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EXHIBIT No. 39A

SECRET

Serial 0130012

WAR AND NAVY DEPARTMENTS,
Washington, November 5, 1941.*Memorandum for the President:*

Subject : Estimate concerning Far Eastern Situation.

The Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Staff have reexamined the military situation in the Far East, particularly in the light of messages recently received from the American Ambassador to Chungking, the Magruder Mission, and the United States Naval Attache. These despatches have indicated it to be Chiang-Kai-Shek's belief that a Japanese attack on Kunming is imminent, and that military support from outside sources, particularly by the use of United States and British air units, is the sole hope for defeat of this threat. The Secretary of State has requested advice as to the attitude which this Government should take toward a Japanese offensive against Kunming and the Burma Road.

There is little doubt that a successful Japanese offensive against the Burma Road would be a very severe blow to the Chinese Central Government. The result might even be the collapse of further effective military resistance by that Government, and thus the liquidation by Japan of the "China incident". If use of the Burma Road is lost, United States and British Commonwealth aid to China will be seriously curtailed for some months. If resistances by the Chinese Central Government ceases, the need for Japanese troops in China will be reduced. These troops can then be employed elsewhere, after the lapse of time sufficient to permit their withdrawal.

[2] Concentration of Japanese troops for the contemplated offensive, based in northern Indo-China, cannot be completed in less than about two months, although initial offensive operations might be undertaken before that time. The advance toward Kunming over nearly three hundred miles of rough country, with poor communications, will be extremely difficult. The maintenance of supply lines will not be easy. The Chinese, on favorable defense terrain, would have a good chance of defeating this offensive by the use of ground troops alone, provided these troops are adequate in quality and numbers.

The question that the Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Staff have taken under consideration is whether or not the United States is justified in undertaking offensive military operations with U. S. forces against Japan, to prevent her from severing the Burma Road. They consider that such operation, however well-disguised, would lead to war.

At the present time the United States Fleet in the Pacific is inferior to the Japanese Fleet and cannot undertake an unlimited strategic offensive in the Western Pacific. In order to be able to do so, it would have to be strengthened by withdrawing practically all naval vessels from the Atlantic except those assigned to local defense forces. An unlimited offensive by the Pacific Fleet would require tremendous merchant tonnage, which could only be withdrawn from services now considered essential. The result of withdrawals from the Atlantic of naval and merchant strength might well cause the United Kingdom to lose the battle of the Atlantic in the near future.

[3] The only current plans for war against Japan in the Far East are to conduct defensive war, in cooperation with the British and Dutch, for the defense of the Philippines and the British and Dutch East Indies. The Philippines are now being reinforced. The present combined naval, air, and ground forces will make attack on the islands a hazardous undertaking. By about the middle of December, 1941, United States air and submarine strength in the Philippines will have become a positive threat to any Japanese operations south of Formosa. The U. S. Army air forces in the Philippines will have reached its projected strength by February or March, 1942. The potency of this threat will have then increased to a point where it might well be a deciding factor in deterring Japan in operations in the areas south and west of the Philippines. By this time, additional British naval and air reinforcements to Singapore will have arrived. The general defensive strength of the entire southern area against possible Japanese operations will then have reached impressive proportions.

Until such time as the Burma Road is closed, aid can be extended to Chiang-Kai-Shek by measures which probably will not result in war with Japan. These measures are: continuation of economic pressure against Japan, supplying increasing amounts of munitions under the Lend-Lease, and continuation and acceleration of aid to the American Volunteer Group.

The Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Staff are in accord in the following conclusions:

[4] (a) The basic military policies and strategy agreed to in the United States-British Staff Conversations remain sound. The primary objective of the two nations is the defeat of Germany. If Japan be defeated and Germany remain undefeated, decision will still have not been reached. In any case, an unlimited offensive war should not be undertaken against Japan, since such a war would greatly weaken the combined effort in the Atlantic against Germany, the most dangerous enemy.

(b) War between the United States and Japan should be avoided while building up defensive forces in the Far East, until such time as Japan attacks or directly threatens territories whose security to the United States is of very great importance. Military action against Japan should be undertaken only in one or more of the following contingencies:

(1) A direct act of war by Japanese armed forces against the territory or mandated territory of the United States, the British Commonwealth, or the Netherlands East Indies;

(2) The movement of Japanese forces into Thailand to the west of 100° East or south of 10° North; or into Portuguese Timor, New Caledonia, or the Loyalty Islands.

[5] (c) If war with Japan can not be avoided, it should follow the strategic lines of existing war plans; i. e., military operations should be primarily defensive, with the object of holding territory, and weakening Japan's economic position.

(d) Considering world strategy, a Japanese advance against Kunming into Thailand except as previously indicated, or an attack on Russia, would not justify intervention by the United States against Japan.

(e) All possible aid short of actual war against Japan should be extended to the Chinese Central Government.

(f) In case it is decided to undertake war against Japan, complete coordinated action in the diplomatic, economic, and military fields, should be undertaken in common by the United States, the British Commonwealth, and the Netherlands East Indies.

The Chief of Naval Operations and the Chief of Staff recommend that the United States policy in the Far East be based on the above conclusions.

Specifically, they recommend:

That the dispatch of United States armed forces for intervention against Japan in China be disapproved.

That material aid to China be accelerated consonant with the need of Russia, Great Britain, and our own forces.

[6] That aid to the American Volunteer Group be continued and accelerated to the maximum practicable extent.

That no ultimatum be delivered to Japan.

Chief of Naval Operations.

Chief of Staff.