Japanese Technology

Perception they were being treated as a second-rate power.

Dissatisfaction with US racism

Precedents

Final Diplomatic failures

Reasons Japan attacked Pearl Harbour?

(Use the article: “The Gathering Storm” by Francis Pike)

US Support for China and Oil Embargo

The rise of nationalism and militarism

Japanese Hopes about US response

Other Reasons

Numerous commentators had predicted a war between Japan and America since the late nineteenth Century. Tensions were so great that during the early 1910s, multiple waves of panic occurred in western states about a combined Mexican-Japanese invasion. Japanese leaders found it puzzling that Americans fixated on access to the Chinese market when its trade with Japan dwarfed trade with China.

In April 1941, Japan signed a five-year neutrality treaty with the USSR. Alongside promising to avoid conflict with each other, the USSR recognised Manchukuo in exchange for Japan acknowledging its preeminence in Mongolia. Operation Barbarossa opened up debates between the army and navy over whether to violate the treaty and join Germany (Japan did not have to assist Germany as it attacked the USSR). Eventually, the navy won the debate arguing that Japan should use the opportunity of a distracted USSR to seize Indochina. Japan publicly removed troops from Manchuria, hoping that the USSR would reciprocate. Although stuck in China, Japan used the stalemate to bolster its forces for a strike into SE Asia.

Indochina provided an ideal base from which to seize the oilfields of the Dutch East Indies. The Japanese cabinet believed direct US intervention was unlikely, but for the first time, plans were drawn up in July for a possible war. In response to the occupation of Vietnam by 40,000 Japanese troops, Roosevelt bolstered the Philippines defenses and brought Douglas MacArthur out of retirement to oversee the colony. On 26 July, Roosevelt signed an executive order freezing all Japanese assets in the United States. The treasury then ceased all import and export transactions, effectively bringing a total ban on oil exports to Japan. The British had already banned exports to Japan as an ally to Germany. The Netherlands soon followed the US lead.

Following the American and British embargo imposed on Japan in retaliation for their occupation of Indochina, the commander of the Imperial Fleet, Admiral Yamamoto Isoroku, had been warned that his ships would run out of fuel within a year. Japanese militarists felt they had to go forward to seize all they needed. To go back involved an unbearable loss of face. A strike to the South East would allow them to take the Dutch East Indies with its substantial oil production. Moreover, if they also seized British Malaya, they would gain four-fifths of the world’s rubber supply and two-thirds of its tin. The army however wanted to refocus on the Soviet Union, predicting an imminent German victory. The Emperor wished to avoid war with the USA and was frustrated by the navies lack of strategic aims beyond it was preferrable to do it whilst oil reserves remained. Still, he took no decisive moves to prevent a US war.

Intoxicated by a belief in their warrior virility, they failed to grasp the difficulty, even impossibility, of successfully making war upon the United States, the world’s greatest industrial power, impregnable to assault. The Japanese regarded Americans as an unwarlike and frankly degenerate people, whom a series of devastating blows would reconcile to a negotiated peace. Throughout the deliberations on how to respond to the US embargo, few understood the economic and human reserves of the USA. With the newly expanded American draft army in the process of completing its largest-ever “war games,” the American public was gradually becoming supportive of the government and more martial in its own sense of national identity.

Isoroku Yamamoto, the commander of the Japanese fleet, was one of the few in the Japanese high command who understood the industrial potential of the USA. He, however, was an obsessive gambler.

Japanese military attachés in London and Stockholm who reported that the Germans were ill-equipped to launch an invasion of Britain were rebuked by their superiors in Tokyo, to whom such views were unacceptable. Germany’s war in Europe was overwhelmingly responsible for precipitating Japan’s war in Asia: Tokyo would never have dared to attack, but for its conviction that a Hitlerian triumph in the west was imminent. The ambassador in London, warned the government in September that Britain was not beaten and that if Japan wished to preserve its great power status after the war’s conclusion it was time to step back and make some concessions to the western powers.

At the imperial conference in September Admiral Nagano admitted that the USA could not be militarily defeated. He claimed instead that a southern strike could knock Britain out of the war, which would turn US public opinion against the war. On this flimsy premise, whilst simultaneously fighting unsuccessfully in China and with a huge force on the Soviet border, Hirohito gave his ascent for drawing up plans for a war with the United States.

The military leaders had outwardly accepted the preference of the prime minister Prince Konoe Fumimaro to seek a diplomatic solution with the United States. Still, they never intended to accept a deal involving significant concessions. The Imperial Army was resolutely opposed to any withdrawal from China. Although, in many cases, fatalistic about their prospects, especially if the war dragged on, Japan’s military commanders preferred the risk of national suicide to a loss of face. In October Konoe, seeing he was no longer trusted, resigned recommending the moderate Prince Higashikuni to replace him. Hirohito declined, asking the bellicose Hideki Tojo to take the role. Any chance of a diplomatic solution greatly diminished. In October the Emperor instructed his prime minister to devise a suitable pretext for war.

On 8 November, the plan for Pearl Harbour was completed. The single most important feature of this final, perfected plan was its hypothesis that an “impregnable” military system to defend economic self-sufficiency, needed for waging a protracted war, would be established following the completion of the first stage of the oceanic offensive in the South Pacific. Apart from that, no long-term, concrete plan for guiding the war through its protracted stage existed. The army and navy had different strategic concepts—and goals—for the offensive stage. Nor did the plan specify where and when to end the initial offensive. Despite these glaring flaws, Supreme Commander Hirohito confirmed it. He questioned many aspects of the plan but was obsessed with procedural details losing sight of the inherent issues with attacking the USA.

In November Japan sent two proposals to America. The first was unrealistic, as it prescribed the permanent stationing of Japanese troops in China. Proposal B, transmitted on November 20, omitted mention of China. It promised that Japan would not advance by armed force any further than French Indochina and would withdraw to the northern part of that colony after peace was reached in the war with China. In return the United States was asked to restore relations prior to the freezing of Japanese assets, furnish Japan with a million tons of aviation fuel, and assist it in procuring raw materials from the Dutch East Indies. To Roosevelt and his strategists the negotiations were expressions of Japanese weakness. To have agreed to anything proposed by Tokyo would have been seen as an act of appeasement. More important, they were under strong pressure from Britain and China not to compromise with Tokyo. By not taking seriously the Japanese military threat, Roosevelt lost the opportunity to prolong discussions when the anti-Axis coalition was at its weakest.

Secretary of State Cordell Hull, while negotiating with a Japanese envoy, was outraged when he heard on 25 November of a massive convoy of warships and troop transports heading through the South China Sea. He responded with a series of demands seen in Tokyo as tantamount to an ultimatum. Hull’s ‘Ten Points’ document insisted, among other things, that the Japanese should withdraw from Indochina and China and renounce the Tripartite Pact with Germany. Rather than seeing the US had left open the possibility of recognition of Manchukuo, the Japanese were relieved they had sufficient justification for the war with the USA. Only a complete and immediate climbdown by the United States and Britain might have averted conflict at that stage. Yet such a sign of western weakness would probably have encouraged Japanese aggression.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Using the sources and your own knowledge, discuss the reasons for the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941. | |
| Key Idea from the sources: | Key Idea from the sources: |
| Own Knowledge: | Own Knowledge: |
| Key Idea from the sources: | Key Idea from the sources: |
| Own Knowledge: | Own Knowledge: |

Source J is not there but it appears to be a cartoon or piece of propaganda that depicts Germany and Japan planning the attack together.