

The US, not Japan, was the aggressor, by MOTEKI Hiromichi

Summary

Standard histories of the Pacific War claim that Japan was the “aggressor” and that America was the innocent victim of Japanese aggression on December 7, 1941. A closer evaluation of the circumstances, however, will point out that it was an unbroken chain of American actions rather than Japanese “aggression” that led to war. By engaging in solipsistic policies that absolutely placed American interests over all other considerations, war became inevitable. It appears that the real lessons from Pearl Harbor have yet to be realized in the West and in America in particular.

Early in the 20th century, President Theodore Roosevelt urged that Japan apply the “Monroe Doctrine” to Asia. As South and Central America and the Caribbean were within the U.S.’s sphere of influence, Asia, especially Manchuria and China given their proximity, would be within Japan’s sphere of influence. However, American reassurance for such an arrangement was quickly overlooked, beginning with the abrogation of the Ishii-Lansing Agreement of 1917 with the Nine-Power Treaty (1923). Rather, Manifest Destiny, into the Pacific and Asia, dictated U.S. foreign policy.

It has been largely forgotten in these modern times that during the early 20th century Japan was entirely reliant on trade to sustain her domestic economy. As a resource poor nation, Japan was forced to import minerals, petroleum and food and Japan needed access to markets to sell her products to pay for imports. Much of Asia however, was colonized by Europe and America, thereby restricting Japan’s access to goods and markets. As a consequence of economic distress following the Great Depression, Western countries formed economic blocks and raised tariffs, further restricting Japanese access to foreign markets. Thus, in order to sustain national well being, Japan moved into Manchuria.

Given American attitudes towards Japan, as indicated by previous treaties that disregarded Japanese concerns for her economic security, America’s commitment to keep China open to Europeans but not to Japan, and anti-Japanese sentiment promoted by Christian missionaries in China, it was only a matter of time before war broke out between the two countries. In fact, it was Franklin Roosevelt, who instigated a series of economic sanctions against Japan and supported anti-Japanese belligerents despite an official policy of neutrality. Roosevelt, stridently anti-Japanese in attitude and fervently wishing to completely overhaul Japanese culture (“regime change”), signed off on JB-355, the planned aerial attack of Japan proposed by the Joint (Army/Navy) Board, on July 23, 1941. Had the situation in the European theatre not been so serious, attacks were to have started by October.

The lessons of the past have apparently been entirely lost on those who currently clamor for the application of “economic sanctions” on their enemies. Perhaps the highly integrated economy of today will diminish the effect sanctions. However, the mere application of sanctions automatically condemns the recipient to international pariah status, which constrains the range of action such countries and, in desperation, defensive war may be the only option.