

THE UNITED STATES AND ARMS CONTROL: ANGLO-AMERICAN
COMPETITIVE COOPERATION AT THE 1935 LONDON NAVAL CONFERENCE

by

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For my parents

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ABSTRACT

This work considers the strategic value of the 1935 London Naval Conference to the United States Navy and the American Government. It addresses longstanding historiographical debates on interwar American foreign policy, including the nature of isolationism under the Roosevelt Administration, the degree of Anglo-American cooperation in the 1930s, and the strategic vision of the United States Navy in the Pacific in the interwar period. Taking into account in equal degrees the perspectives of the uniformed naval officers and the civilian diplomats in the State Department, this thesis will argue that American participation in the 1935 London Naval Conference shows a degree of international participation and a commitment to the international order that is often overlooked by historians in this field.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

CNO	Chief of Naval Operations
DRC	Defense Requirements Committee
FO	Foreign Office
GB	General Board
IJN	Imperial Japanese Navy
LNC	London Naval Conference
LNT	London Naval Treaty
ONI	Office of Naval Intelligence
RN	Royal Navy
USN	United States Navy
WNC	Washington Naval Conference

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Second London Naval Conference is usually remembered as the final chapter of interwar naval arms control. The 1935 conference saw the great experimentation of multilateral limitation on arms construction end with a whimper. The terms of the treaty were a shadow of the ambitious program initially conceived in 1922, and two of the five original participants in arms control refused to adhere to even these limited tenets. The resultant failure of the signatories to attain wider participation in the treaty led the three remaining powers, the United States, Britain, and France, to depart from the treaty's terms within a year of its ratification. At first glance, it appears that the 1935 conference was the nail in the coffin for interwar arms limitation, relegating it to a brief mention in the conclusions of histories on naval arms control.

This impression is certainly borne out in the historiography of arms control. The conference has been neglected by historians in all relevant fields; histories of arms control, interwar foreign policy, or interwar navies tend to mention it only in passing or not at all. This neglect stems mostly from historical hindsight. The failure of the conference seems predetermined by the instability of the global scene in the mid-1930s and the irreconcilable views of the Americans, British, and Japanese delegations. As such, it is usually seen either as the end of arms control or the beginning of the breakdown in the Pacific. Yet if the conference is examined without glancing forward, it is clear that American and British policymakers still held hope that arms control could stem the rising tide of militarism across the globe. They invested a great deal of time and effort into the conference in spite of what must have seemed overwhelming odds. The

Americans proved resilient in their hope for arms control even after the Japanese withdrew in an attempt to strengthen the liberal international order and enticing the non-signatories back into the fold. Even if they were not successful, the serious attempt by Western policymakers at the 1935 conference sheds light on their desires, goals, and world vision in the mid-1930s.

In particular, the second LNC is critically important for understanding the interwar foreign policy of the United States. The historiography is not settled on the matter. For much of the postwar era, historians have concluded that the United States became deeply isolationist between the wars, rejecting participation in international institutions and shying away from alliances with likeminded states. In recent years, this dominant interpretation has come under attack from historians who have argued that the United States was actually reasonably active in world affairs but that its participation was simply limited to its economic influence rather than more conventional means of power. An examination of the second LNC can add usefully to this debate by establishing the ways in which American policymakers were also willing to use military power to shape the world order and to further the United States' interests abroad. The determination of US policymakers to produce a treaty at the 1935 conference demonstrates a durable commitment to a liberal international order, a dedication to maintaining a navy second to none, and a willingness to cooperate with foreign powers to further mutual interests.

First, it is necessary to provide an overview of the interwar naval arms control system, which spanned four conferences and three treaties between 1921 and 1936. This subject has been covered by numerous historians of both naval and foreign policy backgrounds, including Erik Goldstein, John Maurer, Herbert LePore, Emily Goldman,

and Christopher Hall to name just a few.¹ Naval arms control was born in America during the 1921-22 Washington Naval Conference as a means to slow and limit the extraordinarily expensive building programs that continued unabated following the conclusion of World War One. Two rising powers, the United States and Japan, threatened the status quo dominance of the Royal Navy. The United States began this construction program in 1916 as a means to defend its neutrality from belligerents on both sides of the European war. The Japanese built to keep pace with their presumed competitor, America. Both nations were locked into building programs for which there no longer existed any intended purpose. The United Kingdom, meanwhile, was left with a fleet bloated by wartime construction that had become out of any proportion to any remaining threat. Yet none of the three could take the first step to disarm or to cancel building programs lest they be left distantly behind their naval peers. It was a classic security dilemma, and one that could only be solved by international cooperation.

The actual shape and form of the Washington Treaty was largely determined by the American Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes who suggested to the delegates that their nations scrap 1.8 million tons of ships that either existed or were under construction. The ships in question were capital ships, the very large battleships or battlecruisers that were predominantly viewed at the time as the main currency of naval power.² Hughes also suggested that the premier powers agree to a tonnage ceiling for capital ships and affix themselves to a tonnage ratio of 5:5:3, with Japan assuming the

¹ Erik Goldstein and John Maurer, *The Washington Conference, 1921-22: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor* (Ilford: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1981), Herbert Lepore, *The Politics and Failure of Naval Disarmament, 1919-1939: The Phantom Peace* (New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, Ltd., 2003), Christopher Hall, *Britain, America, and Arms Control, 1921-37* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), Emily Goldman, *Sunken Treaties: Naval Arms Control Between the Wars* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1984).

² Lepore, *Disarmament*, 12-13.

lowest figure.³ Japan was compensated by a non-fortification clause, which prevented both the US and UK from building bases in their Pacific territories from which they could strike at the Japanese homeland. Numerous other limitations were agreed to, most notably unit limitations on battleships to a maximum of 35,000 tons and on all other ships to 10,000 tons.⁴ Finally, a “battleship holiday” of ten years was agreed to, during which time no signatory could begin construction on a capital ship.⁵ In addition to the Five Power Treaty, the Four Power Treaty was agreed to, which set the territorial status quo in the Western Pacific, and the Nine Power Treaty, which established the long-standing American policy of the Open Door in China.

After much negotiation, these terms were agreed to. The United States, as it was noted by many navalists for years to come, sacrificed the greatest tonnage of all the powers. The United States scrapped over 730,000 tons of capital ships, the majority of them brand new vessels or ships in various stages of construction.⁶ The United Kingdom scrapped 500,000 tons, all of it comprised of older vessels. Japan scrapped something approaching 250,000 tons.⁷ The greater sacrifice by the United States rankled some within the USN all the more since it was acknowledged that the UK’s extensive system of bases and refueling stations made the Royal Navy unquestionably the greatest naval

³ France and Italy, which also possessed large surface fleets by the end of WWI, made up the other two parties of the Washington Naval Treaty. They were granted what amounted to a 1.67 ratio to the US and UK’s 5 and Japan’s 3.

⁴ Aircraft carriers were also limited to a unit tonnage of 27,000 tons per vessel and a total cap at 135,000 tons.

⁵ The British were allowed to build the *Nelson* and *Rodney* during the holiday to compensate for the RN’s lack of battleships with 16 inch batteries (Goldman, *Sunken Treaties*, 157).

⁶ NARAI, Foreign Relations (14) Sen 74B-B25, Captain Puleston to Senator Key Pittman, Feb. 10, 1936. The capital ships under construction in US shipyards in 1922 ranged from 10-75% complete.

⁷ NARG 80, box 172, Naval War College Study, “What Will be the Fate of the 5-5-3 Ratio in 1935” by Lieutenant Commander D. P. Moon, July 14, 1934, pg. 16.

power even if the two fleets were numerically equal.⁸ No party was entirely happy with the result, however. The Japanese were unhappy to be given such an inferior ratio. And many British officials, who had been previously been undisputed masters of the sea, only reluctantly submitted to parity with the upstart Americans. Rosslyn Wester-Wemyss, formerly the First Sea Lord, grumbled that America had done well for itself. “They have rid themselves of a vast and ruinous shipbuilding program without giving up the object for which it was projected; they have secured a general ratio of naval strength which leaves them free from anxiety in all quarters; and they have attained an equality with the first naval Power with a minimum of effort.”⁹

The system required sacrifices from all parties—the ratios and tonnage caps were based on estimates of each nation’s security needs and industrial capacities. The United States, with its tremendous industrial might, could have built the world’s largest navy if it had chosen to do so but most US policymakers were unwilling to assume the immense cost that such an effort required. By establishing parity with the British, both parties got what they wanted. The British still maintained a fleet necessary to secure their far-flung empire, while the Americans cheaply enhanced their prestige and their clout in international affairs. Japan, while unhappy with its lower ratio, became nearly unassailable in its home waters by dint of the non-fortification clause. The Washington Treaty provided a relatively firm foundation of military and political agreements for order in the Pacific, despite the misgivings of some nationalists. As Emily O. Goldman notes, however, the agreement at Washington rested on a very particular congruity of interests.

⁸ NARG 80, box 172, General Board 438-1, “Displacement and Gun Caliber on Battleships,” prepared by Commander E. M. Williams, May 21, 1931. Williams noted that the British had 7 bases between the United Kingdom and Singapore, whereas America had but one (Hawaii) between San Francisco and the Philippines. This disparity left the UK “supreme on the sea.”

⁹ Goldman, *Sunken Treaties*, 144.

As relative power and national policies would change over time, as they inevitably would, the basis for the system was likely to erode. In contrast to many international agreements, the Washington system was easier to establish than it was to maintain.¹⁰

The Washington Treaty had applied quantitative limitation to capital ships only. The American delegation had sought to apply the ratios and tonnage caps to all naval vessels, but there was objection from the other powers. Britain, in particular, argued that capital ships ought to be limited because their purpose was strictly for warfare whereas lighter vessels had multifaceted duties including commerce protection and policing actions.¹¹ The Americans accepted this argument for the sake of expediency. The United States quickly fell behind Britain and Japan in cruiser construction during the middle years of the 1920s, however, prompting calls to regulate auxiliary vessels.

The first such attempt arose in 1927 with the Geneva Naval Conference. American political leaders saw the cruiser debate as primarily a technical issue rather than a political one, and as such gave uniformed naval officers a much larger role than they had been granted at Washington. Britain's requested cruiser fleet dwarfed the one desired by American delegates, and the conference ended in complete failure.¹² The negotiations foundered as a result of unreasonable positions on both sides. The United States possessed only a small cruiser fleet and it was in no real position to dictate the level at which parity ought to be set. The British, on the other hand, insisted on a fleet of

¹⁰ Goldman, *Sunken Treaties*, 32.

¹¹ John H. Maurer and Christopher M. Bell (eds), *At the Crossroads between Peace and War: Naval Rivalries and Arms Control between the World Wars: The London Conference of 1930* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2013) (Cited from a manuscript copy without page numbers). In 1930, Prime Minister MacDonald said that "The cruiser category for me is therefore only partly a fighting category, and is to a considerable extent a police category... I cannot take the necessary police off the seas..."

¹² Raymond G. O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium: The United States Navy and the London Naval Conference of 1930* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1962), 17. Britain's proposed tonnage cap for cruisers exceeded American expectations by around 200,000 tons.

70 cruisers which was well in excess of the fleet they possessed and for which no political will even existed in Britain to create.¹³ The collapse of the conference led to a troubling break in Anglo-American relations, and prompted a retaliatory cruiser construction program in the United States.¹⁴

Over the following three years policymakers in Britain and the United States expressed a desire to repair their relations and to finish the business that had been started in Geneva. This effort culminated in the London Conference of 1930. Again the crucial factor became the cruiser issue. The British scaled back their demands considerably at the conference, but a qualitative issue soon became the central concern. The British preferred a cruiser fleet composed of vessels of around 7,000 tons mounting six-inch guns. The Americans, on the other hand, preferred to build to the category limit of 10,000 tons with an eight-inch battery. USN strategy held that the lack of American bases in the Pacific meant that their ships needed large cruising radii and a high degree of “survivability.”¹⁵ The British, with their numerous bases and far-flung empire, preferred a larger number of smaller vessels to perform a large number of duties.

The disagreement highlighted a significant difference in doctrine, and, as US delegate William V. Pratt remarked, “asymmetries in doctrine can seriously restrict the scope of arms limitation.”¹⁶ The British desired what could be called “passive sea control.” In times of peace this meant controlling (or at least showing a presence) in disparate waters against encroachments from numerous potential threats. In times of war

¹³ Maurer and Bell, *The London Conference of 1930*.

¹⁴ HR 11526, passed February 28, 1928 at the urging of President Coolidge provided for the construction of 15 cruisers.

¹⁵ Since the vessels would conceivably be operating far from any docking facility, it was thought imperative to have vessels that could withstand a great deal of damage in battle so that a damaged ship would not equal a lost ship.

¹⁶ Goldman, *Sunken Treaties*, 96.

this meant protecting distant merchant fleets from commerce raiders while simultaneously raiding the enemy's commerce and disrupting their lines of communication. Both circumstances called for a large and nimble fleet. The United States, on the other hand, planned almost exclusively for war with a single prospective enemy: Japan. As such, American strategy could be more properly labeled as "active sea control"; when war came, the USN simply needed fleet superiority at the point of contact.¹⁷ This disparity in doctrine fuelled the main controversy that would bedevil Anglo-American relations at the 1930 conference and in the years ahead.

Negotiations were often heated, and many of the same barbs present at the Geneva Conference came out again. At length, however, a settlement was reached by way of the "yardstick" formula. This formula aimed to compensate the British in additional total cruiser tonnage while allowing the US preponderance in the "heavy cruiser" category that they favored. The British were to have a fleet totalling 339,000 tons with 15 heavy cruisers while the Americans were to have 323,500 tons with 18 heavy cruisers.¹⁸ At the urging of the American delegation, and against the desires of the Admiralty, the battleship holiday was extended to the end of 1936.¹⁹ The main trouble at the London Conference involved the Japanese delegation, which pressed for a higher ratio for auxiliary vessels than they had been given for battleships. In 1930, Japan held a substantially larger cruiser fleet than the United States a result of the aggressive construction of the former and the languid building programs of the latter. While the

¹⁷ This was at least true under the earlier versions of War Plan Orange, in which the US fleet would seek out a "decisive battle" with the IJN. This plan changed in the 1930s, and fleet doctrine changed accordingly.

¹⁸ Maurer and Bell, *The London Conference of 1930*.

¹⁹ Maurer and Bell, *The London Conference of 1930*. The British capital fleet was, on average, the oldest of the naval powers.

Japanese delegation was conciliated by the higher 10:7 ratio in light cruisers and destroyers, as well as parity in submarines, they were nonetheless outraged by the fact that they would have to slow their cruiser construction to allow the United States to build to their allotted superiority.²⁰

The intervening years before the next conference, scheduled for 1935, were marred by the Great Depression, imperial wars of expansion in Asia and Africa, and the rise of Nazi Germany. These factors compelled the British to alter their security estimations and return to their demand for 70 cruisers. The Japanese Government, meanwhile, facing domestic fury for conceding to the 1930 Treaty and in the middle of a violent expansion in mainland China, announced its intention to seek parity in all classes of warships with Britain and America. Faced with these two positions, American leaders threw their weight behind British proposals to block the Japanese from gaining parity. The Japanese withdrew from the conference when it became apparent that the Western powers would not concede parity on paper. The treaty ultimately produced at the 1935 Conference contained no quantitative provisions, focusing instead on limiting the size of individual units and requiring the signatories to notify each other of their annual building programs.²¹ Diplomatic efforts to bring in Japan, Germany, and Italy to the treaty after the fact failed soon after the treaty was signed, leading the signatories to abandon what remained of arms limitation and engage in what was to be a naval construction race.

This thesis will examine the final conference of the arms control era, the second London Naval Conference. A close study of the conference from an American

²⁰ Stephen E. Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor: The Failure of the Second London Conference and the Onset of World War II* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974) 2.

²¹ Italy also withdrew from the conference, leaving only the United States, Britain, and France as signatories.

perspective must include several layers of analysis, including military policy, domestic politics, and international relations. Each of these fields has long and complex historiographies and internal debates. In the more specific case of the second London Naval Conference, these layers of analysis can be more particularly identified as US Navy policy, American isolationism in the interwar period, and the nature of the Anglo-American relationship in the 1930s. All of these issues intersect at the 1935 conference. The stated policy of the United States to maintain a fleet “second to none” places great weight upon the relationship of America with the strongest naval power in the system, the United Kingdom. Determining the existence and the degree of “isolationism” in the mid-1930s, meanwhile, is critical given the internationalist agenda of the conference.

The historiography of the United States Navy is a critical component to any study of the 1935 London Naval Conference. The conventional historiography of interwar American foreign policy intersects with the long-accepted interpretation of the interwar US Navy. Historians such as Robert O’Connell have argued that the US Navy remained rigidly hierarchical throughout the interwar period, and that this bred an institutional conservatism within the officer corps.²² O’Connell also argues that US naval officers were overly wedded to the doctrine of Alfred T. Mahan, author of the seminal work *The Influence of Sea Power Upon History*. In the book, Mahan advocates a single, decisive battleship engagement as the most efficacious path to victory. Once the enemy’s main fleet had been discovered and destroyed, the victorious navy would be free to blockade the enemy’s ports and achieve victory through economic strangulation.²³ This strategy held the battleship as the backbone of the fleet, and by corollary it placed high value on

²² Robert L. O’Connell, *Sacred Vessels: The Cult of the Battleship and the Rise of the U.S. Navy* (Boulder: Westview Press, Inc., 1991), 24.

²³ O’Connell, *Sacred vessels*, 66.

great size and large armaments upon such vessels. Mahan's theory of naval power gained worldwide recognition, but found a special place in the heart of President Theodore Roosevelt and his closest advisors. Because the Roosevelt administration was so instrumental in modernizing and expanding the American fleet (expending, on average, 17 percent of federal expenditures on the naval buildup),²⁴ O'Connell argues that the US Navy was unduly influenced by the Mahanian doctrine of a battleship-centric navy.²⁵ As a result, interwar US Naval policy, including its efforts at naval arms control, was misguided and aimed at solving the wrong problems.²⁶

O'Connell's central thesis—that US naval planners were beholden to the simplistic strategies of Mahan and the centrality of the battleship even after evolving technology and tactics had rendered them obsolete—is a thesis that was relatively common in the early historiography of the United States Navy.²⁷ The thesis is flawed and one-sided, and numerous histories in recent years have since offered a more rounded view of the US Navy. *War Plan Orange* by Edward S. Miller examines the United States Joint Army and Navy Board's plan to defeat Japan in the event of a Pacific War. While the plan originally relied on seeking a battleship-centric, "Mahanian" style decisive battle after a pell-mell transpacific dash, the plan evolved in the 1930s alongside political and technological developments. The "through ticket" approach was replaced by the so-called

²⁴ William M. McBride, *Technological Change and the United States Navy, 1865-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 34.

²⁵ O'Connell, *Sacred Vessels*, 225. O'Connell claims that throughout the interwar period, US Navy officers were hesitant to break Mahan's "commandments," and frequently mentions "the cult of Mahan."

²⁶ O'Connell, *Sacred Vessels*, 274. O'Connell believes that the lesson of the Washington Naval Conference is that "negotiated arms control was generally far more successful at limiting weapons that did not work or were unwanted for other reasons." Meanwhile, more deadly and effective technologies, such as submarines, went largely unregulated.

²⁷ See, for instance, Brayton Harris, *The Age of the Battleship, 1890-1922* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965) or Richard Hough, *Death of the Battleship: The Tragic Close of the Era of Sea Power* (Michigan: MacMillan Publishers, 1963).

“cautionary strategy,” which involved the slow advance of the US Navy across the Pacific using the Micronesian Atolls as a sort of “highway.” This strategy depended on novel tactics and technology, including aircraft carriers and joint army-navy beach landings.²⁸ The main arc of Miller’s argument is that while a conservative streak did run through the interwar navy, it was nonetheless highly adaptive to shifting political realities and to rapidly developing means of warfare. William McBride pursues a similar argument in his book *Technological Change and the United States Navy*. McBride allows the point that Mahan had tremendous influence over the United States Navy at the turn of the century, as evidenced by the “all big gun” admirals in the lead-up to World War One.²⁹ Yet McBride argues that such attitudes were prevalent in every navy across the globe following the “lesson” learned at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905.³⁰ Following the inconclusive results of World War One and the constraints of the Washington Treaty, US Navy planners became receptive to new technologies. While battleship-centric officers still constituted the bulk of the naval hierarchy, technological insurgents such as William Sims and Bradley Fiske touted alternative technologies and won the attention of the receptive General Board.³¹ New technologies such as aircraft carriers and submarines were developed as auxiliaries to the battleship paradigm, yet ambitious captains were able to prove their worth independently.³² The shift in historiographical consensus is seen

²⁸ Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Press Institute, 1991), 112-113. The United States Marine Corps was still tiny and untested at this time.

²⁹ McBride, *Technological Change*, 70-2.

³⁰ McBride, *Technological Change*, 70. The 1905 Japanese victory over the Russian Navy at Tsushima Bay was achieved in spite of significant Japanese inferiority in numbers, and was largely attributed to the superior speed and firepower of the Japanese battleships. This led to the “all big gun” design and the dreadnought race.

³¹ McBride, *Technological Change*, 135.

³² McBride, *Technological Change*, 154. For a more thorough examination of interwar naval testing, see Craig C. Felker. *Testing American Sea Power: U.S. Navy Strategic Exercises, 1923-1940* (College Station:

most recently in *Agents of Innovation* by John Kuehn. Here, Kuehn examines how the General Board of the United States Navy responded to political developments in the interwar period. While outraged at the political realm's sacrifice of naval bases in the western Pacific by signing the Washington Naval Treaty in 1922, the Navy General Board immediately began developing new technologies in order to compensate, such as the aircraft carrier and mobile dry docks.³³

The debate on the nature of the interwar United States Navy has shifted decidedly to the view that America's most prominent interwar military arm to be much more flexible and innovative than previously assumed. The consensus among naval historians as to the attitude of the USN towards arms control is not so settled. Philip T. Rosen argues that the Harding Administration saw the Washington Treaty largely as a means to cut costs, and after some skillful maneuvering by Secretary Hughes, "an isolationist people eagerly accepted the nine treaties produced by the conference."³⁴ The General Board "repeatedly warned against naval limitations, arguing that such a policy would prove dangerous to the United States." The Harding Administration ignored the Board's warnings, and the Navy was forced to "grudgingly" accept the limitations and work within them. For the remainder of the interwar period, the Navy's primary concern became the Republican administrations which occupied the White House in the 1920s and attempted to implement a policy of disarmament by example. According to Rosen, Hoover was particularly maligned by the USN for his attempts to "starve the Navy."³⁵

Texas A & M University Press, 2007). From 1923-1940, the US Navy held 23 major fleet exercises (2). After 1929, all such fleet exercises involved two opposing fleets both equipped with aircraft carriers (49).

³³ John T. Kuehn, *Agents of Innovation: The General Board and the Design of the Fleet that Defeated the Japanese Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), 102.

³⁴ Philip T. Rosen, "The Treaty Navy, 1919-1937," in *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978*, ed. Kenneth J. Hagan (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 222.

³⁵ Rosen, "Treaty Navy," 232.

Irritation at the constraints placed on the cruiser fleet at the 1930 London Conference persisted in the later interwar period, but the main battle consisted of winning the appropriations necessary to build the fleet that existed on paper.³⁶

George Baer's *One Hundred Years of Sea Power* argues that there was a lack of coordination between the State Department and the Navy at the Washington Conference, and that consequently the Navy felt that arms control had been unfairly imposed on them by civilians without the technical expertise to understand the ramifications.³⁷ Baer asserts that the Harding Administration was not interested in the cost of maintaining a first-class fleet, and therefore pushed the Navy's objections aside and negotiated parity with the United Kingdom to a level that would be acceptable from a budgetary sense.³⁸ After the system was established, Baer argues that the Navy simply saw arms limitation as a barrier to overcome and adapt to, while also petitioning for funds to at least build up to treaty limits.³⁹

John Kuehn tells a similar story. After their suggestions were swatted down at the Washington Conference, the Navy simply accepted the new reality of arms limitation and strove to design and maintain a fleet that would make best use of these limitations.⁴⁰ In a more recent work, Kuehn has written that the State Department saw the Washington Conference as a means to enhance the role of the United States in foreign affairs and negotiated its terms more or less separately from the advice of the General Board. However, after Secretary of State Hughes devised the agenda for arms control based on

³⁶ Rosen, "Treaty Navy," 231.

³⁷ George Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 94.

³⁸ Baer, *Sea Power*, 97.

³⁹ Baer, *Sea Power*, 140-44, 129.

⁴⁰ John T. Kuehn, *Agents of Innovation: The General Board and the Design of the Fleet that Defeated the Japanese Navy* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2008), xv.

the aim of enhancing America's international stature, it was left to the Board to actually implement the treaty's technical provisions.⁴¹ By the time of the 1930 London Conference, the issue of limitation had been rendered largely moot, as Congress had not allocated sufficient funds to even build up to the Washington limits.⁴² According to Kuehn, the Washington system was devised by the civilian government and then laid at the feet of the uniformed officers to implement.

Raymond G. O'Connor's *Perilous Equilibrium* is an account of the 1930 London Naval Conference, the relatively successful midpoint to the treaty system. O'Connor provides a fairly conventional analysis of the conference, which attempted to regulate auxiliary vessels under the Washington ratio that had originally applied only to capital ships. O'Connor identifies three principal actors on the American side: the Hoover administration (notably President Hoover and Secretary of State Henry Stimson), the General Board of the US Navy, and the American delegation at the conference. O'Connor emphasizes the rigidity and marginalization of the General Board, whose countless recommendations were continually ignored and with whom Hoover met only once.⁴³ The General Board insisted on equality with the United Kingdom despite British protestations for greater security needs, since America needed a world-class navy in an uncertain world. O'Connor writes that the "negative attitude displayed by the Navy Department must have annoyed and disturbed the President and his Secretary of State... the unwillingness of professionals to provide constructive criticism threw the problem back into the hands of the civilians."⁴⁴ The civilian side was more concerned with

⁴¹ Maurer and Bell, *The London Conference of 1930*.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium*, 44.

⁴⁴ O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium*, 34.

absolute naval reductions than theoretical ratios, which led to the American delegation arguing entirely separate points to the much more technically oriented British delegation.

While this is an account of the first rather than the second London Naval Conference, O'Connor underscores several recurrent themes in interwar naval historiography. First and foremost is the depiction of a confused American approach to the conferences, a confusion that O'Connor attributes to "the difficulty between the military and civil branches of the government [which] stemmed from the lack of a satisfactory working arrangement between the two."⁴⁵ The other notable theme is the perceived rigidity and conservatism of the Navy General Board and of naval line officers in general. However, O'Connor does not spare the State Department either, arguing that its entire theory of arms control was flawed from its inception.

...successful diplomacy is diplomacy backed by force. Lacking the means of fulfillment, commitments are robbed of both spirit and substance. Hughes very properly subordinated military to political considerations, but politically he apparently was more concerned with reaching an understanding that would give the illusion, if not the reality, of a world in harmony. Unwilling or unable to resist the clamor for economy and peace through the reduction or elimination of the weapons of war, the Secretary of State sacrificed America's freedom of action, lessened her influence in world affairs, and weakened her ability to promote the national interest. It was a precarious position for a nation that had renounced the principle of collective security.⁴⁶

The Second London Naval Conference, the final arms control conference of the interwar period, receives by a wide margin the least attention in the historiography. Even in general histories of naval arms control, the conference received little serious coverage. Emily Goldman's *Sunken Treaties* mentions it only in passing. Christopher Hall dedicates

⁴⁵ O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium*, 125.

⁴⁶ O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium*, 9.

a chapter to the conference in *Britain, America, and Arms Control*, but talks mostly about the circumstances leading up to the negotiations rather than identifying any real worth in the negotiations themselves. Histories of the United States Navy, such as Geroge Baer's *One Hundred Years of Sea power* or William McBride's *Technological Change in the United States Navy* either fail to mention the conference at all or else use it as a convenient endpoint in the Washington System.

Stephen E. Pelz's *The Race to Pearl Harbor* is the only attempt at a full-length account of the conference. Approximately the first third of Pelz's book is dedicated to the military-political situation in Japan that preceded their decision to abrogate the treaty and to the United States Navy's (usually accurate) estimation of Japanese naval plans in the event of war.⁴⁷ The latter two thirds of the narrative shifts in a decidedly civilian direction, though Pelz includes the actions, perspectives, and advice of the USN. Like O'Connor, Pelz determines that there was a considerable disconnect between the naval leaders and the real policymakers, a disconnect recorded in one admiral's complaint that it was "becoming the fashion to belittle technical advice, meaning the advice of naval officers, concerning naval matters."⁴⁸ Chief of Naval Operations William Standley, the linchpin between the civilian and uniformed divisions of the Navy Department, is given particular attention in the narrative. Standley was included in most of Roosevelt's meetings on the London Conference. Standley urged the President to more clearly define America's interests in the Far East and to draw definite parameters for when military

⁴⁷ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 34-39. Essentially, the Japanese plan was to harass and attrite the US Navy on its transpacific journey with submarines and aircraft, and then seek a decisive battleship engagement on terms of relative equality, relying on the superior range of their guns.

⁴⁸ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 87, remark of Admiral Frank H. Schofield to Chief of Naval Operations William H. Standley. Schofield went on to remark that "As a matter of fact, they [naval officers] are the only ones competent to judge the naval aspects of naval proposals... It is we who have to stay on the job throughout the years of our life and who have to combat the ill effects of diplomatic decisions taken years before, contrary to that advice."

intervention ought to be used. Standley recommended that the Roosevelt administration should either commit concrete naval forces to the defense of its Far Eastern interests or else withdraw altogether before they were challenged.⁴⁹ Pelz also pays considerable attention to Anglo-American interactions in the prelude to the conference, generally depicting the uniformed men of both nations as mutually hostile while the diplomats were stubborn but collegial.⁵⁰ Yet there were limits to Anglo-American cooperation in the lead up to the conference, and fundamental problems with their perception of Japan. In the final analysis, Pelz believes that “the naval system... collapsed, not because it threatened or discriminated against Japan, but because it assumed that Japan was a satisfied power.”⁵¹

Pelz’s narrative is effective but not definitive. His main objective is to explain why the conference failed, with much of his focus dedicated to the political developments in Japan that led to its demand for parity. He succumbs to a similar preconceived notion that most historians subscribe to when discussing the conference—due to Japanese

⁴⁹ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 127, in a meeting on September 26, 1934, Standley said to Roosevelt, “If we desire to give adequate support to the policies which we have been following in the past, such as the Open Door, the 9-Power Treaty, the Kellogg Pact, et cetera, then we must possess adequate naval force.”

⁵⁰ American professional naval officers generally believed that Great Britain had outmaneuvered America at both Washington 1921-22 and at London in 1930, while British navalists such as Winston Churchill believed that the Treaty system rendered Britain “an inferior sea power” given the Empire’s disparate security needs (Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 2). British and American diplomats were much more agreeable at the 1935 conference, as both were eager for a renewal of the Treaty system: Britain to avoid an expensive naval race it could ill afford, and America due to domestic political constraints (Pelz, 125).

⁵¹ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 227. Pelz also blames the inconsistent naval building programs of the British and the Americans for ultimately pushing the paranoid Japanese over the brink in December 1941. “Distracted by troubles in Europe, by domestic economic distress, and by extreme political partisanship, the Americans and the British refrained from entering into the naval competition until very late in the day. But by 1941, the sudden and massive entry into the naval race by the United States [in 1937 and 1940 with the various Vinson Plans] cast a steadily lengthening shadow over Japan’s building programs. Faced with both the frustration of their plans for expansion and a counterbalance to the fleet for which they had made great economic sacrifices, the leaders of Japan’s navy decided to seek battle while they were still fairly confident of victory. In December 1941, naval technology, which had been controlled until 1936 by the Washington and London naval treaties, finally seized the wheel and sailed for war.” (Pelz, 228). In other words, if America had followed its naval professionals’ advice and built to treaty limits throughout the interwar period rather than going all in all at once, then Japan might have been more effectively deterred.

demands and Western unwillingness to accede to them, the conference was doomed from the start and was therefore not particularly important. Rather, it simply fits into Pelz's narrative as a precursor to "the race to Pearl Harbor."

The historiography of America's interwar foreign policy is the second lens through which the 1935 naval conference must be examined. The historiography is dominated by the isolationist interpretation. Isolationism refers to the policy of cutting off the nation from involvement in foreign affairs and exerting nearly all national energy, resources, and attention inward. Isolationism is often most intense in the arena of security agreements, as its adherents seek to avoid alliances and undertake a unilateral defense policy. However, isolationism is a blanket doctrine which eschews trade, treaties, involvement in transnational institutions—essentially any form of international engagement.

Numerous factors have led a series of historians to label the United States isolationist in the interwar period. The narrative typically begins with the American rejection of the Treaty of Versailles leading to its abstention from the League of Nations. The impression is strengthened by various other political developments which seemed to place America outside of the postwar international order, including the refusal to participate in the World Court, the implementation of the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s, and the continuous rejection of any collective security agreement. In economic policy, too, the United States has been accused of pursuing an isolationist agenda. A protectionist impulse had been relatively strong within the Republic since its founding, based on the theory that it would help nurture a robust domestic manufacturing sector. These impulses were intensified in the interwar period with the introduction of the Smoot-Hawley Act,

which raised tariffs on a full spectrum of imported goods to staggering levels. Even before the enactment of Smoot-Hawley, the US economy remained a relatively closed-circuit affair—foreign trade accounted for less than 3 percent of the nation’s assets throughout the 1920s.⁵² Given these factors, it is easy to see how the dominance of the isolationist paradigm in American interwar historiography took hold.

The historiography of interwar American foreign policy begins in the 1950s and 1960s with historians who employed traditional methodologies, strongly emphasizing high-level diplomatic exchanges between prominent statesmen. This methodology necessarily places great weight on the actions and personalities of a relatively small group of policymakers. William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason in *The Challenge to Isolation* believe that President Roosevelt was an inherently internationalist leader who was forced to preside over isolationist policies due to the pressures of the Depression.⁵³ The authors identify President Roosevelt’s 1937 Quarantine Speech, in which he denounced aggressor nations and vaguely recommended that “moral” nations “quarantine” such aggressors, as the breaking point from his isolationist first term.⁵⁴ Using a similar politico-diplomatic methodology, Selig Adler’s classic *American Foreign Policy Between the Wars* characterizes the three interwar Republican Presidents as narrow-minded nationalists, whose sole preoccupation was business rather than

⁵² William E. Leuchtenburg, *The Perils of Prosperity, 1914-1932*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 107.

⁵³ William L. Langer and S. Everett Gleason, *The Challenge to Isolation, 1937-1940* (New York: Harper and Row, 1952), 2. “In the early years of his administration he was so engrossed with the problems of the New Deal that he had relatively little time for international issues. But by the year 1937 that was no longer the case. The New Deal had been fairly launched and, as the situation in the Far East and in Europe became dangerously acute, Mr. Roosevelt concentrated his attention more and more on external problems.”

⁵⁴ Langer and Gleason, *Isolation*, 18.

international engagement.⁵⁵ The Wall Street collapse of 1929 and the hard years that followed only served to heighten American indifference to global events, and aggravated a general unwillingness to fund an activist foreign policy.⁵⁶ Adler sees Roosevelt as more internationally minded than his Republican predecessors, especially in the realm of naval rearmament in the late 1930s,⁵⁷ but overall Roosevelt had “tenuous control of foreign policy, and as late as 1938, of the hardrock strength of isolationist sentiment in America.”⁵⁸ Early traditional accounts such as these established the orthodox interpretation of American interwar foreign policy, depicting the United States as dangerously isolationist until late in the 1930s. Indeed, the watershed date of 1937 is still used by many historians today. These accounts, if they deal with the Naval Limitation Treaties at all, tend to dismiss them as being agreeable to isolationism and therefore not legitimate international activism.

The historiography of the Roosevelt administration tends to emphasize a continued isolationist American foreign policy in spite of that President’s more internationalist leanings. Robert Dallek, perhaps Roosevelt’s most celebrated academic biographer, believes that Roosevelt was, at heart, an internationalist whose inclinations were curbed by the exigencies of the Depression and the constraints of domestic politics. As Dallek writes, Roosevelt championed the League of Nations for Woodrow Wilson,

⁵⁵ Selig Adler, *The Uncertain Giant, 1921-1941: American Foreign Policy Between the Wars* (New York: Collier MacMillan Ltd, 1966), 80-1. Adler also called Secretary of State Charles Evan Hughes, the principle American proponent for the Washington Naval Treaty, a “modified isolationist.”

⁵⁶ Adler, *Uncertain Giant*, 160. Adler sees the neutrality legislation of the mid-thirties to be the nadir of American isolationism. As he puts it, “Six years of sharp depression and successive aggression had intensified introversive thinking,” leading to “the supreme triumph of the isolationist concept—the inflexible neutrality legislation.”

⁵⁷ Adler, *Uncertain Giant*, 203.

⁵⁸ Adler, *Uncertain Giant*, 201.

and tried to revive enthusiasm for the League as James M. Cox's running mate in 1920.⁵⁹ It was only when he was running for President twelve years later that Roosevelt dismissed the League as "a mere meeting place for the political discussion of strictly European affairs," for which reason he "[did] not support American participation."⁶⁰ Dallek also asserts that Roosevelt stacked the State Department with "nationalists," a move which "indicated that Roosevelt intended to deal with domestic problems first."⁶¹ It was only after the failure of the Second London Naval Conference, and the attendant strengthening of Anglo-American relations, that Roosevelt's internationalist leanings were given expression in meaningful policy outputs.⁶²

Irwin Gellman's *Good Neighbor Diplomacy* also argues that Roosevelt was an internationalist at heart but that this impulse was muted in the 1930s to conserve political capital for his domestic agenda. Gellman believes that Roosevelt's early focus on Latin American relations is proof of his internationalist inclinations. Roosevelt, however, justified the activist nature of the Good Neighbor policy to an isolationist public along the lines of hemispheric solidarity and the established precedent of the Monroe Doctrine.⁶³ After getting his feet wet in international relations, Roosevelt's eye moved beyond the near abroad as international crises mounted rapidly after 1937.⁶⁴ His first administration, Gellman has generally concluded, was overwhelmed by the domestic agenda and the

⁵⁹ Robert Dallek, *Franklin D Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy 1932-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), 12.

⁶⁰ Dallek, *Roosevelt*, 19.

⁶¹ Dallek, *Roosevelt*, 34.

⁶² Dallek, *Roosevelt*, in particular, Dallek notes a considerable expansion of the US Navy and air force budgets in spring 1938 (172) and the Roosevelt administration's attempts to modify the neutrality legislation throughout 1939 (187-89).

⁶³ Irwin Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy: United States Policies in Latin America, 1933-1945* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 95-96.

⁶⁴ Gellman, *Good Neighbor Diplomacy*, 113.

foreign policy initiative was highly constrained and conducted in a manner that was conducive to nationalist agenda.

Dealing more specifically with America's foreign policy in the Pacific is Dorothy Borg's *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis*. Borg asserts that despite high-flying rhetoric and fantastical portraits of its potential, the United States was never particularly devoted to China or even its own Pacific territories in the interwar period. Indeed, the only American faction that truly cared about them was the navy, for purely strategic reasons.⁶⁵ Borg believes that Roosevelt's only foreign policy objective in his first term "was not to champion China but rather to prevent the threat of war between the United States and Japan from increasing."⁶⁶ Even after 1937, when Japan had abrogated the Washington Treaty and began a naval arms race, Borg asserts that Roosevelt "indicated that he neither wanted to go to war with Japan nor to adopt measures that ran risk of precipitating a war... [he] probably never departed far from this position."⁶⁷ According to Borg, then, the Roosevelt administration was interested in the international system only inasmuch as to keep the immediate peace, and therefore showed "a marked desire to avoid any active involvements in the Far East."⁶⁸

The theme of reckless American isolationism is repeated in countless narratives of the interwar period. William E. Leuchtenburg's work on the 1920s, *The Perils of Prosperity*, tells the story of three Republican administrations that were myopically obsessed with slashing spending and promoting business whilst ignoring the unsteady

⁶⁵ Dorothy Borg, *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933-1938* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1964), 118. The USN was intent on holding strategic territories like the Philippines and Guam for conducting operations in the Far East, especially against Japan.

⁶⁶ Borg, *Far Eastern Crisis*, v.

⁶⁷ Borg, *Far Eastern Crisis*, 542. Here Borg refers to the Roosevelt administration's mild reaction to the Japanese sinking of the USS *Panay* in China on December 12, 1937.

⁶⁸ Borg, *Far Eastern Crisis*, 99.

global scene. Leuchtenburg writes scathingly of Wilson's successor, Warren G. Harding, calling him a "third-rate President" and recounting humiliating tales of his ignorance of both domestic and international affairs.⁶⁹ Leuchtenburg sees the landslide election in 1920 of such an unimpressive and provincial specimen as a clear repudiation of Wilson's foray into internationalism.⁷⁰ A fundamental problem that Leuchtenburg identifies among American policymakers was that "peace was seen as merely the avoidance of war rather than the continuous process of political accommodation."⁷¹ It was this widely shared belief that led America to not only reject the League, but also to throw up imposing tariffs, cease interventions into Latin America almost entirely by the end of the decade, and lag far behind its competitors in naval building.⁷² Leuchtenburg argues that the United States bought trouble for itself at the Washington Naval Conference, because "by committing itself to the cause of Chinese independence and to maintaining Pacific possessions it was unwilling to defend, it stood in the way of Japanese ambitions without developing a power base that Japan would be compelled to respect."⁷³ The terms of the Washington Treaty prohibited America from developing fortified bases west of Hawaii, which, according to Leuchtenburg, "turned the western Pacific into a Japanese Lake."⁷⁴

In recent years, however, some historians have questioned the isolationist paradigm. Paul Johnson in "The Myth of American Isolationism" has argued that the United States has been very active on the international scene since its founding, despite

⁶⁹ Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 89-90. When asked of developments in the League of Nations by a Washington journalist, Harding admitted, "I don't know anything about this European stuff." When discussing a tax problem with his speech writer, Harding lamented, "I listen to one side and they seem right, and then—God!—I talk to the other side and they seem just as right." Eventually, Harding came to the gloomy conclusion that, "I knew this job would be too much for me."

⁷⁰ Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 88.

⁷¹ Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 66.

⁷² Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 107.

⁷³ Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 116.

⁷⁴ Leuchtenburg, *Perils of Prosperity*, 116.

its relative geographical isolation and the security that this entails. Indeed, “given the sheer size of the Atlantic, with its temptation to hermitry,” the central role of the United States in world affairs is nothing short of remarkable.⁷⁵ Johnson argues that the United States public and even its Congress was not as opposed to participation in the League of Nations as history generally remembers. The Republican opposition to Wilson’s Fourteen Points, led by Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, was not uniformly isolationist and Lodge and his allies may even have harbored internationalist sentiments. The failure to bring the US into the League fold was due to the inflexibility and poor politics of Wilson rather than any sort of overwhelming postwar isolationist impulse. Johnson stops short of questioning the whole premise of American isolationism in the interwar period, however, claiming that “It can be argued, with more justice, that America was isolationist in the 1930s,” as a result of rising fears of war and the domestic pressures of the Great Depression.⁷⁶ The weight of isolationist historiography is evidently hard to buck, even in treatises intended to question its validity.

A fuller and more specific attempt to reinterpret American interwar foreign policy is offered by Bear F. Braumoeller in his identically titled “The Myth of American Isolationism.” Braumoeller believes that the label “isolationism” is overblown and inaccurate. He asserts that many states throughout history have swung from periods of intense international activity to periods of relative reclusion, though elements of both inclinations are present during either period. He points out that in the decades preceding the 20th century Great Britain was said to be pursuing “splendid isolation,” but that this

⁷⁵ Paul Johnson, “The Myth of American Isolationism,” in *Foreign Affairs* 74.3 (1995), 160.

⁷⁶ Johnson, “Myth,” 162-3.

was a relative term rather than an absolute one.⁷⁷ Braumoeller claims that the same holds true for the US in the interwar period. While policymakers shied away from America's early 20th century flirtation with empire under leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and from Wilson's post-World War internationalist vision, they were nonetheless actively engaged in many arenas around the globe. Policymakers simply found that they could "rely on banks rather than tanks" to settle international quarrels due to America's newfound influence as the world's biggest creditor, and that it could thereby protect its interests without repeating its involvement in a European conflict.⁷⁸ Braumoeller also tackles the supposed isolationism in the 1930s, arguing that the Neutrality Acts were the result of complicated politics rather than straightforward isolationism and that America's lack of reaction to Nazi Germany's rearmament was based on the remoteness of the threat rather than general indifference.⁷⁹

Braumoeller makes a compelling case, but his account, like Johnson's, is generally limited to the domestic politics behind America's foreign policy apparatus rather than focusing on the nature of the international interaction itself. These revisionist authors also neglect what may be the greatest challenge to the isolationist model: America's pivotal involvement in interwar naval arms control.⁸⁰ Given the unsettled nature of the historiography of the United States' foreign policy in this period, an examination of America's role in naval arms control could shed some light on this ongoing debate.

⁷⁷ Bear F. Braumoeller, "The Myth of American Isolationism," *Foreign Policy Analysis* 6 (2010), 353. While Britain remained largely aloof of European affairs in the late 19th century, it was active in furthering its imperial agenda in Asia and Africa.

⁷⁸ Braumoeller, "Myth," 350.

⁷⁹ Braumoeller, "Myth," 359-61.

⁸⁰ Johnson neglects the topic almost entirely. Braumoeller does address the Washington Naval Conference (1921-1922) quite thoroughly, but neglects the later conferences and dismisses the 1935 conference in a sentence. (Pg. 359).

The final crucial level of analysis which must be understood is the nature of the relationship between the United States and Great Britain in the interwar period. There is a relatively wide body of historiography dedicated to the interwar Anglo-American relationship, and the consensus is generally that it was cool, occasionally hostile, and very inconsistent. David Reynolds in his classic work *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance* asserts that “the U.S.A. was deeply isolationist and preoccupied with its grave Depression” in the 1930s, and that the domestic pressure to relieve the economic suffering consumed almost all of the Roosevelt administration’s first two terms.⁸¹ Reynolds believes that the administration’s hands-off approach to foreign affairs allowed a generally isolationist Congress to author a series of crippling Neutrality laws throughout the 1930s, which in turn were a response to Britain’s inability to pay back its war debt along rigid American terms. These isolationist policies had the effect of alienating America’s most important strategic ally. Reynolds asserts that the “unimportance of foreign affairs, the strength of the isolationist sentiment, the fragmented nature of Congress and bureaucracy, and the personality of F.D.R. himself” led to often confused and irrational policy outputs in the 1930s.⁸² For Reynolds, it was not until 1939 that the Anglo-American relationship was finally able to overcome deep-

⁸¹ David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance 1937-41* (London: Europa Publications Ltd., 1981), 8.

⁸² Reynolds, *Alliance*, 27. Reynolds believes that the aforementioned characteristics means that “American diplomacy in the 1930s approximates more to what political scientists call the ‘bureaucratic politics’ model of foreign policy-making than to that of the ‘unitary agent.’ According to the latter model a government’s foreign policy can be understood on the analogy of an individual’s purposive action—a deliberate choice of what seems to be the best means to reach a defined goal, after discussion of all the various alternatives. Clearly this was not true of Washington in the 1930s.”

seated differences in security conceptions and begin its evolution towards a formal alliance.⁸³

B. J. C. McKercher also believes that the relationship had strict limitations in this period. He argues that American power between the wars remained potential rather than real, as policymakers lacked the will or desire to translate the nation's tremendous economic power into the power of international relations.⁸⁴ By declining its moment to become the preeminent power, the United States ceded the responsibility of maintaining global security to the British—yet the Americans became irritated when the British asserted their prerogative in the realm of global security.⁸⁵ The British, meanwhile, were beset by security problems across their empire throughout the 1930s which limited the scope of their cooperation with the Americans on issues where their strategies were irreconcilable.⁸⁶ British policymakers would have liked American participation in the maintenance of European security but they did little to court it.⁸⁷ McKercher believes that it was only after Britain's policy of appeasement had clearly failed in 1939 that the relationship finally moved forward in a meaningful way.⁸⁸

⁸³ Reynolds, *Alliance*. Reynolds believes that continuous failure of the Roosevelt administration to craft a policy of meaningful assistance—for instance, its non-reaction to the “Panay Incident” (31) or the administration's failure to revise Neutrality in 1939 (56)—indicates the continued dominance of isolationism right up until the declaration of war in September 1939.

⁸⁴ B. J. C. McKercher, “‘Our Most Dangerous Enemy’: Great Britain Pre-Eminent in the 1930s,” *The International History Review* 13.4 (1991), 757.

⁸⁵ McKercher, “Great Britain Pre-Eminent,” 764-5.

⁸⁶ McKercher, “Great Britain Pre-Eminent,” 774. The disparity in strategic conceptions was especially apparent in the two nations' naval policies: “Britain had an absolute need for a minimum number of warships and other arms, while the Americans, with no commitments of any sort beyond the necessity to protect their routes to overseas markets and their imperial holdings in the western hemisphere and the western Pacific, had a relative need: they could accept significant reductions as long as other powers did the same. Hence the US emphasis on cutting arms spending to effect reductions; such reductions would enhance their security.”

⁸⁷ McKercher, “Great Britain Pre-Eminent,” 764.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

Donald Cameron Watt explored this relationship extensively in *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place, 1900-1975*. His chapters on the interwar period assert that the relationship was frequently rocky and at times outright hostile. Watt writes that "from 1920 onwards" British policymakers increasingly came to believe that "the United States was in reality hostile, inimical, and above all 'foreign,'" and that "the new generations of America were 'growing apart' from Britain."⁸⁹ Of America, Watt writes that "Congress was congenitally responsive to the Anglophobes, as was the US press"⁹⁰ and that the State Department was often too quick to exert pressure on British dominions to force them to toe the American line.⁹¹ The virtual paralysis of President Wilson's final lame duck year and the languid Republican administrations that followed had the effect of "accentuating the ever-present fissiparous forces in American foreign-policy making. Each department of the US government, State, War, Commerce, and Treasury, developed its own foreign policies; so did the oil lobby, the New York banking confraternity, and American exporters abroad."⁹² Watt writes extensively on the factional nature of American government, with "economic expansionists" controlling in the State Department, isolationists in the Treasury Department, and "strategic nationalists ensconced in the General Board of the US Navy."⁹³ These stark divisions within the US government, which persisted and even worsened under the highly personalized rule of Franklin Roosevelt, fractured Anglo-American relations and frequently led to erratic foreign policy outputs. As a result, Watt writes, Britain never fully trusted the United

⁸⁹ Donald Cameron Watt, *Succeeding John Bull: America in Britain's Place 1900-1975* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 50.

⁹⁰ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 55.

⁹¹ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 43. This refers to Watt's judgment of "[Secretary of State] Hughes's too efficient use of Canadian influence at the Dominions Conference in June 1921, to thwart British plans to renew the Anglo-Japanese alliance."

⁹² Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 40.

⁹³ Watt, *Succeeding John Bull*, 53.

States, while America never truly developed a unified policy regarding its relationship with Britain before World War Two.

As regards the navy specifically, there is a strong impression in the literature that the interwar USN, and in particular the General Board, was highly antagonistic towards arms limitation and towards the British who they believe foisted disadvantageous terms upon an unsuspecting State Department. Philip T. Rosen suggests that while planners had mostly dismissed the possibility of an Anglo-American war by the 1930s, the top brass of the Navy remained Anglophobic and averse to cooperation.⁹⁴ As previously mentioned, both O'Connor and Pelz noted a high degree of Anglophobia and rigidity among the uniformed men of the US Navy. George Baer's narrative in *One Hundred Years of Sea Power* paints a generally favorable view of the interwar USN as an innovative and resourceful institution. Nonetheless, he describes the USN as Anglophobic and typically hostile towards naval arms control.⁹⁵ The theme of bitterness within the USN at being relegated to a perceived "second place" by the Washington Treaties is a prevalent theme in the literature.⁹⁶

The historical consensus on the interwar Anglo-American relationship was that it was distant, cool, and lacked the sort of cooperation that would be expected between two liberal democracies in an increasingly illiberal world. The date at which the relationship began its evolution towards the wartime "Special Relationship" ranges from 1937 to 1941. The tightening of the Anglo-American relationship at the Second London Naval Conference is badly neglected in the historiography. Increasing concerns of Japanese

⁹⁴ Rosen, "Treaty Navy," 229-30.

⁹⁵ Baer, *Sea Power*, 111.

⁹⁶ Michael Simpson, ed., *Anglo-American Naval Relations, 1919-1939 (Navy Records Society Publications, vol. 156)* (London: Ashgate Publishing, 2010), 166.

militarism in the Pacific and evolving American naval strategy led policymakers to re-evaluate their relationship with Britain over the course of the conference and its surrounding negotiations. This thesis will establish that the beginnings of the Anglo-American alliance can be traced back further than the oft-cited watershed date of 1937.

The second London Naval Conference offers a compelling opportunity to examine these various historiographical debates in an all-too-often overlooked context. In particular, this thesis will aim to fuel the recent trend in bucking the isolationist interpretation of America in the interwar period by examining the role and intended purpose of the United States Navy. Revisionist works by Johnson and Braumoeller focus mainly on re-evaluating the failure of the United States to adhere to various international institutions, blaming it on the complexity of domestic politics rather than intrinsic isolationism. While this is a welcome development, isolationism also must be questioned along the lines of military policy as well. History has generally remembered interwar America as pacifist to the point of complacency, but an examination of the 1935 conference will show that US policymakers took active steps to resuscitate the Washington System, reinforce the failing liberal international order, and enhance the security of their homeland and their overseas interests.

America's place within the arms control framework in the Washington System's twilight years will also be examined. There exists a general historiographical consensus that the Washington Treaty was beneficial to the United States in that it cheaply bought the nation security in its own waters, parity with the greatest naval power in the system, and neutralization of its presumed competitor, Japan. A Navy equal to the world's largest granted the United States both hemispheric security and the prestige that comes with

“Great Power” status. A similar consensus also exists that while arms limitation may have been conducive to American foreign policy, the armed services chafed under its limits and resented the quelling of America’s potential for outright dominance.

This consensus is not so clear for the latter days of naval arms control. In the historiography, the central antagonist to the United States Navy in the 1930s was no longer arms limitation but rather deprivation at the hands of its own government. Further, while American goals may have been achieved at the Washington Conference, the motivations and aims of US policymakers at the final arms control conference have not been sufficiently explored. This thesis will argue that evolving American naval strategies transformed the USN into an unlikely supporter of arms control in the mid-1930s, at times to a greater degree than its counterparts in the State Department. Nonetheless, this thesis will also argue that, contrary to the beliefs of historians like O’Connor and Pelz, the Navy and the State Department worked relatively closely and usually harmoniously. American diplomats eventually saw the conference as an opportunity to establish closer linkages with the Western naval powers, in particular the United Kingdom, in order to cultivate a more favorable strategic environment in the Pacific. The civilian and military branches of the US government aligned on this issue to a greater degree than the historiography allows.

The American approach to the 1935 Naval Conference simply does not fit with the traditional interpretation of isolationism in the interwar period. The close degree of cooperation with the British throughout the negotiations, the determination to preserve naval arms control, and a broad strategic vision for American security all cast doubt on the narrow label of isolationism. America’s commitment to arms control transcended

multiple presidential administrations and a new generation of naval leaders. Its commitment proved durable even as its greatest competitor rattled its sword across the Pacific. This thesis will shed new light on the relationship between the interwar foreign policy of the United States, evolving concepts of naval strategy and security, and the Anglo-American relationship.

CHAPTER 2: AN UNCERTAIN BEGINNING

In the years following the 1930 London Naval Conference, American attitudes towards arms control began to change along with the times. The two agencies typically responsible for negotiating and implementing the arms control treaties, the State Department and the Navy Department, both underwent internal changes in years between the two London Conferences. The United States Naval establishment, which had been generally hostile towards arms control throughout the 1920s and into the 1930 conference, began to change its tune. The outrage evoked by the cancellation of Wilson's building programs had largely faded. Its reference was still enough to evoke bitterness at America's lost moment among senior USN officers, but by the early years of the 1930s the quest for dominance had been replaced decidedly by a struggle to tread water. The conference in London was held before the true extent of the 1929 recession became known. As America entered the worst years of the Great Depression, the Navy became just one of many government departments turned into beggars for dwindling federal dollars. Given the persistently hostile nature of the interwar Republican administrations towards increasing military expenditures, and of the Hoover administration in particular, exceeding the Washington tonnage caps was no longer on the USN's agenda in the early 1930s. Simply building up to them would prove challenge enough. In this sense, maintaining the ratios became a desirable goal for the USN as it provided an opportunity to limit the naval construction of nations more eager to provide large military outlays.

The USN also experienced a change in attitude among its senior-most brass. In September 1930 William V. Pratt became the Chief of Naval Operations, the highest

uniformed position within the USN. Pratt was an outspoken supporter of the Washington Treaty since the early 1920s and had assumed the role of chief technical advisor to the American delegation at the London Conference in which capacity he helped to smooth out cruiser differences with the British.⁹⁷ Pratt had taken a great deal of heat from the General Board of the US Navy and from many naval line officers. The Board and many others within the Navy Department had publicly criticized the treaty for serving Britain's interests better than America's and they pointed the finger squarely at Pratt for the failure.⁹⁸ Admiral Charles F. Hughes, Pratt's predecessor as CNO, refused to shake Pratt's hand at the change of command ceremony.⁹⁹ Hostility to naval arms limitation was certainly still strong up until the 1930 conference.

Yet Pratt's assumption of the Navy's highest uniformed office coincided with the Navy's bleakest years since before World War One. Although he was pro-treaty, he was also a persistent voice for more funds for the Navy. As CNO, he became instrumental in steering United States Naval policy towards the construction and maintenance of a full treaty Navy in all categories. As Robert O'Connor has written, the London Treaty at least gave the Navy a goal to build towards as opposed to an open-ended competition with Britain and Japan.¹⁰⁰ Preserving the quantitative limitations on naval tonnage would buy the USN the time it needed to achieve full treaty strength deemed requisite for baseline national security. Given the expected budgetary drought occasioned by the Depression, the USN was clearly in need of time when it came to naval construction. Pratt's pro-treaty influence, which was extended during his next two successors' reigns, combined

⁹⁷ Maurer and Bell, *The London Conference of 1930*.

⁹⁸ John T. Kuehn, "The U.S. Navy General Board and Naval Arms Limitation: 1922-1937," *The Journal of Military History* 74.4 (2010): 1154.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium*, 127.

with the belt-tightening years of the Great Depression transformed the USN's attitude towards arms control from general hostility to reluctant support.

The State Department, on the other hand, had been the great champion of naval arms control since its inception. Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes had played a pivotal role in establishing the Washington System in 1922, and since that date the State Department had touted the treaty as America's greatest contribution to world peace. At the 1930 London Conference, Secretary of State Henry Stimson carried this torch as a delegate and worked hard to reach a compromise with the British on their naval differences. Stimson was appalled by the break in Anglo-American relations occasioned by the disastrous Geneva Conference, and fought to get the USN in line with the concessions necessary to solve the cruiser issue.¹⁰¹ He was no friend to a large Navy, believing it to be a political liability in both domestic and international terms.¹⁰² Stimson believed the Navy to be unnecessarily large for the purposes of American defense, and was therefore willing to use it as a bargaining chip to repair damaged relationships with Britain and Japan and solidify America's role as peacekeeper-by-example.

1933 saw a change in US administrations, and newly-elected Franklin D. Roosevelt selected Cordell Hull as his Secretary of State. Hull was a well-known internationalist, but his passion lay with lowering economic barriers rather than solving security issues. He called for world recovery by means of "economic disarmament" but had little to say regarding naval disarmament.¹⁰³ There was every reason to believe that Hull would toe his Department's historic line and continue to fight for arms control.

¹⁰¹ O'Connor, *Perilous Equilibrium*, 23.

¹⁰² LePore, *Naval Disarmament*, 155.

¹⁰³ Dallek, *Roosevelt*, 33.

It appeared in the years preceding the 1935 conference that the evolving views of the Navy brought the two Departments principally involved in arms control closer than ever. Indeed, along the bumpy road ahead the Navy Department and even the General Board would at times exceed the State Department in their commitment to the Washington ratios. In any event, the two Departments remained in close contact and coordinated policy throughout the conference and the years surrounding it, harmonizing their views to a far greater extent than the preceding three conferences. Both agencies were committed to the maintenance of parity with the United Kingdom and both saw value in limitation. Historians have generally emphasized the disconnect between the two agencies during the Washington Conference and the following decade, but have neglected their cooperation in the mid-1930s due to a general dismissal of the second London Naval Conference. This thesis will show a trend towards greater interagency cooperation and departure from the USN's traditional hostility towards arms control.

The years between the two London Conferences were marred by numerous disturbances that greatly upset the general international situation. The onset of the Great Depression, the Japanese annexation of Manchuria, the accession of Hitler and the Nazi Party in Germany, and the Italian invasion of Abyssinia all occurred in the years that immediately followed the signature of the 1930 London Treaty. The very concept and philosophy of arms control was also badly weakened. The LNT had inspired a series of assassinations in Japan and had greatly strengthened the Fleet Faction. The Fleet Faction was an unofficial organization composed of officers of the IJN as well as their political allies that opposed the arms control treaties. They had been a prominent force within Japanese politics since the Washington Conference, but with the militarist upwelling in

the early 1930s they became increasingly dominant and strident in their demands for abrogation of the Washington Treaty. Some prominent members of the Fleet Faction even contended that as a result of the Depression in the West and the resources flowing in from newly conquered Manchuria that Japan could win a naval arms race.¹⁰⁴

Thus, despite the changes afoot within the United States, the general prospects for arms control in the mid-1930s were dismal. A time of international disturbance was a poor time to seek limitations on security. The issues peculiar to naval arms control also appeared to work against the possibility of international agreement in 1935. The two greatest animating forces for naval limitation in the years between the two conferences were the Japanese push for parity and the belated expansion of the American fleet. The former signified a threat to the existence of the Washington system; the latter signified a substantial recommitment to that very system. The conflict between these two policies would determine the shape and outcome of the 1935 conference.

The World Disarmament Conference in Geneva, convened in February 1932, was an effort by the members of the League of Nations at comprehensive arms limitation that the treaty of Versailles had failed to achieve. While the conference was largely directed at limiting armaments on the land and in the air, naval limitation was also discussed. The Japanese, who remained members of the League until the following year, formally advanced their proposal for naval limitation in December 1932. Seizing upon the widely held desire among European public opinion to limit weapons of primarily “offensive” value, the Japanese suggested that naval vessels ought to be categorized as either offensive or defensive in nature. The Japanese delegation argued that the largest vessels, namely battleships, aircraft carriers, and heavy cruisers constituted “forces which are

¹⁰⁴ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 33.

aggressive in character and strong in offensive power,” due to their long cruising radii and powerful armaments.¹⁰⁵ Under the Japanese plan, these “offensive” vessels would be greatly reduced both quantitatively and qualitatively in order to limit their potential for aggression. Vessels which the Japanese delegation deemed “defensive,” namely submarines, destroyers, and light cruisers were to be given “maximum tonnages uniform to the five naval Powers,” meaning the original five signatories to the Washington Naval Treaty in 1922.¹⁰⁶ The proposal pre-emptively addressed British concerns about the submarine by stating that “submarines, as was recognized by a large majority of the members of the Naval Commission, are of a defensive and not offensive character.” At the same time, the Japanese appealed to the French adherence to a large submarine fleet and thereby widened the Anglo-French rift that had opened at the London Naval Conference in 1930, saying that “[submarines] are indispensable for the defense of a lesser naval power.”¹⁰⁷

The Japanese proposal was an excellent way to frame the naval debate that was sure to be waged at the Geneva Conference and at the next naval conference that was scheduled before the London Treaty expired in 1936. The proposal skillfully allied itself with arms limitation enthusiasts with its promise of limiting the tools of aggression and its commitment to “an enormous reduction in expenditures on armament that now weigh heavily upon the peoples of the world.”¹⁰⁸ The proposal also aligned Japanese interests with those of the junior signatories of the Washington Treaty, Italy and France, by pledging the right of all five powers to a common tonnage limit and by championing the

¹⁰⁵ *Foreign Relations of the United States* (Hereafter *FRUS*) 1932, I, 410-11, Davis to Hull, Dec. 8, 1932.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 411.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 413.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 414.

defensive usefulness of the submarine. The proposal clearly played to Japanese interests, as it would greatly limit the vessels which the United States and Great Britain held a decided advantage in while granting them the right to build to equal tonnage in smaller, less expensive craft.

The Japanese proscription for naval arms control at the Geneva Conference was a delicate phrasing by the Japanese Foreign Office of an increasingly hard line taken by the Navy and their civilian supporters. Following the signing of the London Naval Treaty in 1930, the junior naval officer corps organized a spate of assassinations targeting pro-treaty politicians across Japan.¹⁰⁹ This culminated in the May 15, 1932 assassination of the Japanese Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi, who was viewed by naval extremists as being far too conciliatory with the Western powers.¹¹⁰ The eleven junior officers who murdered Tsuyoshi were openly defended by the Navy Minister, who said that “when we consider what caused these pure-hearted youths to make this mistake, reverent reflection is proper.”¹¹¹ Meanwhile, the Japanese consolidated their hold over Manchuria following their internationally censured annexation of the Chinese territory in 1931. Tsuyoshi’s successor, Saito Makoto, recognized the independence of the puppet state Manchukuo in 1932, and soon afterward Japan would withdraw from the League of Nations.¹¹² Beyond their new responsibilities on the mainland, the Japanese military establishment also cast a wary eye at the rapidly industrializing Soviet Union and the attendant increase in their military strength.¹¹³ Thus, by a combination of pressures both domestic and external, the Japanese Navy was compelled to seek a stronger hand vis-à-vis the status quo powers in

¹⁰⁹ Hall, *Arms Control*, 197.

¹¹⁰ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 10.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹¹² Sandra Wilson, *The Manchurian Crisis and Japanese Society, 1931-33* (London: Routledge, 2002), 96.

¹¹³ Maurer and Bell, *The London Conference of 1930*.

the Pacific. This radical reimagining of the Washington Treaty would dog Anglo-American naval establishments for the next three years.

The other major factor that would shape the Second London Naval Conference came from the United States. The United States found itself in a perpetually poor negotiating position after the Washington Conference in the early 1920s as it failed to keep pace with the other naval powers' building programs.¹¹⁴ The Republican administrations of the 1920s, while not quite as penurious towards the Navy as the historiography often suggests, provided little in the way of appropriations for new construction. Between 1922 and 1928, the United States laid down 40 ships totalling approximately 150,000 tons of naval construction. In the same span of time, the United Kingdom had laid down 350,000 tons and the Japanese 360,000 tons.¹¹⁵ Nearly all this tonnage came in the form of auxiliary vessels, in particular cruisers, a category in which the United States Navy lagged badly behind its competitors. This deficit had dire political consequences. The 1930 negotiations had nearly fallen apart over the insistence of the American delegates to extend the Washington ratios to auxiliaries in addition to capital ships, even though the Japanese had a 70,000 ton edge on the United States Navy in cruiser construction.¹¹⁶ The Japanese were forced to halt their cruiser construction to allow the Americans to catch up and, presumably, eventually overtake them.¹¹⁷ Negotiating from a deficit was a nearly disastrous policy for the delegation in 1930 and,

¹¹⁴ NARG 80, box 172, Naval War College Study, "What Will be the Fate of the 5-5-3 Ratio in 1935" by Lieutenant Commander D. P. Moon, July 14, 1934, pg. 34.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board memo on conversion of Hawkins class cruisers by Great Britain, enclosed estimate of cruiser tonnages since 1930, August 14, 1936.

¹¹⁷ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 2.

given the domestic reaction to the treaty in Japan, the Americans were unlikely to be able to pull off the same trick twice.

Unfortunately, any hope that President Hoover might follow through on the necessary construction implicit in the ratification of the LNT was dashed as the Great Depression worsened and ravaged the finances of the American government. Hoover was, in any event, a diehard pacifist who had an enduring mistrust of a permanent military establishment. He was committed to disarmament and felt that the whole basis of the naval arms limitation treaties was wrongheaded. Writing to Secretary of State Henry Stimson just before the LNC, Hoover expressed his own feeling and the feeling of a great portion of Americans, saying “we shall between us have imposed upon ourselves, say 236,000 tons of new warships at an expense of, say \$1,500 a ton, a total expenditure of over \$350,000,000, some part of which at least would be much better invested in works contributing to real human welfare... in the same breath we are promising the world that at that date [1936] we shall use our best endeavors to sink a considerable portion of these fleets. All this is illogical and is the simple negation of our own aspirations and I believe also of public opinion on both sides of the Atlantic.”¹¹⁸ When the full effects of the Depression began to reverberate across America in 1930, Hoover certainly saw the enormous expense as superfluous. While Hoover allowed any construction that had already begun under President Coolidge’s 1928 “cruiser bill” to be completed, Hoover cancelled the remaining six cruisers still unbuilt and warned the Navy that its budget would be slashed below 1920s levels.¹¹⁹ As tax and customs receipts plummeted and the

¹¹⁸ Greg Kennedy, “Depression and Security: Aspects Influencing the United States Navy during the Hoover Administration,” *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 6.2 (1995), 344-45.

¹¹⁹ Robert H. Levine, *The Politics of American Naval Rearmament, 1930-1938* (New York: Garland Publishing Inc., 1988), 6.

treasury bled dollars, Hoover prioritized dwindling federal funds to large-scale public works and relief efforts for drought-worsened rural areas.¹²⁰ Since a United States President submits a budget for the year in which he leaves office, the United States Navy had no hope for an increase in construction until at least the fiscal year 1934. Due to the long and arduous process of obtaining appropriations from Congress (especially military appropriations from a decidedly non-interventionist Congress), and due to the time-consuming nature of naval construction itself, the United States was sure to be negotiating from a deficit once again in 1936.

The arrival of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the White House in March 1933 would drastically alter the fortunes of the United States Navy that had fallen to a new austerity-ridden low. Formerly the Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War One and cousin to the father of the modern USN, Teddy Roosevelt, FDR presented a viable opportunity for the Navy to at last get the funds it needed to reach treaty levels.

Warnings from the Navy Department reached a fever pitch shortly after Roosevelt assumed the Presidency, likely with the intention of making an impression on the former Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In a May 1933 memorandum the General Board reported that “a vital military consideration of naval policy is the relative strength at which the Navy is maintained with respect to other leading navies of the world... the present relative inferiority of the American Navy is so great and the protection of our national interests is so seriously jeopardized as to be provocative of a national emergency fraught with the gravest consequences to this nation.”¹²¹ The Board warned that world conditions had deteriorated considerably since 1932 and that therefore “the commencement of a

¹²⁰ Kennedy, “Depression and Security,” 346.

¹²¹ NARG 80, Box 62, General Board 420-2 Serial No. 1619, May 10, 1933.

large building program is necessary to correct the United States naval inferiority.”¹²² The disarmament conference in Geneva was judged to be a futile affair, and naval planners warned of the likelihood that America’s naval rivals would continue to build at their present or even accelerated rates. As would be expected, the Board frequently recommended large building programs that well exceeded the available funds.¹²³

In spite of FDR’s campaign promises to balance the federal budget and to aggressively pursue arms control, the new President immediately proved amenable to increased naval construction.¹²⁴ The navalists’ chief ally in Congress, Chairman of the House Naval Affairs Committee Carl Vinson, had proposed in 1932 a law that would mandate the United States to reach its maximum treaty tonnage allotment by 1941. Vinson’s law had languished in Congress under the unfriendly Hoover Presidency, but Roosevelt proved much more receptive. The Navy had argued for the previous three years that increased naval construction was doubly beneficial for the United States, for it simultaneously increased American security and provided much-needed employment in the great downturn. In numerous reports and memoranda to the President, the General Board and other naval officials would point to the oft-cited statistic that 80 percent of shipbuilding costs went to labor.¹²⁵ CNO William H. Standley made the same argument in numerous speeches, such as a speech before the New York Rotary Club in 1934 in which he claimed that 85 percent of the monies went to labor and that “only forty percent of the total cost is spent in the shipyard where the ship is built; the other sixty per cent is

¹²² *Ibid.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ Thomas C. Hone, “The Evolution of the U.S. Fleet, 1933-1941,” in *FDR and the U.S. Navy*, ed. Edward J. Marolda (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1998), 101.

¹²⁵ NARG 80, box 172, Naval War College Study, “What Will be the Fate of the 5-5-3 Ratio in 1935” by Lieutenant Commander D. P. Moon, July 14, 1934, pg. 100.

spent throughout the entire country for labor and for raw materials.”¹²⁶ It was also a stroke of luck for the Navy that the majority of America’s shipbuilding facilities happened to be located in Democratic strongholds that had suffered badly from the Depression.¹²⁷ As a result of these various factors, as well as Roosevelt’s personal affection for the Navy, Roosevelt committed the weight of the presidency to the Vinson Act.¹²⁸

Roosevelt materially demonstrated his commitment to the Navy within the first 100 days of his presidency by including naval construction funds in the National Industrial Recovery Act, which provided for large public works projects and various labor protection provisions. Signed into law on June 16, 1933 with solid majorities from both chambers of Congress, NIRA provided \$238 million “to the Department of the Navy for the construction of certain vessels, the construction whereof conforms to the London Naval Treaty and has heretofore been approved by me.”¹²⁹ These funds provided for 21 new ships, including an aircraft carrier and seven of the 8” gun cruisers that had caused such controversy at the LNC.¹³⁰ While this was well short of what was required to bring the USN to full treaty strength, it nonetheless gave the Navy a major place in the cornerstone legislation of the Roosevelt Presidency and for the first time in twelve years secured them an ally in the White House.

Following the passage of NIRA, Congressman Vinson launched a reinvigorated campaign to promote his naval legislation. “Since no man can foresee the future clearly,

¹²⁶ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Navy Press Room Transcript, Feb. 7, 1934.

¹²⁷ McBride, *Technological Change*, 159. Roosevelt was a Democratic President.

¹²⁸ Rosen, “Treaty Navy,” 232.

¹²⁹ Executive Order 6174 on Public Works Administration, June 16, 1933.

¹³⁰ NARG 80, Box 62, Navy Department’s Office of the Judge Advocate General memo for Chairman Carl Vinson, March 11, 1933.

it must be evident that a nation that requires a military or naval force requires one adequate to function efficiently in the hour of need,” Vinson said in a speech before Congress in early 1933.¹³¹ “Again and again we must be taught that soldiers cannot be made in a day and that it takes years to create ships.”¹³² He also warned loudly of considerable increases in Japanese naval spending and their mounting violations of the Nine Power Treaty. By January 1934, Vinson had resubmitted the Bill to authorize a treaty Navy, only this time he had the momentum of the NIRA building program behind him and the implicit support of the President. The Vinson Bill generated a firestorm of controversy from the isolationist bloc in Congress, who drew on American concerns that large-scale arms manufacturing of this very type had led America into World War One. Reportedly, the Vinson Bill generated 200 letters a day to the White House, 99 percent of them negative.¹³³ As would be expected, Roosevelt backed off on directly supporting the Bill as it wound its way through Congress in early 1934. Fortunately, Vinson was a skilled legislator and secured the allegiance of heavyweights like Sam Rayburn in the House and Park Trammell in the Senate. Ultimately, the Vinson-Trammell Act sailed through both chambers, passing in the Senate by a majority of 65-18 on March 6, 1934.

The Vinson-Trammell Bill went a long way to establishing a coherent United States Naval policy after the confusion that followed the onset of Depression, yet it was still limited in scope. As a backpedalling Roosevelt explained to the Press on March 23, a few days before he signed the bill into law, “this bill is really, in its essentials, nothing more than a resolution that it is still the policy of the United States to build up to the

¹³¹ James F. Cook, *Carl Vinson: Patriarch of the Armed Forces* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 2004), 68.

¹³² Cook, *Vinson*, 78.

¹³³ Cook, *Vinson*, 93.

London Naval Treaty limits and, having passed that resolution, it depends on the action of future Congresses as to whether the ships will be actually started or not.”¹³⁴ The NIRA funds were between one third and one fourth of the amount required to bring the USN up to full underage strength (Vinson’s estimates tended to be lower than the Navy Department’s).¹³⁵ The USN’s most persistent interwar problem had been addressed, but it was still a long way from being solved.

Thus, while the Navy was pleased with the NIRA monies and the passage of the Vinson Bill, it was irritated by the continued absence of a regular, steady, and predictable fund for naval construction. “The hand to mouth way of running the Navy of a great country is inefficient, expensive, and always catches us at the right moment in a sad position,” Chief of Naval Operations William V. Pratt wrote in March 1933.¹³⁶ Pratt argued that Congress should “[incorporate] all federal construction in one broad plan... the great variables are all in one bill, making the big Congressional fight thereon, while the routine appropriations, the bread and butter, pass through causing less talk and less waste of time in Congress.”¹³⁷ A General Board report issued subsequent to the passage of NIRA seconded this recommendation. While the report congratulated the President for the substantial sum, the Board was nonetheless concerned that “in view of the limited nature of the authorization for naval construction carried in the National Industrial Recovery Act, which expires as a whole in two years, it is extremely desirable that this be supplemented by permanent authorization in some form for the construction of naval

¹³⁴ Edgar B. Nixon, ed. *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Foreign Affairs*, Vol. II (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969), 31, Press conference, March 23, 1934.

¹³⁵ NARG 80, Box 62, CNO William V. Pratt to SecNav Claude Swanson, “The Navy’s Needs,” March 24, 1933.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*

vessels for the Navy—and their aircraft—up to the limits authorized by the London Treaty.”¹³⁸ The naval funds attached to NIRA had been included by executive fiat rather than congressional action. Roosevelt was unlikely to risk such a move again on behalf of the Navy. While the first year of Roosevelt’s Presidency proved promising for the Navy, the future of the fleet was still in doubt as long as funds for construction were still dependent upon the passing whims of Congress or the occupant of the White House.

Nonetheless the passage of the NIRA and Vinson-Trammell Acts laid the groundwork for the future of naval arms limitation. After a decade-long strategy of “disarmament by example,” the American government at last committed to build to the ratio limits at the same time that Japan was attempting to throw off the ratio system altogether. Indeed, the Japanese complained that the Vinson-Trammell Act constituted a threat to Japanese security, and used it as further evidence for the need to bring down the Washington Treaty.¹³⁹ The chasm between these two divergent national policies would come to define the remaining years of the arms control system.

The pivot of the Washington system in the mid-1930s, then, lay with the United Kingdom. Like the United States, Britain desired the maintenance of the status quo in the Western Pacific. Yet unlike America, Britain’s main point of vulnerability lay in the European waters on her doorstep, not her distant possessions in the Far East. While the MacDonald government had tried hard to court American opinion at the 1930 LNC, the darkening of the European scene compromised Britain’s commitment to the friendship of the United States as an end in itself. Both America and Japan had ample motivation to

¹³⁸ NARG 80, Box 62, General Board 420-2 Serial No. 1622, July 19, 1933.

¹³⁹ *FRUS*, 1933, I,380, Grew to Hull, July 26, 1933. Grew commented that the Japanese reaction was a perverse one, given that the Act was a modest replacement program at a time when the Japanese were bombing Chinese cities. The outspoken ambassador opined that the Japanese were worried that a USN at full ratio strength would limit their plans for expansion.

seek a pact with the British. Britain, meanwhile, had good reasons to accept either party—a pact with Japan would secure the Empire from Singapore westwards, while a pact with America could plausibly contain potential Japanese aggression. The irreconcilable policies of America and Japan meant that the British would have to definitely pick a side and alienate the other. In an international system with three near-equal players, any combination of two presents an overwhelming force. Even more than the ships it built, the policy of the United States towards Great Britain in the coming naval conference would decide the fate of the Pacific and the global balance of power.

Almost immediately, however, trouble arose with the British. The building program authorized via the Vinson-Trammell Act emphasized the construction of heavy cruisers, the 10,000 ton vessels that had caused so much trouble at the last conference. The USN was anxious to build to its full allotment in this category, because naval strategists had deemed the heavy cruiser strategically vital in the Pacific theater and because it was the one vessel category in which the United States held a tonnage allotment superiority over any other naval power. In July 1933 the British Embassy cabled an objection to the US building program to Secretary of State Hull. While the British note conceded the US was within its treaty rights, “it was the hope of His Majesty’s Government that during the Disarmament Conference... there would be no construction of what amounts to a large new expensive type, exceeding considerably any six-inch cruiser now in existence.” The note expressed concern that the US program would provoke a qualitative cruiser race with Japan, which had announced since the passage of NIRA that it intended to hasten the construction of its 8,500 ton heavy cruisers. The note insinuated that the program was not in good faith, since at the 1930

conference Secretary of State Stimson had said that ““he thought that in practice it was very unlikely that the United States would actually build a six-inch gun 10,000 ton cruiser.”¹⁴⁰

This provoked an irritated reply from Hull, who responded in September that the building program was simply a measure taken to bring the United States up to its treaty quotas since, unlike the United Kingdom and Japan, America had attempted a policy of disarmament by example and was significantly understrength. Furthermore, the statement regarding the probability of the US constructing 10,000 ton cruisers “could only be viewed as an expression of personal expectation rather than a statement of considered policy.” In fact, State Department records testified to repeated statements by US delegates at the LNC that their Navy intended to build cruisers to “the maximum allowed unit tonnage” of 10,000 tons. Finally, the accusation that America risked a naval race with Japan by its actions was fallacious, given that Japan had already announced its 8,500 ton cruiser program before the passage of the NIRA. Hull concluded by suggesting that the United States had historically demonstrated the greatest commitment to “actual disarmament,” reminding the British that President Hoover’s suggestion of a quantitative reduction of 25 percent in all categories had been rejected by all parties at the last conference, including the UK.¹⁴¹

Former Secretary of State Stimson, though generally an Anglophile, emerged from retirement to protect his legacy. “I have carefully examined the record of the Naval Conference,” Stimson wrote to the State Department in November. “I find nothing in any way to substantiate, either directly or by inference, either the statement made by the

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 383.

¹⁴¹ *FRUS*, 1933, I, 386-8, Hull Memo, Sept. 14, 1933.

Prime Minister or that contained in the British memorandum. On the contrary, I find that these records, as well as the circumstances surrounding the entire negotiations, make a directly contrary inference practically unavoidable.”¹⁴² Stimson went on to cite numerous instances when he or other delegates directly informed their British counterparts of the United States’ intention to construct the largest possible vessel in each category. Although Stimson emphasized that “I feel very deeply the importance of the frank and friendly relations which were established by the British and American governments throughout the negotiation of this Treaty,” he was peeved by the British manipulation of the records.¹⁴³ With the preliminary conversations for the next conference due to be held in the near future, the episode was a poor start for Anglo-American relations.

With the General Disarmament Conference ongoing and a treaty-mandated naval conference scheduled in the near future, the new administration took stock of America’s arms limitation policy. Jay Pierpont Moffat, the head of the State Department’s Division of Western European Affairs, was concerned about Roosevelt’s interfering in the matter on the basis of his experience with the USN. “President Roosevelt has grown personally interested in disarmament, but I don’t think he appreciates the difficulties or the European psychologies he is up against,” Moffat wrote in his diary in March 1933. “I am very much afraid that if we are not careful there will be a stubbed toe.”¹⁴⁴ Fortunately, the President and the State Department selected Norman H. Davis to head up talks at the forthcoming preliminary discussions with the British. Davis had been intimately involved

¹⁴² LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 20, Stimson to Hull, Nov. 3, 1933.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴ Nancy Harvison Hooker, ed., *The Moffat Papers: Selections from the Diplomatic Journals of Jay Pierrepont Moffat 1919-1943* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1956), 93.

in the General Disarmament Conference in Geneva since 1931 and had been thoroughly briefed on both the political and technical side of arms limitation.

Davis was highly regarded as a diplomat. Undersecretary of State William Phillips commented that he had a remarkable command of the technical facts and figures which were to be indispensable in the negotiations.¹⁴⁵ He was also a noted Anglophile, and in the years ahead he would make countless statements, both public and private, advocating close Anglo-American relations as the only means to prevent war. With a background in private business ventures and banking, Davis had spent his recent years as an American delegate to the General Disarmament Conference in Geneva. Over the coming years, Davis assumed an impressive degree of importance as the administration's point man in arms control deliberations. If he had a fault it lay in a tendency to place too much importance upon diplomatic exchanges and not enough upon other factors such as political or military considerations. Moffat believed that "Norman Davis' only weakness as a negotiator" was his "belief that if he can convince the man with whom he is negotiating, the problem is solved. He tends to overlook the force of circumstances and the power of public opinions."¹⁴⁶ A General Board briefing from February 1934 contained criticism of Davis in a similar vein, though its motivations were different. The briefing was softly scathing of Davis' character, saying that he "is enjoying toying with diplomacy in his retirement from banking." The report fretted that Davis was spread so thin across so many different fields that it "makes one doubt if he can give his best efforts to all." While the briefing noted that Davis denied the desire to greatly reduce the USN in the name of pacifism, the author noted that "these views might change if there were

¹⁴⁵ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 135, Davis to Roosevelt, June 4, 1934.

¹⁴⁶ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 121.

opportunity to get an agreement, which is the thing nearest his heart.”¹⁴⁷ The Board, however, was simply nervous that Davis’ affinity for the British would result in negotiations that favored the Royal Navy, as some Board members believed all the previous treaties had done. In fact, Davis’ combination of experience, deft negotiating skills, and openness to cooperation with the British would make him the perfect US delegate to the conference.

The Navy insisted on maintaining close relations with State Department officials since it was felt in some naval circles that “lack of cooperation between the State and Navy Departments in the past has jeopardized the interests of the United States in connection with naval armaments. Pressure upon the State Department brought to bear by well-organized and strongly entrenched pacifist organizations has had a very decided effect. Undoubtedly this pressure will be exerted again.”¹⁴⁸ With bilateral talks scheduled with the United Kingdom for 1934, Davis met with members of the General Board in November 1933 to discuss the USN’s position, especially as regarded the British. The admirals emphasized that it was imperative for the USN to build up to treaty levels as soon as possible or else America “would be in a hopeless position now from a trading point of view.” Davis assured the Board that from private talks with Roosevelt, he was sure the President was dedicated to building a treaty Navy and would seek only a token reduction at the conference for “good psychological effect.” In spite of some grumbling regarding the “stupid note” the British had sent regarding the 10,000 ton cruisers, most of the attendees at the meeting were reconciled to closer relations with the British. Admiral William D. Leahy expressed the opinion that “England and the United States would and

¹⁴⁷ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board Memo, “1935 Naval Conference—Comments and Suggestions,” Feb. 26, 1934.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

should be together,” and that in case of war “the overwhelming opinion in England would be with us and that they would come to our assistance.”¹⁴⁹ Admiral William H. Standley, the CNO and future delegate at the 1935 conference, expressed similar sentiments regarding cooperation with the British. Davis was the most vocal on the need to secure good relations with the British at the upcoming conference. Given the aggressive moves by Japan and the weakness of the US position in the Far East, especially with Philippine independence looming, he believed it was “necessary to get Britain on our side.”¹⁵⁰

A report from the President of the Naval War College, Admiral McNamee, in February 1934 seemed to confirm the general feeling within the USN that the unsettled situation in the Pacific would require Anglo-American cooperation. The memo concluded that Japan had become so entrenched within its sphere that any war between the IJN and the USN alone would “involve us in losses entirely out of proportion to any possible gain.” Only by combining the strength of the USN with Britain’s Royal Navy could US interests in the Far East be protected at a reasonable cost. Given Britain’s substantially greater interests in the region, inducing cooperation ought not to be a difficult task for the United States. “The more clearly UK understands that this will be our policy, the surer we will be of obtaining joint action if and when it may become necessary,” the report noted.¹⁵¹ The NWC report was not unequivocally supportive of the UK—among other things, it recommended leaving the burden of the conference’s possible failure on

¹⁴⁹ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1, “Memo on talk of Norman Davis before General Board,” Nov. 16, 1933.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ NARG 80, Box 172, President of the Naval War College to General Board, “Study on 1935 Conference for Further Limitation of Naval Armaments,” Feb. 27, 1934.

Britain's shoulders¹⁵²—but in general a trend towards an accord with the UK was underway within the USN as the 1935 conference neared.

The limits of the Navy's desire for cooperation were quickly established. In March Davis went to London for informal talks with Prime Minister MacDonald regarding naval disarmament. The Prime Minister revealed that central to Britain's platform to the upcoming conference was a substantial reduction in the unit tonnage of battleships, from 35,000 tons as in the Washington Treaty to a limit of perhaps 25,000 tons and a gun caliber limit of 12 inches from 16 inches.¹⁵³ This suggestion dated back as far as the Geneva Naval Conference in 1927 and was part of the present British agenda in the General Disarmament Conference, but the Prime Minister confirmed that it would continue to be a central platform of the UK for the 1935 talks.

The Board wasted no time forming a response. A March report stated that “a reduction in the gun power of the battleship increases the proportionate value of lesser types of vessels.” The report also placed greater value on the possession of refueling stations, given that smaller vessels generally had shorter cruising radii. Given that that bases and auxiliaries were the RN's greatest strength and the USN's greatest weakness, the Board interpreted the UK's insistence on battleship tonnage reduction as a self-interested ploy to strengthen its hand at the cost of American sea power.¹⁵⁴ The Board also believed that the prohibitively high cost of large unit battleships made the vessel type the sole domain of great powers. If the unit cost was too far diminished, there was a risk that a slew of lesser naval powers outside of the present treaty would challenge the

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 228, Davis to Roosevelt, March 6, 1934.

¹⁵⁴ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1640-E, March 12, 1934.

signatories and complicate the already perilous naval situation.¹⁵⁵ A follow-up report re-emphasized the need for a continued policy of parity with the RN, while noting that its larger merchant fleet and bases “throw the balance of naval power, when combatant fleets are equal, strongly in favor of Great Britain.”¹⁵⁶ As far as the Japanese were concerned, America’s territorial interests were strictly local and therefore did not justify the increase it had asked for. Given these facts, the Board recommended that the United States insist on the maintenance of the status quo as far as the ratios were concerned. Indeed, the Board even argued that “If any change is to be made it should in equity be to the advantage of the United States, (1) as respects Great Britain, because of the weight of her merchant fleet and system of bases, (2) as respect Japan, because of the unwarrantedly high ratio allowed by the London Treaty in auxiliary craft.”¹⁵⁷ Even if the Navy was coming around to the theory of strategic Anglo-American cooperation in the Pacific, in practice the relationship was still on uncertain ground.

With the situation in the Pacific highly unstable since the Japanese annexation of Manchuria, there was increasing pressure from many quarters for the United States to clearly define its Far Eastern policy and establish definite limits on the violations it would tolerate from the Japanese. The Navy was one such entity demanding a clarification of intent. CNO Standley had already requested that the administration regularize US policy ahead of the 1935 conference, and he would become a persistent voice for this request in the years ahead.¹⁵⁸ Admiral McNamee’s report in February expressed a similar concern.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.* The comment refers to the 10:7 ratio exception made for light cruisers and destroyers for Japan at the 1930 London Conference.

¹⁵⁸ Standley had been present as a *de facto* General Board member during Davis’ meeting with the Board, and he had voiced his concern regarding US policy at this meeting.

He believed that Philippine Independence and the prospect of US recognition of Manchukuo represented two invaluable bargaining chips in negotiations with both the British and the Japanese. Their value could not be realized, however, until America “[defined] our national objective in negotiations—shall we hold out for a Navy capable of exercising control in the Western Pacific, or shall we limit our aims to control the Eastern Pacific and the Western Atlantic.”¹⁵⁹ This was a fundamental question of policy that the United States had not yet definitively answered for itself—was the USN to be used strictly for the defense of the American homeland, or was it to be used to further American interests and influence around the globe? For the USN, it was vital that policymakers solidify long-term American aims.

The loudest voice for the clarification of American policy was the State Department’s head of the Division of Far Eastern Affairs, Stanley K. Hornbeck. On April 5, 1934 Hornbeck issued a lengthy memorandum to Secretary Hull outlining the challenges America faced in the Pacific. Hornbeck believed that the Japanese were anxious to remove the US and UK as factors in the Western Pacific in order to free their hand for their policy of “manifest destiny” on the Asian mainland. The Japanese were eager to maintain Anglo-American indifference to their China policy, which they believed they had achieved by their largely ignored annexation of Manchuria, and to secure recognition of Manchukuo as a furtherance of their ambition for a “Monroe Doctrine for Asia.” The problem with deciding how to proceed on these various issues was that “the United States has no ‘Far Eastern Policy’ as a thing separate from and different from our foreign policy in general.” The so-called “special policies” of the Far

¹⁵⁹ NARG 80, Box 172, President of the Naval War College to General Board, “Study on 1935 Conference for Further Limitation of Naval Armaments,” Feb. 27, 1934.

East—such as the Open Door and the Hay Doctrine¹⁶⁰—were really just general policies of the United States Government—that of free markets and self-determination, respectively—that did not account for the specific circumstances of the Western Pacific. Hornbeck composed a list of proposals for a clear US policy which, among other things, recommended that the US refuse to recognize Manchukuo, refuse to negotiate on the Japanese immigration issue, and adhere rigidly to the current ratios. Essentially, he desired to formulate a definite US policy on a number of likely scenarios which would arise in the coming years with Japan. Clarity of objectives was vital since the US and Japan “are outstandingly the two great powers on the Pacific Ocean: both are youthful and vigorous; both are growing and neither has reached the peak of its development; in the matter of various fundamental concepts the two nations differ and in the matter of national endowment the two countries are unequal; there is bound to be competition between them...”¹⁶¹ Given the likelihood of conflict and the currently unsettled situation in the Pacific, Hornbeck urged the administration to clarify its policy.

The Roosevelt administration, however, was not forthcoming. The President *did* endorse the maintenance of the Washington ratios as a definite US policy when he had endorsed the Vinson-Trammell Act in March 1934.¹⁶² Beyond this, the administration did little of what Hornbeck or the admirals requested. Waldo Heinrichs has written that Roosevelt remained deliberately vague on his foreign policy intentions as a means to

¹⁶⁰ An ancillary directive to the Open Door established by Secretary of State John Hay 1898-1905, which established “The policy of the government of the United States is to seek a solution which may bring about permanent safety and peace to China, preserve Chinese territorial and administrative entity, protect all rights guaranteed to friendly powers by treaty and international law, and safeguard for the world the principle of equal and impartial trade with all parts of the Chinese Empire.” From Thomas F. Millard, “The ABCs of the Hay Doctrine,” *The Weekly Review of the Far East* (1921), 3.

¹⁶¹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 69, Hornbeck to Hull, April 5, 1934.

¹⁶² Franklin D. Roosevelt, *The Public Papers and Addresses of Franklin D. Roosevelt*, Vol. III, ed. Samuel I. Rosenman (New York: Random House, 1938), 172, Presidential statement issued at signing of Vinson Navy Bill, March 27, 1934.

conserve power. The President's "secrecy, obfuscation, compartmentalization of subordinates, and veiling of intentions enhanced the mystique of power and kept him aloof from the bureaucratic process rather than a prisoner of it."¹⁶³ Roosevelt would not be hastened into committing to a policy by State Department bureaucrats or impatient admirals. He preferred a flexible policy in both domestic and foreign affairs that adapted to changing conditions.¹⁶⁴ His governing style was entirely at odds with the bureaucratic mindset that desired definite, prepared responses for likely developments. Until at least the end of the decade, the precise parameters of US policy in the Western Pacific would remain undefined.

The continued lack of clarity from the administration was all the more vexing to the Navy Department with the passage of the Tydings-McDuffie Act in March 1934. The Act provided for the complete independence of the Philippines after a period of ten years, beginning with the drafting of a constitution and the creation of a representative government by 1935. Philippine independence had already been decided in January 1933, when Congress had overridden President Hoover's veto to maintain American control over the island nation.¹⁶⁵ The Tydings-McDuffie Act put a definite time frame on the nation's independence. However, in the midst of a stubborn Depression, Congress showed no interest in providing for the security of a distant archipelago. The Navy stringently objected to Philippine independence on several grounds. Most immediately and directly, the Board warned that an American exit from the Philippines would remove a considerable restraint on Japanese freedom of action and embolden its expansionism in

¹⁶³ Marolda, *FDR and the US Navy*, 117.

¹⁶⁴ Warren Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.

¹⁶⁵ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 68. 274-94 in the House, 66-26 in the Senate

Asia.¹⁶⁶ A more general but equally worrying implication was the blow it dealt to one of the Navy's primary justifications for maintaining a fleet second to none: the claim that America held overseas responsibilities had long been the fallback argument for the possession of a higher ratio than the Japanese. As the next conference neared, and with Japan more determined than ever to secure a higher ratio, America's bargaining position was further weakened by this Act. The only definite policy the US committed to in the Far East was one detrimental to the Navy's interest.

Fortunately, the British side of the equation appeared promising. Initial meetings between Davis and various UK officials were friendly and agreeable. At an April 12 meeting with Robert Craigie, Britain's disarmament expert, and Admiral Charles Little, the Deputy Chief of the Naval Staff, both parties agreed that the upcoming conference would have to produce actual tonnage reductions rather than just limitation.¹⁶⁷ They also agreed that an increase to the Japanese ratio was unacceptable and unjustifiable, and would be resisted by both at the conference.¹⁶⁸ Various other issues were addressed, including the British proposal for a decrease in battleship unit tonnage and the intransigence of the French on the submarine issue which would likely force an increase in destroyer tonnage.¹⁶⁹ The 10,000 ton cruiser issue was also addressed, with Craigie quick to mollify Davis over the controversial note of several months before, saying "the note was sent in the most friendly spirit" and that there was never any doubt that the US had the right to build in this category. The British had merely hoped to prevent a race in a relatively new category of ship, and stick with the less expensive light cruiser for reasons

¹⁶⁶ Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 26.

¹⁶⁷ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 9, Memorandum of conversation between Craigie, Little, Bingham, and Davis, April 12, 1934.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

of economy. Davis replied that the United States had refrained for several years from building the heavy cruisers that they had fought for in 1930, and had authorized the most recent program only after Japan had laid down two 8,500 ton cruisers. He also pointed out that the British argument for economy regarding the smaller cruiser unit size was doubtful, since the per ton cost of 10,000 ton cruisers was less than that of the British 7,000 ton cruiser. Craigie merely said that Americans tended to be more concerned with unit size, whereas the primary British concern was with numbers.¹⁷⁰ Even this heated issue raised few objections from either party. Davis reported to Roosevelt optimistically that “I feel there is not going to be any particular difficulty with the British over the technical questions themselves.”¹⁷¹

Robert Bingham, the US Ambassador to Britain, largely confirmed Davis’ impressions. The Ambassador was present with Davis at the April 12 meeting and had also met with the First Lord of the Admiralty Sir Bolton Eyres-Monsell in March. Monsell confided to Bingham that “our general situation, particularly our Japanese situation, made it highly desirable for both countries to cooperate in dealing with the whole naval situation...” When the topic of the heavy cruiser arose, Monsell “expressed himself as heartily agreeing” to Bingham’s assertion that both nations ought to “be able to carry out our naval programs along the lines best suited to our own countries, without suspicion, competition or hostility...”¹⁷² “I believe it is probable that the British will work satisfactorily with us in connection with the naval conference,” Bingham wrote on April 23 to the President. The recent menacing actions and statements by Japan against

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 71, Davis to Roosevelt, April 23, 1934.

¹⁷² Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 171-72, Bingham to Roosevelt, March 8, 1934.

China had “made this cooperation the more probable.”¹⁷³ The simultaneously deteriorating security situation in both the Atlantic and Pacific poles of the Empire had the British deeply concerned, and they were aware that they lacked the strength alone to repel attacks in both quarters. “I am convinced that all thoughtful people here believe that the only hope for peace in the world lies in cooperation between the British and ourselves, and that they eagerly desire it,” Bingham continued. “They want peace as earnestly and sincerely as we want it, and we are in a better position to deal with them now than in all the long period since I have known them.”¹⁷⁴

The sole caveat that Bingham noted was that the British government wished to avoid the appearance of an Anglo-American front in advance of the conference. He warned that “British official opinion has crystallized very definite views in regard to the Japanese problem. As I understand these, I believe that until the menace of Japanese policy is more actually pressing than at present, when events in the Far East are overshadowed here by the threats inherent in the European situation, Britain would be against any appearance now of such Anglo-American cooperation and coercion vis-à-vis Japan as allegedly would strengthen the hands of the militarists in Japan and weaken the civilian element which is reportedly recovering political strength.”¹⁷⁵ Avoiding the appearance of outright Anglo-American cooperation to the Japanese became a regular refrain from the British delegation in the years ahead. Nonetheless, on the whole the way seemed clear for an Anglo-American accord at the conference.

The prospects were not truly as favorable as Davis, Bingham, and others presumed, however. Neither side truly grasped the full intentions of the other. On April

¹⁷³ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 79-80, Bingham to Roosevelt, April 23, 1934.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 233, Bingham to Hull, May 2, 1934.

28, Davis, Hull, and President Roosevelt met to discuss general American strategy for the upcoming conference. Roosevelt expressed willingness for American attendance at a conference in 1935 in spite of the opinion from some quarters that the Japanese push for parity would render any such multilateral meeting pointless and possibly damaging.¹⁷⁶ The President judged that the United States should have no trouble with the British in the coming conference, and that America should use this anticipated unity to its advantage in dealing with Japan. He believed that America should ask for an extension of the ratios for ten years as well as an across-the-board reduction of twenty percent in all categories. Assuming that Britain was amenable, and that they could win the French and Italians as well, then all the pressure would be upon Japan to alter its demands or else assume full responsibility for the conference's failure.¹⁷⁷ It was believed that America's commitment to the status quo in addition to putting absolute reduction on the table would put it in a favorable negotiating position and an unassailable moral position.

Unfortunately, American policymakers were not aware of the extent of the gulf between their aims and those of the British government. The Admiralty and the Defense Requirements Committee (DRC) had judged that the rising threats in Europe and Asia had necessitated an expansion of the RN's cruiser fleet. Britain's naval strategy was explained in a April 1934 Admiralty memorandum, which stated that the primary British fleet, comprised of the lion's share of the nation's capital ships, was to provide "cover" for a widely dispersed network of colonies by containing the enemy's main fleet. However, given the historic problem of smaller units being dispersed for commerce raiding and communications disruption, mobile escort squadrons were necessary. The

¹⁷⁶ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 9, Memorandum of conversation between Roosevelt and Davis, April 28, 1934.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

report noted that “In the last 12 years our naval security has been seriously jeopardized, so that the despatch to the East of a fleet sufficient to meet that of Japan... would leave us with a strength in European and Home Waters definitely inferior to the strongest European Naval Power.”¹⁷⁸ The immense geography between Britain’s two main threats, Germany and Japan, as well as the dual role of cruisers as escorts and as auxiliaries to the fleet would require a considerable increase in the number of cruisers required for national security. Based on various calculations, the DRC recommended a force of not less than 70 cruisers totalling 541,000 tons—a huge increase over the 339,000 ton limit established by the LNT and the same British figure that had torpedoed the 1927 Naval Conference and caused a deep rupture in Anglo-American relations.¹⁷⁹ More to the point, it represented an approximately 60 percent increase in tonnage in the cruiser category at a time when the American delegation was instructed to obtain an overall 20 percent decrease in fleet strength.

There was also a small but powerful and very vocal British minority who were opposed to the sort of Anglo-American accord that MacDonald had sought at the last conference. Many of these men resided in the UK Treasury and balked at the staggering costs of maintaining fleets capable of fighting in both the Atlantic and the Pacific in the midst of the Depression. Prominent among these was Warren Fisher, the Permanent Undersecretary of the Treasury. He believed that the most prudent course on both security and financial lines was to seek an understanding with the Japanese and remove any zone of overlap in the Pacific. On January 30, 1934 Fisher urged the Government to get “back to something like our former relations with Japan,” referring to the 1903

¹⁷⁸ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 173-4, Admiralty staff memo, April 1934.

¹⁷⁹ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 64-65.

Anglo-Japanese Alliance which had secured Pacific security in the first decades of the twentieth century. While this would certainly involve damaging or even destroying Britain's relationship with America, it was a good trade-off given that it would free the Royal Navy to focus on the nation's ultimate potential enemy, Germany, while also staving off undue naval expansion requisite for a two-ocean war. Britain could draw its defensive line at Singapore without sacrificing any real power or interest thereby. Fisher was contemptuous of the effect this would have on America, saying it could "circle the globe with ships if they want... and wait and see for how many years the politically all-powerful Middle West will continue to acquiesce in paying a fantastic bill related to no real requirement but primarily to indulge the braggadocio of Yahoodom."¹⁸⁰

Fisher was by far the most extreme among Britain's highest officials, but he was not entirely alone. First Sea Lord Ernle Chatfield, while not nearly so anti-American in his outlook as Fisher, was disposed to a similar viewpoint as far as general strategy went. In June, just before the preliminaries began in London, Chatfield wrote to Fisher,

I agree with Vansittart [Permanent Undersecretary at the Foreign Office] to the extent that we do not want to prompt Japan at the expense of a hostile and jealous US. At the same time I am entirely with you that we do not want to tie ourselves as we have done in the past to the US, because she is unreliable and does not know her own mind and her statesmen do not know the mind of their own country. Nothing that is said by the President or any of their Statesmen can ever be accepted at more than its face value, as we all know. Whether our diplomacy can steer so difficult a course as seems to be necessary between the USA and Japan I do not know, but if our recent example of trying to steer a course between France and Germany is to be trusted, it does not seem very hopeful...¹⁸¹

¹⁸⁰ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 105.

¹⁸¹ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 181, Chatfield to Fisher, June 4, 1934.

While Chatfield was not nearly so extreme in his views as Fisher, he nonetheless had little faith that a conventional conference along the lines of the ones held in Washington in 1921-22 or London in 1930 would produce useful results. Like Fisher, Chatfield was in favor of certain political understandings between nations, including Japan, that would allow each nation to build what they could justify. As for the US, Chatfield believed that “There are inherent differences between us and the US over Naval matters and I do not see how we can get agreement with them unless we are willing to sacrifice our security, or they are willing to sacrifice their pride.”¹⁸² Chatfield and Fisher both expressed a British criticism that had been prevalent at past conferences: the accusation that America had no real naval requirement, or certainly none that justified parity with the RN, and that her maintenance of a large Navy was strictly for the purpose of prestige. To these critics, America’s actual commitment to fighting seemed slight, and the promises of its statesmen were thus suspect. To them, defusing a real threat had far more value than acquiring the friendship of a doubtful ally, however powerful it might be.

On May 18, the British Foreign Office formally invited the American delegation for preliminary talks to be held in early June in advance of the Japanese delegation.¹⁸³ The British desired to hold bilateral talks with both powers over the summer in order to gain a sense of all the positions before the scheduled conference in 1935. There was some concern on the American side that the invitation stemmed from a British strategy to insert itself between the United States and Japan, enabling them to dictate terms to each separately. Davis thought the sensible move was to have tripartite preliminaries,

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 236, Bingham to Hull, May 18, 1934.

“Otherwise we may be jockeyed into a position where the British will be acting as a mediator between the Japanese and ourselves, interpreting to the Japanese our position and to us the Japanese position, and thereby getting all the benefits of the ‘honest inaccuracies.’”¹⁸⁴ Nonetheless, as the host nation, the State Department conceded that it was the British government’s prerogative to organize the conference in the manner they saw fit.

As the preliminaries opened, the USN was in a more favorable position in terms of fleet composition than it had been in the previous two conferences. In 1930, the USN had been badly understrength in cruisers and was handily outmatched in this category by both the British and the Japanese. The great gap between the USN and the IJN in cruisers was a central reason why the treaty had produced such a violent reaction in Japan; despite the IJN possessing a greater number of cruisers in reality, the United States was granted the right to build a fleet in the same ratios that governed capital ships.¹⁸⁵ By June of 1934, reality had come much closer to theory, even if the two were not yet congruous. In terms of ships built, building, and appropriated for which would be underage by the time the London Treaty would expire in December 1936, the United States possessed one million tons, the British 1.06 million tons, and the Japanese 775,000 tons. The USN had 35 cruisers afloat or appropriated for, the British 39 (with 10 overage cruisers), and the Japanese 32.¹⁸⁶ Much of the US cruiser fleet still only existed in theory, and in numerous instances in the interwar period Congress had axed these paper fleets.¹⁸⁷ However, as the

¹⁸⁴ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 246, Davis to Hull, June 2, 1934.

¹⁸⁵ Baer, *Sea Power*, 115-118.

¹⁸⁶ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board Report, “Treaty limited classes now built which will be under-age December 31, 1936, plus those now building or appropriated for,” June 4, 1934.

¹⁸⁷ President Coolidge had cut three of the eight cruisers appropriated for in the 1924 budget year (McBride, *Technological Change*, 160.) For fiscal years 1932 and 1933, President Hoover first halved then

General Board noted in March, unlike the previous London Conference, “by virtue of recent building programs, the United States will be, if not to the London Treaty limits, within reasonable attainment thereof... In consequence, the status quo will in itself present no basis for argument by any nation for change in the treaty ratios.”¹⁸⁸ The policy shift that occurred under Roosevelt was a very real one, with real consequences in foreign affairs. Even if it had been justified primarily as a means to combat unemployment, the building program that Roosevelt authorized deeply affected the arena of international activity in which the United States was most engaged. Given the President’s personal interest in arms control, and his general internationalist leanings, it seems likely that Roosevelt’s enthusiasm for the Vinson-Trammell Act was derived at least in part from a bid to strengthen America’s hand at the next conference.

The preliminary conversations began on June 18 at 10 Downing Street. Prime Minister MacDonald was present, along with First Lord Eyres-Monsell, Craigie, and Admiral Little. Davis and Bingham were present for the United States, along with embassy counselor Ray Atherton and Chairman of the General Board Admiral Leigh representing the USN. MacDonald opened by saying that the world was much changed from the last conference and that conditions would need to be altered accordingly. He continued to say that in 1930, Japan had tried to play the US and UK off each other for its own benefit, but that the effort had failed “because we maintained an excellent liaison.” He stressed the need for continued close and frank Anglo-American communication in the months and years ahead. Both parties agreed that it was highly likely that Japan would announce its abrogation of the Washington Treaty by the end of 1934, which,

cancelled naval construction, taking a large bite out of Coolidge’s 1928 “cruiser bill” (Baer, *Sea Power*, 122).

¹⁸⁸ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1640-E, March 12, 1934

given the two years' notice the treaty required, would leave the naval system without limitation by the end of 1936 when the London Treaty also expired. There was also general agreement that Japan was in a stronger position than ever before, and that the UK and US would have to stand together to resist its claim to an increase in the ratios and to any alteration to the Nine Power Treaty.¹⁸⁹

The mood of the preliminaries soured, however, when the British laid out their specific proposals. On June 21, in addition to explaining their plans for a qualitative reduction of battleships to 25,000 tons and 12 inch guns, the British also explained their cruiser proposals. Their proposal was three-fold: that (a) 8 inch cruisers should be abolished, (b) that heavy (10,000 ton) 6 inch cruisers be limited in number and affixed to the Washington 5:3 ratio, and (c) that future cruisers be limited qualitatively to 7,000 tons and 6 inch guns. Furthermore, the British also informed the US of their intention to seek a fleet of 70 cruisers, comprised of 60 underage vessels and 10 overage. Atherton objected to this considerable increase, and could identify no specific situation which had arisen that could justify it. Atherton said that the proposal amounted to a tonnage increase of 45 percent without even counting the intended retention of the 10 overage vessels. Admiral Little replied that the cruiser tonnage limit agreed to at the London Conference, 339,000 tons for the British, was intended to provide for 50 individual units. Given the larger ships built by other nations, referring not so subtly to the touchy issue of the US heavy cruiser program, Little explained that to provide for 50 underage cruisers the minimum necessary tonnage was 408,000 tons. Therefore the increase was only truly 83,000 tons,

¹⁸⁹ NARG 80, Box 172, Notes on London meeting, enclosed in Memo from Leigh to Standley, General Board 438-1, July 30, 1934.

or 10 ships, which he hoped would be seen in America as a modest and justifiable increase.¹⁹⁰

The reaction from the American delegation was one of disbelief and hostility. Not only was the British position irreconcilable with Roosevelt's directive of a 20 percent reduction, but it entailed an increase in the category for which the US had long stated it had the least need for. Taken in combination with the drastic cuts to the unit tonnage of battleships, it appeared to the American delegates that the British proposal was entirely self-serving, playing to their strengths and offering no recompense for the weaknesses it exposed in American sea power. Davis, who was generally pro-British, expressed outrage at the cruiser numbers. "The position taken by the British last Thursday in submitting their naval program is so completely different from what they indicated it would be in their conversations with Bingham and me last April," Davis wrote to Hull "and so unacceptable from our point of view as a basis for a treaty, that we have all come to the conclusion after full consideration that we should tell MacDonald frankly that the possibility of agreement on such a basis as that indicated is so remote, that we feel it would serve no useful purpose to continue further with the discussions on such a basis." It was inconceivable, given the trouble that previous administrations had found in seeking ratification of previous treaties, that the Senate would pass any document containing such costly increases.¹⁹¹

On June 26, Roosevelt became directly involved in the debacle and sent Davis a note he wished passed on to the Prime Minister. The President said that the future of modern civilization depended on a decrease of arms rather than an increase, and that a 20

¹⁹⁰ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 2, Notes on preparations for the 1935 Naval Conference, June 21, 1934.

¹⁹¹ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 272, Davis to Hull, June 25, 1934.

percent reduction was the United States' bottom line for the conference. Roosevelt believed that MacDonald was being manipulated by militarists and big Navy enthusiasts in his country, and urged him to resist the pressure of the Admiralty. He informed MacDonald that the US delegation would not delve into more technical discussions "until the naval nations agree on the big basic principle" of absolute reductions.¹⁹² Very quickly, the bilateral talks looked to be in doubt.

The British, for their part, defended their position by pointing out that Britain's security concerns were both greater and more numerous than in 1930. At the time of the LNC, the UK, like the US, had really only Japan to be concerned about as a naval threat. In the past year, there had arisen increasing threats, potential or actual, in both the North Sea and the Mediterranean. There was also the added factor that the US withdrawal from the Philippines cast doubt on American policy in the Pacific. British policymakers were less confident than ever that the US would stand with them in case of trouble in the Pacific.¹⁹³ The British also claimed that American parameters for reduction were too narrow. The US delegation sought tonnage reduction solely by decreasing the number of units. The British, whose far-flung responsibilities required a global presence, needed the same number of units or more but wished to reduce and regulate the maximum tonnage of each unit. Eyres-Monsell said that if all the British qualitative restrictions were adopted, that it would amount to an approximately 20 percent reduction in overall tonnage.¹⁹⁴ American strategy in the Pacific, however, had long required large vessels with large cruising radii, and therefore the qualitative road to reduction was unacceptable

¹⁹² *FRUS*, 1934, I, 277, Roosevelt to Davis, June 26, 1934.

¹⁹³ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 279, Bingham to Hull, June 27, 1934.

¹⁹⁴ NARG 80, Box 172, Notes on London meeting, enclosed in Memo from Leigh to Standley, General Board 438-1, July 30, 1934.

to the United States. It was as Craigie had said: the British were more concerned with numbers whereas the Americans were more concerned with unit size. This fundamental disconnect was causing far more problems than the US delegation had anticipated.

On June 27, Davis informed the British that their proposals had “greatly surprised and shocked the American Delegation as well as the Government at Washington,” and that “The United States was unwilling to take them as a basis for discussion.”¹⁹⁵ Davis accused the British of false faith, saying that when he had met Craigie and Little in April, they had given the impression that “the views of the two Governments were sufficiently close to justify the inauguration of the present preliminary conversations” but had neglected any mention of the “large increase in cruiser tonnage” which they must have known the US would reject. MacDonald replied that he wished the United States would take Britain’s security problems more seriously and offer concrete alternatives as to how to fix it. Davis held the administration line and said that the delegation could not delve into technical negotiations until the principle of reduction was accepted by the British. The talks were suspended for several days thereafter.¹⁹⁶

The problem lay at least in part with American expectations. The US delegation approached the preliminaries with much the same attitude as they had the 1930 conference, since in the intervening four years little had changed in terms of American security problems. The USN was almost solely focused on Japan as America’s eventual naval enemy. The ever-evolving War Plan Orange, the Joint Army and Navy war plan to

¹⁹⁵ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 2, Notes on preparations for the 1935 Naval Conference, June 27, 1934.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

defeat Japan in the Pacific, dominated strategic thinking in the Navy Department.¹⁹⁷ Nearly every fleet exercise conducted in the interwar period had the Pacific as its prospective battlefield and the Japanese as the prospective enemy.¹⁹⁸ There was also the contentious issue of naval requirements. Although the Navy Department frequently touted America's dependence on trade and imports of raw materials when justifying naval expenditures to the administration or the populace, within the Department this view was not always held. Writing to Admiral Leigh, who was to represent the Navy at the preliminaries, General Board member William L. Rodgers opined that as long as the USN could preserve its commerce with South America and as far west as Hawaii, America would remain relatively self-sufficient for its domestic economy. "These southern countries furnish almost all the raw products we do not have ourselves, but which we must have for American industries," Rodgers wrote to Leigh in February. "An equitable ratio of navies, for the United States, is one in which both her merchant fleet and her Navy are dominant in North and South American waters."¹⁹⁹ Rodgers judged the current ratios were sufficient to maintain regional hegemony and to dissuade any overseas interlopers, and therefore believed the status quo should be maintained.

The British were much more exposed. Not only did they share the long-range threat of Japan, but its own near abroad was filled with strong potential enemies. Earlier in the year the DRC had identified Germany as the UK's "ultimate potential enemy against which our 'long-range' Defence policy must be directed," and that nation lay on

¹⁹⁷ Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 134. Despite formulating some hypothetical war plans for conflict with Britain in the Atlantic, almost all strategic thinking was dedicated to the Pacific theater.

¹⁹⁸ Felker, *Testing American Sea Power*, 114.

¹⁹⁹ NARG 80, Box 172, Admiral R. L. Rodger's memo concerning General Board 420-1 Serial No. 1640, Jan. 24, 1934.

Britain's doorstep.²⁰⁰ Furthermore, Britain was much more obviously dependent on imports for basic functioning than the United States was. The UK was far from being self-sufficient in food, to say nothing of raw materials for its industry. Its imports came from every corner of its far-flung empire and required by far the world's largest merchant marine. These transport ships required protection over the long sea routes that crossed through many dangerous waters. The difference between the two outlooks was clear. The United States was generally content with the naval status quo in order to maintain its own security, and viewed arms limitation primarily as a means of reducing expenditures to combat the Great Depression. Britain was increasingly anxious about another global conflict, and viewed arms limitation primarily as a means to managing naval uncertainties via both qualitative and quantitative restrictions. British and American security estimations, therefore, were worlds apart and poor bilateral communication had revealed the gap at a time when the two nations had planned to coordinate strategy against the Japanese.

American officials expressed grave disappointment with the British proposals. Hull considered the UK's numbers to be unacceptable and its divergence from American aims too great to be bridged.²⁰¹ Ambassador Bingham recommended that the talks be broken off, since they were clearly going nowhere and would serve only to make the Japanese suspicious.²⁰² The formal preliminaries were suspended without any compromise or progress being made.

Interestingly, the Navy demonstrated more forbearance with the British than their counterparts in State. Admiral Leigh remained in London and met privately with Admiral

²⁰⁰ CAB/23/78 "Imperial Defense Policy – Report of Defence Requirements Committee" March 19, 1934.

²⁰¹ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 284, Hull to Bingham, June 29, 1934.

²⁰² *FRUS*, 1934, I, 290, Bingham to Hull, July 7, 1934.

Little on several more occasions. On July 4, Leigh told Little that the USN “did wish very much to come to a friendly understanding with them, that their figures for increased tonnage were much higher than we had any idea they would be” and that the administration was earnestly seeking a 20 percent reduction. Little replied that while there were difficulties between them, he was confident that the two nations would come to an understanding before the 1935 conference.²⁰³ The First Sea Lord Chatfield told Leigh on July 13 that their Plans Division had carefully studied the global situation and he hoped that the United States could be sympathetic to Britain’s numerous vulnerabilities. He assured Leigh that their plans had given no “thought of defense against the United States.”²⁰⁴

Leigh reported his meetings with the British favorably to CNO Standley and Secretary of the Navy Swanson. He said that “British officials were most cordial and friendly and on every occasion evidenced their desire for cooperation with the United States...”²⁰⁵ The maintenance of the parity principle was not in question, and British fleet needs were occasioned entirely by Japanese and French building, not by the recent spate of US construction. He furthermore believed that the British were anxious for a renewal of the treaties, but that the Admiralty’s views, though suppressed in 1930, were again in the ascendant and would force a lapse in the treaties before an “unsatisfactory renewal.”²⁰⁶ While Leigh did hold the view that the UK’s insistence on the 25,000 ton battleship stemmed from a desire “to deter us from acquiring vessels individually

²⁰³ NARG 80, Box 172, Notes on London meeting, enclosed in Memo from Leigh to Standley, General Board 438-1, Memo of Admiral Leigh’s meeting with Admiral Little, July 4, 1934.

²⁰⁴ NARG 80, Box 172, Notes on London meeting, enclosed in Memo from Leigh to Standley, General Board 438-1, Memo of Admiral Leigh’s meeting with Admiral Chatfield, July 13, 1934.

²⁰⁵ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1, Leigh to Swanson, July 30, 1934.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

superior to theirs” and to retain its *de facto* status as the world’s preeminent Navy, he was nonetheless generally favorable towards an Anglo-American accord. He believed that the US should accept Britain’s invitation to continue talks in October, because of the clear value of “mutual support” between the nations to “subdue Japanese aspirations.” Leigh’s other concern lay with the possibility that an American absence might make the British “more inclined to ‘trade’ with the Japanese, particularly in view of our obviously cold reception of their own figures.”²⁰⁷

The Chairman of the General Board, a body of admirals usually labeled in the historiography as a nationalistic and Anglophobic haven, was also considerably more enthusiastic about the prospect of cooperating with the British than was the State Department. The Navy’s willingness to deal with the British derived at least in part from increasingly dire warnings from ONI. A July 3 report stated that nearly all of Japan’s naval planning was directed against the United States. The Japanese judged that they could largely ignore the European powers, including Britain, due to the high unsettled and complex naval situation in that sphere. The Japanese would settle for nothing less than parity at the next conference, the report predicted, and failure to achieve that would render further negotiations useless in the eyes of Japanese policymakers.²⁰⁸ US Ambassador Joseph C. Grew in Tokyo reported that the Japanese Fleet Faction had whipped up public support to such an extent that “it is doubtful if any Japanese representative could sign a new treaty on the bases of the present ratios and avoid assassination on his return to Japan.”²⁰⁹ Grew also noted in July that Japanese naval expenditures had increased 80 percent over the last 8 years, compared to a paltry 10

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Naval Attaché, Japan, Report No. 161, July 3, 1934.

²⁰⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 35, Grew to Hull, September 6, 1934.

percent increase for the USN and a net decrease in spending for the RN.²¹⁰ All the while, the rhetoric from Japanese officials was becoming more and more belligerent. In October, Admiral Hibino spoke before an audience of 5,000 in Osaka warning of the danger of an American attack and assuring the people of the ultimate victory of the IJN. The impolitic speech also laid out plans for continued expansion of Japanese influence on mainland China and spoke of the fear that the Europeans held for their nation.²¹¹ Faced with the difficult and deteriorating realities of the Pacific in a more visceral sense than the diplomats of the State Department, there were some in the Navy pushing for close ties with Britain even as the civilians backed away.

However, Leigh's sense that the disastrous preliminaries in June had encouraged certain British policymakers to "trade" with the Japanese was unfortunately close to the mark. Writing to Foreign Secretary John Simon in September, Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain said, "As for the U.S.A. don't let us be browbeaten by her. She will never repay us for sacrificing our interests in order to conciliate her..." Chamberlain believed that Davis' attitude at the preliminaries was "only a repetition of a procedure with which we have become very familiar." First the Americans would emphasize the great advantages that would accrue if the two nations worked together and in this spirit would induce the British to lay bare their plans without revealing their own. "When we have laid all our cards on the table they shake their heads sadly and express their regretful conviction that Congress will have nothing to do with us unless we can make them an offer that will suit them better."²¹² To Chamberlain, it seemed clear the

²¹⁰ NARG 38, Box 554, Naval Attaché, London, Report No. 350, May 25, 1934.

²¹¹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Naval Attaché, Japan, Report No. 246, Nov. 8, 1934.

²¹² *Documents on British Foreign Policy: Second Series, Vol. XIII* (Hereafter DBFP), ed. W. N. Medlicott et al (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1973) 25-29, Chamberlain to Simon, September 1, 1934.

Americans were manipulating Britain's vulnerability to serve their own interests.

Chamberlain, like Fisher, seemed to favor an understanding with the Japanese that would free the nation of its Pacific vulnerabilities.²¹³

Treasury officials were disposed to this view, however after the June talks a similar opinion permeated other areas of the British Government. John Simon was also coming around to the possibility of "trading" with Japan at the expense of Anglo-American relations. "Our American friends may well be sincere in saying that they do not mind how big a Navy we have," Simon said in June. "[T]heir real concern is that the British needs should not encourage Japan to build a Navy so big as to threaten America. It may be, therefore, that the only hope would be for a preliminary Anglo-Japanese negotiation which fixed the Japanese Navy at a reasonable level and then to face the Americans with the prospect of losing this advantage if they do not find it possible to agree on the [higher] British level."²¹⁴ Exasperated by the American refusal to accept British figures, there were some in the FO who believed the only way to corral the United States was to manipulate its anxiety over Japan.

Even Robert Craigie, who had been a leading voice for conciliation with the Americans at the last conference, expressed his doubts as to the future of the relationship. He was confident that Roosevelt was personally interested in establishing good relations with Britain and that he was generally internationalist in his outlook. However, he believed that the President "is surrounded by men who try to narrow what would normally be a broad vision in foreign affairs." Among these narrow-minded men he counted Navy Secretary Swanson, who he deemed a "die-hard big-navyist who believes

²¹³ *DBFP*, 2nd Series, Vol. XIII, 61, Foreign Office Memo, Oct. 16, 1934.

²¹⁴ McKercher, *Great Britain Pre-Eminent*, 766.

in bluster and the big stick” and, rather unfairly, Norman Davis, who he thought “tended to emphasize rather than to moderate Mr. Roosevelt’s natural inclination to look at this question through domestic spectacles.” While he believed that the push for an Anglo-Japanese understanding was a dangerous illusion, he did not see how to proceed with the Americans.²¹⁵

The US delegation was invited to trilateral preliminary discussions for October. Despite the misgivings of some within the State Department, the talks would go forward. At a meeting between the State and Navy Departments in September CNO Standley insisted that it was still possible to include Japan in an arms limitation scheme. Regardless of the “chauvinistic” talk from the Japanese quarter of late, Standley was confident that the Japanese would not lightly throw the Washington Treaty out. Standley also urged the State Department to define America’s Far Eastern policy, echoing Hornbeck’s earlier plea. When the discussion shifted to US strategy regarding Britain, all naval officers present believed that America ought to come to an understanding with the UK.²¹⁶

The early preliminaries had gotten off to a rotten start. Both sides of the Anglo-American relationship parted in June remarkably soured by the prospects of the relations between their two nations. Given the growing overlap in interests and vulnerabilities in the Pacific between the US and UK, and the optimism that existed in both camps just prior to the June talks, the reversal was a remarkable one. The break in the relationship is a testament to the difficulty of arms control. The US and UK were generally on friendly terms in 1934 and the security of both nations was intimately related to the strength of the

²¹⁵ *DBFP*, 2nd Series, Vol. XIII, 11-12, Foreign Office Memo, August 7, 1934.

²¹⁶ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between State Department and Navy Department, September 26, 1934.

other. If negotiations could be derailed under conditions such as these, it calls into question the viability of arms control between nations which are in the midst of a hostile competition of interests—in other words, the sort of international relationships that might actually be stabilized by an arms control agreement.

However, the episode might not be indicative of the difficulty of arms control simply because it was, in many ways, a “best case scenario” in which to test its application. Indeed, the closeness of the relationship might have actually worked to the detriment of negotiations. The lack of pressure on any particular security issue—neither the Americans nor the British projected their building programs with the other in mind—encouraged the parties to quibble on matters of comparatively small importance. The US delegation objected in the strongest terms to a relatively modest increase of 10 new cruisers to the RN at a time of clear instability. The British, on the other hand, insisted on a dramatic reduction to the unit tonnage of battleships that they must have known would be unacceptable to the United States and impracticable in application given the building programs of other nations.²¹⁷ Holding bilateral talks at this stage in the preliminaries was clearly an error. The congruity of the two positions served only to highlight the differences. An external factor was needed to overcome these relatively slight disagreements. It may be that arms control is exceedingly difficult when no specific security issue is present, as was the case between the US and UK. Differing tactics, strategies, and concerns can only be harmonized if the stakes demand it.

There is also the problem of quantifying security in arms control agreements. In a case where few security concerns exist, as between the US and UK, a rigid framework for

²¹⁷ France and Italy were both constructing battleships at the Washington Treaty maximum of 35,000 tons. Japan had given no sign that it would agree to the 25,000 ton cap either.

arms control is likely to be detrimental. It is probable, for instance, that the US would have registered little complaint over a British construction program for 10 cruisers if a pre-existing treaty had not affixed the numbers of craft allotted to each. Quantifying security can create a competitive psychology between nations where none might otherwise exist.

Whatever the case, the early lead up to the second LNT was highly problematic for the Anglo-American relationship. The British objections to the Vinson-Trammell Act had been followed by American objections at the June preliminaries. The trilateral preliminaries promised to add the Japanese proposal issued at the Geneva conference into the discussion. The introduction of a real and present security problem in the Pacific would be the true test of the strength of the Anglo-American relationship and the ability of American policymakers to commit to international agreements.

CHAPTER 3: A RESOLUTION TO COOPERATION

The second round of preliminary discussions was scheduled for October in London. This time, the talks were to include the Japanese, though the negotiations were to remain one-on-one affairs between the three premier naval powers. Japan represented the clear and present security concern that was lacking in the bilateral preliminaries over the summer. The addition of Japan's Geneva proposal would add perspective to the naval scene and emphasize the broad similarities in the Anglo-American strategic outlook rather than the incongruities.

In the early fall of 1934, however, American policymakers were still recovering from the disappointing negotiations with the British and trying to determine the best way forward. In an October 3 meeting between Roosevelt, Standley, and Moffat, the CNO raised the possibility that a "slight increase in tonnage" above current treaty limits might "facilitate an agreement with the British and Japanese," especially in view of the former's long-standing request for a larger cruiser fleet. Roosevelt emphatically rejected the notion, saying that the United States must hold to a consistent policy of reduction in addition to limitation.²¹⁸ As he explained in a memorandum to Norman Davis composed during the course of the October 3 meeting, Roosevelt refused to submit a treaty to the Senate that called for larger navies. The President was clearly convinced that a hard line against British cruiser requests was politically unavoidable, even if it ran contrary to America's security interests. Nonetheless, Roosevelt was prepared to come down from his insistence upon a proportional 20 percent reduction in the naval tonnage of the three powers. The President conceded to a more malleable "fifteen per cent or ten per cent or

²¹⁸ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 116.

five per cent” if Britain and Japan rejected his proposal. If no reduction whatsoever could be agreed to, then Roosevelt instructed that Davis merely seek to extend the current treaties as they existed.²¹⁹ Beyond these vague parameters, Roosevelt breezily floated the possibility of a US pledge stating that “we would not in time of peace maintain in the Pacific a fleet greater than that of Japan.” Standley said that while this would have no serious consequences from a “purely defensive point of view,” it would fatally compromise American interests in the Pacific and likely drive Britain to a conciliatory understanding with the Japanese.²²⁰ The idea was promptly dropped, marking a considerable decline in the personal involvement of the President in the conference. After the fall of 1934, the State and Navy Departments would handle most of the business of the conference largely independent of the White House.

In the fall of 1934, both Departments began to seriously question the value of perpetuating the Washington system. In spite of a general willingness to work with the British, some voices within the Navy viewed any continuation of a treaty system that involved Japan to be disadvantageous to US interests and to US naval strategy. A memorandum issued by the Navy Department to the delegation in London largely concurred with this view. “We should constantly take stock of the fact that under no circumstances can a treaty of naval limitation be to the United States an unmixed blessing,” the memorandum began. “The United States would be better off with a termination of naval limitations than a new agreement for the obtaining of which we

²¹⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 51, Roosevelt to Davis, October 5, 1934.

²²⁰ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 117.

would have paid a new and high price...”²²¹ Of the 715,000 tons of current global naval construction, the largest amount (250,000 tons) belonged to the United States by dint of NIRA and the Vinson-Trammell Act. In second place came Britain at 140,000 tons, and in a rather distant third was Japan with 90,000 tons.²²² Under these terms, it was ridiculous and disadvantageous to negotiate for limitation with a rival that was clearly bent on expansion in a crucial area of American interest. The only reason America might be tempted to an ill-advised and disadvantageous compromise with Japan would be from political pressure from the isolationist bent of the populace. Yet the Navy argued “that the American people are not demanding naval limitation or disarmament as they were in 1921 and at intervals during the ensuing decade; that they are exasperated with and suspicious of Japan; and that the majority of them would probably accept with a sense of relief what a few (only) critics might call a ‘failure’ at London.”²²³

The USN had long harbored a large bloc of officers who were hostile to arms limitation, yet since the WNC economy-minded Presidents had favored the pro-treaty State Department over “big Navy” enthusiasts. Already, Roosevelt had proven to be a different sort of President, and it appeared that State was coming around to the anti-treaty faction long present within the Navy Department. An October 4 memorandum from the Far Eastern Division of the State Department urged “we should divest ourselves of any conception that the world must have a treaty of naval limitation. Where national conceptions, attitudes, policies, objectives and actions are so different as, on the one

²²¹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Navy Department memo, “Naval Conference: Suggestions for consideration of the American Government and the American Conferees, in Relation Thereto,” October 6, 1934.

²²² NARG 38, Box 554, Naval Attaché, London, Serial No. 928, Oct. 23, 1934.

²²³ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Navy Department memo, “Suggestions for consideration of the American Government and the American Conferees, in Relation Thereto,” October 6, 1934.

hand, those of Great Britain and the United States, and on the other hand, those of Japan have been shown during the last three years to be, the very principle of limitation of armament becomes of questionable—if not of deniable—value.”²²⁴ Japan was clearly bent on a broad policy of expansion in East Asia, the memorandum continued, and was trying to secure a ratio that could best support a war of aggression. Since “Great Britain and the United States each have...not even approached the limits of their capacity” in naval armaments whereas Japan had “almost reached that limit,” it followed that “the Japanese have much more to gain by naval limitation” than either the US or UK.²²⁵ While this remained the decided opinion of the division headed by Stanley Hornbeck, something of a hawk within the department, this opinion rapidly permeated all the way to Secretary Hull. By November, Hull had concluded that “practically no chance exists of bridging the definite disagreement between the Japanese delegation on the one hand and the British and ourselves on the other,” and therefore he judged it best to allow the Japanese to abrogate the Washington treaty without any negotiation from the American delegation.²²⁶ Historically the champions of naval arms control, the State Department was coalescing around the opinion that the future of the Washington system was, at best, unlikely and, at worst, detrimental to the United States.

Thus, after the hostile and unhelpful Anglo-American meetings over the summer, the United States delegation arrived in London in October for the preliminary conversations with a growing consensus among policymakers that the conference was not worth the effort. The American delegates themselves, led by the ever-optimistic Norman

²²⁴ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 35, Division of Far Eastern Affairs memo, “Naval Conference: London Preliminary Conversations,” Oct. 4, 1934.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 364, Hull to Davis, Nov. 22, 1934.

Davis, had not surrendered to the notion that their mission was pointless. Certainly, the initial statements from the Japanese quarter confirmed the misgivings of State and the Navy. In a meeting between the delegations on October 24, Matsudaira began by reiterating the Japanese desire for a common upper limit. “Reduction of naval strength by means of ratios no longer satisfies the feeling of prestige and the security of the Japanese nation,” Matsudaira continued, stating definitively that Japan would only agree to a proposal that superseded the existing treaties.²²⁷ Matsudaira went on to say that the relative “self-sufficiency” of the United States offered poor justification for a Navy 40 percent larger than the IJN, and created a needless affront to the prestige of Japan. If the aspirations of the Japanese people was satisfied, “they will feel more pacific, and will be in a better position to cooperate”; if the Japanese aspirations are frustrated a third time, then the peace would be imperilled.²²⁸ Admiral Yamamoto, the chief Japanese naval advisor, added that technological progress over the past twelve years had rendered the old figures insufficient to maintain Japanese security—a claim that would become common from the Japanese delegation over the following months.²²⁹ Davis made few attempts to rebut the Japanese claims at this initial meeting, using it instead as an opportunity to judge their true intentions.

This preliminary meeting appeared to confirm the pessimism of policymakers in Washington. “That the Japanese are preparing the ground for a probable walkout is suggested by the rigidity and scope of the position which they take,” Undersecretary of State William Phillips wrote to Davis, responding to his report of the meeting the

²²⁷ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between the American and Japanese delegations, Oct. 24, 1934.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

previous day. The Japanese would discuss nothing but their own aspirations and offered no justification other than “manifest destiny” in Asia.²³⁰ The meeting was enough to dampen Davis’ spirits as well. Moffat reported that “I detect in the tone of Norman Davis’ telegrams a feeling of dismay at the lack of progress he is making not only with Yamamoto, which I think he anticipated, but with Matsudaira with whom he was formerly on the best of terms and who is now as unapproachable as the others.”²³¹ On October 29, Davis reported to Secretary Hull that Matsudaira had confirmed that the Japanese definitely intended to abrogate the Washington Treaty by the end of the year, and that the Japanese were not interested in discussing specific technical details at this point.²³² Any hope that the “common upper limit” was an aggressive opening bid had quickly vanished in the first week of the preliminary talks.

The British and Americans were scheduled for talks on October 29. With the Japanese opening with their non-negotiable bottom line, the only hope for salvaging the conference lay in these talks. The two delegations had parted on less than favorable terms over the summer, so there was considerable pressure to begin on friendly terms. A joint memorandum by the Foreign Office and the Admiralty noted that if “the American attitude remains as unhelpful and as divorced from realities as was their attitude during last summer,” then the position of the United Kingdom at the conference was an impossible one.²³³ Ironically, the stubbornness of the Japanese delegation prompted the Americans to seek the good graces of the British. Davis and Hull agreed that “the unity of view between the British and ourselves with relation to the Japanese question should not

²³⁰ *FRUS*, Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan, 1931-1941, I, 256-7, Phillips to Davis, Oct. 25, 1934.

²³¹ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 118.

²³² *FRUS*, 1934, I, 317-8, Davis to Hull, Oct. 29, 1934.

²³³ *DBFP*, 2nd Series, Vol. XIII, 59, Undated joint memo by the Foreign Office and the Admiralty.

be prejudiced by the injection at this time of a discussion with the British on technical questions on which there are differences.”²³⁴ For the time being, at least, the contentious cruiser issue would be more or less tabled in favor of dealing with the looming Japanese abrogation.

Prime Minister MacDonald opened the negotiations on the 29th, pre-empting the American position by stating that no one more than he desired naval reductions but that the current world situation rendered this impossible. MacDonald went on to remark that it would be “a disaster for the United States... if British security were jeopardized.” Davis emphatically agreed, and said that the United States had no interest in weakening the security of Great Britain in any way.²³⁵ Both Davis and Standley said that they sympathized with Britain’s preoccupation regarding cruiser replacement, given that so many powers, including the United States, were building the heavier type of this ship for which Britain had no use but which she would be obliged to match.²³⁶ While Davis reiterated the American line about a 20 percent reduction, he also headed off John Simon’s request for particulars, explaining that “technical discussion at this time would be unrealistic, in the face of the far greater issue which had arisen as a result of Japan’s demands.” The British agreed wholeheartedly, and the conversation and its tone shifted precipitously.

Simon remarked that the British had arrived at the same conclusion as the United States regarding Japanese intentions; that its desire to abrogate was no bluff and that its consequences would be a menace to both America and Britain. MacDonald declared that

²³⁴ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 317, Davis to Hull, Oct. 27, 1934.

²³⁵ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between the British and American delegations, Oct. 29, 1934.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*

if the Japanese neglected to sign any treaty at the upcoming conference then Britain would engage in a building race with them, and that it would be a “grave error” for the Japanese to presume that the British would not abandon their social relief programs in service of such construction.²³⁷ The only alternative to a ruinous naval race, the Prime Minister said, would be a security pact between the United States and Britain in the Pacific. Davis replied that an alliance was out of the question, given the long-standing American policy of avoiding foreign entanglements. MacDonald understood this to be the case, but suggested that Britain and America could enter into a bilateral treaty that would ensure no race between them and would suggest to the Japanese an Anglo-American front in the Pacific. Both nations were free democracies; both nations had accepted the principle of parity. The Prime Minister stated clearly, however, “as between friends” that “the actual figures must rest on Great Britain’s far-flung needs and responsibilities, and not on arbitrary figures imposed by the United States.” Davis agreed, sympathizing with British security needs and neglecting to restate Roosevelt’s 20 percent line.

The delegations discussed how they ought to deal with the upcoming conference in view of the near-certain Japanese abrogation. Davis felt it was likely that the Japanese were “planning to stage a run out, combined with an attempt to shift the blame to the other two powers.”²³⁸ The British agreed steps needed to be taken to ensure that the Japanese could not produce failure at the conference on their terms, but urged the Americans not to abandon the conference just yet. If the Japanese did end up walking out, then the US and UK could arrive at some agreement, but every effort to preserve the

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

tripartite arrangement must be exhausted.²³⁹ The delegates also discussed the technical aspects of the Japanese proposal, with the British asking Davis if the Japanese had yet brought up their definition of “defensive and offensive weapons” in their preliminary conversations. Davis replied in the affirmative, and asked whether the British had been able to agree on the Japanese classification. The British delegation merely laughed and said that they had not and they assumed the American delegation was having the same difficulty.²⁴⁰

The atmosphere and tone of the meeting was undeniably cordial and a remarkable shift from the hostile exchanges of the summer. Indeed, over the course of a few days the directive of the American delegation in London had shifted dramatically. It was clear that the second London Naval Conference would bear no similarity to the first, nor any of its predecessors. The primary objective became damage control rather than reduction or even limitation. In this regard, the United Kingdom was clearly a friend—both nations stood to lose much from such a fundamental disturbance in the ratios as Japan demanded. The cruiser issue, while still present, began to seem rather inconsequential during the early phase of the preliminary discussions. The threat presented by the Japanese to the Washington order became apparent to both parties and united them in their opposition to it.

The American delegation agreed not to immediately break off the preliminary talks, and over the following week continued to conduct separate bilateral talks with the Japanese. On October 31, Standley pressed Yamamoto to justify the Japanese statement that technological development had rendered the Washington ratios, accepted by all

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

parties in 1922, suddenly inadequate in 1934. The Japanese had laid down far more vessels since 1922 than the United States, Standley argued, and therefore any qualitative edge resulting from technological improvements ought to favor Japan. He continued to say that while parity with Japan would of course not threaten the West coast of the United States, it would clearly render Alaska, Hawaii, and the Philippines critically insecure. Given such insecurity, there would inevitably be a naval arms race.²⁴¹ Matsudaira countered that the Japanese proposal would affix all powers to a common limit, thereby precluding an arms race. Davis replied that “it would not be possible to destroy the foundation of naval limitation and expect the house built thereon to stand.”²⁴² Further, Davis argued that naval power was not the only measure of military might; the United States had expressed its willingness to accept a greatly inferior army to that of many nations, Japan included, and did not as a result feel it had sacrificed any prestige.²⁴³ Matsudaira simply said that this was a separate question, and abruptly ended the meeting.²⁴⁴

The British had no greater success in dissuading the Japanese from their decided course, but they continued to display a willingness to cooperate with the Americans. In what was to become a regular occurrence over the course of the conference and its preliminaries, the delegations shared the import of their bilateral talks with the Japanese. John Simon reported to Davis that Matsudaira was personally satisfied that “the United States had no more desire or intention of attacking Japan than had Great Britain,” but that “nevertheless this was the view of the Japanese Navy and people, and would have to be

²⁴¹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between the American and Japanese delegations, Oct. 31, 1934.

²⁴² *Ibid.*

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

reckoned with.”²⁴⁵ As Simon admitted, given that this came from the mouth of a supposed moderate, the British thesis that the common upper limit arose from a momentary upwelling of extremism appeared to be incorrect.²⁴⁶ The extent of the growing closeness between the delegations still had its limitations, however. When Davis suggested that Britain and America immediately assume an openly united front against Japan, Simon said that this would back the Japanese into a corner and make negotiations impossible. While it was the “cardinal policy” of the UK to “cooperate in the closest possible way with the United States,” it was clear the British were not yet prepared to cast their lot entirely with the Americans.²⁴⁷

Nonetheless, Davis was enthusiastic about the possibility of a united front, and cabled his support of going forward with the conference back to Washington. Davis reported to Roosevelt that Japanese intransigence had swung the favor of British policymakers and the British public at large behind the United States.²⁴⁸ There were worrisome reports that the Japanese had approached the British for a separate arrangement along the lines of carving out definite spheres in the Far East, thereby giving the Japanese a free hand in China.²⁴⁹ This, however, remained an opinion only among “a minority and extreme Tory group,” and the majority of the Cabinet believed that “cooperation with the United States must be a basic policy and negotiations with Japan must only be carried to a point where they do not run contrary to complete accord with the United States.”²⁵⁰ Recognizing that his plan for a 20 percent reduction had become

²⁴⁵ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of a meeting between Davis and Simon, Nov. 1, 1934.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 259, Davis to Roosevelt, Nov. 6, 1934.

²⁴⁹ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 329, Davis to Hull, Nov. 13, 1934.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 330.

untenable, Roosevelt instructed Davis to secure at minimum a “gentleman’s agreement” with the British to follow the general tenets of the Washington and London Treaties after their probable expiration at the end of 1936.²⁵¹ This was a remarkable comedown for the President to submit to, and shows a substantial shift in American policy.

The American delegation reconvened with the British on November 14. Davis relayed Roosevelt’s intention to continue conversations with the British, but said that the United States might be unwilling to continue the conference on a trilateral basis. “It is not just a naval question, that is mere camouflage,” Davis told MacDonald. “We have set up a collective system for cooperating in the Far East to maintain peace and now what Japan is trying to say is that she won’t have anything more to do with that collective system. We simply cannot agree with that.”²⁵² The British agreed, but Simon proposed what would come to be called the British “middle course” compromise. Essentially, Simon proposed that the US and Britain try to obtain from Japan an assurance that its post-Washington building program “would be as not to involve a fundamental departure from the existing ratios.”²⁵³ In other words, the British suggested that in lieu of an official system of ratios, the powers privately agree to exchange information on their future naval construction to ensure that each adhere more or less to the status quo tonnage. The proposal was a purely face-saving solution based on the common British assumption that the Japanese position derived from a sense of wounded national prestige arising from an inferior ratio.

²⁵¹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 273, Roosevelt to Hull, Nov. 14, 1934.

²⁵² LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Minutes of meeting between British and American delegations, Nov. 14, 1934.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

The “middle course” would have only unofficial quantitative limitations but would include definite qualitative provisions. Chatfield explained that if Japan opted to increase its Navy beyond its current tonnage, the problem was not so great. “It is not so much a question of numbers. It is very difficult to upset the fellow ahead of you numerically,” especially if, as the case was, the “fellows” had a much greater shipbuilding capacity anyway. The real threat lay in a qualitative race, for then Japan could construct a whole new type of ship that would instantly render whole portions of the Anglo-American fleets obsolete.²⁵⁴ The argument from the British side was not a new one; the cruiser debate at the last conference was primarily a qualitative one, and the UK’s initial proposal at the General Disarmament conference had focused largely on the specifications of individual vessels. Despite the fact that the “middle course” was more or less in line with Roosevelt’s directive, Davis refused to discuss it at any length. “We are in a ridiculous position,” Davis said. The Japanese announced their intent to abrogate the Washington Treaty yet they proposed no comprehensive alternative beyond the vaguely described and mutually unacceptable “common upper limit.” The middle course was “too hypothetical now. We did not come here to negotiate an entirely new arrangement.”²⁵⁵ Without a clearer directive from Washington, Davis could not commit the United States to such a radical reinterpretation of the treaty system despite a general pledge to closer Anglo-American relations.

Indeed, there seemed to be disagreement between the President and the State Department on how to proceed. Replying to Davis’ cable regarding the November 14 discussions, Hull simply instructed the delegation to continue the talks and thereby place

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

the responsibility of suspending negotiations on either the British or the Japanese.²⁵⁶ Davis requested further instructions, specifically what the American response should be to the British “middle course.”²⁵⁷ Hull’s reply apparently contradicted Roosevelt’s desire to seek a “gentleman’s agreement,” which more or less aligned with the “middle course” proposal. “We are convinced that the best chance of ultimately negotiating a successful agreement would lie in letting the Japanese return home emptyhanded,” Hull wrote, saying that any agreement whatsoever would be seen by the Japanese as a concession. At all events, the Secretary wrote, any agreement that did not maintain the ratios in an official statement “would seem an evasion of the essence of naval limitation.”²⁵⁸ On November 22, Hull even went so far as to instruct Davis to “talk the British out of their idea of further exploring a middle course” for fear that it would make the Anglo-American front appear weak and fearful of Japanese sea power.²⁵⁹

If there was some confusion from policymakers in Washington it may be forgiven. The sudden and complete collapse of the American platform for the conference in combination with the delay in communications between the two capitals led to some contradictory instructions. Given the available evidence, it seems likely that Roosevelt would have accepted negotiations along the lines of the British middle course in the fall of 1934, given his support of a “gentleman’s agreement.” In fact, this middle course was the sort of policy that Roosevelt tended to favor, as it would give the President some flexibility without producing any kind of politically contentious document that would have to be submitted to the Senate. However, this exchange occurred between Davis and

²⁵⁶ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 350, Hull to Davis, Nov. 15, 1934.

²⁵⁷ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 351, Davis to Hull, Nov. 16, 1934. Davis personally suggests that “the wisest course would be for us to go along with the British...”

²⁵⁸ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 355, Hull to Davis, Nov. 17, 1934.

²⁵⁹ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 364-5, Hull to Davis, Nov. 22, 1934.

Roosevelt directly, without conferring with State first. Roosevelt was no great admirer of the State Department, which he felt was populated by “boys in striped pants” who tended also to be isolationists. As Warren Kimball has written, Roosevelt preferred to deal with foreign policy through personal correspondence with “nonprofessional diplomats” who “were told to bypass the State Department and go directly to the president whenever they wished.”²⁶⁰ The relationship between Cordell Hull and the President is well documented as being cool and at times outright hostile.²⁶¹ It appears likely that Hull asserted what he believed was the State Department’s prerogative over foreign policy and steered the delegation away from the middle course. American foreign policy in this period may have been more activist than has previously been recognized, but it was still bounded by the considerable aversion to foreign entanglements that Hull represented.

As a result of American caution, Japanese stubbornness, and British desperation, the preliminaries continued to limp through November. MacDonald persisted in his attempts to gain a solid commitment from the Americans but Davis could only offer general support while policymakers in Washington re-evaluated the situation and awaited word of Japanese abrogation. The Prime Minister tried to appeal to American security interests, saying that the RN would be “in the front firing line” in both the Pacific and the Atlantic and in this capacity they guarded both American coasts. As a result, the British would expect the Americans to be more generous as regards tonnage than they had been

²⁶⁰ Warren Kimball, *Forged in War* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1997) 37.

²⁶¹ Hull was an early supporter of Roosevelt, and the President appointed him as Secretary of State because of his passionate internationalism (Dallek, *Roosevelt*, 33-4). However, the relationship between the two men cooled over the course of Roosevelt’s Presidency, and by 1937 Roosevelt’s dealings with the State Department occurred overwhelmingly through Undersecretary of State Sumner Welles, much to Hull’s ire. See Alan P. Dobson, *U.S. Wartime Aid to Britain 1940-1946* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1986) 73-6.

in the past due to the dangerous situation in Asia. Davis replied vaguely that the United States was in “a very reasonable frame of mind.”²⁶²

The Japanese, meanwhile, made aggressive overtures for British favor. Simon reported to Davis on November 23 that the Japanese had asked the British to join in their denunciation of the Washington Treaty, as this might placate the Japanese navalists and lay more fertile ground for the coming conference.²⁶³ On November 27, a press report surfaced indicating that the Japanese had offered the British a compromise whereby the ratios would be altered from 5:5:3 to 5:4:4, giving the Japanese parity with the Americans and the British a return to naval dominance.²⁶⁴ Both offers were obvious attempts to sow discord between the British and American delegations as the Japanese position alienated both parties. As Moffat remarked, while the Americans were hesitating to commit, “Japanese diplomacy has not been adroit and the rather clumsy efforts made to drive a wedge between the British and ourselves have widely overshot the mark.”²⁶⁵ While it was becoming clear that the United States would need to develop closer ties with Britain in order to deal with the Far Eastern situation, it was also clear that America had the time to work out an arrangement on its terms. In Davis’ estimation, the much talked about British “responsibilities” meant that “Great Britain needed American cooperation more than the United States needed that of Great Britain.”²⁶⁶

Pressure mounted from Washington to conclude the preliminary talks and re-evaluate once Japanese abrogation came through. The moderate Japanese faction was not

²⁶² LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Minutes of meeting between British and American delegations, Nov. 23, 1934.

²⁶³ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 369, Memo of conversation in Prime Minister’s Office, Nov. 23, 1934.

²⁶⁴ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 2, Matthew E. Hanna to Hull re. London Naval Discussions, Nov. 27, 1934.

²⁶⁵ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 120.

²⁶⁶ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Minutes of meeting between British and American delegations, Nov. 23, 1934.

“in eclipse,” according to Hull. The militarist element was stronger than ever and had the diplomatic corps dancing to its tune. The Americans had gone along with the British suggestion not to suspend talks right away, but public opinion was only getting more confused with no tangible result.²⁶⁷ On December 4, Davis informed the Prime Minister that the US government felt that “irrespective of any intrinsic merits the middle course might have... it would be best to have a clean break and take up the question at a later date.”²⁶⁸ The Japanese have “held denunciation as a hammer over our head, without even sitting down and talking it over with both of us beforehand; they have decided arbitrarily to destroy the peace structure and collective system set up in the Far East.” As far as the Washington policymakers were concerned, to negotiate under such circumstances would be to negotiate on Japan’s terms.²⁶⁹

The talks concluded on December 6, leaving the future of the conference very much in doubt. Many officials in the State Department believed that the London talks made holding another conference useless and even harmful to American interests. “To hold an unsuccessful conference does more damage to international goodwill, than to forego a conference,” Secretary Hull wrote to Davis on December 8.²⁷⁰ Moffat and Hornbeck, heads of Western and Eastern Divisions, respectively, arrived at the same conclusion. Both men “earnestly advocated British-American cooperation” but felt that a failed conference would put strain on that relationship over relatively insignificant technical issues while accomplishing nothing vis-à-vis Japan.²⁷¹ The American

²⁶⁷ *FRUS*, Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan, 1931-1941, I, 266, Hull to Davis, Nov. 26, 1934.

²⁶⁸ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 381, Memo of conversation between American and British Delegations at the House of Commons, Dec. 4, 1934.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 381-2.

²⁷⁰ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 391-2, Hull to Davis, Dec. 8, 1934.

²⁷¹ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 121.

Ambassador in Japan, Joseph C. Grew, did not comment one way or the other on the advisability of a conference but his reports certainly added fuel to the arguments of senior State Department skeptics. He reported that Japanese policymakers were as determined as ever to abandon the ratio system and that, sensitive to the negative world public opinion they received during the London talks, they were “seeking to throw the blame elsewhere for the breakdown in the preliminary conversations.”²⁷² The implication of this report was clear: a conference in 1935 would have almost no chance of success while it presented an opportunity for the Japanese to lay the failure at the feet of the US.

Nonetheless, the preliminaries had certainly concluded on friendlier terms with the British than had been the case during the bilateral talks over the summer. Moffat remarked that while relations with the Japanese had deteriorated alarmingly over the course of the London talks, this was somewhat compensated by the fact that “our working arrangement with England is stronger than it has been for some months past.”²⁷³ The US press also generally noted that Anglo-American relations seem to have cozied in the wake of the talks. At a press conference held on December 21, one reporter asked, “how are we getting along with Great Britain... there has been some discussion that our relations are improved as a result of the strain in every direction.” The President, ever cautious about the appearance of foreign entanglements, downplayed but confirmed the impression, saying simply that relations with the British “are always what they have been, friendly.”²⁷⁴ Davis privately confirmed the press’ perception, reporting that the relationship between the delegations had improved considerably since the summer, and

²⁷² *FRUS* 1934 409

²⁷³ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 122.

²⁷⁴ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 327, Press Conference, Dec. 21, 1934.

that the British government had entirely cast aside notions of a separate agreement with the Japanese.²⁷⁵

On the other hand, Davis reported that the British were possessed of an “inordinate fear that if the tactics we propose so estrange Japan as to lead to ultimate trouble, we may not be with them when the trouble comes.”²⁷⁶ Davis also spoke of a growing fear among British policymakers of a possible German-Japanese entente.²⁷⁷ As a later General Board report on the RN would surmise, the greatest strength of British sea power was also its greatest weakness. Britain’s claim to naval pre-eminence lay in its “possession of round-the-world bases” yet these very possessions put the RN “in close proximity to possible enemies.”²⁷⁸ In other words, Davis’ statement to the Prime Minister that Britain needed America more than the other way around appeared to be accurate. With the door apparently closed on an Anglo-Japanese arrangement, Britain had nowhere else to turn to but America. And given the far greater immediacy of danger for the RN, as well as the threat arising on its doorstep, Britain needed a friend much more than distant America did.

The issue of immediacy explains many of the Anglo-American misunderstandings that occurred over the course of the preliminary talks. In the summer of 1934, the sphere of American interest was as secure as it had ever been by dint of geography. Therefore, policymakers viewed the prospective conference as an opportunity to reduce the burden of arms on an already battered economy and to buy time for the USN to reach treaty strength. The British, however, faced rising threats from every sphere they occupied, and

²⁷⁵ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 316, Davis to Roosevelt, Dec. 14, 1934.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 317.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1693, enclosure “A Basis for Discussion of Limitation of Armaments – 1935,” July 27, 1935.

therefore they viewed the conference as an opportunity to enhance their security. When faced with the inevitability of Japanese abrogation in the fall preliminaries, the American delegation was suddenly presented with the same sense of immediacy that had informed the British cruiser demands over the summer. It was clear the Japanese proposal was no bargaining play—they would be satisfied with quantitative parity and nothing less. Under these circumstances, the American delegation was quick to change its tune—the 20 percent reduction was almost immediately out the window, and they became much more amenable to Britain’s security claims.

At the same time, however, the Americans would not be rushed by Britain into their “middle course.” In the event of a war with Japan, USN planners were relatively certain that they would eventually triumph. War Plan Orange in the early 1930s did not consider the factor of British cooperation at all. Working under the assumption that the Atlantic would remain secure, the United States could rely on its larger Navy and superior shipbuilding capacity to beat the IJN. Britain, on the other hand, could never bring the full force of its Navy to bear against Japan while its homeland lay in such dangerous waters. It was clear that Britain was attempting to bind the United States to a certain policy in the Pacific in order to safeguard its own Far Eastern possessions. If America approached any such arrangement cautiously, this can hardly be attributed to isolationism. American policymakers needed time to re-evaluate the situation and to determine exactly what Japanese intentions were. In any event, as time would tell, the American reading of the situation was more accurate than that of their British counterparts, whose hope that Japan might be dissuaded from its course was based more on desperation than fact. It is clear that the Americans were coming around to the idea of

closer cooperation with the British in the Pacific, but the terms of such cooperation would not be dictated solely by the party in greater need.

The Japanese announced their abrogation of the Washington Treaty on December 29, 1934. The announcement contained the same talk of a common upper limit that had been the Japanese line since 1932, and emphasized that the Washington Treaty's "inferior ratio, so detrimental to our national prestige, is bound to remain a source of permanent and profound discontent to our people."²⁷⁹ Article XXIII of the Washington Treaty provided that two years' notice must be given before the termination of the Treaty's terms. The London Naval Treaty was of a fixed duration of six years and was set to expire December 31, 1936. Thus, by January 1, 1937, the system of naval arms limitation and all its attendant political machinery would be dead.

As the new year dawned, world events proved inauspicious for a grand Anglo-American alliance. After a concerted effort at securing US participation in the World Court, Roosevelt put the matter to a vote before the Senate. The Court appeared to have a majority backing among the legislators, but a vocal minority campaigned venomously against it. Many in the isolationist camp saw the Court as a back door into the League and all the entanglements that it entailed at a time when Europe was becoming increasingly unstable. Senator Homer T. Bone of Washington summed up the isolationist opinion on the "poisonous European mess," saying that while America ought to be kind to "people who have smallpox, such as Mussolini and Hitler," that nonetheless America ought not to go inside their houses.²⁸⁰ The Roosevelt administration tried to get the isolationist bloc onside by endorsing non-interventionist Senator Vandenberg's amendment that would

²⁷⁹ *FRUS*, 1934, I, 418, Memo by Hull, Dec. 29, 1934.

²⁸⁰ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 356, Eastman to Roosevelt, Jan. 11, 1935.

constrain America's direct involvement in any political administration of a foreign state.²⁸¹ The final vote at the end of January was 53-36—as with the Versailles vote, it captured a majority vote but less than the two-thirds supermajority required by Senate rules for treaty ratification. The World Court debacle in the first weeks of 1935 served as a stark reminder to the British of the difficulty of securing American cooperation. The American political system was geared to produce cautious policy outputs. At a time when Congress harbored a substantial minority whose political philosophy was based around extreme caution in the international realm, a binding Anglo-American arrangement in the Pacific appeared unlikely.

Some small glimmer of hope for an Anglo-American pact could be salvaged from the failure. The President's earnest personal efforts at pushing the World Court appeared to confirm Roosevelt's internationalist inclinations. Roosevelt was greatly irritated by the obstructionists in the Senate, remarking privately about the 36 Senators who voted against the Court, "I am inclined to think that if they ever get to Heaven, they will be doing a lot of apologizing—that is if God is against war—and I think He is."²⁸² Davis was likewise dismayed by the failure in the Senate, but he was quick to reassure the British that it would have no bearing on their bilateral cooperation. Writing to Philip Kerr, later the British ambassador to the United States, Davis said

I assume that this action on the Court will make them feel in England that they cannot count on our cooperation. Strange as it may seem, I am inclined to believe that it will have the opposite effect. Some of the Senators for instance, who have opposed the Court are in favor of Anglo-American cooperation. There is somehow a feeling here that we can cooperate with England without becoming entangled in Europe and that in

²⁸¹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 373-4, Press Conference, Jan. 23, 1935.

²⁸² Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 381, Roosevelt to Sen. Robinson, Jan. 30, 1935.

that way we can both more effectively deal with the problem in the Far East which is of common interest and concern. Apparently there was universal approval by the press here of the stand I took in London and of the way the United States and England stood together in refusing to accede to Japanese proposals. I have already talked with some of the Senators and they have been most laudatory of my position...²⁸³

Even if Davis was trying to paint a rosy picture, it was clear that the United States was not monolithically isolationist at this time. There were many American policymakers who were at least willing to tolerate some degree of internationalism, including the President, the chief delegate at the naval conference, and well over half the US Senate. The isolationist bloc in the Senate was still a formidable obstacle to Anglo-American cooperation but not an insurmountable one.

Unfortunately, a second, more pressing development later in the year also raised some questions regarding America's commitment to any international accord. Congress passed the first in a series of neutrality laws in the summer of 1935. Passed in the wake of the Nye Committee investigations, an influential series of hearings that had determined that financiers and industrialists had forced the United States into World War One for their own profits, the 1935 Neutrality Act prohibited America from exporting war materiel to any party in an armed conflict.²⁸⁴ The legislation had obvious implications for the Anglo-American relationship. In the last war, imports from America had been absolutely vital to Allied survival. The 1935 iteration of neutrality made no distinction between aggressor and defender, however, which meant that the United States would be prohibited from aiding Britain in any future war. The Neutrality Act was yet further

²⁸³ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 40, Davis to Lothian, Jan. 30, 1935.

²⁸⁴ Dallek, *Roosevelt*, 102-3.

evidence of America's extraordinary caution on the world stage, and its stringent efforts to remove any possible entanglement that could lead it into a foreign war.

As Bear F. Braumoeller has written, in spite of a historiographical consensus that the Neutrality Acts represented the apex of American interwar isolationism, “contemporary commentators, however, noted that the purpose of the Neutrality Act was not nearly as clear-cut as subsequent analyses have assumed. Some members of the public and Congress sought non-involvement in foreign affairs; others sought to use economic embargo as a weapon against aggression,” while still other groups “sought to weaken the President and thereby avoid war, while another sought to strengthen the President’s ability to sanction aggressors.”²⁸⁵ The Neutrality laws were actually an uneasy compromise between internationalists and isolationists, the former party believing that the Act could be invoked as an economic weapon and used to arbitrate international disputes. The limitations of the legislation were certainly recognized by a disgruntled Roosevelt, who decided not to stake any political capital in resisting it. In a public address delivered on August 31, Roosevelt said, “history is filled with unforeseeable situations that call for flexibility of action. It is conceivable that situations may arise in which the wholly inflexible provisions of Section I of this act might have exactly the opposite effect from that which was intended. In other words, the inflexible provisions might drag us into war instead of keeping us out.”²⁸⁶ Davis concurred, and reckoned the legislation was simply Congress meddling with the Presidential prerogative. While generally supportive of Neutrality, Davis believed it was only proper that “the President should have the authority to decide whether an embargo on arms should be applied to any

²⁸⁵ Braumoeller, “Myth of Isolationism,” 359.

²⁸⁶ Rosenman, *Public Papers*, IV, 345-46, Presidential statement of approval of Neutrality legislation, Aug. 31, 1935.

one belligerent rather than necessarily to all.”²⁸⁷ If, for example, a general war were to break out between Japan and China (as appeared likely), then the United States would be obliged to withhold any aid to China despite the numerous Japanese violations that would have caused it.²⁸⁸ These misgivings were cold comfort to observers across the Atlantic. As world conditions deteriorated in 1935, America appeared to be preparing to entrench themselves within “fortress America.”

Ominous warnings from abroad began to permeate the offices of Washington policymakers throughout 1935. Breckenridge Long, the Ambassador to Italy, reported in February that war preparations were intensifying across Europe and that “there is no doubt in my mind that Europe is headed straight for war.”²⁸⁹ Ambassador Grew warned that the Japanese were absolutely committed to attaining first class power status with “uncontested dominance over ‘East Asia.’” Emboldened by their successful defiance of world opinion at Shanghai and in Manchuria, the Japanese were almost certain to torpedo any conference held in the near future in service of that aim.²⁹⁰ William Dodd, ambassador to Germany, reported troubling rumors of a tripartite German-Italian-Japanese cooperation. “If Italy, Germany and Japan at some critical moment move at the same time in their spheres, I cannot see any way to stop the dictatorships,” Dodd wrote to Roosevelt personally, adding “one of the Ministers here said to me today: “In that case I would commit suicide; your country alone can save civilization.”²⁹¹ In March, Roosevelt gloomily concluded with Ambassador Long that “these are the most hair-trigger times the

²⁸⁷ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 43, Davis to Hull, “Memo regarding neutrality,” Jan. 18, 1935.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 426, Long to Roosevelt, Feb. 21, 1935.

²⁹⁰ *FRUS*, 1935, I, 70, Grew to Hull, May 31, 1935.

²⁹¹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 44, Dodd to Roosevelt, Oct. 31, 1935.

world has gone through in your lifetime or mine. I do not even exclude June and July, 1914, because at that time there was economic and social stability with only the loom of a war by Governments in accordance with preconceived ideas and prognostications. Today there is not one element alone but three or more.”²⁹² The rapidly worsening international situation would certainly influence American decision-making regarding the advisability of a naval conference in 1935 and the attitude that America would assume at said conference.

Another consideration for the Americans as they decided whether or not a naval conference was worth the effort was the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. Often seen in the historiography as the beginning of the British policy of appeasement towards Nazi Germany and a “landmark on the road to war,” in 1935 the UK unilaterally rewrote the naval provisions of Versailles and endorsed a much larger German Navy than the treaty allowed.²⁹³ The World Disarmament Conference in Geneva had failed entirely by 1935, with Hitler withdrawing Germany from both the Conference and the League in October 1933. Thereafter, Hitler accelerated the German rearmament program that had been quietly ongoing since the 1920s. Hitler’s naval rearmament included the so-called “pocket battleships,” which simultaneously presented a type of ship that might render Britain’s cruiser fleet obsolete while also spurring reactive naval building in France and Italy, threatening to upheave the European naval balance.²⁹⁴ British naval policy had been sufficiently served by a “one power standard” with the United States, a dramatic climb down from its “two power standard” in the decades leading up with WWI which had

²⁹² Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 437-38, Roosevelt to Long, March 9, 1935.

²⁹³ Charles Bloch, “Great Britain, German Rearmament, and the Naval Agreement of 1935,” in *European Diplomacy Between Two Wars, 1919-1939*, ed. Hans W. Gatzke (Chicago: Quadrangle Books 1972) 148.

²⁹⁴ Claire M. Scammell, “The Royal Navy and the Strategic Origins of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935,” in *Journal of Strategic Studies* 20.2 (1997): 101.

mandated a Navy as large as the next two largest combined.²⁹⁵ The naval race that German building threatened would certainly force a return to the “two power standard” (excluding the United States) and force greater British building—building which their ravaged finances could ill afford. In a bid to limit the German naval expansion, the MacDonald government extended the invitation for bilateral talks with Hitler. The Foreign Office and the Admiralty agreed that with Germany flagrantly defying the Versailles Treaty, some form of limitation would be better than unrestricted building.

The British were surprised and troubled by Hitler’s aggressive negotiations, however. Hitler demanded a Navy 35 per cent the strength of the RN, and substantially more in submarine tonnage. More than the number itself, however, the British were dismayed by German tactics. Atherton reported in May that while the MacDonald Government was previously aware of Hitler’s 35 per cent ambition, “the British Government resent what has been termed in a private conversation the ‘nasty way’ taken by Germany to make this announcement, just before the Anglo-German naval conversations were scheduled to take place in London.”²⁹⁶ As with the Japanese demand for a common upper limit, the Foreign Office believed that the initial demand was bluster and that they could talk the Germans down.²⁹⁷ British diplomats proved unable to get Hitler to budge, however, and the Admiralty ultimately accepted a German Navy 35 percent the size of the RN as acceptable within Britain’s security framework and two power standard. In recent years, historians have begun to re-examine the AGNA as the best the British could have done given the circumstances—faced with a growing security

²⁹⁵ Christopher M. Bell, *The Royal Navy, Seapower and Strategy Between the Wars* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000) 2.

²⁹⁶ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 3, Atherton to Hull, “Debate on Foreign Affairs and Defense, in the House of Commons,” May 3, 1935.

²⁹⁷ Scammell, “Anglo-German Naval Agreement,” 107.

problem in the Far East, keeping the still embryonic Germany Navy to within a maximum limit of around a third the tonnage of the RN was better than nothing. As Clare M. Scammell has written, “Only by limiting the *potential* naval threat of Britain’s *ultimate* enemy, could the Admiralty concentrate its efforts once more on the *actual* and *immediate* threat of Japan in the Far East.”²⁹⁸

Whether or not the AGNA was a wise strategic move for Britain must remain a discussion for a different place. The unfortunate side-effect of the deal was the negative perception that it cultivated among Britain’s prospective allies in any future conflict. France, in particular, was outraged by Britain’s unilateral action and disregard for the Versailles Treaty. Feeling betrayed by Britain’s move to endorse a larger Navy in the hands of their mortal enemy, France would cause a great deal of trouble at the upcoming conference.

The Americans were also bothered by British action on the German front. Roosevelt was skeptical of the wisdom of the agreement, believing that “the British have, in the German Naval agreement, let themselves in for real resentment on the Continent, and also for much trouble to themselves in the days to come.”²⁹⁹ He also criticized the treaty’s submarine provisions, which allowed the Germans 45 per cent of the RN submarine tonnage, with the theoretical right to parity if the German government deemed this necessary. Given the submarine’s immense potential for threatening America’s cardinal policy of “freedom of the seas,” this provision was particularly irksome to the United States. Roosevelt seemed exasperated by the whole British attitude on the matter, saying the British “are a funny people and, though always polite, can be counted on when

²⁹⁸ Scammell, “Anglo-German Naval Agreement,” 113.

²⁹⁹ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 554, Roosevelt to Bingham, July 11, 1935.

things are going well with them to show a national selfishness towards other nations which makes mutual helpfulness very difficult to accomplish. Their average conception of mutuality differs from mine.”³⁰⁰

Secretary Hull was similarly ill-disposed to the AGNA and the lack of information given on a matter that would ultimately affect American security. While the United States had conceded to contemplate Britain’s “middle course” in the interim between the preliminaries and the conference, Hull wrote to Atherton,

the British Government is now, upon its own initiative, and without prior discussion with us, endeavoring to reach ‘a sufficient measure of European agreement’ so that it can put forward ‘as a European view’ proposal which it must have known embodied such a wide divergence from existing treaty types as to make them unacceptable to the United States. In these circumstances, while we wish to be as cooperative as possible and share the desire of the British to reach an agreement on general naval limitation, we feel that little hope of achieving these aims is offered by a conference so long as the positions of the two major participants are still so far apart.³⁰¹

It is clear that however much America’s cautionary policy outputs distressed Britain in the aftermath of the 1934 preliminaries, Britain’s actions in the European sphere provoked a great deal of irritation in America.

The political consideration was only one half of the equation. The USN was, of course, the other critical component in any Anglo-American pact. In the immediate aftermath of the Japanese abrogation, however, many senior officers in the Navy were much more concerned with their own fleet rather than any notion of cooperation with the RN. A military force must prepare for the worst-case scenario, and the worst-case scenario in 1935 was a war with Japan with no outside help. It was also a scenario for

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ *FRUS*, 1935, I, 91, Hull to Atherton, August 14, 1935.

which the USN was woefully unprepared. America's naval shortcomings appeared starker given the news from Japan. In 1935 the USN was well short of its 5:3 allotment in overall tonnage and even worse when it came to underage vessels. The General Board reckoned that the ratio in underage vessels was approximately 9:7, a slim margin even without the considerable geographic advantage that Japan possessed.³⁰² Secretary of the Navy Swanson ordered new post-Washington designs be drawn up of vessels hitherto restricted by the treaty, including so-called "pocket battleships" and fast cruiser squadrons.³⁰³

CNO Standley, also the chief technical advisor for the American delegation, took the lead in stumping for more funds for the Navy and delivered a renewed call for a steady and regularized building program. Standley has gotten something of a bad shake from his contemporaries and historians alike for being rigid and conservative. His predecessor, William V. Pratt, suggested as much to Roosevelt, saying that he personally endorsed Admiral Arthur Hepburn to replace him but that Standley was the service's choice—implying that the conservative-minded line officers saw Standley as one of their own.³⁰⁴ The President and Standley had a cool working relationship throughout his term, with Standley remarking privately that he resented Roosevelt's "inflated opinion" of his expertise in naval matters.³⁰⁵ William McBride, writing about the USN's adaptation to new technologies, casts Standley as a technological obstructionist who "was a staunch member of the "Gun Club" and cool to aviation and airships."³⁰⁶ It is true, Standley had

³⁰² LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1640, Oct. 1, 1934.

³⁰³ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 322-23, Swanson to Roosevelt, Nov. 28, 1934, and Roosevelt's reply, Dec. 17, 1934.

³⁰⁴ McBride, *Technological Change*, 304.

³⁰⁵ McBride, *Technological Change*, 165.

³⁰⁶ McBride, *Technological Change*, 188.

been a loud big-Navy advocate during the London Naval Conference and had stood in the camp of the Anglophobic nationalist Hilary P. Jones, who had strongly objected to the treaty. Apparently, Standley's reputation as a rigid big-Navy enthusiast was even recognized in Japan. An ONI report issued from Tokyo on October 6, 1934 stated that "most of the papers expressed the opinion that Admiral Standley's presence in London meant that it would be impossible for Japan and America to reach an agreement, since they are very sure that he will not be inclined to accept the Japanese proposals."³⁰⁷ Historian Robert Levine is particularly critical of the CNO, claiming, "his views were inflexible... Standley was, unfortunately, a poor choice as delegate to sensitive disarmament negotiations... Standley went to London to safeguard the Navy from Davis just as much as he went to safeguard it from the British and Japanese negotiators."³⁰⁸

This criticism is mostly unfair. Standley's views evolved to be much more flexible upon assuming office as CNO, and evolved even further over the course of the conference and its preliminaries. Contrary to McBride's assertion, Standley frequently spoke out for the need of carriers and other auxiliary vessels. In an October 1933 radio address, Standley declared that "a treaty Navy which of course includes aircraft and a large merchant marine are vital to the welfare of the United States."³⁰⁹ Standley was particularly emphatic on the need for merchant marine support craft to service any US Pacific fleet, a vital component of sea power that had been neglected by politicians and "Big Gun" naval officers alike.³¹⁰ He criticized the funds attached to the Vinson Act for failing to provide for "minor combat ships and auxiliaries, tenders, etc., which are

³⁰⁷ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Naval Attaché, Japan, Report No. 252, Oct. 6, 1934.

³⁰⁸ Levine, *American Naval Rearmament*, 277-8.

³⁰⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Navy Press Transcript, Oct. 27, 1933.

³¹⁰ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 281, Hull to Roosevelt, Nov. 21, 1934. The US Merchant Marine had been badly neglected in the 1920s, and its total tonnage had declined considerably since 1920.

required to round out our fleet.”³¹¹ The characterization of Standley as a mechanical adherent to the battleship is entirely false.

As CNO, Standley finally ordered an official end to the “Through Ticket” strategy present in the early iterations of War Plan Orange, a strategy that advocated a swift trans-Pacific journey of the US fleet to Manila and thence to Japan for a decisive naval engagement.³¹² He was instrumental in developing the so-called “cautionary” approach, which would slowly take the Micronesian islands as a “highway” across the Pacific.³¹³ In a February 1935 address, Standley stumped for funds in a measured tone. “Let us avoid rocking the boat; let us not rattle the sword; let us pursue the even tenor of our way; urge adherence to our present naval policy and replacement program and make every effort to see that funds are appropriated to carry this program into effect.”³¹⁴ Standley consistently asked for a regularized building program throughout 1935, but a gradual one that would avoid “rocking the international boat” or take on the appearance of “swashbuckling.”³¹⁵ Standley was well aware the effects of increased American naval spending would have on the Japanese militarist faction, and sought to avoid such negative effects as much as possible. He was a “big Navy” enthusiast only inasmuch as he advocated for the USN to be built to its full Washington allotments, which was the policy of even the most ardent pro-treaty officers such as William V. Pratt.³¹⁶ Standley decried the “anti-preparedness influence” which was “able to thwart all efforts to build the Navy to treaty strength.”³¹⁷ However, he consistently showed himself to be in favor

³¹¹ NARG 80, Box 62, Records of the CNO Office, Standley to Swanson, March 22, 1934.

³¹² Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 182.

³¹³ Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 184.

³¹⁴ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Navy Press Transcript, February 14, 1935.

³¹⁵ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Navy Press Transcript, March 29, 1935.

³¹⁶ NARG 80, Box 62, Records of the CNO Office, Pratt to Swanson, March 24, 1933.

³¹⁷ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Navy Press Transcript, September 17, 1935.

of maintaining the upper limit of naval expansion. The Admiral was an excellent steward of the USN in the troubled years of the mid-30s, and would prove his worth at the conference and its aftermath.

The General Board, without clear direction from its civilian policymakers as to whether a conference would even be held, began to draw up recommendations on the assumption that it would go forward. As would be expected, the General Board roundly dismissed the Japanese demand for a common upper limit. However, they were also critical of the British middle course, which discarded official quantitative limitation in the form of the ratio system in favor of stricter qualitative limitation. Due to Britain's widely dispersed array of naval bases and superior merchant marine, the RN could best afford smaller vessels with a more limited radius of action of any of the naval powers. With the best shipbuilding facilities in the world, Britain could also best afford to swiftly construct large numbers of small craft so long as no other nation built a type of vessel that rendered them obsolete. "The announced intention of Great Britain to favor qualitative limitation," read a General Board report on July 16, "to the detriment of quantitative limitation—is in accord with a policy of self-interest which, analysis will prove, has no fundamental principle of general application behind it."³¹⁸ The British position was "plausible but illogical" and rife with "self-serving policies and methods."³¹⁹ The General Board insisted that the United States stick to a consistent policy, even to the detriment of relations with the British. An August report stated that "Great Britain and Japan desire to increase the tonnage of types which the United States considers should be held, at most, to present levels. While the increase desired by Great Britain has a more logical

³¹⁸ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1693, enclosure "A Basis for Discussion of Limitation of Armaments – 1935," July 27, 1935.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*

foundation than that of Japan, the two can hardly be accorded different treatment.”³²⁰ If the United States entered the conference seeking merely to preserve the status quo, that would place the responsibility of the conference’s likely failure squarely upon the other powers.

The General Board, while backpedalling somewhat from their openness to Anglo-American cooperation that they had displayed during the summer of 1934, was nonetheless not composed of the “Big Navy” diehards that the historiography often presumes. The General Board endorsed a 20 percent reduction to the size of the capital fleet so long as the qualitative limitations established at Washington remained the same, and recommended that this should be the continued policy of the United States at the prospective conference.³²¹ The General Board suggested that a 20 percent quantitative reduction could be accomplished simply by scrapping and not replacing some of the capital ships that would become overage over the next decade.³²² Beyond a 20 percent reduction in the battleship fleet, they also recommended exploring further reductions in other categories, including a 10 percent reduction in light cruisers, a 10 percent reduction in aircraft carriers, and a 33 percent reduction in destroyers (contingent on the unlikely abolishment of submarines).³²³ The GB saw the value in limitation, as expressed in a July report,

There appears to be one way in which the United States can exert influence toward stabilization, international understanding, and retention of the present basis and situation as regards naval armaments; that is:—to present to all interested nations a proposed general policy as to the

³²⁰ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1696, Oct. 4, 1935.

³²¹ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1693, enclosure “A Basis for Discussion of Limitation of Armaments – 1935,” July 27, 1935.

³²² NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1640, Oct. 1, 1934.

³²³ *Ibid.*

situation left by, but not on, the termination of the treaties; to invite the other nations to concur in this basic policy; and to state her willingness to confer as to details. The essence of that proposed policy should derive from the thesis of the United States presented at London,—that equality of security is fundamental and that equality of armament is an anomaly in international welfare and good relations. It should state the intention to preserve if possible the fundamental features of international understanding and stabilized situation established by the treaties under which accord has been maintained... the United States may suggest recognition that the Washington, London and collateral treaties have served as a basis for international stabilization and agreement...³²⁴

Certainly by the mid-1930s, the interwar USN was not the ultra-conservative, myopically nationalistic body that it has sometimes been portrayed as. The naval officer corps could and did see the security value in arms limitation and even arms reduction. While they resisted limitation solely on Britain's terms, they were neither anti-treaty nor Anglophobic.

By August it appeared likely the conference would go forward, with the British indicating that they would call it sometime in the fall. There was general agreement by both the civilian and military halves of the delegation that an arrangement with Britain was both possible and desirable. Davis and Standley concurred that "there are no insuperable difficulties to our achieving agreement with Great Britain on the question of qualitative limitation and of increased cruiser tonnage."³²⁵ Davis suggested that the USN could retain greater overage tonnage to compensate for British demands for a larger cruiser fleet, and Standley was generally amenable.³²⁶ While Standley said that the USN would not concede to a lower unit tonnage cap for battleships from the current 35,000 tons, he was prepared to accept a limit of 14 inch guns rather than the 16 inches presently

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *FRUS*, 1935, I, 86, State Department Memo by Noel H. Field, August 7, 1935.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

in the Washington Treaty.³²⁷ The Admiral also said that the nettlesome question of 8 inch gun cruisers “will not in any case be an urgent question in the near future, since this type is of recent construction and, as long as the total tonnage in this sub-category is not increased, there will in any case be no new construction therein for a number of years.”³²⁸ At least as far as the delegation was concerned, the upcoming conference would be fertile ground for an Anglo-American accord.

This is not to suggest that the delegation was unreservedly pro-British. In a September 14 meeting between Secretary Hull and the naval half of the delegation (as part of a general policy to coordinate State and Navy Departments more effectively than at past conferences)³²⁹, Standley thought that for the moment the United States should hold its cards close to its chest in dealing with the British. He did not believe that the British had been “frank with us;” for instance, Standley “doubted whether the British really wanted to limit battleships to 25,000 tons.”³³⁰ With the Italians presently building two 35,000 ton battleships and the Japanese almost sure to reject any treaty whatsoever, the 25,000 ton limit seemed to Standley to be a disingenuous bargaining chip. Standley believed that the British were endeavoring to get the French and Italians onside regarding qualitative limitations on battleships in order to present a united European front on the matter and force concessions from the minority American position.³³¹ He advised that the delegation should perhaps offer to offer a slight reduction in gun caliber and a token 2-3,000 ton decrease in order to save face. Given that America had not constructed a new

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between State Department and Navy Department, Sept. 14, 1935.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ *Ibid.*

battleship in almost fifteen years, however, the first post-treaty battleships laid down would be largely experimental, and conceding to such a drastic alteration to the Washington characteristics might result in costly fleet of instantly obsolete capital ships.³³² This was particularly worrisome for USN planners, who were saddled with the old problem of a lack of bases and therefore required large cruising radii. Standley expressed irritation that the British were always demanding the Americans to be more understanding of their responsibilities which required a larger cruiser force while ignoring that “the United States has a particular problem in the Pacific which calls for characteristics in American Fleet construction which are not required by other Powers.”³³³ The naval problems which had bedevilled Anglo-American relations throughout the interwar period had been muted since the preliminaries, but they were still very much in the delegations’ minds as the conference loomed nearer.

Despite these minor misgivings, the pieces continued to fall in place. The Navy and State Departments formally notified the British that they would accept many of their qualitative demands, including a reduction in tonnage to carriers, an extension of the age limit on battleships from 20 to 26 years, and likely an agreement to a building holiday of 8 inch gun heavy cruisers.³³⁴ The USN had, by late 1935, 10 heavy cruisers built and 8 more building or provided for, meaning that they had reached their treaty allotment in this category and could therefore afford to be agreeable without compromising security or being inconsistent on policy.³³⁵ In a November meeting between the President and the

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ *Ibid.*

³³⁴ *FRUS*, 1935, I, 126-7, Hull to Bingham, Oct. 14, 1935.

³³⁵ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Undated Navy Department memo, “Respecting cruiser limitation on the basis of present British cruiser strength plus cruisers building and appropriated for.”

delegates, Davis and Standley both insisted to Roosevelt that “our Navy is inclined to consider Great Britain’s insistence on additional cruisers sympathetically, bearing in mind British responsibility throughout the world.” Standley added that “the United States had been in the undesirable position in the past of attempting to prove to the British that they did not need what they claimed they needed.”³³⁶ Roosevelt agreed that the US should avoid trying to determine British security requirements, and informed the delegates that they were authorized to accept 75,000 ton increase above present tonnage levels, though they should insist that the increase be offset as much as possible by reductions in other categories—a stark comedown from the President’s bottom line position from a year before.³³⁷

Roosevelt deemed a bilateral treaty with the British “politically undesirable” as it would give a perception of Anglo-American entanglement that would be off-putting to both the Japanese and to domestic non-interventionists. If the conference collapsed, Roosevelt was confident that the two nations would be able to cooperate just as effectively in “non-contractual form” (in other words, without a politically risky treaty).³³⁸ Roosevelt and the delegates also approved the State Department’s draft regarding America’s cooperation with Britain, which read

It is possible that the British Government may again bring up the thought that some form of agreement for Anglo-American political cooperation, particularly in the Far East, might be a determining factor in Great Britain’s attitude toward naval limitation. The Delegation should repeat the position taken in the conversations a year ago, namely, that any agreement of this sort is out of the question. On the other hand, the Delegation may emphasize the inevitable and growing community of

³³⁶ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between American delegation, Hull, and Roosevelt, November 23, 1935.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*

³³⁸ *FRUS*, 1935, I, 152, Hull to Davis, Nov. 26, 1935.

interests of the British Empire and the United States throughout the world and particularly in the Far East (maintenance of treaties and rights accruing thereunder, stabilization of political and economic relations, maintenance of Open Door, opposition to expansion by means of military aggression, et cetera). From this community of interests, it would appear evident that despite the absence of any mutual commitments, the United States and the British Empire are likely, in their own interests and in the interests of the community of nations, to follow, in general, a parallel, though independent policy, notably in the Far East.³³⁹

Roosevelt's administration was clearly still exhibiting the same reluctance to accede to any appearance of entanglement, but there was a definite change in the tone of American policy towards Britain. This statement appears to implicitly acknowledge that the United States intended to pursue an unofficial "non-contractual" policy of cooperation with Britain in the Pacific, regardless of the outcome of the conference. While the official legislation and policy outputs of the United States in the mid-1930s may appear to be consistent with an isolationist interpretation, many of the policymakers in the executive were shifting America in a much more "entangled" direction.

The British at last gave formal notice for the conference on October 25, to be held in early December. Ambassador Bingham desired to be the chief delegate at the conference, but the Navy favored Davis, and Roosevelt came down in favor of Davis as well.³⁴⁰ The principal concern was "how seriously the conference is to be taken by the British and ourselves."³⁴¹ Appointing the present ambassador to London to handle the conversations rather than sending a special delegation would run the risk of appearing to take the conference without due seriousness. As ever, political considerations were on the

³³⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between American delegation, Hull, and Roosevelt, November 23, 1935.

³⁴⁰ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 89, Roosevelt to Bingham, Nov. 23, 1935. The Navy preferred Davis on the basis that he had been briefed on Naval issues since his involvement with the General Disarmament Conference and they did not wish to start from scratch with Bingham.

³⁴¹ *FRUS*, 1935, I, 137, Roosevelt to Bingham, Nov. 1, 1935.

President's mind, but they were not sufficiently risky for Roosevelt to assume the blame for the conference's failure when the American strategy since the early preliminaries had been to maneuver the blame to Japan's doorstep. "While it is important that our public must not be led to expect too much from the conference," the President wrote to Bingham on November 1, "it is equally important for us to do nothing that would make it appear that we are taking this naval conference causally and less seriously than we have taken previous naval conferences and thus run the risk of being blamed for its failure."³⁴² After much handwringing, America would commit wholeheartedly to the conference in an effort to divest itself of responsibility for its probable collapse.

Despite announcing beforehand that they would not sign any treaty that did not address their quantitative concerns, the Japanese likewise sent a special delegation to London in November. The conference, whose tenability had been questioned by all parties for the preceding year, was to convene on December 9, 1935. On December 8, the US and UK delegations met for a final discussion to harmonize their positions. The British still expressed hope that the Japanese delegation would back down from their demand for parity once it became clear that America and Britain, and probably France and Italy as well, rejected their thesis of a common upper limit entirely.³⁴³ While this did not align with the American delegation's expectations, Davis nonetheless pledged that the United States would not object to British cruiser increases, which amounted to a total of 60 underage and 10 overage cruisers. He also promised that the American delegation would make no major issue of the 10,000 ton heavy cruiser.³⁴⁴ If Britain's security

³⁴² *Ibid.*

³⁴³ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Memo of meeting between British and American delegations, Dec. 8, 1935.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

estimations deemed that a 70 cruiser fleet was necessary, and if this was the only “stumbling block” for Anglo-American unity at the conference, then the United States was willing to swallow its demand for reductions. The British delegates were “fully satisfied” by the “most reasonable attitude on the part of the American Delegation.”³⁴⁵ Both parties agreed to be patient with the Japanese proposals and not to frustrate them into an early exit, but they also agreed to present a united front of objections.

The conference opened the following day with statements by all the delegations stating their aims. Stanley Baldwin, the new Prime Minister who had replaced MacDonald over the summer, laid out the British proposal of continued quantitative ratios supplemented by stricter qualitative controls. They also pled for the abolishment of the submarine, a British desire held since the Washington Conference but always overridden by the other delegations.³⁴⁶ Davis delivered the American proposal. Davis mentioned America’s commitment to a 20 percent reduction, mostly for form’s sake, but mainly his speech was designed to pre-empt the Japanese proposal. With nearly every nation in the world struggling to recover from a worldwide Depression, it seemed obvious folly to assume the enormous expense of an arms race now. “No nation desires to enter such a race,” Davis said. “No government can afford the responsibility for inaugurating it.”³⁴⁷ In order to head off any accusation that the Vinson-Trammell Act constituted an “inauguration” of a naval arms race, Davis pointed out that the United States virtually ceased construction for 10 years while other nations built to their limits. Vinson-Trammell, he said, was essentially a “replacement” program that was consistent

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁶ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of the first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 9, 1935.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

with the original terms of the Washington Treaty.³⁴⁸ The French and Italians delegations both delivered relatively vague commitments to the tenets of arms control, with the French specifically refuting the British desire to abolish submarines.³⁴⁹ The chief Japanese delegate Admiral Nagano concluded, and reiterated the Japanese proposal of a common upper limit and equality of arms.

The conference was immediately consumed by the problem of the common upper limit. On December 10, First Lord of the Admiralty and Conference Chairman Eyres-Monsell, floated the possibility of “unilateral and voluntary declarations by each of the signatory Powers, limiting its new Naval construction over a period of years,” as a means of “perpetuating the underlying principles of the Treaty of Washington”—in other words, the “middle course.”³⁵⁰ Davis solidified America’s claim to legitimacy in the arena of arms control by citing the fact that the United States sacrificed the greatest tonnage at the Washington Conference, including some very valuable vessels that were almost complete.³⁵¹ Yet he also maneuvered the delegation to the spot that Roosevelt had desired, claiming that the United States was “demanding absolutely nothing,” and that it was entirely content to continue the treaties as they were presently formulated.³⁵²

The floor was then opened to questions of Japan’s controversial common upper limit. Davis asked if the Japanese intended that the IJN should build up to the tonnage levels of the USN and the RN or if the Western powers were expected to scrap until they had reached the Japanese level. He also asked which naval powers the common upper

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 10, 1935.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² *Ibid.*

limit was intended to apply to.³⁵³ The British followed up, questioning the wisdom of allowing any naval power to build up except for the power possessing the largest Navy who must stand still or, worse, scrap down. “As I see it,” Monsell proclaimed, “a large Navy is maintained, not as a luxury but only because of a vital necessity.”³⁵⁴ The American and British delegations worked together and in succession to poke holes in the Japanese thesis.

The Japanese desired time to formulate answers to the Anglo-American barrage, and the meeting was adjourned until the next day. On December 11 they replied that it was “necessary for the larger navies to make the greatest sacrifice,” and that the “common upper limit” was to be “fixed at as low a figure as possible,” perhaps even below the current IJN tonnage.³⁵⁵ In other words, the Japanese plan would require the United States and Great Britain to scrap huge portions of their navies—a radical and unacceptable demand that obviously telegraphed its intention to be a spoiler proposal. Nagano refused to give specifics of the Japanese plan until all the delegations accepted the principle of the common upper limit.³⁵⁶ Nagano bungled his answer to which powers the common upper limit was to apply to, however, identifying only “Great Britain, the United States and Japan” since “there has always existed and still exists today a specially intimate relationship between those three Powers on the disarmament question.”³⁵⁷ By excluding the French and the Italians from the common upper limit, Japan squandered any chance it had of securing the cooperation of the lesser naval powers that would

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁵ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Extract of the replies of the Japanese delegation, Dec. 11, 1935.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

actually benefit from their thesis of equality of arms. Nagano later backpedalled and opened up the possibility of applying the common upper limit to all powers, but the damage was already done.

The British and American delegations again launched a coordinated attack against the Japanese proposal. Monsell stated that equality of navies would mean inequality of security, as Britain had global responsibilities that would prevent the concentration of its forces and thus make them vulnerable everywhere. Chatfield posed the hypothetical situation of a large country with many neighbors forced to make do with the same sized army as a small country with only one or two neighbors to illustrate the UK's security problems and the general folly of the common upper limit.³⁵⁸ Furthermore, Britain's "absolute needs of naval security" based on its global responsibilities and total dependence on sea-borne commerce meant that they would be obliged to set the limit on the common upper limit. As Britain already possessed the world's largest Navy, that meant "the result must be largely to increase armaments all over the world, and often increase armaments in countries that do not really want them at all because if, by treaty, any country is allowed to build up to a certain level you may be quite sure that a section will... always be pressing its government to build up, for the purpose of prestige, to the limit that it is allowed to be treaty."³⁵⁹ The inevitable result of the Japanese proposal would "enormously increase the armaments of the world."³⁶⁰

Davis remarked "I find myself in general accord with the views expressed by the British Delegation regarding the impracticability of, and also the fundamental objections

³⁵⁸ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 12, 1935.

³⁵⁹ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 11, 1935.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

to, the proposal for a common upper limit.” Prior to the Washington Treaty, there existed a theoretical common upper limit, in which any nation could build to the level of the most powerful nation in the system if it so desired. This, of course, created a feeling of deep insecurity and led to dangerous and expensive arms races.³⁶¹ Davis accused the Japanese of attempting to revert the world to the state of insecurity that existed before arms control and which had precipitated the First World War. Furthermore, Davis questioned the wisdom of throwing out the experience and stability of the Washington System and adopting an entirely new theory when the world was in the throes of Depression and war.³⁶² The points of both the Americans and the British overlapped and complemented the other, owing in no small part to the fact that the delegations frequently met before the sessions to rehearse the questions they intended to put to the Japanese.³⁶³

The US and UK delegations were soon helped by the French and Italians, who had been subjected to intense British diplomatic efforts over the past year and who had been alienated by Japan’s exclusion from the common upper limit. On December 16, Italian delegate Raineri-Biscia said that the common upper limit was simply the old ratio system in different clothing that would create a “hierarchy between the nations” and would cause no end of difficulties. Quantitative limitation had proven a failure, even by Japan’s own admission—it would be better, he said, to produce a treaty with “qualitative limitation accompanied by indirect methods of quantitative limitation.”³⁶⁴ The French delegation even more directly mirrored British and American sentiments, proclaiming,

³⁶¹ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 13, 1935.

³⁶² *Ibid.*

³⁶³ *DBFP*, 2nd Series, Vol. XIII, 765, Record of conversation between Eden and Davis, Jan.9 1936.

³⁶⁴ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 16, 1935.

“equality of rights does not necessarily imply equality of armaments, and equality of armaments is not always the same thing as equality of security.”³⁶⁵ While the French also elaborated on their own desires, specifically some binding political guarantees of security, it was clear that skillful diplomacy and some blunders from the Japanese had united the four powers against the common upper limit.

The Japanese delegation, meanwhile, provided few answers to the pointed questions continually leveled at them from the Anglo-American quarter. The UK delegation repeatedly asked Japan how they intended to compensate the RN for its worldwide interests versus Japan’s regional interests in view of their proposal for equal tonnage limits. Nagano at first refused to answer, though in the following days he stated that the unique maneuverability of naval craft meant that a superior force could be concentrated decisively, strongly indicating that the Japanese plan allowed for no such “compensations.”³⁶⁶ Davis came to Britain’s defense, saying that the entire basis of the Washington Treaty was to find a level of armament that provided “equality at the point of attack.” Given the global responsibilities of certain powers, in addition to the basic defense requirements for their home waters, “equality at the point of attack” necessitated higher tonnages for global powers.³⁶⁷

Davis also lent a hand to the “middle course” on the conference floor, endorsing it as a means to prevent an arms race and stating that “it is not intended as a means for changing the relative positions of the Naval Powers. It is merely to bridge over temporarily until we may some day be able to find a definite way of limiting naval

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 19, 1935.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

strength.”³⁶⁸ The Japanese delegation rejected the middle course, however, saying that the voluntary limitations on building were simply the ratio system in camouflage. While Nagano acknowledged that the British were attempting to solve the problem of prestige, he insisted that the discriminatory ratios were a security concern first and foremost, and therefore not acceptable to Japan.³⁶⁹ The Japanese also launched their last attempt to drive a wedge in the Anglo-American front. On December 17, in reply to Standley’s assertion that the United States needed a higher ratio to defend its possessions in Japan’s vicinity, Nagano said that if this accepted then any European power with territory in the Western hemisphere ought to be compensated as well in order to defend against American aggression.³⁷⁰ On December 20, the Japanese delegation flipped the script, saying that while the American plan at least “expressly aims at reduction,” the British plan would undoubtedly lead to naval increases.³⁷¹

The conference adjourned for the holiday season with no progress whatsoever, yet the Anglo-American relationship remained strong and even improved by the heated debates on the floor. Ambassador Dodd, who closely followed the conference, remarked to Davis that if Japan and Germany together “become so domineering you will see that England and the United States will be forced into a completer cooperation than they have ever practiced before, little as typical Englishmen like Americans.”³⁷² Davis replied on December 23, writing that while “our British and French friends delayed and dickered entirely too long” on at last coming to terms on the conference, he was confident “that

³⁶⁸ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 17, 1935.

³⁶⁹ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Dec. 19, 1935.

³⁷⁰ *FRUS*, Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan, 1931-1941, I, 287, Memo of conversation between the American and Japanese delegations, Dec. 17, 1935.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

³⁷² LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 37, Dodd to Davis, Dec. 11, 1935.

England and America, the two great democracies, who most want peace, will be forced to cooperate more and more closely to protect themselves against dictatorships and militarists.”³⁷³ To Roosevelt, Davis reported “British cooperation so far has been 100%” and that they have continually refused to rise to Japanese bait that would drive the delegations apart.³⁷⁴ Undersecretary of State William Phillips, who accompanied the delegation, reported to Roosevelt that “while actual accomplishments up-to-date are nil, owing to the adamant position of the Japanese with respect to the ‘common upper limit,’” the real takeaway from the conference thus far was

the decidedly cooperative spirit on behalf of the British Delegation. From the moment of our first call at Admiralty House upon Lord [sic] Monsell, Admiral Chatfield and Craigie there has been nothing but the closest collaboration. In fact, the British do not make a move without talking it over with Norman [Davis], by telephone or otherwise. Vincent Massey [Canadian delegate] remarked last night at the Pilgrim’s Dinner that the evident understanding and cooperative spirit between the Americans and British was the outstanding and most satisfactory part of the Conference so far... the general atmosphere of the Conference could not, in my opinion, be improved upon.³⁷⁵

The British were likewise enthusiastic about their relationship with the Americans. They continually pressed for bilateral talks with the Americans throughout the proceedings to coordinate strategy. Anthony Eden was careful to stress to Bingham and Phillips that the Foreign Office had a “strong desire to do what was possible to maintain close and friendly relations with the United States.”³⁷⁶ The British press mostly reflected the Anglo-American goodwill. The *Scotsman* and *Times* were both generally positive on the American position and approved of the developing unity between the UK

³⁷³ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Davis to Dodd, Dec. 23, 1935.

³⁷⁴ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 207, Davis to Roosevelt, Dec. 20, 1935.

³⁷⁵ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 134-5, Phillips to Roosevelt, Dec. 20, 1935.

³⁷⁶ *DBFP*, 2nd Series, Vol. XIII, 769, Eden to Sir R. Lindsay, Jan. 13, 1936.

and the US. A December 22 article in the *Economist* was especially aggressive in advocating for a closer relationship between the two nations, stating “Japan’s action has overthrown the status quo on which Anglo-American relations have rested since the time of the Washington Conference. In other words, if Japan’s action does not bring the British Empire and the United States together, it will succeed in driving them apart... we may perhaps inevitably expect to see something like a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ between the British Empire and the United States. Such an agreement would reply to any Japanese attempt at an armaments race with an overwhelmingly greater combined construction program...”³⁷⁷ The Japanese press also noticed the trend with a great deal more ire, with the *Asahi* noting “that Anglo-American co-operation at the Conference is undeniable, and that a breakdown is inevitable.”³⁷⁸

When the Conference reconvened in early January, it was quickly bogged down over the essential problem of the common upper limit. Still the British beseeched the Americans to be patient, and to seek alternative methods of arriving at an agreement. Craigie floated the idea of a non-aggression pact in the Pacific during a January 6 bilateral meeting, but Davis deemed such a scheme to be “perfectly worthless” if it dealt with neither the causes for aggression nor the means to carry out such aggression. While Davis pledged to “cooperate within reasonable limits,” he warned that American patience was finite.³⁷⁹

As it happened, the point was soon moot. Joseph Grew reported from Tokyo on January 12 that the conference had only been kept afloat by the Japanese Foreign Office

³⁷⁷ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 3, Atherton to Hill, Jan. 15, 1936.

³⁷⁸ NARG 38, Box 555, Naval Attache, Great Britain, Serial No. 1311, Dec. 24, 1935.

³⁷⁹ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Davis memo on meeting with Craigie and Atherton, Jan. 6, 1936.

who had dissuaded Nagano from an early withdrawal in an attempt to maintain good relations with the Western Powers. Grew reported that “the Japanese Navy in demanding parity had principally the American Navy in view, but failed to foresee the complications which their attitude would create in Europe.” With the Japanese delegation “having burned their bridges,” the Foreign Office was increasingly distressed by the negative effect the Japanese position was having on world opinion.³⁸⁰ On January 15, Nagano officially withdrew the Japanese from the conference.

The Five Power conference collapsed without any discernible progress on the question of naval arms limitation. Yet the short-term objectives of the American delegation had been accomplished. Clearly, the United States had avoided any blame for its failure and, in conjunction with the British, they had laid the blame firmly on Japan’s doorstep. It was evident from the Japanese delegation’s inflexible adherence to a radical reimagining of security in the Pacific that their only real intention was to spoil the Second London Naval Conference in the hope of driving a wedge between the United States and Great Britain. The Japanese line was absolutely rigid from its inception in 1932 at the World Disarmament Conference through the disastrous 1934 preliminaries and ultimately at the floor of the Naval Conference itself. Yet it is also clear that the diplomatic advances made between Britain and America since late 1934 had crafted a relationship sufficiently resilient to withstand the Japanese assault upon naval limitation. Indeed, it is possible to view the entire first portion of the conference, running from December 9, 1935 until the Japanese withdrawal on January 15, 1936 as an elaborate and eminently successful piece of Anglo-American theater designed to prevent the Japanese from leaving on their terms. While the British expressed hope even into early January that the

³⁸⁰ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 31, Grew to Hull, Jan. 12, 1936.

Japanese might come around, it was clear that both the US and UK were laying the groundwork for an Anglo-American order to cope with a post-Washington world.

CHAPTER 4: TOWARDS A PACIFIC ALLIANCE

Despite the success of the short-term American goal of overseeing a managed collapse of the Five Power talks, there was disagreement among American policymakers as to the implications of the Japanese withdrawal and on strategy regarding how to proceed. Senator Key Pittman, the influential Chairman of the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations and one of Roosevelt's legislative point men, made a statement in Congress suggesting that the conference had been rendered pointless and that Japan's withdrawal meant that it planned to commence an arms race. Davis wrote to Hull to prevent officials from making statements of this type while the conference was still ongoing. "The general consensus here is that Japan is not intending to start a naval race," Davis said, but that the navalist faction had "forced the Government to take the unreasonable and unwise position it did..." It was vitally important that officials in Washington express the belief that limitation could proceed without Japan, else the conference would end with nothing gained, and the Japanese withdrawal would have attained its goal of spoiling the proceedings.³⁸¹ Stanley Hornbeck, who received a copy of Davis' missive, refuted the delegate's assertions and sided with Pittman. It seemed clear to Hornbeck that the Japanese *did* intend to commence a building program that would bring the IJN as close to parity with the USN as possible—whether it became a "race" depended on whether the United States and Britain rose to the challenge.³⁸² Furthermore, Hornbeck not only believed that continuing the conference was pointless, but that it might actually be harmful. "The Japanese desire that there be naval limitation,"

³⁸¹ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 35, Davis to Hull, Jan. 16, 1936.

³⁸² *FRUS*, 1936, I, 36, Memo by Hornbeck, Jan. 16, 1936.

Hornbeck asserted. “The fact of there being limitation and of their knowing the limitation to which the other powers agree will be, if and when, of definite value to the Japanese... being outside has its compensations: in this case it will enable them to know to what the others are committed without their being themselves committed.”³⁸³ The whole theory of arms control as it had existed in the Washington system had been undone, Hornbeck claimed, saying that,

it may with reason be doubted whether, in the world as it is, multilateral agreements with regard to armament can, unless preceded and connected with agreements with regard to political matters, rest on any sound foundation, and whether, even if associated with political agreements, their net effect is not that of deceiving the peacefully inclined nations into a false sense of security without in any way really placing effective obstacles in the way of aggressively disposed nations. In other words, it may be asked: should nations rich in resources and desirous of peace limit their right to arm and thereby make easier for nations less rich but aggressively disposed to prepare for and engage in predatory activities?

Hornbeck recommended that the United States and Britain enter into a period of unrestricted naval building in order to cow the Japanese into submission.³⁸⁴

The British pressed the American delegation to continue the conference as policymakers in Washington evaluated the situation. They were “disturbed by the possibility of an Anglo-American disagreement” over qualitative limitations that all the remaining powers were willing to accept, especially if such disagreement became known in Japan and ruin the effect of the front they had presented at the conference.³⁸⁵ At any rate, it was hoped that if the four powers produced a treaty then they could hope that the

³⁸³ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁸⁵ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 44, Davis to Hull, Jan. 23, 1936.

moderates retake control of the Japanese government and get them to sign on at a later date, or else pressure them to do so by some other means.

On January 24, the US and UK delegations had a bilateral meeting to hammer out the details of any agreement that could be made in the absence of Japan and of quantitative limitation. Chatfield expressed his concern regarding US adherence to the 10,000 ton cruiser, and Standley revealed that the US was willing to accept a five year building holiday on this vessel type. Standley went on to say that America would match Britain's cruiser fleet up to 60 vessels, but that they were unlikely to exceed this number if the British insisted on going to 70.³⁸⁶ Davis and Standley both agreed that the British naval problem was much more complex than their own, and were willing to reach a reasonable compromise.³⁸⁷ Standley headed off any reduction in battleship tonnage, however, despite promises from the British that a substantially smaller vessel could meet all the USN's requirements. It was clear that Davis and Standley were enthusiastic to continue, but still had to wait on word from Washington. The General Board registered its displeasure with Britain's demand for a building holiday on cruisers heavier than 8,000 tons, but Standley had already corralled the Navy Department behind this conciliatory measure and had the additional backing of the State Department.³⁸⁸ There was, however, the added complication that the French expressed an unwillingness to go forward while both Japan and Germany, the likely enemies in any future war, were not

³⁸⁶ NARG 80, Box 172, Memo by Captains Ingersoll and Danckwerts regarding British and Japanese cruiser forces, Feb. 14, 1936. By Jan 1 1937, the British were still only at 339kt of cruisers (48 units), their London allotment; to get to 70 would require much more building.

³⁸⁷ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 46, Davis to Hull, Jan. 24, 1936.

³⁸⁸ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 185, Phillips to Roosevelt, Feb. 5, 1936. "The Navy Department and ourselves have now reached the conclusion that we could very well acquiesce in the naval holiday on 10,000 ton cruisers..."

involved in the proceedings.³⁸⁹ As had happened so many times already, the future of the second LNC was in doubt. Fortunately, the state of Anglo-American relations was not in doubt, as Davis informed the President on January 30. “I must say our relations with the British with the British have improved remarkably since last year,” Davis wrote. “They have stood with us, taking their full share of responsibility without any attempt to pass the buck to us. Whatever tendency there was before to coddle Japan, in the hope of thus placating her, has disappeared.”³⁹⁰ Whatever the result of the doubtful conference might be, the mission of improving the Anglo-American relationship had already been accomplished.

After further correspondence among Davis, the President, and Hull, the American delegation was ordered to continue negotiations in London and the plenary sessions resumed in February. The French also reluctantly returned to the table. It was quickly apparent that the negotiations would be much smoother following the withdrawal of Japan. Standley received some flak from the other powers over the USN’s refusal to come down from the Washington tonnage cap on battleship units when all other powers were satisfied with a cap at 25,000 tons. Standley alluded to the fact that, as a result of recent competitive building programs in Europe that had been touched off by the German Versailles violations, Germany, France, and Italy were all currently building 35,000 ton battleships with 15 inch batteries. Standley also pointed out the fact that Japan, soon to be unbound by any treaty, would surely not limit themselves to smaller capital ships.³⁹¹ He cannily shifted the responsibility to the French delegation, which favored the British

³⁸⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 37, Davis to Roosevelt, Feb. 18, 1936.

³⁹⁰ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 37, Davis to Roosevelt, Jan. 27, 1936.

³⁹¹ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Feb. 7, 1936.

qualitative reduction of battleships, asking why they refused to abolish submarines when all powers agreed that this vessel type was a primary reason for the increasing tonnages of capital ships.³⁹² While Standley conceded that a reduction in capital ship unit size would be an efficacious path to reduction in costs, he asserted that “there is no economy in building a capital ship unsuited to one’s needs. We feel that any money spent on such a ship would be money wasted.”³⁹³ On February 10, Chatfield allowed that any significant reduction to battleship unit tonnage, while desirable for the British, “we realize that the facts that are before us now make that impossible.”³⁹⁴ This concluded the last lingering Anglo-American dispute at the conference.

The following weeks were spent hammering out the final details of the treaty. Beyond the building holiday for 10,000 ton cruisers, the powers also agreed to a caliber limit on battleships of 14”, a slight decrease in the maximum displacement of aircraft carriers, and a “zone of no construction” for vessels displacing between 8,000 and 17,500 tons, in order to prevent any power building a new vessel type such as the “pocket battleship.”³⁹⁵ Perhaps most importantly, the delegates agreed to notification clauses, which required signatories to announce their building programs annually and provide four months’ notice before laying down the keel of any ship.³⁹⁶ The powers agreed to broad “escape clauses” which would allow any signatory to abandon the tenets of the

³⁹² NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Feb. 14, 1936. Standley quoted a 1935 statement from the French Committee on Naval Affairs, blaming the submarine for the ever-growing size of battleships as they need greater speed and armor to survive them.

³⁹³ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Feb. 14, 1936.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Chatfield: “It is very difficult to ask a Power to lay down a battleship on the 1st of January of 27,000 tons, if on the 31st December preceding it, a ship of 35,000 tons has just been laid down.”

³⁹⁵ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Stenographic notes of the technical subcommittee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Mar. 5, 1936.

³⁹⁶ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of the technical subcommittee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Jan. 30, 1936.

treaty provided they give the other signatories due notification and justified their escape along clear and present security threats.³⁹⁷ The broad escape clause was essentially designed to allow the powers to opportunity to respond to naval construction by a non-signatory power (i.e. Japan or Germany).

The only remaining obstacle to signing a treaty became Franco-German hostility. The French desired to attach security guarantees to the treaty, a policy that the United States was absolutely opposed to. At a private meeting between Davis and Eden on February 14, Eden agreed with the American delegate that if the French insisted on bringing in “extraneous European political questions” that Britain would stand with the United States in opposing it.³⁹⁸ As Davis explained to Roosevelt on February 18, “the chief remaining obstacle to naval agreement is the question of German participation.” The French, still rankled by Britain’s instigation of the AGNA, stubbornly resisted finalizing the treaty since Britain intended to include the Germans as signatories bilaterally after the conference was concluded. The British justified their plan on the same basis they had justified the AGNA, saying that “the Treaty of Versailles had become a fiction” and the Western powers should not now overlook any possibility of restraining German armament by any means.

Further, Davis reported that the British delegation felt that “in the last analysis Great Britain has to defend France, and that the French should realize that it is not in their own interests to have the British so tie themselves as to leave only the alternative of

³⁹⁷ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Stenographic notes of the technical subcommittee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Feb. 6, 1936. The treaty stated that the maximum gun caliber would revert to 16” if Japan did not sign on by mid-1937.

³⁹⁸ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 60, Davis to Hull, Feb. 14, 1936.

war.”³⁹⁹ The French, in an attempt to spread the blame for the stalemate, also accused the Americans of stubbornness for refusing to come down on the battleship issue.⁴⁰⁰ A March 3 memorandum by American delegate Noel H. Field explained that the British were natural allies in dealing with troublesome France, positing that the “Anglo-Saxon School” on “peace enforcement” emphasized arbitration, disarmament, the “pressure of an enlightened world public opinion” and “prevention instead of punishment.” As with Japan, Field contended, the United States would find common ground with the British over the French dispute, as both nations opposed the “French School” which held that the only viable means to arms control were “definite assurances of mutual assistance against aggression”—in other words, security pacts.⁴⁰¹ Davis expressed confidence to the President that the British would find a way to break the impasse, but the episode was a stark reminder that even with Japan out of the picture naval arms control rested on an extremely unstable foundation. The old enmities of Europe, which many American policymakers had tried so hard to insulate their country from, nonetheless haunted any foray the United States made into the international realm.

On February 28, the Italians notified the other delegations that they would not be signatories to the Second London Treaty. Grandi explained that the turbulent state of the Italian political scene, complicated by Italy’s ongoing war in Ethiopia, prevented Italy from submitting to a binding agreement at the moment.⁴⁰² The French still did not seem willing to budge. Davis relayed to Hull Eden’s continued assurances that the British would take every effort to prevent political complications from terminating any tangible

³⁹⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 37, Davis to Roosevelt, Feb. 18, 1936.

⁴⁰⁰ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 65-6, Hull to Davis, Feb. 20, 1936.

⁴⁰¹ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Undated memo by Division of Western European Affairs, “The Security Question Since the Peace Conference.”

⁴⁰² *FRUS*, 1936, I, 77-8, Davis to Hull, Feb. 28, 1936

accomplishment at the conference, but suggested that the President might want to reconsider his hard line against a bilateral treaty with the British.⁴⁰³

As March dawned, the conference entered its fourth month with two delegations down and a treaty very much in doubt. By March 3, regular sessions resumed, and the finer details of the treaty continued to be worked out. On March 7, Hitler ordered the remilitarization of the Rhineland in direct contravention of the Treaty of Versailles. The reappearance of German troops on territory which abutted their own was apparently sufficient to spook the French into cooperation, as Davis noted to Hull.⁴⁰⁴ Davis reported that the treaty was going to be finalized and signed soon, and urged the administration to present the treaty for ratification in the Senate as soon as possible. 1936 was, unfortunately for the delegates, an election year for Roosevelt, and the President was not too keen to present an international treaty to the same Congress that had just recently defeated the World Court and instigated the Neutrality Act. The problem, as the British warned, was that if the treaty was not ratified by the end of the year, there would be a period during which no naval treaty would be in effect.⁴⁰⁵ The problem would be mostly psychological, but it was important to maintain the appearance of continuity of the treaty system and to display to Japan and Germany a continued adherence to the principles of arms control. Roosevelt was non-committal, though Phillips and Davis urged a scheme upon the President that would fulfill the notification portion of the treaty for any gap which may occur between January 1, 1937 and American ratification.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 80, Davis to Hull, Feb 28, 1936.

⁴⁰⁴ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 88, Davis to Hull, March 10, 1936.

⁴⁰⁵ The 1930 London Naval Treaty expired on December 31, 1936.

⁴⁰⁶ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 270, Phillips to Roosevelt, March 20, 1936.

At long last, on March 25, after nearly four months of negotiations, the United States, Great Britain, and France signed the Second London Naval Treaty. Each delegate delivered a speech which extolled the accomplishment given the air of pessimism, the withdrawals, and the destabilizing international events which preceded it and occurred during its course.⁴⁰⁷ Davis wrote Eden a congratulatory note on the 24th, expressing the US delegation's "appreciation of the patient and untiring efforts of the United Kingdom delegation," and confidence in the endurance of the accord reached between the two nations. Eden replied in a similarly cordial tone, saying, "I can assure you that the friendly relations which have prevailed between the United States and the United Kingdom delegations have been a source of pleasure to all of us... I am glad, furthermore, to be able to confirm the correctness of your understanding in regard to the maintenance of the principle of parity... I can indeed go further than this and say that, in estimating our naval requirements, we have never taken the strength of the United States Navy into account."⁴⁰⁸ The Anglo-American relationship emerged from the conference at an historical high point, exceeding considerably the frosty years which had followed the sometimes contentious first London Conference.

The treaty had at last been passed. It was much less ambitious in scope than previous treaties, and even its rather broad provisions were only to last just six years. Nonetheless, the treaty symbolized a remarkable commitment of the democracies to arms control at a time when the world order was rapidly falling apart. More particularly, it is demonstrative of the commitment of the United States to the preservation of the world

⁴⁰⁷ NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Stenographic notes of first committee of London Naval Conference, 1935, Mar. 25, 1936.

⁴⁰⁸ NARAI, Foreign Relations (14) Sen 74B-B25, Senate Hearing on 1935 London Naval Treaty, May 14, 1936.

order, giving lie to decades of historiography which has stubbornly labeled America “isolationist” in this period. There is no doubt that American policymakers exercised extreme caution throughout the negotiations, but caution cannot be equated with isolationism. Washington was inundated with warnings of impending wars in Europe and Asia since 1934, and the conference itself was marred by the violent adventurism of Italy in Ethiopia. The United States had a geography which lent itself to defense and a Navy which essentially made the Western Hemisphere unassailable. Roosevelt had made it clear that the United States would not go to war with Japan due solely to any violations of the Nine Power Treaty—implying the only cause for war which would be accepted would be in defense of American territory.⁴⁰⁹ With the line thus drawn, and considering America’s centuries old tradition of avoiding foreign entanglements, the success of the Second London Naval Conference can properly be seen as a remarkable achievement. While the treaty had no security guarantees attached to it, no American policymaker could have missed that the whole experience of the conference had created an unofficial but undeniable linkage between the United States and the other signatories, but of course in particular with Great Britain. The strengthening of the Anglo-American relationship over the course of the conference and its preliminaries would prove an invaluable tool to both nations in the years ahead.

Immediate American ratification of the treaty appeared in doubt as a result Roosevelt’s cautious concern over the trouble that could be stirred by ardent isolationists in the coming election. However, in the months preceding and following the conference, the rhetoric of the Roosevelt administration appeared to take a decided turn towards international concerns—well before the 1937 Quarantine Speech that is identified as the

⁴⁰⁹ Hooker, *Moffat Papers*, 117.

watershed for Roosevelt's internationalism by numerous historians. Speaking out against the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in October 1935, Roosevelt warned the American people that a "foreign war" was a "potent danger at this moment to the future of civilization. It is not surprising that many of our citizens feel a deep sense of apprehension lest some nations of the world repeat the folly of twenty years ago and drag civilization to a level from which worldwide recovery may be all but impossible." He continued by stating that "Our national determination to keep free of foreign wars and foreign entanglements cannot prevent us from feeling deep concern when ideals and principles that we have cherished are challenged," and warned that America would need to play an active role to maintain international peace along the lines of his "Good Neighbor" policy.⁴¹⁰ Four days later, Roosevelt invoked the Neutrality Act in the Italian-Abyssinian War as a means to impose sanctions on Italy, though the poorly crafted Act likely only hurt the Abyssinian resistance while still supplying much-needed oil to Italy.⁴¹¹

Roosevelt's 1936 State of the Union address similarly stressed the dangers of war and the need for American action abroad. "Americans must take cognizance of growing ill-will, of marked trends towards aggression, of increasing armaments, of shortening tempers," the President warned. "Nations, seeking expansion... have therefore impatiently reverted to the old belief in the law of the sword." Roosevelt emphasized America's leading role in arms control and in peaceful arbitration and its continued efforts to "exert our moral influence against repression, against intolerance, against autocracy..." While he limited the role of America in managing the deteriorating world

⁴¹⁰ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 13-4, Speech by Roosevelt in San Diego, Oct. 2, 1935.

⁴¹¹ The 1935 iteration of the Neutrality Act only banned arms and ammunition, not oil; France and Britain considered imposing a League oil embargo, though they considered it pointless since Italy could still obtain its oil from America, a non-League nation.

scene to peaceful arbitration, hemispheric defense, and “a well-ordered neutrality to do naught to encourage the contest,” nonetheless the speech was a frank discussion to the American people of the likelihood of a general war breaking out and linked such a war to American fortunes.⁴¹² While Roosevelt avoided naming any nations specifically in these addresses, he did target Germany in a March 12 speech, warning of Hitler’s warlike propaganda and of large German airplane orders. He also warned of the possibility of “European nations coming in and attacking independent countries on this hemisphere in order to get raw materials,” a threat the President would repeat with increasing frequency in the years ahead.⁴¹³ Clearly the President still felt the need to cloak international concern in the language of self-interested defense. Still, it was a heartening sign to the British and to the American delegation that the Roosevelt administration would press for immediate ratification of the treaty.

The Roosevelt administration was helped some by a generally positive response from the US press to the 1935 conference. A survey of 250 editorials from almost every state in the nation by the Navy Department’s Division of Press Intelligence showed that 90 percent of the response ran from positive to neutral, and even the 10 percent who objected to the treaty universally condemned Japan.⁴¹⁴ The solid majority saw the value in limitation in general and some even identified to value of cooperation with Great Britain more particularly. Perhaps the most effusive praise for the treaty was found in an editorial by Walter Lippmann in the *New York Tribune*. “At first sight, of course, it would seem to be no treaty at all,” Lippmann wrote, conceding that the absence of Japan, Italy,

⁴¹² Rosenman, *Public Papers*, V, 8-18, State of the Union Address, Jan. 3, 1936.

⁴¹³ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 249, Speech by Roosevelt to People’s Mandate to End War Committee, March 12, 1936.

⁴¹⁴ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1, Memo by F. B. Upham, March 4, 1936.

and Germany was disappointing. Nonetheless, he insisted, “a close study will show, I believe, that this treaty binds all naval powers of the world at least as effectively, and probably more effectively than the treaties which it replaces, and that is as powerful a safeguard against a race of naval armaments as could now be erected by diplomacy.” The treaty would prevent naval competition between the three signers while, by its broad escape clauses, make non-signatories unlikely to commence an arms race and face the combined ire of the three. Lippmann concluded that “the treaty rests on the simple principle that the strongest naval powers retain their freedom to become even stronger but intend to use it to maintain their present, but no greater, relative superiority. Individually and collectively they have the right and the power to maintain the status quo and make a naval race intolerable costly to the challenger.”⁴¹⁵ The editorial was certainly optimistic, but it was welcomed and bandied about by the American delegation who strongly desired to see their hard work ratified by the Senate.⁴¹⁶

The editorials which opposed the treaty did so harshly, however. For the most part, the treaty’s opponents in the press simply decried the perceived uselessness of the treaty for failing to actually reduce naval armaments. The *Washington Post*, for instance, called it a “costly scrap of paper.”⁴¹⁷ The most biting criticism was to be found in the Hearst papers, which took their traditionally nationalistic and Anglophobic stance in their analysis. One Hearst publication posted a survey which tore apart the treaty, claiming that the United States gained nothing and lost much by signing it. The only type of vessel actually limited by the treaty was the heavy cruiser, a category which the United States

⁴¹⁵ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 37, Reber to Davis, May 5, 1936.

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁷ “1936 London Treaty Leaves Way Clear for Unbridled Naval Race,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 1936, B9.

had continually stated a need for which the British had none. Furthermore, the treaty contained only qualitative provisions, a bugbear for the British but not traditionally an object of great concern to the United States. The author also wondered why “the British wish to weaken a power friendly to them, as we undoubtedly are,” and concluded that they were anxious to lose their historical control of the seas and their ability to “[deprive] us of our rights to commerce on the high seas” as they did during World War One. “The sea power of the United States is what the British really fear,” the author asserted, which was why “Great Britain so evidently [stood] at the side of Japan in this business.”⁴¹⁸ The Hearst papers were some of the most widely read publications in the United States, and even though they held a minority position their criticism was influential.

The Hearst survey found an unlikely opponent in the General Board, which released an April 21 memo taking direct aim at the survey and its author. The United States lost nothing by signing the treaty, the memo stated, since the USN had either built or was building its full allotment of heavy cruisers and was presently focusing on replacing overage battleships and lighter auxiliaries such as submarines and destroyers. On the contrary, the US had much to gain from the treaty, and in justification the memo repeated the British line held since the preliminaries, stating that “a race in size may be as costly as a race in numbers.” The claim that the USN constituted Britain’s greatest security concern was dismissed as ridiculous, and it was made clear that numerous British policymakers had stated since 1920 that the RN “is unconcerned with how many ships we build.” Indeed, the General Board report continued, backbencher Winston Churchill went so far as to claim during the rearmament debates in Parliament that “the stronger the United States Navy becomes, the surer are the foundations of peace throughout the

⁴¹⁸ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1, Memo by F. B. Upham, March 4, 1936.

world.” Finally, the claim that Britain stood by Japan was rejected entirely, stating “Great Britain gave no evidence of standing by the side of Japan and took the lead in opposing Japan’s demands.”⁴¹⁹ By 1936, the General Board had moved decidedly towards a pro-treaty stance and even defended it from nationalist criticism.

Immediately following the signing of the treaty, Admiral Standley continued his campaign stumping for support for the treaty. In an April 3 address, Standley admitted the treaty was a “disappointment” for anyone “who expected radical reduction in armaments,” but he emphasized that, given the circumstances, “it seems rather a miracle that we could reach any agreement whatever.” The treaty was “well worth while” by continuing to limit the burden of an unbridled arms race. Standley pledged that while the stated USN policy of building and maintaining a “treaty strength” Navy no longer made sense given the lack of quantitative provisions in the new treaty, nonetheless the continued policy would be to keep pace with America’s naval peers and cultivate a shipbuilding industry second to none.⁴²⁰ Standley continued along similar lines with a May 2 address, assuring the public that a naval arms race would not ensue as a result of the lack of quantitative provisions in the treaty since “no country that I know of could afford to engage in a naval building race with us if we were determined to outbuild them.” Standley laid out the costs of maintaining a “treaty Navy”—approximately \$180 million dollars per year for construction and \$550 million per year for maintenance and salaries—admitting that it constituted a great expense but saying that the amount equaled only 1.5 cents a day per American citizen in return for which the nation bought security for its homeland and its global interests. If it became necessary, Standley said, the United

⁴¹⁹ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1, Memo on press digest, April 21, 1936.

⁴²⁰ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 6, “Address by W. H. Standley, U.S. Navy before American Society of Naval Engineers,” April 3, 1936.

States could shoulder a much larger burden to build an incomparable Navy. The signature of the treaty, then, was a no-loss scenario for the US.⁴²¹

With the majority of the press onside and the endorsement of the Navy Department, the way appeared relatively clear for the administration to submit the treaty to the Senate without undue backlash. As it happened, the President moved swiftly to introduce the treaty, despite prior warnings that the state of Congress was “fickle” and that risking its defeat was more dangerous than a late ratification.⁴²² Perhaps heartened by the press response, Roosevelt submitted the treaty to the Senate with his approval on May 12, with the additional endorsement of Cordell Hull. The treaty was read on the Senate floor on the 12th and the delegates were set to testify before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on the 14th.

Davis began the testimony with a statement in which he defended his work on the grounds that while “some things which we wanted are not in this treaty, there is nothing in it to which we object.”⁴²³ The US sacrificed neither principle nor any point of security by signing the treaty, and it was possible that other powers, such as Germany or even Japan, would at a later date become signatories as well. Davis even expressed a personal belief that “I somehow cannot believe that Japan will refuse to adhere to the provisions of the treaty.”⁴²⁴ The treaty, if nothing else, would reaffirm the principle of parity with the United Kingdom and America’s commitment to arms control.

⁴²¹ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Standley Speech, “Common Interests of the National Rivers and Harbors Congress and the United States Navy,” May 2, 1935. Incidentally, Standley also stumped for funds for the Merchant Marine in this speech.

⁴²² *FRUS*, 1936, I, 89, Hull to Davis, March 11, 1936.

⁴²³ NARAI, Foreign Relations (14) Sen 74B-B25, Senate Hearing on 1935 London Naval Treaty, May 14, 1936.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

The floor was opened to debate, and senators with an isolationist bent got their shots in. Senator Arthur Vandenberg, who played a leading role in opposing the President over the World Court, offered the most biting cross-examination. He claimed that the qualitative provisions of the treaty were rendered pointless by Germany's building of the pocket battleships which violated the treaty's "zone of non-construction," and that even if the Japanese signed there would be nothing stopping them from building to the level of the USN. Davis countered by saying that the treaty would deal only with the *future* construction of vessels in the tonnage zone restricted by the treaty, and that the German issue was being dealt with by the British on a separate and bilateral basis. Furthermore, the actions of the Japanese were not dependent on the treaty; if Japan started an arms race, they would only "build a Navy equal to ours" if "we sit still"—in other words, if Congress allowed it to happen. Senator James Lewis attacked the treaty on the curious grounds that it contained nothing truly binding, and that its escape clauses were so broad that it was essentially no treaty at all. Davis skillfully shut down this line of questioning, asking the senator, "would you believe that we ought to tie our hands so that we could not do what we saw fit, if we got into war?" To which Lewis replied, "To the contrary, I am one who insists we ought not to let other nations tie our hands." "Then we should not ask the other nations to tie theirs," Davis finished.⁴²⁵

A handful of senators on the committee assisted the delegation, including Senator Robinson and the committee Chairman Key Pittman, who batted away some of the more persistently critical members. The most contentious portion of the hearing arrived with the discussion on the heavy cruiser holiday, an historically problematic Anglo-American issue and the bogeyman of the Hearst Press. Senators Wagner and Johnson relentlessly

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

pressed the old American line of the last conference, asking why the only vessel being limited was one which the British did not need and the United States did. Admiral Standley, after much effort, laid the issue to its final rest. “Great Britain is not allowed to have cruisers superior to ours, and she has not got them,” the Admiral said, replying to a suggestion that this was the case.

under the [1930] London Treaty... we exceed her by three 8-inch gun cruisers... in 1930 we felt that the large-size cruiser with the 8-inch guns was the most all-round cruiser for our needs. At the time we were discussing that, Senator, we only had two of those types built... And since that time I have commanded them. I was the cruiser commander of that type of ship and, Senator, our ideas have changed a little bit as a result of tactical experience. The 8-inch cruiser is the best for certain kinds of duty, commerce protection and for outside scouting. We still have those needs, but we find that the 8-inch cruiser cannot perform all the functions that the 6-inch cruiser can... In 1930, I stated that if [I] had unlimited funds and unlimited tonnage, I would build them all of 8-inch. I would not do that today, sir.⁴²⁶

It was an important statement for a CNO to make before a committee with some members bent on throwing out the treaty on the old objections of the 1930 LNC. It was also a strong indication of the evolution of ideology and strategy that was underway within the USN during the mid-1930s. Where before strategists had focused so strongly upon superiority at the point of attack—along the lines of Mahan’s strategy of the “decisive battle”—increasingly the USN was coming around to the British strategy of total sea control with an emphasis on smaller auxiliaries.

Standley also delivered an important statement on arms control in general, also reflecting a maturation in USN ideology and a step away from the nationalistic “big Navy” enthusiasts of the 1920s. “I have come to feel that a naval race is a most disastrous

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

thing for a Navy,” Standley told the senators by way of recommending the utility of the notification clause in preventing such a race.

The second part of the treaty is also advantageous. I did not, in the beginning, feel that a limitation on armament was desirable. I felt, when the Washington Treaty was signed, that it was highly undesirable to limit by agreement our naval needs, particularly if we felt that we did not get all the advantages. I have come to the opinion that limitation is a desirable thing, and that if we can limit our naval power to our naval needs, and base it on that, frankly so stating that it is a desirable thing to have for the Navy.⁴²⁷

Standley made a solid argument for the case that rational actors may seek to constrain themselves as long as other actors in the system agree to the same constraints. Militaries, since their whole existence is predicated on the use of force, are often seen by historians and political scientists as “power maximizers” in the terminology of international relations.⁴²⁸ Certainly, there were many in the United States during the interwar period subscribed to this notion. In 1934, Senator Gerald Nye had launched a special committee to investigate, among other things, the munitions industry’s role in America entry into the First World War. The committee’s findings, released not long before the LNT senate hearings, found that the munitions industry and the shipbuilding industry in particular held excessive influence over the decision of the United States to go

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁸ Militaries are often seen as both tools and propagators of “offensive realism,” a doctrine in which states seek to increase their military power to the limit of what it may provide in order to achieve absolute security. See, for instance, John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 2001). Militaries congenitally overestimate external threats which in turn leads to large appropriations requests. Pressures from militaries upon governments are often seen to drive “security dilemmas,” a condition of spiralling insecurity brought about by an increase in arms by one actor in the system. This has been intensely examined under the “military industrial complex” theory that has been prevalent among political scientists since the 1950s and 1960s (see, for instance, Chalmers Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2004).

to war in Europe in 1917.⁴²⁹ The politics of the Nye Committee decision must remain a discussion for another place, and has already been covered in numerous histories.⁴³⁰ The takeaway is that many senators, including many members of the Foreign Relations Committee, subscribed to Nye's findings and even legislated on them in the form of the Neutrality Act. That Standley, perceived at the time as a "big Navy" uniformed officer and a representative of the oft-maligned armed forces, stated before the committee that arms control may be advantageous to national security and not just national economy was an important statement for arms control and the USN in the 1930s.

It was Davis, incidentally, who reminded the senators that even if arms control was desirable it was essential that the United States maintain a consistent building program and keep pace with construction in the UK and Japan. "I think one thing that had a bad effect, frankly, was for us to go for several years without laying down a single naval vessel," Davis explained to the senators, implicating the stinginess of Congress in the 1920s. "I think some countries got an impression that we have gone so far pacifist that we were not concerned about our security; and I frankly think that if the Senate will see fit to ratify this treaty quickly, the psychological effect on the rest of the world would be very good indeed."⁴³¹ Arms control, Davis insisted, must not be confused with unilateral disarmament, or "disarmament by example" as the Republican administrations of the 1920s had optimistically labeled it. The United States had to reaffirm its commitment to arms control for psychological reasons, but it also had to maintain a force

⁴²⁹ Rosen, "Treaty Navy," 227.

⁴³⁰ See, for instance, Paul A. C. Koistinen. *Planning War, Pursuing Peace: The Political Economy of American Warfare, 1920–1939* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas 1998) or J. E. Wiltz, "The Nye Committee Revisited," *The Historian* 23.2 (1961): 211–233.

⁴³¹ NARAI, Foreign Relations (14) Sen 74B-B25, Senate Hearing on 1935 London Naval Treaty, May 14, 1936.

sufficient for plausible retaliation in order to maintain the peace. The United States had committed too firmly to the former strategy since signing the Washington Treaty, and the LNC delegation along with their allies in the Roosevelt administration sought to bring balance to the equation.

Despite the presence of several staunch isolationists in the Foreign Relations Committee, the testimony was mostly a success for the delegates. The questioning, though at times relentless, did not devolve into shouting matches that occasionally arose over issues of foreign entanglements. Chairman of the Committee Pittman, even though he had publically voiced his disappointment with the treaty some months before, rammed the treaty through the senate at the behest of Roosevelt on May 18. He continued to bat away objections by some senators that the treaty was a purely British document that the American delegates had been swindled into signing, much as the accusations had ran for the two previous treaties.⁴³² Senator Lewis offered the treaty an interesting endorsement, tinged with the firebrand issue of outstanding war debts. “Fortunately, we are able to point to the fact that it is some of our debtors—I may say the principle debtors—who have joined in the present arrangement which we speak of as a treaty,” Lewis said. “The demonstration of their intent to harmonize with us upon the courses of nations, and the indication of willingness on their part to come to terms which in some degree will be mutually satisfactory to us all, serves to promote good will, and is of itself a prospect, as I see it, of better things in the future.”⁴³³ Even if it was not a note of unequivocal unity, the salutary psychological effects of the treaty upon the allies of the last war were certainly recognized by some American legislators. Senator Nye registered predictable dissent,

⁴³² *Congressional Record*, Vol. 80, No. 101, Seventy-Fourth Congress, Second Session, Senate, May 18, 1936, pg. 7593.

⁴³³ *Ibid*, 7594.

arguing that the delegations sent were comprised of men “whose interest was in the naval establishment,” and who therefore had no interest in producing a treaty of real arms limitation.⁴³⁴ Despite this and other objections, the treaty was ratified by a robust majority. Although the Congresses of the 1930s showed a tendency towards non-interventionist legislation, there was continued recognition among the senators of the value of international cooperation in the limitation of arms.

The prompt American ratification of the second LNT was a boon to Anglo-American relations, at least as far as the British government was concerned. There was a faction in Parliament that saw the second LNT as a futile effort at reviving a failed system and saw compliance as pointless and even potentially damaging.⁴³⁵ The UK press received the treaty tepidly as well, with many expressing skepticism that the terms would have any endurance without the inclusion of Japan.⁴³⁶ Nonetheless, the relatively accommodating attitude of the United States, especially in comparison to the sometimes hostile conferences in the past, was noted even by the skeptics. “It is a definite gain that, by their signatures, the naval Powers should give a firm basis to world condemnation of breaches of humanitarian considerations,” wrote the *Daily Telegraph*. “To hold that public opinion in such matters may not have decisive consequences is to forget how unrestricted sinkings at sea influenced the American determination to aid the Allies 20 years ago.”⁴³⁷ The treaty was a long step towards the British insurance policy of securing American cooperation in the next war.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7598.

⁴³⁵ NARG 38, Box 555, Naval Attaché, Great Britain, Serial No. 590, May 19, 1936.

⁴³⁶ NARG 38, Box 555, Naval Attaché, Great Britain, Serial No. 1273, Nov. 10, 1936.

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

The transition to a new phase in Anglo-American relations was not a smooth or perfect one, however. Almost immediately complications arose. The largest arose over the issue of compliance with the terms of the 1930 LNT before it expired at the end of December 1936. The Admiralty wished to retain 40,000 tons of overage destroyers in excess of the limit proscribed in the LNT. The more contentious problem lay with the British desire to convert four “Hawkins” class cruisers from their designation of sub-category A cruisers (i.e. heavy cruisers) to sub-category B cruisers (i.e. light cruisers), as they were over-strength in the former category and under-strength in the latter. The four vessels were due to be scrapped in 1936 in accordance with the 1930 LNT, however the rising international tension compelled the Admiralty to press for their retention. Nonetheless, the conversion of three of the vessels to light cruisers and the fourth to a “training ship” would put the British over their allotted tonnage in sub-category B in violation of the 1930 LNT. The British Government wanted to settle the matter on the terms of a “friendly negotiation” with the United States, rather than invoking the treaty’s escalator clause and potentially assuming the responsibility of beginning an arms race.⁴³⁸

US policymakers were unforgiving in their attitude towards this “friendly” bilateral negotiation. The General Board insisted that the tonnage be retained legally, without modifying the 1930 LNT and possibly damaging the international goodwill just gained by signing on to the second LNT. They recommended that the State Department inform the UK that they must invoke the escalator clause, and the US would follow suit and also retain an equal amount of overage destroyers.⁴³⁹ Standley clarified that “the Navy Department has no objection to the proposed demilitarization of one of the

⁴³⁸ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1719, May 25, 1936.

⁴³⁹ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1725, July 7, 1936.

HAWKINS class for use as a training ship and the conversion of the remaining three to sub-category (b) cruisers in so far as it affects our naval position relative to Great Britain.” Standley only stressed that the four vessels be retained in a “legal way” that would “not give Japan an excuse to declare that the treaty has been violated and that therefore she is free to retain excess submarines without invoking... the escalator clause.”⁴⁴⁰ The State Department concurred, and would not allow the British to skirt the letter of the London Treaty. On July 14, Hull cabled Bingham to with instructions to tell Craigie that while America had “appreciation of the spirit” which prompted the desire for retention by “friendly negotiation,” the United States would insist that the British officially invoke the escalator clause while the US would “reserve the right” to follow suit.⁴⁴¹

In other words, the United States wanted the British to fire the first shot in what was sure to be an escalation in naval arms without offering to stand beside them. Davis expressed dismay over this show of disunity, writing to State Department official Robert Pell on July 16, “I think it is silly and unwise for us to quibble over the conversion of these cruisers as proposed by the British. In fact, I seriously doubt if it would be in our interests, under present circumstances, for the British to do anything to weaken their Navy. In my judgment we should have told the British frankly that while we feel the proposed action is not authorized under the Treaty we do not wish to offer any formal opposition.”⁴⁴² Davis was and would remain one of several persistent voices advocating for stronger Anglo-American relations, but there were many factors that determined

⁴⁴⁰ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 39, Memo of meeting between Navy Department and State Department, August 26, 1936.

⁴⁴¹ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 135, Hull to Bingham, June 4, 1936. On August 14, the United States formally declared its intention to retain 40,000 tons of destroyers in response to the British escalation.

⁴⁴² NARG 59, Records Relating to Disarmament, Box 5, Davis to Pell, July 16, 1936.

American policy, and the necessity of securing a wartime ally was not felt half as sharply in Washington as it was in London. In the same vein, it was a great deal more essential for the UK Admiralty to retain overage destroyer tonnage for possible transatlantic convoy duty than it was for the United States, so American policymakers had the luxury of forcing the British to make the first move in invoking escalation. As long as the United States was relatively secure, self-interest would prevail over strengthening the Anglo-American relationship as an end in itself. For the British, whose homeland and colonies both were increasingly vulnerable, the math was significantly different.

In the wake of the ratification of the second LNT, the Navy Department was compelled to reassess its global strategy. Admiral Standley released a memo on June 9 urging the Roosevelt administration to state clearly its national aims and goals so that the USN would better know what it ought to be preparing for. “The national policies are poorly defined except as very broadly stated in the preamble to the Constitution,” Standley wrote.

Lesser policies, such as the Monroe Doctrine, the Open Door Policy, the maintenance of the Panama Canal, and a multitude of others, promulgated and altered from time to time by successive administrations, are usually but vaguely defined. Inasmuch as the Navy is maintained largely to support such national policies, it would be constructive to define and codify national policies as a prelude to formulating a more formal policy of national defense. It would also be constructive to define the term national defense authoritatively. It is now frequently accepted as meaning defense merely against aggressive invasion of home territories, whereas for many decades the naval viewpoint has been considerably broader, including defense of American shipping, seaborne commerce, and general overseas commercial and political interests. This broader naval viewpoint has followed from the missions regularly assigned to the Navy by higher civil authorities. In its work of supporting national policies and defending maritime interests, the Navy has also frequently been used as an instrument of diplomacy with a view to gaining the political or commercial ends of our government through the influence of force rather

than by its combat use... Armaments are one of the most useful instruments of diplomacy and national policy—regarded from the viewpoint of peace.⁴⁴³

This was an important statement for the CNO to make, and it echoed Stanley Hornbeck's complaint of two years prior.⁴⁴⁴ Standley's criticism is common among historians to this day, namely that the United States in the interwar period—and the Roosevelt administration in particular—had an ill-defined national policy. While this is not strictly true in a general sense—the United States was consistent in its aims of hemispheric defense, freedom of the seas, and establishing no entangling alliances—the accusation has merit in certain particulars. The most important, at least as concerned the USN, was the refusal of any administration to state the limits of American policy in the Far East. Naval strategists certainly never strayed from their conviction that the next conflict would be with Japan; the very large majority of fleet problems and war planning concerned the Pacific. The lack of certainty on the civilian side regarding US foreign policy in the Far East, however, negatively affected the USN, as far as Standley was concerned. It meant that the government had refused, and would potentially continue to refuse to allocate sufficient funds for a Navy that could pose credible retaliation in the Pacific. If the parameters of war were not well-defined, it meant they were not on the national agenda. If that continued to be the case, the Navy was potentially in for more years of the “hand-to-mouth” budgeting that it had experienced through the 1920s.

Regardless, the USN formulated its policies and strategies for the post-Washington world as best they could. One of the chief issues that arose was the replacement of the capital ship fleet. The battleship holiday which had been established at

⁴⁴³ NARG 80, Box 683, Standley to Judge Advocate General A16-1/A18, June 6, 1936.

⁴⁴⁴ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, II, 54-71, Hornbeck to Hull, April 5, 1934.

Washington in 1922 and extended at London in 1930 would at last end on January 1, 1937. The United States had a comparatively young capital fleet, at least compared to the United Kingdom, due to President Wilson's World War One battleship construction program.⁴⁴⁵ Nonetheless, three battleships would be reaching the 26 year age limit prescribed by the treaty just signed by 1940, which would match the approximate date of commission for any battleship laid down in 1937. The General Board desired to aggressively replace each US capital ship as it became overage and seek authorization for a five year plan for up to seven battleships.⁴⁴⁶ Beyond the two battleships already provided for in 1937, the Board recommended at least three more by the fiscal year 1939.⁴⁴⁷ The British had confided in the American delegation in London that they would pursue a rapid replacement of their capital fleet, laying down two to three such vessels per year.⁴⁴⁸ CNO Standley disagreed with the Board's assessment, however. "No battleships have been built by this country since 1923," Standley wrote to Secretary Swanson on August 26, "and it is considered advisable to take advantage, to as great an extent as is possible, of the experience to be gained by this building of the two battleships already appropriated for, provided this can be done without jeopardizing national security."⁴⁴⁹ Furthermore, Standley had already campaigned tirelessly for a regularized building program rather than the pell-mell construction followed by the budgetary droughts of yesteryear. "The inclusion of these two ships in the 1938 Budget, as

⁴⁴⁵ NARG 80, Box 63, General Board 420-2 Serial No. 1741, May 8, 1937.

2022. By 1942, only 6 of America's 15 battleships would be overage. In contrast, by 1942 11 of Britain's 15 battleships would be overage. By that date, Japan would have 4 of its 9 battleships overage.

⁴⁴⁶ NARG 80, Box 63, Office of CNO, L1-1 Serial No. 37798, "Ten-Year Shipbuilding Program," Aug. 26, 1938.

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ Nixon, *Roosevelt*, III, 200, Davis to Roosevelt, Feb. 18, 1936. Davis urged the President to keep pace with British building and not fall behind as happened in the 1920s.

⁴⁴⁹ NARG 80, Box 63, Office of CNO, L1-1 Serial No. 380205, "Ten-Year Shipbuilding Program," July 18, 1938.

recommended by the General Board, is not consistent with such a program and is therefore not recommended.”⁴⁵⁰ Standley desired that the emphasis remain on building up the USN’s fleet of auxiliaries and tenders before it committed to a fleet of untested capital ships.

Another complication for the USN arose over diplomatic uncertainty regarding the Japanese. In August, ambassador Grew reported that the Vice Minister of the IJN told him that “it would be out of the question for Japan to enter any naval limitation treaty for probably the next 10 years.”⁴⁵¹ The British hope that the Japanese might be induced to join the treaty after a display of Western unity appeared to be entirely dashed. The implications of near-certain Japanese non-participation colored the issue that confronted US policymakers in September, when the British expressed interest in maintaining at least Article XIX of the Washington Naval Treaty—the non-fortification clause. On September 11, in a meeting between A. L. Mallet and John Hickerson, the British charge d’affaires and the chief of Western European Division, respectively, Mallet said that “from every standpoint, psychological, political, as a deterrent to the race in armaments, and in the general interest of peace, it would be well to preserve Article XIX, and his Government was most anxious to have it preserved.”⁴⁵² The British desired that any renewal agreement would include a provision that would allow for the modernization of existing bases but would preclude the proliferation of new fortifications—this, as it happened, was in line with British plans to expand and fortify their naval base at Singapore. If it were not renewed, it would be assured that the Pacific would become

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *FRUS*, 1936, I, 107, Grew to Hull, Aug. 27, 1936.

⁴⁵² NARG 80, Box 172, Office of SecNav, Doc. 7440 Serial No. 1730, Standley to GB, Sept. 15, 1936.

dangerously militarized, and a race in fortifications could exceed even a race in armaments in both cost and dangers to the two powers' Far Eastern interests.

Once again, however, the two sides of the Anglo-American relationship were not in accord on this issue. State Department, Navy, and Army officials, including Standley and Davis, met on September 16 to discuss the possibility of renewing Article XIX. Davis, usually a firm voice in favor of cooperation with the British, was definitely against the suggestion of negotiating on the basis of a single article from the Washington Treaty. The Japanese "had broken the chain in three or four places," Davis said. "To take an isolated link on the morrow of Japan's departure from the Conference and keep it was illogical." If they were going to negotiate at all on the article, he continued, the Japanese had to be willing to offer concessions, else it would make them all appear weak.⁴⁵³ Standley agreed, and felt the point of Article XIX was moot anyway, since "the United States had held the Philippines for 38 years and had failed to fortify them. It was absurd to talk of fortifying them now."⁴⁵⁴ General Embick, the US Army's representative at the meeting, confirmed Standley's view. In the event of a war with the Japanese, Embick said, the Philippines would be "a detriment from a military standpoint."⁴⁵⁵ Embick continued to say that the British proposal of "modernization" would "serve no purpose" for the US. "Corregidor," Embick said, referring to the island fort at the mouth of Manila bay, "was merely a refuge, a place where the flag might be kept flying."⁴⁵⁶ Like the Navy, the US Army had evolved and changed its strategic viewpoint of its position in the Far East. Throughout the 1920s and early '30s, senior US Army officials had insisted that

⁴⁵³ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 39, Memo of meeting between Navy, Army, and State Departments, Sept. 16, 1936.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

they could hold the Philippines in the case of a Pacific war and maintain it as a striking point against Japan.⁴⁵⁷ Periodically in the mid-'30s, some ambitious strategist would continue to claim that the Philippines were defensible—as late as May 1936, US Army advisors in the Philippines insisted that that “a success, a brilliant success, is assured,” in defending the island state, with a minimum of 300,000 attackers necessary to dislodge the defenders.⁴⁵⁸ By the time of this joint meeting, however, the view was in the distinct minority in both the Army and Navy Departments. Embick and Standley agreed that the fortifications required to make the Philippines defensible would be so expensive and time consuming that no Congress would agree to it.

There was also some question of British motivations. Embick doubted that the British really desired to fortify Hong Kong, since its position astride the Chinese mainland would make it “hostage in Japanese hands” in the event of war. He believed that the British were trying “to draw us unto a negotiation and leave us holding the bag.”⁴⁵⁹ Davis expressed similar concern. When Craigie had first approached him over the issue of Article XIX, he had assured Davis that the motivation was to resist domestic pressure to commit to a costly and misguided fortification of Hong Kong. Now the British Government’s line was to include an amendment to allow for the fortification of Hong Kong. The inconsistency made British motivations suspect in Davis’ view.⁴⁶⁰ All parties at the meeting, State, Navy, and Army, agreed that given the unsettled situation in

⁴⁵⁷ Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 56-7, 124-5.

⁴⁵⁸ NARG 80, Box 685, Office of Military Advisor for the Philippines to Standley, enclosed “National Defense Plan for the Philippines,” May 23, 1936. The belief that the Philippines could be held was declining fast in the mid-1930s, but experienced a belated resurgence in 1941, championed principally by Douglas MacArthur.

⁴⁵⁹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 39, Memo of meeting between Navy, Army, and State Departments, Sept. 16, 1936.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

the Pacific, the intransigent position of the Japanese, and the inconsistency of the British that it would be best to not renew Article XIX separate from the treaty.⁴⁶¹

The General Board offered similar advice on the question of Article XIX but the substance of their objection was different. Their primary concern has to do with the failings of the US Government rather than British machinations. Once again, they urged clarity of objectives from the civilian leadership. “Unless the policy of the United States as regards its military and naval situation in the Far East is clearly outlined,” an October 8 General Board memo read, “the Board will be completely at a loss to evaluate the military considerations involved in the question of renewing Article 19.”⁴⁶² If the US Government had determined that it had no stake in its Far Eastern possessions, then the article had no consequence. If, however, the United States determined it had a limit to the transgressions it would allow from the Japanese, then they warned that failure to renew would result in an impregnable ring of fortifications around Japan’s Home Islands. They recommended that ideally “Article 19 is to be renewed without change” other than a provision that would allow all powers concerned to “inspect” certain sites that would be allowed modernization.⁴⁶³

Interestingly, however, just a few days later the Board reversed this recommendation. In a memo issued by the General Board’s Chairman, Admiral Joseph M. Reeves, the Board formally opposed renewing the article separately, stating “the only advantage apparent in an agreement of this nature would be the doubtful one of ‘going along’ with Great Britain in negotiations,” while allowing the Japanese a free hand to

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² NARG 80, Box 172, Memo for General Board, Reply to SecNav Serial No. 1730, Oct. 8, 1936.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

consolidate its hold over China.⁴⁶⁴ “In view of the unsettled naval situation as well as the political situation in the Far East,” Reeves continued, “as well as the inability of the United States Government to clearly define its future policy in regard thereto,” the General Board was categorically against extending nonfortification as an “independent diplomatic discussion.”⁴⁶⁵ In spite of what appeared to be some disagreement within the General Board, the view among policymakers appeared to be unanimous, and Hull informed the British in October that the United States would not stand with Britain in the negotiations.⁴⁶⁶ For the second time since the ratification of the treaty, US policymakers shied away from Britain’s lead.

On at least one point, however, the United States Government allowed the British free rein without significant objection. It had been the British Government’s intention to negotiate a treaty with the five original signatories to the Washington Treaty and then to bilaterally bring in other powers to its terms. The two powers the British were most concerned with were the USSR and Germany. The British began negotiations with the Soviets over the spring and summer of 1936. The USSR’s rapid industrialization and attendant militarization under Stalin was causing considerable tension with Japan in the Far East. Numerous border skirmishes between Soviet and Japanese troops along the USSR-Manchuria border had spurred a military buildup in the area. In May, Stalin privately told US Naval Attaché W. S. Anderson that he would guarantee Mongolian independence against Japanese encroachment.⁴⁶⁷ From a naval standpoint, the Japanese had maintained a vast lead over their northern rivals ever since the spectacular defeat of

⁴⁶⁴ NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1 Serial No. 1730, Oct. 17, 1936.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁶ NARG 59, Papers Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Hull telegram to London Embassy, Sept. 25, 1936.

⁴⁶⁷ NARG 38, Box 442, Naval Attaché, Great Britain, Serial No. 641, May 28, 1936.

the Russian fleet at Tsushima in 1905. Nonetheless, given the large US and UK fleets to its east and west, Japan was extremely sensitive to any naval increases from the Soviets, whose base at Vladivostok threatened Japanese waters. Between 1926 and 1934, USSR naval expenditures had leapt an astounding 200 percent.⁴⁶⁸ A June 26 report from ONI estimated that the Soviets had 186 vessels in their Far Eastern fleet, including 49 submarines—a worrisome figure for Japanese shipping.⁴⁶⁹ By 1938, the USSR would commence its third “five year plan,” and Stalin announced that he would concentrate heavily on naval building.⁴⁷⁰ Bringing the Soviets onside was thus considered a vital objective for containing the Japanese threat and deterring any naval aggression.

Just as they had conceded on the issue of the AGNA, the United States allowed the British a free hand to deal with the Soviets as a means to avoid further entanglements in the European sphere. American policymakers agreed to allow the British to secure the signature of the Soviet Union to the second LNT as long as they did stray too far outside the written tenets of the treaty. The UK concluded talks with the Soviets over the summer. The agreement contained numerous reservations to which the State Department objected. The Soviets demanded that they be able to construct two battleships with 16 inch guns by 1943, (exceeding the limit agreed to in the second LNT), that they be able to construct seven cruisers mounting guns of over 7 inches, (violating the building holiday on heavy cruisers), and that their Far Eastern fleet would be exempt from the notification clause. And even with all these reservations, Soviet participation in what remained of the treaty was dependent on the eventual accession of the Germans and the Japanese.⁴⁷¹ US

⁴⁶⁸ NARG 38, Box 554, Naval Attaché, Great Britain, Serial No. 446, June 27, 1936.

⁴⁶⁹ NARG 38, Box 442, Naval Attaché, Japan, Report No. 157, June 24, 1936.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷¹ NARG 38, Box 442, A19 No. 1442, Hull to Bingham, Sept. 29, 1936.

policymakers were generally of the opinion that the agreement was so qualified as to be worthless. Secretary Hull was not worried about Soviet construction directly, but believed that it may indirectly affect the building programs of other powers. Nonetheless, he believed that “this Government does not desire to assume the onus of opposing this amendment,” since it was “the responsibility of the British Government as negotiator of the Bilateral Agreement with the Soviet Government to accept or reject the amendment in respect of capital ships.”⁴⁷² Davis came to a similar conclusion in a note to Robert Pell, writing that “if the British wish to enter into the proposed agreement we have no objections to offer,” but that the Soviet agreement alone “would not aid very much in solving the general naval problem.”⁴⁷³ The muted US response at least did not impede the Anglo-American relationship, but it did not show much faith in the British diplomatic strategy. After the high point of the relationship at the 1935 conference, the limits of the revitalized Anglo-American relationship were quickly established.

In the fall of 1936, ONI released a detailed report on the UK’s rearmament program. The report concluded that Britain was dangerously unprepared for another war. The report claimed that the so-called “ten year policy”—an assumption that no major emergency would occur within the next decade—was established in 1922 and the budgets for the services were determined on this basis. However, due to the Depression and other political considerations, the ten year policy “drifted” into a thirteen year policy that was only broken with mounting international tension in 1935.⁴⁷⁴ The RN was a shadow of its

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*

⁴⁷³ ⁴⁷³ NARG 59, Papers Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Davis to Pell, Sept. 8, 1936.

⁴⁷⁴ NARG 38, Box 471, Naval Attaché, London, Report No. 38310, Oct. 19, 1936. The author of this report fundamentally misunderstood the “ten year policy.” It was actually formulated first in 1919 and underwent numerous iterations throughout the interwar period. Its effect and intention was never as certain or clear-cut as the report suggests. Nonetheless, the conclusion of the report—that Britain was badly unprepared for another war—was correct.

former self, half the size it had been in 1914 and aging badly. Its expeditionary force consisted of five weak divisions equipped with obsolescent material. The RAF and the nation's AA capabilities were its most impressive assets, but they were still deemed insufficient compared to the strides made by the powers on the continent.⁴⁷⁵ In 1935, the British had dispatched a fleet to the Mediterranean to deter Mussolini on his Abyssinian conquest but the ships were almost entirely ignored. The defiance of a second-rate power in the face of the RN has “produced a profound sense of weakness in Great Britain” and hastened a decision to rearm.⁴⁷⁶ The rearmament program was not as big as it likely needed to be, ONI reported, likely as a result of the ballooning debt of the nation—£8 billion in 1934, up from £680 million in 1914.⁴⁷⁷ The lion's share of the spending increases was going to the air services rather than the Navy, however, given persistent British fears of bombing raids over London.⁴⁷⁸ The ONI report noted that until the present British rearmament program was completed in 1939, “the first line of British defense will be the Foreign Office.”⁴⁷⁹

The first line of American defense, conversely, was Great Britain and its Navy. This was especially true in the Atlantic, where US naval strategists were quite certain that the RN would contain any future German threat. However, it was also widely deemed true in the Pacific. The Far East Division of the State Department along with the USN both believed that the Japanese were planning a southward push, which would put them in direct conflict with British interests—as MacDonald had put it, Britain was “first on

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

the firing line” in the event of a Pacific war.⁴⁸⁰ The ONI report revealed that America’s first line of defense was dangerously weak. Nonetheless, despite the fact that diplomacy would remain the UK’s primary weapon for the next few years, US cooperation on multiple British diplomatic pushes was limited.

The United States, of course, was necessarily more concerned with its own rearmament program. Admiral Standley continued his tour of public speaking events stumping for support for naval funding, in his capacity both as CNO and, increasingly, Acting Secretary of the Navy in place of the chronically ill Claude Swanson. Given the approaching end of the long battleship holiday and the aging of the capital fleet, there was every reason to expect that the Navy Department would return to its early 20th century campaigns seeking funds for the construction of the glorious ships of the line.⁴⁸¹ Yet the emphasis of Standley’s speeches continued to be the construction of auxiliaries, tenders, and the merchant marine. In October, Standley urged the Baltimore Propeller Club of the need for a “merchant marine policy which is strong and enduring,” while also stressing the “stabilizing influence on industry, and thus labor, of an annual building program necessary to maintain a treaty Navy...”⁴⁸² Standley repeated this sentiment in a November address, saying that “the mere existence and possession of magnificent ships of war does not necessarily insure the maritime security of a nation. For the combatant units to be effective... they must be adequately serviced by a fleet of auxiliary vessels, oilers, supply ships, and tenders.”⁴⁸³ Standley’s successor William D. Leahy, who

⁴⁸⁰ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between American and British delegations, Nov. 23, 1934.

⁴⁸¹ McBride, *Technological Change*, 40.

⁴⁸² LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 6, Navy Press Transcript, Address by Standley before Propeller Club, Oct. 27, 1936.

⁴⁸³ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 6, Navy Press Transcript, Address by Standley before St. Andrew’s Society, Nov. 30, 1936.

assumed the office of CNO in January 1937, continued these public addresses in the same vein. “The power and influence of nations throughout the world may be accurately measured by their maintenance of an efficient, adequate Navy, and their own mercantile marine,” Leahy said on a nationally broadcast address in October 1937. “Our Government is now making every effort to maintain and to increase foreign trade. One of the most important of these efforts is the creation of a fleet of American merchant ships to carry our own products to and from foreign markets of trade.”⁴⁸⁴ Leahy also continued Standley’s strategy of emphasizing the economic boon that shipbuilding brought, claiming that naval construction required goods and labor from every state in the Union.⁴⁸⁵

This was, in part, savvy advertising for the USN and an attempt to justify the large expenditures required for rearmament to a reluctant public. The Navy Department had issued many reports and studies during the interwar period that were designed to combat the frequent assertion that the United States was a self-sufficient national entity. In naval conferences past, Britain and Japan had questioned the American claim to parity on the basis that its enormous continental resources made it only fractionally as dependent on imports as the island nations that they called home. On many occasions Navy released exhaustive lists of imported raw materials and trade data in order to establish the necessity of maintaining a fleet equal to the largest in the world.⁴⁸⁶ In this

⁴⁸⁴ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 12, Navy Press Transcript, Navy Day Address by Leahy, Oct. 27, 1937.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁶ For instance, NARG 80, Box 172, General Board 438-1, Report on reduction on displacement of capital ships, prepared by Commander E. M. Williams, May 21, 1931. “The United States is not self-supporting, and cannot exist in time of peace or carry on a war, upon the raw materials produced from or found in the soil within the continental limits. Some of the essential materials which must be imported if our great industries are to operate at necessary capacity are imported from south eastern Asia” and therefore required the Navy to protect them from flanking Japanese bases.

sense, the emphasis on building a large merchant marine was a self-conscious attempt to appeal to the interests of ordinary Americans in a way that immediate security threats could not, due to a lack of proximate powers. The Navy cast itself as both the purveyor and protector of trade, all the while boosting labor through shipbuilding.

Yet the constant emphasis on building a strong merchant marine and other auxiliaries was also evidence of a more fundamental shift in USN strategy, already alluded to above. The USN had scaled back its capital ship replacement program in favor of auxiliaries such as destroyers and light cruisers. Even the General Board, which had recommended a rapid battleship replacement program, was more focused on other elements of the fleet. As the USN remained understrength in carrier tonnage, the Board was anxious to build two 22,000 ton carriers for operations in the Pacific.⁴⁸⁷ The Board's cruiser recommendations were even more ambitious, as they called for the construction of 30 cruisers of 8,000 tons mounting 6 inch guns, the maximum allowed in the second LNT. Adding to the 37 US cruisers already built or building, this would give the USN a fleet of 67 cruisers—47 for “fleet” duty, 10 for “control” duty (in other words, harassing enemy shipping and communication lines), and 10 overage vessels to be retained as a match for the 10 overage cruisers it had demanded at the conference.⁴⁸⁸ In contrast, the Board recommended only a single battleship for fiscal year 1937, two for 1938, and one for 1939.⁴⁸⁹ This implications of these plans ought not to be overstated—the capital ship was still widely considered to be the backbone of the fleet—but it does show an evolution of USN strategy in line with the development of the “cautionary” Pacific strategy. A fleet of supply ships, carriers, and cruisers were all requisite for a successful transpacific

⁴⁸⁷ NARG 80, Box 62, General Board Doc. 9572, “Building Program, Fiscal Year 1939,” April 9, 1937.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

journey as envisioned by the mid-1930s iteration of War Plan Orange. Rather than sending a fleet of battleships across the Pacific for a “Mahanian” style decisive battle, the “cautionary” approach called for endurance (supply ships), sea control (cruisers), and long-range scouting in open seas (carriers). In late 1930s USN strategy, battleships still played a pivotal role as the “line” ships, but increasingly the focus was on a balanced fleet to fight a long war.

As 1937 dawned, it became increasingly clear that naval arms limitation was effectively over and that the second LNT would not be honored in the way the delegations had hoped. Despite tenuous progress made with the Soviets, it appeared that Britain’s bilateral efforts to bring in other continental powers to the treaty had failed. The domestic mood in the United States soured as well, with numerous editorials claiming that the naval powers were about to embark on a new arms race. Davis urged the press division of the State Department to “at least attempt to scotch the wholly uncalled for newspaper campaign” for it would be “highly dangerous to permit the idea to get abroad that naval limitation was at an end...”⁴⁹⁰ It was a futile effort to stem the tide of reality.

As a primary author of the treaty, Davis struggled admirably to see its terms adhered to in future USN plans. In a March 12 meeting between State and Navy Department officials, Davis held the treaty line concerning the Navy’s plans to mount 16 inch guns on the replacement capital ships due to be laid down later in the year. Admiral Pye stated that since the US did not yet know what caliber guns the Japanese intended to use, it was necessary to err on the side of the heavier weaponry lest the US commission a

⁴⁹⁰ NARG 59, Papers Relating to Disarmament, Box 4, Davis to Moore at Division of Western European Affairs, Dec. 31, 1936.

fleet of inferior battleships.⁴⁹¹ Davis strongly objected to this decision, declaring “there was so little left of naval limitation at the present time that what was left should be carefully preserved.”⁴⁹² As long as there was any chance of pressuring Japan to accept any measure of limitation, Davis said, it was inadvisable that the United States be the first power to violate the treaty for which it had fought so hard. Furthermore, the British were reportedly mounting 14 inch guns on their new King George V class battleships, and in the interest of good Anglo-American relations it was imperative that the US followed suit.⁴⁹³ Pye, however, insisted that the cost of a 16 inch battery versus a 14 inch battery was not so great, but the cost of mounting guns inferior to Japanese battleships could be disastrous.⁴⁹⁴ Davis expressed confidence that the Japanese would not press the matter, as he has received personal assurances from Japanese Minister of Foreign Affairs Naotake Sato that the Foreign Office would do all it could to “favor a policy of international cooperation.”⁴⁹⁵

As it happened, by March 30 the Japanese formally rejected the 14 inch caliber limitation “in spite of every effort on the part of Sato” due to the overwhelming political strength of the Fleet Faction.⁴⁹⁶ Under the terms of the second LNT, this gave the United States the right to invoke the treaty’s escalator clause to mount 16 inch guns.⁴⁹⁷ Davis still expressed hope that this move was continued bluster on the part of the hardliners,

⁴⁹¹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between State Department and Navy Department, March 12, 1937.

⁴⁹² LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 36, Memo of meeting between State Department and Navy Department, March 12, 1937.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.* In reality, the Japanese were already planning to build the titanic *Yamato*-class battleships which would displace over 65,000 tons and mount 18 inch guns.

⁴⁹⁶ *FRUS*, 1937, I, 624-25, Bingham to Hull, March 30, 1937.

⁴⁹⁷ The treaty required that all parties to the Washington Treaty had to agree to the 14 inch limit by April 1, 1937, else the caliber limit would automatically be raised to 16 inches.

and relayed British concerns that building vessels with the larger caliber might induce a qualitative race with the Japanese.⁴⁹⁸ However, Davis' voice quickly became a minority in both Navy and State circles. Despite several last ditch efforts over the spring to get the Japanese to adhere to the lower limit, President Roosevelt announced on July 10 that the USN would mount 16 inch guns on the two replacement battleships laid down in 1937.⁴⁹⁹ While capital ship designs would remain within the 35,000 ton range prescribed by the treaty, in spite of a push by some members of the General Board to construct 45,000 ton vessels, the second LNT was clearly in tatters.⁵⁰⁰

The most enduring legacy of the treaty was not anything contained within the text but rather the improvement in Anglo-American relations. Key American policymakers continued to emphasize the importance of the relationship. Davis wrote to Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in June 1937 "that world economic and financial stability and hence peace depend largely on an enlightened policy of Anglo-American cooperation," and urged the British leader to continue efforts at arms limitation.⁵⁰¹ In a 1938 speech in Philadelphia, then-retired Admiral Standley professed his belief that "Our people generally have regarded England as our mother country and have assumed that the United States was ever under the shelter and protection of England's sea power." Standley went on to say that "It has always been my personal belief that the English speaking race must either stand or fall together. My observations over a period of forty-five years in the Navy lead me to believe that deeply embedded in the subconscious mind of our citizenry is the feeling that when the last call comes... people with the same origin, the same culture, the

⁴⁹⁸ *FRUS*, 1937, I, 626, Davis to Hull, April 16, 1937.

⁴⁹⁹ *FRUS*, 1937, I, 637, Hull transmitting Roosevelt's statement to Bingham, July 10, 1937.

⁵⁰⁰ NARG 80, Box 63, Office of CNO, L1-1 Serial No. 37798, "Ten-Year Shipbuilding Program," Aug. 26, 1938.

⁵⁰¹ LOC Manuscript Division, Davis Papers, Box 8, Davis to Chamberlain, June 10, 1937.

same language and the same ideals and traditions will be found in the same life boat.”⁵⁰²

Certainly nearly all the delegates to the 1935 Conference imbued Anglo-American relations with a degree of vital importance—Davis and Standley especially, but also others, such as the State Department’s William Phillips and the Navy Department’s Royal Ingersoll—as they all had detailed knowledge of the intractable naval dilemma that faced the Western Powers and the necessity of British cooperation in solving it.

There were some indications that this feeling permeated the White House as well. On October 5, 1937 Roosevelt delivered his “Quarantine Speech,” which has traditionally been cited as a turning point in Roosevelt’s presidency in which the tone of his discourse became more international. In this speech Roosevelt famously proclaimed that “When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease.”⁵⁰³ While for political reasons Roosevelt mentioned no nation by name, it was clear that the “patients” he referred to were Italy, Germany, and Japan. Yet it is also evident that he had specific powers in mind when he referred to “the community.” Given Britain’s possession of the largest Navy in the world and its historic policy of blockade, it appeared certain that Roosevelt had the United Kingdom in mind when he spoke of a community “quarantine.”

This impression is supported by the Anglo-American talks which followed the Panay Incident later that year. The Japanese had launched a large-scale expedition into the Chinese heartland over the summer, invading from their territory in Manchukuo and raiding along the coast. The USN dispatched several small vessels to protect American

⁵⁰² LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 6, Transcript of Standley Address at 40th annual dinner of the Pennsylvania Society, Dec. 17, 1938.

⁵⁰³ Rosenman, *Public Papers* Vol. VI, 406-411, Speech in Chicago, Oct. 5, 1937.

citizens and property in China who lay in the path of the war.⁵⁰⁴ On December 12, 1937 a squadron of Japanese planes sank one such vessel, the USS *Panay*, on the Yangtze River killing three American sailors.⁵⁰⁵ It was hoped in British circles that the sinking would galvanize US policymakers against Japan and prompt them to make official security arrangements with the United Kingdom in the Pacific. Roosevelt, however, informed Eden that the United States could enter into no such pact but that he was amenable to opening Anglo-American conversations on the matter. The President's reticence prompted Chamberlain to dismiss the prospect of real American cooperation, saying "the power that [has] the greatest strength [is] America, but he would be a rash man who based his calculations on help from that quarter." In a separate statement the Prime Minister said that "it is always best and safest to count on nothing from the Americans but words."⁵⁰⁶

In spite of Chamberlain's disappointment, Roosevelt was true to his word and he and his close personal confidant CNO William D. Leahy arranged for talks to bring about an arrangement with the Royal Navy. Even if Roosevelt was constrained by political considerations, the USN was absolutely ready to accelerate the Anglo-American relationship after the sinking of *Panay*. Both CNO Leahy and the US commander of the Asiatic fleet Admiral Harry Yarnell were decided Anglophiles who favored close cooperation with the British as the outlook in the Pacific darkened precipitously followed the Japanese invasion of China. The day after the *Panay* was sunk, Leahy wrote in his

⁵⁰⁴ *FRUS*, Papers Relating to Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan, 1931-1941, I, 417, State Department press release, Nov. 22, 1937. *Panay* and *Luzon* were dispatched to Nanking to evacuate US citizens who wished to leave.

⁵⁰⁵ Akira Iriye, *The Origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific* (Harlow: Longman Publishing, 1987), 48-49.

⁵⁰⁶ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 193.

diary that it was “time now to get the Fleet ready for sea” and “to make an agreement with the British Navy for joint action.”⁵⁰⁷ Yarnell expressed a similar sentiment, writing to Leahy, “it is my firm conviction that we should stick with England and France in all our dealings in the Far East... As for pulling chestnuts out of the fire, England stands to pull just as many out for us as we do for her. If these three countries stand together they can dominate the situation in the Far East. If they do not, they will be defeated singly and in detail.”⁵⁰⁸ The sentiments expressed towards the Royal Navy by the USN’s top men had completely reversed from the suspicion and resentment that pervaded the service during the early part of the decade. Faced with the stark tactical and strategic realities of a Pacific war, the armed services now exceeded their civilian counterparts in their enthusiasm for close cooperation with the British.

Leahy selected Admiral Royal E. Ingersoll, a senior technical advisor to the US delegation at the 1935 conference, to coordinate strategy with the Admiralty’s Plan Division. Arriving in London in January 1938, the Ingersoll conversations were friendly and frank. The British revealed their exact strength in the Far East and their plans to build up these forces if necessary. At the time of the discussions, the British told Ingersoll that they had a paltry force of two carriers, ten cruisers and a smattering of destroyers in the Far East, but that they intended to send a fleet headed by nine battleships in the event that war with Japan appeared likely.⁵⁰⁹ Ingersoll reciprocated and shared with impressive detail the outline of War Plan Orange and the fleet strength the USN intended to muster.⁵¹⁰ Both parties assured the other that their respective navies could make use of

⁵⁰⁷ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 257, Leahy’s Diary, Dec. 13, 1937.

⁵⁰⁸ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 259, Yarnell to Leahy, Dec. 22, 1937.

⁵⁰⁹ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 265, memo of conversation at Admiralty, Jan. 3, 1938.

⁵¹⁰ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 274, memo of conversation at Admiralty, Jan. 11, 1938.

the territorial waters of the other for their operations—the British even extended the use of their base as Singapore for the US fleet, though Ingersoll was told it would not be fully completed for another 18 months. It was also agreed that both fleets should arrive at their respective bases (the Royal Navy at Singapore, the United States Navy at Hawaii) at the same time and to synchronize operations as much as possible, in order to produce the maximum effect upon Japan.⁵¹¹ There was also discussion of a so-called “distant blockade,” a strategy whereby the two navies would cut Japan off from supplies that it imported from beyond its near abroad, most notably oil. The rough lines of this distant blockade were sketched out, with the Royal Navy to take the Singapore—New Guinea—Australian line while the USN to take everything from Alaska to Cape Horn, in the process assuming responsibility for the defense of the West Coast of the Commonwealth nation of Canada.⁵¹²

Yarnell had outlined this distant blockade plan to Roosevelt in late 1937 to a favorable reception. “With our allies,” the Admiral wrote to the President, “we would control roughly ninety percent of the world’s reserves of iron, coal, and oil as well as a major portion of other raw materials.” By a combination of embargo and blockade, Yarnell insisted, the United States and Britain could ensure that Japan would lack the materials needed to sustain a war economy. “Some nations can be strangled to death,” he told the President. Roosevelt expressed his approval of the plan to Leahy, commenting in his usual breezy way that “Yarnell talks a lot of sense... it goes along with that word ‘quarantine’ I used in the Chicago speech last month.”⁵¹³ The plan was later codified as Joint Army-Navy Rainbow Two, part of a series of war plans for a global conflict and a

⁵¹¹ Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 267, memo of conversation at Admiralty, Jan. 3, 1938.

⁵¹² Simpson, *Anglo-American Naval Relations*, 278, memo of conversation at Admiralty, Jan. 11, 1938.

⁵¹³ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 199.

two-ocean war. Rainbow Two eventually evolved into the final plan before the war, Rainbow Five, which advocated a defensive war in the Pacific and a “Europe First” orientation.⁵¹⁴

It seemed as though both the administration and the military had concluded that the American relationship with Britain would remain a cornerstone for security and for the preservation of a familiar world order. It was a long distance from the chilly bilateral preliminaries over the summer of 1934. As the dawn of the Second World War neared, American policymakers became increasingly reconciled to the fact that a greater degree of international cooperation than a strict philosophy of non-interventionism would normally allow was necessary to maintain the security of the United States. Following the rough awakening of the 1935 conference, America was forced to come to terms with a deteriorating situation on both its flanks and a Navy that was insufficient to deal with both at once. The situation called for international alignment with those nations it shared the greatest interests with, and the American policymakers demonstrated their willingness to adapt accordingly.

⁵¹⁴ Russel F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1973), 313-14.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

The narrative to this thesis concludes in 1938. By 1939, the numerous threats to the Western Powers had actualized and soon foreign policy was dictated on the basis of wartime urgency of an entirely different breed than the sort found in conference halls. The story of the Anglo-American relationship from 1939 onward is a tale expertly told in countless places.

The Second London Naval Conference, on the other hand, is poorly covered in the literature. Few historians of either the interwar United States Navy or interwar US foreign policy address the conference at all. Even histories that are devoted solely to the naval arms control treaties scarcely mention the final meeting of the Powers. The reason for the conference's near absence in the historiography is clear. By failing to secure the signature of the Japanese, the treaty was essentially a failure from the beginning. Its terms were a great deal more limited than its predecessors, and they were quickly rendered obsolete through the invocation of various escalator clauses. Arms control, at least as it was understood by delegates to the Washington Conference and the 1930 London Conference, was effectively ended when those treaties expired on January 1, 1937.

However, the Second LNT still deserves much more attention than it has been given by historians. Even if the treaty itself was of little consequence, it was the result of serious, determined, and exhaustive diplomacy. The Anglo-American relationship was greatly strengthened over the course of negotiations at a critical juncture. The frank discussions of strategy and the coordination of tactics at the conference and its surrounding talks is evidence of a degree of trust exceedingly rare among nations—

especially at a time of such uncertainty and discord. The conference presents an interesting case to students of international relations. Followers of the realist school of thought would have difficulty enough with the ardent desire to adhere to arms control from military men and civilians alike, let alone the closeness of the relationship between America and Britain during these years.

The conference also provides a fascinating case study for American foreign policy in the interwar years. The foreign policy process has been endlessly examined in the years during and especially following World War Two by historians and political scientists alike. By that time, the executive branch of the US Government had expanded greatly, and the process had changed completely from the relatively intimate affair it had remained under Roosevelt's first two terms.⁵¹⁵ In particular, the relationship between the military and civilian branches of government was not regularized in peacetime to the extent that they were during the Cold War. There was no National Security Council or even the Joint Chiefs of Staff.⁵¹⁶ The lines of communication between the policymakers and the armed forces was not always open in the interwar period. The disconnect had caused numerous problems at the 1922 and 1930 naval conferences and a lingering bitterness within the Navy. The two halves of government worked considerably better at the 1935 conference, however, and the signature of the treaty resulted in little if any hostility between the Navy and State. The traditional narrative of discord between the civilian and military halves of the US government that dots the historiography of naval arms control does not hold up at all for the 1935 conference.

⁵¹⁵ The Executive Office of the President, the permanent body of support staff to the President, was only created in 1939. Before this, the President's staff was small and their positions were largely informal.

⁵¹⁶ Created by the National Security Act of 1947.

Much of the difference in attitude must be attributed to changes in the USN. Under the leadership of CNO William V. Pratt and continuing under William H. Standley, the top officials of the USN came not only to accept arms limitation but some even started to see it as beneficial to naval strategy. The opinion from both the CNO's office and the General Board began to conclude that the ratios and the tonnage caps were things worth maintaining if possible. This contrasts greatly to the outrage expressed by USN officers in the aftermath of the Washington Conference, and to a lesser extent the anger resulting from the London Conference. Stephen E. Pelz has written that the USN had dialed back its "big navy" ambitions in the mid-1930s and its bitterness over the continued dominance of the RN since "after the famine of the Hoover years, they remained satisfied with the hors d'oeuvres that Roosevelt provided."⁵¹⁷ Indeed, it is possible that after the rough experience of the 1920s and during the economic constraints of the Great Depression, the Navy was cognizant of the reality that building a treaty fleet was probably the best they could hope for.

Yet this is a very limited and unsatisfactory answer. Undoubtedly it is partly true; if government money had been loose and the domestic mood disposed to a buildup of arms, it is quite likely that the attitude of the navy would not have been the same. Nonetheless, there is compelling evidence that many naval officers of the interwar period saw the value of limiting arms below their nation's potential capacity and fixing arms at a definite level vis-à-vis potential competitors. Rational actors may seek external constraints on their freedom of action, including men in uniform. This is an important point given the prevalent view that militaries tend to push for expansion to the limit of what the nation may provide. This view is also particular to the interwar arms control

⁵¹⁷ Pelz, *Race to Pearl Harbor*, 203.

era—the failure at the Geneva Naval Conference in 1927 was attributed to the rigidity of the men in uniform by both contemporaries and by many historians. The actions and suggested policies of the USN throughout the 1935 conference and the years that bookended it suggests that the attitude of naval officers in this period was a great deal more complex than is sometimes allowed.

A better answer for the USN's increasing commitment to the Washington system in the 1930s can be found in its evolving strategy. War Plan Orange changed considerably from the 1920s to the 1930s. In its original iteration, the plan called for a fleet of overwhelming force to cross from Hawaii to the Philippines as fast as possible. From the Philippines the fleet would regroup and refuel and seek a decisive battle with the Japanese fleet. The original plan followed Mahan's tenet of "sea control," whereby the destruction of the fleet would enable the USN to control seaborne commerce in the Pacific and defeat Japan by means of blockade. The strategy explains the USN's insistence on building to the unit maximum in each category, in order to obtain the greatest cruising radius and to achieve the highest degree of gun power at the point of contact with the Japanese fleet. It also explains why the USN sometimes chafed under the ratios—the most important element to the strategy was the capital fleet, the category in which the US sacrificed the most at Washington in 1922 and the only category in which it maintained the maximum throughout the interwar period.

Technological advancements and results from interwar "fleet problems" changed this so-called "through ticket" strategy to a much more cautious one. The fleet would slowly approach Japan by "leapfrogging" across the Micronesian islands before eventually taking back the Philippines as a staging ground for a general blockade of the

Japanese Home Islands. Under this slow approach, the US would use its much larger shipbuilding capacity to establish complete superiority over the Japanese fleet—time was thought to favor the US in the prospective war.⁵¹⁸ By the time of the 1935 conference, the Philippines was judged indefensible and Standley ordered the end of the “through ticket” strategy. While battleships would remain a central part of this strategy, War Plan Orange would rely much more heavily on cruisers, carriers, and supply ships in order to establish “passive sea control” over long periods of time. In these areas, the USN remained understrength; even by 1939, five years into the Vinson Act and one year into the Second Vinson Act, the USN had only half the number of cruisers afloat that the Royal Navy possessed despite notional parity.⁵¹⁹ The public addresses and interdepartmental memoranda all emphasized the need to build up the merchant marine, fuel tenders, and cruiser forces to a much greater degree than the battleship replacement program due to begin in 1937. Limitation was thus looked at more favorably by the USN in the mid to late 1930s than it had been in the past, as it would allow them time to build up to strength in neglected categories and enable their more complex war plans in the Pacific.

This also helps to explain the USN’s generally friendly disposition towards the British during the 1935 conference and its immediate aftermath. Admiral Leigh, Chairman of the General Board, CNOs Standley and Leahy, Commander of the Asiatic Fleet Admiral Yarnell, among many others, all advocated coming to terms with the UK and establishing a close working relationship with the RN in the Pacific. This stood in stark contrast to the 1920s when the general attitude towards the British alternated from indifferent to outright hostile and was always tinged with a hint of bitterness. The change

⁵¹⁸ Miller, *War Plan Orange*, 79.

⁵¹⁹ McKercher, “Great Britain Pre-Eminent,” 766.

in demeanor towards the British is also indicative of the change in strategy. War Plan Orange hinged on a gradual advance from an enormous perimeter. Such a strategy would benefit immeasurably from a friendly presence on the opposite flank. The concept of the “distant blockade” derived from this strategy and was critically reliant on the cooperation of the Royal Navy to complete the required encirclement of Japan. The evolution of War Plan Orange in the 1930s helped smooth the way for a friendlier and more cooperative relationship with the British at the 1935 conference.

The thesis of American “isolationism” likewise does not hold up to scrutiny in this period. Certainly, Congress at times acted in a manner consistent with an interpretation of isolationism; the failure of the World Court and the passage of the Neutrality Acts were two prominent examples of the legislature distancing itself from the affairs of the world in the mid-30s. Yet even these cases were not clear-cut examples of a prevalent dogma of isolationism among American policymakers. A majority of US Senators voted for US accession to the World Court, and the politics behind Neutrality were complex and multifaceted. At any rate, the US Congress, and in particular the Senate, was vulnerable to cohesive and well-organized minorities. The “hard-core” isolationists were certainly a minority but, as with the failure of the ratification of the Versailles Treaty which inaugurated the so-called “isolationist era,” they could exert disproportionate influence as a result of constitutional design.

The aggregate of American policies in the interwar period, and by extension the majority of American policymakers can more properly be said to be “non-interventionist.” The distinction may seem a fine one on the surface, but a thorough account of US foreign policy in the mid-1930s illustrates the very real differences

between isolationism and non-interventionism. President Roosevelt showed a keen interest in arms limitation from the start, just as he had shown himself to be an early ally to the Vinson-Trammell Act. Both of these policies—the latter designed to strengthen the American hand in the former—were intrinsically internationalist in their intent.

America’s involvement in the creation and preservation of the Washington System represented perhaps the nation’s biggest commitment to the international order between the wars, at least on a security basis. Its Navy, furthermore, was its only tool of hard power, and it was a formidable one—equal, at least theoretically, to the largest in the world. A blue water navy is a unique tool of foreign policy. Unlike ground forces, its potential reach is global. The Roosevelt administration’s recommitment to building a treaty navy—in essence, a recommitment to the principle of maintaining a navy “second to none”—shows a clear desire to hone one of America’s greatest tools of foreign policy.

In part, this desire can still be seen through the lens of isolationism. In numerous addresses and papers, the Navy Department pled the case for a treaty navy as a means to “wage neutrality.”⁵²⁰ If the nation remained weak, in times of war its interests would be freely assailed and America would be obliged to enter the fray, as had happened in World War One.⁵²¹ Indeed, Roosevelt continued to identify the basis of America’s defense policy as hemispheric security and the maintenance of neutral rights up until 1941.⁵²² In

⁵²⁰ LOC Manuscript Division, Standley Papers, Box 6, Transcript of Standley Address at 40th annual dinner of the Pennsylvania Society, Dec. 17, 1938.

⁵²¹ NARG 80, Box 683, Navy Department Memo on House Joint Resolution 254, May 26, 1937. “President Woodrow Wilson endeavored most earnestly to maintain out neutrality from 1914 to 1917 by the use of diplomacy alone, entirely divorced from the influence of force. In 1916, as a result of his experience, he became convinced of the necessity of having sufficient force with which to back his diplomacy if our neutral rights were to be preserved without being drawn into war.”

⁵²² Rosenman, *Public Papers* 1941, 181-193, Roosevelt Radio Address, “We Choose Human Freedom,” May 27, 1941.

this sense, then, the Roosevelt administration's resolve to build to treaty limits can be seen as the re-entrenchment of the United States within "fortress America."

This point of view ignores the attitude of American policymakers at the 1935 conference and the years that followed. The dogged determination of the delegation and the relevant officials in Washington to preserve some semblance of arms control, in the face of mounting difficulties and even after the withdrawal of America's presumed enemy, demonstrates the United States' willingness to enter into international agreements. The treaty in its final form was less about controlling or limiting actual armaments and was more a gesture of faith between nations. The notification clause was envisioned as the new backbone of arms control, a provision that rested entirely on international trust and faith in the durability of the liberal order. The behavior and attitude of American policymakers during the conference is simply not compatible within the framework of an isolationist interpretation.

In particular, the extraordinary development of the Anglo-American relationship during the middle years of the 1930s illustrates the acceptance of US policymakers of working with foreign nations to solve mutual security problems, even if that acceptance was sometimes slow and reluctant. Americans were not blind to the dangers that were building in the world, and many saw the UK as a necessary friend in the days ahead. Both civilian and military planners operated on the assumption that the Royal Navy would keep their Atlantic flank secure in the event of a European war. As far as Japan went, American diplomats and officers worked closely with their British counterparts first to try and defuse the threat in the Pacific and then to contain it. It seems clear that most American officials would have preferred to maintain a policy of non-interventionism. But

the close bond forged with the UK at the conference makes it equally clear that they were willing to explore alternative policies as contingency plans in an increasingly uncertain world. The overlapping interests of the two nations were recognized by many Americans, and they sought an international arrangement accordingly.

There were certainly limits to the Anglo-American relationship. A minor fissure opened in the summer preliminaries of 1934, and American policymakers cut the British adrift in several diplomatic initiatives in the aftermath of the treaty's completion. Yet the limits imposed on the relationship do little to detract from the remarkable nature of that relationship, nor do they provide any evidence for an isolationist interpretation. There are always limits on any international relationship, due to the complexity and uncertainty of the international scene and the pressure of domestic politics. America was not alone in imposing strict limitations on a relationship with clear mutual benefits—the Anglo-French relationship, which had obvious and vital potential benefits for both parties, was fraught with conflict and obstruction throughout the interwar period. Perceptions of security risks and strategies of dealing with them are naturally incongruous among states, due to a countless host of factors unique to each national situation. The limitations insisted on by Americans at various times throughout the mid-1930s irked British policymakers and prompted grumblings about American isolationism. Yet the simple truth was that British long-term security plans were much more reliant on US cooperation than was the case vice versa. Anglo-American cooperation at the conference was strong, even differing security concerns limited its depth.

The second London Naval Conference is not so much overlooked in the literature as it is dismissed. It is widely seen as the whimper with which naval arms control died.

Undoubtedly, as a means to military-based arms control, the conference failed in its aims. Yet the conference was held in the middle of a pivotal crossroads. The international scene was in flux, and an examination of the conference offers a fascinating view into the policies and aims of the world's premier naval powers. In particular, the conference offers an excellent opportunity to explore the foreign policy of the United States in the mid-1930s and the process in which it was made. The commitment to naval arms control from both the civilian and military branches of the US government, the evolving strategies of the United States Navy, and the closeness of the Anglo-American relationship all point to a foreign policy that cannot be interpreted through the simplistic lens of "isolationism." The 1935 conference offers compelling evidence of interwar America's efforts to preserve the international system in which it had become such a pivotal actor.

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