

Lecture 7 - History of International Politics (Oriental) [E] - Lecture Notes

Course Leader: Dr. Senan Fox

Telephone number: 264 -5764

Email Address: senanfox@staff.kanazawa-u.ac.jp

Office: Room 309 (General Education Hall – GEH - 総合教育 1 号館)

Consultation Times: Please email Senan Fox in advance if you wish to meet to discuss your work and studies.

NOTE: The following lecture notes are largely based on the class textbook – Warren Cohen (2000), ‘East Asia at the Center – Four Thousand Years of Engagement with the World’, New York: Columbia University Press.

Lecture Title: *The Road to War (the late 1920s to 1942)*

Republican China in the late 1920s and early 1930s

Having reunited China after defeating the powerful warlords in the late 1920s, the nationalist KMT government under Chiang Kai-shek attempted to complete the equally difficult tasks of modernizing the country’s economy and armed forces. A major obstacle in the way of this objective was the KMT’s lack of funds with which to commence and complete projects. Effective tax collection was **hindered** by the disorganized and corrupt state of the country’s political, social, economic, and military systems. This situation, and initial uncertainty and suspicion in the West about nationalist China, negatively affected its **credit rating** and its ability to attract foreign investment. The condition of Kuomintang politics also did not give outsiders much reason for optimism. The KMT was, by the early 1930s, a divided party with self-interested rivals constantly **snapping at each other’s heels** to advance their own goals. It was **anything but** democratic. Nationalist China was a country in which one party (the Leninist-modeled KMT) and one man (Chiang Kai-shek) dominated. Political **dissent** was not tolerated and was ruthlessly crushed. Within the elite, Chiang’s rivals maneuvered to succeed him. In areas such as Jiangxi in China’s southeast, the communists regrouped and set about **radicalizing** the Chinese peasantry, and building their own forces in order to harass government forces. In terms of foreign policy, the relationship with the Soviet Russians and the Japanese was tense. By 1930 however, China had won back complete **tariff autonomy** and a number of European concessions had been returned. Some weaker foreign powers and the defeated nations in the First World War (1914 – 1918) had also **jettisoned** extra-territoriality rights that they had enjoyed for decades. Japan, the USA, and the UK however still rejected Chinese calls to **rescind** the extra-territoriality laws for their foreign citizens in China. The presence of foreign soldiers and foreign vessels on Chinese soil and in Chinese waters reminded many in the country that they were still **at the mercy of** the outside world. As Cohen notes, ‘*Most of the symbols of China’s humiliation remained*’ (Cohen, 2000:334).

Despite the pessimism however, some progress was made in the years immediately after Chinese **reunification** in 1928. Despite continuing difficulties in other areas, **partial** tariff autonomy in 1928 had enabled the nationalists to increase the amount of money that they received from customs. Positive relations between Washington and Nanking resulted in a greater willingness by American banks to provide loans. The **League of Nations** (which had been founded in 1919) and the US sent technical advisers whose **know-how** proved invaluable to Republican China's development. US companies played a major role in building the country's communications and transportation network. There was also a noticeable increase in Japanese and British investment within China. The economic **boost** was **most noticeable** along the country's eastern coastline where cities such as Shanghai displayed many of the symbols of **affluent** and modern urban life in the early twentieth century. **First-world** hospitals and universities, modern cars and roadways, Western clothing, and Western practices all intermixed **to paint a picture of** a China that was making progress. The world's most powerful states, who had once humiliated the Chinese dragon, now all appeared willing to accept the new China and even to assist it on its road to modernization.

The Manchurian Crisis

Japan-China relations however remained **volatile** due to the issue of Manchuria. Tensions started to **resurface** as a result of Chiang Kai-shek's desire to **rid** China's **resource-rich** north-eastern provinces of their Soviet and Japanese presence. The son of the assassinated warlord Zhang Zuolin (who was killed on June 4th 1928), **Zhang Xueliang** ('the Young Marshal'), had succeeded his dead father as the most powerful Chinese leader in Manchuria. Like Chiang, Zhang was also interested in undermining the foreign presence in the northeast of China. When the Chinese attempted to take control of the Soviet-controlled 'Chinese Eastern Railroad' in July 1929, the Soviet Russians quickly responded with a superior show of force and successfully demanded that the Chinese accept Soviet rights in the area (see **Sino-Soviet Conflict of 1929**). After that experience, the 'Young General' and Chiang Kai-shek decided to concentrate their energies and resources against the Japanese in Manchuria. The Chinese however **underestimated** the Japanese and their **resolve** to defend their interests in that area, particularly in the early 1930s. As Cohen observes, '*No Japanese leader – and few knowledgeable Japanese – were willing to **countenance** the loss of privileges in Manchuria. Moreover, 1931 was a particularly bad time to challenge Japan. The country had been hurt badly by **the Great Depression** and the loss of markets around the world, including those in Japan. The military had been outraged by the government's concessions at the **London Naval Conference of 1930**. Patriotic societies were increasing the level of domestic violence including the assassination of the prime minister in late 1930. Tokyo had neither the will nor the ability to control its troops in Manchuria*' (Cohen, 2000:337). [Prime Minister **Osachi Hamaguchi** was shot and seriously wounded on November 14th 1930; see also **the May 15th Incident** (1932) and the assassination of Prime Minister **Tsuyoshi Inukai**; see **Japanese militarism**, and the rise of international **fascism**].

With militarists and right-wing **conservatives** becoming stronger and more influential at home in Japan, hardliners within **the Kwantung Army** (based in Manchuria), who had tired of Tokyo's **indecisiveness** and who feared that Manchuria could be lost

without **prompt** action, decided **to take matters into their own hands**. In the **infamous Mukden Incident** of September 18th 1931, hardline Japanese military elites **staged** an explosion alongside a Japanese-owned railway near Mukden (present-day Shenyang) in southern Manchuria. This explosion, which was conveniently **blamed upon** the Chinese, was used as proof of Chinese **provocation** and as a **pretext** for the full-scale invasion and occupation of all of Manchuria. The Mukden Incident marked a new and much more **sinister** episode in Sino-Japanese relations. As Cohen argues '*The age of Japanese militarism had dawned and with it a new threat to Western interests in East Asia. As it crushed nationalism in Korea and fought it in China, Japan asserted its claim to lead nationalist movements throughout the rest of Asia, promising to preserve the continent for Asians, to free it from Western influence*' (Cohen, 2000:337). [For more on the rise of nationalism in East Asia, see Pages 318 to 322 of Cohen, 2000; see also the later Japanese concept of a '**Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere**'].

In general, Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist forces in the early 1930s proved incapable of effectively resisting the Japanese. A key reason for this was that the KMT's armed forces were not in 1931 the united force that they had been in the 1920s. By the time of the Mukden Incident of September 1931, the nationalist army had split into rival factions loyal to different leaders. In Guangzhou, a rival regime had been set up. Hostilities between the nationalists and the communists were another reason for a **less than optimal** Chinese response to Japan's military expansion in Manchuria. Chiang's determined attempts to encircle and destroy the communists in Jiangxi had failed. The communists had begun to develop a strong rival army and a rival ideology to the KMT's fractured and corrupt regime. Chiang **was obsessed with** removing the communist threat **once and for all** and dedicated an **inordinate** amount of time and valuable resources for that purpose **to the detriment of** the war in the northeast against Japan. Indeed, this anti-communist drive witnessed Chiang choosing not to fight the Japanese in Manchuria, but where possible to contain them within that area, so that he could prioritize the war against the communists. He also did not wish to intimidate the Japanese into further attacks outside of the Manchuria region because he feared the potential effect of an expanded war upon his already fragile nationalist regime. Chiang's attitude was that the communists were, in Cohen's words, '*a cancer that had to be destroyed before China could fight an external enemy*' (Cohen, 2000: 339). The KMT leader also hoped, **in vain**, that major foreign powers such as the United States and Great Britain, as well as global organizations such as the League of Nations, might be able to **exert** enough pressure upon Japan to force them to abandon their **expansionist** objectives in northeastern China.

The hardliners within the Kwantung Army who had **engineered** the Mukden Incident were determined that they would not to be contained within a small corner of Manchuria. Their aim was to take over **virtually** the entire area of northeast China, to drive out any Chinese authorities, and then to replace them with a completely Japanese controlled administration. As mentioned earlier, the timing of the outbreak of the war over Manchuria was not favorable to Chiang and his KMT regime. The Great Depression meant that the Western states including the US, the UK, and France were seriously distracted by economic and political problems at home. They thus hoped that the Manchurian crisis resolved itself soon without requiring the foreign powers to get involved. The United States was not a member of the League of Nations, an organization tasked with resolving global conflicts, and the British were

not willing **to take the lead**. The outside world could only offer the Chinese words **condemning** Japan's actions and **empty promises** but little else. In early 1932, the Kwantung Army succeeded in conquering the whole of Manchuria. In January 1932, the Japanese military extended the combat area by launching an attack on Shanghai on the pretext of defending Japanese citizens and concessions. The city had a large foreign population and significant foreign business interests [see the **January 28th Incident** (1932)]. After some brave resistance by the local Chinese fighters, the Japanese succeeded in their objectives and then withdrew after forcing the Chinese to sign a humiliating agreement in May 1932 [see the **Shanghai Ceasefire Agreement**]. **For the time being**, Japan was content to focus solely on Manchuria and not to spread the conflict further. However, the Shanghai attack created a lot of anger towards Japan amongst the world's major powers, including the US who had adopted a largely **non-interventionist** policy towards foreign affairs since the 1920s.

In March 1932, the Japanese set up the **puppet state** of '**Manchukuo**' (meaning the 'country of the Manchus') and placed Pu Yi, the last emperor of Qing China, at its head as the 'Emperor of Manchukuo.' In protest against a League of Nations' report in May 1932, which criticized Japanese actions in Manchuria, Japan withdrew from the League of Nations (in February 1933). The League had officially accepted and adopted the report's findings, and Japan was thus further isolated from the international diplomatic community as a result. As Cohen argues '*Japan had become a **pariah** nation, but its military leaders, firmly in control of Manchuria, cared little about world public opinion*' (Cohen, 2000:340). In Tokyo, decision-makers, though troubled by the escalation of conflict in China, and Japan's diplomatic isolation, believed that they could persuade the Western powers to **reluctantly** accept Japan's position on Manchuria. After all, Japan was still East Asia's number one political, military, and economic power and none of the Western powers with interests in that region wanted to seriously damage relations with Japan. The Japanese also knew that the major powers were distracted and were unwilling to directly get involved. This situation benefitted Japan for most of the 1930s.

Henry Stimson, the US Secretary of State (from March 28th 1929 to March 4th 1933) did make serious efforts to diplomatically punish Japan for its behavior in Manchuria (see the **Stimson Doctrine** of January 1932). His attempts failed however **with little to show** for the US and China except the anger of Tokyo. Under President Franklin D. Roosevelt, the Americans, like the French and the British, mostly adopted a **non-confrontational** position. Knowing that the outside world was unwilling to intervene, the Kwantung Army sought to create a **buffer zone** around Manchukuo by occupying surrounding provinces in northern China. As a result of these military actions, the Chinese were forced to accept that by 1935, Japan controlled a very large section of northeastern China. Chiang Kai-shek's control over the country was in serious danger of **unraveling**, and it appeared once more as if **the Chinese dragon** was about to be **dismembered**. Despite this, Chiang's priority remained the destruction of the communists within China. From his KMT capital in Nanking, Chiang worked hard to keep his regime together. Internally the KMT was severely weakened by army general and rival factional leaders who all assumed that they could do a better job than Chiang, who was **losing credibility** as the country started to crumble. In Jiangxi province, the Chinese communists had established a power base. During the famous '**Long March**' of October 1934 to October 1935, the communists had **miraculously** succeeded in escaping from Jiangxi and the anti-communist KMT strategy of

encirclement and **extermination** to Shaanxi province. The march and the legends surrounding it helped **Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung)** to reinforce his power as leader of the Chinese communists.

Japanese influence and authority in northern China gradually ate away at Chiang's authority like a cancer. The Kuomintang's military links with the rising Nazi Germany after 1933 provided some hope for the KMT leader in the form of military advisers and German industries in China. These ties however were ended and cut short after Nazi Germany and Japan signed the anti-communist **Anti-Comintern Pact** in November 1936. Chiang's attempts at a diplomatic approach with more moderate elements within Japan in the mid-1930s were also undermined by the aggressive actions of the hardline Kwantung Army in northern China. By the mid-1930s, public frustration and anger over the failure of the Chiang regime to effectively challenge the Japanese resulted in widespread student protests and demonstrations throughout China. The so-called '**national salvation movement**' placed enormous pressure upon the KMT leader to alter his strategy and to unite all Chinese behind the war against Japan.

Japanese advances into China as well as suspected Japanese intentions to **penetrate** deeper into the country had been a **catalyst** for the demonstrations. Chiang feared that if he did not act to publicly challenge the Japanese then popular support might shift to the communists who had declared war on Japan in April 1932 (from the safety of Jiangxi, thousands of kilometers from the nearest large scale Japanese forces). In response to a call from Soviet Russia in late 1935 for a global united front against fascism, the communists **called upon** all Chinese to **bury their differences** and to unite to fight against Japanese imperialism. KMT generals who were loyal to the nationalist government found the communists' call to patriotism appealing and were similarly influenced by the national salvation movement. Zhang Xueliang, whose army had earlier been forced away from the front line war with Japan in Manchuria, and who had obediently followed Chiang's orders during the anti-communist extermination campaigns, also began to question why so much time and so many resources was being spent killing other Chinese rather than the Japanese **occupiers**. Zhang **longed to** return some day to Manchuria but knew that the Japanese needed to be driven out first. In the southwest, warlords who had joined KMT forces in the 1920s when it suited their own **self-interests** to do so, were in the 1930s, becoming more difficult to please, and increasingly viewed Chiang Kai-shek as an obstacle. Chiang was able to re-assert his authority over the warlords with little violence. The hated Communists, who were based in Xian (in Shaanxi province), however remained **a thorn in his side**. Positive **overtures** between Mao Zedong and Zhang Xueliang resulted in an end to **hostilities** between Zhang and the communists, despite Chiang's continued insistence on their **elimination**. Zhang had also engaged in unofficial discussions with **Zhou Enlai** (Mao's top **aide** and negotiator) about **formulating** a strategy against Japan. He had also had **constructive** talks with some KMT generals. By late 1935, **the time appeared ripe** for a united Chinese front against the foreign invaders.

Late 1936 witnessed two key events, which had a dramatic effect upon China's approach to the war with Japan in Manchuria. In the first incident, a massive pro-Japanese **proxy** force of soldiers, tanks and aircraft was repulsed by Chinese armed

forces during an attack in Suiyuan province in November 1936 (see the **Suiyuan Campaign**). The incident marked the first time since the war over northeastern China began in September 1931 that the Chinese had defeated the Japanese in a major confrontation. As a result, it galvanized the Chinese people behind the war effort. The KMT government in Nanking responded to the patriotic **fervor** gripping the nation by announcing that the days when outsiders could humiliate the Chinese on Chinese soil were over. The second incident involved the surprise **kidnapping** of Chiang Kai-shek and an attempted **coup d'état** by Zhang Xueliang in Xian (Shaanxi province) in December 1936. The KMT leader had travelled to Xian to push for a greater effort to eliminate the communist forces in the area. Zhang's motivation for the kidnapping was to force an end to the nationalist-communist **civil war** (**intermittent** and consisting of different stages between 1927 and 1950) and to prioritize an **all-out** effort to fight the Japanese. The intervention of **Joseph Stalin** and the **USSR** helped **to calm the waters** and ensured the survival of Chiang. Stalin's intervention was not of a **humanitarian** nature but was based rather on the knowledge that Chiang was the person best suited to hold China together and to organize the country to fight Japan, a country that remained a serious potential threat to Soviet interests in north-east Asia. Following his escape from a **near-certain** death, the KMT leader **begrudgingly** accepted an **uneasy truce** with the hated communists from late December 1936 (until 1946) so that the Chinese could fight Japan as a united country (see the nationalist-communist **Second United Front**). The new nationalist-communist alliance against the Japanese presence in China caused concern in Tokyo. Japan's right-wing **militarist** government held a particular hatred for communism and all it represented. The Japanese had even made attempts in the past to reach a **rapprochement** with the Chinese nationalists for the purposes of keeping communist and Soviet influence out of the region but these had proved **fruitless**. With the Chinese united and the Japanese more determined than ever to defend their interests in China, the scene was set for a full-scale confrontation between the two countries.

The Second Sino-Japanese War (July 7th 1937 – September 2nd 1945)

The night of July 7th 1937 witnessed a major escalation in the conflict between Japan and China following an incident at Marco Polo Bridge (*Lugouqiao Incident*) on the outskirts of Peking (see **the Marco Polo Bridge Incident**). Miscommunications and misunderstandings between the local Japanese and Chinese forces in the area resulted in a minor Japanese attack that later result in a major war. The incident set off a chain of events and failed negotiations, which ended with a full-scale conflict between China and Japan that **engulfed** most of China and not just the northeastern provinces. The Second Sino-Japanese War (July 7th 1937 – September 2nd 1945) therefore started as a result of the Marco Polo Bridge Incident. With Japanese hardliners in the mood to strike hard and the Chinese in no mood to concede, the scene was set for war. Within a short time, Japanese soldiers were pouring across the border in their tens of thousands to punish the Chinese for their resistance, and to secure Japanese objectives in China once and for all (see for example **the Battle of Beiping-Tianjin** in July and August 1937). This escalation after the Marco Polo Bridge Incident represented the start of the Second World War in Asia. In August, a Chinese attack on Japanese troops and naval vessels in Shanghai **backfired** when the Japanese responded with a massive display of firepower by sea and air. Chinese resistance was dealt with ruthlessly. In their attempt to control the strategically vital Yangtze valley, the Japanese army

advanced upriver from Shanghai to the government capital in Nanking. The campaign was an extremely bloody affair **spanning** over five months and with the Chinese army suffering a staggering **250,000** casualties, some sixty per cent of the total number of soldiers sent to fight the Japanese (see **the Battle of Shanghai** from August to November 1937). When an exhausted and vengeful Japanese Army entered Nanking on December 13th 1937, they engaged a campaign of rape, murder, and **looting** on a scale **unparalleled** in the history of modern warfare. **The Nanking Massacre** (between December 1937 and January 1938) as it was later called, resulted in the deaths of between 200,000 and 300,000 people and the rape of over 20,000 women and girls. To the present day, the **atrocities** committed in Nanking, and Japanese and Chinese attitudes and approaches towards their memories, remain **an open wound** in bilateral ties. Japan's military campaigns after July 1937 had a **crippling effect** on China's military, economy, and society.

Severely weakened along the eastern coastline, the KMT-led government had no choice but to withdraw deep into the country's interior, constantly engaging and fending off Japanese forces that were in hot pursuit. Despite their losses, the Chinese secured several military victories against the Japanese. While the Japanese were **undoubtedly** the superior force in terms of organization and capabilities, the Chinese nonetheless inflicted numerous losses upon the Japanese in a war which Japan started but did not know how to end. By late 1938, Japan was predominant along China's eastern coastline all the way from Tianjin in the north to Guangzhou in the south but they were unable to **subdue** stubborn Chinese resistance deeper inland where geography and distance favored the Chinese armed forces. By the late 1930s, Chiang Kai-shek had set up his KMT base in **Chongqing (Chungking)**, deep in the southwest China. The city was surrounded by mountains and was **impenetrable** to Japanese ground forces. Chongqing was heavily bombed by the Japanese air force from February 1938 until August 1943, and the Chinese suffered massive civilian casualties as a result.

The **protracted** nature of the Second Sino-Japanese War was not helped by the absence of outside help from the US, the UK, or the League of Nations. With the **clouds of war on the horizon** in Europe, the foreign powers could only offer words of **condemnation** for Japan's actions rather than concrete assistance. Nazi Germany under **Adolf Hitler** and **Fascist** Italy under **Benito Mussolini** kept the European powers' eyes focused firmly on Europe. In the United States, the **prevailing** mood in the 1930s was one of **neutrality** and **pacifism** in the area of foreign affairs. It was only the USSR, a state with **a vested interest** in preventing Japanese expansionism in northeast Asia that offered any substantial assistance. The first **glimmers of hope** in terms of foreign help from the US and the UK appeared in October 1937 when US President Roosevelt made a widely publicized speech in which he called for an international '**quarantine**' against aggressor states (see **the Quarantine Speech**). A month later, the British organized a meeting of the participant members of the Washington Naval Conference of 1922. The purpose was to reach a consensus on the implications of Japan's behavior in China. This **initiative** however had no impact. Despite these symbolic gestures of disapproval for Japan's actions, the US continued to do nothing for the remainder of the 1930s. As Cohen observes, *'American property was destroyed by the Japanese, an American warship deliberately sunk by Japanese planes, American commerce ravaged, and American citizens killed, but the United States was unwilling to risk being drawn into the war. Unlike Stalin, Roosevelt was*

not ready to send his countrymen to fight and die for China' (Cohen, 2000:346) (see **the USS Panay Incident** on December 12th 1937; see also **the Allison Incident** on January 26th 1938). A reluctance to get involved in a possible war with Japan however did not mean that the Americans were unwilling to help. For example, the Americans provided the Chinese with \$25 million with which to purchase trucks in the United States. Tokyo was outraged by the move, and China was boosted by the gesture of help. The Chinese **diaspora** and American **sympathizers** in the US also played a key role in **garnering** public support and sympathy for China's cause. By 1939, opinion polls showed that the vast majority of US citizens favored an embargo on any war-related materials to Japan. Roosevelt however still remained cautious.

The USSR's approach to China took a dramatic change after the Soviets signed a **controversial non-aggression pact** (see **the Nazi-Soviet Non-aggression Pact**) with Nazi Germany in August 1939, prior to the outbreak of full-scale war in Europe on September 1st when the Germans invaded Poland. From Moscow's **perspective**, the threat of attack from Germany in the West appeared to have been removed, at least for the time being. Soviet military successes against the Japanese on the Mongolia-Manchuria border also resulted in a much calmer **appraisal** of the Japanese threat in the East. When the Soviets decimated a Japanese force in a counter-offensive during the so-called **Nomonhan Incident** in August 1939, Stalin felt confident that the Japanese could be contained. As a result, the importance of China as a defensive buffer decreased. Gradually, vital Soviet assistance to the Chinese decreased as well. The US was also **fixated** on the outbreak of major war in Europe in late 1939, and the UK embraced itself for a possible invasion attempt by Germany. Republican China was now more isolated and unaided than ever before. In March 1940, a major KMT rival to Chiang's power, **Wang Jingwei**, agreed to Japanese proposals to establish a puppet government in Nanking. The situation appeared **hopeless** for Chiang Kai-shek but miraculously both the nationalists and the communists (who were centered in Yan'an in Shaanxi province) **held out**.

Both the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact and the defeat of Japan's military forces along the Mongolian border were an unexpected **set-back** for Japan. The proposal by some in Tokyo of an alliance with Nazi Germany and a war with the Soviet Union to defend Japan's interests in the East now **appeared remote**. As a result, Japanese strategists who had pushed for an expansion and a risky advance southwards into Southeast Asia were given more attention by decision-makers in Tokyo. They argued that such a strategy could help to address Japan's shortages in energy resources and raw materials, and its vulnerability to the Western colonial powers that controlled them (see **the Southern Expansion Doctrine**). The timing also appeared **opportune** given the fact that the region's colonial powers, France, Great Britain, and the Netherlands were all trying to prevent and end Nazi occupation in Europe, and could offer little or no attention to Asia. This strategy was made more **feasible** after April 1941 when, following positive overtures from Stalin, the Japanese and the Soviets agreed **to bury their differences** and to sign a non-aggression agreement of their own (see **the Japanese-Soviet Non-aggression Pact** of April 13th 1941).

In September 1940, Japan forced **the Vichy French regime** to permit Japanese forces into northern French Indochina (present day Vietnam). On September 27th 1940, Japan, Italy, and Germany, the world's three most powerful fascist states signed the Tripartite **Pact** (the Axis Alliance). A key objective of this treaty was to keep the US

out of the European and East Asian conflicts by threatening a war in two oceans (in the Atlantic Ocean against Germany and Italy, and in the Pacific Ocean against Japan) if the United States declared war on Japan, Germany, or Italy. **Far from intimidating** Washington, the pact however had the opposite effect on US attitudes and opinions towards the Japan-China war. As Cohen notes, *'it was an event of enormous importance for Japan's relations with the United States – and, indirectly, of tremendous benefit to China. No words, no act, could have been more effective in convincing Americans of their **stake** in the outcome of the Sino-Japanese war than Japan's decision to ally with Nazi Germany'* (Cohen, 2000:347).

Within a matter of months following the signing of the Tripartite Pact, the Americans provided the Chinese with huge sums of money with which to fight the Japanese (for example as much as \$95 million in the first six months after September 27th 1940). The US also provided one hundred fighter planes. Experienced US pilots who were also hired by the Chinese to **wreck havoc** upon the Japanese air force in China (see **the Flying Tigers**). The Chinese also greatly benefitted from the '**Lend Lease**' program (from 1941 to 1945) through which they received millions of dollars worth of military material from the US government. With Japan now making moves to expand its activities in Southeast Asia in areas such as French Indochina (Vietnam), the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia), and British Malaya (Malaysia), the US, under pressure with major powers such as Great Britain and France, started to attempt to restrict and punish the Japanese **via economic sanctions**. On the day before the signing of the Tripartite Pact, the US declared that it would commence an **embargo** on the sale of steel and iron scrap – some of the most important materials that Japan imported from the USA. This embargo seriously limited Japan's access to these vital materials. As a result, Tokyo interpreted Washington's move as an 'unfriendly act' (see **the Export Control Act** of 1940). The extra limitations and restrictions on Japan's access to vital raw materials and resources reinvigorated the debate amongst Japanese strategists and politicians about how to end the dependence on the Western powers for oil, rubber, iron ore, tin, and so forth. One strategy was to challenge Western power in Southeast Asia and even to go to war if necessary to secure access to these materials. With the Western powers distracted by the outbreak of World War Two in Europe since September 1939, Japan's general supply of vital imports from around the world also decreased considerably. The resources of Southeast Asia were now more important than ever.

With Western Europe experiencing the full force of Nazi German power during its **blitzkrieg** campaign after the spring of 1940, Japan expanded its operations in Indonesia and Indochina. In September 1940, Japanese soldiers had landed in northern French Indochina (Vietnam). Japan had also demanded that the Netherlands provide them with a fixed supply of oil and other vital materials from the Dutch East Indies (Indonesia). The Dutch used delaying tactics **to buy time**. Japan examined plans to occupy Indonesia while keeping the US out of any potential conflict. In July 1941, a Japanese Imperial Conference, **undeterred** by US economic sanctions, officially agreed to the Japanese military's advance into Southeast Asia even though they knew that the move could risk a war with the USA. Despite Americans warnings to Tokyo not to intervene any further in Indochina, Japan expanded its activities in the area and moved to completely occupy Indochina in July 1941. In August, Washington conceded to political pressure and commenced a **partial** embargo on oil supplies from the US to Japan. Both countries were at this stage still eager to avoid a war. For the

Americans, the priority lay not in East Asia but in the war in Europe. The autumn of 1941 was a period of ongoing diplomacy between Tokyo and Washington to prevent war. Many US elites worried that conceding to Japan might force their allies in China (Chiang Kai-shek and the KMT) to surrender to the Japanese. They also viewed Japanese **assurances** as insincere. The UK, the US' most important war-time ally also warned of the dangers to American and British interests in East Asia if Japan was not **held back**. As such, it was apparent that the United States' commitment to both Great Britain and China ensured that Washington and Tokyo could not find a middle ground that could prevent further potential conflict. The restrictions on oil however placed great pressure on Japan to find alternative supplies as soon as possible. As Cohen notes '*As Japan's oil reserves ran out, its time ran out. If the Americans would not provide the oil essential to Japan's war machine, it would have to be found elsewhere – and soon, before spring*' [the spring of 1942]. *The American Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor would have to be destroyed to **preempt** American interference in Japan's conquest of Southeast Asia and its control of the oil reserves of Indochina. Weather – the **horrendous** seas of the North Pacific in winter – **precluded** waiting beyond early December. The failure of diplomacy would **necessitate** war – and diplomacy failed to resolve Japanese-American differences*' (Cohen, 2000:349).

By late 1941, Washington continued to punish Japanese aggression in Southeast Asia by freezing Japanese assets in the USA (see **the Hull Note** of November 1941). By this stage Japan believed that war with the United States was unavoidable if Japan was to protect its interests in East Asia and if it was remain a major and expanding imperial power. It should be noted that the Japanese did not realistically expect to defeat the USA. They did however believe that if they could take a military risk and temporarily destroy America's naval capabilities in the Pacific then they might be able to buy time in which to create an **impregnable** Japanese position in the whole of East Asia. For this purpose, the Japanese decided to attack **Pearl Harbor** on the morning of December 7th 1941. US President Roosevelt later referred to this attack as a date 'which will live in **infamy**.' The US and Japan were now at war and the Second World War in East Asia had reached a new and more brutal stage.

Key Points:

- The Mukden Incident (1931) and the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937 – 1945) had a profoundly negative effect on China, the stability of East Asia, and the future of Japan-China relations.
- Japanese militarism and Japanese support for a fascist ideology had contributed to the outbreak of an unwinnable war that ultimately led to the Second World War breaking out in East Asia. This had a devastating effect on both Japan and China (as well as the entire region).
- As a result of Sino-Japanese frictions in the 1930s, the Chinese communists in particular developed into a **formidable** political and military force with a significant support base amongst the Chinese public.

- The United Second Front alliance between the nationalists and the communists after late 1936 and early 1937 (from 1937 to 1946), temporarily suspended **the Chinese Civil War** (1927 – 1950) until after World War Two, and allowed the nationalists and the communists in China to fight the Japanese as allies.
- The Japanese occupation of parts of China and Southeast Asia; at a time when the Western powers were distracted by the Second World War in Europe, had a dramatic effect on the international order in East Asia. Nationalist and communist groups in the region became stronger as they fought to resist the Japanese occupiers, and later the Europeans who returned after the war to reclaim their colonies.
- Intense rivalry between nationalist and communist groups would also be a characteristic of East Asian politics from the 1930s onwards.
- By the end of the 1930s and the start of the 1940s, the United States was seen as the most powerful Western state amongst the major global powers.