

## STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 1

You are Lieutenant Commander Wade McClusky, the leader of a dive-bomber squadron attached to the aircraft carrier USS *Enterprise*. Intelligence intercepts have alerted the Navy that the Japanese plan to attack the US base at Midway Island, and the US Navy has moved all three of its aircraft carriers into position off Midway in hopes of catching the Japanese by surprise as they attack. The only problem is that the Americans do not know exactly where the Japanese ships are and, without sophisticated radar technology, must rely on scout planes to locate the Japanese fleet. As the Japanese strike first, inflicting damage on Midway, you take off from the *Enterprise* but are unknowingly flying south of the Japanese fleet over the open ocean. Around the same time, a separate squadron takes off from the USS *Hornet* also in search of the Japanese. As your fuel drops to a dangerously low level, you face a decision:

**Do you continue your search, risking your life and the lives of your squadron, or do you head back to the *Enterprise*, knowing that failing to locate the Japanese before they spot the American carriers could cost the United States its aircraft carrier fleet and possibly the war?**

## STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 2

You are President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Nearly three months into a grueling engagement on the island of Guadalcanal, during which the American public has been shielded from news and graphic images of the fighting and the casualties, the tide begins to turn in favor of the United States. In late October 1942, tenacious fighting by US Marines and soldiers blunts a Japanese ground assault. Then, a mid-November victory in the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal all but assures that the United States will maintain control of Guadalcanal and its strategically important airstrip. Events in Europe and the Mediterranean are also going well, with the Allies making advances at Stalingrad and in North Africa. But you must decide how much information to make public about the costs of the war, most notably regarding the 1,705 US sailors who died during the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal.

**Will you allow the news media to report the true number of casualties from this battle?**

## STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 3

You are President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and the US Marines and Navy are fighting on the Tarawa atoll in the Gilbert Islands, 2,400 miles west of Hawaii, in November 1943. A victory here places the United States within striking distance of the Marshall Islands, an objective that will bring it ever closer to Japan. But the victory comes at steep costs, with more than 3,000 casualties, including 1,000 killed in gruesome close-contact combat. A US Marine Corps filmmaker named Norman Hatch wants to release a graphic documentary of the fighting at Tarawa and needs your approval to do so. Just two months before, you agreed to lift the ban on the publication of photos of American war dead and faced a wave of criticism for doing so. Americans were further outraged when they saw photos from Tarawa and heard a general report that Americans succeeded there only because of their willingness to die. But the government's war-bond campaign is also slowing, and Hatch's film may convince the public that a more significant investment will be needed to win the war.

**Will you allow Hatch to show the documentary, or will you prohibit the film's release?**

## STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 4

You are Admiral Chester Nimitz, and it is September 1944. After months of debate, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt and military leaders have decided to continue with both southwest and central Pacific campaigns, and have approved General Douglas MacArthur's plan to take the Philippines as the United States continues its advance toward Japan. As part of that strategy, leaders plan to invade the Philippine island of Mindanao before proceeding up the Philippine archipelago to Leyte and then Luzon.

To support the Mindanao operation, you have been tasked with overseeing the invasion and conquest of Peleliu in the Palau Islands. Peleliu, which is 500 miles east of Mindanao, will give the United States access to a well-positioned air base and support facility for the invasion of Mindanao. But almost as soon as this plan is hatched, the US Navy has unexpected success attacking the Philippines from the air. You learn about the success of these raids from Admiral William F. "Bull" Halsey, who recommends canceling the Mindanao operation in favor of an immediate strike against Leyte. MacArthur agrees to bypass Mindanao and launch an amphibious assault on Leyte on October 20. You now need to decide what to do about the Peleliu assault force, which is three days from the island. You know that MacArthur wants all the air support he can get, and intelligence reports suggest that the roughly 9,000 US Marines headed to Peleliu can gain control of the island in two or three days. But with Mindanao no longer in play, Peleliu's strategic value has diminished.

**Do you continue with the planned invasion of Peleliu, or do you call off the attack?**

## STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 5

You are President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and it is July 1944. Since the end of 1943, the military has been waging simultaneous campaigns in the central and southwest Pacific. Under this plan, General Douglas MacArthur has been leading his troops along the northern New Guinea coast toward the Philippines while the US Navy has pressed through the central Pacific, targeting the Gilbert, Marshall, Caroline, and Mariana Islands. The original goal was for the two forces to converge for a joint offensive against Formosa and Japanese-controlled China. But with the Marianas under US control by July 1944, the military now has air bases that are close enough to Japan for bombers to directly target the mainland. This means you and your military advisers face a decision: do you continue with both the central and southwest Pacific campaigns, or do you prioritize one over the other?

Navy Admiral Ernest King advises you to bypass the Philippines in order to attack Formosa, which he believes will save American lives. MacArthur, meanwhile, presses you to keep the Philippines campaign alive. He argues that the United States has a duty to "liberate" the US territory and to save the thousands of American soldiers and nurses whom the Japanese have harshly imprisoned since his troops surrendered the island in 1942. There are also personal and political considerations at play. While MacArthur is a talented general, you dislike his politically conservative views and his brash, headline-grabbing persona. You must also consider the upcoming November elections, in which you will be seeking your fourth term as president. At a July 1944 strategy session in Hawaii, MacArthur pointedly reminds you of this by referencing the potential consequences of abandoning the Philippines: "I dare say that the American people would be so aroused that they would register most complete resentment against you at the polls this fall."

**What would you do? Would you continue with both the central and southwest Pacific campaigns, or would you focus on either the attack against Formosa or the liberation of the Philippines?**

#### STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 1 OUTCOME

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Without orders, McClusky decided to keep searching for the Japanese fleet. At the last moment, he spotted a single enemy ship, which led him to the Japanese carriers. Within minutes, the American planes mortally damaged the Japanese aircraft carriers *Akagi*, *Kaga*, and *Soryu*. McClusky's decision contributed to the Allied victory at Midway and earned him the Navy Cross.

#### STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 2 OUTCOME

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With the United States beginning to make progress following its early string of defeats in the Pacific, Roosevelt decided against reporting the number of naval deaths from the Naval Battle of Guadalcanal. As the naval battle came to a close, he announced, "During the past two weeks we have had a great deal of good news and it would seem that the turning point in this war has at last been reached." But he also cautioned against complacency or overconfidence. "This is not time for exultation. There is no time now for anything but fighting and working to win." This proved especially true on Guadalcanal, where US troops continued to battle Japanese forces until early February 1943.

#### STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 3 OUTCOME

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Roosevelt permitted the US Marine Corps to release Hatch's film, *With the Marines at Tarawa*. While enlistment in the Marines reportedly dropped by 35 percent after the film's release, sales of war bonds soared. The film also received the 1945 Academy Award for best short-subject documentary.

#### STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 4 OUTCOME

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In hopes of securing an airfield that would boost air support for MacArthur's upcoming assault on the Philippines, Nimitz pressed forward with the Peleliu invasion. Nearly 10,000 American troops were killed or wounded during a battle that raged for 10 weeks—far longer than the two to three days analysts had expected would be necessary to secure the island. One historian called that faulty prediction “one of the worst intelligence blunders of the war.”

#### STRATEGIC DECISION-MAKING IN THE PACIFIC: SCENARIO 5 OUTCOME

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During his July 1944 meeting with military planners in Hawaii, Roosevelt agreed to continue both the central campaign toward Formosa and the southwestern campaign targeting the Philippines. Historians often interpret this “nondecision” as a sign that the president's trip to Hawaii was more about politics than strategy. By dramatically traveling across the Pacific during wartime, Roosevelt possibly hoped to boost his standing as he campaigned for a fourth term. It is also likely that he and MacArthur made an implicit bargain: the president would support the Philippine offensive in exchange for the media-savvy MacArthur's positive comments about Roosevelt's decision-making and America's progress in the Pacific. Ultimately, altered battlefield conditions pushed military leaders to drop the planned attack on Formosa in favor of an all-out assault on the Philippines.