

CONFIDENTIAL MEMORANDUM ADOPTED BY THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

To be placed on file in connection with General Board's confidential letter to the Secretary of the Navy G.B.No. 420-2, of July 30, 1918.

(See Minutes of July 30, August 3, 4, 5 and 6.)

In its report submitted to the Navy Department, under date of July 30, the General Board recommended a Naval Policy as follows:

"The Navy of the United States should ultimately be equal to the most powerful maintained by any other nation of the world. It should be gradually increased to this point by such a rate of development, year by year, as may be permitted by the facilities of the country, but the limit above defined should be attained not later than 1925."

2. This is a marked change in policy from that previously recommended by the General Board and the Board submits the facts and reasoning which have led it to its present attitude.

3. Public opinion in the United States seems very general that we must have an "adequate" navy. The size of an "adequate" navy involves a question of mission. What is the navy to be used for?

4. Armies and navies exist as the instruments of diplomacy. They must be strong enough to ensure a respectful hearing in the councils of the world for the nations they represent.

5. The United States at the present moment is more or less committed to the following policies:

No entangling alliances;
The Monroe Doctrine;
Open door in China;
Asiatic exclusion;
Military control of the Panama Canal
and contiguous waters;
Control of Philippines.

The strength of the Navy must be such as to maintain these policies which are none of them aggressive nor have they been urged in an aggressive manner.

6. Relative strength alone can be considered in diplomacy, in war, and in the prevention of war. The phenomenal and unprecedented progress in naval development made by other powers, therefore, subordinates consideration of the ultimate strength of the United States fleet as recommended by the General Board to that of relative strength. This is most clearly illustrated in the course of the present war where we have seen Germany's great merchant marine confined to port, and the powerful navy built to protect it driven from the sea and operating feebly only through its submarines, because it was inadequate to cope with the fully adequate navy of Great Britain.

7. The standard set for ourselves can not be reached too soon, for delay in attaining it is dangerous. When war comes it will probably come as a surprise to the side which is not seeking it. There can be no doubt that the present war came as a surprise to many of the nations which it has involved, and it found them very imperfectly prepared. In former times, the military strength of a nation was measured chiefly by her ultimate resources in wealth and population, but in these days of sudden wars and rapid mobilization when the first blow may even be decisive military strength lies chiefly in the military resources immediately available, - in the degree of preparedness.

8. War is too serious a matter for any country to undertake lightly and international good will and absence of friction are in themselves grateful and desirable to every nation. All governments need some compelling cause or weighty advantage to make them sacrifice international good will. A country even though inadequately armed may be able to obtain a certain degree of deference for itself in proportion to its wealth, population and foreign commerce. Such has been the position of the United States, but the situation is a dangerous one and invites challenge. The plight of China illustrates this truth.

9. The different nations of the world are not altruistic; their national policies are selfish and in competition with the rest of the world. These policies are advanced only by force, either open or latent. The United States asserts that its policies are unselfish, but even so, to maintain them it must be ready to protect and defend itself and them by its own military power if these policies are challenged.

10. The reasons for maintaining our group of policies above named may be traced to one dominant source, that of economic pressure, and the challenging policies of other powers have the same origin. History shows that wars are chiefly caused by economic pressure and competition between nations and races. Points of contact and of pressure multiply with increase of population. In the past, as districts filled up, strong and warlike peoples found that they must expand or starve. Invasions and wars resulted. In the face of an overgrowth of population and of the consequent development of economic pressure hitherto unknown it will be unwise to place sole reliance upon the protection of international law. In the present way the conduct of the antagonists on both sides is a warning too plain to be disregarded.

11. The world is now approaching a crisis of overcrowding. At the close of the eighteenth century Europe was approaching a similar crisis, but the enormous development of mechanical power and of the means of transportation during the nineteenth century opened great and sparsely inhabited areas for the supply of Europe and the expansion of the white races. Europe, and later in the century Japan, then greatly advanced in manufactures, health and population, with an increasing dependence upon colonies or countries beyond the seas for food and other raw products. By the close of the nineteenth century, two great powers especially felt the pressure of expanding population which in the case of the Japanese resulted in two wars for the control of Korea and of Oriental markets and in the German case has brought about the present world-wide war, where England and Germany contend for industrial and commercial supremacy in the markets of the world.

12. Like Germany and Japan the United States is beginning to feel the pressure of increasing population. There are no longer great unsettled areas inviting occupation. Our dispute with Japan about immigration is economic in its origin. Similarly our desire for the open door in China and for the maintenance of the Monroe Doctrine and the development of trade relations with South America are evidences of an economic pressure which was not felt a half century ago because the United States then had an abundance of undeveloped territory. It is not unreasonable belief that the present great war will be followed by others of comparable magnitude due to the increasing population of the world, and the struggle to control agricultural lands. This expansion can be little further accommodated by occupation of virgin territories. The continents of the old world are already wholly controlled by great military

powers, except in China whose people are awakening somewhat late, to the need of protecting their country from economic pressure. In the Americas, there is no great military power; nor is there any united country of great wealth and population except the United States. At the close of the present war it is not improbable that the defeated belligerents, with the connivance and perhaps the participation of the victors, may seek to recoup their war losses and to expand at the expense of the new world. On the other hand, perhaps soon, the victor may challenge the United States. As we have seen so strongly illustrated in the current war, it can scarcely be hoped that international law, unsupported by physical force, will be respected where the interests which it guards are ever-whelming. In the near future, owing to fast increasing manufacturing populations and economic pressure for productive lands, the temptations to over-ride its provisions will be greater and greater as nations seek to feed and maintain themselves in the face of international competition.

13. The great developments of the world's system of transportation make widely separated territories economically essential to each other's prosperity and throw a vast and increasing volume of trade and communication upon the oceans. It is the business of navies to protect and police sea communications in time of peace, and to control them in time of war. Although the United States has great agricultural possibilities yet undeveloped, its manufactures are increasing enormously, and its continued prosperity requires successful rivalry with other great manufacturing countries in maintaining closest trade connection with agricultural territories yet undeveloped.

14. American merchants are now taking advantage of the present war to make efforts to extend their foreign trade at the expense of the belligerents. This procedure has the approval of the public, but it does not tend to secure the good will of the warring nations who see their fields of business threatened. The Navy is not at present strong enough to support these growing commercial interests in whose behalf we are challenging preoccupied Europe. If the increase of the Navy to meet present requirements were authorized at once, the facilities of the country and the time needed to build ships and train personnel would yet leave the Navy none too much time to prepare to engage successfully in hostilities with a strong antagonist.

15. As the territory of the United States fills up, the country will turn more and more to manufactures and to foreign commerce, - importation of foodstuffs has already begun. Trade rivalry with Europe, particularly Great Britain and Germany, and with Japan will multiply causes of disputes in regions south and west of the United States. In these waters will lie the theater of action of the American Navy. In the control of these theaters other nations have the start of us commercially and the close of the present war will leave the victors, and perhaps the vanquished, with a military (including naval) preponderance over the United States to be exerted at pleasure. The naval policy should, therefore, be to make the United States secure in the Western Atlantic, the Caribbean, and the Pacific Oceans at the earliest possible moment.

16. Soon after the close of the present war the United States will probably find itself face to face with serious difficulties in connection with Mexico, and other unstable governments in Central America and in the Caribbean, and perhaps also in connection with South American questions.

17. Trade rivalry and economic pressure are now and will increasingly be felt by the United States in both great oceans. They have already begun to be felt with regard to Japan in connection with Asiatic markets. The Philippines are valuable to the United States as a foot-hold near those Asiatic markets, and recent reports indicate that Japan is endeavoring to extend her trade and influence in the Philippines themselves.

NOTE: - If the United States should withdraw from the Philippines, and if her withdrawal should be accompanied by a guarantee of the independence of those islands, that responsibility will demand as great military and naval preparedness for the defense of the Philippines as if they remained under the American flag. Perhaps the requirements would be even greater, for the United States having given up complete control might be drawn into war by acts for which it is not primarily responsible.

18. Should the United States find its diplomatic situation across one great ocean becoming tense, it may reasonably anticipate simultaneous pressure across the other one.

We have seen in the present war how Germany's preoccupation in Europe was made the opportunity to deprive her of her possession in China.

19. Since the capture of Kiao-Chan there are alleged some indications of a rapprochement between Japan and Germany, with the possible result that we may be called upon to face an alliance between these powers which will demand a campaign of defense to be conducted simultaneously in the Atlantic and Pacific.

20. On the other hand there are strong reasons for believing that Japan has already established an understanding with Russia in regard to China and affairs in the Far East. Such an understanding would relieve Japan of pressure in her rear if engaged in a war with the United States.

21. There is yet another factor in the problem which is far from negligible. In her projects for expansion Japan has established a claim to the support of Great Britain by entering the present war, a claim which England if victorious may find it difficult to ignore, even though the projects in question might be directed against the United States. Thus there is reason to believe that Japan is assuring her future freedom of action with regard to the United States no matter which side is victorious in the present war.

22. When the Panama Canal was authorized the great argument then urged in its favor was that American naval security would be much increased by the facility acquired for passing the fleet from one ocean to the other. This facility is as important as ever but it is not as sure as was anticipated. Owing to the great development of air craft and the possibility of aerial attack upon the locks, power houses and shipping, we may not rely upon the same degree of certainty of trans-isthmian communication as was hoped for ten years ago. While every military use possible will be made of the canal, it can not be counted upon with absolute certainty. In the future we must face the possibility of a fleet divided against its will by the isthmus and forced to operate simultaneously in two oceans. To meet this situation, which is not improbable, a fleet equal to the largest maintained by any single power is none too strong.

23. Our policy of no entangling alliances is traditional. Since we have never lent ourselves to any diplomatic log rolling

For other powers we may expect little or no support from any of them when we desire it for ourselves. Moreover, our policy of strict neutrality during the present war has served to alienate the friends of the United States rather than to draw them closer. As a result our nation has no friends. England recently had to abandon her former policy of "splendid isolation". Hence when ever strained relations arise not only is there reason to anticipate that we shall be confronted with unfriendly actions in two widely separated theaters but we shall have to meet the situation single handed. In case of war we can not even hope for "benevolent" neutrality such as that extended by France to the Russian fleet in its voyage from the Baltic to Tsushima.

24. It is very commonly assumed that the victor in the present struggle will be so completely exhausted as to have neither desire nor ability to engage in another war immediately. In the opinion of the General Board this view is dangerously in error and the Navy may be called upon very soon to fulfill its mission in war. A nation having real or alleged grievances with a vast army and navy of veterans flushed with victory it will be in no need to forge a new struggle with a country rich enough to pay an indemnity of any conceivable amount and be imperfectly prepared for defense as to make its defeat not only inevitable but comparatively simple.

25. In conclusion the General Board holds that the mission of our Navy is to protect the nation against aggression whether the reasons therefor be economic, racial or political. This involves not only the protection of our possessions at home and abroad, but that of our over-sea commerce both in peace and war. The strength of the Navy must be "adequate" to accomplish this mission. The policy and the immediate building program that the General Board submitted in its No. 420-2 of July 30 1915, were based upon the convictions expressed in the present communication.

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Senior Member Press