

## LESSON 7

### WORLD WAR II: PRE-WAR STRATEGY AND PLANNING

*“With many calculations one can win; with few, one may not. How much less the chances for victory for one who makes none at all.”*

—Sun Tzu

#### **Lesson Introduction**

If, as Clausewitz so famously wrote, war is an act of policy and a continuation of political activity by other means, then the fundamental military objective in war is rather straightforward: to overcome the enemy’s ability to resist our political objective. One might conclude from Clausewitz’s writings that specific military objectives would, therefore, flow naturally from a clear political object—but the opposite is often the case. A broad political goal provides little in the way of practical guidance for military planning purposes. The result can be a divergence of military objectives from the political object. For example, during World War I, the belligerents lost sight of the original political goals as the war descended into the mud and blood of Verdun and Flanders. The original objective that was sought gave way to simply killing the enemy, and the end result was unsatisfactory to all concerned and sowed the seeds of future war.

Conversely, World War II was more clear-cut: the political object was clear, and military objectives followed easily; at least that is the popular view.

The historical experience and institutionalized methods of shaping and executing grand strategy are unique to each state. National character (or strategic culture) often marks a state’s conduct of foreign affairs in a manner that distinguishes it from other states. However, evolving circumstances can prompt a state to depart from established patterns and to undertake actions that are, on the surface at least, inconsistent with the norm. This was the case with the United States before, during, and certainly after World War II. Before the war, the core tradition remained that of an isolated, unmilitaristic power seeking to perfect itself, independent of all other nations. U.S. foreign policy eschewed alliances with other nations, presumed nonintervention in the affairs of Europe, asserted continuing U.S. domination of the Western hemisphere, and pursued only limited, mostly economic expansion in the Pacific. And yet the rules of the international game had changed. New players, e.g., the Soviet Union, discarded the old rules. Old players with new and aggressive ideologies, e.g., Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, viewed the prospect of war not as something to avoid but rather as an opportunity to secure their own expansionist aims. But, protected by two oceans, U.S. policy remained isolationist and strategically defensive. Consequently, military planning and force structure reflected this orientation. In the absence of clear strategic guidance from the White House, the question of what kind of war would be waged, should war break out, was therefore open to question. No one provided an answer, that is, until the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

## Student Requirements by Educational Objective

### Requirement 1

Objective 1. Distinguish the differences of the grand strategies of the Allied and Axis powers between the world wars. [JPME Areas 2(b), 3(d)(e)]

Objective 2. Determine the impact that War Plan Orange and the Rainbow Five Plan had on U.S. strategy for a war in the Pacific theater. [JPME Areas 1(a)(c), 2(b), 3(e), 4(a)(b)]

Read:

- Thomas Buckley and Edwin Strong, *American Foreign and National Security Policies, 1914-1945*, (Knoxville: Univ. of TN Press, 1987), Ch. 5, “A National Strategy, 1914-1932,” and Ch. 7, “Roads to War,” pp 92-112, 139-68. (45 pages) (“Selected Reading” at the end of each chapter is provided for information only and not required reading)
- Edward Miller, *War Plan Orange: The US Strategy to Defeat Japan, 1897-1945*, (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 1991), Chs. 3-4, “The Geopolitics of the Pacific War,” and “Grand Strategy,” pp 19-38. (20 pages)

### Events Leading to World War II

Numerous explanations have been offered regarding what caused World War II. In the broadest sense, competition between Germany and France in Europe and between Japan and the United States in the Pacific can be regarded as the proximate cause of World War II.

The competition between France and Germany had deep roots. The humiliating defeat of Prussia at the hands of Napoleon gave rise to Prussian determination to unify the German states to prevent such humiliation from ever occurring again. The process of unification took some fifty years but culminated in Prussia’s easy victory over France in 1870. One result of that war was the “re-annexation” of Alsace-Lorraine to Germany, which played a significant role in creating the conditions that provoked the outbreak of World War I. That war, however, returned Germany to its previous position relative to France, a status that was viewed by the Germans as intolerable. Reparations, the Great Depression, and an imposed political system all combined to foster great resentment in Germany and set the stage for World War II. In that regard, economic nationalism and the Great Depression gave rise to fascism in Germany with its attendant expansionist aims. Fascism also arose in Italy and in Japan, but fascism in Germany took on a particularly virulent form in Nazism. A resurgent, aggressive, and expansionist Germany had the potential to threaten the peace throughout Europe as had been the case before World War I. However, whereas the major European powers before World War I had taken steps to deter Germany and her Austro-Hungarian allies, what occurred in the 1930s was a pattern of unchecked aggression on the part of Germany that climaxed with the invasion of Poland. Only then did France and Britain move to check German power, but the die was already cast.

Concerning the Far East, some historians submit that World War II actually began in 1931 when Japan invaded Manchuria, the industrial heart of China. Shortly afterward, the Japanese established a puppet state, called Manchukuo. The Europeans offered rather mild objections to this turn of events. The strongest condemnation of Japanese aggression came from the United States, which promulgated the so-called Stimson Doctrine of Non-Recognition, stating that the U.S. refused to recognize governments brought to power by force. Nevertheless, although the U.S. government did not recognize Manchukuo, it did continue relations with the government of Japan. Encouraged by apparent American inaction, the Japanese proceeded to embark upon their goal of creating the Japanese Sphere of Co-Equality. Only when expansion of the Japanese empire collided with specific U.S. national interests perceived as vital did the United States take action in the form of an economic embargo of strategic materials.

Despite the so-called axis between Japan and the fascist powers of Europe, the United States did not react overtly to aggression in Europe, as the Axis advance did not directly affect the American people. Protected by two oceans and economically self-sufficient, the American people took notice of events in Europe but concentrated instead on recovering from the Great Depression. There was little sentiment in favor of becoming involved in yet another European war. This attitude greatly affected policy-making and strategic planning on the part of the Roosevelt Administration. Although President Roosevelt correctly understood that the United States would, in all likelihood, become involved in any conflict in Europe, he was constrained by public opinion and by legislation enforcing American neutrality. Thus, when the United States was attacked, the U.S. had not adequately mobilized for war.

### **Pre-War U.S. Grand Strategy and Military Strategy**

American grand strategy before World War II was essentially isolationist and strategically defensive. During Theodore Roosevelt's presidency, the U.S. had begun developing tentative war plans for possible future enemies and revised these plans over the years. However, World War I and the Great Depression had solidified public opinion against engaging in foreign wars. Thus, until 1941, when Japan attacked Pearl Harbor and Germany declared war on the United States, Franklin D. Roosevelt's problem was preparing for war without provoking the ire of the Congress and the American people. He did what he could to aid Britain, Russia, and China and waited until the public awakened to the fact that the Axis powers were a direct threat to the United States. In that regard, FDR's policy was driven by American public opinion and reflected the same. In 1934, the Army War College had conducted a study concluding that it would require flagrant aggression against the United States and skillful propaganda by the U.S. government specifically intended to arouse the nation before the American people would submit to prosecuting an overseas war. The lack of public support for any foreign war, however, materially affected pre-war mobilization and strategy.

Without national direction in terms of war aims, the Army and the Navy blindly attempted to create a military strategy and prepare for war. In their frustration, the Chief of Staff of the Army and the Chief of Naval Operations devised their own long-range plan and submitted it to the White House in the hopes of prodding the President to provide some measure of guidance. None was forthcoming, at least in the explicit terms the military wanted. Although the armed forces complained bitterly about the lack of a national strategy, Roosevelt did have a general concept of

how the United States should wage war once it came. His concept was a military strategy vested in naval and air power. In essence, the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army Air Corps would wreck the national economies of the enemy without any need to fight the enemy's army on the ground. In retrospect, the notion that the Axis governments would cease their aggression and abandon their expansionist aims as a result of naval blockade and aerial bombardment seems fantastic, but, at the time, the potential of modern aerial warfare in particular offered an attractive indirect strategy that Roosevelt fully embraced. One must remember that World War I was seared into the memory of the American people, and it was the fear of another similar bloody war that made the idea of long-range naval and air warfare so attractive. Equally important, in the midst of a global depression, such a military strategy was cheap. Moreover, adequately and credibly communicated, such a military posture might serve to deter Axis aggression.

### Lesson Summary

This lesson provides you with an opportunity to assess strategic thinking and planning prior to World War II. It further offers you the chance to employ the tools you have acquired in the previous lessons by analyzing the strategic context and evaluating the strategic thinking of the time, in terms of the creation of national policy and military planning. In that regard, this lesson highlights the challenge of translating grand strategy into military planning and anticipates subsequent learning in follow-on courses.

### JPME Summary

AREA 1					AREA 2				AREA 3					AREA 4					AREA 5				
A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	
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