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Pearl Harbour A Level Extension Task

Introduction

To what extent did the Americans force the Japanese into attacking Pearl Harbour? The traditional view of the attack on Pearl Harbour is one of an unprovoked attack. To what extent is this picture backed up by the views of Akira Iriye and Robert Dallek? As you read the following extracts put key notes along the line (Resource Two, *Pearl Harbour Lesson Plan*) depending on how far they support the view that the Americans themselves forced the Japanese to attack.

LAURENCE REES: And so come 1940 the Japanese decide to invade Indochina, and it's this that precipitates the problems with the United States isn't it?

AKIRA IRIYE: I think so. In 1940 there is what they call the Southern Advance that follows the Nazi invasion of France and the Low Countries and some bombing of Great Britain. The idea is that they would take advantage of it, because while Germany was victorious, the Dutch, French, and British would not be able to defend their empires in Asia, and here was a big chance for Japan to invade those territories and try their hand first in Indochina because it seemed to be the weak spot there, and also in the China borders and China proper. There had been shipments of arms from Indochina into China also from Burma.

So what the Japanese do is, in order to win this victory in China, they want to cut off the shipment of arms from the West, from the United States and also via the Northern Vietnamese route or the Northern Burmese route. So Japan puts pressure on Great Britain to close the so-called Burma Road, also puts pressure on the French authorities in Vietnam to let the Japanese stay there, basically, essentially, occupying Northern Indochina, and making sure that no shipment went from Indochina into China.

So ultimately the China issue comes back, because from the US point of view what Japan was doing was not simply conquering China. Even to create an Asia for Asians would be detrimental to American tourists and to the spirit of international trade; that's another picture that is very important I think. By the late 1930s the United States had come to exemplify this

open door of international trade, those kind of things, as the key to real economic recovery, and Japan seemed to stand in the way of this kind of new programme.

If the Germans and Japanese combine their forces the Japanese felt that they could just do away with the Soviet Union and remove the Soviet threat to Manchuria under Japanese control. Roosevelt, of course, knows that and tries to put pressure on the Japanese saying that if Japan did anything like that they would have to face strong US resistance. And in this picture from June to about September 1941 the United States is not interested in negotiating with the Japanese at all because what they're interested in is making sure that Japan will not attack the Soviet Union, and they do that by stepping up US pressure, like the embargoing of Japanese oil that comes as a result of a Japanese invasion [of southern Indo-China]. But I think, the thinking is already there in June; to take a tougher stand towards Japan so that Japan would become very much worried about the possible US response to any act that Japan would commit either against Soviet Union or elsewhere. So the United States takes a very hard stand of no compromise on this - Japan [must] clearly make its policy not to attack the Soviet Union nor anybody else. It's the Japanese Emperor and all the high command, the politicians, who begin to say that things were becoming quite untenable. Japan was not attacking the Soviet Union because of fear of American retaliation and not getting oil from the United States. If it decided to get its own oil, Japan would have to face the US countermeasure as well. And so there is a sense that Japan is being closed in; there's no place to manoeuvre or expand.

That's the famous *modus vivendi* agreement that the United States was inclined to agree to. Roosevelt was inclined to say that, okay, this might sound like a nice deal at least for a few months, but in the end the United States rejects that. This is the so-called Hull Memorandum. Cordell Hull presents the Japanese ambassador with this Hull note of November 26th which says that there's no agreement between the United States and Japan unless you also evacuate from China. So China comes into the picture at the last moment and so historians have wondered why, when there was almost an agreement on south-east Asia, why did you bring in China, because the US must have known that once you mention China the Japanese were not going to accept that.

ROBERT DALLEK: Roosevelt, I believe, was very eager to keep Japan at bay. He did not want to see a war with Japan. He was afraid it would be a terrible distraction from the war in Europe, and he did not want to get into a war with Japan. On the other hand, he felt he could not let Japan run wild because the sentiment in the United States about the fighting fronts was much more anti-Japanese than it was anti-German. People were much more preoccupied with what the Japanese were doing in Asia than they were with what was happening in Europe. And so Roosevelt feels he has to do certain things in order to demonstrate to his public that he is taking a firm stand, because people are very sympathetic towards China.

China is America's favourite ally in World War Two, there's this kind of sympathy; China's never been an imperial power, like Britain, and after the attack on the Soviet Union it doesn't have this communist system which is so anathema to what we have here in the United States. And so there is this sense that Japan is a prime enemy, and most disliked in the United States, so Roosevelt needs to put on certain embargoes; public opinion is never far from his mind.

Now, he also does want to punish them for the kind of aggression they're committing in China, there's no question about it, but he doesn't want to see a war with Japan and he's balancing this.

LAURENCE REES: What I find hard to fully understand is this: it is the Japanese movement into Southern Indo-China that triggers the American sanctions in the summer of 1941. But then, in the subsequent discussions with the Japanese, the Americans don't just say 'you have to pull out of Indo-China' they start saying 'stop your aggression in China'. But the Japanese had been in China since 1937, fighting a war of aggression, and anyone who knew the Japanese leadership knew it was an impossibility that the Japanese would agree to pull back out of China. So I don't understand how anybody in America could think that demand wouldn't lead to a situation of dangerous intransigence?

ROBERT DALLEK: I think the feeling in the United States was that Japan could never defeat us. How could they possibly defeat the United States? We are such a larger power, we have such industrial potential. Would they be so foolish as to attack us, to go to war with us? We'll mop them up and they can't really fight all that effectively. So we have to take a tough line with them. American public opinion wants it and Congress is happy to see this happen. Take a tough line with them and it's not going to lead to war. That, I think, is the perspective of the time, of the moment, though of course it was absolutely wrongheaded. And of course the same thing with the surprise attack at Pearl Harbour, we misread the Japanese and we underestimated what their capacity was.