

Japan's political path to Pearl Harbour.

Japan feared westernisation, but rapidly industrialised from the late nineteenth century, adjusting from feudalism to modernity. The Samurai influenced Army wanted to finish occupation of China started in 1894, where they established the province of Manchuria,¹ Japan defeated Europeans against Russia in 1905, then success in the First World War gave high confidence militarily.² The Treaty of Versailles opposed Japanese strength, dishonoured them, providing limited concessions such as Shantung, in relation to victorious Allied 'White' powers.³ Growing resentment of white colonialism develops.

1921 onwards Japan's humiliations continued; Britain refused to renew its 1902 alliance under US pressure, desiring to build a battlefleet naval base in Singapore, a challenge. Japan's '21 demands' of China are removed under US opposition, then The US excludes Asians in the Immigration Act of 1924. Japan's politicians accept a 3-5-5 basis with American and British fleets under the Washington Naval Limitation Treaty of 1921 and returned Shantung province to China in 1922, signing the Nine-Power Treaty ensuring China's integrity.⁴

The world economic crisis severely affects Japan in 1929. Militarists argue for expansion as a solution. The Army, without government approval conduct a campaign from Manchuria in 1931 catalysed by the 'Mukden' incident to international disapproval. Japan in 1936 joined the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Italy,⁵ finding solidarity with others impoverished following World War One.⁶ Japan pushed into China itself in 1937, initiated by an alleged clash on the Marco Polo bridge. Slowed by Chiang Kai-Shek's resistance forces, reinforced from the South,⁷ cutting the Burma Road seen as Japan's solution.⁸

Prince Konoye's new government had expansionist ambitions also, beyond China's defeat. Imperialist General Hideki Tojo, enters cabinet in 1938 as Vice-

¹ John Keegan, *The Second World War* (London: PIMLICO, 1997), pp198-99.

² B.H. Liddell Hart, *A History Of The Second World War* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2014), p.259.

³ Keegan, *The Second World War*, pp198-99.

⁴ Liddell Hart, *A History Of The Second World War*, pp.259-260.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.261.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p.259.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.253.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.299.

Minister of War, promoted in 1940.⁹ Japan signs the Tripartite Pact with its allies, offered 'protective' occupation of defeated French Indochina. Countering, US moves its Pacific Fleet from California to Pearl Harbour in Hawaii.¹⁰

In essence China was the touchstone of Japanese-American relations, yet China was only part of the so-called Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere, a concept the very fluidity of which made the democracies uneasy. The Japanese... fought shy of actually stating in geographical terms just what "Greater East Asia" covered. Presumably it would expand as Japan moved outward,¹¹

The US supported the Chinese including a powerful foreign-policy interest US lobby, trade protection and historical influence.¹² On 24th July 1941, President Roosevelt demanded Japan's military withdrawal from Indochina and China hearing of intended negotiation combined with secret offence. The US and Great Britain freeze assets and embargo oil.¹³ Peacetime Japan imported eighty eight percent of its oil consumption having stocks for three years, half this at war, running out before Chinas defeated.¹⁴

In earlier discussions, as far back as 1931, it had always been recognized that such a paralysing stroke would force Japan to fight, as the only alternative to collapse or the abandonment of her policy.¹⁵

Unacceptable terms leave Japan two options, continue negotiations, or gamble while still strong. Conquering local resource rich countries, strengthening Japan with oil, rubber and tin while weakening its opponent's,¹⁶ Japan provisions both. Admiral Yamamoto concerned that Japan could 'run wild' for a limited time.¹⁷ Promoted to commander of the Combined Fleet 1941, instead of attacking and holding the Philippines; Yamamoto devised a sustainable new strategy. Aircraft surprise attack on Pearl Harbour 'A dagger pointing at the throat of Japan.' crippling the condensed Pacific Fleet at anchor, inspired by

⁹Keegan, *The Second World War*, pp.200-201

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p.206.

¹¹George W Prange, *At Dawn We Slept* (London: Michael Joseph 1981), p.4.

¹²Keegan, *The Second World War*, pp.200-202.

¹³Liddell Hart, *A History Of The Second World War*, p.253.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p.262.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p.253.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp.262-263.

¹⁷Keegan, *The Second World War*, p.198.

Taranto in 1940.¹⁸ Counterattack annulled; an impenetrable barrier could be built from The Aleutian Islands to Burma, suffocating Chinese resistance.¹⁹ Yamamoto thought America would be demoralized by Pearl harbour.²⁰

Tojo made Prime Minister, October 1941. Japan's terms, withdrawal from Indo-Chinese territory just claimed plus one hundred tonnes of aviation fuel.²¹ Britain had offered to close the Burma Road.²² The US is unmoveable, wanting China's government accepted and an end to Axis allegiance,²³ Japan attacks Pearl Harbour on the 7th of December 1941,²⁴ having held for resolution to the day.²⁵ Declaration just prior but due to US translation, known after.²⁶ Tojo believing US would smash against Japan's' defence then come to the negotiation table.²⁷

¹⁸Liddell Hart, A History Of The Second World War, pp.267-269

¹⁹Ibid., pp.265-266.

²⁰Michael Slackman, Target: Pearl Harbour (London: PIMLICO, 2001), p.10.

²¹Keegan, The Second World War, pp.203-204.

²²Ibid., p.201.

²³Ibid., p.205.

²⁴Ibid., p.206.

²⁵Liddell Hart, A History Of The Second World War, p.263.

²⁶Keegan, The Second World War, p.205.

²⁷ Liddell Hart, A History Of The Second World War, p.266.

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