

US & JAPAN, CONTINUED

The fact that the sailors had been harshly treated by the Japanese did nothing to assist early relations between the two countries.

This first contact was followed in a much more aggressive fashion by the visit of Commodore Perry in 1853 and in 1854 the purpose of which was to establish a trade treaty with Japan. As he arrived, Perry turned the ship's guns towards the town of Uraga and refused Japanese demands to leave. He demanded permission to deliver a letter from President Fillmore, which made it clear that the United States expected to be allowed similar, if not better, access to Japan than the Dutch. Tough terms were imposed on the Japanese, and the letter threatened large-scale violence from the USA in the event of any armed resistance from the country. It was not the best way to start a relationship.

WHY WAS THE US INTERESTED IN JAPAN?

Relations between Japan and the USA remained uneasy throughout the remainder of the 19th century and into the early 20th century. There was substantial Japanese immigration into both Hawaii and the United States, but legislation in 1900 stopped this movement. The openly racist nature of these laws upset the Japanese, as did the US annexation of the Philippines. The Americans felt threatened by the growth of a large Japanese navy and Japan's ambitions in China. The defeat of the Russians in the Russo-Japanese War – especially the destruction of a large Russian fleet at the Battle of Tsushima in 1905 – only heightened the USA's fear of a strong and powerful Japan.

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WHAT FACTORS CAUSED TENSION * B/W US & JAPAN?

President Theodore Roosevelt helped negotiate the end of the Russo-Japanese War in 1905. He was concerned about Japanese imperialism, but was keen to develop better relations. As a result, in 1908 the Root-Takahira Agreement was signed. The two countries agreed to respect each other's interests in China and to maintain the 'status quo' (or current situation) in the Pacific. The Open Door policy (see page 93) was confirmed for the USA. The United States agreed, without consulting the Koreans, to the Japanese 'right' to annex Korea. The relationship remained uneasy, however. Wilson did his best to stop continuing Japanese aggression against China in 1915, and in 1919 made Japan return Shantung Province to China. Increasingly, the USA saw itself as 'protector' of China against its aggressive neighbours.

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[Japan] is a most formidable military power. Her people have peculiar fighting capacity. They are very proud, very warlike, very sensitive, and are influenced by two contradictory feelings; namely, a great self-confidence, both ferocious and conceited, due to their victory over the mighty empire of Russia; and a great touchiness because they would like to be considered as on a full equality with, as one of the brotherhood of, Occidental nations, and have been bitterly humiliated to find that even their allies, the English, and their friends, the Americans, won't admit them to association and citizenship.

Former US president Theodore Roosevelt on Japan, 1909.

The Washington Naval Conference

In 1922, as tensions in the Pacific continued after the First World War, the Washington Naval Conference aimed to settle two threats to global peace and stability: the international naval arms race and the unstable politics of the Asia Pacific region. Both of these issues were at least in part related to tensions between the USA and Japan. Nine countries attended the three-month conference: the USA, Britain, Japan, China, Portugal, France, Italy, Belgium and the Netherlands.

GOALS OF WASHINGTON CONFERENCE ?

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The USA, Japan, Britain, France and Italy signed a naval treaty, agreeing to limit their fleets of battleships and aircraft carriers, to destroy some of their existing ships and not to build any new warships for the next ten years. This was a significant measure of disarmament, intended to prevent the reoccurrence of the pre-war arms race that many thought had contributed to the outbreak of the First World War. In practice, however, the treaty would ~~not~~ ensure Japan's naval dominance in the western Pacific region.

Two issues of power politics in the Asia Pacific region were addressed at the conference. The first was the competing ambitions of the USA and Japan: US politicians were alarmed by Japan's rapid rise as a regional power, while Japan had ambitions to expand its influence in the region even further. The USA, Britain, Japan and France agreed to consult with each other rather than act independently in any future crisis in the region. This treaty ended the 1902 Anglo-Japanese Alliance, which had provided British support for Japan in the event of conflict.

The other issue was China, not least because it was the focus of Japanese ambitions. All nine powers at the conference agreed to uphold the status quo in China, which included the Open Door policy advocated by the USA. At the same time, Japan's special interests in the Chinese province of Manchuria were recognised. All three of these treaties depended solely on the goodwill of the signatory states, but within ten years that goodwill had evaporated.

In 1930, President Hoover's refusal to veto the Smoot-Hawley Tariff (see page 141) hit Japan very hard, and was seen as an attack on the country. Then in 1931 the Japanese invaded Manchuria, left the League of Nations and began building up its army and navy prior to a series of attacks on British, French and Dutch colonies in 1941.

The US-Japanese relationship was always an uneasy one. Both were in a sense 'emerging' nations, anxious to establish their power and influence in the same region. Each saw the other as a threat - and with their very different cultures, values and traditions, conflict was likely.

veto
A president is given the power to stop a congressional bill becoming law, and this known as applying a veto.

SMOOT-HAWLEY TARIFF
HURT JAPAN'S ECONOMY

Growing Problems B/W
US & JAPAN