

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