

## **MODERN HISTORY: *CONFLICT IN THE PACIFIC***

**Assess the impact of strategies used by the Japanese and the Allies in the Pacific in the period 1937 to 1951.**

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The policies of Japan from 1937 to 1951 were one of expansion through the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere which was reflected in the strategies undertaken by the Japanese military in this time. Through a large gamble, the implementation of Pearl Harbour and the strategies of attack and conquer, the Japanese were able to acquire a significant amount of land over the course of the war, effective in the short term, however, the Japanese had no long term strategy for a longer war. In response to the Japanese attack, the allies implemented strategies of island-hopping, leap-frogging, sea battles and air attacks to be used against the Japanese mainland. These strategies were effective and efficient and resulted in the victory of the allies against Japan in 1945, thus, impacted on the Japanese defeat in the war.

Japan gambled to initiate war, their strategy relying on German focus on war in the west, China being occupied with minimum resistance and the US requiring time to recover before they retaliate. Japan thought that the US would be compliant with their gains in Pacific after a time delay. In 1941 their strategy was well placed with the US kept at bay and Guam and Wake mandated islands were protected. They were in a good position due to having a better trained army and navy, no language barriers, shorter supply lines and air superiority and recent fighting experience. The US and British viewed Japan as inept, caused in part by racial prejudice; Churchill viewed Japan as the “Italians of the Pacific” and quality Japanese planes like Zero were ignored as the Japanese “had poor eyesight” and “inner ear defects”. The American underestimation of Japan therefore contributed to the success of their expansionist strategies.

It was through the implementation of Pearl Harbour that Japan had the largest impact on the US. On the 7th December 1941 the Japanese attacked the American Pacific fleet at Pearl Harbour in hope of knocking the US out of a war in order to pursue their strategic and imperialistic goals in the south. The Japanese needed vital resources to continue the war and due to the allied embargo, they needed to expand to access these resources. It was influential in that Pearl Harbour was an important naval station to guard the US’ growing interests in the Asia-Pacific region, believed by the US to be too shallow for the use of aerial torpedoes. On the day of the attack the Japanese completely destroyed four US battleships, damaged three cruisers, killed over 2000 people and destroyed 188 aircraft with light Japanese losses. While it was reasonably successful in stalling the US entry into war, the late declaration which was meant to arrive before the attack on the harbour outraged the Americans which altered their previous isolationist view to refrain from war and the US public went from 30% to almost 80% supporting the decision to go to war. Furthermore, not all of the US ships were in the harbour that day which meant that the US was able to recover more quickly and respond with great force. Pearl Harbour had positive impacts for Japan including restoration of pride for the Japanese navy which reaffirmed the racial pride of the Japanese and demonstrated to them the vulnerability of the West.

Despite Pearl Harbour, the Japanese had no back-up plan. The strategy of expansion was vague, they had no plans for an efficient way to deal with the resources they aimed to acquire and no plans for war. The possibility of fighting a multi-front war with the “ABCD powers” of America, Britain, China and Dutch had not been thought through by Japan. Their lack of strategy in turn limited the benefits of Pearl Harbour for Japan and in turn resulted in the creation of stronger and more efficient allied strategies.

The US and British put only 40% of their resources towards the Pacific war, reflecting their underestimation of Japan but also the importance placed of the war with Germany. Despite this, they developed some strategies which were efficient and effective in damaging the morale of Japan and regaining much of the land Japan had occupied. The most successful of which was their strategy of island-hopping which was designed to avoid the main centres of Japanese military

power, while gradually re-taking the Japanese-occupied Pacific islands. They would select an island, isolate, bombard, build bases there and move on to the next island if executed successfully. The allies would target places of economic or strategic importance which strategically meant that they could acquire air bases with which they could bomb Japanese ships and forces. This two-pronged defence's code name was 'operation cartwheel' and both MacArthur and Nimitz established forces that would help to defeat the gaining Japanese. MacArthur's force pushed along the New Guinea coast with the Australian allies and Nimitz crossed the central Pacific. Together they took Guadalcanal, Tarawa in the Gilbert Islands, the Marshall Islands in February 1944, the Marianas in June and the Philippines in October. This strategy allowed the allies to maintain a stronghold in the Pacific from which they were able to launch air attacks on Japanese outposts and Japan itself.

The second allied tactic was leap-frogging which aimed to cut off Japanese supply routes and consequently attacked Japan's resource capacity. MacArthur used this effectively in New Guinea, ordering US and Australian troops to attack particular Japanese garrisons, isolating them from their supply lines and letting the others struggle. In Rabaul it was used to stop Japanese transport ships with troops and supplies reaching the Japanese, further putting pressure on their supply routes. By March 1944, the allies had completely isolated Rabaul with 100 000 Japanese troops left stranded.

The Pacific war was the first time military personnel fought without seeing each other, demonstrating the importance of planes. Thus, the allies aimed to improve their naval force and undertook numerous sea battles by engaging with the Japanese fleet at sea. Improved technology assisted the US in attacking the "impregnable" Japanese which was of particular importance in sea battles. The allies had access to a ship mounted radar which provided the allies with extra awareness of Japanese movements, especially important in times of poor visibility, at night and in sea battles fought across large distances, for example the Coral Sea in which it was clear that the allies had better perfected the new style of fighting at sea. Other technological advances included their use of "magic" which was their ability to break Japanese codes and have complete knowledge of Japanese strategies which was useful all throughout the war and gave the allies significant advantages. After turning points such as Midway, the Americans had total air superiority over the Japanese.

The fourth strategy used by the allies was air attacks on the Japanese mainland which had significant impacts equalling and possibly surpassing that of the A-bomb in 1945. In April 1942 the Japanese launched an air raid on Tokyo which did little damage, however, it had the effect of increasing allied morale. Subsequently, each air attack and Japanese defeat brought the Allies closer to Japan. In 1943 the US began systematic air raids against mainland Japan from China and from the Mariana Islands in 1944. Collectively over 660 000 civilians were killed in these attacks which demoralised the Japanese. Other attacks were conducted for the purpose of attacking specific military installations such as aircraft and munitions factories which worsened Japanese industry and resources, meaning that continuing the war was becoming difficult.

The Battle of Iwo Jima from February to March 1945 is an example of the effectiveness of such tactics. In 6 months of fighting there were 20 000 dead through US bombing to prepare for invasion followed by the fiercest fighting in the history of the marines. There would be "no Japanese survivors" and of 22 000 Japanese soldiers at the beginning of the battle, 20 000 were killed and 216 taken prisoner. It had a huge impact on allied future success by securing a secure location from which the US could use B-29s to bomb Tokyo, only 1100km away from the Japanese capital. Subsequently, the Battle of Okinawa from March until June, or 'Operation Downfall' implemented strategies for the invasion of the mainland. Its success is evident in the way that the Japanese used over 3500 Kamikaze and for the first time many Japanese committed Seppuku, the only battle where they surrendered rather than die for their emperor. Clearly, such a strategy was doomed to failure. It was following the final capture of Iwo Jima and Okinawa that the allies decided to drop the atomic bomb rather than attempt a full-scale invasion.

The dropping of the atomic bomb was the last allied tactic which ended the Pacific war, causing over 150 000 deaths and removing any Japanese capacity to continue the war. On the 15th of August the Emperor surrendered, speaking to his people for the first time ever.

From 1937 to 1951 both Japanese and Allied strategies were extremely effective but ultimately allied strategies had the largest impact on Japanese home fronts, resources and morale resulting in their defeat in war. The Japanese use of Pearl Harbour gave them advantages at the start of the war while allied strategies of island-hopping, leap-frogging, sea battles and air attacks were more efficient and prepared which resulted in the Allied victory in 1945.