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Michael K. Doyle

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War Plan ORANGE assumed that America alone would face Japan in a Pacific war after Germany had been defeated, that there would be no threat in the Atlantic and Caribbean areas. As late as October 1940 it remained the only well-developed plan—even after Europe was overrun and England was bracing for invasion. Little wonder that critics of that time and since have faulted the plan and the Navy's unmovable support of it. Another view can be taken, however; a wider view that considers naval officers' analysis of strategy and diplomatic questions regarding the pre-1941 Pacific.

THE U.S. NAVY AND WAR PLAN ORANGE, 1933-1940: MAKING NECESSITY A VIRTUE

by

Michael K. Doyle

In October 1940 Capt. A.W. Clarke, R.N., the British Government's personal liaison with President Franklin Roosevelt, received an invitation to visit the Navy Department's War Plans Division. Once there, Clarke's host, Capt. Richmond "Kelley" Turner, ushered him into a room, unlocked a safe, and presented him with a document that proved to be the U.S. Navy's operational plans for war with Japan. Left alone and encouraged to read, the British captain was astonished at the amount of detail the plans contained. What he was seeing was the culmination of almost two decades of efforts by U.S. Navy strategists to prepare for a conflict they had believed almost unavoidable since the end of

World War One. What is remarkable is that the Navy's Basic War Plan ORANGE, the document Clarke perused, was little more than a literary artifact in October 1940.² Events in Europe had radically transformed the conditions under which any Pacific war would be fought. Hitler's armies had overrun the Low Countries and France, the German air force was systematically devastating English cities, and conceivably the British Isles would face invasion in the near future. The growing danger to the security of the Atlantic and Caribbean had already been publicly expressed, first in the Act of Havana in July and followed by the destroyers-for-bases deal with Britain in September 1940.³ Yet the fleet remained at Pearl Harbor, symbol of traditional American preoccupation with the Pacific.

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Moreover, RAINBOW contingency planning, begun in 1938 to meet the changed international situation, continued to be plagued by a lack of Presidential direction and by interservice disputes.⁴ War Plan ORANGE, outmoded though it was, remained the only well-developed war plan available to both the Navy and the Army.

Adm. James O. Richardson, the Commander of the United States Fleet, alluded to this predicament that same October when he outspokenly challenged the soundness of policy based on Plan ORANGE. Such straightforwardness cost Admiral Richardson his command within a few months.⁵ Reduced to its essential point, his argument was that a Pacific naval offensive, the heart of the ORANGE plan, was sure to fail. In a letter to the Chief of Naval Operations, Adm. Harold Stark, Admiral Richardson pointed to the lack of enough fleet bases, men, and ships to support the required operations. He added that any move west of Hawaii would expose the vital regions of the Atlantic and Caribbean to attack.⁶ The authors of Plan ORANGE had never considered this last possibility in their scenario, developed for a world in which Germany was a defeated, disarmed power, Europe at peace, and America, untrammelled by commitments elsewhere, faced Japan alone.⁷

There was nothing new about the charges Admiral Richardson leveled against policy based on War Plan ORANGE. The Army members of the Joint Army-Navy Board, the agency responsible for coordinating strategic planning, had been saying much the same thing since the early 1930s. Despite Army opposition, Joint Board naval strategists had remained unmoved in their support for the traditional ORANGE plan.⁸

For the most part, historians have accepted the critics' view of Plan

ORANGE. Louis Morton has acknowledged that strategic planners in the 1930s faced a growing disparity between American commitments in the Far East and the ability to defend those commitments, a situation for which he held American diplomats largely responsible.⁹ Morton clearly sympathized with the plight of naval strategists. Nevertheless, the impression left by his work and by more recent scholars is that the consequent disarray in strategic planning was largely because of naval officers' intransigent support for a Pacific strategy grown increasingly irrelevant. In its most extreme form the case against Navy strategists in the 1930s is that their unreceptiveness to criticism and their tenacious adherence to an obviously flawed and outmoded conception of a Pacific war was at best self-serving, at worst a manifestation of an inflexible cast of mind.¹⁰

This paper offers another interpretation of naval planners' behavior, based upon material not previously considered in accounts of ORANGE war planning. The object here is not to dispute the view that Plan ORANGE was a fighting plan mainly in the sense that it could be employed as a justification for more money in the battle of the budget. Nor is it to deny that dogma too often intruded into the thinking of some naval officers. Undoubtedly both self-interest and dogma played some part in shaping naval officers' strategic estimates of the requirements for a Pacific war. However, the archives of the Naval War College in Newport reveal another aspect of naval officers' analysis of strategy and diplomatic questions affecting the Pacific prior to 1941.¹¹

The following discussion seeks to show that the Navy's support for offensive operations in the Pacific was dictated in part by diplomatic considerations; namely, the desire to ensure American security through an

informal entente with Great Britain on naval policy and Pacific Strategy.¹² Ironically, then, support for Plan ORANGE can be seen not as an indication of inflexibility, but rather the reverse; an attempt to preserve as many options as possible in a world grown increasingly complex and dangerous for American interests.

The argument that follows rests on a few broad observations that illustrate why naval officers in the 1930s would have approached strategic questions from a perspective fundamentally different from their Army colleagues. First, the experiences of the interwar years deepened, if anything, the traditional parochialism and continentalism of Army strategists in particular, while that service generally languished like a poor relation, barely maintaining its dignity on the grudging charity of Congress.¹³

These same years reinforced the Navy's traditional sense of separation from the mainstream of American society.¹⁴ Unlike their Army colleagues, Navy officers possessed in the writing of Alfred Thayer Mahan and his successors a literature that sustained an expansive view of America's responsibilities and interests in world affairs, to which was added a fairly sizable annual appropriation, albeit not everything the Navy desired.¹⁵ Moreover, the Navy was involved in all the arms limitations conferences that were a hallmark of the interwar years. These conferences not only brought high-ranking naval officers directly into contact with major diplomatic and political decisions, but also provided the opportunity for informal collaboration between naval officers and diplomats on mutually important subjects. Years of working together had an educative effect on both parties. Just as certain State Department officials became increasingly receptive to the Navy's analysis of America's defense needs, so too naval officers learned to appreciate

the need to work indirectly for ends otherwise unattainable in the isolationist political conditions of the 1930s.¹⁶

With these considerations in mind, and before moving on to an account of the Naval War College's work on Pacific strategy and related policy issues, it is necessary first to describe the general features of War Plan ORANGE as it emerged in the 1930s. According to the Joint Board the cause of hostilities would be Japan's refusal to accept restraints on her political and economic ambitions in Asia, especially in China. Following this logic the authors believed Japan was liable to attack American interests in the Far East rather than conform to America's interpretation of the Open Door policy of equal economic opportunity. As envisioned in Plan ORANGE the conflict would be limited to the armed forces of Japan and the United States.¹⁷ Finally, there was the tacit assumption that the Atlantic and Caribbean would remain secure. Only the implicit predicates of a common British-American interest in those regions and the protection afforded by the Royal Navy could provide this security in a Japanese-American war, thereby releasing American forces for the Pacific.

Joint Board Navy strategists consistently maintained that success in a Pacific war demanded offensive operations west of Hawaii at the war's outset. There is no evidence that either Army or Navy planners believed the Japanese high command would try to invade the Eastern Pacific. The consensus was that the high command might send strike forces into eastern waters, but would concentrate the bulk of Japanese naval and military strength in a defensive perimeter anchored on the island chains of the Central and Western Pacific. Taking Pacific geography and the enemy's likely intentions into consideration, estimates

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of the situation in an ORANGE war provided for an almost exclusively naval conflict to be fought out on what would be a Japanese lake.¹⁸

Only at the Naval War College was there a sustained effort to test these ideas systematically. Among the educational duties of the College staff was preparation of a series of yearly strategic exercises or war games, operations problems in college terminology. These operations problems, usually four or five in a year, had a dual function: to teach student officers a prescribed method for solving strategic problems and to examine various solutions under simulated combat conditions. Echoing the prevailing service wisdom, the college staff gave only nominal attention to the possibility of a British-American conflict in the Atlantic and Caribbean, emphasizing instead the more likely Japanese war.¹⁹ Concentration on the Pacific had had a long history by the 1930s. As Adm. Ernest J. King noted in his autobiography: "Ever since the acquisition of the Philippine Islands by the United States, the Naval War College had been pondering... problems that might arise in the Pacific Ocean because of their possession." The "annual strategic maneuver," King continued, "concerned... the means of moving the fleet from Hawaii to the Philippines in the event of any hostile move toward those islands by ORANGE."²⁰

Notwithstanding the yearly absorption in strategy of a Pacific war, the staff insisted that students not mistake these efforts for an "official rest of an actual War Plan." One pamphlet simply described the operations problems as "mental exercise."²¹ Strictly speaking, these remarks were accurate; the Naval War College had long since ceased to have any direct role in formulating war plans.²² However, there can be no doubt that in practice both staff and students

understood the results of the problems as a fair indication of what would occur in combat. The playing of Operations Problem IV-1933 confirmed this. More importantly, that game provides invaluable insight into naval strategists' conceptions of how Pacific strategy related to larger problems of American foreign and defense policy. This is so not because of any unique characteristic of Operations Problem IV-1933; on the contrary, its basic outlines were no different from other hypothetical Pacific war dramas of the period. What makes this particular problem significant is that the staff and Adm. Luke McNamee, president of the college between 1933 and 1935, made it the focus of a special study of strategy, arms limitation policy, and their relevance for the diplomacy of Asia.²³

One does not have to search far for reasons why in 1933 the college was even more concerned than usual with Pacific strategy and related diplomatic problems. First, the Geneva Arms Limitation Conference was in its second year, already mired in the difficulties that would overwhelm discussion by 1934. Not the least of these difficulties was President Hoover's initiative for an across-the-board cut in defense establishments.²⁴ Second, there was a major naval conference pending. Indications were that Japan would either demand extensive revisions of or abrogate the Five Power Naval Treaty which had governed naval building since the 1921-1922 Washington Conference.²⁵ Given this estimate of Japan's intentions, Congress' recent votes to grant Philippine independence was of tremendous import for the Navy because of the doubtful future of America's naval bases in the islands.²⁶ Third, Army officers had recently raised a number of strong objections to current Pacific strategy, which were soon to come before the Joint Board.²⁷ Fourth, the new Democratic administration was still an unknown quantity, though naval

officers believed President Franklin Roosevelt to be personally sympathetic to their interests.²⁸

Against a background shaded by these considerations, the staff and students at the Naval War College executed their annual strategic maneuver, Operations Problem IV-1933. In this version of a hypothetical Pacific war, Japan had instigated the conflict as part of a drive to control China's (YELLOW's) economic resources. According to the scenario, the Japanese had launched an attack designed to make Manila's naval facilities untenable for the U.S. Fleet (BLUE). BLUE's first major objective was to regain a naval base in the Philippines, whence it could wear down ORANGE resistance through control of the sea.²⁹ Members of the senior class, made up mostly of captains and flag officers, first attempted individual solutions to the problem of moving the fleet westward from Hawaii to achieve this objective. When their individual projects were done, the student officers divided into ORANGE and BLUE high commands to test one solution under carefully controlled conditions laid down by the staff. Although the game was artificial and the rules governing it controversial, the staff made every effort to achieve a semblance of what a campaign would be like under combat conditions.³⁰

In the play that followed, the staff decided to use a southern route to the Philippines. They rejected the solution proposed by Admiral (then Captain) King, commander of BLUE, because it "did not fit well to make an interesting game."³¹ The significance of this decision was that King's plan, to send the fleet north of potential Japanese naval and air bases in the Marshalls and Carolines, would not have provided the information the staff sought: the relative logistical difficulties ORANGE and BLUE might face in the southern Philippines. Moreover, the staff had seen efforts similar to King's in years

past and knew that his route promised no better or worse results than the other alternatives. King, however, privately fumed at what he believed was unnecessary exposure to flanking attacks in the narrow waters off New Guinea. Hence he felt no regrets when the Navy detached him from the college before the exercise was complete. In his opinion the nearly disastrous outcome had been "sadly obvious" from the first.³² Even though the staff had disagreed with his strategic reasoning, they would have concurred in his estimate of the results of the problem. The fleet managed to fight its way across the Pacific but lost many auxiliary craft and airplanes. A base of sorts was established at Dumanquilas Bay in the southern Philippines but it was problematical at the end of the game whether the fleet would be able to defend the base against a counterattack, or operate from it for any length of time.³³

The ORANGE plan of campaign that year had called for a minimal effort against the Philippines and attrition tactics to begin with BLUE's approach to mid-Pacific.³⁴ The staff always assumed that the Japanese high command would base its strategy and tactics on the same doctrine as did the United States. Hence the ORANGE commander's objective would be reduction of American battleship strength as the means of attaining strategic superiority. It was this goal that determined the use of attrition tactics, no matter what other plans the ORANGE commander made. Furthermore, Operations Problem IV-1933 was predicated on the ships actually built or under construction in both navies. Since America had failed to maintain its Navy at the strength permitted under the 1922 and 1930 naval treaties, this constraint worked in Japan's favor, giving ORANGE a large edge in cruisers and destroyers.³⁵ Even so, the staff thought attrition was

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unlikely to provide ORANGE with an overwhelming tactical success. Although ORANGE would undoubtedly take a high toll of BLUE auxiliary craft during the early stages of the offensive, a conjecture based on many war game results, this in itself would not decide the conflict. Attrition alone would not encourage the Japanese high command to stake its capital ships, and with them the outcome of the war itself, on a major fleet action off the Philippines.³⁶

Instead, ORANGE as well as BLUE could be expected to conserve capital ship strength; in the staff's view these behemoths would ultimately determine the victor, even if a decisive fleet action never took place. College doctrine stated that control of the sea would go to the nation maintaining a concentrated fleet with a superior battleline in the area of operations, a conviction that attained the status of holy writ in the interwar Navy.³⁷ However, as one staff member observed, it made little difference if the fleet held Dumanquilas Bay or some other southern base. Japan would still be able to import crucial strategic materials from Manchuria and might thus easily continue the war indefinitely. The U.S. Fleet would be in no position to provoke a decisive encounter and Japan would have no reason to seek one. Even with a successful return of the fleet to the Philippines, the conclusion was inescapable that final victory would cost enormously in time, manpower, and money.³⁸

In the critique following Operations Problem IV-1933, Capt. S.C. Rowan, chief of the Operations Department, and Capt. Forde A. Todd, head of the Strategy Section of Operations, led the discussion. Both men made abundantly clear their grave reservations about the feasibility of offensive operations in the Pacific. Rowan was fatalistic, convinced as he was that "something like this advance may be forced upon us." While "higher authority" deliberated on the

war's larger objectives, "with due regard to political and economic considerations," the BLUE commander would have to conduct operations with whatever forces were available. At the outset these forces were unlikely to be sufficient. Nevertheless, Rowan warned, BLUE's commander "will have to take what he can get and do the best he can."³⁹

Following this counsel of near despair, Capt. Harold Train, lately student commander of ORANGE, asked "if it is a good thing for us to give so much thought to this crossing... when it is pretty well established that it could not be done." Train had put the staff 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. The college Chief of Staff, Capt. Adolphus Andrews, avoided Train's remark, merely noting that "the War College is in no way a War Plans Section" and could provide "no 'canned solution'" to an ORANGE war.⁴⁰ Privately, however, both Andrews and Capt. Wilbur Van Auken, director of the Research Department, shared Train's opinion of the Pacific offensive. A short time after the critique Andrews received a request from Capt. J.D. Wainwright, USN, then at the Army War College, for data on an ORANGE war to assist in joint planning. Andrews complied, adding that any naval officer arguing optimistically about a Pacific offensive would be guilty of "giving a very false impression of what we could actually do."⁴¹

A similar pessimism infused Captain Van Auken's report on Operations Problem IV-1933. In his evaluation for Admiral McNamee, Van Auken emphasized the difficulties of amassing enough ships at Hawaii and defending a slow fleet train from repeated air and submarine attacks during the Pacific crossing. Once in the Philippines, the fleet would also lack a secure base and

facilities for repairing underwater damage. Van Auken further noted that under these staggering handicaps the fleet was expected to seize and then defend an advanced base. Manila's defenders could not be expected to hold out longer than 2 weeks, an insufficient amount of time for the fleet to cross the Pacific. With the collapse of resistance Manila would be lost and with it any hope of operating out of the Manila Bay facilities. Given the risks of the campaign, Van Auken doubted that the public would support a war in the Far East that entailed such a high probability of immediate defeats.⁴²

With Van Auken's report before him, Admiral McNamee took the unusual step of sending an unsolicited letter on 27 February 1934 to Adm. William Standley, the Chief of Naval Operations. Generally the college did not initiate studies except in response to a specific request. Just the day before, however, Admiral McNamee had written a similar letter to the General Board in compliance with the Board's desire for an evaluation of issues relevant to the naval limitation talks soon to be held in London. Apparently McNamee thought the unsettling results of the college's investigation warranted the additional letter to Standley. This letter to Admiral Standley briefly surveyed the knowledge yielded by recent war games. Given the evidence, Admiral McNamee wrote, it was "highly questionable" whether the United States, with its "Treaty Navy," could accomplish its strategic mission "against determined ORANGE opposition." It was impossible to mistake McNamee's meaning: to fling American naval units across the Pacific in one dramatic charge would only invite disaster.⁴³

The letter to Admiral Standley quoted above merely summarized the naval and strategic aspects of the Pacific problem. However, the staff had also developed the policy implications in

massive document titled "Limitation of Naval Armaments, 1935: Report of the Staff."⁴⁴ Admiral McNamee relied on this study for his reply to the General Board on 26 February and his letter to Standley the next day. The study itself remained at the college. Nevertheless, it deserves a close examination as one of the most candid analyses of foreign and defense policy done anywhere within the 1930s Navy Department. Most strikingly, the study reveals a consensus among the college staff that an informal agreement with the British on Pacific naval policy would provide a way out of the strategic dilemmas presented by the Far Eastern situation.

To begin with, the majority of the staff was dubious about the fate of America's interests in China and the Philippines if the current trend of Far Eastern policy continued. With public opinion opposed to enlarging American defense capabilities in Asia, the rational policy would obviously have appeared to be retrenchment from vulnerable outposts in the Philippines.⁴⁵

The staff advanced a number of reasons to support the retrenchment thesis. First of all, the Navy could not be assured of public support for a long war to retake the Philippines. Secondly, the Philippines were presently an economic as well as a strategic liability. Thus Congress appeared determined to give them independence, making unlikely the appropriation of sufficient funds for developing an adequate naval base at Manila or elsewhere in the Pacific. Thirdly, it was problematic whether or not the American people would ever approve a war solely to maintain Washington's interpretation of the Far Eastern Open Door. Judged by the actions of Congress on questions of naval policy, there was little support for building the kind of Navy capable of fighting such a war. In short, the consensus was that defending the nation's political and economic stake in any part of Asia was a game evidently

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not worth the candle in the eyes of the public. Rather than permitting this situation to continue, the staff suggested it might be advisable to cut loose from the Far East altogether before the nation found itself in a war it was unprepared materially or psychologically to fight.⁴⁶

These radical conclusions were muted but not completely absent from Admiral McNamee's report to the General Board. There was an unmistakable mood of foreboding in his assertion that a "war between Japan and the United States alone under present conditions would involve us in losses entirely out of proportion to any possible gain." Taken at face value, this statement could have been understood as an argument against maintaining a naval presence in Asia. But this was devil's advocacy. Actually, Admiral McNamee was intimating there was a third alternative either to withdrawing altogether from Asia or continuing to tolerate the imbalance of diplomatic and strategic forces currently existing.⁴⁷

The staff's studies had argued that Japanese-American relations would remain potentially explosive as long as Washington opposed Tokyo's aims but lacked the wherewithal to support its diplomacy with force. Clearly retrenchment was preferable to a continuation of this predicament. But then various staff papers cautiously explored another possibility: rather than playing a lone hand, the United States could establish closer ties with Great Britain, the other major Far Eastern naval power. The majority of the staff felt that British rivalry with the United States was more apparent than real in any event. As one writer, Capt. R.B. Coffey, put it, the differences between the two powers were "technicalities" based on "honest" divergences of opinion, merely reflecting "unchangeable peculiarities and conditions."⁴⁸ Indeed, a common interest already existed between

Washington and London in matters relating to the Atlantic and Caribbean. Moreover, since 1931 the college had been arguing for some sort of informal arrangement whereby the two governments could face Japan with a united front on naval questions. Such an informal coalition might salvage the existing naval and diplomatic arrangements in the Far East.⁴⁹

Awareness of weakness in American defenses, the dangers inherent in a policy of drift, and a desire to promote entente with Britain as a solution to these difficulties all found their way into Admiral McNamee's answer to the General Board. Thus his observations regarding the forthcoming London discussions were a mixed bag. Two of his central points underscored America's vulnerability in Asia. The first laid down the standard formula of an overseas naval base and a Navy capable of fighting Japan in its own waters as the absolute minimum acceptable for a sound Asian policy. McNamee's second point emphasized that the Navy presently was so handicapped that it could "no longer exercise decisive influence" in curtailing Japanese aggression. But then in his third point he flatly asserted that the "British and U.S. navies combined could enforce any reasonable restrictions on Japanese policies." Even though an alliance was out of the question, Admiral McNamee reasoned that if the two greatest naval powers joined forces to thwart Japan's naval pretensions, other difficulties would virtually solve themselves, including the strategic dilemmas of a Pacific war.⁵⁰

Much of the argument advanced by the War College president was either understated or elliptical. Nevertheless, read in the context of a decade of General Board studies of the Pacific naval problem and against a background of college war gaming, its implications were clear enough to those familiar with the issues. It is possible to reformulate

the argument in a manner that clarifies the implications lying imbedded in McNamee's recommendations to the General Board and the Chief of Naval Operations, recommendations clearly designed by the college to influence not only the Navy, but also the diplomats of the Roosevelt administration.

First, there would continue to be uncertainty about the public mood on Far Eastern questions. Public opinion might very well fluctuate, whereas American interests in the Pacific were of long standing, and not likely to alter markedly in the future. Given the geography of the Pacific, the Navy would remain primarily responsible for defense of those interests. Second, for the reasons enumerated above, American naval power alone was not a persuasive deterrent to Japan.⁵¹ Third, the sobering effects of naval limitations and Japanese expansion in recent years had tended to quell the remaining vestiges of Anglophobia lingering from the rivalries of the 1920s.⁵² Fourth, isolationism ruled out the possibility of an Anglo-American Pacific alliance, although the British were expressing interest in such an agreement.⁵³ Still, the best hope for American security lay in encouraging the kind of cooperation between the two governments that could result in a common Far Eastern naval policy.⁵⁴ The conclusion that emerges inescapably from this reasoning is that for an Anglo-American entente to develop into a viable possibility, perhaps extending to an informal naval agreement, the United States would have to remain actively committed to the defense of its Pacific interests.

To return to the original question of the Navy's attachment to Plan ORANGE, Navy planners were unlikely to accept the offensive simply because the campaign conformed to doctrine or because it promised material rewards in the annual battle of the budget. No naval officer in Washington

aware of the work done at the Naval War College could have had any illusions about the terrible risks such a strategy involved. Put simply, a major consideration in support for Plan ORANGE after 1933 was preservation of some flexibility in the choices open to American policymakers. With these observations in mind, it remains to examine the debate between Army and Navy members of the Joint Board over Pacific strategy as it evolved after 1933.

Between 1933 and 1935 the Joint Board heard increasing criticism of Plan ORANGE from both Army and Navy officers stationed in the Philippines. The gist of their objections, remarkably similar to Admiral Richardson's criticism of October 1940, was that the offensive was infeasible because the Manila garrison could never hold out.⁵⁵ While the Joint Board took these objections under consideration, the Navy members recommended substituting a step-by-step offensive through the island chains of the Pacific. This revision was designed to secure an advanced base of operations along the route from Pearl Harbor to Manila, thereby abandoning the steamroller advance and fundamentally altering the timing and character of the entire operation.⁵⁶ In May 1935 the Army members accepted the Navy revision for reasons that can only be conjectured. Apparently the desire for interservice harmony in Washington prevailed over the Army-led chorus of opponents. In Louis Morton's view, the result was "a plan even more unrealistic than before."⁵⁷

From the Army's standpoint, charged as it was with Philippines defense, Morton's judgment is correct. To be sure, advancing step-by-step avoided the hazards of a headlong rush, which the Naval War College had already thoroughly documented. Nevertheless, this revision only made other problems worse. An island-hopping campaign such as this virtually guaranteed the

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destruction of the Luzon defenders and loss of the Manila and Subic Bay naval facilities. If Manila could not have held out long enough with the fleet rushing across the Pacific, this substitution was a tacit admission by the Navy that Pacific victory would be a slow and costly affair. Furthermore, the nation would simply have to absorb some tremendous defeats at the outset.

In retrospect, the step-by-step advance seems obtuse if a major goal of Plan ORANGE were Philippines defense and preservation of a base of operations at Manila. So it seemed to the Army after 1935. Continentally minded in the best of circumstances, Army planners such as Brig. Gen. Walter Kreuger now found offensive operations in the Pacific totally unacceptable. Not only would the Philippines fall in any event, but an offensive would also strip the Western Hemisphere of defense forces.⁵⁸ Thus Kreuger and his Army colleagues dug in their heels after 1935. They argued that offensive operations ought to be scrapped; in their place the Army wanted to substitute a "position of readiness."⁵⁹ This was in fact a strategic defensive along a perimeter running from Alaska, through Hawaii, down to Panama. Planning based on such a defensive posture would sacrifice everything west of Hawaii indefinitely while ensuring the immediate security of the continental United States.

A number of considerations prompted Army planners' advocacy of such a cautious strategy, among them the familiar fear that the country might not support a long war. Most important of all, the pessimistic views of Brig. Gen. Stanley Embick, head of Army war planning in 1935, had come to dominate Army thinking on the Pacific. General Embick had been one of those officers in the Philippines who originally had voiced strong objections to Plan ORANGE. His tour as commander of the Corregidor garrison in 1933 had

convinced him that the operations in Plan ORANGE were dangerous beyond all reason; that an offensive particularly would be "literally an act of madness." Under his leadership Army planners came to advocate what they believed was a safe, realistic approach to matters of strategy and defense, given the contemporary isolationism of the American public.⁶⁰ The Navy, for its part, refused to concede to General Embick's analysis of current political and diplomatic attitudes, or to his views of Pacific strategy.⁶¹ Eventually disagreement, latent in joint planning since 1933, emerged openly between 1936 and 1938. For months the Joint Board was deadlocked, unable to devise a commonly acceptable revision of the ORANGE plan.⁶²

In early 1938, sitting as a special committee of the Joint Board, General Embick, now Deputy Chief of Staff, and Adm. James O. Richardson, serving as Assistant Chief of Naval Operations, managed a compromise. As in the 1935 step-by-step revision, the resulting agreement produced superficial harmony rather than satisfying Army objections. The 1938 ORANGE plan incorporated the Army's preference for a defensive posture together with the Navy's insistence that any meaningful plan had to include provision for offensive operations.⁶³

From 1935 on, Army analysts remained unalterably convinced that the military and diplomatic balance in the Far East would continue to favor Japan; that an isolationist America might thus be forced into a war against an adversary enjoying local strategic superiority; that such a war would sacrifice a vital security in the Atlantic and Caribbean; and that for the armed services to plan for offensive operations under these conditions would be suicidal.⁶⁴ Seen in the light of 1940, these arguments evidently acquired a cogency for Admiral Richardson that had been lacking in the late 1930s. At

further remove, seen in the light cast by the events at Pearl Harbor in 1941, the Navy planners' support of Plan ORANGE offensive operations appears wildly optimistic at best.

But the Navy planners' continuing support did not emerge from misplaced optimism or something worse. On the contrary, the Naval War College had documented both the flaws in the offensive strategy and the equivocal nature of America's commitment to the Far East, confirming the observations of other Navy agencies, particularly the General Board. Once convinced that the Navy had no hope of reaching the Philippines defenders in time, the Army was willing to abandon Asia as a lost cause. Naval officers were not so cavalier. Though they acknowledged the difficulties, for a host of reasons they opposed abandoning America's interests in Asia. Not the least of the considerations affecting their judgment was growing confidence in cooperation with the British on naval matters.

Unlike their Army colleagues, naval officers such as Adm. Richard Leigh of the General Board and Adm. William Standley, Chief of Naval Operations during the crucial mid-1930s, were actively involved in shaping American policy prior to and during the Second London Naval Conference of 1935-1936.⁶⁵ Conversations with their counterparts in the British Admiralty had led to a common understanding on strategic and policy problems. Although the emerging British-American front failed to induce Japan to sign the Second London Naval Treaty, this informal understanding was no small achievement when isolationist sentiment in Congress was at its zenith.⁶⁶ Furthermore the signatories of the Second London Treaty were to consult on future naval policies; for practical purposes such consultations would almost solely concern the Far East and Japan. Indeed, when Sino-Japanese hostilities resumed in the

summer of 1937 President Roosevelt and Adm. William Leahy, Standley's replacement as Chief of Naval Operations, employed this provision as an excuse to send an American naval officer to England. Significantly they chose the director of war plans, Capt. Royal Ingersoll. In early 1938 Ingersoll engaged in highly secret, informal conversations with the Admiralty in London on possible naval cooperation in the Far East. From these conversations emerged the first tentative fruit of the British-American naval entente.⁶⁷

To recur briefly to the related issue of ORANGE war planning, the Navy's substitution of a step-by-step advance in place of the impossible all-out offensive clearly made sense given the Navy's views of emerging policy. First of all, the island-hopping campaign adjusted strategy to the realities of a Pacific campaign as the Navy perceived them. Secondly, the cautious advance into the Pacific kept alive the possibility of coordinating naval policy with Britain in the region, albeit this new operation created insoluble problems for Manila's defenders.⁶⁸ Thirdly, the Navy was bereft of clear directives on national policy in these years. Given domestic political conditions and the Navy planners' understanding of America's ineluctable role in Asia, the planners were preparing for a protracted war to retake the Philippines, which according to War College estimates could take as long as 2 years, to say nothing of the time required to defeat Japan.⁶⁹ Moreover, a Pacific war would be the *ultima ratio*, only the last resort of American policymakers.

Even as late as 1941 it remained as unclear that Japan would actually fight as it was uncertain that the American public would support an Asian war.⁷⁰ Unlike their Army counterparts in the 1930s, Navy planners perceived American interests in Asia as sufficiently important that no American

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government could abandon them in the near future, and surely not in the face of Japanese threats. On this score, eventual Philippine independence was a plaguesome nuisance, complicating rather than signaling an end to the dilemmas of Pacific strategy. Until the situation clarified, Navy planners insisted that the better part of wisdom was to be prepared for any eventuality.⁷¹ These considerations, when added to a growing common interest with Britain on naval questions, undoubtedly contributed heavily to the refusal to junk the ORANGE plan.

Put simply, War Plan ORANGE provided an important opportunity to keep alive a crucial debate on matters of defense policy. To charge that the plan itself was studded with contradictions or that it served the Navy's special interests may be accurate, but such charges can also be misleading; they ignore and thereby obscure the broader concerns underlying the Navy's position. In Admiral Richardson's letter of October 1940 referred to at the beginning of this paper, the admiral charged that Plan ORANGE "had its inception primarily in the desirability of having a guiding directive for the development of the Naval Establishment to meet any international situation that might be thrust upon it."⁷² In the context in which he wrote, Richardson intended this as a damning criticism. While his judgment was undoubtedly accurate on the narrow ground of the plan's feasibility under the conditions of 1940, his characterization of the Navy's objective in supporting the plan

sustains the interpretation advanced here, namely, what Navy planners and strategists at the War College and on the Joint Board had in mind was a device to preserve as many alternatives as possible in an uncertain world, not a document rigidly prescribing behavior in a given situation. Under the less than optimal circumstances confronting Army and Navy planners in the 1930s, such precision could have been achieved only at the expense of flexibility. That the only detailed war plan available in October 1940 was the outmoded ORANGE merely testifies to the inadequacy of the RAINBOW war planning effort, under way since the spring of 1938. Ultimately it was Adm. Harold Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, who led the way in redirecting American strategic thinking to an Atlantic First commitment in November 1940.⁷³ Given the opportunity, the Navy quite willingly jettisoned a preference for the Pacific sustained so long by necessity rather than conviction.

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Michael Doyle was educated at Reed College and the University of Washington, receiving the Ph.D. degree in history from the latter. He has taught at the University of Washington and at Pacific Lutheran University. He is now Director of Research for R.F. Cross Associates, engaged in analysis of the U.S. Navy's role in supporting oceanic nuclear weapons tests between 1946-1962.

NOTES

List of abbreviations used in the notes:

GBR	General Board Records
JBR	Joint Board Records
I.CMD	Library of Congress Manuscripts Division
NA	National Archives
NHC	Naval Historical Collection, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, R.I.
NHD	Naval History Division, Old Navy Yard, Washington, D.C.
NMR	New Military records
OA	Operational Archives
OMR	Old Military Records
WPDNF	Army War Plans Division Numerical Files

1. James R. Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937-1941* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1978), pp. 186-187.

2. War plans were related in an hierarchic fashion: first, Joint Army-Navy Basic War Plan ORANGE established the overall strategic concept; from this the Navy derived its Navy Basic War Plan ORANGE; in turn the Commander of the U.S. Fleet developed the Fleet Operating Plan, 0-1 ORANGE. James O. Richardson and George C. Dyer, *On the Treadmill to Pearl Harbor: the Memoirs of Admiral James O. Richardson* (Washington: Naval History Division, 1973), pp. 255-256.

3. William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation* (New York: Harper, 1952), v. 2, pp. 668-707, 742-776.

4. Robert J. Quinlan, "The United States Fleet: Diplomacy, Strategy, and the Allocation of Ships (1940-1941)," in Harold Stein, ed., *American Civil-Military Decisions* (Birmingham: University of Alabama Press, 1963), pp. 152-202.

5. Richardson and Dyer, p. 424.

6. CINCUS (Richardson) to CNO (Stark), 22 October 1940, A16/FF1, Naval Operations, Secret and Confidential File, Secret Correspondence, 1927-1940, microfilm reel 4, RG 38, NA.

7. In late 1937, in a draft plan of the Navy's (which the Army rejected), if ORANGE had allies, the United States would also have sufficient assistance "to maintain an adequate superiority." Joint Strategic Plan A, Navy members-JPC to JB, 29 November 1937, Serial No. 617, Subject File No. 325, JBR.

8. The development of war plans in the interwar period can be followed in the Records of the Joint Army-Navy Board and Special Committees, RG 225, OMR, NA. The actual drafting of documents was done by a special committee, the Joint Planning Committee (JPC), which drew its staff from the war plans divisions of the two services. Thus it was actually the officers of the JPC who directed the activities of the Joint Board. The best brief account of war planning in these years remains Louis Morton, "War Plan ORANGE: Evolution of a Strategy," *World Politics*, January 1959, pp. 221-250.

9. Morton, pp. 248-250.

10. Richardson makes this argument most pungently in his memoirs. Richardson and Dyer, pp. 268-277. See also the recent scholarship of Russell F. Weigley, "The Role of the War Department and the Army," and Waldo H. Heinrichs, Jr., "The Role of the United States Navy," both in Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto, eds., *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931-1941* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1973), pp. 165-187, 268-277. Morton makes these criticisms more circumspectly.

11. The author would like to thank Professor James King, formerly Director of Advanced Research, Center for Advanced Research, U.S. Naval War College, Mr. Anthony Nicolosi, curator of the Naval Historical Collection at the Naval War College, and Dr. Dean Allard of the Naval History Division, for their assistance in the research for this article.

12. Norman Gibbs has outlined this thesis in a recent article, "The Naval War Conferences of the Interwar Years: A Study in Anglo-American Relations," *Naval War College Review*, Summer 1977, pp. 50-63. For a full elaboration of the ideas advanced in this paper, see Michael K. Doyle, "The U.S. Navy: Strategy, Defense, and Foreign Policy, 1932-1941." Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Washington, St. Louis, Mo., 1977.

13. Weigley; Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Education of a General* (New York: Viking Press, 1963); and Douglas MacArthur, *Reminiscences* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). The latter two works, the one biography of the man who became COS in 1939, the other an autobiography of his arch rival, eloquently testify to the prevailing attitudes among high-ranking officers during the interwar years.

14. Peter Kartsen, *The Naval Aristocracy* (New York: Free Press, 1972) discusses the development of a new sense of professional expertise and self-consciousness among the officer corps of the "new" Navy of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Although Kartsen offers some speculative conclusions about professional naval attitudes for these years, much work remains to be done in this area. For an interesting

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discussion of attitudes among young officers in the interwar Navy, see Thomas B. Buell, *The Quiet Warrior: A Biography of Admiral Raymond A. Spruance* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974).

15. Raymond G. O'Connor, "Naval Strategy in the 20th Century," *Naval War College Review*, February 1969, pp. 4-12. George T. Davis, *A Navy Second to None* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), pp. 473-474 contains a table of naval appropriations and related expenditures for the years 1883-1941.

16. Arthur J. Hepburn, memorandum for Norman Davis, 8 June 1933, Norman H. Davis papers, LCMD; Doyle, pp. 339-405; Meredith William Berg, "Admiral William H. Standley and the Second London Naval Treaty, 1934-1936," *Historian*, v. 33, no. 2, 1971, pp. 215-236.

17. BLUE-ORANGE Joint Estimate of the Situation, 9 January 1929, Serial No. 280, Subject File No. 325, JBR.

18. Joint Army-Navy Basic War Plan ORANGE, Subject File No. 325, Serial No. 280, JBR.

19. Ironically, in light of the BLUE-ORANGE situation in the Pacific, the U.S. Navy would assume the strategic defensive in the Western Atlantic, while the Royal Navy would face a strategic offensive not so very different from that contemplated in an ORANGE war.

20. Ernest J. King and Walter Muir Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King: A Naval Record* (New York: Norton, 1952), p. 236.

21. Remarks of President of Naval War College Preliminary to solving Operations Problem III-Sr., 20 February 1935, 1914-C, RG 4, NHC. Dept. of Intelligence, Prospectus of the Naval War College Courses, Senior and Junior, 1939-1939, RG 19, NHC.

22. William Veazie Pratt, "The Naval War College," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings*, September 1927, pp. 937-947.

23. Operation Problem IV-1933 originated and was played under the presidency of Harris Laning, whose term ended in May 1933. McNamee's term began in June, and he instigated the study.

24. Chmn Gen Bd to Sec Nav, 18 June 1933, Serial No. 1584 (1521-AA), Subject File No. 438-2, GBR, OA, NHD.

25. Report Nos. 76, 89, 119, C-10-e/21201, Office of Naval Intelligence, RG 38, OMR, NA.

26. J.W. G(reenslade), memorandum, 21 May 1935, Serial No. 1688, Subject File No. 404, GBR, OA, NHD.

27. S.D. Embick, memorandum for CG Phil Dept, 19 April 1933, 3251-15, WPDFNF 1920-1942, RG 165, OMR, NA.

28. See for example Leahy Diary, 12 November 1932, William H. Leahy papers, LCMD.

29. Operations Problem IV-1933, 2261-AA, RG 4, NHC.

30. Notes taken at Critique, 2261-AA-q.

31. Forde A. Todd, Critique of Operations Problem IV, 2261-AA-k.

32. King and Whitehill, p. 242.

33. Research Dept (Van Auken) to PNWC (McNamee), 6 December 1933, 2261-AA.

34. S.C. Rowan, Critique of Operations Problem IV, 2261-A-o. Ships Laid Down or Appropriated for Since Washington Treaty, 24 September 1932, table filed in Subject File No. 420-2, GBR.

35. Rowan, 2261-AA-o.

36. Operations Problem V-1932, 1722-E, 1722-F, RG 4, NHC.

37. PNWC (Laning) to Gen Bd, 23 October 1931, XTYG(1931-107), RG 8, NHC. T.S. Wilkinson to Norman Davis, memorandum, Battleships—Their Continuance and Their Size, 28 October 1933, Subject File No. 438-1, GBR.

38. Operation Problem I-1935, History of Chart Maneuver, 1912-M, RG 4, NHC.

39. Rowan, Critique and General Comments, 2261-AA-p.

40. Notes taken at Critique, 2261-AA-q.

41. Adolphus Andrews to J.D. Wainwright, 21 March 1933, XSTP (1919-1940), RG 8, NHC.

42. Research Dept (Van Auken) to PNWC (McNamee), 6 December 1933.

43. PNWC (McNamee) to CNO (Standley), 28 February 1934, UNT (1934-29), RG 8, NHC.

44. Limitation of Naval Armaments, 1935: Report of the Staff; individual papers filed in XPOD(1934-34), RG 8, NHC.

45. Paper by W. Van Auken, Limitation of Naval Armaments.

46. Papers by G.B. Wright, R.C. MacFall, R.A. Dawes, Limitation of Naval Armaments.

47. PNWC (McNamee) to Gen Bd, 27 February 1934, XPOD(1934-34), RG 8, NHC.

48. Papers by R.B. Coffey, Limitation of Naval Armaments.

49. PNWC (Laning) to Gen Bd, 23 October 1931.

50. PNWC (McNamee) to Gen Bd, 27 February 1934.

51. F.P. Conger, memorandum for Director, War Plans Division, 20 July 1935, Strategic Plans Division, Miscellaneous Subject File, Series III, Philippines Island Naval Base Studies, OA, NHD.

52. William V. Pratt, "Autobiography," unpublished mss, William V. Pratt papers, LCMD. W.E. Yarnell, memorandum, N.D., Disarmament Files, Series IX, 3, GBR, OA, NHD. Yarnell almost certainly wrote this memorandum in 1930.

53. G.W. Duggler, memorandum, Notes on Talk of Norman Davis Before the General Board on 15 November 1933, Subject File No. 438-1, GBR, OA, NHD.

54. Chmn Gen Bd to Sec Nav and CNO, 30 July 1934, and Enc(A), Enc(C) of same, Subject File No. 438-1, GBR, OA, NHD.

55. See material filed in Serial No. 533, Subject File No. 325, JBR. Also Embick, memorandum for CG Phil Dept, 19 April 1933.

56. JB to Sec Nav, 8 May 1935, Serial No. 546, Subject File No. 325, JBR.

57. Morton, p. 241.

58. Walter Kreuger, memorandum for COS, 28 October 1937, 2720-14, WPDNF 1920-1940, RG 165, OMR, NA.

59. Walter Kreuger, memorandum for COS, 18 October 1937, 2720-14, WPDNF 1920-1940, RG 165, OMR, NA.

60. Stanley Embick, memorandum for COS. Drafts of this memorandum with appendices A and B were completed in May and November 1935, filed in 3389-29, WPDNF 1920-1940, RG 165, OMR, NA. Another copy dated 2 December 1935 is filed in Serial No. 573.

61. Conger, memorandum, 20 July 1935.

62. W.E. Pye, memorandum for CNO, 22 April 1936, Strategic Plans Division, Miscellaneous Subject file, Series III, OA, NHD. See also material filed in Serial No. 573, Subject File No. 305, JBR.

63. Joint Army-Navy War Plan ORANGE, 21 February 1938, Serial No. 618, Subject File No. 325.

64. Weigley; Walter Kreuger, memorandum for COS, 28 October 1937, COS, memorandum for CNO, 7 December 1937 (not sent), 2720-104, WPDNF 1920-1940, RG 165, OMR, NA.

65. Richard Leigh, chairman of the General Board in 1934, attended preliminary negotiations in London along with Norman Davis in the early summer of 1934. William Standley, CNO 1933-1937, attended the London Naval Conference as a delegate. For their views of cooperating with the British, see respectively Chmn Bd to Sec Nav and CNO, 30 July 1934, and the correspondence between Standley and J.K. Taussig, acting CNO while Standley was in London during late 1935 and early 1936, William H. Standley papers, USC Library.

66. Berg; Gibbs; Doyle, chaps. V-VIII.

67. Ingersoll Diary, 31 January 1938 and Record of Conversations, 13 January 1938, Strategic Plans Division, Series III, OA, NHD. Lawrence Pratt, "The Anglo-American Naval Conversations on the Far East of January 1938," *International Affairs*, October 1971, pp. 745-763.

68. Record of Conversations, 13 January 1938 and Royal Ingersoll memorandum for CNO, 31 January 1938, Strategic Plans Division, Series VII, Records Relating to Anglo-American Cooperation, 1930-1944, OA, NHD.

69. Operations Problem VIII, 1938, 2166; Operations Problem VII, 1939, 2244-E, RG 4; C.W. Magruder, Potential Economic Strength and Weakness of Japan for War, 24 Apr 1938, RG 8, NHC.

70. R.J.C. Butow, *The John Doe Associates: Backdoor Diplomacy for Peace* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974), pp. 302-306.

71. Conger, memorandum, 20 July 1935.

72. CinCUS (Richardson) to CNO (Stark), 22 Oct 1940, A16/FF1.

73. Thus in November 1940, Stark took the initiative for shifting strategic concentration from the Pacific to the Atlantic in his Plan D, or "Dog," Leutze, pp. 183 ff. Louis Morton, "Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II," in Kent Roberts Greenfield, ed., *Command Decisions* (Washington: U.S. Dept. of the Army, Office of Military History, 1960), pp. 11-48.

