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The Eagle and the Lion: Reassessing Anglo-American strategic planning and the foundations of U.S. grand strategy for World War II

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ABSTRACT

Many accounts of the formation of American and British grand strategy during World War II between the fall of France and the Pearl Harbor attacks stress the differences between the two sides' strategic thinking. These accounts argue that while the Americans favored a 'direct' Germany-first approach to defeating the Axis powers, the British preferred the 'indirect' or 'peripheral' method. However, a review of Anglo-American strategic planning in this period shows that before official U.S. wartime entry, both sides largely agreed the British 'peripheral' approach was the wisest grand strategy for winning the war.

KEYWORDS Grand strategy; Second World War; Allies; Axis; United States

On 9 July 1941, around two weeks after Nazi Germany nullified the Molotov-Ribbentrop nonaggression pact and invaded the Soviet Union, President Franklin D. Roosevelt sent an urgent message to his secretaries of war and the navy. Eying how the German assault might change the nature of the war in Europe, Roosevelt asked Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Navy Secretary Frank Knox to direct their departments to explore the United States' production requirements for defeating 'our potential enemies' if it entered the war.¹ To Roosevelt, these were mainly industrial and logistical questions focused on munitions and military equipment aimed at bolstering U.S. defences. Two months later, the president instead received the 'Joint Board Estimate of United States

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¹Franklin D. Roosevelt to Henry L. Stimson, and Frank Knox, 9 July 1941, President's Secretary's File (PSF) Departmental Correspondence: War Department: Henry L. Stimson, 1940–1941; Navy Department: Frank Knox, 1939–1941, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Museum, Hyde Park, NY (hereafter FDRL). See also *Ibid.*, Knox to FDR, 10 July 1941; Henry L. Stimson Diary, 10 July 1941, Henry L. Stimson Papers, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

Overall Production Requirements', a report labelled by a Roosevelt speechwriter as 'one of the most remarkable documents of American history' because of its farsighted strategic outlook and mostly uncanny ability to predict how the Allies could defeat their adversaries.² Going far beyond the president's original directive, top U.S. military planners, backed by their superiors, laid out their views on what American grand strategy ought to be if and when their nation went to war against the German-led Axis powers.

Yet how U.S. military officials and strategic planners envisioned fighting a global war against the Axis before the United States became an active belligerent in World War II has received remarkably little scholarly attention over the past several decades. When this subject has been studied, it has not received the investigative depth one would imagine for such a topic. This has led historians to mischaracterise and misrepresent U.S. strategic thinking in this period, particularly between the Fall of France in the spring of 1940 and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, with negative repercussions for grasping how American grand strategy developed before the United States was thrust into the war and during the immediate months afterward.

After Germany's lightning attacks on Western Europe and the Fall of France in May-June 1940, Britain was left as the only major power the United States could conceivably partner with in a potential war with the Axis.³ With the U.S.-U.K. relationship deepening after this earth-shattering event, scholars sensibly viewed the development of American grand strategy at the time as a process defined in part by its connections to its British counterpart. Shortly following the first major declassification of U.S. government documents in the 1970s, several historians began examining the formation of American grand strategy during the war years. At the center of their analysis stood an Anglo-American debate over the best way to beat the Axis: Both sides mainly agreed Germany should be defeated first but clashed over whether the American 'direct' method of an overwhelming invasion of northwestern Europe, or the British 'indirect' or 'peripheral' approach via an encirclement of Germany was superior for accomplishing

²The 'Joint Board Estimate of Overall Production Requirements' can be found in PSF Safe File: American-British Joint Chiefs of Staff, FDRL. It can also be viewed at <http://www.alternatewars.com/WW2/VictoryPlan/JointBoard.htm> and is reproduced in Steven T. Ross (ed.), *American War Plans, 1919-1941*, Vol. 5 (New York: Garland 1992), 5: 143-298. For the quotation, see Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins: An Intimate History* (New York: Harper & Brothers 1948), 410.

³On how the Fall of France changed World War II and 20th century international history, see David Reynolds, '1940: Fulcrum of the 20th Century?', *International Affairs* 66/2 (Apr. 1990), 325-50. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2621337>. On how France's collapse impacted Anglo-American relations, see Michael S. Neiberg, *When France Fell: The Vichy Crisis and the Fate of the Anglo-American Alliance* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2021).

this goal.⁴ At the same time, other crucial historical works assessing the United States and World War II either mention grand strategy before Pearl Harbor in passing or fail to analyse the process of its formation in careful detail.⁵ More recent scholarship on America's struggle against the Axis powers has also neglected to substantively revisit these issues.⁶ This lack of serious scholarly scrutiny is striking given that the pre-Pearl Harbor strategic planning process laid the foundations for U.S. grand strategic designs after it entered the war.

⁴For example, see Russell Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Policy and Strategy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP 1973), 316–17; Richard W. Steele, *The First Offensive, 1942: Roosevelt, Marshall and the Making of American Strategy* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana UP 1973), 22–5, 30–31; Mark A. Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front: American Military Planning and Diplomacy in Coalition Warfare, 1941–1943* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press 1977), 3–6; Mark A. Stoler, *Allies in War: Britain and America against the Axis Powers, 1940–1945*, Modern Wars (London: Bloomsbury Academic 2007), 28; Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 2000). For Michael Howard's thinking on this subject, see Michael Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1968). For the British official histories, see J.R.M. Butler (ed.), *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy*, Vol. 6 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1956–76). On the American side, see Louis Morton, 'Germany First: The Basic Concept of Allied Strategy in World War II', in Kent Roberts Greenfield (ed.), *Command Decisions* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1960); Mark S. Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Planning and Preparations* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1950); Maurice Matloff and Edwin Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare: 1941–1942* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1953); Maurice Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare: 1943–1944* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1959); Stetson Conn and Byron Fairchild, *The Framework of Hemisphere Defense* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1989); Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1990).

⁵For example, see David Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance, 1937–1941: A Study in Competitive Co-Operation* (Raleigh, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 1981); David Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor: Roosevelt's America and the Origins of the Second World War* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee 2002); Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War: Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Entry into World War II* (New York: Oxford UP 1988); Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932–1945* (New York: Oxford UP 1995); Warren F. Kimball, *Forged in War: Roosevelt, Churchill, and the Second World War* (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc. 1997); B.J.C. McKercher, *Transition of Power: Britain's Loss of Global Pre-eminence to the United States, 1930–1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP 1999). Richard Leighton argued Anglo-American strategic differences were smaller than many historians claimed, but focused on the 1942–44 period. See Richard Leighton, 'Overlord Revisited: An Interpretation of American Strategy in the European War, 1942–1944', *The American Historical Review* 68/4 (July 1963), 919–37, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1847256>.

⁶For instance, see Andrew Buchanan, *American Grand Strategy in the Mediterranean during World War II* (New York: Cambridge UP 2014); Phillips Payson O'Brien, *How the War Was Won: Air-Sea Power and Allied Victory in World War II* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP 2015); John A. Thompson, *A Sense of Power: The Roots of America's Global Role* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2015); Stephen Wertheim, *Tomorrow, the World: The Birth of U.S. Global Supremacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP 2020); David F. Schmitz, *The Sailor: Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Transformation of American Foreign Policy* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky 2021). Recent scholarship on Britain's fight against the Axis has also overlooked this. For example, see Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: Into Battle, 1937–1941* (New York: Oxford UP 2016); Daniel Todman, *Britain's War: A New World, 1942–1947* (New York: Oxford UP 2020); Alan Allport, *Britain at Bay: The Epic Story of the Second World War, 1938–1941* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf 2020). However, one exception is William T. Johnsen, *The Origins of the Grand Alliance: Anglo-American Military Collaboration from the Panay Incident to Pearl Harbor* (Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky 2016). David Kaiser discusses the development of American grand strategy before Pearl Harbor in some detail but reiterates the findings of other historians. See David Kaiser, *No End Save Victory: How FDR Led the Nation into War* (New York: Basic Books 2014), 174–77, 179–81, 287–93.

This article intends to fill that gap by exploring how U.S. strategic planners conceptualised their country's grand strategy before it entered World War II, mainly focusing on the period between the Fall of France and the Pearl Harbor attacks. Grand strategy has become a popular topic of scholarly inquiry amongst historians and political scientists alike. As a result, there are a plethora of definitions and conceptual frameworks for studying grand strategy today.⁷ However, this article uses Hal Brands' definition of grand strategy because as it became increasingly apparent to American strategists that the United States would be drawn into the war in one way or another, they strove to devise a clear set of ideas about what U.S. global interests were and which policies could be employed to meet them.⁸ By examining grand strategy from this perspective, this article highlights how American strategists used a dynamic and shifting set of frameworks to identify U.S. interests in a fast-changing and constantly evolving international environment. As global circumstances dramatically changed during this roughly 18-month interval, U.S. planners were forced to adjust their grand strategic thinking. Grand strategy is not a static exercise but must instead be consistently adapted to reflect a capricious international political and military context, especially during world war. As this article will show, senior American officials understood this concept.

This article argues that the dichotomy between British and American strategic thinking presented by an earlier generation of historians is misleading and oversimplified. Instead, it will show that in the months before official U.S. entry into the war, American and British strategists predominantly agreed on how to overcome the Axis powers and there was more Anglo-American consensus on grand strategy than most scholars have previously recognised. This shared understanding of grand strategy at this stage of the war is even more striking given that both sides' definitions of their national interests diverged in key areas, particularly in East Asia. In addition to evaluating the U.S. strategic process, this requires reconstructing the British equivalent, something that has not been done by other scholars studying American grand strategy in this period despite the interwoven connections between the two. This has led them to misconstrue the evolution of British grand strategy in this phase of the war and draw superficial conclusions about the fledgling concepts for U.S.-U.K. coalition warfare in 1940–41. To accomplish

⁷For example, see Paul Kennedy, 'Grand Strategy in War and Peace: Toward a Broader Definition', in Paul Kennedy (ed.), *Grand Strategies in War and Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP 1991), 5; Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2014), 1; John Lewis Gaddis, *Strategies of Containment: A Critical Appraisal of American National Security Policy during the Cold War*, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford UP 2005), viii, 23.

⁸Brands defines grand strategy as a 'purposeful and coherent set of ideas about what a nation seeks to accomplish in the world, and how it should go about doing so'. It is an 'intellectual architecture' that 'represents an integrated scheme of interests, threats, resources, and policies'. See Hal Brands, *What Good Is Grand Strategy?: Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP 2014), 3.

these tasks, this article reinterprets official U.S. documents and utilises overlooked records in the U.K. national archives to demonstrate that the Anglo-American disagreements over grand strategy in this period were the consequences of misunderstandings between the two sides. Those false impressions were rooted in discrepancies over issues of emphasis and timing rather than fundamental strategic differences. From this perspective, it becomes clear that as the U.S. inched closer to war, its military establishment primarily supported the British indirect method for liberating Europe from Nazi control. It was only after the U.S. was forced on the defensive in the wake of Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor and Tokyo's subsequent conquests in the southwestern Pacific that American military planners began to rethink their wartime grand strategy and question whether the British peripheral approach was still the best way to achieve victory. Moreover, by reassessing how U.S. strategists prepared for global war, this article aims to contribute to a burgeoning literature rethinking the history and underpinnings of American grand strategy.⁹

II

During the interwar period, U.S. military officers developed a series of color-coded contingency plans outlining potential strategies for hypothetical conflicts against an array of possible adversaries. No major power was exempt, including America's neighbors and friendly countries such as Britain and France, but by the late 1930s, their war planning was increasingly focused on the fascist powers of Germany, Italy, and Japan.¹⁰ In the spring of 1939, the top-level Joint Planning Committee concluded that while this group currently did not possess the military means to pose a direct threat to the United States or invade the Western Hemisphere, their subversive activities in Latin America could eventually violate American 'freedom from external injury to our world trade, and from interference with our domestic course of life'. To deter them, the U.S. should increase its defence preparedness via armed forces increases, new base construction, hardware augmentations, and through shoring up its regional relationships.¹¹

Yet these conclusions concealed long-standing disagreements between the Army and Navy over U.S. strategic priorities, specifically in the Far East and Western Pacific. For decades, naval planners had long viewed U.S. foreign commerce and trade expansion as a vital national policy and East Asia as the

⁹For example, see Elizabeth Borgwardt, Christopher McKnight Nichols, and Andrew Preston, (eds.), *Rethinking American Grand Strategy* (New York: Oxford UP 2021). For similar works, see Beatrice Heuser, *The Evolution of Strategy: Thinking War from Antiquity to the Present* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge UP 2010); Lawrence Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (New York: Oxford UP 2013).

¹⁰'Study of Joint Action in Event of Violation of Monroe Doctrine by Fascist Powers', 12 Nov. 1938 in Ross, *American War Plans*, 3:3.

¹¹*Ibid.*, 'Joint Planning Committee Exploratory Studies in Accordance with J.B. 325', 21 Apr. 1939, 3: 4-66.

main source to facilitate this goal. Since they perceived a rising Japan to pose the greatest threat to these economic interests and saw it as the country most diametrically opposed to American regional objectives, the Navy emphasised the Pacific as the linchpin of U.S. military planning.¹² Their Army colleagues challenged this outlook, contending that U.S. ambitions in the Far East, particularly in China and the Philippines, were economically insignificant, militarily untenable, and likely to lead to needless conflict with Japan. Combined with the probability that regional U.S. land forces would be outnumbered and surrounded in the event of war, Army planners concluded their troops would be left defending insecure positions on the Asian mainland and the interests of European colonial powers; instead, they maintained continental or hemispheric security should be the top priority.¹³ These foundational planning and ideological differences would persist until the Fall of France forced a grand strategic shift, but considering prevailing Navy views on the importance of the Pacific theatre to American national interests, it was not wholly unexpected the Chief of Naval Operations later considered the 'prevention of the disruption of the British Empire' crucial to maintaining a balance of power in East Asia and a major U.S. interest.¹⁴

Confronted with the growing realisation that they could face a multiple-front war against a coalition of powerful enemies, the Joint Board (the predecessor of the Joint Chiefs of Staff) ordered a new set of war plans – nicknamed RAINBOW – to be devised exploring how the United States might strategically respond.¹⁵ The outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 created a feverish sense of urgency to accelerate RAINBOW planning. With Britain and France fighting Germany, U.S. planners concentrated on developing frameworks where Washington would act in concert with London and Paris. Under most of these nascent concepts, British and French forces focused on Europe and the Atlantic theatre and the U.S. directed its resources

¹²Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 4–18; Edward S. Miller, *War Plan Orange: The U.S. Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897–1945* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press 1991); Louis Morton, 'War Plan ORANGE: Evolution of a Strategy', *World Politics* 11/2 (Jan. 1959), 221–50, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009529>. This was not surprising given that a robust Pacific presence justified elevated U.S. naval spending, a point Waldo Heinrichs also makes in 'The Role of the U.S. Navy', in Dorothy Borg and Shumpei Okamoto (eds.), *Pearl Harbor as History: Japanese-American Relations, 1931–1941* (New York: Columbia UP 1973), 201–11.

¹³Sherman Miles memo, 'U.S. Military Position in the Far East', undated (but probably mid-1930s), JB 305, Serial 573, JPC Development File, No. 9, Record Group 225, U.S. National Archives (hereafter NARA); Assistant Chief of Staff – War Plans Division memo to Chief of Staff, 2 May 1939, JB 325, Serial 634, WPD 4175, RG 165, NARA; Morton, 'War Plan ORANGE', 221–50; Watson, 98–100; Mark A. Stoler, 'From Continentalism to Globalism: General Stanley D. Embick, the Joint Strategic Survey Committee, and the Military View of American National Policy during the Second World War', *Diplomatic History* 6/3 (July 1982), 303–21, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-7709.1982.tb00378.x>.

¹⁴For the quotation, see Harold Stark to Knox, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 12 Nov. 1940, PSF Safe File: Navy Department, 'Plan Dog', FDRL.

¹⁵Joint Army and Navy Basic War Plans, RAINBOW Nos. 1, 2, 3, and 4', 11 May 1939; 'Alternative Situations set up in Directive for Joint RAINBOW Plans', 23 June 1939 in Ross, *American War Plans*, 3: 69–76.

toward offensive operations in the Pacific.¹⁶ However, the Nazis' smashing victories in Western Europe and the Fall of France in the spring of 1940 completely upended that calculus.¹⁷ Now, with France defeated and Britain vulnerable to attack and invasion, American strategists pivoted toward unilateral Western Hemispheric defence.¹⁸

Across the Atlantic, France's collapse was a devastating blow to Britain on multiple levels. Not only did it lose its major Continental ally against Germany when France capitulated, but it was also humiliated when the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) chaotically evacuated from Dunkirk to escape the encroaching German Panzer divisions. Moreover, the *Luftwaffe*, now in control of French airfields, would have a much easier time launching destructive air raids on Britain itself, leaving the U.K. susceptible to a Nazi invasion. Yet even before the outcome of the Battle of France was clear, the British Chiefs of Staff (COS) were already estimating how they could fight on in case France was compelled to surrender. They concluded that with the BEF likely to incur substantial losses, Britain would need to rely on economic pressure in the form of naval blockade, strategic bombing, and subversive action to defeat Germany. But without full American economic and financial support, 'we do not think we could continue the war with any chance of success'.¹⁹

This is where misapprehension of British grand strategy often begins, which leads to later cursory judgments of the Anglo-American strategic discussions during the months before U.S. wartime entry, especially in 1941. Some scholars have argued that after the Fall of France the British envisaged relying on the activities mentioned above as the centerpiece of their peripheral approach to victory. Because they would coerce Hitler into a long war of attrition, attacks then on the outposts of Axis power in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Mediterranean would weaken his forces to a point in the distant future where the British could reenter the Continent in small contingents and incite mass uprisings against German occupation to precipitate Nazi downfall. Such plans reflected Britain's insecure position, especially in 1940–41, and its diffuse defensive requirements, but also its supposedly lengthy history of avoiding direct Continental clashes with powerful European rivals, except for World War I, due to its relative weakness in population.²⁰

¹⁶Ibid., 'Joint Army and Navy Basic War Plans – RAINBOW', 9 Apr. 1940, 3: 77–82. Out of the five working RAINBOW scenarios, three envisioned the U.S. fighting with major allies. Of those three, two employed the general hypothesis mentioned above.

¹⁷In addition to the Reynolds article and Neiberg's book, on the Fall of France see Ernest R. May, *Strange Victory: Hitler's Conquest of France* (New York: Hill and Wang 2000); Julian Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (New York: Oxford UP 2003). For a new argument that emphasises contingency in the Battle of France, see Allport, 191–260.

¹⁸Matloff and Snell, 11–13; Conn and Fairchild, 31–36.

¹⁹The National Archives of the United Kingdom (hereafter TNA), Records of the Cabinet Office (hereafter CAB), CAB 66/7/48, 'British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality', 25 May 1940 (emphasis in original).

²⁰For example, see Weigley, 327–28; Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front*, 4; Stoler, *Allies in War*, 38–41.

However, historians such as Michael Howard and B.J.C. McKercher have clearly shown Britain had a strategic commitment to the European continent for years before the outbreak of war in 1939.²¹ The COS made that explicit when they warned in the winter of 1939 that 'it is difficult to say how the security of the United Kingdom could be maintained if France were forced to capitulate, and therefore defence of the former may have to include a share in the land defence of French territory'.²² Additionally, the COS clearly stated as France was falling that their strategic thinking at the time was not 'designed to serve as a precise definition of our future strategy' but instead was meant 'to illustrate our ability to continue the war and to argue the urgent measures it was considered desirable to institute'.²³ In a situation as dire as the one Britain faced in 1940–41, where Hitler bestrode Europe and the U.K. lacked a mighty Continental ally, it is difficult to imagine historical precedent was offering much of a useful guide. National survival in this desperate period was Britain's top priority; victory, and the grand strategy to deliver it, could only come once the British were on safer ground.

III

As it became clearer the *Luftwaffe* would not achieve a knockout blow and a Nazi invasion of Britain grew increasingly unlikely in the summer of 1940, American strategic planners faced a dilemma. When a joint Anglo-French defeat in June seemed like a distinct possibility, U.S. military officials shifted toward a grand strategy of unilateral hemispheric defence to protect the United States from future Axis attacks. Although Britain initially withstood France's collapse, American strategists assumed its surrender was imminent and therefore opposed President Roosevelt's initiatives to provide it with material assistance.²⁴ Moreover, they felt it was dangerous to waste aid and equipment on London when it would probably capitulate anyway while the U.S. was perilously unprepared to defend its hemispheric interests. By the late summer though, Britain's continued survival and Roosevelt's emphasis on sustaining London pushed U.S. planners to reconsider once again their grand strategy.²⁵

²¹Michael Howard, *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of Two World Wars* (London: Temple Smith 1972), 96–137; B.J.C. McKercher, 'National Security and Imperial Defence: British Grand Strategy and Appeasement, 1930–1939', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 19/3 (Sept. 2008), 391–442. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290802344954>.

²²TNA, CAB 16/183A/44, 'European Appreciation 1939–1940', 20 Feb. 1939. See also Howard, *The Continental Commitment*, 127.

²³Butler, *History of the Second World War*, 209.

²⁴Matloff and Snell, 13–21; Louis Morton, *Strategy and Command: The First Two Years* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army 1962), 74–8; David G. Haglund, 'George C. Marshall and the Question of Military Aid to England, May–June 1940', *Journal of Contemporary History* 15/4 (Oct. 1980), 745–60.

²⁵Conn and Fairchild, 65; Mark M. Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision: American War Planning and Policy Process, 1937–1942*, Vol. 2 (New York: Garland 1988), 1: 386.

The first step was determining how the British planned to fight on considering their still precarious circumstances. At the British ambassador in Washington's suggestion, Roosevelt authorised U.S. military observers to travel to Britain to learn more about the current state of London's war effort.²⁶ Ahead of the Americans' visit, British planners spent weeks preparing their superiors to update their counterparts on the status of the war and their future strategy for defeating the Axis coalition.²⁷ As the leader of the fascist powers, it was vital to focus British offensive energies on Germany; if it were thwarted, the remainder of the Axis bloc would crumble. Already starting to shift away from the somber COS appreciation in May 1940, internal planning documents stressed that a peripheral strategy of economic pressure, air attack, and subversive activities were crucial for softening the enemy's capacity to wage war while building up sufficient land forces to return to Europe and battle the enemy.²⁸ It was not that the British didn't plan to eventually meet the German *Heer*, but rather sought to avoid confronting it in its 'present state'.²⁹ This was a sensible policy given that the British Army was still recovering from the Battle of France and the Nazis had a combined total of 73 armored, mechanised, and infantry divisions in Western Europe alone at the time.³⁰ As the Americans' arrival drew closer, the British planners explicitly underlined again that they did not believe economic pressure combined with strategic bombing would decisively cause Hitler's downfall. They were necessary components of their grand strategy, but they were not sufficient. As they intensified those elements, it was crucial to build up resources so they could resume 'major offensive operations' on land against the Germans as quickly as possible.³¹ These were not going to be small-scale operations to rouse revolts in Nazi-occupied Europe but were conceptualised as extensive land attacks in different areas of the European continent.

When they finally met with the U.S. military observers in late August, the COS sketched out a clear Germany-first strategy for winning the war. Echoing the planners' articulated policies, they told their American visitors that while they strengthened their offensive capabilities it was necessary to rely upon the indirect methods of blockade, aerial bombing, and subversion to degrade Germany's ability to prosecute the war. At the same time, the COS admitted they were still on the defensive and needed to protect the security of the U.K. and British imperial interests in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Once the

²⁶Watson, 113–14; James R. Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy: Anglo-American Naval Collaboration, 1937–1941* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press 1977), 128–45.

²⁷For example, see TNA, CAB 80/16/7, 'Anglo-American Standardisation of Arms Committee – Note by the Joint Planning Sub-Committee', 8 Aug. 1940; CAB 80/16/29, 'Anglo-American Standardisation of Arms Committee – Note by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee', 10 Aug. 1940; CAB 80/16/40, 'Brief for the Chiefs of Staff Address', 14 Aug. 1940.

²⁸TNA, CAB 80/16/40, 'Brief for the Chiefs of Staff Address', 14 Aug. 1940.

²⁹*Ibid.*

³⁰*Ibid.*, CAB 80/16/16, 'Weekly Resume of Naval, Military and Air Situation, No. 49', 9 Aug. 1940.

³¹*Ibid.*, CAB 122/59, 'British Policy for the Future Conduct of the War', n.d. (but likely 17 Aug. 1940).

threats to these areas decreased and Germany had been weakened through the above schemes, they could resume the offensive through a European invasion. When the Americans forthrightly asked whether the COS considered 'whether the final issue of the war could *only* be decided on land', Sir Cyril Newall, the Chief of the Air Staff, replied it was 'inevitable that the Army should deliver the *coup de grace*'.³² He explained they hoped to just make it easier for the numerically inferior British Army to wage open combat against the *Wehrmacht* in the future. And in a formal strategic appreciation less than a week later, the COS reiterated the central planks of their peripheral strategy were designed to undermine German military strength to the point British land operations could reasonably inflict direct damage on it.³³ The objective of British strategy therefore was not to substitute their indirect action policies for a land engagement, but rather reduce German effectiveness in the field so the British Army could successfully invade Europe. The British sought to enfeeble their enemy before directly destroying their power to resist. That was evidently something the Americans could understand for Colonel Raymond E. Lee, the U.S. military attaché in London, agreed that 'not until these defensive dispositions are made will it be possible to assume the offensive'.³⁴

Far Eastern issues added to the complexity of Anglo-American strategic planning in the fall of 1940. In September, Japan took advantage of Hitler's victories in Europe by invading the northern half of Indochina, generating fears in London and Washington it was the opening bid in a fresh round of territorial expansion. These fears seemed to be confirmed when Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with the European Axis powers, formalizing a defensive alliance with them as Hitler and Mussolini consolidated their grip in the West.³⁵ The British chiefs alluded to these concerns when they told the Americans the month before it was vital to avoid an 'open clash' with Japan and that 'the support of the American battle fleet would obviously transform the whole strategical situation in the Far East'.³⁶ First Sea Lord Sir Dudley Pound put it more bluntly when he said 'it was very much in the British interest that the United States Fleet should remain in the Pacific'.³⁷ A.V.

³²Ibid., CAB 122/59, 'Minutes of 3rd Anglo-American Standardisation of Arms Committee Meeting', 31 Aug. 1940 (emphasis mine).

³³Ibid., CAB 66/11/42, 'Future Strategy', 4 Sept. 1940.

³⁴James Leutze (ed.), *The London Observer: The Journal of General Raymond E. Lee, 1940–1941* (London: Hutchinson & Co 1972), 41.

³⁵Reynolds, *The Creation of the Anglo-American Alliance*, 138–43. Also see Jonathan Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937–1941* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press 1985), 136. This was not a completely unexpected development though. For example, see Office of Naval Intelligence memo to Chief of Naval Operations, 'Japanese Policy of Empire Expansion', 13 July 1940, attached to D.J. Callaghan memo to FDR, 16 July 1940, PSF Departmental Correspondence: Navy, July–October 1940, FDRL.

³⁶TNA, CAB 122/59, 'Minutes of 3rd Anglo-American Standardisation of Arms Committee Meeting', 31 Aug. 1940. For more on Britain's attempts to avoid war with Japan, see Antony Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor: Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936–1941* (London: Routledge 1995).

³⁷Ibid. Also see Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 162–77.

Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty and Pound's direct civilian superior, echoed this sentiment when he informed Lord Halifax, the British foreign secretary, that the Royal Navy could not afford to divert resources to the region and that the 'real deterrent to Japanese aggression in the Far East' was 'the willing and open co-operation of the United States'.³⁸ They seemed to be elaborating on Churchill's veiled request to Roosevelt in May when he offered to let the U.S. use the British naval base at Singapore, the linchpin of British sea power in the Far East, to 'keep that Japanese dog quiet'.³⁹ In October, Churchill officially made that plea when he asked Roosevelt to send an American naval squadron to 'pay a friendly visit' to Singapore.⁴⁰ U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Harold Stark rejected this proposal though on the grounds the Atlantic was the priority theatre.⁴¹ It was not hard to see they were unwilling to entrust the Atlantic's security – and by extension, U.S. security – to a country that was still prone to ruin.

The silver lining in both Japan's aggression and the conclusion of the Tripartite Act that fall was that they clarified the truly international nature of the war. Invigorated by this reality, what Britain's continued survival meant for U.S. strategic priorities, and the general lack of lucidity over American grand strategy, Stark began working on a solution. In November, days after Roosevelt won an unprecedented third term, he forwarded a memorandum to Knox, the navy secretary, in which he argued American security was linked to the survival of the British Empire, which was needed to preserve the European balance of power and prevent the rise of a dominant Continental hegemon. If Britain collapsed, Stark warned, it was likely the Axis powers would seek to expand their control and attempt penetration into the Western Hemisphere.⁴² He also pointed out

³⁸TNA, Records of the Foreign Office, FO 371/ 24711/193, A.V. Alexander to Lord Halifax, 29 Nov. 1940.

³⁹Warren F. Kimball (ed.), *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, Vols. 1, 3. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1984) (hereafter *Churchill and Roosevelt*), 1: 38.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 74.

⁴¹Stark's concurrence that the Atlantic took precedence over the Pacific reflected a broader strategic shift in Navy thinking that brought it somewhat more in line with the Army's more limited defence plans. The Navy's historical emphasis on the Pacific theatre was contingent upon the Royal Navy safeguarding the Atlantic's shipping lanes, an essential underpinning of U.S. abilities to protect North America and the Western Hemisphere. With Britain's durability still uncertain in late 1940 after the Fall of France, naval planners continued to judge this assumption hazardous and cautioned that war with Japan must be avoided now that American military power was needed to protect the Atlantic. See Commander-in-Chief, U.S. Fleet memo to CNO, 'War Plans', 22 Oct. 1940 in U.S. Congress, *Hearings Before the Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack*, pursuant to Senate Cong. Res. 27, 79th Congress, 1st Session, 39 Parts (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 1946), Part 14: 963–70; *Ibid.*, Stark to J.O. Richardson, 12 Nov. 1940, 971–72; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 166; Watson, 117–18.

⁴²As Assistant Secretary of State Adolf Berle noted in his diary, the U.S. had a 'very real and solid interest in having the British, and not the Germans, dominant in the Atlantic'. See Beatrice Bishop Berle and Travis Beal Jacobs, (eds.), *Navigating the Rapids, 1918–1971, From the Papers of Adolf A. Berle* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1973), 230.

Britain lacked sufficient manpower and war material to defeat Germany, necessitating assistance from allies who could launch expansive land offensives, namely, the United States.⁴³

In Stark's view, America had four major strategic choices: hemispheric defence (Plan A); begin offensive operations against Japan in the Pacific and assume the defensive in the Atlantic (Plan B); send maximum military aid to the Allies in both the Atlantic and Pacific (Plan C); or maintain the defensive in the Pacific while focusing on launching massive offensive operations in the Atlantic and Europe against Germany (Plan D). Yet, Stark rejected the first three and argued the final one, Plan D or 'Dog', was superior because it was the best approach for meeting U.S. interests in defeating Germany while attempting to avoid war with Japan. Ultimately, Stark believed 'the continued existence of the British Empire, combined with building up a strong protection in our home areas, will do most to ensure the status quo in the Western Hemisphere, and to promote our principal national interests'.⁴⁴ In addition to securing the British Empire, he defined those interests as 'preserving the territorial, economic, and ideological integrity of the United States, plus that of the remainder of the Western Hemisphere'; the reduction of Japan's 'offensive military power', and the sustainment of U.S. economic and political influence in the Far East. But, Stark cautioned, Japan should not be downgraded to the position of a second-rate regional power; it was as valuable for the United States to maintain a balance of power in the Far East as it was in Europe.⁴⁵ Knox sent the memorandum to the White House, but Roosevelt avoided endorsing it. However, the president did approve secret military staff talks with the British, one of Stark's recommendations.⁴⁶

Stark's memorandum, a document Louis Morton called 'perhaps the most important single document in the development of World War II strategy', finally pointed the way toward what American strategists had been groping around for the last several months.⁴⁷ In the face of a worldwide hostile coalition, Stark claimed American interests needed to be understood on a global scale.⁴⁸ It was

⁴³Stark to Knox, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 12 Nov. 1940, FDRL. Also see Morton, 'Germany First', 35–8.

⁴⁴Stark to Knox, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 12 Nov. 1940, FDRL. This version of Stark's memo, along with an earlier draft, is reproduced in Ross, *American War Plans*, 3: 225–74.

⁴⁵Stark to Knox, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 12 Nov. 1940, FDRL.

⁴⁶Matloff and Snell, 28; Watson, 124–25. Also see Larry I. Bland (ed.), *The Papers of George Catlett Marshall: "We Cannot Delay", July 1, 1939 - December 6, 1941*, Vol. 2 (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins UP 1986), 391–92.

⁴⁷Morton, 'Germany First', 35. For more on the parallel strategic reconsiderations happening in civilian circles within the State Department, and more prominently, outside the Roosevelt administration at this time, see Wertheim, 47–80.

⁴⁸Roosevelt likewise told Joseph C. Grew, the U.S. ambassador in Tokyo, that the 'hostilities in Europe, in Africa, and in Asia are all parts of a single world conflict. We must, consequently, recognise that our interests are menaced both in Europe and the Far East . . . Our strategy of self-defence must be a global strategy which takes account of every front and takes advantage of every opportunity to contribute to our total security'. See FDR to Grew, 21 Jan. 1941, PSF Diplomatic Correspondence: Japan, January–September 1941, FDRL.

no longer sufficient to protect the Western Hemisphere from outside powers. On the contrary, U.S. grand strategy must look beyond its backyard and center itself around preserving balances of power in both Asia and Europe. Echoing Roosevelt's arguments several months before that the United States could not exist 'as a lone island in a world dominated by the philosophy of force', Stark was essentially breaking with a strategic tradition dating back to George Washington and arguing the U.S. must adopt a global posture if it was to safeguard its national security and preserve its way of life.⁴⁹ Although several Army officials expressed some reservations about Stark's perceptions of U.S. interests in the Pacific because they believed it could lead to war with Japan, Marshall and the Army War Plans Division conveyed their 'general agreement' with the CNO's outlook, which constituted the genesis of a Joint Planning Committee study that essentially repeated Stark's assessments.⁵⁰ After years of acerbic interservice feuding over the contours of American grand strategy, Stark's analysis allowed the Army and Navy to reconcile their competing approaches enough to approximately create a set of shared assumptions about the future of U.S. national policy.⁵¹ American planners now possessed the basis to move forward and forge tighter cooperation with the British on how to defeat the Axis. It led to fundamental agreement between the two sides over how to accomplish this in the months ahead of Pearl Harbor.

IV

In the weeks before the U.S.-U.K. military staff conversations were to begin in Washington in January 1941, it is easy to get fixated on American concerns they could be manipulated into protecting British interests. After all, they made those anxieties obvious. In his Plan Dog memorandum, Stark stressed it was crucial to develop a cogent grand strategy that advanced American, not British, objectives. 'I believe our every effort should be directed toward the prosecution of a national policy with mutually supporting diplomatic and military aspects, and having as its guiding feature a determination that any intervention we may undertake shall be such as will ultimately best promote

⁴⁹FDR, 'Address at University of Virginia', 10 June 1940, The American Presidency Project (last accessed 2 Nov. 2021. <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/address-university-virginia>). For a wider discussion on the enlargement of U.S. national security definitions in this period, see John A. Thompson, 'Conceptions of National Security and American Entry into World War II', *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 16/4 (2005), 671–97. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592290500331006>.

⁵⁰Marshall to Stimson and J.W. Anderson to Marshall, 'National Policy of the United States' memos, 13 Nov. 1940, WPD 4175–15, RG 165, NARA; *ibid.*, JPC memo to JB, 'National Defence Policy of the United States', 21 Dec. 1940, JB 325, Serial 670, RG 225. The JPC memo is reprinted in Ross, *American War Plans*, 3: 281–300.

⁵¹One of Marshall's planners later echoed Stark's global perspective on U.S. national security policy when he recorded in his diary 'if any one power dominates Asia, Europe, and Africa, our country will ultimately become a second class power even if we gain South America and the whole of North America'. See Paul Robinett Diary, 12 Sept. 1941, Paul Robinett Collection, George C. Marshall Foundation, Lexington, VA.

our own national interests', he wrote.⁵² As one of Marshall's advisers observed, the alignment of a 'virile power' (i.e., the United States) with a 'decadent power' (i.e., Britain) would be a disaster if the virile power 'dissipates his strength in the support of the old power or relies upon it for active military assistance'; therefore, the declining power's 'interests should be ruthlessly subordinated' to those of the stronger one. Britain was in its grave predicament because it had relied upon feeble allies and was now trying to slyly 'escape [this situation] through the support of a virile nation'.⁵³ A week before the conference commenced, a top British naval planner warned his superiors that pushing the Singapore proposal too hard would backfire and 'acts like a red rag to a bull'. 'Every American believes that we are determined to use him as a tool to achieve our own ends'.⁵⁴ The U.S. military representatives' instructions for the talks summed it up by declaring Washington 'cannot afford, nor do we need, to entrust our national future to British direction'. British proposals 'will have been drawn up with chief regard for the support of the British Commonwealth. Never absent from British minds are their post-war interests, commercial and military. We should likewise safeguard our own eventual interests'.⁵⁵

Never mind that protecting national interests is what any country would do, but focusing on this American fear, as some historians have done, masks how much agreement there was leading up to and during these staff conversations.⁵⁶ Two days after Stark sent his memorandum to Knox, the chief U.S. naval observer in London reported that recent conversations with British military planners revealed their grand strategic judgements resembled the CNO's: adopt the defensive in the Pacific while concentrating first on Germany's defeat.⁵⁷ Upon receiving a summary of Stark's memorandum, Churchill heartily endorsed it and argued Plan Dog was 'highly adapted to our interests'. To encourage it becoming U.S. national policy, the prime minister advised 'we should ... in every way contribute to strengthen the policy of Admiral Stark and should not use arguments inconsistent with it'.⁵⁸

⁵²Stark to Knox, 'Memorandum for the Secretary', 12 Nov. 1940, FDRL.

⁵³Unsigned typescript, 'A Historical, Strategic Study', 1940, with attached note, '1940 – Paper to Marshall', Speeches and Writings: Box 7, Folder 2, Albert C. Wedemeyer Papers, Hoover Institution Library and Archives, Stanford, CA.

⁵⁴TNA, CAB 122/5, Note by Captain A.W. Clarke, R.N. 'Forthcoming Staff Talks', 21 Jan. 1941.

⁵⁵Joint Instructions for Army and Navy Representatives for Holding Staff Conversations with the British, Including an Agenda for the Conversations', 21 Jan. 1941 in Ross, *American War Plans*, 3: 307–17. Roosevelt approved these instructions several days later. See FDR to Knox, 26 Jan. 1941, PSF Departmental Correspondence: Navy, January-June 1941, FDRL.

⁵⁶Stoler, *The Politics of the Second Front*, 6–7; Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 37; Leutze, *Bargaining for Supremacy*, 224; Matloff and Snell, 29; Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 86.

⁵⁷Robert Ghormley to CNO, 14 Nov. 1940, Serial No. 51, Box 117, Ghormley-CNO Correspondence, RG 38, NARA. Also see TNA, Records of the Admiralty, ADM 199/691, 'Appreciation of the Policy of the USA in the Event of America Entering the War', 12 Nov. 1940.

⁵⁸TNA, CAB 121/146, 'Minute by the Prime Minister commenting on Washington Telegram No. 2750 dated 20 November', 22 Nov. 1940.

After learning top Navy Department officials warned their British colleagues in Washington that London's views on Singapore 'were quite unacceptable as a basis for staff discussions', Churchill immediately ordered that the whole issue be avoided during the forthcoming talks. 'There is no use in putting before them a naval policy which they will not accept, and which will only offend them and make it more difficult to bring them into the war'.⁵⁹ Admiral Pound confirmed Churchill's guidance when he told the U.S. special military observers in London that the U.K. delegation 'will not be bound by any rigid instructions' and 'will have complete freedom to discuss with the United States ... the general strategical situation and to consider dispositions in the event of the United States entering the war'. It was imperative the British not create the 'impression that we desire to impose our own views on the United States'.⁶⁰ The general British guidance reiterated that although the defence of Singapore was central to Britain's grand strategy, 'it is recognised that the United States naval, and more particularly, the political, authorities may not accept this view'.⁶¹ If the American delegates changed course, that would be welcomed; otherwise, they should not be pressed on the issue. The British were quite sensitive to U.S. views on Singapore and were willing to downplay the matter to score agreement on everything else. They wanted to create an atmosphere of congeniality before the two sides even met in Washington.

That this underlying correlation between the American and British approaches to grand strategy existed is even more extraordinary considering both countries' national interests deviated in notable ways, particularly in the Pacific. While British leaders saw Singapore as the keystone of their empire in the Far East, and accordingly wanted to protect it at all costs, they also plainly understood that Germany posed an existential and immediate threat to the British Isles, without which their imperium would probably disintegrate. It made little sense to prioritise their far-flung interests when the home islands could still collapse – hence Britain's 'Germany-first' grand strategy. But this converging Anglo-American strategic thinking in late 1940 and early 1941 also demonstrates that even when two nations possess distinct hierarchies of interests, they can still pursue similar grand strategies to achieve their own disparate ends despite facing different constraints, pressures, and risks. At this point in the rapidly shifting Anglo-American relationship, with a sharply developing power imbalance soon to be obvious to all if it was not already, U.S. strategists saw the merit in matching their grand strategy with their British counterparts', in part because they appreciated their country did not

⁵⁹Ibid., CAB 122/4, Lothian to London telegram, 7 Dec. 1940; CAB 121/146, 'Minute by the Prime Minister commenting on Washington Telegram No. 2952 dated 7 December', 7 Dec. 1940.

⁶⁰Ibid., CAB 121/146, COS Meeting Minutes, 2 Jan. 1941.

⁶¹Ibid., CAB 121/146, 'British-United States Technical Conversations: General Instructions for the United Kingdom Delegation to Washington', 19 Dec. 1940.

have the industrial or military capacity to do much else at the time.⁶² Moreover, and perhaps more acutely, London was actually fighting the war while Washington remained on the sidelines and American strategic planners knew their country's security could not be disentangled from the U.K.'s. Although the war would soon push the U.S. into the senior partnership role in the relationship, during this period Britain was arguably at the zenith of its ability to mold the grand strategy for defeating the Axis powers even though there were differing ideas on both sides of the Atlantic about respective national policies.

The U.S.-U.K. staff conversations, which took place between January-March 1941, yielded the ABC-1 agreement. In it, both sides agreed to a 'Germany-first' framework for vanquishing the Axis and a set of peripheral action policies to accomplish that: economic pressure and blockade, strategic bombing, early elimination of Italy from the war, minor raids and offensives; support for resistance movements, and offensive operations in North Africa and the Mediterranean to establish bases for the final campaign against Germany.⁶³ Crucially, the British had proposed those policies during the talks, and the Americans agreed to this indirect approach to Nazi downfall without discussion. In fact, the Singapore conundrum was the only main bone of contention between the American and British delegates, and even then, it was rather quickly set aside when Churchill once more directed it to be dropped from the discussions.⁶⁴ Consequently, it is difficult to discern why some scholars have argued the Americans favored what Russell Weigley

⁶²As Reynolds points out, the U.S. Army only had 245,000 full-time personnel in mid-1940, placing it at twentieth in the world. That was one place behind the Netherlands, which had been conquered by the Germans in the spring of 1940. Most of the Army's equipment was old and dated back to the First World War. Likewise, Congress had only recently authorised a massive naval buildup that would allow the U.S. to construct a 'two-ocean navy' necessary for waging a multi-front war. See Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 78–79. Also see David I. Walsh, 'The Decline and Renaissance of the Navy, 1922–1944', Box 2, Folder 15, Pamphlet Collection, Naval Historical Collection Archives, U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI; 'New Navy Building Proceeds Swiftly', *New York Times*, 21 July 1940.

⁶³The ABC-1 agreement can be found in TNA, CAB 99/5, 'British-United States Staff Conversations, 1941'. ABC-1 and the revised RAINBOW 5 war plan based on it are also reproduced in Ross, *American War Plans*, 4: 3–66 and 5: 3–43. For a detailed account of the ABC-1 conversations, see Johnsen, 131–60.

⁶⁴It's not clear from the conference minutes why the Singapore issue was discussed when Churchill had instructed his envoys to avoid it. The U.K. delegation raised it for the first time at the sixth meeting on 10 Feb. perhaps in response to U.S. explanations for declining to reinforce their Asiatic Fleet based in the Philippines. After the British underlined the importance of Singapore to their interests in the Far East, the Americans invited their counterparts to present an appreciation of their views. In their memorandum, the British indirectly requested U.S. naval assistance for Singapore, which angered the American delegates and reinforced their preexisting fears of British manipulation. In an aide-mémoire of their own, they explicitly declined to reinforce Singapore. At any rate, when Churchill learned about all this, he was upset his directives had not been followed and reasserted the entire matter should be abandoned for the duration of the talks. See U.S.-U.K. Conversations Minutes, 10 Feb. 1941; 'The Far East', Appreciation by the United Kingdom Delegation, 11 Feb. 1941; Statement by the United States Staff Committee, 'The United States Military Position in the Far East', 19 Feb. 1941, all in TNA, CAB 99/5. For the U.S. Army delegates' private thoughts on the Singapore topic, see Stanley Embick, Leonard Gerow, Sherman Miles, and Joseph McNarney memo to Marshall, 'Dispatch of United States Forces to Singapore', 12 Feb. 1941, OPD Exec. 4, item 11, RG 165, NARA. For Churchill's instructions, see TNA, ADM 116/4877, Churchill minute to First Lord and First Sea Lord, 17 Feb. 1941.

called a 'strategy of annihilation' when they quickly consented to the British indirect approach for defeating the Nazis.⁶⁵ It stands to reason that if U.S. strategic planners were so invested in the direct method they would have protested against British ideas at least to some extent. Maybe Richard Steele was right when he argued the Americans viewed peripheral operations as 'time-fillers'.⁶⁶ But if that were true, it's unlikely U.S. strategists would have used the ABC-1 agreement, even though it was nonbinding since the U.S. was not an active belligerent yet, to revise their primary war plan and cement it as a future blueprint for Anglo-American coalition warfare.⁶⁷ At this stage in the spring of 1941, with the Singapore issue settled, American and British ideas on grand strategy were in harmony. And as we will see, when there was a later strategic misunderstanding between the two countries, it was the Americans who were arguing the original British peripheral policies proposed during the ABC-1 talks were the soundest way to overpower Germany.

Toward the end of the summer, the American chiefs of staff met with the British COS on the sidelines of the Atlantic Conference between Churchill and Roosevelt off the coast of Newfoundland. Since the ABC-1 conference, the global picture had shifted dramatically. In the spring, Britain suffered crushing defeats in the eastern Mediterranean, the Middle East, and North Africa that renewed concerns about its abilities to fight the Germans. As the weather warmed, the *Luftwaffe* resumed its aerial bombing campaign, devastating several major British cities. Shipping losses nearly doubled as the *Kriegsmarine* feasted on British ships, amplifying fears Britain could soon collapse.⁶⁸ By June, the British received somewhat of a reprieve when Hitler launched his invasion of the U.S.S.R. Although American and British diplomatic and military intelligence sources initially believed Germany would quickly defeat the Soviets, by August it was clear Russian resistance was stronger than anticipated and Hitler's forces would not coast to victory.⁶⁹ In the Pacific, Japanese troops consolidated their control over French Indochina by invading its southern half in July to prepare for an attack on the resource-rich Dutch East Indies.⁷⁰ Faced with a transformed European war and an increasingly unpredictable situation in East Asia, the COS prepared a new appreciation to update their American counterparts on their grand strategy.

⁶⁵For the quotation, see Weigley, 316. Also see note 4.

⁶⁶Steele, 22–5.

⁶⁷Matloff and Snell, 43–46; Morton, *Strategy and Command*, 89–91.

⁶⁸Heinrichs, 57–60; Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 123–25.

⁶⁹Heinrichs, 103–04; Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 136–39; Warren F. Kimball, *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP 1994), 27–28.

⁷⁰Utley, 151.

The British chiefs presented their American listeners with an updated indirect approach to defeating Germany. It was based upon air and naval power blended with raids and peripheral operations in the Middle East and North Africa to degrade Germany's fighting capacity and force its disintegration. At the same time, the COS insisted U.S. intervention and entry into the war would 'revolutionise the whole situation' and ensure a 'certain and swift' victory.⁷¹ The American chiefs were largely noncommittal, but privately, their planners skewered the strategy as a 'definite propaganda effort' that in the words of one of them was a disconnected and defeatist document 'groping for a panacea which will bring relief from their unfortunate and not entirely avoidable predicament'.⁷² In two sets of documents of their own, the U.S. planners forcefully pushed back on what they viewed was an unnecessary shift in British grand strategy.

This is where the primary misunderstandings between the British and American military establishments over grand strategy began. In effect, the Americans believed their British colleagues were abandoning the ABC-1 agreement and pursuing a new approach they thought would not thwart Hitler. They basically said so when they sent their official comments on the COS strategy review to London when they wrote 'we consider these policies [ABC-1] still sound, not only for a war in which the United States and the British Commonwealth are Associates, but also for the present war, in which the United States is not directly involved'.⁷³ That is to say they judged the indirect action policies the *British* had offered during the ABC-1 talks as the ones required to best Germany and crush the Axis. The U.S. chiefs and their planners also felt the British had not paid enough attention to land operations and argued it was 'an almost invariable rule that wars cannot be finally won without the use of land armies'.⁷⁴ Major Albert Wedemeyer, a U.S. Army planner, made a similar argument while criticizing the COS strategy review to one of his superiors. He paradoxically slammed the British approach while also arguing it was the one needed to defeat the Germans. Wedemeyer argued ABC-1 was

⁷¹Ross, *American War Plans*, 3: 325–32, 335–40; Also see TNA, CAB 80/59/5, 'General Strategy Review', 31 July 1941. On the Atlantic Conference, see Reynolds, *From Munich to Pearl Harbor*, 144–51; Johnsen, 189–216; Matloff and Snell, 53–6; Theodore A. Wilson, *The First Summit: Roosevelt and Churchill at Placentia Bay 1941* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1969).

⁷²Comments on British staff paper, August–September 1941, WPD 4402–64, RG 165, NARA. Some of these comments are reproduced in Albert C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!* (New York: Henry Holt 1958), 442–45. See also Lowenthal, *Leadership and Indecision*, 2: 657–58.

⁷³'Comment on "General Strategy Review by the British Chiefs of Staff"', 25 Sept. 1941, JB 325, Serial 729, RG 225, NARA. Rear Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, the Chief of the U.S. Naval War Plans Division, made a similar observation to the British during the Atlantic Conference when he said ABC-1 is 'still sound' and that it had been 'drawn up as a guide for action not only after the U.S. came into the war, but as a guide to British action before that'. See TNA, CAB 99/18, 'Record of a meeting between the United States and British Chiefs of Staff held in H.M.S. "Prince of Wales" on August 11, 1941', 11 Aug. 1941.

⁷⁴'Comment on "General Strategy Review by the British Chiefs of Staff"', 25 Sept. 1941, JB 325, Serial 729, RG 225, NARA.

sound and must be followed 'in order to facilitate the operations involved in softening up . . . the foe before combined air and ground efforts can possibly be launched against him'.⁷⁵ When U.S. planners submitted the Joint Board Estimate to Roosevelt at the same time, they reached identical conclusions and assertively laid out a peripheral grand strategy for the European war.⁷⁶ 'It is out of the question to expect the United States and its Associates to undertake in the near future a sustained and successful land offensive against the center of German power', they wrote. Since defensive operations alone would not subdue Germany, 'effective strategic offensive methods other than an early land offensive in Europe must be employed'.⁷⁷ Moreover, full American belligerency would be required if the Allies were going to defeat the Axis. In other words, the U.S. must adopt British grand strategy for winning the war in Europe until the final offensive against Hitler's *Festung Europa* could be launched.⁷⁸ It wasn't a strategy of annihilation, but instead consisted of encircling the Germans in a war of attrition before directly attacking their main forces on the European continent.

⁷⁵Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports!*, 443–44. Many historians credit Wedemeyer as the major or even sole author of the Joint Board Estimate and its supporting Army 'Ground Forces Requirements' study, which collectively they often refer to as the 'Victory Program'. For example, see Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries*, 45–50; Steele, 30–31; Lowenthal, 2: 624–41; Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Ordeal and Hope, 1939–1942* (New York: Viking 1966), 140–41; Charles E. Kirkpatrick, *An Unknown Future and a Doubtful Present: Writing the Victory Program of 1941* (Washington, DC: Center of Military History 1992). However, James Lacey contends it is one of the 'more enduring myths of World War II' that Wedemeyer drafted the Victory Program and that his contributions to it were akin to one of dozens of PowerPoint presentations Pentagon audiences receive each month and then promptly forget. U.S. industrial mobilization planners had never even seen Wedemeyer's estimates and found the Army ones they did receive to be 'worthless'. See James Lacey, 'Toward a strategy: Creating an American strategy for global war, 1940–1943', in Williamson Murray, Richard Hart Sinnreich, and James Lacey, (eds.), *The Shaping of Grand Strategy: Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (New York: Cambridge UP 2011), 187–91. See also James Lacey, 'World War II's Real Victory Program', *The Journal of Military History* 75/3 (July 2011), 811–34.

⁷⁶Joint Board Estimate of Overall Production Requirements', 11 Sept. 1941, PSF Safe File: American-British Joint Chiefs of Staff, FDRL.

⁷⁷Ibid. Top Army planners also told Stimson they believed the U.S. did not have the munitions capacity to launch 'major offensive operations' against Germany and would not for the foreseeable future. See 'Conference of the Secretary and McCloy and Bundy with General Gerow and Major Wedemeyer', 16 Sept. 1941, Henry L. Stimson Papers, reel 127, Sterling Memorial Library, Yale University.

⁷⁸Marshall made a similar argument to Roosevelt when meeting with him and Stimson to discuss the Joint Board Estimate. He said, 'Our broad concept of encircling Germany and closing in on her step by step is the only practical way of wearing down her war potential by military and economic pressure. In the final decisive phase we must come to grips with and annihilate the German military machine'. In reasoning Germany could not be defeated solely through material assistance to friendly powers or air and naval operations, Marshall contended 'large ground forces' were required to triumph. He estimated 215 divisions would be needed to win, but that 'encircling Germany and closing in on her step by step' was the only realistic method in the meantime while those forces were created. See Marshall to Roosevelt, 'Ground Forces', 22 Sept. 1941, PSF Departmental Correspondence: War, September–December 1941, FDRL. See also Ibid., Stimson to FDR, 23 Sept. 1941, PSF Departmental Correspondence: War – Henry L. Stimson, 1940–1941. However as Lacey persuasively argues, Marshall's estimates were a fabricated number that U.S. industrial planners found unrealistic and unworkable. See Lacey, 'Toward a strategy: Creating an American strategy for global war, 1940–1943', 190–91.

The main reason for these false impressions is that the British did not properly communicate their own strategy to the Americans. A thorough examination of the origins and aftermath of the COS general strategy view reveals this. Back in March 1941, Churchill had instructed the COS to conduct a long-term review of future British grand strategy.⁷⁹ By June, a team of British strategic planners completed this task and compiled their findings in a 39-page report called the 'Future Strategy Review'.⁸⁰ Similarly to previous articulations of British grand strategy, the planners found an indirect method was necessary for destroying the Third Reich due to its current military strength. In the *Wehrmacht's* present state, the British could not defeat it even with 'full American help'. Nevertheless, once the Nazis had been weakened through a war of attrition, British forces could re-enter the European continent and launch full-scale land operations against them.⁸¹ Put another way, U.K. planners were internally endorsing the ABC-1 policies they had agreed to a few months earlier. Additionally, they understood and desired U.S. participation in the war. Nothing had changed.

In examining the planners' work, Sir John Dill, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, stressed the war must be decided on land and could only be won with American intervention. 'Everything possible must be done to persuade the United States of America to enter the war *now*', Dill insisted.⁸² Once the U.S. was fighting, British troops could be shifted from the U.K. to other theatres, including for European continental operations. As British forces increased their strength and wore the Germans down through bombing, economic pressure, and covert action, Dill concluded, 'we must intervene with armed forces on the Continent' to directly attack the *Wehrmacht*.⁸³ The other British chiefs supported Dill's verdicts, emphasised U.S. entry was 'essential' and directed their planners to prepare a summarised version of the aide-mémoire.⁸⁴ The COS clearly did not plan to deviate from the ABC-1 agreement, manipulate the Americans, or shift their grand strategy. If anything, they were now more forcefully reasserting ABC-1's central tenants than ever before.

⁷⁹TNA, CAB 121/144, 'Note by Major-General Ismay – Review of Future Strategy', 11 Mar. 1941.

⁸⁰Ibid., 'Future Strategy – Note by Joint Planning Staff', 13 June 1941.

⁸¹Ibid., CAB 79/12/13, Future Strategy Review attached to COS Meeting Minutes, 16 June 1941.

⁸²Ibid., CAB 121/144, 'Future Strategy – Note by Chief of the Imperial General Staff', 19 June 1941 (emphasis in original).

⁸³Ibid. Churchill similarly told Sir Charles Portal, Newall's successor as Chief of the Air Staff, later in 1941 that Britain could not rely on air power to defeat Germany and must be prepared to use land forces to attain victory. 'Only in this way could a decision certainly be achieved'. See Winston Churchill, *The Grand Alliance* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company 1950), 508–09.

⁸⁴Ibid., CAB 121/144, COS Minute for Prime Minister, 24 June 1941; CAB 79/13/13, COS Meeting Minutes, 26 July 1941.

However, the British planning staff prepared a distorted summary of their strategic thinking. This led to the general strategy paper the COS presented to their American counterparts at the Atlantic Conference and the howls of outrage that followed from Washington. Yet it remains a puzzle how they arrived at the formulation that became the COS general strategy review. Beyond the draft review the planners presented to the chiefs, no earlier versions can be found in the records of the British Joint Planning Staff (JPS).⁸⁵ There were also no detailed discussions at the planners' meetings where they examined the drafts beyond approving the one eventually shown to the COS for their comments.⁸⁶ Given later British bewilderment over the official U.S. replies to the general strategy review, it seems likely they thought they were adequately representing their strategic views. At the time, the COS made some stylistic changes to the planners' draft but did not voice any concerns the Americans might misconstrue the document with its heavy focus on blockade, strategic bombing, and subversion in conjunction with U.S. intervention and less emphasis on land operations.⁸⁷ In hindsight, that was a problematic perception.

After the British received the American comments, they quickly realised their errors. The British Joint Staff Mission in Washington warned London of the U.S. tendency to desire abundant details in their strategy papers and were therefore dismayed to see the COS review lacked them. This led the Americans to draw erroneous conclusions about British grand strategy that formed the basis of their official analysis.⁸⁸ The British JPS made similar inferences. In their internal review of the U.S. comments, they were puzzled over American disagreements with their claim that U.S. intervention would 'revolutionise' the war given that American planners had basically agreed when they contended the Allies could not win without U.S. belligerency.⁸⁹ They also realised that by not explicitly discussing land operations as a means for destroying enemy power, especially as the linchpin for eventually defeating Germany on the European continent, Washington now incorrectly believed the British thought they could win the war solely via peripheral operations. The planners judged this a 'matter of misunderstanding rather than disagreement' and advised the COS to rapidly clear this up with the

⁸⁵According to TNA, it was apparently standard procedure to destroy previous drafts of planning documents to avoid confusion. See any files in TNA, CAB 84 for notes explaining this.

⁸⁶TNA, CAB 84/3/92, Joint Planning Staff Meeting Minutes, 29 July 1941; CAB 84/3/93, Joint Planning Staff Meeting Minutes, 30 July 1941.

⁸⁷Ibid., CAB 121/144, 'General Strategy – Draft Review by the Chiefs of Staff' with COS edits, 31 July 1941; CAB 79/13/19, COS Meeting Minutes, 31 July 1941.

⁸⁸Ibid., CAB 121/144, BNLO Washington telegram to Admiralty, 8 Oct. 1941.

⁸⁹Ibid., CAB 79/15/16, 'General Strategy – American Comments: Report by the Joint Planning Staff', 11 Nov. 1941.

U.S. observers in London.⁹⁰ The British chiefs immediately concurred and directed the planners to resolve any misconceptions the Americans now held about U.K. strategic designs.⁹¹

What Mark Stoler called a ‘fundamental disagreement’ turned out to be a misunderstanding – a large misunderstanding to be sure, but a misunderstanding nonetheless.⁹² Throughout the critical months of 1941 leading to Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor, British and American strategists mainly agreed on how to break the European Axis. There were discrepancies in terms of emphasis and timing as we’ve seen, but on the foundational strategic method, both sides concurred the British-conceived indirect approach was crucial until Allied forces could be enlarged to sufficient strength for directly confronting the Germans. These were not meaningless operations like Richard Steele suggests, just policies to enact while biding time for an invasion of France. Instead, these indirect undertakings were vital for exhausting Germany to the point where a direct land engagement would not result in disaster like it had in the spring of 1940. It was not anathema or alien to the Americans, but was incredibly sensible, especially when the U.S. military badly required time to rapidly expand their forces and capacities. Nothing encapsulates that more than when at the moment the Americans felt the British were shifting their grand strategy, they passionately argued the British indirect approach enshrined in the ABC-1 agreement and the subsequent U.S. war plan was the soundest way to win the war.

V

As the smoke cleared from Japan’s devastating attack on Pearl Harbor, Churchill and his military advisers traveled to Washington to discuss the war now that the United States had entered it. During the conference – codenamed ARCADIA – vital decisions were placed in a grand strategy memorandum produced by the U.S. and British Chiefs of Staff. Known as ABC-4/CS-1 or WW-1, the military chiefs reaffirmed the Germany-first approach. On *how* to defeat Germany, they adopted the indirect British strategy first developed in ABC-1 and later supported in the Joint Board Estimate, which they called ‘closing the ring’. This required securing the Russian front, supporting Turkey’s resistance to the Axis, strengthening

⁹⁰Ibid. Johnsen also discusses this document, but instead argues it showed ‘the British were almost totally tone-deaf’ about how angry the Americans were over British grand strategy. However, he also mentions the British JPS recognised they needed to correct some misconceptions, which would seemingly belie his claim. See Johnsen, 217–34.

⁹¹Ibid., CAB/79/15/16, COS Meeting Minutes, 13 Nov. 1941. This seems to have been done at a meeting a week later between the British JPS and the U.S. observers in London. The British planners insisted landing a large force on the Continent to ultimately defeat Germany was ‘a cardinal feature in British long term strategy’. The Americans replied they would relay this back to Washington. See Ibid, CAB 99/9, American Liaison Meeting Minutes, 21 Nov. 1941. Also see Leutze, *London Observer*, 458–59.

⁹²Stoler, *Allies in War*, 28.

Allied forces in the Middle East, and seizing control of North Africa. From there, European land offensives could be planned and initiated. Critically, the chiefs noted 'it does not seem likely that in 1942 any large-scale land offensive against Germany except on the Russian front will be possible' but added a 'return to the Continent' could occur in 1943.⁹³ This was entirely in line with U.S. grand strategy throughout 1941, which unmistakably stated offensive operations on the German periphery were required to mount a successful invasion of the European mainland.

Historians who have argued there was a massive rift between the British and the Americans on grand strategy at this point in the war have struggled to reconcile why the U.S. chiefs would support a strategy they were allegedly hostile toward previously.⁹⁴ However, as this article has shown, there was little that needed reconciling. By ARCADIA, the prior confusion and mistakes stemming from the British general strategy paper had evidently been resolved. If they had not been, it is unlikely the Americans would have accepted British proposals without a mention of those misconceptions.⁹⁵ The American military chiefs supported pursuing a peripheral strategy before invading Europe because they deemed it both necessary and it reflected their strategic thinking throughout the immediate pre-Pearl Harbor period. This was documented several times, both internally and with the British, throughout 1941: in the ABC-1 agreement, the revision of the U.S. war plan to resemble ABC-1, the Joint Board Estimate, and the official U.S. comments on the COS strategy review. Again and again, the Americans clearly demonstrated they backed the British indirect method for defeating Germany. On the British side, it was also viewed peripheral action policies to weaken German power were required before delivering the final blow on land through an Anglo-American invasion of Europe. There was little daylight between the American and British military establishments on grand strategy between the late summer of 1940 when it became clear to Washington that Britain would not imminently succumb to the Nazis and the Pearl Harbor

⁹³"American-British Grand Strategy", Memorandum by the United States and British Chiefs of Staff, 31 Dec. 1941, *Foreign Relations of the United States: The Conferences at Washington, 1941-1942, and Casablanca, 1943*, (eds.), Fredrick Aandahl, William M. Franklin, and William Slany (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office 1958), Document 115. For more on this, see Grant Golub, 'The Proper and Orthodox Way of War: Henry Stimson, the War Department, and the Politics of U.S. Military Policy During World War II', *The International History Review*, Mar. 2022, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.2022.2046624>.

⁹⁴For example, Stoler claims Pearl Harbor had put the U.S. in a 'defensive mode of thinking' and that it was 'still reeling from the Japanese attack' yet provides no evidence this impacted American views. See Stoler, *Allies in War*, 42. Steele makes the equally dubious claim that the U.S. chiefs, especially Marshall, were in such a state of confusion that it led them to accept the British peripheral strategy. See Steele, 75. J.R.M. Butler and J.M.A. Gwyer argue that due to shipping losses, the Americans had no alternative. J.R.M. Butler and J.M.A. Gwyer, *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy*, Vol. 3 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office 1964), 357-58.

⁹⁵The American chiefs suggested minor modifications to British ideas, but no significant adjustments. See *FRUS: Washington, 1941-1942*, Documents 47-48, 52, 56, 67, 80, 83, 88, 96-97, 99, 105-07, 110, 112.

attacks. This began to shift by early 1942 when continued Allied reversals and losses in North Africa, the Middle East, and the Pacific raised concerns the Axis appeared on the verge of strategic victory and pushed U.S. planners to reconsider their approach to winning the war. These developments, and the American response to them, helped lay the groundwork for the major Anglo-American strategic disputes that would dominate significant portions of the war's remainder. But that was to occur later. For now, in the early weeks of official U.S. participation, London and Washington remained united around how to prosecute the war and defeat their enemies.

This article explored how American strategists conceptualised and defined their nation's grand strategy during the 18-month period between the Fall of France and the Japanese assault on Pearl Harbor. It argued that previous scholars' emphasis on a stark contrast between American and British grand strategy has been misplaced and that there was greater consensus between the two sides than this prior scholarship has acknowledged. If anything, as this article showed, the more impactful divides at this time were the ones between the Army and Navy when it came to formulating U.S. grand strategy. Instead, American grand strategy was in predominantly close alignment with British strategic thinking. Throughout 1940–41, both countries demonstrated they were essentially united on a Germany-first framework combined with an indirect method for vanquishing the Axis powers. These peripheral operations would eventually set up a direct thrust at Nazi-controlled Europe and lead to its collapse.

This article also contributed to the burgeoning historical literature on grand strategy by highlighting the dynamic and ever-changing nature of grand strategy in response to a rapidly evolving and unpredictable international environment. Grand strategy is not static but must constantly shift as new global developments alter the strategic calculus. U.S. officials faced this predicament several times during the period of World War II examined here and reacted by adopting new strategies to best serve their perceptions of American geopolitical interests. When they grasped Britain would fight on against Germany despite consistent, if remote, concerns it would fall, American planners moved closer to British grand strategic designs and articulated a similar approach to winning the war. This was remarkable given that the U.S. had not even entered the fighting at this stage, but also because both countries held diverging national interests and somewhat clashing objectives in defeating the Axis powers. Yet if this period of deepening Anglo-American strategic collaboration reveals anything, it is that partner nations can have different goals but recognize they can employ similar grand strategies for achieving them. That was the case for Britain and the United States in 1940–41, whose prewar global positions and concerns were distant but who had been brought together by a powerful coalition of adversaries who threatened to disrupt the international status quo and establish a hostile

world order antithetical to their ways of life. As U.S. strategists prepared for global war, they realised America's security was conjoined with the continuity of the British Empire. Although London and Washington confronted separate dangers, strains, and risks, they were able to overcome the palpable tensions that existed between the two nations and forge a common grand strategy for quelling their foes, at least before Pearl Harbor. After Japan's attack thrust the U.S. into the war and it was able to steadily activate its latent potential, the shifting parameters of the so-called Special Relationship and the emerging power asymmetry between the U.S. and the U.K. created new stresses within the Anglo-American alliance that caused strategic disputes and issues for the remainder of the war. However, before official American wartime entry, it was not whether to choose between the direct or indirect approach to grand strategy and vanquishing the Axis; it was determining how best to utilise them both.

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