**CHAPTER 5: WW2 IN ASIA PACIFIC**

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| **WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW:**  Key developments leading to the outbreak of World War II in the Asia–Pacific  – Ineffectiveness of the League of Nations in the 1930s  – Worsening of US–Japan relations  – Japan’s expansionist foreign policy o Aggression towards China from 1937  o Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere  o Bombing of Pearl Harbour, 1941 |

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| **JAPAN – BACKGROUND INFORMATION** |

**\*\*Modernizing to Strengthen\*\***

* 1800s: Japan worried about Western imperialism as Western powers colonized nearby Asian countries (e.g., India, Southeast Asia).
* 1868: Began Meiji Restoration to modernize industries and military.
* Sent scholars overseas to learn Western technology and science.
* By early 1900s, Japan transformed into a significant power.

**\*\*Military Victories and Expansion\*\***

* 1894: First Sino-Japanese War; 1904: Russo-Japanese War.
* Gained control over Korea and parts of Manchuria, boosting resources and ambitions.
* Developed a close relationship with Britain through trade and defense treaties.
* Became a League of Nations member, gaining global prestige.

**\*\*Washington Naval Conference (1921)\*\***

* Japan, Britain, France, and the USA agreed to limit warship building.
* Japan felt unfairly treated as it was required to reduce its navy more than the Western powers.
* This heightened Japan’s desire to be equal to the West, fostering ambitions for a strong empire.

**\*\*Japan’s Ambitions and Ultranationalism\*\***

* Aspired to be as powerful as Western countries.
* Meiji Constitution and national education emphasized loyalty to the emperor and military strength.
* Rise of ultranationalism, with citizens supporting aggressive expansion to solve economic issues.
* 1910: Public support for Japan’s conquest of Korea, seen as a solution for land and food scarcity.

**\*\*Economic and Resource Pressures\*\***

* Japan faced limited land and resources for its growing population.
* Sought to control territories for self-sufficiency in food and raw materials (e.g., coal, iron).
* Reluctant to depend on imports from countries like China.
* The ambition to rival Western powers led to tensions with the West, particularly with America and Britain, heightening Asia-Pacific conflicts.

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| **REASONS FOR THE OUTBREAK OF WW2 IN ASIA PACIFIC** |

3 main reasons:

1. Japan’s aggressive Foreign Policy
2. Weak League of Nations
3. US-Japan relationship worsening.

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| **REASON 1: Japan’s Aggressive Foreign Policy** |

**Why did Japan embark on an aggressive foreign policy?**

**[A] Rise of Japanese Militarism**

* Civilian leaders favoured strengthening Japan through peaceful means, such as investments and trade.
* They opposed an aggressive expansionist policy and reduced the military budget.
* However, military leaders, who were ultranationalists, supported an aggressive foreign policy.
* They believed war with the West was inevitable and sought to build an empire to prepare for it.
* They distrusted the West, fearing that trade deals could be broken, leaving Japan vulnerable to economic crises.
* They aimed to remove Western influence from Asia and establish Japanese dominance.
* Military leaders resented civilian leaders for cutting their budget.
* The military gained influence due to victories against China and Russia.
* Japan's 1931 invasion of Manchuria was popular among the Japanese, who saw it as a solution to economic problems.
* The military convinced the public that expansion was key to solving Japan’s economic issues.
* Japanese citizens increasingly supported the military over civilian politicians.
* The military grew in popularity, making civilian politicians appear weak.
* By 1936, the military controlled the entire government.
* **This shift toward military power led Japan towards aggressive foreign policies, increasing tensions with Western powers in the Asia Pacific and raising the likelihood of war.**

**[B] To remove Western powers from Asia**

* The Meiji Constitution and Japan’s education system instilled loyalty to the emperor and opposition to the West among citizens.
* Britain, Russia, and the USA were seen as rivals hindering Japan’s rise as an Asian power.
* **USA’s trade tariffs** on Japanese goods in the 1930s damaged Japan's economy, fostering hostility towards the USA.
* Japan believed it could not depend on other countries for economic needs, increasing the desire to acquire territories for resources and new markets, leading to conflicts with the USA and other Western nations.
* **USSR’s communist ideology**, which promoted governance by the people rather than emperors, threatened Japan’s belief in loyalty to the emperor.
* Japan feared the spread of communism in Asia and signed the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1936 with Italy and Germany to oppose communism.
* This heightened Japan’s interest in controlling more territories to prevent communism’s spread and secure resources for potential conflicts with the USSR.
* **Britain was considered a rival** due to its colonies in Hong Kong and Malaya.
* Britain’s criticism of Japan’s 1931 invasion of Manchuria increased tensions, as Britain grew wary of Japan’s expanding power.
* **Western powers were seen as a threat to Japan’s ambitions. Japan’s desire to remove Western powers from Asia and establish itself as an Asian power fuelled its aggressive foreign policies.**

**[C] To solve economic problems.**

* During the Great Depression, countries such as USA adopted protectionism.
  + This meant they placed taxes on foreign imports such as products from Japan.
  + -> it led to a sharp fall in demand for Japanese goods as Japanese exports were now more expensive to foreign buyers.
  + Japan was also unable to obtain resources from other countries such as oil and steel. -> hurt Japan’s economy.
  + Led to business closures, unemployment - > led to suffering of Japanese people.
* Military commanders were convinced that other countries cannot be relied upon, and Japan needs to be self-sufficient.
* **Felt an aggressive foreign policy can solve Japan’s economic problems :->**
* **By conquering other countries and building an empire, Japan could obtain their resources and sell Japanese products in these new markets, solving the economic problems for the Japanese people.**
* **This, the desire to solve Japan’s economic problems would lead to worsening tensions with other countries and outbreak of war more likely.**

**How did Japan carry out its aggressive foreign policies?**

Japan’s aggressive foreign policies were carried out through the idea of the **Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere**.

* This plan claimed Japan wanted to unite Asian countries and free them from Western control.
* Japan said this would bring economic and cultural benefits to Asia.
* In reality, Japan wanted to dominate these areas, taking resources and forcing local people to work for Japan.

 Japan **invaded China in 1937** as part of its goal to expand its control in Asia.

* The invasion started after a clash at the Marco Polo Bridge, which led to a full-scale war.
* Japan aimed to control China for its resources and to create a buffer against Western powers.
* During the invasion, Japanese forces committed severe atrocities, like the Nanjing Massacre, where many Chinese civilians were killed and mistreated.
* Japan set up puppet governments in areas they occupied in China.
* These puppet governments made it easier for Japan to control resources and keep local resistance low.

**Japan’s aggressive expansion in Asia and its plan to dominate the region raised tensions with Western countries, eventually contributing to conflict with the United States and other Allies in World War II.**

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| **REASON 2: WEAK LEAGUE OF NATIONS** |

**Japan’s Invasion of Manchuria (1931)**

* + Japan was facing economic problems due to the Great Depression.
  + Manchuria, a region in China, was rich in resources like coal and iron, which Japan needed
  + In 1931, the Japanese military staged an explosion on a railway (known as the Mukden Incident) as an excuse to invade Manchuria.
  + The Japanese army quickly took control of the region, claiming they were protecting their interests.
  + Japan set up a puppet state in Manchuria called Manchukuo, with a former Chinese emperor, Puyi, as a figurehead ruler.
  + The invasion was supported by many Japanese citizens who believed it would solve Japan’s economic issues.

**Response by League of Nations and the Impact:**

* + The League of Nations condemned Japan’s actions, but Japan ignored them and withdrew from the League in 1933.
  + Japan announced its desires to invade the rest of China.
  + The League took no further actions.
  + **The League appeared weak as they were unable to stop Japan’s aggression.**
  + **It would boost Japan’s ambitions and encourage it to continue its aggressive foreign policies.**
  + **The successful invasion of Manchuria provided Japan with raw materials and a market to sell its products -> helped to solve economic problems in Japan.**
  + **The military became even more popular in Japan and strengthened its influence in the government.**
  + **The invasion marked the start of Japan’s aggressive expansion in Asia, leading to further conflicts and contributing to the outbreak of World War II.**

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| **Reason 3: Japan’s worsening relationship with USA** |

* 1930: USA introduced tariffs on foreign products during the Great Depression to protect its own economy.
  + This hurt Japan’s exports to USA resulting in a fall in income and economic hardship for Japan’s businesses.
  + Led to tensions between USA and Japan.
* 1937: USA condemned Japan’s invasion of China.
  + USA wanted to stop Japan from expanding – concerned about its growing power.
  + USA provided financial and military aid to China’s leader Chiang Kai Shek.
* 1940: Japan invaded French Indochina
  + USA placed economic sanctions on Japan such as the banning the sale of steel, and iron.
  + Expanded to oil when negotiations failed between USA and Japan in 1941.
  + Seized Japanese assets in USA making it unable to buy essential goods.

**Impact on Japan**

* US sanctions severely affected Japan’s economy -> Japan suffered due to a drastic drop in its oil supplies – Oil supplies dropped by 90%.
  + This severely hampered Japan’s war efforts in China as oil was essential to fuel its military.
  + USA demanded Japan to withdraw from China and French Indo China. -> Japan refused.
* Japan refused to accept USA’s demands.
  + It would be humiliating for Japan to withdraw from China. -> Hurt the morale of its soldiers and threaten its control over Manchuria and Korea.
  + Without oil, they would suffer a humiliating defeat in its war with China – thus they aimed to conquer countries in Southeast Asia for its oil. This would put Japan in conflict with USA.
  + They realised that conflict with USA was inevitable.

**Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere**

* To confront the USA in war – they had to strengthen its economy and rival that of USA’s. -> USA’s economy was six times greater than Japan’s.
* Japan launched the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity programme.
  + > goal was to remove Western powers in Southeast Asia, to unite them under Japan’s control and that Japan will protect the people of Asia and rule them fairly.
  + As war had started in Europe, the European colonies in Southeast Asia were not defended sufficiently making it easy for Japan to target these colonies.
  + People in these colonies were unhappy with colonial rule and hence Japan took advantage of this by promising them a better life free from colonial rule.
* Reality:
  + Japan wanted to use the resources in these territories to strengthen its economy and to prepare for war.
  + It was desperate to solve its economic problems caused by US sanctions and wanted to obtain resources from Southeast Asia.
* **Japan’s GEACPS programme would put Japan on a path towards war with the West as Japan would attack and invade the colonies in Southeast Asia which belonged to the Western powers, further worsening tensions and leading to outbreak of WW2 in Asia Pacific.**

**Attack on Pearl Harbor.**

* Japan was desperate for resources as US sanctions had severely crippled its economy.
* It had to conquer Southeast Asia for its resources.
* However to attack Southeast Asia, Japan had to remove the US naval fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor.
  + This US naval fleet was a threat to Japan’s ambitions of creating a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere.
  + Attacking Pearl Harbor would buy time for Japan to conquer countries in Southeast Asia for their resources -> the resources would also allow Japan to sustain its war efforts in China.
* Japan attacked Pearl Harbor on 7th Dec 1941 ->
  + Attack was done in surprise -> 5 battleships were sunk, 2400 Americans were killed.
* The next day Japan began its invasion of Southeast Asia.
* USA declared war on Japan -> led to the start of WW2 in Asia Pacific.

**THE MAIN REASONS WHY JAPAN WENT TO WAR WITH USA:**

 **To Overcome Economic Sanctions:**

* Japan went to war partly because of economic restrictions that the USA placed on them, which put Japan’s survival at risk. Japan's aggressive actions in Asia, like invading China and later French Indochina, upset the United States. To stop Japan's military activities, the US imposed tough economic sanctions, including cutting off supplies of crucial materials like steel, iron, and especially oil. These sanctions had a huge impact, reducing Japan's oil supply by 90%, which was essential for their military and industrial needs, especially in the war against China. Facing a severe shortage of resources and the possibility of losing in China, Japan felt they had no choice but to go to war to secure new resources in Southeast Asia. The sanctions left Japan feeling cornered, with war seeming like the only way to maintain their empire and national pride.

 **To Remove the USA as a Threat and Build the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere:**

* Another reason Japan went to war was to get rid of the threat posed by the USA in the Pacific. Japan wanted to create a group of Asian nations, led by Japan, that would be free from Western control, called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The plan was to use the resources from these regions to support Japan's economy and military efforts. However, the Japanese leaders knew that to achieve this, they needed to eliminate the threat of the US military in the Pacific. The USA had economic interests in Southeast Asia and would likely defend the region if Japan attacked. The attack on Pearl Harbor was a pre-emptive strike meant to give Japan time to take control of Southeast Asia, access vital resources, and strengthen its position before the US could strike back effectively.