

MODERN HISTORY

Assess the factors that contributed to the growth in Pacific tensions leading to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941.

The bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941 can be seen as result of years of cumulative tension between the US and Japan in their rivalry to become the superpower of East Asian region. This was made more complicated by the economic political issues during the period of 1937-1941 which saw the Japanese invasion of China and ambitions in French Indo-China. The conflicting foreign policies between the Japanese to that of the US and the European colonial powers that by such times were circumscribed by the outbreak of WWII at their own home front intensified the already existing tension between US and Japan. Japan's progress in conquering the South East Asian region and rise as a threat to the economic and imperialistic might of the West can also be seen as a direct result of its ruthless army which posed Japan as a powerful competitor in the global arena in its quest to rise to supremacy which eventually led to the bombing of Pearl Harbor in 1941.

The economic and political scene of between 1937 and 1941 witnessed the prolific application of expansionist and imperialist policies in Japan. This can be seen in the Japanese invasion of China and expansion of Indo-China which with the outbreak of WWII effectively minimized the interferences of colonial powers in the affairs in the South East Asian region. The Japanese invasion of Chinese territories can be interpreted by some as an initial military success, however as the result of the combination of Second United Front of Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong in 1937 and the escalating presence of Chinese nationalism and patriotism subsequently had a draining effect in the Japanese budget as the war prolonged. The notion nationalism and anti-Japanese sentiments were amplified as the Japanese capture of major cities and transport routes in Northern China, and more prominently after the Rape of Nanking. Additionally, the ever presence of Japanese pride and supremacy felt during this period would make an earlier withdraw an embarrassment of the Japanese masses, thus leaving the Second Sino Japanese war in a state of stagnation and attrition. Another factor contributing to the tension between foreign relation in Japan and its neighbors can be seen in its expansion into Indo-China. Japan's ambition in French Indo-China contradicts to the US' interest in the Pacific. This central difference between the conflicts of interest between the US and the Japanese resulted in the trade embargoes on imports to Japan from scrap metal in September 1940 to total ban on oil exports to Japan and freezing of Japanese assets in the US and Britain by July 1941. The implications of embargoes on Japan from a various trading partners saw the Japanese oil imports dropped by 90%, a dramatic reduction to a warring nation. This resulted in Japan expanding further into the Asia Pacific region in search of more oil and natural resources in order to fill the gap created by the embargoes thus creating a downward spiral where more expansions are needed by the imperialist Japanese in order to maintain adequate reserves of oil to maintain the military and security of its empire.

The Japanese foreign policy and the stringent demands of the US was another factor powerfully intensifying Pacific tension during the period 1937-1941. This can be seen in the implementation of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere in August 1940 by Minister of Foreign Affairs Matsuoka Yosuke to create a self sufficient Asian bloc led by the Japanese and free of any Western influence. This particular policy can be seen as failure as it ensured Japanese imperialist ambitions more than the creation of unity among Asian countries. The selfish and manipulative policy by the Japanese was however justified in W.G. Beasley's "Japanese Imperialism 1894-1945" in which he justifies that "...the sphere took shape in time of war, when policy makers had more on their minds than constitutions and welfare. It had to serve the immediate purpose of gaining victory or averting defeat, which meant accepting military priorities." The notion of diplomacy is forgone in times of war to ensure eventual victory. The establishment of the Sphere contradicts greatly to the policy of the US which insisted upon an Open Door Policy in China. The Lend Lease of 1941 also saw US providing loans of up to \$US50.1 billion (equivalent of \$US 700 billion by 2008 prices with the effects of increase in the annual CPI) of supplies shipped to China, USSR and Britain, all of whom are in war against the Japanese.

The rise of the military in Japan can be seen as a significant cause of the tension in the Pacific leading to the bombing of Pearl Harbor and a major factor influencing Japan's confidence in conquering the Asia Pacific region. The prolific growth of the Japanese population throughout 1900s and the subsequent growth of IJA (Imperial Japanese Army) can be regarded as central in the shift of power from the Diet to the military. The Imperial Japanese Army grew from a mere 17 divisions in 1934 to 41 divisions in 1941 with 2 million reserves, out of which 27 divisions are stationed in China and 12 in Manchuria. The growth in status and power of the Japanese cannot be doubted as can be seen in Beasley's "Japanese Imperialist 1894-1945" which states that by the 1930s the "Army Commanders had shown that they could disregard the cabinet with impunity. There was no elder statesman who were highly enough regarded to be able to call them to order." This shows that despite the Taisho democratic reforms in the early 1930s, Japan is still an authoritarian state where the military cannot be controlled by the parliament and act as a force of its own. The growth in status and power of the military can be seen as a major force driving the Japanese expansion since all acquisition of land was done through invasion and none through diplomacy. The imperialist agenda of the Japanese can be seen as achieved primarily through the development and advancement of the army, the principle of "bushido" – the "way of the warrior" which Japanese soldiers adhere to as a form of discipline and conduct in war.

The growth in Pacific tension can be seen as a result that can be viewed as a manifest spread of imperialist agendas through the Japanese, the US and the European powers. The timing of the Pacific tension and its coincidence with the outbreak of WWII in Europe, has eliminated the rivalry in the Asia Pacific region between that of the Japanese and the American. Together with the advancement of the Japanese military and its increasing dominance in domestic politics and the contradictions of foreign policies in Japan and the US an ever precarious issue, causing threat to the stability and security of the Asia Pacific region and to the continuation of diplomacy in the global arena. Thus slowing and challenging Japan's rise as a superpower.

ESSAY PLAN

Economic and political issues:

- **Japanese invasion of China**
 - 1939, Japan has captured major cities and transport routes.
 - Chinese nationalism was stronger than ever.
 - Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Zedong formed the second United Front, ongoing war with Chiang's army and the guerilla warfare of Mao drained the Japanese budget
 - Fought the Chinese brutally e.g. the Rape of Nanking in December 1937 killing 300 000 Chinese civilians.
 - US opposed to the Japanese expansion into China, in July 1938 it announced a moral embargo on exports of strategic goods to Japan.
- **Outbreak of war in Europe,**
 - Hitler's initial victory captured the militarist dream of Japan, inspired to embark on a program of territorial expansion.
 - European colonies were left unguarded, power vacuum in South East Asia in 1940; European powers were left too ill equipped to defend them.
- **Japan's expansion into Indo-China**
 - Throughout 1940-1941 Japan expanded its influence in South East Asia in French colony of Indochina. US responded by increasing economic pressure on Japan.

- 26/09/1940 US imposed total embargo on the export of scrap metal to Japan.
- 28/07/1941 US freezes all Japanese assets in the US and placed total ban on oil exports to Japan, this was joined by Britain, the Netherlands East Indies... Japan's oil imports dropped by 90%.

JAPANESE FOREIGN POLICY 1937-1941:

- Japan had long seen itself as the great power of Asia, regarded it as hypocritical that the European and Americans opposed Japan's own territorial expansion.
- Japan already was in war with China, had a experienced armed forces while Russia has been removed as a threat, US had not yet completed a naval rebuilding program and still an isolationist.
- Japan been reliant on imported raw materials, which US has heavily embargoed at the time.
- Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere where Japan would offer leadership for the development of its Asian neighbors, justifies the military aggression to the Japanese masses.
- Japanese foreign policy was confused with America's status:
 - In December 1937 American gunboat Panay was sunk in the Yangtze River by Japanese forces. US accepted an apology.
 - Tripartite Pact September 1940 with Germany and Italy, thought it would frighten US from armed conflict as it would have to fight a 2 front war in Europe and Asia.
- In 1941, Secretary of State Cordell Hull demanded in November demand Japan withdraw from China was interpreted by the Japanese as an uncompromising ultimatum that could not be complied with. American sanctions and Hull's demand convinced Japanese they were fighting for their survival.
- Military planning took precedence over diplomacy; Prince Konoe Fuminmaro was replaced by General Tojo Hideki while seeking for a peaceful solution.
- Japanese believed that their superior fighting spirit of their armed forces could make up for the economic advantage of America's.

US AND BRITAIN POLICIES IN THE PACIFIC 1937-1941:

American Foreign Policy

- In the mid 1930s Isolationism was strong; the US Congress has passed as series of Neutrality Laws, making it illegal for the US to offer arms or loans to nations that were at war.
- In 1941, Roosevelt persuaded Congress to approve the Lend Lease scheme, where vital resources were loaned to a beleaguered Britain, China and USSR. FDR provided "all aids short of war".
- Japanese expansion challenged the American interest and insistence on an Open Door Policy in China. US responded with moral embargoes hoping to correct Japan on the error of its way.
- US knew of the Japanese reliance on imports, and embargoes seem like an effective policy to force Japan to reconsider its expansionist policies.

- US made offer the Japanese would always be refused.

US embargoes on Japan:

1. 1939 moral embargo was tightened and US announced the cancellation of a US Japan trade treaty.
2. 07/1940 US restricted the export of strategic materials to Japan.
3. 09/1940 embargo extended to exports of metals
4. 07/1941 all Japanese assets in the US were frozen and all oil exports were stopped.

British Foreign Policy

- Japan's expansion towards the south threatens British colonial territory.
- British traditional dominance of the sea and ability to protect its trade routes was threatened by Japan.
- Since the 1920s, Britain had supported Chiang and an independent China.
- Rise of Mussolini and Hitler forced Britain to concentrate on the threat in Europe.
- Britain was forced by Japan to close Burma Road- supplier to Chiang, forced to neglect military preparation in Asia, left Singapore unprotected.
- Britain hoped US trade sanctions would curb Japanese expansion and hoped to draw the US into WWII.
- Britain froze Japanese assets and imposed an oil embargo following similar actions by US on 28 July 1941.

STRATEGIC AND POLITICAL REASONS FOR BOMBING PEARL HARBOR:

By 26 November 1941, Japan could either comply with American demands to withdraw from Indochina and China or to advance further into South East Asia to secure oil and other resources. At the same time orders were given to Japanese fleet to carry out a surprise attack on the US naval base in Pearl Harbor.

Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Minister of the Navy realized that Japan would not be able to defeat a country and economy of US' size in a long war. He also suggested that:

- Japan's chances of victory lies by a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, destroying US Pacific fleet.
- US fleet was seen as the only obstacle to Japan's expansion into South East Asia, with it destroyed, Japan would rise to dominance.
- Even if the US decided to fight after Pearl Harbor, Japan would now have access to Asia's raw materials and in a much stronger strategic position.

Attack on Pearl Harbor

1. Japanese fleet left Pearl Harbor in remote Kurile Islands on 26 November 1941, with 6 aircrafts, carrying a total of 423 planes sailed east across the northern Pacific Ocean undetected.
2. 2 December 1941 Admiral Nagumo received order to go ahead with original plan.
3. Dawn of 7 December 1941, 400 km from Hawaii Japanese carriers launched their carriers.

As a result US had lost:

- 8 battleships, 2 of them sunk
- 11 other warships were sunk or damaged
- 164 US aircraft were destroyed and 159 damaged
- 2388 Americans lost their lives.

Pearl Harbor has brought US to the end of isolationism and Roosevelt convinced the Congress to declare war on Japan *"No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through an absolute victory."*

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Figure 1.

(2008).
South
Co-
Sphere.
US.
from:



(Unknown).
Greater
East Asian
Prosperity
[Internet].
Available

http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/topics/Greater_East_Asia_Co-Prosperity_Sphere. Accessed on [9 May 2009]

This Japanese propaganda poster aims to reshape the strong presence of Chinese nationalism and obtaining greater acceptance of the Japanese empire. This secondary source demonstrates a Japanese perspective in regard to the “Greater East Asia Co-prosperity Sphere” with the Japanese in sailor uniform position at the centre in the foreground supporting the Manchu and Chinese. The caption written in Kanji “the world would be peaceful with the help of China, Manchuria and Japan allows all 3 nationalities to understand the poster. The degree of bias is evident which subsequently would undermine degree of its reliability in reflecting the real intention of the sphere; however it is nevertheless useful for historians in gaining insights into the degree of Japanese supremacy of the period of 1940s.

Figure 2.

“Army commanders had shown that they could disregard the cabinet with impunity. There was no elder statesmen who were highly enough regarded to be able to call them to order...Most decisions in the 1930s were made by groups of departmental ministers, many of whom were former bureaucrats. Each spoke for the ‘national’ interest in terms of his own segmental view of it; non had the authority to impose his own priorities on the rest.... And Japanese imperialism became the product of a multiplicity of policies, ill co-ordinated.”

Beasley, W.G. (1985) Japanese Imperialism 1894-1945. New York. Oxford University Press.

This secondary source by the Oriental historian Beasley demonstrates the perspective of an outsider to Japan’s turmoil between military and democratic rule in the 1930s. It aims to inform the responders of the political instability within Japanese parliament; however Beasley being a British historian would subsequently contain degree of bias and thus placing the reliability of the source under doubts. This is however inevitable and would need to be studied with other sources in order to obtain the true extent of military domination and the survival of democracy within the Japanese political hierarchy in the 1930s. It’s usefulness in providing an Allied perspective should not be undermined and ignored.

Figure 3.

“Seizing upon the negligible Marco Polo Bridge incident between Japanese and Chinese forces near Peiping, Japan in July of 1937 began wholesale invasion of China. The lawless acts of the Japanese military in carrying forward the invasion were a disgusting and degrading episode of rape, theft and murder. In the outrages attending the occupation of Nanking on December 13, 1937, the Japanese military wrote a particularly ignoble page in history. Yet on July 27, 1937, the Japanese Premier, Prince Konoye, stated, ‘in sending troops to North China, of course, the Government was has no other purpose, as was explained in its recent statement, than to preserve the peace of East Asia.’ Again on October 28, 1937, the Japanese Foreign Office said: ‘Japan never looks upon the Chinese people as an enemy.’ As observed by Secretary Hull: ‘Japan showed its friendly feeling for China by bombing Chinese civilian population, by burning Chinese cities, by making millions of Chinese homeless and destitute by mistreating and killing civilians, and by acts of horror and cruelty.”

(Unknown). (1941). Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, Report on the joint committee on the investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack Congress of the United States S.Con.Res 27 79th Congress. A concurrent resolution to investigate the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7 1941 and events and circumstances relating thereto. United States Government Printing Office Washington 1946. 2nd Session Report on the Joint Committee on the investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack. Da Capo Press, New York 1972

The primary source extracted from speaker of the US 79th Congress 2nd Session demonstrates a biased perspective of the American government in regard to the growing tension in the Asia Pacific region during the 1930s. This particular government paper aims to inform the masses of the menace of the Japanese through depiction of their conduct towards the Chinese and apathetic comments made by Japanese officials. The source would be effective in inflicting anti-Japanese sentiments and in uses of propaganda of the American perspective. Although the reliability of the source would need to be challenged, the source is useful in providing the insights of the American government and highlighting their belittling of the Japanese government.