

# 7 The Second World War in the Pacific: Total War

- WWII erupts from complex ideological and economic context of the 1930s
- Great Depression affects all countries
- situation in Asia and Pacific is complicated by European imperial administration

## 7.1 Causes of the Second World War in the Pacific

### Long-term causes

- Japan provides aid to Allies in WWI; expands her markets at expense of western powers
- Japan expands influence by occupying German colonies in Pacific and give ultimatum to China of 21 demands for concessions
- global economy recovers and Japanese manufacturers suffer from competition
- China erects tariff barriers on cheaper Japanese products: collision course
- Japan is disappointed with settlement (as the Axis allies)
- Japan also hopes for extra-territorial concessions in China
- Asia is treated as a retainer at the imperial table rather than equal partner
- Washington Naval conference: effort to avert naval arms race (US, GB, Jap)
- 5:5:3 ratio of capital ship tonnage
- Japan suffers under restrictions: demands equality: US, GB refuse: Japan doesn't renew treaty
- Japan is a liberal democracy overseen by a divine emperor; however no mechanism for responsible government
- number of large families, navy and army exercise great deal of political and economic influence
- Japanese economy falters in 1920s: ultra-nationalism and anti-western sentiments as "new" doctrine
- after Wall Street Crash: conclusion that expansion is the only answer to shrinking markets
- China is the target of expansion

### Short-term causes

- Japan responds to Great Depression with deficit financing (spending dependent on loans)
- ultra-nationalists and militarists demand rearming of military: Prime Minister who doesn't allow this is assassinated
- two-thirds of Japanese spending is on armaments: expanding to China
- lack of civilian control of military and government
- staged explosion on Japanese owned railway in Manchuria as excuse for occupation
- protectorate called Manchukuo under puppet ruler Pu Yi is created
- Pu Yi is the last emperor of Manchu dynasty in China
- Chinese government complains to League of Nations: League is unwilling to deploy troops
- Lytton Commission (sent by League) finds that both sides are responsible for conflict and that the Manchukuo territory is illegitimate due to Nine Power Treaty: Japan withdraws from League
- League of Nations fails its first major test: collective security
- economic sanctions and military adventure impossible: economic crisis, 12 years after a war
- Japan understands League's weakness: proclaims whole of China as their region of influence: tell all other countries to remove themselves from Chinese economy and politics
- agreements and treaties are only useful if countries are willing to back them up with force
- future Axis powers protect trade at the expense of national self-determination
- US and Japan: if both continue their foreign policy path they will get into conflict
- Feb. 1936: junior officers try to overthrow civilian government: military tightens control of government: ensures that military solutions to foreign policy issues take precedence over diplomatic answers
- military Japan keeps forcing Chinese government for concessions

- Japan invades: capture much of coast and entire north-east: use up a lot of resources
- dependent on US for oil and steel: strategic liability: propels war with US
- Japanese expansion threatens US, British, Dutch holdings in south-east China: resources taken from there are threatened by US protectorate in Philippines
- Japanese army argues for land operation against Soviets: "north programme"
- programme is tested in late summer 1939 at Mongolian border: Japanese are overwhelmed and withdraw: from then on emphasize on "south programme"
- when France falls and Tripartite Pact (Germany, Italy, Japan) is signed Japan expands into French colonies in Indo-China
- US demands restoration of Chinese integrity and free trade, Japan wants to keep gains
- Roosevelt understands that Japan makes military preparations while negotiating in good faith: with British and Dutch they cut 80% of oil and much of steel
- Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto studied in US, understands their industrial and military potential: predicts that Japan would survive war with US for 6-12 months: forms strategic thinking: in case of war actions would have to be quick
- Yamamoto is tasked with developing attack plan: three assaults: Guam and Wake islands, Philippines, Pearl Harbor: surprise tactics: goal is to damage US fleet
- surprise works: two-thirds of anti-aircraft are unmanned, ammunition is missing: four battleships are destroyed and three damaged, 200 aircraft are destroyed
- more important to consider what is not hit on 7. Dec. 1941: US aircraft carriers are not there that morning; Pearl Harbor stays an operational base

## 7.2 Combatants

### Allied forces

- 1939: Australian army and navy is incredibly small
- British forces concentrated in India, Burma, Singapore with garrisons in Hong Kong
- Royal Navy is in Mediterranean and Atlantic: vital supply lines during war
- British forces defending Burma are made up of Indian army (poorly supported and trained)
- Chinese nationalist force and communist army (less than 700'000) are very under-equipped
- US army deploys 20 divisions to Pacific operations

### Japanese forces

- conscription and indoctrination increase army
- men receive varying levels of training
- though US produces a lot more it has to divide it amongst different theaters
- political influence of army ensures that most of troops are deployed in China

## 7.3 Strategy and tactics

### Japanese war plans

- Japanese strategists: defensive: industrial and military potential of US
- initial period of offensive operations: territory with enough resources to sustain empire
- if US is still in the war and Australia and New Zealand join a war of attrition is planned
- mid 1943: initial perimeter cannot be maintained and it shrinks
- plan requires close cooperation between army and navy
- aircraft carrier as new technology: Japan adapts quickly: elite of navy
- after initial successes in the six months after Pearl Harbor Japanese land forces are primarily involved in defensive operations
- defensive positions are very strengthened and defended until last defender: tactics inspired by fierce loyalty (includes suicide attacks on US units)

## US strategy: Island Hopping

- after six months of Japanese success they are strategically defeated at Coral Sea and sit behind defensive perimeter
- US decision which route to take to Japan (inter-service politics also play a role)
- army does not get along with navy
- Pacific is split into two theaters of war
- "Island Hopping": strategy that plays on US strength, air and sea power while minimizing Japanese strength, strong defensive positions and a willingness to defend them to the last man
- US bypass islands with strong defenses and capture smaller ones: on these they build air strips for air power: system of overlapping air cover brings forces near enough to Home Islands
- the bypassed islands have no strategic value without naval or air support

## Strategic bombing and commercial warfare

- Japan in the range of newest long-range bomber
- US use incendiary bombs rather than explosives as Japanese urban areas are built of wood
- devastate Japanese ability to produce war material and cut off shipping lines of import (Japan has no plan of defending their supply lines as the Allies did in the Atlantic)

## Fighting in the Pacific

- locating enemy ships in the vast space of the ocean is a challenge
- up to this point in history naval warfare was confined to areas close to landfall and enemies usually occupied the same continent
- aircraft carrier as indispensable weapon of Pacific war
- land operations undertaken by Japan or Allies include an amphibious landing
- amphibious landings: notoriously difficult, landing troops are vulnerable, air supremacy is key, supply and transport are exposed

## 7.4 Operations

### Japanese advance - Philippines, Singapore, Hong Kong

- most important operation initiated in Dec. 1941 is Pearl Harbor
- assault on Malaya is one of conquest for needed resources
- British in East Indies is concentrated in Singapore
- British High Command always prioritizes North Africa and Home Islands
- British military planners give little weight to Japanese land, air and sea fighting ability
- they think their defenses are more than enough; two ships are sunken and troops are pushed back into Singapore: British have to surrender as water supply falls to Japanese
- 8. Dec.: Japanese attack Hong Kong (holds until 25. Dec.); likewise islands of Wake, Guam, Tarawa fall to Japanese; British also pushed from Burma; Dutch surrender holdings in East Indies after Battle of Java Sea
- US presence at Philippines: looms in strategic planning: all resources gained in South China have to be shipped next to Philippines: all gains will be pointless if US stays in there
- Japanese dislodge the small force from Philippines

### Guadalcanal

- initiative is passed over to US at Midway with the defeat of Japanese carrier fleet
- first target is the re-conquest of Guadalcanal (important air base)
- primary assault is successful but the Japanese counterattack: six-month brawl
- Japanese try to run supplies through US blockade
- both sides lose around dozen ships
- victory at Guadalcanal enables two-pronged advance against Japanese stronghold at Rabaul
- US makes steady, but slow, progress

- after Guadalcanal, Japanese strengthen their positions and defend these with fanatical intensity
- air combat is essential to Allied success throughout campaign

## **The Gilbert and Caroline Islands**

- US amount of material allows two-way moving through Pacific
- offensive in central Pacific opens route to recapturing Philippines and attacking Home Islands

## **The Marshall and Marianas Islands**

- once Marshalls are under Allied control, they advance against Saipan in Marianas Island group
- desperate struggle with many US casualties
- Japanese lose a lot of their material; survivors of garrison commit suicide

## **The Philippines**

- US forces land in Oct. and Japanese reinforce their forces on smaller islands
- initial US landings occur on the smaller islands
- Feb. 1945 the capital is recaptured; takes until July to defeat last of Japanese troops on island

## **Burma**

- US has a bulk of fighting in Central Pacific, but Australian army plays vital role in fighting on New Guinea and other parts of southern sector
- meanwhile the British are fighting in Japanese Burma
- Burma is defended weakly and the troops retreat to British India
- Allied forces attempt retake; these attempts are thrown back (Nov. 1942; Feb. 1943)
- March 1943: Japanese go on offensive and invade India, less than quarter returns
- late 1944: Allied forces push into Burma

## **Iwo Jima and Okinawa**

- US captures Iwo Jima to provide damaged bombers returning a place to ditch and base for short-range fighters to support bombing missions
- Japanese are dug deeply into the ground
- Marines capture island's high ground quickly but it takes longer to finish the campaign
- next step is the heavily fortified island Okinawa
- in desperation the Japanese unleash airborne suicide attacks
- kamikaze sink over 30 ships
- Japanese soldiers are unwilling to surrender and die
- Okinawa is strategically important and also plays an important psychological role in US decisions: Okinawa gives US an impression how invasion of Home Islands will look like: kamikaze, suicidal defenses and monstrous casualties
- talks of whether or not and how to use atomic weapons

## **The war at sea**

- US decode that Japan will attack southern New Guinea: send carriers to intercept
- first naval battle in which the surface fleets never lay eyes on each other
- numerically the Battle at Coral Sea is a draw but strategically the US prevent the Japanese landings on New Guinea
- the Magic programme also decodes that Japan prepares another major attack, place unknown
- Washington is worried it could be continental US, carriers draw back east
- Japanese want their capture of Midway to get US carriers into battle and finish off what they started at Pearl Harbor
- deciphering trick reveals that Japanese will attack US base at Midway Island
- US carriers surprise the Japanese fleet

- within five minutes three of four Japanese carriers are ablaze
- from this point US industrial power overwhelms the Japanese in the Pacific
- the battle of Midway can be seen as the changing course of war against Japan just as Stalingrad and El Alamein mark the turn of the tide against Germany
- Japanese effort to stop US landing in Philippines with a fleet attacking the naval force supporting the landings; the US outgun them and they retreat

## The air war

- when US captures Saipan, Japanese home islands are within range of the US B-29
- this bombing campaign starts in spring 1945
- rather than exploding bombs, the US used incendiary bombs attacking at low level
- devastated Japanese air force has no answer
- over half of the country's urban centers are destroyed but do little damage to Japanese industrial capacity (dispersed through the country)
- the only alternative to invading Japan is the total isolation of the home islands combined with concentrated strategic bombing campaign against urban centers: efficacy of plan is called into question intensive fire bombing campaign brings Japanese government no closer to unconditional surrender
- when Albert Einstein says there are scientists left in Germany capable of deciphering how to initiate the chain reaction of nuclear fission and harnessing it into a weapon, President Truman assembles programme (Manhattan Project) with greatest minds of physics and chemistry
- British have a weapon programme themselves but fuse with US in 1942
- summer 1945: prototype of weapon
- discussion whether to use it as normal weapon (no warning) or to give Japan warning and option to surrender: Truman decided for the first, no warning and maximum effect
- targeting committee settles for industrial centers: omit Tokyo and Kyoto to maintain government structure capable of surrender
- US builds runways to accommodate the potential for B-29s with heavier payloads to lift off: these are the atomic bombs (Fat Man and Little Boy)
- 6. Aug.: first bomb is dropped on Hiroshima
- three days later, with no surrender, second bomb is dropped on Nagasaki
- Japanese Emperor orders general surrender (formalized on 2. Sept. 1945)

## 7.5 Effects of the Second World War on the Pacific

### Democratization of Japan and US occupation

- Japan primarily defeated by US and its occupation falls to US
- US goals for Japan are the development as a liberal democracy with economy based on free market principles
- terms of occupation: punishment of war criminals, disarmament, banning former military officers holding political office, disbanding large corporations, emperor has to denounce his divinity and accept a figurehead role in government, land reform breaking up large holdings, US is permitted to hold military bases on Okinawa and in Japan
- US aid pours into Japan (1945-50)
- occupation formally ends in 1952 although peace does not
- Japan remains a demilitarized parliamentary democracy with flourishing market economy

### Cold War

- US is sole occupying power of Japan which determines its rehabilitation
- Japanese imperial holdings are divided amongst Allies
- Soviet Union honors pledge made at Yalta to enter war with Japan
- declaration of pledge and invasion of Mongolia happen on 7. Aug. 1945 (day after atomic bomb; events are related)
- decision to drop bomb had hinged on US reluctance to accept Soviet help in defeating Japan and a share of occupation

- with the dropping of atomic bomb the US does not need help from Allies
- Britain, China and France are in no position economically to occupy Japan
- the Soviets are left; Truman has a growing distrust
- US occupation of Japan provides important base for US and United Nations operations during Korean War
- escalation of Cold War that comes with Korean War accelerates rehabilitation of Japan and Germany

## **Imperialism and decolonization**

- cost of WWII reduces Britain and France to second-rate powers
- both still have global empires
- British difficulty of defending such scattered holdings (1940-42)
- political will in Britain to contemplate independence of some colonial holdings (India)
- French colonial holdings in Asia are different: Japanese troops after the two bombs surrendering; China falling back to Civil War
- France hopes to regain industrial holdings which results in nine years of warfare