

# Pearl Harbor and War in the Pacific

Enquiry: When was the turning point of the Second World War?

Ms Dawson



Since the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, Japan had been modernising and industrialising. Japan had become the dominant nation in East Asia. They had expected to join international politics as an equal to America and the European powers, but this did not occur. After the First World War, the Japanese did not achieve their aims at the **Paris Peace Conference**. Then in 1920, the Western Powers introduced measures to limit the power of Japan's navy to make sure that it was smaller than Britain and America's navies. To make matters worse, in 1924 the Asian Exclusion Act banned all Japanese immigration to the United States. All of these events caused tension between Japan and the Western Powers.



In the 1930s, Japan was hit badly by the **Great Depression** along with the rest of the world. Although their population was growing rapidly, wages and incomes were falling. The Japanese needed resources and did not feel that they would be able to achieve these aims through **diplomacy** with the Western Powers. So, in the 1930s Japan began to follow an aggressive **expansionist** policy. In 1931 Japan occupied Manchuria, a province in northern China. Japan's actions were condemned by the Western Powers. In particular, Britain, France, the USA, and the Netherlands were worried about Japan's behaviour as they all possessed **colonies** in South-East Asia. Japan's response to their criticism was to leave the **League of Nations** in 1933. The conflict with China intensified over several years and in July 1937, China and Japan went to war. The European powers feared that Japan would attack their colonies next.



To fund this new conflict Japan desperately needed key natural resources like oil and rubber which were both in short supply in Japan. In order to protect themselves, Japan signed the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, becoming one of the **Axis Powers**. Then, while the European Powers were busy fighting Germany in the West, Japan decided to expand into European colonies in East Asia. Japan conquered the French colony of Indochina (now Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia) and the Dutch colony of East Indies (Indonesia) to source key resources like oil and rubber. But this only further set Japan against the West and angered America. In order to try and prevent the Japanese from expanding further, the United States issued an **oil embargo** and increased their military presence in the Philippines. For Japan, this was further evidence that war with the United States was inevitable. However, this was a daunting thought for the Japanese as America was far more powerful than Japan.



The Japanese military therefore believed their only hope was a shock attack that would knock the Americans out of the war before they had even joined. The Japanese decided to target the US Pacific naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. At 7.55am on Sunday 7 December 1941, the first of two waves of Japanese aircraft began their deadly attack on the US Pacific Fleet. Within two hours, five battleships had been sunk, another 16 damaged, and 188 aircraft destroyed. The attacks killed just 64 Japanese but over 2,400 Americans, with another 1,178 injured. Immediately afterwards, the Japanese invaded the Philippines – an important strategic American colony. Japan wanted to take the Philippines so that the Americans wouldn't have a base from which to attack them in the Pacific. The attack on Pearl Harbour weakened and distracted the Americans, enabling the Japanese to attack the Philippines.



The attacks came as a shock to the American people and changed public opinion about entering the war. The following day US President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared war on Japan. Days later, he declared war on Germany and Italy who made up the Axis powers with Japan. Less than a week after Pearl Harbor, America was now at war with Japan, Germany and Italy. America was the world's strongest economy and its entrance into the war was a huge relief to the British and was something that Winston Churchill had been pleading Roosevelt to do for years. Not even the Nazis could match the industrial power of America. This sudden influx of American men, money and equipment is seen by many as a key moment in the Second World War. American involvement shifted the balance of the conflict from Axis advantage to Allies advantage.





# Glossary

**Paris Peace Conference:** The conference held after the end of the First World War to decide how to settle the conflict. Attended by many countries.

**Great Depression:** Period of worldwide economic difficulty in the 1930s, widespread unemployment and rising prices.

**Diplomacy:** Dealing with international relations issues by discussing and negotiating.

**Expansionist:** A policy of taking territories from other countries in order to gain power

**Colonies:** Countries that are under control of another country (e.g. the Philippines was an American colony because it was under American control).

**League of Nations:** An international organisation set up after the First World War. It aimed to keep peace and encourage countries to discuss their problems without going to war.

**Axis Powers:** The wartime alliance between Germany, Italy, and Japan.

**Oil embargo:** A refusal to trade oil, often done for political reasons.



## Comprehension questions:

1. Which country became the dominant country in East Asia?
2. Why did Japan need to increase its income in the 1930s?
3. Why were the European powers worried about Japan's occupation of Manchuria?
4. What did the United States do in order to try and limit Japan's expansion?
5. When did the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor?
6. What damage did the Japanese attack cause?
7. What did the American President do the day after the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Challenge: Why did the Japanese want to ensure that their attack on the Americans was a surprise?

Sentence starter: The Japanese wanted their attack to be a surprise because...

This meant that...

This was important because...





# Turning point table

Date	In your opinion, who looks likely to win the war at this point?	Evidence to justify your view
June 1940	Nazi Germany	They had defeated Poland, Denmark, Norway, Belgium, the Netherlands, and France. They had forced the British and French to evacuate.
May 1941		
November 1941		
December 1941		



# Extension Question

Why might some consider the attack on Pearl Harbor a ‘turning point’ in the Second World War?

Use the sentence starters and key words below to help you.

Sentence starters:	Key words
<p>The Japanese invasion attack on Pearl Harbor may be considered a turning point in the Second World War because it led to...</p> <p>Evidence to support this is...</p> <p>This was important because...</p>	<p>Declare</p> <p>Alliance</p> <p>Britain</p> <p>Support</p>

