailors – or ‘85 percent of the full crews required for the fleet’ – which was ‘*insufficient for mobilisation*’ in the event of an emergency, such as a Japanese attack on the Philippines.¹¹³ This report undermines Cowman’s argument that the Admiralty was unaware that the US fleet was ‘in no fit state’ from the personnel standpoint to reach Manila.¹¹⁴ A year onwards, Bradley highlighted the ongoing paucity of officers, which remained at 6,341 officers, despite 7,941 being required. Whilst the US Navy’s enlisted strength had increased, the personnel shortage remained unchanged given the new ships and air squadrons commissioned throughout 1937. Meanwhile, the strength of the Naval Reserve was deemed equally

¹¹⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Murfett, *Fool-proof Relations*, p. 32.

¹¹¹ *The Far East and Pacific*, ADM 223/494

¹¹² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹¹³ Italics added; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹¹⁴ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 134.

'inadequate' by Bradley 'to fulfil its purpose of meeting personnel needs during the initial stages of mobilisation'.¹¹⁵ It would take several years to rectify this manpower shortage even if Congress was willing to spend the large sums required.

Most significantly of all, the British recognised that the US Navy totally lacked any sufficiently-developed or fortified naval bases in the Western Pacific. Whilst this shortcoming has been accepted without controversy by historians, there has been almost nothing said on the Admiralty's knowledge of this shortcoming, except by Cowman, who has incorrectly asserted that the British knew 'little'.¹¹⁶ Without adequate naval bases, Roosevelt would not be able to deploy the US Navy to the Western Pacific. As a result, America would not be able to relieve Manila, impose an economic blockade upon Japan, or attack the Japanese Navy. Knowledge of this handicap would have dictated British calculations on the likelihood and feasibility of Anglo-American naval collaboration against Japan, giving a fresh angle for historians on why both the British Cabinet and Admiralty opposed such collaboration in 1937 and 1938.

On 17 December 1937, the Plans Division of the Admiralty circulated a significant memorandum on the prospect of Anglo-American collaboration against Japan. This document reveals that the Admiralty fully acknowledged the Philippines' lack of adequate docking facilities, repair facilities, fuel supplies, general supplies and defensive capabilities.¹¹⁷ In other words, the Admiralty knew that US Navy had no suitable base in the Western Pacific. Implicitly referencing Manila Bay's limited docking facilities, the Plans Division concluded that there were 'only two [friendly] docks in the Far East capable of docking capital ships – the graving dock and the floating dock at the Naval Base, Singapore'. Since this naval base was 'only adequate to meet the requirements of a single fleet', the Plans Division concluded that the US Navy's capital ships would have to be docked at Hawaii, which was too great a distance from Japan.

¹¹⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹¹⁶ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 134.

¹¹⁷ 'Possible Staff Conversations with U.S.A.', Plans Division, 17 December 1937, ADM 116/3922

The Plans Division also scorned Manila's repair facilities, labelling them as 'only sufficient to carry out the normal refit and repair work of a *small force*'.¹¹⁸ The Plans Division likened Manila's minor repair facilities to those at Bermuda, which were *incapable* of servicing capital ships, a vital requisite if America was to fight Japan. Another alarming problem was that Manila only had a 'very small stock' of fuel, ammunition, food and other supplies. The Plans Division, therefore, presumed that key supplies for the fleet would have to come from America or Hawaii. This was a perilous, reoccurring round-trip of approximately 14,000 miles or 9,600 miles respectively for the supply vessels, which would undoubtedly need protection from Japanese air and naval attrition in the Central Pacific.¹¹⁹

The Admiralty was also aware of Manila's almost non-existent defences. Captain Bradley reported in 1937 that the US garrison on Corregidor Island was 'of *insufficient* strength to prevent the capture of the islands' in the event of a Japanese attack. Consequently, the naval base at Manila 'could not be retained' in war.¹²⁰ The aforementioned naval memorandum went into greater detail, citing the acute shortage of adequate anti-aircraft defence in the Philippines.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Manila Bay's seaward defences lacked nets, boom defences and cable-ships for planting mines, all of which were vital for stopping Japanese submarines and ships from entering the harbour.¹²² In short, Manila was destined to fall quickly and, even it was

¹¹⁸ Italics added; 'Possible Staff Conversations with U.S.A.', Plans Division, 17 December 1937, ADM 116/3922

¹¹⁹ 'Possible Staff Conversations with U.S.A.', Plans Division, 17 December 1937, ADM 116/3922

¹²⁰ Italics added; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹²¹ Whilst the islands possessed a dozen portable searchlights and a dozen heavy artillery guns, the American garrison did not have the manpower to operate these weapons. The Plans Division noted that there were 'only 12 officers and 300 men available without encroaching on other commitments and few, if any, of these would be sufficiently trained in shore H.A. [heavy artillery] duties'. 'Possible Staff Conversations with U.S.A.', Plans Division, 17 December 1937, ADM 116/3922

¹²² A cable ship could be borrowed from Singapore in an emergency, but this was nearly 2,500 miles away. Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plans' Room, 5 January 1938, ADM 116/3922; 'Possible Staff Conversations with U.S.A.', Plans Division, 17 December 1937, ADM 116/3922

recovered by the US Navy, years of construction would then be required before it could host capital ships.¹²³

Simultaneously, the Naval Intelligence Directorate in London reported that 'the Japanese base position was very strong' in the Pacific, with many well-placed for Japan's forces to interrupt the US Navy's journey from Hawaii to the Philippines.¹²⁴ Indeed, the Japanese had illegally 'prepared a chain of naval and air bases... throughout the Marinas, Marshalls and Carolines', which 'stood right athwart the American supply route to the Philippines' and 'provided excellent offensive bases for action towards the south'.¹²⁵ The Admiralty also recognised that Formosa was 'extensively developed' and could act as a spearhead threatening the north of the Philippines.¹²⁶ Thus, Japan had a distinct advantage over America in naval and air bases in the Western and Central Pacific. An American operation to relieve Manila would therefore be immensely difficult, if not impossible.

Such a risky mission would demand an efficient fleet. Whilst Bradley's reports spoke positively about the US Navy's efficiency, the Admiralty's perception was decidedly negative.¹²⁷ In fact, at this time, the Admiralty's senior members 'believed that the American fleet was even less efficient than it had showed itself to be in 1917'. This negative perception was only dispelled in 1941, following reports from two British naval officers, Captain Moncrieff and Commander Poe, who observed the efficiency of the US fleet personally, something which had not been permitted since 1918. When these officers reported that its efficiency was 'high', it created 'astonishment' in the

¹²³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹²⁴ According to British intelligence, Japan's major naval bases in home waters at Kure, Yokosuka, Sasebo and Maizuru, Ominato and Port Arthur 'were safe from any potential annoyance, even by air, except from Vladivostok'. *The Far East and Pacific*, ADM 223/494

¹²⁵ According to British intelligence, these mandated islands had anchorages 'for a large fleet', and numerous harbours for destroyers and submarines. *The Far East and Pacific*, ADM 223/494; *Naval War Memorandum (Eastern)*, January 1938, ADM 116/4393

¹²⁶ *The Far East and Pacific*, ADM 223/494

¹²⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

Admiralty, and contradicted the opinions of NID-2 officers who 'tended to supply harsh criticism to American naval methods'.¹²⁸

Despite all these weaknesses, Bradley and Pirie highlighted one significant naval strength: the US fleet Air Arm. This force was regarded by the Admiralty as second-to-none.¹²⁹ By 1936, it possessed 1,220 aircraft, of which only 240 aircraft 'were considered obsolete'.¹³⁰ America had plans to expand this naval air force to 1,910 planes by 1942. Towards this aim, 422 aircraft were ordered in 1936, plus an additional 417 aircraft to replace those becoming obsolete.¹³¹ This rate of aircraft production outshone those of other great powers. For example, the French only built 60 naval aircraft during 1937.¹³²

Ambitiously, America increased its Fleet Air Arm expansion targets in early 1938. Curzon-Howe reported that Congress had authorised its expansion to 3,000 aircraft over five years, a process which would include the production of 1,000 patrol bombers.¹³³ In tandem with this, the Americans would expand and build new flying schools, construct a large base for carrier squadrons at Alameda, and build a string of air bases across both the Americas and the Pacific.¹³⁴ By the outbreak of war in 1939, the US Navy had expanded to a remarkable air strength of 2,450 aircraft, of which

¹²⁸ American Section (NID18), USA and the Americas, 1940-47, ADM 223/491

¹²⁹ Memorandum, 'Exchange of Technical Information with the US Navy', 7 May 1938, ADM 116/4210

¹³⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹³¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹³² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹³³ To accommodate this great expansion, the flying school at Pensacola would increase its intake of pilot cadets by 50 percent, with a new school was also being established at Corpus Christi, Texas; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹³⁴ These bases would be established at Hampton Roads, Squantum, Quanset Point, Jacksonville, Floyd Bennet, Key West, Puerto Rico, Coco Sole, Sand Point, Sitka, Kodiak, Pearl Harbour, Kaneohe Bay, Midway Island, Wake Island, Johnson Island, Palmyra Island and Guam. *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

only 600 planes were obsolete.¹³⁵ Comparatively, the combined strengths of the British and Japanese Fleet Air Arms only reached a quarter of this number by 1940.¹³⁶

A qualitative revolution also occurred in the mid-1930s, with new patrol bomber squadrons, and the re-equipment of torpedo bomber squadrons with the impressive Douglas TBD-1 aircraft. Pirie claimed that these new sea planes were 'a marked advance over present types' in speed and range, due to their improved aerodynamical design and more powerful twin-row engines. With similar enthusiasm, Bradley reported that the new flying-boat medium-bomber was capable of flying thousands of miles instead of hundreds.¹³⁷ He observed that these bombers squadrons operating from aircraft carriers were now considered 'indispensable', as they could observe wide areas around the fleet and add to its offensive power with their fast bombers and torpedo aircraft.

Meanwhile, by late 1937, America had five aircraft carriers, organised into two divisions, with each carrier equipped with eighteen single-seat fighters and 54 triple-seat torpedo bombers. Equally encouraging was the fact that the operational efficiency of the Fleet Air Arm was 'high' – though not as high as the Royal Navy's.¹³⁸ In conclusion, Pirie remarked that the Fleet Air Arm had not only maintained its 'high standard of the past', but had also made 'distinct gains' in equipment, personnel, efficiency and training.¹³⁹ Nevertheless, for as long as America lacked adequately developed naval bases in the Western Pacific, this force could not be deployed offensively against the Japanese.

Thus, even the strongest of America's armed services was seen by the British as extraordinarily weak and incapable both of relieving Manila and attacking Japan. Meanwhile, America's army and air service represented depleted forces, incapable of intervening in a European war. America's failure to translate her economic power into military might proved a cataclysmic error once the Great Depression struck her economic, financial and social fabric. Unlike the French and British, she lacked a

¹³⁵ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹³⁶ Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, Vol. II, p. 206 and 212.

¹³⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹³⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹³⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

military safety net to ensure that her global power and influence remained as her economy struggled. Consequently, America's military ineptitude restricted Roosevelt during the 1930s from imposing sanctions or embargos upon the revisionist powers for fear that these actions might lead to a war for which America was completely unprepared. America's inability to police the world surely dispels the historiographical myth of America as the pre-eminent power or *deus ex machina* throughout the inter war years, 'the goddess who would descend from the machine and restore order and harmony in the last act'.¹⁴⁰ Significantly, the British knew that this goddess was not so much omnipotent as impotent and would therefore be of little help in "the last act".

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Handicapped from acting by American military weakness during 1936, Roosevelt's focus shifted away from global politics to winning re-election and consolidating his New Deal legislation to ensure America's economic recovery, which was currently under siege from the business community and supreme court.¹⁴¹ According to Maiolo, some affluent business families vindictively 'funded the American Liberty League, a right-wing, pro-business lobby that denounced the New Deal as a communist plot'.¹⁴² Meanwhile, according to Lindsay, the New Deal was already facing an uphill battle with the Supreme Court, which had overturned ample legislation in 1935 and 1936. Equally troubling for the President was that unemployment remained sky-high across America, whilst 'serious strikes' were once again springing up.¹⁴³ Meanwhile, a growing business recession risked mutating into a full-blown depression over the winter months.¹⁴⁴

Until America recovered her economic power or increased her military power, Roosevelt's hands would remain tied in global affairs. Aside from Roosevelt's

¹⁴⁰ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87.

¹⁴¹ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 125.

¹⁴² Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 292.

¹⁴³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁴⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

tentative involvement in the Abyssinian Affair, his recent track record of sustaining the new world order was deplorable. In March 1935, when Hitler announced the Luftwaffe's existence and military conscription, Roosevelt refused even to send a mere protest note to Berlin to support London and Paris. Likewise, Hull refused to comment on Hitler's flagrant actions when asked by journalists. 'Both sides were responsible for creating the situation which led Germany to denounce the [Versailles] Treaty,' explained Norman Davies, a favourite emissary of Roosevelt's, 'and since protest could do no good and might do some harm and be construed as our taking sides..., we all agreed that we should not send a protest'.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, after the Rhineland Coup, the White House refused to criticise Germany.¹⁴⁶ As Britain investigated the feasibility of imposing economic sanctions on Germany, it was concluded that they would be ineffective since the Roosevelt Administration would not cooperate with the League.¹⁴⁷

Roosevelt was similarly aloof when it came to quashing the Spanish Civil War. Roosevelt rebuffed Blum's proposal for an Anglo-Franco-American diplomatic intervention. Under the President's orders, Ambassador Bullitt also warned the French that they were mistaken if they thought that the sweetening of Franco-American relations 'could by hook and crook get the United States to take a position which we took in 1917'.¹⁴⁸ In short, neutrality was America's mantra. This policy extended to East Asia, where America's grand strategy was to 'refrain from action and as far as possible from comment without, however, creating an impression of indifference' to Japanese aggression.¹⁴⁹ Whilst Roosevelt constructed bold peace initiatives in private, he was extremely tentative in public, offering almost no collaborative support whatsoever to London and Paris.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁵ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 112 and 114.

¹⁴⁶ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 141 and 144; Marks, 'Six Between Roosevelt and Hitler: America's Role in the Appeasement of Nazi Germany', p. 971.

¹⁴⁷ 'Economic Pressure on Germany without there being a State of War. Possible Action by the League', report, 19 March 1936, ATB Committee, CAB 24/261/15

¹⁴⁸ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 56.

¹⁴⁹ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 528.

¹⁵⁰ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 24.

Throughout the mid-1930s, there was only one exception to America's detached attitude in international affairs. On 26 September 1936, as Paris was drowning in financial crisis, the three great democracies announced a monetary stabilisation agreement in a rare show of togetherness.¹⁵¹ Perhaps surprisingly, the impetus for the triple financial agreement came from Washington, not London, with Morgenthau insisting upon holding discussions despite 'a reluctant and sceptical British Treasury'.¹⁵² The agreement to support Blum's devaluation of the franc by fixing currency rates was also repeated in 1937 and 1938.¹⁵³ Notably, this financial collaboration followed on from the Franco-American Commercial Agreement of 1936, which was 'the first of its kind' for 150 years.¹⁵⁴

Maiolo argues that the financial agreement was 'a conspicuous act of political solidarity in the game of feints and gestures that passed for alliances in these years, indeed one comparable to the forthcoming Anti-Comintern Pact and the Rome-Berlin axis'.¹⁵⁵ However, this thesis claims that democracies saw it as less of an alliance – though it caused initial excitement – and more as a 'first tentative effort to re-establish the international monetary co-operation destroyed by the 1929 crash'.¹⁵⁶ Indeed, given the almost non-existent partnership between the democracies since 1919 – and over the following period leading up to Munich – this should be considered as an isolated incident – the anomaly that proved the rule of discord between the democracies.

With that said, there was a short-lived wave of initial excitement and great expectations. In December 1936, the British Economic Advisory Council (EAC) reported that London's participation in the agreement would 'probably be unfavourable; for we shall suffer from the effects of greater French competition

¹⁵¹ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 209; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 86; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 56; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 69; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 166; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 70; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 125.

¹⁵² Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 86.

¹⁵³ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 209.

¹⁵⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁵⁵ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 166.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 70 and 74.

abroad and indeed at home', but it should allow the French to recover financially. Indeed, the EAC noted that the Bank of France had already 'regained substantial quantities of gold' and that there had also been 'a noticeable improvement in some branches of French activity'. Significantly, the EAC concluded that the financial agreement had opened 'a new phase in international economic relations' after a period of hostile economic rivalry.¹⁵⁷

From the British Embassy in Washington, Lindsay commented, 'it is unnecessary to exaggerate the intrinsic importance of the financial agreement', which, even apart from its numerous financial merits 'is to be regarded with great satisfaction'.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, he noted, 'on the American side it required some courage to produce an international agreement' at a moment when Roosevelt was vulnerable, being in the thick of a presidential race and business recession.¹⁵⁹ Lindsay added that it was pleasing to strike 'a real rapprochement with the United States along the only path open to them, that of cooperation in the economic and financial field'. Perhaps overgenerously, Lindsay concluded that this agreement fully compensated for any previous criticism that Roosevelt had shipwrecked the 1933 World Economic Conference.¹⁶⁰

The White House also believed that the agreement was significant. 'If this goes through I think it is the greatest move taken for peace in the world since the World War', wrote Morgenthau privately, and 'it may be the turning point for again resuming rational thinking in Europe'. Paris was also hopeful, the French Finance Minister claiming to Morgenthau that the agreement put a 'definite end to the monetary war and opened the road towards the "economic peace" – so essential to peace among nations'.¹⁶¹ Whilst the agreement did not end France's financial

¹⁵⁷ Twenty-First Report of the Committee on Economic Information, 'Survey of the Economic Situation', 1 December 1936, CAB 24/265/61

¹⁵⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁵⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 126.

¹⁶⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁶¹ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 126.

struggles or birth a partnership between the democracies, it was briefly seen as a symbol of solidarity.¹⁶²

Indeed, after its announcement, there was a wave of optimism that a global democratic system might yet arise in which the three democracies were wholeheartedly invested. For example, Lindsay brightly reported, 'it is widely held in America that the issue of Europe is the clash between the democratic and the totalitarian philosophies of government, and on that question every American is wholeheartedly in sympathy with the former'.¹⁶³ Even more encouragingly, Bullitt wrote that the financial agreement had made him 'optimistic' that America's ideological solidarity with Britain and France could be translated into tangible support.¹⁶⁴

On the backbenches, Churchill was convinced that a grandiose Anglo-American combination was the answer to the world's problems. Despite their acrimonious relationship since 1919, Churchill believed that the surest method 'for maintaining peace across the globe would be an understanding with Great Britain and the United States in which they would police the world together using their combined naval and aerial supremacy'. If this occurred, he claimed, 'none of us would ever live to see another war'.¹⁶⁵ With this grand solution in mind, he warned Baldwin that 'we are facing the greatest danger and emergency of our history and we have no hope of solving our problem' except in conjunction with France and America.¹⁶⁶

These small flames of optimism were fanned by Roosevelt's landslide election victory in November 1936.¹⁶⁷ 'Nothing like it has been seen since 1820', reported Ambassador Lindsay in awe of Roosevelt's triumph, 'when one man in the electoral college cast his vote against Monroe because he would not see anyone elected unanimously except George Washington'. 'He has won in town and country alike,' Lindsay continued enthusiastically, 'in the industrial districts of the east, in the

¹⁶² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹⁶³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁶⁴ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 123.

¹⁶⁵ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 84.

¹⁶⁶ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 179.

¹⁶⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 294; Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 359.

agricultural communities of the west, in prairie, village and mountain. There is no geographical area that has not voted for him'. After winning by 11 million votes, Roosevelt's prestige was 'sky high', whilst that of the Republican Party was 'depressed', the party disorientated after its fourth consecutive election defeat, including three landslide defeats.¹⁶⁸ Roskill argues that Roosevelt's triumph gave him the necessary breathing space to pursue his grandiose peace schemes abroad.¹⁶⁹ However, this was not so. Roosevelt would remain powerless to intervene in international affairs until he cemented America's economic recovery, dramatically increased America's military capabilities and made peace with Congress.

At least progress was being made on the economic front. Despite the looming business recession, the American economy had come on leaps and bounds during 1936. The British EAC observed spikes in employment in the important spheres of iron, machinery, steel, vehicles, non-ferrous metals and timber, whilst the summer months had seen 'a steady expansion in all branches of American economic activity'.¹⁷⁰ 'The stars in their courses have fought for the President', Lindsay reported, 'and a marked return to prosperity has contributed materially to his electoral success'. In almost every area and aspect of the economy has improved, Lindsay wrote with delight, including in the industrial realm, in trade, in heavy industry, in re-equipment, in investment into new enterprises and even into construction projects. Only re-employment lagged behind, the final great remnant of the Great Depression, which otherwise would soon be consigned to the history books.¹⁷¹ Roosevelt was at last free breaking free from its iron shackles.

In tandem with these pleasing developments, Anglo-American relations had greatly improved throughout the year. The two democracies had moved from financial competition to cooperation and their naval relations had also become increasingly cordial as a consequence of the close, joint preparations for the London Naval

¹⁶⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁶⁹ Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars*, Vol. II, p. 359.

¹⁷⁰ Nineteenth Report of the Committee on Economic Information, 'Survey of the Economic Situation', 10 February 1936, CAB 24/260/16; Twenty-First Report of the Committee on Economic Information, 'Survey of the Economic Situation', 1 December 1936, CAB 24/265/61

¹⁷¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

Conference of 1936.¹⁷² Credit for this spike in cordiality was accorded 'chiefly to Norman Davies and Admiral Standley on the American side and to Craigie and Chatfield on the British side'.¹⁷³ By December 1936, Lindsay concluded that the issue of war debts was now 'the only actively sore place in Anglo-American relations', a marked change from the open hostility that characterised the previous seventeen years.¹⁷⁴

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In conclusion, 1936 ended with the Anglo-American relationship moving cautiously from animosity to friendship. Yet, the relationship lacked almost any promise of future collaboration. The triple financial agreement was a momentary flash in an otherwise black sky of discord and disunity. Whilst the democracies shared an ideological affinity and recognised the emerging totalitarian threat to the existing world order, there was no tangible effort to support one another beyond *ad hoc* financial collaboration.

Traditionally, historians have blamed both Roosevelt's personality and the iron shackles of American isolationism for his hesitancy to follow through on his peace schemes.¹⁷⁵ However, this thesis has stressed America's military ineptitude as a second restrictive factor equal to the first. Fully conscious of America's military unpreparedness, Roosevelt realised that he could not start down the path of diplomatic, moral or economic sanctions if this path risked sparking a war. Thus, Roosevelt's tendencies to delay and backtrack on his peace schemes should be recognised as manifestations of the inner conflict between his desire to help the democracies to resist aggression and his incapability of doing so because of the associated military dangers. Since America's military inadequacy prevented the

¹⁷² Gibbs, 'The Naval Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations', p. 59; Muffett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 22.

¹⁷³ Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 320.

¹⁷⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

¹⁷⁵ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41; Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Net Assessment', p. 221.

President from imposing sanctions then he was ultimately powerless, unable to influence global politics, lead the international community or save Europe from disaster. America's inaction was not so much a choice as a manifestation of powerlessness. In short, America was not the pre-eminent power in the interwar years that historians such as Kennedy, Barnett and Watt have claimed. Thus, Walker claims that even those in London well-aware of Hitler's true evil nature, such as Churchill and Eden, 'may not have been able to mobilise... the support the United States prior to 1939', had they been Prime Minister.¹⁷⁶

Given America's military weakness and isolationist spirit, the rising military shortcomings and internal woes plaguing France (see chapter seven) and the overstretched position of the British Empire, it was increasingly difficult for the few British anti-appeasers 'to suggest a constructive, coherent alternative' from 1936 onwards. Indeed, Stedman claims that the idea that the anti-appeasers 'knew instinctively what sort of a beast Hitler was, and that the best way to deal with him was by force, is far too simplistic and unsubstantiated by the evidence'. On the contrary, 'critics of appeasement were frequently divided amongst themselves and constantly changing their minds on how best to deal with Hitler'. Indeed, they fluctuated at given time between calls for splendid isolation, pacifism, economic and colonial concessions, collective security via the League, all-out rearmament and various kinds of alliance-building with France, America, Soviet Russia and even Italy.¹⁷⁷ The anti-appeasers could not band together around a coherent alternative, quite simply because none existed. Walker claims that the "anti-appeasement" decision-maker... [had he been British Prime Minister in the late 1930s] would probably have been unable to pursue a policy of confrontation without the support of strong, committed allies'. Unfortunately, no such allies existed in the late 1930s, as this chapter's exposé of America's military weakness has shown, and 'as the German invasions of France and the Soviet Union reveal in retrospect'.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 238.

¹⁷⁷ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, pp. 232-34.

¹⁷⁸ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 238.

A Dysfunctional Partnership

May-Nov 1937

As Chamberlain assumed the premiership in May 1937, he wished to end the drifting diplomacy of his predecessors, which had neither properly stood up to the three aggressive powers nor fully appeased them.¹ He was a problem solver, a fixer, supremely confident in his abilities. Unsurprisingly, he wished for a coherent foreign policy and concrete objectives from the outset, believing that this would secure the lasting peace settlement craved by the democratic world. Chamberlain also relished his new political muscle and the opportunity it gave him to fix the broken and disintegrating new world order. In a letter to his sister, Ida, on 8 August 1937, he explained that as Chancellor 'I could have hardly moved a pebble: now I only have to raise a finger and the whole face of Europe is changed'.² The question remained whether his finger would be raised to appease the aggressive powers, or to pursue alliances with likeminded democracies.

At this time, 'a small number of political figures, recognising that the League was inadequately suited to these dangers, favoured alliances [with France and either America or Soviet Russia] as an alternative to the Prime Minister's policy of appeasement'. Yet, Stedman correctly emphasises that the alternatives to appeasement 'have often been treated as a mere footnote by academics more interested in the wider debate surrounding Chamberlain's policies'.³ It is only by investigating the foremost of these alternatives – the pursuit of alliances with likeminded democracies – that one can understand its impracticability. The remainder of this thesis focuses on Chamberlain's time as premier and seeks to

¹ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 8.

² Neville Chamberlain to Ida Chamberlain, 8 August 1937, NC 18/1/1015

³ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 4 and 156.

remedy the 'significant dearth of work regarding the other options available to him at the time'.⁴

From Chamberlain's perspective upon assuming power, the alliance-building alternative so exalted by his critics, was discredited by eighteen years of discord between the democracies in the era preceding his premiership.⁵ Chamberlain had witnessed the continuous *failure* of London, Washington and Paris to move from friendship into *partnership* on the world stage, despite both the creation of international forums and institutions such as the League of Nations to facilitate cooperation.

In fact, one can count on one hand the number of times when there was *actual* collaboration, rather than just fruitless discussion and bitter arguments on how to proceed between 1919 and Chamberlain's ascendancy. The idea of a *functional*, global democratic order during the interwar period is therefore a myth. In truth, the peak of British relations with Paris and Washington before 1937 was limited to pleasantries and rare acts of financial collaboration, whilst the trough extended to almost-unabated division, competition and animosity. In Chamberlain's eyes, *dysfunction* had ruled the day since 1919, and there was little sign that an *effective* partnership between the democracies was within reach. Chamberlain was destined to have six months in power before the COS petitioned him to choose between appeasement and alliance-building as the way to secure Britain's future. This brief period, sprinkled with fresh opportunities for collaboration, would either cement Chamberlain's world view of a dysfunctional global democratic order, the leaders of which were incapable of transitioning from friendship into partnership, or would

⁴ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 4.

⁵ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199; Grayson, *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement*, pp. x-xi; Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', p. 459; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 165; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p. 1.

somehow supplant this view, opening the door towards an alliance-building alternative.

Encouragingly, for the small group of anti-appeasers who regarded America as the solution to the rising totalitarian threat, Anglo-American political relations had become closer since the turn of 1937, mirroring the equally pleasing spike in intelligence-sharing. In direct response to the Anti-Comintern Pact of November 1936, Roosevelt agreed to the opening of trade negotiations with Britain and suspended similar negotiations with Italy.⁶ Both London and Washington believed that a trade deal would have a 'very great impression throughout the world', particularly upon the aggressive powers.⁷ Indeed, Lindsay observed that the prospective trade deal was regarded by American internationalists as 'a political demonstration of solidarity by the two richest and most influential democracies'. Meanwhile, American isolationists suspected that the trade deal was cunningly designed for 'the inveigling of the United States into a "political-economic front"' with Britain and France to oppose the dictators.⁸ For Hull, the deal had the potential power to prevent another world war. 'Had the Anglo-American trade agreement of 1938 been signed four years earlier,' he lamented years onwards, 'there would have been no Second World War'.⁹

The significance accorded to these trade negotiations in America was mirrored in England. 'I reckoned it would help to educate American opinion to act more & more with us and [I supported it] because I felt sure it would frighten the totalitarians,' Chamberlain wrote to his sister Hilda. 'Coming at this moment it looks just like an answer to the Berlin-Rome-Tokyo axis and will have a steadying effect'.¹⁰ Similarly, the Foreign Office Economic Department expressed hopes that this display of

⁶ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 50.

⁷ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 178; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 65; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 18.

⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁹ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 65.

¹⁰ Chamberlain to Hilda, 21 November 1937, NC 18/1/1029

solidarity would have an effect 'in curbing the dictators and keeping up the spirits of Central Europe'.¹¹ However, these hopes soon petered out.

The trade talks were not the only sign that transatlantic relations were being strengthened. In February 1937, Morgenthau asked Chamberlain if there was anything America could do to help with the turbulent international situation.¹² Morgenthau, with Roosevelt's blessing, even suggested that 'some bold Anglo-American initiative might preserve peace in Europe', and wished for Chamberlain's opinion.¹³ A sceptical Chamberlain sidestepped all talk of a grandiose initiative, choosing instead to make three requests of Washington: the amending of her neutrality laws; any action that might stabilise the Far East; and the successful conclusion of the Anglo-American Trade Agreement.¹⁴ Whether Washington could come through on these matters remained to be seen that summer, and would undoubtedly influence Chamberlain's choice between appeasement and alliance-building.

'Never in history have Anglo-American relations been so friendly and cordial as now,' Lindsay reported in March 1937, 'except during the eighteen months when the two countries were associated together in war'. He believed that this was due to 'the elimination of the sources of friction which had so bedevilled relations' in the eighteen years since 1919.¹⁵ Chamberlain and Eden both publicly observed this positive shift in transatlantic relations from rivalry to friendship at the Imperial Conference of May 1937. Eden painted Anglo-American relations as more intimate and friendly than ever before, whilst Chamberlain proclaimed that relations 'were moving forward in a positive way' and that the chance of Anglo-American collaboration was more probable now than at any point in his lifetime.¹⁶ Anglo-American relations had evidently become friendly and now seemed on the cusp of

¹¹ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 24.

¹² Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 27.

¹³ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 177

¹⁴ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 27; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 177.

¹⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 22.

¹⁶ Eden on Far East in 44th Meeting of Imperial Conference, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 128; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 26 and 30.

transitioning into partnership, with even the most ardent appeasers following the situation closely.

Yet, over the next eight months, transatlantic relations plummeted. This decline began after Chamberlain rejected an invitation from Roosevelt to visit him in Washington.¹⁷ Davies told Chamberlain that the President wished to draw up an agenda for Chamberlain's proposed visit, which would provide the necessary groundwork for a 'comprehensive effort to achieve economic rehabilitation, financial stability, a limitation of armaments and peace' across the globe.¹⁸ Chamberlain has been heavily criticised by scholars for rejecting this remarkable opportunity to strengthen Anglo-American relations and form a global partnership.¹⁹ Yet, Chamberlain's critics should note that both the Foreign Office and Board of Trade advised him to reject Roosevelt's invitation – albeit with a counter-offer to send a respected substitute in his stead.²⁰

Eden's Foreign Office advised Chamberlain to consider the potentially devastating impact of a failed Anglo-American conference upon the world, especially if no solutions were found to the issues currently affecting transatlantic relations. These issues included the hard questions of war debts, the economic and political appeasement of Germany, a disarmament agreement, and work towards an Anglo-American trade agreement, which had proved more complicated and divisive than expected, 'proceeding slowly and with difficulty since early 1937'.²¹ Given the eighteen years of discord between Britain and America, this warning of a failed conference carried weight. Indeed, it was reasonable to assume that a grandiose transatlantic conference might well fail. The Foreign Office also reminded

¹⁷ Chamberlain to Davis, letter, 8 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 46; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 29; Offner, *American Appeasement*, pp. 181-2; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 30; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 377; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 30.

¹⁸ Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" Speech', p. 411.

¹⁹ Murfett, *Fool-Proof relations*, p. 37; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 377; Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" Speech', pp. 410-11.

²⁰ Notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 45.

²¹ Notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 45-6.

Chamberlain that, given that he had just assumed the British premiership, 'it would hardly be possible for him to leave England for "some little time to come"'.²²

Whilst remaining cautious of Roosevelt's invitation, the Foreign Office favoured sending Eden as a substitute.²³ However, Chamberlain rebuffed this idea. He duly informed Roosevelt that the time was 'not yet ripe' for such a meeting, and that nothing would be more disastrous than if the meeting, 'which would inevitably attract the utmost publicity, should fail to produce commensurate results'.²⁴ Roosevelt accepted the argument that an early autumnal visit might not be practical given Chamberlain's recent rise to the premiership, but wished for a solution. He asked which transnational issues might be worked on in the interim to expedite Chamberlain's visit.²⁵

Following two months of surprising silence, Chamberlain flatly replied, 'I am afraid I cannot suggest any way in which the meeting between us could be expedited'.²⁶ This reply quashed any prospect of a transatlantic conference. In a revealing letter to Hilda, Chamberlain explained that, though a closer relationship with Roosevelt 'may be useful... the Americans have a long way to go yet before they become helpful partners in world affairs'.²⁷ This comment reinforces the argument of this thesis. Anglo-American relations had just transitioned from acrimony into friendship but were yet to advance into partnership – nor did such a transition seem likely in Chamberlain's eyes.

It is also possible that Chamberlain's reply to Roosevelt was influenced by Washington's decision not to collaborate with Britain throughout July and August 1937 to stop the erupting war between China and Japan. London's unfruitful communications with Washington on how to quash this erupting conflict were sandwiched in between Chamberlain's letters to Roosevelt of 28 June and 28

²² Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 29.

²³ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 29.

²⁴ Chamberlain to Davies, letter, 8 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 46.

²⁵ Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" Speech', p. 411.

²⁶ Chamberlain to Roosevelt, letter, 28 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 336.

²⁷ Chamberlain to Hilda, 29 August 1937, NC 18/1/1018

September, rejecting the President's invitation. Yet, this has not been noted by historians. Exactly nine days after Chamberlain's first letter to Roosevelt, a small skirmish occurred between Chinese and Japanese forces on Marco Polo Bridge, near Peking. The Japanese forces on the ground, wishing to provoke a war with China, 'misled the Japanese Government as to the seriousness of the situation'.²⁸ These exaggerated reports led to significant military reinforcements being sent from Japan and Manchuria, and the rapid escalation of the incident into a full-blown conflict, which eventually merged into the Second World War.²⁹

During these tense days, London approached Washington 'with as many as half a dozen different proposals... to terminate the fighting in China through some form of Anglo-American cooperation', yet all were rebuffed by Hull.³⁰ Following Hull's first refusal to consider joint action on 13 July 1937, a precedent was set in which Washington would not consider joint action with London, but only parallel or independent action.³¹ This precedent remained until 1941. Eden could not comprehend why Washington refused to consider joint action, and so sent many similar proposals to Washington throughout the summer – specifically on 13, 19, 20 and 28 July, and on 18 and 30 August – all aimed at ending the Sino-Japanese conflict.³² Exasperated by these requests, Hull advised Lindsay on 21 August that he was 'somewhat embarrassed at being pressed more than once to co-operate' with Eden's schemes, which he believed to be either impractical or dangerous. He then likened Eden's requests for joint action to being 'offered a dead horse and invited to join in flogging it into a canter'.³³

²⁸ Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, telegram, 5 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 225.

²⁹ Sir H. Knatchbull-Hugessen to Foreign Office, telegram, 5 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 225.

³⁰ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 535.

³¹ Clifford, 'Britain, America, and the Far East, 1937-1940: A Failure in Cooperation', p. 138.

³² Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 42-43.

³³ Lindsay to Eden, 21 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 258.

Eden made one last request for joint action nine days later, which was again rebuffed by Hull. After this, the flames of war in China became too great to contain.³⁴ 'Humourists might find humour in the complete turning of the tables between 1931 and 1937,' wrote Ambassador Grew. 'Then it was we who stepped out in front and the British who would not follow. Now it is the British who are taking the lead while we are moving slowly and very, very carefully'.³⁵ For the British, it seemed as if hesitancy, anxiety and cowardliness ruled the day in Washington. This is also the conviction of most historians. However, after closer inspection, the Americans seemed to have good reasons for not collaborating Britain – though this does not mean that Anglo-American relations were any less damaged by Hull's refusal to collaborate.

Hull, for his part, had several reasons for avoiding diplomatic collaboration with London.³⁶ First and foremost, Hull believed that Eden's proposals for joint action were dangerous and impractical.³⁷ The dominant view in Washington was that the military element had 'taken charge of government in Japan and that nothing will stop them'. Thus, joint action would only serve to 'exacerbate an already desperate situation'.³⁸ From East Asia, British diplomats reported that Ambassador Grew, who enjoyed the complete confidence of the State Department, was 'fond of saying that it is useless or dangerous to make representations to them [the Japanese] as they loathe occidental interference in Asia more than anything'.³⁹ Meanwhile, from the United States, both Lindsay and Mallet reported to Eden that the Americans had refused joint action not because they preferred parallel representation, but 'solely

³⁴ Clifford, 'Britain, America, and the Far East, 1937-1940: A Failure in Cooperation', p. 137.

³⁵ Clifford, 'Britain, America, and the Far East, 1937-1940: A Failure in Cooperation', p. 141.

³⁶ Cadogan, minute, 14 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 159.

³⁷ Lindsay to Eden, 21 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 258.

³⁸ Lindsay to Eden, 21 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 182; Lindsay to Eden, 22 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 188.

³⁹ Dodds to Eden, 26 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 267.

and entirely' on the merits of each scheme proposed.⁴⁰ Mallet explained that 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'.⁴¹ For the Americans, joint action was first and foremost a pointless endeavour.

Aside from fearing the consequences of joint action in the Far East, Hull was also apprehensive of its consequences domestically. According to Mallet, the American Secretary of State was convinced that parallel action, rather than joint action, was 'more expeditious and less liable to involve him in criticism here [Washington]'.⁴² Likewise Lindsay reported that Hull feared the furious reaction of isolationists in America if it appeared that America was either the tail to the British kite or in danger of being dragged into a foreign entanglement because of her collaboration with Britain.⁴³ In deference to these isolationists, Hull wished to avoid any overt collaboration with Britain, something which made the advancement of UK-US relations into an effective partnership tricky. Thus, as Chamberlain took power in 1937, public opinion was a significant restraint on the White House, which was already facing a fight against the Supreme Court, a looming business recession, industrial unrest, and the scandal of having selected a Supreme Court Justice who once belonged to the Ku Klux Klan.⁴⁴

Once again, it seemed as if Roosevelt was prioritising domestic issues over the turbulent international situation, fearing that joint action risked provoking both Congress and the isolationists in the mid-west, which could tip the political scales against him.⁴⁵ Thus, Drummond claims that Roosevelt's foreign policy in the mid-1930s was 'tentative, shapeless, and wholly secondary to the treatment of domestic

⁴⁰ Mallet to Eden, 7 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 294.

⁴¹ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 49.

⁴² Mallet to Eden, 7 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 294.

⁴³ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 42.

⁴⁴ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 147.

⁴⁵ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 147.

politics'.⁴⁶ Similarly, Reynolds argues that Roosevelt generally practiced a 'stern moral condemnation' of Japanese aggression in the Far East with a 'pronounced determination to avoid being entangled in any international action'.⁴⁷

'We can obviously not rely on American cooperation,' concluded the Foreign Office in September 1937, 'so we must go ahead under own steam'.⁴⁸ One Foreign Office official even described the whole saga of approaching Washington as a 'somewhat sombre and dispiriting story'.⁴⁹ According to Dallek, Reynolds and Drummond, Roosevelt's political restraints were the primary handicap on Hull's foreign policy.⁵⁰ However, Hull was open to parallel diplomatic intervention during the summer, conditional always on the scheme having a realistic chance of success.⁵¹ Contrary to the opinions above, it was the unfortunate timing and impracticality of Eden's proposals that primarily influenced Hull's foreign policy decision-making, not his political restraints. Eden's wide-ranging proposals for collaboration included: joint protest notes to Tokyo; joint demands for a ceasefire; offers for Anglo-American mediation; the neutralisation of Shanghai of Chinese and Japanese soldiers; and a joint query concerning Japan's naval blockade of Chinese shipping.⁵² Most of these schemes fall into the "mild action" category, which begs the question of why Hull opposed them.

Whilst Hull undoubtedly feared provoking the isolationists at home and the Japanese abroad, it was often the timing of Eden's requests that first and foremost counted against them. For example, immediately after Eden's request jointly to protest to Tokyo on 13 July, the most senior British representative in Tokyo, James Dodds,

⁴⁶ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 373.

⁴⁷ Reynolds, *the Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 31.

⁴⁸ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 147.

⁴⁹ Ronald to Craigie, minute, 6 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 291.

⁵⁰ Reynolds, *the Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 31; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 147; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 373.

⁵¹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 14 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 158-9.

⁵² Lindsay to Eden, 21 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 258; Lindsay to Eden, 23 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 188.

reported on Ambassador Grew's conviction that the erupting war was neither of Japan's making, nor did she wish to aggravate it.⁵³ In fact, Grew had advised Hull 'that inaction was the best course for US Government at present'.⁵⁴ Moreover, the French Ambassador had come to the same conclusion, whilst Dodds was also increasingly inclined to sympathise with Japan.⁵⁵ This growing conviction of Japan's innocence meant that Eden's "mild" request for a joint protest to Tokyo was unfortunately outdated from the moment it reached Hull's desk.

Another proposal to neutralise Shanghai of belligerent military forces on 18 August also suffered from unfortunate timing. The conflict escalated so rapidly in the Shanghai region that the scheme was described as untenable by Eden's own representative in China only days after it was proposed to the Americans.⁵⁶ Moreover, Washington did not believe that Eden's "neutralisation" scheme was practical, as the Japanese 'would never... allow other nations to protect their nationals'.⁵⁷ Once again, Hull did not rebuff Eden's proposal out of principle, but because of its timing and lack of intrinsic merit. In other cases, Hull simply found Eden's proposals to be dangerous, especially since Japan knew 'perfectly well' that neither Britain nor America was prepared to push her to the extremity of war. America feared that Japan would eventually force the democracies to admit their bluff.⁵⁸

⁵³ Dodds was "holding the fort" in Tokyo until the arrival of Ambassador Craigie in September 1937.

⁵⁴ Dodds to Eden, 14 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 160.

⁵⁵ Dodds to Eden, 15 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 164.

⁵⁶ Dodds to Eden, 26 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 267.

⁵⁷ Lindsay to Eden, 21 August 1937 *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 258.

⁵⁸ This mindset was supported by Charles Orde, the head of the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office, who agreed with Hull that joint action was 'dangerous'. Orde, minute, 14 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 159; Lindsay to Eden, 15 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 163; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 49.

Historians have also failed to note that there were minor instances when Hull did sanction parallel action with Britain. Grew was granted permission by Hull on 13 and 16 August to support Dodds' representations to the Japanese '*if he thinks fit*', or on the condition that the German, Italian and French representatives did likewise.⁵⁹ However, Grew chose not to support Britain's representations, confirming for Chamberlain the image of a dysfunctional UK-US relationship, which was friendly but incapable of partnership. Hull's permission for Grew to support the British undermines the arguments of Dallek, Reynolds and Drummond that he was handicapped from acting with Britain in the Far East by the isolationist political climate at home.

Whilst Hull clearly rejected Eden's proposals either for their danger, lack of intrinsic merit or unfortunate timing, most of the British Cabinet believed that Eden's proposals were rejected out of principle, without receiving due consideration. This was immensely damaging for Anglo-American relations. As a consequence, the Cabinet believed that Washington could *not* be counted upon to help stabilise the world.⁶⁰ It is probable that this dispiriting diplomatic episode influenced Chamberlain's decision in late September not to visit Washington for fear that a transatlantic conference might similarly fail to produce commensurate results or collaboration.

Whilst the British felt deeply frustrated with Washington, they could at least be content with France's diplomatic support. According to Ambassador Phipps, whilst Paris was minimally affected by the Far Eastern conflict, she was nevertheless 'inspired towards a definite, if somewhat vague, desire to keep her policy aligned, so far as possible' with Britain.⁶¹ In fact, Paris was willing throughout 1937 for her

⁵⁹ Italics added; Lindsay to Foreign Office, 13 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 240; Dodds to Foreign Office, 16 August, 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 246; Dodds to Eden, 13 August, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 237.

⁶⁰ Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 224.

⁶¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

foreign policy to be 'largely directed by London' – a marked shift in attitude.⁶² However, London would not act against Tokyo without American support for fear of provoking a conflict, which she would have to fight singlehandedly given France's inability to intervene in the Pacific (see below). Thus, on 26 August, when two Japanese fighter planes attacked the British Ambassador's car in China, Chamberlain refused any response beyond a protest note.⁶³ The Japanese were encouraged by Britain's inaction and duly stepped up their bombing campaign in China.

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As the Japanese threat mushroomed in East Asia from mid-1937, the strength and efficiency of the French Navy gained in significance for the British as they contemplated despatching the Royal Navy to Singapore. It was hoped that if the Mediterranean was abandoned by the British fleet, the French Navy would take responsibility for the volatile region.⁶⁴ Whilst this was not ideal, the British were desperate for a way to protect Hong Kong, Singapore, and Britain's stake in China, which included HSBC, vast trade links, major investments in Chinese railway construction and shipping, and her control of Shanghai.⁶⁵ Elsewhere in South East Asia, Britain controlled Malacca, Penang, the Federated Malay States, Burma and many unfederated states, including Johore, Perlis, Kedah, Northern Borneo, Kelantan and Terengganu.⁶⁶ Further southwards lay the dominions of Australia and New Zealand, whilst India lay to the west. These territories, rich in raw materials such as

⁶² Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940', p. 737; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 180.

⁶³ J.W.O. Davidson to Eden, telegram, 26 August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 266; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 221; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 47.

⁶⁴ 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379; Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 7; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 102; Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 21. Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 11; Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan, 1933-1934*, p. 14.

⁶⁶ Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 11.

oil, tin and rubber, were attractive targets for the Japanese, who sought imperial expansion.⁶⁷

In the event of Japanese aggression in South East Asia, stated an Admiralty memorandum in late 1937, 'we could not afford to keep any forces in the Mediterranean, other than A/S [anti-Submarine] forces at Gibraltar and light forces based on Alexandria'.⁶⁸ With the Mediterranean emptied of British warships despatched to Singapore, a dichotomy would arise between British interests in the Mediterranean and her capacity to defend those interests from potential Axis aggression.⁶⁹ The Admiralty therefore planned to utilise the French Navy to contain Italy, whilst the British fleet 'in Home Waters, would meet the German threat' in the North Sea.⁷⁰

The Admiralty memorandum stated that the French navy would need 'to station an adequate force at Gibraltar to prevent any Italian surface ships breaking out' into the Atlantic to disrupt British trade. The French navy would also need to control the Mediterranean waters west of Sicily and Libya, and, if necessary, use its land forces in Tunisia to divert an Italian land attack on Egypt and the Suez Canal from Libya, the Canal being jointly owned by Britain and France. The Admiralty also believed that the Royal Navy would need the assistance of one French battleship and a handful of cruisers to contain Germany in the North Sea.⁷¹ These were astonishing demands given the present state of acrimonious relations between the two powers – and demands that would require a strong French Navy.

⁶⁷ Best, 'Constructing an Image', p. 4; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 11.

⁶⁸ 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379

⁶⁹ 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379; Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23

⁷⁰ 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379

⁷¹ 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379

Given the absence of joint Anglo-French naval planning in the 1930s, the French had unsurprisingly assigned a different role for their navy in wartime.⁷² The Navy's first objective was to help transfer eight colonial divisions from North Africa to the Rhine to bolster France's defences.⁷³ The Navy's second objective was to protect shipments of raw materials to France and attack the enemy's naval and merchant ships, ports and coastal installations.⁷⁴ Strangely, the Admiralty's plans to use the French Navy to control the Mediterranean were not revealed to France. In fact, the Admiralty opposed naval conversations with France throughout the 1930s, believing that France's help in the Mediterranean could be secured without advanced warning.⁷⁵

At this point, the French possessed the world's fourth largest navy, behind the Japanese, British and Americans.⁷⁶ Since the Versailles Treaty, it had been the long-term aim of successive French naval ministers to equal the combined maritime strength of Italy and Germany.⁷⁷ Considering that the Germany Navy had been stripped to its bare bones in 1919, this standard was not difficult to maintain.⁷⁸

For France, maintaining a two-power standard only became troublesome once the aggressive states began to rearm intensively in the 1930s. As a rearmament fever spread across the globe, France was ravaged by the Great Depression, forcing the Government to choose between guns and butter – and which types of guns.⁷⁹ Either

⁷² Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 25.

⁷³ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 30; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 28; Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 158; M. Thomas, 'Imperial Defence or Diversionary Attack? Anglo-French Strategic Planning in the Near East, 1936-1940', in *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, by ed. M. S. Alexander and W. J. Philpott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 157-185 (p. 160).

⁷⁴ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 28

⁷⁵ COS, 'Staff Conversations with France and Belgium', 4 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 856.

⁷⁶ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149.

⁷⁷ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 30; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149.

⁷⁸ Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 800; Wark, 'In Search of a Suitable Japan: British Naval Intelligence in the Pacific before the Second World War', p. 191; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 127.

⁷⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 214.

France's naval ambitions had to be checked, or both the French Army and Air Force would suffer.⁸⁰

As Bonnet called for naval cuts, Berlin and Rome were 'narrowing the tenuous French superiority' in naval tonnage.⁸¹ As mentioned, the 1935 Anglo-German Naval Agreement dramatically increased Germany's naval ceiling, which infuriated the French.⁸² Between 1935 and 1939, the Germans built a menacing fleet of two battleships (with another two battleships soon to be completed), three pocket-battleships, eight cruisers, 22 destroyers and 57 submarines. Once Germany reached its naval ceiling in 1939, Hitler denounced the naval agreement and authorised the fleet's quadrupling by 1944, including the construction of six super-battleships of 56,000 tons.⁸³

Meanwhile, Mussolini authorised the construction of two 35,000-ton battleships and a powerful fleet of submarines in 1934.⁸⁴ Within three years, Rome was scarcely behind Paris in terms of modern naval tonnage and was churning out more submarines than any other power.⁸⁵ Worse still, the French fleet was due to scrap 139,067 tons of obsolete vessels between 1937 and 1941, all of which needed replacing if France was to maintain her superiority over the Axis powers.⁸⁶ With the French Navy facing financial cuts in 1937, Admiral Darlan predicted that her superiority would disintegrate by 1939.⁸⁷ France's spending trends were just as ominous as Darlan's predictions. In 1935, the French only spent £23.4 million on naval armaments, whilst Germany and Italy spent a combined £70.5 million. By 1937, the French naval budget had only increased to £27.4 million, whilst the Axis budget had

⁸⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 5; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 394.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 153.

⁸² Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 299; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 135-6; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 201; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 33; Carley, 'A Fearful Concatenation of Circumstances': The Anglo-Soviet Rapprochement, 1934-1936', p. 52.

⁸³ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 150-2.

⁸⁴ Bagnasco, *The Littorio Class*, p. 20.

⁸⁵ Young, 'French Military Intelligence and the Franco-Italian Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 155.

⁸⁶ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 153.

⁸⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 215.

doubled to £140.1 million.⁸⁸ This rising dichotomy in naval spending between France and the Axis powers undermined Britain's plan to entrust the Mediterranean to the French should the Royal Navy sail to Singapore.

From across the Channel, the NID in London closely observed the French Navy's waning relative strength. The NID was far more pessimistic in its appreciations and future predictions than Admiral Darlan. By December 1936, the NID believed that the Axis had gained a combined naval superiority over the French. 'The end of the year sees the French navy being outstripped by the Italians', reported the British NA to Paris, 'with Germany coming up at a pace which looks menacing for the future'. Indeed, he believed that the German Fleet would only be marginally inferior by 1940.⁸⁹

Equally concerning was the gap in naval responsibilities between France and the Axis powers. Italy and Germany both only had one seaboard, and Germany had no colonies whatsoever, allowing their fleets to be concentrated in the Mediterranean and North Sea respectively. In comparison, France had two seaboards, plus the second largest empire in the world, encompassing 4,900,000 square miles of territory from South East Asia to Africa and the Americas, the trade routes of which needed protection.⁹⁰

The French also lagged behind the Axis powers in naval construction. The NA often compared the busy shipyards in Germany, Italy and Japan to the sluggish shipyards in France. According to the NA, Blum's socialist Government had been disastrous for the French shipbuilding programme. Indeed, new construction had already been slow, expensive and behind schedule *before* the infamous forty-hour working week was introduced by Blum in mid-1936. This new labour law, twinned with a dearth of skilled workers, 'made the task of... strengthening the fleet a very uphill struggle against neighbours working up to sixty hours a week in several shifts'. The British ruefully observed that France took five years to build capital ships as compared to the external average of 3.5 years. A similar time proportion also applied to cruisers and

⁸⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 325.

⁸⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁹⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

smaller vessels.⁹¹ This was an alarming omen if Chamberlain was to choose the forging of a democratic axis between Britain, France and America over the appeasement of the aggressive powers.

Another problem was the rising personnel shortage in sea crews caused by the commissioning of new warships, which had forced a number of vessels to be reduced to 60 percent of complement. Thus, the NA compared the French Navy to 'a weary and imperfectly armed Christian struggling up the Hill Difficulty, with an uneasy feeling that at any moment Apollyon [the Angel of Death] may appear straddling across the path'.⁹² Whilst France's aim to equal the combined naval strength of the Axis powers was disintegrating, it was widely anticipated that she would combine with the Royal Navy in wartime, a merging which would give London and Paris an overwhelming naval superiority over Rome and Berlin, which would only become marginal if the Japanese drew the Royal Navy to Singapore.⁹³

Although Rome and Berlin were surpassing Paris in the sphere of *modern* naval tonnage, when one incorporates older vessels into the equation the picture become murkier. In 1937, the British calculated that the French fleet maintained the lead in larger vessels, with nine battleships to the Axis Power's seven (three of which were merely German pocket-battleships) and one aircraft carrier as to none, whilst the French also matched the Axis Powers in heavy cruisers with seven a piece.⁹⁴ In smaller vessels, however, a gulf was opening in favour of Italy and Germany. France only had ten light cruisers as to the Axis power's 21; only 66 destroyers as compared to the Axis power's 130, and only 80 submarines to the Axis Powers' 120.⁹⁵

According to the NA, there was little that Admiral Darlan could do to reverse the relative decline of the French Navy in favour of Germany and Italy. In his opinion, the French CNS 'had immense difficulties to deal with, owing to the unstable state of

⁹¹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁹² *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁹³ 'British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

⁹⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 32.

⁹⁵ The breakdown of France's destroyer types is as follows: 10 small destroyers, 26 large destroyers and 30 *Contre-Torpilleurs*. A *Contre-Torpilleur* was a special type of destroyer unique to France; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 32.

French politics and finance, and is probably doing all that can be hoped for under the circumstances'.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, the British still believed that in wartime they 'could rely on France to neutralise the Italian fleet in the Mediterranean to some extent, to maintain command of the Western Mediterranean, and... to prevent essential trade reaching Italy', especially when one considered the French fleet's superior efficiency over the Italians.⁹⁷

This conviction of France's superior naval efficiency was only strengthened after the British observed first-hand the French Navy's impressive performance during the anti-piracy Mediterranean patrols of late 1937.⁹⁸ In a rare display of strength during this era of appeasement, the French patrolled Tunisian waters with 20 destroyers, whilst the British patrolled Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus and part of the Aegean Sea with 36 destroyers, with a mandate to destroy any submerged Italian submarines on sight. According to Clayton, the patrols gave the French Navy invaluable experience in submarine-tracking.⁹⁹

The British NA had also observed the French annual naval manoeuvres for the past two years, reporting on them without any notes of criticism.¹⁰⁰ Thus, the French were still deemed capable of controlling the Western Mediterranean should the British fleet be despatched to Singapore – something which seemed increasingly likely with the sudden eruption of war in China. However, the French would not be able to send large reinforcements to the Far East to help the British restrain Japan. Thus, the British would only consider despatching their fleet to the Western Pacific if America was willing to do likewise.

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As summer turned to autumn, Chamberlain reflected that Morgenthau had not come through on any of Chamberlain's three requests for help in February 1937. America

⁹⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁹⁷ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; COS report, 'Situation in the Far East', June 1939, ADM 205/57

⁹⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁹⁹ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 40.

¹⁰⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

had failed both to stabilise the Far East and to rescind her neutrality laws, which in fact had become more stringent than ever, whilst the Anglo-American trade agreement was progressing with difficulty.¹⁰¹ According to Drummond, the neutrality laws of May 1937 'represented the most absolute form of neutrality and the most complete programme of isolation to which the country had ever been subjected'.¹⁰² Even more discouraging was that Roosevelt had decided not to fight too hard for executive discretionary powers and that these neutrality laws had no expiry date, unlike its predecessors.¹⁰³ Inskip concluded that America's neutrality restrictions on munitions exports, if applied without bias in a European war, would 'be of considerable embarrassment to us and our allies'.¹⁰⁴

Lindsay, however, believed that these laws would not stop America from supporting her democratic associates in Europe. 'Friendly members of the State Department took the line that in the event of a big European war it [the neutrality laws] would never work but would be scrapped in twenty-four hours,' he reported, 'and it is believed that the President himself spoke to the French Ambassador in this sense'.¹⁰⁵ In fact, the main reason why the President did not seek executive discretionary powers was not because isolationism was more entrenched in Congress, but because he wished to avoid a Congressional fight that would delay his programme to reform the Supreme Court. This programme was a bid to save his vital, but highly controversial, New Deal legislation.¹⁰⁶

Twinned with this calculation was a desire to maintain the arms embargo on Spain, especially following chilling reports of urban areas being bombed, killing swathes of innocent civilians.¹⁰⁷ As war raged on both in Spain and China, the belief rose in America that neutrality and the inaction it inspired was *only* hurting the victims of

¹⁰¹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 177; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 27; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 373.

¹⁰² Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 46.

¹⁰³ Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 655.

¹⁰⁴ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference: Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23, p. 13.

¹⁰⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹⁰⁶ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 136.

¹⁰⁷ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 136.

aggression. Indeed, Roosevelt realised that if he officially recognised the Sino-Japanese conflict and declared neutrality, it would be the Chinese who suffered most, since they needed American arms and finance to resist the Japanese onslaught.¹⁰⁸

The power of isolationism was beginning to dissipate, something reflected in the emboldened speeches of the Roosevelt Administration, which, according to Lindsay, increasingly shone a light on 'the threat to democracy and the non-observance of international treaties'. On one occasion, Hull claimed that the arms race 'was sowing the seeds of economic disaster' and would end with 'an economic collapse' or 'a military explosion'. He called on the entire civilised world to seek a political and economic rapprochement to avoid this doom. Similarly, Welles asked all nations to work towards appeasement, the revitalisation of international morals, the renewed sanctity of the pledged word, disarmament and free trade.¹⁰⁹ Meanwhile, Roosevelt criticised Washington's inactivity in global affairs, proclaiming that 'peace must be affirmatively reached for. It cannot just be wished for'.¹¹⁰

According to Langer, by late 1937, 'hardly a trace of intellectual or spiritual neutrality remained', with almost the entire population of America believing that Nazism 'violated basic moral codes, Christian values, and indeed the ordinary "decisions" by which all civilised people aimed to abide'.¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the White House seemed to be transitioning from words to action as the President delivered his famous "Quarantine" speech on 5 October 1937.

In Chicago, the very heartland of American isolationism, Roosevelt proclaimed to his audience that a 'reign of terror had broken out in the world', from which there was 'no escape through mere isolation or neutrality'.¹¹² The President then likened this lawlessness to a contagious disease, which had to be quarantined, lest it infected the

¹⁰⁸ Medlicott, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. x; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544.

¹⁰⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹¹⁰ John McVickar Haight Jr., 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', *The Review of Politics*, 24, 2 (1962), pp. 233-259 (p. 258).

¹¹¹ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 12.

¹¹² Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 39.

world.¹¹³ Fierce debate followed his speech both domestically and overseas as to what was meant by “quarantine”, and has since been intensely debated by historians.¹¹⁴ According to Doenecke and Stoler, the Quarantine Speech ‘was a trial balloon, delivered in the heavily isolationist Midwest and designed to test the strength of isolationist as opposed to interventionist public opinion amid the growing crisis around the world’.¹¹⁵ Meanwhile, Murfett, Watt and Langer argue that the Quarantine Speech marked the moment when Roosevelt decided to oppose the aggressor states, only for him to back down in the face of hostile public opinion.¹¹⁶ Orthodox and counter-revisionist historians think along similar lines and use Roosevelt’s speech as evidence of America’s willingness to collaborate with Chamberlain, had he chosen to pursue an alliance-building alternative to appeasement.¹¹⁷ Finally, Borg, Haight, Dallek, Radar and Rock argue that the public did not react as vehemently to the Quarantine Speech as first supposed. Indeed, they believe that the President never had in mind a specific programme of action to challenge the aggressor states from which he then shied away, but rather was only ever ‘pursuing a variety of nebulous schemes for warding off catastrophe’, which were unlikely to come into fruition.¹¹⁸

The provocative speech caused a stir domestically and overseas, with every listener pondering what was meant by the term “quarantine”, including Roosevelt’s own advisors. The following day, the League confused the situation even further by officially blaming Japan for the conflict in China and by summoning the Nine Power Treaty nations to a conference to solve the crisis. The timing of the League’s statement made it seem as if Roosevelt’s speech had been ‘an advance notice of a

¹¹³ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 30.

¹¹⁴ Borg, ‘Notes on Roosevelt’s “Quarantine” speech’, p. 405; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 11; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 131.

¹¹⁵ Doenecke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Foreign Policies*, p. 126.

¹¹⁶ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 65; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 190; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 11.

¹¹⁷ Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler*, p. 61.

¹¹⁸ Haight, ‘Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech’, p. 234; Borg, ‘Notes on Roosevelt’s “Quarantine” speech’, p. 405; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 150-1; Radar, ‘The Works Progress Administration and Hawaiian Preparedness, 1935-1940’, p. 14; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 38.

declaration of sanctions against Japan'.¹¹⁹ Rumours swiftly spread that these two events were 'part of one... political strategy which would culminate in the Nine Power nations adopting sanctions against Japan', when in fact there was no link between Roosevelt's speech and the League's statement, nor any 'convincing evidence... that the President had decided to use coercive measures against Japan'.¹²⁰

On the contrary, there is ample evidence to suggest that by "quarantine" the President merely meant the *diplomatic ostracising* of aggressor states, rather than the use of economic sanctions, as orthodox and counter-revisionist historians have suggested.¹²¹ There was no proffered American hand outstretched across the Atlantic, calling for joint economic sanctions or joint military action. Cardinal Mundelein, who met with Roosevelt immediately after his speech, wrote the following day that the President's quarantine strategy 'does not contemplate either military or naval action against the unjust aggressor nation, nor does it involve "sanctions"... but rather a policy of isolation, [namely the] severance of ordinary communications in a united manner'. Simultaneously, on 6 October, Roosevelt told William Phillips that "quarantine" merely meant a 'drawing away from someone'.¹²² He also told the press that "quarantine" did not mean "sanction" and that his speech had merely outlined 'an attitude', not a programme for quarantining future aggressors.¹²³

According to Borg, this idea of politically ostracising an aggressor was something that Roosevelt had tabled at the Buenos Aires Conference of 1936 and would suggest again to Davies before the Nine Power Conference in Brussels.¹²⁴ Roosevelt's refusal to consider anything more than mild political sanctions was a far cry from the all-powerful American intervention envisaged by Chamberlain's scholarly critics, who

¹¹⁹ Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 417.

¹²⁰ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 148; Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 417; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 34.

¹²¹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 61.

¹²² Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 420 and 422.

¹²³ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 189; Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 423; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 30; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 149.

¹²⁴ Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 421.

maintain that the non-existent American option should have been utilised to stop Hitler.¹²⁵

Despite Roosevelt's mild intentions, the press response was initially mixed, and became more negative as the days passed and the quarantine speech was linked to the League's proclamation against Japan. The US Government became increasingly demoralised. 'It's a terrible thing to look over your shoulder when you are trying to lead,' said Roosevelt to Samuel Rosenman, his speechwriter, 'and find no one there'.¹²⁶ In his diary, Welles described Roosevelt as 'dismayed by the widespread violence of the attacks', whilst Hull later recalled in his memoirs that the press and public response was 'quick and violent' and nearly unanimous.¹²⁷

However, the Roosevelt Administration tended to focus on critical articles from the isolationist Midwest, and overlook upbeat articles from elsewhere in America, which included *The New York Times* headline: 'Roosevelt's Speech Is Widely Approved', and the claim by *The San Francisco Chronicle* that the everyday American had responded to Roosevelt's speech like a 'cavalry horse to a bugle call'.¹²⁸ Equally encouraging was the flood of congratulatory letters to the White House. As the dust settled, Roosevelt wrote 'I thought that there would be more criticism' and remarked to Welles, 'frankly, I do not believe that any of these [isolationist-leaning] newspapers carry any particular weight as expressions of public opinion', when citing critical articles from *The Baltimore Sun*, *The Washington Post*, and *The New York Sun*.¹²⁹ Thus, it seems that the American public's reaction was not negative or violent enough to stop

¹²⁵ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 5.

¹²⁶ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 65.

¹²⁷ Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 425.

¹²⁸ Doenecke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies*, p. 126; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, pp. 150-1; Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 234; Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', pp. 426-28, Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 398.

¹²⁹ Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 235.

Roosevelt, had he actually had a serious programme in mind as Murfett, Watt, Ruggiero and Langer mistakenly believe.¹³⁰

Ambassador Lindsay, for his part, informed the Foreign Office that the President's Quarantine Speech 'was quite well received although some fear was expressed in the United States and some doubts arose abroad as to what Mr Roosevelt meant by... "quarantine"'.¹³¹ The British Government felt both surprised and confused by the Chicago Speech, having received no forewarning by Roosevelt nor subsequent explanation of what "quarantine" meant.¹³² Mallet, after speaking with Welles, reported to Eden that "quarantine" was a 'remote and vague objective', rather than 'an immediate policy'.¹³³

Whilst both Eden and the British press was pleased with Roosevelt's Speech, the majority of British decision-makers were 'alarmed'.¹³⁴ 'With the two [European] dictators in a thoroughly nasty temper, we simply cannot afford to quarrel with Japan,' Chamberlain wrote to Hilda, 'and I very much fear that after a lot of ballyhoo the Americans will somehow fade out and leave us to carry all the blame & the odium'. It is possible that British intelligence on America's military weaknesses and inability to use force to support their words against Japan (see chapter five) was a contributing factor to Chamberlain's above apprehension. 'It is particularly exasperating that when I asked the U.S.A. to make a joint *demarche*... [in the summer] they refused...,' he wrote on. 'Now they jump in, without saying a word to us beforehand, without knowing what they mean to do'. He was thus adamant that

¹³⁰ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 65; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 190; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 11; Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 61.

¹³¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹³² Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 42; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 212; Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 234.

¹³³ Mallet to Eden, telegram, 12 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 387.

¹³⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 43; Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', p. 747; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 62-3.

some 'some straight speaking to U.S.A. (in private)' was necessary 'before they go any further'.¹³⁵

'Roosevelt's speech may do us more harm than good,' Admiral Chatfield similarly concluded, '...you may be quite sure that if it comes to trouble in the Far East the Americans will stand aside'.¹³⁶ Hore-Belisha was equally disturbed and warned the Cabinet that neither Hong Kong nor Shanghai could repel a Japanese attack if things turned sour.¹³⁷ Even in the Foreign Office, 'there was little support for the speech', with most officials believing that it was merely a test of Midwest, isolationist opinion.¹³⁸ 'I think we can expect to get little out of America... in regard to economic or other measures against Japan,' said Holdman, the First-Secretary of the American Department, who seriously doubted whether Roosevelt's speech would 'have any immediate effect on the country and Congress'.¹³⁹ Vansittart, however, advised, 'we must not cold-water this in the press. On the contrary we must see how far we can develop this change of tone in the USA, though we may well be disappointed'.¹⁴⁰

Even Eden's spirits were soon dampened by the Roosevelt Administration's radio silence on the "quarantine" message in the following weeks, and by a disheartening conversation with Ambassador Bingham who seemed 'fairly confident' that "quarantine" did not mean sanctions.¹⁴¹ From a British perspective, it seemed as if Roosevelt had 'decided to let the whole incident sink into oblivion'.¹⁴² For Chamberlain, the sooner it disappeared the better, as he feared that the forging of a democratic bloc 'would only solidify the Axis one'.¹⁴³ Perhaps thinking similarly, the

¹³⁵ Neville Chamberlain to Hilda, 9 October, NC 18/1/1023

¹³⁶ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, pp. 131-2.

¹³⁷ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 6 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 376.

¹³⁸ Vansittart, minute, 7 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 375; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 131.

¹³⁹ Holdman, minute, 18 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 401.

¹⁴⁰ Vansittart, minute, 7 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 375.

¹⁴¹ Eden to Lindsay, 28 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 414.

¹⁴² Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 19.

¹⁴³ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 44.

Roosevelt Administration quickly assured Hitler's emissary to Washington that 'the President's Quarantine Address did not apply to Germany'.¹⁴⁴ For the moment, Roosevelt's idea *only* applied to the Far East, not to Europe. Once again, Roosevelt had raised British hopes only to retreat into the shadows, even as war in China escalated, damaging the interests, property, trade and prestige of Britain and America.

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As Japan's intentions to absorb China became undisputable, the British began to contemplate whether to impose economic sanctions. Eden was the leading sponsor of this sanctions strategy, having returned from the Nyon Conference in mid-September freshly enthused by the Anglo-French stand against Italian piracy in the Mediterranean.¹⁴⁵ Whilst both the British Cabinet and COS were opposed to economic sanctions against Japan, the Foreign Office had seriously weighed the matter in the weeks before Roosevelt's Chicago Speech, concluding that the strategy might be feasible if – *and only if* – America participated.¹⁴⁶ 'If America will not play, then, of course, we cannot proceed,' John Keynes advised Gladwyn Jebb of the Foreign Office. 'But it would be a splendid thing to at least put the proposition to her. It is high time that she was forced into the position of having to take clear responsibility one way or another'.¹⁴⁷

According to a study by the ATB, commissioned by the Cabinet on 20 October 1937, between 65 and 70 percent of Japan's imports and exports were traded with the

¹⁴⁴ Marks, 'Six Between Roosevelt and Hitler: America's Role in the Appeasement of Nazi Germany', p. 973.

¹⁴⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 58.

¹⁴⁶ Mr S. H. Phillips (Admiralty) to Foreign Office, letter, 4 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 364-6; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 69; Eden, Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 392; 'Report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War on Economic Sanctions Against Japan', 5 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 433-8; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 57 and 66; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 69; Wark, 'In Search of a Suitable Japan: British Naval Intelligence in the Pacific before the Second World War', p. 198.

¹⁴⁷ Keynes to Jebb, letter, 29 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 353.

British Empire and America.¹⁴⁸ The study thus concluded that for sanctions to be imposed effectively the full cooperation of America was required. Eden was also informed by Edmond that America supplied 60 percent of Japan's oil imports, and as such her involvement in imposing economic sanctions would be key. Meanwhile, Lord Cranborne cited the Abyssinian Crisis as evidence that ineffective sanctions were as pointless as they were dangerous.¹⁴⁹ Even the British public realised that the 'participation of U.S. Government would be essential'.¹⁵⁰

Yet, the Foreign Office was divided on the wisdom of imposing joint UK-US sanctions on Japan, given the risk of war entailed and Roosevelt's tendency to backtrack. According to the ATB, Anglo-American sanctions would also take two years to cripple Japan. In the interim, British and American possessions would be vulnerable to a Japanese attack, whilst Dominion trade would also suffer.¹⁵¹ These were high stakes. Cadogan reiterated these points and questioned how a naval blockade on the high seas might be maintained given that Singapore was the nearest developed naval base. He also emphasised the remote likelihood of American collaboration in any case, adding that the US business community was likely to oppose sanctions against one of their biggest trading partners during 'a time of recession, retrenchment and unemployment'.¹⁵²

Despite these objections, Eden communicated with Washington on 30 September to enquire of her attitude towards economic sanctions. In his message, Eden stressed the growing pressure on the democracies for some effective action to be taken

¹⁴⁸ 'Report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War on Economic Sanctions Against Japan', 5 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 436-8.

¹⁴⁹ Edmond to Eden, telegram, 29 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 351.

¹⁵⁰ Foreign Office to Edmond, telegram, 1 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 359.

¹⁵¹ 'Report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War on Economic Sanctions Against Japan', 5 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 433-4 and 438.

¹⁵² Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 55-58.

against Japan.¹⁵³ Eden also stressed that London would not consider sanctions without American participation – it would be a joint endeavour or nothing. Dispiritingly, Washington poured cold water on Eden's approach, once again reinforcing Chamberlain's belief that she was a long way from becoming a useful partner in world affairs.

Yet, within a week, Roosevelt's Chicago Speech rocked the world and reignited debate in London as to the wisdom and plausibility of sanctions, especially now that Washington's involvement seemed more likely – *if* one interpreted the term "quarantine" to mean sanctions.¹⁵⁴ As mentioned, fuel was added to the fire the following day as the League called for a conference of the Nine Power Treaty nations to be held on 3 November 1937 to settle the Sino-Japanese conflict.¹⁵⁵ The conference in Brussels was immediately billed by the press as the launchpad for economic sanctions against the Japanese.

Eden was equally excited, informing the Cabinet on 13 October that these new developments represented 'a most important new factor in the situation'. He emphasised that American participation was a vital pre-condition for the strategy of sanctions given the grave danger of Japanese retaliation, and advised that this strategy could only be risked if Roosevelt agreed to support them 'by the use of force'.¹⁵⁶ On the same day, a spirited debate erupted in the Foreign Office on the same question of sanctions.¹⁵⁷ Jebb was the dominant voice in favour of sanctions. Whilst recognising the risk of Japanese military retaliation, he claimed that the advantages of joint action with America 'would be enormous' – it would not only make Washington an 'active partner in world policy' in peacetime, but also an ally in wartime.¹⁵⁸ Jebb also cautioned his peers that British tepidness on the issue of

¹⁵³ Foreign Office to Mallet, telegram, 30 September 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 355.

¹⁵⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 62.

¹⁵⁵ Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 417.

¹⁵⁶ Eden, Extract of Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 392

¹⁵⁷ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 69.

¹⁵⁸ Clive to Foreign Office, 9 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 474.

sanctions might dishearten Washington and cause her to retreat back into her 'isolationist shell'.¹⁵⁹ Vansittart and Eden wholeheartedly agreed, the latter ardently warning against a 'lukewarm' response as it 'might fatally impair the goodwill of President Roosevelt, and we should be made to appear once more as having rebuffed an American offer of cooperation as in the case of Manchukuo'.¹⁶⁰

Yet, those against sanctions were well-armed with a memorandum by J.W. Nicholls, which warned that Britain did not just require American support to impose effective sanctions, but also that of Belgium, Russia, Egypt, Sweden, France, Brazil and Argentina, and even then Japan would 'still possess enough oil for her fleet, food for her soldiers and sailors, and ammunition for her guns'.¹⁶¹ Given Japan's ability to retaliate, Orde wondered whether America realised just how dangerous sanctions might be – especially following Senator's Pittman's alarming remark on 12 October that sanctions could be imposed without risking war.¹⁶² In any case, Orde doubted whether Washington would involve herself, given her adherence to isolationism and recent, anti-collaborative track record, which had seen her almost systematically refuse to partner with London in East Asia.¹⁶³

The time it would take for sanctions to hurt Japan was also a concern. Could Britain spare the Royal Navy for at least eighteen months to cripple Japan whilst Europe and the Mediterranean remained so volatile; and could sanctions 'operate in time to save China, whose collapse appeared possible' within several months with the Japanese armies presently 'rolling up the Chinese'?¹⁶⁴ Another risk was that Japan might increase her military and economic pressure against China 'to resolve war quickly

¹⁵⁹ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁰ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 10 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 465.

¹⁶¹ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 66.

¹⁶² Orde, minute, 5 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 367; Mallet to Eden, telegram, 12 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 387; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 69.

¹⁶³ Orde, minute, 5 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 367.

¹⁶⁴ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 391.

before sanctions could take effect'.¹⁶⁵ Finally, there was the potential damage to Dominion trade, specifically Australian wool, Malayan rubber and Indian cotton and jute, all of which were heavily exported to Japan.¹⁶⁶

Whilst Chamberlain and Eden jointly accepted that 'it was impossible to put in force *effective* sanctions without a risk of war', which could be sparked by an attack on Hong Kong, the Philippines or the East Indies, they deviated on whether those risks were acceptable.¹⁶⁷ 'There is a divergence between A.E. [Eden] and P.M. [Chamberlain] as latter is strongly opposed to any sort of economic boycott in the Far East even with the U.S.A.,' wrote Eden's private secretary, Oliver Harvey. 'A.E. on the other hand would welcome joint action with U.S.A.'¹⁶⁸ The Admiralty sided with Chamberlain, agreeing with his comments to the Cabinet that he 'could not imagine anything more suicidal than to pick a quarrel with Japan... when the European situation had become so serious'.¹⁶⁹ The Admiralty and Air Ministry both sent strongly-worded letters to the Foreign Office, cautioning that America was unlikely to offer military assistance if Japan retaliated.¹⁷⁰ As previously mentioned, the British military elite were fully conscious of America's depleted armed forces and her resulting inability to fight a war in the Far East. The Cabinet also supported Chamberlain's stance against sanctions on 13 October.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, Lindsay had warned Eden months previously that America's involvement in 'such an embargo is

¹⁶⁵ 'Report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War on Economic Sanctions Against Japan', 5 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 434.

¹⁶⁶ 'Report of the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War on Economic Sanctions Against Japan', 5 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 442.

¹⁶⁷ Extract from Oliver Harvey's Diary, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 363.

¹⁶⁸ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 391.

¹⁶⁹ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 6 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 377.

¹⁷⁰ S.H. Phillips (Admiralty) to Foreign Office, 4 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 364-6; Orde, minute, 5 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 367.

¹⁷¹ Medlicott, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. xv.

impossible without legislation and idea that Congress, just emerging from a bitter five months' battle over Supreme Court, should now take up such a thorny topic as neutrality is not worth a moment's consideration' and should be dismissed immediately as 'nonsense'.¹⁷² Roosevelt was evidently constrained by two factors: America's political isolationism and her military weakness. He would not be free to act until *both* these hindrances were removed.

Despite mounting opposition, Eden was determined to sound out Washington's attitude towards joint sanctions. On 18 October, he told Mallet that he wished to discuss any concerted action that Washington might be contemplating, but also warned that economic sanctions could spark a war with Japan. Thus, London would only risk the consequences of sanctions if American military support was guaranteed.¹⁷³ Once again, however, Hull strongly intimated 'that the American Government would not resort to economic sanctions'.¹⁷⁴ Hearing this news, the Cabinet concluded that the possibility of Roosevelt proposing sanctions could be 'safely discounted'.¹⁷⁵ Far from Chamberlain putting a dampener on Roosevelt's Chicago Speech, as Ruggiero claims, it was Washington that swiftly ruled out sanctions.¹⁷⁶

Despite Hull's negative reply, behind closed doors the White House was quietly contemplating strong counter-measures, should Japan prove obstructive at the forthcoming Brussels Conference. Whilst American public opinion was unlikely to favour sanctions at the present time, the Roosevelt Administration placed great importance on the conference as a tool to educate public opinion into a more cooperative stance.¹⁷⁷ On 12 October, Roosevelt told Davies that 'if Japan refused to

¹⁷² Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 23 July 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 188.

¹⁷³ Eden to Mallet, telegram, 18 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 400; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 70.

¹⁷⁴ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 535.

¹⁷⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 71.

¹⁷⁶ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁷ Clive (Brussels) to Foreign Office, telegram, 3 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 421; Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 28 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 413.

be reasonable [at Brussels] and persisted in a determination to dismember and conquer China, public opinion of the world and of the United States by that time would most probably demand that something be done'.¹⁷⁸ Roosevelt was increasingly adamant that Washington could not just 'pack up and come home and drop the matter', but would have to 'consider taking further steps' such as quarantining Japan.¹⁷⁹

Yet, only a week later, Eden was told that Washington did 'not intend to be drawn into discussion of sanctions' at Brussels 'and did not favour that option *ipso facto*'.¹⁸⁰ Ominously, it was observed that the American delegation to Brussels did not even include an economic expert, which was necessary when considering economic sanctions.¹⁸¹ Three days later, the stakes were raised significantly as Japan declared that she would neither attend the conference nor accept foreign mediation.¹⁸² Even this did not change Washington's opposition to sanctions to London's dismay. Cadogan lamented, 'it is difficult to see exactly how the Brussels Conference can proceed' if Washington will not even discuss economic sanctions, whilst Eden commented, 'I am more and more in doubt as to what this conference can achieve'.¹⁸³ Once again, Roosevelt's desire to broker a peace had raced ahead of his military and political circumstances. Sooner or later, these circumstances always forced him to backtrack on his peace schemes.

On the eve of the Brussels Conference, the President sent a message to Eden that Washington would not be pressured by London into assuming the lead at the upcoming conference. Angrily, he warned that Eden's attempt 'to pin the United

¹⁷⁸ Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 238.

¹⁷⁹ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 151; Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 252.

¹⁸⁰ Mallet to Eden, telegram, 19 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 403.

¹⁸¹ Mallet to Eden, telegram, 19 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 403.

¹⁸² Cadogan, memorandum, 22 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 406; Clive to Eden, telegram, 12 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 472.

¹⁸³ Eden, minute, 26 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 410; Cadogan, memorandum, 22 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 406.

States down to a specific statement as to how far it would go, and precisely what the President meant by his Chicago speech, was objectionable and damaging'.¹⁸⁴ Roosevelt then criticised Britain, France and Holland for behaving 'like scared rabbits' in the Far East.¹⁸⁵ This was a most ironic description since Roosevelt wished to replicate at Brussels the model of the Buenos Aires Conference of 1936, where America 'had not played any role publicly greater than that of the smallest state present'.¹⁸⁶ Astonishingly, Roosevelt then warned Eden not to take the lead at Brussels either for this would also 'prove embarrassing for the United States,' especially as 'the Administration was frequently accused of being dragged along at Britain's tail'. A hapless Eden could only retort to Roosevelt's messenger that the smaller powers 'might be too shy to take the lead in such a serious situation'.¹⁸⁷

The President's message to Eden was reminiscent of the anti-collaborative and acrimonious Anglo-American relations of previous decades. As the world turned their attentions to Brussels to see if the great democracies would restrain Japan, Roosevelt's untimely retreat to the shadows threatened to catalyse the collapse of any semblance of a global democratic order. Roosevelt's retreat was tragically compounded by Hull's refusal to attend the conference.¹⁸⁸ Instead, Washington sent Davies, Hornbeck and Moffat as a three-man delegation. Davies was the President's man, always willing to do his bidding and, significantly, had helped to draft the Quarantine Speech. Moffat was a vehement isolationist and an expert in European politics, whilst Hornbeck was a passionate interventionist and an expert in Far Eastern affairs.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 150.

¹⁸⁵ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 28 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 413

¹⁸⁶ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 150.

¹⁸⁷ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 28 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 414.

¹⁸⁸ Eden to Mallet, telegram, 8 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 384; Mallet to Eden, telegram, 12 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 388.

¹⁸⁹ Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 242; Borg, 'Notes on Roosevelt's "Quarantine" speech', p. 413.

Given Washington's reluctance to consider sanctions in the run up to the Brussels Conference, Eden was surprised to find the US delegation pushing for action once the conference convened on 3 November 1937. In private discussions behind closed doors, Davies suggested several ideas to Eden to pressure the Japanese, including the non-recognition of Japanese territorial gains, the selling of armaments to China, and the rejection of any Japanese requests for financial credits – though he would need Roosevelt's permission before these ideas could be suggested publicly. Davies also suggested that whilst Congress might block the imposition of economic sanctions, America could 'just refuse to buy Japanese goods, that's what we'll do'.¹⁹⁰ Eden was pleased with Davies' suggestions, but warned that sanctions might provoke a conflict with Japan and so prior security guarantees between London and Washington would be necessary.

Despite America's military weakness, which had recently led to War Plan Orange being scrapped altogether, Davies and Hornbeck were convinced that Eden was unduly 'overestimating the power of Japan', which 'would never dare to attack' Hong Kong or the Philippines 'while she had a dispute such as this on her hands'.¹⁹¹ The British were concerned by this attitude, fearing that if Washington did not realise the risks of sanctions, they might retreat from any resulting war out of military and political unpreparedness, abandoning Britain to fight Japan singlehandedly. Eden was also apprehensive that Davies' "refuse to buy" scheme was an *ineffective* economic sanction, which would antagonise Japan but would not compel her into peace negotiations. However, Eden was willing to consider this measure purely to foster

¹⁹⁰ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 6 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 452; Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 473.

¹⁹¹ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 3 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 421; Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 9 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 459.

Anglo-American cooperation.¹⁹² Chamberlain, however, was not, and warned Eden, 'on no account will I impose a sanction'.¹⁹³

To complicate matters, the French, Russian and Dutch delegations informed Eden that they would support sanctions if Washington and London would guarantee their possessions against a Japanese attack.¹⁹⁴ Litvinov, the Russian Foreign Minister, frankly warned Eden that the peace-loving powers must 'combine their action or [else] Germany, Italy and Japan would one day virtually dominate the world', and Britain and France 'would be reduced to playing the role of second-class powers'.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, Delbos promised Eden that 'France was ready to cooperate to the utmost of her available resources' and 'would do anything under a mutual guarantee by Great Britain and the United States'.¹⁹⁶ With Eden and Davies also keen on sanctions, only the consent of Roosevelt and Chamberlain stood in the way of a response by the global democratic order.

In Davies' opinion, American public opinion appeared to be the greatest hindrance on Roosevelt. He told Eden that he was 'convinced that President Roosevelt would be anxious to take some action in this conflict' and hoped that, if the Japanese continued to be recalcitrant, US public opinion would swiftly shift to 'support' a policy of sanctions.¹⁹⁷ Davies added that this shift had already begun, citing the drift of the traditionally-isolationist Midwest newspapers towards intervention and

¹⁹² Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 6 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 452.

¹⁹³ Record of Conversation between Eden and Chamberlain, 8 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 453.

¹⁹⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 83.

¹⁹⁵ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 9 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 457.

¹⁹⁶ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 10 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 468; Phipps to Eden, 20 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 517.

¹⁹⁷ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 9 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 459; Clive to Lindsay, telegram, 10 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 465.

internationalism.¹⁹⁸ However, upon hearing this claim, Orde commented, 'I find difficulty in believing it'.¹⁹⁹

As Davies waited for the green light from Washington to implement his schemes, the Foreign Office debated the wisdom of ineffective economic sanctions, reaching the conclusion that they were worthwhile, despite being impractical, if only to foster collaboration with Washington. A shift in Anglo-American relations from friendship to partnership could be paramount for the defence of the established order from totalitarianism. It was decided that Davies' various schemes should be encouraged, particularly the "refuse to buy" scheme, but only if Washington was willing to guarantee British possessions in the Far East.²⁰⁰

Yet, Lindsay tried to dampen Eden's hopes, sceptically commenting that Davies and Hornbeck certainly have 'plans for putting further pressure on Japan just as the American General Staff has plans for the invasion of Canada but... neither has yet come out of the pigeon hole'.²⁰¹ In fact, most of the Foreign Office was 'not convinced that Davies represented the views of his government when he talked of sanctioning Japan', with Holman warning that Davies had 'an unfortunate tendency of being over optimistic, vague and most misleading in any official talks, no matter what they concerned'.²⁰² 'We shall no doubt start off bravely and tell America that we will go with them all the way they wish to go,' predicted Thomas Jones, an advisor to Chamberlain, 'but do they want to go beyond Hawaii? Not they'.²⁰³

After digging into the matter in Washington, Lindsay reported to Eden that 'sanctions, whether mild or severe, are hardly in the atmosphere at all and the only talk [in Washington] is about some form of purely private boycott of Japanese goods and I

¹⁹⁸ Clive to Eden, telegram, 8 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 454.

¹⁹⁹ Orde, minute, 8 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 454.

²⁰⁰ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 9 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 458-60 and 474-5.

²⁰¹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 6 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 449.

²⁰² Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 81-2.

²⁰³ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 42.

have no reason to think even this is seriously thought of in official circles'.²⁰⁴ Meanwhile, at a meeting between Dominion and British delegates at Brussels, 'doubts' were expressed about whether the USA would follow through on Davies' schemes to pressure Japan, since they would require the passage of legislation through Congress.²⁰⁵

Just as the sceptics anticipated, Washington dashed Eden's hopes for sanctions against Japan. Having caught wind of Davies' schemes to pressure Japan, Hull instructed him that 'none of these measures envisaged should be proposed'.²⁰⁶ In fact, Davies was told that the conference should take no positive steps whatsoever, and that he should initiate 'nothing more than platitudes'.²⁰⁷ To Davies' surprise, Roosevelt refused to 'override' Hull's instructions.²⁰⁸ Yet again, the American alternative to appeasement proved to be a mirage. Feeling bruised and bewildered after his many conversations with Roosevelt to the contrary, Davies told Eden that Washington would not even consider mild sanctions, such as non-recognition or the refusal of financial credits, yet alone economic sanctions.²⁰⁹

Revealingly, Welles informed Lindsay that the American delegation had received instructions all along 'to do no more than explore' the option of sanctions, and had since been clearly told that Washington did not support Davies' ideas to pressure Japan.²¹⁰ Davies had exceeded his mandate and the most America would permit was the establishment of a committee to explore future possibilities.²¹¹ Upon hearing this

²⁰⁴ Lindsay to Clive, telegram, 11 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 496.

²⁰⁵ Clive to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 475.

²⁰⁶ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 14 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 482; Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 254.

²⁰⁷ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 48.

²⁰⁸ Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 254.

²⁰⁹ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 14 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 482; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 191.

²¹⁰ Lindsay to Clive, telegram, 13 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 480.

²¹¹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 16 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 498-9.

news, Chamberlain described the conference as a 'complete waste of time'.²¹² Nevertheless, the conference stumbled on like a wounded animal, eventually publishing two hollow declarations against Japan, before sinking into oblivion. One Foreign Office official could only comment that 'we are not proud of either of the documents which have been produced', whilst the effect of the conference on American public opinion was perceived to be 'nil'.²¹³

Historians unanimously believe that the Brussels Conference 'was a dismal failure', achieving 'the minimum results commensurate with the lowest expectations of success', and 'could scarcely have been in more marked contrast to the Nyon Conference'.²¹⁴ A disillusioned Welles even suggested to Lindsay that 'we should both insist first that the conference had not been a failure and secondly that the Nine Power Treaty was not dead'.²¹⁵ Feeling betrayed by his masters in Washington, Davies blamed them for the conference's failure and retired from Roosevelt's entourage to direct the American Red Cross.²¹⁶

After the failure of the democracies to construct a partnership to sustain the global democratic order, an episode of mutual recriminations erupted between London and Washington. Writing to Davies, Roosevelt furiously protested against being lumped with the blame for the world's inaction against Japan 'when the records show that they [the League] turned down sanctions at Geneva' before the Brussels Conference even convened.²¹⁷ Yet, the refusal of Roosevelt and Chamberlain even to try to collaborate is undisputable. Historians have emphasised Roosevelt's domestic woes to explain his backtracking at Brussels. Indeed, he was facing 'a sharp November downturn in the economy, a special Congressional session to deal with pressing

²¹² Chamberlain, 16 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 482.

²¹³ Clive to Eden, telegram, 22 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 520.

²¹⁴ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 212; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 42; Murfett, *Fool-Proof relations*, p. 85; Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', p. 747.

²¹⁵ Lindsay to Clive, telegram, 13 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 480.

²¹⁶ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 191; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 45.

²¹⁷ Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 150.

domestic legislation (which failed to pass anyway), and a suspected business conspiracy that Roosevelt feared was designed to weaken him', not to mention the isolationism of the American people.²¹⁸ Another explanation must be added for Roosevelt's sudden retreat from sanctions and quarantine – America's military weakness. In light of these facts, the claims of post-revisionist historians, such as Ruggiero, that 'the conference failed' simply because Britain did not give its 'wholehearted support' appears to be a transparent attempt both to tarnish Chamberlain's reputation and simultaneously maintain the illusion that Roosevelt would have collaborated if only asked by Chamberlain.²¹⁹ Indeed, Ruggiero's accusation that Chamberlain 'did everything in his power to discourage an Anglo-American understanding' in the autumn of 1937 seems harsh given the US Government's frequent rejections of Eden's proposals for joint action between July and December 1937.²²⁰

Across the Atlantic, Chamberlain concluded that 'the main lesson to be drawn [from Brussels] was the difficulty of securing effective cooperation from the United States'.²²¹ For him, it was 'always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans but words'.²²² The dismal failure of the Brussels Conference marked the end of Chamberlain's first six months as Prime Minister. His world view upon taking power had been one of discord and anti-collaboration between the democracies, which had shifted from rivalry to friendship in recent years, but seemed a long way from transitioning into partnership. His first six months in power undoubtedly confirmed this pessimistic world view. America had failed to partner with Britain throughout the summer of 1937 to stop the erupting Sino-Japanese conflict, despite numerous proposals from Eden. Likewise, the Americans had refused to consider joint sanctions throughout the autumn months, misleading the British with sensational speeches – such as the Chicago Address – only to retreat into

²¹⁸ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 46; Haight, 'Roosevelt and the Aftermath of the Quarantine Speech', p. 255.

²¹⁹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 61.

²²⁰ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 62.

²²¹ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 24 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 576.

²²² Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 16.

prevarication and silence. This distinct six-month period of non-collaboration culminated with the Brussels Conference. Once again, the Americans gave hints that collaboration was around the corner, only to backtrack.

These disappointments made hollow the regular calls of Churchill and Archibald Sinclair, the leader of the Liberal Party, to prioritise and wholeheartedly pursue 'renewed Anglo-American relations' – and likewise hollow the arguments of orthodox and post-revisionist historians, who unfairly criticise Chamberlain for not pursuing the American option, which under closer inspection has proved to be a mirage.²²³ Indeed, this chapter challenges Kennedy's accusation that Chamberlain's 'attitude and actions ensured an unnecessarily longer period of poisoned Anglo-American relations, especially at the highest level of Treasury to Treasury and then Prime Minister to President, than should have been the case'.²²⁴ In fact, Roosevelt's attitude and actions seem more to blame.

Only a matter of days after the Brussels Conference ended in failure, the COS advised Chamberlain that Britain either needed to appease her enemies or increase her number of friends.²²⁵ Chamberlain's newly cemented view of a dysfunctional international community convinced him that an alliance-building alternative was beyond reach. Appeasement, in his eyes, quite understandably appeared to be the most promising path to a lasting peace, especially since Hitler and Mussolini continued to intimate their openness to a European settlement, should certain political and economic demands be met – most of which were regarded as reasonable by the British. Moreover, as long as a lasting peace in Europe could be found, Britain believed herself more than capable of dealing with Japan.

²²³ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 153.

²²⁴ Kennedy, 'Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the United States during his Chancellorship', p. 114.

²²⁵ Cabinet Conclusions of 8 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 655; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

7

France's True Nadir

As these ructions beset the Far East, Chamberlain was also concerned about France's reputation as a great power, which had been in freefall since the mid-1930s as her economic woes, financial fragility, woeful rearmament effort, political volatility and ideological division undermined her influence in Europe.¹ Stedman claims that 'the rationale' for Chamberlain's appeasement policy 'can only be understood when the strengths and weaknesses of the other options he considered are analysed'. A key component of all the other options was deep collaboration with France, a nation which 'was widely viewed as Britain's closest friend and most important neighbour and was the one country that was almost always considered a constituent member of any alliance system envisaged'.²

British apprehensions concerning France reached fever-pitch in 1937 and 1938 – especially concerning France's aerial weakness and dire aircraft production capacity compared to Germany – in what became known as the "pessimistic years". This was France's 'true nadir'.³ Ruggerio claims that the weaknesses of the three great democracies and structural constraints weighing upon them 'were not as insurmountable as alleged by Chamberlain and the revisionists'.⁴ Yet, British intelligence on France's plummeting economic, financial, political, social and military situation begged to differ and proved paramount in Chamberlain's decision to prioritise appeasement over collective security as the best method of securing Britain's survival. Aptly, Neville claims that 'a Grand Alliance was an impressive concept, but its component parts seemed to be defective'.⁵ This chapter is an in-depth analysis of France's defectiveness.

¹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 46.

² Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 6 and 125-6.

³ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 245.

⁴ Ruggerio, *Hitler's enabler*, p. 5.

⁵ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 123.

'The trouble is that however strong France may really be,' analysed one Foreign Office official, 'the outward and visible signs which she at present displays are those of weakness rather than strength'.⁶ Two days after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident of 7 July, Chamberlain frankly told the CID that 'we could not at the present moment count on any very effective support from France' in the Mediterranean should the Royal Navy be despatched to Singapore, as France was 'not in a very strong position to give us much help'.⁷ Eden, Hoare, Cooper, Hore-Belisha, Simon and Zetland all shared the Prime Minister's conviction. The British Ambassador to Paris even declared that France's interminable economic problems had 'reduced France to the status of "*quantité négligeable*" in the councils of nations'.⁸ The White House also received news of 'France's internal weakness and diminished prestige' from its representatives in Europe, leaving Roosevelt in a pit of despair.⁹ These economic, financial, military and political convulsions in Paris 'convinced British Conservatives that little was to be gained by cooperating too closely with an unreliable and unstable France'.¹⁰

Economically, France continued to be ravaged by the Great Depression throughout 1937.¹¹ The rate of industrial production plummeted, the alarming fall catalysed by widespread industrial strikes, skilled labour shortages, Trade Union interference, and the 40-hour working week. These problems were greatly exacerbated by antiquated methods of production and a lack of investment for the modernisation of industrial plant and agricultural machinery.¹² France's share of the global export market plummeted to half of its value of 1929, creating a trade deficit, aggravated by France's dependence on raw material imports.¹³ From September 1936, Blum tried to combat this trade deficit by devaluing the franc to increase export demand.¹⁴

⁶ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations Before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 129; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 69.

⁷ Inskip, 'The Mediterranean: Assumptions to Govern Defensive Preparations', 9 July 1937, CAB 24/270/28

⁸ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 168.

⁹ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 76.

¹⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 69.

¹¹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 60.

¹² Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, pp. 167-8.

¹³ Young, *In Command of France*, pp. 22-3.

¹⁴ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

However, a year on, the British EAC observed that French industrial production appeared to have received 'extraordinarily little benefit' from the franc devaluation.¹⁵ Ambassador Phipps explained that the devaluation was supposed to encourage higher wages, spending, demand for goods and production. However, the prices of goods had risen as fast as wages, whilst production costs had also risen as a consequence of Blum's controversial social reforms, which meant that France's industries 'have not gained the competitive advantages that was hoped from devaluation'.¹⁶ According to Imlay, these economic maelstroms 'exacerbated social tensions' as France's workers and employers 'sought to shift... the economic burden of depression and rearmament onto the other'.¹⁷ France's disastrous slump was impossible for the British to ignore now that war was primarily perceived as a macroeconomic struggle between nations, and the economy regarded as the fourth arm of defence.

France also had to weather a succession of financial storms.¹⁸ Since 1935, France had suffered from a haemorrhaging of capital as investors lost confidence and sent 1.5 billion dollars overseas, halving France's gold reserves to 81 milliards.¹⁹ The Blum Government was thus engulfed with 'the fight to save the franc'.²⁰ Observing this crisis, Chamberlain commented that France was 'in a terribly weak position being continually subject to attacks on the franc & flight of capital together with industrial troubles & discontent'.²¹ He feared this would obstruct her rearmament effort and compound her weak appearance, whetting the totalitarians' appetite for a foreign adventure.

As the Foreign Office contemplated how to help Paris financially, one official advised that Britain should do all she can, but warned that 'the remedy, I fear, lies with the French themselves, since fundamentally it is matter of faith in the future, and it is

¹⁵ Economic Advisory Council, 'Twenty-third Report of Committee on Economic Information: Survey of the Economic Situation for October 1937', 25 November 1937, CAB 24/273/12

¹⁶ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁷ Imlay, 'Paul Reynaud and France's Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940', p. 501.

¹⁸ Imlay, 'Paul Reynaud and France's Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940', p. 500.

¹⁹ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 166; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 65.

²⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. xiii.

²¹ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 77.

precisely this faith which is completely lacking in the French financial world at the present time'.²² Meanwhile, in the White House, Morgenthau could only harshly advise Roosevelt that lending money to France was 'just flowing money into the Atlantic' and that 'someone had to tell the French that they were a bankrupt, fourth class power'.²³

Despite Morgenthau's reservations, London and Washington loyally supported Blum's endeavours to restore financial confidence through a policy of devaluation, but to little avail.²⁴ The financial crisis raged on and Blum was duly replaced by Chautemps in the summer.²⁵ However, the maelstrom continued relentlessly, with the British EAC reporting in November 1937 that 'the export of French capital has continued on a very substantial scale throughout the year'.²⁶ Indeed, the franc had been in free-fall after the financial community wrongly predicted sweeping Communist gains in the local French autumn elections. The franc stabilised as Chautemps united several political factions to save the nation from financial collapse.²⁷

Yet, there were also grounds for optimism. First and foremost, Ambassador Phipps emphasised that despite all France's domestic troubles, the Germans and Italians were facing equally severe economic and financial difficulties, though their rearmament efforts had not yet been affected.²⁸ The economic situation was also gradually improving in France, with unemployment and industrial unrest falling throughout the year.²⁹ Phipps noted that, whilst sporadic strikes were still ongoing, 'practically the whole of the million men who had been on strike when M. Blum came

²² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 70.

²³ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 15.

²⁴ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, pp. 72-3.

²⁵ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 160.

²⁶ Economic Advisory Council, 'Twenty-third Report of Committee on Economic Information: Survey of the Economic Situation for October 1937', 25 November 1937, CAB 24/273/12

²⁷ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

²⁸ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 75.

²⁹ Economic Advisory Council, 'Twenty-third Report of Committee on Economic Information: Survey of the Economic Situation for October 1937', 25 November 1937, CAB 24/273/12

into power had returned to work'.³⁰ Nevertheless, overall, France's financial position and economy were seen as alarmingly weak, impacting rearmament and aggravating social tensions.

Alongside her financial woes, France also had an unfortunate 'reputation for political instability', which 'undermined her credibility as a great power'.³¹ In total, France had 23 governments during the 1930s, the administrations falling like leaves in autumn.³² Meanwhile, during the Rhineland and *Anschluss* crises, France respectively had either a caretaker administration or no sitting government whatsoever.³³ According to Jordan, the 'instability of individual ministries... created destructive impressions abroad'.³⁴ This was undoubtedly the case in London and Washington. In January 1938, the French Ambassador to London warned that 'the persistence of our internal quarrels' was greatly damaging British perceptions. It was on these grounds that the British Government rebuffed his request for Anglo-French ministerial conversations in January 1938, claiming that such conversations were 'useless until the days of transitional French Governments were over'.³⁵ Likewise, Chamberlain quipped that Paris was neither able to 'keep a secret for more than half an hour, nor a government for more than nine months'.³⁶

Whilst France undoubtedly suffered from political instability throughout the 1930s, revisionists have argued that this weakness has been exaggerated by historians. 'The numerous Cabinet changes in the early and mid-1930s,' claims Ross, 'were more a matter of redistributing portfolios than of fundamental political changes', with the same men essentially sitting in different chairs around the cabinet table.³⁷ Meanwhile, from mid-1936 to 1940 only three men held the premiership: Blum, Chautemps and Daladier. The latter two were highly experienced, with Daladier

³⁰ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

³¹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 28.

³² Alexander, 'The Military Consequences for France of the End of Locarno,' p. 567; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 91; Carley, 'Down a Blind Alley: Anglo-French-Soviet Relations, 1920-1939', p. 157.

³³ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 171; Zeiner, *triumph of the Dark*, p. 158;

³⁴ Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 3.

³⁵ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 74 and 84.

³⁶ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 76.

³⁷ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 138; Rostov, *Anglo-French Relations*, p. 56.

having served in twelve cabinets and twice previously as premier, with Chautemps also boasting similar political credentials.³⁸ Adamwraithe even claims that ministerial crisis in Paris was actually 'a technique of government, concealing a basic continuity of personnel'.³⁹ Thus, after Clemenceau was criticised for bringing down so many governments, he quipped that they were all the same.⁴⁰

There were many other significant political continuities. France had one President from 1932 to 1939, one secretary general at the Quai d'Orsay from 1933 to 1940, and the 'legendary permanence' of General Gamelin and Marshal Pétain at the pinnacle of the French military elite.⁴¹ Meanwhile, Daladier dominated French defence, serving as Army Minister, National Defence Minister, and the Chairman of the Supreme Defence Council from the mid-1930s, his grip on defence matters similar to that of Blomberg, Mussolini, Inskip and Vorisilov in Berlin, Rome, London and Moscow respectively.⁴² Moreover, when France's political instability in the 1930s is contextualised against the interminable instability of the Third Republic across its lifespan between 1871 and 1940, it actually appears distinctly ordinary. During these 69 years, there were 86 changes in the premiership – one every nine-and-a-half months on average. Political instability thus appears to have been part of the very fabric of France. However, this fact did not stop France's political reputation from being damaged abroad or her friends from becoming frustrated with her untimely government collapses.

Alongside this political instability, successive French administrations had to combat a widening ideological split within French society. As Blum took power the boiling waters overflowed: 'there were strikes, occupations of factories, street demonstrations, and a general atmosphere of Left-wing euphoria and Right-wing alarm'.⁴³ Simultaneously, the Spanish Civil War erupted and soon became a

³⁸ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 138.

³⁹ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 9.

⁴⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 9.

⁴¹ Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 3; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 9 and 187.

⁴² Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 161.

⁴³ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 171 and 207.

microcosm for the conflict of ideologies raging across Europe between communism, fascism and democracy.⁴⁴ It duly 'fanned the flames of class-conflict in France'.⁴⁵

'She is inoculated with the virus of communism,' Hankey wrote to Vansittart, 'which is at present rotting the body politic, delaying much needed rearmament and causing acute internal dissension'.⁴⁶ Right-wing extremists were equally troublesome, responsible for various acts of violence and domestic terrorism. In February 1936, they even attacked Blum, pulling him from his car and beating him savagely.⁴⁷ 'Better Hitler than Blum' proclaimed a popular Right-wing slogan, as fears rose of a communist coup or violent uprising in Paris.⁴⁸ These anxieties spiked following unexpected communist gains in the April-May elections of 1936, which saw their representation in the chamber increase sevenfold. Simultaneously, the French elected their first ever socialist government and swarmed to the streets in their millions to strike.⁴⁹ These events appeared almost apocalyptic to the Right-wing.

In March 1937, this class conflict reached fever pitch with the Clichy Riots, which were sparked by the French police as they sought to stop a 10,000 strong communist demonstration. The police opened fire on the unsuspecting crowd, killing seven and wounding several hundred. The communists rose up in retaliation, rioting, protesting and striking. Blum's failure sufficiently to clamp down on these communist disturbances undermined the public's confidence in him and sealed his downfall.⁵⁰

According to Jordan, this class war was also responsible for destroying two pillars of France's security system: her military friendships with Soviet Russia and Fascist Italy.⁵¹ The majority of the French military elite sympathised with the Right-wing, fearing Russian interference in French politics, a Moscow-inspired communist coup and

⁴⁴ Frank, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 368.

⁴⁵ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 15, 26 and 42; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 207.

⁴⁶ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 106; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 168.

⁴⁷ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 155; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 151; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 26.

⁴⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁵⁰ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁵¹ Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 309.

communist agitation within the army. Unsurprisingly, as class tensions reached boiling-point, they opposed Blum's attempts to strengthen France's military ties with Russia.⁵² Simultaneously, Blum's Left-wing government found itself on ideological grounds unable to mend fences with Fascist Italy in the aftermath of the Abyssinian Crisis.⁵³ France's class war – and Stalin's abhorrent purges – destroyed Churchill's hopes for a grand alliance between London, Paris and Moscow and Gamelin's hopes for a southern military front against Germany, built around Rome. Chamberlain bitterly recognised that if he was to embrace a strategy of collective security over appeasement to ensure Britain's short-term survival, the only option open to him was a democratic axis between London, Paris and Washington – an option which was undermined by his acute awareness of France's internal woes and military weaknesses, not to mention America's political and military restraints.

The British rejoiced in the rupture in Paris-Moscow relations, whilst mourning the rupture in Paris-Rome relations. Ambassador Phipps observed that Moscow's sponsorship of the French Communist Party had considerably strained Franco-Russian relations, whilst the Russian purges 'disgusted military and political circles, who viewed with dismay the consequent weakening of Russia as an ally in the event of war'. The Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935 had also become a dead letter militarily-speaking, with the French military establishment stiffly opposed to turning it into something meaningful. However, they would not scrap it either, valuing it as a tool for preventing a Germano-Russian rapprochement.⁵⁴

Meanwhile, Phipps alarmingly observed that Franco-Italian relations had 'became progressively worse during 1937'.⁵⁵ Mussolini had made it clear that any political

⁵² *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; P. Buffotot, 'The French High Command and the Franco-Soviet Alliance, 1933-1939', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 5 (1982), pp. 546-559 (p. 548-9); Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 146; Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-1937', p. 229; Carley, 'Down a Blind Alley: Anglo-Franco-Soviet Relations, 1920-1939', p. 161; Adamwraith, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 47.

⁵³ Young, *In Command of France*, pp. 136-7; Salerno, 'Britain, France and the Emerging Italian Threat, 1935-1938', p. 76; Jackson, 'French Intelligence and Hitler's Rise to Power', p. 820.

⁵⁴ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁵⁵ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

rapprochement 'depended on Blum's acceptance of a Francoist regime in Spain' and his recognition of an annexed Abyssinia.⁵⁶ A diplomatic stand-off therefore ensued, with neither France nor Italy replacing their ambassadors to Rome and Paris after their respective retirements in November 1936 until October 1938.⁵⁷ As Italy rescinded her League membership in 1937, the French Right-wing finally disowned Mussolini. All the while, 'press polemics between the two countries continued almost unabated'. Whilst Germany was more feared in Paris, Ambassador Phipps noted that Italy drew 'greater resentment, and the irresponsibility of her actions was felt to be a more immediate danger to peace'.⁵⁸ Within two years, France had thus become estranged from both Russia and Italy, despite them having been close associates in the early 1930s.

Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia also drifted away from France, the powers unanimously rejecting France's proposal for a quadruple military pact on 2 April 1937, leaving France isolated on the continent, despite her long-term effort to construct a European alliance network.⁵⁹ Herriot pessimistically claimed that France, with her population of 40 million people, could 'no longer regard herself as a great power of sufficient military strength or human resources to maintain her position in Central or Eastern Europe and bring effective support to her allies'.⁶⁰ By the winter of 1937-38, France's complex security system had completely shattered. Italy, Russia, Spain, Belgium, Romania and Yugoslavia could no longer be relied upon, with some even becoming a menace to France. Meanwhile, Britain and America seemed no closer to embracing collective security.

Indeed, Britain was fully aware of the many domestic troubles that were smearing France's reputation. However, a section of the political establishment in London,

⁵⁶ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 135.

⁵⁷ Eden, 'The Present Phase in Anglo-Italian Relations and the Question of the Final Recognition of Italian Sovereignty in Abyssinia', memorandum, 2 September 1927, CAB 24/271/10; Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, p. 310.

⁵⁸ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁵⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, pp. 46-47; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 249.

⁶⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 61.

including Ambassador Clerk, believed that 'France possessed an underlying strength that would ultimately enable the country to overcome its internal problems'. Thus, although Frank Ashton-Gwatkin of the Foreign Office admitted that London's economic intelligence on Paris suggests 'muddle and mismanagement running through the whole of the French economy from Government finance downward', he countered that, 'next to the U.K. and the U.S.A., no country has greater resources of all kinds'.⁶¹

Similarly, Ambassador Phipps proclaimed in 1937 that 'it would be foolish to deny her abiding vitality or under-rate her fundamental strength', which had allowed her to overcome numerous difficult political tests in past decades that 'elsewhere led to dictatorship'.⁶² Instead of resorting to extreme or violent action, leaders such as Blum, Delbos and Harriot had called for 'greater national unity' as each difficulty arose.⁶³ Meanwhile, the French had impressively 'maintained an immensely powerful army, the second, perhaps even the first, in Europe, highly efficient and free from political interference'.⁶⁴

In a rebuttal to those who painted France as a decrepit, second-rate power, Phipps commented that 'France is neither dominated by communist views, nor trembling on the verge of revolution. Nor is she weak'. On the contrary, the French, 'unlike the Germans or the Russians, decline to be slaves' and will undoubtedly 'fight again as magnificently as before, to preserve that freedom'.⁶⁵ For Ambassador Phipps, France thus remained a valuable partner on the world stage, despite her domestic woes. Whether Chamberlain would be influenced by this passionate defence of France's latent strength – whether he could overlook France's almost-interminable domestic crises and military troubles – remained to be seen.

Alongside this underlying strength, the British also held an increasingly high opinion of Blum's Popular Front Government, which seemed intent on rearmament despite the nation's domestic woes. Eden and Chamberlain were especially impressed with Blum

⁶¹ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 69.

⁶² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 75.

⁶³ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁶⁴ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 75.

⁶⁵ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

himself.⁶⁶ Likewise, *The Times* newspaper described him as a 'brilliant' politician, who 'stands out as an oasis in a desert of incompetence'.⁶⁷ Ambassador Clerk was equally impressed, reporting that France owes her swiftly improving situation 'to the skill and courage displayed by M. Blum', whilst Europe is 'indebted to his wisdom' of introducing a non-intervention pact for preventing an escalation of the Spanish Civil War. According to Clerk, 'even Blum's opponents now pay him reluctant tributes of admiration'.⁶⁸

London was won over completely by Blum's bold sponsorship of 'the biggest arms programme ever attempted by a French Government in peacetime'.⁶⁹ 'Without the creation of the new coordinating Ministry for War *and* National Defence,' remarks Young, referencing Blum's achievements, 'without the fourteen billion franc programme, and without a revitalised war industry... it is doubtful whether France could have rearmed as quickly and as well as it did'.⁷⁰ Before long, an impressed Foreign Office began to warn of the 'very serious consequences' which 'the collapse of the Blum Government would undoubtedly have for British foreign policy'.⁷¹

Despite all Blum's achievements, the British 'preferred the new government under Chautemps,' and were impressed by Bonnet's radical measures to restore financial confidence in the winter of 1937-38.⁷² Chamberlain and Eden were also impressed with Chautemps at the Anglo-French Ministerial Conversations in November 1937, where Chautemps agreed to follow Chamberlain's plan to appease Germany and Italy by exchanging colonies for a peace settlement.⁷³ Afterwards, Chamberlain wrote that the conference 'really was, for once, as successful as the papers reported it', whilst Sargent remarked that 'it all went happily as a marriage bell'.⁷⁴ This was a most

⁶⁶ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 207.

⁶⁷ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 72.

⁶⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁶⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 160.

⁷⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 187.

⁷¹ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 70.

⁷² *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 204.

⁷³ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 67.

⁷⁴ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 63.

welcomed change to the 'normally quite poor' relations that were only somewhat masked by 'the usual lip-service paid in public statements to Anglo-French unity'. Indeed, during the Chamberlain years, Daladier 'described Chamberlain as a "desiccated stick', Eden as a "young idiot", the King as a "moron", and England in general as "feeble and senile"', sentiments which were no doubt reciprocated by British leaders.⁷⁵ However, the willingness of Blum and Chautemps to follow Chamberlain's foreign policy lead throughout 1937 treated the wounds in Anglo-French relations.⁷⁶ By the year's end, Phipps reported over-enthusiastically that intimate collaboration with Britain had become 'the pillar of French foreign policy, and it was considered a matter of encouragement and congratulation [in Paris] that the year closed with this friendship more fully developed and more firmly established than ever before'.⁷⁷

However, this friendship failed to transition into a partnership against the rising aggressive powers. France's alarming domestic woes were exacerbated by exaggerated intelligence on Germany's military strength. The resultingly bleak intelligence picture convinced Chamberlain that he could not oppose the revisionist powers with only France as a diplomatic and military partner. Until Washington was able and willing to make a stand with London and Paris against the revisionist powers, France would be a liability to Britain, capable of dragging Britain into a European War if Germany drove eastwards against the Little Entente as expected. Desperate to avoid a distant (and potentially fatal) entanglement, the British kept France decidedly at arm's length.

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Chamberlain's negative view of France was compounded by an alarming swing in the European military balance from France to the Axis powers, which shocked the British political and military elite to their core. At a time when the principle of air power dominated strategic thinking in Europe, the British were stunned to learn of the great disparity between the Luftwaffe and the French Armée de l'Air. This shock was the

⁷⁵ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, pp. 138-39.

⁷⁶ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 229.

⁷⁷ *Annual report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

consequence of an abrupt intelligence awakening on the Luftwaffe's strength, France's aerial weakness and her severely limited production in late 1936. This overshadowed all the other woes besieging France. Significantly, this rude intelligence awakening occurred in the months immediately preceding Chamberlain's appointment as Prime Minister and so seriously impacted the direction of his foreign policy as he sought to end the drift of the Baldwin years and champion a new strategy to ensure Britain's survival.

At the beginning of 1936, France was seen as the second greatest air power in Europe behind only Soviet Russia. This high starting point made her dramatic decline vis-à-vis Germany all the more shocking when Britain realised the true strength and awesome expansion rate of the Luftwaffe in October 1936.⁷⁸ Indeed, only seven months previously during the Rhineland Crisis, the British had deemed that France had air superiority over a weak Luftwaffe.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, Britain was considered as the weak link for the democracies aurally. Indeed, at the Anglo-Franco-Belgian air staff conversations of April 1936, Air Vice-Marshal C.L. Courtney, the British DCAS, confessed that the RAF's present condition was 'unsatisfactory for European operations of any magnitude'. He revealed that the RAF was alarmingly short of personnel, flying material and high-quality aircraft. Meanwhile, the ongoing Abyssinian Crisis had caused 'a further weakening of the metropolitan air force by necessitating the despatch of 14 squadrons overseas'.⁸⁰

The British DCAS claimed to only have seventeen metropolitan squadrons available for operations against the Luftwaffe, whilst an additional three squadrons could be made available after mobilisation. These twenty British squadrons were only five more than

⁷⁸ Wark, 'British Military and Economic Intelligence: Assessments of Nazi Germany before the Second World War', p. 80.

⁷⁹ 'Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, 1936: First Meeting', 15 April 1936, AIR 9/74

⁸⁰ However, the DCAS's list of RAF shortcomings should be contextualised. Since London did not wish to involve itself in the Rhineland Crisis, it was in Britain's interest for the DCAS to emphasise the air service's weaknesses, rather than its strengths; 'Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, 1936: First Meeting', 15 April 1936, AIR 9/74

Belgium's small contribution.⁸¹ Britain's pessimistic self-appreciations were thus highly influential in driving Chamberlain towards appeasement.

In comparison, the French DCAS, General Henri Mouchard, was able to promise substantially more for operations against Germany. The French had 109 squadrons, including 37 fighter squadrons, 26 heavy bomber squadrons, sixteen reconnaissance-bombing squadrons, and 30 other squadrons (some with bombing capabilities). This amounted to 1,000 first-line aircraft, of which 600 were deemed modern.⁸² Significantly, Mouchard revealed that the modern aircraft were mostly fighters and bombers – the most desired types – whilst the 400 quasi-obsolete planes were mostly earmarked for reconnaissance tasks. Thus, Mouchard observed that the French 'were in a somewhat better position' aurally than the British in April 1936, especially since the French air expansion and re-equipment programme had started years before Britain's recent expansion programme.⁸³

The French also believed that their air force was superior to the Luftwaffe, holding 'a technical, organisational and, for a [short] while, a numerical edge'.⁸⁴ Group Captain Douglas Colyer, the British AA to Paris, likewise reported on France's numerical and qualitative superiority over the Luftwaffe. Colyer especially noted that French pilots are convinced that their current aircraft 'are better than those possessed by their possible enemies and their morale is consequently very high'.⁸⁵ Thus, in April 1936, the French Air Force was undoubtedly considered a great asset by the democracies.

Yet, as the French looked to the future of the Armée de l'Air, it was with a sense of foreboding. French aircraft production had fallen to a crawl as the civilised world transitioned from wooden-and-canvas airframes to all-metal planes. This fall in

⁸¹ These seventeen squadrons included six fighter squadrons, four light bomber squadrons, three heavy bomber squadrons, two army co-operation squadrons and two naval co-operation squadrons; 'Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, 1936: First Meeting', 15 April 1936, AIR 9/74

⁸² 'Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, 1936: Summary of Conclusions for 15 and 16 April Meetings', AIR 9/74

⁸³ 'Staff Conversations with France and Belgium, 1936: First Meeting', 15 April 1936, AIR 9/74

⁸⁴ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 163.

⁸⁵ Annual Report on France for 1936, FO 371/20670

production stemmed from a lack of investment in the early 1930s for new factory equipment to mass produce all-metal planes, the French industrials and government battenning down the hatches in anticipation of the Great Depression.⁸⁶ This industrial stagnation was awful news for the French Air Force, which urgently needed aircraft replacements. Indeed, during the Rhineland Crisis, 50 percent of French bombers were grounded and unavailable for combat, 'either awaiting spare parts or undergoing modernisation'.⁸⁷ The cracks in French air power were spreading quickly and alarm bells would soon be ringing.

Upon his appointment as Air Minister in June 1936, Pierre Cot, a rising star in French politics, highly-regarded at home and abroad, was shocked by the deterioration of the French Air Force.⁸⁸ The young, ambitious socialist had previously held the post in 1933 and had received much adulation for making the Armée de l'Air an independent service and for adding much of its structure.⁸⁹ Upon his return, he found that France's aerial bombing capability had fallen to 'about nil' and was taken aback by intelligence appreciations of the Luftwaffe's rising power.⁹⁰

'We possess at the moment a slight margin of superiority in relation to Germany', Cot informed the CPDN in July 1936, but, 'by 1938 German air power will be double our own'. He warned the CPDN that Germany was 'moving towards a force of 3,000 aircraft'. Given the industrial slump that was paralysing France, Cot was convinced that 'even with an enormous effort, it would be difficult for us to surpass one-third

⁸⁶ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 169 and 198.

⁸⁷ Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936', p. 661; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 32; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 129.

⁸⁸ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 154; Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 69.

⁸⁹ These included the establishment of an air war council, an air staff, an air intelligence branch, an air war college, and the posting of air attaches to numerous French embassies and legations abroad. Alexander, *Anglo-French Relations between the Wars*, p. 6.

⁹⁰ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 154; Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 69.

this number'. As a solution, Cot advised a 'policy of industrial collaboration with our eventual allies, Britain, the USSR, and the Little Entente'.⁹¹

British estimates of the French Air Force were also declining in the summer of 1936. France's present air strength was lowered from 1,000 to 600 first-line machines to accord with London's new 'definition of modern flying material' in the era of all-metal planes. Similarly, France's self-appreciation of her air strength fell from 1,200 to 900 modern aircraft. Meanwhile, the French believed that the Germans possessed 1,236 first-line modern aircraft and had thus gained air superiority.⁹²

From autumn 1936, the French air situation suddenly became alarming as the British intelligence community experienced a rude awakening over the Luftwaffe's true rate of expansion, which hitherto had been deemed conservative, much like the RAF's steady growth during the 1920s. 'We do not believe that Germany with her ability and love of good organisation,' claimed the Air Ministry in 1936, 'would adopt the [rapid air force expansion] measures that X [Malcom Christie] says she has adopted'.⁹³ Yet, after receiving ample contrasting intelligence over the autumn months, the Air Ministry was forced to accept that Hitler was pushing 'for the largest possible air force in the shortest possible time'.⁹⁴ According to Wark, the British suddenly perceived the Luftwaffe 'as a child of the Nazi State', its supporting industries operating under totalitarian, war-like conditions.⁹⁵ This revelation caused defeatism in London and Paris.

Cot reacted quickly to the rising German threat with a grandiose plan to revolutionise France's air power, strategic doctrine, organisation and supporting industries, which immediately won him praise across the Channel. Cot's first act was to announce Air

⁹¹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, pp. 196-8.

⁹² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 163 and 173.

⁹³ X was the codename of Malcom Christie, a secret agent who sent disturbing information on the Luftwaffe's rapid expansion in the mid-1930s. Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 258; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 48.

⁹⁴ Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 80; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 57 and 77; Wark, 'British Military and Economic Intelligence: Assessments of Nazi Germany before the Second World War', p. 80; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 258.

⁹⁵ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 77.

Rearmament Plan II, a four-year programme which aimed to add 2,040 fighters and bombers to France's air strength, whilst also replacing one-fifth of the nation's flying material each year to ensure against obsolescence.⁹⁶ This 5 billion franc programme would give France a first-line strength of 1,500 modern aircraft by 1939, plus ample aircraft reserves.⁹⁷

The second part of Cot's 'major overhaul' targeted France's aerial war doctrine. Cot immediately prioritised long-range, strategic bombing missions over tactical fighter cooperation with the army. 'Our air squadrons will strike far behind the enemy lines', he proclaimed in 1936.⁹⁸ This would allow the air force to take immediate offensive action against Germany's industrial capabilities, vital for sustaining her war effort. It would also allow French bombers to operate from bases in Czechoslovakia, Romania, Poland and Yugoslavia, which would help to restore France's political and military prestige, influence and presence in Eastern Europe.⁹⁹

The third part of Cot's major overhaul targeted France's stagnant aircraft industry. This overhaul was by far the most controversial, and proved his undoing within eighteen months.¹⁰⁰ As mentioned, the French aircraft industry was not modernised in the early 1930s, which prevented a smooth transition from wooden-and-canvas airframes to all-metal planes and mass production methods.¹⁰¹ The dearth of investment for factory modernisation caused aircraft production to become so lethargic that 'only a handful of military aircraft became operational in any given year', most of which were 'rendered obsolete' upon delivery.¹⁰² By 1936, France's

⁹⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 164.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

⁹⁸ Young, 'The Strategic Dream, French Air Doctrine in the Inter-War Period, 1919-1939', p. 69.

⁹⁹ Cot also changed the French Air Force's structure. On 3 October 1936, Cot divided the service into two commands: operational and territorial (or administrative). According to Colyer, this change was 'met with unqualified approval in the French air force'. *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹⁰¹ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 19; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 128; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 195.

¹⁰² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 19.

aircraft industry was deemed 'the most inefficient of all France's armament sectors'.¹⁰³ Indeed, Colyer described the French aircraft industry as being 'in a poor state'.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, joint studies by the IIC and Air Ministry 'confirmed the breadth and depth of large-scale industrial failure' in France, the country only producing 75 planes a month compared to Germany's 250-300 planes.¹⁰⁵

By the time Cot was re-appointed as Air Minister it was obvious to London that the air rearmament programme of 1933, which had aimed to produce 1,000 military planes by 1936, was a shambolic failure.¹⁰⁶ The British AI reported to the CID in July 1936 that of these 1,000 machines only 386 had actually been built, whilst the German output was approximately 260 airframes and 650 aero-engines per month.¹⁰⁷ These production problems were compounded by widespread strikes across France that summer, which hit aircraft factory hubs in Paris and Toulouse. By the spring of 1937, the French air rearmament programme of 1933 was only 'three-quarters finished', its completion anticipated to be eighteen months behind schedule, which eventually proved too optimistic.¹⁰⁸

It was with these problems in mind that Cot set out to rationalise the country's aviation industry by announcing a new nationalisation law in June 1936. This bold piece of legislation would allow him to take control of the aviation industry to modernise its antiquated equipment, plant and training methods to propel aircraft production.¹⁰⁹ Cot nationalised approximately 80 percent of France's airframe

¹⁰³ Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936', p. 661.

¹⁰⁴ 'Conference of Military Attachés to Consider the World Situation', June 1936, WO 190/433

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 128; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 164.

¹⁰⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 198; Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936', p. 662.

¹⁰⁷ Thomas, 'French Economic Affairs and Rearmament: The First Crucial Months, June-September 1936', p. 662.

¹⁰⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

¹⁰⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 164.

manufacturers and one aero-engine company, vowing to inject finance and skilled labour.¹¹⁰

As part of the nationalisation laws, Cot also acquired the power to relocate aviation factories from Paris to southern France, where they would be a safe distance from the Luftwaffe and more dispersed.¹¹¹ Immediately, Cot delivered relocation decrees to the large companies of Hispano-Suiza, Gnome-et-Rhône, Dewoitine and Aviation Bloch-Dassault.¹¹² Cot also prioritised the expansion of provincial factories over inner-city factories in Paris in anticipation of a Luftwaffe bombing campaign against the capital.¹¹³ These measures pleased the British Foreign Office and Air Ministry.¹¹⁴ Meanwhile, Colyer believed that these radical changes – along with Cot's 'greater speed and energy' – would see the French Air Force become 'a much improved instrument of war' within a year's time and 'an adversary not lightly to be reckoned with'.¹¹⁵ However, Cot's nationalisation scheme proved a short-term disaster, and one which drove the British and French governments towards appeasement.

There is no doubt that Cot's nationalisation, rationalisation and relocation plans for the French aircraft industry had a 'long-term soundness, indeed were essential in many cases'.¹¹⁶ Jackson believes that this overhaul 'laid the foundations for the impressive performance of the aircraft industry in late 1938 and 1939'.¹¹⁷ Yet, in the short and medium-term, the impact of Cot's schemes on French aircraft production

¹¹⁰ Colyer reported that France's aviation firms were assigned to five geographical groups across the country; that respected private industrialists had been appointed as directors of the geographical groups, and that arrangements had been made for the French Government to purchase the factories and plants, as well as two-thirds of the companies' shares. *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 147; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 216; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 196.

¹¹¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, p. 7.

¹¹² Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, p. 7.

¹¹³ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹¹⁴ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 129.

¹¹⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

¹¹⁶ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, p. 7.

¹¹⁷ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 197.

rates was catastrophic.¹¹⁸ The problem was that nationalisation could not provide rapid results, nor could the relocation scheme, which caused enormous disruption.¹¹⁹ In the two years following the 1936 nationalisation law, French aircraft production remained between a meagre 30 and 100 planes a month, compared to between 450 and 500 aircraft in Germany.¹²⁰ This slump in French production before it slowly recovered and rapidly increased from late 1938 allowed Cot's opponents – mainly industrialists and big business owners, as well as the political right in the Chamber and Senate – to heap pressure upon him.¹²¹

Initially, however, productivity in the nationalised factories *appeared* to soar between autumn 1936 and spring 1937 by 23 percent, creating the momentary impression that Cot was the saviour long awaited by the French aircraft industry.¹²² Cot's youthful and energetic colleagues at the Air Ministry, which included General Philippe Féquart, the new CAS, and Colonel Henri Jauneaud, the new *Chef de Cabinet*, added to the image of competence, efficiency and strategic radicalism which Cot wished to convey to the nation.¹²³ Cot also made a series of promises and announcements which helped to generate a belief that his radical methods were achieving the promised results. On one occasion, he pledged to honour all foreign aircraft contracts and deliver them on time, whilst in another proclamation Cot promised to produce 1,800 aircraft annually by December 1937.¹²⁴

Yet, the soaring production figures reported by Cot over the winter of 1936-37 were a deliberate deception.¹²⁵ In fact, French aircraft production was plummeting.¹²⁶ In an

¹¹⁸ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, p. 7.

¹¹⁹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 198.

¹²⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 162.

¹²¹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, pp. 197-8; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 215.

¹²² British air intelligence reported an increase of 23 percent in French aircraft production in the first quarter of 1937 over the corresponding quarter of the previous year. France, April 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 216.

¹²³ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 174.

¹²⁴ France, May 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 197.

¹²⁵ France, April 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 201.

attempt to buy his nationalisation scheme more time, Cot lied to the French public, chamber and senate about the productivity of the aircraft industry and the strength of the Armée de l'Air.¹²⁷ For example, Cot brazenly deceived the French Parliament in March 1937, announcing that France now had more than 2000 first-line aircraft backed by 3,329 machines in reserve. Similarly, Cot told the citizens of Nantes in July 1937 that the strength of the French Air Force 'had increased by 80 percent during his tenure as air minister', when production had actually fallen by 30 percent.¹²⁸ Cot even proclaimed in June 1937 that the French Air Force was now the second largest in the world after Russia, a speech which sparked accusations that he was lying. One critic, according to British air intelligence, claimed that production was not even two-thirds what Cot proclaimed, and was 'not even sufficient to replace crashed or obsolete aircraft', a fact which had caused Cot to reduce pilots' flying hours to preserve the few aircraft he possessed.¹²⁹

In fact, France's aircraft industry had 'virtually collapsed' and throughout 1937 never exceeded 42 planes a month – a dismally-low figure in the age of mass production.¹³⁰ Consequently, France was only able to build 370 aircraft throughout 1937 compared to Italy's 1,974, Britain's 2,218, Germany's 5,606 and Russia's 6,033 aircraft.¹³¹ Moreover, the few aircraft deliveries during 1937 were mainly outdated models from the 1933 air rearmament programme, which 'lacked the gyros, the motorised cannon, and the retractable landing gear with which the latest German and British aircraft were equipped'.¹³²

Given Cot's deceitful inflation of production figures, it took months for the French and British to realise France's catastrophic aerial situation. While the British were initially optimistic about "the Cot effect", intelligence on his results soon became

¹²⁶ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 201.

¹²⁷ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 28.

¹²⁸ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, pp. 233-4.

¹²⁹ France, July 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹³⁰ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 152; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 163; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 221.

¹³¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 216.

¹³² Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 233.

conflicting.¹³³ From March 1937, the French Air Ministry proved exceedingly reluctant to share its production figures with London, forcing the British Air Ministry and IIC to piece together ‘what they could from public and commercial sources’.¹³⁴ As British suspicions rose, the focus of AI shifted from Germany to France.¹³⁵ In April 1937, British Air Intelligence highlighted a resolution from the French Senate Air Commission which stressed ‘the risks arising from the *slowing down of production* in aircraft factories’. The resolution also petitioned the Government ‘to take all necessary measures’ to reverse the alarming trend.¹³⁶ Meanwhile, other intelligence reports shed light on factory strikes in Toulouse where 800 men had downed tools, occupied shops and hoisted a red flag over the large aircraft factory.¹³⁷

As Chamberlain accepted the premiership in May 1937 and took hold of British foreign policy, the truth dramatically emerged about the calamitous state of France’s aircraft industry. The Foreign Office and Air Ministry gathered and disseminated revealing intelligence on the ‘catastrophic slide in monthly aircraft output’, the news sending shockwaves through Whitehall.¹³⁸ After reading an IIC appreciation in July 1937, which detailed the breakdown of French aircraft production, Vansittart described Cot as ‘a remarkable liar’.¹³⁹ This was the moment that London ‘lost faith in Cot’s ability and veracity’, the Foreign Office describing Cot as ‘probably a disaster’ and ‘certainly untruthful’.¹⁴⁰ In the following months, any production figures shared by Cot were ‘dismissed out of hand’ by the British.¹⁴¹ According to Colyer, it had become obvious that Cot could not justify his extraordinary production claims, which included the lie

¹³³ Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 129.

¹³⁴ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 217; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 238.

¹³⁵ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 165.

¹³⁶ Italics added. France, April 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹³⁷ France, April 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹³⁸ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, p. 7.

¹³⁹ Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 129; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 238; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 165.

¹⁴⁰ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 238; Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 129;

¹⁴¹ Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 129.

that France's bombing potential had risen by 500 percent.¹⁴² British intelligence concluded in October 1937 that 'the war potential of the French Air Force is, for the present, reduced in a most grave manner'.¹⁴³ Cot, once the rising star of French politics, was now in freefall.

'Production had been allowed to sink to a very low figure', Colyer reported with despair, 'due to the manner in which nationalisation had been carried out, the forty-hour week, frequent strikes and ill-equipped and inadequate factories'.¹⁴⁴ To build bombers and fighters, he explained, it took the French 36,000 and 12,000 man-hours respectively compared to Germany's 12,000 and 4,000 man-hours. The reason for this, Colyer believed, was that 'the German factories have been specially equipped with the most modern tools and every facility for rapid construction', whilst the French factory owners had been 'unwilling to spend money on expensive machinery and tools' at a time of economic uncertainty and dwindling aircraft orders in the early 1930s.¹⁴⁵ Since Cot's ascendancy, Colyer concluded, 'little had been done towards equipping the Air Force beyond the completion of General Denain's [1933] "Plan of 1,000"'.¹⁴⁶ Indeed, Cot's air rearmament plan of 1936 had made no progress whatsoever.¹⁴⁷

The British were also distressed by the untenable time-lag between the design and mass production phases of promising French prototypes.¹⁴⁸ 'Although the French build prototypes which are on a level with the best that aeronautical science can produce', reported Colyer, 'the process of testing, modification, retesting, remodification, take up so much time' that the planes are rendered obsolete upon

¹⁴² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁴³ 'The Requisite Standard of Air Strength', Air Staff Memorandum, 2 October 1937, CAB 24/273/41.

¹⁴⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹⁴⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; France, December 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹⁴⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611.

¹⁴⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611.

¹⁴⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697

delivery.¹⁴⁹ For example, the Morane 405 was ‘the fastest fighter in the world’ when designed in 1933, but was outclassed by its delivery in late 1938. Similarly, the Bloch 210 bomber had been impressive, but after extensive testing and slow production, its once revolutionary capabilities were overshadowed by the British Blenheim and the German DO-17.¹⁵⁰ Although France had few other revolutionary prototypes, Cot willingly deceived his colleagues, claiming that ‘the material in the Armee de L’air is as good as any’ in the Luftwaffe.¹⁵¹

Matters came to a head at the Anglo-French ministerial conversations in London in late November 1937, just weeks before Chamberlain would nail his colours either to appeasement or alliance-building as the means to guarantee Britain’s survival. After Chautemps and Delbos arrived in London for the two-day conference, Chamberlain confronted them about the calamitous state of French aircraft production.¹⁵² ‘You have no modern aircraft,’ he declared, holding aloft an intelligence report as evidence, ‘and no prospects of producing any in the near future’. Ashen-faced, Chautemps promised to ‘spend a good deal of money’ and to ‘make purchases in America’ to remedy the situation.¹⁵³ Chamberlain also offered British assistance to reignite the French aircraft industry.¹⁵⁴

‘During the Anglo-French visit, M. Chautemps had admitted to an output that was only about one-fifth (60-300) of our own,’ Chamberlain told his Cabinet. ‘A long time must elapse before France would be able to give us much help in the air’.¹⁵⁵ Given the shambolic failures of the Brussels Conference and of UK-US relations to shift from friendship into partnership, this news of France’s aerial weakness – which greatly compounded her economic, financial, political and social woes – was the final nail in

¹⁴⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁵⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁵¹ France, January 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹⁵² Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 165; Jackson, ‘Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War’, p. 130; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 217.

¹⁵³ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 240.

¹⁵⁴ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 217.

¹⁵⁵ Cabinet Conclusions, 8 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd series, Vol. XIX*, p. 656.

the coffin for an alternative option to appeasement. The idea of a democratic axis to oppose the aggressive powers must have been a dead-letter in Chamberlain's mind, with one democracy refusing to collaborate, and the other becoming a liability in every sense. Meanwhile, the purges in Russia were in full swing, hollowing the capabilities of the Red Army. For Chamberlain, the British stood alone, and appeasement seemed to be the only feasible policy.

Perhaps surprisingly, Colyer claimed that the air situation was still 'not necessarily desperate', as Cot and Chautemps would now be 'alive to the deplorable state of its air defence' and 'thoroughly aroused to the need for drastic improvements'. Colyer was adamant that Cot was 'the one man most likely to be able to bring order out of chaos', despite his flagrant lies and dismal track-record. If he was given credits aplenty, factories could be fully-equipped for mass production, whilst the forty-hour week could also be amended to increase industrial output.¹⁵⁶

However, Colyer's optimism failed to influence London, which remained alarmed by the weakness of the Armée de l'Air and its supporting industries.¹⁵⁷ According to British intelligence, France had 1,195 first-line aircraft (many obsolete) compared to Germany's 1,737 first-line aircraft. Moreover, Germany had twice the bombing fleet of their neighbour, with these bombers possessing cruising speeds 'equivalent to those of most French fighters'.¹⁵⁸ Meanwhile, French intelligence put Germany's air strength at 2,268 first-line aircraft, and believed that Italy had gained superiority over France in both air strength and production rates.¹⁵⁹

Across the Channel, Michel Detroyat, a French industrialist, reported to the Senate Air Commission on a recent trip to German aircraft factories, claiming that Germany was producing ten times as many machines as France – 500 to 50 – and far superior

¹⁵⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 164.

¹⁵⁸ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 164; Robert Young, 'The Strategic Dream: French Air Doctrine in the Interwar Period, 1919-1939', *Historical Journal*, 28, 1 (1985), pp. 57-76 (p. 72).

¹⁵⁹ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, 154; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 164.

prototypes.¹⁶⁰ Remarkably, this was a revelation to the highest levels of French Government, which had been denied access to German and French aircraft production figures by the Air Ministry. 'It is time to sound the alarm', concluded the chalky-faced President of the Commission, 'France is in grave danger'.¹⁶¹ Cot's lies had finally unravelled. On 7 December 1937, he told the truth about France's air crisis to the CPDN.¹⁶² This storm was met by another as a Morane-405 fighter crashed whilst being shown to a Lithuanian military mission. The news that France was selling prototypes to foreigners at the expense of France's own depleted air force caused a wave of 'indignant criticism in the French press'.¹⁶³ Amidst fierce accusations that Cot had betrayed France by starving the nation of desperately-needed aircraft, the Air Minister was finally sacked.¹⁶⁴

Cot's fall from grace and the complete collapse of French aircraft production was extraordinarily ill-timed for advocates of an alternative foreign policy to Chamberlain's appeasement strategy. Even if France could overcome this air crisis, she still faced an overwhelming social civil war; unremitting economic and financial crises, which were destabilising the country, knocking investor confidence and holding back all kinds of rearmament; and the continuously revolving doors of government, which saw a change in administration every 5-6 months on average during the 1930s.¹⁶⁵ Francophiles in Britain looked on in dismay as France walked 'on the brink of political, social and economic chaos'.¹⁶⁶ London also recognised that France's geo-strategic position had been undermined by the drift of Yugoslavia, Romania and Belgium towards neutrality. Simultaneously, France had also found herself opposed along three frontiers as Italy and Spain joined Germany as potential enemies. In short, France had become a most unattractive partner by the winter of 1937-38. Chamberlain was thus left without a feasible alternative foreign policy to

¹⁶⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 240.

¹⁶¹ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 238 and 240.

¹⁶² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 240.

¹⁶³ France, December 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹⁶⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹⁶⁵ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 245.

¹⁶⁶ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 161.

appeasement. Indeed, this chapter dismantles Ruggiero's argument that Chamberlain's actions to prioritise appeasement over alliance-building was 'so divorced from reality that they defy rational analysis'.¹⁶⁷ On the contrary, his prioritisation of appeasement was drenched in rational analysis.

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If appeasement was to be Britain's primary objective, Chamberlain recognised that this objective might be derailed by close relations with France, which might spook Germany and make her feel encircled. Chamberlain and his military advisors were also concerned that a close partnership with France might increase the danger of Britain being dragged into a costly and perhaps unwinnable war in Eastern Europe. France's complex network of alliances could at any moment push her into a confrontation with Germany, if Hitler moved eastwards against the Little Entente. If Britain's relationship with France was deeply intimate, this could morally compel Britain to intervene, rather than see her friend destroyed. To avoid such a moral dilemma – and to keep appeasement afloat – both Chamberlain and the British military elite recognised that the French had to be kept distinctly at arm's length.

However, as the threat of the aggressive powers rose globally, the British became increasingly desperate for military intelligence on the fierce rearmament drives of Germany, Italy and Japan and any unexpected military movements which might threaten the peace. From the mid-1930s, the French saw this British thirst for intelligence as an opportunity to draw Britain closer. It was hoped that military intelligence cooperation behind closed doors between Paris and London would cultivate friendship and trust, and perhaps even lead to staff conversations, joint planning against Germany and the forging of a partnership on the world stage. In essence, Paris set an 'intelligence trap', using her military, industrial and political intelligence as bait to lure Britain into closer relations.¹⁶⁸

As with any trap, the bait had to come first. Paris was forced to share her sensitive intelligence with Britain in the hope that this would spiral into fully-fledged

¹⁶⁷ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, P. 88.

¹⁶⁸ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 122.

partnership. With all of France's cards on the table, Britain was in the driving seat, free to determine the level of intelligence exchange. Indeed, the British military elite was able to balance their thirst for information on the aggressor states with their caution not to become too entwined with Paris for fear of tacitly committing themselves to French security at a time when she was plagued by many domestic troubles.

Between late 1936 and early 1938, the British military elite cautiously welcomed an intelligence partnership with France behind closed doors, whilst simultaneously rebuffing any requests for staff conversations or joint military planning against Germany.¹⁶⁹ In essence, the British raided the sinking French ship for intelligence goods, without ever actually being tied to it. Mistakenly, Young has seen this emerging intelligence partnership as a stepping stone towards the Anglo-French alliance of 1939.¹⁷⁰ This, however, betrays a teleological approach, which ignores Britain's unwavering opposition towards staff conversations and joint military planning against Germany, not to mention her generally stand-offish and frosty behaviour towards France, which epitomised relations before 1939.

The first piece of intelligence bait dangled by the French was access to her early-warning aerial system, which would notify London of a Luftwaffe attack if German bombers flew over Franco-Belgian aircraft detection stations on their way to England.¹⁷¹ Such warnings were pivotal to British security in the pre-radar years of 1936 to 1939, especially given Britain's irrational fears of air attack at this time,

¹⁶⁹ 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379; Eden to Phipps, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 356-7; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 130 and 141; Adamwraith, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 71; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 163.

¹⁷⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 161.

¹⁷¹ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 164; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 160; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 6.

including gross over-estimations of possible casualty rates should London be subjected to a bombing campaign (see chapter ten).¹⁷²

In connection to these fears, the British were also thirsty for information on the Luftwaffe's rapid expansion. This was the second piece of intelligence bait used by the French to broker an agreement on 12 February 1937 for a regular exchange of air intelligence on Germany, using the British air attaché to Paris as a low-level intermediate.¹⁷³ This intelligence collaboration paid immediate dividends for the British, who received numerous sensitive documents, including a copy of the Luftwaffe's order of battle, which, according to Colyer, 'showed the complete trust which they [the French Air Bureau] had in us'.¹⁷⁴ The volume and scope of air intelligence exchanges on Germany intensified throughout the year, the two democracies pooling information on Germany's industrial conglomerates and their vulnerability to sustained aerial bombardment.¹⁷⁵ The French intelligence trap seemed to be working. Indeed, Young claims that both 'the tone and scope of these new staff contacts were unmistakably different from those of the past'.¹⁷⁶ The British recognised this and walked a fine line, taking what intelligence they could, whilst avoiding the danger of staff conversations.

From mid-1937, Britain and France began to exchange naval intelligence on Italy, following suspected Italian submarine piracy in the Mediterranean.¹⁷⁷ Irregular, *ad hoc* military intelligence-sharing also took place, such as on the Wehrmacht's annual manoeuvres of September 1937, after which Paris and London freely exchanged their

¹⁷² Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 335; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 76; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, pp. 282-3; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 127; Bailer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 133.

¹⁷³ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 164; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 160.

¹⁷⁴ Douglas Colyer, 'Exchange of Information between the British and French Air Staffs, March-April 1937', 9 March 1937, AIR 40/1826

¹⁷⁵ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 139; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 161; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 8.

¹⁷⁶ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 161.

¹⁷⁷ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 161.

opinions and notes on the German Army.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, the Spanish Civil War presented another opportunity for increased Anglo-French intelligence exchanges in the military and political spheres, whilst there was 'extensive *ad hoc* cooperation between intelligence officials outside of Europe', the two democracies 'collaborating on a wide-range of issues' in Africa and East Asia.¹⁷⁹

As the Spanish Civil War intensified, Colonel Menzies, the Deputy Director of SIS, visited Paris to meet with Colonel Rivet, the head of SR. Menzies and Rivet freely discussed the conflict and agreed to a future intelligence exchange on Italy and Germany.¹⁸⁰ The French intelligence trap was now in full flow, with the British military elite unable to resist the attractive bait. However, these useful exchanges strictly occurred behind closed doors, ensuring that Chamberlain's appeasement efforts with the Axis powers would not be derailed.

Despite the growing intelligence partnership, French hopes that this would naturally spiral into military staff conversations with Britain and joint planning against Germany were repeatedly crushed. Between late 1936 and 1938, the British military elite refused numerous French requests for staff conversations for fear that they would morally tie Britain to French security at a time when she was weak.¹⁸¹ Of the three services, the Admiralty felt strongest about keeping France at arm's length. During the winter of 1936-37, the Admiralty rebuffed French requests for naval conversations. A year onwards, French requests for naval conversations were rejected again.¹⁸²

In light of the elevated tensions between Britain and Japan in the Far East and the heightened possibility of the Royal Navy being sent to Singapore to restrain Japan,

¹⁷⁸ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 68.

¹⁷⁹ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 132 and 135.

¹⁸⁰ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 136.

¹⁸¹ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 130 and 141; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 71; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 163.

¹⁸² Eden to Phipps, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 356-7; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 71.

these naval conversations might have represented a timely opportunity for the coordination of Anglo-French war plans and strategies to secure the Mediterranean and Atlantic following the denuding of these waters of British warships. Instead, the British wished to keep the French in the dark about their naval contingency plans, despite these plans relying on the French Navy's cooperation.¹⁸³

Meanwhile, at the Anglo-French ministerial conversations in November 1937, proposals for staff conversations were deliberately kept off the agenda. Joint planning against Germany thus continued to be as 'non-existent' at the end of 1937, as it had been at the beginning. Adamwraithe highlights that these ministerial conversations represented 'a missed opportunity to forge a real Anglo-French alliance'.¹⁸⁴ In fact, these conversations highlight just how far away the two democracies were from forging such an alliance. The British military elite would not even enter the same room as their French counterparts for non-committal conversations.

Regrettably for Paris, which wished for an alliance with Britain, 'political and emotional objections to staff conversations held sway' in London over the logical arguments for military collaboration.¹⁸⁵ In fact, by the end of 1937, Inskip had ushered in a policy of limited liability, and had reduced to the lowest priority the offering of military assistance to France, below the defence of Britain, the preservation of trade routes and the defence of her overseas territories.¹⁸⁶

The French, however, were unfazed by Britain's stand-offish behaviour and loyally continued to invite British military officials to France in the hope of drawing closer. Indeed, Hore-Belisha and the CIGS attended the French Army's manoeuvres in

¹⁸³ Eden to Lindsay, 20 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 605; 'Possible Staff Conversations with the French', 23 December 1937, Plans Division, ADM 116/3379; Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 7; Best, *British Intelligence and the Japanese Challenge in Asia*, p. 102; Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, p. 39.

¹⁸⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 51 and 70.

¹⁸⁵ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 163; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 130.

¹⁸⁶ Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41

September 193 and were granted 'unprecedented access to the Maginot Line'.¹⁸⁷ According to Beaumont-Nesbitt, it was clear that Daladier and Gamelin wished 'to mark their pleasure at the presence of the political and military heads of the British Army' in France, something which had not occurred since the First World War.¹⁸⁸ However, France's transparent attempts to alliance-build with Britain failed. Paris could find no way to cross the threshold with London from secret, one-way intelligence sharing behind closed doors to a partnership on the world stage. Lamentably for France, her greater desire for close relations allowed Britain to dictate the levels of military contact and intelligence cooperation between the democracies. Cautiously, the British struck a balance between their desire for intelligence on Germany and their twin fears of shipwrecking Chamberlain's appeasement strategy and of committing themselves tacitly to the defence of France, both of which could be a grave consequence of drawing too close to France. Given France's internal woes, she was deemed as a sinking ship – the mast to which Britain could not afford to be tied.

Ironically, a similar relationship existed in Anglo-American relations. However, in this instance, it was Eden who laid an intelligence trap to lure Washington into close relations in the hope of cultivating a global partnership and the Americans who consequently sat in the driving seat, dictating the levels of contact and intelligence cooperation between London and Washington. Prior to 1937, intelligence exchanges between Washington and London in the military sphere were practically non-existent. However, from 1937, Washington slowly became willing to exchange military and political intelligence with Britain on the aggressor states on an *ad hoc* basis.¹⁸⁹ This change in attitude was sparked by cordial relations during preparations for the

¹⁸⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 67.

¹⁸⁸ Likewise, Beaumont-Nesbitt reported that 'nothing could have exceeded the courtesy and consideration' shown to himself in Paris 'as well as to some twenty British officers... attached to units in the French Army'. *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁸⁹ Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars*, vol. II, p. 366; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 22.

London Naval Conference of 1936.¹⁹⁰ As a result of this cooperation, a new naval treaty was signed, Article 12 of which called for a 'fuller exchange of information' from 1937 onwards, including clandestine naval intelligence.¹⁹¹

The British were so desperate to cultivate a partnership with Washington that they were willing to accept an unbalanced exchange of naval information in America's favour. 'For us, a nice balancing of information given against information received is entirely unimportant,' advised Lindsay. 'What we want is the goodwill of the American General Staff just as much as their information. That goodwill can be fostered by exchanges' and 'would probably be of crucial importance if we were at war'. The Foreign Office concurred with Lindsay and believed that the Americans could be trusted with clandestine information.¹⁹²

From mid-1937, the Admiralty contemplated whether to propose an Anglo-American intelligence exchange specifically on Japanese naval construction given Japan's secretive behaviour.¹⁹³ The proposal was immediately approved by the Foreign Office, which wished to 'proceed at once'.¹⁹⁴ To their delight, the proposal was accepted by Washington, though it only produced a momentary spike in intelligence sharing. The British followed up this overture with an offer for an American naval squadron to use British naval bases at Gibraltar and Malta, including dockyard facilities, for free whilst the naval squadron toured the Mediterranean.¹⁹⁵ The Admiralty hoped that this open display of friendship would send a message of democratic solidarity to the aggressive powers.¹⁹⁶ Yet, behind closed doors, Anglo-American military intelligence exchanges remained at a low level throughout 1937, always on an *ad hoc* basis and usually on American terms.

As with military intelligence exchanges, the flow of political information between Washington and London remained 'sporadic and tentative, depending on the tension

¹⁹⁰ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 22.

¹⁹¹ Director of Plans, minute, 29 June 1937, ADM 116/4302

¹⁹² Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 22 March 1937, ADM 116/4302

¹⁹³ Mahnken, 'Gazing at the Sun', p. 431.

¹⁹⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof relations*, p. 45.

¹⁹⁵ Roskill, *Naval Policy between the Wars*, vol. II, p. 366; Murfett, *Fool-Proof relations*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁶ Murfett, *Fool-Proof relations*, p. 43.

in specific areas across the world and the benefits the two countries expected to accrue to themselves through the exchange'.¹⁹⁷ Just as in the military realm, Britain's desire to cultivate American goodwill, trust and intimacy in the political sphere ensured that Washington was once again in the driving seat, carefully balancing her desire for information on the aggressor nations with her caution not to be dragged into a war by her closer ties with Britain – a mirror image of what was occurring between Britain and France.

Essentially, political intelligence exchanges were minimal, unless and until the Americans wished to know something specific. For example, in November 1937, Hull asked for information on the precise relationship between 'the three desperadoes' – or revisionist powers.¹⁹⁸ Without asking for reciprocal information, Eden gladly provided ample sensitive information.¹⁹⁹ After reading this valuable intelligence, Welles proposed to Lindsay that 'our two governments should exchange very frankly all information on this subject in their possession'.²⁰⁰ This warm response gave Eden hope that a new chapter was opening in Anglo-American relations. These hopes were fanned when Hull freely shared sensitive intelligence on the Germano-Japanese relationship a few days later, highlighting the existence of secret mutual assistance clauses within the Anti-Comintern Pact – though London swiftly corrected Washington's incorrect intelligence.²⁰¹ Unfortunately, however, this budding intelligence partnership behind closed doors failed to develop into a partnership on

¹⁹⁷ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 228.

¹⁹⁸ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 16 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 496.

¹⁹⁹ He explained to Hull that, whilst there was nothing so definite as an alliance, Germany and Japan regularly exchanged information on Soviet Russia's communist and military activities and had also agreed to consultation if either was threatened. Eden disclosed that there was also collaboration between Rome and Berlin on European affairs, and that 'no diplomatic document has of late been dealt with by either party without consultation with the other'. Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 24 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 525.

²⁰⁰ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 27 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 545.

²⁰¹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 30 November 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 548-9.

the world stage, with Eden's many requests for diplomatic and naval collaboration rebuffed throughout 1937.

Whilst the British willingly sent intelligence to the Americans upon request, they only reluctantly gave information to the French, fearing both intelligence leakages by the Quai d'Orsay and the dangerous consequences of greater intimacy.²⁰² British calculations to pursue Washington and shun Paris boiled down to the fact that America was a more powerful democracy. Thus, whilst a military partnership with Washington was seen as *a help* against the Axis threat, a military partnership with Paris was only seen as *an aggravator* that invited Axis aggression. It became an unspoken policy that London would only reach out to Paris if a partnership was first secured with Washington. However, this seemed increasingly unlikely as discord and anti-collaboration continued to dominate UK-US relations.

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In conclusion, France's domestic troubles and aerial weakness in 1937, along with America's unwillingness and inability to collaborate with Britain on the world stage, hindered those in London demanding an alternative foreign policy to appeasement. Chamberlain watched these events unfold during his first six months in power, finding himself increasingly convinced that France and America were, respectively, undesirable or unattainable partners for Britain. Parker claims that allies 'were available' for Britain and 'were much more likely to have averted the war that Chamberlain so desperately sought to avoid'.²⁰³ This chapter has shown that Parker's argument is incorrect. Despite France's eagerness to combine with Britain, it is abundantly clear that this partnership was not strong enough to oppose the aggressive powers of Germany, Italy and Japan without American support – which seemed improbable in the years immediately ahead. Thus, Chamberlain rightly deduced that there was no feasible alternative to appeasement.

²⁰² Eden to Lindsay, 20 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 605; Lindsay to Eden, 21 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 605.

²⁰³ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 9.

The rationale behind this conclusion has of course been greatly challenged by his contemporary and subsequent critics. Yet, few have studied British perceptions of American, French and Russian power – or, rather, their dearth of power – nor the history of divisive relations between these powers, nor indeed their numerous failed attempts at collaboration on the world stage in the depth required truly to understand that Chamberlain's thinking was logical. Given the intelligence at his disposal, appeasement appeared to be Chamberlain's best opportunity for a permanent peace – indeed, for survival. The grievous consequences of German appeasement could not have been foreseen by Chamberlain with any certainty or definitiveness, whilst other courses seemed even more cataclysmic, given Britain's alarmingly over-stretched Empire, military unpreparedness and need to play for time to rectify this dichotomy. Suffering from similarly adverse internal and external conditions in 1940, 'the archetypal anti-appeaser, Winston Churchill, was [also] forced to avoid a confrontation with Japan until his American ally agreed to support a policy of economic sanctions against Tokyo', a fact which Chamberlain's critics are quick to forget.²⁰⁴

Chamberlain's gloomy world outlook was wholeheartedly endorsed by the British military establishment, which kept its distance from France whilst simultaneously accepting intelligence bait behind closed doors. In almost identical fashion, the Americans readily received British intelligence on the aggressive powers, whilst refusing to be tied to British security. Thus, by the twilight of 1937, the three great democracies were as far away as ever from forging an alliance to oppose the rising revisionist regimes. Chamberlain recognised this fact, and so understandably poured his energies into his appeasement strategy. From Chamberlain's perspective, if Hitler could be moulded into a reasonable man, something of which he had shown clear signs – signs which ranged from the support of Macdonald's disarmament plan in 1934 and the penning of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in 1935 to far-reaching proposals from Hitler in 1936 for a new Locarno agreement, a non-aggression pact, an air pact, and a return to the League of Nations – this would be the surest way of

²⁰⁴ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 238.

guaranteeing peace.²⁰⁵ Ruggiero claims that the 'most disturbing' thing about Chamberlain's government 'was that such little thought was given to an alternative policy of constructive engagement as a possible deterrent to Hitler's belligerent policy'.²⁰⁶ Whilst there were many alliance bloc combinations espoused by the anti-appeasers as an alternative to Chamberlain's appeasement policy, every possible combination had France as a central player. Chamberlain could only deduce after digesting ample intelligence on France's rising domestic woes and deteriorating military power that this central player was presently an untenable partner. All the while, the pursuit of alliances with America, Soviet Russia and Italy offered even less promise.

²⁰⁵ Offner, *American Appeasement*, pp. 33-4; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 188; Steiner, *Triumph of the Dark*, p. 142.

²⁰⁶ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, 10.

America's Proffered Hand

In the winter of 1937-38, a dramatic series of events led to the prospect of an Anglo-American partnership finally being established. Chamberlain has been disparaged by contemporary and subsequent critics alike – including Churchill, Grayson, Eden, Leutze, Rock and Murfett – for wrecking the opportunity.¹ According to these orthodox and post-revisionist historians, Chamberlain had a feasible alternative strategy to appeasement: partnering Britain (and France) with America to alter the balance of power in Europe and Asia. Indeed, Watt, Rock, Reynolds, Leutze, Dilks, Kennedy and Churchill have all stressed the viability of the American option, describing the great industrial nation as an almost-divine solution to the rising challenge of the revisionist powers. These historians share Churchill's 'breathless... amazement' at Chamberlain's anti-collaborative actions during the weeks before and after Christmas 1937.² However, this thesis argues that Chamberlain's actions can only be understood in the context of France and America's alarming military deficiencies and the acrimonious and anti-collaborative spirit that had haunted relations between the democracies since 1919. After the repeated failure of the democracies to stop Japan from advancing military into China, a failure which culminated in the shambolic Brussels Conference, Orde sourly anticipated that

¹ Grayson, *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement*, pp. x-xi; Aster, 'Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism', p. 459; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 165; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72.

² Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

'nothing but defeat, exhaustion or Russian intervention' would stop Japan's campaign.³

Shortly after the Brussels Conference, Japanese bomber planes attacked two British steamers at Wuhu on 5 December 1937.⁴ Once again, Washington rejected Eden's proposals for joint sanctions or naval redeployments to the Far East, forcing Eden to respond merely with a protest note.⁵ As this incident occurred, the COS challenged Chamberlain to choose between the conflicting strategies of appeasement or of constructing a partnership with France and America. On 8 December, Chamberlain seemingly had reached a verdict, concluding, 'he would be a rash man who based his calculations on help from that quarter [America]'.⁶ The time had come, at least in Chamberlain's mind, to end the inconsistency in foreign policy that had dominated the Baldwin years.⁷ He would reach agreements with Italy and Germany, promising the recognition of Abyssinia to the former and the ceding of British and French colonies to the latter, the resulting settlement in Europe freeing him to discipline Japan. According to Kennedy, Britain's choice to pursue appeasement was arguably "natural"... for a small island state gradually losing its place in world affairs, shouldering military and economic burdens which were increasingly too great for it'.⁸ When one adds to this calculation an absence of suitable partners with which to pursue an alliance-building alternative strategy, appeasement seems all the more natural.

Chamberlain's hope for a peace agreement with Hitler and Mussolini increased in urgency in December as the "Rape of Nanking" saw the Japanese slaughter between

³ Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 213 and 224.

⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 101.

⁵ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 6 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 555-6.

⁶ Extract from Cabinet Conclusions, 8 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 656.

⁷ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 8.

⁸ Kennedy, 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939', pp. 213-14.

40,000 and 200,000 civilians.⁹ This massacre impacted public opinion in the great democracies.¹⁰ 'Foreigners... found civilians dead on every street', one American eye-witness wrote in the *New York Times*. 'Some of the victims were aged men, women and children... Many victims [including babies] were bayoneted and some of the wounds were barbarously cruel'.¹¹

On 12 December 1937, 100 kilometres to the south of these atrocities, the Japanese attacked British and American oil tankers, gunboats and merchant ships on the Yangtze River. The intensive gunfire from Japanese aircraft, shore batteries and patrol boats damaged numerous vessels and sank several Standard Oil Company tankers and one American gunboat – the USS Panay – killing dozens of Americans and one Briton in the process.¹² Washington was outraged to hear that the USS Panay was bombed and machine-gunned by Japanese planes and then fired upon by Japanese patrol boats as it sank. According to the survivors who were forced to abandon ship, the Japanese had searched for them amidst the marshy reeds 'to destroy all witnesses'.¹³

Eden, fearing that Britain's prestige had been dealt a serious blow by the Japanese, immediately looked to America in the hope that she would agree to a strong, united response – perhaps a naval demonstration in the Far East or Anglo-American naval conversations. Eden was adamant that London and Washington needed 'to curb this dangerous [Japanese] spirit before it goes to still more intolerable lengths'.¹⁴ Yet, Chamberlain believed that the dismal Brussels Conference had shown the futility of

⁹ These estimates vary greatly, depending on the time, geographical and demographic parameters used by scholars, such as the inclusion or exclusion of military fatalities and deaths in the surrounding areas of Nanking.

¹⁰ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 20; Lowe, 'Great Britain's Assessment of Japan Before the Outbreak of the Pacific War', p. 459.

¹¹ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 493; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 20.

¹² Notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 564; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 486; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 20; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 30; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, pp. 50-2.

¹³ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 491.

¹⁴ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 13 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 565; Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 14 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 575.

approaching America for help. In his eyes, appeasement was the only way forward. Immediately, a cold war erupted between the two politicians for the rudder of British foreign policy, with Eden temporarily clinging on to the helm.

Whilst Eden wished to propose a powerful naval demonstration in response to Japan's latest outrage, he first had to see if Washington would consider more minor, united responses, such as a joint protest note to Tokyo.¹⁵ Yet, Washington, perhaps having anticipated this, sent their protest note within twenty-four hours of the Panay Incident, before the British could consult them, which 'disappointed' Eden, and reinforced Chamberlain's argument that a partnership with America was not a realistic possibility.¹⁶ Once again, Eden's approach to Washington was unfortunately timed, as the Roosevelt Administration was being sieged by the Ludlow Resolution in Congress – Ludlow had proposed a national referendum before the President could declare war to restrict his power.¹⁷ The knife-edge vote on the Ludlow Resolution would occur on 10 January, severely restricting the President's actions during the interim.

Despite Washington's decision to send their protest note independently, the British believed that the door was still open for a joint naval demonstration in the Far East, depending on the tone and conciliatoriness of Tokyo's response. On 15 December, the Cabinet agreed to send a fleet to the Pacific, *if* Washington did likewise, though Chamberlain fatalistically assumed that the Americans would not be willing.¹⁸ As the proposal was being drafted by the Cabinet, word arrived from Lindsay warning that Roosevelt was 'not yet in a position' to act jointly with Britain against Japan as public opinion remained exceedingly isolationist despite the Administration's best efforts to

¹⁵ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 13 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 565.

¹⁶ The Americans sent a copy of their formal protest note to London to allow a similar but fundamentally *independent* note to be sent by the British; Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 14 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 572-3; Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 501.

¹⁷ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Cabinet Conclusions, 15 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 583-6.

educate it.¹⁹ Eden admitted to Lindsay that 'it might be useless and indeed impolitic to press them again', but wished for Lindsay to do so if he deemed it prudent, since the prestige of both democracies had been trampled on.²⁰

Whilst Washington had so far acted independently out of wariness of the Ludlow Resolution, behind closed doors some advisors believed that the time had arrived for action.²¹ An indignant CNO Admiral Leahy petitioned Roosevelt to 'get the fleet ready for sea, to make an arrangement with the British Navy for joint action and to inform the Japanese that we expect to protect our nationals'.²² Similarly, Morgenthau suggested the freezing of all Japanese governmental assets in Britain and America.²³ Only weeks previously, Roosevelt had denied Leahy's request for Anglo-American naval staff conversations after the Japanese had seized British customs vessels in Shanghai and Tientsin.²⁴ This time, however, Roosevelt was willing to consider clandestine naval conversations, and as a first step asked Lindsay to meet him at the White House 'most secretly' to discuss the matter.²⁵

Whilst Lindsay doubted that Roosevelt would go beyond 'any but the most secret steps' in deference to American public opinion, hope was kindled in London.²⁶ Chamberlain admitted that the Americans – although liable to never go beyond words – were 'nearer to doing something than I have ever known them and I can't altogether repress hopes'.²⁷ Similarly encouraged, Eden asked Lindsay to declare to Roosevelt

¹⁹ Cabinet Conclusions, 15 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 583-6; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 108.

²⁰ Eden to Lindsay, 15 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 581; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 108.

²¹ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 192.

²² Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 18.

²³ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 192.

²⁴ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, pp. 16-7.

²⁵ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 15 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 578.

²⁶ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 16 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 587.

²⁷ Chamberlain to Hilda, letter, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 588.

that the 'democracies have to meet rising criticism of inaction and helplessness' and finally 'do something to restore our damaged prestige'.²⁸

As he sat down with Lindsay in the White House, Roosevelt exceeded all hopes and expectations, calling not just for joint naval staff conversations in London, but 'an arrangement such as prevailed from 1915 to 1917... by which a systematic exchange of secret information had been established between the Admiralty and Navy Department', without the knowledge of the British and American foreign ministries. Although this pleased the British, he then surprised Lindsay with an idea to impose a naval economic blockade on Japan, running from Hawaii to Hong Kong, which would strangle Japan's economy, *without* risking war.²⁹ This blockade would only be imposed after the *next* Japanese outrage.

It seems plausible that Roosevelt's desperation to retaliate with strength distorted his reasoning. He became temporarily blind to the reality that his proposals for a naval blockade might lead to war, something which Roosevelt could not risk given America's military unpreparedness. This might explain why he wished for the blockade to be implemented only after the *next* outrage. Perhaps he wished for extra time to rectify America's serious military deficiencies, as well as time to shift American public opinion. According to Lindsay, Roosevelt had 'entered into his worst inspirational mood', with his elaborate scheme coming out 'not as one statement but piecemeal in response to my horrified criticisms and questions which I must admit made little impression on him as he seemed wedded to his scheme'.³⁰

Yet, Lindsay tried not to 'quench the smoking flax' as the promise of naval staff conversations was a remarkable breakthrough for the British after the dysfunctional relationship of the past nineteen years. Instead, Lindsay moved onto more realistic options than an economic blockade to check Japan, such as naval redeployments to the Pacific, naval mobilisations in home waters, advancing the date of naval

²⁸ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 16 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 587-8.

²⁹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 589-90.

³⁰ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 590.

manoeuvres, and a visit of American cruisers to Singapore. Whilst Roosevelt was willing to consider the last idea, he dismissed the first, believing that the Royal Navy was more desperately required in Europe. He also 'rejected out of hand' the idea of a naval mobilisation, claiming that it 'did not count for anything' in America, where the naval reserve system was rudimentary.³¹ As the meeting terminated, Lindsay was given permission to report that Roosevelt was seriously considering both naval conversations and a cruiser visit to Singapore. Thus, the opportunity to forge a global partnership seemed closer than ever before.

'The chief impression left on my mind was that I had been talking to a man who had done his best in the Great War to bring America speedily on the side of the Allies,' reported Lindsay with unusual optimism, 'and who now was equally anxious to be able to bring America in on the side before it might be too late'.³² In the Foreign Office, Ronald commented, 'the plan sketched out by the President may be a fantastic chimaera as it stands, but it... should not be impossible to preserve the lion's head while yet transforming the goatly body into something more congruous'.³³ The following day, Morgenthau telephoned Simon to propose another way to pressure Japan should she not prove remorseful over the Panay Incident, namely the establishment of an exchange control against Japan, which Roosevelt could legally create *without* Congressional approval.³⁴ However, Morgenthau 'could not have chosen a more unfortunate person', for Simon was 'the arch-enemy of precipitate action'.³⁵ Simon replied that he was 'uncomfortable handling this on the telephone' and curtly advised Morgenthau to approach Lindsay instead.³⁶ Although this

³¹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 590-1.

³² Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 592.

³³ Ronald, minute, 19 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 592.

³⁴ Simon to Chamberlain, 18 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 595-7.

³⁵ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 192.

³⁶ Simon to Chamberlain, 18 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 597.

approach led nowhere, what is clear is that Washington was at last seriously contemplating how to stop the rot in the Far East in direct partnership with London.

Astonishingly, the American public and press were also swiftly drifting towards an overwhelming Anglo-American response to Japan as the details of the USS Panay attack were received and disseminated. On 22 December, Lindsay observed that there was 'almost a conspiracy among the writers of special articles in the [American] press to advocate cooperation', whilst 'there had hardly been a murmur against the cause' from Congress.³⁷ Only a week previously, Hull had revealed to Lindsay that 'he had been working day and night to educate the American public on the dangers of isolation and on the necessity of co-operating. A little while ago he had addressed a private meeting of 150 Congressmen on the subject and had... opened their eyes', and was 'trying to arrange in Congress that pacifist mischief-makers should have their wings clipped. Hull had also invited the press 'up to the State Department in batches' and 'had inspired the recent leader in *New York Times*, which had made such a sensation'.³⁸

Hull's aim was to bring American public opinion 'to a point where it would be possible to move the fleet without causing a panic. No one appreciated more than he did that Great Britain and the United States must cooperate'. This was something Hull wished to normalise for Americans, and he was 'putting around everywhere that the two Governments always sought to consult each other,... were in close cooperation and were habitually conducting their business along parallel lines'.³⁹ According to Lindsay, public opinion was moving 'very favourably' as a consequence and 'a voluntary boycott of Japanese goods... had suddenly developed in large proportions'. Equally encouraging was the news that the President had received a hundred letters from the public, of which 80 were in favour of decisive action against Japan.⁴⁰ Eden read this

³⁷ Lindsay to Cadogan, telegram, 22 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 611.

³⁸ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 14 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 575-6.

³⁹ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 14 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 575-6.

⁴⁰ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 592.

news with pleasure, commenting that it was 'on the whole encouraging, for Sir. R. Lindsay is ever wisely cautious in his estimates of U.S. action & opinion'.⁴¹

Much of this good news on the dramatic shift in American public opinion was communicated to Lindsay by Roosevelt at the same secret meeting where Roosevelt revealed his plans economically to blockade Japan after the *next* outrage. It seems peculiar then, given the timing of this shift in public opinion, that Roosevelt ruled out a naval blockade against Japan as a response to her recalcitrance, *unless* one takes into account America's military weakness as a second restrictive factor alongside her political isolationism. This interpretation breaks with the traditional focus of historians solely on Roosevelt's political restrictions.⁴² Whilst the Ludlow Resolution was akin to a Sword of Damocles, hanging over Roosevelt's head as he attempted to rule, he was equally concerned by America's alarming military weakness. This was a second sword, which equally stood in the way of imposing harsh sanctions on Japan. Roosevelt would not collaborate navally with the British until both these swords were removed, despite his desperation to act. This explains why he suggested naval action only after the *next* Japanese outrage. It was hoped that both American public opinion and military preparedness would be substantially more favourable by then, allowing him to act more decisively. Roosevelt, forced to wait for his military circumstances to improve, thus had no choice but to accept Japan's apology in late December, despite the positive shift in public opinion. Roosevelt claimed that Japan's apology satisfied America's need for recompense, even as the British disparaged this apology and pushed for a joint naval response.⁴³

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America's military weakness in the eighteen years prior to 1937 has already been established in previous chapters. This severe restriction upon the President was at

⁴¹ Eden, minute, 22 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 611.

⁴² Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41.

⁴³ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 126.

least equal to America's political isolationism. As the world slid towards another cataclysmic war in the 1930s, Roosevelt often found himself ready to save it from destruction with some bold peace initiative. Yet, as seen in previous chapters, Roosevelt was often forced to backtrack or procrastinate as America's political and military handicaps returned to the forefront of his mind. Whilst the wintry grip of isolationism began to thaw after the destruction of the USS Panay, this thesis contends that America's military weakness remained a severe restriction upon the actions of Roosevelt in the winter of 1937-38 and beyond, preventing him from imposing sanctions on Japan.

This argument has serious ramifications for how historians perceive America's global position during the interwar years. Rather than being the heir apparent of the British Empire, or God incarnate, ready to save mankind from itself, America was in fact largely devoid of economic and military power in the 1930s. This dearth of power diluted her influence across the world as she was removed from the military calculations of the other great powers before 1939. Indeed, America is not mentioned in Inskip's numerous military appreciations between 1936 and 1940, except to be discounted from the military equation.⁴⁴ No matter Roosevelt's internationalism and desperation to help, he was destined to be side-lined whilst America remained powerless, unable to coerce the aggressive states to embrace peace. Unfortunately, the only tool Roosevelt possessed was a moral plea. This weapon was frequently wielded, but rarely proved effective.

In chapter five, it was shown that the Admiralty was fully aware of the US Navy's severe deficiencies in the early and mid-1930s, including its shortage in personnel, warships, auxiliaries, bases, dry docks and fuelling facilities, all of which made war plan Orange infeasible. Building upon this fresh revelation, Admiralty documents in

⁴⁴ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937. Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; 'British Strategic Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

the late 1930s – specifically from the Naval Intelligence Directorate, the British Embassy in Washington and the files concerning the Anglo-American Naval Conversations of January 1938 – confirm that the British were acutely aware of America's inability to fight Japan in East Asia. This revelation allows a complete reinterpretation of why Roosevelt refused to contemplate naval action during the Panay Crisis and a complete explanation for why Chamberlain opposed naval collaboration with Washington at this time. In fact, according to Pratt, Chamberlain only agreed to the Anglo-American naval staff conversations in order 'to constrain him [Roosevelt] and educate him' about the risks of imposing an economic blockade.⁴⁵ Chamberlain was not willing to start down the road to war so long as America appeared likely to backtrack at the last moment because of her naval and military insecurities.

On 31 December 1937, USN Captain Ingersoll arrived in Britain for these secret naval conversations.⁴⁶ It was hoped by Eden that these discussions might culminate in an agreement for joint naval action against Japan. However, as soon as the talks began, Ingersoll explained that America was in no position to wage war against Japan given her navy's acute shortage of warships, personnel and a suitable naval base in the Western Pacific from where she could attack Japan.⁴⁷ Ingersoll revealed that the US Navy 'was wholly opposed to any strong steps being taken [against Japan] until the fleet in commission was 'brought up to 100 percent full complement and prepared in all aspects for war', a process which would take several years *if* America poured all her resources into naval rearmament.⁴⁸ This, however, was an unlikely proposition given America's refusal to participate in the global naval arms race thus far. Washington's decision to rule out immediate action against Japan dismayed Eden.⁴⁹ However,

⁴⁵ Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', p. 754.

⁴⁶ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 22.

⁴⁷ Captain Ingersoll, Memorandum for Captain Phillips, 'Summary of talks', ADM 116/3922; Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plans' Room, 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922; Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 1 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 628-9.

⁴⁸ Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, p. 367.

⁴⁹ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 194; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 128.

Chamberlain was delighted.⁵⁰ His reaction is understandable when one considers Britain's negative perception of America's military capability.

Indeed, the new Naval Attaché to Washington, Captain Curzon-Howe, was stunned by America's shortage of warships. Whilst other nations had spent the mid-1930s building warships at a relentless pace, America was still yet to reach her 1921-2 naval treaty allocation, despite the expiry of these treaties in January 1936. Even more alarmingly, Curzon-Howe predicted that the US Navy's already-expired allocation in battleships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines would 'not be realised before 1945' due to naval production bottlenecks in the providing ground and production of armour, guns and mountings for warships.⁵¹

America's limited naval production capacity served as a handicap for the next five years. Even after Washington's famous Two Ocean Navy Bill of July 1940, which 'called for the largest [naval] expansion known to history', and after eighteen months of intense shipbuilding prior to Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour, the British NID despondently acknowledged that 'little of this immense programme had as yet left the ways, and a comparison between the U.S. and the Japanese navies' was only slightly in the former's favour. Furthermore, the NID highlighted 'the two ocean responsibilities of the United States, which could never move all she had into the Pacific'. This placed the advantage 'clearly on the side of Japan', its forces being entirely concentrated in Pacific waters.⁵²

Another problem flagged by Curzon-Howe was the US Navy's chronic 'shortage in personnel, both for officers and men'. Despite increases in enlistment, the US Navy remained at 85 percent of war complement, due to its parallel increase in warships.⁵³ Alarmingly, this percentage dropped to 50% complement when one considered the battleships and destroyers on the Atlantic Coast. At the Anglo-American naval staff conversations, Ingersoll warned that America would not risk fighting Japan until this

⁵⁰ Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', p. 754.

⁵¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁵² *The Far East and Pacific*, ADM 223/494

⁵³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plans' Room, 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922

personnel shortage was remedied.⁵⁴ Around 150,000 men and 1,087 pilots were required to bring the navy up to full complement, a difficult target whilst the US Navy's wages remained so meagre. Strangely, the Navy Department did nothing to invigorate its recruitment strategy during the late 1930s, an ominous sign for those hoping for naval collaboration against Japan.⁵⁵ As a silver lining, Curzon-Howe observed that the officer shortage was 'not as bad as it sounds, as the US Navy are extravagant in their use of officers', deploying more than necessary to each warship.⁵⁶

Perhaps the most serious handicap which Washington had neglected to address after the expiry of the non-fortification clauses of the Washington Treaties in 1936 was the development of a suitable naval base in the Philippines from where a large-scale naval offensive could be launched against Japan.⁵⁷ The defensive frailties of Manila Bay had received no attention since 1936, whilst a new threat was revealed to the British by Ingersoll, who warned that Manila Bay was vulnerable to a Japanese air attack from Formosa, 'more especially as the Americans had no long-range bombing aircraft' in the Philippines, nor the capability to transport such aircraft from America by sea, to attack Formosa in turn. Ingersoll was thus anxious about the damage Japanese bombers could inflict to 'tankers, dockyard facilities and oil fuel installations at Manila'. Meanwhile, the limited defences of the other significant Philippine harbours of Cavites and Malampaya were either 'unmanned' or non-existent respectively.⁵⁸

In light of these weaknesses, Ingersoll revealed that the US Navy did not 'at present envisage proceeding immediately to Manila or any other Philippine port' in the event of war, but instead anticipated 'a gradual advance across the Pacific', before 'finally establishing themselves at Truk'.⁵⁹ However, Truk was 2,000 miles to the east of the Philippines, too distant from Japan to serve as an advanced naval base, even if it had sufficient docking and repair facilities to host a major fleet, which it did not. The

⁵⁴ Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plans' Room, 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922

⁵⁵ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 134.

⁵⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁵⁷ These clauses had forbidden America from improving the defences or facilities of her naval bases in the Western Pacific.

⁵⁸ Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plans' Room, 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922

⁵⁹ Captain Ingersoll, Memorandum for Captain Phillips, 'Summary of talks', ADM 116/3922

navy's gradual advance would also doom the weak US garrison in the Philippines. These two factors nullified war plan Orange. America finally accepted this in November 1937, scrapping it altogether, despite it being her *only* comprehensive war plan.⁶⁰ Without a feasible war plan to call upon, Roosevelt understandably declined to act until the *next* Japanese outrage.

Congress's decision in 1938 to bestow independence to the Philippines by 1946 compounded this bleak British image of America's naval capabilities.⁶¹ This decision condemned what little hope remained of transforming Manila into a major naval base.⁶² According to Lindsay, the US Army had long desired to abandon the Philippines at the earliest opportunity as they deemed the islands both a 'dangerous outpost' and a 'dangerous liability'.⁶³ In the event of independence, Lindsay predicted that the US Government would completely dismantle its fortifications on the islands.⁶⁴

The only serious positive for the US Navy was its Fleet Air Arm, which has been fully discussed in chapter six. By 1938, its rising strength and efficiency led Admiral Chatfield to describe it as 'the finest in the world'.⁶⁵ However, even with this impressive Fleet Air Arm, the US Navy was regarded as incapable of fighting an offensive war in the Pacific so long as it lacked an adequate naval base. If the navy was the greatest of America's armed services, how much more incapable would the army and air force be?

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In the late 1930s, the strength of the US Air Force dramatically diminished in British eyes compared to Europe's leading air forces. Documents from the British Embassy in Washington, the Air Intelligence Directorate and the British air mission to America

⁶⁰ Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East', p. 753; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 97.

⁶¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁶² Doyle, 'The US Navy and War Plan Orange', pp. 252-260.

⁶³ Lindsay to Foreign Office, 28 May 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, vol. XXI*, pp. 131-132; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁶⁴ Lindsay to Foreign Office, 28 May 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, vol. XXI*, p. 133.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, 'Exchange of Technical Information with the US Navy', 7 May 1938, ADM 116/4210

collectively testify to this bleak British assessment. From Washington, Captain Pirie reported that the GHQ Air Force had been in a terrible condition in 1937 and still remained 'considerably below' strength in 1938, making it second-rate. Its greatest aircraft deficiencies could be found in its three large bomber squadrons, its nine pursuit plane squadrons, and its four reconnaissance squadrons, which all languished at around 50 percent of their establishment strength. Indeed, the GHQ only possessed twelve of its 24 "establishment total" of B-17 bombers; 136 of its 225 "establishment total" of P-35, P-36 and PB-2A pursuit planes; and 27 of its 52 "establishment total" of B-10B and B-18 reconnaissance planes.⁶⁶ Moreover, production was so slow that by the time the B-18 orders were completed in 1940, the British labelled it 'obsolescent'.⁶⁷ The GHQ also only possessed reserve aircraft and trainer planes on 'a meagre scale'.⁶⁸

By 1938, the American air situation had become so terrible that Pirie reported 'the awakening of the American public to a realisation that their country is no longer pre-eminent'. According to Pirie, Europe had 'surpassed' America in aerial terms both numerically and qualitatively, and America would not regain her former crown unless she gave 'a considerably greater effort than is at present being exerted'.⁶⁹ Nine months onwards, during the Munich Crisis, Roosevelt keenly felt the impact of America's aerial decline. He vented his frustrations, complaining, 'I must have something to back up my words. Had we this summer 5,000 planes and the capacity immediately to produce 10,000 planes a year... Hitler would not have dared to take the stand he did'.⁷⁰ In a similar vein, Ambassador Bullitt lamented to Roosevelt that the lesson was clear: 'if you have enough airplanes you don't have to go to Berchtesgaden'.⁷¹ These despondent comments epitomise how America's dearth of military power had diluted Roosevelt's influence internationally. The President was all-but powerless to reinforce his pleas for an accommodation with a show of force.

⁶⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁶⁷ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

⁶⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁶⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁷⁰ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 42; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 301.

⁷¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 300.

America's global position in the twilight years of peace thus appears much less substantial than historians such as Kennedy, Watt and Barnett have claimed.⁷²

By early 1938, America only had plans for an air force of 2,320 *first-line* planes by 1940.⁷³ However, Pirie vehemently warned that the term 'first-line' in Washington did not have the same significance as it did in Europe as 'it comprises all operational and training aircraft and includes all reserve aircraft as well'. He thus stressed that America's aim for 2,320 first-line aircraft was much less impressive than it sounded.⁷⁴ Even after the completion of the US air rearmament programme, the Americans would still lag behind the major powers of Europe. Indeed, by autumn 1938, Britain, France, and Germany had first-line strengths of 1,669, 1,550, and 2,349 aircraft respectively, without including reserve aircraft, trainer planes or aircraft earmarked for imperial duties.⁷⁵

Perhaps more alarming still, Britain was aiming for a first-line strength of 2,331 aircraft within two years, supported by a similar number of reserve aircraft, giving Britain approximately double the aircraft of America.⁷⁶ Not dissimilarly, France had launched Plan V in March 1938 for 2,617 first-line aircraft within two years, with an additional 2,122 reserve aircraft.⁷⁷ Meanwhile, according to Britain's most recent appreciations, the Luftwaffe was aiming for 4,540 first-line aircraft by April 1940.⁷⁸ In fact, German aircraft factories produced 3350 *combat* aircraft in 1938 alone, whilst in 1939 they built 4,733 combat aircraft.⁷⁹ This rate of production was only overshadowed by the Soviets, who were producing over 6,000 aircraft a year from

⁷² Mckercher, *Transition of Power*, p. 1; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87.

⁷³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁷⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁷⁵ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 69; Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at an Military Equation', p. 57.

⁷⁶ Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41, 12.

⁷⁷ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 269.

⁷⁸ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 70.

⁷⁹ Overy, 'The German Pre-War Aircraft production Plans: November 1936-April 1939', p. 785.

1937 onwards, and had the world's largest air force of 3,500 first-line planes.⁸⁰ It was obvious to the British that America had lost her aerial crown, and that it would be years before she could reclaim it, leaving Roosevelt without a powerful air force to back up his words.

It was only after Munich that Roosevelt decided to rectify America's dire air situation. On 14 November, the President announced his plans to construct a substantial air force to counter the *alleged* 10,000 aircraft possessed by Germany and Italy. Roosevelt desired a 'shop-window' force mainly consisting of first-line aircraft to deter the dictators from aggression – he was not so interested with providing spares, reserves or additional pilots.⁸¹ Roosevelt's plans were immediately put into motion and the American Air Force was accorded the task of achieving a strength of 5,500 aircraft by 1 July 1940, at a cost of \$300 million.⁸² This expansion would constitute a 'tripling of the existing strength of the Air Corps'.⁸³

However, Pirie noted that of these 5,500 aircraft only 3,400 would be *combat* types, with the other 2,100 planes being used for training, communication, and transportation. Furthermore, of these combat types only 2,000 would make up the GHQ's total first-line strength, with the other 1,400 held in reserve.⁸⁴ Thus, even after this dramatic air rearmament programme, America would still lag behind Europe.⁸⁵ In tandem with this material expansion, the Army Air Corps secured appropriations virtually to double its personnel from 20,000 to 44,537 enlisted men and from 2,600

⁸⁰ Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937: Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23, p. 11; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 216; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p. 57.

⁸¹ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 42.

⁸² *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 305.

⁸³ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

⁸⁴ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

⁸⁵ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253; Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim Report', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41, p. 12; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 269; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 70.

to 4,663 officers.⁸⁶ Whilst the GHQ Air Force's efficiency was deemed 'remarkable', its expansion cast doubt on whether this efficiency could be maintained.⁸⁷

It must of course be remembered that this great post-Munich expansion was not anticipated by the Americans or British during the winter of 1937-38. At that point, the American Air Force was numerically deficient, languishing well below its establishment strength – which, in any case, was seriously dwarfed by the air forces of Britain, Russia, France and Germany. Thus, it would be years before the American air force was fully respected by its European rivals, and longer still before it was feared.

In tandem with its numerical decline, Pirie believed that the American air force had declined qualitatively in comparison to its European rivals.⁸⁸ For several years, Pirie had reported on the 'poor condition of the Army Air Corp's equipment'.⁸⁹ In particular, Pirie emphasised that the GHQ Air Force had made 'little headway since 1918 in aircraft armament equipment'.⁹⁰ Indeed, it was only now belatedly giving more attention to weapons development. Meanwhile, the next generation of large bomber prototypes – particularly the B-17 – had seemed promising, but two accidents in 1936 had raised concerns over its controllability.⁹¹

However, the real wake-up call to America's qualitative decline in planes, material and equipment came in 1938. Pirie learnt that the heavy deficiencies in bombers and reconnaissance aircraft presently plaguing the GHQ Air Force were to be exclusively alleviated by the B-18 bomber, which in his opinion was 'outclassed in performance by aircraft of all the leading European powers'. He complained that 'despite this serious defect, the army continue to order the type in fairly large numbers', with 180 delivered already, and 210 more on order.⁹² Whilst its interior was spacious and comfortable, its handling delightful, and its windows good for fighting and reconnaissance purposes, the Douglas B-18 lacked good defensive weapons. Indeed,

⁸⁶ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

⁸⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁸⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁸⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁹⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

⁹¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1936*, FO 371/20670

⁹² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

its tunnel gun, top turret and forward nose turret were all deemed inadequate for defensive purposes, whilst its flying speed was also found wanting.⁹³ By 1940, the B-18 was rendered obsolete by the Americans themselves and earmarked for replacement by the Martin B-26 and the North American B-25, both of which had vastly superior top speeds of 330 mph.⁹⁴ Pirie also criticised American fighters, particularly the A-17A, for being 'not entirely suitable' for low-flying attacks and for its technical troubles.⁹⁵

Even more revealing were the reports of the British air mission to America. A handful of RAF and Royal Navy officers departed for New York on 20 April 1938, where they were welcomed by Pirie. Their task was to examine and order American planes in bulk for the British Government, on condition that they were of good quality, reasonably priced and quickly producible. For reconnaissance aircraft, the air mission planned to visit the companies of Martin, Douglas, Lockheed and Consolidated; for large bombers they chose Boeing; for trainer-planes they chose North American and Curtiss-Wright; and for naval planes they chose Grumman, Curtiss-Wright and Chance-Vought.⁹⁶

Commander A. T. Harris travelled to Baltimore to observe the Martin 166 general reconnaissance plane, but quickly realised that its 'shortcomings' made this aircraft 'a hopeless proposition for G.R. [general reconnaissance] work'. The plane's mediocre performance also ruled it out as a medium-bomber. Harris concluded that 'under no circumstances could I recommend this type for adaption as a G.R. or Bomber aircraft'.⁹⁷ Lord Weir added in a second report that 'this type would scarcely be considered for G.R. purposes except at a last resort'.⁹⁸

Observations of the Consolidated PBY-1 flying boat, which was widely used by the US Navy, fared little better, despite Pirie having previously described it as 'highly successful' with 'astonishing capabilities'. To its credit, the PBY-1 had a range of 4,000

⁹³ Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

⁹⁴ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

⁹⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁹⁶ Lord Weir to Secretary of State, Air Mission to USA and Canada, 1938, Air 19/39

⁹⁷ Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

⁹⁸ Lord Weir to Secretary of State, Air Mission to USA and Canada, 1938, Air 19/39

miles, a self-contained interior and a tail turret, which was revolutionary for American planes (though not for British planes).⁹⁹ Furthermore, future adaptations of the PBY-1 flying boat would 'carry two 21" torpedoes'. This meant that a hostile fleet would not be able to come 'within 1,000 miles of American territory without becoming liable to torpedo attacks delivered by shore-based aircraft'.¹⁰⁰ However, after closer inspection in San Diego, Harris declared that the aircraft was 'most unimpressive'. In his opinion, 'even to the uninitiated in aerodynamics and stress volumes – such as myself – the vast difference between our own ideas of size and practicable design and those accepted in this aircraft were evident on every hand'. Labelling it a waste of money, Harris advised against its purchase 'other than as a last resort'.¹⁰¹

The aforementioned B-18 was also inspected in San Diego. When Harris discussed its capabilities with American pilots they were 'enthusiastic'. Yet, after observing it flying, Harris reported that its take-off was 'poor, even with a light load', and believed that this explained why delivered B-18s were being 'returned in rotation to the factory for more powerful engines to be fitted'. He further noted that their turret guns were utterly inadequate, and that 'we should have to fit our own'. This problem of poorly designed turret guns was rife throughout the American aircraft industry. He complained that 'all American turrets we have seen so far are similarly rudimentary and obviously as impracticable as our own earliest attempts'.¹⁰²

This weakness in turrets was reported numerous times. Whilst the Lockheed B-14 was regarded as a 'most attractive' general reconnaissance plane *and* a 'formidable medium bomber', almost akin in speed to the rapid Blenheim (200 of these B-14 planes were eventually ordered by the British after inspecting it in San Diego), it was criticised for its turrets, which Harris believed would have to be acquired separately

⁹⁹ USA, October 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544; Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

¹⁰⁰ USA, October 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

¹⁰¹ Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

¹⁰² Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

from English manufacturers. Harris reported that due to America's lack of modern turrets 'we can dismiss all thoughts of obtaining practical turrets of American design from American sources'. In a damning verdict of the American aircraft industry, Harris wrote that the Lockheed B-14 was 'the only aircraft I have seen in America which I regard seriously as an up-to-date military aircraft'.¹⁰³

Harris' harshest remarks were reserved for the B-17 "Flying Fortress", which was inspected in Seattle. He concluded that its turrets 'would be more appropriately located in an amusement park than in a war aeroplane'. Indeed, the bomber's front turrets were deemed so hopeless that he believed the "Flying Fortress" could 'operate only at night if opposed by modern fighters', or else it would be destroyed. 'So far from being a "fortress"', Harris explained, 'this aircraft is *practically indefensible* against any modern fighter'.¹⁰⁴ The B-17 bomber was also scorned for having 'a very bad take off' and a 'remarkably bad landing'.¹⁰⁵ Whilst the B-17 had a range of 2,000 miles with a load of 6000-lbs, Lord Weir concluded that the plane was 'not favourable'.¹⁰⁶

Over the following two years, there was little sign of improvement. In January 1940, a second British air mission to America observed that her aircraft still lacked well-designed turrets. It was reported that 'no long-range American bombers have an armament which in our view is any way adequate'. In particular, the British officers criticised a complete absence of 'power-operated turrets, which we consider to be indispensable'. The mission concluded that, apart from a few short-range attack bombers, such as the Douglas A-20, 'none of the present type of American bomber appears to meet our requirements'.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

¹⁰⁴ Italics added; Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

¹⁰⁵ Harris, 'The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada', report of 30 May 1938, Air 19/39

¹⁰⁶ USA, October 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; Lord Weir to Secretary of State, Air Mission to USA and Canada, 1938, Air 19/39

¹⁰⁷ W.S. Douglas to PUS, 16 January 1940, AIR 8/293

Returning to 1938, the Curtiss P-36 fighter was respected. The aircraft possessed a top speed of 300 mph, which was 2 mph faster than France's Morane-405, though it was 70 mph slower than the revolutionary Spitfire, which was delivered to the RAF from 1938.¹⁰⁸ Even more impressively, the Curtiss P-37 had a top speed of 340 mph. Meanwhile, Lockheed was testing a fighter with a reported top speed of 415 mph. Whilst these American fighters were of high-quality, the American aircraft industry had become incapable of producing them quickly or in great numbers, which caused serious delivery delays.¹⁰⁹ These delays meant that the fighters were often rendered obsolete upon arrival. This did not bode well for the British who required immediate and large deliveries of American combat planes to close the gap with the Luftwaffe. Anxiously, the British observed that when the P-36 deliveries were finally completed in 1939, the plane was already earmarked for replacement by the P-40, which had a top speed of 368 mph. Along with the P-40, the Americans had also ordered 100 Bell P-39s and 100 Republic P-44 fighters, which had speeds of 390 and 370 mph respectively.¹¹⁰ Whilst their capabilities were impressive, on-time delivery was crucial, or they too would be obsolete upon entering service.

The British air mission also wished to find suitable sea-planes for the Royal Navy and a trainer-type plane for RAF cadets. Commander John inspected the Vought SB2-U, the Curtiss SBC and the Grumman two-seater. The first two models were designed as scout bombers, with a primary function of dive-bombing. John reported that both types were 'very under-gunned', and that 'neither firm relished the proposition of increasing the number of front guns'. More importantly, he recognised that the wing-folding arrangements of both planes were 'either non-existent or impracticable for British carriers'. This made it impossible to store them in hangers. The Grumman plane was even more disappointing, the machine quickly branded as 'obsolete'. John bitterly concluded that 'none of these three aircraft can be recommended'.¹¹¹ Harris was more fortunate in his search for trainer-aircraft. He found two models produced

¹⁰⁸ USA, August 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; France, January 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 262.

¹⁰⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹¹⁰ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹¹¹ John, 'Possible Fleet Air Arm Types', undated report, Air 19/39

by North American and Curtiss-Wright – the NA-16G and C-19R.¹¹² Two hundred of the former type were eventually ordered, whilst the latter type was also deemed worthy.¹¹³

America did not just languish behind the leading air forces of Europe in the spheres of quantity and quality, its aircraft industry also failed to match the extraordinary aircraft production rates seen across Europe. Since 1930, the British had successfully curtailed the period between design, production and delivery, whilst their American counterparts continued to have ‘an interval of seven years’.¹¹⁴ Moreover, industrial bottlenecks plagued the American aircraft industry. Thus, the volume of production was now ‘greatly’ in Britain’s favour.¹¹⁵

Consequently, the GHQ Air Force critically lacked pursuit aircraft. Pirie reported that production of the Bell twin-engine pursuit planes only began a whole year after the contracts were placed. Paradoxically, whilst some factories were seriously behind in deliveries, others were ‘unusually quiet... due to a lack of orders’. Pirie observed that Boeing, Consolidated, Martin and Seversky had each reduced their staffs for some 5-6 months as they completed deliveries and received no additional contracts during the year. Pirie believed that the factories of Lockheed and North American would have been similarly idle in 1938, had it not been for the British orders. This was a peculiar phenomenon, especially given the all-out air arms race occurring across the Atlantic. Of the many American aircraft companies, Douglas and Curtiss were the only other firms to be fully employed throughout 1938. Likewise, amongst the engine-producing companies, only Wright and Pratt & Whitney worked ‘at full pressure’.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Harris, ‘The practical Aspects of the Aircraft Investigated by the Mission to USA and Canada’, report of 30 May 1938, AIR 19/39.

¹¹³ ‘Purchase of Aircraft from USA,’ Note for Prime Minister and Chancellor of Exchequer, 2 June 1938, AIR 19/39

¹¹⁴ ‘Investigation of Possibilities of Aircraft Purchases in U.S.A.’, undated report, AIR 19/39

¹¹⁵ Whilst the Americans had only sold £22m worth of airframes and engines in 1937, the British were approaching £50m in sales for 1938 and expected to surpass £70m in sales by the following year. ‘Investigation of Possibilities of Aircraft Purchases in U.S.A.’, undated report, AIR 19/39

¹¹⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

This situation became even more serious in late 1938 as France sought enormous aircraft orders from America. Since her aircraft production capacity was 'hardly more than one hundred planes per month', the issue of factory expansion suddenly 'became an urgent one'.¹¹⁷ Indeed, given that the Americans had proven incapable of bringing their own air force to establishment strength, how could they simultaneously accept aircraft contracts to supply the French? By December 1939, Daladier, was at a loss as to how to secure an increase in American aircraft deliveries.¹¹⁸

A last minute expansion of the American aircraft industry occurred in response to the European war, allowing orders to rise from a total of \$125 million in January 1939 to \$600 million by 1940, an increase of 480 percent.¹¹⁹ Employment in the industry rose in tandem, and by the end of 1939 a total of 93,000 men worked for American aircraft companies, an increase of 30,000 workers from the previous year.¹²⁰ Yet, these rising employment figures were still dwarfed by those in Europe. From 1936, the German aviation industry had 169,000 workers, whilst by 1938 the Russian aviation industry had 200,000 workers.¹²¹ It would also take time for increased investment to translate into increased output. Thus, Daladier complained in December 1939 that further orders could not be contemplated from America until the potential output of her aircraft industries was considerably increased.¹²² Regretfully, France was conquered before the fruits of this industrial investment could be enjoyed. Even then, British orders and needs were 'to outrun by far the available supplies' from America.¹²³

America's dire aircraft production capacity during the 1930s prevented Roosevelt from closing the gap between the American Air Force and the leading air forces across the Atlantic. It also prevented him from supplying Britain and France with enough combat aircraft to tilt the air balance in their favour. Throughout the late 1930s, the British recognised that the American Air Force was riddled with deficiencies – from its

¹¹⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 46.

¹¹⁸ Daladier to Chamberlain, 11 December 1939, AIR 8/293

¹¹⁹ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹²⁰ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹²¹ Overy, 'The German Pre-war Aircraft Production Plans, 1936-8', p. 793; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 184.

¹²² Daladier to Chamberlain, 11 December 1939, AIR 8/293

¹²³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 480.

numerical weakness and qualitative disadvantage to its dire rate of production – and saw little prospect of this being rectified in the coming years. The air mission of 1938 only compounded this negative perception, dispelling myths on the capabilities of significant American prototypes, such as the B-17, B-18, and PB1Y-1, all of which were widely used by America's armed forces. At a time when the principle of air power dominated strategic thinking in Europe, the American Air Force and aircraft industry were found to languish dangerously behind Europe, offering little hope of salvation to the downcast British and French.

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The US Army was widely recognised as the weakest of America's military services, chronically deficient in equipment, personnel and finance, even after several years of General MacArthur's five-year modernisation programme. By the time this programme reached completion in 1940, the British Military Attaché, Colonel Read (who relieved Colonel Torr in 1938) concluded that the US Army 'was still, in point of numbers, training and equipment, hardly better than third rate' and still had 'a long way to go to reach modern European standards'.¹²⁴ The Americans themselves reached a similar verdict in their 'Are We Ready?' study of 1941, concluding that, whilst the US Navy was still 'not ready to meet a serious emergency', the US Army was 'not ready for any emergency – major, minor, or in between'.¹²⁵ Thus, during the interwar period, the US Army was widely regarded as incapable of even defending the Western Hemisphere against a determined attack, never mind of fighting in Europe or Asia.¹²⁶

Of the US Army's longstanding equipment problems, the most concerning was its anti-aircraft regiments, which were criticised by Read for being 'practically devoid of weapons and fire-control equipment'. It was estimated that 408 more anti-aircraft guns were required by the National Guard to bring it close to its target of 1,940

¹²⁴ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 270; *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹²⁵ NB: latter quote in Christman's own words, Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt', p. 243.

¹²⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 471.

weapons.¹²⁷ It was clear that America's production of such equipment was 'severely limited'.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, the money spent on coastal artillery defence had accomplished 'very little beyond maintenance'.¹²⁹

However, there were positives. Colonel Read highlighted the recently completed mechanisation of the 7th Cavalry Brigade. Furthermore, the mechanisation of the 66th and 67th infantry regiments to consist of light and medium tanks respectively, was proceeding apace, the former having 'received practically all its equipment'. Yet, the latter regiment only had one active company, which was armed 'with *obsolete equipment*'. The motorisation of infantry divisions was also 'practically complete', though the army still lacked heavier types of motor vehicles.¹³⁰ The National Guard had also seen a 'steady improvement in armament, equipment and conditions of training', not to mention spirit, the organisation gaining the trust and confidence of the nation. Higher states of morale and discipline could also be 'found at every level of the regular army'.¹³¹

Equally welcome, was the level of financial support for the US Army, which was now abnormally high, with funds from Congress meeting the War Department's wishes 'in almost every respect'.¹³² Indeed, the following year, Read highlighted appropriations of \$160 million 'for ordinance material of all kinds, including tanks, anti-aircraft artillery, field artillery, anti-tank guns mortars, rifles and ammunition'. As a result, all government arsenals were 'working at full pressure' and even sharing the burden with civilian firms.¹³³

However, the US Army still lacked efficiency, with the manoeuvres of 1938 yet again revealing 'various weaknesses in organisation, armaments and tactics'. Read observed several smaller-scale exercises in the autumn, which he described as 'perfunctory' and executed with 'a lack of imagination'. Read believed that the army

¹²⁷ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹²⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

¹²⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹³⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹³¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹³² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹³³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

was very much handicapped by dispersion, something which damaged its efficiency by removing the opportunity for collective training. Read confessed that it was difficult to see 'how any real progress in training can be made until a small but permanent field army can be maintained and concentrated in two or three large areas' across the nation. Meanwhile, Read disparaged the military academy at West Point for its four-year course, which had led 'to many failures', and 'a suppression' of independent thinking. The military academy was especially scorned for 'teaching the infantry with horsed transport,' the lessons 'obsolete in theory and practice' and 'bearing little relation to reality'.¹³⁴

Little changed the following year. After spending twelve days observing the US Army's annual manoeuvres, Read pessimistically reported that its training was 'at a *low ebb*, far below that of most European armies, and that it is at present *unfit to play its part in a major war of rapid decision*'.¹³⁵ This damning verdict was echoed by the American military leadership. Major-General Hugh Drum described the US Army's performance at the manoeuvres as 'deplorable and inexcusable'.¹³⁶ It was clear to the British War Office that the US Army was too small, deficient and poorly trained to make even a remotely worthwhile contribution in a European war. This depressing verdict was passed up the ladder by the War Office to the COS in the late 1930s, which in turn encouraged Chamberlain 'to believe that little of practical value could be expected from the Americans'.¹³⁷

Despite reporting that the US Army appeared to be 'approaching a state of efficiency greater than at any time during its peacetime history', Read concluded that it had 'a long way to go to reach modern European standards' and be considered as a serious military factor.¹³⁸ Even by 1940, as war raged in Europe, the US Army had only increased its strength to 227,000 men, a meagre force overshadowed by the millions

¹³⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹³⁵ *Italics added, Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹³⁶ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹³⁷ Murfett, *Fool-proof Relations*, p. 165.

¹³⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

coscripted to the armies of Germany, Russia and France.¹³⁹ Thus, the British DNI commented that the defeat of France had no other effect than to convince the Americans that militarily 'they were powerless to help us, and thereby to inculcate a despondency throughout the whole of America'.¹⁴⁰

This unanimous perception of American military incapability helps explain why both the Admiralty and the British Government were so lukewarm to the idea of transatlantic collaboration against Japan during the winter months of 1937-38. Indeed, Admiral Chatfield declared after Roosevelt's Chicago Speech that 'you can be quite sure that if it comes to trouble in the Far East the Americans will stand aside'.¹⁴¹ Similarly, after the Panay Incident, Chamberlain commented, 'it is always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans but words'.¹⁴² Britain's acute awareness of America's military weakness means that Chamberlain's reluctance to seek an alliance with America was grounded on more than just an 'anti-American bias', 'a predetermined anti-American agenda' or a general dislike of a foreign policy strategy based on alliance-building, as both Ruggiero and Kennedy incorrectly suggest.¹⁴³ Likewise, the theory that America's military weakness was a severe restriction on Roosevelt's actions significantly differs from the mainstream historiography, which puts Roosevelt's hesitancy purely down to political considerations.¹⁴⁴ In fact, America's military restraints were central in stopping Roosevelt from starting down the road of sanctions for fear that this road might eventually lead to war.

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¹³⁹ *Wartime Survey for 1939: Reports by Service Attachés*, FO 371/24253

¹⁴⁰ Director of Naval Intelligence, *USA and Americas, 1940-47*, ADM 223/491

¹⁴¹ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, pp. 131-2.

¹⁴² On 12 December 1937, the Japanese fired upon British and American ships on the Yangtze River in China, sinking an American gunboat, the U.S.S. Panay; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 189.

¹⁴³ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 63; Kennedy, 'Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the United States during his Chancellorship', p. 114.

¹⁴⁴ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41.

The military restraints on Roosevelt explains why Washington accepted Tokyo's apology for the Panay Incident in the last week of December, whilst London did not.¹⁴⁵ It had been hoped by the British that the forthcoming naval staff conversations in London might have culminated in an agreement for a joint naval demonstration against Japan. Now, only Eden remained hopeful of convincing the Americans to collaborate immediately. In the run up to these conversations, the British again debated the feasibility of imposing sanctions on Japan, concluding that it was not possible without American participation as the risk of war would be carried by London alone.¹⁴⁶ Thus, the onus for a strong response to Japan's flagrant activities rested on Roosevelt's shoulders.

As an early Christmas present, Eden was told on 24 December that a squadron of US cruisers would visit Singapore, something which Eden believed 'would be an event of first class importance', showing the world that London and Washington were finally moving towards collaboration.¹⁴⁷ Precisely a week later, Eden wrote to Chamberlain listing the many serious and far-flung troubles facing the British Empire in 1938, including the danger of a triple war against Germany, Italy and Japan and the weakening of the Royal Navy as three battleships returned to Britain to be modernised, a programme which would leave the fleet depleted for eighteen months.¹⁴⁸

However, Eden's survey of the bleak international situation had 'elements of encouragement: first and foremost cooperation with the United States', which was 'making real progress'.¹⁴⁹ Eden hoped that Anglo-American relations might finally evolve from friendship to partnership. All the while, Paris had been willing to follow the British wherever they led, be it towards a strategy of appeasement or joint

¹⁴⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 126.

¹⁴⁶ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 499.

¹⁴⁷ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 24 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 612; Eden to Chamberlain, letter, 31 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 625.

¹⁴⁸ Eden to Chamberlain, letter, 31 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 625.

¹⁴⁹ Eden to Chamberlain, letter, 31 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 625.

sanctions. Thus, as the curtains closed on 1937, Eden believed that the seeds for a democratic bloc to oppose the revisionist powers had been planted. Whether these seeds would grow remained to be seen.

Curiously, as Eden awaited the Anglo-American naval conversations, the British rejected French requests for naval staff conversations.¹⁵⁰ As mentioned, the British wished to draw close to Washington, whilst maintaining their distance from Paris. Indeed, it was believed that a close association with America posed little danger, whilst one with France risked an Eastern European entanglement. In British eyes, the Americans only had the capacity to help, even if just in a limited capacity. Unfortunately, the opposite applied to the French, who only seemed capable of complicating matters for the British.

The Anglo-American naval conversations began on 1 January 1938. Ingersoll was given permission by Roosevelt to forge plans with the British for joint naval action in the future should Japan commit another outrage.¹⁵¹ However, to Eden's disappointment, immediate naval action was ruled out. Nevertheless, the offer to construct plans for future naval collaboration was regarded as significant – even ground-breaking. Since its birth, America had 'never engaged in formal staff planning and coordination with another country before the advent of hostilities' and had only struck one peacetime alliance – with France in 1778. In fact, America was so cautious in this regard that she had fought alongside Britain and France in 1917 'as an "associate" rather than as an "ally"'.¹⁵²

It was agreed that if joint naval action occurred in the Pacific, the two fleets should synchronise their respective arrivals to Singapore and Hawaii to safeguard against a

¹⁵⁰ Eden to Phipps, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 356-7; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 71.

¹⁵¹ Agreed Record of Conversations between Captain Ingersoll and the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 656.

¹⁵² Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 17.

Japanese attack before their strengths could be combined.¹⁵³ The Admiralty and Navy Department were willing to despatch eight and ten capital ships respectively in an emergency, along with a host of smaller vessels. Their combined naval forces would be double that of Japan – though Japan would have the home advantage.¹⁵⁴ The democracies would simultaneously have to keep careful watch on the Axis fleets in the Atlantic, North Sea and Mediterranean.

Upon arrival, the two navies would strategically cooperate to blockade Japan economically.¹⁵⁵ It was decided that the British fleet would stop Japanese trade on a line running ‘from Singapore through the Dutch East Indies past New Guinea and New Hebrides, and thence round to the Eastward of Australia and New Zealand’, whilst the Americans would intercept Japanese trade along ‘the West Coast of North and South America, including the Panama Canal and the Passage round Cape Horne’.¹⁵⁶ Although these naval plans were hypothetical, they remained significant nonetheless.¹⁵⁷ Both Reynolds and Leutze emphasise that ‘common action with the U.S. in the Pacific was now within the realms of possibility’, should Japan commit another outrage.¹⁵⁸ However, this potential partnership remained dormant and inactivated. Moreover, these talks only focused on a joint economic blockade, circumventing the practicalities of a joint naval war against Japan.

¹⁵³ Agreed Record of Conversations between Captain Ingersoll and the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 653.

¹⁵⁴ Alongside these capital ships the British fleet would also include 1 battle cruiser, 3 aircraft carriers, 19 cruisers, 7 destroyer flotillas, 1 cruiser minelayer and 25 submarines from Europe, with another 5 cruisers joining this fleet from Australasia; Agreed Record of Conversations between Captain Ingersoll and the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 652.

¹⁵⁵ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 590.

¹⁵⁶ Agreed Record of Conversations between Captain Ingersoll and the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 656.

¹⁵⁷ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 71.

¹⁵⁸ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 60; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 29.

Incidentally, several days after these naval staff conversations, two British soldiers were beaten by Japanese troops in China.¹⁵⁹ In a letter to Hilda on 9 January, Chamberlain revealed the significance he placed on Roosevelt's intimations that he would respond decisively to the next Japanese outrage.¹⁶⁰ 'I do wish the Japs would beat up an American or two!' he wrote, hoping that this would force Roosevelt's hand. 'But of course the little d-v-ils [devils] are too cunning for that, and we may eventually have to act alone'.¹⁶¹ Despite America's unreliability when it came to immediate naval action – and Chamberlain's favouring of appeasement – if future outrages compelled London to move her fleet to stand up to Tokyo, either in partnership with Washington or singlehandedly, then Chamberlain of course preferred concerted action.

Rewinding back to the naval staff conversations, Britain and America also agreed to formalise *ad hoc* intelligence exchanges on Japanese naval construction and on her mandated islands, extending their scope to include 'all subjects connected with Japan', especially the IJN's movements.¹⁶² It was also agreed that an information exchange on codes and re-cyphering tables for the Higher Command, Flag Officers and indeed all ships would be desirable, as would an exchange of simple recognition signals, wavelength procedures, W/T call signs, and W/T personnel.¹⁶³ These information exchanges laid the foundations for future strategic and technical cooperation against Japan.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁹ Chamberlain to Hilda, letter, 9 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 638.

¹⁶⁰ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 December 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 590.

¹⁶¹ Chamberlain to Hilda, letter, 9 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 638.

¹⁶² 'Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plan's Room', 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 135-6; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 33.

¹⁶³ 'Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plan's Room', 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922; Agreed Record of Conversations between Captain Ingersoll and the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 655.

¹⁶⁴ However, the agreed plans for an economic blockade only covered strategic cooperation (joint aims but with separate commands and operating zones), not

Roosevelt was pleased with the conversations, whilst the formal and informal records on the British side 'make it plain that the talks went very well'.¹⁶⁵ Eden regarded these conversations 'as the first important step which the Americans had consented to take', especially the exchanges of information on signalling, codes, and the like.¹⁶⁶ Roosevelt stressed the significance of these exchanges to Lindsay, claiming that a similar exchange had occurred in 1915 and had organically 'developed to such an extent that by the time war came complete war plans had been elaborated and Admiral Sims' well known mission [in 1917] was really of minor importance'.¹⁶⁷ Roosevelt was hinting that close naval relations might naturally evolve into partnership.

Chatfield also placed great value on the conversations. 'We must remember that in the recent trouble in [the] Pacific the initiative on combined action came from the United States,' he wrote six months later, 'and that an American Naval Officer came over here under the instructions of the President to get the matter on to a practical footing with us – an international factor of very great importance, which may well recur'.¹⁶⁸ However, Borg, Cowman and Rock question the significance of these conversations, claiming that they achieved little of substance since Roosevelt had refused to greenlight a joint naval response against Japan until his fleet was adequately strengthened, a process which would take many years.¹⁶⁹ Moreover, Roosevelt would only use the fleet for a joint economic blockade and refused to believe that war could arise from economic sanctions. Whilst these historians therefore challenge the significance accorded to these naval conversations, this

technical cooperation (unity of command and shared operating zones), as the fleets were likely to be separated by thousands of miles; 'Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plan's Room', 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922; Agreed Record of Conversations between Captain Ingersoll and the Naval Staff at the Admiralty, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 654-5.

¹⁶⁵ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 27; Roskill, *Navy Policy Between the Wars*, p. 368.

¹⁶⁶ Murfett, *Fool-Proof relations*, p. 128; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 21.

¹⁶⁷ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 3 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 630.

¹⁶⁸ Chatfield, minute, 17 June 1938, ADM 116/4302

¹⁶⁹ Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938*, p. 542; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 137; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 53.

monograph goes further by placing them in the context of America's military weakness. As long as this military restriction remained for Roosevelt, his vision of a joint economic blockade on the high seas of the Pacific Ocean would never be realised, no matter the next outrage – as the Tientsin Crisis shows (see chapter twelve).

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Within a week of these ground-breaking conversations, Roosevelt made two further suggestions for transatlantic collaboration on 10 and 12 January, the first in the naval sphere and the second in the diplomatic sphere.¹⁷⁰ Both of Roosevelt's approaches delighted Eden. However, Roosevelt's overtures for collaboration were swiftly rebuffed by Chamberlain, who 'hated' the ideas, brandishing them as dangerous, far-fetched, and, in the words of Horace Wilson, 'woolly rubbish', likely to destroy his appeasement efforts with the Axis powers.¹⁷¹ It is common for historians to criticise Chamberlain's responses to Roosevelt.¹⁷² Yet, these historians do not take into account America's military weakness – nor the disunity and anti-collaborative behaviour of the democracies over the previous nineteen years – as the driving factor not only for Chamberlain's opposition to UK-US collaboration, but also for his preference of appeasement. This new interpretation helps one to understand Chamberlain's thought process and partially exonerates his actions. This fresh interpretation also challenges the view of post-revisionists, such as Ruggiero, who claim that 'the reason for Chamberlain's decision to reject the American offer in favour of the dictator card had to do with the recent visit by Lord Halifax to Berlin' in November 1937.¹⁷³

The background to Roosevelt's first approach is as follows. On 7 January 1938, as mentioned, two British soldiers were attacked by Japanese troops in China. With

¹⁷⁰ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 10 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 645; Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 726.

¹⁷¹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 55; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 26; Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 219.

¹⁷² Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72.

¹⁷³ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 62.

Eden holidaying in France, Cadogan was responsible for handling the situation, having recently replaced Vansittart as Permanent Under-Secretary. With Chamberlain's permission, Cadogan asked the Americans whether they would consider parallel naval preparations with Britain as a response to Japan's latest provocative act.¹⁷⁴ Whilst Chamberlain expected a negative reply, which could then be used to destroy the arguments of those wishing for UK-US collaboration, Eden was hopeful that Washington would collaborate rather than 'sit with folded hands and watch the British Empire in jeopardy'.¹⁷⁵

On 10 January, Roosevelt's positive reply astonished both Chamberlain and Cadogan. He promised to follow any British announcement of naval preparations with his own announcement that the US Navy's warships would be 'sent to dry-dock to have their bottoms scraped' – which was 'recognised as a measure of preparatory action'.¹⁷⁶ This proposal by Roosevelt, only hours after the narrow defeat of the Ludlow Resolution, was 'courageous'.¹⁷⁷ Whilst America's military weakness still troubled Roosevelt, his buoyancy after this Congressional victory seemed to trumped his customary caution. The President also brought forward the US Navy's annual manoeuvres by several weeks to send a stern message to Japan.¹⁷⁸

Whilst Roosevelt's response to the latest Japanese outrage was 'almost precisely' what Cadogan had requested, 'the reaction in London was not joy but gloom'.¹⁷⁹ Cadogan, Chamberlain and Chatfield all looked ahead to the impending appeasement discussions with Mussolini and concluded that these talks would require the bulk of the Royal Navy to remain in the Mediterranean to add weight to the negotiations.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ Foreign Office to Lindsay, telegram, 7 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 639.

¹⁷⁵ Eden to Cadogan, telegram, 9 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 643.

¹⁷⁶ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 10 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 645.

¹⁷⁷ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁸ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 10 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 645.

¹⁷⁹ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 25.

¹⁸⁰ Chamberlain, minute, 11 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 647; Cadogan, minute, 11 January 1938, *Documents on British*

Appeasement, for them, was the priority given the events of the last six months, which had illuminated the difficulty of securing American cooperation in any meaningful form. Meanwhile, Orde stressed that dry-docking naval procedures would not commit Washington politically as much as a British announcement of naval preparations against Japan, giving Roosevelt the freedom to backtrack at any moment.¹⁸¹ This could be dangerous if Japan escalated the situation by refusing to apologise. However, even with these considerations in mind, Leutze claims that it is 'difficult to explain why the British reacted in such contradictory fashion after Roosevelt had virtually acceded to their requests'.¹⁸²

As mentioned, Chamberlain probably assumed that Washington would reject London's request for help, 'which would enable him to refute his critics for not building better relations with the United States'.¹⁸³ This seemed a safe bet given Roosevelt's regular refusals to collaborate with Eden over the past six months. Indeed, this strategy mirrors the French Government's tactics during the Rhineland and *Anschluss* incidents of criticising and hiding behind British inaction, despite inaction being its own preference. In the same way, Chamberlain believed that America's inaction would provide him with a convenient alibi for his continued passivity in East Asia, which was vital if appeasement in Europe was to succeed. Against all the odds, this gamble failed.

Had Eden not been overseas, it is most probable that he would have opposed Chamberlain's decision to rebuff Roosevelt. Indeed, Eden had long sought to challenge Japan in combination with America, believing that it would 'serve as an example' to the Axis powers in Europe and 'alter the existing balance of power in favour of the democracies'.¹⁸⁴ Eden often cited a memorandum by Pratt, which claimed that Britain could only force Japan into an agreeable settlement over China if the fleet was despatched to Singapore. Otherwise, a Japanese victory in China would

Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI, p. 647; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 96, 145 and 147; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 132.

¹⁸¹ Orde, minute, 10 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 645.

¹⁸² Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26.

¹⁸³ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 60.

¹⁸⁴ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 159.

be certain – as would the ‘rapid elimination of all British interests in China’.¹⁸⁵ From Eden’s perspective, rebuffing Roosevelt’s proposal would be a grave error, as it represented the first step to restoring peace in East Asia. However, Eden was unable to influence events from France.

Decades later, Pratt recalled that the President’s naval offer meant that ‘for once the British had to assess their own, rather than American, willingness to act’.¹⁸⁶ Chamberlain and his supporters deduced that if the Japanese called their bluff regarding naval preparations, they would be compelled to despatch the fleet to Singapore, which might provoke war.¹⁸⁷ This was a path that Chamberlain would not take whilst the President seemed liable to backtrack. Nor would he take this path while the European situation remained so volatile, even though he recognised that the latest Japanese provocation was ‘worse than ever before since there is no question here of an “accident”’. Chamberlain was even prepared to overlook the fact that the attack had since ‘been justified and described in the most insulting way by the Japanese’.¹⁸⁸ Cadogan duly informed Washington that London would not announce naval preparations for fear of destabilising Europe.¹⁸⁹ Contrary to the accusation of historians that Chamberlain was foolish to reject Roosevelt’s proffered hand, Chamberlain should be exonerated for acting in a rational manner, his calculations based on sound intelligence of America’s military weaknesses and his recent experiences of Roosevelt’s tendency to backtrack. Indeed, the bitter disappointments of the Chicago Speech, Brussels Conference and Panay Crisis were still fresh in his mind.

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¹⁸⁵ Pratt, ‘Memorandum on British Policy in the Far East’, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 666.

¹⁸⁶ Pratt, ‘The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938’, p. 757.

¹⁸⁷ Pratt, ‘The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938’, p. 757; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 54; Watt, ‘Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers’, p. 195.

¹⁸⁸ Chamberlain, minute, 11 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 647.

¹⁸⁹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 55.

On 12 January 1938, the day after London rejected Washington's naval overture, Lindsay was approached by Welles with a second benevolent offer of transatlantic collaboration, this time in the diplomatic sphere. Roosevelt proposed a parallel initiative to the intermittent appeasement discussions between Britain and the Axis powers.¹⁹⁰ This initiative became known "the Welles Peace Plan" and had two distinct phases. Firstly, Roosevelt would call upon ten small nations from Europe and Latin America to form a special drafting committee. This body would be tasked with framing new principles of international law on the subjects of international conduct, disarmament, free trade and equal access to raw materials.¹⁹¹ Roosevelt hoped that this plan would lend 'powerful support' to Chamberlain's appeasement endeavours and break the trend of smaller, democratic states drifting into the orbit of dictator states.¹⁹² If the special drafting committee was successful, the President would then petition the wider international community to etch these principles into an international treaty.¹⁹³

However, Roosevelt was working to a strict, self-imposed timetable, wishing privately to inform Paris, Berlin and Rome of the peace scheme on 20 January, and then publicly to announce it on 22 January. He therefore required London to confirm its support by 17 January.¹⁹⁴ Lindsay warned that the British would 'be held to blame by United States Government if they kill the scheme' prematurely by not giving the President their wholehearted support, an act which would 'annul all progress we have made in last two years' in cultivating intimate UK-US relations, which were on the cusp of transitioning from friendliness into partnership.¹⁹⁵ Candidly, he advised the British Government to 'give reply to this invaluable initiative with a very quick and

¹⁹⁰ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 726 and 730.

¹⁹¹ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 63; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 19.

¹⁹² Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 726-30.

¹⁹³ Cadogan, minute, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 733-4.

¹⁹⁴ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 727.

¹⁹⁵ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 731-2; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 26.

cordial acceptance', and to avoid suggestions or criticisms, which would only 'create a disproportionate bad impression' in Washington.¹⁹⁶ Likewise, Cadogan advised that Roosevelt's 'readiness to enter the arena is obviously a fact of the first importance, and I should say that we must not discourage him', even though his scheme is 'problematical and the risks, maybe, very great'.¹⁹⁷

With Eden still in France, Chamberlain took the rudder of British foreign policy. True to form, he 'would have nothing of the American proposal'.¹⁹⁸ On 13 January, he warned Lindsay that Roosevelt's scheme might derail his upcoming appeasement negotiations with the Axis powers, who could demand a delay in these concrete discussions whilst they awaited the more ethereal results of Roosevelt's special drafting committee. Chamberlain was also concerned that the Axis powers might acquire more leverage in their appeasement negotiations with Britain if Roosevelt's initiative also depended on their success. He complained that Roosevelt's peace scheme caused him 'grave misgivings' and risked 'upsetting all that we were trying to do here'.¹⁹⁹

Ignoring Lindsay's warnings that Roosevelt would not delay or change his peace scheme, Chamberlain asked whether the President would 'consider holding his hand for a short while to see what progress we can make' with the Axis Powers, as the British were 'beginning to tackle some of the problems piecemeal'.²⁰⁰ Chamberlain also ignored Cadogan's advice to end his reply with a pledge of support should Roosevelt still be 'determined to proceed'.²⁰¹

During this critical episode, the Foreign Office tried to forward to Eden any relevant telegrams, but found itself almost supernaturally obstructed. 'The bag with the

¹⁹⁶ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 731-2.

¹⁹⁷ Cadogan, minute, 12 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 733-4.

¹⁹⁸ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 26.

¹⁹⁹ Foreign Office to Lindsay, telegram, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 738-9.

²⁰⁰ Foreign Office to Lindsay, telegram, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 738-9.

²⁰¹ Cadogan to Eden, letter, 13 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 743.

telegrams was put on the wrong portion of the train at Marseilles and did not reach Mr. Eden,' explains Medicott. Eden then travelled to Paris in order to fly home, 'but owing to tempestuous weather the air service was cancelled, and he had to travel by boat to Folkestone in a rough sea on January 15th.'²⁰² Only after arriving in Folkestone did Eden receive the telegrams from Cadogan and Harvey and learn of Chamberlain's surprising response.

Upon returning home, Eden clashed with Chamberlain. Matters came to a head on 18 January in a private meeting, which went 'very badly'.²⁰³ Eden decried the 'grave error' of favouring appeasement over collaboration with America.²⁰⁴ 'At best,' he argued, 'we should have succeeded in improving relations with Mussolini at the cost of imperilling them with President Roosevelt'. At worst, Roosevelt might 'withdraw more and more into isolation', disappointed both by our failure to support his peace initiative and our decision to recognise Abyssinia, which would be a condition of Italian appeasement. 'Our patient efforts over the last six months to build up Anglo-American cooperation would then be completely destroyed,' Eden warned. 'Such an event I should regard as the greatest possible disaster to the peace of the world'.²⁰⁵

For Eden, Britain was at a crossroads and had to choose between an act of transatlantic cooperation intended to bring about world peace or a morally dubious settlement with Mussolini, which might be broken at any moment.²⁰⁶ Chamberlain disagreed, claiming that Roosevelt had simply made 'rather preposterous proposals... containing nothing new and merely stating four old principles', which were 'unpalatable to the Dictator States'.²⁰⁷ For Chamberlain, his appeasement strategy

²⁰² Medicott and Dakin, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 744.

²⁰³ Oliver Harvey, diary, 18 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 760.

²⁰⁴ Eden, minute, 18 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 760.

²⁰⁵ Eden, minute, 18 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 760.

²⁰⁶ Eden, minute, 18 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 760.

²⁰⁷ Chamberlain, Secret Addendum to Cabinet, 22 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 798.

gave the British Empire its best chance of survival – especially given the dispiriting story of Eden's efforts over the past six months to shift UK-US relations from friendship into partnership. Chamberlain believed that he had to appease the Axis powers until the democracies could rectify their military weaknesses. After the meeting, Chamberlain 'admitted that there was a fundamental difference between him and A.E. [Eden] and left the impression that one or the other must go'.²⁰⁸ The cold war between Eden and Chamberlain had suddenly become searing hot.

The Cabinet intervened and called on the Foreign Policy Committee to debate the President's offer on 19 and 20 January. The FPC supported Eden, who immediately promised London's support to Roosevelt on 21 January.²⁰⁹ However, the damage had already been done by Chamberlain. With Roosevelt unconvinced that London's support was wholehearted – London had of course missed his deadline by several days – he halted his peace initiative.²¹⁰ Meanwhile, the split between Eden and Chamberlain culminated in the former's resignation on 20 February 1938.²¹¹ The Americans saw this as confirmation that Britain had chosen appeasement over collaboration with Washington. This setback was compounded by an alarming internal reshuffle in Germany in February, which saw Blomberg, Fritsch and Neurath – who were perceived by the British and Americans as moderates – dismissed from Hitler's entourage.²¹² Hitler also anointed himself as supreme commander over Germany's armed forces, raising fears of an even more extremist Germany.²¹³ A month later, the *Anschluss* was the final nail in the coffin for Roosevelt's peace initiative.²¹⁴

²⁰⁸ Oliver Harvey, diary, 18 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 760

²⁰⁹ Notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 767-8.

²¹⁰ William V. Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', *Bulletin of the British Association of American Studies*, new series, 5 (1962), pp. 4-30 (p. 9); Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 196; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 149.

²¹¹ Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', p. 9.

²¹² Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 7.

²¹³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 28.

²¹⁴ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 196.

In Rock's eyes, the fact that Roosevelt's scheme 'was dealt a stunning blow by Chamberlain's initial reply is beyond question'.²¹⁵ Yet, Marks, Langer, Reynolds, Wallace and Cowman all stress that Roosevelt's scheme was subsequently 'postponed five times *by the White House* – twice before Eden resigned, twice after, and the last time (13 March) indefinitely' – a fact which some counter-revisionists, such as Ruggiero, fail to mention for fear of harming their anti-Chamberlain narrative.²¹⁶ This revelation adds weight to the criticism that Roosevelt tended to backtrack and hesitate, though it misses a major cause of his hesitancy – America's military weakness. Although the President repeatedly told London that he was only postponing the scheme for 'a matter of days and not weeks', the plummeting international situation forced him to scrap the scheme altogether.²¹⁷ As news of these delays reached London, Chamberlain celebrated wildly, exclaiming, 'this is excellent'.²¹⁸

Langer and Offner both defend Chamberlain's reaction, arguing that Roosevelt's peace initiative would have ended in failure no matter Chamberlain's response.²¹⁹ 'Since the publication of Axis records captured during the war,' Langer writes, 'it has become perfectly patent that the ambitions of the Nazi leaders went far beyond what reasonable statesmen in other countries would have thought possible at the time'. Thus, even if Roosevelt's peace scheme had been launched, it 'would probably have

²¹⁵ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72.

²¹⁶ Marks, 'Six Between Roosevelt and Hitler: America's Role in the Appeasement of Nazi Germany', p. 974; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 28; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 2; Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', p. 8; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 138; Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p.64.

²¹⁷ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 2 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 833; Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 9 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 902; Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 16 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 902.

²¹⁸ Chamberlain, minute, 25 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 965.

²¹⁹ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 278; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 31.

been doomed to failure' like Chamberlain's appeasement strategy – especially as it had been designed to bolster this strategy.²²⁰

This argument that Roosevelt's peace initiative would have been doomed to failure has been challenged by Churchill and other orthodox historians, who disparage Chamberlain for preventing a dramatic American intervention into European politics. This dramatic intervention, they argue, might have permanently entangled Washington in the affairs of Europe, whilst a display of collaboration between the democracies might have caused Hitler to postpone his moves against Austria and Czechoslovakia. In his memoirs, Churchill writes that Chamberlain's rejection of Roosevelt's scheme was 'the loss of the last chance to save the world from tyranny otherwise than war... no event could have been more likely to stave off, or even prevent, war than the arrival of the United States in the circle of European hates and fears'. That the Prime Minister 'should have possessed the self-sufficiency to wave away the proffered hand stretched out across the Atlantic,' remarked Churchill, 'leaves one, even at this date, breathless with amazement'.²²¹ Even more astonishing is that this rejection came only forty-eight hours after Chamberlain had rebuffed Roosevelt's proposal for naval collaboration against Japan.

Britain's awareness of America's military ineptness, however, provides a new interpretation that challenges the mainstream historiography. Chamberlain's rejection of Roosevelt's offer for naval collaboration can be explained by the depressing revelations of America's naval deficiencies only days previously at the Anglo-American naval conversations and by the continuing flow of gloomy reports from the British Embassy in Washington. The British knew that America was incapable of fighting Japan in East Asia, given her longstanding military deficiencies and undeveloped naval bases in the Western Pacific.²²² In light of this information, Chamberlain was wise to rebuff Roosevelt's offer for naval collaboration, since

²²⁰ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 31.

²²¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

²²² Captain Ingersoll, Memorandum for Captain Phillips, 'Summary of talks', ADM 116/3922; Notes of Meeting held in Director of Plans' Room, 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922; Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 1 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, pp. 628-9.

America was incapable of backing up this move with force if Japan reacted aggressively. Otherwise, Britain might have found herself fighting alone against the Japanese in East Asia, a situation which would put her at the mercy of Hitler and Mussolini in Europe.

Chamberlain can also be partially exonerated for rejecting Roosevelt's overture for diplomatic collaboration a mere two days later, given the acrimonious and anti-collaborative history of UK-US interwar relations, something which had only heightened over the last six months. Indeed, the shambolic failure of the Brussels Conference was still fresh in his mind. Although rejecting Roosevelt's two overtures simultaneously was risky, Chamberlain believed that he was being sensible and consistent in his foreign policy objectives. Diplomatic and military collaboration with America and France was not a viable alternative to appeasement, given America's military and political handicaps, France's domestic woes, and the disastrous collaboration record of the great democracies since 1919. Chamberlain thus concluded that Roosevelt's diplomatic scheme would merely interfere with, and possibly destroy, the only feasible strategy at his disposal – the appeasement of Germany and Italy. Chamberlain thus took advantage of Eden's ill-timed holiday to ensure that his appeasement efforts took precedence over Roosevelt's dubious schemes.

Chamberlain's seizure of the rudder of British foreign policy led to Eden's resignation. Washington and Paris were shaken by the news. Indeed, the entire French political establishment was disturbed, fearing that Eden's resignation insinuated a shift in British policy away from intimacy with France, whilst the news was 'greeted with universal consternation in the French press'.²²³ Eden's departure had also closely followed those of Vansittart and Cranborne. Their departures were keenly felt in Paris as these three diplomats had built intimate ties with the Quai d'Orsay and were widely recognised as influential Francophiles.²²⁴

²²³ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

²²⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 82; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 78.

In Washington fears were kindled that Britain would now make a morally dubious appeasement deal with the Axis powers.²²⁵ Eden's resignation was met by a 'sharp dip' in American public approval of Britain and mounting criticism of its meek stance on the Czechoslovakian Crisis over the summer of 1938.²²⁶ During this period, Washington observed that both Chamberlain and Halifax 'were cooler and more restrained' towards America than Eden had been. Murfett emphasises that Eden's resignation 'brought an end to an important era in Anglo-American relations', since thereafter the British no longer considered collaboration with Washington 'to be essential to the success of their foreign policy'.²²⁷ However, Murfett does not distinguish that UK-US collaboration was only ever envisioned during Eden's tenure, never implemented.

Kennedy mistakenly claims that Chamberlain's 'style of government and politics helped prevent any prewar formal Anglo-American security arrangement'.²²⁸ On the contrary, this chapter has shown that even a Churchillian government would have struggled to convince Roosevelt to pursue joint economic sanctions against the Japanese – let alone the formal UK-US security pact that orthodox and counter-revisionist historians claim was obtainable – given the impediment of America's military weaknesses. The failure of Britain and America to secure an alliance in the 1930s is not explained by personalities and prejudice, but by military and political factors.

According to Watt, all that was left after the events of December 1937 and January 1938 was Hull's renewed distrust of Britain.²²⁹ Likewise, Leutze claims that Chamberlain's unhelpful actions 'aroused deep resentment in Washington'.²³⁰ Unsurprisingly, Roosevelt took a step back from world politics, becoming content 'to

²²⁵ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 72; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 28.

²²⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

²²⁷ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 165.

²²⁸ Kennedy, 'Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the United States during his Chancellorship', p. 114.

²²⁹ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 196; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 234.

²³⁰ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26.

stand by and watch while Chamberlain tried to handle things'.²³¹ In the following months, the situation died down in the Far East, and Japan faded from the headlines.²³² Hitler gladly accepted the baton of disruption from the Japanese, mounting the *Anschluss* and seizing the Sudetenland. Meanwhile, with Eden gone, Chamberlain was free to implement his appeasement policy. According to the intelligence at Chamberlain's disposal, this seemed to be the greatest chance for guaranteeing Britain's survival.

²³¹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72.

²³² Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 154.

Anschluss

British intelligence on the dearth of military power of both France and America emanated from the three intelligence directorates of the armed forces. It is no surprise given the abject nature of this intelligence that the British military establishment wholeheartedly supported Chamberlain's appeasement plan and stringently opposed staff conversations with France, which had the potential to antagonise Germany and possibly shipwreck Chamberlain's appeasement efforts should they be publicised. Thus, whilst the *Anschluss* cornered Britain into staff conversations – as was the case with the Rhineland Affair – Britain hoped to make these staff conversations as meaningless as possible. Furthermore – as was the case with the Rhineland Affair – the *Anschluss* was not deemed as flagrant as orthodox and counter-revisionist historians have made out in the decades since. In fact, it was seen at the time as a reasonable objective and fair reversal of the Versailles Treaty, long anticipated by France and Britain, who had little desire to oppose it with force. However – like the Rhineland Affair – Germany's forced separation from Austria was an injustice righted in the wrong way. This put the democracies in a tricky predicament, given the expectations of the pacifist movements, the League and public opinion.

One of Eden's last acts as Foreign Secretary was to press for Anglo-French staff conversations in January 1938.¹ He advised Chamberlain that these military conversations were a 'must' to challenge the Axis powers; that the French Army was 'fundamentally sound'; and that he wished to counter the growing tendency in Whitehall 'to under-estimate the strength of France' and over-estimate that of the

¹ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 130; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 130; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 90.

aggressive powers.² However, Chamberlain was convinced that the incoming intelligence on France's military weakness meant that an alliance-building strategy against the aggressive powers was both futile and dangerous in equal measure. He was wholeheartedly supported by the military elite, which supplied him with this intelligence.

On 1 February, the COS considered Eden's request and voted against staff conversations with France, using any and all arguments at their disposal.³ In a memorandum, the COS explained that staff conversations 'would inevitably tend to involve us in military commitments, which would fetter our freedom of action' and possibly drag Britain into a dangerous entanglement at a time when her military resources were spread thinly across the globe. Thus, the COS advised that conversations with any power should be avoided at all costs. The COS also used political arguments, stating that 'the very term "staff conversations" has a sinister purport' and would give the impression to the three aggressive powers 'of mutually assured military collaboration by those partaking'.⁴ This could push the three aggressive powers into forming a counterweight bloc. The British would then be another step closer to their nightmare of having to fight against three totalitarian powers in three different theatres across the globe.

Whilst the COS ceded that air staff conversations with France were 'desirable' and 'logical' – especially if the British wished to strike Germany's industrial heartlands from better-located air bases in France – the COS nevertheless opposed them for similar political reasons. It was feared that Paris might leak news of the air conversations 'to flaunt an Anglo-French accord in the face of Germany'. The COS was adamant that Britain could 'not appear to have both feet in the French camp' if appeasement was to be successful. Thus, as an alternative, the COS proposed informal discussions between French and British officers; a low-level exchange of

² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 90.

³ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 130; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 130; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 66.

⁴ 'Memorandum by COS Sub-Committee of the CID on Staff Conversations with France and Belgium', 4 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 853.

information via air attachés; and French visits to British aircraft factories to observe mass production methods.⁵

Using similar political arguments, the COS also rejected Eden's call for naval and military conversations with France, despite admitting that cooperation with the French Navy would be required in Europe if the bulk of the Royal Navy sailed to Singapore. In this instance, the COS was confident that advanced naval staff conversations were not necessary to secure France's last-minute cooperation. Meanwhile, military conversations with France were deemed pointless, given the emergence of the policy of limited liability, which opposed the despatching of the British Army to France. Thus, it was judged that the only benefit of military conversations with France would be to inform her of this policy so that she could prepare to stand alone.⁶

The COS's rejection of staff conversations frustrated the British Embassy in Paris and astonished Cadogan, Eden and Strang at the Foreign Office.⁷ Strang and Cadogan complained that the COS members had unfairly 'exceeded their functions' by 'using arguments on political, not military grounds'.⁸ In exasperation, Eden demanded that the matter be revisited by Cabinet.⁹ Eden's wish was granted on 16 February. The Cabinet, terrified by the German air menace (see chapter ten), were only willing to hold air staff conversations with France.¹⁰

⁵ 'Memorandum by COS Sub-Committee of the CID on Staff Conversations with France and Belgium', 4 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 854.

⁶ 'Memorandum by COS Sub-Committee of the CID on Staff Conversations with France and Belgium', 4 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 854.

⁷ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 90.

⁸ Strang, minute, 8 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 857; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 273; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 90.

⁹ Notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 857.

¹⁰ Director of Plans to CNS, 'Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France', 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

Within four weeks, however, the British were forced to reconsider the matter following Hitler's absorption of Austria into the Third Reich on 13 March 1938.¹¹ For several years, the *Anschluss* had been anticipated, though its timing had remained a mystery until 9 March, when British intelligence intercepted the telephone conversations of German General Walter von Reichenau from his hotel in Egypt to Germany.¹² Despite the British and French receiving advanced warnings, their responses were passive.¹³

Given that Austria was not a vital British interest, no one in London wished to risk a European war over her independence, especially since Hitler's claims over the German-speaking state had irredentist credibility.¹⁴ The French, however, exaggerated their alarm at the prospect.¹⁵ As intelligence warnings spiked in the weeks before the *Anschluss*, Delbos advised Ambassador Phipps that, 'if Austria is swallowed, German hegemony in Europe becomes certain and then Great Britain and France will become in effect Secondary Powers'.¹⁶ Simultaneously, Ambassador Corbin advised Eden that Berlin must be warned that Austria would be defended with all the military might of France and Britain if her independence was threatened.¹⁷ Strang correctly criticised this 'rather typical French production', claiming that 'they put up proposals which go well beyond what they themselves are willing (or in a

¹¹ Director of Plans to CNS, 'Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France', 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

¹² Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 391.

¹³ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 210; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 195; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 391.

¹⁴ Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433; Young, *In command of France*, p. 198.

¹⁵ Corbin to Eden, memorandum, 18 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 924-7; Conference of Military Attachés to Consider World Situation, June 1936, WO 190/433; Phipps to Eden, telegram, 7 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 914.

¹⁶ Phipps to Eden, telegram, 7 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 914.

¹⁷ Corbin to Eden, memorandum, 18 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 924-7

position) to perform, and will place all the responsibility for inaction upon us'.¹⁸ Similarly, Ambassador Bullitt predicted that France would respond meekly and allow Hitler to triumph.¹⁹

As anticipated, the French reacted passively to Hitler's move and – as with the Rhineland Affair – 'used British reluctance as its excuse for not acting'.²⁰ The French were not helped by the impeccable timing of the *Anschluss*, which occurred the day after Chautemps' resignation, leaving France without a government during the incident. Considering that France was in the throes of parliamentary crisis, Ambassador Phipps advised that 'any effective action' by France 'was out of the question'.²¹

Unable to respond militarily, the French resurrected the "blame game" used so effectively during the Rhineland Affair with the aim of guilt-tripping Britain into military conversations and perhaps into extending their military commitment to France. Under pressure from France and public opinion, the British Cabinet authorised staff conversations on 6 April 1938.²² Chamberlain even suffered a momentary lapse in confidence over his appeasement strategy. Only two weeks previously, Hitler had rejected his carefully prepared appeasement package, which offered colonial concessions in return for an air pact.²³ Moreover, Hitler did this verbally, never finding the time to reply to Chamberlain in writing.²⁴ This setback for Chamberlain's appeasement strategy was compounded by the *Anschluss*, which provoked calls from his opponents for the embracement of an alliance-building strategy.

¹⁸ Strang, minute, 18 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 926-7.

¹⁹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 68.

²⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 196; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 157.

²¹ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

²² Director of Plans to CNS, 'Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France', 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

²³ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 86.

²⁴ G. L. Weinburg, 'Hitler and England, 1933-1945: Pretence and Reality', *German Studies Review*, 8 (1985), pp. 299-309 (p. 303).

‘Those wretched Germans,’ Chamberlain seethed to Hilda, ‘I wish them at the bottom of the sea... It is perfectly evident that force is the only argument Germany understands... Heaven knows I don’t want to get back to alliances but if Germany continues to behave as she has done lately she may drive us to it’.²⁵ Yet, the time for alliances had not yet come for Chamberlain. For him, the impending staff conversations with France were but a political sop – a miniscule offering of compensation for Britain’s passivity during the crisis – and an opportunity to dilute expectations regarding the help Britain might offer France if Germany drove westwards.²⁶

Despite these limited aims, the COS aggressively opposed the decision to hold staff conversations with France. As mentioned, the COS feared that an antagonised Germany might respond by sponsoring a counterweight alliance system, something which could unleash a cataclysmic world war.²⁷ Alarmed by these warnings, the Cabinet reversed its decision on 13 April, only to backtrack at the Anglo-French ministerial conversations of 28-29 April in London, after the French relentlessly pushed for military staff conversations.²⁸ In the decades since, these staff conversations have been painted by numerous historians as a key stepping-stone towards the Anglo-French Alliance of 1939.²⁹ However, the hostile attitude of the British military elite – twinned with their adverse objectives for these staff conversations discussed below – show that the British wished to use these conversations to distance themselves from France and to snuff out French hopes of obtaining British military assistance against Germany.

²⁵ Chamberlain to Hilda, letter, 13 March 1938, NC 18/1/1041

²⁶ Cabinet Conclusions, 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379; Instructions for Captain Holland, Plans Division, July 1938, ADM 116/3379; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 274.

²⁷ Director of Plans to CNS, ‘Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France’, 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

²⁸ Anglo-French Conversations, Record of Meeting held on 28 April 1938, ADM 116/3379; Director of Plans to CNS, ‘Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France’, 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

²⁹ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 124; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 40.

Similarly to 1936, the COS planned to make these military staff conversations as superficial as possible by limiting their scope, seniority level and by not 'going into more detail... than was absolutely necessary'. This, it was believed, would blunt France's attempt 'to bind Great Britain more tightly' to herself.³⁰ The COS further advised that Germany should be regarded as the *only* hypothetical enemy in deference to the impending appeasement discussions with Italy, which might otherwise be derailed if leaks occurred.³¹

Following this advice, the Admiralty decided that the forthcoming naval staff conversations should be severely limited in scope to a mere seven topics, all pre-determined by the Admiralty, none of which would include Italy as a potential adversary.³² Whilst Admiral Darlan agreed to these restrictions, he warned of the Italian threat to the Mediterranean and 'the would-be assassin who tries to stab you in the back with his stiletto'.³³ The meaningless scope of the conversations also confirmed Darlan's suspicion that the Admiralty had not changed its 'traditional attitude of extreme reserve' towards France.³⁴

Meanwhile, in the War Office, Hore-Belisha and the CIGS agreed that any military conversations should be brief as their sole aim was to inform the French that they would be fighting alone against the Wehrmacht, without British help on land. According to the CIGS, the British would no longer send a field force to France if the Wehrmacht attacked. Instead, the British land commitment to France would be

³⁰ This advice divided the most senior figures within the Admiralty. The DOP and DCNS called for superficial naval conversations with the sole purpose of appeasing Paris. However, Duff Cooper disagreed. 'Personally I incline to the view that if we are to have the conversations the fuller and franker they are the better,' he argued. 'The only argument against having them was that they would affront the Germans and Italians. This they will do however restricted they are'. Anglo-French Conversations, Record of Meeting held on 28 April 1938, ADM 116/3379; Director of Plans to CNS, 'Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France', 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

³¹ Director of Plans to CNS, 'Notes on Naval Staff Conversations with France', 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379; Director of Plans, Minute, 6 May 1938, ADM 116/3379; DCNS, Minute, 6 May 1938, ADM 116/3379; Duff Cooper, Minute, 9 May 1938, ADM 116/3379

³² General Instructions for Captain Holland, ADM 116/3379; NA Paris to Admiralty, Telegram, 10 June 1938, ADM 116/3379

³³ NA Paris to Admiralty, Telegram, 10 June 1938, ADM 116/3379

³⁴ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 163.

reduced to only 5,000 men 'to provide base and lines-of-communication troops for the advanced air striking force'. Britain's acceptance of military conversations was thus in no way an overture to France, offered 'in a spirit of friendly co-operation with a view to concerting a firm military agreement', but an attempt 'to leave Britain's likely ally in no doubt as to how little Britain could offer her'.³⁵

Of the three services, only the British Air Ministry wished to use the staff conversations to good effect, hoping to lay the necessary groundwork for the deployment of the Air Striking Force onto French soil.³⁶ London and Paris agreed to exchange information on 'French air fields, fuel supplies and storage, and the ground logistical support required by the RAF' once in northern France.³⁷ However, it should be remembered that the Air Striking Force was not intended to strengthen France's aerial defences, but to bomb Germany's industrial heartlands.³⁸ The Air Striking Force had no fighters whatsoever to bolster French security. Thus, the Air Ministry's enthusiasm for staff conversations was purely self-serving. Indeed, Anglo-French aerial cooperation unravelled as soon as British bombers acquired the flying range to bomb Germany from Britain. This swift winding down of air cooperation was compounded by Britain's invention of radar, which negated her need for France's early-warning aerial system.³⁹

During the summer of 1938, as tensions rose dramatically between Germany and Czechoslovakia, the British reluctantly convened the promised Anglo-French staff conversations.⁴⁰ Between May and July, the Cabinet also agreed to authorise discussions on the wartime supply of food, fuel, non-ferrous metals, minerals, textiles, raw materials and shipping tonnage on the premise that this 'hypothetical' contingency planning contained 'no commitments or agreements'.⁴¹ However, Inskip

³⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 272 and 274.

³⁶ 'Memorandum by COS Sub-Committee of the CID on Staff Conversations with France and Belgium', 4 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 854.

³⁷ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 9.

³⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 275.

³⁹ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars* pp. 9-10.

⁴⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 94.

⁴¹ Extract of Cabinet Conclusions, 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379

complained that these discussions risked the accidental establishment of a combined 'Civilian War Plan', which far exceeded Britain's Locarno obligations.⁴²

The naval staff conversations also drew complaints. The Admiralty's DOP warned that 'a hard and fast line must eventually be drawn beyond which we cannot go without morally committing ourselves to act with France in war'. He feared that this line might be reached at the coming discussions and perhaps even crossed.⁴³ The Cabinet agreed and informed France that her fleet distribution should remain on the basis of a unilateral war against Germany, ignoring any hypotheticals discussed with the Admiralty, as London was 'undertaking no commitment'.⁴⁴ The Air Ministry was equally wary of an inadvertent commitment to France. After reading a report on the air staff conversations, the CAS criticised its loose language, pointing out that 'the words "ally" and "allied" had been used'.⁴⁵ The French were 'always trying to pin us down' to a military commitment, he warned, and would 'be glad to seize on any phrasing' in the report that might help their cause.⁴⁶ The British military elite was determined to maintain their distance from France for the sake of appeasement, which offered the only viable solution to the gargantuan crisis facing the British Empire.

Air collaboration with France was the exception to the rule, given the terrifying German air menace. The British therefore reached hypothetical agreements with France for RAF fighters to use French air bases and fuel after chasing Luftwaffe bombers back across the English Channel; to standardise radio frequencies and communications; to establish a system of aircraft recognition; and to send a British air

⁴² Alexander, 'Preparing to Feed Mars: Anglo-French Economic Co-ordination and the Coming of War, 1937-40', p. 192.

⁴³ Director of Plans, Minute, 17 June 1938, ADM 116/3379

⁴⁴ Cabinet Conclusions, 6 July 1938, ADM 116/3379; Instructions for Captain Holland, Plans Division, July 1938, ADM 116/3379

⁴⁵ Air Ministry to Admiral Sir William M. James, Letter, 14 June 1938, ADM 116/3379; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 9.

⁴⁶ Air Ministry to Admiral Sir William M. James, Letter, 14 June 1938, ADM 116/3379

mission to Paris 'to discuss new strategies for modernisation and mass production with representatives from the French Air Ministry and aero-industry'.⁴⁷

As the three aggressive powers became more daring, Britain's survival instinct increasingly demanded a close attachment to France behind closed doors – particularly in the air and intelligence spheres – ready to be activated in case Chamberlain's appeasement strategy failed.⁴⁸ This back-up plan was something that the British privately accepted as a theory, but refused to admit to the French, except in hypothetical terms.⁴⁹ The British stubbornly clung on to their "single relationship status", using the military staff conversations of 1938 to reduce France's hopes of receiving British military assistance, despite knowing that a military alliance with France was key to defeating Germany if appeasement failed and war became unavoidable.⁵⁰ For the moment, however, Britain was willing to gamble on appeasement given the gloomy intelligence on America, France and its own overstretched Empire. None of the democracies were in a position to seriously

⁴⁷ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 9. Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 269.

⁴⁸ Anglo-French naval Intelligence-sharing in particular increased during 1938. Captain Holland, the British NA to Paris, served as the go-between from mid-1938 onwards, with many 'questions and answers... passed verbally between British operations division and their French opposite numbers by the naval attaché'. According to Captain Hillgarth, the British NA and his staff in Paris 'virtually became a Naval Mission' in all but name. Anglo-French Naval Staff Collaboration, 1936-1939, ADM 223487; Director of Plans, Minute, 17 June 1938, ADM 116/3379; Captain Hillgarth, 'Qualities Needed by a Naval Attaché', ADM 223/474

⁴⁹ Inskip, 'Review of Imperial Defence', 25 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23, 13; Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in relation to certain other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; CID, 'Situation in Far East', report, June 1939, ADM 205/57; Ingersoll, Memorandum for Captain Philipps, 'Summary of Talks', January 1938, ADM 116/3922

⁵⁰ Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations*, p. 247; Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-40', p. 720; Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?" French Perceptions of Britain as an Ally after the First World War', p. 40; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 51; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 61; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936-40*, p. 96; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 128; Jackson and Maiolo, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 121; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 215.

contemplate war. Meanwhile, Hitler was still only pursuing German territories and hiding behind righteous irredentist claims. Thus, whilst the alliance-building alternative gathered support in certain political circles after the *Anschluss*, this support was not yet sizeable enough to compel the British Government to abandon its appeasement strategy, which still seemed the most feasible option for securing peace.⁵¹

The superficiality of the staff conversations was mourned both by France and European allies, all of which had desperately hoped for the exorcism of the anti-collaborative demon which had haunted relations between Paris and London since 1919.⁵² Rather than drawing Britain and France closer together, the *Anschluss* had caused their relations to plummet as Britain stubbornly opposed discussing meaningful military matters with France.⁵³ In fact, the British were so fixated on appeasement that they immediately informed Rome and Berlin that these staff conversations did not ‘involve any new commitments’ of a military kind between Britain and France and that ‘the two [Axis] Governments need have no cause for anxiety’. Once again, the British had prioritised German appeasement over their relations with France.⁵⁴

In a disparaging letter to the Foreign Office, the Russians seethed that the staff conversations had ‘nothing in common with collective security’ and in fact encouraged ‘further acts of aggression’. In their eyes, London and Paris had ‘capitulated to the aggressors on every important point’, including China, Abyssinia, Spain and now Austria. Moscow thus lamented the lost opportunity for an Anglo-French military union, around which other peace-loving powers might have gathered to check Germany.⁵⁵ This letter reveals how the wider world saw Anglo-French relations – broken and as anti-collaborative as they had been since 1919.

⁵¹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 156.

⁵² Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 276; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 164.

⁵³ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 82.

⁵⁴ ‘Anglo-French Conversations, Note of Conclusions, Meeting of 29 April 1938’, ADM 116/3379

⁵⁵ Mr Vereker to Foreign Office, Telegram, 9 May 1938, ADM 116/3379

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In the aftermath of the *Anschluss*, the British sought America's support for their appeasement discussions with Italy. Whilst Roosevelt agreed with the aims of appeasement, 'he had private doubts about the morality and practicality of British concessions', particularly the morally dubious recognition of Abyssinia.⁵⁶ As the discussions loomed, Hull warned the British that the recognition of Abyssinia 'would have a very unfortunate effect indeed in America' and rouse 'disgust', whilst Roosevelt added that Abyssinia's recognition would have a terrible effect on Japan, which would expect the democracies officially to recognise Manchuria in turn'.⁵⁷

Roosevelt then told Chamberlain a parable, which warned of the risks of appeasement. 'If a Chief of Police makes a deal with the leading gangsters and the deal results in no more hold-ups, that Chief of Police will be called a great man', Roosevelt wrote, 'but if the gangsters do not live up to their word the Chief of Police will go to Jail'.⁵⁸ Roosevelt also revealingly told a confidante that many Americans 'would really like me to be a Neville Chamberlain [and appease the aggressive powers]... But if that were done, we would only be breeding for more serious trouble four or eight years from now'.⁵⁹ Washington's disapproval was clear.

However, when the Gentlemen's Agreement was eventually struck between Chamberlain and Mussolini on 16 April 1938, Roosevelt surprisingly praised the contribution to peace, although he 'refrained from commenting on contents (i.e. the means) such as British recognition of Abyssinia'.⁶⁰ Revealing his pragmatism, Roosevelt hoped that Britain's concession to Italy might weaken Mussolini's bond with

⁵⁶ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 32.

⁵⁷ Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 17 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 753-4; Lindsay to Eden, telegram, 18 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, pp. 755-6 and 757-8.

⁵⁸ Notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 758; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 32.

⁵⁹ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 219.

⁶⁰ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 219; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 32.

Hitler, a hope which he retained until Italy joined the Second World War.⁶¹ Roosevelt's warm message encouraged Chamberlain and kindled hope that Washington might vocally support his appeasement strategy in the future.⁶² However, whilst Roosevelt had come round to Italian appeasement, he regarded German appeasement to be an almost impossible proposition, especially following Hitler's removal of Germany's leading moderates from his Cabinet in February 1938.⁶³ Chamberlain's triumphant Gentlemen's Agreement with Mussolini was also overshadowed by the tightening bond between the three aggressive powers. In deference to Japan in February 1938, the Germans recognised Manchuria, penned a treaty of friendship with Tokyo and ceased supplying arms to China.⁶⁴ The following month, British intelligence reported that Ribbentrop wished to create a military alliance with Japan to oppose Soviet Russia.⁶⁵ Simultaneously, British hopes that a wedge might appear between Rome and Berlin as a consequence of their clashing interests both in Central Europe and the Balkans soon proved ill-founded.⁶⁶ The Italians refused to protest the *Anschluss*, despite Austrian independence being a traditional Italian concern and at one time a key pillar of the now-collapsed Stresa Front.⁶⁷

As the aggressive powers drew closer together, the democracies increased their collaboration behind closed doors. London continued to offer Washington sensitive intelligence in the hope of cultivating close relations and a partnership.⁶⁸ Taking advantage of London's greater desire for close relations, the Americans made *ad hoc* requests for political intelligence in 1938. Welles asked Ambassador Lindsay for any

⁶¹ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 75; Watt, Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 197.

⁶² Lindsay to Halifax, telegram, 7 March 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 997; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 75; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 30.

⁶³ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 75.

⁶⁴ Offner, *American Appeasement*, p. 196.

⁶⁵ Best, 'Constructing an Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan, 1931-1939', p. 419.

⁶⁶ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 190.

⁶⁷ Salerno, 'Britain, France and the Emerging Italian Threat, 1935-1938', p. 84.

⁶⁸ 'Notes of Meeting Held in Director of Plan's Room', 3 January 1938, ADM 116/3922

secret information on Spain, Romania, Russia, the anti-Comintern Pact, and Hitler's recent conversations with Halifax.⁶⁹ The Foreign Office was 'only too happy' to accommodate Welles' requests, which encouraged the State Department and Roosevelt to make more.⁷⁰ Meanwhile, Welles offered to reciprocate should London need information.⁷¹ Although the value of America's political intelligence was doubted, the Foreign Office believed that the unbalanced exchange was worthwhile as it would cultivate friendship. The Foreign Office hoped that this intelligence trap would soon pay dividends, with one diplomat observing that America's 'desire for intimacy... has evidently grown recently in intensity'.⁷²

However, the Admiralty was divided on whether to lay its own information trap for Washington, doubting whether it would bring about the effective partnership so desired by the Foreign Office, especially given America's inability to intervene in the Pacific. A heated debate therefore erupted in the Admiralty after the US Navy Department requested an exchange of technical naval information in January 1938, with the First Lord, CNS, DCNS, DNI, DOP and DSR all arguing in favour of the exchange.⁷³ These senior men emphasised that a positive reply would implement 'the wish of the Foreign Office, expressed a number of months ago, for closer relations with the United States'.⁷⁴

However, the Admiralty's technical departments opposed the motion on the grounds that the exchange would be grossly imbalanced in America's favour.⁷⁵ In their opinion, the US Navy Department could not match the Admiralty's superior

⁶⁹ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 7 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 717.

⁷⁰ Eden to Lindsay, telegram, 20 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 763; notes, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 637; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72.

⁷¹ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 22 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 775.

⁷² Ronald, minute, 10 January 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XXI*, p. 638.

⁷³ Chatfield, minute, 8 March 1938, ADM 116/4302; DCNS, minute, 7 March 1938, ADM 116/4302; DSR, minute, 13 April 1938, ADM 116/4302; DOP, minute, 3 February 1938, ADM 116/4302; DNI, minute, 4 January 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁷⁴ DNI, minute, 4 January 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁷⁵ DTM, minute, 28 January 1938, ADM 116/4302

knowledge, 'laboriously acquired at great expense and trouble' over the past twenty years.⁷⁶ This was especially true for the Admiralty's ground-breaking secrets on Boom Defence, something for which the Americans greatly hungered.⁷⁷ There was also a secondary concern that American security 'was lax and that information furnished to America would find its way into German hands'.⁷⁸

The DCNS countered that America was 'the only nation in the world with whom [technical] exchanges might be profitable'.⁷⁹ Likewise, the DSR emphasised that 'the progress of scientific and industrial research in America is comparable with that in this country,' and that their highly-prized technical information would be 'no less the result of the expenditure of many years of work and great sums of money'.⁸⁰ Supporting these claims, Cooper stressed that the arguments of the Technical Departments 'may be exaggerated'.⁸¹ Chatfield, conversely, was convinced that the Admiralty was superior in technical matters, but argued that one also had to weigh the political advantages – 'if we had a very friendly understanding with them it might make a vast difference' to the Far Eastern situation.⁸²

Intervening in May 1938, the Admiralty Board argued that America 'should be treated exceptionally' and thus authorised the technical exchanges on a *quid pro quo* basis.⁸³ The Admiralty duly created a list of 95 subjects for information exchange, with many topics 'of intrinsic importance'.⁸⁴ Yet, both sides prove reluctant to share their secrets, leading Cooper to exclaim that 'these conversations will be of no use if they are entered into in the spirit of "you show first"'.⁸⁵ This highlights the ongoing

⁷⁶ DOTD, minute, 28 January 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁷⁷ DTM, minute, 28 January 1938, ADM 116/4302; DOTD, minute, 28 January 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁷⁸ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 229; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 31.

⁷⁹ DCNS, minute, 7 March 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁸⁰ DSR, minute, 13 April 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁸¹ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 179.

⁸² Chatfield, minute, 8 March 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁸³ 'Extract from Board Minutes', 12 May 1938, ADM 116/4302

⁸⁴ 'Extract from Board Minutes', 12 May 1938, ADM 116/4302; DNI, minute, 4 April 1938, ADM 116/4302.

⁸⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 178-9 and 199; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 33.

acrimonious and anti-collaborative spirit between the democracies, which had haunted relations since 1919. Reflecting back on these one-sided intelligence exchanges, one NID official remarked that America was 'very much in our debt regarding intelligence pure and simple'.⁸⁶

The British, Americans and French also began to cooperate more openly in aircraft production.⁸⁷ As Germany moved against Austria and then the Sudetenland, Roosevelt anxiously noted Germany's aerial pre-dominance in Europe. Roosevelt believed that America was the key to restoring the air balance for Britain and France, especially given France's shambolic aircraft production figures. If the two democracies placed aircraft orders with American factories, America could become "the arsenal of democracy".⁸⁸ Such an arrangement would not only bolster the aerial forces of Britain and France, but also dramatically increase America's aerial production capacity, which was woefully low.

Whilst this arrangement would be legal in peacetime, the President would have to circumvent America's neutrality laws in wartime. He suggested this could be done either by repealing the arms embargo, or by using Canada as a go-between.⁸⁹ Although the British and French Governments were deeply sceptical about this circumvention of America's neutrality laws in wartime – both Halifax and Lindsay dismissed these 'pet schemes' of Roosevelt – the offer remained an attractive one during peacetime.⁹⁰ Following the *Anschluss*, the British sent an air mission to America and coordinated their aircraft purchases with France 'so as to avoid

⁸⁶ Charles Morgan, 'North West Europe and Africa', France, ADM 223/487

⁸⁷ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 67; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 98.

⁸⁸ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, pp. 41-2.

⁸⁹ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, pp. 41-2.

⁹⁰ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 36.

overlapping and competition'.⁹¹ To Roosevelt's delight, Britain ordered 200 medium bombers and 200 trainers, whilst the French ordered 1,000 fighters.⁹²

Despite Roosevelt's "pet schemes" to supply weapons in wartime, America's neutrality laws and the isolationist tendencies of her people remained dispiriting for Britain and France. The efforts of the Roosevelt Administration to challenge isolationism were pleasing but had almost no impact on public opinion. On 6 February, 17 March, 3 June and 16 August, Hull publicly claimed that isolationism 'was not a means to security but a "frightful source of insecurity"'.⁹³ Similarly, Woodring and Ickes made many 'public utterances attacking dictatorships in general and Italy in particular'. According to Mallet, these speeches revealed 'a growing preoccupation' with the aggressive acts of the three revisionist powers, which outraged American politicians. Most encouraging of all was Roosevelt's decision not to recognise the state of war between China and Japan, allowing him to supply China with arms, unrestricted by America's neutrality laws.⁹⁴

However, these speeches did little to weaken the hold of isolationism on the American people. In early 1938, a Gallup poll showed that 70 percent of Americans supported a withdrawal from China.⁹⁵ Meanwhile, a majority of Americans 'warmly supported the neutrality legislation and expected highly beneficial results from it'.⁹⁶ In February 1938, Chamberlain wrote that 'the U.S.A. has drawn closer to us but the isolationists there are strong and so vocal that she cannot be depended on for help if we should get into trouble'.⁹⁷ This view was widespread in governmental circles,

⁹¹ 'Anglo-French Conversations, Record of meeting held on 28 April 1938', ADM 116/3379

⁹² 'Purchase of Aircraft from USA', 2 June 1938, AIR 19/39; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 269; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 98 and 104.

⁹³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 75 and 79.

⁹⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁹⁵ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 68.

⁹⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 19.

⁹⁷ Neville Chamberlain's Diary, 19 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 1138.

which ‘tended to write off the U.S. as “incurably isolationist”’.⁹⁸ Given that Roosevelt’s political and military restrictions showed no signs of weakening, Chamberlain was convinced that appeasement was the only way forward, despite recent setbacks.

For London, American actions spoke louder than words. Despite some encouraging signs, Roosevelt had remained passive when it came to revising America’s neutrality laws.⁹⁹ Until these neutrality laws were repealed, the British had to assume that America’s industrial might could not be harnessed by the European democracies in wartime. On 18 June, Senator Pittman sparked hope by announcing ‘that the Neutrality Act would be studied actively during the [summer] recess as a focal point in a sweeping revision of United States Foreign Policy Legislation in the next Congress’.¹⁰⁰ However, this process was interrupted by the Munich Crisis.¹⁰¹

As tensions mounted in Central Europe, the White House used similar tactics to Edward Grey in the July Crisis of 1914, keeping both sides doubtful as to whether America would intervene if war erupted. To this end, Hull warned the German Ambassador that he was ‘doing everything to suppress’ isolationism in America ‘so that, when the moment comes, the whole weight of the United States can be thrown onto the scale on the side of Britain’.¹⁰² Simultaneously, Ambassador Bullitt warned Paris that Roosevelt would implement the neutrality laws as soon as war erupted, ending the supply of arms to France and reducing American assistance to the moral realm.¹⁰³ As tensions boiled over with Germany, Cadogan therefore advised his colleagues to learn from experience and place ‘little faith in America’.¹⁰⁴ UK-US relations had become both friendly and intimate, but there was little intimation that America was ready to step into an open partnership or revise her neutrality legislation, dashing any hopes Chamberlain might have had that there was an alternative to appeasement.

⁹⁸ Macdonald, *The United States Britain and Appeasement*, p. 19.

⁹⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹⁰⁰ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹⁰¹ Macdonald, *The United States Britain and Appeasement*, p. 88.

¹⁰² Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 79.

¹⁰³ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 291.

¹⁰⁴ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 44.

The Munich Equation

Ruggiero claims that ‘there is little hard evidence to suggest that appeasement was the only viable alternative under the circumstances’ of Munich and that ‘the revisionist argument rested on hopes and fears, *rather than reason* and experience and the facts on the ground’.¹ Similarly, Kennedy argues that Chamberlain had ‘a narrow and dogmatic style of decision-making; a supreme belief in the correctness of his own view once it was formulated; and a willingness to act in that decision-making process *without sufficient evidence*’.² This chapter begs to differ and argues that Chamberlain’s past experience of the acrimonious relations between the great democracies and incoming intelligence on Anglo-French military, political and economic weaknesses vis-à-vis Germany were paramount in forcing him towards appeasement in September 1938. In short, sound reasoning and evidence-based conclusions were at the heart of his “Munich equation”.

Almost immediately after the *Anschluss*, rumours began to spread that a German attack on Czechoslovakia was imminent. It was not known at the time that these reports were being deliberately manufactured by a Czech agent working undercover in the Abwehr. Yet, these false rumours coincidentally matched British reports from Dresden, Munich and Vienna of ‘threatening troop concentrations’ by the Wehrmacht, and were supported by the forewarnings of the SIS, which had long named Czechoslovakia as one of Hitler’s targets.³ Tensions mounted on 20-21 May, with the French Government promising to fight for Czechoslovakia, the Czech Army

¹ Italics added; Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler*, p. 88.

² Italics added; Kennedy, ‘Neville Chamberlain and Strategic Relations with the United States during his Chancellorship’, p. 96.

³ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 103; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 394.

mobilising, and the British Government warning Germany that they might also intervene militarily.⁴

The world anxiously awaited the phantom German incursion, which had never been planned. When Germany remained inactive, the belief was sparked that she had capitulated in the face of stiff British and French opposition, with both the French and American press proclaiming it 'a diplomatic victory for England'.⁵ Likewise, the SIS concluded that the threat of British intervention had forced Hitler to abandon the attack.⁶ Even Chamberlain was convinced that the Germans 'decided after getting our warnings that the risks were too great'.⁷ Ecstatically, Vansittart proclaimed that the half-balmy Hitler was 'not too balmy to be scared back over the fence, if we have the nerve to do it'.⁸

Yet, these events did not alter Chamberlain's belief that 'you should never menace unless you are in a position to carry out your threats'. Likewise, Halifax and Strang advised colleagues 'not to play the game of bluff too high' given Britain's overstretched position.⁹ Vansittart countered that the May Crisis 'proved that resolute British action could deter Hitler from war'.¹⁰ However, Chamberlain would not entertain the idea of bluffing; nor did he believe in the "Grand Alliance" envisioned by Churchill and Vansittart. 'It [a military alliance between London, Paris and either Washington or Moscow] is a very attractive idea... until you come to examine its practicality,' wrote Chamberlain. 'From that moment its attraction vanishes'. Chamberlain was fully conscious of France's military, geo-strategic, political, social, economic and financial weaknesses and her inability 'to save Czechoslovakia from being overrun by the Germans'.¹¹ Nor could Russia intervene

⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p. 8.

⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 393.

⁶ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 393.

⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 241.

⁸ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 105.

⁹ Ferris, "'Indulged in all too Little"?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement', p. 158.

¹⁰ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 103.

¹¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 214.

until its military forces had recovered from Stalin's purges. Meanwhile, America remained militarily unprepared and incurably isolationist.

Within weeks, tensions rose again as Hitler accused the Czech people of oppressing the German minority living in the Sudetenland.¹² Surprisingly, most British and American decision-makers believed that this grievance was legitimate.¹³ In John Simon's words, returning the Sudetenland to Germany 'involved the reversal after twenty years of one of the very worst arrangements made in the Peace Treaties'.¹⁴ The British political elite believed that Hitler's expansionism was driven by irredentism, rather than some Napoleonic-style bid to dominate Europe, although there were notable exceptions, including Churchill and Vansittart.¹⁵

Chamberlain decided to involve himself in the Czech dispute in July, after hearing encouraging reports that Hitler wished to send Goering to Britain to negotiate an Anglo-German settlement.¹⁶ Buoyed by the recently-struck Gentlemen's Agreement, Chamberlain believed that, if he could broker a favourable deal for Germany over the Sudetenland, Hitler might push ahead with the Goering visit.¹⁷ Chamberlain hoped that this would vindicate his prioritisation of appeasement over the cultivation of UK-US relations. Lord Runciman was thus sent to Czechoslovakia as Chamberlain's negotiator. Notably, Chamberlain did not discuss this move with Paris, which highlights the ongoing anti-collaborative relations between the democracies.¹⁸

Despite Runciman's efforts, the Czechs refused to cede the Sudetenland to Germany. As tensions mounted, the Vansittart-Christie intelligence network received nine separate reports that a German invasion was imminent. The SIS received similar

¹² Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 212.

¹³ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Ferris, "'Indulged in all too Little'?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement', p. 152; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 103.

¹⁴ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 102; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 100; Ferris, "'Indulged in all too Little'?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement', p. 164.

¹⁶ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, pp. 89-90.

¹⁷ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 214; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 90.

¹⁸ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 217.

reports from undercover agents across Europe, whilst German dissidents also gave notice to the British.¹⁹ Returning from holiday, Cadogan found 'enough in the Secret Reports to make one's hair stand on end'.²⁰ Just as these reports suggested, Hitler had approved Operation "Green" on 30 May, giving the Wehrmacht until 1 October to prepare the invasion.²¹

Inconveniently for the British Government which had no interest in Czechoslovakia, the Franco-Czech Alliance of 1924 obliged France to offer military assistance to Czechoslovakia should Germany attack without provocation.²² The present Germano-Czech dispute therefore had the potential to spark a European war and force Britain to intervene militarily. The alarmed Cabinet requested an update on the military balance in Europe. The COS advised that the impending European war might be swiftly lost if the Luftwaffe delivered a knock-out blow on either London or Paris. Discouragingly, the COS was also convinced that there was nothing that the great democracies could do to 'prevent Germany from invading and overrunning Bohemia, and from inflicting a decisive defeat on the Czechoslovakian army' within three months.²³

Orthodox and post-revisionist historians have criticised the British military elite for concocting a worst-case-scenario assessment of a European war. In their opinion, the military balance was more favourable for the European democracies in September 1938 than in September 1939.²⁴ According to these historians, the COS disseminated false intelligence on the military balance in Europe so as to advise the Government

¹⁹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 105; Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 201; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 395; Ferris, "'Indulged in all too Little"?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement', pp. 153-4.

²⁰ Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 201.

²¹ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 392.

²² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

²³ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 397; Ferris, "'Indulged in all too Little"?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement', p. 152; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 99 and 108; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 238; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 264.

²⁴ Kennedy, 'British Net Assessment and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 39; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp. 126-8; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 160.

that war would be 'suicidal'.²⁵ The COS implied that Germany had the strength to devastate London, Paris and Prague simultaneously, their exaggerations motivated by a desire to support Chamberlain's appeasement strategy and by genuine fears of British military unpreparedness.

Whilst it is true that the COS manipulated intelligence to push the Cabinet towards appeasement and away from war, without further explanation this implies that the COS simultaneously inflated Germany's military capabilities *and deflated* France's military capabilities. Historians have failed to emphasise that France's military and domestic situation was *so terrible* that any deliberate deflations of her strengths (or inflations of her weaknesses) was not necessary as it was with Czechoslovakia, where the COS did indeed bury positive reports on her powers of resistance.²⁶ In fact, the COS relied on *untainted* intelligence on France's relatively weakened armed forces to persuade the British Government to avoid war at all costs. The failure to make this distinction aids the arguments of orthodox and post-revisionist scholars, who claim that France was a worthy military partner during the Munich Crisis. However, Chamberlain and the COS comprehensively studied the attractive idea of forging a Grand Alliance, only to find it wanting.²⁷

In their eyes, British intelligence on France's weak armed forces genuinely implied that there was no viable military alternative to appeasement.²⁸ This explains why those most acquainted with this intelligence – the Service and Intelligence Chiefs in London – 'were as ardent appeasers as the Government'.²⁹ It also explains why Chamberlain believed that, in the 'absence of a powerful ally, and until our armaments are completed, we must adjust our foreign policy to our circumstances'

²⁵ Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', pp. 56-61; Kennedy, 'British Net Assessment and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 39; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, pp. 126-8; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 160.

²⁶ Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 397-8.

²⁷ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 214.

²⁸ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 103.

²⁹ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 397.

and tolerate flagrant actions ‘which we should like to treat in very different fashion’.³⁰ The British recognised that France was still tread-watering in respect of its economic, financial, political and social crises in September 1938. These problems were compounded by Britain’s negative appreciations of France’s armed forces, which cemented the perception that France was an infeasible partner. This topples the arguments of the anti-appeasers, who disparage the British Government for not risking war, whilst the odds were allegedly “favourable” during the Munich Crisis.

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In September 1938, the most alarming chink in the armour of the two European democracies was France’s aerial weakness. The British Government’s chronic apprehensions as to the dire state of the French Air Force were compounded by fears of a German air armada being launched against London.³¹ Indeed, the British Government regarded this as Germany’s best chance of knocking Britain out of the war before her economic might could be mobilised. Unlike the situation in 1914, Ismay warned Hankey, Germany now possessed ‘the means of striking at the very foundations of our existence within a few hours of the declaration of war’.³²

This irrational dread of a German knock-out blow was driven by the Air Ministry’s constant exaggerations of the Luftwaffe’s capabilities from 1936 onwards.³³ Consequently, the British cowered before Germany’s aerial might long before she could produce aircraft with the adequate range and carrying capacity to destroy London.³⁴ According to Reynolds, the British failed to realise ‘just how far the Luftwaffe was a “shop window” air force in September 1938, lacking reserves, spares

³⁰ Italics added; Strang, ‘The Moscow Negotiations, 1939’, p. 172.

³¹ Terraine, ‘The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation’, p. 56; Uri Bailer, ‘Elite Opinion and Defence Policy: Air Power Advocacy and British Rearmament During the 1930s’, *British Journal of International Studies*, 6 (1980), pp. 32-51 (p. 32).

³² Bailer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 135.

³³ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 76; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, pp. 282-3; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 127; Bailer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 133.

³⁴ Watt, ‘British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War’, p. 259; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 76; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 390; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, pp. 282-3; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 127; Bailer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 133.

and modern equipment' capable of making the round-trip, let alone of destroying London.³⁵ With the Luftwaffe utterly unprepared for such a mission, Germany actually had no plans to bomb London prior to Munich.³⁶

However, this reality was like a needle lost in the haystack of exaggerated British intelligence on 'the immediacy of the Luftwaffe menace and the capacity of bombers to deliver a knock-out blow'.³⁷ According to Liddell Hart's memoirs, imaginations ran wild across Britain from the early 1930s, with many conjuring-up tales of Germany 'launching vast aerial armadas' in a horrific aerial war 'in which the civilian population will serve as a massed target for the contending champions'.³⁸ In 1936, HG Wells's shocking and controversial film, *Things To Come*, showed the bombing of "Everytown", a fictional city, and the rise of a new dark age of totalitarianism. Within months, the Luftwaffe's bombing of Guernica 'actualised' the fictional destruction of "Everytown" and 'fed the deep horror of air bombardment', as 'newspapers, picture magazines, and newsreels' overflowed with images of atrocities, including 'graphic rows of dead Spanish children' lined up in morgues.³⁹

Britain's fears were further intensified by the Air Ministry's gross overestimations of the civilian casualty rate. In 1932, the CID was informed that 'one week's bombing will involve 18,750 casualties'.⁴⁰ By 1936, the JPC had increased this estimate to an extraordinary 150,000 civilian casualties within a week – yet Britain 'suffered in total less than 147,000 casualties from all forms of bombing and long-range bombardment in the *whole* of the Second World War'.⁴¹ The following year, the newly established Air Intelligence Directorate estimated that 1.8 million casualties from bombardment could be expected within the first 60 days of war, with devastating consequences for

³⁵ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 127.

³⁶ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 283.

³⁷ Andew, *Secret Service*, p. 390.

³⁸ Peden, *British Rearmament and the Treasury*, p. 120; Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 46.

³⁹ Frank, 'The Spanish Civil War and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 373.

⁴⁰ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, p. 21.

⁴¹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 116.

the public morale, which might lead to demands for Britain's surrender within weeks.⁴²

Any doubts about Germany's aerial bombing capabilities during September 1938 were not enough to overturn 'two decades of Air Staff and civilian rhetoric' to the contrary.⁴³ Britain's obsession with a German knock-out blow had 'deluded the public, experts and Government alike', including Ismay and Fisher, and most of the Cabinet – particularly Chamberlain, Hoare, Simon, Hore-Belisha and Halifax.⁴⁴ Even hardened military experts, such as General Ironside, feared that Britain would '*simply commit suicide*' if she exposed herself to a German air attack.⁴⁵ Once these apprehensions were combined with Britain's pessimistic assessments of French air power in the eight months preceding Munich (see below), they convinced Chamberlain that there was no alternative to appeasement.

After Pierre Cot admitted the truth about the state of France's air force and aviation industry in December 1937 to the dismay of his listeners, Guy La Chambre was swiftly chosen to replace him as Air Minister. La Chambre's mandate was to kick-start mass production to close the numerical gap with the Luftwaffe. As a first step, he prioritised the production of fighters over bombers to build up France's defensive aerial capabilities.⁴⁶ This differed from Cot's strategy to build up France's offensive bombing capabilities.⁴⁷ La Chambre believed that Germany's aerial predominance demanded fighters to protect France's industrial heartlands and civilian population.⁴⁸ The production of fighters also had the additional benefits of being less costly than

⁴² Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars, Vol. II*, p. 335; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 267.

⁴³ Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 82.

⁴⁴ Bialer, *The Shadow of the Bomber*, pp. 136-7; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, pp. 282-3.

⁴⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 278.

⁴⁶ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 235; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 73.

⁴⁷ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 70.

⁴⁸ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, pp. 70-4; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 236.

bombers and three times as quick to manufacture, vital considerations given France's financial troubles and aerial inferiority.⁴⁹

In the spring of 1938, La Chambre boldly announced Air Rearmament Plan V. This programme aimed to build 2,617 first-line aircraft – including 1,081 fighters and 876 bombers – along with another 2,122 reserve aircraft by January 1941.⁵⁰ Whilst these figures were impressive, this plan ambitiously demanded a six-fold increase in mass production from 50 to 300 planes a month.⁵¹ Miraculously, after a slow start, the French aircraft industry responded to the challenge from 1939, producing in the following two years as many aircraft as Germany had in the previous four.⁵² Ironically, this sharp spike in production was only possible because of Cot's radical restructuring and rebuilding of the French aviation industry, his schemes at last bearing fruit.⁵³ To bolster Plan V, La Chambre also ordered 1,000 fighter planes from America.⁵⁴

Yet, in the interim period, before the completion of Plan V in 1941 and the delivery of American planes in 1940, France was in grave danger. On taking up his post as Air Minister, La Chambre learned that France was 'outclassed both quantitatively and qualitatively' in the air by Germany.⁵⁵ 'We do not know what the future holds,' wrote General Vuillemin, the newly-appointed CAS, 'but I am quite convinced that if a conflict erupts this year, the French Air Force would be annihilated in a few days'.⁵⁶ Indeed, Vuillemin explained, the Armée de l'Air's flying 'materiel was outdated, reserve aircraft were virtually non-existent, and morale had reached an all-time

⁴⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; France, December 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 74.

⁵⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, 163; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 74.

⁵¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 236.

⁵² Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 163.

⁵³ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 197. Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations between the Wars*, p. 7.

⁵⁴ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 163.

⁵⁵ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 72; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159.

⁵⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 217; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 88.

low'.⁵⁷ Across the Channel, the COS concluded that Germany and Italy were overwhelmingly supreme in the air over Britain and France, especially in long-range bombers capable of striking London.⁵⁸ Alexander and Philpott argue that French air weakness 'made the wisdom of giving priority to RAF programmes in 1937-38 appear irrefutable'.⁵⁹ For Chamberlain and his military advisors, it also made appeasement appear irrefutable.

Fearing that London might discard Paris as a military partner, Gamelin cautioned his colleagues not to 'acknowledge... to England' the 'present weakness of our air force'.⁶⁰ Regrettably for Gamelin, however, the British were intensively monitoring France's 'deplorable' situation.⁶¹ In February 1938, an IIC report confirmed that French aircraft production was still no more than 60 planes a month, whilst its skilled labour shortage was as acute as ever.⁶² Equally disturbing were France's poorly-designed prototypes and her failure to make sufficiently-powerful aero-engines upwards of 900 horse-power.⁶³ Whilst the Lorraine aero-engine company had recently produced a prototype with 1,200 horse-power, it was not ready for mass production.⁶⁴ Officials in the Foreign Office grimaced as they read these intelligence reports in early 1938. Strang described the situation as 'catastrophic', whilst Vansittart remarked that it was 'as bad as ever'.⁶⁵ France's aerial crisis had become so alarming that there was no need for the COS to exaggerate her aerial weakness during the Munich Crisis.

Indeed, long before the stakes were raised, Chamberlain advised the Foreign Policy Committee that, whilst the French Army was strong, 'in other respects e.g. finance, *air*, [and] the domestic political situation, France was in a *hopeless* position'.⁶⁶

⁵⁷ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 222.

⁵⁸ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 89.

⁵⁹ Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 8.

⁶⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 88.

⁶¹ Inksip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

⁶² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 95.

⁶³ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; France, December 1937, *RAF Intelligence Summaries, 1937*, AIR 8/219

⁶⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁶⁵ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 95.

⁶⁶ Italics added; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 87.

Likewise, in February 1938, he wrote that France was 'in a terribly weak condition being continually subject to attacks on the franc & flights of capital together with industrial troubles & discontent which seriously effect her production of all kinds & particularly of arms & equipment'.⁶⁷ Many French leaders were equally despondent. 'We are not capable of heroics', George Bonnet told a journalist in April 1938, '...It is all very well to proclaim yourself the policemen of Europe, but for this you need more than cap guns, straw handcuffs and paper prisons'.⁶⁸ In Chamberlain's opinion, Bonnet might have added paper planes to his list.

The Munich Crisis returned France's aerial weakness to the fore of British military appreciations and calculations. As a European war over the Sudetenland seemed increasingly imminent, the French CAS became 'scared out of his wits'. Indeed, he was conscious that France could only mobilise 250 fighters and 350 bombers, most of which were obsolete.⁶⁹ 'What characterises the air force in September 1938,' lamented La Chambre, 'is not so much that the number of aircraft it possesses is inadequate by comparison with the German Air Force, but above all that *it possesses scarcely any modern planes*'.⁷⁰ La Chambre informed the Chamber of Deputies that France only had 21 machines equal in speed to most Luftwaffe planes. 'This is even worse than we had supposed', remarked one Foreign Office official, 'and fully explains French reluctance to be drawn into a war'.⁷¹

On 19 September 1938, as tensions sky-rocketed, a British Air Ministry memorandum concluded that France could only field 450 modern planes (out of 1,350 first-line aircraft) and could only produce 100 machines a month – a sixth of Germany's output. Equally worrying were France's non-existent anti-aircraft defences.⁷² Similarly, the British 'did not have the chain of radar stations; the Ultra material, which the mastery of the Enigma machines eventually provided; or the Spitfires and Hurricanes' that

⁶⁷ Chamberlain, *Diary*, 19 February 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 1138.

⁶⁸ Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', p. 94.

⁶⁹ Young, 'The Strategic Dream: French Air Doctrine in the Interwar Period, 1919-1939', p. 60.

⁷⁰ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 148.

⁷¹ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, pp. 99-100.

⁷² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives*, p. 100.

secured victory in the Battle of Britain.⁷³ Both nations appeared to be sitting ducks – if intelligence on the Luftwaffe’s flying range and bomb loads was to be believed.

Whilst the British military establishment had a strong tendency towards worst-case scenarios during this crisis, historians have failed to note that there was no need to exaggerate France’s aerial weakness.⁷⁴ Indeed, in the last moment before Munich, the French CAS warned that if war broke out France would lose 64 percent of her air strength within two months.⁷⁵ He also predicted that, if war came before 1940, France’s aerial forces would still be grossly ‘insufficient, even if reinforced by the R.A.F.’.⁷⁶

On a positive note, the British observed that the French had expanded their aviation factories and floor space and had purchased large quantities of machine tools from overseas, improvements which the British had pushed for since March 1938.⁷⁷ Whilst the rewards of this investment had not born fruit by Munich, two months later, Colyer reported that these fruits could soon be expected and predicted an output of 150 planes a month by early 1939.⁷⁸ Colyer’s optimism actually proved conservative. France miraculously increased her annual production from 533 aircraft in 1938 to 2,277 aircraft in 1939, and from September 1939 was producing more fighters per month than Germany.⁷⁹ Likewise, the workforce of the French aviation industry increased from 47,000 to 81,289 workers over these twelve months.⁸⁰

⁷³ Dilks, ‘Appeasement and Intelligence’, p. 168.

⁷⁴ Andrew, *The Missing Dimension*, p. 81; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 397; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 103.

⁷⁵ Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, p. 159.

⁷⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 260.

⁷⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 269.

⁷⁸ Another pleasing development was the appointment of M. Caquot, a first class engineer, as President of the nationalised aircraft industry. ‘With his widespread experience and driving power’, reported Colyer, he ‘is seriously tackling the problem of increasing production’. *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

⁷⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 277; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 200.

⁸⁰ Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, p. 143; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 216.

Impressed with this transformation, the British 'developed a high regard for Guy la Chambre' after the Munich Crisis.⁸¹ Indeed, Coyler described him as 'a protégé of M. Daladier', who was highly respected in London.⁸² He reported that the two men were close friends and had together convinced the Chamber and the Senate that major investment was necessary 'to expand and retool the aviation industry... to introduce effective mass production'.⁸³ Only a year onwards, France boasted a first-line strength of 1,900 aircraft, half of which were considered truly modern.⁸⁴ This figure rose to an astonishing 3,289 modern planes by 1940, of which 2,122 were fighters.⁸⁵ This high-on miraculous increase was due both to exponential increases in French aircraft production and increased orders of 1,500 planes annually from American aviation firms.⁸⁶ The French suddenly possessed the fourth largest air force in the world and felt a strong measure of prestige returning to the Armée de l'air.⁸⁷

However, none of this was known at the time of Munich, leaving the British military establishment in despair about France's aerial weakness. If it came to blows, France's own aerial chiefs believed that the Armée de l'air would be annihilated within a matter of months, if not days. The mountain of intelligence on France's aerial weakness and dire aircraft production figures intensified Britain's irrational fears of an aerial knock-out blow in the months preceding Munich. Unsurprisingly, General Pownall, the DMI, concluded that the two democracies were 'in a bad condition to wage even a defensive war', whilst an offensive war was 'well-nigh hopeless'.⁸⁸ His views were wholeheartedly supported by the CIGS and Generals Ironside and Ismay. Given the seriously unfavourable aerial balance, the British military elite was convinced that appeasement was the only way forward at Munich, especially since Britain's naval advantage over the Axis powers would only enter the equation if she could survive the Luftwaffe's initial onslaught, which was predicted to be catastrophic.

⁸¹ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 166.

⁸² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

⁸³ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 268.

⁸⁴ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 172.

⁸⁵ Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 149.

⁸⁶ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 277.

⁸⁷ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159.

⁸⁸ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 108.

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France's naval lead over the Axis powers was also deteriorating. By Munich, Italy had commissioned two 35,000-ton battleships, both of which had superior capabilities to France's battleships. Italy had also announced her intention to build a further two battleships. Whilst France's shipbuilding programme would close the gap in battleships by 1941, the Admiralty concluded that during the interim, it would be 'at least doubtful... whether France can deal unassisted with the Italian Navy in the Mediterranean, much less safeguard our interests, as well as her own, in that sea'.⁸⁹

Budgetary and production trends were also discouraging. The budget for 1938 only accorded the French Navy 24.1 percent of total military expenditure, dropping to 11.2 percent for 1939 as the army and air force were accorded financial priority.⁹⁰ Although France and Britain would retain joint naval supremacy over the Axis powers, the British were concerned for the future position of the French Navy, should it continue to be starved of finance, especially if the bulk of the Royal Navy was sent to Singapore to check the Japanese. Alarming, in 1938, France's budget for naval construction had dropped by 7 percent – or 189 million francs – on the previous year. Likewise, the 1939 budget estimations appeared inadequate for the navy to sustain its marginal lead over the Axis powers. 'There is an increasing feeling that the clouds of financial shortage are massing on the horizon,' wrote the British Naval Attaché in 1938, and that France will see her navy 'being overtaken by those of her more strident, though even less solvent neighbours'.⁹¹

These financial problems were compounded by skilled labour shortages, which caused production backlogs.⁹² Approximately half of France's shipbuilding programme for 1937 was only laid down in December, whilst one heavy cruiser was not even laid

⁸⁹ 'Military Preparations in Relation to Imperial Defence Policy', 11 February 1938, ADM 205/57

⁹⁰ Although the navy budget increased by 22 percent in real terms. Ross, *French Net Assessment*, p. 149; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

⁹¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁹² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

down the following year.⁹³ This caused an almighty backlog which paralysed the shipbuilding programme for 1938, a year which had been billed as the start of a mammoth, three-year construction programme. This naval programme was unfortunately 'smothered at birth by financial and political difficulties'.⁹⁴ A silver lining was that the tempo of naval construction increased in 1938 'due to an absence of strikes and an adjustment of the 40-hour week in naval yards'.⁹⁵

Another British concern was that France's merchant fleet was only the seventh largest globally, behind Britain, America, Japan, Norway, Germany and Italy. In fact, in the late 1930s, British vessels carried more goods to and from French ports than the French themselves, with the French fleet carrying 'no more than a third of France's total requirements' from overseas, whilst 45 percent was carried under the Union Jack.⁹⁶ Additionally, the French had a considerable deficit in fuel reserves as war loomed.⁹⁷

More encouragingly, the French were still leading the Axis powers, particularly the Italians, in terms of naval efficiency. In September 1938, France's naval manoeuvres were cancelled as the French Navy mobilised in response to the Munich Crisis. This allowed the British NA to observe the first French naval mobilisation for twenty years, which he described as an 'intricate and highly specialised organisation which includes not only the ships... but embraces dockyards, shore defences, ancillary services of many kinds, communications and supplies of material of all sorts'. Whilst certain deficiencies had been unearthed, he believed that the mobilisation had been carried out satisfactorily.⁹⁸

However, as the French examined the naval balance in Europe, they believed that within several months they would lose their maritime superiority over the Axis. The French accurately anticipated that by early 1939 the Axis powers would possess

⁹³ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

⁹⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁹⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

⁹⁶ Young, *In Command of France*, pp. 19-22.

⁹⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

⁹⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

eleven battleships as to France's seven; two aircraft carriers as to France's one; and ten heavy cruisers as to France's seven.⁹⁹ Meanwhile, the Axis powers would increase their submarine superiority over France by 25 vessels and maintain their eleven-ship lead in light cruisers. The Axis powers, however, would see a dramatic reduction in their destroyer superiority over France from 64 to 27 ships.¹⁰⁰

Nevertheless, London remained convinced that the French would fulfil their naval duties if war erupted over Czechoslovakia, even if Japan entered the conflict and drew significant Royal Navy reinforcements to Singapore. This optimistic view was supported by the Admiralty's mistaken belief that the Axis powers had no aircraft carriers whatsoever and only seven battleships. This was an uncharacteristic underestimation of the strength of the Axis powers – at a time of exaggeration. Moreover, the French fleet was deemed more efficient.¹⁰¹ Meanwhile, if Japan remained neutral, the two European democracies would possess an enormous superiority over the Axis powers, which would more than compensate for France's relative naval weakening.¹⁰²

Thus, Britain's war plan navally to blockade the Axis powers still appeared viable as war loomed in September 1938. If London and Paris could survive the initial knock-out blow attempt from Germany – an enormous *if* in the eyes of the British military elite – their superior economic might would ensure victory. However, months would pass before Britain's naval blockade could slow down the Axis economies. Unsurprisingly, given the British military elite's rampant fears of an immediate aerial knock-out blow, they opposed the option of war during the Munich Crisis. Their caution was temporarily strengthened through the deliberate inflation of the Luftwaffe's bombing capabilities and through the dissemination of *accurate* intelligence on the depressing weakness of the French Air Force and aviation industry.

⁹⁹ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939, British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 32.

¹⁰⁰ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 32.

¹⁰¹ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939, British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

¹⁰² 'British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

This bleak prediction of how a European war might be lost convinced the British Cabinet to reject the pursuit of alliances.

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Throughout 1938, the French Army and Maginot Line were seen as all-powerful in defence, capable of repelling a German incursion without British help. The French military elite often boasted about their defensive impregnability to the British, and even contemplated redeploying infantry and munition stocks away from the Franco-German frontier to other more vulnerable theatres.¹⁰³ Indeed, General Requin told Hore-Belisha that if the Maginot Line was 'not broken in the first forty-eight hours, the French General Staff felt confident of resisting any subsequent attack'.¹⁰⁴ Likewise, the French Army DB stressed that Germany was 'incapable of breaking through France's defences', because Germany's tanks were too weak to oppose French firepower.¹⁰⁵

The British believed their French counterparts. 'Judging by those sections of the Maginot Line which have been actually visited,' concluded Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'there seems no reason to doubt... that... *the system is impregnable*'.¹⁰⁶ Meanwhile, Hore-Belisha and Hankey concluded that the BEF would *not* be required to secure the French frontier against a German offensive and thus justified Inskip's doctrine of limited liability.¹⁰⁷ Even notorious Francophobes such as John Simon admitted that the Maginot Line was 'the strongest system of fortifications that had ever been constructed'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰³ Colonel Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy', 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

¹⁰⁴ Beaumont-Nesbitt was told something similar by General Sancelme during the same inspection; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 282.

¹⁰⁶ Italics added; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁰⁷ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 254; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 65; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 51;

¹⁰⁸ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 18.

Going into more detail, Inskip regularly highlighted the Maginot Line as the primary deterrent preventing the Axis from gambling on a land offensive.¹⁰⁹ These nigh-impenetrable fixed-fortifications were flanked by tricky natural obstacles – mountains, rivers and forests – on the Franco-Italian and Germano-Belgian borders. Belgium's defences were also regarded as 'formidable'.¹¹⁰ Inskip described Belgium's fixed-fortifications at Namur, Liege and Antwerp as being 'of considerable strength', the three strongholds linked by a system of concrete machine-gun posts behind tricky water obstacles, including the river Meuse.¹¹¹ Though, of course, Belgium had declared her neutrality on 14 October 1936, which meant that these fixed-fortifications could not be counted on, forcing France to increase her defences between Lille and Dunkirk.¹¹²

France also faced an increased threat from Italy. France reacted swiftly by strengthening her fixed-defences along her Alpine border with Switzerland and Italy.¹¹³ Though it was anticipated that Italy could attack France with eighteen infantry divisions, the War Office concluded that this force would now 'meet strong French fortifications along all the existing passes. Furthermore, the mountainous nature of southern France 'would increase Italian difficulties'. Thus, the British doubted that 'any serious attempt to invade southern France would be made'.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁹ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

¹¹⁰ Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

¹¹¹ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

¹¹² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy,' 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

¹¹³ Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy,' 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

¹¹⁴ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939: British Strategic Memorandum', ADM 205/57

Confidently, Inskip judged that France's fixed-defences were 'now relatively as strong as they were ever likely to be'.¹¹⁵ Indeed, whilst he admitted that the numerical advantage was tilting towards the Wehrmacht, he believed that the French Army acquired its overwhelming might from its fixed-fortifications.¹¹⁶ Thus, on the *defensive*, it remained more powerful than the Wehrmacht in 1938.¹¹⁷

Even without these fixed-defences, the French Army was menacing in its own right. According to Thomas, the French believed themselves to possess 'the most powerful European land force' in 1937, even as Germany worked relentlessly to close the gap.¹¹⁸ The British were even more optimistic. After being 'dazzled' by the annual manoeuvres of the French Army in September 1937, Hore-Belisha declared to the pleasure of his hosts that the French Army was 'invincible', and simultaneously wrote 'glowing reports' to the War Office on the French Army's power, efficiency and morale.¹¹⁹ Simultaneously, Beaumont-Nesbitt confidently concluded that 'the French Army to-day is more efficiently led and trained probably than at any time since the war, and certainly before the war'.¹²⁰

However, the French Army's doctrine, equipment, training and strategy were decidedly *defensively-minded*. If the disagreement between Czechoslovakia and Germany came to blows, the Czechs would require the French Army to act *offensively*. This was another proposition entirely to the defensive war that France had prepared to fight over the previous two decades. Such an intervention required a different,

¹¹⁵ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

¹¹⁶ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

¹¹⁷ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

¹¹⁸ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 153.

¹¹⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 67; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 253.

¹²⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

offensive strength, which was distinctly lacking. The British further believed that the French Army was losing the mechanisation and motorisation race to Germany and struggling with a chronic shortage of modern equipment, armament reserves, and manpower.

In terms of equipment, the mechanisation and motorisation of the French Army had progressed smoothly in the late 1930s, though these efforts were overshadowed by Germany's.¹²¹ By the time of Munich, the French Army possessed ten motorised infantry divisions and intended to replace horse-transport entirely so that its increased mobility would compensate for its manpower shortage.¹²² The French Army also possessed two light armoured divisions, each equipped with 87 Hotchkiss H-35 light tanks and 87 Somua S-35 medium tanks, whilst the infantry and cavalry divisions between them possessed 800 Renault R-35 infantry tanks and 400 Hotchkiss tanks.¹²³

Beaumont-Nesbitt was content that these mechanisation and motorisation programmes would increase the army's firepower and speed of manoeuvre. This in turn would alleviate France's manpower shortage and allow her more speedily to react to any punctures in the Maginot Line.¹²⁴ However, the French treated tanks as defensive weapons, rather than powerful offensive instruments, and thus did not consider them as tools for breaking through the Siegfried Line, which would be the first step towards saving Czechoslovakia.¹²⁵ Alarming, the French also had no heavy tank divisions – although they did possess 66 heavy B-1 tanks, which General Guderin described as 'the best tank in the field', and planned to create two heavy tank divisions.¹²⁶ In comparison, the Wehrmacht had constructed three heavy tank divisions and two light tank divisions since 1933.¹²⁷

¹²¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹²² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹²³ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 59.

¹²⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹²⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹²⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 59.

¹²⁷ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 100.

The British also mistakenly believed that the Wehrmacht possessed 35 motorised infantry divisions to, when the Wehrmacht actually only possessed four motorised infantry divisions to France's ten.¹²⁸ This extraordinary exaggeration of Germany's motorised strength led British observers to scorn France's 'widespread use of horse-drawn transport' after the French Army's manoeuvres in September 1937. Whilst this belief was soon 'dispelled when the same heavy reliance on horses was seen at the German exercises a week later', the British still believed that Germany led the motorisation race, in which they actually lagged behind France.¹²⁹

France was also working hard to end the chronic shortage of modern equipment for its peacetime army during the mid-1930s. Beaumont-Nesbitt observed a considerable improvement in 1937, with anti-tank guns, machine guns and motor carriers being 'issued on a considerable scale'. Although he conceded that a large volume of obsolescent equipment was still in use, he believed that this was normal for democracies, which were unable to implement 'a policy of ruthless scrapping and replacement' like the totalitarians. On the whole, Beaumont-Nesbitt judged the French Army's material position *in peacetime* to be 'adequate', thanks to the ongoing work of Daladier and Gamelin.¹³⁰ However, both Beaumont-Nesbitt and Inskip warned that the French Army's material position *in wartime* 'must give grounds for apprehension'.¹³¹ In the former's view, the French Army had a paucity of armament reserves, whilst her snail-paced armament production was 'totally insufficient for war demands'.¹³² Meanwhile, the War Office concluded that the French Army's 'very

¹²⁸Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 253; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 101.

¹²⁹ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 68.

¹³⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹³¹ Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹³² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

small' armament reserves could only equip and sustain 53 infantry divisions in the field for 2-5 months.¹³³

A glance at the map also revealed that the bulk of France's heavy industries and centres of essential raw materials in the north-east were extremely vulnerable. 'Even should France avoid invasion and subsequent occupation by enemy forces as in 1914,' Beaumont-Nesbitt argued, 'these [industrial] areas are open to destruction, or at least dislocation, by an attack from the air'. In a long war, this would compel France to rely on friendly powers for munitions supplies, 'and this in itself constitutes a problem of vital importance to the security of France', especially given America's neutrality laws and Britain's own production bottlenecks. The means at France's disposal, therefore, caused 'some anxious thought'.¹³⁴

This concern was aggravated by Britain's mistaken belief that the Wehrmacht was supported by an armament industry capable of equipping fifteen divisions annually and of sustaining in wartime 'the maximum number of divisions for which trained manpower existed'. The British intelligence community incorrectly assumed that 'the impressive performance of the large armament firms – Krupps and Rhinemetall – was replicated throughout Germany', when in fact the country as a whole was being choked by economic and financial bottlenecks, including acute raw material shortages and a balance of payments crisis.¹³⁵ The French intelligence community, in contrast, believed that the Wehrmacht had 'grave deficiencies' in armaments.¹³⁶

The question of man-power remained the greatest problem for the French, despite the addition of 975 officers and 41,259 soldiers to the French Army in 1937, an *increase* equivalent to approximately half the strength of the US Army. This expansion raised the army's establishment to 29,733 officers and 613,065 troops, of which 22,314 officers and 413,537 troops served in metropolitan France.¹³⁷ In 1937, the

¹³³ 'Brief Note on the Strength of the Armies in Germany, France, and Italy on Mobilisation, with Special Reference to the Speech of Signor Mussolini to the Fascist Grand Council on 2.3.37', 3 March 1937, WO 190/520

¹³⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹³⁵ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 99-100.

¹³⁶ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 281.

¹³⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

French General Staff also approved War Plan E, which planned for 'three hundred thousand empire troops and a further two hundred thousand empire war workers all to be mobilised and in place within the first year of war'. Notably, this plan was in fact 'substantially realised' when hostilities erupted in September 1939.¹³⁸

Despite the French Army's impressive numerical increases, Gamelin warned that the Wehrmacht would soon be double its size.¹³⁹ According to Young, the land balance decisively shifted during 1937 'as the Germans began to draw ahead in the number of reserve divisions' and the number of divisions they could sustain in the field.¹⁴⁰ Germany could also mobilise their divisions more quickly. Within a week, she could mobilise 78 divisions to France's 33 divisions and would still have an advantage of nineteen divisions after three months of warfare.¹⁴¹ Numerically speaking, the odds were 'decisively with the Germans'.¹⁴² However, the Germans were much less highly-trained, leading Inskip and General Ironside to predict that the military balance would not shift inexorably against France until 1939 or 1940.¹⁴³

Nevertheless, the British readily accepted that the *combined* land strength of the Axis powers already overshadowed that of the French.¹⁴⁴ Unable to bridge this gap in manpower, France decided to focus her efforts on artillery power and gained a 'clear advantage' over the Wehrmacht by the late 1930s, possessing 3,000 more artillery

¹³⁸ Thomas, 'At the Heart of Things? French Imperial Defence Planning in the Late 1930s', p. 339.

¹³⁹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 215.

¹⁴⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 163.

¹⁴¹ Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 163.

¹⁴² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 163.

¹⁴³ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 164; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 207; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 67.

¹⁴⁴ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

pieces than Germany.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, only a third of Germany's infantry divisions were accompanied by heavy artillery, and even these weapons had barely advanced in technological terms from Germany's pre-1918 artillery.¹⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the French lagged dangerously behind Germany in anti-tank weapons and mortars. Fraser also noted that France's military units stationed far away from the Maginot Line were plagued with shortages of auxiliary weapons.¹⁴⁷

Morale was another factor in which the French could take pride. Beaumont-Nesbitt reported to London that the French Army was utterly 'sound and untouched by outside events... in spite of attempts of extremists to undermine discipline'. Meanwhile, the rising threat of Germany was recognised with 'a complete absence of defeatism' by the French General Staff. 'They are confident that Germany cannot break through the frontier,' Beaumont-Nesbitt observed, 'and believe that with British [naval, aerial and industrial] cooperation – and no doubt it is hoped later on with American – France can survive a long war' and out-last the Axis powers.¹⁴⁸ This evidence contradicts Stedman's claim that 'defeatism was thought to be rife in the upper ranks of the French Army, the generals of which commanded a force... hidden behind the outdated and crumbling Maginot Line'.¹⁴⁹

The British also praised France's military leaders. Ambassadors Clerk and Phipps were impressed with Gamelin, the former describing him as 'active, intelligent, practical... Extremely amiable... [with] a lucid and elastic mind', whilst the latter described him as 'a man of quite remarkable "sang froid"'.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, Beaumont-Nesbitt reported that the entirety of France praised Daladier as 'a really competent Minister of War', who 'worked untiringly to bring the material position of the French Army into line with modern requirements'. Daladier was also highly experienced, having already

¹⁴⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, pp. 281-2; Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 59.

¹⁴⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 183 and 281-2.

¹⁴⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹⁴⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁴⁹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 139.

¹⁵⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 59.

served as War Minister twice previously. France was thus 'fortunate to have found at this critical juncture in her history, a politician and a soldier who work together to such good purpose'.¹⁵¹ Indeed, they had secured both the funds and approval for 'the largest peacetime rearmament programme in French history'.¹⁵²

However, this achievement was overshadowed by France's bleak strategic situation and plummeting relative military strength as the Wehrmacht advanced in leaps and bounds. In September 1937, the German Army's annual manoeuvres served as a mammoth propaganda show to intimidate the democracies. Mussolini looked on as the guest of honour as 159,000 soldiers, 20,000 vehicles, 800 tanks, 800 aircraft, 180 anti-aircraft batteries, and 25,000 horses took part. The British CIGS was also present and reported that he was 'favourably impressed by the offensive capability of the German Army compared to the French'. Meanwhile, a British tank expert observed the fiercely offensive role played by the two armoured divisions on display, which stood in stark contrast to France's lack of offensive tank doctrine.¹⁵³ These British comparisons were significant, as it was France's *offensive* power that would be assessed during the Munich Crisis.

Germany's defensive capabilities were also noted. Colonel Hotblack, the MA to Berlin, reported in August 1937 that the Germans, to all practical purposes, had become 'unattackable', given their rising defensive power, the birth of the Siegfried Line and France's severely limited offensive capability. Germany's newfound defensive invulnerability undermined France's ability to assist her Eastern European allies and therefore spelled the end for France's carefully crafted security network. Hotblack also believed that by early 1939 the Germans would be 'in a position to carry out offensive action... provided they are not faced with the prospect of a very long war or of a world combined against them'.¹⁵⁴

Whilst Young and Jackson both argue that France's land superiority was lost by January 1938, other historians, such as Adamwraithe, Alexander, Bond, Maiolo and

¹⁵¹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁵² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁵³ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 95-6.

¹⁵⁴ Colonel Hotblack, 'Memorandum on German Military Preparedness', August 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 207.

Philpott, maintain that the French Army was still the most powerful in Europe in early 1938.¹⁵⁵ Adamwraithe emphasises that France had more divisions than Germany at full mobilisation until March 1939, whilst the combined strength of France, Poland and Czechoslovakia was superior to that of Germany and Italy.¹⁵⁶ Throughout 1938, the Axis powers were also quick to recognise the French Army's unrivalled power. Ambassador Phipps reported that the German and Italian Ambassadors were convinced 'that the French Army was the best in Europe at present'.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, in the words of Vittorio Cerruti, the Italian Ambassador to Paris, 'the French Army was the finest in the world'.¹⁵⁸

Churchill likewise described the French Army as 'the most perfectly trained and mobile force in Europe'.¹⁵⁹ Decades later, Churchill maintained that 'the German armies were not capable of defeating the French in 1938 or 1939', reasoning that 'the vast tank production with which they broke the French Front did not come into existence 'til 1940'.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, the COS concluded that, if war came immediately, the Wehrmacht would neither have 'the numbers, equipment or training to justify a belief that she could overrun France quickly', even with Italian military cooperation'.¹⁶¹ The COS believed that the Wehrmacht would only gain the necessary strength in 1939 or 1940, and even then 'the Maginot Line would prevent a rapid German breakthrough'.¹⁶²

According to Inskip, the Wehrmacht had an acute shortage of trained officers and was resultingly 'short of the high standard which the German general staff consider

¹⁵⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 207; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 245; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 163; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159; 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 75.

¹⁵⁶ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 159.

¹⁵⁷ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 68.

¹⁵⁸ Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler*, p. 186.

¹⁵⁹ Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler*, p. 186.

¹⁶⁰ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265.

¹⁶¹ Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

¹⁶² Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 88.

necessary for war'. In his view, the Wehrmacht also lacked medium and heavy tanks, whilst her Landwehr divisions lacked artillery. Without sufficient quantities of heavy tanks, he concluded, Germany would have no 'prospect of breaking through the French or Belgian frontier fortifications'.¹⁶³ This conviction of France's defensive invulnerability offered the British a moral justification for scrapping a large BEF and introducing a policy of limited liability.¹⁶⁴

However, the British were only confident of French Army's *defensive* might, not her *offensive* power to break the Siegfried Line and save Czechoslovakia. That was another proposition entirely. Consequently, the French Army was considered strong and weak simultaneously. This paradoxical state was also seen in Soviet Russia before the purges struck, its army being regarded by London as powerful enough to repel a German attack, yet *incapable* of attacking Germany in turn, given its young munitions industry, antiquated transport system and pre-dominantly defensive doctrines, tactics, equipment and training.¹⁶⁵ The French Army was seen in a similarly paradoxical light.

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More alarmingly still, France's geo-strategic picture had plummeted. Since the Rhineland Crisis, her alliance network had turned into rubble as Russia found her military power temporarily eclipsed by Stalin's purges and as Belgium, Yugoslavia and Romania drifted away from France towards neutrality. Meanwhile, Mussolini and Hitler had announced the Rome-Berlin Axis; the Siegfried Line was being constructed, blocking France's path to the Little Entente; General Franco was slowly conquering Spain; and Italy was excessively strengthening her Libyan garrison and threatening

¹⁶³ Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

¹⁶⁴ Adamwraith, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 70; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 63; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 207.

¹⁶⁵ Inskip, 'The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; 'Conference of Military Attachés to Consider the World Situation', June 1936, WO 190/433; Keith Nielson, "'Pursued by the Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations', *Canadian Journal of History*, 28 (1993), pp. 189-222 (p. 211).

France's North African colonies.¹⁶⁶ These alarming trends were further compounded by France's economic, financial, political, social and aerial woes and thus overshadowed the French Army's lead over the Wehrmacht when fighting on the defensive.

Over the previous year, Russia had been removed from the military equation as Stalin's purges tore apart the upper echelons of the Red Army. These purges have also metaphorically torn apart the arguments of orthodox and post-revisionist historians, such as Shaw, who claim that a viable 'alternative policy existed to the policy of appeasement – namely an Anglo-French-Soviet Alliance'.¹⁶⁷ Even more brazenly, Ruggiero brushes off the impact of Stalin's purges by claiming that Russia still 'offered the best, most timely, and most effective military deterrent to the Anti-Comintern bloc'.¹⁶⁸ This seems fanciful, given that Tukhachevsky, the Red Army's Chief of Staff, and eight of the highest-ranking military officers were trialled and executed on 11 June 1937, whilst in the following days 75 out of 80 members of the military Soviet were 'liquidated' along with 34,501 officers.¹⁶⁹

The Foreign Office received a regular stream of intelligence reports on the purges – including the arrests and executions of military personnel – which were read with horror.¹⁷⁰ Colonel R.C. Firebrace, the British MA to Moscow, reported that 65 percent of Russia's senior officers had been vanquished. Consequently, the morale and the efficiency of the Soviet Red Army had become so questionable that he seriously doubted whether Russia was in any position to fulfil her military obligations to her allies – France and Czechoslovakia – in an offensive war.¹⁷¹ This view was generally

¹⁶⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁶⁷ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 125.

¹⁶⁸ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 63.

¹⁶⁹ Strang, 'The Moscow Negotiations, 1939', p. 183; Dreifort, 'The French Popular Front and the Franco-Soviet Pact, 1936-1947: A Dilemma in Foreign Policy', pp. 223-4; Buffotot, 'The French High Command and the Franco-Soviet Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 552; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 183.

¹⁷⁰ Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939*, p. 9; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 208.

¹⁷¹ Nielson, "'Pursued by the Bear": British Estimates of Soviet Military Strength and Anglo-Soviet Relations', p. 215.

accepted by both the War Office and Foreign Office.¹⁷² Inskip summarised that ‘the internal situation in the U.S.S.R. has deteriorated to such an extent during the past year’ that she will no longer ‘embark on an offensive war unless she is directly threatened’.¹⁷³ Another problem, often unmentioned by counter-revisionists, was that a pact with Soviet Russia was deemed by the British ruling elite as likely to antagonise Japan – who was already involved in skirmishes with Russia along the Manchurian-Mongolian-Siberian frontiers – and drag her into a European war.¹⁷⁴ Indeed, in early 1937, months before the purges began, when Russia was at her interwar peak in military strength, Inskip concluded that ‘Russian neutrality is infinitely preferable to Russian intervention, if there is any likelihood of the latter leading us into hostilities against Japan’.¹⁷⁵

Despite Russia’s intolerably weak position, the *Anschluss* was a spark for the uninformed public to write to newspapers and MPs demanding that ‘Britain draw closer to the Soviets or the USA’.¹⁷⁶ Surprisingly, orthodox historians, such as Northedge, Namier and Rowse, and post-revisionist historians, such as Ruggiero, Parker and Shaw, still believe ‘that Churchill’s Grand Alliance was... realistic in the years before the war’, despite having access to all the above contrary evidence on Russian weakness.¹⁷⁷ However, there is no escaping that the British military and political elites regarded Soviet Russia as an untenable partner during the purges. Indeed, Nielson concludes that Stalin’s two years of purges ‘eliminated the British belief, which had built up in the period from 1933 to 1937, in Soviet strength’.¹⁷⁸

Across the English Channel, Franco-Soviet relations had also begun to falter as the threat of communism disrupted France’s internal politics, causing the French right-

¹⁷² Nielson, Britain, *Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 215 and 236.

¹⁷³ Inskip, ‘Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938’, 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

¹⁷⁴ Nielson, Britain, *Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, pp. 1-250.

¹⁷⁵ Inskip, ‘The Preparedness for War of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May, 1937’, 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8

¹⁷⁶ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 134.

¹⁷⁷ Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler*, p. 13; Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 123.

¹⁷⁸ Nielson, Britain, *Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 252.

wing to accuse Stalin's Comintern of interference. Simultaneously, the French military elite treated Russia with open disdain, rejecting her requests to strengthen the Franco-Soviet Pact with a fresh-round of staff conversations.¹⁷⁹ 'France has no confidence in the Soviet Union', the Russian Foreign Minister tellingly declared in March 1938, 'and the Soviet Union has no confidence in France'. This attitude was supported by the Russian Ambassador to London, who dismissed the Franco-Russian Pact as an accord 'not worth two pence'.¹⁸⁰ Halifax despondently concluded that, if Hitler invaded Czechoslovakia over the Sudetenland debacle, 'there was nothing that we in this country or France, or Russia could do'.¹⁸¹

France also had to accept the collapse of the Little Entente. Since the Rhineland Crisis, Yugoslavia and Romania had drifted away from France and towards the Axis powers. According to Ambassador Phipps, Paris had 'watched with concern the development of closer relations between Yugoslavia and Italy, the divisions of counsels in the Little Entente, and the formation of Governments in Yugoslavia and Romania of less Francophile tendencies'. These alarming trends had forced Foreign Minister Delbos to tour the capitals of the Little Entente in 1937 in an attempt to reverse their political drift.¹⁸² Though Delbos was well-received by the Little Entente, his mission was unsuccessful.¹⁸³ Beaumont-Nesbitt concluded that, whilst Yugoslavia, Romania and Czechoslovakia 'form a most important link in that chain with which France has endeavoured to circle Germany, no chain is stronger than its weakest link, and in the present instance signs of wear have been noticeable' with Yugoslavia and Romania.¹⁸⁴ These signs included a string of visits to Yugoslavia by senior Nazi officials, including Schacht, Goering and von Neurath; and the announcements of a Yugoslavian-German

¹⁷⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; Buffotot, 'The French High Command and the Franco-Soviet Alliance, 1933-1939', p. 550.

¹⁸⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 73 and 89.

¹⁸¹ Nielson, Britain, *Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 247.

¹⁸² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

¹⁸³ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 249.

¹⁸⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

Commercial Agreement in 1936 and an Italian-Yugoslavian Treaty of Friendship in early 1937.¹⁸⁵

The final nail in the coffin for the French-sponsored alliance system was the unanimous rejection on 2 April 1937 of France's request for a quadruple military alliance between France, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia.¹⁸⁶ The Yugoslavian Prime Minister even described the conference as 'a first class funeral'.¹⁸⁷ At the heart of this drift was the dichotomy between France's longstanding *defensive* doctrine, tactics, preparations, equipment and training, and her increasing need to demonstrate an *offensive* military capability to save Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Romania and Poland from a German incursion. Without this demonstration, her alliance system was destined to crumble. By early 1938, French decision-makers privately conceded that they could not assist Czechoslovakia if Germany attacked, a conclusion reached by the Little Entente two years previously following the Rhineland Coup and birth of the Siegfried Line.¹⁸⁸

France had evidently lost important friends, including Belgium, Romania and Yugoslavia. Simultaneously, she had gained menaces along her southern borders, including Italy and Spain. 'A third frontier to be guarded on the Pyrenees has in the past had fatal consequences for France,' Beaumont-Nesbitt warned in early 1938, 'while the establishment of hostile [Italian] air and submarine bases in such strategically important localities as the Balearic Islands, Spanish Morocco, or on the mainland of Spain, would jeopardise, if not make impossible, the passage of troops from North Africa to France', which would damage France's war effort against Germany.¹⁸⁹

In London, Vansittart similarly warned that Italy's occupation of the Balearics threatened France's communication links to North Africa, and that the COS would

¹⁸⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, pp. 188-190;

¹⁸⁶ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, pp. 46-47.

¹⁸⁷ Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, pp. 188-190.

¹⁸⁸ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. xv and 88.

¹⁸⁹ Beaumont-Nesbitt, 'Possible Tendencies of French Military Policy', 8 February 1938, WO 106/5413

‘one day be repentant’ if Britain did not force the Italians out of the region. ‘What weakens France...impairs our own chance of survival,’ he added, ‘and it is not an odds-on chance anyway’.¹⁹⁰ Eden supported his views in Cabinet.¹⁹¹ However, no manoeuvre was attempted by the British Government to push the Italians out of the Balearics, as this would have endangered appeasement.¹⁹² France therefore had to accept that her vital colonial reinforcements (300,000 troops) and industrial manpower (200,000 men) might not be forthcoming if hostilities erupted with Germany.

Perhaps worst of all, the French were ‘still mired by economic doldrums while other countries recovered’.¹⁹³ Ambassador Phipps observed that the French economy was precarious in 1938, suffering from ‘excessive public expenditure, falling production, rising unemployment, increased cost of living and intense pressure for increased wages’.¹⁹⁴ According to Jackson, her national revenue had also ‘decreased by over a half’, her production levels lagged at 75 percent of pre-1900 levels, and she remained unable to resolve her ‘seemingly endless financial difficulties’.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the British Embassy observed that the financial situation ‘had been becoming steadily more serious since 1931’ and was verging on the ‘acute’, with the franc subject to continual attacks.¹⁹⁶ Meanwhile, France remained politically fragile. ‘Until France can pull together under a strong Govt. [Government],’ wrote Cadogan in March 1938, ‘she is really rather a broken reed’.¹⁹⁷ Together, France’s rising domestic woes convinced Inskip that they ‘must be taken as factors that increase the dangers of war’.¹⁹⁸ In

¹⁹⁰ Vansittart, minute, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 351.

¹⁹¹ Foreign Office Memorandum, ‘British Strategic Requirements in the Mediterranean’, 25 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 439; Eden, Cabinet Conclusions, 13 October 1937, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 402.

¹⁹² Vansittart, minute, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 439.

¹⁹³ Imlay, ‘Paul Reynaud and France’s Response to Nazi Germany, 1938-1940’, p. 500.

¹⁹⁴ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 82.

¹⁹⁵ Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 289.

¹⁹⁶ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹⁹⁷ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 80.

¹⁹⁸ Inskip, ‘Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at January 1938’, 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21

other words, France's internal tribulations made her so weak that she invited a German attack.

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In conclusion, although the French Army was strengthened in absolute terms before Munich, it declined relatively in respect to the Wehrmacht. Indeed, the German Army was widely believed to be transitioning into a highly mobile, mechanised, fierce, offensive machine, numerically superior to the French Army and supported by a powerful armament industry capable of mass production on a scale deemed impossible for France to emulate. In comparison, the French armament industry was only capable of sustaining half of its 100 divisions in wartime, and only for a maximum of five months, especially as it lacked in armament reserves. Whilst France hoped to acquire munitions supplies from Britain and America in wartime, these nations were struggling to re-equip their own armies, despite them being miniscule in comparison, and so could offer little immediate industrial assistance.¹⁹⁹

The French Army's strength was also primarily defensive, the army possessing little offensive doctrine, training, tactics, equipment, strategy or capability, all of which were required to save Czechoslovakia. Meanwhile, the French Army had witnessed the rapid collapse of its alliance network, with Belgium, Romania and Yugoslavia drifting towards neutrality, whilst Spain and Italy increasingly threatened France's southern borders. Compounding this geo-strategic decline was the nation's economic, financial, political and social troubles. Most alarming of all was Germany's rising aerial pre-dominance, which Britain feared might result in the immediate destruction of either Paris or London.

As tensions peaked during the Munich Crisis, the British military elite offered bleak assessments of the European military balance to the Cabinet to support Chamberlain's appeasement strategy.²⁰⁰ Indeed, they deliberately overestimated the Wehrmacht's strength and concealed crucial pieces of military information from their political masters. For example, they failed to emphasise that only seven German divisions would be left to guard Germany's western frontier against a French incursion if she

¹⁹⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611

²⁰⁰ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, pp. 100-1.

moved to attack Czechoslovakia. Even with this risky redistribution, the Wehrmacht would only have numerical parity with the Czech Army, which was 'well short of the three-to-one supremacy which most military commentators supposed to be required for a successful offensive'.²⁰¹ Likewise, optimistic reports from the British MA to Prague on Czechoslovakia's powers of resistance were dismissed by the War Office, which stubbornly argued that Germany 'would gain a swift and complete victory in a clash with Czechoslovakia'.²⁰²

Bond claims that it is now evident to scholars that France should have fought for Czechoslovakia in 1938, as this represented 'her last opportunity to fight Germany on favourable or at least even terms'.²⁰³ Churchill similarly believed that France's 60 or 70 divisions 'could most certainly have rolled forward across the Rhine or into the Ruhr' to prevent the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia.²⁰⁴ However, it must be remembered that most of the French Army's power was defensive, as was its war doctrine, training, equipment and composition. It had little offensive power with which to save Czechoslovakia from destruction.

Even though the British overestimated the German Army's strength – and underestimated Czechoslovakia's defensive strength – France's geo-strategic, aerial, economic, financial, social, political and offensive weaknesses were arguably more important in Chamberlain's decision-making. Britain's *accurate* appreciations of France's aerial, domestic and geo-strategic situation convinced the Cabinet that an offensive war against Germany was futile and gave the COS nightmares of a devastating air armada against London, which they mistakenly saw as a distinct possibility. This bleak intelligence picture challenges Ruggiero's argument that 'alternatives to appeasement were never really subjected to serious consideration or given a fair hearing in the Cabinet' and 'no matter what evidence was adduced suggesting the possible success of an alternative policy, Chamberlain always found

²⁰¹ Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 254; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 121.

²⁰² Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 254; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 102 and 109.

²⁰³ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288.

²⁰⁴ Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 59.

reasons for rejecting them, as do the revisionists'.²⁰⁵ On the contrary, the consideration by the Cabinet of an Anglo-French military partnership was thorough and the reasons for rejecting it were sound, according to the available intelligence. Chamberlain recognised after much consideration that France's many woes – never mind Soviet Russia's – 'militated against a Churchillian Grand Alliance in the summer of 1938'.²⁰⁶

According to Stedman, 'there was no "one" policy of alliances suggested in the late 1930s'. In fact, he argues 'appeasement critics from different political parties, at different times, and in different circumstances, envisaged a swathe of variously constituted pacts and blocs, which, they hoped, could deter Hitler from war'.²⁰⁷ Nevertheless, each of these alliance bloc alternatives had an Anglo-French axis at its core, an axis which Chamberlain believed was untenable based on the above intelligence concerning France's weak military forces and tumultuous domestic position.

Britain's gloomy review of France's strength was combined with a stark self-assessment of her own military ability to defend her overstretched Empire across three distinct global theatres – Europe, the Mediterranean and the Far East. Specifically, the Britain's air force lagged behind Germany's, whilst the British army was miniscule in size and chronically lacking in modern equipment.²⁰⁸ 'The Re-equipment of Fighter Command had barely begun,' wrote the private secretary of the CAS on the RAF's weakness in 1938, 'the radar chain was half completed. Of the 45 fighter squadrons deemed necessary at that time, only 29 were mobilisable and all but five of these were obsolete'.²⁰⁹ Similarly, Inskip believed that the Luftwaffe had 'gained a long lead on us', particularly in long-range bombers, whilst her supporting

²⁰⁵ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 63.

²⁰⁶ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 155.

²⁰⁷ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 125.

²⁰⁸ Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41; Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 56 and 60; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 217; Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', p. 99.

²⁰⁹ Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 56.

aircraft industry was 'more extensive than our own' and her preparations for resisting air attack were 'far ahead'.²¹⁰ Even Churchill admitted that 'the year 1938 in fact found us sadly deficient in [aircraft] quantity'.²¹¹ According to J.M. Spaight, the RAF 'was simply not in a position to fight the Luftwaffe in the autumn of 1938'.²¹²

The British Army was in even worse shape. According to Bond, the British military isolationists, such as Liddell Hart and Burnett Stuart, did not seriously believe that Britain could avoid assisting France in a European war, but were most aware of 'the utter unpreparedness of even the Regular Army for such an ordeal'. Hore-Belisha 'was appalled at the thought of what would have happened to the Field Force had it been dispatched to France,' Bond continues, '...Quite apart from lack of tanks, guns, and ammunition reserves, the troops would have had no winter clothing. This was a state of neglect almost comparable with the condition in which the army had been sent to the Crimea'.²¹³ Even the French felt similarly. General Lelong, the French MA in London, reported in the aftermath of Munich that the British Army was in no state to intervene militarily in Europe and would not be for several years, 'even with the best intentions'.²¹⁴

Equally alarming for the British was the state of the Territorial Army, which was described by the COS as 'scarcely more than a skeleton organisation' in 1937.²¹⁵ Numbers were far below establishment, training was limited in peacetime, and it was without any equipment.²¹⁶ It is clear that there was a gaping dichotomy between

²¹⁰ Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of certain other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; Inskip, 'Defence Expenditure in Future Years: Interim report by the Minister for Coordination of Defence', 15 December 1937, CAB 24/273/41.

²¹¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265.

²¹² Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 56.

²¹³ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 217 and 290.

²¹⁴ T. C. Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', in *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, ed. by M. S. Alexander and W. S. Philpott (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002), pp. 92-120 (p. 99).

²¹⁵ 'Role of the British Army', COS Report, 28 January 1937, CAB 24/267/42

²¹⁶ 'Statement Relating to Defence', White Paper, Prime Minister to Parliament, 2 March 1936, CAB 24/260/29

Britain's vast imperial commitments and her sorrowful military capabilities.²¹⁷ Poignantly, Walker argues that 'the decolonisation process... since the end of World War II is the logical redress of this imbalance' witnessed in the late 1930s. He concludes that the events of the 1930s were 'in retrospect... a watershed in British diplomatic history, which presaged the denouement of Britain as a World Power and the demise of the British Empire'.²¹⁸ Recognising these dire circumstances, Self similarly argues that Chamberlain should be praised for playing with skill the limited cards dealt to him, not disparaged for failing to utilise 'an alternative, imaginary deck of cards, in which there was nothing but aces'.²¹⁹

Indeed, it is obvious that both France and Britain were decidedly weak and overstretched. Even their vast maritime supremacy could not be utilised to stop themselves being crushed by the dreaded Luftwaffe in the opening stages of a European war. The majority of the Cabinet and COS therefore opposed war on the grounds of British unpreparedness, with the latter describing the prospect as 'suicidal'.²²⁰ The appeasers in Cabinet did not wish to question the COS's pessimistic military assessment, preferring to use these reports to ensure the continuation of their appeasement strategy. In Chamberlain's eyes – and in the eyes of the intelligence and military elites which had examined all the facts – there was no viable alternative to appeasement, as painful as it would be. 'We cannot help Czechoslovakia,' the Prime Minister concluded, 'she would simply be a pretext for going to war with Germany. That we could not think of unless we had a reasonable prospect of being able to beat her to her knees in reasonable time and of that I see no sign'.²²¹ Vansittart, a well-known anti-appeaser, aptly summarised Britain's

²¹⁷ Kennedy, 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939', p. 196.

²¹⁸ Walker, 'Solving the Appeasement Puzzle: Contending Historical Interpretations of British Diplomacy during the 1930s', p. 241.

²¹⁹ Robert Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography* (Aldershot: Asgate, 2006), p. 3.

²²⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 101; Kennedy, 'British Net Assessment and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 39; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 126.

²²¹ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 238; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 264.

predicament. 'For the first time in memory,' he lamented, 'we have been driven from our political course by sheer national helplessness'.²²²

David Dutton and Robert Self both 'recognise the significance of the issue of alternatives [to appeasement] to the evolving debate and its importance for future research'. According to Stedman, 'both concluded tentatively that there may have been no good, "correct", or "better" policies existing in this period, and that Chamberlain did quite well in view of the poor hand he had been dealt with', though both admitted that 'more depth is needed in this area of study'.²²³ This chapter – and this thesis – has provided this depth by fully examining the feasibility of the most popular alternative to appeasement – that of alliance-building. Significantly, the Churchillian alternative, espoused for almost eighty years by orthodox and post-revisionist historians, has been exposed as impractical on all counts.

²²² Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence,' p. 147.

²²³ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 3; Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography*, p. 3.

'Peace in Our Time'

For over three-quarters of a century, Chamberlain has been disparaged by historians, politicians, world leaders, commentators and journalists alike for masterminding the appeasement of Germany, a policy which culminated with “the Munich Betrayal” of September 1938. From the pioneering works of Gilbert, Gott, Namier, Rowse and Middlemas in the 1950s to the later works of Neville, Murray, Grenville, Ruggiero, Adamwraithe, Parker, and Fuscher in the 1970s-1990s to the speeches of Thatcher, Blair, Bush and Johnson, “appeasement” has been painted as a dirty word, and Chamberlain as short-sighted, naïve and cowardly.¹ Historians such as Carley, Shaw, Nielson, Watt, Rock, Reynolds, Dilks, Leutze, Kennedy, Ross, and Churchill have all emphasised the viable alternatives to appeasement, including various military, economic and diplomatic combinations between Britain, France and either Soviet Russia or America to oppose Hitler.² Ruggiero bemoans that ‘conventional wisdom called for an alliance’, yet Chamberlain ‘always seemed to prefer to talk with potential enemies instead of building up relations with more friendly countries such as the United States, France and the Soviet Union’.³

¹ Aster, ‘Appeasement: Before and After Revisionism’, pp. 444-454; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union, 1937-1939*, p. 1.

² Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 265; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 128; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 288; Ross, ‘French Net Assessment’, p. 160; Terraine, ‘The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation’, pp. 56-61; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, ‘Appeasement and Intelligence’, p. 142; Watt, ‘Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers’, p. 186; Kennedy, ‘British “Net Assessment” and the Coming of the Second World War’, p. 41; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Leibovitz, *The Chamberlain-Hitler Deal*, p. 497; Carley, 1939, p. xviii; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 7; Shaw, ‘Attitudes of the British Political Elite Towards the Soviet Union’, p. 70; Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler*, p. 1.

³ Ruggiero, *Hitler’s Enabler*, p. 5.

Yet, this thesis has highlighted the *highly-acrimonious relations* between Britain, France and America throughout the interwar period; their continuous *failure to collaborate* diplomatically on the world stage; and British intelligence on their military, economic, political and social troubles in the immediate years before the Second World War. These many obstacles far exceed Ruggiero's whispered recognition that 'the French were politically unstable. The Russians were "untrustworthy". And the United States was wrapped in isolation'.⁴ Indeed, unmentioned by Ruggiero is that military weakness was a common theme amongst these potential allies, as was their acrimonious relations with Britain. Whilst the democracies had moved from division to friendship between autumn 1936 and September 1938, they had failed to move further on towards partnership – as epitomised by the shambolic Brussels Conference of November 1937. All the while, Britain's own military strength left much to be desired, whilst the Luftwaffe was incorrectly deemed powerful enough to destroy London in a matter of weeks.

The British military elite thus warned Chamberlain that a war against Germany to save Czechoslovakia would be 'suicidal'.⁵ Despite this, post-revisionists still criticise Chamberlain for not calling Hitler's bluff, claiming that even if this failed and 'Hitler was really hell-bent on war, there was... good reason to believe that the German generals might have overthrown him'.⁶ Yet, Chamberlain should not be disparaged for refusing to entertain a gamble that, according to the gloomy assessments of Britain's military experts, risked the very survival of the British Empire. Indeed, according to Kennedy, 'the simple existence of multi-fold dangers and obligations' – represented in this instance by Germany, Italy and Japan – 'could occasionally "paralyse" decision-making, for it was appreciated that if Britain concentrated too much in one region, she would have no strength to protect the others'. In his opinion,

⁴ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 5.

⁵ Kennedy, 'British Net Assessment and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 39; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 126.

⁶ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 88 and 178.

Britain's 'stretched global position was an enormously powerful reason for compromise with other states and for the pacific settlement of disputes with them'.⁷

Absorbing the bleak military and diplomatic outlook, Chamberlain came to the understandable conclusion that his only viable option was appeasement until Germany's aerial lead was narrowed. Thus, A.J.P. Taylor aptly claims that appeasement was a rational strategy 'given the harsh conditions of the day'.⁸ Likewise, respected newspapers, such as *The Times*, 'advocated concession'.⁹ Indeed, most British newspapers were 'pro-appeasement'.¹⁰ Lamentably, it was widely recognised that it would be several years before the democracies had the military strength to maintain the global *status quo* by force.

However, Chamberlain was buoyed by the recent signing of the Gentleman's Agreement with Mussolini and hoped to reach a similarly pleasing accommodation with Hitler by meeting his arguably reasonable irredentist demands. In short, Chamberlain approached the Munich Crisis as a chance to save Europe from destruction at a time when the British Empire was threatened by three rising aggressive powers in Europe, the Mediterranean and the Far East. Success, he believed, would vindicate his humbling, distasteful, controversial, but ultimately necessary, strategy of appeasement. Thus, contrary to Ruggiero's claims, Chamberlain's actions were the opposite of 'those of a spoiled child driven more by excesses of the will than by the dispassionate and calming exercise of the intellect'.¹¹

As the prospect of a European war increased in September 1938, the French were forced to cancel military leave, recall their reservists and put their navy on standby.¹² These measures brought one million men under arms by 24 September 1938 and were soon followed by the general mobilisations of the French Army and the Royal

⁷ Kennedy, 'The Tradition of Appeasement in British Foreign Policy, 1865-1939', p. 196.

⁸ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, p. 123.

⁹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 85.

¹⁰ Watt, 'Appeasement: The Rise of the Revisionist School?', p. 196.

¹¹ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 88.

¹² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 296.

Navy and the digging of trenches in parks across London.¹³ The stakes were higher than ever. Unlike previous crises, the French were treaty-bound to intervene militarily if Germany attacked Czechoslovakia.¹⁴ This terrified the British, who feared that they might be dragged by France into a European conflagration.¹⁵ If it comes to war, Delbos warned Phipps, France 'will be fighting for her existence, and Great Britain will not be able to stand aside'.¹⁶ Chamberlain thus had a crucial mission ahead of him to keep the peace at all costs.

Since early 1938, Roosevelt had observed Chamberlain's appeasement efforts from "the bench". He refused to involve himself in the game, since he doubted whether a peaceful settlement could be purchased without an immoral or distasteful compromise as payment.¹⁷ Yet, as tensions mounted in September 1938, the President dramatically 'moved from distrust of Chamberlain's peace programme to endorsement of it' and even gave Chamberlain 'some good neighbourly help', breaking the spell of anti-collaboration and disunity that had tormented Anglo-American relations since 1919.¹⁸ According to Watt, Roosevelt's decision to assist London during the Munich Crisis was driven by two apprehensions: firstly, that the Axis powers might win a European war if it was fought at that most unfavourable moment; and, secondly, that the Axis powers might thereafter seek to penetrate South America.¹⁹

Roosevelt's first act of transatlantic solidarity during the Munich Crisis was to seek to intimidate Germany by moving his military chess pieces into more threatening positions. On 1 September, Roosevelt established an Atlantic Squadron, which threatened Germany with seven of the world's 'newest and most formidable

¹³ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 216.

¹⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

¹⁵ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 199; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 42; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 212.

¹⁶ Phipps to Halifax, telegram, 4 March 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 2nd Series, Vol. XIX*, p. 965.

¹⁷ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 75.

¹⁸ Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', p. 22.

¹⁹ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 202.

cruisers'.²⁰ Nine days later, he sent two large battleships to British waters, once again 'to impress Germany'.²¹ Roosevelt then offered to transport British gold reserves to America for safe-keeping.²² On 20 September, Roosevelt exceeded all expectations by promising to stop all supplies to Germany if the European democracies imposed a naval blockade. He also encouraged the Russians to redeploy their air forces westwards against Germany. Lindsay and Mallet were impressed by these moves.²³

Roosevelt's second act of solidarity with Britain was to investigate the idea of America becoming "the arsenal of democracy", an idea that he had often floated to Paris and London. On 12 September 1938, the President sent Hopkins to examine the aviation industry in California.²⁴ As mentioned, he believed that he could circumvent the neutrality laws in wartime if Congress refused to rescind them.²⁵ Roosevelt thus promised Lindsay, 'you can count on us for everything except troops and loans'.²⁶ However, this refusal to offer either armed forces or finance essentially removed America as an alliance option. Indeed, Chamberlain pointed out that America's limited industrial assistance in peacetime – and perhaps wartime – would do little to prevent the Luftwaffe from destroying London in the opening phase of war. Fundamentally, Roosevelt's refusal to offer troops or financial loans belittles Ruggiero's criticism that Chamberlain should have pursued an alliance with Roosevelt to deter Hitler at Munich, or at least should have 'played the "psychological" American card' – which, in any case, Roosevelt had already played by moving two battleships to British waters.²⁷ Whilst Roosevelt also intimated that, should a

²⁰ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 98.

²¹ Pratt, 'The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938', p. 759; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 98; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 34.

²² Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 184.

²³ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 98

²⁴ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 98.

²⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 185; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 95.

²⁶ The same pledge was given to Paris; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 200; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 34.

²⁷ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 179.

European war erupt, America would join the fray sooner than in the First World War, the British refused to hold their breath.²⁸

Essentially, Roosevelt's moves between 1 and 20 September were merely a side show to the dramatic negotiations in Europe between the democracies and Germany, and indeed between the democracies themselves. By mid-September, as the Germans looked increasingly likely to attack Czechoslovakia, the hitherto-stiff attitude of the French Government thawed in favour of a policy of concessions. On 14 September, Bonnet exclaimed to Phipps that 'it is not possible for France to sacrifice 10 million men in order to prevent 3,500,000 Sudeten Germans joining the Reich'.²⁹ Despite Daladier suggesting a three-power conference between Berlin, London and Paris on 13 September to broker a peace settlement, he was ignored by Chamberlain, who chose instead to fly to Berchtesgaden on 15 September to meet Hitler one-to-one, without consulting Paris in advance.³⁰ Chamberlain's decision angered Daladier, who had turned down prior invitations to meet Hitler in Germany to avoid excluding Chamberlain from the discussions.³¹ Once again, anti-collaboration between the two European democracies overshadowed proceedings.

At Berchtesgaden, Chamberlain agreed to Hitler's demands for the transferring of the Sudetenland to Germany, believing that his appeasement strategy was about to reach a historic conclusion.³² Upon returning to London, he was supported by his Cabinet. Daladier, however, believed that the deal was akin to advising a friend to have his legs cut off and refused to betray Czechoslovakia.³³ A deadlock emerged, and was only broken by Chamberlain's promise for Britain to guarantee the remaining territories of Czechoslovakia. Chamberlain won the support of France on 19 September and Czechoslovakia on 21 September, and then flew to Godesberg to close the deal with

²⁸ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 34; *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

²⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

³⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 215; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 101.

³¹ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

³² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

³³ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 215.

Hitler.³⁴ However, the Fuhrer proved recalcitrant and made two additional demands: firstly, that the Czechs cede two more contested regions to Poland and Hungary and; secondly, that the Wehrmacht occupy the Sudetenland by 1 October.³⁵

Chamberlain agreed to Hitler's demands, as he was desperate to see his appeasement strategy through to the bitter end and believed that there was little viable alternative beyond a risky bluff. However, his Cabinet vehemently objected, declaring that 'appeasement was becoming surrender'.³⁶ 'I know we and they [the French] are in no position to fight,' admitted Cadogan, 'but I'd rather be beaten than dishonoured'.³⁷ Daladier also rejected Hitler's additional demands and warned Germany that 'France had gone to the extreme limits of concession, and that, if Germany carried out a *coup de force* against Czechoslovakia, France would fulfil her [military] commitments'.³⁸ The following day, the divided French nation recalled to the colours 470,000 soldiers.³⁹

Despite Chamberlain's best efforts, he was unable to convince Daladier that France was unprepared for war and should accept Germany's outrageous demands.⁴⁰ Daladier countered that Czechoslovakia was also allied to Soviet Russia, but the British belittled this connection. They argued that the Red Army was weakened by the purges and incapable of launching a large-scale offensive, especially since its pathway to Czechoslovakia was blocked by Romania and Poland, something which effectively limited her military contribution to her submarines and 600 long-range bombers.⁴¹ Despite this, counter-revisionists such as Shaw still distortedly claim that 'Soviet military weakness was not a dominant influence upon the decisions made [by

³⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

³⁵ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 216.

³⁶ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 216.

³⁷ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 104.

³⁸ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

³⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 201; Jackson, *France and the Nazi Menace*, p. 290.

⁴⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 216.

⁴¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 239-40; Inskip, 'Comparison of the Strength of Great Britain with that of Certain Other Nations as at January 1938', 3 December 1937, CAB 24/273/21; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 160.

Chamberlain] regarding the Soviet Union', believing instead that his dismissal of the Russian option was due to ideological prejudice.⁴²

It was at this moment that Roosevelt intervened diplomatically – his third act of transatlantic solidarity during the Munich Crisis. On 26 September, as tensions reached fever-pitch in Europe, Roosevelt sent an appeal to all the nations involved, stating that 'should hostilities break out the lives of millions of men, women and children in every country involved will most certainly be lost under circumstances of unspeakable horror', whilst each country's socio-economic system would be 'shattered'. This appeal was perfectly timed for Chamberlain, who was struggling to convince his British and French colleagues to sanction one last round of negotiations with Hitler. According to Wallace, Roosevelt's incursion into European politics put the Czechoslovakian President 'in the dock with Hitler and swayed the jury [the British and French Cabinets] round to Chamberlain's policy of peace at any price'.⁴³ After receiving Chamberlain's offer for another round of talks, Hitler agreed to attend a four-power conference. 'For the next few days,' writes Wallace, 'Chamberlain hardly stopped thanking Roosevelt'.⁴⁴

At the Munich Conference, "the Grand Alliance" envisioned by Churchill and the French seemed a far cry. Russia was not invited to the conference, despite Stalin's offers of diplomatic and military assistance to stop Germany.⁴⁵ In fact, Britain had deliberately excluded Russia from any involvement whatsoever during the Czech Crisis, fearing that the Russians wished for Europe to be ravaged by war to pave the way for revolution and communism.⁴⁶ According to Churchill, the Russians 'were treated with indifference [by Britain] – not to say disdain – which left a mark in Stalin's mind. Events took their course as if Soviet Russia did not exist. For this we afterwards

⁴² Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p. 23.

⁴³ Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', p. 24.

⁴⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 216; Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', p. 25.

⁴⁵ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 189; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 102.

⁴⁶ Nielson, *Britain, the Soviet Union and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*, p. 253; Adamwraith, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 90; Shaw, *The British Political Elite and the Soviet Union*, p. 75; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 189.

paid dearly'.⁴⁷ Meanwhile, the Americans were kept informed of the Czech Crisis, but no requests for help were made to Washington – and it was unlikely that any such requests would have been positively answered.⁴⁸ Churchill claims that 'we were now disengaging ourselves... from the two mighty nations [Russia and America] whose extreme efforts were needed to save our lives and their own', and thereby stopping history from taking 'a different turn'.⁴⁹ However, Chamberlain could not ignore common sense, which argued that Stalin's purges and Roosevelt's military and political handicaps were impassable roadblocks to a Grand Alliance.

At the conference itself, Daladier was 'taciturn and withdrawn, taking little part in the proceedings' as the democracies capitulated to Hitler's demands to absorb the Sudetenland.⁵⁰ There was also little collaboration between London and Paris. On 30 September, immediately after an agreement was reached over the Sudetenland, Chamberlain asked Hitler for a private audience without informing Daladier. The two leaders emerged from the meeting with a headline-winning declaration of peace. Alas, according to Bell, this was yet 'another occasion when the British stole a march on them [the French], even when they were going down the same road'.⁵¹ A frowning Daladier returned to Paris, ashamed of his broken treaty promises to Czechoslovakia only to be welcomed by cheering crowds at *Le Bourget*.⁵² Meanwhile, a grinning Chamberlain wholeheartedly believed that he had secured peace and revelled in having achieved it singlehandedly.

Although Hitler would break the Munich Agreement within six months, proving he could not be trusted, history might have taken a different turn had he been a rational leader, as Chamberlain hoped. If a lasting peace settlement had been secured and war permanently avoided, the acrimonious history of relations between the three great democracies between 1919 and 1938 would have been a primary focus of

⁴⁷ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, pp. 239-40.

⁴⁸ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 182.

⁴⁹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

⁵⁰ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 217.

⁵¹ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 217.

⁵² *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 259; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 215.

historians. Distrust, rivalry, bitterness and animosity would have been the major themes of these nineteen years, with little reference to the false and teleological narrative of gradual cooperation, partnership and alliance-building before the outbreak of the Second World War that now dominates the histories of these cataclysmic years. It would have been a story filled with good intentions but ultimately failed attempts at collaboration as the revisionist powers continuously defied the global democratic order.

Half-hearted sanctions, mild intelligence cooperation behind closed doors and severely restricted military conversations carried out with a standoffish attitude represented the peaks of cooperation against the aggressive powers. Conversely, the passive responses of the three great democracies to the aggressive moves of Germany, Italy and Japan; and the failed conferences on the subjects of global disarmament, the Great Depression and the Sino-Japanese conflict epitomised the troughs in cooperation. Meanwhile, the military balance in Europe had swung in favour of Germany by late 1938. With this depressing diplomatic and military backdrop, Chamberlain's decision to appease Germany at Munich – had it proved successful by ushering in a generation of peace – would have been looked on favourably by historians and contemporaries alike.

In fact, the initial reaction to Munich was one of relief and euphoria across the globe. Indeed, A.J.P. Taylor 'called Munich "a triumph for all that was good and enlightened in British life and for those who courageously denounced the harshness and short-sightedness of Versailles'.⁵³ As Roosevelt learnt that peace had been secured, he sent the words 'good man' to Chamberlain.⁵⁴ Meanwhile, the Prime Minister arrived home to cheering crowds and famously declared that he had achieved 'peace in our time'.⁵⁵ Writing to his sisters, he claimed that he was greeted by 'people of every class, shouting themselves hoarse, leaping on the running board, banging on the windows & thrusting hands in the car to be shaken'.⁵⁶ Initial polls in America showed that 59 percent approved of the Munich Settlement, whilst in France relief 'swept over the

⁵³ Ruggiero, *Hitler's Enabler*, p. 11.

⁵⁴ Wallace, 'Roosevelt and British Appeasement in 1938', p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 217.

⁵⁶ Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography*, p. 1.

country', which had been 'deeply anxious for an honourable settlement'⁵⁷ As Roosevelt witnessed the global euphoria, he tactically ordained himself the 'chief architect of Munich'.⁵⁸

However, the global euphoria was short-lived and opinions soon turned against the Munich Settlement. Within weeks, Roosevelt became grateful that his boasting had made little impression on domestic and international opinion.⁵⁹ America's disillusionment peaked in November 1938 following *Kristallnacht* – the night of broken glass, which saw Jewish homes, businesses and synagogues attacked across Germany.⁶⁰ Roosevelt read the shifting winds and henceforth spoke of Paris and London washing 'the blood from their Judas Iscariot hands' in reference to "the Munich Betrayal."⁶¹ Roosevelt also became ashamed of his own role as accomplice.⁶² According to Mallet, the Americans gradually believed that there had been a 'cowardly and selfish betrayal' by Britain and France of "'the last democracy in Eastern Europe'". Consequently, UK-US relations entered a 'chilly period'.⁶³ Roosevelt withdrew his support of British appeasement. Henceforth, he encouraged the European democracies to stand up to Hitler, promising to supply them with munitions.⁶⁴

The Munich Settlement was not just a 'symbol of surrender and shame' in America but across the globe.⁶⁵ One British diplomat reported that the diplomatic corps in Shanghai believed 'that Perfidious Albion has been true to form and let her friends down again', whilst the Japanese had concluded that 'we are prepared to put up with

⁵⁷ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 80.

⁵⁸ Marks, 'Six Between Roosevelt and Hitler: America's Role in the Appeasement of Nazi Germany', p. 976.

⁵⁹ Marks, 'Six Between Roosevelt and Hitler: America's Role in the Appeasement of Nazi Germany', p. 976.

⁶⁰ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 79; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 44.

⁶¹ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 34.

⁶² Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 202.

⁶³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

⁶⁴ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 105.

⁶⁵ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 218.

almost any indignity rather than fight'. Thus, British prestige was 'at a low ebb'.⁶⁶ Likewise, the French felt humiliated and ashamed.⁶⁷ Moreover, France's network of alliances had collapsed in all but name, with her promises of military assistance now regarded as worthless. In Eden's opinion, France had 'become a second-class power'.⁶⁸

As the hopes of anti-appeasers for a democratic axis lay in tatters, Moscow shared disturbing intelligence that the revisionist powers were close to signing a defensive triple alliance.⁶⁹ Japan's overt diplomatic support for Hitler during the Munich Crisis added weight to these rumours. On 14 September, the Japanese Foreign Minister had declared that Hitler's demand for Czech territory was 'a solution of justice, for which our nation has nothing but admiration and sympathy'. Similarly, the *Japan Times* had declared that Tokyo would 'morally support Germany' at Munich and perhaps militarily if a 'world war starts and Soviet [Russia] or United States join in'.⁷⁰ The rising intimacy between Japan, Germany and Italy was the realisation of a long-dreaded nightmare for the British military elite, the majority of which had favoured appeasement to reduce Britain's number of enemies over a risky grand alliance.⁷¹ Despondently, Inskip informed the Cabinet that Britain could not possibly prepare in peacetime to fight 'three major powers in three different theatres of war'.⁷²

In the aftermath of Munich, Anglo-French relations plummeted as the French blamed Britain for refusing to offer "*un effort du sang*".⁷³ With the collapse of France's

⁶⁶ Sir A. Clark Kerr to Halifax, telegram, 14 October 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, Vol. VIII*, p. 137.

⁶⁷ Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 259.

⁶⁸ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 109.

⁶⁹ Craigie to Halifax, telegram, 3 November 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, Vol. VIII*, p. 179; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 156; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Order*, p. 261.

⁷⁰ Craigie to Halifax, telegram, 14 September 1938, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 3rd Series, Vol. VIII*, pp. 85-6.

⁷¹ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 143.

⁷² Michael Howard, 'British Military Preparations for the Second World War', in *Retreat from Power: Studies in Britain's Foreign Policy of the Twentieth Century*, ed. by David Dilks (London: Macmillan, 1981), pp. 102-17 (p. 107).

⁷³ Translation: *an effort of blood*. Howard, 'British Military Preparations for the Second World War', p. 115.

European alliance network, she now wholly relied on British military assistance to resist an unprovoked German attack. This was simply untenable if the British continued only to commit their air and naval forces to a European war, leaving the French Army singlehandedly to face the Wehrmacht. The French Government therefore made it clear that Britain would not be allowed to fight 'to the last Frenchman'.⁷⁴ Fearing that France might choose neutrality over an unequal fight with Germany, Chamberlain and Halifax made the 'hollow gesture' of visiting Paris for ministerial conversations on 23-25 November 1938.⁷⁵ At this meeting, Daladier attacked the British for their lack of military solidarity during the Munich Crisis and criticised the CIGS for refusing to discuss military plans with his French counterparts even when war appeared imminent.⁷⁶ Chamberlain and Halifax were unmoved by this criticism and refused to upscale their 1936 commitment to send only two BEF divisions to France if Germany attacked.⁷⁷ This stance was supported by the COS, who advised the Cabinet 'against extending Anglo-French staff talks beyond the current low-level contacts between service attachés'.⁷⁸ The British were not willing to risk the Munich Settlement and 'peace in our time' by making Germany feel encircled unnecessarily.⁷⁹

Paris was dismayed by London's refusal to entertain closer military ties and was surprised by the standoffish attitude adopted by the British military elite in the aftermath of Munich. However, Britain's frosty attitude towards France was dramatically broken over the winter months by waves of harrowing intelligence on Germany's next aggressive move. Rumours began to spread that Hitler was not satisfied with having unified the German-speaking peoples of Central Europe and that the Wehrmacht would soon be driving westwards against the Low Countries, Switzerland, France and Britain. This was a shock to the democracies, which had long

⁷⁴ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 289; Howard, 'British Military Preparations for the Second World War', p. 115.

⁷⁵ *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 263; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 221; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 290.

⁷⁶ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 61.

⁷⁷ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 292.

⁷⁸ Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', p. 103.

⁷⁹ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 64.

been assumed that Hitler would move eastwards, not westwards, to accomplish his goal of *Lebensraum*.⁸⁰ In December, rumours spread of an imminent air armada on London, causing panic, whilst in January 1939 both Vansittart and the SIS received separate intelligence warnings that the Luftwaffe was going to attack Britain imminently.⁸¹ Chamberlain's claim that he had secured 'peace in our time' soon crumbled under the pressure of mounting intelligence that Hitler would break his word. These alarming rumours served as a wake-up call for Chamberlain, who realised that Hitler was *not* a rational man after all.

Paris also forwarded misleading intelligence to London, which claimed that Hitler was plotting a westward offensive against France's Channel ports – a move which would threaten Britain herself as the Luftwaffe would be able to base itself closer to London.⁸² Whilst Colonel Pownall suspected that this intelligence had 'a distinct element of propaganda in it' and was designed 'as a lever to put a bit of ginger into us', he admitted that the ploy was 'having a most admirable effect' in London.⁸³ Other intelligence rumours that Germany would attack either Holland or Switzerland caused Cadogan to admit that these nations were in considerable danger.⁸⁴ The accumulation of these intelligence reports was paramount in breaking Britain's isolationist stance. She undoubtedly preferred to stand alone whilst there was a chance of peace, but if war seemed certain it was rational to accept France's outstretched hand of friendship.

As tensions rose, Halifax and Admiral Backhouse (the new CNS) increasingly feared that France might make terms with Germany if London remained distant and uncommitted to French security.⁸⁵ 'If we were to tell France that we did not intend...

⁸⁰ Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 113 and 146; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 414.

⁸¹ David Dilks, 'Flashes of Intelligence: The Foreign Office, the SIS and Security Before the Second World War', in *The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century*, eds. by C. Andrew and D. Dilks (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984), pp. 101-125 (p. 122); Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 414; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 113.

⁸² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 222; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War,' p. 144.

⁸³ Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', p. 111.

⁸⁴ Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 415.

⁸⁵ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 292.

to send more than a few divisions to her assistance,' Backhouse wrote in January 1939, 'could we be surprised if she gave up the unequal struggle and made the best terms she could with Germany and Italy rather than risk the loss of much more by defeat in war?'⁸⁶ This apprehension, coupled with rising fears that the Munich Settlement had failed to deliver a lasting peace, dissolved London's isolationist tendencies.

From February, alarm bells sounded as Vansittart received intelligence concerning a German coup against Prague sometime between 12-19 March 1939. These reports were substantiated by the SIS and then reinforced several days later by MI5.⁸⁷ The Wehrmacht marched into Prague as predicted on 15 March, spelling the end of Chamberlain's grand appeasement strategy, which suffered a lethal blow from Hitler's betrayal. This marked the turning point in Anglo-French relations. Chamberlain's appeasement strategy was dead, war was coming, and Britain shrewdly calculated that she had a greater chance of survival with France as an ally. If Hitler was to be successfully resisted, an understanding with France would be paramount, especially as further intelligence surfaced over the following months, warning of Axis aggression against Romania, Albania, Memel, Poland, not to mention aerial attacks against Britain and France.⁸⁸

Under the searing heat of these intelligence reports, London's frostiness towards staff conversations with Paris melted and the COS capitulated to calls for military staff conversations in February 1939.⁸⁹ Simultaneously, some senior SIS and MI5 representatives met with both the French Deputy Secret-Service Chief Commandant, Malraison, and the French head of Counter-Intelligence, Captain Schlessler, striking an agreement fully to coordinate covert intelligence operations across Europe, a level of

⁸⁶ Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', p. 111.

⁸⁷ Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 249; Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 207; Andrew, *Secret Service*, p. 416.

⁸⁸ Andrew, *The Defence of the Realm*, p. 208; Andrew, *Secret Service*, pp. 417-18; Wark, *The Ultimate Enemy*, p. 116; Watt, 'British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 249.

⁸⁹ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 54; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 137; Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 146.

intelligence collaboration which had not occurred since 1918.⁹⁰ Following Hitler's absorption of Prague, intelligence cooperation between France and Britain 'became institutionalised and systematic', rather than *ad hoc*.⁹¹ Meanwhile, naval intelligence cooperation finally returned to the levels seen during the Abyssinian Crisis.⁹² Yet, even now, an element of distrust persisted. The British remained apprehensive that the French might accidentally leak sensitive information.⁹³ Thus, as late as July 1939, the British Joint Intelligence Committee advised that it was 'advisable to hand over as little as possible [to France], provided that the maintenance of good relations was not prejudiced'.⁹⁴

In tandem with a largely positive shift in intelligence relations, on 20 February 1939 the COS finally admitted that British security depended on French security and on stopping the Channel ports from falling into German hands. This realisation immediately transformed British defence policy. It was decided that Britain should scrap the policy of limited liability and commit herself to 'the land defence of French territory'.⁹⁵ Instead of sending an inconsequential two BEF divisions as planned, the COS now wished to send a large continental-style army of 32 BEF divisions. This transformation of British military policy was cemented by Hitler's betrayal of the Munich Settlement and by rising pressure from both Washington and Paris for a British military contribution. In response to these calls, the British introduced compulsory conscription on 20 April 1939 in 'a remarkable gesture' to the French.⁹⁶

⁹⁰ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 146.

⁹¹ Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 121 and 132.

⁹² Jackson, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 141.

⁹³ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 72.

⁹⁴ Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, p. 72.

⁹⁵ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 222.

⁹⁶ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 48; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 222.

An equally remarkable gesture was the unrestricted Anglo-French staff conversations held in London from 29 March-4 April and from 24 April-2 May 1939.⁹⁷

Significantly, these staff conversations were conducted by high-ranking military personnel, rather than by lowly attachés, with 'cordiality and complete frankness on both sides'.⁹⁸ Even more importantly, this was the first time that London *willingly* held military conversations with the French on the threat of Germany during the interwar period. At these military conversations, the British were given vital information on 'the number of divisions the French Army could put into the field, the French plan for repelling a large-scale German offensive, and further plans for the employment of a British military contingent'.⁹⁹ At last Anglo-French relations were transitioning from friendship into partnership.

Mistakenly, many historians have described the forging of an Anglo-French alliance as a gradual process, beginning with the military staff conversations in the spring of 1936.¹⁰⁰ However, it is clear that the British held the French decidedly at arm's length until Chamberlain's appeasement strategy failed in March 1939, leaving Chamberlain and his advisors with little alternative. Indeed, these staff conversations revealed a dramatic shift in the British attitude compared to 1937, when the CIGS complained that 'the French had become embarrassing in their endeavours to acquaint us with their plans, although we had... communicated nothing to them'.¹⁰¹ Conversely, the French had faithfully kept to their strategy of seeking British military assistance and friendship throughout the inter-war period, recognising their military inter-dependency. Indeed, France's interwar motto, in the words of her own military

⁹⁷ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 47; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 312.

⁹⁸ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 72; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 47; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 313.

⁹⁹ Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 72.

¹⁰⁰ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 124; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 40.

¹⁰¹ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 273.

strategists, was that France 'could only defeat Germany in a war if we were assured, in every possible respect, of total British assistance'.¹⁰²

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Across the Atlantic, the Munich Surrender and the wave of intelligence warnings of imminent German aggression over the winter months shook the decision-makers in Washington out of their military complacency. 'Americans were finally brought to a realisation of how far the moral disintegration of the world had progressed', reported Mallet. 'By an unparalleled volume of newspaper reports and continuous radio commentary, often highly dramatized in its emotional appeal, the horrors of imminent war were carried into every American household... The effect has been deep and lasting' with even the Midwest no longer 'indifferent to what happens in Europe'.¹⁰³

Several weeks after Munich, the long-awaited Anglo-American Trade Agreement was announced to the world and billed as a strong response to the lawlessness of the aggressive regimes across the globe. The British Embassy described it as 'the major event of the year' in Anglo-American relations and 'the most outstanding achievement to date of Secretary Hull's trade agreement policy'. Similarly, Mallet labelled it a 'well-timed gesture of solidarity', but also stressed the trade agreement's intrinsic importance, noting that the commerce between Britain and America amounted to three-fifths of America's total trade.¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, in terms of the agreement's 'mass of detail and complexity', Mallet believed it 'probably had no rival in history'.¹⁰⁵

In tandem with this gesture of solidarity, Roosevelt turned his attentions towards remedying America's military unpreparedness. He wished to rid himself of the military handicap which had severely restricted his actions since the start of his presidency. According to Mallet, America's war preparedness was 'now the President's obsession'. Roosevelt had seemingly become 'convinced that America would be forced into [any] war in which Great Britain and France were the victims of aggression'. Yet, the President believed that neutrality should remain America's

¹⁰² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 22.

¹⁰³ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹⁰⁴ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹⁰⁵ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1937*, FO 371/21544

ambition, even if it was perhaps 'wishful thinking'.¹⁰⁶ British decision-makers in London, however, read these reports with scepticism, refusing to believe that America would willingly fight in a European war.¹⁰⁷ Fisher, the head of the civil service, even revealed to Ambassador Kennedy that Whitehall 'had been advised to proceed independently on war plans without looking for any support from America'.¹⁰⁸

Nevertheless, alarm bells were ringing across America after Munich. 'The United States does not feel so safe today as it used to only a short while ago,' wrote Ambassador Lindsay, as she believes that 'war in Europe is imminent and in it the British Empire may be destroyed'.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, a Gallup poll showed that 63 percent of Americans feared being attacked if Germany won a European war.¹¹⁰ It was also feared that Germany might penetrate or attack Latin America.¹¹¹ These fears heightened after Munich, with Mallet reporting that 'Fascist and Nazi agitation in Latin America became suddenly of vast significance' for everyday Americans. Mallet also observed 'an increasing sense of insecurity' across America and 'a deep-seated hatred of Hitlerism', especially following *Kristallnacht*.¹¹²

These fears fed America's hunger for intelligence exchanges with London behind closed doors. From January 1939, the two democracies began to share intelligence on the 'activities of suspicious German merchant vessels, including potential armed raiders'.¹¹³ America was also sent regular intelligence updates on the anticipated Axis attacks on Czechoslovakia, Poland, Romania, Albania, Holland, France and Britain. Indeed, Chamberlain met frequently with Ambassador Kennedy to discuss with him 'at length the British Government's reaction to each new development'.¹¹⁴ The British also sent Washington sensitive air intelligence after the Americans incorrectly

¹⁰⁶ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹⁰⁷ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 189.

¹⁰⁸ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁹ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, ADM 116/3922

¹¹⁰ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 97.

¹¹¹ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 202; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 41.

¹¹² *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹¹³ DNI, minute, 6 December 1938, ADM 116/4210; DNI, minute, 24, January 1939, ADM 116/4210

¹¹⁴ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 123.

remarked that the Luftwaffe had six times as many aircraft as Britain (9,000 to 1,500), when the air gap between the two forces was in fact only 1,600 planes.¹¹⁵ Yet even as their friendship deepened, partnership on the world stage remained a far cry.

Whilst Roosevelt believed that America might be sucked into a European war, he was unwilling to sanction transatlantic military collaboration to sustain the crumbling international system after Munich. He was only willing to help the two European democracies rearm by granting them access to America's armament industries.¹¹⁶ Roosevelt assured Chamberlain that, if war erupted, Britain 'would have the industrial resources of the American nation behind it'.¹¹⁷

However, Chamberlain was sceptical that American fighters could be delivered in good time, believing that America's aviation industry 'was geared primarily to civilian types'.¹¹⁸ Chamberlain's opinion was well-founded – America's aircraft production capacity remained miniscule, capable of churning out 'hardly more than one hundred planes per month'.¹¹⁹ For America to become "the arsenal of democracy", she first had to increase her production capacity. Another hindrance noted by the COS was that America did not 'normally manufacture the type of equipment used by France and Great Britain, and some time would consequently elapse before this equipment could be produced in bulk'.¹²⁰ Lamentably, the British did not give advanced notice of what type of engines and planes might be required, causing delays when British orders were eventually placed with American aviation firms.¹²¹

¹¹⁵ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 49.

¹¹⁶ Barbara Farnham, 'The Theory of Democratic Peace and Threat Perception', *International Studies Quarterly*, 47, 3 (2003), pp. 395-415 (p. 396); Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 202; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 46; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 108.

¹¹⁷ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 219; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 47.

¹¹⁸ Alexander, 'Preparing to Feed Mars: Anglo-French Economic Co-ordination and the Coming of War, 1937-1940', p. 197.

¹¹⁹ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 46.

¹²⁰ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939: British Strategic memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

¹²¹ Arthur Pervis, 'Aircraft', 27 December 1939, *Aircraft Potential in USA*, AIR 8/293

Over the winter months, the British 'accumulated encouraging evidence of F.D.R.'s determination to supply the British with munitions and aircraft', with Morgenthau specifically tasked with handling all foreign armament orders.¹²² Meanwhile, in January 1939, Roosevelt made eye-watering requests to Congress for an extra 5,500 planes for the US Army and 3,000 planes for the US Navy. These requests raised suspicions amongst American isolationists that the real objective was 'to build a reserve of planes on which the British and French might draw in case of emergency'.¹²³

In its final strategic assessment before the war in early 1939, the COS concluded that Britain's inadequate armament production capacity 'could be made good from America', but *only* 'if that country proved willing to modify her Neutrality Act'.¹²⁴ Several months later, after Hitler absorbed Czechoslovakia, Chamberlain communicated to Roosevelt via Kennedy that he 'never had the slightest suspicion that the United States contemplated coming to their rescue with men... but he felt the benefit of buying goods, paying for them, and carrying them away should be received by Britain' and that this assistance would be 'the greatest psychological lift they could have at this time'. Chamberlain warned that 'it would be a sheer disaster for England and France' if the neutrality laws endured now that Hitler had broken the world's trust.¹²⁵

Roosevelt seemed eager to meet British expectations.¹²⁶ In his New Year speech to Congress, he had already admitted that history had shown that 'our neutrality laws may operate unevenly and unfairly – may actually give aid to an aggressor and deny it to a victim. The instinct of self-preservation warns us... not to let that happen anymore'.¹²⁷ Roosevelt also declared that America must 'avoid any action, or any lack

¹²² Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 47.

¹²³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 48; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 108.

¹²⁴ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939: British Strategic memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

¹²⁵ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 220.

¹²⁶ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 42.

¹²⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 47.

of action, which will encourage, assist, or build up an aggressor'.¹²⁸ In the following months, 'the Administration and the President made no secret of the fact that they wished to see the [Neutrality] Act amended'.¹²⁹ The American populace seemed equally willing, with 66 percent supporting arms supplies to Britain and France in wartime in a Gallup poll in March.¹³⁰ However, Roosevelt once again failed to convince Congress to repeal the neutrality laws to the dismay of London and Paris.¹³¹

According to Reynolds, the fear of being entangled in a European war was prevalent in Washington and the neutrality laws 'had become a shibboleth – a talismanic symbol of American determination to remain at peace'.¹³² In Congress, Roosevelt was ardently opposed by every Republican and by a quarter of Democrats. In an attempt to muster support, he summoned the congressional leaders to a special conference in the White House, but this failed to stop the Senate Committee from deferring the thorny topic of neutrality until the next term by a single vote.¹³³ According to the British Embassy, congressional opposition came 'partly from an ingrained [isolationist] spirit, partly from apprehension lest the President might lead the country into war and partly from purely political motives and hostility to the President'. This was especially true for the conservative Democrats. Roosevelt had tried to replace these traditionally-minded congressmen with more liberal-minded Democrats in the previous election, but the coup had failed miserably, only producing more enemies, rather than supporters, for the President.¹³⁴

Roosevelt had also angered Congress in recent months. In January 1939, the press had exposed Roosevelt's secret deal to supply France with fighters and bombers, causing consternation amongst isolationists.¹³⁵ After summoning the Senate Military

¹²⁸ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 203; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 47; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 80.

¹²⁹ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

¹³⁰ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 88.

¹³¹ Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1937-1940', p. 657.

¹³² Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 55.

¹³³ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253; Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1937-1940', p. 658.

¹³⁴ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

¹³⁵ Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 205; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 148; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 49.

Affairs Committee to the White House to discuss the controversy, the President naively declared that America's frontier rested on the Rhine.¹³⁶ When news of this audacious statement leaked, Roosevelt dismissed it as a lie. This claim outraged the Committee, which publicly set the record straight to Roosevelt's embarrassment.¹³⁷ Following this episode, suspicion reached fever-pitch that Roosevelt hoped to circumvent the neutrality laws and forge a military alliance with London and Paris. Roosevelt was unable to convince Congress otherwise.

These Congressmen 'are incorrigible', Chamberlain seethed. 'Their behaviour over the Neutrality Legislation is enough to make one weep, but I have not been disappointed for I never expected any better behaviour from these pig-headed and self-righteous nobodies'. In another outburst, one Foreign Office official commented, 'what a deplorable impression this news makes on my mind. In my political life I have always been convinced that we can no more count on America than on Brazil, but I had led myself to hope that this legislation might at least be passed'. America 'landed us with the League and then quitted, and now deliberately encourages "aggression" in our hour of need'. The French were equally disillusioned by Roosevelt's failure to follow through on his promises. Roosevelt responded by making new promises over the summer months, pledging that, if Germany sparked a war, he would simply call an emergency Congressional session to repeal the neutrality laws.¹³⁸

Although America had once again failed to make the transition from friendship to partnership, a silver lining was the warming American public attitude towards Britain. Eden's visit to America in late 1938 'was a major sensation,' according to the British Embassy, 'and not for many years had any visitor from abroad excited such enthusiasm'. Eden was regarded by the Americans as a 'hero on account of his championship of democracy and his well-known antipathy to the dictators'. Equally popular was a US broadcast by Churchill on the menace of totalitarianism to democracy.¹³⁹ The most important visit came in June 1939, as George VI travelled

¹³⁶ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 81; Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, p. 205; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 148

¹³⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 49.

¹³⁸ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 55 and 58

¹³⁹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

across the Atlantic for the first royal state visit since American independence, which proved a tremendous success. 'The impression created was deep and extended to every stratum of the population', serving to remove 'the animosity so long enshrined in the American attitude'.¹⁴⁰ According to Mallet, British popularity had reached dizzying heights which 'would have been impossible even 10 years ago'. Meanwhile, America's antipathy towards Germany was 'more unanimous and violent even than in 1917'.¹⁴¹ However, this would count for little if Britain could not secure armament supplies from America in wartime. If Britain could not even secure this meagre assistance from America, how could they secure the illusionary alliance option espoused by orthodox and counter-revisionist historians?

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As the British waited for Roosevelt to challenge the neutrality laws, a significant breakthrough in transatlantic relations occurred in the military sphere after Hitler's Prague Coup lost him the world's trust on 15 March 1939. In response to Hitler's betrayal, the British asked Roosevelt to move the US fleet from the Atlantic to the Pacific to keep Japan in check whilst London restrained Berlin.¹⁴² Roosevelt obliged in a rare show of solidarity.¹⁴³ More significantly still, the President enthusiastically accepted Chamberlain's impromptu suggestion of naval staff conversations, a suggestion made without the Admiralty's knowledge, and even suggested the establishment of a permanent mission to foster naval intelligence cooperation.¹⁴⁴

Surprisingly, the Admiralty's reaction was mixed. On the subject of establishing a permanent naval mission in London, the First Sea Lord, DCNS and DOP feared that this might aggravate the tense international situation if news of it was leaked to the revisionist powers.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, on the subject of naval conversations, the DOP argued that there was little to discuss, since an updated comparison of strengths had

¹⁴⁰ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 129.

¹⁴¹ *Annual Report on the United States of America for 1938*, FO 371/22832

¹⁴² Murfett, *Fool-Proof Relations*, pp. 217-18; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 147.

¹⁴³ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

¹⁴⁴ Lindsay to Foreign Office, 21 March 1939, ADM 116/3922; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 34; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 146.

¹⁴⁵ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 147.

occurred in January 1939. He also warned that a news leakage might incense the Axis powers and American isolationists, derailing Roosevelt's attempts to repeal the neutrality laws.¹⁴⁶

The DCNS countered that Roosevelt might feel slighted if Britain decided against naval conversations, even if there was little to discuss.¹⁴⁷ The First Sea Lord, however, went further, arguing that the naval conversations might lead to real political gains for the Admiralty. The assurance of American naval cooperation, he argued, 'would make the whole difference to our strategic position in the Far East and give us a much freer hand to deal with our problems in Home Waters and the Mediterranean. It would be impossible to exaggerate what this would mean to us in the event of a world war'.¹⁴⁸ As the British stalled, Lindsay was forced to enquire on 2 May why there had been no response to Roosevelt, which prompted the Admiralty to approve the naval staff conversations.¹⁴⁹ However, Roosevelt's suggestion for a permanent intelligence mission in London was rebuffed.

Given the serious consequences of a news leakage, Roosevelt was anxious about maintaining secrecy, especially after news of the previous round of secret naval conversations in 1938 had been leaked to *Newsweek* by an official of the US Navy Department, sparking a fierce backlash in Washington.¹⁵⁰ Since the US naval attaché to London was being replaced, the British proposed that his successor should be sent fully prepped to handle the naval talks.¹⁵¹ These talks could also be linked with the conversations already ongoing in London with the French, whilst London 'being so

¹⁴⁶ DOP, 'Conversations with U.S. Navy,' Plans Division, 24 March 1939, ADM 116/3922; Lindsay to Foreign Office, 21 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁴⁷ DCNS, minute, 26 April 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁴⁸ First Sea Lord, minute, 27 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁴⁹ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 36.

¹⁵⁰ Naval Attaché in Washington to DNI, telegram, 20 March 1939, ADM 116/3922; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 139; Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 21 March 1939, ADM 116/3922, Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 62.

¹⁵¹ DCNS, minute, 24 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

much larger and more varied in character' than Washington was better suited for ensuring secrecy.¹⁵²

Welles, however, was adamant that the talks 'cannot be conducted in London' and emphasised 'the fatal results of publicity', should the news be leaked to the American press. 'To ensure secrecy,' he argued, 'only three or four officers in the US Navy Department could be allowed to know what was happening'. Holding the naval conversations in London would 'involve telegraphing London and this would widen the circle and the danger of leakage would be multiplied'.¹⁵³ Roosevelt agreed, adding that any leakage 'might seriously compromise the pending neutrality legislation'.¹⁵⁴ After much debate, it was decided that a British officer, Commander T.C. Hampton, would travel to Washington under the pretence of conducting private business as a land agent.¹⁵⁵

In the meantime, the British discussed their reasonable objectives for the naval conversations.¹⁵⁶ In the previous round of naval conversations in 1938, the two democracies had already reached a non-binding agreement to cooperate navally against Japan. Britain's primary aim for the next round was to gain a binding American commitment to check Japan by moving the fleet to Hawaii should hostilities erupt in Europe.¹⁵⁷ This move 'was calculated to deter Japan either from entering the war, or operating in strength to the south'.¹⁵⁸ The DCNS agreed that this 'would be most convenient', but sceptically cautioned, 'I do not see the American Naval Staff being in a position to promise that'.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵² DNI to DOP and DCNS, 24 April 1939, ADM 116/3922; Admiralty to Lindsay, telegram, 29 April 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵³ Lindsay to Admiralty, telegram, 8 May 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵⁴ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 21 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵⁵ Foreign Office to Lindsay, telegram, 22 May 1939, ADM 116/3922; Lindsay to Admiralty, telegram, 11 May 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵⁶ 'Report of Meeting held on 12th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922; 'Conversations with U.S. Navy', Plans Division, Director of Plans, 19 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵⁷ 'Conversations with U.S. Navy', Plans Division, Director of Plans, 19 March 1939, ADM 116/3922; DCNS, minute, 24 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵⁸ 'Conversations with U.S. Navy', Plans Division, Director of Plans, 19 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁵⁹ DCNS, minute, 24 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

As soon as the first meeting began on 12 June, CNO Admiral Leahy raised British expectations. According to Hampton's report, Leahy told him that 'in the event of a European war he thought that it was the present intention of the President that the U.S. Fleet should be moved to Hawaii as a deterrent to Japan'. Leahy explained that Japan was 'unlikely to embark on large scale operations against either Australia or New Zealand while the US fleet based on Hawaii was in a position to interrupt their lines of communication'.¹⁶⁰ Whilst Britain's primary wish had been verbally answered against all previous doubts, Leahy was 'unwilling to put anything in writing... due to the fear of compromising secrecy and to the difficulty of evading questions if he appeared before Congress for interrogation'.¹⁶¹ However, Commander Hampton warned that this latter consideration should not be belittled, emphasising that Admiral Ghormley, who was also present, 'never read the agreed record of conversations prepared in January 1938 until the day before my visit in case he was interrogated... by Congress'.¹⁶² Thus, the President's verbal promise to move the US fleet to Hawaii should be regarded as a significant breakthrough given his fear of Congress.¹⁶³

Two days later, Admiral Leahy shared his 'purely personal' views on how London and Washington might navally combine against the revisionist powers in wartime. Leahy proposed that the US fleet 'should control the Pacific and the allied fleets should control European waters, the Mediterranean and the Atlantic', assisted by 'the American naval forces already in the Atlantic'. Remarkably, Leahy then proposed that 'the U.S. Fleet should move to Singapore in sufficient force [ten capital ships] to be able to engage and defeat the Japanese Fleet', supported by a 'token' British force adequate to appease American public opinion.¹⁶⁴

According to the DCNS, the idea that the US fleet would not only redeploy to Hawaii, but possibly advance all the way to Singapore was 'itself a great advance on the 1938

¹⁶⁰ 'Report of Meeting held on 12th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922

¹⁶¹ 'Report of Meeting held on 12th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922; Conversations with U.S. Navy', Plans Division, Director of Plans, 19 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁶² 'Report of Meeting held on 12th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922

¹⁶³ Conversations with U.S. Navy', Plans Division, Director of Plans, 19 March 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁶⁴ 'Report of Meeting held on 14th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922

discussions when they were inclined to use a U.S. harbour [Manila] without any real facilities'.¹⁶⁵ Several months beforehand, the DOP had advised that Japan would only be deterred if the US fleet moved to Singapore, Australia, New Guinea or the Philippines, as Hawaii was still 3,500 miles away from Japan.¹⁶⁶ Leahy had seemingly answered his prayers. The Foreign Office believed that Roosevelt had gone as far he possibly could, whilst Hampton stressed that the conversations had 'an atmosphere of complete mutual confidence and friendliness'.¹⁶⁷ Overall, Leutze claims that 'the British were pleased with developments vis-à-vis the U.S. Navy'.¹⁶⁸

However, there were notable exceptions. The DOP commented flatly that 'little positive result was achieved and nothing was committed in writing'.¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Hampton himself remarked that he was 'fully conscious that the results of my visit are in some respects disappointing' and that 'a leakage concerning my visit would have political repercussions out of all proportion to the importance of the conversations themselves'. Hampton further pointed out that the cooperative Admiral Leahy was soon to retire as CNO. Similarly, Roosevelt was due to pass on the presidential baton in 1940. These key leadership changes could drastically shift America's friendly attitude in the near future. Hampton also reminded his audience that Roosevelt was 'far ahead of the majority of his people in his championship of the democracies'.¹⁷⁰

Roosevelt was still constrained by two Swords of Damocles hanging over his head. America's chronic naval weakness stopped the President from advancing beyond hypothetical naval plans towards an iron-cast commitment to the British. Simultaneously, the President's severe political handicaps meant that great secrecy was required for the naval conversations when their publicisation might have deterred Hitler. Once again, Washington proved incapable of advancing from friendship behind closed doors towards a *public* partnership on the international stage.

¹⁶⁵ DCNS, minute, 28 June 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁶⁶ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 146.

¹⁶⁷ 'Report of Meeting held on 14th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 32.

¹⁶⁸ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 41.

¹⁶⁹ DOP, minute, 28 June 1939, ADM 116/3922

¹⁷⁰ 'Report of Meeting held on 14th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922

Even though Leahy's intentions to help the British in the Pacific were billed as being hypothetical, Marder believes that it was still 'a gain for the British that Leahy was favourably disposed to sending a strong American force to Singapore'.¹⁷¹ Indeed, the Americans even promised to go away and examine the particulars of undertaking the perilous journey.¹⁷² Similarly, Reynolds claims that these naval conversations were significant because the thinking of Britain and the United States 'was broadly complementary', whilst Leahy's plan to move the US fleet first to Hawaii and then to Singapore 'was exactly what the British wanted'.¹⁷³ These gains might also be contextualised against the Admiralty's scepticism before the conversations begun of achieving any positive results whatsoever. However, Leahy's *verbal* pledges were not enough to influence the plans, policies and hopes of Chamberlain or the COS, which continued largely to discount America as a military factor even as the Japanese committed another outrage.¹⁷⁴

On the final day of the naval staff conversations, the Japanese blockaded the British concession at Tientsin, claiming it to be a haven for Chinese guerrilla-fighters. The Japanese Army demanded that a Japanese currency be adopted and that any Chinese currency reserves in Tientsin be ceded to the Japanese, along with the alleged guerrilla-fighters.¹⁷⁵ Chatfield later remarked that Japan, 'trading on our relatively weak naval position, was insulting British nationals in Tientsin in a manner that would have made a Georgian or Victorian statesman issue violent ultimatums'.¹⁷⁶ Japan's bombing campaign over China was also damaging American property once every three days on average throughout 1939 to Washington's outrage.¹⁷⁷

As the British debated whether to capitulate to Japan or impose sanctions, a similar meeting occurred in Washington on 16 June 1939, with Hull, Welles and General Marshall present. This meeting revealed that Roosevelt's military handicap had not

¹⁷¹ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 74.

¹⁷² 'Report of Meeting held on 14th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922

¹⁷³ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 61.

¹⁷⁴ Lowe, 'Great Britain's Assessment of Japan Before the Outbreak of the Pacific War', p. 464.

¹⁷⁵ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 150.

¹⁷⁶ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 55.

¹⁷⁷ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 93.

been removed. 'Without material one cannot fight,' General Marshall advised in a depressing account of America's unpreparedness for war. 'With recent Congressional appropriations, the United States should be in a position, within eighteen or twenty-four months, to play a decisive role in any conflict. But for the time being there was nothing practical the United States could do in the Far East'. For once, American public opinion raced ahead of its leadership. A Gallup poll revealed that 66 percent were willing to boycott Japanese goods, whilst 72 percent supported an arms embargo upon Japan.¹⁷⁸

Well-informed on America's military incapability, Chamberlain and his advisors immediately concluded that Washington could not be depended on for naval assistance and that the Tientsin dispute had to be settled peacefully.¹⁷⁹ This bleak verdict challenges the significance placed by Reynolds and Marder on the Anglo-American naval staff conversations, which evidently failed to make a significant impression on the British.¹⁸⁰ Indeed, the COS advised that American naval intervention was extremely 'doubtful; nor can we count on the active support of the U.S.S.R. Consequently, we consider that our plans... should be based on the assumption that France will be our only certain major ally'. All the while, the COS predicted that 'sooner or later Germany, Italy and Japan will all be ranged against us' threatening our interests in three theatres. Thus, the COS advised, it would 'not be possible to send seven ships to the Far East until September, unless we are prepared to accept additional risks at home' in the three months before the REVENGE and RENOWN capital ships had finished being modernised.¹⁸¹

The COS further warned that 'the political effect of our heavy ships leaving the Mediterranean would no doubt be considerable on our... friends and allies, particularly Egypt and Turkey, and indeed the whole Mohammedan world', whilst 'it might also encourage Spain to side definitely with the Axis powers'. Britain's seaborne trade in the Atlantic would also face increased danger from Axis submarines.

¹⁷⁸ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, pp. 151-3.

¹⁷⁹ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 150.

¹⁸⁰ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 74; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 61.

¹⁸¹ COS, 'Situation in the Far East', Report, 18 June 1939, ADM 205/57

Given these considerations, the COS was convinced that only two capital ships could be spared for Singapore, which would not be enough to moderate Japan's attitude. Thus, the COS concluded that, 'without the active cooperation of the United States of America, it would not be justifiable from the military point of view... to take any avoidable action [economic sanctions] which might lead to hostilities with Japan'.¹⁸² The Foreign Office and Cabinet concurred.¹⁸³

Correctly anticipating a negative response from America, the Cabinet skipped the formality of asking her for help and instead instructed Ambassador Craigie to appease Japan immediately.¹⁸⁴ Chamberlain recognised that Britain's forces could not fight unaided in three distinct theatres. Moreover, his potential allies were militarily unprepared and politically unreliable. In short, he had no viable alternative to appeasement during the Tientsin Crisis, even though his grand strategy to appease Germany had emphatically unravelled three months previously. Only a month on from the Anglo-American naval conversations, the British surrendered to Japan's demands on 22 July, signing a "shameful" document of appeasement.¹⁸⁵ A forlorn Chamberlain wrote that it is 'maddening to have to hold our hands in face of such humiliations, but we cannot ignore the terrible risks of putting such temptations in Hitler's way'.¹⁸⁶

The Americans were less accommodating and officially informed Japan that they would cancel the American-Japanese Commercial Treaty.¹⁸⁷ In a parallel move, the President also proposed to London that, if a European war erupted, the Americans could patrol the Western Atlantic using British naval bases and clear the waters of belligerents. This would free up British ships to blockade the Axis powers.¹⁸⁸ The

¹⁸² COS, 'Situation in the Far East', Report, 18 June 1939, ADM 205/57

¹⁸³ Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, p. 57; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 150; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 302.

¹⁸⁴ Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1937-1941* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), p. 285; Nielson, *Britain, Soviet Russia and the Collapse of the Versailles Settlement*, p. 302.

¹⁸⁵ Lowe, 'Great Britain's Assessment of Japan Before the Outbreak of the Pacific War', p. 464.

¹⁸⁶ Bell, *Chamberlain, Germany and Japan*, p. 1.

¹⁸⁷ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

¹⁸⁸ Lindsay to Foreign Office, telegram, 30 June 1939, ADM 116/3922

British 'gladly' accepted Roosevelt's proposal to use their naval bases at 'Newfoundland, Bermuda, Jamaica, St. Lucia, Antigua and Trinidad'.¹⁸⁹ The Admiralty hoped that this arrangement might foster collaboration with Washington and work 'sooner or later to involve the U.S.A. in hostilities on our side'. As promised, Roosevelt established the patrol upon the outbreak of hostilities, showing a willingness to help Britain militarily where possible.¹⁹⁰ The Americans were not able to fight a distant war in the Western Pacific, but they were more than capable of helping in the nearby Western Atlantic.

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It was also hoped that Washington might involve herself in the war under the right conditions. In April 1939, John Balfour, the head of the American Department at the Foreign Office, claimed that 'some spectacular act of violence', such as an air armada against London, might provoke 'an explosion of American feeling' and lead America to intervene in the coming war. Similarly, Lindsay claimed that if Washington ever intervened, 'it will be some violent emotional impulse which will provide the last and decisive thrust. Nothing would be so effective as the bombing of London'. Likewise, after King George VI met with Roosevelt, the monarch wrote, 'if London was bombed U.S.A. would come in'.¹⁹¹ Fanciful reports also came from Washington that America would enter the war within three weeks if it was fought on ideological grounds, whilst Stimson passionately called for 'a direct military understanding' between the democracies.¹⁹²

However, these reports were digested in London with a pinch of salt. 'If I was convinced that the United States would come in our side I know which way I should vote,' commented Cadogan, 'but I'm not so sure'.¹⁹³ The COS was also unmoved, advising that Washington 'would be a friendly neutral, probably willing to modify the

¹⁸⁹ Foreign Office to Lindsay, telegram, 6 July 1939, ADM 116/3922; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 43.

¹⁹⁰ Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 44 and 46.

¹⁹¹ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, pp. 49-50.

¹⁹² Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 49.

¹⁹³ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 50.

Neutrality Legislation in our favour, but not likely to intervene actively'.¹⁹⁴ Similarly, the British Embassy in Washington was convinced that there was a 'solid determination that America should not be dragged into any war' despite their 'unanimous detestation of the policies of the European dictators'.¹⁹⁵ Meanwhile, after the Anglo-American naval conversations, Commander Hampton reported that the U.S. Navy had 'no detailed plans at present for active co-operation with the British fleet in war'.¹⁹⁶ In fact, since the scrapping of war plan orange in late 1937, Washington no longer even possessed plans for a *unilateral* conflict against Japan, let alone a joint Anglo-American effort.

Even more unlikely was a joint effort against Germany in Europe. On 26 October 1939, Roosevelt attacked any such idea in a passionate radio address aimed at convincing Congress to scrap the neutrality laws. 'The simple truth is that no person [in government]... has ever suggested in any shape, manner or form the remotest possibility of sending the boys of American mothers to fight on the battlefields of Europe,' he proclaimed. 'That is why I label that argument a shameless and dishonest fake... the United States of America, as I have said before, is neutral and does not intend to get involved in war'.¹⁹⁷ Even if the President privately wished to assist the British, he would be constrained by America's war unpreparedness for another two years, something which the COS recognised. Whilst Roosevelt has often been criticised by scholars for being unreliable, ambiguous, a procrastinator and a backtracker when proposing radical peace schemes – which ranged from the moral ostracization of aggressors to the imposition of economic blockades – this thesis contends that he genuinely desired to help but was overruled by America's military weakness.¹⁹⁸ This challenges the mistaken consensus amongst historians that

¹⁹⁴ Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939: British Strategic Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

¹⁹⁵ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

¹⁹⁶ 'Report of Meeting held on 14th June, 1939', ADM 116/3922

¹⁹⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 229.

¹⁹⁸ Doenecke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies*, p. 2.

Roosevelt was primarily hamstrung by America's rampant isolationism and a fickle personality.¹⁹⁹

There were in fact many occasions when Roosevelt defied Congress and public opinion to help Britain and France. The Quarantine Speech, the Welles Peace Programme, the idea to impose economic embargos or naval blockades on Japan and Germany, the vision to become the arsenal of the European democracies, the welcoming of Anglo-French air missions in 1938 and 1940, and the Anglo-American naval conversations of 1938, 1939, 1940 and 1941, all show that Roosevelt was not entirely handicapped by the power of Congress and an isolationist public opinion. On these occasions, Roosevelt courageously ignored, bypassed or overruled these domestic considerations, only to be stopped from implementing his schemes by America's military unpreparedness – or by Chamberlain's objections, which were primarily made precisely on the same grounds. A pattern emerged in the mid-late 1930s where Roosevelt would announce a sensational programme for peace in spite of his political restrictions only to backtrack in fear. In most instances, his advisors forced him to drop his plans as they risked provoking the aggressor states into a war for which America was unprepared. Thus, America's military considerations had the final say in preventing Roosevelt from implementing his sensational schemes. This restraint upon Roosevelt has either been understated or entirely unmentioned in the historiography of Anglo-American relations, which mistakenly focuses on his domestic political restraints and personality shortcomings.

Likewise, Chamberlain could not rely on Roosevelt to see through these sensational schemes to the end. He deeply feared being left in the lurch if war erupted as a consequence of Roosevelt's diplomatic and economic interventions, especially in the Pacific. Chamberlain did not believe that America would fight if Japan called the bluff of the democracies and retaliated aggressively against Hong-Kong or Singapore. Chamberlain therefore rejected Roosevelt's offer of naval collaboration in January 1938 and vehemently opposed Roosevelt's idea of imposing a naval blockade against

¹⁹⁹ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 15; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy*, p. 140; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 75; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 91.

Japan after the next outrage. In his experience, it was a fruitless endeavour to pursue American support. Britain's only realistic option for immediate military assistance against the aggressive states lay with France – who was at last emerging from the pessimistic years and rectifying the domestic troubles that had made her a most undesirable partner. With the collapse of Chamberlain's appeasement plan in March 1939, the British had no alternative but to advance those relations from friendship into partnership.

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As war became imminent in the summer of 1939, the political and military intimacy between London and Paris reached new heights. A network of joint Anglo-French coordination boards and purchasing missions was established, as were 'schedules of French and British requirements of raw materials in war-time'.²⁰⁰ The British shared information on their ASDIC anti-submarine equipment – though not their radar equipment.²⁰¹ The CIGS spent much time in France, whilst joint aerial planning soared.²⁰² French and British submarine squadrons in East Asia began to train together.²⁰³ Meanwhile, British forces participated in the French Bastille Day military parade for the first time in history.²⁰⁴

Following the Anglo-French military staff conversations in London in April and May, others were held in Singapore on 22-27 July to discuss security in the Far East. According to the British C-in-C China, these discussions were 'thorough and all the value possible was gained'. It was agreed in Singapore that intelligence on the political and military situation in East Asia 'should be regularly exchanged... without delay'. These conversations also established regular liaison arrangements and periodic meetings between the British and French flagships as war loomed.²⁰⁵ During

²⁰⁰ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 139.

²⁰¹ Clayton, 'Growing Respect: The Royal Navy and the Marine Nationale, 1918-1939', p. 43.

²⁰² Thomas, *Britain, France and Appeasement*, p. 166.

²⁰³ C-in-C China to Admiralty, Telegram, 21 July 1939, ADM 116/3767; Admiralty to C-in-C China, 3 August 1939, ADM 116/3767

²⁰⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324.

²⁰⁵ 'C-in-C China Report of Singapore Anglo-French Conference, 22-27 July 1939', ADM 116/3767

the same month, an Anglo-French-Polish conference convened on cracking the German Enigma code, with the Polish sharing their secret successes in this area.²⁰⁶ This conference sparked an intimate relationship between Bletchley Park in England and PC Bruno in France.²⁰⁷ Within six months, British decrypts of Enigma messages were automatically transmitted to Paris and vice versa.²⁰⁸

As war erupted in September 1939, measures were taken to enhance military cooperation between London and Paris, including the creation of a Supreme War Council and a system of joint payments for military expenses.²⁰⁹ Beaumont-Nesbitt noted that further steps were taken to establish unity of command 'on land under the French Commander-in-Chief, and at sea under the British'. Meanwhile, a French mission established its headquarters in London to help coordinate the Allied naval blockade of Germany, whilst two British military missions were set up in France.²¹⁰

In the economic sphere, a fixed rate of exchange between the pound and the franc was established as part of the Anglo-French Financial and Economic Agreements of 4 December 1939. An Anglo-French Purchasing Board was also created to coordinate munitions orders from America.²¹¹ Meanwhile, Beaumont-Nesbitt reported that 'constant visits of officials and ministers took place so as to co-ordinate Allied policy in every field', whilst 'close contact was immediately established between the Information and Propaganda Services'.²¹² Bell describes these measures as 'considerable achievements', given the two decades 'of disputes over policy and clashes of personality'.²¹³ Indeed, the speed of the Anglo-French transition from friendship behind closed doors into an all-encompassing partnership was astonishing.

²⁰⁶ Jackson, *Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War*, p. 147.

²⁰⁷ PC Bruno was the French equivalent of Bletchley Park – both secret locations were dedicated to code-breaking. Jackson, *Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War*, p. 147.

²⁰⁸ Jackson, *Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War*, p. 147.

²⁰⁹ *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 228.

²¹⁰ *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324

²¹¹ *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324; Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 228.

²¹² *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324

²¹³ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 228.

However, these cooperative measures were *reactive* rather than *pre-emptive* and therefore came too late to deter the Axis powers from war.

*

It has often been argued that a strong democratic axis before 1936 might have stopped Germany, before she was strong enough militarily to unleash a world war. However, the democracies had no way of knowing the beast that Hitler would become and continuously proved themselves incapable of rising above their squabbles in the meantime. Rotten relations between the democracies reigned supreme, with rivalry, disunity, acrimony and anti-collaboration dominating proceedings in the years before 1936. Indeed, according to the British Embassy in Paris, most Frenchman believed that the present catastrophe was 'due... to the fact that British and French policy diverged after the war' as opposed to the faults of the Versailles Settlement.²¹⁴

The three democracies must share the blame for their rotten relations during the interwar years. Britain was hostile towards America in the naval, financial and economic spheres throughout the 1920s and early 1930s, and also contributed to the poisoning of Anglo-French relations in the early 1920s and early 1930s. The British also mistakenly trusted Mussolini and Hitler to be reasonable men. The French self-harmed by shipwrecking the World Disarmament Conference of 1932-34 and by contributing to the poisoning of relations with London during the Abyssinian and Rhineland crises, despite recognising that they could not resist Germany without military assistance from Britain and America. Meanwhile, the Americans refused to remove their isolationist cloaks, prepare themselves for war or support the besieged new world order. Putting their interests first, they forsook the new world order envisioned by President Wilson between 1918 and 1921, poisoned relations with London during the Coolidge Naval Conference of 1927 and shipwrecked the World Economic Conference of 1933.

²¹⁴ *Annual Report on France for 1939*, FO 371/24324

Meanwhile, from 1936 onwards, France's increasing domestic troubles, aerial vulnerability and geo-strategic weaknesses following Hitler's militarisation of the Rhineland zone; America's refusal to strengthen militarily, her isolationist and anti-collaborative spirit; and the intense rearmament drives of the aggressive powers collectively made unfeasible the option of a democratic alliance as the three aggressive powers became military predominant. These conditions framed Chamberlain's premiership, leaving him without a viable alternative option to appeasement. Indeed, according to Self, who wrote a magisterial biography on Chamberlain, the Prime Minister 'led a nation with singularly few realistic policy options open to it'.²¹⁵

In particular, the American option, so often espoused by orthodox and counter-revisionist historians, was nothing more than a mirage. Indeed, at the height of the Munich Crisis, Roosevelt distanced himself from Britain and France in their hour of need, declaring that the sensationalist reports of a triple democratic front against Germany and Italy were 'about one hundred percent wrong' – a quote that few counter-revisionists publish.²¹⁶ Whilst the Americans eventually became allies with Britain in 1941, Japan's attack on Pearl Harbour forced their hand (see chapter twelve). The Americans idly stood by as France was defeated in June 1940 and watched on as the Luftwaffe came close to destroying London several months later.

Ultimately, Chamberlain was trapped by the powerful forces of logic, reason and circumstance into appeasing Germany from May 1937. For a short while, the Prime Minister was convinced that his appeasement plan had triumphed at Munich and was bitterly disappointed as intelligence reports on impending German aggression mounted over the winter of 1938. Hitler finally betrayed Chamberlain's trust and revealed his true colours by absorbing Czechoslovakia in March 1939. With his appeasement plan shattered into a thousand pieces, Chamberlain turned his attentions towards alliance-building with Soviet Russia and France as a method to secure Britain's survival – the American option still being infeasible on all fronts.

²¹⁵ Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography*, p. 3.

²¹⁶ Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 200; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 34.

However, he failed in his last-ditch attempts to convince Stalin to sign on the dotted line.²¹⁷ In the words of Bond, the Anglo-French military mission to Moscow ‘was so belated, so low-level and lacking in authority to make definite contributions to an alliance that it was virtually doomed to failure’.²¹⁸

Likewise, it was a case of too little too late for the British to save France from destruction. As war erupted, Chamberlain confessed to Parliament that ‘everything I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life, has crashed into ruins’.²¹⁹ Aside from the failure of his appeasement policy, the establishment of a large Field Force had been sacrificed to aid appeasement – as had close military relations with France, in order not to spook Germany. Thus, a large Field Force would not be remotely ready by the time the Wehrmacht bypassed the Maginot Line less than a year after war erupted in September 1939.²²⁰

²¹⁷ Shaw, ‘Attitudes of the British Political Elite Towards the Soviet Union’, p. 56; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 142.

²¹⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 318.

²¹⁹ Self, *Neville Chamberlain: A Biography*, p. 3.

²²⁰ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 446.

Too Little Too Late

This final chapter, although exclusively covering events after the failure of Chamberlain's appeasement strategy, is no less important for the appeasement debate. It investigates how Chamberlain's appeasement plan was a vital factor behind France's defeat; how America was militarily unprepared and incapable of intervening to save France in May-June 1940; and how UK-US relations struggled to transition from friendship into partnership even as the new world order looked certain to fall to the totalitarians. If America was both unwilling and incapable of helping Britain and France in 1940-1, despite her intense land, naval and air rearmament programmes, this incapability can be projected back to the 1930s to challenge the arguments of orthodox and post-revisionist historians, who claim that she represented a viable alternative to appeasement long before these intense rearmament programmes began.¹

On 11 September 1939, as the Fuhrer's land and air forces devastated Poland, Roosevelt penned a letter to Chamberlain. 'I hope and believe that we shall repeal the embargo within the next month'. According to his calculations, 60 senators were prepared to support a cash-and-carry act, whilst only 25 were opposed, with others undecided.² Yet, as things stood, America was banned from supplying the European democracies with munitions, leaving them to face Germany without America's long-promised industrial assistance.³

¹ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 12; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 10; Dilks, 'Appeasement and Intelligence', p. 142; Watt, 'Roosevelt and Neville Chamberlain: Two Appeasers', p. 186; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 41; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 26; Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 199.

² Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 219.

³ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

'If we are to win this war, we shall have to win it on supplies of every kind from the United States,' Daladier told Ambassador Bullitt in September 1939. 'We can hold for a time without such supplies, but England and ourselves cannot possibly build up sufficient production of munitions and planes to make a successful offensive possible'. Bullitt passed on the message to Roosevelt, adding that, without a new cash-and-carry amendment, a 'German victory would be certain'.⁴ Fortunately, the President acted quickly, summoning Congress to a special session on 21 September to debate the amendment.⁵

According to the British Embassy, the Congressional debate showed 'a wide sympathy with the Allies, a unanimous determination that the United States must be kept out of war, and a readiness to impose appreciable burdens on American interests in order to minimise the risk of "Lusitania" incidents'.⁶ The decisive Senate vote came on 27 October, the amendment passing by 63 votes. Roosevelt triumphantly signed the amendment on 4 November.⁷ Chamberlain and Daladier now had full access to America's armament industry and their strategists began to hope that, if they could survive the German attack, an allied victory could be achieved. 'The repeal of the arms embargo,' Chamberlain wrote to Roosevelt warmly, 'which has been so anxiously awaited in this country, is not only an assurance of American resources; it is also a profound moral encouragement to us'.⁸ Although the cash-and-carry amendment aided the European democracies, it unfortunately worked to Japan's advantage in the Pacific, as she could prevent China from receiving supplies of armaments from America, whilst freely replenishing her own stocks, since she controlled the China seas.⁹

⁴ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 219.

⁵ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

⁶ On 7 May 1915, the British ocean-liner, *Lusitania*, was sunk by a German submarine with 128 Americans aboard; 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

⁷ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253; Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 660; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 109; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 65.

⁸ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 231.

⁹ Cole, 'Senator Key Pittman and American Neutrality Policies, 1933-1940', p. 657.

Strangely, Chamberlain 'did not intend to take advantage of the American arsenal'. According to Reynolds, Chamberlain only lobbied for the cash-and-carry act during peacetime because he believed that it would have a profound moderating affect upon Berlin – he only required the *threat* of American industrial assistance, rather than its implementation, to deter Axis aggression.¹⁰ On 18 January 1938, Chamberlain had tellingly remarked that the 'U.S.A. and U.K. in combination represent a force so overwhelming that the mere hint of the possibility of its use is sufficient to make the most powerful dictator pause'.¹¹ In essence, Chamberlain was 'more interested in the appearance than the reality of American help', which under closer inspection appeared impractical.¹²

Once war began, Chamberlain wished to win it cheaply, *without* a great reliance on American industrial assistance.¹³ In fact, he was convinced that, if Britain could survive Germany's initial attack, the mobilisation of her imperial resources would allow her gradually to surpass Germany in arms production without American help.¹⁴ She would then launch an irresistible offensive against Germany and win the conflict. Significantly, Chamberlain believed that the armaments desired from America would not be produced in time to affect the opening phase of war, when Britain would be aerially vulnerable; nor would they be required once Britain's economy was fully mobilised and industrially self-sufficient.¹⁵ Consequently, 'foreign orders were slow in coming' to America, despite the brimming war chest of the two European

¹⁰ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 76.

¹¹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, p. 72.

¹² Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 53.

¹³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 469; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 77.

¹⁴ 'British Strategical Memorandum', 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57; Inskip, 'Imperial Conference, 1937: Review of Imperial Defence', 26 February 1937, CAB 24/268/23; Inskip, 'The Preparedness for war of Great Britain in Relation to Certain Other Powers by May 1937', 11 February 1937, CAB 24/268/8; Alexander, *Anglo-French Defence Relations Between the Wars*, p. 13; Young, 'Spokesmen for Economic Warfare: The Industrial Intelligence Centre in the 1930s', p. 481; Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 76; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 469; Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 51.

¹⁵ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 22.

democracies for the purchase of munitions.¹⁶ Instead of arms, the British mainly bought 'food, cotton, petroleum and machine tools', with American exports to Britain only rising by ten percent during the opening five months of war.¹⁷

In fact, it was only after Daladier's personal intervention that Chamberlain placed a significant order for American bombers and fighters in the winter of 1939-40. On 11 December, Daladier petitioned Chamberlain that American arms would remain essential to the Anglo-French war effort '*even if the results of our national production programmes reveal themselves fully up to our expectations*', which was a most-unlikely prospect given 'the hazards of sea transport... and the risk that enemy bombing might slow down the rate of output of our factories'.¹⁸ In the same letter, Daladier proposed an immediate Anglo-French air mission to determine America's production capacity and ascertain the investment and expansion required for America to supply the Allies with sufficient numbers of bombers and fighters.¹⁹

From the outset of this air mission in early 1940, the goodwill of the Roosevelt Administration was evident. Morgenthau promised the British representatives his assistance to ensure that America's aviation companies charged reasonable prices and deducted any sales tax. He also suggested that any new aviation plants financed by Britain and France might later be bought back by the US Government.²⁰ Pleased, the air mission placed contracts with three airframe manufacturers – Glenn Martin, Douglas and Curtiss – for 2,000 bombers and 2,400 fighters between September 1940 and August 1941.²¹ In tandem, the British placed contracts with three engine manufacturers – General Motors, Wright, and Pratt & Whitney.²² Recourse to the American aviation industry for bombers and fighters intensified after France's collapse, which shocked Britain out of her military complacency. By January 1941, the

¹⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 290.

¹⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 290; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 170.

¹⁸ Italics added; Daladier to Chamberlain, telegram, 11 December 1939, AIR 8/293

¹⁹ Daladier to Chamberlain, telegram, 11 December 1939, AIR 8/293

²⁰ A.W. Street to Secretary of State for Air, telegram, 24 January 1940, AIR 8/293

²¹ Plevin-Greenly Investigation to Secretary of State for Air, telegram, 19 January 1940, AIR 8/293; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 469; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 85.

²² Lindsay to Air Ministry, telegram, 15 January 1940, AIR 8/293

European democracies had ordered 10,000 combat planes and 20,000 engines from America. According to Langer, the vast expansion of American aviation factories – which, to Roosevelt’s delight, was financed by Allied purchases – ‘came much too late to save the French from disaster, but it was to play a role of major importance in the defence of Britain and also in the development of the American defence programme’.²³

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Chamberlain was not just hesitant about utilising America’s industrial might after September 1939, but feared the consequences if America entered the war against Germany.²⁴ As shown throughout this thesis, the British were aware of America’s unpreparedness for war and believed that years of spending, training, expanding and equipping was required before America could influence the outcome of a European conflict.²⁵ Chamberlain deduced that America would not be in a military position to intervene at the start of hostilities, but might be ready to enter the conflict sometime after Germany’s opening aerial attack had failed and an Allied victory seemed probable. Roosevelt would then seek a share in the spoils of war – despite his unrequested and now-unnecessary military assistance – and become the dominant voice in the peace negotiations.²⁶

This fear of a belated American war entry was rife across Britain from 1939. Upon the outbreak of war, many Britons prayed: ‘God protect us from a German victory and an American peace’. This tongue-in-cheek prayer could also be heard reverberating around the Foreign Office and the Tory social clubs. In early 1940, Chamberlain even wrote, ‘Heaven knows I don’t want the Americans to fight for us – we should have to

²³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 290.

²⁴ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 165; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 80; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 8; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, pp. 12-13.

²⁵ *Annual Report on the United States for 1936*, FO 371/20670; *Annual Report on the United States for 1937*, FO 371/21544; *Annual Report on the United States for 1938*, FO 371/22832

²⁶ Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 165; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 8; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, pp. 12-13.

pay too dearly for that if they had a right to be in on the peace terms'.²⁷ Chamberlain feared that America's price for intervening would be the dismantling of imperial preference, the end of the Sterling bloc and independence for Britain's colonies, all of which would lay the foundations for a post-war US economic hegemony.²⁸

For Chamberlain, it seemed like a dangerous gamble for Britain to take in return for delayed, and probably unnecessary, American aid. After all, Britain and France were presently only fighting Germany. Meanwhile, Japan, Italy and Soviet Russia remained neutral. According to Reynolds, 'the limited extent of the war was in fact a major achievement' for the British Government, which had long feared fighting all three revisionist powers simultaneously. As things stood, Chamberlain only required America's benevolent neutrality, not her outright 'belligerency'.²⁹

According to Macdonald, even the price of America's non-military help – her finance and material – 'would be economic domination of the Empire' with Roosevelt keen for US armaments to be bought at the cost of British overseas assets.³⁰ In particular, Roosevelt coveted Britain's assets in Latin America. Similarly, Rock claims that America's war entry was dreaded in many British quarters because it 'would result in Britain's displacement by the United States in a wide range of matters, especially economic ones, relating to world leadership'.³¹ True to expectations, the Americans plotted their post-war economic hegemony and Britain's demise as soon as Germany invaded Poland. Indeed, the State Department 'seized on the chance of planning for the peace... to work for the destruction of the British imperial economic bloc, to dismantle [the protectionist] Ottawa [Agreements of 1932] and to break up the sterling area'. According to Watt, it is 'impossible to escape the melancholy

²⁷ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 63 and 79.

²⁸ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 165; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 80; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 8; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, pp. 12-13; Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 180

²⁹ Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 53 and 63.

³⁰ Macdonald, *The United States, Britain and Appeasement*, p. 180; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 78.

³¹ Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, pp. 12-13.

conclusion' that America's wartime planning 'played a major part in bringing about the decline of Britain'.³²

Another danger was a peace settlement built upon the principle of national self-determination, a principle often flaunted by the anti-colonial Roosevelt.³³ According to Dulles, Roosevelt possessed 'a vigorous and persistent opposition to colonialism, which was birthed in the mid-1920s and maintained throughout the war'. Roosevelt hoped that the great powers would eventually grant independence to their colonies, just as America, in her "benevolence", had to the Philippines. To this end, he declared in 1941 that no race has the natural right to rule over others and that 'any nationality, no matter how small, has the inherent right to its own nationhood'. As tensions mounted between Roosevelt and Churchill over Britain's imperial future, the President told his son that there would be 'more talk about India before we are through. *And* Burma. *And* Java. *And* Indonesia. *And* all the African colonies. *And* Egypt and Palestine. We'll talk about all of them'. Tensions sky-rocketed after the principle of national self-determination was etched into the Atlantic Charter of 1941 – a combined Allied statement on their post-war aims – sparking another disagreement. Whilst the President argued that the Atlantic Charter applied to 'all humanity', Churchill irately maintained that it only applied to Europe.³⁴

These economic and imperial tensions hint at the shallowness of the Anglo-American partnership that began to be forged in the early 1940s. Underneath the surface, the competition, rivalry, distrust and division of the 1920s and early 1930s remained as dominant as ever, as the two powers quietly wrestled for global supremacy. However, Britain's decision not to chase wholeheartedly after American military assistance throughout the 1930s did not primarily stem from a desire to avoid the adverse consequences of America's war entry, as many historians have asserted,

³² Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 95 and 162.

³³ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 80.

³⁴ Foster Rhea Dulles, 'The Anti-Colonial Policies of Franklin D. Roosevelt', *Political Science Quarterly*, 70, 1 (1955), pp. 1-18 (pp. 1-2 and 5-7).

including Macdonald, Reynolds, Rock, Watt and Leutze.³⁵ These scholars have been influenced by hindsight and teleologically reach forward towards the economic and imperial tensions that arose between London and Washington in the 1940s.

Britain's half-hearted overtures towards America in fact stemmed from an awareness of Roosevelt's political and military restrictions, which made him liable to leave Britain in the lurch in peacetime and to be militarily useless in the opening stages of war. Indeed, at the moment when the Wehrmacht broke the Maginot Line in June 1940, the US Army was only capable of despatching five divisions – or 80,000 men – to Europe. This force was not remotely sufficient to turn the war. In fact, the US Assistant Secretary of War frankly asserted in 1940 that 1.5 billion dollars and two years of intensive rearmament would be required before the US Army could intervene effectively.³⁶ However, by that point, America's delayed intervention would be unnecessary and undesirable in the eyes of Chamberlain. His stance only shifted after France surrendered and Italy joined the war, at which point the Axis threat became existential.

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The speed of France's military collapse in May-June 1940 came as a shock to the British, who believed that the Allied forces of Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands – along with the Maginot Line – were much superior to that of the Wehrmacht *when fighting on the defensive*.³⁷ Indeed, it was this confidence – arrogance even – in France's defensive power on land that makes her sudden capitulation to the Wehrmacht so poignant, especially as most contemporaries believed that the war would be lost in the skies, not on the ground.³⁸

As France overcame her internal woes by late 1938, British optimism about her military strength spiked, especially once the realisation dawned in late 1939 that

³⁵ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, p. 87; Cowman, *Dominion or Decline*, p. 165; Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, p. 80; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, p. 8; Rock, *Chamberlain and Roosevelt*, pp. 12-13.

³⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 471.

³⁷ Ernest May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), pp. 8-9; Karl-Heinz Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend: The 1940 Campaign in the West* (Annapolis, Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 2005), pp. 1-50.

³⁸ Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler*, p. 1.

neither Italy nor Japan would join Germany in her struggle against the great democracies. According to Kennedy, readers of the War Office's 1939 strategic appreciation 'cannot help but be struck by its optimistic references to France's ability to withstand a German offensive'.³⁹ This sanguine analysis was mirrored in Paris, with Gamelin declaring that 'the French Army had never been better. The High Command was a well co-ordinated instrument and possessed long experience, the cadres were fully trained, and the men were determined'.⁴⁰

Indeed, Gamelin's four-year rearmament programme had paid dividends, solving equipment shortages prevalent since the Great Depression and rife during Munich. Over four years from 1936, the French armament industry had churned out an impressive 4,500 anti-tank guns, over 2,000 light and medium tanks, 200 heavy tanks, and 900 anti-aircraft guns.⁴¹ Ross claims that qualitatively, by May 1940, these tanks were 'at least the equal of the German machine', the German tanks capable of higher speeds and equipped with superior radio-communications, whilst the French tanks possessed more powerful guns and thicker armour.⁴² The Allied forces could also boast numerical superiority over Germany both in lighter tanks and artillery pieces. Crucially, however, Germany possessed ten heavy tank divisions to the five of the Allied forces.⁴³

In terms of manpower, the French Army had also exceeded all estimations by mobilising 440,000 empire troops to serve in France and North Africa by 1940.⁴⁴ These forces allowed Gamelin to mobilise 104 infantry divisions in north-eastern France alone, a figure not thought possible by the British or French during the interwar period.⁴⁵ It was also believed that Belgium would side with the Allies,

³⁹ Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 43.

⁴⁰ Phipps to War Office, telegram, 3 April 1939, WO 106/5413

⁴¹ Young, *In Command of France*, p. 173.

⁴² Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 148.

⁴³ Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 447; Ross, 'French Net Assessment', p. 148.

⁴⁴ Thomas, 'At the Heart of Things? French Imperial Defence Planning in the Late 1930s' p. 340.

⁴⁵ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939: British Strategic Memorandum,' 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57; Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50.

offering eighteen infantry divisions and three mobile divisions, 'with modern equipment; high morale and strong fortifications'.⁴⁶ The Dutch and British armies contribute another ten and thirteen divisions respectively.⁴⁷ In total, the Allies positioned 151 divisions to Germany's 135 divisions on the Western front by May 1940. This amounted to four million Allied troops compared to Germany's three million.⁴⁸

Whilst the Allied forces would be numerically inferior if Italy joined forces with Germany, the War Office believed that this military combination in the short-term outlook was unlikely, despite having feared the opposite during the 1930s.⁴⁹ As anticipated, Italy remained neutral on 10 May 1940 as Germany attacked both the Low Countries and France with 93 divisions, leaving 42 divisions in reserve.⁵⁰ The Allies thus had numerical superiority, without accounting for the Maginot Line, which has been estimated by historians to be worth an additional eleven divisions.⁵¹

Given the numerical superiority of the Allied forces in infantry, artillery and tank tonnage, it is no surprise that Britain trusted France's defensive power. In 1940, General Ironside, the British CIGS, wrote, 'we must have confidence in the French Army. It is the *only thing* in which we can have confidence'. Similarly, one British diplomat recalled that, at this time 'Britain looked on the French quite simply as predominant in military, as we would be in naval, matters'.⁵² According to the French Ambassador to London, the British military elite were 'inclined to consider the provision of military support [on land] as a token of allied solidarity rather than a vital military necessity'.⁵³

⁴⁶ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 125.

⁴⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 446.

⁴⁸ Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50.

⁴⁹ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939: British Strategical Memorandum,' 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57; Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50.

⁵⁰ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 446.

⁵¹ Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 58.

⁵² Alexander, *Knowing Your Friends*, pp. 72-3.

⁵³ Alexander, 'Preparing to Feed Mars: Anglo-French Economic Co-ordination and the Coming of War, 1937-40', p. 197.

France's defensive strength was further buttressed by the Wehrmacht's temporary weakness. The War Office believed that the Wehrmacht had overstretched itself by absorbing Austria and Czechoslovakia in quick succession and so could only risk at most 'an *attaque brusque* against a first-class power'.⁵⁴ According to May, the Allies had become convinced by 1940 'that Hitler would never dare an offensive against France and that Germany's seeming preparations for an offensive were deceptive manoeuvres intended to pin down Allied forces' in north-eastern France whilst Germany launched offensives in Scandinavia and the Balkans.⁵⁵

Yet, the French did not take account of a small gap in their defences through the Ardennes forest. According to May, if the French 'had anticipated the German offensive through the Ardennes, even as a worrisome contingency, it is almost inconceivable that France would have been defeated when and as it was'. In fact, May argues that 'it is more likely that the outcome would have been not France's defeat but Germany's'.⁵⁶ In 1934, Marshal Pétain informed the Senate Army Committee that the heavily forested and mountainous terrain of the Ardennes region 'rendered the Ardennes "impenetrable" if such "special disposition" as roadblocks and defensive works were provided'. Whilst none of these key precautions were undertaken, the Ardennes was nevertheless regarded as a safe zone 'that could be held by category B divisions'.⁵⁷

Until January 1940, this major oversight might have been inconsequential, as the Wehrmacht expected to circumvent the Ardennes and attack France via the Netherlands and north-eastern Belgium.⁵⁸ However, the details of the German war plan were leaked to the Allies by General Walter von Reicheneau via Dr Karl Goerdeler, the leader of the civic resistance in Nazi Germany, during the winter months of 1940. General von Reicheneau encouraged the Dutch 'to activate their defences, combined with the previously prepared flooding, to show that the

⁵⁴ Kennedy, 'British "Net Assessment" and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 43.

⁵⁵ May, *Strange Victory*, 9.

⁵⁶ May, *Strange Victory*, 5.

⁵⁷ Kiesling, *Arming Against Hitler*, pp. 177-8.

⁵⁸ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 449.

inevitable element of surprise had been lost', thereby preventing an infeasible German offensive against France.⁵⁹ This untimely leak forced Hitler to approve the Yellow Plan – which was organically created by Generals Manstein, Guderian, Tippleskirch, Rundstedt and Halder and Lieutenant-Colonel Liss.⁶⁰ These authors of Plan Yellow believed that a speedy mobile force could drive through the Ardennes region and break through the Allied defensive line, with the Wehrmacht's infantry divisions 'following in its wake' and securing the conquered territory.⁶¹ Although the Yellow Plan was opposed by the bulk of the German General Staff, who did not wish to attack France under any circumstances, believing such an operation to be infeasible, Hitler overruled his generals.⁶²

In the event, five panzer divisions and three mobile divisions surged through the Ardennes, acting as the steel point of the German lance, the ill-equipped infantry divisions making up the longer wooden shaft.⁶³ A murky intelligence picture encouraged the Allied forces to move towards the Netherlands with their 'best-trained forces and newest tanks' in response to intelligence reports 'of German parachutists dropping on Rotterdam'. Meanwhile, other conflicting intelligence reports were ignored or judged to be German decoys. It took several days for the Allies to realise 'they had made a tragic mistake'.⁶⁴ Germany's speedy mobile force had in fact already crossed the river Meuse between Namur and Sedan and, supported by screeching dive-bombers, was driving northwards for the sea to secure France's ports and air bases.⁶⁵ The Allied forces were 'cut off from those in central France, partly by civilian refugees clogging the roads' and the 'situation proved beyond rescue'.⁶⁶ The French fought on valiantly, but continued to retreat, their government relocating 'from Paris to Tours to Bordeaux'. As a last resort, Prime Minister Reynaud sent a message to President Roosevelt on 14 June 'saying that

⁵⁹ Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50.

⁶⁰ May, *Strange Victory*, 456.

⁶¹ Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50.

⁶² Young, *In Command of France*, p. 210; Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50; May, *Strange Victory*, 9.

⁶³ Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50.

⁶⁴ May, *Strange Victory*, 4.

⁶⁵ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, pp. 449-50; May, *Strange Victory*, 4.

⁶⁶ May, *Strange Victory*, 5.

France could not continue to fight unless the United States declared their intention to enter the war “in the very near future”. Predictably, Roosevelt ‘replied in the negative’, leaving France to surrender to Germany on 22 June 1940.⁶⁷ Within six weeks, France, Belgium, Holland and Luxemburg had fallen, whilst Britain had retreated from Dunkirk, bringing a halt to major Allied military operations in Western Europe until 6 June 1944.⁶⁸

The speed of the French collapse shocked the world and explanations for her capitulation are still debated today. It is widely accepted that the Ardennes misjudgement was a calamitous one for Paris.⁶⁹ Yet, scholars have also intensely debated whether French agency or structure – the actions and policies of key individuals or the economic, financial, political and social restraints outside the individuals’ control – were culpable for France’s military defeat. In these heated debates, scholars have criticised France’s sluggish rearmament effort between 1934 and 1937; her out-dated war doctrine; her half-hearted utilisation of modern machines, including aircraft, tanks and submarines; a lack of morale and innovative military leadership when it mattered most in May-June 1940; a lack of open communication channels between the French Army’s intelligence units and high command; and France’s failure to tackle a succession of economic, financial, social and political crises throughout the 1930s.⁷⁰

Yet the majority of these elements were assessed before the outbreak of war and praised by British observers as ‘sound’ by May 1940.⁷¹ Indeed, the British held Gamelin and Daladier in high-esteem for overseeing the French Army’s huge re-

⁶⁷ May, *Strange Victory*, 446.

⁶⁸ Ad hoc minor operations took place, such as the Dieppe Raid of 19 August 1942, which was also known as Operation Jubilee.

⁶⁹ Young, ‘French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period’, p. 155.

⁷⁰ May, *Strange Victory*, 10; Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 166; Alexander, ‘The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Cooperation, 1938-1939’, p. 75; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 448; Young, ‘French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period’, p. 155.

⁷¹ *Annual Report on France for 1936*, FO 371/20697; *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

equipment drive from 1936 onwards, whilst Reynaud was praised for overcoming France's chronic structural problems.⁷² By May 1940, France and her allies fully recognised that they were 'better equipped for war than was Germany, with more trained men, more guns, more and better tanks, more bombers and fighters'. The French also proved their courage during the 1940 campaign, with 124,000 soldiers killed and another 200,000 wounded.⁷³

As the debate on France's strange defeat continues, this thesis argues that too few historians have looked beyond mainland Europe to the significant roles played by Britain and America in refusing to engage in discussions of a democratic axis during the late 1930s, a decision driven by the acrimonious relations between the democracies throughout the interwar years and the logical prioritising of appeasement. The chronic inability of London, Washington and Paris to partner together in global affairs prevented the timely construction of democratic bloc before 7 March 1936, which might have either stopped Hitler long before Germany was ready for war, or allowed military preparations to be made by London and Washington in good time to help France resist the German land offensive.⁷⁴ As it was, when France succumbed, she was accompanied only by a miniscule British land force and no American troops whatsoever.

As discussed throughout this thesis, Chamberlain had no viable alternative to appeasement. For the policy of appeasement to work, Germany's chronic fears of encirclement had to be quashed. With this aim in mind, the British distanced themselves from the French military elite and introduced the principle of limited liability in the mid-late 1930s, shunning the idea of creating a large BEF to aid France.⁷⁵ France's aerial weakness further forced the British to prioritise air

⁷² *Annual Report on France for 1937*, FO 371/21611; *Annual Report on France for 1938*, FO 371/22934

⁷³ May, *Strange Victory*, 5-7.

⁷⁴ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 166; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Cooperation, 1938-1939', p. 75; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 448; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 155.

⁷⁵ Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations*, p. 247; Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-40', p. 720; Keiger, "'Perfidious Albion?" French

rearmament over a large BEF to close the gap with the Luftwaffe. France was therefore abandoned to tend to her own security, despite British and French recognition that she could not overcome Germany singlehandedly, given her industrial, economic and demographic inferiority.⁷⁶ In effect, Chamberlain was compelled by adverse internal and external conditions between 1936 and 1938 to gamble everything on appeasement, a gamble which spectacularly failed.

Once rumours erupted in February 1939 that Hitler would break the Munich Agreement and destroy Chamberlain's appeasement strategy by invading Czechoslovakia, a dramatic shift occurred in British military and foreign policy. Apprehensive that Germany would attack westwards now that Chamberlain's appeasement strategy had failed, the COS advised on 20 February 1939 that Britain would be existentially threatened if France succumbed to a German land offensive, and therefore proposed the establishment of a continental-style British Army to bolster the French Army.⁷⁷ However, an army of 32 divisions could not be trained and equipped overnight. Indeed, Britain's meagre land armament industry had failed to equip even a mere five BEF divisions between 1935 and 1939. All the while, Germany's gargantuan, state-of-the-art armament industry could only produce equipment for seventeen infantry divisions a year.⁷⁸

Thus, the French correctly observed in the winter of 1938-39 that the British Army was in no state to intervene in Europe and would not be able to despatch a substantial, well-equipped BEF for several years, even with the best intentions.⁷⁹ Simultaneously, General Ironside concluded that even the first two divisions of the

Perceptions of Britain as an Ally after the First World War', p. 40; Adamwraith, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 51; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Co-operation, 1938-1939', p. 61; Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France, 1936-40*, p. 96; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 128; Jackson and Maiolo, 'Intelligence in Anglo-French Relations before the Outbreak of the Second World War', p. 121; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 215.

⁷⁶ Davies, '*Mesentente Cordiale: The Failure of the Anglo-French Alliance. Anglo-French Relations During the Ethiopian and Rhineland Crises, 1934-1936*', p. 517; Young, *In Command of France*, p. 193; Maiolo, *Cry Havoc*, p. 237.

⁷⁷ Bell, *France and Britain*, p. 222.

⁷⁸ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 290.

⁷⁹ Imlay, 'The Making of the Anglo-French Alliance, 1938-1939', pp. 99-100.

BEF were seriously lacking equipment, whilst Hore-Belisha was 'appalled at the thought of what would have happened to the Field Force had it been dispatched to France' during the Munich Crisis. According to Bond, the BEF chronically lacked all kinds of tanks, artillery, ammunition reserves, anti-tank weapons and winter clothing.⁸⁰ Not much had changed by 1940.

The British also lost their tank superiority during the 1930s, having led the way in Europe throughout the 1920s. This loss of tank superiority was largely due to an ambiguity over the role of the army in the 1930s – whilst a BEF to assist France required armoured divisions, a BEF tasked with colonial defence did not. This prolonged delay in deciding the BEF's role meant that the British were 'almost completely lacking in armoured forces' by September 1939. When the Germans finally attacked in May 1940, the British only had two battalions of the Royal Tank Regiment in France, and one partially formed division in Egypt, whilst the 1st Armoured Division remained in England, in no state to join the fight.⁸¹

Equally alarming for Britain was the state of her Territorial Army (TA), which was described by the COS as 'scarcely more than a skeleton organisation' in January 1937.⁸² Numbers were far below establishment, training was limited in peacetime, and it was inadequately equipped. Furthermore, due to the limits of British industrial capacity, Baldwin admitted that it was 'not presently possible... to recondition the Territorial Army'.⁸³ In 1938, the TA was shunned again in favour of establishing six anti-aircraft divisions. General Ironside lamented that 'all our guns and money and energy will be expended in making these divisions', killing the idea of sending Territorial Army divisions overseas to Europe.⁸⁴ Whilst the TA possessed thirteen divisions on paper by 1939, the War Office fully recognised that 'equipment and reserves for these divisions are *not available*'.⁸⁵ Thus, it would be twelve months

⁸⁰ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 271 and 290.

⁸¹ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 160 and 187-8.

⁸² 'Role of the British Army', COS Report, 28 January 1937, CAB 24/267/42

⁸³ 'Statement Relating to Defence', White Paper, Prime Minister to Parliament, 2 March 1936, CAB 24/260/29

⁸⁴ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 263.

⁸⁵ Italics added; 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939', British Strategic Memorandum, 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

before even four divisions – yet alone thirteen – could be sent to fight in Europe.⁸⁶ Bond concludes that London's chronic neglect of the BEF and TA throughout the 1930s 'contributed to a predictable series of defeats and fiascos between 1939 and 1942 including Norway, France, Dakar, Crete, Greece, North Africa, Malaya, Burma, and Dieppe'.⁸⁷

Chamberlain's prioritisation of German appeasement and limited liability – and the corresponding neglect of the BEF and TA – are major factors behind France's capitulation in June 1940. To this can be added Belgium's shift to neutrality in October 1936 and German's unexpected offensive through the Ardennes. As the German panzer divisions surged into Belgium, less than 400,000 poorly-equipped British soldiers were present to help resist the onslaught, as oppose to the 5.5 million soldiers mobilised during the First World War, where 64 out of 88 British Army divisions had fought alongside France in Western Europe.⁸⁸ In stark contrast, the British only contributed thirteen divisions to French security in May 1940. This contribution was embarrassingly overshadowed by the 22 divisions of the Belgian Army and was only marginally superior to the ten divisions of the miniscule Dutch Army.⁸⁹ It was also a far cry from the 32 divisions which the COS had deemed necessary to ensure France's survival.

Although the French Army has been criticised by scholars for its shortcomings, deficiencies and failures during the campaign of May-June 1940, Germany's circumvention of the Maginot Line might have been stopped had it not been for Britain's miniscule land contribution.⁹⁰ Throughout the interwar period, the French were utterly clear that without *full* British military assistance they could not repel Germany indefinitely, given her economic, industrial and demographic superiority.

⁸⁶ 'Anglo-French Staff Conversations, 1939', British Strategical Memorandum, 20 March 1939, ADM 205/57

⁸⁷ Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 337.

⁸⁸ Frieser, *The Blitzkrieg Legend*, pp. 1-50; Bond, *British Military Policy Between the Two World Wars*, p. 2 and 275.

⁸⁹ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 446.

⁹⁰ Adamwraithe, *France and the Coming of the Second World War*, p. 166; Alexander, 'The Entente Cordiale and the Next War: Anglo-French Views on Future Military Cooperation, 1938-1939', p. 75; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolationism*, p. 448; Young, 'French Preparations for Defeat: French War Doctrine in the Interwar Period', p. 155.

Thus, Paris concentrated on forging a military partnership with London during the interwar years. France's unshakeable belief that Britain would fulfil her Locarno obligation and provide the final piece of France's defensive puzzle – a well-equipped and substantial Expeditionary Force – proved in the end to be the gravest misjudgement of all.

Yet, Britain, France and America must share equal responsibility for cultivating the adverse conditions that forced Chamberlain to gamble everything on German appeasement. The acrimonious and anti-collaborative spirit between the democracies, America's alarming military unpreparedness, and France's failure to overcome her domestic woes forced Chamberlain to conclude that there was no feasible alternative, a verdict reinforced by the COS's advice that an alliance of democracies against Germany was 'suicidal'.⁹¹ Thus, Chamberlain was forced to gamble both Britain's survival and the future of the crumbling, global democratic order on reaching a peaceful accommodation with Hitler. A large BEF and TA and intimate military relations with France were deemed as serious obstructions to this ambition and were sacrificed accordingly. His gamble seemed logical and understandable given the intelligence on France and America's wide-ranging weaknesses and Hitler's apparent openness to a peace settlement for much of the 1930s.

This thesis has continuously stressed the acrimonious relations between the three democracies during the interwar years. Although France's defeat was seen as a terrible catastrophe in Britain, the private and public reactions of some prominent British figures shows just how rotten relations were beneath the surface. Cadogan had long held that 'we'd be better without them'.⁹² Likewise, Hankey commented that it was 'a relief to be thrown back on the resources of the Empire and of America'.⁹³ Even more sharply, King George VI remarked, 'personally I feel happier now that we have no allies to be polite & pamper'.⁹⁴ Journalists also shared this

⁹¹ Kennedy, 'British Net Assessment and the Coming of the Second World War', p. 39; Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 126.

⁹² Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940', p. 742.

⁹³ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 157.

⁹⁴ Rostow, *Anglo-French Relations, 1934-1936*, p. 246.

sentiment, with Viscount Lee of the Daily Mail writing that he undoubtedly 'felt for the first time an uplift of spirit and a new assurance of ultimate victory'.⁹⁵ In fact, Terraine claims that there was a 'wave of lunatic relief when Britain stood alone after the fall of France'.⁹⁶

'The Third Republic has ceased to exist and I don't care; it was gaft-ridden, ugly, incompetent, Communistic and corrupt, and had long outlived its day,' wrote Henry Channon, a Tory MP, in a scathing rebuke. '...The old France is dead. The French National Fête day is no more; it is abolished, as is that tiresome motto "Liberté, Égalité, Fraternité"'. Finally, Chamberlain himself remarked that we are finally 'free of our obligations to France, who have been nothing but a liability to us'.⁹⁷ It seems that the Anglo-French Alliance of 1939 merely patched over a relationship that was rotten to its core. The stench of this rot convinced Chamberlain that appeasement had greater merit than alliance-building.

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Across the Atlantic, France's military capitulation gave America 'one of the most terrific shocks it had ever experienced' and pushed her towards long-overdue collaboration with Britain. The combination of the Maginot Line and Royal Navy, backed by America's industrial might, had convinced Washington that the European war would be protracted and ultimately won by the superior production capacity of the democracies. According to Langer, 'almost everyone, from the President down, was quite unprepared for a swift German victory in the west', believing that the worst-case scenario would be a stalemate.⁹⁸

France's sudden collapse raised a terror throughout America that Hitler would finish off Britain and then seek military control over several significant states in South America – states that 'could ultimately be used as staging areas from which to launch an invasion of the United States'. During these tense weeks, US diplomats reported home to Washington that the armed forces and high society of Argentina were pro-

⁹⁵ Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France, 1919-1940', p. 742.

⁹⁶ Terraine, 'The Munich Surrender: An Attempt at a Military Equation', p. 59.

⁹⁷ Dockrill, *British Establishment Perspectives on France*, p. 157.

⁹⁸ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, pp. 469-470.

Nazi and that a political coup was imminent. The situation was even worse in Uruguay, which was deemed 'the soft under belly of South America' and vulnerable to a German invasion from Brazil – the home of 1 million Germans.⁹⁹ Tellingly, the *New York Times* headline for 2 June 1940 was: 'Dunkerque Holds Out; Fighting Along Somme; U.S is Studying Nazi Threat in South America'. As France surrendered, and with Britain's defeat seemingly imminent, Roosevelt demanded the creation of military plans to counter Nazi aggression in Latin America.¹⁰⁰

On 10 May 1940, as the Germans swept through Holland and Belgium, Churchill was appointed Prime Minister. Unlike Chamberlain, he had long lobbied for the forging of a democratic axis and wholeheartedly wished for American industrial and financial aid.¹⁰¹ Five days after taking power, Churchill wrote to the President, asking for all possible assistance short of armed forces, including a gift of 40-50 antiquated American destroyers.¹⁰² These ships were desperately needed – of the 100 destroyers in Home Waters, protecting Britain's vital trade routes, almost half had already been sunk or damaged, whilst Italy's dramatic entry into the war meant that Britain would face yet another 100 submarines.¹⁰³ Churchill also requested aircraft, anti-aircraft guns, ammunition, steel and other war materials.¹⁰⁴

On 16 May, Roosevelt frankly told Churchill that he could not supply any American destroyers, but was willing to sell the British \$37 million in surplus aircraft, guns and ammunition.¹⁰⁵ However, 'so far as the fighter and bomber planes were concerned, it was simply impossible to turn them over' as the army was acutely lacking 100 P-40 pursuit planes and 86 bombers for its own forces. The US Army also lacked anti-

⁹⁹ Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', pp. 747-51.

¹⁰⁰ Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', pp. 751-22.

¹⁰¹ Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, p. 179.

¹⁰² Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 353; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 177.

¹⁰³ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 353; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, pp. 744-5.

¹⁰⁴ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 177; Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 482.

¹⁰⁵ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 353; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 178.

aircraft weapons, with General Marshall admitting that 'the shortage is terrible and we have no ammunition for anti-aircraft guns and will not for six months'.¹⁰⁶ This dire state of war unpreparedness in mid-1940 vindicates Chamberlain's belief held during the 1930s that America could not intervene militarily. It also undermines the arguments of counter-revisionists that the pursuit of American help was a viable option during the Panay, Munich and Tientsin crises.

In light of these alarming deficiencies, Roosevelt passionately lobbied Congress for more funds. He secured \$1.5 billion for defence, including sufficient funds to produce 50,000 planes annually.¹⁰⁷ Yet, for the time being, Roosevelt could only give strictly-limited supplies to the British, insufficient to alter the outcome of war.¹⁰⁸ In frustration at America's military impotence, Roosevelt replaced his Navy and War Secretaries with Frank Knox and Henry Stimson, having long been displeased with Edison and Woodring. Mirroring the President's dissatisfaction, Colonel Stilwell quipped that Woodring's War Department functioned 'just like the alimentary canal. You feed it at one end, and nothing comes out at the other but crap'.¹⁰⁹

The fall of France shook Roosevelt into even more fervent action. On 10 June, in Charlottesville, Roosevelt promised in a dramatic speech to give Britain 'the material resources of the nation' and simultaneously to build up the US armed forces to meet 'any emergency and every defence'.¹¹⁰ Encouraged, Churchill again requested 40-50 American destroyers, but to little avail.¹¹¹ The President frankly told Lindsay that 'it would be impossible to get Congress to release destroyers'.¹¹² Thus, Washington's anti-collaborative spirit remained, even as Britain prepared herself for the long-dreaded Luftwaffe attack.

¹⁰⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 487.

¹⁰⁷ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 178.

¹⁰⁸ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 482.

¹⁰⁹ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 179.

¹¹⁰ Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', p. 755; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 178.

¹¹¹ Lindsay to Admiralty, 17 June 1940, ADM 223/491; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 178.

¹¹² Lindsay to Admiralty, 17 June 1940, ADM 223/491

The opposition of Congress was not the only factor behind Roosevelt's hesitancy. The President partially rejected Churchill's request because he feared that Britain might surrender to Germany within months. This would risk American destroyers and any other American armaments falling into Hitler's hands.¹¹³ This apprehension was fuelled by the 'defeatist' Ambassador Kennedy, who believed that the British had little chance of survival.¹¹⁴ Kennedy was convinced that either Germany or Russian Communism would destroy the old world. 'By the end of this year...' he reported to Roosevelt, 'people in England and France, and all over Europe, would be ready for Communism'.¹¹⁵ He advised the President to pour his financial and material resources into securing America's own position to 'withstand the shock of ruin in Europe'.¹¹⁶ Even after Churchill emerged victorious from the Battle of Britain, Kennedy pessimistically told the *Boston Globe* in a heavily-criticised interview on 12 November that 'democracy in England is finished'. Amidst the ensuing outrage, he resigned as Ambassador.¹¹⁷

As the Wehrmacht circumvented the Maginot Line, Ambassador Kennedy became hysterical, preaching that 'all was lost'. According to Rear-Admiral J.H. Godfrey, the British DNI, Ambassador Kennedy 'reckoned the big attack [on London] was coming very soon and wanted to clear out before it materialised – he thought his mission was complete'.¹¹⁸ During these critical months, the US Embassy was infected by Kennedy's doomsday prophecies and gained a reputation for 'low morale and defeatism'.¹¹⁹ Indeed, Captain Kirk, the US NA, even bet Admiral Godfrey that Britain would be defeated by 4 August, unless America 'came in'. The bet was accepted and the money

¹¹³ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 745.

¹¹⁴ DNI, Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491; Doencke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies*, p. 13.

¹¹⁵ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 345.

¹¹⁶ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, p. 345; Doencke, *Debating Franklin D. Roosevelt's Foreign Policies*, p. 13.

¹¹⁷ NID2, 'Mr Kennedy', 10 January 1941, ADM 223/491

¹¹⁸ DNI, Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491

¹¹⁹ DNI, Anglo-U.S. Collaboration and Security, ADM 223/491

stored in an envelope. On 4 August, Godfrey triumphantly ripped up the envelope, accompanied by a grinning Kirk.¹²⁰

According to Godfrey's recollections, this defeatism extended to Washington. 'The overthrow of Western Europe had no other immediate effect,' he recalled in 1947, 'than to convince the States that they were powerless to help us, and thereby to inculcate a despondency throughout the whole of America'.¹²¹ Roosevelt was in fact advised by Marshall and Stark in a joint memorandum on 24 June that releasing the army's war material to Britain 'will seriously weaken our present state of defence and will *not* materially assist the British forces', who's situation was hopeless.¹²² According to Haglund, 'many members of the Roosevelt administration... [especially Marshall and Kennedy] were violently opposed to the policy of draining America of her military hardware for the purpose of supplying Britain'.¹²³

As France surrendered, Roosevelt, Knox and Stimson wished for a second opinion on Britain's reportedly-low survival chances, and so sent Colonel Donovan to England to investigate the matter in July 1940. Before leaving America, Donovan was advised to expect the British to be 'difficult, secretive and patronising'. Donovan quickly found himself impressed with the British fighting spirit and returned to America with a message that 'there was still time for American aid, both material and economic, to exercise a decisive effect on the war'. He advised that America should supply Britain with bomb sights, flying-boats, destroyers, B-17 bombers, with mechanical and technical maintenance staffs, 25-pdr and 105-mm guns, motor boats, any surplus war material, including Lee Enfield rifles, and the use of American airfields for the training of British, Canadian and Australian pilots. He also urged full intelligence collaboration and the sharing of American consular reports from occupied Europe.¹²⁴

¹²⁰ DNI, Anglo-U.S. Collaboration and Security, ADM 223/491; DNI, Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491

¹²¹ DNI, American Section (NID18), ADM 223/491

¹²² Italics added; Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', 757.

¹²³ Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', p. 745

¹²⁴ DNI, Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491

As the Battle of Britain raged in July 1940, Churchill made another request for 40-50 American destroyers, this time bluntly explaining to the President 'the perilous position which the United States would occupy if British resistance collapsed and Hitler became master of Europe, with all its dockyards and navies'.¹²⁵ The timing of the Donovan mission was remarkable and his advice helped to persuade Roosevelt to supply Britain with the requested destroyers, a decision which was reached on 2 August and announced on 2 September 1940 to Churchill's delight.¹²⁶

As a result of Donovan's advice, Roosevelt further sanctioned the following supplies to Britain: 970,000 rifles, 200,500 revolvers, 87,500 machine guns (including anti-aircraft weapons), 895 field guns (including 75-mm guns) and 316 Stokes mortars, all with ammunition, delivered between June and October 1940. The belief was kindled that Britain might survive the *blitzkrieg* from the skies. In the following months, British munitions orders reached dizzying heights, and by October, the British had accumulated \$1.75 billion worth of orders for aircraft and engines alone. In fact, a high-level Anglo-American Purchasing Mission Conference on 23-24 July 1940 concluded that over the following 21 months the British would require no less than 14,375 planes, whilst America would need 12,884 planes for its army and another 6,208 planes for its navy. This was over 33,000 planes in all, which would be delivered to the two nations at a fixed ratio of nineteen to fourteen in America's favour.¹²⁷ At last, Anglo-American relations were transitioning from friendship into partnership.

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During his time in England, Donovan was also asked by Knox 'to establish intimate collaboration with the British Navy, both in the spheres of technical development and intelligence'.¹²⁸ However, Churchill was initially opposed to a wide-ranging technical exchange with America, advising the Admiralty on 21 May that 'I do not think a wholesale offer of military secrets will count for much at the moment. I made an offer

¹²⁵ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 353.

¹²⁶ Churchill, *Their Finest Hour*, p. 353; Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May-June 1940', p. 755; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 376.

¹²⁷ Langer, *The Challenge to Isolation*, pp. 714-15.

¹²⁸ DNI, Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491

previously to give them the secrets of Asdics [an underwater detection device] in exchange for their bomber sight, but it was not accepted'.¹²⁹ Yet, within a month, Churchill sanctioned the pooling of all technical information with Washington, persuaded by the fall of France and by advice from CAS Archibald Sinclair and the US scientific attaché, Professor Hill.¹³⁰

Sinclair warned that Professor Hill and Ambassador Lindsay had observed 'a certain resentment [in Washington] at our apparent "stickiness" ... and our reluctance to share with them these secrets' at a time when America was actively seeking to help us against Germany. Many of these secrets had also fallen into German hands 'as the result of crashes of our aircraft in Germany and... the capture of secret drawings and documents in French offices and factories'.¹³¹ Sinclair therefore advised that it was counter-productive to keep America in the dark and risk her goodwill when the aggressive powers had already learnt our secrets, removing the danger of a leakage on the American side.¹³² Persuaded, Churchill swiftly approved the complete exchange of technical secrets with America.¹³³ Godfrey was pleased, having long argued that 'the U.S. Navy should be as efficient as possible in case they come into the war'.¹³⁴

On 23 July 1940, the British War Cabinet agreed that 'a special mission, to initiate the exchange of secret technical information, should be sent to ... America as soon as possible'.¹³⁵ This mission was led by Sir Henry Tizard, who was accompanied by representatives from the Admiralty, War Office, Air Ministry, Ministry of Supply and Ministry of Aircraft Production, all of whom were granted 'full authority to disclose secret information to the U.S. authorities'.¹³⁶ The two countries moved quickly and,

¹²⁹ Churchill to First Lord, letter, 21 May 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³⁰ Archibald Sinclair to Churchill, letter, 25 June 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³¹ Archibald Sinclair to Churchill, letter, 25 June 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³² Archibald Sinclair to Churchill, letter, 25 June 1940, ADM 116/4210; DNI, minute, 26 February 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³³ Churchill to Archibald Sinclair, letter, 40 June 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³⁴ DNI, minute, 26 February 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³⁵ War Cabinet Extract, Meeting of Minutes and Advisors, 23 July 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³⁶ Cypher telegram to the UK High Commissioner in Canada, 7 August 1940, ADM 116/4210; US NA Kirk to Sir Archibald Carter (Permanent Secretary, Board of

within a month, exchanges had already taken place on radar, aircraft ranging devices and underwater detection devices.¹³⁷ Britain also gave America one of her 'precious PURPLE machines used to decode Japanese diplomatic messages'.¹³⁸ Since September 1939, America had also helped Britain 'a good deal' by moving the US fleet to the Pacific to contain Japan, whilst US naval patrols in the Atlantic sent Britain the locations of enemy ships. According to Godfrey, the Americans also gave 'all the information they have about the Japanese navy and pass[ed] on tit bits picked up by Attachés in Berlin and other European capitals'. Godfrey concluded that America's behaviour was 'thoroughly unneutral' in Britain's favour.¹³⁹

As France collapsed, a new phase in Anglo-American relations emerged as Washington transitioned from neutrality to non-belligerency.¹⁴⁰ Roosevelt informed Lindsay that he wished to hold transatlantic naval staff conversations 'at once'.¹⁴¹ Admiral Ghormley travelled to London in August 1940 with Roosevelt's authority to hold naval staff conversations and to establish a permanent US naval mission.¹⁴² As the British awaited Ghormley's arrival, a new policy emerged within the Admiralty of 'no secrets' towards Washington.¹⁴³ Roskill recalled years later that 'this courageous and far reaching decision enabled the Naval Staff to go right ahead in dealing with the Ghormley Mission and undoubtedly made the success of the mission a foregone conclusion'.¹⁴⁴ According to Drummond, 'although neutrality remained its [Washington's] official text, every major aspect of United States policy was thus

Admiralty), telegram, 15 August 1940, ADM 116/4210; War Cabinet Extract, Meeting of Minutes and Advisors, 23 July 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹³⁷ US NA Kirk to Sir Archibald Carter (Permanent Secretary, Board of Admiralty), telegram, 15 August 1940, ADM 116/4210; Roskill, *Anglo-US Collaboration in London and Washington*, ADM 116/3398

¹³⁸ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 230.

¹³⁹ DNI, minute, 26 February 1940, ADM 116/4210

¹⁴⁰ American Section (NID18), ADM 116/3398; Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 376.

¹⁴¹ Lindsay to Admiralty, 17 June 1940, ADM 116/3398

¹⁴² Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 376.

¹⁴³ Roskill, *Anglo-US Collaboration in London and Washington*, ADM 116/3398; Barrett, *Anglo-American Co-operation*, ADM 116/3398

¹⁴⁴ Roskill, *Anglo-US Collaboration in London and Washington*, ADM 116/3398

orientated towards Great Britain'.¹⁴⁵ Gradually, Ghormley's naval mission increased from six to 40 officers.¹⁴⁶

By August 1940, regular economic and diplomatic intelligence exchanges were also occurring, with the American Treasury Department receiving 'British assessments of German, Italian and Japanese oil stocks' and conducting joint studies on 'German food supplies, labour shortages, and finance'.¹⁴⁷ Diplomatically, the British were forwarded American consular reports from occupied Europe, since their own officials had immediately been expelled by the conquering Germans.¹⁴⁸ By December, the Americans even allowed the British to read their secret war plans.¹⁴⁹ Significantly, America's newly-developed war plans 'had moved a long way from ORANGE', with Plan Dog, ABC-1 and RAINBOW 5 all emphasising that 'Europe would have priority' over the Pacific and that 'Britain must survive'.¹⁵⁰ During these months, America also intervened more actively in the Atlantic.¹⁵¹

Yet, there were still sticking points between Britain and America, especially regarding financial aid. According to Kimball, 'the Presidential election campaign, as well as Roosevelt's lack of any sense of urgency in the matter of British dollar shortages, prevented anything from being done to head off the financial crisis' brewing in London. In November 1940, the Americans were therefore shocked when the British Ambassador bluntly declared to reporters in New York: 'Well boys, Britain's broke; it's your money we want'.¹⁵² Although the Neutrality Act of 1939 had successfully repealed the munitions embargo, it still prevented loans to Britain.¹⁵³ Sceptical of Britain's bankruptcy claims, Roosevelt allowed Britain's financial crisis to become

¹⁴⁵ Drummond, *The Passing of American Neutrality*, p. 376.

¹⁴⁶ Barrett, *Anglo-American Co-operation*, ADM 116/3398

¹⁴⁷ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 232.

¹⁴⁸ Charles Morgan, *North West Europe and Africa*, ADM 223/487

¹⁴⁹ Assistant NA (Washington) to Admiralty, telegram, 2 December 1940, ADM 223/492

¹⁵⁰ Christman, 'Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Craft of Strategic Assessment', p. 249.

¹⁵¹ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 176.

¹⁵² Warren F. Kimball, 'Beggars my Neighbour: America and the British Interim Finance Crisis, 1940-1941', *Journal of Economic History*, 29 (1969), pp. 758-72 (pp. 759-60).

¹⁵³ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253

acute before finally introducing the Lend-Lease Act in March 1941.¹⁵⁴ There was also friction over the British blockade of Germany, over America's neutral rights in supposedly neutral waters, and over British interference with American mail to and from Europe, which led 'the State Department to despatch its first really sharp protest to London'.¹⁵⁵ However, these tensions should not detract from the President's courageous move from neutrality to non-belligerency.

This process culminated in May 1941 with a 'complete fusion' of Anglo-American intelligence.¹⁵⁶ The COS sent Admiral Godfrey to Washington to co-ordinate this comprehensive intelligence merger with a 'mandate to set up a Combined Intelligence Organisation on a 100% co-operative basis'.¹⁵⁷ This was a remarkable step for the non-belligerent Americans to take, with the British Embassy suddenly more resembling 'an Embassy in an Allied than in a neutral country'. In fact, American intelligence was so freely shared that the British Embassy struggled to handle the heightened volume of material, leading the British NA to call for a new, covert organisation 'to handle it effectively'.¹⁵⁸ According to Godfrey, the most useful pieces of American intelligence emanated from Vichy France and North Africa.¹⁵⁹ One highly-successful operation saw intelligence smuggled from a French informant in Vichy France, who was code-named "Germaines Blue Angel", using the US consular service.¹⁶⁰

Meanwhile, Anglo-American staff conversations were held in Washington between 26 January and 27 March 1941. The two nations discussed how to defeat the Axis powers should America enter the war. It was agreed that a sustained air-offensive against Germany and the early elimination of Italy would be best, whilst the Allies

¹⁵⁴ Kimball, 'Beggars my Neighbour: America and the British Interim Finance Crisis, 1940-1941', p. 760.

¹⁵⁵ Langer, *The Challenge of Isolation*, pp. 355-8.

¹⁵⁶ COS 155th Meeting, Extract of Minutes, 1 May 1941, ADM 223/491

¹⁵⁷ DNI, COS 155th Meeting, Extract of Minutes, 1 May 1941, ADM 223/491; COS 155th Meeting, Extract of Minutes, 1 May 1941, ADM 223/491

¹⁵⁸ NA to Washington, 'Report of the Supply of European and other Intelligence from the British Embassy, Washington', 4 May 1941, ADM 223/491

¹⁵⁹ Godfrey, Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491

¹⁶⁰ NA to Washington, 'Report of the Supply of European and other Intelligence from the British Embassy, Washington', 4 May 1941, ADM 223/491

built up the necessary forces for an eventual offensive. Meanwhile, the Pacific would become of secondary importance as compared to Europe, with any war there fought on the defensive. Significantly, the two democracies also agreed to exchange military missions over the following months. Since America was still a non-belligerent, the British Mission representatives were accorded undercover identities as Advisors to the British Supply Council and attached to the Embassy from June 1940.¹⁶¹ The sound of Anglo-American cooperation was finally rising and would crescendo with Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941.

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During the spring of 1940, the Japanese stepped up their endeavours to control China, declaring 'Holy War with China' on 29 February 1940 and installing a Japanese puppet-regime in Nanking on 30 March 1940 to rival the Chiang Kai-shek Administration in Chungking.¹⁶² The Japanese also made unfair economic demands on the Dutch East Indies, and pressured Britain and France to shut the Burma Road and Indochina supply routes to China.¹⁶³ According to Offner, the American response 'was a mixture of admonitions and ambiguous half-steps', with financial and military aid to Chiang's "Koumintang" extremely limited.¹⁶⁴ However, in July 1940, Morgenthau and Lindsay discussed imposing an oil embargo and the blowing up of oil wells in the Dutch East Indies to stop Japan from seizing them, a move supported by Stimson and Ickes, but opposed by Welles, who feared the dangers of effective sanctions – war.¹⁶⁵ Roosevelt compromised and initially announced sanctions for aviation fuel and certain grades of iron and scrap-steel. However, the Japanese then occupied northern Indochina on 22 September, forcing Roosevelt to extend the iron and scrap-steel embargo to 'all grades' four days later. Historians believe that this was the moment when Roosevelt

¹⁶¹ Godfrey, *Anglo-U.S. Naval Cooperation*, 7 May 1947, ADM 223/491

¹⁶² Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p. 519; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 185; Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 136.

¹⁶³ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 139; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. pp. 185-8.

¹⁶⁴ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 186.

¹⁶⁵ 'Political Review on the United States for 1939', 3 September 1940, FO 371/24253; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 189.

moved 'from words to deeds'.¹⁶⁶ The following day, Germany, Italy and Japan ominously signed the Tripartite Pact.¹⁶⁷

Tensions continued to spiral and then boiled over in July 1941 when Japan occupied southern Indochina, a move which menaced Malaya, the Dutch East Indies and the Philippines.¹⁶⁸ America led the world's reaction, calling on Britain and Holland to join an economic and oil embargo on Japan and the freezing of all Japanese assets. These measures meant that Japan had to consume her limited oil reserves to fuel the war in China, an untenable situation that would compel her to choose between the stark alternatives of surrender or fighting America.¹⁶⁹ Both Churchill and Roosevelt were confident that Japan would 'recoil'.¹⁷⁰

Nevertheless, rumours spread in the autumn of an imminent Japanese attack on either British, French, Dutch or American territories in South East Asia, some of which were rich with oil.¹⁷¹ On 26 November, Hull delivered a Ten Point Note to Japan offering the unfreezing of Japanese assets, a commercial pact, and the stabilisation of the dollar-yen currency rate *if* the Japanese withdrew their armed forces from China, Indochina and Manchuria, signed a non-aggression pact covering the entire Pacific, denounced the Tripartite Pact and recognised Chiang's government in China.¹⁷² Extraordinarily, on 25 November, the US War Council also decided to warn Japan that if she crossed into the Indian Ocean to attack Burma, America 'would have to fight' alongside the British.¹⁷³ Despite the boldness of this threat, America's intervention was still dependent on Congressional approval, and therefore remained doubtful in British eyes unless Japan attacked American territory.

¹⁶⁶ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 191.

¹⁶⁷ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 168.

¹⁶⁸ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 233.

¹⁶⁹ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, pp. 521-2; Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 233.

¹⁷⁰ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p. 522.

¹⁷¹ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 232.

¹⁷² Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p. 530; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 238.

¹⁷³ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 237.

Japan decided that war was her only option and secretly negotiated a tripartite military alliance with Germany and Italy between 2 and 5 December 1941. All the while, the democracies received intelligence reports of an enormous Japanese troop build-up in Indochina and of decrypted messages from the Japanese Foreign Minister ordering embassies to destroy all diplomatic codes and warning that war might come 'quicker than anyone's dreams'.¹⁷⁴ The British pressured Washington for a defensive pact. At first, Roosevelt demurred, but on 3 December pledged 'armed support' even if Japan only attacked Thailand, though again he lacked Congressional approval.¹⁷⁵ He also approved Britain's proposal for a pre-emptive strike if Japan moved towards the Kra Isthmus, which would threaten Allied possessions in the Indian Ocean.¹⁷⁶

By 5 December 1941, an official break in relations between America and Japan was regarded as imminent, as was a sudden attack in South East Asia. More intercepted messages intimated that Japan would reject Hull's Ten Point Note at 13:00 hours on 7 December, a revelation which caused Roosevelt to comment, 'this means war'. Suspiciously, on 7 December, Hull's meeting with the Japanese Ambassador was delayed. During the interim, news arrived from the Navy Department at 13:30 hours.: 'AIR RAID PEARL HARBOUR. THIS IS NO DRILL'. Knox exclaimed, 'My God, this can't be true; they must mean the Philippines!', but he was quickly corrected by a chalky-faced Admiral Stark.¹⁷⁷ The fates of Britain and America were at last irrevocably entwined. 'Even before America had finally declared war', wrote Godfrey, 'the officers of the U.S. Mission in London, who now numbered over 100, put on their uniform and processed into Room 38 to shake hands with their new allies'.¹⁷⁸ Later that evening, Roosevelt told Churchill via telephone that 'they have attacked us at Pearl Harbour. We are all in the same boat now'.¹⁷⁹

The Grand Alliance long envisioned by Churchill and Eden had at last emerged, albeit too late for France. 'Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the

¹⁷⁴ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 240.

¹⁷⁵ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, pp. 232-3 and 272; Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, p. 240.

¹⁷⁶ Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War*, p. 233.

¹⁷⁷ Offner, *The Origins of the Second World War*, pp. 241-2.

¹⁷⁸ American Section (NID18), ADM 116/3398

¹⁷⁹ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, p. 538.

Japanese, they would be ground to powder,' Churchill wrote retrospectively. 'The British Empire, the Soviet Union and now the United States... were... twice or even thrice the force of their antagonists... United we could subdue everybody else in the world'.¹⁸⁰ Churchill's analysis was ultimately confirmed. However, it had cost billions of dollars to revive America's armed forces between 1939 and 1942 and would take another thirty months of rearmament before America was in a position to intervene militarily in Europe. In the interim, America's naval forces were humiliated as Japan won a sequence of naval victories in early 1942. These rearmament delays and colossal defeats prove that the American option was inviable in the 1930s and vindicates Chamberlain's appeasement strategy. Indeed, this failed policy bought valuable time for Britain, France and America to rearm and Soviet Russia to recover from Stalin's purges.

Although America finally fought alongside Britain, it should not be forgotten that the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941 forced her hand. The Americans only committed themselves militarily less than a week before they themselves had been horrifically attacked, and even this commitment was not watertight, dependent on Congressional approval. Washington's reluctance to join hands with London was something that Chamberlain had astonishingly prophesied in 1934. 'We ought to know by now that the U.S.A. will give us no undertaking to resist by force any action by Japan short of an attack on Hawaii,' he wrote. 'She will give us plenty of assurances of goodwill especially if we will promise to do all the fighting, but the moment she is asked to contribute something she invariably takes refuge behind Congress'.¹⁸¹ In essence, this was the story of the 1930s.

America's military intervention came much too late to save the Third Republic from annihilation – not to mention a number of weaker democracies absorbed by the Wehrmacht – and came only just in time to save the British Empire. Even then, the Americans waited to see if London would win the Battle of Britain before sending substantial military supplies. Though the Americans forced the pace of events in Asia by imposing sanctions upon Japan, they believed that this would result in the

¹⁸⁰ Churchill, *The Grand Alliance*, pp. 539-40.

¹⁸¹ Reynolds, *Britannia Overruled*, p. 121.

moderation of Japanese policies in China, rather than provoke her into aggression. Had Japan attacked a British territory instead of Hawaii, it cannot be known whether Congress would have supported Roosevelt's pleas for war. Ultimately, America was forced from friendship into partnership with Britain by Japan's surprise attack against Hawaii – a partnership which otherwise might never have been formed.

Conclusion

Whilst Steiner and other historians have emphasised *the triumph of the dark*, this thesis has stressed *the failure of the light*. This study diverges from the mainstream historiography by unveiling the *acrimonious relations* between the democracies during the interwar years; their continuous *failure to collaborate* diplomatically or militarily on the world stage; and British intelligence on their increasing military, strategic, economic, financial, political and social troubles during the 1930s. This thesis also contributes to “the missing dimension” of intelligence on one’s allies by investigating how Britain assessed the power of two potential allies, France and America, in the late 1930s. It has been shown that Britain’s gloomy assessments decidedly influenced the direction of Chamberlain’s foreign policy towards appeasement. Britain’s consciousness of America’s military incapability has particularly powerful implications for the existing historiography, which only recognises American isolationism as a sole restraint on Roosevelt, preventing him from intervening in European or Far Eastern affairs.

The troubling global outlook from 1936 onwards set the tone for Chamberlain’s premiership of 1937 to 1940 leaving him without a viable alternative policy to appeasement. Alliance-building is by far the most popular alternative espoused by Chamberlain’s contemporary and post-humous critics. Yet, this thesis has undoubtedly shown that this sparkling alternative was a mirage. Perhaps most significantly of all, by examining in depth the feasibility of the alliance-building alternative to appeasement, this thesis has filled an enormous hole in the historiography recognised by Stedman, Self, Dutton and many other esteemed historians.¹ The author’s fresh interpretation on the alternatives has serious ramifications for orthodox and post-revisionist historians, who have built careers on the premise that there were better alternatives. In fact, these alternatives would have most likely led to the destruction of the British Empire. Chamberlain should therefore be exonerated for playing the only sensible card available to him and should no longer be disparaged as a “guilty man”.

¹ Stedman, *Alternatives to Appeasement*, pp. 3-4.

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