

**FROM ALLIANCE TO ENMITY:  
ANGLO-JAPANESE RELATIONS, 1930 TO 1939**

by

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During the early twentieth century, Anglo-Japanese relations declined dramatically, and disintegrated altogether during the 1940s. The purpose of the thesis was to examine relations between Britain and Japan from 1930 to 1939. Numerous archival and secondary sources concerning diplomatic relations, contemporary domestic politics, economic constraints, and public opinion were consulted. The principal conclusions were that the decline of the Anglo-Japanese alliance was all but inevitable in light of the altered diplomatic environment following the First World War, that Britain lacked any practical means of stopping Japanese aggression in Manchuria, and that while numerous Britons recognised the threat posed by Japan, few could see any practical way of stopping her.

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## FROM ALLIANCE TO ENMITY: ANGLO-JAPANESE RELATIONS, 1930 TO 1939

### INTRODUCTION

*Oh, East is East and West is West, and never the twain shall meet,  
Till Earth and Sky stand presently at God's great Judgment Seat;  
But there is neither East nor West, Border, nor Breed, nor Birth,  
When two strong men stand face to face, though they come from the ends of the earth!*

Rudyard Kipling: *The Ballad of East and West*, 1889<sup>1</sup>

Kipling's poem was written to emphasise the essential similarities between peoples from different cultures, races and families – no matter how fixed the geographical points of the compass, the Asian and the European were fundamentally equal. Indeed, in the years following its publication, the greatest European empire in history would form an alliance with Asia's youngest and most ambitious empire, proving his point. However, in the years following the First World War, as relations between the East and the West became worse and worse, it would become a symbol of European racism and chauvinism, as though Kipling had never written the final two lines.<sup>2</sup> As such, it may well stand as a most appropriate commentary upon Anglo-Japanese relations in the first half of the Twentieth Century, beginning with high hopes and mutually-beneficial cooperation between the two island empires, but ultimately deteriorating into outright hatred and contempt. It is my intention to

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<sup>1</sup> Kipling, Rudyard. *The Ballad of East and West*, London: *Macmillan's Magazine*, December 1889, p123-124

<sup>2</sup> Carrington, Charles. *Rudyard Kipling: His Life and Work*, London, Macmillan & Co., 1955, p136

examine Anglo-Japanese relations from 1900 to 1939, focusing in particular upon British attitudes towards Japan in the 1930s, how these were affected by domestic and foreign influences, what contemporaries in Britain thought of the deterioration in relations, and why they should think so. For this purpose, this thesis has been divided into three chapters.

The first chapter will examine the impact of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, the First World War and the Washington Naval Treaty, and how these impacted relations between the two countries: from the early days, when two strong empires from opposite ends of the Earth could work together to defend their own interests, to the interwar period, when suspicion and mistrust would result in utter alienation. Its purpose is introductory, in order to provide the necessary contextual background to better understand the substantive chapters that follow. It will argue that while an alliance between Britain and Japan made perfect sense in 1902, with both empires in a strong position that was threatened by Russia, by the interwar period it had come to appear pointless to both countries, as external and internal pressures forced them apart. The second chapter will examine the impact of the Manchurian Incident and its immediate aftermath; how the British regarded Japan's aggression, why Britain's initial response to said aggression was so confused and ineffectual, and whether or not something could have been done under the circumstances. It will argue that while Britain's leaders have been bitterly criticised for their inaction, it is very difficult, even with the benefit of hindsight, to suggest a practical alternative, as many of the factors constraining Britain were external or insurmountable. The third chapter will examine the attitudes of the British towards Japan and her actions following Manchuria by analysing the opinions, hopes and fears of the British Prime Ministers, cabinet ministers, senior civil servants and diplomats, Parliament, the armed forces, the Dominions, the Press, the League of Nations Organisation and the public in

general during the later 1930s, and will also focus upon how the actions and inactions of other countries affected Britain's policy. It will argue that a broad majority in Britain and the empire understood Japan to be a threat, but were unable to suggest any sort of rational, effective means of tackling the menace she posed, not least because of the lack of support from Britain's old allies. In order to address these issues, the thesis has drawn upon a range of private papers (from politicians, civil servants and diplomats), contemporary newspapers and transcripts from *Hansard*, in addition to consulting official papers from the National Archives in Kew, *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939* and *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy*. It has located these within a wide reading of the secondary literature, the historiographical highlights of which shall be considered next.

Of such secondary sources, arguably the most important works are those of Ian Nish, who has written numerous books on Anglo-Japanese relations, examining their growth and decline from the perspectives of both sides from the 1900s onward, paying particular attention to the decline in relations following the First World War.<sup>3</sup> His work is complemented by that of Antony Best, whose work provides a valuable insight into just how Britain viewed Japan, from the break-up of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance to the beginning of the Second World War.<sup>4</sup> Their findings sometimes reinforce each other's statements: in particular, both emphasise how ambivalent Britain's attitude towards and perspective of Japan really were; and sometimes their opinions do not agree: as is mentioned above, they disagree over whether or not the final breakdown of relations was inevitable or not. In the final analysis, their works

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<sup>3</sup> These include but are not limited to: *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-1923*, London: Routledge Curzon, 2004; *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919-1952: Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second World War*, Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1982; *Anglo-Japanese Relations 1892-1925*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002; and *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period*, Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 2002;

<sup>4</sup> Best, Antony. *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor: Avoiding war in East Asia, 1936-41*, London: Routledge, 1995

tend to complement each other's: Best prefers to examine British political and official attitudes at home, while Nish tends to concentrate upon the official and military attitudes of those Britons stationed in the Far East and charged with cooperating with or opposing Japan. As such, a thorough understanding of their works is vital when one seeks to research and understand Anglo-Japanese relations in this period.

Their findings have been reinforced to an extent by Lawrence James, who has provided a superb examination of Anglo-Japanese relations in the context of Britain's decline as a World Power. He is primarily concerned with examining the many diverse causes for Britain's rise to power and her eventual decline, and while concentrating more upon European and internal causes and effects, he does briefly examine Anglo-Japanese relations in the 1930s, touching on some of the areas mentioned above, but also providing valuable new information concerning the extremely mistrustful attitudes of the Dominions towards Japanese expansion.<sup>5</sup> Still another recent account on Anglo-Japanese relations is provided by Philip Towle, whose work concentrates upon the attitudes of the armed forces of Britain and Japan towards one another. He shows that while Britain's Royal Navy and Royal Air Force often underestimated the fighting power and military potential of their Japanese counterparts, the same could not be said for the British Army, which treated the Imperial Japanese Army with great respect and often encouraged the Foreign Office to ally with Japan, abandon China, and form a united front against Germany.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> James, Lawrence. *The Rise and Fall of the British Empire*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995, pp459-460

<sup>6</sup>Towle, Philip. *From ally to enemy: Anglo-Japanese Military Relations, 1900-45*, Cambridge: Global Oriental, 2006, pp86-87

Older works concerning Anglo-Japanese relations include that of Malcolm D. Kennedy, who sees the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance as the beginning of a long decline in Anglo-Japanese relations, as Japan was left isolated, bitter and resentful at Britain's apparent betrayal.<sup>7</sup> He regards Japan as retaining a great deal of respect for and friendship with Britain until well into the late 1930s, only to be all too often snubbed by Britain.<sup>8</sup> His work is still of interest, as it reflects the experiences of a contemporary with personal experience in the field of Anglo-Japanese relations; he was successively a British officer seconded to the Imperial Japanese Army, a member of the Far Eastern Section at the War Office in London, a foreign affairs correspondent in Tokyo, a lecturer on the Far East in Britain, and a researcher on Far Eastern Affairs for the Foreign Office.<sup>9</sup> Unfortunately, his very familiarity (and indeed, sympathy) with the Japanese government often results in him being too critical of the British and their actions, without fully admitting that Japan herself helped to contribute to the ever-deteriorating state of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Another older work is that of Paul Haggie, who like Towle concentrates on the attitudes of the British Armed Forces towards Japan. He focuses primarily upon the Royal Navy's attitude towards Japan, but does not neglect the views held by the other armed forces. He also argues that Britain's political leadership, in contrast to her military leadership, failed to fully recognise the extent to which her military power had declined in the 1920s, thus magnifying the scale of the disaster that would overtake Britain in the 1940s.<sup>10</sup> Unfortunately, as with Kennedy, Haggie's work suffers

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<sup>7</sup> Kennedy, Malcolm D. *The Estrangement of Great Britain and Japan 1917-35*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969, p1

<sup>8</sup> Kennedy, *Great Britain and Japan*, 1969, pp332-334

<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, *Great Britain and Japan*, 1969, p4

<sup>10</sup> Haggie, Paul. *Britannia at Bay: The Defence of the British Empire against Japan 1931-1941*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981, pp vii-viii



from being written before the revisionist period in the study of British appeasement (as expressed in the works of Nish), and is somewhat lacking in comparison to Best and Towle.

More recently, J. K. J. Perry has provided a useful analysis on Anglo-Chinese relations during this period, noting that an increasing number of Britons were won over to China's side during this period, and postulates that had this sympathy not existed, 'a Far Eastern Munich would have been entirely possible, indeed sensible': in doing so, he casts valuable light on Britain's policy towards both China and Japan in the 1930s.<sup>11</sup> Douglas Ford has examined the attitudes of Britain and America towards Japan both prior to and during the Second World War. In particular, he has postulated that as a result of the Imperial Japanese Army's inability to defeat Chinese forces, the Japanese Government's apparent rejection of German proposals for a military alliance, and numerous mistakes made by British and American intelligence services, both countries (America in particular) tended to assume that while Japan was bent on crushing China, she had little interest in controlling the entire Asia-Pacific region.<sup>12</sup> John Ferris has provided an article on British assessments of the Japanese Army between 1919 and 1941, and the effect that these had on Britain's position in the Far East in the Second World War. He suggests that professional British Army analysts actually had a good understanding of the Japanese Army's fighting potential, and were often "sentimental Japanophiles"; as such, his work to an extent corroborates that of Towle, although he also claims that there was another school of thought in the British Army (but not in the War Office) whose far less

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<sup>11</sup> Perry, J. K. J. 'Powerless and Frustrated: Britain's Relationship With China During the Opening Years of the Second Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1939', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Volume 22, Issue 3 (2011): pp408-430

<sup>12</sup> Ford, Douglas. *Britain's Secret War Against Japan, 1937-1945*, New York: Routledge, 2006; 'US Perceptions of Military Culture and the Japanese Army's performance during the Pacific War', *War & Society*, Volume 29, No. 1 (May 2010): pp71-93; 'Realistic Caution and Ambivalent Optimism: United States Intelligence Assessments and War Preparations Against Japan, 1918-1941', *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, Volume 21, No. 2 (2010): pp175-201

accurate views were influenced by “vulgar racism,” and that by 1941 this school had come to dominate the views of the British garrisons in the Far East.<sup>13</sup>

The economic and commercial factors affecting Anglo-Japanese relations have been thoroughly scrutinised in a series of essays by Kibata Yoichi, Antony Best, Isshii Osamu and John Sharkey. Yoichi has analysed the nature of diplomacy between Britain and Japan in the 1930s, focusing in particular upon Japanese activities in China. He argues that in the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian Incident, Britain would have been quite happy to allow Japan to do as it pleased in China as long as it did not threaten Britain’s interests in the rest of China, that Britain did not regard Japanese expansion in Manchuria as a threat to the British Empire, and that Britain had some sympathy for Japan’s desire to resist the rise of Chinese nationalism.<sup>14</sup> While this attitude was challenged by Japan’s withdrawal from the League of Nations, Britain remained optimistic about reaching an agreement, believing that Japan’s increasingly bellicose statements about expansion in East Asia were mainly targeted against other power, especially the United States.<sup>15</sup> Britain would subsequently make several attempts to re-establish cordial relations with Japan: in 1934 (when Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain offered a non-aggression pact between the two countries), and in 1935-36 (when Sir Frederick Leith-Ross twice attempted, with Chamberlain’s support, to link Britain, Japan and China via a policy of currency reform in China and recognition of Japan’s control over Manchuria). In both cases, however, Japan made it clear that she would

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<sup>13</sup> Ferris, John. “Worthy of Some Better Enemy?” *The British Estimate of the Imperial Japanese Army 1919-41, and the Fall of Singapore.* *Canadian Journal of History*, Volume 28, No. 2 (1993): pp233-256

<sup>14</sup> Yoichi, Kibata. “Anglo-Japanese Relations from the Manchurian Incident to Pearl Harbor: Missed Opportunities?”, Nish, Ian and Kibata, Yoichi (eds.). *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1600-2000. Volume II: The Political-Diplomatic Dimension, 1931-2000*, Basingstoke: Macmillan Press Ltd, 2000, pp3-4

<sup>15</sup> Yoichi, “Missed Opportunities?”, 2000, pp5-7

not allow Britain to interfere with Japanese expansion in China, and the decline of civilian influence in Japan (coupled with the steady growth of Anglophobia) made such a rapprochement impossible.<sup>16</sup> This was not fully realised at the time in either country. In the eyes of Japan, cooperation with Britain remained desirable even after the conclusion of the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936 between Japan, Germany and Italy: all that was required was for Britain to acknowledge Japan's dominance in East Asia.<sup>17</sup> Yoichi argues that it was the Tientsin Crisis of 1939, not the Manchurian Crisis, which truly marked a great rise in tension between the two nations, and concludes that "however precarious an agreement between the two countries might have been, it would have changed the power constellation in East Asia in a short term context, which might then have had a critical effect on the long-term development of the international situation in Asia in the 1930s."<sup>18</sup>

In contrast to Yoichi, Antony Best has argued that the Manchurian Crisis began the process of disintegration for relations between Britain and Japan, which had remained relatively stable after the collapse of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, if more distant than before.<sup>19</sup> Best argues that during the 1930s there were elements in both countries that wished to return to the friendship of previous decades, but they were never able to dominate policy, as the interests of Britain and Japan had actually begun to diverge prior to the Washington Treaty, and from then on went into a steady decline.<sup>20</sup> Britain wished to avoid war and stop Japanese aggression, but was ultimately forced to choose between the two: she could only prevent war

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<sup>16</sup> Yoichi, "Missed Opportunities?", 2000, pp7-11

<sup>17</sup> Yoichi, "Missed Opportunities?", 2000, p12

<sup>18</sup> Yoichi, "Missed Opportunities?", 2000, pp18-21

<sup>19</sup> Best, Antony. "The Road to Anglo-Japanese Confrontation, 1931-41", Nish and Kibata (eds.). *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations. Volume II*, 2000, p26

<sup>20</sup> Best, "Anglo-Japanese Confrontation", 2000, p45

by appeasing Japan and accepting her dominance in China, or she could resist Japan by risking war. After many years of debate, Britain chose to resist, and the result was the Pacific War.<sup>21</sup> Best concludes that this diplomatic and economic dispute contributed to the overall breakdown of the interwar order, but this dispute was in turn influenced by growing worldwide tensions over armament, trade wars, and the revision of the postwar treaties.<sup>22</sup>

Ishii Osamu also emphasises commercial rivalry (particularly over Japan's rapid expansion into cotton goods markets) and psychological factors (notably Japan's fear of encirclement) as playing a major part in the decline of Anglo-Japanese relations.<sup>23</sup> Both Britain and Japan were islands with limited resources that largely depended upon international trade, and so in the past both had strongly advocated free trade, but the Great Depression and the shrinking of world trade led both to raise tariffs and impose quotas on imports. Osamu believes that the year 1936 marked the real turning point in Anglo-Japanese relations, as Japan nullified the Naval Treaty and became increasingly diplomatically isolated. An abortive military coup that year resulted in the deaths of several Japanese cabinet ministers, and greatly strengthened the hand of the military. When the Australians and Americans both raised tariffs on Japanese textiles in May 1936, the Japanese saw this as blatant economic warfare. Given that Japan had purchased large amounts of American cotton and Australian wool, the psychological blow of these actions were especially heavy, and Japan's fears of a conspiracy between the English-speaking nations were only increased as a result.<sup>24</sup> Osamu's arguments are challenged,

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<sup>21</sup> Best, "Anglo-Japanese Confrontation", 2000, pp45-46

<sup>22</sup> Best, "Anglo-Japanese Confrontation", 2000, p27

<sup>23</sup> Osamu, Ishii. "Markets and Diplomacy: the Anglo-Japanese Rivalries over Cotton Goods Markets, 1930-36", Nish and Kibata (eds.). *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations. Volume II*, 2000, pp51-52

<sup>24</sup> Osamu, Ishii. "Markets and Diplomacy", 2000, pp71-73

however, by John Sharkey, who argues that economic questions occasionally strained Anglo-Japanese relations, but they did not define the Anglo-Japanese confrontation in the 1930s, and neither country showed much interest in resolving said questions, with Britain adopting a moderate policy and Japan tacitly accepting this. Their rivalry was the result of political and military instability between an ailing Britain and an ambitious Japan, and only the resolution of these issues could improve relations. Economic cooperation was essential in order to reduce the escalation of hostilities, but this could not reduce political tension between the two countries as any British economic initiative was dependent upon Japan's response, and Japan's regarded such initiatives as peripheral to her need to expand into East Asia.<sup>25</sup>

Other works that are not primarily concerned with Anglo-Japanese relations, but which do touch upon them while examining British foreign policy in the Interwar period, include those of Helen McCarthy and Richard S. Grayson. McCarthy's recent work on the British people and the League of Nations focuses upon the attitudes held by Britons towards foreign relations and internationalism during the Interwar years and the Second World War, and argues that the League of Nations Union largely succeeded at raising awareness of the League's existence and ideals amongst the public, but failed to prove that "public opinion, mobilised effectively, could prevent war."<sup>26</sup> Grayson concentrates upon the role played by the Liberal Party in shaping British foreign and international policies, arguing that there was a Liberal alternative to appeasement in the 1930s, but that such an alternative simply failed to gain much favour with the public, or even in the Party itself, and was also fundamentally

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<sup>25</sup> Sharkey, John. "Economic Diplomacy in Anglo-Japanese Relations, 1931-41", Nish and Kibata (eds.). *The History of Anglo-Japanese Relations. Volume II*, 2000, p103

<sup>26</sup> McCarthy, Helen. *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, citizenship and internationalism, c.1918-45*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011, pp243-244

flawed in its perception of what Germany, Italy and Japan truly desired.<sup>27</sup> While I do not agree with all of the conclusions reached by the authors above, I have nevertheless made use of their research. It is my hope that this thesis will build upon their work, and help to further understanding on Anglo-Japanese relations in the early twentieth century.

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<sup>27</sup> Grayson, Richard S. *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement: The Liberal Party, 1919-39*, London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2001, pp148-150

## **CHAPTER ONE: WHY DID ANGLO-JAPANESE RELATIONS DETERIORATE BETWEEN 1900 AND 1929?**

On 30 January 1902, the Marquess of Lansdowne (the British Foreign Secretary) and Baron Hayashi Tadasu (the Japanese Minister in London) signed the Anglo-Japanese Treaty. The Treaty recognised the independence of China and Korea, but asserted that Britain had political and commercial interests in China, and Japan had such interests in both, and as such, it might prove necessary for the two empires to take steps to prevent other powers from interfering, or to prevent the native peoples from rebelling. If either country was involved in war as a result, the other would remain neutral, but support would be rendered if either signatory became involved in a war with more than one power. Both states agreed not to make separate agreements with other countries that could harm the Alliance, and both agreed to communicate with each other whenever the above interests were threatened. The Alliance also encouraged cultural exchange between the two countries in order to further strengthen relations and encourage cooperation.

The then-Prime Minister of Great Britain and Ireland was the Marquess of Salisbury, an immensely experienced Conservative statesman who had already served two previous terms as Prime Minister. Now in his third term, he was most certainly not a man given to flights of fancy or excessive imagination in any field, least of all foreign affairs. He knew exactly what was best for Britain and her empire: a sober, restrained foreign policy based upon avoiding dangerous and expensive overseas entanglements. He had long argued that “English policy is to float lazily downstream, occasionally putting out a diplomatic boathook to avoid

collisions”:<sup>28</sup> indeed, Salisbury had been the man to coin the phrase “Splendid Isolation” in order to describe this policy. Yet it was during his third (and last) premiership that Britain would begin to abandon this policy that had served her so well during the late nineteenth century by agreeing to the Alliance with Japan, thus beginning a new foreign policy that would eventually lead to her becoming involved in two World Wars and losing her Empire. This section will explain why the old policy was abandoned, and how Salisbury’s agreement to the Anglo-Japanese Alliance would ultimately fail to achieve a permanent peace between the two countries. It will argue that in 1902 the Alliance offered clear benefits to both countries, given the threat posed by Russia; but that in the aftermath of the First World War, it no longer appeared sufficiently relevant or beneficial to either empire.

### **The Anglo-Japanese Alliance**

By the late nineteenth century, Britain was at her greatest strength in history. The British Empire covered almost a quarter of the world: an enormous, bewildering conglomeration of Dominions, Dependencies, Crown Colonies, Protectorates, Client States, chartered companies and spheres of influence that stretched from the Arctic Circle to the Southern Ocean, from the Mediterranean to the Caribbean, and from Suez to Singapore; a motley array of cultures, skin-colours, religions and languages, all dominated by, controlled by or allied to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. All of this had been won, protected and buttressed by Britain’s most important tools of military and commercial power: the Royal Navy and the British Merchant Navy. As her Empire continued to grow, Britain had sought to maintain the

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<sup>28</sup> Cecil, The Lady Gwendolen. *Life of Robert, Marquis of Salisbury, Volume II*, Letter to Earl of Lytton, 9 March 1877, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921, p130



Balance of Power in Europe between the five Great Powers of the time (Britain, France, Russia, Prussia (later Germany) and Austria (later Austria-Hungary), while avoiding any form of permanent diplomatic, economic or military alliance. This policy of “Splendid Isolation” was intended to prevent Britain from becoming entangled in European wars, allowing her to concentrate upon expanding, developing and protecting her empire. It also ensured the primacy of the Royal Navy over the British Army: without control over the trade routes to India and the revenue thus generated, Britain simply could not afford to keep the Empire.

However, from the 1870s onward, other states began to challenge Britain's industrial dominance.<sup>29</sup> The unification of Germany in 1871 had created a powerful new European empire with ambitious plans for military/naval expansion, industrial growth and the creation of a new colonial empire, while her Triple Alliance with Austria-Hungary and Italy in 1882 made the new German Empire more than a match for the Dual Alliance of France and Russia. On the other side of the world, the United States was itself undergoing a fantastic industrial boom that would ultimately result in her permanently eclipsing Britain as the single most powerful nation on earth. As such, by the turn of the century, many British politicians were openly questioning the wisdom of Splendid Isolation, as the threat posed by Britain's old enemies (France and Russia) had only been magnified by the rise of Germany and America: Britain was alone and overstretched. She had already come close to war with France as a result of the Fashoda Crisis of 1898, while Russian expansionism threatened India and Britain's interests in Persia. The immediate task for her leaders was to reduce the scale of her commitments without becoming dangerously entangled in the affairs of other nations; this

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<sup>29</sup> Hosch, William L. *World War I: People, Politics, and Power. America at War*. New York: Britannica Educational Publishing, 2009, p21

way, the bulk of the Royal Navy could be stationed in European waters.<sup>30</sup> Given that Britain was overstretched in the Pacific Ocean, the decision to make a deal with the Empire of Japan seemed, therefore, the most logical choice.<sup>31</sup>

To many observers in 1900, the story of Japan was both extraordinary and unprecedented: a feudalistic, isolationist, backward regime (by Western standards) that had managed to remain closed to the rest of the world for two hundred years, the Empire had been forcibly opened to international trade by the United States in 1854. Yet this humiliation had provoked a great surge in nationalism and militarism, and encouraged numerous political, social and economic reforms: within a few decades, in the so-called Meiji restoration, Japan had become a centralised, unified state, with a modern, well-disciplined army and a strong, expanding economy. Her position and interests in China had been threatened by the encroaching European powers, most notably Russia and Germany's ambitions, and a strong ally in Europe was necessary to compel the world to recognise her status as a Power. Britain had already opposed the so-called "Triple Intervention" of 1895 (in which France, Germany and Russia had united to force the Japanese to retire from the Liaotung peninsula in China), as well as giving Japan assistance in previous years (particularly in modernising the Imperial Japanese Navy) and cooperating (along with other Powers) to suppress the Boxers. Both countries were disturbed by Russia's expansion into China; yet both had reservations when it came to opposing said expansion. Britain did not wish to antagonise Russia or the United States, Japan was uncertain as to how relations with America would develop, and each was unwilling to protect the other's interests in Asia. However, these problems were eventually ironed over (or

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<sup>30</sup> O'Brien, Phillips Payson. *The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, 1902-1922*. London: Routledge, 2004, p1

<sup>31</sup> Brown, Judith. *The Twentieth Century, The Oxford History of the British Empire Volume IV*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, p667

ignored), and on 12 February 1902, a treaty was signed that recognised the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Subsequently, the Alliance would be twice renewed, in 1905 and 1911: the first renewal also allowed Japan to support British interests in India, and for Britain to support Japanese interests in Korea. The provisions for mutual defence would later prompt Japan to declare war on Germany in 1914. At first, all seemed well.

### **The Impact of the First World War**

Even after the Alliance had been signed, there remained serious strains upon relations between the two countries. As it happened, both countries had rather different ideas as to what the Treaty really meant: the British saw it largely as a way of reining in Russia, while the Japanese saw it as open permission to expand further into Korea; from that point onwards, even Japanese moderates refused to accept any compromise on this matter. The First World War, while leading to the two empires fighting side by side against Germany, failed to greatly improve relations: the British, understandably traumatised by the terrible losses on the Western Front, tended to minimise the contribution made by the Japanese, who were in turn somewhat contemptuous of Britain's inability to triumph over the Central Powers. Still more significant than the War itself were its diplomatic consequences: the international environment of the inter-war era was one of sharp contrast to the comparatively orderly and stable environment of the pre-war era. Four great polities, the German Empire, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Russian Empire and the Ottoman Empire had all collapsed; their successor states (Germany, Austria, Hungary, the Soviet Union and Turkey, respectively) were shrunken, bankrupted and embittered towards the western powers. Even the victorious

powers had not emerged from the War in an enviable position (with the exception of the United States): both Britain and France had suffered terrible casualties and incurred substantial debts (and in the case of France, had been forced to endure four years of concentrated devastation to its most important industrial centres).

By the 1920s, Britain and her Empire were in an increasingly dangerous situation, as growing pressures from within the Empire made it increasingly difficult to protect the vast conglomeration that made up this vast entity. Always a drain upon British resources, the massive damage caused to the British economy by the War and the post-war recession was deeply destabilising, and the British lacked any real policy to alter this.<sup>32</sup> To make matters worse, the War (and the horrific casualties sustained by Imperial troops: approximately 222,551 soldiers and sailors from British Dominions and colonies were lost<sup>33</sup>) had greatly stimulated independence movements in India and Ireland, while increasing the desire for autonomy in other, less troublesome dominions.<sup>34</sup> There had long been movements for Indian independence, but it was not until the aftermath of the War and a series of repressive measures imposed by the British government in response to communist conspiracies and foreign plots (culminating in the infamous Amritsar Massacre of 1919, in which hundreds of Indians were killed by British forces) that the campaign for independence truly gathered strength, and would become an ever-more decisive factor in Anglo-Indian relations.<sup>35</sup> While Britain had been able to rely upon Indian loyalty in the First World War, this could no longer

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<sup>32</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, pp456-457

<sup>33</sup> *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War 1914–1920*. The War Office, 1922, p237

<sup>34</sup> Goldstein, Erik. (ed.). *The Washington Conference, 1921–22: Naval Rivalry, East Asian Stability and the Road to Pearl Harbor*, London: Routledge, 1994, p4

<sup>35</sup> Lapping, Brian. *End of Empire*, London: St. Martin's Press, 1986, p38

be taken for granted. Public opinion in Britain itself was divided on the matter, with some calling for India to be granted more autonomy, in the hope of preventing a repetition of the problems caused in Ireland by the British government's long opposition to Home Rule, while others felt that granting India dominion status (as had ultimately been done with Ireland) would only encourage the breakup of the Empire.<sup>36</sup> This fear was not without justification, as the 1923 Imperial Conference had established that each Dominion had the right to pursue their own independent foreign policies, and Britain's attempt to enlist the support of the Dominions in the Chanak Crisis of 1922 (in which Turkish forces confronted British forces) ended with a humiliating personal defeat for then-Prime Minister David Lloyd George when neither South Africa nor Canada were willing to assist.<sup>37</sup> This trend towards still greater autonomy for the Dominions would eventually gain legal substance under the 1931 Statute of Westminster, in which all Dominions (at the time, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Ireland and Newfoundland) gained the right to nullify all laws passed by Britain.<sup>38</sup>

Japan, by way of contrast, had emerged from the War with its power and reputation greater than ever. She had played a major role in protecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans from the German Navy, and simultaneously managed to greatly increase her influence in China and gain the port of Tsingtao (Kiautschou), Germany's sole Chinese territory. However, her attempts to reduce China to a *de facto* protectorate by issuing the Twenty-One Demands in January 1915 backfired, resulting in international condemnation and the withdrawal of some of the most outrageous demands. Furthermore, the resentment of foreign opposition, the ease

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<sup>36</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, p416

<sup>37</sup> McIntyre, Donald. *The Commonwealth of Nations: Origins and Impact, 1869-1971*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977, p187

<sup>38</sup> Turpin, Colin & Tomkins, Adam. *British government and the constitution*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, 2007, p48

of Japanese victories and internal political and economic policies greatly contributed to a rise of militarism, especially from the late 1920s onward. The Japanese were suspicious that Britain refused to support the adoption of a Racial Equality Proposal at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, believing that this showed that Britain and her Dominions regarded the Japanese as a racial menace. Their suspicions were not entirely without merit: during the first half of the twentieth century, Australians, Canadians, New Zealanders and South Africans all shared similar (and negative) racial attitudes towards Japan in general and Japanese migrants in particular.<sup>39</sup> Their hostility towards the Racial Equality Proposal had been instrumental in persuading Britain to refuse to support it,<sup>40</sup> and the so-called “White Australia” and “White Canada” policies evoked as much protest from Japan as did America’s restrictions on Japanese immigration, and were condemned by Japan as provocative.<sup>41</sup> In practice, however, Britain could usually curb the worst excesses of its Dominions by pointing out that good relations with Japan were essential in order to prevent another war.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Bennett, Neville. ‘White discrimination against Japan: Britain, the Dominions and the United States, 1908-1928,’ *New Zealand Journal of Asian Studies*, Volume 3, No. 2 (December 2001): p91

<sup>40</sup> Kajima, Morinosuke. *The Diplomacy of Japan 1894-1922. Volume I: Sino-Japanese War and Triple Intervention*, Tokyo: Kajima Institute of International Peace, 1976, p409

<sup>41</sup> *International Military Tribunal Far East*, University of Canterbury Library, Proceedings, 30 November 1947, pp36430-36434

<sup>42</sup> Bennett, ‘White discrimination against Japan’, 2001, pp104-105

## The Collapse of the Alliance and the Washington Naval Treaty

By 1920, both countries agreed that the Alliance “is not entirely consistent with the letter of that Covenant [of the League of Nations], which both Governments earnestly desire to respect.”<sup>43</sup> The following year, leaders from throughout the British Empire convened at the Imperial Conference of 1921, a forum for discussing international policy that allowed the Prime Ministers of the Dominions to question the British government on Imperial foreign and military policies. Most delegates supported the renewal of the Alliance, on the grounds that this could help provide security for Commonwealth interests in the Pacific.<sup>44</sup> In particular, the Australians, in spite of their racial fears, supported such a renewal, arguing that the Imperial Japanese Navy posed a major threat and an alliance with the increasingly-isolationist United States would be of little value.<sup>45</sup> On the other hand, the Canadian Prime Minister, Arthur Meighen, recommended that the Alliance be abandoned, fearing that the Commonwealth might be forced into a war between Japan and America. While most delegates agreed upon the need for closer relations with the United States, they did not advise that the Alliance should be completely dropped.<sup>46</sup> However, Britain was now required to take the fears of the American Government into account, as the United States had now become a major world power in its own right. The Americans feared that a renewed Alliance would allow the Japanese to gain economic domination over the Pacific and close China to American

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<sup>43</sup> *League of Nations. Treaty Series. 1920-1946*, Vol. 1, p24.

<sup>44</sup> Vinson, J. C. "The Imperial Conference of 1921 and the Anglo-Japanese alliance." *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 31, No. 3 (1962): p258

<sup>45</sup> Brebner, J. B. "Canada, The Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Washington Conference." *Political Science Quarterly*, Volume 50, No. 1 (1935): p52

<sup>46</sup> Vinson, 'The Imperial Conference of 1921', p257

commerce, and these fears were strengthened by the American and Canadian press, which claimed that the treaty of renewal contained secret anti-American clauses.<sup>47</sup>

By the time that the Conference was held, the Royal Navy was still the largest in the world, possessing a vast array of assorted vessels. Yet the First World War had had a serious impact: not only had thousands of British sailors been killed and hundreds of military and merchant vessels sunk, but Britain's financial state and the growing desire for retrenchment and disarmament made it politically impossible to keep up with the demands of the naval arms race developing between herself, Japan and the United States. As a result, the Commonwealth delegates at the Imperial Conference of 1921 convinced the United States to invite several nations to Washington for negotiations concerning Far East policies and naval disarmament.<sup>48</sup>

The Japanese attended the resulting Washington Naval Conference with a deep mistrust of Britain, feeling that its erstwhile ally no longer wished for Japanese success, an attitude that seemed to be borne out by the results.<sup>49</sup> The Four-Power Treaty of 1921 effectively terminated the Anglo-Japanese Alliance, and was soon followed by the Washington Naval Treaty of 1921, which was an attempt to bring naval construction under control, and placed limits upon the navies of Britain, America, France, Japan and Italy.<sup>50</sup> For capital ships (battleships and battlecruisers) Britain and America were each limited to a total tonnage of 525,000 tons, Japan to 315,000 tons, and France and Italy each to 175,000 tons; for aircraft carriers, Britain and America were each limited to a total tonnage of 135,000 tons, Japan to

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<sup>47</sup> Spinks, Charles N. "The Termination of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance." *Pacific Historical Review*, Volume 6, No. 4 (1937): pp324-326

<sup>48</sup> Nish, Ian H. *Alliance in Decline: A Study in Anglo-Japanese Relations 1908-23*. London: Routledge Curzon, 2004, p381

<sup>49</sup> Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 2004, p354

<sup>50</sup> Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 2004, p383



81,000 tons, and France and Italy each to 60,000 tons. No single ship could exceed 35,000 tons, and no ship's gun could exceed 16 inches. The Treaty also forbid the signatories to establish new fortifications or naval bases, while existing forts and bases could only be improved if they were on the main coasts of the countries – not on the various smaller island territories in the Pacific. On the whole, Britain benefited from the Treaty: she could no longer afford to out-build the United States, so the Treaty simply gave her a way to maintain naval parity with America. The Japanese, on the other hand, were deeply dissatisfied: they regarded it as yet another deeply unfair snub by the Western Powers, and believed that it posed a great threat to Japanese security in the event of a war with the United States. In spite of the best efforts of numerous politicians, diplomats, officials and private individuals from both empires, each country had failed to make itself loved or feared by the other – for now.

By the 1920s, Salisbury's former foreign policy formula had been abandoned forever: no responsible British politician seriously believed that Britain could remain diplomatically isolated without risking ruin, and a foreign policy of "floating lazily downstream" was something that they could only dream about. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance, together with the Entente Cordiale of 1904 between Britain and France, had been intended to reduce the likelihood of Britain becoming entangled with the affairs of other nations, but the First World War had changed *everything*: from now on, Britain would be forced to work closer with the other Powers if she was to survive. The collapse of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance must be seen in this context: with the temporary collapse of Russia as a threat and the rising power of the United States in the Far East, there simply was no way for Britain to remain Japan's ally without alienating the United States. As such, it was Britain's increasing reliance upon America that truly spelled the end of the Alliance, regardless of the real benefits that had been

gained from it by both Britain and Japan. The Washington Treaty simply confirmed the inevitable, as what was acceptable to the United States was unacceptable for Japan, and vice versa: all Britain could do was to choose whether to side with one or the other. The consequences would be violent and dramatic for all three countries, and indeed for the world in general. Salisbury would have been dismayed by Britain's loss of diplomatic freedom, but he would not have been surprised by the destruction of the Alliance. He had once noted (prophetically) that "all the talk about the inveterate enmity of a rising nation is moonshine. Nations neither love nor hate for ten years together. Whatever we do now, Japan will always do to us precisely what at any moment she thinks it her interest to do – neither more nor less."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> The National Archives, Public Records Office (hereafter referred to as 'TNA, PRO'), FO 46/265, *Memo by Lord Salisbury*, 16 April 1879, p327

## CHAPTER TWO: HOW DID BRITAIN REACT TO THE MANCHURIAN CRISIS, 1931-33?

It was up to Suemori Komoto to place the explosives.<sup>52</sup> A First Lieutenant in the Independent Garrison Unit of the 29th Infantry Regiment of the Imperial Japanese Army, the young soldier's orders were clear and precise – and top secret. It was absolutely essential that no one knew of his actions: indeed, the future of the Japanese Empire depended upon them. His target was the South Manchurian Railway, but his orders were not to destroy or even to cause any real damage to the tracks; the sole purpose of the exercise was give Japan a plausible excuse for her actions. Suemori was not the only Japanese soldier illicitly busy in China that night; at Mukden, near a Japanese officers' club, a concrete bunker disguised as a swimming pool had been constructed that contained a pair of 9.2 inch artillery pieces.<sup>53</sup> But these would only be used when Suemori had completed his mission. At 10.20 pm on 18 September 1931, the dynamite was detonated, causing very little damage to the tracks, but giving the Japanese the excuse they desired. The following morning, with Japan insisting that the nearby Chinese garrison was responsible for the attack, the two artillery pieces opened fire upon the garrison, and five hundred Japanese troops launched their assault. By the evening, the Japanese had occupied Mukden at the cost of two Japanese lives... and five hundred Chinese.<sup>54</sup> They would be the first to perish as a result of Japan's new policy of aggressive expansionism; they would most certainly not be the last.

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<sup>52</sup> Duus, Peter and Hall, John Whitney. *The Cambridge History of Japan: The Twentieth Century*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p294

<sup>53</sup> Behr, Edward. *The Last Emperor*, New York: Bantam Books, 1987, p180

<sup>54</sup> Behr, *The Last Emperor*, 1987, p182

In the aftermath of the First World War, there was an understandable desire amongst most people in Britain to avoid another – whatever the cost. The resulting policy of appeasement has been thoroughly analysed, with much attention being paid to the consequences of the Anglo-French policy of appeasing Germany, and how it merely resulted in Germany gaining more resources and a superior strategic position, while any advantages gained by the Western Allies were more than offset by the loss of prestige and allies resulting from their actions and inactions. At each stage, the failure to stop Germany from rearming, reoccupying the Rhineland, interfering in the Spanish Civil War, annexing Austria and invading Czechoslovakia simply encouraged Hitler to take the next step towards German domination of Europe. Rather less popular attention, however, has been devoted to developments in the Far East, where an increasingly expansionist and anti-democratic Japan began a policy of ruthless colonialism and subjugation before even Germany and Fascist Italy, with grave consequences for China, Britain, the United States and the world in general. This section will explain why Japan took such actions, and will argue that Britain's attempts to stop her were doomed to failure, as even in hindsight it is virtually impossible to see what could have been done given the array of internal and external factors that constrained British foreign policy.

### **Japanese aggression, the Manchurian Crisis and the British reaction**

From the beginning of Japan's existence as a modern state, there had been tension between the civilian government and the military leadership over Japanese foreign and economic policy, and the apparent failure by 1930 of Japan's attempt to promote prosperity through international trade led to a strong right-wing reaction, especially following Japan's signing of

the Treaty of London in 1930, which extended the limits placed upon the number of capital ships Japan could possess to include cruisers and destroyers as well.<sup>55</sup> Many of Japan's earlier leaders had regarded the Empire as being threatened by Western imperialism, and the rise of the United States, coupled with Britain's apparent treachery, did nothing to dispel this alarm. In a similar manner to developments in Germany in the 1920s, the Japanese military regarded itself as being "clean" and "unsullied by politics", in contrast to the corrupt, self-serving politicians and parties that liberal democracy had spawned. In the eyes of the Japanese military leadership, only by creating a strong centralised state and a disciplined, patriotic people, bound by unquestioning loyalty to the Emperor, would Japan be able to secure an overseas empire and the respect of other nations. The humiliation of the Washington Naval Treaty and other arms limitation agreements appeared to treat Japan as an inferior party, leading to a surge in Japanese nationalism, which increasingly bore similarities with European fascism.<sup>56</sup> In order to reduce her dependency upon the United States for such raw materials as iron, oil and rubber, it would be necessary for Japan to expand her territories in East Asia, which at the time consisted of Korea and the port of Tsingtao (now Qingdao) in China. Manchuria, the north-eastern region of China, seemed ideal, as it was bordered by Korea, was rich in raw materials, and already contained numerous and the Japanese government established the State of Manchukuo as a puppet regime, with Puyi, the former Emperor of China, as the official head of state.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Parker, R.A.C. *Chamberlain and Appeasement: British Policy and the Coming of the Second World War*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003, p36

<sup>56</sup> Gordon, Andrew. *A Modern History of Japan: From Tokugawa to the Present*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2003, p210

<sup>57</sup> Horvitz, Leslie Alan and Catherwood, Christopher. *Encyclopedia of war crimes and genocide*, New York: Facts on File, 2011, p128

The reaction abroad was overwhelmingly one of condemnation of Japan's actions, which were generally seen as unjustifiable and immoral.<sup>58</sup> In contrast to the press' generally hostile reaction (see below), the British government did not initially find the Crisis to be too much a problem, as Britain had only limited commercial interests in Manchuria, and 'maintaining cordial relations with Japan' was far more important.<sup>59</sup> Furthermore, the British regarded China with some suspicion, as one Foreign Office official noted: 'there is virtually no Chinese Government in existence (the nominal government at Nanking is without power and on the point of collapse).'<sup>60</sup> The situation changed, however, with the Shanghai Incident on 28 January 1932, when a Japanese officer organised an incident (in a similar fashion to the Manchurian incident), in which five Japanese men were beaten up by Chinese factory workers. In retaliation, a Japanese mob attacked the factory and a police post, the Japanese authorities demanded an apology from the local authorities, and Japanese marines occupied the suburb of Chapei, clashing with the local Chinese forces.<sup>61</sup> This resulted in a battle that lasted until 3 March and the death of thousands of Chinese civilians... in full view of the Shanghai International Settlement (a predominantly British affair at the time, but still under Chinese sovereignty). Attempts by Britain, France and the United States to negotiate a ceasefire failed, and the Battle continued until both China and Japan signed the Shanghai Ceasefire Agreement, demilitarising Shanghai and forbidding China to retain military forces in the surrounding area. The Shanghai Incident caused far more alarm in London than the initial Manchurian Crisis, as many in Britain had some sympathy with Japan's need to expand and accepted that

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<sup>58</sup> Harries, Meirion and Harries, Susie. *Soldiers of the Sun: The Rise and Fall of the Imperial Japanese Army*, New York: Random House, 1994, p161

<sup>59</sup> *Documents on British Foreign Policy, 1919-1939*, Series 2, Volume IX, No. 21, Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1947, memo by Sir Victor Wellesley, 22 December 1931 (hereafter referred to as 'DBFP')

<sup>60</sup> *DBFP*, Series 2, Volume IX, No. 85, memo by Charles W. Orde, 15 January 1932

<sup>61</sup> Lowe, Peter. *Britain in the Far East: A study from 1819 to the present*, Longman: London and New York, 1981, p141

Manchuria lay with Japan's sphere of influence, although there was criticism of Japan's methods. Shanghai, on the other hand, was completely different, as the city lay outside Japan's legitimate claims and had been largely created by British investment.<sup>62</sup>

Britain's initial refusal to become involved was partially a result of domestic woes: in the immediate aftermath of the Wall Street Crash and the onset of the Great Depression, she had suffered greatly as the ineffectual Labour government of Ramsay MacDonald struggled to simultaneously maintain Britain's economic position, balance the budget and provide social welfare to the millions of unemployed. By 1931, the situation had deteriorated still further, with the independent May Report advising that only immediate retrenchment in public spending could bring the colossal National Debt under control.<sup>63</sup> The resulting debate within the Cabinet concerning the adoption of the austerity measures brought down the government, resulting in the creation of a National Coalition Government headed by MacDonald, but dominated by the Conservative and Liberal Parties, with the Labour Party now weakened and divided by MacDonald's 'defection'. Under these trying circumstances, it would only be natural for the Prime Minister to desire international peace in order to concentrate upon domestic and financial concerns, but he was unfortunate enough to take office just as the inter-war peace began to die. MacDonald feared the expansionist tendencies of Germany, Italy and Japan, yet at the same time, he was strongly devoted to disarmament, although his coalition partners were not, and so little concrete progress was made in this area (a fortunate occurrence, as it turned out). As a result of this schizophrenic view of international affairs (and his failing health), MacDonald's handling of foreign affairs in general and of the

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<sup>62</sup> Lowe, *Britain in the Far East*, 1981, pp141-142

<sup>63</sup> Williamson, Philip. *National Crisis and National Government: British Politics, the Economy and Empire, 1926-1932*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, pp267-269

Shanghai incident in particular was decidedly weak. He refused to support the American's strong-worded protest to Japan's aggression, on the grounds that neither Britain nor America were ready or willing to go to war, and instead submitted a resolution insisting that the Sino-Japanese conflict should not be settled by force, written in such an inoffensive manner that the Japanese simply ignored it. To make matters worse, MacDonald could not bring himself to admit his opposition to the Americans, and continued to delude them into believing that he would support them in any actions they wished to take against Japan.<sup>64</sup> He would eventually retire as Prime Minister in June 1935, leaving Stanley Baldwin to assume the premiership.

Given MacDonald's weakness, much influence was exerted upon British policy by Sir John Simon, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs. Simon had been appointed as to this position in November 1931 (and would hold the post until 1935). He was cautious and subtle, but inexperienced in international affairs. Arguably, although it is easy to blame Simon for failing to resolve the crisis, the policy he adopted was actually devised by the professional diplomats and officials in the Foreign Office, and was backed by the Cabinet and the public.<sup>65</sup> In November 1931, he informed the Cabinet that the Council of the League of Nations would be meeting in Paris on 16 November to resume consideration of Manchuria. He described Japan's interests and rights in Manchuria, noting that "one of the causes of the dispute was the construction by the Chinese of competing railways, which created economic difficulties with Japan", and then described the causes and consequences of the dispute. The Japanese had refused to withdraw before "certain fundamental principles [were] cleared up with China... without specifying what they were." The Council of the League had eventually instructed the

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<sup>64</sup> Marquand, David. *Ramsay MacDonald*, London: Jonathon Cape, 1977, pp714-715

<sup>65</sup> Nish, Ian (ed). *Anglo-Japanese Alienation 1919-1952: Papers of the Anglo-Japanese Conference on the History of the Second World War*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982, pp37-38



Japanese to withdraw their troops by 16 November, although Simon also noted that the League had no way of enforcing its decision. While the Americans supported the League, they would not assist in placing pressure on Japan. Simon urged against the imposition of sanctions: “The only way to exercise any influence on the Japanese Government was to keep a representative of high standing at Tokyo.” Ultimately, the Cabinet adopted his views, supporting a policy of “conciliation, with an avoidance of implied threats.”<sup>66</sup> Clearly, Simon’s views were not confined to his department, as other ministers, notably Chancellor of the Exchequer Neville Chamberlain, had come to similar conclusions. While Chamberlain has often been criticised for his later policies of appeasement and (apparent) naivety in foreign affairs, he was only too aware of how dangerous Japanese aggression was for Britain. He lamented how pointless negotiating with Japan appeared to be: “Our ambassador in Tokyo says he feels as if he were in a lunatic asylum,”<sup>67</sup> yet was also convinced that “...we are not in a position to do much help while if we got into a real quarrel with Japan she could blow our ships out of the water one by one” as they attempted to assist her aggression.<sup>68</sup>

The attitude of Parliament was more divided: in February 1932, after Simon gave a statement of the situation in Manchuria and China to the House of Commons, George Lansbury (the Member from Poplar Bow and Bromley and Leader of the Opposition) requested a debate on the subject of Japanese aggression. MacDonald spoke against this, urging that a debate “might do a great deal of harm and could not possibly do any good.” Lansbury bitterly denounced this attitude, insisting that the world should recognise Japan’s actions as “international piracy”,

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<sup>66</sup> TNA, PRO, CAB 75 (51), Conclusion 1, 11 November 1931

<sup>67</sup> Self, Robert (ed). *The Neville Chamberlain Diary Letters. Volume IV: The Downing Street Years, 1934–1940*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002, Diary entry, 13 February 1932, pp302-303

<sup>68</sup> *Chamberlain Diary Letters. Volume IV*, 2002, Diary entry, 20 February 1932, pp310-311

an expression that caused uproar in the House.<sup>69</sup> His argument would later be attacked by Leo Amery, who also denounced the British government's response, but on the grounds that it was pointless to merely stop all munitions to both China and Japan: "the whole implication being that we were willing to wound Japan but afraid to strike." He upset many pacifists and idealists by arguing that the League of Nations Covenant was absurd and dangerous, that Britain could not possibly disarm if other countries were strengthening their armed forces,<sup>70</sup> and, perhaps most importantly, that he could not see any reason why Britain should oppose Japan, as Japan had a very powerful case. She had spent much blood and treasure to protect Manchuria from Russia, she had made Manchuria the most prosperous part of China ("that loose congeries"), she needed markets, peace and order, and she had to defend her interests against Chinese nationalists. Was this not what Britain herself had done in the past, and indeed, what she desired at present? "Our whole policy in India, our whole policy in Egypt, stands condemned if we condemn Japan."<sup>71</sup> Nor was Amery alone in holding this view; he had "a good many supporters in the House and... some friendly messages from outside."<sup>72</sup> With even the Opposition failing to provide an alternative plan to resist Japanese aggression, it is hard (even in retrospect) to see what else Britain could have done.

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<sup>69</sup> *Hansard's Parliamentary Record*, House of Commons, Debate, 2 February 1932, Vol. 261, cc17-22 (hereafter referred to as '*Hansard*')

<sup>70</sup> Nicholson, David and Barnes, John (eds). *The Empire at Bay: The Leo Amery Diaries 1929-1945*, London: Hutchinson, 1988, pp289-290, Speech in the House of Commons, 27 February 1933

<sup>71</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debate, 27 February 1933, Vol. 275, c81

<sup>72</sup> *Amery Diaries*, 1988, Speech in the House of Commons, 27 February 1933, pp289-290

## Other influences upon British policy

One important influence upon British public opinion was the League of Nations Union, which had been formed on 13 October 1918 as part of the Paris Peace Treaties, and whose membership peaked at more than 400,000 members by 1931. Its purpose was to help establish a new system of international relations, seeking to achieve world peace and protect the rights of men through collective security and disarmament (the old approaches of secret treaties and preserving the balance of power were explicitly rejected).<sup>73</sup> It succeeded in converting the mainstream of British society, including the trade unions, the churches and the principal newspapers to the cause of the League of Nations,<sup>74</sup> and carried great influence in traditional political circles.<sup>75</sup> On the other hand, *The Times* adopted a considerably firmer attitude towards Japan from the beginning. It demonstrated sympathy towards Japan whenever it appeared that she was clearly in the right (an admittedly rare occurrence), most notably when four Japanese soldiers were arrested, robbed and murdered by Chinese soldiers, with the Chinese Government proving either unable or unwilling to punish the perpetrators.<sup>76</sup> *The Times* also acknowledged that Japan did have significant rights in Manchuria – but denied her any extensive powers in Shanghai and the rest of China.<sup>77</sup> Ultimately, however, *The Times*

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<sup>73</sup> Douglas, R. M. *The Labour Party, Nationalism and Internationalism, 1939-1951: A New World Order*; Routledge, 2004, p27

<sup>74</sup> McKercher, B. J. C. (ed). *Anglo-American Relations in the 1920's: The Struggle for Supremacy*; University of Alberta, 1990, p23

<sup>75</sup> McDonough, Frank. *Neville Chamberlain, Appeasement, and the British Road to War*; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998, p111

<sup>76</sup> *The Times*, 9 September 1931, p13

<sup>77</sup> *The Times*, 4 February 1932, p13

stated that Britain was not anti-Japanese or necessarily pro-Chinese – but she was pro-League of Nations, and Japan’s actions were in flagrant violation of the spirit of the League.<sup>78</sup>

Some further support for a conciliatory policy towards Japan came from Britain’s own armed forces. While the view of the Japanese as utterly inferior to Britain was widespread in both the Royal Air Force and the Royal Navy, it was certainly not the case in the British Army, with the General Staff in particular making rather more effort to learn about the Japanese Army than about the American, Soviet, German or French armed forces. At this point, the British military experts on Japan “had a very high appreciation of its army and warned constantly of the need to conciliate Tokyo, to sacrifice China and to concentrate Britain’s limited forces against Germany.”<sup>79</sup> After the First World War, those British Army officers serving in Japan had grown close to the Japanese, effectively becoming a lobby for improving Anglo-Japanese relations: “[Their reports praised Japanese] efficiency and warned of the dangers which would arise from an Anglo-Japanese war. The attachés and many senior officers in the War Office advised the government to avoid giving the Japanese the impression that Britain was the main stumbling block to their colonial ambitions in China...”<sup>80</sup> Indeed, the British Army’s sympathy for Japan could be excessive: as British Army officers could not normally see for themselves just how harsh Japanese behaviour in Korea, Manchuria and China really was, they often sympathised with Japanese colonialism, and felt that harsh means were necessary to promote stability.<sup>81</sup> “With rare exceptions... reports from the military attachés and

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<sup>78</sup> *The Times*, 2 November 1931, p13

<sup>79</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, pp86-87

<sup>80</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, p. viii

<sup>81</sup> Towle. *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, p88

language officers in Tokyo failed to emphasise Japanese brutality.”<sup>82</sup> Captain Malcolm Kennedy, in particular, continued to express such sentiments even after the Second World War, regarding the breakdown of Anglo-Japanese relations as “tragic.”<sup>83</sup> It is rather surprising that Kennedy and his colleagues so liked their Japanese counterparts, in spite of the open contempt in which many junior Japanese officers held Britain, feeling that Britain should simply stand aside and allow Japan to conquer China, and that British complaints had merely angered the Japanese government and public without affecting their policies.<sup>84</sup> This unusually strong sympathy may have also been affected by admiration for both the military potential of Japan and the Japanese military ethos, both of which contrasted starkly with the piteous state that Britain had found herself in after the First World War, with militarism utterly discredited and the Armed Forces facing severe cuts and a long painful period of retrenchment.<sup>85</sup> While the Japanese Army had undoubted weaknesses (most notably in fire-power, equipment and lack of experience of defeat), it had very high morale, superb mobilisation arrangements, a very efficient high command, great endurance, high levels of secrecy and large reserves, and the nation that it protected was fully unified, far more so than the increasingly unstable British Empire.<sup>86</sup> Under the circumstances it was understandable the British soldiers would see much to approve (and, perhaps, to fear).

China itself, while an important factor in British policy, was so more for its economic and strategic values than for its potential as an ally: Britain regarded China as one aspect (albeit

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<sup>82</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, p101

<sup>83</sup> Kennedy, *Great Britain and Japan*, 1969, p1

<sup>84</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, p156

<sup>85</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, pp. xi-xiii

<sup>86</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, p94

an important one) of the wider problem of defending the British Empire and its economic interests worldwide. Japan, on the other hand, regarded China and its future therein as being of central importance, both economically and culturally. It was as hard for the British to appreciate the significance of China for Japan as it was for the Japanese to understand that Britain assessed the East Asian situation in the light of European, Mediterranean and imperial problems, not simply in terms of competition or cooperation with Japan in the exploitation of an area in which Japan felt was within her sphere of interest.<sup>87</sup> By the 1930s, China was divided between Chiang Kai-shek's nationalists (who were in nominal control of most of China) and the rather less organised Chinese communists. Only the outbreak of the second Sino-Japanese War in 1937 would (temporarily) unite the two factions against a common enemy. Unfortunately for Britain, Chinese nationalism, while preferable to Chinese communism, was directed against the legally and economically favoured foreigners. It opposed all European power in China (especially that of Britain, which controlled transport and customs, whose citizens were exempt from Chinese laws and jurisdiction, and whose soldiers and warships guarded settlements and patrolled the coasts and rivers). As such, the nationalists could not be relied upon to support Britain if the threat of Japan subsided, while the rampant corruption and brutality of Chiang's regime only decreased their popularity amongst the Chinese peasantry.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, British attempts to strengthen the Chinese economy (by granting credits for railways and exports, and by reforming the Chinese currency) appear to have only strengthened Japan's resolve to crush any opposition.<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, in spite of her efforts, Britain's reputation in China declined calamitously

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<sup>87</sup> Trotter, *Ann. Britain and East Asia 1933-1937*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1975, p214

<sup>88</sup> Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 2003, p36

<sup>89</sup> Eden, Anthony, The Rt. Hon. The Earl of Eden. *The Eden Memoirs: Facing the Dictators*, London: Cassell, 1962, p524

during the 1930s, owing to Britain's refusal to provide open support, the one thing that might stop Japanese expansion.<sup>90</sup> To make matters worse, while the British took pains to deny that their post-Manchurian Crisis policies were in any way anti-Japanese, and while the primary purpose of cultivating friendship with the Chinese was to protect British interests in China, it also had the effect of causing the Chinese to focus their anti-imperialism against Japan, and the Japanese could not help but see this as provocative.<sup>91</sup> Far from strengthening her position, Britain simply appeared contemptible to both sides.

The significance of the United States of America in the determining of Britain's Far Eastern policy was well summed up by Simon, who once told his colleagues in the Cabinet that "we cannot afford to upset the United States of America... and I do not mean to do so."<sup>92</sup> Britain's financial and military weaknesses made it absolutely essential to improve cooperation with the United States.<sup>93</sup> In comparison to Britain, the United States was a rising power, both economically and militarily. Yet while the American public become increasingly concerned about the worsening international situation, a substantial majority remained opposed to any idea of an alliance with Britain or any other country.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Harvey, John (ed). *The Diplomatic Diaries of Oliver Harvey*, London: Collins, 1970, Diary entry, 23 April 1940, pp351-352

<sup>91</sup> Trotter, *Britain and East Asia*, 1975, p211

<sup>92</sup> Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 2003, pp38-39

<sup>93</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p558

<sup>94</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p523

## Aftermath

Eventually, time simply ran out for the League of Nations – and for Britain. In December 1931, the Lytton Commission had been established to determine the cause of the Mukden Incident, and issued a report in the hope of maintaining peace in the Far East. The resulting Lytton Report described the situation in Manchuria prior to the Japanese takeover, and offered some sympathy for her actions and noted the numerous problems of Chinese rule, before giving a narrative of events that followed and detailing the creation of Manchukuo. The Report concluded by examining Japanese economic interests in both Manchuria and the rest of China, and made various proposals as to how a satisfactory solution might be reached. Crucially, however, it failed to address the cause of the Mukden Incident, and failed to comment as to whether or not the Japanese claims of Chinese responsibility were accurate.<sup>95</sup> There was, it seems, no doubt as to Japan's guilt among the five commission members, but the French delegate, Claudel, insisted that Japan not be blamed.<sup>96</sup> In spite of this rather transparent attempt to avoid offending Japan, the Report still vindicated many of the Chinese accusations: the Japanese Army's action following Mukden were not legitimate, Manchukuo had no general Chinese support, and could not have been formed without Japanese military support. Ultimately, the Report failed to placate the Japanese government, which extended official diplomatic recognition to Manchukuo's puppet government in September 1932 – before the Lytton Report's findings were even published. When the League of Nations condemned Japan as an aggressor in February 1933, the Japanese delegation walked out, and

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<sup>95</sup> Ferrell, Robert H. 'The Mukden Incident', *Journal of Modern History*, Volume 27, No 1, (March 1955): p67

<sup>96</sup> *Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan 1931-1941*, Memo from US Ambassador in Japan Joseph Grew to US Secretary of State Henry L. Stimson, 16 July 1932, pp93-94; Dreifort, John E. *Myopic Grandeur: The Ambivalence of French Foreign Policy toward the Far East, 1919-1945*, Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1991, pp80-83



Japan left the League the following month. Ultimately, the Report had simply shown that the League was powerless to enforce its decisions: it required its members to do so instead. In light of the reluctance of Britain, France and the United States to get involved, its failure was all but inevitable.<sup>97</sup>

In the immediate aftermath of the Manchurian Crisis and Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, there was almost a sense of anticlimax. After all the resolutions, threats and negotiations, Japan was still in Manchuria (or *Manchukuo*), and was showing no sign of being prepared to leave. Britain would soon become increasingly embroiled in European affairs as she sought to appease Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy while upholding the principles of the League – with conspicuously little success – while her position in the Far East began a process of inexorable decline. The failure to stop Japan would only whet her appetite, and the growing tensions between America and Japan would only highlight her inability to preserve peace in the region. Without support from France or the United States, Britain failed to uphold the principles of the League of Nations, and by condemning Japan's actions, she further strained her relations with her old ally. Yet, given the reluctance of the British people to go to war or support Japanese imperialism, and given the refusal of Britain's allies to intervene, it remains difficult to see what ought to have been done. Put simply, Britain was no longer the Power she had been in 1902; while her prestige remained high, her military and economic strength was utterly inadequate for the purpose of driving Japan out of Manchuria and defending her own possessions in the Far East. Japan, on the other hand, would spend the next few years digesting Manchuria, before launching a full-scale invasion of China in 1937, and beginning the Second Sino-Japanese War. In doing so, she would unwittingly seal her

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<sup>97</sup> Harries and Harries, *Soldiers of the Sun*, 1994, p163

fate, as the Sino-Japanese War would lead, inexorably, to open conflict with the United States in the Second World War. By planting and detonating the dynamite at Mukden, Suemori Komoto had unwittingly lit the fuse to a powder keg that would blow the Far East and both Empires to pieces in the following years.

### CHAPTER THREE: HOW DID BRITAIN PERCEIVE JAPAN IN THE 1930s?

“It can’t be said that our ‘policy’ so far has been successful. In fact we haven't *got* a policy; we merely wait to see what will happen to us next.”<sup>98</sup> With those words, written in his diary after working for two years at the British legation in Peking, Alexander Cadogan correctly and succinctly summarised the policy of the Foreign Office towards the Totalitarian Powers. There simply did not appear to be any way for Britain to dissuade her old enemy and former allies from their ruthless policies of expansionism, and while Cadogan was specifically referring to Germany, his comments apply equally well to Britain’s ‘policy’ towards Japan. “For British policy-makers, the German challenge was more immediate than the Japanese question, but both problems posed similar and agonising dilemmas. Should Britain take a stand against Japan and Germany? Should she play for time – refusing to make significant concessions yet grudgingly acquiescing in *faits accomplis* – in the hope that she would grow relatively stronger and events would turn in her favour? Or should she try to take the steam out of Japanese and German expansion by an active policy of conciliation?”<sup>99</sup> In the event, Britain’s muted reaction to Japanese aggression, although understandable given her precarious economic and strategic situation, combined with popular revulsion at the thought of another war, could not help but contribute to Japan’s sense of entitlement and self-confidence: Sir Robert Vansittart would later conclude, with the benefit of hindsight, that “it would have been cheaper to fight an isolated Japan in 1931 than a powerfully allied Japan in 1941.”<sup>100</sup> Britain’s failure to stop Japan was also a major blow to the prestige of the League of Nations: “in the

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<sup>98</sup> *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938-1945*, New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1972, Memo to Lord Privy Seal Anthony Eden, 30 April 1935, p13

<sup>99</sup> Lee, Bradford A. *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1939: A Study in the Dilemmas of British Decline*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1973, p205

<sup>100</sup> Vansittart, Sir Robert, *The Mist Procession*, London: Hutchinson, 1958, p348

face of its first serious challenge,” Britain, America and the League had all given in, with the only response being “moral condemnation.”<sup>101</sup> It would be wrong, however, to assume that Britain’s inaction was simply due to ignorance of Japanese motives and/or the desire to avoid another war, although these undoubtedly played an important part. To fully understand Britain’s actions, it is necessary to analyse both the contemporary attitudes held by Britons towards Japan and her actions, and the external factors that helped to shape said attitudes. This section will, therefore, examine the opinions, hopes and fears of the British Prime Ministers, cabinet ministers, senior civil servants and diplomats, Parliament, the armed forces, intelligence services, Dominions, Press, and the League of Nations Organisation towards Japan in the 1930s. It will argue that a broad majority in Britain and her Empire understood Japan to be a serious threat to Britain, her position in Asia and peace in the Far East, but were unable to suggest any sort of rational, effective means of tackling the menace she posed, due to a combination of Britain’s internal weaknesses and the lack of support from Britain’s old allies.

### **The British Government in the later 1930s**

During the later 1930s, the British National Government (still largely Conservative in terms of Parliamentary composition, but not numerically superior in the Cabinet), together with the Labour and Liberal parties, would fail to come up with any constructive measures to stop the Axis powers.<sup>102</sup> The lack of capable leadership for much of this period proved disastrous, as

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<sup>101</sup> Taylor, A. J. P. *The Origins of the Second World War*, New York: Atheneum, 1962, p91

<sup>102</sup> Churchill, Winston S. *The Second World War. Volume I: The Gathering Storm*, London: Cassell, 1948, pp69-70  
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following Ramsay MacDonald's resignation in June 1935, the conservative politician Stanley Baldwin became the new Prime Minister. While a canny political operator, Baldwin was naturally indecisive and lacked confidence in foreign affairs, at the very time that foreign affairs were becoming increasingly important in politics. He would lead the National Government to victory in the 1935 general election on a platform that expressed strong support for the League of Nations, the idea of collective security and sanctions against Italy in retaliation for her invasion of Abyssinia. However, his refusal to introduce oil sanctions against Italy proved disastrous, failing to stop Italy from conquering Abyssinia, but still greatly offending Mussolini and pushing him further towards Hitler. Baldwin recognised British dependence upon American support in international affairs, yet resented her refusal to honour her international obligations, and her inability to back up her words with actions. He also understood that Japan had the ability to 'knock us out of the Pacific and land in Australia,' and these two factors made him ever unwilling to take practical action to support the League of Nations or to oppose Japan.<sup>103</sup> Baldwin would continue to drift through foreign affairs until his retirement on 28 May 1937.

His successor, the final Prime Minister of this period, was probably the most competent – and arguably the most controversial: Neville Chamberlain. His previous ministerial experience as Secretary of State for Health and Chancellor of the Exchequer had given him great experience in domestic and financial affairs, but in contrast to his immediate predecessors, he also took a keen interest in foreign affairs, as a result of the growing threat from Germany, Italy and Japan. Whilst his aim (as with most previous Prime Ministers) was to strengthen Britain's military might, maintain the British Empire and prevent any one power from dominating

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<sup>103</sup> Williamson, Philip. *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative leadership and national values*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp304-305

Europe, Chamberlain took a far more proactive role in his attempts to do so. While he has been somewhat typecast as an ‘appeaser’, it is noticeable that Chamberlain appears to have been severely critical of both Japan and her foreign policy from the beginning, and his attitude did not particularly improve over time: he later referred to the Japanese as “a barbarous people”<sup>104</sup> and noted that the Japanese “are getting more and more insolent and brutal.”<sup>105</sup> His attitudes should not, however, be oversimplified: at one point, he urged the creation of a political/commercial pact with Japan and China, but was opposed by the Foreign Office and most of the Cabinet.<sup>106</sup> Furthermore, in spite of his many misgivings on Japan and her policies, he often expressed the hope that Japan could be neutralised as a threat by making some limited concessions.<sup>107</sup> Chamberlain’s interest in the Far East was partially based upon political-strategic concerns, as he wished to concentrate Britain’s defences against Germany. He understood that friendship with Japan was complicated by Japanese ambitions in China and Britain’s committal to Chinese independence. He believed that Japan could and should be appeased by recognition of Manchukuo and that China could be pacified by a sterling loan, in a manner similar to how he would later try at Munich.<sup>108</sup>

While it has been fashionable to blame the ‘Guilty Men’ for implementing the policy of appeasement, it is worth noting that those MPs who opposed said policy found it all but impossible to provide a practical alternative. Harold Nicolson, the National Labour Member of Parliament for Leicester West (a member of the National Coalition) was one of the few

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<sup>104</sup> *Chamberlain Diary Letters. Volume IV*, 2002, Diary entry, 29 February 1936, p179

<sup>105</sup> *Chamberlain Diary Letters. Volume IV*, 2002, Diary entry, 30 January 1938, p30

<sup>106</sup> *Chamberlain Diary Letters. Volume IV*, 2002, Diary entry, 21 April 1934, p67

<sup>107</sup> *Chamberlain Diary Letters. Volume IV*, 2002, Diary entry, 14 July 1940, p551

<sup>108</sup> Endicott, Stephen Lyon. *Diplomacy and Enterprise: British China Policy 1933-1937*, Manchester University Press, 1975, p170

MPs to comprehend the threat posed by Fascism, yet he still found it difficult to suggest an alternate foreign policy. After meeting with French Under Secretary Pierre Viénot, Nicolson noted that “it is quite evident that the French foresee and dread a German-Italian alliance with the possibility of Japan as a third party.” If this should happen, then Britain and France would have to make an agreement with Russia to encircle Germany.<sup>109</sup> In a later conversation with Conservative MP Duncan Sandys about Germany, Nicolson insisted that Britain could not possibly fight Germany, Italy and Japan all at once, and placed great emphasis upon the dangers from a German attack and whether or not Britain could survive it.<sup>110</sup> It is notable that while Nicolson, Viénot and Sandys all acknowledged Japan as a potential threat, they all appeared to be more concerned by the threat posed by Germany and Italy. In their eyes, Japan was only of importance in so far as she might serve as an adjunct to a German attack; the most alarming prospect of Japan involving Britain, the United States and the Soviet Union in an Asiatic War was that Germany could then strike in Europe.<sup>111</sup> This overall sense of fatalism was not shared by Leo Amery, who recognised Japan’s power and potential and who had already bitterly criticised British policy in the Far East: when Conservative MP Vyvyan Adams stresses the virtues of China and its people, insisting that they should not be abandoned in order to placate the Japanese, Amery admitted that the Chinese were “much more human” than the Japanese, but doubted that Britain could do anything to really help, and stressed the importance of reaching an agreement with Japan and Italy in order to prevent German expansion.<sup>112</sup> He also discounted the possibility of support from the political Left,

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<sup>109</sup> Nicolson, Nigel (ed). *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and Letters 1930-1939*, London: Collins, 1966, Diary entry, 4 July 1936, pp267-268

<sup>110</sup> Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*, 1966, Diary entry, 18 November 1936, p313

<sup>111</sup> Nicolson, *Diaries and Letters*, 1966, Diary entry, 6 June 1938, pp345-346

<sup>112</sup> *Amery Diaries*, 1988, Diary entry, 4 November 1934, p388

recalling that during the Manchurian crisis, it was “the Socialists who [were] clamouring for war”, but that now they were insistent upon peace.<sup>113</sup>

### **The British Diplomatic and Civil Services**

The writings of Sir Robert Craigie (the British Ambassador in Tokyo from 1937 to 1941) provide a clear insight into just what British diplomats in Japan, “the men on the spot”, actually thought of their former ally in the 1930s. In his correspondence with Lord Halifax (then-Foreign Secretary), Craigie criticised the ideas of Privy Counsellor Viscount Ishii Kikujirō (a pro-British and anti-German Japanese statesman) on Anglo-Japanese relations; the Japanese claim that Japanese actions in China were vital in order to remove communist influence was ridiculed, as Ishii himself had admitted that Chiang Kai-shek and Chang Hsueh Liang were staunchly anti-communist, and only turning to Russia as a result of Japanese pressure. The excuse of Japanese overpopulation necessitating the acquisition of Manchuria was similarly mocked: the Japanese had proven very reluctant to settle in cold Manchuria, they were “a home-loving people”, and they could not compete economically with the Chinese. The best way for Japan to solve her population pressure, acquire raw materials and dispose of manufactured goods would be to stop spending half of her annual revenues on munitions and to produce more commercial goods, thus increasing confidence: “if she knew the meaning of the word ‘cooperation’ her problems would disappear.” Craigie pointed out that, like Germany and Italy, Japan had suppressed birth control clinics with the explicit intent of increasing the population, and then used this growth as an excuse to expand. Furthermore,

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<sup>113</sup> *Amery Diaries*, 1988, Speech at West Ham, 9 May 1934, p315



just like Germany, Japan had dealt with unemployment by expanding the armaments industry – although it must be remembered that this was being done to satisfy military ambition, not to solve social problems. Ishii had claimed that Japan could not dispose of her goods, yet Japan had made great progress in this area in the past few years, and had also managed to somewhat increase the standard of living and reduce unemployment: “If the Japanese were really prepared to cooperate with the European Powers in the development of the vast markets of China, instead of trying to drive them out, they would have no difficulty in selling their goods... The choice before Japan in relation to the future development of China is either to attempt domination or to accept cooperation.” He insisted, however, that “despite appearances to the contrary, the choice has not yet finally been made.”<sup>114</sup> Somewhat surprisingly, Craigie concluded by noting that in spite of the dire picture painted above, there were still some influential elements in Japan with which Britain could cooperate: those who wished for a more gradual expansion. While this would not solve the problems, it would hopefully buy Britain the time that it desperately needed. Furthermore, Craigie believed that the rulers of Japan were, ultimately, a group of hard-headed realists who could “keep their mystical and expansionist tendencies well under control... they recognise that in the long run cooperation with Great Britain and the United States is likely to be much more fruitful in practical results than the much heralded...friendship with Germany and Italy.”<sup>115</sup> Interestingly, Craigie’s views were *not* shared by Sir Archibald Clark Kerr in Shanghai, who argued that “any form of cooperation which would be likely to satisfy the Japanese must be to the detriment of China and ultimately damaging to our interests”; presumably, his experience with Japanese military

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<sup>114</sup> TNA, PRO, F 10608/25/23, pp151-153, 28 February 1938

<sup>115</sup> TNA, PRO, F 10608/25/23, pp158-159, 28 February 1938

rule in China had proven to be most instructive, and any illusions he might have once held towards Japan had been (brutally) stripped away.<sup>116</sup>

The attitude of the Foreign Office towards Japan noticeable hardened in the late 1930s, as it seemed that previous concessions had accomplished nothing.<sup>117</sup> In his correspondence with Craigie, Sir Alexander Cadogan (who became Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office in 1938) largely agreed with the Diplomat's analysis of Japan, but noted that "for the last seven or eight years Japan has been in a state of simmering revolution," a state of affairs that he attributed partly to economic causes and partly to the military's political ideas of creating a totalitarian regime. Japanese realists were content to see such desires being employed (and hopefully worn down) in China; they considered this potential social danger to be of far greater consequence than national expansion of international alliances, and it appears that the Japanese army, regardless of whether it was victorious or defeated, posed a severe threat to the Japanese government and economy. Viscount Ishii had obliquely referred to this in his comments concerning "misery" in Japan and the limitations on social reform; and such fears also explained Japanese nervousness concerning Communism. All of this appears to have been ignored by Craigie.<sup>118</sup> Cadogan later elaborated in this theme in a letter to Craigie, written in response to a letter from Craigie describing a conversation between his wife and a Japanese lady. Those Japanese who had assured the British Ambassador and Government that they wished for better relations between the two countries were "doubtless sincere in their desire to be on better terms with us, but their ideas of how this shall be bought about and what the terms shall be differ vastly from ours. Apart from the preservation of our... commercial

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<sup>116</sup> TNA, PRO, F 9305, p284, 30 August 1938

<sup>117</sup> Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War*, 1973, pp60-61

<sup>118</sup> TNA, PRO, F 16414/1/38, pp143-144, 12 April 1938

enterprises we want to retain intact our... hold on the [Chinese] Customs Service, our control over the administration of the Shanghai settlement, our personnel in the railways and the maintenance of our shipping interests along the [Chinese] coasts and waterways...” Even those Japanese who were well-disposed towards Britain and who distrusted the alliance with Germany and Italy hoped that Britain, France and the United States would “accept and recognise Japan’s new position [in China]... abandon Chiang Kai-shek and cooperate with Japan in developing the occupied territory by financing Japanese enterprises.” In conclusion, “there is no prospect [at present] of obtaining anything of permanent value by abandoning China and cooperating with Japan... [and] the “stalemate” policy still offers the best hope for the survival of our influence in China.”<sup>119</sup>

It appears that his attitude was shared by other civil servants in the Foreign Office, notably R. G. Howe, who was responsible for the Far Eastern Department of the Foreign Office. In response to a letter from Craigie, he made it clear that Britain can “neither throw over the Chinese Government nor collaborate with Japan... the best we can hope for is to mark time and do our best to prevent Anglo-Japanese relations from deteriorating still further.” Howe acknowledged “the difficulties with which you are confronted in Tokyo...” and blamed many of these difficulties upon the inability of the Japanese Government to force the Army to obey any order unless it wished to do so. He also revealed that the Foreign Office was “subject to very intensive pressure by political and commercial interests... [that] perpetually insist upon ‘taking a strong line with the Japanese’,” but lamented that the (then-recent) Munich Crisis had overshadowed all other considerations in the last few days, pushing Japan and China into the

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<sup>119</sup> TNA, PRO, F 8961, pp14-16, 19 August 1938

background.<sup>120</sup> This dichotomy between the views of the Foreign Office and the views of the British embassy in Tokyo would ultimately come close to beginning an Anglo-Japanese war in 1939.

The port of Tientsin (now known as Tianjin) was an important city in Northern China, not least because of its concession territories – areas that had been ceded by the Chinese government to several foreign nations, including Britain and Japan. While the port was occupied by the Japanese Army in July 1937, the concession territories were not as Japan continued (for the most part) to respect the claims of the other nations. The presence of armed European troops in the middle of Japan's new empire became an intolerable insult in the eyes of many Japanese militarists, and in the spring and summer of 1939, things took a dramatic turn for the worse when Chinese nationalists assassinated the manager of a Japanese-owned Federal Reserve Bank in Tientsin, and the Japanese responded by accusing six Chinese men living in the British concession of being responsible (the men in question were, in fact, Chinese operatives involved in the anti-Japanese resistance).<sup>121</sup> The British police in Tientsin, under the direction of British Consul-General George Jamieson, cooperated with the Japanese by arresting most of the accused and handing them over for interrogation, on condition that they not be tortured and that they be subsequently returned to British custody.<sup>122</sup> Upon their return, the men alleged that they had been tortured, and Madame Soong May-ling, the wife of Chiang Kai-shek (leader of the Chinese Nationalists) urged Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr not to return them to Japanese custody, admitting that the accused were all Chinese Nationalists

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<sup>120</sup> TNA, PRO, F 7605, pp8-11, 7 June 1938

<sup>121</sup> Watt, D.C. *How War Came: The Immediate Origins of The Second World War, 1938-1939*, New York: Pantheon Books, 1989, pp351-353

<sup>122</sup> Watt, *How War Came*, 1939, pp351-352

engaged in the anti-Japanese resistance. Jamieson, convinced of the rightness of his actions, failed to keep his superiors in London well informed on the details of the case, and in the absence of necessary information, the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax made a serious mistake.

Halifax, who became Foreign Secretary in 1938, appears to have shared many of Chamberlain's instincts and feelings concerning Japan, but was, if anything, even more sceptical about her motives, and after hearing that the confessions had been obtained by torture, he ordered that the accused assassins should not be handed back to the Japanese, in spite of the overwhelming evidence of their guilt. The commander of the Japanese North China Army, General Masaharu Homma, had been regarded as friendly by the British, but at this point he lost patience, and allowed his more anti-Western subordinates to order a blockade of the concession on 14 June 1939. The Japanese insisted that this would only be lifted if the British agreed to suppress all anti-Japanese activities, surrender all Chinese Nationalist monies and resources, and cease all support for said Nationalists: the mere surrender of the guilty parties was no longer sufficient.<sup>123</sup> These developments resulted in a surge of anti-Japanese feeling in Britain, but there was little the British government could do. Sir Robert Craigie argued that it was necessary to placate the moderates in Tokyo and not to play into the hands of the extremists, but the Far Eastern section of the Foreign Office argued that there was no distinction between the two factions, that both aimed at Japanese expansion into China, and that it was essential to strengthen China against them. Five days after the blockade began, however, Halifax was persuaded by Craigie that regardless of whether or not backing the Chinese nationalists was strategically or morally justifiable, it seemed likely to lead to an open conflict between Britain and Japan in the near future. In order to prevent this,

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<sup>123</sup> Watt, *How War Came*, 1939, p354

the operatives were eventually handed over to Japan, and the blockade was lifted. Japan did not invade the British concession, there were no humiliating withdrawals, and war had been staved off, but Anglo-Japanese relations were worse than ever, with Japan seething of Britain's apparent bias and Britain dismayed by its ever-deteriorating position in East Asia.<sup>124</sup>

### **Other internal influences**

At the time of the Manchurian Crisis, the British public's attention was largely focused on domestic issues, but the British Press spent considerable time analysing Japanese actions from different viewpoints.<sup>125</sup> Left-wing newspapers (such as the *Manchester Guardian* and *New Statesman*) condemned Japanese aggression, but did not rule out the hope for a peaceful settlement, with the *Guardian* in particular urging the League to support the Japanese moderates, and later congratulating the League for having done all it could at the time. In contrast, some right-wing newspapers (including the *Daily Mail*, *Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express* and *Morning Post*) were openly pro-Japanese, while the *Times* condemned the methods adopted by the Japanese Army, but still felt that Japan had legitimate grievances, and that the League was doing the best in could, under the circumstances. By the end of the year, however, both the *Manchester Guardian* and the *Times* had criticised the League for tardiness, with the *Guardian* tentatively suggesting economic sanctions.<sup>126</sup> The British press in

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<sup>124</sup> Watt, *How War Came*, 1939, p359

<sup>125</sup> Thorne, Christopher. *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933*, London: Hamish Hamilton, 1972, pp97-98

<sup>126</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy*, 1972, pp177-179

Shanghai did, however, condemn the “cynically conceived acts” of the Japanese forces and praised Chinese restraint.<sup>127</sup>

Attitudes began to change after the Japanese bombing of the city of Chapei in February 1932 resulted in substantial loss of life and a large public outcry. The *Telegraph* and *Morning Post* continued to support Japan, but the *Times* and *Observer* held Japan solely responsible for the loss of life resulting from Chapei. Both newspapers urged close cooperation with the United States to restrain Japan, while the *Guardian* condemned the MacDonald Government for failing to take steps to deal with the crisis. The *New Statesman* and *Economist* both recommended that financial and economic sanctions should be imposed on Japan, but most of the press rejected the idea out of hand.<sup>128</sup> The Lytton Report was praised by the British Press, but while the *Guardian* was enthusiastic, the *Times* and other newspapers emphasised that only a basis for conciliation had been achieved, no more. The *Guardian* criticised the Government’s failure to stop Japan, but simultaneously suggested that the major powers should undergo large-scale disarmament in order to maintain “the supremacy of the moral authority of the League.”<sup>129</sup> Following Japan’s withdrawal from the League, the *Times*, *Guardian*, *New Statesman*, *News Chronicle* and *Daily Herald* all, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and consistency, supported an arms embargo against Japan; however, beyond the *Guardian*, *Economist* and *New Statesman*, there was little sustained criticism in the Press of the Government’s handling of the Crisis.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>127</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy*, 1972, pp137-138

<sup>128</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy*, 1972, pp215-221

<sup>129</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy*, 1972, pp284-287

<sup>130</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy*, 1972, p338

In the following years, the *Times* tended to approve of Simon's cautious policy,<sup>131</sup> expressing sympathy towards China without being harshly condemnatory towards Japan.<sup>132</sup> The newspaper advised, however, that although China was ill-equipped and under-armed, she was also united against the Japanese, and that there was no end to Chinese resistance in sight.<sup>133</sup> It also claimed that Japan regretted her increasing isolation, and stated that Britain would welcome her friendship, provided that the sovereign rights of China were respected.<sup>134</sup> The *Guardian*, on the other hand, came to treat Japanese claims and assurances with contempt: when Tokyo denied rumours of an alliance between Japan, Germany and Italy, the newspaper pointed out that "if the Japanese government could deny that the invasion of Manchuria was a war with China, it could deny anything."<sup>135</sup> The newspaper also stated that Japan could not possibly win in China, and that their "ruthless terrorism" would make no difference to the final outcome.<sup>136</sup> This view was most articulately expressed in July 1937, when the *Guardian* argued that Japan had already proven her military power and maintained her prestige: she no longer had any reason to continue her expansion into China, especially in light of the impracticality of conquering China (as admitted by some of her own militarists), and in light of the severe economic strain that a war would place upon her. Ultimately, the only thing she had to gain was the scorn and contempt of the whole world.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>131</sup> Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy*, 1972, pp342-343

<sup>132</sup> *The Times*, 1 May 1934, p17

<sup>133</sup> *The Times*, 7 January 1938, p13

<sup>134</sup> *The Times*, 8 August 1936, p11

<sup>135</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 November 1936, p10

<sup>136</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 9 July 1938, p12

<sup>137</sup> *The Manchester Guardian*, 29 July 1937, p8



The League of Nations Union remained influential, but reached the peak of its success with the controversial Peace Ballot of 1935. Eleven million people participated in the Ballot, showing strong support for Britain's continued membership in the League of Nations and a strong preference for using economic and non-military methods to prevent aggression from other states. The many critics of the LNU (including Austin Chamberlain) quickly noted, however, that the Ballot was rather one-sided and simplistic in format, and accused the LNU of manipulating the public by presenting them with false choices and biased information. The utter failure of "economic and non-military measures" to prevent Italy from crushing Abyssinia in 1935-36 discredited the League of Nations and made the LNU's goals appear utterly unrealistic, and this problem was only aggravated by the Union's association with the more pacifistic and pro-communist International Peace Campaign. Its leadership consistently "overestimated the readiness of public opinion to engage seriously with matters of foreign policy and misjudged the readiness of the political classes to open up [foreign policy] to democratic methods," while its insistence on reducing complex issues to 'peace or war' and its refusal to offer a more impartial argument rankled amongst professional diplomats. This perception of the LNU as naive and "utopian", while arguably a somewhat unjustified oversimplification, certainly helped to deny it credibility in the eyes of the National Government.<sup>138</sup>

As for Britain's armed forces, the British Army remained strongly supportive of closer relations with Japan, but the same could not be said of its sister services. The Army General Staff had considerable information upon which to base its assessment of the Japanese Army in the interwar period, and that this far exceeded what information the Royal Air Force and the

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<sup>138</sup> McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations*, 2011, pp30-32, 212-213, 244-246

Royal Navy had about their Japanese equivalents: what the General Staff failed to do was to pass its reports on Japanese tactics to British forces in Hong Kong, Singapore and India.<sup>139</sup> The RAF, on the other hand, tended to regard their Japanese counterparts as being inferior to any European air force; according to Air Chief Marshal Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, the British Commander in the Far East, the Japanese could never field an “intelligent fighting force”, an observation he made after seeing Japanese troops across the border from Hong Kong.<sup>140</sup> Apparently, this contemptuous attitude was shared by the RN at that time, which had come to rate the Imperial Japanese Navy as being only equal to the Royal Italian Navy. “The Admiralty underestimated the efficiency of the Japanese navy and deplored the lack of initiative they perceived among its senior admirals,”<sup>141</sup> and believed that the Japanese were inferior shipbuilders and aviators, slow-thinking, poorly trained and incapable of dealing with crises, an attitude that was apparently the result of a combination of ignorance and prejudice.<sup>142</sup> Ignorance and bigotry were probably the key reasons for such arrogance, backed up in the Royal Navy’s case by bitterness from the relative lack of support gained from Japan in the First World War. Therefore, it could be argued that the Navy and Air Force largely dismissed the danger from Japan, and that this attitude led the British government to largely ignore their former ally, instead preferring to concentrate upon the European threat. They cannot bear total responsibility for this attitude, as Britain’s military intelligence services were, at that stage, utilising a deeply flawed method of assessment that assumed that British forces would always prevail over Japan, which would not risk provoking a war that it knew it could

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<sup>139</sup> Towle, *From Ally To Enemy*, 2006, pp100-101

<sup>140</sup> Thorne, Christopher. *The Issue of War: States, Societies, and the Far Eastern Conflict, 1941-1945*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1985, p18

<sup>141</sup> Maiolo, Joseph A. *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany, 1933-39: A Study in Appeasement and the Origins of the Second World War*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998, p128

<sup>142</sup> Marder, Arthur. *Old Friends, New Enemies: The Royal Navy and the Japanese Navy*, London: Clarendon Press, 1961, p341 ff

not win. British intelligence simply did not understand how the Imperial Japanese Army and the Imperial Japanese Navy had developed and modernised to the extent of being able to match or surpass their Western adversaries, and Japan's obsession with secrecy (and the lack of British personnel and agents who spoke Japanese) made it even harder to assess her true strength. Furthermore, as the First World War had fully demonstrated Germany's military prowess, the various intelligence services tended to concentrate their limited resources and finances upon the Third Reich; Japan had to first prove its potential before it could be taken seriously, especially given her inability to fully subdue the Chinese.<sup>143</sup>

However, it should be noted that in spite of these intelligence failings, the Royal Navy at least was not completely sanguine: during the 1930s, the Naval Staff consistently assumed that in the event of a European war, the Japanese would seize the opportunity to extend its power in Asia at Britain's expense: therefore, it would be necessary to maintain a credible deterrent in the Far East.<sup>144</sup> As a result, Britain's inter-war naval strategy had established that the Navy would be based in British home waters and the Mediterranean, and would concentrate at the key port of Singapore in the event of any Japanese threat to British Dominions, colonies or interests in the Far East. However, Singapore had not been truly fortified against attacks from the sea; until this work was completed, the British fleet lacked a secure base east of the Mediterranean, and so would be unable to protect Britain's possessions, commerce and communications, including India, Australia and New Zealand. To make matters worse, the Royal Air Force's fighter and bomber squadrons were concentrated in Britain to guard against a German attack, leaving Singapore defenceless against aerial attack. By 1937 the naval planners no longer believed that peace in Europe would be enough to prevent Japan from

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<sup>143</sup> Ford, Douglas. *Britain's Secret War Against Japan, 1937-1945*, New York: Routledge, 2006, p13

<sup>144</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 1998, p75

attacking British possessions. Only a strong naval force in the Far East would be sufficient, and the immense cost of sea power, combined with Britain's fragile economic condition, led ministers to hesitate,<sup>145</sup> especially when the Joint Planning Committee produced its Far East Appreciation in May 1937, which baldly stated that war with both Germany and Japan would almost certainly lead to the fall of Singapore, and that if Italy also entered the war, the Mediterranean would have to be sacrificed.<sup>146</sup> When the European threat assumed terrifying proportions in early 1939, naval strategists acknowledged that naval operations in the Mediterranean would have to take precedence over those in the Far East, and that Singapore would have to endure for a longer time without relief in the event of a war with Germany and/or Italy, as the bulk of the Royal Navy would be required in home waters, the North Atlantic or the Mediterranean.<sup>147</sup> These factors were fully understood by the British government, and further contributed to its support for appeasement,<sup>148</sup> not least when in September 1938, during the Munich Crisis, the Chiefs of Staff warned the Cabinet that if a German attack on Czechoslovakia resulted in a European war, this would in turn inevitably result in a global war, as Italy and Japan would exploit the opportunity to expand their power at the expense of Britain and France.<sup>149</sup>

The three major British political parties (the Conservative Party, the Labour Party and the Liberal party) all held diverging attitudes towards Britain's foreign policy in general. Of these,

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<sup>145</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 1998, p134-135

<sup>146</sup> Neidpath, James. *The Singapore Naval Base and the Defence of Britain's Eastern Empire, 1919-1941*, Clarendon Press, 1981

<sup>147</sup> Pratt, Lawrence R. *East of Malta, West of Suez: Britain's Mediterranean Crisis, 1936-1939*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp169-171

<sup>148</sup> Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 2003, p37

<sup>149</sup> Maiolo, *The Royal Navy and Nazi Germany*, 1998, p117

the Conservative Party was of greatest significance due to its political dominance of 1930s Britain. In the eyes of many Conservatives, the Manchurian Crisis simply confirmed what they had long thought: the League of Nations was simply incapable of maintaining international peace and order.<sup>150</sup> As such, some Conservatives favoured the appeasement of the Axis Powers for strategic reasons, on the grounds that a war with Germany would destroy the British Empire and allow Communism to dominate Europe, while others supported negotiation because of sympathy with Germany's treatment following the First World War, support for fascism, or a genuine belief in pacifism.<sup>151</sup> Similarly, some Conservatives had expressed some sympathy for Japan's actions. They regarded Japan's actions as being similar to those taken by Britain in the past and necessary to restore stability to the area, and also believed that Japan's presence in Manchuria would serve as a useful counterweight to the threat posed by the Soviet Union. Even those who opposed the further expansion of Germany and champion British rearmament, such as Winston Churchill and Leo Amery, tended to favour some sort of accommodation with Japan.<sup>152</sup> On the other end of the political spectrum, the Labour Party in the 1930s was strongly opposed to Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Imperial Japan *in principle*, but its leadership simultaneously remained equally opposed to any sort of British rearmament, believing that collective security, internationalism and mediation via the League of Nations were better ways of preventing aggression and war. It was not until 1935 that its pacifistic leader George Lansbury resigned (after the Party voted in favour of sanctions against Italy during the Abyssinia Crisis), and his replacement, Clement

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<sup>150</sup> Crowson, N. J. *Facing Fascism: The Conservative Party and the European Dictators, 1935-1940*, London and New York: Routledge, 1997, p130

<sup>151</sup> Crowson, *Facing Fascism*, 1997, p3

<sup>152</sup> Best, "Anglo-Japanese Confrontation", 2000, pp28-29

Atlee, remained opposed to rearmament.<sup>153</sup> While the Party did come to support rearmament and oppose appeasement as the magnitudes of Hitler's ambition became clearer, the dichotomy between Labour's opposition to aggression and reluctance to take the necessary steps to stop said aggression remained: Atlee opposed the Munich Agreement in 1938,<sup>154</sup> but also condemned the introduction of conscription the following year.<sup>155</sup> The Party's refusal to acknowledge the League's impotence, combined with its lack of political power for much of the decade, rendered it of little importance in Anglo-Japanese relations.

In sharp contrast to the prevailing attitudes of anti-communism, complacency, pacifism and defeatism, there was one party that still called for action to stop Britain's enemies from expanding even further: the Liberal Party. Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Member of Parliament for Caithness and Sutherland, had become the Liberal leader after the 1935 general election, in which the once-great Party lost all but twenty of its seats. It was in an attempt to change its fortunes that Sinclair suggested an alternative to the policy of Appeasement. He urged that Britain should adamantly oppose Germany, Italy and Japan, and seek to maintain peace through more active participation in the League of Nations, economic cooperation with the other Powers, the promotion of international disarmament (but not unilateral disarmament) and encouraging collective security to ward off aggression from Britain's opponents. The Liberals urged the British government to make an anti-Nazi alliance with France and the Soviet Union. There is no doubt that if the Liberals had been in office during the 1930s, Appeasement as a policy would have been abandoned long before the Munich Crisis, and

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<sup>153</sup> Toye, Richard. 'The Labour Party and the Economics of Rearmament, 1935-39', *Twentieth Century British History*, Vol. 12, No 3 (2001), p307

<sup>154</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debate, 03 October 1938, Vol. 339, cc40-162

<sup>155</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons, Debate, 26 April 1939, Vol. 346, cc1150-1158

while it is extremely doubtful that this would have succeeded in stopping German expansion, given Hitler's long-term goals and utter rapacity, it may have proven more useful against Italy, given Mussolini's opportunism. How well it would have worked against Japan, given her unstable, ever-fluctuating government and policies, will remain unknown. Ultimately, much would have depended upon factors beyond the immediate control of the British government – most notably the attitudes and actions of the British Dominions and foreign nations.<sup>156</sup>

### **The British Empire and Foreign Countries**

It is hard to fault Britain's politicians, diplomats and officials for failing to stop Japanese aggression as, by the 1930s, the position and unity of the British Empire remained precarious, to say the least. A system of Imperial Preference had been introduced, but this was merely a desperate attempt to secure cheap food and raw materials, and to keep some outlets for industrial goods as the world market shrunk rapidly: it was not, in any way, a visionary strategy to unite the Empire.<sup>157</sup> While few Dominions were as anti-British as Eire or India, Britain could no longer rely upon them to offer unflinching support in foreign affairs: even after the occupation of Czechoslovakia, most Dominions remained wary about following Britain into war, and even as the invasion of Poland appeared imminent, there remained no enthusiasm in South Africa to lend assistance, while Canada refused to guarantee support. Of all the Dominions, only Australia and New Zealand had ever offered any opposition to the policy of appeasement, as these were by far the most exposed to any immediate danger: Ireland, Canada and South Africa were in far safer strategic positions. The two Pacific Ocean

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<sup>156</sup> Grayson, *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement*, 2001, pp149-151

<sup>157</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, pp456-457

Dominions, on the other hand, were deeply alarmed by the Japanese threat, each advocating increased defence. Yet in Australia, this support for rearmament was a mixed blessing for the British, as only Australian Conservatives favoured assisting Britain in Europe to maintain Imperial unity, while the Australian Labour Party wished to devote all Australian resources towards protecting the Dominion from the Japanese, distrusting Britain's ability to fight in Europe and the Far East simultaneously (with good reason, as would eventually transpire).

It should also be noted that Australia's opposition to appeasement and support for rearmament did not mean that Canberra opposed closer relations with Japan: indeed, in a series of letters and memoranda in 1937, the Australian Government spelled out its position. It stated that "better relations between Great Britain and Japan and even a definite understanding... are most desirable from the point of view of Australia... it is advisable, from the point of view of Australian policy, that more friendly relations and a closer understanding should be established between Great Britain and Japan."<sup>158</sup> The Australians felt that "the promotion of better relations and a closer understanding between Great Britain and Japan would be highly desirable from the point of view of Japan,"<sup>159</sup> and insisted that "...despite the known aims of Japanese policy, which may at any time involve a clash with China, Russia or the British Empire... there are signs that Japan, like Italy, does not desire to substitute German to the exclusion of British friendship and would be glad of a closer understanding with Great Britain."<sup>160</sup> As far as Canberra was concerned, "the improvement of British relations with

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<sup>158</sup> *Documents on Australian Foreign Policy, Volume I: 1937-1939*, Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, 1975, *Document 11. Memorandum prepared for Delegation to Imperial Conference (extract)*, 6 March 1937, pp34-35 (hereafter referred to as *DAFP, Vol. I*)

<sup>159</sup> *DAFP, Vol. I*, 1975, *Document 12. Mr J. A. Lyons, Prime Minister, to Mr S. M. Bruce, High Commissioner in London*, 6 March 1937, p36

<sup>160</sup> *DAFP, Vol. I*, 1975, *Document 17. Memorandum prepared for Delegation to Imperial Conference (extract)*, 10 March 1937, pp40-54



Japan with the object of securing her permanent friendship is understood to be the ultimate aim of British Foreign Policy. While British defences are being strengthened, this improvement is to be secured by a policy of accommodation, to guard against the possibility of the British Commonwealth being faced simultaneously with the hostility of Germany, Italy and Japan... While realizing Britain's world-wide interests, particularly in the maintenance of peace in Europe, Australia is naturally most concerned in the Pacific Region, as are also Canada and New Zealand."<sup>161</sup>

The outbreak of the Sino-Japanese War in 1937 had driven Australia and New Zealand to rearm at a frantic pace, and both Dominions demanded that Britain relieve Singapore, no matter what the European situation, placing an even greater financial and military burden upon Britain.<sup>162</sup> Nevertheless, no matter how difficult it became to protect the Empire, doing so was vital: the British economy could not recover from the Great Depression or maintain her international position without support from the Empire. The debacles at Munich and Abyssinia would have catastrophic consequences for the Empire, confirming in the eyes of many Mussolini's description of Britain as "a decrepit, weary nation which... would inevitably give way to a youthful and virile imperial power."<sup>163</sup> Cadogan feared that Japan's actions in China and indifference towards Britain were signals to the rest of Asia that henceforth Britain would count for less and less in the Far East.<sup>164</sup> Events would soon prove him correct: indeed, the Japanese invasion of Southern China, which threatened to ruin Hong

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<sup>161</sup> *DAFP, Vol. I, 1975, Document 13. Memorandum prepared for Delegation to Imperial Conference (extract)*, 8 March 1937, p37

<sup>162</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, pp477-478

<sup>163</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, p475

<sup>164</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, p476

Kong's trade or even occupy the port, may well have been a direct result of appeasement: Japan no longer took Britain seriously.<sup>165</sup>

Under these circumstances, it was vital for Britain to acquire allies, of which the most vital in Europe was France. Unfortunately, she would spend much of the interwar period in a state of near-constant political, economic and social disorder, as governments and political parties rose and fell, socialists and reactionaries fought bitterly amongst themselves, and an overall air of defeatism gradually began to infiltrate French society. The Third French Republic had suffered bitterly during the First World War, with 1.5 million French soldiers being lost and much of her coal and steel-producing regions devastated, and so was torn between a paranoid fear of Germany and her actions, and the overwhelming dread of another war. France had established a ring of alliances and non-aggression pacts with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, Italy and the Soviet Union as a means of checking Germany, yet lacked the political will to enforce them. She was one of the founding members of the League of Nations, but was unwilling to take action against Germany, Japan or Italy whenever they abused or violated its principles. France was extremely worried by the occupation of Hainan (near to French Indo-China and Hong Kong), even more so than Britain; but given her reluctance to take action to protect her allies (and her own position) in Europe, it was rather unlikely that she would take any action against Japan that might result in her losing her colonies in the Far East.<sup>166</sup> To make matters worse, on the few occasions that France did seem to be willing to take a stand against her opponents, such as with the so-called "Stresa Pact" with Britain and

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<sup>165</sup> *The Economist*, 15 October 1938, p21

<sup>166</sup> *Harvey Diaries*, 1970, Diary entry, 12 February 1938, p253

Italy against Germany, she was undercut by Britain's attempts to preserve her own position *vis-à-vis* Germany.<sup>167</sup>

The most immediate threat to Britain herself (as opposed to her Empire) remained Germany: although the German empire had collapsed in the aftermath of the First World War, and the succeeding "Weimar Republic" was far too politically, militarily and economically weak to pose any sort of threat, the rise of Nazism and its increasingly aggressive policies ensured that by the mid-1930s, Germany was increasingly seen as the single greatest threat to peace: indeed, by 1937, it was clear that Germany was increasing her military spending at an astonishing rate, and would soon be in a position to utterly crush Britain unless something was done – and soon.<sup>168</sup> In contrast to Germany, Britain's other major threat in Europe was her former-ally turned present-competitor, Fascist Italy. Mussolini's commitment to expansion in the Mediterranean and the growth of the Royal Italian Navy meant that Britain would have to take steps to guarantee the safety of Malta, Egypt, the Suez Canal and the trade routes and lines of communication with India.<sup>169</sup> Britain's attempts to prevent these new empires from expanding proved pitifully ineffective, and merely exposed her weakness to the world.

In the eyes of many western leaders, the new Soviet Union posed a great threat to any kind of world order. Britain, France and the United States had all intervened in the Russian Civil War, offering assistance to the reactionary, anti-communist White forces. Only when it became

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<sup>167</sup> Shirer, William. *The Collapse of the Third Republic: An Inquiry into the Fall of France in 1940*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969, pp249-25

<sup>168</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p490

<sup>169</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p490

clear that the new Soviet Union was here to stay (and following the introduction of Josef Stalin's policy of "Socialism in One Country" as opposed to Leon Trotsky's desire for an international "Permanent Revolution") did foreign countries reluctantly, grudgingly begin to grant her diplomatic recognition; hence, by the 1930s, the USSR was no longer as ostracised by the West as she had once been. Indeed, according to Sir Stafford Cripps, the Russian were becoming increasingly worried over the expansion of Germany and Japan, and were eager to come to an understanding with Britain – provided it left them as more or less neutral. Cripps argued that there was a real danger that by opposing Russia, Britain could end up forcing her to come to terms with Japan and partition China.<sup>170</sup> Her support would have proven a valuable asset in combating German aggression in Czechoslovakia and Poland, and Japanese aggression in China, yet only France truly regarded the Soviet Union as a useful ally. Britain feared her ambitions in Europe, India and the Far East, and the smaller European states feared being consumed by the Communist superstate (with good reason, as this would eventually happen to the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1939). To make matters worse, Stalin's unpredictable behaviour (in light of the Great Purges) made Soviet foreign policy increasingly erratic, while a long-standing contempt for Russian industrial power and scientific ability led many westerners to underestimate her military potential.<sup>171</sup> However, the British did not completely ignore the dangers posed by Russia: it was considered essential to avoid a war with the USSR, not least because doing so could end up forcing her to come to terms with Japan and partition China.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>170</sup> *Harvey Diaries*, 1970, Diary entry, 29 April 1940, pp351-352

<sup>171</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p524

<sup>172</sup> *Harvey Diaries*, 1970, Diary entry, 29 April 1940, pp351-352

Arguably the single most important country (in terms of its effects upon British policy in the Far East) was the United States of America. The general mood in America during the 1930s was one of isolationism: the American people simply did not want to be dragged into another war. President Franklin Roosevelt certainly hoped to educate his people as to the reality of the international crisis: if Japan was not stopped (and soon) she would be in a position to occupy all British and Dutch possessions in the Far East, leaving America to fight her alone. Yet with considerable opposition to any interference with foreign countries, and the United States still recovering from the Great Depression, his task was rendered extremely difficult. It would be wrong, however, to assume that public pressure was solely responsible for America's refusal to help stop Japan. Throughout the 1930s, the United States armed forces and intelligence services regarded Japan and her actions in an ambiguous light, for much the same reasons that Britain's armed forces and intelligence services did. The opportunistic nature of Japanese expansion made it difficult to predict her actions in advance, or to truly understand her motives, and the evidence at hand suggested that Japan lacked sufficient military or economic resources to conquer the Asia-Pacific region; as such, senior officials in the United States Departments of State, War and the Navy concluded that America's military position in the Far East was not vulnerable to a Japanese attack: indeed, the Commander-in-Chief of the US Asiatic Fleet once claimed that there was not even the remotest possibility of trouble with Japan for years to come.<sup>173</sup> In light of the Abyssinian fiasco, where half-hearted sanctions imposed by Britain and France following the Italian invasion of Abyssinia had utterly failed to prevent Mussolini from conquering the African nation, Britain felt that there was no point in applying any sanctions unless they were to be truly effective, and unless both Britain and America were to be immediately ready to declare war upon Japan. As America would not be

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<sup>173</sup> Ford. 'Realistic Caution and Ambivalent Optimism' (2010): pp175-201

prepared for either of these (let alone both) there seemed little point in trying – doing so would probably only damage Anglo-American relations.<sup>174</sup> Germany, Italy and Japan would all greatly benefit from this failure of Britain and America to unite against them,<sup>175</sup> yet even Winston Churchill, arch-enemy of the appeasers, would eventually conclude that the only way to stop the Japanese aggression in China would have been for the United States to have lent her assistance: therefore, the British government could not really be blamed for not offering strong support to America in the Far East without American support in Europe, in light of Britain's growing financial and diplomatic difficulties.<sup>176</sup>

## **Evaluation**

By 1939, Cadogan's complaint had proved all too correct: Britain had indeed been incapable of providing a positive programme in response to Japan's actions, a failure that would have dire consequences. Between 1932 and 1937, Japanese militarism continued to grow, as more and more of China was consumed. The indecision and Eurocentrism of certain British leaders may have made it virtually impossible to do anything to oppose this expansion, but it certainly wasn't the only factor. No other British statesman during this period was able to provide a viable strategy for dealing with Japan alone: indeed, the growing threat from Germany and Italy forced the British government to retain most of her naval forces in home waters or the Mediterranean, and Britain's poor finances and parlous economic condition made it impossible to maintain sufficient forces to handle all three Axis Powers. Any demonstration

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<sup>174</sup> *Harvey Diaries*, 1970, Diary entry, 2 November 1937, pp54-55

<sup>175</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p524

<sup>176</sup> Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 1948, pp67-68

would thus have been inadequate... unless either France or the United States (or preferably both) were to provide at least an equal sized force. Unfortunately, the French were both obsessed with the German menace and deeply unwilling to enter another war, and while the American public were concerned about the worsening international situation, they were also strongly opposed to the mere *idea* of an alliance with Britain or any other country,<sup>177</sup> and both Germany and Japan would greatly benefit from the resulting failure of Britain, France and America to unite.<sup>178</sup> It would be wrong to say that Japan was ignored by Britain during this period: indeed, Neville Chamberlain often defended the policy of appeasement (as applied to Germany) by stressing the all-to-real threat from Japanese and Italian attacks upon the British Empire. By 1937, it was clear that Germany was increasing her military spending at an astonishing rate, and would soon be in a position to utterly crush Britain unless something was done – and soon. Italy's commitment to expansion in the Mediterranean meant that Britain would have to take steps to guarantee the safety of Malta, Egypt, the Suez Canal and the trade routes and lines of communication with India. On top of this, Japan was 'running amok' in East Asia, and would soon be in a position to menace Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaya, with Australia, New Zealand and India also looking increasingly vulnerable.<sup>179</sup> The government was too fearful of Japan and Italy to openly prevent them (in Manchuria and Abyssinia) but was also too worried about domestic criticism to simply turn a blind eye to their activities. Hence, domestic, diplomatic, military and financial concerns all combined to render Britain's position most unfavourable, and ultimately unsustainable.<sup>180</sup> As such, while Cadogan's complaint was well earned by the British government and Foreign Office, it

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<sup>177</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p523

<sup>178</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p524

<sup>179</sup> Eden, *Memoirs*, 1962, p490

<sup>180</sup> Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 2003, p34

remains difficult even with the benefit of hindsight to see what rational and effective policy Britain might have adopted in order to stop Japan and protect the British Empire.



## CONCLUSION

For much of the twentieth century, Kipling's hopes would not be honoured. By 1924, Anglo-Japanese relations, which had seemed so strong twenty years earlier, were in steady decline. This may have begun to develop prior to the First World War, as Japan was no longer content with simply being a substantial naval power with minor colonial and commercial ambitions in China, while Britain saw Japan as a useful ally but not as an equal, and was somewhat disturbed by the intensity and zeal of Japan's leadership. This growing sense of alienation was only magnified by the effects of the War itself, as Britain, while conceding that the Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 had provided some benefits, expected more from Japan than was actually required from Japan under the terms of the Alliance; as such Britain would often (and unfairly) bemoan Japan's lack of support during the War.<sup>181</sup> In spite of this, the Alliance was generally seen as providing some benefits to both nations in that it allowed Britain to reduce her naval obligations in the Far East, reduced commercial competition and provided for the creation of a front against the growing threat posed by the Soviet Union. However, Japan's expansion into China would prove to be the single most important bone of contention between the two nations, and this would be a major factor when it came for Britain and Japan to decide whether or not to renew the Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Japan had suddenly changed from merely wishing to be a prominent naval power to desiring to become a major colonial power in China.<sup>182</sup> Britain was faced with a stark choice: whether to more closely tie herself to Japan in the faint hope that this might allow her to try and restrain Japan's actions in China, or to instead completely disassociate herself from Japan's actions in order to retain the friendship of America, a country whose friendship had become politically and economically vital to

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<sup>181</sup> Nish, *Anglo-Japanese Alienation*, 1982, pp27-28

<sup>182</sup> Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 2004, p392

Britain.<sup>183</sup> Ultimately, it was Japan that felt the most outrage at the end of the Alliance and the signing of the Washington Naval Treaty, believing that an Anglo-American conspiracy had been formed to destroy her growing power in East Asia and the Pacific.<sup>184</sup> This would have baleful consequences for the world in general, and for both Japan and Britain in particular, as the road from Washington led to Manchuria.<sup>185</sup>

Britain's reaction to the Manchurian Crisis was one of moral outrage on the one hand and political dithering on the other. It has been argued (with some justification) that during this period, the British National Government, together with the Opposition, failed to come up with any constructive measures to stop Japan (or, indeed, any of the Totalitarian powers).<sup>186</sup> Yet in light of the various constraints under which they had to work (as are enumerated above), it is difficult to see what alternatives existed, or that adopting a different course would have proven any more effective. Britain's conduct during the Manchurian Crisis (and during the later 1930s) was certainly inglorious, yet given the circumstances, it is at least understandable. Japan's actions were aggressive, unpredictable and completely unscrupulous, and while MacDonald's dithering and indecision undoubtedly made matters worse, it remains difficult to see what a more intelligent and decisive man might have done. Britain lacked the strength to fight Japan alone with any great chance of success, and neither France nor the United States were likely to intervene. Furthermore, the British public's hostility to Japanese aggression did not necessarily translate into support for the only measure likely to succeed – military action. After a decade of retrenchment and austerity measures, coupled with worldwide revulsion at

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<sup>183</sup> Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 2004, pp392-397

<sup>184</sup> Nish, *Alliance in Decline*, 2004, pp396-397

<sup>185</sup> Kennedy, *Great Britain and Japan*, 1969, p56

<sup>186</sup> Churchill, *The Gathering Storm*, 1948, pp69-70

the thought of another war, Britain was simply too weak to stop the Japanese alone, as Sir Robert Vansittart (then Permanent Secretary of the Foreign Office) lamented: “We cut our defences and replaced them with world opinion.”<sup>187</sup> The British policy may have been weak, but the United States lacked even this: they would blame the British for failing to take a firm stand, yet refuse to do so themselves.<sup>188</sup> The American people were not prepared to do anything, and much of America’s political and military leadership felt that there was no need to do anything.<sup>189</sup> Britain’s terrible economic state made it utterly impractical for her to act alone: within two years of the Wall Street Crash of 1929, there were three million unemployed (twenty per cent of Britain’s workforce). Her old, already-decaying staple industries (shipbuilding, textiles, coal, heavy engineering and iron and steel) had been hit the hardest, and by 1932, nearly half of the national budget was being expanded in welfare payments, mostly to the unemployed and their families.<sup>190</sup> The British public had no desire to participate in another war, and regarded those few politicians who supported collective security and defensive alliances (such as Winston Churchill and Archibald Sinclair) as dangerous and reckless warmongers.<sup>191</sup> To expect the British government to be able to gather the physical and moral strength to fight and defeat Japan with very few resources and very little domestic or foreign support was, to say the least, highly unrealistic.

British perceptions of Japan and her actions were mixed, to say the least, and this made it very difficult to decide on a coherent Far Eastern policy: the British Prime Ministers and

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<sup>187</sup> Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, p344

<sup>188</sup> Vansittart, *The Mist Procession*, pp346-347

<sup>189</sup> Ford. ‘US Perceptions’ (2010)

<sup>190</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, pp455-456

<sup>191</sup> Grayson, *Liberals, International Relations and Appeasement*, 2001, p149

governments tended to regard Japan as dangerous and unpredictable, yet still hoped for a peaceful solution; Parliament was alarmed by Japanese aggression, but tended to regard Germany and Italy as the greater dangers; British diplomats in Japan believed that peace and mutual respect between the two countries was possible and desirable, but those outside were far more sceptical; the Dominions were deeply divided over where the greater threat lay; the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force were somewhat contemptuous of Japan, while the British Army was more respectful and desired closer relations; the British Press demanded that something ought to be done to stop the Japanese; and the League of Nations Organisation insisted that if anything were to be done, it ought to be done peacefully and the public thoroughly consulted beforehand. Yet this uncertainty was not the cause of Britain's difficult position, it was an effect. Internationally, British power was not crumbling because her politicians and governors were retreating into an idealistic paradise, where compromise and appeasement could be used to stop dictators and prevent wars: her reputation as a global power had simply managed to outlive her actual strength in terms of wealth and military strength.<sup>192</sup> Indeed, Britain's prestige remained high, and many contemporaries (including Adolf Hitler) were certain that she would be willing to fight ruthlessly in order to preserve her empire, yet later events would show that Britain was finding it increasingly difficult to maintain her international and imperial pretensions.<sup>193</sup> Neville Chamberlain would often defend the policy of appeasement (as applied to Germany) by stressing the all-to-real threat from Japanese and Italian attacks upon the British Empire. The government was too fearful of Japan and Italy to openly prevent them (in Manchuria and Abyssinia) but was also too worried about domestic criticism to simply turn a blind eye to their activities. Neither the Conservative Party nor the Liberal Party were able to provide coherent, practical foreign

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<sup>192</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, p454

<sup>193</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, p454

policies, while the Liberal Party's alternative strategy was deeply unpopular amongst the public, and would have required the long-term support of both France and the United States; with the former morbidly obsessed by the German threat, the latter refusing to become involved, and both adamantly opposed to war, it is difficult to imagine the Liberal alternative achieving success. Racial prejudice (especially in the armed forces) led many to underestimate the threat posed by Japan to British dominions and colonies, but this was not *sufficiently* widespread to give Britain the confidence to engage and defeat her, but instead contributed to Britain neglecting her Far Eastern defences and concentrating upon Europe. Hence, domestic, diplomatic, military, financial and cultural factors all combined to render Britain's position most unfavourable.<sup>194</sup>

Looking at this entire period in retrospect, it can be seen that while Britain's prestige was high and its military power considerable, its poor economic status and numerous commitments considerably reduced her freedom of action, and "made ministers, diplomats and strategists tread warily." It was for this reason that Britain's leaders devoted so much time and effort in establishing and maintaining a system for guaranteeing international peace and stability, based upon the League of Nations and a series of non-aggression pacts from the 1920s. Collective security would (it was hoped) create a world in which the Empire could flourish. It was for this reason, as much as any sense of idealism concerning world peace, that British statesmen were so willing to adapt their policies to the principles of the League.<sup>195</sup> As it was, British policy, based on the assumption that the British Empire could not afford to fight Japan alone, had been reduced to a simple yet impossible objective: to maintain her position and

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<sup>194</sup> Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 2003, p34

<sup>195</sup> James, *Rise and Fall*, 2004, p458

influence without incurring the hostility of any other participants.<sup>196</sup> Just how impossible this really was would become all too apparent in later years. All British foreign policy was unified – it was impossible to be weak in the Far East and strong in Europe. A weak approach to Spain resulted in further aggressive movements from Japan; Britain's inability to stop Japan only encouraged Germany and Italy. Her failure to support China (which was, after all, fighting Britain's war at this point), only encouraged Britain's other allies to desert her.<sup>197</sup> Ultimately, only British (and American) withdrawal from the Far East could prevent a war, but such a move was never seriously entertained, as it would have had terrible consequences for the British Empire. It would suggest the surrender of the Empire east of India, encourage the collapse of authority in India, have disastrous consequences on relations with Australia and New Zealand, and liquidate British investments in China, thus making her weaker still in Europe and the Mediterranean.<sup>198</sup> Ultimately, in order to understand Anglo-Japanese relations in this period, it is vital to see said diplomatic relationship against the background of a region in turmoil; it is impossible to understand events without studying how Britain viewed the aspirations of Nationalist China or the USSR. It is also necessary to see how the influence of confrontation in Europe between the Axis and the Anglo-French blocs shaped Britain's fears for her security. Last, and perhaps most importantly, it is essential to understand the attitude and role of the United States, as Britain's success in any future war in East Asia or in Europe rested upon America's support.<sup>199</sup> As such, no matter how complex the situation appeared, the

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<sup>196</sup> Parker, *Chamberlain and Appeasement*, 2003, p38

<sup>197</sup> *Harvey Diaries*, 1970, Diary entry, 24 June 1939, p299

<sup>198</sup> Lowe, Peter. *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War: A Study of British Policy in East Asia 1937-1941*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977, pp285-286

<sup>199</sup> Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, 1995, pp3-4

simple conclusion reached by most educated contemporaries was that Britain could not do what had to be done, *when* it had to be done.

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