Anglo-Japanese Relations in the 1930s:

The Inevitable Road to War?

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Introduction

In recent years the origins of the Second World War in Asia and the Pacific have attracted a good deal of attention from historians. In one respect this has been due to the modern obsession with commemorating anniversaries, which led for example to the fiftieth anniversary of the start of the Pacific War giving rise to three edited collections of conference papers. However, it has also been the result of scholars gaining access to previously closed archival material not only in the West but also in countries such as China and the Soviet Union. In addition, the growing openness of diplomatic historians towards economic, intellectual, cultural and social history and the study of intelligence and propaganda has filtered into the debate and this too has helped to enrich our understanding of events in East Asia in this crucial decade. In the light of these developments it is possible to reassess some aspects of the origins of the Asian conflict. The object of this paper is to look once again at Anglo-Japanese relations and how the tensions between these two countries contributed to the outbreak of the Pacific War.

It is necessary to begin by observing that in the 1930s Britain was still one of the leading powers in the world, if not, as John Ferris and Brian McKercher have argued, the leading power.[1] Certainly if any one state in the international system stood for the maintenance of the *status quo* it was

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Britain. Britain at this time controlled an Empire that covered a quarter of the globe. It was the world's leading naval power and it possessed substantial investments and trade interests in virtually every country in the world. In East Asia it had important trade links with Japan, particularly in regard to Indian and Australian commodity exports, and possessed extensive interests in China. If anything it was a more significant regional presence than the United States, particularly when one takes into account the isolationism of America during the inter-war period. One needs to state this, because it is important to realize that the extent of British power meant that Anglo-Japanese relations were central to the future of East Asia, and played a crucial role in the region's descent into war.

Britain, however, faced a grave challenge to the *status quo* in the 1930s due to the breakdown of the international system that had been constructed at Paris in 1919 and Washington in 1921-22. The Depression that began in 1929 unleashed destructive forces far and wide. The response of the western democracies, including Britain, to the Slump was to reject internationalism in trade and finance and to move towards protectionism and a reliance on imperial and/or domestic markets, as symbolized by the Smoot-Hawley Act in the United States in 1930, the British abandonment of the Gold Standard in 1931 and the introduction of Imperial Preference in 1932, and finally by the ignominious failure of the World Economic Conference held in London in 1933. The dislocation of the world economy exacerbated the unsolved issues from the First World War that had divided Europe during the 1920s, bringing forth a period of fear and uncertainty. Furthermore, the American retreat into introspection and the continued threat to the capitalist world from Soviet communism only served to heighten the prevailing sense of anxiety.

This collapse of the international order did not, however, just affect Europe, for East Asia was not immune to the ravages of the Depression and here too the slump arrived in a region plagued by the spectre of war. Within

East Asia the late 1920s had seen two incompatible and mutually reinforcing developments; first, the rise of Chinese nationalism and its challenge to the unequal treaties that had been forced on China by the Great Powers since the mid-nineteenth century, and second, a growing political and economic crisis in Japan which led to calls for a policy of expansion in continental Asia. The Depression helped to produce a climate within which these two phenomena began to collide and the result was an explosion of tensions that brought China and Japan into direct conflict.

The escalation of tensions in East Asia naturally concerned Britain due to its economic stake within the region, but in addition to its commercial concerns, Japan's actions also caused distrust as they were perceived to be an attack on the new post-war international order itself. Japan in turn saw Britain as an obstacle to the achievement of its ambitions, as a key contributor to Japan's economic plight, and as a Power that encouraged Chinese resistance to Japan. The Anglo-Japanese clash of interests that emerged from 1931 onwards was thus the result of a number of different factors, including the fact that a fundamental philosophical divide was beginning to open up between the two countries.

The original issue that led to the two former allies to break away from each other was the Manchurian Crisis. The aggressive nature of Japanese policy in Manchuria in 1931, and in 1932 in Shanghai, led to harsh Western criticism of Japan's actions which in turn prompted an aggrieved Japanese response. Thus began a spiral of mutual recriminations and the construction in each country of a deeply unsympathetic image of the other.[2]

The Japanese Challenge

The Japanese aim in the 1930s was to construct a bloc in East Asia consisting of the Japanese Empire, Manchukuo and China within which Japan would be the dominant political, military and economic force. In regard to China, it

wanted to encourage the emergence of a regime that would realise that it was in China's political and economic interest to collaborate with Japan. It also envisaged that any such pro-Japanese government in China should co-operate in the struggle to contain the Soviet Union and eradicate communism from East Asia. This plan for the region was clearly one that envisaged an expansion of empire and the subjugation of other peoples, just as the western European states had done when they had constructed their own empires, but the Japanese liked to believe that their common cultural and historical bonds with China would allow for a more mutually benevolent relationship than existed within the European empires. The logic and legitimacy behind the Japanese case was not, however, accepted by the West, and most importantly was entirely rejected by the Chinese who sought nothing more than control over their own destiny.

To many Japanese observers the British failure to recognize the legitimacy of Japan's case in the Manchurian Crisis demonstrated the inherent hypocrisy of the Western states, who criticized Japan for seeking empire while simultaneously exploiting the resources and populations of their own imperial possessions. In other words the moral case that was argued by the West was dismissed or even twisted around in order to argue that it was Japan as a 'have-not' country that had morality on its side. Pronouncements by Japanese officials frequently made reference to what was seen as a policy of deliberate Western discrimination against Japan in regard to tariffs, quotas and immigration. To the more extreme elements the West's attitude could be explained by reference to its inherent racism towards Asians. For example, in January 1934 Admiral Suetsugu, the former Vice-Chief of the Naval General Staff, observed in an interview with the magazine *Gendai*:

> To put it in a nutshell, the greatest obstacle to Japan's smoothing out its diplomatic difficulties is the dislike of the Occidentals in regard to the steady rise of the Japanese in world affairs. Japan is the only

coloured race which has been expanding beyond its natural boundaries, and this constitutes a serious set-back to the world hegemony which has heretofore been the Whites' privilege.[3]

It must not, however, be assumed that only the military extremists held these views, for those from political and bureaucratic backgrounds expressed similar opinions although maybe not in such inflammatory language.

It would also be dangerous to see such statements as purely exercises in justification or propaganda, for these sentiments were important in the formulation of Japanese foreign policy. For example, it is easy to see their influence in the Amau statement of 1934. One can also see them at play in a lengthy memorandum on world affairs written in August 1935 by the influential Vice-Minister at the Japanese Foreign Ministry, Shigemitsu Mamoru. In this document Shigemitsu noted his belief that the problems in the world were to a large degree caused by the *status quo* powers adopting the language of Wilsonianism and thus refusing to accept anything but mediated changes to the *status quo*, while at the same time they pursued a policy of *realpolitik* and held on doggedly to their own empires and spheres of influence. This, he observed, was a hypocritical and untenable position.[4] In regard to the position in China, Shigemitsu defended Japan's actions by noting that in reality Britain had been the first of the Washington Powers to disturb the *status quo* in East Asia due to its change of policy in 1926. In that year Britain had adopted a policy of conciliation towards China, as symbolized by the famous Christmas Memorandum issued by the then Foreign Secretary, Austen Chamberlain, which not only had the effect of abandoning Britain's co-operation with Japan, but had also encouraged Chinese claims against Japan. As Britain had thus helped to bring about instability in East Asia it was hardly in a position to complain if Japan protected its own interests.[5]

What then was the Japanese solution to this lack of understanding of its position and ambitions. As far as Shigemitsu was concerned, the answer was

that Japan should seek to win over those within Britain who remained wedded to a more traditional view of international relations, and who rejected the internationalist creed of the League of Nations. He believed, as did others in Japan, such as Yoshida Shigeru, the Ambassador to Britain from 1936-38, and Hirota Koki, the Prime Minister from 1936-7, and Foreign Minister from 1933-36 and 1937-8, that there existed within the Conservative Party a pro-Japanese group centred around the figure of Neville Chamberlain, the Chancellor of the Exchequer from 1931 to 1937 and then Prime Minister from 1937 to 1940. This 'orthodox' group included prominent figures in the Conservative Party such as Sir Samuel Hoare and Lord Halifax, but excluded those individuals who were seen as pro-American or even pro-Soviet, such as Anthony Eden, Alfred Duff Cooper and Winston Churchill. It was believed that this 'orthodox' Conservative faction could be won over by the promise of economic collaboration between Japan and Britain in China and the common interest that both states had in containing the Soviet Union and the Comintern. This was the basis of the proposals made by Yoshida Shigeru, when he was the Ambassador in London, and then by Shigemitsu, as Yoshida's successor, between 1938 and 1941.[6]

It needs to be emphasized, however, that the Japanese definition of economic collaboration with Britain in China was a very specific one, the basis for which can be seen in the Amau statement of April 1934, and Konoe Fumimaro's 'New Order in East Asia' statement in November 1938. Japan did not envisage that it should be the junior partner in this relationship, as it had been historically, rather it was the British role that was to be limited in scope. What Japan desired was for Britain to have a purely commercial and financial role in China. Britain was not to have political or military interests, for this would give it the capacity to incite Chinese resistance against Japan, it was at best to be a provider of capital for the exploitation of Chinese resources.

The British Response to the Japanese Challenge

There were many problems with this solution to the difficulties in Anglo-Japanese relations and indeed with the Japanese perception of trends within British politics. The most important failing was that the Japanese observers of British politics and society tended to focus their attention on the small but vocal pro-Japanese faction in Britain with the result that they did not fully comprehend the degree to which public opinion had become alienated from Japan. The Manchurian Crisis had caused a sea-change in attitudes among an influential segment of public and elite opinion which from then on consistently saw Japanese actions as being immoral and uncivilized. Japan's behaviour in the environs of Shanghai, under the eye of the foreign press, was particularly important in this respect, with the aerial bombing of Chapei in 1932 standing as a symbol of the brutality of the new Japan.[7] Behind this alienation lay a feeling that Japan's actions flew in the face of the new modes of conduct in international relations that had arisen after the First World War. These modes of conduct were for many Britons not an ideological luxury, they were the guarantee that a conflagration as deep and as awful as the Great War could never happen again. Japan's actions flew in the face of this desire for a better world and appeared to be a throwback to an unwanted past.

If Japan had changed the tenor of its foreign policy this atmosphere of condemnation might have died away, for there was some realization even in liberal circles that Japan's desire for expansion was underpinned by legitimate concerns about its rising population and need for economic security.[8] However, Japan's propensity to use coercion against China only helped to reinforce its image as a bully and thus sapped any sympathy towards its predicament. Domestic events in Japan also played their part; the collapse of party rule, the proliferation of political violence, the obsession with rearmament, and the flirtation by some individuals with fascist ideas combined to create the image of a dangerous and unstable country, which had turned its

back on the West.[9]

This image did not just exist just among the informed public, it was also present within Whitehall itself where it was, if anything, bolstered by the economic, political and military intelligence concerning Japan that flowed into the Foreign Office and the Service ministries. The most important intelligence source was the decrypts of Japan's diplomatic telegrams provided by the Government Code and Cypher School. The intelligence from this source allowed Britain to map Japan's growing ties with Germany and Italy, Japan's machinations in China, its spying in Singapore and Hong Kong, and its dissemination of Pan-Asianist propaganda in the European colonies in South-East Asia; all of which seemed to confirm Japan's unlimited ambitions.[10]

Another contributory factor to the distrust of Japan was the latter's aggressive foreign trade policy during the 1930s which was widely perceived to be aimed at driving British cotton textile firms out of business.[11] This led to a great deal of resentment among public opinion which was reflected in the House of Commons. During these years there were many speeches in Parliament on the theme of the unfair competition from Japan and one sometimes has to search hard to find a voice being raised in defence of Japanese practices.[12]

The ideological, military and commercial suspicions of Japan meant that there was a sizeable constituency within Britain that wanted nothing more to do with Japan and which would have opposed any attempt by the National Government to construct a *rapprochement*. The dislike of Japan's actions cannot be dismissed, as Shigemitsu tries to do in his memoirs *Gaiko Kaisoroku*, as simply the result of the efforts of pro-Soviet propagandists, it was a deep and serious sentiment.[13]

Anti-Japanese comments were even made by those who Shigemitsu liked in retrospect to cite as sympathetic towards Japan. For example, in September 1937 Lord Halifax, then the Lord Privy Seal but soon to be Foreign Secretary, noted to Anthony Eden in regard to Japan's behaviour in China:

> I am terribly shocked with the Japanese indiscriminate bombing - Can we - with the USA - do anything more effective than protests? Trade? Withdrawal of Craigie [the British ambassador] It does seem to me to be the worst thing - for morality and civilization - that we have yet seen.[14]

In addition, about the same time as this note was written, further evidence of the British Establishment's increasing alienation from Japan came when the Archbishop of Canterbury agreed to chair a meeting at the Royal Albert Hall in London to protest against Japan's actions.[15] The feeling of a moral revulsion of Japan was thus not limited to the left, it also affected those on the right who came from a deeply Christian background.

Neville Chamberlain and Japan

As well as failing to comprehend the seriousness of Britain's alienation, the Japanese elite were also naive in believing that Chamberlain and his allies were espousing a pro-Japanese policy. There was nothing inherently Japanophile about Chamberlain, and any analysis of his policies during this period must lead to the conclusion that his knowledge of the motives behind Japan's policy was negligible. Chamberlain's interest in East Asia was driven by two factors. The first was his belief that the threat to British security in Europe and the perilous state of Britain's finances meant that it was essential to remove Japan as a potential enemy. This drove him for purely power political reasons to seek some kind of concord with Japan. This policy, however, collided with the second factor which was a desire for the strengthening of the British economic and financial stake in China.[16]

On the face of it these two interests might not seem incompatible, but the problem was that while Japan might be willing to accept a non-aggression pact with Britain in order to meet Chamberlain's desire for better relations and to secure a deal over naval arms limitation, it was clear that the price for

such an arrangement would be British acceptance of Japan's right to police and dominate East Asia. Chamberlain's plans for British economic expansion in East Asia, however, directly contradicted Japan's regional intentions and thus made any such settlement impossible, for Japan was not willing to compromise its freedom of movement in the region. This was the dilemma that doomed the various overtures made by Britain and Japan in the period between 1934-37 to failure.

A major part of the problem was that Chamberlain was simply unaware of the seriousness of the Japanese position. He appeared consistently to imagine that all Britain had to do to assert itself was to remind Japan that it had no intention of withdrawing from the region, and that then the Japanese would be willing to co-operate. In part this was based on the attitude that the development of China was impossible without British capital and thus Japan could not afford to turn its back on Britain.[16] There was little in this view that suggested any deep understanding of the Amau statement, and indeed the Foreign Office itself, which through its intelligence sources did have some understanding of Japan's aims in China, often criticized Chamberlain's policy for this very reason.[17]

The collision of interests is most apparent in the events surrounding the Leith-Ross mission in 1935-36. Sir Frederick Leith-Ross, a senior figure in the British Treasury, was dispatched to East Asia in the late summer of 1935 with the express purpose of creating an Anglo-Japanese condominium in China, which would pave the way for an expansion of British interests in China. His ideas were, however, met with disdain in Tokyo. The Japanese case at the time was that they had not been forewarned of this initiative, but in reality it did not suit their designs for a third country, Britain, to intervene in Sino-Japanese relations and they did not wish to see any expansion of the British stake in the region, and thus an opportunity was lost.[18]

The Trade Issue and Reform of the Status Quo

Another problem in Chamberlain's attitude towards Japan was that, although he was willing to suggest limited concessions over China and a deal in regard to the nettlesome issue of naval arms limitation, he was loath to deal with one of the major issues that concerned Japan - the rise of Anglo-Japanese trade tensions and Japan's dissatisfaction with the economic *status quo*. This is important because he cannot have been unaware of Japanese dissatisfaction over this issue. It is, for example, likely in June 1936 that he would have seen an important letter sent by Shigemitsu to one of his closest English acquaintances, Arthur Edwardes, in which Shigemitsu noted that Japan's economic 'grievances are justified'.[20] Yet there was no evidence at any point that Chamberlain was willing to address the need for trade liberalization, indeed his pronouncements on this issue demonstrated that he was not willing to sacrifice British trade interests in his quest for an understanding with Japan.[21]

This failure to grasp the nettle of the trade issue was unfortunately common throughout Whitehall. Yet it was quite clearly an important issue, for if Japan was not allowed easier and greater access to imperial markets then it became even more imperative for Japan to seek markets in China. There were some in the Foreign Office who recognized the gravity of the situation and argued that Britain must do something to rectify the position. In February 1936 Frank Ashton Gwatkin, the head of the Economic Section in the Foreign Office, noted in regard to Britain's trade policy that:

> Our Imperial Preference policy has given a great impetus to economic nationalisms, great and small, and has had a direct effect on Japan's policy in China. This was inevitable ... it is part of the price we have to pay for the economic conception of Empire based on preference.[22]

This dilemma was also apparent to Anthony Eden who, despite his moral objections to many Japanese practices, noted in March 1937 that British policy was only adding to its own difficulties. He observed in a letter to

Chamberlain:

> At present we are engaged in damming back Japanese goods from our colonial empire ... by that policy of quotas which we are the first to condemn in other countries; while the Japanese cut off from normal economic expansion and nervous about their supply of war materials are busy establishing by force of arms a preferential area in Manchukuo and North China.[23]

Linked to this was also an acknowledgement by some in the Foreign Office that in a wider sense Britain risked danger by sticking too rigidly to the *status quo* no matter what. As Sir Orme Sargent, a senior figure in the Foreign Office, noted to do so would be 'likely to conflict sooner or later with the natural course of world evolution and development'.[24]

Why then were these ideas about reform of the *status quo* not developed into a coherent policy? The first reason is clearly that these ideas were considered within the contemporary British context to be almost dangerously progressive. The orthodox view in Britain and in Whitehall concerning the rise of the revisionist states was that the economic motivations behind their desire for expansion were slight. What they sought was expansion for power's sake, which was a reflection of the militarism that prevailed in these countries. They therefore had to be dealt with on those terms. Linked to this was an unwillingness to make any concessions in regard to the Empire. Britain possessed what it owned under international law. There was no question about its legitimacy and thus no reason why Britain should make concessions to Japan in this area. Indeed, many in Britain felt that its imperial policies were far less discriminatory than those of Japan itself. In the autumn of 1938 when Japan announced its 'New Order in East Asia' policy the British Ambassador to Japan, Sir Robert Craigie, told the Japanese Foreign Minister, Arita Hachiro, that there was no justification for Japan's plans for a closed economic bloc in East Asia as 'Japan enjoyed and continues to enjoy the same

free access to raw materials in the British Empire as is enjoyed by members of the Empire.'[25]

Ironically, considering the above, another important reason for the rejection was exactly that any changes in the area of trade would have run contrary to the protectionism that was considered vital in the 1930s to the continued prosperity of Britain and its Empire. Protectionism was in part introduced for financial reasons, to defend the Pound and to provide it with a springboard for recovery in its struggle against the dollar. However, protectionism was also necessary for commercial reasons. Britain had to defend some of its increasingly outdated industries from the hardships of competition in the free market. The economic sector that needed help beyond all others was the cotton textiles industry which was concentrated in the city of Manchester and the surrounding county of Lancashire, and whose chief rival was Japan.

Clearly if Britain made concessions to Japan in the area of trade it was Lancashire that would suffer, with the risk that it could add to an already high rate of unemployment in the county. This raised problems for British politicians as Lancashire was densely populated and was always a keenly fought election battleground.[26] This meant that if the National Government sacrificed Lancashire's interests to appease Japan it would have risked losing support in a key area, and the Labour Party would have enthusiastically pressed home the advantage, particularly as the government could have been presented as making concessions to Japanese militarism. The importance of this consideration can be seen in the late spring of 1937 when two politician members of the Cabinet Committee on Foreign Policy, one of whom was the supposedly pro-Japanese Sir Samuel Hoare, attacked a civil service memorandum calling for trade concessions on the grounds that it would harm Lancashire's interests.[27]

Britain's Strategic Problems

There were then significant economic, political and philosophical reasons for Britain's alienation from Japan and its reluctance to broach the idea of a *rapprochement*. However, it is often argued that British policy in the 1930s was heavily influenced by strategic imperatives and thus it is also necessary to see how strategy weighed against any attempt to find a *modus vivendi*. In a sense, considering the increasingly hostile climate of Europe in the 1930s, it seems surprising that Britain did not follow the lead given by Chamberlain and attempt to settle its East Asian security problems through reconciliation with Japan in order that it might concentrate on containing the threat of war in Europe. There were, however, important restraints on Britain's freedom of movement, which ironically were linked to the very European problems it was seeking to solve by getting closer to Japan.

The most obvious problem was that if Britain attempted to improve its relations with Japan, it felt it would jeopardize its links with the United States. The perception in the Foreign Office was that, although the Roosevelt administration seemed loath to take any coercive action against Japan, it could be counted upon to voice its disapproval if Britain attempted to restore its relations with Tokyo. A clear precedent for this came in the negotiations about naval arms limitation that took place between 1934 and 1936, when the United States made it clear both through official pronouncements and leaks to the American press that it would not accept any Anglo-Japanese compromise settlement over the naval ratio issue. The danger was that Washington would not only disapprove of any *rapprochement* between Britain and Japan, but that it would refuse in the future to co-operate with Britain. This was a dangerous prospect as it raised the possibility that, in the case of a European war, Britain might find its access barred to the American munitions factories and the money markets of Wall Street, which had proved crucial to its survival in the First World War.

Another restraint on Britain was the complicating factor of the Soviet Union. The problem in relation to Russia was that like Britain it was both a European and an Asian Power, and that it too was opposed to the rise of the 'Fascist' states. The Russian fear of Japan raised the danger that if London sided with Tokyo, and indeed agreed to be a benevolent neutral should a Soviet-Japanese War break out, it might lead Stalin to move closer to Nazi Germany and perhaps to a deal with Hitler to divide eastern Europe. Such a deal would destroy the value of the French treaties with states such as Poland, Czechoslovakia, Romania and Yugoslavia and thus make Hitler's task in Europe considerably easier.

The difficulties caused by the fact that Britain's strategic interests in Asia and Europe could not be divided and dealt with separately was a problem that haunted Britain throughout the 1930s. It was also a dilemma that meant that Shigemitsu's hope that an Anglo-Japanese understanding could be built on the basis of a common loathing of communism was doomed to failure; for although there was no love for the Soviet Union in the Conservative Party, there was a recognition of its strategic importance vis-a-vis Germany. Indeed the optimum position for Britain, as the Foreign Office observed in 1934, was that the Japanese-Soviet stand-off in North-East Asia should continue indefinitely and that mutual fear would help to restrain both of these revisionist states.[28]

The Road to War

The grave divisions that developed between Britain and Japan, added to the fact that commercial and strategic considerations hindered any move towards a *rapprochement*, meant that the mutual hostility between the two states continued inexorably to rise and thus helped more broadly to poison international relations as a whole within the region. The fact that Britain and Japan were at loggerheads over so many issues helped to encourage Chiang

Kai-shek between 1933 and 1937 in his belief that at some point in the future a clash between the West and Japan was inevitable and this led to the steady replacement of his appeasement policy towards Japan by one of resistance.[29] In addition, the British refusal to countenance any degree of economic liberalism only helped to play into the hands of the Japanese militarists in Japan who sought to carve out an autarchic zone in China. Above and beyond this, Britain's decision not to take a stand over the Soviet-Japanese confrontation and its belief that this rivalry would be limited to the Siberian-Manchurian border proved to be deeply flawed judgements. By 1935 in an attempt to outflank each other Soviet-Japanese competition began to spread into China proper and helped to further exacerbate Sino-Japanese relations. By 1937 Chiang Kai-shek was convinced that in any conflict with Japan he could rely on Soviet military and British financial aid, while Japan was equally determined to defend its gains in China from the forces of Chinese nationalism and its Soviet backers. The result was that when the Lukiaochou incident broke out in July of that year neither Japan nor China felt able to back away from the fighting and thus the Sino-Japanese war began in earnest.

The gulf that had developed between Britain and Japan in the mid-1930s was already a wide one and it inevitably grew worse with the start of the Sino-Japanese War. Britain from the first, both in terms of public and official opinion, identified Japan as the clear aggressor in this conflict, while Japan accused Britain of being the chief backer of Chiang Kai-shek's regime.[30] Over the next few years the tensions and recriminations between the two states escalated rapidly until in the summer of 1939 they almost came to blows over the Japanese blockade of the British Concession at Tientsin.

It might seem logical that this drift towards ever worse relations should have ended once the European War broke out in September 1939 as Britain now had to concentrate on winning the conflict against Germany. In this situation it might be expected that Britain would have been prepared to sacrifice its

interests in China in order to ensure itself of Japanese neutrality. However, while such ideas were occasionally expressed in Whitehall, particularly by the Parliamentary Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office, R.A. Butler, they received little support. There were many obstacles to such a policy and these included the objection of the British public to the appeasement of Japan and moreover the likelihood of an explosive reaction within the United States. In addition, Japan did itself little good by its continuing interest in relations with the Axis Powers and the growing evidence of its hunger for the raw materials of South-East Asia. Finally the policies of the second Konoe administration that took power in July 1940 led Britain to move towards the introduction of sanctions against Japan and by the autumn of 1940 the two states began the confrontation over the future of South-East Asia and its economic resources which was to lead to the outbreak of the Pacific War.

Conclusions

To a great extent it is hard to see how a war between Britain and Japan could have been avoided for the divide that opened up between the two states in the 1930s was deep and there were many factors that made it appear unbridgeable. Certainly the international climate of the 1930s was incredibly restrictive in terms of both economic and strategic considerations, and clearly there was a very different philosophical outlook in the two states. Intermittently, there were some signs of hope and there is evidence that in the Foreign Office some officials did attempt to understand Japan's position and to put forward solutions to the trade problems that would have met some of Japan's desires. There was also a *post-facto* acknowledgement by the mid-1930s that the introduction of Imperial Preference had been an error which had raised rather than reduced international tensions. In addition, on the Japanese side there were still some who adherred to internationalist ideals, such as Sato Naotake, but whether these ideas, if they had led to policy in Britain or Japan, would

have been acceptable to the Japanese militarists is of course a moot point.[31] Enthused by the virility of the fascist regimes in Europe, the militarists might well still have rejected internationalism and concentrated on the construction of a New Order in East Asia.

One is led by this apparent deadlock to conclude that probably the structural problems that existed by the mid-1930s were too deep to rectify, except if one of the two countries was willing to undertake a fundamental change of course. The dreadful lesson that the 1930s teaches us is that once international relations sink into a prolonged crisis it is very difficult to find a way out.

Such a statement, however, leads on to the question of whether the war that broke out in 1941 was inevitable and if so from when did it become inevitable. It is, of course, difficult to speculate about such a question as the concept of inevitability in history is a notoriously hard one to approach. In a sense the best way to deal with such an issue is to deal with the war that actually broke out in December 1941 first and then to look at the more long-term abstract arguments. If the December 1941 war is studied one can say that, although it occurred against the background of ten years of tensions, the factors that actually led to the conflict breaking out only came together in 1940. The Pacific War was to a large extent the result of the conflict in Europe and Japan's ties to the Axis Powers. As far as the Anglo-Saxon Powers were concerned it was vital to contain Japan from the autumn of 1940 onwards in order to achieve a number of goals. These were to protect the raw materials of South-East Asia from Japan, in order that they might be used in the war against Germany and also so that Japan could not provide them to Berlin through the Trans-Siberian Railway, and to prohibit a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union. Without these more specific considerations Britain and the United States would not have been motivated to introduce the policy of containment instigated from the autumn of 1940 onwards, which in turn

provoked Japan into war.

However, although it is possible to differentiate the short-term, direct origins of the war, it is also true to say that the roots of the conflict between the two states can be found in the 1930s. What is significant about this decade is that for both strategic and political reasons it would have been in the interests of both states to have found some sort of *modus vivendi*, this, however, proved to be impossible. The fact of the matter was that any agreement would have meant either one or both of the parties making substantial concessions and yet neither was willing to do so. The problem was that too much was at stake. For Britain, commercial concessions in either China or the Empire in a time of Depression were unthinkable for both economic and domestic political reasons, nor could it afford to make political decisions that might damage its ability to contain or pursue a war against Germany. For Japan, a policy of compromise held no attraction for the only concessions that mattered to it were ones that Britain could not grant, such as a complete British retreat from China, anything less would merely have perpetuated or even exasperated its domestic problems.

Without a diplomatic solution it was inevitable that Japanese expansion would continue and this necessarily led to a collision with British interests, because the same factors that prohibited Britain from attempting to make a settlement with Japan also meant that it could not contemplate any retreat from the region. In addition, Britain was for most of the period unable to work to put together any kind of anti-Japanese coalition within the region, as it had no faith in the Chinese, no trust in the isolationist America of Roosevelt, and a strong dislike of the Soviets. This, combined with the fact that Britain's resources were over-stretched by its European, Middle Eastern and Indian resources, meant that, despite its intention to remain as a Power within the region, it did not have the material strength to deter or resist Japan. Britain was thus an obstacle to Japan's expansion but not so powerful

an obstacle as to persuade Japan to change course. In these circumstances a dramatic collision of interests was inevitable, although the final form of the conflict between the two states was only set by the conditions created by the European war.

Notes and References

1. See J. Ferris, '"The Greatest Power on Earth": Great Britain in the 1920s', *International History Review*, vol.13, no.3, 1991, pp.731-50, and B. McKercher, '"Our Most Dangerous Enemy": Great Britain Pre-eminent in the 1930s', ibid, pp.751-83.
2. On the effects of the Manchurian Crisis see I. Nish, *Japan's Struggle With Internationalism: Japan, China and the League, 1931-3*, (Kegan Paul, London, 1993).
3. Public Record Office (Kew) (hereafter PRO) WO106/5135 James (Tokyo) to War Office 16 January 1934.
4. See K. Usui, 'Japanese Approaches to China in the 1930s: Two Alternatives', in A. Iriye and W. Cohen (eds.), *American, Chinese and Japanese Perspectives on Wartime Asia, 1931-1949*, (Scholarly Resources, Wilmington, 1990), p.101.
5. See Y. Watanabe & T.Ito (eds.), *Shigemitsu Mamoru Shuki* [Shigemitsu Memoirs], (Chuo Koronsha, Tokyo, 1986), p.25. For Shigemitsu's views on Britain see A. Best, 'Shigemitsu Mamoru and Anglo-Japanese Relations', in I. Nish (ed.), *Britain and Japan: Biographical Portraits*, Vol.II, (Japan Library, Richmond, 1997), pp.245-59.
6. For this interpretation of British politics see M. Shigemitsu, *Gaiko Kaisoroku* [Diplomatic Memoirs], (Mainichi Shimbun, Tokyo, 1978), pp.203-8. On Yoshida's proposals in 1936 see Trotter, op.cit. pp.192-3.
7. On the effect of the Chapei bombing see C. Thorne, *The Limits of Foreign Policy: The West, the League and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933*, (Hamish Hamilton, London, 1972), p.216.
8. See for example the articles written between 1993 and 1937 in liberal journals such as *The Fortnightly* and *The Contemporary Review*.
9. This was particularly the case after the 26 February 1936 Incident which led to a number of British journals taking a tougher stance against Japan.
10. On British intelligence see A. Best, 'Constructing An Image: British Intelligence and Whitehall's Perception of Japan, 1931-1939', *Intelligence and*

National Security, Vol.11, No.3, 1996, pp.403-23.

11. See for example the letters from businessmen in various industries, including textiles, to the Federation of British Industry, in the files MSS200 F/3E1/15/13-16; Federation of British Industry papers, Modern Record Centre, University of Warwick.
12. As Ann Trotter notes, the dislike of Japanese trade policy also led to general criticism of its foreign policy, see Trotter, op.cit. pp.73-83.
13. See Shigemitsu, op.cit. p.204-5.
14. See A. Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor: Avoiding War in East Asia, 1936-41*, (Routledge, London, 1995), p.42.
15. Ibid, p.40.
16. On the Treasury's plans for an expansion of British interests in China see S. Endicott, *Diplomacy and Enterprise, British China Policy, 1933-1937*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1975), pp.82-102, P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Crisis and Deconstruction, 1914-1990*, (Longman, London, 1993), pp.251-9, and Trotter, op.cit. pp.141-7.
17. This assumption also affected the Leith-Ross report in 1936 and Treasury policy as late as the summer of 1938, see Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, pp.54-5.
18. The Foreign Office was aware that the Amau statement was an accurate statement of Gaimusho policy as it had read telegrams sent from the Foreign Minister to overseas legations expressing much the same opinions, see Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, p.10.
19. For a retrospective view of Leith-Ross's arrival by a Japanese diplomat which emphasises Japan's lack of preparation, see Shigemitsu, op.cit. p.159. For the view that Japan was opposed to Leith-Ross on principle, see T. Sakai, *Taisho Demokurashi Taisei no Hokai: Naisei to Gaiko* [The Collapse of the Taisho Democracy System: Domestic Politics and Diplomacy], (Tokyo University Press, Tokyo, 1992), p.126.
20. See I. Nish, 'Anglo-Japanese Alienation Revisited' in S. Dockrill (ed.), *From Pearl Harbor to Hiroshima: The Second World War in Asia and the Pacific, 1941-45*, (Macmillan, Basingstoke, 1994), pp.19-22.
21. See for example the comments made by Chamberlain in PRO T172/2111 Chamberlain to Eden 25 August 1936.
22. PRO FO371/20281 F598/119/23 Ashton Gwatkin minute 8 February 1936.
23. PRO FO371/21215 W6363/5/50 Eden to Chamberlain 24 March 1937.
24. PRO FO371/19687 W8174/2304/98 Sargent memorandum 5 September 1936.
25. PRO FO371/22164 F13875/11783/10 Craigie to Halifax 30 November 1938.

26. See Trotter, op.cit. p.28.
27. PRO CAB27／622 FP(36) Cabinet Foreign Policy Committee 12th meeting 11 June 1937.
28. See Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, p.11-12.
29. For the link between British policy and Chinese resistance see Y-L. Sun, *China and the Origins of the Pacific War, 1931-1941*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1993), passim.
30. See Best, *Britain, Japan and Pearl Harbor*, pp.37-60.
31. On Sato, see Usui, op.cit. pp.103-7.

(付記)

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