

THE US, NOT JAPAN, WAS THE AGGRESSOR

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13 years to the day before Pearl Harbor

On March 10, 1948, at the Tokyo Trials, William Logan, Jr., one of the defense attorneys, delivered his closing argument. In it he maintained that “Japan was provoked into a war of self-defense.”

Thirteen years ago to the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor announcing the commencement of open hostilities in the Pacific, a group of distinguished American statesmen were assembled in the Capitol Building at Washington, D.C. Their purpose was to discuss the advisability of the United States ratification of the now famous Kellogg-Briand Peace Pact. In the group was none other than the co-author of that document himself, then Secretary of State, the Honorable Frank B. Kellogg.¹

The Kellogg-Briand Treaty (also known as the Pact of Paris) was the sole basis in international law for the charges of aggressive war levied against Japan. Deliberations in the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations over the ratification of that treaty took place on December 7, 1928, 13 years to the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Frank B. Kellogg, then Secretary of State and one of the authors of the treaty, was, of course, present.

During those deliberations Senator Claude A. Swanson (Virginia) posed the following question to Secretary Kellogg: “Suppose a country is not attacked. Suppose there is an economic blockade, and they carry out their obligations under the League of Nations for an economic blockade; would this treaty interfere with it?” Kellogg’s reply: There is no such thing as a blockade without you are in war.” He added, “An act of war, absolutely.”² From this interchange we can conclude that, in 1928, the notion that an economic blockade was an act of war was firmly ingrained, if not in the minds of the American public, certainly in the minds of the authors of the Pact of Paris and the senators who ratified it.

In fact, the oft-referred-to perception prevailing at that time, i.e., that sovereignty gave nations the right to determine what constitutes a legitimate act of self-defense, had its origin in a statement made by Kellogg at those hearings.

¹ Kobori Keiichiro, *The Tokyo Trials: The Unheard Defense* (Rockport, ME: New England History Press, 2003), p.240.

² “Hearings Before the Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, Seventieth Congress on The General Pact for the Renunciation of War signed at Paris August 27, 1928,” http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kbhear.asp.

As I have explained before, nobody on earth, probably, could write an article defining “self-defense” or “aggressor” that some country could not get around, and I made up my mind that the only safe thing for any country to do was to judge for itself within its sovereign rights whether it was unjustly attacked and had a right to defend itself, and it must answer to the opinion of the world.³

Economic blockades and their effects

Now let us return to the question of whether an economic blockade is an act of war. At the IMTFE, the prosecution attempted to justify the economic blockade with the following rhetoric: “We are all clear that you cannot justify an attack on another country because the other country decides not to trade with you unless perhaps that trade is vital to your very existence.”⁴

However, the economic blockade imposed by the US and its allies was not simply a matter of one nation’s refusing to trade with Japan. Here is Logan’s rebuttal.

This was more than the old fashioned encirclement of a nation by ships of overwhelming superiority and refusing to allow commerce to enter or leave. It was the act of all powerful and greatly superior economic states against a confessedly dependent island nation whose existence and economics were predicated upon world commercial relations.⁵

Then Logan proceeded to prove that, contrary to the prosecution’s claim that diminution of military supplies was the objective of the Allied economic blockade of Japan, said blockade “affected all types of civilian goods and trade, even food.”

The terrific impact of the freezing orders on the civilian life of Japan has been amply demonstrated by the evidence. A large number of trades, industries, and commodities whose very existence depended upon the importation of raw materials and the exportation of finished products unrelated to the production of military goods were immediately affected. Some of these were as follows: Cement, aluminum, lead, copper, coal, rice, beans, phosphate rock, fats, oil and oil bearing materials, hides and skin, tanning materials, leather and leather manufactures, potassium salts, wheat and wheat flour, zinc, sugar, lumber, textile machinery, sulphur and sulphuric acid, wool and wool manufactures, marine products, soda, ash and caustic soda, chemical nitrogen, rayon yarn and staple fibre, bicycles, electrical equipment, silk fabrics, cotton textiles, rubber and rubber manufactures, rayon fabrics, and raw cotton. The evidence further discloses that the freezing orders effected [sic] such basic commodities as rice, fodder, cattle, sugar, fertilizers, salt and so forth. Its textile industries including such materials as cotton, wool, silk and rayon upon which many of the civilian population depended for a living were practically brought to a

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Kobori, *op. cit.*, p. 261.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

standstill.⁶

On July 26, 1939 the US announced the abrogation of the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, which it had signed with Japan in 1911. The reason given by Secretary of State Cordell Hull was that “the operation of the most favored nation clause of the treaty was a bar to the adoption of retaliatory measures against Japanese commerce.”⁷

Japan had not infringed upon American rights in any way whatsoever. The retaliatory measures of which Hull spoke concerned Japan’s China policy, and was intended to restrict Japanese activity there. At that point the US was already, through China, engaged in behavior that was clearly antagonistic toward Japan.

And a new version of Plan Orange formulated in 1938 included putting pressure on Japan by halting the export of petroleum, upon which Japan depended, from the US. In December 1939 a “moral embargo” banning the export of aviation gasoline to Japan was imposed. More embargos followed: one on lower-quality, high-octane aviation gasoline in August 1940; another on iron and steel (and iron and steel products) in December 1940; and still others on radium and uranium in January 1941.

Finally, on July 25, 1941 the US issued an order freezing all Japanese assets in the US, citing as its reason the advance of Japanese troops into southern French Indochina. The order effectively halted all trade between Japan and the US. The coup de grâce came on August 1 when an embargo was placed on the export of petroleum, a vital resource, to Japan. Great Britain and the Netherlands, which had already limited imports from and exports to Japan, followed suit.

The consequences of these actions amounted, needless to say, to a lethal blow to Japan, since, prosecution’s argument notwithstanding, trade was indeed vital to Japan’s very existence.

MacArthur’s testimony validates Japanese position

Gen. Douglas MacArthur obviously agreed with this assessment, given his testimony before the Armed Services and Foreign Relations committees of the US Senate, 82nd Congress, on May 3, 1951. An excerpt follows.

Potentially the labor pool in Japan, both in quantity and quality, is as good as anything that I have ever known. Some place down the line they have discovered what you might call the dignity of labor, that men are happier when they are working and constructing than when they are idling.

This enormous capacity for work meant that they had to have something to work on. They built the factories, they had the labor, but they didn’t have the basic materials.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 267-8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

There is practically nothing indigenous to Japan except the silkworm. They lack cotton, they lack wool, they lack petroleum products, they lack tin, they lack rubber, they lack a great many other things, all of which was in the Asiatic basin.

They feared that if those supplies were cut off, there would be 10 to 12 million people unoccupied in Japan. Their purpose, therefore, in going to war was largely dictated by security.⁸

Here we have Gen. Douglas MacArthur, the former Supreme Commander of the Allied Forces (and the highest authority over the IMTFE, which deemed Japan an aggressor nation) saying in no uncertain terms that Japan, in initiating hostilities, was exercising its right of self-defense. At this point I would very much like to say that this controversy has been settled once and for all. However, since there are some who remain unconvinced, I shall respond to their objections.

One argument that has come to my attention is that when MacArthur said that Japan's purpose "in going to war was largely dictated by security," he did not necessarily mean "national security." But MacArthur was a military man; he could not have meant anything else but "national security" — the sort of security on which national survival hinges.

Another argument goes as follows: in his testimony MacArthur was not speaking on behalf of the US government, nor was he asked what caused war to break out between the two nations. Accordingly, his remarks were not official, but personal — he was simply speaking his mind. Perhaps that was the case, but we should be mindful that this was an extraordinarily significant statement for someone who was the supreme authority during the Japanese occupation to make before two Senate committees. It is possible that if he had been asked specifically about the causes of the war, MacArthur might not have made such an open, honest statement. However, it is very likely that he spoke candidly during a long session that covered many topics.

Therefore, we Japanese have the right to make full use of this testimony in our quest to settle the debate about the causes of war with the US.

American solipsism caused the war

With some help from MacArthur, we have demonstrated that the economic blockade, an act of war perpetrated by the US, prompted Japan to exercise its right of self-defense. However, the story does not end here. The truth is that long before the economic blockade, the US was acting in a manner that was bound to thrust Japan into dire economic straits.

The Wall Street crash on October 24, 1929, dealt a devastating blow not only to the US economy, but also to the world economy. The resulting panic was long-lasting and, again, global. US industrial production in 1932 plummeted to half what it had been in 1929. Since the US had accounted for approximately one-third of the world GDP, the

⁸ United States Congress, Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, *Inquiry into the military situation in the Far East and the facts surrounding the relief of General of the Army Douglas MacArthur from his assignment in that area* (Washington, DC: Ward and Paul, 1951), p. 57.

repercussions were huge. Under such circumstances the US should have accepted a commensurate amount of responsibility toward the world economy, but in that particular crisis the American stance was solipsistic.

In 1930 the US Congress passed the Smooth-Hawley Tariff Act. The legislation, intended to protect the US from foreign competition, raised tariffs on 20,000 imported items to a record high of 40% on average.

The blow to Japan, 42% of whose exports were destined for the US, was exceedingly severe. The effects of the legislation spread throughout the entire world, and hastened the formation of economic blocs.

The British Empire Economic Conference, held in Ottawa, Canada in 1932, gave rise to the Ottawa Agreements, which imposed tariffs on goods imported from non-commonwealth nations.

The year 1933 saw the Netherlands implement emergency limits on imports, which affected imports to Indonesia as well. In the same year France and its colonies formed a franc bloc.

In 1934 the US passed the Reciprocal Trade Agreements Act. This legislation made it possible to lower tariffs on imports from nations with which the US had concluded trade agreements. Japan was not a party to any such pact with the US; it was mainly Latin American nations with which the US signed such agreements, thus forming an American bloc.

In other words, the US spearheaded the displacement of free trade from the world's markets, and turned the world into protectionist blocs.

With the world economy divided into blocs, Japan was forced to secure neighboring markets. The Manchurian Incident was a legitimate act of self-defense on Japan's part, a response to having its legitimate interests encroached on, time after time, by warlords with regional power bases. It was also a minimal response to the division of the world's markets into blocs.

US refuses to recognize Manzhouguo

But the US refused to recognize Manzhouguo, [the fruit of Japanese enterprise]. At one point Theodore Roosevelt had encouraged Japan to adopt the Monroe Doctrine in Asia. Furthermore, according to the Lansing-Ishii Agreement, signed in 1917, the US acknowledged special Japanese interests in China. However, the US later did an about-face and refused to recognize Manzhouguo, using the affirmation of Chinese territorial integrity in the Nine-Power Treaty, signed in Washington, DC in 1922, as an excuse. In a memorandum entitled "Developments Affecting American Policy in the Far East," John MacMurray (US envoy to the Republic of China from 1925 to 1929 and one of the chief proponents of the Nine-Power Treaty) writes that what caused the Washington framework to collapse was China's revolutionary diplomacy,

and that Japan was simply exercising, and rightfully so, its right of self-defense.⁹

The US preached the Monroe Doctrine, refusing to brook interference from other nations in Central and South America. Though it retained considerable special interests in those regions, and wielded considerable political and economic control over them, why was the US unwilling to recognize the Japanese version of that doctrine? Several reasons have been cited, but perhaps the most convincing argument is that the nature of manifest destiny, the fundamental American belief in expansionism, changed.

When Theodore Roosevelt assumed the presidency, manifest destiny was construed as the westward advancement of Anglo-Saxon civilization and Christianity. Roosevelt perceived Japan as a kindred spirit — the sole Asian proponent of the Anglo-Saxon civilization. He did not seem view Japan as an enemy of Christianity.

But in the 1930s the prospects changed. The problem was Christianity. Christian missionaries are the embodiment of manifest destiny, but they proselytized with much more fervor in China than Japan. In China they were subjected to persecution in numerous instances, much more so than in Japan. Willing to die for their beliefs, the missionaries soldiered on, and ultimately tasted decisive victory, which came in the form of Chiang Kai-shek's conversion in 1927. Subsequently they came to view Chiang as a guardian of Christianity, as the exemplar of Christianity in the Far East.

Manchurian Incident invites American hostility

Both the Manchurian Incident and the founding of Manzhouguo were legitimate acts. Japan's survival hinged on them, given the division of the world into economic blocs, spearheaded by the US. But the US invoked the Stimson Doctrine, according to which the US government would not recognize "any situation, treaty, or agreement ... which may impair the treaty rights of the United States or its citizens in China, including those which relate to the sovereignty, the independence, or the territorial and administrative integrity of the Republic of China, or to the international policy relative to China, commonly known as the open door policy"¹⁰

Stimson mentioned the sovereignty of China, but that was a baseless claim. The Qing dynasty — not China — had sovereignty over Manchuria. With Emperor Puyi's restoration to the throne, that sovereignty reverted to him as head of state. Furthermore, Manzhouguo in no way infringed on the treaty rights of the US or its citizens. The claim was audacious, particularly since the US had supposedly adopted an open-door policy. Secretary Stimson went as far as to propose economic sanctions against Japan, but President Herbert Hoover rejected his proposal.

⁹ John Van Antwerp MacMurray, *How the Peace Was Lost: The 1935 Memorandum, Developments Affecting American Policy in the Far East*, ed. Arthur Waldron (Stanford, California: Hoover Institution Press, 1992), p.2.

¹⁰ United States Department of State, *Foreign relations of the United States diplomatic papers, 1932. The Far East*, pp. 7-8; <http://digicoll.library.wisc.edu/cgi-bin/FRUS/FRUS-idx?type=turn&entity=FRUS.FRUS1932v03.p0112&id=FRUS.FRUS1932v03&isize=M&q1=impair%20the%20treaty>

When the Hoover administration was succeeded by that of Franklin Roosevelt, the mood became even more hostile toward Japan, for the following reasons.

First, Roosevelt harbored favorable notions about China. Second, he detested, or rather, looked down on Japan. This is a man who actually believed in cross-breeding the inferior, lunatic Japanese race with the bright and cheery natives of the South Pacific.¹¹

The third is the belief that Japan has a feudalistic, backward culture, which can be traced to a Marxist historical standpoint (at the time the historical standpoint embraced by the Frankfurt School, or neo-Marxism, dominated in American academic circles). This factor combined with the second formed the conviction that Japan needed to be completely reformed.

When the Second Sino-Japanese War commenced in 1937 American pro-China leanings grew stronger. The conflict began with hostilities in Shanghai in August of that year. Even the normally anti-Japanese, pro-Chinese *New York Times* blamed China.

“Opinions may differ regarding the responsibility for the opening of hostilities in the vicinity of Peiping [Beijing] early in July,” said one foreign official ... “but concerning the Shanghai hostilities the records will justify only one decision. The Japanese did not want a repetition of the fighting here and exhibited forbearance and patience and did everything possible to avoid aggravating the situation. But they were literally pushed into the clash by the Chinese, who seemed intent on involving the foreign area and foreign interests in this clash.”¹²

However, on October 5, President Roosevelt delivered what came to be known as his “Quarantine Speech” in Chicago. Here is an excerpt.

Without a declaration of war and without warning or justification of any kind, civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air.

(...)

And mark this well: When an epidemic of physical disease starts to spread, the community approves and joins in a quarantine of the patients in order to protect the health of the community against the spread of the disease.¹³

One could easily mistake Roosevelt’s language for that of wartime Chinese or pro-Chinese propaganda. It later became clear that by “quarantine,” Roosevelt’s meant

¹¹ Kase Hideaki, *Nippon wo ayamaraseta Kokurenkyo to kenpo shinja* (How undue faith in the UN and the Constitution led Japan astray) (Tokyo: Tendensha, 2004), p. 126.

¹² “Japan May Start Drive on Nanking,” *New York Times*, 31 August 1937.

¹³ Franklin D. Roosevelt’s “Quarantine” Speech: AMDOCS: Documents for the Study of American History, <http://www.vlib.us/amdocs/texts/fdrquarn.html>.

imposing an economic blockade against Japan. The Panay Incident occurred in Nanjing on December 12, but soon after that, at a Cabinet meeting on December 17, Roosevelt proposed applying economic pressure to Japan by instituting a blockade. According to Harold Ickes, secretary of the interior from 1933-46, Roosevelt said he would use the word “quarantine” as a euphemism for “economic blockade.”¹⁴ Perhaps even at that point Roosevelt was contemplating an undeclared war.

On July 26, 1939 the US announced the termination of the Japan-US Treaty of Commerce and Navigation.

On November 30, 1940 the US extended \$100 million in loans to China (Great Britain followed suit with £10 million in loans).

On March 11, 1941 the Lend-Lease Act was signed into law.

American (and British) aid to China considerably lengthened the war between Japan and China. In July 1940 the Japanese arranged to hold peace talks with the Chiang government and Wang Jingwei in August. But the negotiations were first postponed and then cancelled due to promises of significant financial support for China, especially the \$100 million loan from the US. It was American, British and Soviet aid to the Chiang government that prolonged the Second Sino-Japanese War.

US approves plan to bomb Japan during Japan-US negotiations

The exact date on which the Roosevelt administration resolved to go to war with Japan is not known with complete certainty. In February 1941 the State Department established the Division of Special Research, headed by Leo Pasvolsky, special assistant to Secretary of State Cordell Hull. The division’s mission was to prepare studies on the appropriate way to deal with Japan after its defeat.¹⁵ Therefore, it is safe to assume that at least Roosevelt and Hull had already decided at that point to wage war against Japan, since they had officially established a division whose purpose was to transform backward Japan.

On April 16, 1941, Nomura Kichisaburo, who had been sent to the US as ambassador and entrusted with the mission of breaking the deadlock in Japan-US relations, submitted a proposal entitled “Japanese-American Understanding” to Secretary Hull. Hull responded with what is known today as the “Four Hull Principles.” Those two documents formed the basis of subsequent Japan-US negotiations.¹⁶

¹⁴ Harold Ickes, *The Secret Diary of Harold Ickes* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1954).

¹⁵ Kase, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

¹⁶ The four principles were: (1) respect for the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of each and all nations; (2) support of the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries; (3) support of the principle of equality, including equality of commercial opportunity; and (4) non-disturbance of the status quo in the Pacific, however the status quo may be altered by peaceful means. (See http://www.jacar.go.jp/english/nichibei/popup/pop_26.html.)

The talks were fraught with difficulties and major changes, such as the outbreak of war between Germany and the USSR on June 22. The Japanese decided to (lawfully) station troops in southern French Indochina on July 23 to counter the ABCD encirclement. As already mentioned, the US responded by freezing all Japanese assets in the US on July 25, and placing an embargo on petroleum and other important resources.

But negotiations between the two nations continued, and Japan continued its desperate search for a breakthrough. On August 8 Ambassador Nomura proposed a conference involving top-level leaders from both nations. At that time Roosevelt was on board the *Prince of Wales* off Newfoundland, Canada conferring with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. On that occasion the two men agreed to cooperate in war with Japan.

However, Roosevelt had already taken more decisive action in the form of the JB-355 Plan, which he had approved prior to that meeting. The plan involved supplying China with long-distance bomber planes, which would then be used to bomb Japan proper. Charts appended to the document show that it was prepared by the Joint Army and Navy Board as an attack plan against Japan, and submitted to Roosevelt by the secretaries of the Army and Navy on July 18; Roosevelt signed it on July 23.

The plan was to be executed no later October 1, 1941. Three hundred fifty fighter planes and 150 B-17s and other long-distance bomber aircraft would be supplied to China. They would fly to Japan from Chinese bases and bomb industrial areas in the Kobe-Kyoto-Osaka triangle, as well as in Yokohama and Tokyo. It was a detailed attack plan with maps showing which Chinese base would be the launching point for each Japanese target location. Chinese troops would man the aircraft, but instructing the Chinese Air Force and serving as key pilots would be members of the Flying Tigers, recruited from the American Army and Navy, to whom the misnomer “volunteers” was applied.

The aforementioned charts and maps appear in Alan Armstrong’s *Preemptive Strike*.¹⁷ The book also contains a wealth of information about the Flying Tigers. They were not volunteers, as their official name (the American Volunteer Group) implies. The unit was a detached corps comprising men on active duty in one of the branches of the US military, whose service in China would be counted as service in the units to which they had originally been assigned. US support of China had progressed to the point that it was no longer simply support of China, but war against Japan.

If the JB-355 Plan had proceeded on schedule after Roosevelt approved it, the Flying Tigers would have been begun bombing Japan in late September and continued through October. However, the situation in the European theater became urgently critical, and heavy bombers were of necessity sent there; the October attacks on Japan never took place.

But the JB-355 Plan was not a scheme developed to prepare for the future; it was an action plan, and Japan was its target. We know that Roosevelt commissioned the plan,

¹⁷ Alan Armstrong, *Preemptive Strike* (Guilford, CT: The Lyons Press, 2006).

five months before December 7.

It is now clear that not only did the US plot an economic blockade, i.e., an act of war, to draw Japan into a conflict, it also previously planned to bomb Japan in “war itself.” If things had gone according to plan, the US would have perpetrated the sneak attack, not Japan.

WAR AND NAVY DEPARTMENTS
WASHINGTON

JUL 18 1941

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The President,
The White House.

DECLASSIFIED
EOD Dec 19, 2013
9/21/73

Dear Mr. President:

At the request of Mr. Lauchlin Currie, Administrative Assistant to The President, The Joint Board has made recommendations for furnishing aircraft to the Chinese Government under the Lend-Lease Act. These recommendations are contained in the Joint Planning Committee report of July 9, 1941, J.B. No. 355 (Serial 691), which The Joint Board approved, and which is transmitted herewith for your consideration.

In connection with this matter, may we point out that the accomplishment of The Joint Board's proposals to furnish aircraft equipment to China in accordance with Mr. Currie's Short Term Requirements for China, requires the collaboration of Great Britain in diversions of allocations already made to them; however, it is our belief that the suggested diversions present no insurmountable difficulty nor occasion any great handicap.

We have approved this report and in forwarding it to you, recommend your approval.

July 23, 1941.

*OK - but re-study
military mission
versus the
attaché method.
1 Incl.*

R. H. P. Patterson
Acting Secretary of War.

Frank S. Knox
Secretary of the Navy.