

# **Dutch neutrality and the ABDACOM experience, 1941 – 1942**

Consequences of interwar Dutch neutrality for wartime attempts at collaboration

Saskia Virginia Noot

saskia\_noot@live.nl

s1080261

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Supervisor: Dr. Bart Luttikhuis

Second Reader: Dr. Anita M.C. van Dissel

M.A. programme Colonial and Global History

Institute for History, Leiden University



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## Introduction

'We shall uphold, the centuries-old tradition of the Dutch Navy, that has already been demonstrated in European waters, this now shall be in service of preserving our regions [in the Far East]' Lieutenant-Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich, Commander in Chief of the Netherlands Indies forces, wrote on 9 December 1941 after the Dutch Minister of the Navy and the Commander in Chief of the Navy, J.Th. Furstner had wished him the best of luck in the conduct of war against Japan.<sup>1</sup> In reaction to the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour, Malacca and Singapore on 7 December 1941, the Netherlands government had declared itself at war with Japan because of hostile acts against 'two powers with which the Netherlands entertains most friendly relations'.<sup>2</sup>

As early as 1912 the Dutch government had identified Japan as a potential threat to the Netherlands Indies. Therefore the Dutch had designed a fleet program to match the Japanese strength. During the mid-1930s Japan actively started conquering territories in the Far East in order to realize the *New Order of Eastern Asia*, a confederation of Pacific territories under Japanese leadership.<sup>3</sup> From this point on, the Japanese conquest in Southeast Asia became a great threat to forces with interest in the region, including the United States and Britain, as well as the Dutch, as colonial rulers of the Indonesian archipelago.

On the eve of the Second World War the Dutch defence potential was no match for the Japanese forces. Thus, the Dutch started looking for an alliance to withstand a possible conflict in the Pacific theatre with Japan. However, the Dutch had maintained to uphold a longstanding tradition of political neutrality since the beginning of the nineteenth century, and had even managed to stay out of the First

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<sup>1</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, 141.

<sup>2</sup> Message from Van Starckenborgh, Batavia, 8 December 1941. National Archive, The Hague, Ministry of Colonies in London, entry number 2.10.45, inventory number 123; Telegram from Loudon to Welles, 8 December 1941. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 123.

<sup>3</sup> J. Anten, *Hr.Ms. Kruisers 'Java' en 'Sumatra'* ('s-Gravenhage 2001) 18; J. Anten, *Navalisme nekt onderzeeboot: de invloed van buitenlandse zeestrategieën op de Nederlandse zeestrategie voor de defensie van Nederlands-Indië, 1912-1942* (Amsterdam 2011) 336; Jeffrey R. Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies; The Disastrous Java Sea Campaign of World War II* (Oxford 2014) 22.

World War because of this.<sup>4</sup> But soon it became evident that the policy of neutrality would not keep the Dutch out of the Second World War. So the Dutch had to re-evaluate their position, in order to survive a future conflict.

Whereas the upside of the Dutch policy of neutrality was that it had been able to avoid involvement in previous wars, the downside was that they were not prepared to actively take part in a war should one become inevitable. Eventually, after several official and unofficial conferences and talks with the allied parties in the Pacific, and more specifically after the shock of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7 December 1941, a unified command, called ABDACOM was established on 28 December 1941. ABDACOM (American-British-Dutch-Australian Command) intended to fight the Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia and to protect the British and the Dutch colonies in this region, as well as the Philippines and Australia.<sup>5</sup>

The efforts of ABDACOM to prevent Japan from taking over the Allied controlled territories in the Pacific failed. On 25 February 1942 ABDACOM was dissolved with disastrous consequences for the Allied presence in the Pacific.<sup>6</sup> Two days later, on 27 February the Battle of the Java Sea resulted in a great loss for the Dutch fleet and the eventual loss of the Netherlands Indies. The efforts of the 'unquenchable soldiers of the British Commonwealth', 'the men of MacArthur' and the 'band of "indomitable Dutch", with their Indonesian comrades in arms' failed to stop the Japanese aggression.<sup>7</sup>

### *Historiography*

Numerous books have been written about the war in the Pacific during the Second World War. Much attention has been given to the Pacific War in various extensive studies that focus on the allied war against Japan. These studies pay attention to

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<sup>4</sup> H.A. Schaper, 'De buitenlandse politiek van een kleine mogendheid', *Tijdschrift voor Geschiedenis* 95 (1982) 143-144, 144.

<sup>5</sup> Under Secretary of State (Welles) to the President, Washington, January 5, 1942. Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): I., The First Washington Conference (December 22, 1941-January 14, 1942) 306-307; Higher Direction of War in the ABDA Area, December 30, 1941. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 288.

<sup>6</sup> H.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942* (London 1982) 337.

<sup>7</sup> Article by the Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Kleffens in the New York Times, 15 February 1942. A.E. Kersten and A.F. Manning, *Documenten betreffende de Buitenlandse politiek van Nederland van 1919-1945, periode C: 1940-1945, Deel IV: 8 december 1941 – 30 juni 1942* ('s-Gravenhage 1984) 292-294.

both the political and the military level on which the war was waged. Moreover these studies take multiple viewpoints in account, but usually focus on the American and British actions. H.P. Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, balances the Japanese viewpoint with the wider Allied view.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, *Allies of a Kind* by Christopher Thorne discusses the interactive Anglo-American relations and the general strategy of the war in the Pacific.<sup>9</sup> The Dutch historian H.Th. Bussemaker added to these publications with 'Paradise in Peril: Western Colonial Power and Japanese Expansion in South-East Asia, 1905-1941'. He pays much attention to the Dutch standpoint, and includes an extensive study on the political and military history of the Netherlands Indies.<sup>10</sup>

Much attention has also been given to the nation specific policy during the Second World War in the Pacific. Peter Guy Silverman wrote a Ph.D. thesis by the name of 'British Naval Strategy in the Far East: a study of priorities in the question of imperial defense' concerning the British Naval policy in the prelude to the Second World War. Moreover, he pays much attention to the Anglo-American relationship, from the British viewpoint. This study has been of great value to this thesis because of its detailed treatment of the subject.<sup>11</sup> A.J. Marder has offered a significant contribution to the history of the British Navy.<sup>12</sup> Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell published a valuable study in 1999, on the American strategic planning for allied warfare.<sup>13</sup> G. Gill wrote an extensive study on the Australian perspective on the participation in the Pacific War and ABDACOM.<sup>14</sup>

Much has been written on the development of Dutch defence planning for the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies. A prime example of an extensive study

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<sup>8</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*.

<sup>9</sup> Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the war against Japan* (Oxford 1978).

<sup>10</sup> H.Th. Bussemaker 'Paradise in Peril, Western Colonial Power and Japanese Expansion in South-East Asia, 1905-1941' (Diss., Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Peter Guy Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy in the Far East: a study of priorities in the question of imperial defense' (Ph.D. thesis, Toronto: University of Ontario, 1976).

<sup>12</sup> A.J. Marder, *British Naval Policy 1880-1905, The Anatomy of British Sea Power* (London 1940); A.J. Marder, *From the Dreadnought to Scapa Flow: The Royal Navy in the Fisher Era 1904-1919. Volume 1, The Road to War, 1904-1914* (London 1961); A.J. Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies: The Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy, Strategic Illusions 1936-1941* (London, 1981).

<sup>13</sup> Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *United States Army in World War II: Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1941-1942* (Washington DC, 1999).

<sup>14</sup> G. Gill, *Australia in the War of 1939-1945, Series Two, Volume I: Royal Australian Navy 1939-1942* (Australian War Memorial 1957).

on the Netherlands during the Second World War is, without any doubt, the monumental *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog* by L. de Jong.<sup>15</sup> More specific published works on the build-up of the Dutch defence potential present valuable insights on the many fleet-programs that the Dutch navy had developed in the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>16</sup>

More recently, Jeffrey Cox pays much attention in *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, to ABDACOM and the prelude to its establishment. Moreover, he also describes in detail the Dutch role in the process, though mainly based on American and British sources. *Forlorn Hope* by G. Jungslager is of great value as a chronological account of events during the first phase of the Pacific War.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Rene van den Berg has written a recent M.A. thesis on the Dutch perspective on ABDACOM. He focuses on the Dutch stance within the establishment of ABDACOM. This study shares some resemblance to the thesis at hand, but is based on different sources and also differs in its conclusion from the thesis at hand. Van den Berg concludes that it was due to the suddenness of the outbreak of the Second World War in the Pacific that ABDACOM lacked an adequate organizational structure. The thesis at hand will show that this was not the case. An allied conflict with Japan had been long expected. A unified command was not established in an earlier phase due to the reluctance of (most) of the Allied partners.<sup>18</sup> Jeffrey C. Nelson has written a master thesis on the American standpoint within the ABDACOM coalition building. The foundations of his thesis are the economic, political and military relations in combination with the differences in diplomatic acting between the actors of ABDACOM. However, this scholarly work is not just about the American viewpoint, but it has also been written from an American perspective. In his conclusion he praises the American

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<sup>15</sup> L. de Jong, *Het Koninkrijk der Nederlanden in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, Deel 9* ('s-Gravenhage 1979).

<sup>16</sup> Anten, *'Java' en 'Sumatra'*; Anten, *Navalisme nekt onderzeeboot*; H.J.G. Beunders, *Weg met de Vlootwet! De maritieme bewapeningspolitiek van het kabinet-Ruys de Beerenbrouck en het succesvolle verzet daartegen in 1923* (Meppel 1984); Ph.M. Bosscher, *De Koninklijke Marine in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, Deel 1* (Franeker 1984); Ph.M. Bosscher, *De Koninklijke Marine in de Tweede Wereldoorlog, Deel 2* (Franeker 1986); A.M.C. van Dissel, 'Dutch naval strategy towards the Empire overseas during the interwar period', J. Bruijn (ed.), *Strategy and Response in the Twentieth Century Maritime World* (Amsterdam 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*; G. Jungslager, *Forlorn Hope: The desperate battle of the Dutch against Japan, december 1941-march 1942* (Amsterdam 2012).

<sup>18</sup> R.W.A. van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests: American-British-Dutch-Australian Command 1942' (M.A. thesis, Kansas 2014).



participation in ABDACOM more than it deserves. Moreover, he does not pay much attention to the Dutch perspective on ABDACOM.<sup>19</sup>

### *Sources*

Apart from the aforementioned thesis by Van den Berg, the current historiography lacks attention to the Dutch political and military perspectives on ABDACOM and its establishment. Although some studies do pay attention to this subject, there has been no extensive study of the Dutch perspective from primary sources on both the political and military level. An important primary source that adds to this research are the volumes of the *Marine Monografieën* dealing with the Netherlands Indies held by the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH). These are an uncensored, day-to-day record of Dutch actions and reactions in the Netherlands Indies from 1939 to March 1942. It comprises details of ship-movements, political and military reports and telegrams, and other information that was available to Dutch politicians and military commanders. In addition, there are copies of official reports in the annexes to the volumes. As far as is known, only five copies were ever made, and it was never published because of its classified nature at the time of compilation.<sup>20</sup> Bosscher did make occasional use of the *Marine Monografieën*, but it is not always clear where and how he used this source. Moreover, his use of the *Marine Monografieën* is not so extensive.<sup>21</sup>

The *Marine Monografieën* is a fundamental source that has been used in writing this thesis. It has been thoroughly researched and therefore provides new insights on the Dutch position within ABDACOM. Other primary sources that have been used are various documents of the National Archives in The Hague. The personal archive of Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich provides information on the operations in the Pacific theatre from his own experience. This archive contributes to the Dutch

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<sup>19</sup> Jeffery C. Nelson, 'ABDACOM: America's first coalition experience in World War II' (Master thesis: Kansas State University, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> *Marine Monografieën*, composed by the department of Maritime History of the naval staff, held by the Netherlands Institute of Military History (NIMH). Chronology regarding the operations of the Royal Navy in Southeast Asia in the period: 24 August 1939 – 8 March 1942, Volume IV, Chapters 1; 2; 3; 4; 5; 6; 8; 9; 10 and 10a. A detailed description of these chapters is included in the bibliography.

<sup>21</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 1*; Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*.

military perspective.<sup>22</sup> In addition, Helfrich's *Memoires* present an extensive account of his views and activities during the ABDACOM period.<sup>23</sup> To also take the Dutch political views in account, the archives of the Ministry of Colonies and of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (in London) have been consulted.<sup>24</sup>

To place the Dutch viewpoint in a wider perspective, the *Foreign Relations of the United States* (FRUS) have been consulted. This source provides Anglo-American correspondence during the establishment of ABDACOM as well as Dutch correspondence with the Americans and British. However, the FRUS is a selective collection of released Government documentation, and therefore it is important to note that it is possible that it does not present a complete and uncensored overview of events.<sup>25</sup> This also applies to the *The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower*.<sup>26</sup>

#### *Research statement*

The primary question that the thesis at hand addresses is what the effect of the Dutch tradition of a policy of neutrality was on the process of coalition building with major powers. In order to answer this question (the process of establishing) ABDACOM shall be examined from a Dutch perspective, and more specifically in the light of both the Dutch policy of neutrality and the subsequent defence policy it gradually developed to protect the Netherlands Indies. This approach has not yet been taken, thus it will add to the historical debate on coalition building and cooperation between smaller and major powers. In addition, this thesis adds a contribution to the Dutch history of World War II in the Pacific theatre.

The significance of the thesis at hand lies in unveiling the conceited and pugnacious ways in which the Dutch politicians and military tried to maintain the Netherlands Indies with the help of, or in spite of, ABDACOM. In this respect, this

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<sup>22</sup> National Archive, The Hague, Ministry of the Navy: Personal Archive of Lieutenant-Admiral C.E.L. Helfrich, 1940-1962, entry number 2.12.44.

<sup>23</sup> C.E.L. Helfrich, *Memoires Van C.E.L. Helfrich Luitenant-Admiraal Bd, Deel 1: De Maleise Barrière* (Amsterdam 1950).

<sup>24</sup> NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45; National Archive, The Hague, Ministry of Foreign Affairs in London (London Archive), entry number 2.05.80.

<sup>25</sup> Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS): I., The First Washington Conference (December 22, 1941-January 14, 1942).

<sup>26</sup> Dwight David Eisenhower, *The Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower: The War Years: I* (Baltimore 1970).

thesis will also elaborate on the counterproductive actions taken by ABDACOM, which led to disadvantages for the Dutch to preserve their territories in the Far East.

Finally, the main focus of this thesis will be the Dutch policy of neutrality and its effect on the participation in ABDACOM during the Second World War. The main question of this thesis is:

Was the influence that the Netherlands could effectively exert within the military coalition ABDACOM adversely influenced by its long established tradition of political neutrality?

It will be shown that the long-lasting tradition of neutrality and isolation negatively influenced the Dutch ability to cooperate with and call upon support from their reluctant allies.

### *Structure*

The aforementioned research question will be discussed in four chapters, dedicated to four sub questions.

The introduction is followed by the first chapter, which elaborates on the origins of, and the maintenance of the Dutch policy of neutrality in the decades before the Second World War. In addition, the efforts for the Dutch defence of the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies in particular are addressed. This chapter is mainly based on Dutch written sources on the Dutch policy of neutrality and the Dutch defence policy in the pre-war years. This chapter will focus on the question: how did the defence efforts regarding the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies develop as a result of Dutch policy of neutrality?

The second chapter will discuss the efforts made by the Americans, British and Dutch to form a unified command for military cooperation in the Far East, starting in the late 1930s. These talks and conferences will give insights on the divergent national objectives of these actors, and the subsequent problems that arose. Moreover, this chapter will consider the build-up to, and the establishment of, ABDACOM. The main question of this chapter is: what measures were taken in order to contain the Japanese threat in Southeast Asia?

The Dutch search for allies to safeguard the Netherlands Indies will be discussed in the third chapter. This chapter will have a chronological overlap with the previous chapter, but it emphasizes more specifically on the Dutch efforts for the establishment of some sort of allied cooperation in the Far East. This chapter will focus on the question: did the long established tradition of political neutrality adversely affect the influence that the Netherlands could exert during the establishment of ABDACOM?

The fourth chapter continues chronologically where the third chapter ended. The transition between chapters three and four takes place on the day ABDACOM comes into existence. Chapter four will analyse the Dutch authority in the eyes of their ABDACOM allies and its efforts to preserve the Netherlands Indies. Moreover, the Dutch national objectives will be studied and related to the national objectives of the other participants of ABDACOM. The main question of this chapter is: did the long established tradition of political neutrality adversely affect the influence that the Netherlands could exert after the establishment of ABDACOM and within its operational procedures?

## **Chapter 1: The history of Dutch neutrality and the defence of the Netherlands Indies**

### *Introduction*

This chapter presents a study on the Dutch neutrality and military policy in the first half of the twentieth century. These policies were influenced by the changes in international relations especially after the First World War, and by the establishment of the League of Nations. Particularly, these policies will be related to the development of the Dutch defence efforts regarding the Netherlands and especially the Netherlands Indies. Various fleet plans will be placed in the context of the changing international spectrum. Ultimately, this chapter provides an analysis of the Dutch defence potential on the eve of the World War II as a result of their national politics. This is important, because said defence potential serves as an indicator of the amount of influence the Dutch could effectively exert within ABDACOM.

### *Dutch neutrality and foreign policy up to the First World War*

Historian H.A. Schaper has argued that the Dutch policy of neutrality originated from 1839 onwards, due to the Dutch efforts to preserve the European balance of power and the need to pursue reinforcement from the neighbouring countries if necessary, meanwhile enforcing a policy of armed neutrality. The Netherlands was well aware of its position as a neutral country surrounded by great powers. There was no single European country that could afford to invade the Netherlands or face the Netherlands being invaded by another European power.<sup>27</sup> This tradition of neutrality continued after the First World War. Historian Henri J.G. Beunders stated in *Weg met de Vlootwet!* that the complexity of the Dutch policy of neutrality had withstood the test of the First World War successfully and that this would be the cornerstone for Dutch foreign policy in the period thereafter.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Schaper, 'De buitenlandse politiek', 144; Remco van Diepen, *Voor Volkenbond en Vrede: Nederland en het streven naar een nieuwe wereldorde 1919-1946* (Amsterdam 1999) 17.

<sup>28</sup> Beunders, *Weg met de Vlootwet!*, 18-19.

In 1905 the Queen of the Netherlands, Wilhelmina, presented a memorandum on the position of the Netherlands in the international arena, in which this neutral policy was reaffirmed for the new century. Her memorandum stated that the Netherlands should not search for an alliance because this would be a risk for both the mother country and its colony. She considered the international balance of power too instable for the Dutch to embark upon a military alliance. Queen Wilhelmina pleaded for the neutrality of the Netherlands. But in addition, she stressed that it was necessary to strengthen the armed forces in order to be taken seriously.<sup>29</sup>

On 31 July 1914, only three days after the declaration of war by Austria-Hungary to Serbia, the general mobilization of the Dutch armed forces took place. Although the Netherlands had indicated their intention to remain neutral, it feared a violation of its neutrality. For both Britain and Germany, the Netherlands could be an important springboard in the war against each other. But despite external threat and pleas from the neighbouring countries, the Netherlands vigorously upheld its neutrality, ultimately with success.<sup>30</sup>

### *The Netherlands and the League of Nations*

Following the devastating First World War, the President of the United States, Thomas Woodrow Wilson, proposed an initiative for an international consultative body: the League of Nations. This was established in 1919. Its objective was to maintain the international balance of power by helping to resolve international disputes in a peaceful manner. The First World War was considered proof that the self-regulating system of balance of the power had been impaired beyond repair.<sup>31</sup>

Yet again, the Dutch were faced with the choice to take part in an international cooperation, or not. The difference then, in comparison to the debate

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<sup>29</sup> Cees Fasseur, *Wilhelmina, De jonge koningin* (Meppel 1998) 424-426; Johan den Hertog, 'Zelfstandigheidspolitiek. De achtergrond van een cruciale term in het buitenlandse beleid van Nederland 1900-1940', *Bijdragen en mededelingen betreffende de geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, 124 (2009) 163-185, 166-167; Tobias van Gent, *Het falen van de Nederlandse gewapende neutraliteit, september 1939-mei 1940* (Amsterdam 2009) 12-14.

<sup>30</sup> Van Gent, *Nederlandse gewapende neutraliteit*, 14-17, 22.

<sup>31</sup> Van Diepen, *Volkenbond en Vrede*, 21; Marc Bossuyt and Jan Wouters, *Grondlijnen van internationaal recht* (Antwerpen 2005) 16.

in 1905 and in 1914, was that the League of Nations was not a military or political body, but aimed to preserve international peace on a legal and procedural manner.

However, the aims of the League of Nations were irreconcilable with the Dutch vision of political independence. Joining the League of Nations would mean that the Netherlands could no longer make decisions on (potential) alliances based solely on its own priorities.<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless the Netherlands decided to join the League of Nations.

The Allied and associated powers presented the draft statutes of the League of Nations to the neutral states 20 March 1920. The Dutch delegation disagreed with the content of Article 16, which stated that if there would be a military operation undertaken by the League of Nations, member-states would be faced with the choice whether or not to participate. The Netherlands submitted an amendment to the General Assembly of the League of Nations that called for the establishment of a federal law, regarding the preparations for such a military operation. Due to the Dutch insistence on this amendment, Article 16 was slightly modified. Ultimately it was decided that the League of Nations Council would prepare a report on the contribution that could be provided by individual member states in case of such a military operation. For the Dutch this was an important modification because now they could interpret Article 16 as an *option* to interfere in military conflict, instead of it being an *obligation*. This served the unwillingness of the Netherlands to put their policy of neutrality at risk by having to follow any economic and/or military sanctions imposed by the League of Nations.<sup>33</sup> Just as before 1914, and during the First World War, the Netherlands chose political autonomy, but under the guise of international cooperation.

#### *The Dutch defence efforts regarding the Netherlands and the Netherlands Indies*

The Netherlands Indies remained under Dutch control throughout the First World War mainly because of the British strategic interests. Although the colony was still of economic interests for the Dutch, it was no longer a major competitor for British interests in Southeast Asia. Moreover, throughout the nineteenth century and the

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<sup>32</sup> Van Gent, *Nederlandse gewapende neutraliteit*, 12-14; Van Diepen, *Volkenbond en Vrede*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Van Diepen, *Volkenbond en Vrede*, 37-39; Beunders, *Weg met de Vlootwet!*, 50.

first half of the twentieth century Britain's main interest was to maintain the existing geopolitical balance of power in Southeast Asia. This in order to prevent that another European major power would gain control over the *Indische Archipel*.<sup>34</sup> In August 1914 First Sea Lord, Winston Churchill believed that the Dutch defence potential for the Netherlands Indies was insufficient. Therefore, he demanded that Tokyo would stay away from the Netherlands Indies and would only occupy German territory North of the equator. Beunders states in *Weg met de Vlootwet!* that this indicates a hidden vow by the British for the sacrosanctity of the Netherlands Indies.<sup>35</sup> By the last quarter of the nineteenth century the British naval power was increasingly being challenged by the ambitions of other European powers like France, Germany and Russia. During the same period Japan also slowly became a force to be reckoned with.<sup>36</sup>

Britain and Japan signed a five-year treaty on 30 January 1902 to maintain the status quo and general peace in the Far East, preserving the independence and integrity of China and Korea, and continuing the trade with those countries. The treaty also ensured that if either party would be at war with a third power the other party would remain neutral, unless the third power would be joined by an ally. The main purpose of the treaty apparently was to prevent an understanding between Russia and Japan. This would have endangered the British power in the Far East. The treaty was renewed in 1905 and 1911.<sup>37</sup>

The events during the Russian-Japanese War of 1904-1905 made the Dutch government anxious that the Russian Baltic Fleet, sent to the Far East as a reinforcement of the Russian Far Eastern Fleet, would use facilities in the Netherlands Indies to replenish. This would be an intrusion on the Dutch neutrality. Dutch naval forces in the Netherlands Indies were put at an increased state of alert to prevent this from happening because of fear for Japanese countermeasures. The

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<sup>34</sup> Anten, 'Java' en 'Sumatra', 14.

<sup>35</sup> Wm.R., Louis, 'Australia and the German colonies in the Pacific, 1914-1919', *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 38, No. 4 (Dec., 1966), 407-421, 414; Beunders, *Weg met de Vlootwet!*, 40.

<sup>36</sup> Marder, *British Naval Policy*, 119-121, 238.

<sup>37</sup> Marder, *Dreadnought to Scapa Flow*, 238-239; Marder, *British Naval Policy*, 427, 450.



Russian-Japanese war ultimately confirmed the Japanese naval power in the Far East.<sup>38</sup>

Over time, this led to increasing concerns in The Hague. Subsequently, a state committee was formed on 5 June 1912 to review the defence of the Netherlands Indies, which came with a secret *Prae-advies*. This identified Japan as the most likely opponent for the Netherlands Indies and concluded that a successful defence could only be achieved by developing sufficient naval power. According to the *Taschenbuch der Kriegsflotten*, Japan at that time had six modern dreadnought-type battleships under construction or completed. The Dutch program was to match this strength. The availability of a Dutch battle fleet was to deter potential aggression by foreign powers and simultaneously make the Netherlands an attractive ally in case of conflict.<sup>39</sup>

By October 1913 a new policy document was developed, the Rambonnet-program, providing for the construction of four battleships and an optional fifth in reserve as well as identifying the requirement for light cruisers. The outbreak of the First World War in August 1914 prevented the implementation of this program because it had not yet been approved by the Dutch parliament. The construction of light cruisers nevertheless went ahead. The *JAVA*, the lead unit, was ordered on 15 November 1915, the *SUMATRA* on 22 November 1915. Construction of both units commenced mid-1916.<sup>40</sup> On the 9 February 1917 approval was sought in the Dutch parliament for the construction of the third light cruiser (*CELEBES*) and the submarines K-VIII, K-IX and K-X.<sup>41</sup> The cruiser *CELEBES* was ordered on 14 June 1917.<sup>42</sup>

It appears that important aspects of Dutch neutrality were twofold: maintaining neutrality towards an aggressor on the one hand, and maintaining neutrality towards warring nations on the other hand. The Dutch hoped to avoid a conflict with Japan in the first place but it was also aware that this eventually might

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<sup>38</sup> Anten, 'Java' en 'Sumatra', 16; Amos S. Hershey, *The International Law and Diplomacy of the Russo-Japanese War* (London 1906) 188-216; Fasseur, *De jonge koningin*, 418-419.

<sup>39</sup> Beunders, *Weg met de Vlootwet!*, 36-37; Bruno Weyer (ed.) *Taschenbuch der Kriegsflotten*, XIII Jahrgang (München 1912) 80-83; Anten, 'Java' en 'Sumatra', 18; Fasseur, *De jonge koningin*, 446.

<sup>40</sup> Anten, 'Java' en 'Sumatra', 19-21, 45.

<sup>41</sup> Handelingen Tweede Kamer, 1916-1917, 64e vergadering, 9 februari 1917, 1520.

<sup>42</sup> Anten, 'Java' en 'Sumatra', 21, 45.

not be possible. Therefore the Dutch policy of neutrality was brought to waver already in 1912.

### *Washington Conference on Limitation of Armament*

Following the First World War the issue of the renewal of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance became a matter of consideration. The United States was already showing concern about the renewal since 1919. To some respect renewal would be superfluous due to the principles of the League of Nations. Invitations for a conference to be held in Washington were sent by the United States Harding Administration in July 1921 to prevent a naval arms race and to provide stability in the Far East. On the 9 December 1921 the Four Power Treaty was agreed upon as a part of the Washington Conference on Limitation of Armament, which entailed the termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, as part of the Washington Conference on Limitation of Armament, the Treaty on the Limitation of Naval Armaments was signed on 6 February 1922 (see chapter 2).<sup>44</sup>

For the Netherlands, the most important result of the Washington Treaty was the recognition that Japan was considered a major naval power and that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance had come to an end. It was particularly the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which had been important for the Netherlands Indies during the First World War.

### *The (half) minimum fleet*

The Netherlands did not actively participate in the conferences on limitation of armament but realized that its naval capacity was wholly insufficient for the defence of the colony. An interdepartmental committee was formed in 1920 under the chairmanship of Chief of Naval Staff, Rear-Admiral A.F. Gooszen to review the defence of the Netherlands Indies. This committee recommended providing a fleet

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<sup>43</sup> Charles Nelson Spinks, 'The Termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance', *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 4 (Dec., 1937), 321-340, 324, 325, 337; George W. Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power: The U.S. Navy, 1890-1990* (Stanford 1994) 93-103.

<sup>44</sup> Conference on Limitation of Armament, Washington, 1921-22 (Treaties, Resolutions, &c.). London HMSO 1922. [Cmd. 1627]. Source: <http://treaties.fco.gov.uk/docs/pdf/1922/TS0001-1.pdf> 13-03-2016; League of Nations Treaties, Volume 25, No. 609. – Treaty between the United States of America, The British Empire, France, Italy and Japan, for the limitation of naval armament, signed at Washington, February 6, 1922, 202-227.

consisting of four cruisers, twenty-four torpedo boat destroyers, thirty-two submarines and four submarine-minelayers. This would be supported by 108 seaplanes of the Naval Air Service (*marineluchtvaartdienst*). It was hoped that this force would be sufficient to deter a Japanese attack on the Netherlands Indies and it was regarded as the so-called *minimum* fleet. This recommendation showed an emphasis on using submarines for the defence of the Netherlands Indies, which could be explained by interpreting the impact of submarine power during the First World War. It also reflected the view that adequate defence of the colony could only be achieved by finding a suitable ally.<sup>45</sup> Adhering to the principle of neutrality would be insufficient if the Netherlands Indies became involved in a major conflict. The cracks in the neutrality policy that had already started to show in 1912 were re-confirmed.

The Dutch government was not able to finance this proposed *minimum*. The committee therefore recommended that half of the proposed strength was to be constructed within six years. This so-called *halve-minimum*, consisted of two cruisers, twelve destroyers, sixteen submarines and two submarine minelayers. It was also proposed that Tandjong Priok was to be converted into a naval base. The Cabinet accepted the half minimum proposal and a draft fleet law was formulated. However, it was rejected by the Dutch parliament on 26 October 1923.<sup>46</sup>

During the same period the Washington conference had taken place, which was internationally presented as an arms reduction agreement.<sup>47</sup> So why would there be a need for the Dutch to increase their naval fleet? Actually the Washington conference was not an arms reduction agreement; it only limited the number of battleships in service and this stimulated a naval arms race in other categories of warships (cruisers, submarines, destroyers).

To overcome the impasse, the Dutch State Council (*Raad van State*) formulated a policy document entitled *De Grondslagen voor de verdediging van en de organisatie van de weermacht in Nederlandsch-Indië* (henceforth: *Grondslagen*)

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<sup>45</sup> Anten, *'Java' en 'Sumatra'*, 29; N. Geldhof, *70 jaar marineluchtvaartdienst* (Leeuwarden 1987) 12; Van Dissel, 'Dutch naval strategy', 21-22; Meindert van der Kaaij, *Een eenzaam staatsman: Dirk de Geer, 1870 – 1960* (Hilversum 2012) 158-161.

<sup>46</sup> Anten, *'Java' en 'Sumatra'*, 29; Beunders, *Weg met de Vlootwet!*, 84; Van der Kaaij, *Een eenzaam staatsman*, 158-161.

<sup>47</sup> Anten, *'Java' en 'Sumatra'*, 29.

to replace the *De Strategische Beginselen* of 1892.<sup>48</sup> The *Grondslagen* formulated a division of responsibilities between the *Koninklijk Nederlands-Indisch Leger* (KNIL) and the Royal Netherlands Navy for the security of the Netherlands Indies: ‘preservation of the Dutch authority in the Archipelago against upheaval or revolt within its borders’ and ‘assuring peace and order, and fulfilment of the military duty as a member of the League of Nations’.<sup>49</sup> The latter responsibility also included maintaining Dutch neutrality in the colonies. The following stipulates the division of responsibilities:<sup>50</sup>

‘Notwithstanding the governor-general’s authority to command the land and naval forces in the case of an outbreak of international conflict as is deemed appropriate under the then existing circumstances, shall for the sake of organization and equipment matters regarding the armed forces be presupposed that the enforcement of [political] neutrality on Java will be executed by the Army, with support from the Navy and in the regions outside of Java be executed by the Navy, with support from the Army, in locations which are particularly vulnerable.’

The move of the naval base from Surabaya to Tandjong Priok was apparently rejected in the *Grondslagen* document for financial and technical reasons. Strategically this was also of great significance; historian A.M.C. van Dissel states in *Dutch naval strategy* that battleships could not reach the naval base of Surabaya, due to draft limitations, but cruisers and submarines could. This would also have significant consequences for the Dutch battle cruiser program of 1938. It would impose draft limitations on these ships.<sup>51</sup>

The half minimum strength of the Dutch Navy comprised the cruisers *JAVA* and *SUMATRA*, and eight destroyers of the Admiral-class, which were all still under construction. The destroyers would be completed between 1928 and 1931. The *JAVA* was delivered in 1925 and the *SUMATRA* in 1926. As of 1 October 1927 there were

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<sup>48</sup> Anten, ‘*Java*’ en ‘*Sumatra*’, 32; Van Dissel, ‘Dutch naval strategy’, 23.

<sup>49</sup> A.A.L. Rutgers, *Defensie van Nederlandsch-Indië* (1939) 4-5.

<sup>50</sup> Rutgers, *Defensie*, 4-5.

<sup>51</sup> Jurrien S. Noot, ‘Battlecruiser: Design studies for the Royal Netherlands Navy 1939-40’, *Warship International* (Toledo Ohio: International Research Organization) 3: 242-273; G. Teitler, *De strijd om de slagkruisers 1938-1940* (Dieren 1984) 43; Van Dissel, ‘Dutch naval strategy’, 24.

thirteen submarines in service for colonial waters (so called K-boats).<sup>52</sup> The *Grondslagen* provided Defence Minister Laurentius Nicolaas Deckers with an opportunity during the parliamentary year 1929-1930 to formulate the requirement for a material reserve of one cruiser, four destroyers and six submarines, as well as the construction of two flotilla leaders/torpedo cruisers to replace two older armoured ships.<sup>53</sup> This so-called Vlootplan-Deckers was submitted to parliament in May 1930 and approved subject to an annual vote for funding. The approval included the formal determination that there had to be a material reserve of fifty percent to guarantee the minimum strength of the fleet in the Netherlands Indies as approved in the *Grondslagen*. Under the Vlootplan-Deckers the construction of the third light cruiser *DE RUYTER* commenced on 16 September 1933.<sup>54</sup>

During the mid 1930's the international tensions increased. Germany had terminated its membership of the League of Nations in October 1933. In addition, Italy had invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and a civil war had broken out in Spain.<sup>55</sup> Absolute neutrality remained the cornerstone of Dutch foreign policy but budget-cuts no longer took place. Increases in the size of the Navy became possible, particularly because the Spanish Civil War showed a need for convoying Dutch merchant ships in the Straits of Gibraltar, for which no modern major surface ships were available in the European theatre.<sup>56</sup>

### *The battle cruiser plan*

The defence budgets of 1938 and 1939 called for serious attention for the replacement of the cruisers *JAVA* and *SUMATRA*. In December 1938 the *Vaderlandse Club* (a political party) held a special meeting in Batavia dedicated to the defence of

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<sup>52</sup> Anten, *'Java' en 'Sumatra'*, 32, 50, 64; Jaarboek van de Koninklijke Marine 1926-1927. ('s-Gravenhage) 342-343, 346-347.

<sup>53</sup> Bijlagen Handelingen Tweede Kamer 1929-1930, kamerstuknummer 346, ondernummer 7, Memorie van Antwoord.

<sup>54</sup> Anten, *'Java' en 'Sumatra'*, 33; Chris Mark, *Schepen van de Koninklijke Marine in W.O. II* (Alkmaar 1997) 13-15, 16-19, 19-21, 33-37; Rutgers, *Defensie*, 6-7.

<sup>55</sup> Anten, *Navalisme nekt onderzeeboot*, 336; Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 1*, 105; Samantha D. Cart, 'Presidential Rhetoric in Times of Crisis: A Textual Analysis of Speeches by Franklin Roosevelt and Ronald Reagan' (Master Thesis, West Virginia: West Virginia University, 2014) 16; Konstantin D. Magliveras, 'The Withdrawal From the League of Nations Revisited', *Dickinson Journal of International Law*, Fall, 1991, Vol.10 (1), 25-71, 32-33.

<sup>56</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 1*, 108.

the Netherlands Indies, which defined a requirement for a substantial increase in naval power for the defence of that region. This resulted in formulating the battle cruiser plan.<sup>57</sup> The *Volksraad* issued a positive opinion on 26 April 1940.<sup>58</sup> Because of the invasion of the Netherlands by Germany on 10 May 1940 the plan was never considered by the Dutch government and eventually put on hold. Furstner proposed an amended version of the plan to the Council of Ministers in mid-March 1941.<sup>59</sup>

After the occupation of the Netherlands by Germany, Dutch military forces were cut off from their traditional base for obtaining or repairing equipment and acquiring personnel. Efforts were made to obtain naval equipment in the United Kingdom out of the on-going constructions programs and this resulted in the commissioning of two N-class destroyers *VAN GALEN* on 11 February 1942 and *TJERK HIDDEN* in May 1942. *VAN GALEN* was sent to the Far East but could not arrive in time to take part in the ABDACOM operations. Four submarines were also taken over from the British between December 1942 and April 1945.<sup>60</sup> At some point in time the British also offered to transfer the new construction cruiser *BELFAST* to the Netherlands Navy but this had to be refused because of a lack of manpower.<sup>61</sup> The lack of manpower was indeed a problem for the navy, in European waters and in the Far East. Helfrich reported on 11 February 1940 that he estimated the shortage in professional manpower in the order of 1,400 men.<sup>62</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The Netherlands had maintained to uphold its longstanding tradition of political neutrality since the nineteenth century but the outbreak of the First World War posed a threat to this policy. Both Germany and Great Britain were willing to form an alliance with the Dutch at this time, mainly because of the ideal strategic position of

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<sup>57</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 1*, 106, 110-111; P.J. Drooglever, *De Vaderlandse Club 1929-1942: Totoks en de Indische politiek* (Franeker 1980) 305-307, 314.

<sup>58</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 2, 67. Bosscher noted that the *Volksraad* issued a positive opinion on 29 April 1940. See: Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*, 49.

<sup>59</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*, 49, 149-150.

<sup>60</sup> Henk van Willigenburg, *Dutch Warships of World War II* (Lanasta 2010) 51, 71-74.

<sup>61</sup> Enquêtecommissie voor het Regeringsbeleid 1940-1945; Verslag houdende de uitkomsten van het onderzoek; Deel 8A en B; Militair beleid 1940-1945; Terugkeer naar Nederlandsch-Indië (Punt P van het enquêtebesluit); Verslag en bijlagen (Den Haag 1956) 64652 (Furstner).

<sup>62</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*, 143.

the Netherlands. The Dutch did not respond to the appeal, primarily due to Queen Wilhelmina's plea for maintaining a policy of neutrality. However, the international situation underwent a massive change because of the disastrous impact of the First World War. It was therefore decided that a supranational body was necessary to maintain the international balance of power: the League of Nations. Even though the Dutch policy of neutrality did not correspond with all of the principles stipulated by this body, the Dutch participated, mainly because of the *political*, in stead of military, character of this body. Although the Dutch had planned to maintain their policy of neutrality, various international developments posed a potential threat to the future of Dutch neutrality. Therefore, the Dutch deemed it best to increase their defence potential to withstand a possible external threat. As early as 1912 the Dutch had recognized Japan as a potential candidate to disturb the status quo of the Netherlands Indies.

During the first half of the twentieth century the Dutch government considered a variety of fleet plans and proposals for a new defence policy. But due to divergent interests within the Dutch political arena insufficient funds were allocated and these plans were never optimally executed. In the decades before the outbreak of World War II, the Netherlands continued to uphold its tradition of neutrality. Dutch politicians did not realize that while maintaining this neutral status during the First World War, it was just by sheer luck that they did not lose their possessions in the Far East. After all, it was not the Dutch policy of neutrality that kept the Netherlands out of the war, but a German decision.

The Dutch government had failed to provide for an adequate defence capability prior to World War I, and this happened again prior to World War II. It is unfortunate that politicians, who must have been aware of the Japanese rise of power in the Far East, combined with the relative decline in power of the British and the Americans, did not act on this sooner. The above factors posed a serious threat to the Netherlands Indies. Due to its neutrality, the Dutch had relied on the League of Nations, which eventually did not play a significant role in the international theatre with regard to the Japanese advance. Moreover, the Dutch tradition of neutrality was paired with an unwillingness to spend on defence, which is sadly in contradiction with Wilhelmina's plea in 1905. That it took up to 1938 for the Dutch

government to wake up to the political and strategic international reality is difficult to understand, particularly, if the risk of losing an empire, such as the Netherlands Indies, is at stake. Ultimately, it was due to financial shortcomings and political unwillingness that an effective defence potential was not realized in this period.



## Chapter 2: Measures to contain the Japanese threat to Southeast Asia

### *Introduction*

This chapter will discuss the measures that were taken by the Dutch, British and Americans, to contain the Japanese threat in Southeast Asia. This chapter provides an essential background on the run-up to the establishment of ABDACOM. The motivations for the establishment of a unified command, which eventually resulted in ABDACOM, will be discussed. Accordingly also the aim of ABDACOM and the achievement of ABDACOM will be considered. The Dutch position within ABDACOM will be discussed in the third and fourth chapters.

### *Limitation of naval armament*

At the Naval Washington Treaty of 1922 the five major nations that won the First World War had agreed upon the limitation of naval armament to prevent a future arms race. This treaty stated that the total capital ship replacement tonnage of each of the Contracting Powers was not to exceed in standard displacement: for the United States 525,000 tons; for the British Empire 525,000 tons; for France 175,000 tons; for Italy 175,000 tons; for Japan, 315,000 tons.<sup>63</sup> The treaty was up for renewal in 1936 as the Second London Treaty but Japan refused to sign.<sup>64</sup>

The 1922 treaty signalled the end of British naval supremacy that had been maintained for over two centuries and also legitimized the rise of Japan as a major (naval) power. With the collapse of the Russian Empire in 1917 and the impotence of China, Japan assumed a powerful position to exploit its interests in Asia. The outbreak of the war in Europe left Japan in an even more powerful position.<sup>65</sup>

### *The Japanese advance in the Far East and its consequences*

By mid-1938 Japan had conquered over 700,000 square miles of China in the northern and central mainland and arrogantly proclaimed the *New Order of Eastern*

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<sup>63</sup> No. 609, Treaty for the limitation of naval armament. League of Nations Treaties, Vol. 25, 205.

<sup>64</sup> Baer, *One Hundred Years*, 131-133; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, 8-14.

<sup>65</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 38-50, 58.

Asia on 22 December 1938. These conquests led to a conflict with the Soviet Union, which inflicted a defeat on the Japanese army. This benefitted the Japanese foreign ministry and the navy, which took over the national power from the Japanese army. Japan was aware that its navy was inferior to the American fleet and that they would not stand a chance in defeating the United States when the U.S. plans for naval rearmament were completed. Consequently, Japan knew it needed to start a war with the Americans before their fleet program was completed.<sup>66</sup>

By the end of 1940, the international situation was quite promising for Japan to realize the recently proclaimed *Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere*. On 27 September 1940 Japan signed the Tripartite Pact together with Germany and Italy. This pact stipulated that both Italy and Germany would recognize the Japanese *New Order in Greater East Asia* and Japan would recognize the New Order in Europe under Italian and German leadership. Japan benefitted from the successes of its new ally Germany in the European theatre; France was quickly overrun, the Dutch government went into exile, and Britain was under heavy attacks by German forces. Also their situation in the Mediterranean became very complicated.<sup>67</sup> The Japanese-Soviet peace agreement of 13 April 1941 freed Japanese forces for a movement to the south.<sup>68</sup> Indochina, by this time under the authority of the French Vichy Government, became an alluring target. In the summer of 1941 Hanoi and Saigon were occupied and the Netherlands Indies, the British possessions in the Far East and the Philippines were now within striking distance.<sup>69</sup>

The United States reacted with trade embargo and a freezing of Japanese assets in the United States. This had serious consequences for Japanese oil imports.<sup>70</sup> For oil imports Japan relied on the United States for 80 percent and on the Netherlands Indies for 10 percent. The British supported the Americans immediately.

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<sup>66</sup> Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 22; Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 53-54, 56-57.

<sup>67</sup> Three-Power Pact Between Germany, Italy, and Japan, Signed at Berlin, September 27, 1940. Avalon Law Project Source: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/triparti.asp> 11-04-2016; Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 22-24.

<sup>68</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 6, 40; Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact April 13, 1941. Avalon Law Project. Source: <http://avalon.law.yale.edu/wwii/s1.asp> 11-04-2016.

<sup>69</sup> Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 24; Daniel Yergin, *The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money and Power* (New York, 2008) 301-302.

<sup>70</sup> According to Cox the United States trade embargo and the freezing of all Japanese assets started on 1 August 1941. Van den Berg notes that this took place on 26 July 1941. See: Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 24; Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 18.

The Governor-General of the Netherlands Indies, Tjarda van Starckenborgh Stachouwer announced on behalf of the Dutch government their support for these measures but introduced a system of export licenses, attempting to make the support for the trade embargo dependent on security guarantees for the Netherlands Indies. Intercepts of Japanese diplomatic messages had already indicated that following an American oil embargo; the Japanese would make a move on the Netherlands Indies.<sup>71</sup> These events constituted a threat to the Netherlands Indies. The Dutch did not entirely follow American and British protocol on dealing with Japan, but felt that they had to make a statement against Japan, and towards the United States and Britain to show that the Netherlands Indies would stand firm against any form of external aggression. It was necessary to show the Dutch solidarity, which could be useful, if Japan indeed attacked the Netherlands Indies.

The effect of the American trade embargo would be that Japan's domestic oil reserves would be cut to only ten percent of its normal level, meaning it would have only enough oil to support military operations for about one year. Therefore it became imperative for the Japanese to take control of the oil production of the Netherlands Indies. To protect Japanese advance in this direction would require occupying the Philippines, thereby eliminating a potential American threat to Japanese supply-lines. The capability of the U.S. Pacific Fleet based in Hawaii also had to be eliminated, which would mean going to war with the United States.<sup>72</sup>

#### *The possibility of mutual allied defence*

With these developments, notably the Japanese actions in Indochina and the increasing Japanese pressure on the Netherlands Indies, the British Empire realized by mid-1940 that the Netherlands Indies had to be regarded as vital to British interests. After the Netherlands Indies had become isolated, because of German occupation of the Netherlands in Europe, Helfrich suggested in August 1940 to the British Commander in Chief China Station, Admiral Percy Noble, that some mutual defence arrangements should be made. The British remained careful not to engage

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<sup>71</sup> Bussemaker, 'Paradise in Peril', 322; Walter J. Levy, *Oil Strategy and Politics 1941-1981* (Boulder, Colorado; Westview Press, 1982) 24-35; Thorne, *Allies of a Kind*, 73; Yergin, *The Prize*, 291, 301.

<sup>72</sup> Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 24-25.

into any arrangement that could be interpreted as a definite commitment to the Dutch, although informal talks did take place.<sup>73</sup>

The signing of the Tripartite Pact brought about an evaluation in early October 1940 by the British to determine its consequences for the Far East and concluded that it was also directed against United States. Believing that the Americans would be unhappy if the British would not support the Netherlands Indies it was suggested that staff talks between the British and the Dutch should take place in Singapore. Indeed, the Americans proposed that preliminary talks should take place between the British and the Dutch prior to Anglo-American staff talks scheduled for after United States elections.<sup>74</sup>

In an exchange of views with the Americans in December 1937/January 1938 the British had indicated that they could send to the Far East a fleet consisting of 8 battleships, one battle cruiser, three aircraft carriers, nineteen cruisers and other units. The events following the outbreak of the war in Europe shattered this assumption completely. At most, according to a 1 August 1940 appreciation by the British Chiefs of Staff, some limited reinforcements could be based at Triconmalee, Ceylon.<sup>75</sup>

The first of these talks was held in Singapore from 22 to 30 October 1940. The Dutch did not take part but there was an information exchange with Furstner in London on 31 October 1940.<sup>76</sup> A second conference was held in Singapore between 25 and 29 November 1940, this time between the British and the Dutch, the so-called BD-Conference to discuss British-Dutch military mutual support, exchange information, common use of military airfields and an exchange of aircraft squadrons in case of a Japanese attack while the Americans remained neutral.<sup>77</sup> At the BD-meeting the Dutch agreed to provide naval and air forces for the defence of

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<sup>73</sup> Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 321.

<sup>74</sup> Ibidem, 322-323.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem, 222, 301, 422-423, 447-448.

<sup>76</sup> Rene W.A. van den Berg, 'Patterns of Innovation: A Historical Case Study of Military Innovation in the Netherlands East Indies Navy from 1900-1942' (Masters Thesis: Kansas 2013) 132; Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 26; Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine* 2, 75; Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 323-324.

<sup>77</sup> Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 26-27; Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 326; A. Treffers, *Nederlands-Indië Contra Japan Deel II* (Bangdung 1950) 104-109.

Singapore.<sup>78</sup> This conference indicated the first implicit disassociation by the Dutch of their neutrality stance, but an interesting question is to what extent the Dutch were aware of the support they could really expect from the British.

These conferences were followed by other conferences in which the Dutch took part, the so-called Anglo-Dutch-Australian conference (ADA) from 22-25 February 1941, the American-British-Dutch, ABD conference from 21 to 27 April 1941, and the British-Dutch (BD) meeting on 27 April 1941. At the ABD meeting the Dutch agreed to provide aircraft for the defence of Luzon. Ensuing from the BD meeting was the 'Plans for the Employment of Naval and Air Forces of the Associated Powers in the Eastern Theatre in the Event of war with Japan' (PLENAPS), issued on 12 November 1941.<sup>79</sup>

### *Pearl Harbour*

With the attack on Pear Harbour on 7 December 1941 the fear of Japanese aggression became reality.<sup>80</sup> Japan had set its plan in motion to conquer the allied territories in the Southeast Asian region and the forces of the United States, Britain and the Dutch had to react and work together or the Pacific would fall into Japanese hands. The Netherlands Indies intelligence department had warned the United States of a possible Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour at the end of November 1941, having detected a movement of the Japanese fleet in this direction. Tragically, the United States intelligence did not take these messages seriously and assumed they were meant to involve the United States in a war against Japan to aid the Netherlands Indies.<sup>81</sup> Consequently, it did not undertake defensive action upon the Dutch warning, thereby failing to limit casualties at Pearl Harbour.

On 8 December 1941 a the Commander in Chief Eastern Fleet, Geoffrey Layton requested Helfrich and the Australian and New Zealand naval boards,

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<sup>78</sup> Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 352.

<sup>79</sup> Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 35-36; Marder, *Old Friends, New Enemies*, 206-208, 211; Ian Pfenningwerth, 'Missing Pieces: The Intelligence Jigsaw and RAN Operations from 1939-71' in *Papers in Australian Maritime Affairs* 25 (2008) 1-371, 61; Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 348, 350-352, 384, 387-389; Treffers, *Nederlands-Indië II*, 120-123.

<sup>80</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, 132.

<sup>81</sup> Robert D. Haslach, *Nishi No Kaze, Hare. Nederlands-Indische inlichtingendienst contra agressor Japan* (Weesp 1985) 179.

implementation of that section of PLENAPS calling for air and naval reinforcements for Singapore to meet an attack on Malaya.<sup>82</sup>

The Netherlands was the first of the later ABDACOM members to declare war on Japan.<sup>83</sup> Queen Wilhelmina issued the proclamation of war at 8 December 1941 while the United States and England were still in negotiation on their position towards Japan.<sup>84</sup> The reason for this rapid proclamation was that the Netherlands considered the attack by Japan on both British and American territories as an attack against the Netherlands Indies.<sup>85</sup> The Dutch neutrality policy in the Far East was now officially abandoned.

On 8 December 1941, the day after the attack on Pearl Harbour, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt wrote a telegram to the 'Former Naval Person' Prime Minister Churchill that the United States had declared war on Japan.<sup>86</sup> Churchill replied the next day proposing a conference to 'review the whole war plan'.<sup>87</sup> The Americans and the British could now together consider how to form an alliance.

The British battle cruiser *REPULSE* and the battleship *PRINCE OF WALES* had been assigned to the Far East in October 1941 and arrived in Singapore on 2 December 1941.<sup>88</sup> Both ships were sunk on 10 December 1941 by the Japanese

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<sup>82</sup> Gill, *Royal Australian Navy*, 485.

<sup>83</sup> The Dutch Governor General, Van Starckenborgh was the first official responding to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour. But, being the Governor General, he was not qualified to declare war on Japan. See: De Jong, *Koninkrijk 9*, 285; A. Kroese, *The Dutch Navy at War* (London 1945) 25. The Dutch eventually declared war on Japan on 08h00 MJT on 8 December. The Dutch ambassador in Tokyo received the order to inform the Japanese government of the declaration of war the Dutch Government had proclaimed at 09h00 MJT. Half an hour later Japan proclaimed war against the United States and Great Britain. The same evening at 19h00 the British government proclaimed their declaration of war with Japan. The United States declared the war on Japan on 9 December 1941 at 09h30 MJT. See: NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume 4, Chapter 10, 135-136. It was not until 11 January 1942 that Japan declared itself in a state of war with the Netherlands. See: NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume 4, Chapter 14, 97.

<sup>84</sup> Inter-Allied Information Center, 'The Kingdom of the Netherlands declares war with Japan' Inter-Allied Review, December 15, 1941. Source: <http://www.ibiblio.org/pha/policy/1941/411208c.html> 23-03-2016.

<sup>85</sup> Message from Van Starckenborgh, Batavia, 8 December 1941. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 123; Telegram from Loudon to Welles, 8 December 1941. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 123; Telegram from Loudon to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, 10 December 1941. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 123; De Jong, *Koninkrijk 9*, 285.

<sup>86</sup> President Roosevelt to Prime Minister Churchill. Washington, December 8, 1941. 740.0011 Pacific War/854E: Telegram. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 4.

<sup>87</sup> Prime Minister Churchill to President Roosevelt. London, December 9, 1941. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Geheimecijfer Batavia from Gerbrandy, 28 November 1941. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 123; Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 36; Jungslager, *Forlorn Hope*, 160-161.

forces. Within the first two weeks Japan achieved strategic surprise in the Far East with simultaneous attacks on divergent locations inflicting major damage. The Allied forces needed to come to a unified coordinated strategy to defeat Japan. Talks commenced on 18 December 1941.<sup>89</sup>

#### *Singapore, 18 December 1941*

On 18 December 1941 Allied conferences took place in both Singapore and Batavia. The Singapore Conference was the first official conference between the Allied forces that would later form the ABDACOM and was a continuation of earlier talks about a unified command between Great Britain, the United States, Australia and the Netherlands.<sup>90</sup> Again, the diverging interests of the various parties were evident and it was difficult to come to an overall agreement. However, it was the Dutch who again emphasized that they would support Singapore in case of Japanese attack.<sup>91</sup> The Dutch delegates were outspoken on this topic because they were aware of their military weakness and knew they had to deliver in order to receive. They could only strike back if they would be supported by an alliance. Again they may not have been aware of the level of support the British could really provide.

Although there was no agreement reached on a unified command during this conference, it was decided that the Allied forces should work together in order to maintain the Malay Barrier, comprising Malaya, Sumatra, Java and the lesser Sunda Islands.<sup>92</sup> As long as this remained under Allied control, the widely spread Indonesian Archipelago would be difficult to capture.<sup>93</sup> The Allies agreed upon the importance of defending Singapore. The Philippines were identified as important for disrupting Japanese communication lines. The Dutch and British navies were to preserve control in the South China Sea and the West Java Sea; the U.S. Asiatic Fleet would

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<sup>89</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>90</sup> Jungslager, *Forlorn Hope*, 192-193.

<sup>91</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>93</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 258-259.

control the Celebes Sea and the Makassar Strait.<sup>94</sup> The conference that took place in Batavia on 18 December 1941 will be discussed in chapter three.

#### *Batavia, 22 December 1941*

Talks about the cooperation of British, American and Dutch naval- and air forces in the Far East continued on 22 December 1941 in Batavia between Helfrich, Rear-Admiral William Glassford Commander of Task Force 5 of the U.S. Navy, Captain J.A. Collins (Royal Australian Navy), Assistant Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief Eastern Fleet and Captain J.J.A. van Staveren. Helfrich stressed that he was in favour of a striking force as was also recommended in the Duff Cooper telegram dated 20 December 1941. This telegram consisted of a telegraphic summary of the Singapore conference held on 18 December 1941.<sup>95</sup> This telegram stated that the Netherlands Indies was considered a 'naval base of vital importance' and he concluded that it was undisputed that it should and would be utterly defended.<sup>96</sup>

#### *Anglo-American tête-à-tête*

Formal talks between the United States and Great Britain started in the Washington Conference, also known as the ARCADIA Conference, held between on 22 December 1941 and 14 January 1942. It discussed the formulation of the Declaration of the United Nations, the establishment of the Combined Chiefs of Staff and prioritized the Atlantic and the Pacific war theatres.<sup>97</sup> Germany was designated as the enemy to be defeated first.<sup>98</sup> They concluded that the only way to stop the Japanese advance was to maintain the Allied territories in the Far East by preserving the Malay Barrier. Only then could these vital resources be protected from a Japanese invasion.<sup>99</sup> It was of utmost importance to keep Japan east of the Malay Barrier, which could only be achieved if all allied forces in the region would participate in a unified command.

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<sup>94</sup> Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 37-38.

<sup>95</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>96</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>97</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 256.

<sup>98</sup> Meeting of President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill with their military advisers. December 26, 1941, 4:30 P.M., The White House. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 103.

<sup>99</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 258-259.



Apparently the Dutch were not taken seriously since they were not invited to participate in the Conference. However, the Dutch had major interests at stake, being involved in both the Atlantic and the Pacific (even though they had been overrun by Germany in the Europe). Eventually, they had to do as the Americans and the British told them, after the establishment of ABDACOM.

### *The birth of ABDACOM*

On 28 December 1941 Churchill and Roosevelt decided to create ABDACOM, a unified command consisting of the United States, Great Britain, the Netherlands and Australia, aiming to fight the Japanese penetration of Southeast Asia.<sup>100</sup> Its jurisdiction encompassed the Philippines, the Netherlands Indies, Malaya and Burma. This action was presented as a *fait accompli* to the Australian government, the Netherlands government-in-exile and the Chinese Nationalist Government.<sup>101</sup> U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall had proposed the establishment of this unified command on 25 December 1941.<sup>102</sup>

Interestingly, in the *Draft Telegram by Minister Churchill at Washington to the British Lord Privy Seal (Attlee)*, dated 28 December 1941, in which the contours of ABDACOM are outlined, it is stated that 'Australia and New Zealand must of course be consulted'.<sup>103</sup> Were the Dutch also consulted on the matter? Were they bluntly sidelined? It appears so. The Dutch envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary Minister in Washington, Alexander Loudon, was *informed*, not *consulted*, of the establishment of the ABDACOM on 29 December 1941 during a meeting with Roosevelt.<sup>104</sup> Presumably the Americans and British did not feel the need to consult with the Dutch before deciding on the establishment of ABDACOM because the Dutch had made it more than clear in the past that they were willing to participate in a unified command in the Pacific.

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<sup>100</sup> Draft Telegram by Prime Minister Churchill at Washington to the British Lord Privy Seal (Attlee), December 28, 1941. Roosevelt Papers: Telegram. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 277-279.

<sup>101</sup> Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning*, 124.

<sup>102</sup> Meeting of the United States and British Chiefs of Staff, December 25, 1941. P.M. Federal Reserve Building. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 90-94.

<sup>103</sup> Draft Telegram by Prime Minister Churchill at Washington to the British Lord Privy Seal (Attlee), December 28, 1941. Roosevelt Papers: Telegram. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 277-279.

<sup>104</sup> Editorial Note. Meeting of President Roosevelt and the Netherlands Minister (Loudon), December 29, 1941, 12 noon, The White House. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 133.

Van Starckenborgh indicated his apprehension of an Anglo-American decision-making monopoly as early as 2 October 1941 in which he stated that it was not beneficial for the Dutch position within the negotiations on a unified command if the Americans and British would become used to a Dutch complaisant attitude.<sup>105</sup>

Roosevelt proposed to appoint the British General Sir Archibald Wavell to Supreme Commander of ABDACOM. On 3 January 1942 Wavell received his instructions about the ABDA area and his responsibilities. He was to report to a new British-American organization called the Combined Chiefs of Staffs (CCS) established in Washington DC. The Americans insisted that he did not receive full command authority, not being able to move ground forces from one territory to another in the area or to interfere with the tactical organization and disposition of forces under national commands. He did however receive the authority to move air forces.<sup>106</sup> This may well have upset the PLENAPS without replacing it with a new detailed plan.

Wavell set up temporary headquarters in Batavia on 10 January 1942 and assumed command on 15 January 1942.<sup>107</sup> Within ABDACOM the American General L.H. Brereton was initially appointed as commander of the air forces (ABDAAIR) but replaced by the British Air Chief Marshal Sir Richard E.C. Peirse on his arrival, the American Admiral Thomas C. Hart was appointed commander of the naval forces (ABDAFLOAT).<sup>108</sup> The Dutchman Hein ter Poorten was appointed commander of the ground forces (ABDAARM). An important decision made by the ABDACOM headquarters was to subordinate the Dutch naval air force to ABDAAIR, which in practice meant that the Dutch Navy lost its direct control over the “eyes” of its fleet.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Geheimecijfer from the Governor General Van Starckenborgh, 2 October 1941. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 123.

<sup>106</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*, 189-190; Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning*, 124-125.

<sup>107</sup> Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning*, 125.

<sup>108</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>109</sup> J.C. Bijkerk, *Vaarwel tot betere tijden: Documentaire over de ondergang van Nederlandsch-Indië* (Franeker 1974) 120-121; Jungslager, *Forlorn Hope*, 259; Bosscher, *De Koninklijke Marine Deel 2*, 190, 198; Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 146; NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 101.

### *Helfrich, Hart and Wavell*

On 1 January 1942 Hart arrived in Surabaya to confer with the Dutch.<sup>110</sup> Hart had initially planned to travel immediately to Port Darwin, but at the insistence of Helfrich he visited Surabaya after which he went to Batavia. A meeting took place at Batavia between Hart and a Dutch delegation comprising Van Starckenborgh, Lieutenant Governor-General H.J. Van Mook (who had just been appointed on 31 December 1941) and Helfrich on 3 January 1942. Helfrich refers to this meeting in his *Memoires*. He stated that Hart came across as a dejected man. One of the first things mentioned by Hart was that 'the defence of the Netherlands Indies was a lost cause and the withdrawal to Australia was inevitable'.<sup>111</sup> Hart even mentioned that he was not aware of the fact that Surabaya was a naval base.<sup>112</sup> Helfrich continued on the obstacles he faced in his meeting with Hart, which were heavy on his heart. Hart had mentioned that he did not consider the base of Surabaya a suitable one, and that the whole Netherlands Indies was not worth the risk of defending. Conflicting interests between the two also applied to the dislocation of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet. Helfrich suggested this should be located in the Celebes Sea in the Ambon region; Hart focussed on the area more South, near Port Darwin.<sup>113</sup>

After his far from fruitful meeting with Hart, Helfrich looked forward to his meeting with Wavell, who arrived on 10 January 1942 on Java. They spoke about the current situation and about the general directives issued by Washington. Helfrich was pleased with the content of these directives; for one they acknowledged the Netherlands Indies as a 'basic defensive position of the Abda-area'.<sup>114</sup>

### *Divergent interests*

The understandings on which ABDACOM was based put the Dutch in an unenviable position towards the Americans and the British: the Dutch could be counted on for support but in return the Dutch were not able to claim reciprocal support from the

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<sup>110</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>111</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine* 2, 191-192.; Helfrich, *Memoires* 1, 247; Jungslager, *Forlorn Hope*, 229-230; Bijkerk, *Vaarwel tot betere tijden*, 119-120.

<sup>112</sup> Letter from Admiral Helfrich to Welter, 29 October 1942, Colombo. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 34.

<sup>113</sup> Helfrich, *Memoires* 1, 247-256.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibidem*, 270, 278.

American and the British. Already in mid-December the U.S. Asiatic Fleet withdrew from the Philippines in the direction of Port Darwin in the southern part of the Malay Barrier. In Helfrich's opinion they were despatched too far south, since he feared the Japanese would approach the Netherlands Indies from the north of the Malay Barrier. Throughout January 1942 the British forces kept their focus on which they believed to be the cornerstone of their defence: Singapore. Throughout the first half of January almost the entire Dutch squadron was used for escorting Singapore bound convoys, which meant they could not prepare the for the defence of the Netherlands Indies proper.<sup>115</sup>

ABDACOM officially commenced activities on 15 January 1942 in Batavia, and, after its move to Lembang on 18 January the official Head Quarters commenced its work.<sup>116</sup> At this time the allied forces were spread around the ABDA area. And, more importantly, no cohesion of strategic command had been reached.

Van den Berg states in his M.A. thesis *Unchained Interests* that ABDACOM was presented to the Dutch and Australians as a *fait accompli*. The only option both countries had was to agree with the Anglo-American orchestrated command. The Australians and the Dutch were not just excluded from taking part in the establishment of ABDACOM; they were also not involved in the higher command, which were divided between British and American officials. In part, Helfrich's frustrations were caused by the disregard of his thorough knowledge of the Southeast Asian territories, by the allies during the formation of ABDACOM.<sup>117</sup> To an extent Van den Berg's analysis is true, but as I will further show in the next chapter, the Dutch did try to influence decision-making in the formation of ABDACOM more than has been traditionally recognized.

Reviewing the whole situation, Helfrich stated in his *Memoirs*: 'in December 1941 it was still possible to operate against the Japanese in the northern part of the archipelago, in January 1942 it had become difficult, and in February it had become

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<sup>115</sup> Helfrich, *Memoires 1*, 260; Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 77; Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 274.

<sup>116</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33; Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*, 197.

<sup>117</sup> Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 66-67; Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 272.

impossible'.<sup>118</sup> Impossible it had indeed become, and history would prove him right. Meanwhile the U.S. Asiatic Fleet was still convoying itself, and the British fleet lost many of their capital ships. The Dutch defence potential had diminished to the availability of only their own fleet. In addition, their fleet had been reduced due to losses of Dutch ships under the British command since the start of the war.

By 3 February Surabaya had been bombed and by 13 February both Dutch and British Borneo were occupied by Japan.<sup>119</sup> The next day, Helfrich replaced Hart as ABDAFLOAT.<sup>120</sup> To the public it was presented that Hart's resignation was due to his ill health, the truth is that Hart resigned because he did not appear to be up for the job due to his old age and many clashes of personality between himself and several other high officials. Most Dutchmen were no fan of Hart; they rather saw Helfrich in his function. Hart did also not impress Roosevelt and Churchill. Moreover, Hart himself was also not convinced he was the right person for the job as he had once mentioned that he regarded himself 'inadequate' as ABDAFLOAT.<sup>121</sup> When Helfrich took over, he was left with an already crumbling command. He could not save more than their pride by taking the allied forces down fighting. Singapore fell the following day, on 15 February 1942.<sup>122</sup> The British beloved major cornerstone had been lost.

The fall of Singapore had grave consequences for the operating of the allied partners within ABDACOM. While the Dutch were now even more emphasizing on the defence of the Netherlands Indies, the British had shifted towards the defence of Burma. Burma had gained importance now because it would be the only country through which communication lines with China could be kept open. The Americans on the other hand had shifted their focus even more to the south, in the direction of

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<sup>118</sup> Helfrich, *Memoires 1*, as cited in: Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 76.

<sup>119</sup> Kroese, *The Dutch Navy*, 126; Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 77.

<sup>120</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33; Kroese, *The Dutch Navy*, 127.

<sup>121</sup> Dutch Naval Attaché in Washington to the Commander of the Naval Forces, 6 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 133; James Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory: A Biography of Admiral Thomas C. Hart* (Annapolis 1981) 210, 272-277.

<sup>122</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33; Kroese, *The Dutch Navy*, 128.

Australia.<sup>123</sup> Without Helfrich being told, his beloved Netherlands Indies was given up and he was left to defend it alone. The Combined Chiefs of Staff eventually dissolved ABDACOM on 25 February 1942.<sup>124</sup> A more detailed discussion on the dissolving of ABDACOM will be provided in chapter four. The command over the allied forces was transferred to Helfrich. On 28 February 1942 Helfrich resigned his command after consulting with Van Starckenborgh. The British and American ships were put back under their national commands.<sup>125</sup>

### *Conclusion*

The Washington Naval Treaty of 1922 marked an important change in the build-up of the defence potential of various major powers such as the United States, Britain and Japan. Although this treaty stipulated limitation of armament to prevent a future arms race, it did not stand in the way of Japanese plans for an arrogantly proclaimed establishment of a confederation in the Far East under Japanese leadership. The Japanese advance towards its southern region initially led to allied statements and a trade embargo, but these aggravated Japan even more. Finally realizing that Japan had become a substantial threat, the allied parties with interests in the Pacific became aware that some form of cooperation was necessary in order to stop Japan.

Various staff talks were held, as well as official and unofficial conversations and conferences. But divergent national interests prevented the establishment of official commitments between the allied forces. Moreover, this had to do with the reluctance of committing politically to one another. Especially, the United States avoided any form of commitment due to their isolationist policy and a desire to remain neutral.

Divergences in strategic planning and priorities dominated most of these conferences. The Americans, British, Dutch and Australians each focussed primarily on their own national objectives. They were all willing to cooperate in order to stop

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<sup>123</sup> Martin Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Road to Victory, Volume II, 1941-1945* (Boston 1986) 60; Eisenhower, *The Papers I*, 126; Pfenningwerth, 'Missing Pieces', 66.

<sup>124</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 295. Some examples of the Dutch requests for reinforcements: Queen Wilhelmina to President Roosevelt, 22 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152; Geheimecijfer for Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 26 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>125</sup> Chronological report, 8 December 1941 – 1 March 1942 of the performance of the Royal Navy in the Netherlands East Indies. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

the Japanese threat, but remained reluctant to set aside national priorities to come to an overall understanding. It is clear that they had no tradition, nor an inclination of working together closely in a mutual alliance, making fruitful cooperation difficult. It was due to shortsightedness that the Allied powers failed to establish a unified military cooperation before the outbreak of World War II in the Pacific.

Moreover, the British had to rely on the Americans for a commitment for support before an agreement could be made with the Dutch, apprehensive as they were for a Japanese reaction. The Dutch could not commit to the British unless they themselves were sure of American support. The Americans, who were present at almost every conference, simply stated that they could not commit politically, and therefore, they could not commit at all. The Dutch were the only party willing to commit, even if this meant that they had to give in order to receive. Although the Dutch maintained their policy of neutrality during these talks, on a military level they were exploring the possibility of a unified cooperation in the Pacific in order to safeguard the Netherlands Indies.

While the Dutch were actively advocating the establishment of mutual support before it would be too late, the British awaited the American willingness to commit. But only after the attack on Pearl Harbour the Americans were finally willing to do so. By this time, Japan had brought its war plans into gear, and no substantial foundation for allied cooperation was realized.

After the attack on Pearl Harbour, the Netherlands government was the first of the allied parties to proclaim war against Japan to show the Americans and British that they were indeed committed to be included in a military alliance. At this point the United States took over and formulated together with the British, a unified command, ABDACOM, comprising of the Americans, British, Dutch and Australian armed forces. The Dutch and Australians were excluded from the discussions establishing this Command because the Americans and British were mainly focussed on their own priorities before presenting the *fait accompli* to the Netherlands and Australia. It seems that because the Netherlands were already overrun in Europe, they were granted little voice in the discussion on the formulation of a command aiming to fight Japan.

The Dutch were not fully aware of their exclusion, as will be seen in the next chapters. They still believed they had a say in the matter even though they had found out that secret conferences were being held between the Americans and the British. But as Van Starckenborgh had argued, the complaisant Dutch attitude made it an easy pawn to pass by. Of course the Netherlands Indies was of vital interest to both the Americans and the British. It was the most central located allied territory in the Far East and held vital resources that had to be kept out of Japanese hands. However, this did not mean that the Dutch needed to be consulted on any decision-making.



### **Chapter 3: Seeking potential allies to safeguard the integrity of the Netherlands Indies**

#### *Introduction*

This chapter will discuss the events leading up to the formation of ABDACOM. In contrast to the previous chapter, which discussed the diplomatic milestones of these events, this chapter focuses on the analysis of the attitude and interests of the Netherlands towards the formation of a unified Allied command. To determine the Dutch position towards the build-up of ABDACOM, the British and American views on the Netherlands as a potential ally will also be studied to gain a complete picture. This chapter will principally be based on primary sources including the *Marine Monografieën*, documents made available by the *Foreign Relations of the United States* and material held by the National Archive such as the personal archives of Admiral Helfrich, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Colonies.

#### *The early stage of conversations*

As the previous chapter indicates, the discussion about the formation of a unified command against Japan started long before the formation of ABDACOM. Already as early as the summer of 1940 primary sources indicate that allied forces with interests in Southeast Asia were exploring options on working together in the event of a conflict with Japan. Conversations between the British and the Americans on this topic were already taking place in December 1937.<sup>126</sup>

The Dutch could not and did not stand still. International tensions were increasing, and rumours arose that simultaneously with a suggested German invasion of the Netherlands on either 13 or 14 April 1940, Japan would launch an attack on either Java or Surabaya.<sup>127</sup> The same week the United States Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, showed his support for the defence of the Netherlands Indies by stating to the Japanese government that external interference in this region by violent means would threaten the status quo of the Archipelago, Southeast Asia and,

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<sup>126</sup> Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 220-225.

<sup>127</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 2, 57.

the entire Pacific. He also referred to the key principles of the Four Power Treaty signed on 6 February 1922. The United States could not and would not allow Japan to conquer territories that were of vital importance to the United States.<sup>128</sup>

The Dutch were aware that their fleet was inferior to the naval forces of the British, American and Japanese. Therefore, after the Netherlands had been invaded by Germany on 10 May 1940, Furstner urged the U.S. Asiatic Squadron of the Pacific Fleet to contact the Dutch Naval Forces in the Netherlands Indies.<sup>129</sup> It remains unclear to what extent the United States responded to the Dutch request, but it reflects an early naval cooperation initiative from the side of the Dutch.

#### *A private party*

Already in the early stage of negotiations about the defence of Southeast Asia between Britain and the United States, Lord Lothian, British Ambassador to the United States, proposed on 5 October 1940 to Hull that a conference should be held in London with American, British, Dutch and Australian representatives. This was rejected by Hull; he deemed it best that the British government kept in contact with these countries, instead of investing a conference.<sup>130</sup> Bussemaker argued that it was actually Hull proposing a conference with the Dutch, Australians, British and the Americans on 'technical matters ... to stiffen the Dutch attitude towards the Japanese'.<sup>131</sup>

Two days later, on 7 October 1940, Lothian repeated his proposal for a conference. The representatives of these countries should deliberate how to build the most effective common defence, without entering into political commitments. Hull finally gave in because for the United States it would also be worth knowing the capability of the allies in the Pacific. But Hull stressed that it could not take place in Washington, at least not before 5 November 1940, when the United States Presidential elections would take place.<sup>132</sup> For the United States the emphasis was in the sentence: *all without entering into political commitments*; the United States

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<sup>128</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 2, 59.

<sup>129</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 3, 47.

<sup>130</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 4.

<sup>131</sup> Bussemaker 'Paradise in Peril', 222.

<sup>132</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 5.

were willing to explore Allied potential in the Pacific but did not want to put their military forces to the disposal of another country.

So why did Hull initially reject Lothian's proposal for a conference? Apparently the British were interested in working on a strategy with all interested parties in the region. The Americans were not. The United States emphasized its unwillingness to enter into any political commitments, and certainly not before the presidential elections. This would have benefitted the Republican Party and their isolationist views. After Roosevelt was re-elected the United States was able to slowly move away from its tradition of isolationism.<sup>133</sup> Still, the Americans focussed primarily on bilateral talks on cooperation with the British. The British were looking for an alliance, but only one that included American participation.

The British Air Officer Commanding, Far East, Air-Vice Marshal Babington, considered cooperation between Britain and the Netherlands imperative and ruled out the possibility of neutrality for either party.<sup>134</sup> The British-Dutch cooperation-plan should be developed from a conference between representatives of Australia, New Zealand, India, Burma, the Netherlands Indies and the British, with an American observer, during which the Japanese aggression and its threat for Southeast Asia would be discussed. Afterwards, the British planners could come to Washington to discuss the conclusions with the Americans, without, of course, any political commitments on either side; the conference would be on a purely hypothetical basis.<sup>135</sup> This conference did take place, but without any Dutch representatives. Why?

Van den Berg states in *Unchained Interests* and *Patterns of Innovation* that the Dutch non-participation was due to their neutrality.<sup>136</sup> He refers to *Paradise in Peril* by Bussemaker, who states that the Dutch indeed declined to take part in the conference, though Bussemaker does not mention why.<sup>137</sup> Bussemaker did, however, mention on a different page in *Paradise in Peril* that the Dutch had hoped for a conference in which the allies would come to explicit agreements on how to

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<sup>133</sup> 'Meer hulp aan Engeland', Washington D.C., 29 November 1940, 10976/998. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 726.

<sup>134</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 7.

<sup>135</sup> Ibidem, 10-11.

<sup>136</sup> Van den Berg, 'Unchained Interests', 26; Van den Berg, 'Patterns of Innovation', 132.

<sup>137</sup> Bussemaker 'Paradise in Peril', 245.

deal with the Japanese aggression in Southeast Asia instead of conferring on technical affairs, thus suggesting that a neutrality policy was not necessarily what the Dutch were worried about at this point.<sup>138</sup> According to Bussemaker, the Dutch were extremely unhappy with this change of content of the conference. So was this why the Dutch 'declined' their invitation? Bussemaker does not say.<sup>139</sup>

The *Marine Monografieën* throw a different light on the questions that Bussemaker and Van den Berg pose. The *Marine Monografieën* provide information on the Dutch views on the conference held in Singapore from 21 October to 30 October 1940. Apparently the Dutch Consul-General in Singapore sent a message to Van Starckenborgh, stating that he discovered that a secret conference was to be held by the end of October. This conference would consist of representatives from Britain, Australia, Burma and India, with an American observer present. After the British territories had come to an overall agreement on strategic policy, another conference would follow with the Netherlands Indies and the United States. The *Marine Monografieën* do mention that the Dutch were to receive an invitation to the conference in Singapore from 21 October to 30 October 1940, but it does not indicate if the Dutch had indeed received this invitation.<sup>140</sup>

Correspondence between the Dutch envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary minister in London, E.F.M.J. Michiels van Verduynen and the Dutch Minister of Foreign Affairs, E.N. Van Kleffens, dated 18 October 1940, indicates that the Dutch were indeed considering taking part in a conference, on British proposal. Michiels van Verduynen seemed reluctant to take part in such a conference, because he thought it might provoke a Japanese reaction.<sup>141</sup> But the *Aide-Mémoire* Michiels van Verduynen had received from the British Foreign Secretary Halifax, dated 17 October 1940, stated that the British would indeed want the Dutch to participate in a conference, but '... at Singapore during the later stages of a conference of the British

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<sup>138</sup> Bussemaker 'Paradise in Peril', 222.

<sup>139</sup> Ibidem, 222, 245.

<sup>140</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 7, 23-24.

<sup>141</sup> The envoy in London, Michiels van Verduynen to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Kleffens, 18 October 1940 in: A.E. Kersten and A.F. Manning, *Documenten betreffende de Buitenlandse politiek van Nederland van 1919-1945, periode C: 1940-1945, Deel I: 10 mei 1940 – 31 oktober 1940* ('s-Gravenhage 1976), 517-518.

Services'.<sup>142</sup> It appears that the Dutch were indeed invited to consult with the British, but not in the early stages of the British initiated conference in Singapore.

It seems that on the British side there had occurred a change of plans in the specifications of the conference. The British first wanted to consult with the British Dominions before talking to the Dutch and the Americans about the situation in Southeast Asia. In contrast to what Bussemaker and Van den Berg suggested, then, the main reasons why the Dutch were not present in Singapore was not that they did not want to be there, but rather that the Pacific Dominions wanted to get assurances from the British first, as they had been requested to send a substantial part of their military forces to the Middle East.<sup>143</sup> Therefore the Dutch were not invited.

#### *Conversations and expectations*

On 21 October 1940 the highest civil servant at the Dutch Foreign Office, W.F.L. van Bylandt informed the British envoy extraordinary and plenipotentiary minister, Sir Neville Bland, that they would highly appreciate to participate in a conference with the British in order to talk about a military collaboration in the Far East.<sup>144</sup>

It is clear that the United States underestimated the Dutch fear of a potential war with Japan. The Americans considered the Dutch absence a 'failure', or at least an 'understandable failure', as Hart puts it in a note to Chief of Naval Operations, H.R. Stark.<sup>145</sup> 'Understandable' because the Dutch, according to Hart, knew British support would be 'meagre' and because the Dutch would not want to show favourites, 'hoping they can escape disaster'. Right here, Hart pointed out, lies the ignorance of a neutral country on the edge of war. However, this assessment of the Dutch views was mistaken on a few key elements.

First of all, the Dutch were not expecting 'meagre' support from the British. Given their longstanding relations, the Dutch expected substantial support from the British, as the Dutch had also promised reciprocal support. The Dutch could have

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<sup>142</sup> Aide-Mémoire from the British Foreign Secretary Halifax to the envoy in London, Michiels van Verduynen, 17 Oktober 1940 in: Kersten and Manning, *DBPN, C, I, 10 mei 1940 – 31 October 1940*, 518.

<sup>143</sup> Silverman, 'British Naval Strategy', 288.

<sup>144</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 12-13.

<sup>145</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 8, Annex 9: The Commander in Chief, United States Asiatic Fleet (Hart) to the Chief of Naval Operations (Stark), Manila, November 13, 1940.

possibly predicted the British support to be 'meagre', considering the large amount of military equipment the British had ordered in the United States.<sup>146</sup>

Secondly, even though the Dutch were still exploring the option of neutrality within the Pacific theatre in July 1940 they were already actively looking for allies.<sup>147</sup> This is made evident in the following statement conveyed by the Dutch Naval Attaché in Washington to United States Admiral Anderson, Head of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) on 27 October 1940: 'The political picture of the Far East is so full with uncertainties that it is possible for the Netherlands Government to take any other commitments than its readiness to defend the Netherlands Indies with all the means at her disposal against any aggressor. If those uncertainties could be lifted, it would be of extreme value for the Netherlands Government that then would be able to adopt a definite stand. The Netherlands Government is entirely aware of its duties and obligations and willing to fulfil them, but find great obstacles in the insisting political uncertainties.'<sup>148</sup> In addition, as early as 21 October Van Bylandt informed Bland, that they would highly appreciate to participate in a conference with the British to talk about military collaboration in the Far East.<sup>149</sup> This indicates that the Americans were misinformed, and that the Dutch were in fact looking for allies in the Far East.

Finally, it was not only the Dutch but also the British who did not want to alienate the Japanese due to close contacts between the British and Dutch naval staffs and therefore gradually decreased contact.<sup>150</sup> A message from Hart to Stark, dated 13 November 1940 shows that the United States held on to the same diplomatic policy towards Japan.<sup>151</sup>

The American interpretation of the Dutch reluctance pursuant to their neutrality – which Van den Berg reproduces in his books – might have something to

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<sup>146</sup> 'Meer hulp aan Engeland', Washington D.C., 29 November 1940, 10976/998. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 726.

<sup>147</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 3, 73.

<sup>148</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 17.

<sup>149</sup> Ibidem, 12-13.

<sup>150</sup> The envoy in London, Michiels van Verduynen to the Minister of Foreign Affairs Van Kleffens, 18 October 1940 in: Kersten and Manning, *DBPN, C, I, 10 mei 1940 – 31 October 1940*, 517-518; NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 3, 54.

<sup>151</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 8, Annex 9: The Commander in Chief, United States Asiatic Fleet (Hart) to the Chief of Naval Operations (Stark), Manila, November 13, 1940.

do with the Dutch attempt to hold on to their policy of neutrality during talks in Singapore on 10 July 1940. The Dutch were trying to figure out if the Netherlands Indies could remain neutral if Britain went into war in the Pacific. If Britain would get dragged into a war, and the Netherlands Indies would hold on to their neutrality, the Singapore Strait would have to be closed, according to Helfrich. These options were discussed in talks between the Van Starckenborgh and Helfrich on 13 July 1940.<sup>152</sup> However, it seems that by October the Dutch had abandoned their hesitancy. At this point in history it is unclear if the Americans were aware of the Dutch ambiguity since it was only discussed through internal Dutch communications.

Stark advised Roosevelt on 12 November 1940 to grant power of attorney to the representatives of the army and navy to immediately hold secret conferences with the British that could lead to final plans and agreements. He strongly stated that the Atlantic was the main area of operations and must remain so; the battle in the Pacific would never be waged at the expense of the Atlantic. Roosevelt endorsed this aim.<sup>153</sup> This opinion indicates an early step in the abandonment by the United States of their tradition of isolationist policy. The re-election of Roosevelt had made this possible.

#### *(Un)willingness to commit*

On 20 November 1940 a meeting between Furstner and the British First Sea Lord, Sir Dudley Pound, took place at the Admiralty. Pound seemed very reserved on the use of the fleet in the Netherlands Indies. He gave the impression that the value of the Dutch fleet was estimated too low for Britain to commit itself for support in case of a Netherlands Indies conflict with Japan. Pound noted that Britain had already committed itself to many agreements, which they had been unable to keep, to their regret. Now they had become more cautious and certainly would not take up more obligations unless it was certain that aid could actually be granted. He continued stating that it was better to lose territories in the Far East than to lose the British fleet in the main war fronts: Great Britain and the Mediterranean.<sup>154</sup> This must have

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<sup>152</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 3, 73.

<sup>153</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 4, 39.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibidem*, 50.

been a huge blow to the Dutch attitude towards the British. And also falls in place considering the diminishing British contact with the Dutch, out of fear to defy the Japanese. It does seem like an excuse; why did the British not want to talk 'military cooperation' with the Dutch? It appears that the British were first trying to organise support from the United States before committing to the Dutch.

From 11 to 14 January 1941 talks took place between Helfrich and Captain William R. Purnell of the United States Navy, which resulted in an agreement on exchange of liaison officers and intelligence. In addition, the establishment of safe communications was deemed necessary. Following these discussions Helfrich stated that it was expected that cooperation could be reached. This would first take form in the exchange of liaison officers between Manila and Batavia. The Dutch considered cooperation with the United States of great importance; the material support from Manila would be more effective for the defence of the Netherlands Indies than support from the British.<sup>155</sup> From the point of view of the Americans cooperation with the Netherlands Indies was also of great importance: 'conversations with the Dutch seem at least equally important because the Dutch have much the greater naval and air force available at the present'.<sup>156</sup> Thus cooperation between the United States and Netherlands Indies began to take shape, but all without political commitments: solely tentative agreements were made.

Now with some sort of agreement established with the Americans, Helfrich continued his efforts to persuade the British to cooperate. He met with the British Naval Liaison Officer in Batavia, Lieutenant Royal Navy V.R. Cooke on 18 January 1941. According to Helfrich, the talks so far had not resulted in anything remotely satisfying and at the moment there was a 'lack of prearranged action to be taken in the event of (a) An attack by Japan on the Malay Peninsula and Singapore. (b) An attack by Japan on the Netherlands East Indies'. He continued stating that 'without any reciprocal agreement between the two governments made in advance that each would automatically be at war in the event of (a) or (b), he would be unable to assist with the Netherlands Indies Fleet for some considerable time after (a) had taken

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<sup>155</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 5, 34-37.

<sup>156</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 8, Annex 9: The Commander in Chief, United States Asiatic Fleet (Hart) to the Chief of Naval Operations (Stark), Manila, November 13, 1940.



place.<sup>157</sup> In Helfrich's opinion time was of the essence. The Japanese would attack sooner or later and it was of the utmost importance to establish an alliance. Helfrich's forward approach to persuade the British into such an alliance did not work at that time. The British wanted to establish an understanding with the Americans before committing to the Dutch on military cooperation in the Pacific.

#### *The Dutch eagerness to commit*

Without formal agreements with any of the allied parties in the Far East, Helfrich formulated his core principles for the defence of the Netherlands Indies for discussions with Australia and Britain. He believed that the Dutch fleet needed to be concentrated at a central position within the Netherlands Indies. He thought it better to be strong with a few assets in one place, rather than to distribute these assets and to be weak everywhere.<sup>158</sup> His Chief of Staff, Van Staveren stipulated that preparation and cooperation were the most important means by which Japan could be defeated if it was committing an 'act of war'.<sup>159</sup> The Dutch were eager to commit, and they were also valued by their potential allies as a beneficial partner; the British General Head Quarters in Singapore had shown appreciation for the Dutch attendance at the upcoming conference by stating that 'The problem has received close study for many years by N.E.I. officers and most questions for discussions can be best framed by them'.<sup>160</sup>

On 11 and 12 February 1941 preliminary discussions were held between the Netherlands and Australia. It was during this conference that Helfrich found out that talks between the United States and Great Britain were being held in Washington. However he was kept completely ignorant of these talks.<sup>161</sup>

On 14 April 1941 the Van Starckenborgh indicated to the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs, Charles Welter, his opinion that where there seemed to be a reluctance on the part of the United Kingdom to commit to a formal agreement with the Netherlands Indies, it would not be appropriate to force the issue. An attack on

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<sup>157</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 5, 35.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibidem*, 79.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibidem*, 80.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibidem*, 81.

the Netherlands Indies would always be considered as touching the vital interests of Britain and Australia.<sup>162</sup>

### *The British viewpoint*

On 2 August 1941 the British were still not conclusive about their position regarding military cooperation with the Dutch. When Van Kleffens consulted about the British willingness to put their initiatives in writing he received the statement made by the British Secretary of State for War, A. Eden saying: 'We have already assumed the duty of safeguarding and restoring the possessions and rights of the Netherlands Government to the best of our ability during the war after peace. It follows therefore that an attack upon the Netherlands Indies would lead us to do the utmost in our power. We must, however, remain sole judge of what actions or military measures are predictable and likely to achieve our common purpose. Should the United States be disposed to take supporting action many things would become possible which we cannot undertake now.'<sup>163</sup> Statements like the above led to confusion amongst the Dutch politicians about the potential unwillingness of the British to commit themselves in writing.

A month later, on 5 September 1941 British government agreed to provide support to the Netherlands Indies in case of a Japanese attack. What this 'support' entailed remained unclear.<sup>164</sup> Although this was the first actual agreement made between the Netherlands and Britain, it was not what the Dutch had hoped for. The Japanese threat was increasing, and still, after months of deliberating on allied military cooperation, the result was indeed as Hull mentioned on 5 October 1940: meagre so far. Thus, the Dutch were very much in the same position as Australia and New Zealand, which were also kept in the dark regarding British support in case of a Japanese attack. This agreement was more committing than PLENAPS, because PLENAPS merely entailed that nations were 'responsible for seeking assistance from

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<sup>162</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 6, 43.

<sup>163</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 9, Annex 1: Message from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van Kleffens, to the Minister of Colonial Affairs, Londen, 2 Augustus 1941.

<sup>164</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, 129-130.

their neighbours'.<sup>165</sup> The understanding dated 5 September included an actual promise of support.

Hart informed the Navy Department on 27 October 1941 of a major change of his plans, exercising the latitude given to him by Stark on 11 September 1941. Hart would now keep the U.S. Asiatic Fleet together and operate from the Philippines, to his knowledge there had been no agreed plan for joined operations possible with the British and with the Dutch. It seems that Washington left this decision at his discretion but no specific approval for this change of plan was given.<sup>166</sup>

The British were faced with a similar problem as the Netherlands: they received hardly any commitment for support from the United States in case of war. Admiral Sir Thomas Phillips met with Hart and General Douglas MacArthur on 5 December 1941 in Manila under great secrecy. Hart agreed that if three British destroyers were to be despatched to Singapore, four American destroyers would be sent to Singapore from his small fleet in the event of war. That was as far as the American commitment went that day, no further reciprocal arrangements were made in case Britain was attacked.<sup>167</sup>

#### *British-Dutch cooperation*

The extent to which the Dutch were willing to cooperate with their allies in the defence of South East Asia is clearly documented in a 26 November 1941 letter by Furstner to the Dutch Minister of Colonial Affairs Pieter S. Gerbrandy, Van Kleffens and the Chairman of the Dutch Council of Ministers. In this letter Furstner emphasized the overriding importance of a unified Allied strategic and operational command and a willingness to put all Dutch naval forces under direct tactical control of the Commander-in-Chief Eastern Fleet after its arrival in the Netherlands Indies region, to serve but one purpose: the victory at sea.<sup>168</sup> Little did Furstner expect that the Eastern Fleet would be destroyed, by the sinking of the *PRINCE OF WALES* and

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<sup>165</sup> Cox, *Rising Sun, Falling Skies*, 36; Pfenningwerth, 'Missing Pieces', 61.

<sup>166</sup> Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory*, 210, 216-217.

<sup>167</sup> Bosscher, *Koninklijke Marine 2*, 125; David Thomas, *Battle of the Java Sea* (London 1968) 72-73.

<sup>168</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, Annex 29: Letter from the Minister of the Navy, Furstner to the Minister of Colonial Affairs.

the *REPULSE* within just two weeks. But what this letter, as well as Helfrich earlier overtures, shows that the Dutch were much more open to cooperation and forming a military alliance than has often been recognized.

On 6 December 1941 British Air Marshall, Sir Brooke Popham received a telegram from the War Office in London stating that in case of an attack on the Netherlands Indies the Americans would 'go to their defence'. It is not entirely clear if the Dutch were aware of this information at the time, but essential steps were taken towards the formation of a military alliance. On the same day Van Kleffens sent a memorandum of understanding on mutual defence of the allied territories in Southeast Asia, he had received from the British Permanent Under-Secretary Alexander Cadogan, to Queen Wilhelmina for approval. The understanding was restricted to Southeast Asia, only in case of Japanese aggression. Moreover, Van Kleffens stated that it would be a reciprocal agreement of the participants, the Netherlands, Australia, New Zealand and Great Britain.<sup>169</sup>

### *Challenge accepted*

It would not be long until the talks, at least between Britain and the United States, would accelerate. On 7 December 1941 Roosevelt had sent the Emperor of Japan Hirohito a personal note in which he pleaded that Japan would 'resume the friendship between the Japanese and the Americans for the sake of humanity and so prevent more death and destruction being let loose over the world'.<sup>170</sup> It was not a token of friendship, however, but an act of all out war that Japan delivered the United States. That morning, it pulverized the American Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbour. Van Starckenborgh responded immediately the next day, stating that 'the Dutch Government accepts this challenge and takes up arms against the Japanese Empire'.<sup>171</sup> Suddenly all the previous consultations between Britain, the United States, the Netherlands and Australia had been thrown in a new light.

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<sup>169</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, 128-130.

<sup>170</sup> Kroese, *The Dutch Navy*, 25; NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, 132.

<sup>171</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 10 and 10a, 135.

## ARCADIA

Entirely justifiable, the Dutch, as well as Australia and New Zealand, were very disappointed by their exclusion from the Washington Conference (22 December 1941 – 14 January 1942) where the United States and Britain had decided how ABDACOM should be established.<sup>172</sup> During this conference, a framework for allied military cooperation was finally created. Without consulting Australia or the Netherlands, the Americans and the British decided how to take up arms against Japan. Both the Americans and the British deemed it best that the British kept in contact with the Dutch and Australians, instead of including them in the talks.<sup>173</sup> Churchill stated at one point that 'If [the] Dutch have official status as members of the ABDA machine in Washington, Dominions will also demand representation resulting in confusion and delay'.<sup>174</sup> In addition, it was considered that it would take too much time to consult with the Dutch and Australians.<sup>175</sup> Thus it seems that the Anglo-American partners simply did not want any interference from other countries in their discussions.

The Washington Conference was presented in a White House Press Release as a preliminary conference 'to further conferences' between the United States, Britain and the Netherlands.<sup>176</sup> This appeared reasonable. But considering the Netherlands and Australia were also at great risk in the Pacific, these countries were of the opinion that they should have been consulted. Also time was running out, and the Japanese forces were advancing. But, as Willmott puts it: 'their [the Dutch] two more powerful friends regarded them as unwelcome intruders on their own private conversations'.<sup>177</sup> Besides, the Dutch government was already in exile in London, so

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<sup>172</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 261.

<sup>173</sup> The Secretary of the British Chiefs of Staff (Hollis) to the President's Special Assistant (Hopkins), Washington, January 5, 1942. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 303-304; Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 261.

<sup>174</sup> Draft Telegram From Prime Minister Churchill to Foreign Secretary Eden. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 305.

<sup>175</sup> Draft Memorandum by the United States Chiefs of Staff, Washington, December 30, 1941. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 287.

<sup>176</sup> White House Press Release, December 22, 1941. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 60.

<sup>177</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 268.

why not let the British confer with the Dutch, if and when the British deemed this necessary?<sup>178</sup>

This also applied to representatives from Australia and New Zealand.<sup>179</sup> It might have seemed convenient to the British and the Americans to keep the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand out of conversations in Washington to prevent loss of time, and confusion, but did it not lead to more confusion in the end, because consultation with the Dutch and Australians might have been of vital importance to defeat Japan? However, it is not at all unlikely that this would lead to more confusion. If more parties were added to the conversations, more attitudes had to be reckoned with. Therefore, it was simply easier for the Americans and the British to hold these conversations between themselves. In addition, it was also easier – between two parties – to enforce one’s opinion.

#### *Batavia, 18 December 1941*

Hart received instructions from the United States Navy Department on 11 December 1941, believing that the fall of the Philippines could not be prevented, to send his surface forces and submarines toward Darwin, Australia.<sup>180</sup> The Dutch authorities became only aware of the movement at the moment that the U.S. Asiatic Fleet was passing south through Netherlands Indies waters.<sup>181</sup> This was a very interesting move made by the United States: did the United States give up on the Philippines as early as 11 December 1941 and did they inform their allies?

As mentioned in the previous chapter, two conferences took place on 18 December 1941: one in Singapore and one in Batavia. In Batavia, Rear-Admiral Purnell, Helfrich and Van Staveren spoke about American ships passing through the Netherlands Indies, initially with Helfrich’s permission. Subsequently, Helfrich was not pleased with the American dislocation of their fleet, mostly because he was badly informed of the American ship movements, and the only information he did

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<sup>178</sup> Meeting of the United States and British Chiefs of Staff, December 30, 141, 3 P.M., Federal Reserve Building. United States Minutes. JCCS-6. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 142.

<sup>179</sup> Memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff, Washington, December 29, 1941. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 282.

<sup>180</sup> Leutze, *A Different Kind of Victory*, 236-237.

<sup>181</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

receive was from his own Naval Commander. Purnell apologized for the lack of clarity, also on Hart's behalf. Subsequently, Purnell suggested that the Eastern Part of the Indonesian Archipelago, contiguous to Australia, including Surabaya and Port Darwin as main bases, should act against Japan. Purnell suggested dividing the area in which the Netherlands and United States fleets operated. Moreover, he proposed that the Asiatic Fleet would remain under the command of the United States Navy, (the Chief of Naval Operations) in Washington. This would entail that both fleets would operate separately from each other. Helfrich begged to differ; he advocated a close cooperation under a single-headed command whereupon Purnell stated that the U.S. Asiatic Fleet would gain strategic control over the Eastern part of the Netherlands Indies waters. Subsequently, the Dutch would gain the strategic control over the Western part of the Netherlands Indies waters. Since Purnell had come to present this proposition as an accomplished fact, originating from the Chiefs of Staff in Washington, Helfrich left it at that.<sup>182</sup> But he disagreed. He thought it was best if both fleets would operate under one command. It can be assumed that the Americans preferred the strategic control in the Eastern part of the waters of the Indonesian Archipelago because it connected them directly to Port Darwin in Australia. Helfrich felt excluded from the strategic planning on the positioning of both the Netherlands and the American fleet. But at that time there was not much he could do about it.

In the report Helfrich wrote about his meeting with Purnell on 18 December 1941, he indicated his disappointment with the American opinion on dealing with the situation at hand.<sup>183</sup> Moreover, the dividing of the fleet commands – as presented by Purnell – was not included in the Duff Cooper Telegram, which stipulated that both the U.S. Task Force and local Dutch naval forces were to take immediate control of the Netherlands Indies waters.<sup>184</sup> The U.S. Task Force 5 was to

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<sup>182</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>183</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>184</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33; Letter from Admiral Helfrich to the Minister of the Navy in London, comments on "Abdacom" Official Account in the South-West Pacific Command, January – February 1942, of the General Staff India and in "Despatch on Operations in South-West Pacific January 15<sup>th</sup> – February 25<sup>th</sup> 1942" from General Sir Archibald Wavell, G.C.B. etcetera, 4 November 1942. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 34.

take control of the 'Celebes-Sourabaya area' and the Dutch naval surface forces were to take control of the 'West Java Sea'. British naval surface forces were responsible for the defence of the 'British Singapore Sunda line and defence of South Malaya and Malacca Straits'.<sup>185</sup> Helfrich's interpretation of the contents of the Duff Cooper Telegram might have been incomplete. But there is nothing in this telegram on the division of naval command of the allied naval forces in the areas in where they operated. Thus, it is not unreasonable that Helfrich was opposed to the American opinion.

### *ABDACOM*

Loudon was informed of the preliminary meetings held between the United States and Britain on 22 December 1941. Roosevelt explicitly mentioned to him that these talks would not immediately result in a final decision on action to be taken in the war in the Pacific. In addition, he implied he envisioned the establishment of two councils comprising the United States, Russia, China, the Netherlands and Britain.<sup>186</sup>

And so, finally, without further ado, the Dutch were presented with the establishment of the so-called ABDACOM on 29 December 1941.<sup>187</sup> Whereas the Dutch politicians viewed this as a draft version of the Allied unified strategy, they felt that they could still demand modifications of the plans that had been put in writing.<sup>188</sup> The establishment of ABDACOM, and its public announcement, marked the definitive change in the status quo of the Dutch tradition of neutrality in the Asian war theatre. This had already been put aside when the Dutch proclaimed war against Japan. But, as of 29 December, the Dutch were officially actively participating in the war against Japan, within a unified command, they had anticipated for so long. These topics will receive ample treatment in the next chapter.

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<sup>185</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>186</sup> Geheimecijfer from Washington, 23 December 1941. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>187</sup> Editorial Note. Meeting of President Roosevelt and the Netherlands Minister (Loudon), December 29, 1941, 12 noon, The White House. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 133.

<sup>188</sup> Geheimecijfer to Batavia. Message from Gerbrandy to the Governor General. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.



### *Conclusion*

As early as April 1940 the Dutch had expected a Japanese attack on the Netherlands Indies. Immediately, the United States responded that they would not allow a violent change of the status quo in Southeast Asia. Already in June 1940 the Dutch appealed to the Americans to prevent any changes in the status quo in the Pacific.

However, the Americans did not want to commit to any agreements with a remotely political nature, so no agreements could be made. Also, they were unwilling to put their military forces to the disposal of another country. The Americans regarded it a British task to confer with the Dutch, because they were already overrun in the European theatre, and the Dutch government was in exile in London. Also, it appeared that the Americans were not convinced that the Dutch were willing to commit to military and political cooperation, due to their tradition of neutrality. But it seems that this assumption (that has since also been appropriated by historians) was made on false grounds. The British were reluctant to come to an understanding with the Dutch. First they wanted to secure a guarantee from the Americans. Moreover, they wanted to make sure that the Dominions were in line with the British strategy. Most of all, the British reluctance in committing to an agreement with the Dutch was due to their await of American interest in a military and political commitment for cooperation to defeat Japan.

Evaluations and appraisals of the Dutch local knowledge and the vital importance of the Netherlands Indies appear to not have been of an important factor for the British and Americans to include the Dutch in their private conversations. Including the Dutch would take up too much time, and would lead to confusion. Moreover, if the Dutch were represented, Australia would demand a similar status. It appears that talks between the British and Americans were already confusing enough, so no third (or fourth) party could be included.

On the military level, the Dutch were faced with a similar problem. American Admirals carried out orders from Washington, and the Dutch were subjected to it. Helfrich was very frustrated concerning the talks with the Americans. According to him, the Americans did as they pleased without considering the interests of the other allied forces in the region. Moreover, Helfrich was irritated by the impression that the Americans had proposed to position their fleet as far as possible from the

active war theatre, where they could actively engage in convoying themselves. In addition, he was of the opinion that the Dutch fleet would not be placed under a unified command, but under the command of the Americans, for which the Dutch were to do the dirty work.

The exploration of maintaining the policy of neutrality has known a short history after the outbreak of war in the European theatre. There, the Dutch neutrality was forcibly given up on after the German invasion of the Netherlands, but a neutral status still applied to the Netherlands Indies. This, however, was largely a façade: the Dutch were actively looking for partners to form an alliance with, because sooner or later Japan would attack the Netherlands Indies, and the policy of neutrality would be dismissed anyway. Eventually, the Dutch abandoned their policy of neutrality before a Japanese attack on the Netherlands Indies, in order to show their commitment to their potential allies, Britain and the United States. But this did not result in a more *equal* position of the Dutch in the view of the Americans and the British. ABDACOM was presented to the Dutch as a *fait accompli*.

There is no indication in the sources consulted that keeping the Dutch out of the decision making process had anything to do with their pre-war neutrality stance. At best it could be argued that it was convenient that the Dutch government (in-exile) was located in London and it could be left to the British to consult with them there. This resulted in poor inter-allied communications and the Dutch voice not being heard where it mattered.

The next chapter will elaborate on these altercations and the Dutch perspective on the Anglo-American war plan, presented as a *fait accompli* to the Dutch.

## Chapter 4: Dutch influence on operational decision-making after the establishment of ABDACOM

### *Introduction*

This chapter will discuss the Dutch attitude towards the establishment of the ABDACOM as a *fait accompli*. It will also provide an extensive analysis on the Dutch dealings on the political level during the period that ABDACOM was active. Much attention will be given to the *unequal* position that had been handed to the Dutch in the *ABDACOM agreement*. The Dutch alterations to this agreement and proposals for councils and bodies in which they would be granted an equal position formed an important part of Dutch diplomatic activity during the short period of ABDACOM's existence. In addition, the military (lack of) cooperation and the *reinforcement issue* are discussed to complete the picture of the Dutch position amongst their partners in ABDACOM in action. This chapter is based solely on primary sources: the *Marine Monografieën*, documents made available by the *Foreign Relations of the United States* and documentation provided by the National Archives such as the personal archives of Admiral Helfrich, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs archive and the archive of the Ministry of Colonies.

### *The public announcement*

No record has been found of the discussion between Roosevelt and Loudon regarding the 'agreement' on the ABDA Command on 29 December 1941, according to the papers concerning the Washington Conference made available by the FRUS.<sup>189</sup> This 'agreement' comprised of the Document No. 1: *Instructions to General Wavell*, Annex 1: *Boundaries of the ABDA Area* and Annex II: *The Higher Direction of War in the ABDA Area*.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Editorial Note. Meeting of President Roosevelt and the Netherlands Minister (Loudon), December 29, 1941, 12 noon, The White House. FRUS, The First Washington Conference, 133.

<sup>190</sup> The Under Secretary of State (Welles) to the President, Washington, January 5, 1942. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 306-307; Higher Direction of War in the ABDA Area, December 30, 1941. FRUS, The First Washington Conference, 288.

After careful consideration of the agreement on the unified command the Dutch delegation concluded that they would only agree to the ABDACOM agreement if Annex II would be revised. Van Starckenborgh emphasized that the Dutch could only accept if all participants would be considered *equal* partners, and all participants would be *equally* represented in the bodies that were to be created to discuss the political, strategic and military matters. He also stressed that the extent to which armed forces were to be despatched at the discretion of their national command, should be duly agreed upon in advance.<sup>191</sup> But before the Dutch were able to pass on the adjustments they deemed necessary on Annex II, or had even agreed upon the establishment of the ABDACOM, a public announcement was made by the B.B.C. on 3 January 1942 that a unified allied command in the Pacific had been founded comprising of the United States, Great Britain, Australia and the Netherlands.<sup>192</sup> The Dutch were furious about this public announcement being made without being consulted. As they already felt passed by in the whole decision-making process of the creation of the command, this event made the Dutch feel even more disregarded and underappreciated.

During talks between Loudon and Hull on 2 February 1942 it was indicated that it was the White House that had made the decision to announce the establishment of the ABDACOM without prior consulting with the Dutch on this matter.<sup>193</sup>

#### *Annex II: the Higher Direction of unequal partnership*

As of 3 January 1942 the ABDACOM was an accomplished fact, and the Dutch had not been able to exert any influence. Or at least not yet. The Dutch politicians were very unsatisfied with the content of Annex II and were determined to see this changed. They objected specifically to the unequal position awarded to the Dutch

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<sup>191</sup> Geheimecijfer Batavia from Van Starckenborgh, 1 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>192</sup> Geheimecijfer to Washington from Van Kleffens. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128; Following for Prime Minister from Foreign Secretary, 4 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>193</sup> Geheimecijfer to Washington from Van Kleffens to Michiels van Verduynen, 3 Februari 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

within ABDACOM. Annex II made clear that ABDACOM was an Anglo-American project in which no other party could exert any influence.

The Dutch did approve 'in general lines' Document No. 1: *Instructions to General Wavell*, and Annex 1: *Boundaries of the ABDA Area*.<sup>194</sup> *The Higher Direction of War in the ABDA Area* dated 30 December 1941, better known as Annex II, along with the modifications the Dutch desired, were sent to the Under Secretary of State, B.S. Welles, in the first week of January 1942. The Dutch wanted to be acknowledged as an equal partner within ABDACOM. Annex II and the Dutch demands for modification are reflected in appendix 1.

To some extent these changes were accepted by both the American and British Chiefs of Staff, but not all, which led to great disappointment amongst the Dutch politicians handling the matter. The revised version of Annex II, the British and Americans had proposed to the Dutch, did not include the suggested alterations 'and Dutch' in paragraph 1; 'acting together' in paragraph 1 and; 'and Dutch' in paragraph 2.a. In paragraph 3 '... for obtaining their views and agreement *at every stage* and for including these...'<sup>195</sup> Eventually the Annex II-discussion would be resolved with the creation of the Pacific Council on 11 February 1942.<sup>196</sup> This will be discussed later on in this chapter.

Van Starckenborgh, presented another Dutch concern; he stressed that a joint body should be created 'in which all participants would be directly represented' to which the Supreme Commander was accountable.<sup>197</sup> In this case the Supreme Commander would not be able to decide on matters at his own discretion.

Van Kleffens had shared the Dutch frustration on the slightly revised version of Annex II, emphasising the non-including of 'and the Dutch Chief of Staff' in paragraph 2.c with Eden on 9 January 1942. Eden replied that if the Dutch were included, Australia would feel left out and would request similar action to be taken on their behalf, to which Van Kleffens responded that the Australians were not even

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<sup>194</sup> The Under Secretary of State (Welles) to the President, Washington, January 5, 1942. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 306-307.

<sup>195</sup> Revised Draft of Annex 2 to ABC-4/5, WW-3 (Final), January 5, 1942. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 311.

<sup>196</sup> Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van Kleffens to the Minister of the Navy, Furstner, 11 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>197</sup> Netherlands Legation Memorandum. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 309-310.

considered to be part of the ABDA area, so that should not be a problem for including the Dutch anyway. But according to Eden the Australians were in fact in support of the ABDA area, so the Dutch request could not be accepted.<sup>198</sup> For the Dutch this conversation was not what they had expected, particularly because they had been taking part in talks and conferences about the situation in the Pacific ever since mid-1940 so on 8 January 1942 they were still under the impression that their approval was essential for the final agreement on the establishment of ABDACOM.<sup>199</sup> Clearly the Americans and British disagreed: ABDACOM was presented to the Dutch and Australians as a *fait accompli*, and this would remain so.

On 9 January 1942 Roosevelt proposed to Marshall to look over the list of Dutch requests for arms 'and make some releases to them, even though they be very modest' to let the Dutch believe that 'we are going to do everything we possibly can for them'.<sup>200</sup> Roosevelt was aware of his superior position relative to the Dutch and if they would just give them some of what they needed, the Dutch might not make too big of a problem of Annex II.

The above indicates that the planning body was indeed an Anglo-American arranged project in which the Dutch were given no say. They were to do as their superiors told them. In fact, the only argument given in support of excluding the Dutch from having their Chief of Staff participate in ABDACOM, together with the British and American Chiefs of Staff, was that Australia would feel left out. Clearly both the Dutch and the Australians were left out of all the important discussions and finalizing of agreements.

The Australians too were quite unhappy with their exclusion. The first secretary of the Australian Legation in Washington, Alan Watt expressed his grave concerns regarding the understandings on which ABDACOM was based. He stated that the Allied efforts in the war against Japan were insufficient and he believed that the Dutch and Australians should be having a 'direct voice' in the matter, '*before*

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<sup>198</sup> Geheimcijfer from Washington to Van Kleffens, 9 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 133; The Ambassador in the United Kingdom (Winant) to the Secretary of State, London, January 9, 1942. FRUS, The First Washington Conference, 312-313.

<sup>199</sup> Geheimcijfer to Batavia from Gerbrandy, 8 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>200</sup> The President to the Chief of Staff, United States Army (Marshall), Washington, January 9, 1942. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 313.

decisions on policy are reached'. He continued arguing that due to the exclusion of these countries at Washington, neither was informed of agreements made which led to inadequate decision-making on the whole.<sup>201</sup>

#### *Re-visions and re-re-visions*

The Dutch did not intend to leave Annex II as presented at first. They felt that they had too much at stake and too much invested in ABDACOM to be left out of any decision-making regarding their interests. So they moved into another direction in order to secure for themselves an equal partnership with the existing ruling parties in order to make sure that the backbone of the Allied defence, the Netherlands Indies, would be equally, or at least appropriately, represented.

It seems that the discussion on Annex II and the American attitude towards the Dutch in this matter, in combination with the stiff nature of Dutch-American naval cooperation on matters of war, provided an incentive for the Dutch to seek support from the British. The British position in ABDACOM had equally diminished because of major naval losses in the early phase of the war in the Pacific. The British promised to revise Annex II again on 22 January 1942 after Gerbrandy, Furstner and Van Kleffens made a visit to the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet.<sup>202</sup> Then it was agreed that the British and the Dutch would work together on formulating a new document that would replace Annex II.<sup>203</sup>

#### *London and/or Washington*

During talks, that took place on 22 January 1942 Michiels van Verduynen proposed two councils based on an earlier idea brought up by Churchill.<sup>204</sup> Roosevelt had also proposed a similar framework for the creation of two bodies mid-December 1941.<sup>205</sup> The first, the Far Eastern Council, based in London, would be a political council and

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<sup>201</sup> Memorandum of Conversations, by Mr. Stewart of the Division of European Affairs. [Washington] January 12, 1942. 740.0011 PW/1576½. FRUS, The First Washington Conference, 321-325.

<sup>202</sup> Geheimcijfer to Washington from Van Kleffens, 22 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>203</sup> Report of events from 16 January 1942 until 24 January 1942, 24 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>204</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>205</sup> Geheimcijfer from Washington, 23 December 1941. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

would be comprised of British, Dutch, Australian and New Zealand representatives. The second body would be designed as a Chiefs of Staff Committee (COSC), comprised of the same countries that would take part in the Far Eastern Council. The COSC would be responsible for tactical planning outside of the jurisdiction of the Supreme Commander. In addition, the COSC would be an advisory council to the existing platform in Washington on matters related to the war in the Far East. If Washington would disapprove on a matter, the representatives in London would reconsider and report to Washington on the final decision. Washington would then instruct Wavell.<sup>206</sup>

Although it was initially an idea of Roosevelt, the Dutch embraced it and adapted it to their convenience. In the proposition for these two councils, there is no mention of the Americans taking part in the strategic planning and decision-making. Washington was only allowed to give input on ideas submitted and was subsequently responsible for the communication of these plans to Wavell. Within this concept, the Dutch would have been able to increase their influence while shunting off the American influence.

Not all Dutch authorities were excited about the idea. Loudon warned that this might possibly bring the Dutch in the midst of an already existing power struggle between the United States and Britain.<sup>207</sup> This might have an inconvenient outcome for the Dutch, because of the Australian preference to work more closely with the Americans, for the very reason that Britain was exerting too much influence on the Commonwealth territories. So for the Dutch this could result in a deterioration of the relations with Australia.

Michiels van Verduynen did not agree; he emphasized that the Dutch would not be used as pawns in the struggle of power between the two superpowers, but would actually take control of a situation they had been shut out of since the beginning. He also referred to the close contacts that had been kept with the

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<sup>206</sup> Report of events from 16 January 1942 until 24 January 1942, 24 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>207</sup> Geheimcijfer to Washington from Loudon, 25 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.



Australian Commissioner, believing that the Dutch friendship with Australia was such that the Dutch should not worry about this.<sup>208</sup>

The Dutch policy of neutrality was already given up when the Dutch proclaimed the war against Japan on 8 December 1941. However, the earlier Dutch policy of neutrality and their limited defence capability had an effect on the appreciation of the Dutch from the standpoint of the Americans and the British. Moreover, the Dutch and Australians were both excluded from the decision-making process, probably because it was already hard enough between the Americans and British to come to an agreement.

Unfortunately for Michiels van Verduynen, things did not work out as he had hoped. When he met with Eden later that week he was told that Australia and New Zealand would not go through with the Dutch plans to base the two bodies in London. Both countries had suggested that the Far Eastern Council was to be placed in Washington, so the British would not be in total control of the decision-making process. Eden concluded, that he had already sent these propositions to Washington.<sup>209</sup> It could have been expected that Australia and New Zealand would be opposed to positioning the Far Eastern Council in London, since they had disliked Churchill's abundant influence over the Commonwealth territories.<sup>210</sup>

### *Change of plans*

The Dutch had initially planned to place both bodies in London to restrict American influence to the examination and sending out of instructions to the Supreme Commander but a statement made by Churchill in the House of Commons put a spoke in the wheels. Churchill suggested that a Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee should be created, comprising of three United States Chiefs of Staff, three high officers representing and acting under the general instructions of the British Chiefs of Staff, placed in Washington. This body 'shall, of course, also remain in the closest touch with one another on all important questions of policy'. By *one another*, the

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<sup>208</sup> Geheimcijfer to Washington from Michiels, 28 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>209</sup> Geheimcijfer to Washington from Michiels, 29 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>210</sup> Telegram from the Governor General to the Minister of Colonies, 10 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Colonies / London, 2.10.45, inv.no. 133; NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 90-91.

British, Dutch, Australian and, New Zealand representatives were referred to. The Pacific Council, the replacement of the Far Eastern Council, would be based in London, and be comprised of British, Dutch, Australian, and New Zealand representatives. Within the Pacific Council these countries would form a planning body acting as a whole, and subsequently sent these plans to the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington where the final decision-making would take place.<sup>211</sup> Again the Dutch were sidelined, the finalizing of agreements remained within the Anglo-American power monopoly.

The Dutch did not appreciate Churchill's change of plans, and soon came up with a new course of action: in preparation for talks between Gerbrandy, Michiels van Verduynen, Churchill and Eden, the Dutch focus would be on obtaining the acknowledgement of 'full partnership', and guaranteeing representation where other partners were also represented in both military and political matters. They also wanted to stipulate that no decisions would be made, not even in the final stages, without consulting the Dutch. Furthermore, Gerbrandy advocated situating the Pacific Council in Washington so that the British would not be able to overshadow Dutch opinions on what needed to be done.<sup>212</sup> Van Mook also believed it was best for the Pacific Council to be situated in Washington, because the Americans were of the utmost importance for sending reinforcements to the Netherlands Indies.<sup>213</sup> The United States was in fact the only ally in ABDACOM still capable of sending substantial reinforcements at that point.

Loudon believed it was for the best if the Netherlands were represented in both Washington and London. This was first of all required in order to not give the Americans the impression that the Dutch were only looking at the British for friendship and support. Secondly, this was important because he believed that ultimately, the final decision-making took place in Washington. So that was were the

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<sup>211</sup> Report of events from 16 January 1942 until 24 January 1942, 24 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128; Geheimecijfer Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 29 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128; Statement made by Churchill in the House of Commons. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>212</sup> Geheimecijfer Batavia from Gerbrandy, 30 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128

<sup>213</sup> Geheimecijfer Washington from Loudon, 31 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128

Dutch had to be. In his opinion, the Dutch would have to make sure that they were placed within the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington, since this body met on a day-to-day basis and spoke about all matters concerning the war in the Pacific.<sup>214</sup>

Gerbrandy, Furstner, Michiels van Verduynen and Minister of Commerce, Industry and Shipping, Piet Kerstens finally agreed upon proposing the Pacific Council to be placed in London for the following reason: the Dutch would not be able to leave London because it would be 'practically impossible', for the Dutch to have 'adequate representation in Washington unless the most important of us go over there'. The Dutch also demanded Dutch representation in Washington 'with the Chiefs of Staff Committee and Supply Organisation guarantees our closest contact and gives us certainty that our wishes, after being expressed to and considered by Churchill, will also be heard in Washington'.<sup>215</sup>

#### *Equal representation*

On 4 February 1942 during talks between Gerbrandy, Michiels van Verduynen, Furstner, Kerstens, Eden and Churchill it was agreed that the Dutch would be represented in a political body in London, and also in a planning commission and the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Moreover, it was settled that a Dutch representative would be present in the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington whenever the situation in the Pacific was to be discussed. For the Dutch, these agreements mended the earlier objections to Annex II.<sup>216</sup>

The discussion on where to set up the Pacific Council carried on until the official establishment on 9 February 1942 in London.<sup>217</sup> Mid-February 1942 the Dutch were finally granted representation in the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington as an equal partner.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Geheimcijfer Washington from Loudon, 31 January 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128

<sup>215</sup> Geheimcijfer for Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 4 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128

<sup>216</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>217</sup> 'First Talks by Pacific War Council', *The Argus*, (10 February 1942), 3. Source: <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/8232181> retrieved on 28-05-2016; Letter from the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Van Kleffens to the Minister of the Navy, Furstner, 11 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128.

<sup>218</sup> Geheimcijfer for Washington from Michiels, 17 Februari 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128

Even though the Dutch were now *equal partners*, cooperation did not go as they had hoped. Loudon asked Michiels van Verduynen to urge the members of the British Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Sir Charles Little and Field Marshall Sir John Dill to not decide on any Dutch matters with the Americans without consulting the Dutch.<sup>219</sup> This was highly frustrating for the Dutch; less than a week before this message the Dutch were granted an equal position in the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington and still they were left out of any crucial decision-making by the United States and Britain.<sup>220</sup>

But it was already too late for the Dutch to achieve their goal through the bodies they had now been accepted in. The fall of Singapore on 15 February 1942 marked a turning point in allied strategy in the Pacific. Both the United States and Britain were willing to accept the loss of Java. The British had shifted their focus on safeguarding Australia, Burma and Ceylon. Especially Burma was considered of vital importance to maintain the communication lines with China. Therefore Churchill decided to 'not defend the Dutch East Indies' anymore. Roosevelt sided with Churchill on the matter; Burma and Australia were now considered as the two flanks that needed to be defended.<sup>221</sup>

This was not communicated with the Dutch politicians in London or Washington, and certainly not with Helfrich, who was requesting reinforcements from the Americans almost every single day throughout February 1942.<sup>222</sup>

#### *Under American command*

The politicians were worried about the formal channels, but meanwhile, Japan was advancing in a tearing rush to conquer the Far Eastern territories. Whereas the Dutch politicians in London were worried if they had an equal status amongst the other participants of ABDACOM, and moreover if they were even heard in the decision-making on the whole, the Dutch military were faced with the consequences

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<sup>219</sup> Message from Loudon to Michiels van Verduynen, 19 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>220</sup> Geheimcijfer aan Washington van Michiels van Verduynen, 17 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1128

<sup>221</sup> Gilbert, *Churchill: Road to Victory II*, 60; Eisenhower, *The Papers I*, 126; Pfenningwerth, 'Missing Pieces', 66.

<sup>222</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 101, 114, 119, 121-122, 124, 162-163, 182, 191, 203, 220, 246, 269, 276-277, 283-284, 289, 290, 297, 299.

of the Dutch unequal status in the political arena. Helfrich in particular was very worried about the (lack of) cooperation, especially on the subject of reinforcements, between the allied forces.

The relationship between the Dutch and American naval forces in the Pacific theatre did not go off on a good start. Already as early as 8 December 1941 the U.S. Pacific Fleet was considered as only convoying military 'reinforcements' and therefore did not add any value to the present allied naval forces at all.<sup>223</sup>

On 3 January 1942 Helfrich stressed that Hart should 'make more intensive use of American submarines operating from Sourabaya'. Helfrich also put in the urgent request that Hart should send more forces for the defence of not only the Netherlands Indies mainland (Java, Sumatra etc.) but also for the defence of the Borneo oilfields. If those were lost, he emphasized, 'the use of Australia as a basis would encounter very great difficulties in view of the fact that then all oil supplies would have to be shipped to Australia via a long and very hazardous sea route.'<sup>224</sup> On 31 December 1941 Stark had stressed that the establishment of Hart's main base in Port Darwin would not affect the cooperation with the Dutch in the Netherlands Indies in a negative way.<sup>225</sup> During the time that Hart was ABDAFLOAT, continuous reports by Helfrich stated that the Asiatic Fleet was performing unsatisfactory and lacked offensive action. The only way he could stay up to date with the movements of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet was through his own Naval Captain Van der Kun, placed in the ABDAFLOAT Staff.<sup>226</sup>

From the beginning of ABDACOM Helfrich placed the blame of the cumbersome cooperation in the Pacific: 'talks are held between incompetent and ignorant people, thus Japan remains master of sea and air'.<sup>227</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> Thomas, *Java Sea*, 62-66.

<sup>224</sup> The Under Secretary of State (Welles) to the President. Washington, January 5, 1942. 740.0011 Pacific War/1994A. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 308-309.

<sup>225</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 68.

<sup>226</sup> Letter from Admiral Helfrich to the Minister of the Navy in London, comments on "Abdacom" Official Account in the South-West Pacific Command, January – February 1942, of the General Staff India and in "Despatch on Operations in South-West Pacific January 15<sup>th</sup> – February 25<sup>th</sup> 1942" from General Sir Archibald Wavell, G.C.B. etcetera, 4 November 1942. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 34.

<sup>227</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 68-69.

Already as early as 2 January 1942 American and British reinforcement destined for the Netherlands Indies arrived later than expected, due to the loss of British battleships and the 'inactivity' of the U.S. fleet centred in the Port Darwin area.<sup>228</sup> The lack of clarity on how cooperation between the allied forces would take place frustrated Helfrich greatly, but he was even more stupefied after he was notified of the appointment of Layton as the new Commander in Chief Eastern Fleet, which would not operate under the command of Wavell, but act independently. The Australian and New Zealand naval forces were also excluded from Wavell's command. According to Helfrich only the Dutch were under the de facto command of an American Admiral.<sup>229</sup> This did not fit the agreements made within the ABDACOM and gave the impression, at least to the Dutch, that they were in fact not placed under ABDACOM command but under the command of the Americans.

*"Reinforcements are on their way"*

On 11 January 1942 the situation in the ABDA Area was considered critical and both the British and the Americans found it necessary to send reinforcements as soon as possible. During this discussion the question was raised if Singapore was in immediate danger and if troops located in the Atlantic theatre could come to the aid of Singapore before the Japanese would launch an attack. Stark recommended the despatch of more American troops to be sent to the ABDA area: 'If Singapore and the Philippines were captured by the Japanese, they would be free to bring their whole weight to bear on the Netherlands East Indies'.<sup>230</sup> No agreement was made on sending reinforcements; it was submitted to British and American shipping experts for examination.<sup>231</sup> The postponement of sending reinforcements can be regarded as a highly dangerous calculated risk since the *Appreciation of the Naval Situation in the A.B.D.A. AREA on 11<sup>th</sup> January 1942* indicated an expected attack of Japan on oilfields in the Netherlands Indies.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 74, 76.

<sup>229</sup> Ibidem, 87-88.

<sup>230</sup> Meeting of the United States and British Chiefs of Staff. Sunday, January 11, 1942. JCCSs-9. FRUS: The First Washington Conference, 175-176.

<sup>231</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>232</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

On 12 January 1942 Hart presented the *Brief Appreciation* to Helfrich, which stated that the 'Allied Naval Force in the Far East lacks the immediate support of a strong United States Pacific or British Eastern Fleet and has no immediate prospect of reinforcements'.<sup>233</sup> No notable reinforcements were sent, even though many requests were submitted by Helfrich throughout January and February 1942.<sup>234</sup>

#### *The departure of Admiral Hart*

Helfrich had expressed his wish to take over Hart's position as acting ABDAFLOAT as early as 3 January 1942.<sup>235</sup> He communicated this with Furstner and Gerbrandy on 14 January 1942 criticising the 'absurd command' of ABDAFLOAT under Hart.<sup>236</sup> Van Mook adhered to Helfrich emphasizing Hart's 'disappointing ability' to actively assert leadership as ABDAFLOAT. He regarded the placement of Helfrich outside of the ABDACOM head quarters in a non-strategic function as a big mistake.<sup>237</sup> On 24 January 1942 rumours had already spread that Hart might resign soon and this did not go unnoticed by Helfrich.<sup>238</sup>

On 4 February 1942 the U.S. Asiatic Fleet ceased to exist as an organized unity. Formally the Asiatic Fleet was not abolished; units would be assigned to the South West Pacific Force. Hart resigned as Commander in Chief of the Asiatic Fleet, but remained ABDAFLOAT.<sup>239</sup> Subsequently, Hart resigned as ABDAFLOAT on 14 February 1942. Helfrich was informed of this on 6 February 1942.<sup>240</sup> On 12 February Helfrich was appointed ABDAFLOAT.<sup>241</sup> Maybe now he could change the naval strategy in the Pacific, especially after the establishment of the Combined Striking

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<sup>233</sup> Report of the conversations held on 18 and 22 December 1941, and on 4 January 1942 at Batavia. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 33.

<sup>234</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 101, 114, 119, 121-122, 124, 162-163, 182, 191, 203, 220, 246, 269, 276-277, 283-284, 289, 290, 297, 299; Message from Loudon to Michiels van Verduynen, 23 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152. Geheimcijfer for Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 24 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>235</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 76.

<sup>236</sup> Ibidem, 103-104.

<sup>237</sup> Ibidem, 121-122.

<sup>238</sup> Ibidem, 129.

<sup>239</sup> Ibidem, 169.

<sup>240</sup> Ibidem, 182.

<sup>241</sup> Ibidem, 207.

Force on 1 February 1942 under the command of Rear Admiral Karel Doorman.<sup>242</sup> Helfrich had always been a great supporter of bringing both the Dutch and the American fleets under a centralized single-headed command.<sup>243</sup>

### *Reinforcements denied*

Again, on 8 February, it was expected that reinforcements would arrive later than promised and on 18 February ABDACOM showed the first sign that, after the fall of Singapore; it had possibly accepted the loss of Java even before it had taken place. A message was sent by ABDACOM to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that a 'successful defence of Java was extremely doubtful'.<sup>244</sup> Helfrich started to suspect something was up with these so-called reinforcements meant for the Netherlands Indies: 'allied troops and other reinforcements could, I repeat, could come on time, but are not forthcoming in expectation of other destination, which is regrettable and incomprehensible'.<sup>245</sup> Moreover, he was under the impression that Australia was withholding fighters originated from the United States meant for the Netherlands Indies.<sup>246</sup> The Dutch were even investigating if the Americans were withholding reinforcements destined for the Netherlands Indies.<sup>247</sup>

On 22 February 1942 Queen Wilhelmina even sent a personal message to Roosevelt, pleading for American reinforcements and support. She addressed him as 'ally and great friend of my country' urging him to sent 'immediate assistance' because together they would be able to change the whole situation in the Far East.<sup>248</sup> Roosevelt responded a few days later stating that reinforcements were on their way. He also shared his respect for the effort the Dutch troops had put in the fights that had already taken place.<sup>249</sup> Her Majesty's personal appeal to Roosevelt seemed to have had its effect.

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<sup>242</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 154.

<sup>243</sup> Willmott, *Empires in the Balance*, 293-294.

<sup>244</sup> Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 191, 246.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibidem*, 269.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibidem*, 269.

<sup>247</sup> Geheimcijfer Washington from Loudon, 24 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>248</sup> Queen Wilhelmina to President Roosevelt, 22 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>249</sup> Message to Her Majesty Queen Wilhelmina from President Roosevelt, 27 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.



### *Losing hope*

But by 23 February 1942 Loudon had lost all hope in receiving supporting troops for the Netherlands Indies: 'despite all semblance of continuous cooperation, the Americans, have, whether or not in mutual agreement with the British, given up on [the defence of] Java'. Loudon forbade Michiels van Verduynen to forward this message to Van Starckenborgh. In order to not give the impression that the Netherlands Indies had indeed been given up on.<sup>250</sup> But Loudon was right. The Americans and British had already accepted the loss of the Netherlands Indies.

The next day, Michiels van Verduynen informed the Dutch delegation in Washington on the current status of the reinforcements that the Netherlands Indies was not receiving. He stated that 'every day' the American navy was asked to participate more actively and also the British were, again, asked to send reinforcements. Whereupon Churchill replied that his cruisers were in a declining state.<sup>251</sup>

Less than a week before the Battle of the Java Sea, on 23 February 1942 Dutch Naval Attaché in Washington sent a message to Furstner regarding the content of the Chief of Staff meeting to be held on 24 February. This meeting would discuss the possibility of dividing the ABDACOM area in two spheres: the Indian Ocean (the British sphere) and the Pacific Ocean (the American sphere). The Dutch opposed; this would mean that the Netherlands Indies would be split in between the two spheres. Moreover, the Dutch would not be able to count on support from either the United States or Australia.<sup>252</sup>

Van Mook had sensed that something was unsound about the American and British stance on sending reinforcements to the Netherlands Indies. But Marshall reassured him, on 24 February that the Combined Chiefs of Staff did not 'contemplate abandonment of the fight in the ABDA area'.<sup>253</sup> Taken literally, there was nothing wrong with this statement; it was not the Chiefs of Staff that had

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<sup>250</sup> Message from Loudon to Michiels van Verduynen, 23 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>251</sup> Geheimecijfer for Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 24 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>252</sup> NIMH, Marine Monografieën, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 284.

<sup>253</sup> Eisenhower, *The Papers I*, 129.

decided to give up on the Netherlands Indies but the leading politicians of both countries.

### *The indomitable Dutch*

Marshall stressed that the reason for dissolving ABDACOM was that the remaining ABDA territories consisted of solely of the Netherlands Indies; therefore it was decided to be entirely placed under Dutch command.<sup>254</sup> Hardly any support came at all. And just days before the Netherlands Indies would be defeated by Japan; the British did have the decency to telegraph Furstner that 'nothing would be taken out of the NEI'. Also, Australia had informed the Dutch that no troops from Australia were to be despatched to the Netherlands Indies in the near future.<sup>255</sup>

This must have upset Helfrich so much that he sent a forward and very blunt message to the Chiefs of Staff in London, which was redirected to the Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington. Hereupon the Dutch Naval Attaché in Washington sent a telegram to Furstner on Helfrich's foul language: 'what made the British chuckle, yet irritated the Americans', emphasizing that it was not in the best interest of vital cooperation with the Americans and the British to insult them. He concluded that Helfrich should be made aware of the urgency to keep further communication 'tactful' and respectful.<sup>256</sup>

Michiels van Verduynen had received a telegram from the War Cabinet, stating that the Combined Chiefs of Staff had decided that they did not want to announce the dissolution of ABDACOM right away (on 25 February 1942) because they did not want to give Japan the impression that the allied forces had given up on the Netherlands Indies.<sup>257</sup> But was this not exactly what they, the Americans and British, had already done a week before, which had been confirmed by dissolving ABDACOM and sending no (substantial) reinforcements whatsoever? The decision did probably not bring Japan in an even more advanced position but this diplomatic support was not even close to what the Netherlands Indies needed from their allies.

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<sup>254</sup> Eisenhower, *The Papers I*, 129.

<sup>255</sup> NIMH, *Marine Monografieën*, Volume IV, Chapter 14, 297.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibidem*, 299-300.

<sup>257</sup> Message from the War Cabinet addressed to Michiels van Verduynen. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

On 26 February 1942 Michiels van Verduynen concluded that the British in fact had nothing left to support the Netherlands Indies with, except for an aircraft carrier. Again the Americans and the Australians were asked to send their supporting troops.<sup>258</sup> On 27 February 1942 Gerbrandy sent a telegram to Van Starckenborgh stating that ABDACOM would not be dissolved after the departure of Wavell, the Head Quarters in the Netherlands Indies would take over his command, the support for the Netherlands Indies by 'practicable means' would remain unchanged.<sup>259</sup> But he was also sceptical on retrieving reinforcements originating from the United States.<sup>260</sup> The Dutch would continue fighting, 'regardless of the action that will be undertaken by the others'; even though neither Churchill nor Roosevelt showed any signs of sending political or military support.<sup>261</sup> Even after the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942 had been lost and the Netherlands Indies was struggling against the Japanese troops in the Archipelago, uncertainty remained on the despatch of American troops [on 3 March 1942].<sup>262</sup>

In retrospect Helfrich's personal archive that is kept at the National Archives in The Hague shows his views on ABDACOM and the mistakes that were made during the short lifetime of ABDACOM. In a letter he sent to the former Minister of Colonial Affairs, Welter, he stated that ABDACOM was 'crafted' by the Americans and British; the Dutch were not allowed to play a notable part in any military or political decision-making.<sup>263</sup> Moreover he was furious about the giving up of Java by the British (and Americans):<sup>264</sup>

'Time will tell, how much the little Dutch fleet has achieved, since 1939, and even more since May 1940, cumulating in the unequal

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<sup>258</sup> Geheimecijfer to Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 26 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>259</sup> Message from Gerbrandy to the Governor of Bandung, 27 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>260</sup> Letter from Gerbrandy to the Governor in Bandung, 25 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>261</sup> Geheimecijfer for Washington from Michiels van Verduynen, 24 February 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>262</sup> Message from Loudon to Van Kleffens, 3 March 1942. NL-HaNA, Foreign Affairs / London Archive, 2.05.80, inv.no. 1152.

<sup>263</sup> Letter from Admiral Helfrich to Welter, 29 October 1942, Colombo. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 34.

<sup>264</sup> Ibidem.

battle against Japan, in which we – frankly – were deceived by our own allies. History will tell, how much the Dutch naval and air forces had been put in the service of the British, than the other way around. The political and military leaders shall soon realize, how incredibly stupid it was to give up on Java, even after the fall of Singapore.’

Helfrich was also astonished by the fact that it took three weeks after its establishment for ABDACOM to sent out instructions on how the allies would operate against Japan.<sup>265</sup>

Helfrich blamed the Americans for the defeat of ABDACOM. First of all because of their late preparation of command, cumbersome cooperation, and the dislocation and use of all allied naval forces. Secondly, he blamed the absence of the U.S. Asiatic Fleet and its positioning too far south, of Port Darwin, in the ABDA area. Finally he blamed the commanders, who had no knowledge of the area they were charged to command. He concludes by saying why the Japanese attack was regarded a surprise; hadn't they seen it coming for at least a half year before the attack on Pearl Harbour?<sup>266</sup>

### *Conclusion*

All the discussions and developments outlined in this chapter present the frantic attempts of the Dutch politicians to be taken seriously within the ABDACOM, as well as the relative indifference of the Americans and British on this matter. In addition, the absence of teamwork between Dutch military and Dutch political representatives has played a significant role regarding the Dutch functioning within ABDACOM. The latter is of great importance for this thesis because it indicates that the Dutch had no experience in working in a military or political alliance. The Americans and British were both involved in the First World War, and it is plausible that this is also an important reason why they took over control of the formation of a unified

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<sup>265</sup> Letter from Admiral Helfrich to the Minister of the Navy in London, comments on “Abdacom” Official Account in the South-West Pacific Command, January – February 1942, of the General Staff India and in “Despatch on Operations in South-West Pacific January 15<sup>th</sup> – February 25<sup>th</sup> 1942” from General Sir Archibald Wavell, G.C.B. etcetera, 4 November 1942. NL-HaNA, Helfrich, 2.12.44, inv.no. 34.

<sup>266</sup> Ibidem.

command: they already experienced working together, although not in a unified command. The Dutch, however, did not take part in the First World War and were possibly considered *ignorant* because of that. Moreover, the Dutch were quickly overrun by Germany in the early phase of the Second World War, which could have lead to an American and British belief that the Dutch were not able to withstand any external violent threat in any case.

The issue of cooperation remained an unsolved issue during the lifetime of ABDACOM. From the start, the Dutch were excluded, and this remained so. The representation of the Dutch in the Pacific Council and the Chiefs of Staff Committee, both established mid-February 1942, promised the Dutch an *equal* status, but in fact this was just a disguise to please the Dutch. At this point both the Americans and the British had lost all that was of vital importance to their own objectives, and their focus shifted away from the ABDACOM operations, so they could invest in maintaining what was still of vital interest in their opinion, namely the defeat of Axis Germany. This meant that the Netherlands Indies had been given up on. This was not communicated with the Dutch.

The *fault*, if it can be called a fault, in the Dutch adhering to the ABDACOM aims does not only lie with the British and American abandonment, but is also attributed to the Dutch politicians. While the Dutch military was still awaiting reinforcements from the Americans and Australians, the Dutch politicians in Washington and London became aware of the Americans and the British giving up on the Netherlands Indies. But this information was prohibited to be forwarded to the Dutch actively fighting in the Netherlands Indies. While the Dutch politicians had lost all hope of reinforcements and support from the allied side, the Dutch military in the Netherlands Indies was kept ignorant of this. With this knowledge the Dutch politicians should have taken the responsibility to order the evacuation of the Netherlands Indies and preserve the fleet. The fact that information regarding the abandonment by our allies was available to the Dutch politicians and yet withheld from the Dutch military and its troops has hitherto not been established by historians.

## Chapter Five: Conclusion

The primary question of this thesis is:

Was the influence that the Netherlands could effectively exert within the military coalition ABDACOM adversely influenced by its long established tradition of political neutrality?

The first chapter has explored the origins of the Dutch policy of neutrality. It has been shown that after the experiment to unite Northern and the Southern provinces of the Low Countries into a unified Kingdom of The Netherlands failed with the Belgian independence in 1839, The Kingdom of The Netherlands embarked on a policy of neutrality. This policy was not without risk, because the Netherlands had an extended and rich colonial empire in the Far East, the Netherlands Indies. An empire like this could really only be retained if the Netherlands maintained sufficient naval and military strength to prevent any other power from taking it over and/or other major powers would strive to maintain the status quo of the region. As was the case, it was the overwhelming power of the British Empire during the nineteenth century and the first quarter of the twentieth century that maintained the status quo as it was not in British interests that any other country would take over control of that region. A Dutch policy of neutrality could only exist as long as it was in accordance with British interests.

The First World War and its aftermath completely overturned the international balance of power. The British Empire lost its hegemony and other non-European powers gained a position of dominance, predominantly the United States and Japan. The Dutch effort to retain its empire in the Far East and to continue its policy of neutrality would henceforth have to take into account the interests of additional powers which were either not necessarily sympathetic to colonial empires (United States) or were seeking regional dominance at the expense of European/Eurasian interests (Japan).

The Dutch and other countries believed that they could rely on the League of Nations to prevent conflicts but this belief was shattered within only a few years. The major powers hoped that they could prevent a future arms race and conflicts by holding the Washington Conferences and others, which led to a Treaty on the Limitation of Naval Armament, but this proved to be of limited effect.

Relying on the League of Nations to maintain the status quo of its empire in the Far East, the Dutch failed to provide sufficiently for their own military capacity during the 1920's and 1930's, particularly in the Far East, in order to be taken seriously by other major powers as a force to be reckoned with should a conflict break out. It could no longer rely on the unspoken passive support of the British Empire, which itself now had to address the other major powers: the German threat in Europe and the Japanese threat in the Far East.

Due to their interdependence, the findings of chapters two, three and four will hereafter be summarized not per chapter but in a chronological order. These chapters have shown that the only potential allies that could help the Dutch to safeguard its Far Eastern Empire were, of course, the British Empire, and the United States. As it turned out, by the time that the Dutch needed allies to do just that, the British forces were overextended both in the Atlantic and Mediterranean theatre due to the outbreak of the war in Europe in 1939. Thus it could not fulfil their promise to its Dominions to send a fleet to the Far East. The Americans were anxious to stay away from an active participation in the war unless forced to do so, and in any case did not believe that the Philippines could or should be defended in case of a Japanese attack.

The defeat of Axis Germany was considered the primary objective. However, the British and the Americans also had to stop the Japanese aggression in the Far East at all costs. Both countries knew that this could only be done by coming to a (bi- or multilateral) arrangement. Because the Netherlands Indies was of strategic importance for the British they were willing to provide assistance to the Dutch, but could only commit to provide assistance if they received assurance from the United States. The United States on their part tried to remain neutral and stay away from the conflict as long as possible. So in effect there were three countries involved in

making informal arrangements for the defence of the Far East prior the Japanese attack, two of which attempted to remain neutral as long as possible. The Dutch traditional pre war neutrality stance had no impact on the eventual formation of ABDACOM because one of the other two parties had maintained a similar pre war position.

When the Japanese attack did come, in December 1941, the limited reinforcements that the British had been able to assemble (*PRINCE OF WALES* and *REPULSE*) were lost within 10 days after their arrival, and a major portion of the U.S. Pacific Fleet was destroyed or damaged at Pearl Harbour. Subsequently, the British lost Singapore and a large army defending it, and the Americans could not hold the Philippines.

For all practical purposes this left the Dutch naval and military capability as the only organized force to deal with the final Japanese attack on Java. Before that happened, however, the organizational structure and tactical doctrine of the Dutch naval forces had been disrupted due to being pressured by the British and Americans to become part of the ABDACOM structure. Help that was promised was not forthcoming and the Americans withdrew to Australia leaving the Dutch to take care of the business at hand. The end followed soon after the Battle of the Java Sea on 27 February 1942 where the Dutch Navy supported by some remnant of British, American and Australian naval forces was destroyed after a day-long fight with Japanese naval invasion forces. Java surrendered soon after.

When the Netherlands Indies became involved in the war, Helfrich issued a Nelson-like dispatch that the Dutch Navy would fight to the end to uphold a centuries old naval tradition. This, the Dutch Navy certainly did. It could not save the empire however.

So, was the influence that the Netherlands could effectively exert within the military coalition ABDACOM adversely influenced by its long established tradition of political neutrality? This research has not found any indication that the influence the Dutch could effectively exert within ABDACOM was *directly* affected by their long established tradition of neutrality. The only indication found was that the Americans frowned upon the 'understandable failure' of the Dutch to not participate in a



conference the Americans believed they had been invited to. Admiral Hart attributed this 'understandable failure' to the Dutch policy of neutrality.

However, the influence that the Netherlands could effectively exert within the ABDACOM was *indirectly* influenced by their long established tradition of neutrality. The Dutch failure to provide for a sufficient defence capability had disastrous consequences for the Dutch position amongst the British and the Americans. Moreover, they had no long-standing channels of communication with the British or Americans that might have facilitated the coalition talks in 1940-1942. For the Dutch, this resulted in a vulnerable position at the negotiation table. If the Dutch possessed a better defence potential, they would have been of more value to work with, from the viewpoint of both the Americans and the British. Moreover, since the beginning of talks on a possible military cooperation in the Far East the Dutch had presented themselves compliant to the American and British plans, as long as the defence of the Netherlands Indies would be included in an agreement.

Still, it appears that the real influence on the Dutch not being able to effectively exert influence within ABDACOM, and its establishment, is due to the American supremacy. This also applied to the British and the Australians. The Americans were not interested to commit to any agreement, and they were particularly not interested in talking with the Dutch and the Australians. Due to the previous British naval supremacy they had a better negotiation position, but even the agreements made between the British and the Americans turned out not to be taken seriously by the Americans. For the Americans it seemed less complicated to talk with the British, as long as they subsequently informed the Dutch and the Australians on the matter.

The only time when the Dutch could effectively exert influence within ABDACOM, ABDACOM was no more, and it was Helfrich and his men, fighting to the bitter end, to uphold the Dutch tradition and pride. But they were uninformed, that the Americans and British had given up on the defence of the Netherlands Indies, which was known to the Dutch politicians in both Washington and London but not to the men on the ground and at sea in the Indonesian Archipelago. As well as the Americans and the British, these Dutch politicians were responsible for the devastating final Battle of the Java Sea.

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## Appendix 1: Annex II: *Higher Direction of War in the ABDA Area*

'December 30, 1941

### HIGHER DIRECTION OF WAR IN THE ABDA AREA

1. On all important military matters, not within the jurisdiction of the Supreme Commander of the ABDA Area, the U.S. Chiefs of Staff and the representatives in Washington of the British Chiefs of Staff will constitute the agency for developing and submitting recommendations for decision by the President of the United States and by the British **and Dutch** Prime Minister and Minister of Defense **acting together on behalf of the ABDA Governments**. Among the Chief matters on which decisions will be required are:
  - a. The provision of reinforcements.
  - b. A major change in policy.
  - c. Departure from the Supreme Commander's directive.
2. This agency will function as follows:
  - a. Any proposal coming either from the Supreme Commander or from any of the ABDA governments will be transmitted to the Chiefs of Staff Committee both in Washington and in London.
  - b. The Chiefs of Staff Committee in London **having consulted the Dutch staff** will immediately telegraph to their representatives in Washington to say whether or not they will be telegraphing any opinions.
  - c. On receipt of these opinions, the United States Chiefs of Staff and the representatives in Washington of the British **and Dutch** Chiefs of Staff will develop and submit their recommendations to the President, and by telegraph to the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. The Prime Minister will then inform the President whether he is in agreement with these recommendations.
3. Since London has the machinery for consulting the Dominion Governments, and since the Dutch Government is in London, the British Government will be responsible for obtaining their views and agreement, and for including these in the final telegram to Washington.
4. Agreement having been reached between the President and the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, the orders to the Supreme Commander will be dispatched from Washington in the name of [both of them] **the ABDA Governments and respective Governments will be informed.**'

See: Higher Direction of War in the ABDA Area, December 30, 1941. Foreign Relations of the United States, I. The First Washington Conference (December 22, 1941-January 14, 1942) 288. Dutch proposed modifications are shown in a bold format. These are the Dutch modifications as presented in: Amendments Proposed by the Netherlands Government. Foreign Relations of the United States. I. The First Washington Conference (December 22, 1941-January 14, 1942) 308.