

USA 1890–1945

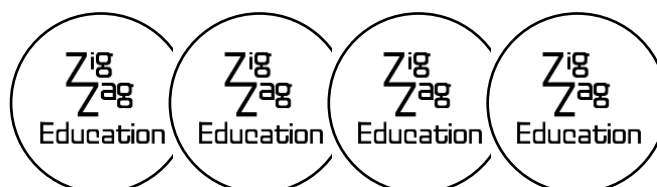
The Impact of the Second World War on the USA 1941–1945

RUSSELL GAME



history@zigzageducation.co.uk
www.zigzageducation.co.uk

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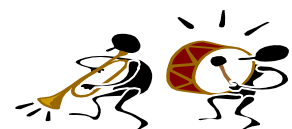
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Teacher's Introduction

This resource has been produced with the new AS Level modules in mind. It specifically matches the specifications for the AQA Examination Unit HIS1M: The USA 1890–1945. However, it also has relevance for any specification covering this period of American history.

The resource is aimed at GCE AS Level students, and includes a number of tasks to reinforce learning or to challenge student perceptions. It can be used as a classroom resource, a basis for teacher-led lessons or as an independent learning tool for students to use at home or in free periods.

How to use each Chapter

Each chapter of this resource can be used together as a complete course or discreetly as a stand-alone episode dealing with certain key issues and questions about the USA 1941–1945.

There are several ways the tasks can be approached:

- Work through each section of the chapter, completing each task in turn
- Introduce each chapter by means of digital presentation, film or other method before handing out the chapter to the students and using the tasks as given
- Using the tasks as a basis for discussion and debate
- Using the tasks as reinforcement or support activities

All tasks are related to the information that directly precedes them; however, some will benefit from additional research or referral to other sections of the resource.

The tasks can be ignored in favour of other teacher-guided activities, and the resource used for background information, additional reading or revision.

Finally the resource and its tasks can be used for homework and/or research, and can also be used to set work for those times when a teacher is absent.

Chapter One: Domestic Policy

What was the effect of the Second World War on the USA?

The most striking impact of the Second World War in the United States was the return of economic prosperity. By 1942 the USA enjoyed full employment and the Great Depression was finally over as the country developed a war economy.

In fact the USA had benefited economically more or less from the start of the war by selling armaments to the British and the French. Even after the defeat of France in 1940 the United States continued to be the so-called arsenal of democracy by providing weapons to Britain through the Lend-Lease programme.

The war affected taxation policy and government spending within the USA. The Revenue Act of 1942 brought large numbers of Americans into the federal income tax system for the first time. The number of income tax payers rose from less than four million in 1939 to almost 43 million in 1945.

The increased revenue was used to pay for the war – but even this increased tax revenue could not provide enough money and government borrowing had to increase. The increased spending by government had a massive impact on economic growth in the USA, which grew by a huge 73% during the war even after inflation is taken into account.

Industrially the war saw corporate profits increase from \$6 billion in 1939 to \$10.5 billion in 1945, as companies benefited from government contracts. It was the United States that provided the lion's share of allied war production. During the Second World War the USA produced more than 300,000 aircraft, 100,000 tanks and 93,000 ships. Even at the end the production capability of the USA was evident as the Russian army went to Berlin in trucks produced in the USA.



Sherman tanks (above) and Boeing bombers (right) being mass-produced in American factories



The power of the federal government also grew dramatically in the war as it took a major role in the direction of the US economy. The Office of Price Administration controlled prices; the War Production Board oversaw defence production and the War Manpower Commission allocated labour between industries. In May 1943 all various bodies were subordinated to the Office of War Mobilisation, which was tasked with running the US economy on a war footing.

With some 12 million men in uniform, by 1945 the growing economy would have faced a major shortfall in labour had it not been for women. Hundreds of thousands of women became involved in war work, serving in the armed forces as secretaries and drivers or working in the war industries.

There was an increase in racial tensions between white and African-Americans however. Black Americans were called up to join the services – and this made many of them question why they were fighting for the freedoms of others but had such freedoms denied to themselves. A serious race riot took place in Detroit in 1943 and riots broke out in other northern cities as well. The armed forces were not immune to this. The Americans still segregated white and African-American troops and fighting could break out anywhere between the two.

Nevertheless, some advances were made in civil rights. Franklin Roosevelt's Executive Order 8802 in 1941 banned discrimination against African-Americans in federal employment and the defence industry. It also set up the Fair Employment Practices Commission to supervise the labour market.

The worst racism and discrimination in the USA during the war was reserved for Japanese-Americans, who mostly lived on the West Coast. It was feared that these people might assist any Japanese invasion of the USA, so they were relocated to camps further away from the coast. Not one Japanese-American was ever arrested for espionage – but some 112,000 were forced to leave their homes and their businesses.

Task

What was the effect of the Second World War on the following?

- Unemployment
- The armaments industry
- Taxation and government spending
- Government borrowing
- The power of the federal government
- Women's employment
- African-Americans and race relations
- Japanese-Americans

Chapter Two: Foreign Policy

To what extent did the USA have a foreign policy during the 1930s?



Franklin Delano Roosevelt (FDR) (*left*) was President of the United States for 12 years, during which time the world was beset by some of the most serious foreign policy problems of the twentieth century. He was elected to the White House on four separate occasions, the only President of the USA to achieve this distinction.

During his first two presidencies he had to contend with a people that wanted merely to remain aloof from the realities of international relations. The efforts of the United States (prior to his first term of office) to stop Japanese aggression in China by supporting the League of Nations had failed. American efforts to sponsor world disarmament and economic co-operation had also failed.

The net effect of all this was an American public even less eager to involve themselves and their country in the world than they had been before. Isolationism ruled supreme in the American towns and countryside, and Roosevelt was not willing to go against this sentiment. Certainly there was little in the way of foreign policy activity from the United States for much of the 1930s.

This was understandable. Roosevelt's first priority was to restore the American economy after the Wall Street Crash and the Great Depression and the isolationist sentiment in the USA was too powerful to be successfully challenged. Roosevelt knew this.

Domestic issues also dominated the agenda in Roosevelt's second term. Opposition from the Supreme Court to several aspects of the New Deal legislation, a slowdown in the American economy 1937–1938 and defeats for the Democrats in the Congressional elections occupied the minds of the Administration. Events abroad were not encouraging in any case. The League of Nations had effectively collapsed following the fiasco of attempted economic sanctions on Italy after the Italians had attacked Ethiopia. By 1937, of the major powers, only Britain, France and the USSR remained in the League after the withdrawal of Japan, Germany and Italy.

Washington viewed British foreign policy in the 1930s with deep suspicion, extreme puzzlement or both. The British system of Imperial Preference, announced in 1932, was seen as an attempt to exclude or keep American trading options with countries of the British Empire to a minimum. Many Americans also believed that the British would seek to embroil the USA in any conflict that developed between Britain and another power. A movement was begun to avoid this and effectively to declare the United States neutral, like Switzerland.

Roosevelt had several doubts about this. He knew that the USA could not stand idly by and watch Europe destroy itself, because of the impact this would ultimately have upon the USA. For Roosevelt the USA was simply too big and too powerful to be another Switzerland.

Franklin Roosevelt is himself a puzzling man. Described alternately as pragmatic, skilful and opportunistic, he never revealed his hand as he played it. Unwilling to challenge the prevailing wind of isolationism, some have nonetheless seen an internationalist side to FDR. He was the first President to recognise Soviet Russia as a legitimate and sovereign state. He was also the man who promoted the 'Good Neighbour' policy in Latin America. Finally he responded positively to a British suggestion that London and Washington work together in naval talks with the Japanese. This may not have precluded isolationism – but some have argued that Roosevelt was as internationalist as he could have been under the circumstances.

The Americans have received some adverse historical comment as a result of their isolationism. The claim has been made that, if only the Americans had taken a much sterner position and dealt firmly with aggressor states, then the Second World War could have been avoided. To a large extent this argument has been developed since the Second World War, and bases itself upon the assumption that the Americans possessed the same amount of influence on the world then as they possessed in the later twentieth century. In the 1930s Hitler considered the USA to be a '*mongrel*' nation, low on the list of racially competent states. As a result the Nazis in Germany were unlikely to pay much heed to Washington regardless of American decisions. This was later to be borne out as events progressed.

Roosevelt was aware of the dangers posed to American (and world) interests by German, Italian and Japanese expansion. However, FDR was unable to move the American people into a position where they could counter this expansion until very late in 1939 – after Hitler had already invaded Poland.

Ideologically Roosevelt had more in common with, and therefore was more sympathetic to, the democracies of Western Europe. He understood that the preservation of those democracies was in the interests of the United States and he also understood the implied dangers behind the German re-occupation of the Rhineland in 1936 and the Japanese invasion of China in 1937.

Could Roosevelt have done more to persuade the Americans of these dangers and to abandon their beliefs in isolationism? He had won a clear mandate from the American people in the 1936 election, but did nothing to 'educate' the Americans in foreign affairs until 1937. When foreign affairs did come to the attention of the American people, there was little if any notable effect on the overriding isolationism of the people, even if they might have sympathised with the plight of the Chinese.

Yet FDR was in a difficult position. Even if he could summon sufficient strength of purpose to turn the Americans into internationalists, there were inherent dangers in the international picture. The obvious allies for the Americans were the British and the French. However, France was, with good reason, seen as politically unstable, whilst British foreign policy seemed prepared to grant the Germans whatever they wanted. In many ways the Americans risked alienating Germany and Japan without securing a firm alliance with France or Britain (neither of whom had asked for US assistance in the late 1930s anyway).

In effect Roosevelt was impotent to make much difference as the world headed on its steady course towards war. Hitler was quick to realise the limitations of the US position and as a result paid little heed to US diplomacy. He knew that the Americans had urged the powers that negotiated over the fate of the Sudetenland to continue their discussions, and to avoid war. He also knew that the Americans continually refused to take any part in any agreement that might result from the Munich talks (*right*). Thus the Germans could easily afford to discount the American position, whatever Washington might say or do.



Foreign events nevertheless began to impinge themselves onto the awareness of the American people as the 1930s drew to a close. Yet the Americans were mere spectators. Roosevelt knew the dangers, but until 1939 did little to change things. His overall policy was essentially a policy to keep the USA out of trouble. This did not amount to much of a foreign policy – but it did have the support of the American people. In this period FDR was quite content to limit his foreign policy to the wishes of the electorate, perhaps at the expense of the long-term interests of his country.

Task

Answer the following questions:

1. Why did Roosevelt pay little attention to foreign affairs in his first two terms of office?
2. How successful were American foreign policy initiatives in the 1930s, such as the attempt to sponsor world disarmament?
3. Why, from an American viewpoint, was there little reason for optimism about the international situation in 1937?
4. Why did the USA find it difficult to comprehend British foreign policy?
5. Why did Roosevelt reject the idea of American neutrality?
6. What was Roosevelt's attitude towards the Soviet Union?
7. What was Roosevelt's attitude towards Latin America?
8. What criticism has been made of US foreign policy between the world wars?
9. Why is it unlikely that a more determined American foreign policy would have made any difference to the events of the 1930s?
10. Why was the USA in a difficult position by the end of the 1930s?
11. Why did Hitler consider that he could ignore the United States?

How Neutral was the USA 1939–1941?

There was a marked change in the attitude of the President from the early months of 1939. Foreign affairs were the focus for the first time in Roosevelt's annual address to Congress in January 1939. FDR had seen the Japanese gains in China and the German annexations of Austria and the Sudetenland, and he pondered on the future targets of these aggressor states.

He knew that the Germans, the Japanese and the Italians would not be content with the status quo, and it became his mission to persuade other Americans of that view. He took it upon himself to teach American Congressmen and people of the importance of foreign affairs. He believed people had to become aware of the threat to American security and interests if Germany and Japan were left unchecked.

In his annual address Roosevelt called for the USA to use all methods "*short of war*" to prevent aggression. As a result, he agreed to a French request to buy thousands of American planes and announced a massive programme of re-armament. Soon afterwards he met with members of the Senate Military Affairs Committee and told them bluntly that the United States could not draw a line of defence around itself and live completely on its own.

The President pointed out that if Europe fell to the Germans and Italians, then the African Empires of the European powers would also fall. This would put German troops in a position to threaten Brazil and other South American states, and once present in Latin America, there would be a clear challenge to the Monroe Doctrine, not to mention a threat to the USA itself.

In April 1939, Roosevelt wrote to Hitler and asked for assurances that 31 named countries would not be attacked by Germany within the next 10 years. Hitler dismissed this with contempt. By now Hitler had become convinced that the '*mongrel society*' was far too weak to interfere with any of his plans. He seemed vindicated in this attitude when – despite FDR's new stance – the President could not get Congress to agree to revise the Neutrality Acts in July 1939.

This was a disappointing result – but it proved to be the beginning of the end for the isolationists. When the British and the French declared war on Germany on 3rd September 1939, Roosevelt spoke to the American nation in one of his '*fireside chats*' (right). He stressed his determination to keep out of the war, and at no time did he ever change this message. This was no doubt a reflection of the mood of Americans. Not until after the attack on Pearl Harbour did most Americans support involvement in the war.



However, many Americans had come to favour a package whereby aid could reach the victims of Nazi aggression. Roosevelt succeeded in ending the Neutrality Laws in November 1939, and as a result the British and French could buy American armaments, though the Europeans had to pay for the armaments, receive them in an American port and then take the armaments in one of their own ships. It was known as the 'cash and carry' provision.

The rapid German gains of 1940 and the collapse of France dissipated any feeling of security possessed by the USA. The fear was that Britain might collapse or surrender or be defeated – and this would leave the United States as the sole democracy in a world dominated by Germany and Japan and their allies. Many of Roosevelt's advisers believed that Britain was finished and argued that all American war material should now be kept in the USA for the needs of the Americans themselves. Roosevelt rejected this advice. As early as June 1940 (well before the Battle of Britain took place in earnest), FDR committed himself to Britain in a speech made at the University of Virginia.

American aid to Britain came in a series of stages. Having developed a strong personal relationship with the British Prime Minister – Winston Churchill – FDR received a British 'shopping list' as early as May 1940. In this the British asked for 40–50 older American destroyers to help in the naval battle against German submarines. In the middle of August, as the Battle of Britain began to rage, Churchill pledged to fight on until the Americans came to the rescue of the Old World. It was a brave vision of a future that Churchill perceived to have a strong Anglo-American flavour to it. It was also a vision that would have been anathema to the isolationists of the USA.



HMS Ludlow, formerly USS Stockton, one of the 50 aging US destroyers transferred to the Royal Navy as part of the 'Destroyers for Bases' agreement

American intervention in the war was by no means certain in August 1940, but the deal over the destroyers was done. Realising the financial constraints placed on Britain by the cost of the war, the Americans did not ask the British for payment. Instead the USA swapped the destroyers in return for the use of British bases in the Western Hemisphere. It was the first move in what later became known as 'Lend-Lease'. In December 1940 the British clearly set out what they would need if they were to continue the war against the Nazis. At the same time Churchill pointed out that Britain would not be able to pay cash for these needs for much longer.

Roosevelt picked up on the message and starkly informed the American people that if Britain failed, then the Axis powers would control Europe, Asia, Australasia and Africa, plus they would possess naval supremacy. They would be able to bring massive military resources to bear against the American continent. They would be able to disrupt American trade. And they represented a threat to freedom and democracy.

He then put forward the Lend-Lease Plan to Congress (January 1941). This was approved in March 1941 and allowed the President of the United States to "*sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend or otherwise dispose of any defence article to the government of any country whose defence the President deems vital to the defence of the United States*". This could only have meant Britain at that time – and thus the Lend-Lease package amounted to a declaration of economic war against the Axis nations.

Isolationists remained opposed to the direction taken by the President. They argued that the measures taken were not 'steps short of war' but 'steps on the way to war'. They established a highly organised and vocal pressure group called the America First Committee in September 1940, whose membership soon amounted to more than 800,000. Major newspapers took isolationist standpoints, such as the Chicago Tribune. They felt that FDR was plotting to take the USA into Europe's conflict, and they regarded his tactics as deceitful.

Lend-Lease was bitterly attacked by the isolationist lobby. They felt that the plan amounted to an authorisation for the President to wage undeclared war for anybody, anywhere in the world, until world affairs were so arranged to suit presidential political viewpoints.

The opposition made no difference. Lend-Lease was passed by the Senate by 60 votes to 31. The House of Representatives passed it 317 to 71. It was clear that the message of the President had reached many Americans. Isolationism was no longer a representation of the mainstream of American opinion. But it remained a strong lobby and isolationists did not concede the issues until the Japanese attack in 1941.

As 1941 progressed, the USA edged towards conflict in the Atlantic. Roosevelt wanted to make sure that any aid granted to the British reached Britain and was not sunk by German submarines. Joint planning between the British and American navies began in 1941, with the Americans agreeing to use some of their warships to escort merchant convoys and to patrol further out into the Atlantic Ocean.

Greenland was occupied by US forces, and new naval bases and facilities were built. In July 1941 Roosevelt's announcement that US Marines would be sent to Iceland to prevent any German attack on the island met with 61% approval. American soldiers and sailors were therefore committed to military deployment abroad some six months before the attack on Pearl Harbour.

In reality the United States was at war from July 1941. German submarine attacks in the Atlantic increased (though not yet against American warships) and American opinion shifted more and more towards intervention and support of Britain. Lend-Lease was extended to the Soviet Union following the German attack on Russia in June 1941.

In August 1941 Roosevelt met Churchill, and both leaders agreed that not only would Britain receive more American aid, but also that they would agree to a Europe-First strategy in the war. This meant that Germany was to be beaten first, whatever actions the Japanese took. The war aims of the allies were declared at the same meeting – even though at that time there had been no Japanese attack, the United States was not at war, and the American people still opposed involvement in war by 3 to 1. It was a case of a country declaring its war aims before the war had started.



Roosevelt and Churchill meet to discuss the Atlantic Charter on the deck of HMS *Prince of Wales*, Newfoundland August 1941

As the year 1941 reached its conclusion, American shipping came under attack in the Atlantic. In September 1941 Roosevelt finally ordered his naval vessels to strike back as soon as they saw a German submarine and regardless of whether it had fired first or not. Finally, three weeks before the events at Pearl Harbour, Congress agreed to the proposal that American merchant ships should be armed.

Popular history clearly states that the USA entered the Second World War as a result of the unprovoked attack on Hawaii – but the record just as clearly shows that American forces were actually in undeclared action several months beforehand.

Task

1. Which of the following statements show American neutrality in the first years of the Second World War and which do not? Explain your answers

1939

- a. In his annual address in 1939 Franklin Roosevelt called for the United States to use all methods short of war to prevent aggression
- b. The Americans sold planes to the French
- c. The United States announced a major programme of rearmament
- d. Roosevelt wrote to Hitler asking for assurance that Germany would not attack 31 named countries
- e. Roosevelt failed to persuade Congress to change the Neutrality Laws
- f. Roosevelt stated that he would keep the USA out of the war

1940

- a. Roosevelt rejected advice to keep all military equipment in the USA rather than using it to support the British
- b. Roosevelt developed a strong personal friendship with British Prime Minister Churchill
- c. Roosevelt pushed forward Lend-Lease so that Britain could receive goods from the USA

1941

- a. Congress gave its support to Lend-Lease
- b. Joint naval planning began with the British Navy with regard to the Atlantic convoys
- c. American forces occupied Greenland
- d. US Marines were sent to Iceland
- e. Lend-Lease was extended to the Soviet Union
- f. The Americans agreed a 'Europe First' strategy with the British
- g. Roosevelt ordered American ships to strike at German submarines
- h. Congress agreed to arm American merchant ships

2. What exactly was Lend-Lease?
3. Why was Lend-Lease crucial to the British war effort?
4. Why did America First oppose Lend-Lease?
5. Why was the United States described as the '*arsenal of democracy*'?
6. Was the United States neutral between 1939 and 1941? Explain your answer

Did Roosevelt want war?

American isolationists at the time criticised Roosevelt's foreign policy. He did tend to keep things secret, and he could be deliberately misleading. He never admitted the joint planning talks with the British; neither did he refer to American involvement in the Atlantic naval war.

American action in the early part of the Second World War cannot be described as neutral. For instance, American ships often used their equipment to find German submarines even before September 1941. Although they then tended to leave the submarine alone, they also told the British of the location so that the Royal Navy could deal with it.

Opponents of FDR often accused him of being '*economical with the truth*'. Many claimed he denied the American people the information they needed to make informed decisions about American foreign policy. Some have even argued he sought the powers of a dictator for himself!

However, many of his opponents were isolationists, concerned about the future for traditional American foreign policy. Roosevelt had, by the time of the Second World War, come out against isolationism as a political ideal, and he was certainly prepared to use skulduggery to achieve his ends.

The President was in fact in a difficult position. He was aware of the seriousness of the challenge to the USA from the Axis Powers, but he could not effectively counter this challenge without also challenging the firmly held convictions of the isolationists. He thus had to walk the tightrope of trying to meet the diplomatic challenges of the time without aggravating opinion at home too much. In the end he believed an Axis victory had to be prevented, and he was prepared to work within whatever constraints he faced at home in order to achieve that goal.

It is hard to consider what might have happened in history. Roosevelt might have persuaded the Americans to join in the war after a period of time. Or he might have been defeated by the isolationists and the traditionalists. In the event the decision was taken out of his hands.

A country can only remain isolated and neutral if the rest of the world allows it to be. The Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbour forced a change in the American position, and severely undermined the position of isolationism in the USA.

Yet even at this moment FDR faced severe difficulties in persuading an America, keen for revenge on Japan, to take up the Europe First strategy agreed with Churchill. It was entirely possible that the Americans would have limited their efforts to the defeat of Japan, ignoring Germany altogether. As it happened the Germans took this decision for him as well by declaring war on the USA.

In the final analysis Pearl Harbour and the subsequent German declaration of war allowed Roosevelt to enter the war without having to persuade Congress and people that war in Europe was essential for American security. Every action of the President had suggested, however, that he believed this was so and acted accordingly to defend American interests. In this he was not so very different from his predecessors.

Task

1. Consider the following arguments:
 - FDR began joint planning talks with the British well before Pearl Harbour
 - The Americans were engaged in war in the Atlantic well before Pearl Harbour
 - The Americans told the British where to look for German submarines
 - Roosevelt kept his actions secret because he knew the American people did not want war
 - Roosevelt had to act carefully because of the strength of isolationist opinion in the USA
 - FDR would take whatever action he could to prevent an Axis victory
 - The Japanese attacked the Americans first
 - It was Hitler who declared war on the USA, not the other way round
 - FDR only acted in what he considered was the best interest for the USA
2. Which of the statements above suggest that FDR wanted war and which do not?
3. There are three opinions about the actions of FDR between 1938 and 1941. Which of the three viewpoints below do you find most convincing and why?
 - Roosevelt was keen to enter the war because he had identified US interests with those of Britain and France and would do anything to assist them in their conflict with Germany
 - Roosevelt recognised that US interests were served by the survival of Britain and France and was prepared to do whatever it took to support the two democracies, short of war
 - Roosevelt never wanted war but matters were taken out of his hands by the decisions of Japan and Germany

How and why did relations between the USA and Japan worsen before 1941?

In 1901 President Theodore Roosevelt stated that the Pacific Ocean was an '*American Lake*' and that the Far East was the new frontier for American expansion. By that time the islands of Hawaii had been taken, and the Americans had control of the Philippines. Also by that time the Open Door policy for China had been established.

From the very beginning of the century, a naval policy was endorsed which allowed the USA to keep a naval presence in the Pacific Ocean. This aimed to keep the Japanese away from China. However, it was a paper tiger. As the closest power to the Chinese heartlands, Japan benefited from lower transport costs and easier access. There was no realistic chance of the Americans acting to prevent Japanese advances – the USA was simply too far away to do so.

By the 1920s the Americans had a new fear – the possible spread of Soviet Communism to China or Japan. Even at this stage the beginnings of the later Cold War could be seen. Communist ideology spoke of the need to spread World Revolution. The Americans elected to do whatever they could to prevent its spread into China or Japan.

Ultimately however the Americans could and would do nothing to prevent the Russians if Moscow was determined on action. As with the Japanese, the Americans were simply too far away to prevent the Russians from advancement in the Far East.

Meanwhile China was rapidly descending into chaos. After the collapse of the Manchu dynasty huge parts of China fell from central control. At the same time local warlords made moves to grab what territory they could, fighting many local and brutal wars against other warlords in a bid for local supremacy.

By the 1930s there were two main groups that had emerged in China – the Nationalists and the Communists. Both were fighting it out for supremacy. The Americans tended to favour the Nationalists, but were generally more concerned to maintain their economic position in China no matter what happened. This was not the case for the Japanese. By this time Japan was suffering greatly from the Great Depression, and saw the civil war in China as an opportunity.

During the 1920s the Chinese had benefited from American moral support, which had proved sufficient to deter any overt Japanese move. But the growth of nationalist sentiment in China throughout the 1920s effectively reduced American influence. The Chinese were growing resentful of foreign influence, even benevolent influences such as that of the USA. Chiang Kai-Shek (*below right*), leader of the Chinese Nationalists, was determined to take control of China for the Chinese. In 1928 Nationalist forces took Peking. The Nationalists later declared that a new, wholly Chinese Government under Chiang would be established and based in Nanking.

The Americans recognised the new government and moved quickly to sign a new trade agreement. This would allow the USA to maintain its trading position in China, and relations between the Americans and the Chinese were soon very friendly. The Americans were pleased with Chiang, especially as his Nationalists were leading the fight against the Chinese Communists.



Chiang could not afford to ignore the Japanese however. Japanese influence was strongest in the Chinese province of Manchuria, largely because Japan owned the South Manchurian Railway Company. Chiang sought to reduce this influence by directing Chinese people to move to the province and by setting up a rival Chinese railway. He also tried to persuade the Chinese not to buy Japanese goods. Ultimately these moves were to backfire on him.

From the American point of view, the twelve years following the Versailles peace conference were a period of stability in the relationship between Japan and the USA. Japanese leaders were convinced that Japanese interests were best served by mutual cooperation and much of the previous suspicion between Tokyo and Washington had been removed as a consequence of the Washington Agreements of 1922.

These Agreements had effectively ended the threat of a naval arms race in the Pacific as well as re-establishing the principle of the Open Door in China. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance of 1902 was also replaced by a Four Power Treaty, which stated that all parties to the treaty would respect the Pacific territories of the others.

The Naval Agreement was startling. The three major Pacific powers – Britain, the USA and Japan – agreed to abolish their naval construction programmes, build no new capital ships for at least ten years, and agree to a ratio of 5:5:3 (USA: Britain: Japan) in capital ship tonnage. It was the most effective piece of disarmament that occurred between the wars.

But it held dangers for the future. The Japanese reluctantly accepted that their tonnage was inferior to the USA and Britain in return for Anglo-American promises to stop fortifying their Pacific possessions. At the time it suited everybody, because nobody wanted the massive costs involved in a naval arms race in the Pacific.

The Americans saw the Japanese acceptance of the agreements as encouraging, and relationships between Japan and the USA began to improve. But there were some in Japan who saw the Washington Agreements as a humiliation. They argued that Japan had given up much and received little in return.

This view was mainly that of the Japanese military – particularly the army based in Manchuria, and (not surprisingly) the Naval General Staff. For the first time the Japanese military began to question the foreign policy undertaken by the civilian government in Tokyo.

Almost at once the Japanese Navy began to circumvent the agreement by increasing the construction of non-capital ships – light cruisers, destroyers and submarines. An attempt by the Japanese to increase their ratio at discussions in London in 1930 failed. The military, together with more militaristic Japanese politicians, began to argue that Japan should seek her own independent path as an Asian nation and not seek compromise with Western countries.

The USA had tried to build a new order in the Far East with the Washington Treaties, but the attempt was doomed to failure. The pressure on the settlement was immense, and not only from the Japanese military. For example, the 1924 Immigration Act was considered by the Japanese to be discriminatory towards Asian peoples and relations with the United States were affected. Meanwhile China continued to descend into civil war.

Throughout the 1920s the Japanese treated China properly, concentrating on peaceful trading links with the Chinese. But China would not stay in chaos forever, and would the Chinese be content with the new American order? Moreover, would civilian government in Japan be able to control the demands of an increasingly hawkish military and preserve the new order?

The Manchurian Crisis

On 18th September 1931 an announcement came from the Japanese that a unit of Chinese soldiers had exploded a bomb on the Japanese-controlled South Manchurian Railway a few miles from Mukden. The Japanese responded by sending out troops to occupy the line of the railway, and then gradually spread out into the rest of Manchuria. It was presented as a justifiable reaction designed to prevent a breakdown of law and order.

In fact, young Japanese officers of the army in Manchuria had enacted the entire incident. They had secretly plotted for months to seize control of Manchuria away from China. There was certainly little that the Chinese could do in the face of the well-disciplined Japanese, and the Japanese government – despite international pressure – refused to withdraw, approving of the actions of its army in Manchuria.



Japanese troops enter Mukden 1931



The Japanese actions were a direct challenge not only to the League of Nations and its concept of collective security, but also to the Washington treaties and the efficacy of the Kellogg-Briand Pact. The world awaited an international response.

The fate of Manchuria was of little direct consequence to American interests. The province – though populated by ethnic Chinese – had never been fully integrated into China, and the USA had already accepted the special interests of Japan in the area. In many ways the United States *approved* of the Japanese presence as a barrier to Russian Communist expansion.

At this time Japan was suffering from the effects of the Great Depression, and the civilian government seemed unable to deal with the pressure of a declining economy and increasing unemployment. Manchuria was seen as a possible solution. It would allow for the emigration of unemployed Japanese workers, was rich in raw materials and would be a profitable market for Japanese goods. More than 50% of Japan's overseas investments had been in Manchuria, and the South Manchurian railway was the economic artery of Japanese activity in the province. As far as the Japanese were concerned, Manchuria was much more a part of Japan than it was of China.

The Chinese Nationalists did not agree. To them this was yet another instance of foreign interference in China, and they immediately lodged a protest at the headquarters of the League of Nations in Geneva.

The issue posed a moral dilemma for the USA. Legally the Japanese had committed an act of aggression and were in breach of the Kellogg-Briand Pact that they had signed up to. Therefore the USA should act to uphold international law. But the Americans did not want to become embroiled in international affairs – it ran counter to isolationist feeling and the words of the Founding Fathers.

At first President Hoover was content to do nothing. In his defence he did have more pressing economic concerns at home, but the overall American position was to wait for the Japanese civilian government to condemn the events and pull back their forces. That never came, because the Americans failed to appreciate that the government in Tokyo was unable to check their military leaders. By this stage Japan's government was effectively under the control of the army and navy.

As the Japanese made good their position in Manchuria, the Americans issued their Non-Recognition Doctrine in 1932. This stated that the USA would not recognise any agreement between China and Japan that came as a result of a violation of the Kellogg-Briand Pact or of China's territorial sovereignty. Japan ignored this doctrine completely, showing their contempt by moving into Shanghai.

The Americans responded to this by threatening to build up their naval forces in the Pacific and to fortify Guam. But the threats were empty rhetoric – the Americans were not prepared to put money into either option at that time. It is likely that the Japanese knew this. In any case, the military logistics and geography of the area made US military action extremely unlikely.

The Roosevelt administration confirmed the Non-Recognition of Japanese-controlled Manchuria. FDR commented that the USA had to uphold international law. By this time (1933) it was known that Tokyo had ignored the League of Nations as well as the protests of the United States. Economic sanctions against Japan had been mooted – but had been rejected by Hoover as “*entailing too great a risk of war*”.

Many Americans were content with the inactivity of Hoover and later Roosevelt – their chief concerns were simply to avoid war and to recover from economic depression at home. This was a position that was to paralyse American foreign policy in the Far East for some while.

US-Japanese relations 1933–1941

In the 1930s there seemed to be no clear American policy towards Japan or China. The Americans stated that they did not approve of and would not support Japanese expansion in the Far East, but they did nothing to try and *prevent* it.

Roosevelt could not however concentrate on foreign policy questions. The ongoing economic difficulties at home and the absence of any further Japanese activity in China or elsewhere pushed the issue onto the back-burner.

Peace reigned in the Far East until 1937, though there was Japanese political and economic interference in Northern China. The Japanese also warned foreign powers to stay out of Chinese affairs. The Americans made no objection to this and Secretary of State, Cordell Hull (*right*), even urged the American press to avoid printing inflammatory articles against Japan. He also asked his expert advisers on the Far East to come up with changes to American policy towards China so that the USA would not antagonise the Japanese.



Unfortunately for Hull, the President made several statements that were clearly pro-Chinese, and were considered as such in Tokyo. Thus the Americans came up with a contradictory policy. Roosevelt made public statements in favour of China, and thus annoyed the Japanese. Meanwhile Cordell Hull's official policy was to try and prevent antagonising Japan. The end result was that China never got the American aid needed to resist Japanese advances, whilst the Japanese became increasingly confused by American policy.

American naval policy was equally confusing from a Japanese viewpoint. Roosevelt was determined to prevent the Japanese increasing their naval strength vis-à-vis the United States, so he gave orders for the construction of 32 new naval vessels, including two aircraft carriers. He was careful to keep within the limits of earlier naval agreements, but the Japanese could not be convinced of this.

Japan believed that the Americans were breaking naval limitations, and so decided to retaliate by building more warships for themselves. Once that happened a new naval arms race between the Americans and the Japanese was assured.

In 1938 a trade commissioner in Shanghai accused the Japanese of closing and locking the Open Door in China. He also claimed that Japanese aggression in China was being effectively condoned by American inactivity.

He had a case. In Japan the new concept was that of a '*Co-Prosperity Sphere*'. The Japanese were seeking to build up a bloc of countries that would sustain the Japanese economy. North-east Asia would comprise Japan and areas like Korea and Northern China, and would see a massive development of heavy industry. Elsewhere the imperialist powers were to be driven out of their colonial possessions in South East Asia and the Pacific islands. These would then enter the Co-Prosperity Sphere with South China as producers of raw materials and export earnings.

Such a new international bloc could never have countenanced the continuation of the Open Door policy in China. But the USA did little to protest about the change. Japan became convinced that the '*isolationist*' Americans would do nothing even in the face of the most extreme provocation.

In 1937 war in China broke out once more. The Americans did nothing apart from make a vague declaration of principles. The main concern of the Americans seemed to be to avoid getting caught in any crossfire. Even when an American gunboat was bombed and sunk by Japanese aircraft in December 1937, there was little of the reaction that so marked the sinking of the *Lusitania* more than 20 years earlier.



In practice the Americans had opted out of foreign policy, terrified of any commitment or pronouncement that might lead to war. Ten British proposals to the USA to take part in a joint offer of mediation between China and Japan or to put on a show of combined naval power were thrown out. In many ways the words of Neville Chamberlain (*left*) aptly described the foreign policy of the USA at this time: "*It is always best and safest to count on the Americans for nothing but words*".

American foreign policy changed in 1938. Although the exact moment of change is hard to pinpoint, the Americans came to the conclusion that the loss of China would undermine the entire western position in the Far East. Roosevelt then used presidential discretion to ignore the Neutrality Acts and offer assistance to the Chinese. It was the first effort to counter Japanese aggression. American aid to China was to continue up to and beyond the US entry into the Second World War.

However, it was becoming clear that that the change in attitude was leading to a breach between the State Department and the US Embassy in Japan. The State Department had come to the conclusion that imposing economic sanctions – especially on oil – would force the Japanese to stop their actions in China. The Ambassador in Japan disagreed – he argued it would merely push the Japanese into a corner, making them more likely than ever to act aggressively.

He was ignored, and the Americans moved to place economic sanctions on Japan. By July 1941 the Americans had suspended trading agreements with Japan, placed a partial trading embargo on aviation and motor fuel, and frozen all Japanese assets in the USA. However, Japanese activity in China had not slowed down, and the freezing of Japanese assets was taken *after* the Japanese had made an incursion into French Indochina. It seemed Japan *was* behaving more aggressively. Had the US Ambassador in Tokyo been correct?

Whether the Americans ever desired that all oil exports to Japan were cut off is uncertain, but that was the result. At which point – just as those who had predicted it had pointed out – the Japanese came to the conclusion that the only solution to the growing oil crisis was war.

At this stage the threat to the USA had grown considerably. In September 1940 Japan entered the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, and Japanese forces began making advances towards French Indochina. France had been knocked out of the European war, and the Battle of Britain was under way. Roosevelt seems to have concluded that if the United States could not avoid war altogether, he should try to avoid a war on two fronts. He thus sought to negotiate with the Japanese in the hope of avoiding war in the Pacific.

Unfortunately for him this merely confused the Japanese. They could not comprehend why the President was offering talks at the same time as the oil embargo was being tightened. Nevertheless they did agree to talk with the Americans.

Japan had no real desire to go to war with the USA. Every simulated war game that navy leaders had fought with US forces had led to a Japanese defeat. It was not a good omen. The Hull-Nomura negotiations got under way in February 1941 and lasted until June. They held out some promise. Admiral Nomura had accepted his appointment as Ambassador to the USA only after he had been assured that the Japanese Navy sincerely desired better relations with the Americans. He also knew that Emperor Hirohito (*right*) was anxious to avoid war.



This time it was the turn of the Americans to be confused. On 2 July 1941 the Japanese decided to proceed with the invasion of Indochina even if this meant war with Britain and / or the United States. In September, Japanese military and civilian leaders agreed that the country must be ready for war unless the economic blockade was lifted or at least eased by the middle of October. Time was already running out for the Japanese – by then normal trade would have to be resumed or they would have to seize the economic materials they needed by force. Failing either of these then Japan had lost because they would have run out of oil and other essential war material.



Chamberlain returns from negotiations with Hitler holding the signed Munich Agreement, declaring "peace for our time", September 1938

The Americans were aware of Japanese plans because they had managed to decode Japanese diplomatic cables. Yet the Japanese still seemed anxious to continue the negotiations. By this time the lessons of Appeasement and Munich were already being digested in the USA. The Munich Agreement of 1938 had seen the effective surrender of Czechoslovakia to the Germans. The Americans believed that the only way to maintain peace in Asia would be at the expense of China. Such a settlement struck too many Americans as an Asian Munich.

At this stage the search for a peace settlement carried on, but there was no hope of success. The Americans had broken the Japanese diplomatic cables, and their interpretation of the signals from Tokyo led them to consider all Japanese proposals at the talks as lacking in sincerity. At the same time the United States required the Japanese to withdraw, not only from Indochina, but also from China. There was simply no way the Japanese government could have accepted that and survived.

Task

Explain fully the following terms, concepts, events and persons as they affected attitudes and policy in the United States:

- The Open Door policy towards China
- The paper tiger that was the US naval presence in the Pacific
- The Communist idea of World Revolution
- The Washington Naval Treaties
- The Immigration Laws in the USA
- The collapse of the Manchu dynasty in China
- The growth of nationalism in China
- Chiang Kai-Shek and the Nationalist Government in China
- Japanese influence in Manchuria before 1931
- The Kellogg-Briand Pact
- The Great Depression in Japan
- The attitude of the Japanese Army and Navy in 1930
- The Manchurian Crisis
- The Chinese protest to the League of Nations
- The American Non-Recognition Doctrine
- The American attitude towards imposing economic sanctions on Japan
- The confusion of foreign policy statements by Franklin Roosevelt and Cordell Hull
- The American decision to build new warships in the 1930s
- The Japanese invasion of China
- The Japanese concept of the '*Co-Prosperity Sphere*'
- The American reaction to the Japanese attack on China
- The British proposals and the British reaction to the American response
- Roosevelt, the Neutrality Laws and China
- The placement of economic sanctions on Japan by the USA
- The oil crisis for the Japanese – and the Japanese solution to the problem
- The attempted negotiations with the Japanese
- The simulated war games in Japan
- The decoding of Japanese diplomatic cables
- The lessons of appeasement and the Munich Agreement
- The failure of diplomatic negotiations

Was the attack on Pearl Harbour a mistake?

One of the more dramatic, infamous and better-known events of world history was the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941. The Japanese used a wave attack system that involved 350 aircraft taking off from six aircraft carriers. The purpose of the attack was to eliminate the US Pacific Fleet, the ships of which were lying peacefully at anchor at their base in Hawaii. By the time the attack was over, the United States had lost 8 battleships, 3 light cruisers, 3 destroyers and 4 auxiliary vessels. A total of 87 aircraft had also been lost. Most significantly, the USA lost 2,400 people – soldiers, airmen, sailors and civilians. It was the worst attack on American soil by a foreign power.



The USS *California* (above) and the USS *Arizona* (below) sinking at Pearl Harbour, 7 December 1941

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour was launched because the Japanese were convinced that they had run out of options. Pushed into an economic corner, the decision was taken to wage war by means of a surprise attack rather than wait for economic paralysis or a humiliating reversal of fortune by withdrawing from China. However, the Japanese were by no means certain that they could achieve victory even as they launched the attack.



The Japanese had discussed plans to attack Pearl Harbour as early as January 1941. They had practised the attack in secret exercises at Kagoshima. It seems clear, however, that they chose to take the risk because they knew that the oil embargo would soon prevent any further war activity in China. Unless they received new sources of oil, they would have to make a humiliating retreat from China. This was unacceptable to them.



The USS *Shaw* explodes, Pearl Harbour, 7 December 1941

They wanted to gain the oil resources of South East Asia, but thought that the USA would seek to prevent them, especially if they threatened the Philippines. So they decided to gamble and hope to knock the USA out of the picture long enough for them to achieve their strategic aims.

Pearl Harbour was a brilliant tactical success – but it proved to be a strategic blunder. Japan could not have hoped to invade the USA across the Pacific Ocean as American air defence was too strong for them, and bombing raids on the West Coast had to be conducted over many thousands of miles. Therefore the attack on Pearl Harbour could not have led to the military defeat of the United States.

Perhaps the Japanese relied on achieving their Co-Prosperity Sphere with little reaction from the Americans. Perhaps they relied on traditional American isolationist feeling to limit any American response. They could not have been more wrong. The attack on Pearl Harbour served to unite the American people in their determination to seek revenge – and therefore to enter the war – in a way that nothing else could have done. The day after the attack, Roosevelt asked Congress to agree to a declaration of war. This was passed with only one vote against. The Japanese had therefore overcome both American isolationism and reluctance to become involved in war, with no hope of being able to defeat the USA.



View of the attack in its early stages from a Japanese Aircraft, Pearl Harbour, 7 December 1941

Task

1. Describe the events at Pearl Harbour
2. Consider the following statements. How might they show that Japan made a calculated gamble by attacking Pearl Harbour and how much do they suggest that the Japanese made a colossal mistake?
 - Japan had been pushed into an economic corner and needed to gain the oil supplies of the East Indies. They preferred to wage a surprise attack on Pearl Harbour than to wait for the slow strangulation of their war effort
 - Unless the Japanese gained new supplies of oil, they would have had to make a humiliating retreat from China
 - The Japanese were not sure that they could win a conflict with the United States. All war game simulations had suggested that the defeat of the USA was not possible and that an attack on the USA would merely waken a sleeping giant
 - Japan did not have the logistical capability to invade the West Coast of the United States and could not have circumvented American air defences in any case
 - The Japanese may have relied on the isolationist sentiment of the American people. As it was, the attack on Pearl Harbour merely served to unite the Americans in a determination to gain revenge for the 'sneaky' attack
 - The Japanese may have been better advised to go on the offensive in South East Asia without attacking Pearl Harbour or any other American possession – such as the Philippines. If they had done so it is possible that isolationist America would have done nothing to prevent the Japanese attack

Did Roosevelt know about Japanese plans for Pearl Harbour?

There have been many questions about Pearl Harbour. Some have argued that President Roosevelt knew about the attack, but deliberately chose not to inform the naval base at Hawaii. They claim that Roosevelt wanted the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbour so that the American people would be inflamed, and he could get the United States into the war.

Roosevelt supposedly knew that nothing else could have persuaded his people to take up arms. In evidence for this his critics cite the absence of the American aircraft carriers on the day and the lack of warning given to the authorities on Hawaii, even though the Americans had broken the Japanese diplomatic codes and knew war was likely.

If true, then Roosevelt should be vilified as partly responsible for the deaths of that day. However, like many other 'conspiracy' theories, it can be dismissed. It is true that mistakes were made. Roosevelt did realise that Japanese diplomatic messages as late as 6th December meant war, and he did little about this. However, he cannot burden the responsibility alone.

The Americans intercepted Japanese cables on 1st and 2nd December that ordered their diplomats to destroy codes. This could only have meant that the Japanese were preparing for war. On 3rd December the Navy Department informed Admiral Kimmel of the developing situation, who was in command of the fleet at Pearl Harbour. Kimmel did not take this information seriously and he also chose not to tell Hawaii's Army Commander, General Short.

The fact was the Americans did not believe the Japanese capable of launching an attack on Pearl Harbour because it was so far away from Japan. The Americans understood the Japanese diplomatic messages, but they had not broken the Japanese military codes. A Japanese attack could have taken place anywhere. The Americans *were* guilty of underestimating the Japanese, but they were no more likely than anyone else to predict that Pearl Harbour was the target.

Neither was there anything suspicious about the movements of the aircraft carriers, which were carrying out normal operations. Two of them – the USS Lexington and the USS Enterprise – were en route to Midway Island. Upon hearing of the attack, the USS Enterprise sought to turn about and give battle. If it had been ordered out of the way, then why would it have done that?

The Japanese attack left the rest of the US Pacific Fleet effectively crippled. If Roosevelt had wanted to lure the Japanese to an attack on Pearl Harbour, he did not have to leave his warships lined up and defenceless in the harbour itself. It would have made more sense to have ordered '*manoeuvres*' for all the fleet and got it out of the way. A Japanese attack would still have allowed Roosevelt to declare war and achieve national unity without losing so much of the fleet.

Task

1. What are the accusations levelled against Roosevelt with regard to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour?
2. What evidence is cited in support of these accusations?
3. What evidence is there against these accusations?

(Consider: The breaking of the Japanese diplomatic code, the behaviour of Admiral Kimmel, the considered likelihood of a Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour, the orders and actions of the American aircraft carriers and the anchorage of the ships at Pearl Harbour.)

What was the American role in the defeat of Germany and Japan?

Germany

On 8th December 1941 the Americans declared war on Japan in response to the attack on Pearl Harbour. However, Roosevelt was left with a problem. He had promised Churchill that Germany would be dealt with first, but would his country allow him to declare war on Germany? His people were clamouring for revenge against Japan, but so far the Germans had not entered the picture.

Four days after the attack on Pearl Harbour, and in response to Japanese pressure, Germany and Italy declared war on the United States. This resolved the difficulty faced by the Americans in pursuing a '*Germany First*' policy. The decision by Hitler gave FDR all the excuse he needed to become engaged in the European theatre. Without it Roosevelt may have found it impossible to divert military resources from the Pacific campaign against Japan in order to assist the British and Russians against the Nazis.



Roosevelt signing the declaration of War with Japan, 8 December 1941

When the USA entered the war in 1941, there were many who felt that the war in Europe was as good as over. German forces were at the gates of Moscow, and Russian resistance seemed to be about to collapse. The rest of Europe was either under German control, allied to Germany or neutral. There was only a defiant Britain, whose resources may have enabled her to continue her defiance, but were simply not good enough to allow her to launch an invasion of Europe and push the Nazis back.

Nevertheless, a start had to be made somewhere. The decision taken by the Americans was to concentrate allied resources on the defeat of Germany. This decision was pleasing to both Britain and Russia, but there were the inevitable differences of opinion with regard to overall strategy. Although the alliance between the British and Americans proved to be remarkably effective, with joint planning committees for just about everything, the British put forward a plan to attack German forces in the Mediterranean – the so-called '*soft under-belly*'. This was not what the Americans wanted – they preferred the direct attack on France across the short distance of the English Channel.

The Russians were eager for any allied attack. Stalin wanted a second front as soon as possible in order to reduce the pressure on the Russian army. The British believed that too soon an invasion attempt on France would merely prove disastrous, and argued that an attack on Italy might be more effective. Roosevelt was persuaded that this was the best option, but even an attack on Italy had to be properly planned.

This meant that the earliest allied invasion took place in 1942 on the North Coast of Africa, leading ultimately to the invasion of Italy in 1943. The Russians suspected the Anglo-Americans were deliberately delaying the invasion of Europe so that Communist and Nazi forces would fight each other to a standstill. Afterwards the Anglo-Americans would move in to pick up the spoils.



US troops land on a North African Beach as part of Operation Torch



In October 1942 the first major British victory of the war came at El Alamein, and the British began to push German forces out of Egypt and into Libya. In November the Allied landings in North Africa occurred under the leadership of Dwight D. Eisenhower (*left*). He planned to coordinate and cooperate with the British forces coming out of Egypt.

These landings showed several weaknesses on the part of the American planners, but the relatively weak opposition faced by allied forces in North Africa allowed the Americans to learn from their mistakes. Eventually the Germans and Italians – facing Allied troops advancing from the West and British forces from the East – were trapped in Tunisia. North Africa had fallen to Allied control.

Possession of North Africa allowed the Anglo-Americans control of the strategic Suez Canal in Egypt, and provided a convenient launching pad to invade first Sicily and then mainland Italy. In October 1943 the Anglo-Americans took Naples and marched on towards Rome. Negotiations with non-Fascist Italian leaders then took place, as a result of which Italy would surrender and change sides. Had it come off, Allied troops could have been on the south side of the Alps in record time, and in a position to threaten Germany, France and Yugoslavia.

In fact, the Germans had learned of the plot, and despite the Italian surrender, German forces immediately moved to occupy those parts of Italy not already controlled by the Anglo-Americans. This meant the Anglo-American advance could now only proceed slowly against determined German resistance. It took until June 1944 to capture Rome and advance further northwards. Nevertheless, Italy had been knocked out of the war.

Also in 1943 the Anglo-Americans had finally won the Battle of the Atlantic. Better technology (e.g. sonar, radar, depth charges) proved decisive in defeating the German submarine campaign, as did the capacity of American shipyards to replace vessels lost to torpedo attacks. The defeat of the U-boats in the Atlantic not only ensured that Britain would not be starved out of the war, but also made sure that American supplies and soldiers would reach Britain ready for the eventual invasion of France. The German defeat at Stalingrad took place in 1943 as well, marking *the* turning point in the war and the beginning of the long retreat of the Germans from Russian territory.

Meanwhile, the failure of the Anglo-American forces to achieve a quick victory in Italy had given strength to the American position that a direct invasion of France was needed. Nothing could be done until the invasion preparations were complete, so most of the fighting in early 1944 fell onto the Russians – yet again. Anglo-American bombers flew raids into German territory against strategic targets in an effort to knock out German industry or demoralise the population or both. In the end they achieved neither, but did lose many aircraft with their crews.

The invasion was ready by June 1944, and it was launched on 6th June. More than a million men were landed on the beaches of Normandy, but it took more than a month before forces under General Bradley finally broke out from their beachheads. Once that had happened there were rapid American advances across Western Europe until the Germans rallied and counter-attacked at the so-called Battle of the Bulge.

This was little more than a blip in the progress of the American army, and by the spring of 1945 the armies were moving forward once more, having entered Germany proper in January. One more twist of fate awaited the Americans, however. In April 1945 President Franklin Roosevelt died, exhausted by the years of struggle against Depression and Tyranny. He was the main architect of the so-called Grand Alliance between Britain, the USA and the USSR, the man whose support for Britain in 1941 had allowed the British to continue the fight, the man who had upheld what he saw as vital American interests in the face of so much turmoil. He did not live to see the final unconditional surrender of German forces on 7th May 1945.



President Roosevelt's funeral parade, Washington 1945

Japan



The German defeat in May 1945 did not bring the Second World War to a close, but it did allow the full concentration of Anglo-American resources on Japan. In the Pacific Japanese gains had been striking. In the wake of the attack on Pearl Harbour, Japanese forces struck at Guam, Hong Kong, the Dutch East Indies, Wake Island, Singapore and the Philippines. A Japanese attack on Papua New Guinea brought them within striking distance of Australia, whilst Japanese forces continued to strike at China.

However, in May 1942, a mere six months after Pearl Harbour, a US Fleet stopped Japanese advances at the Battle of the Coral Sea and so secured the safety of Australia. The next month saw the Battle of Midway, the destruction of four Japanese aircraft carriers and more than 300 Japanese planes. The Japanese had lost naval supremacy, and thus they had lost the war.

The Pacific War was mainly an American matter, British troops being localised to certain key areas, such as Burma. American strategy in the Pacific was to undertake a two-pronged attack across the Pacific Ocean, one across the north, the other in the south. The overall strategy involved 'island hopping' to Japan. This meant that the Americans chose their targets carefully, but did not try to clear up Japanese forces on every island in the Pacific.



Japanese troops, attacking across a trench in 1941 (*top left*) under air attack in Burma (*above*)

In August 1942 the Americans landed on Guadalcanal, but it was six months *before* they finally secured the island. Eventually the Americans came within 1,500 miles of Japan, which put their bombers within range of Japanese cities. Japan was to suffer strategic bombing raids every bit as much as Germany.



US troops in dense jungle common in much of the fighting in the Pacific theatre

However, although the Americans continued to push the Japanese back towards their own islands, the struggle was difficult. In gaining control of Iwo Jima, the Americans had taken 25,000 casualties. Okinawa took even more. Desperate Japanese suicide pilots (called Kamikaze) deliberately crashed their planes onto American ships, and sank over 30 ships. The Japanese code of honour, which considered surrender to be humiliating, meant they tended to fight to the death, and the Americans grew concerned that they would fight particularly bitterly in defence of the Japanese homeland. The possible cost in American lives was huge.

In July 1945 Truman warned the Japanese to surrender unconditionally. If they did not, then the Americans would use their new weapon. The Japanese refused; so on 6th August 1945 an atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. On 9th August a second bomb landed on Nagasaki. The Japanese surrendered five days after that, though the formal ceremony did not occur until September.

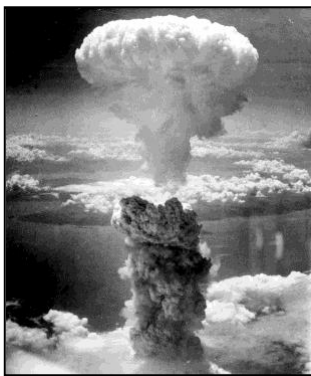


US troops preparing to clear a dugout during the 'island hopping' campaign, 1944

The Use of the Atomic Bomb

Since 1945 an argument has taken place as to whether the dropping of the atomic bomb was necessary. Several pundits have claimed that the main reason for the atomic bomb was not to hasten the surrender of Japan but to impress the Russians and prevent any further Russian advances in the Far East.

There can be little doubt that President Truman, who was more suspicious of the Russians than Roosevelt, wanted to contain the Soviet Union's ambitions. At Yalta, in February 1945 (*right*), Roosevelt had wanted a Russian assurance that they would enter the war against Japan. In return for this the Russians would be offered Japanese territory in Sakhalin and the Kurile Islands. By the summer of 1945 Truman was regretting this decision, as well as being fearful that the Soviets would use a declaration of war on Japan as an excuse to occupy (and thereby remain in) Manchuria and Korea.



The mushroom cloud of the atomic blast rising over Nagasaki, 9 August 1945

The first atomic bomb was dropped on 6th August 1945. The Russians declared war on 8th August – no doubt aware that if they waited too long the Japanese would surrender **before** the Russian declaration of war. This would mean that the Soviets would not be entitled to anything other than what had been agreed in Yalta, and perhaps not even that. The second bomb was dropped on 9th August. Was this second bomb dropped as a warning to the Russians not to advance into too many areas of the Far East?

Another argument put forward concentrates on the cost of the Manhattan Project. This amounted to some \$2 billion. Given the amount of money spent on the weapon it has been claimed that once it had been successfully tested, the temptation to use the weapon was too great.

Others have claimed that the Japanese were already looking to surrender and had put forward peace feelers through the USSR. The sticking point was that the Japanese wanted a guarantee on the future position and role of their Emperor. The Americans considered this to be a condition, and they demanded unconditional surrender. It has therefore been argued that a more flexible American attitude could have brought the war to a conclusion without the use of the atomic bomb.



However, there seems little doubt that Truman (*left*) took the decision to drop the bomb after receiving projected figures on likely American losses in the event of an invasion of Japan. The prediction was that the war against Japan would last at least another year and that it would cost a million American lives.

Considering that the Americans had lost fewer than half a million men in all the fighting so far, this was not a prospect faced by Truman with relish. Therefore the most likely explanation for the dropping of the bomb is the traditional one. The atomic bombs were dropped on Japan in the hope that the Japanese would capitulate with the loss of as few Americans as possible. It is unlikely that many Americans at the time – especially American soldiers on duty in the Pacific – would have argued with the decision.



Hiroshima after the atomic bomb, few buildings remain standing, August 1945

Task

Create an information booklet or presentation describing the important role of the USA in the Second World War. You will need to create two separate sections – one for Japan and one for Europe (Germany).

The European one should include:

- The Germany First agreement with Churchill
- The reasons for the German declaration of war on the USA
- The debate about the Second Front between the British and Americans
- Operation Torch and the American experience at Kasserine Pass
- The invasion of Sicily and mainland Italy
- The campaign in Italy
- The Battle of the Atlantic
- Strategic Bombing over Germany
- D-Day – the Allied invasion of Normandy
- The American campaign in France, including the Battle of the Bulge
- Meeting up with Soviet forces at Torgau
- The unconditional surrender of the Germans

The Japanese one should include:

- The Doolittle Raids
- The Battle of the Coral Sea
- The Battle of Midway
- Island-hopping
- Guadalcanal
- Strategic Bombing over Japan
- Iwo Jima and Okinawa, including Kamikaze attacks
- The Japanese code of honour
- The dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Task

Which of the following do you consider the most convincing reason(s) for the American use of an atomic bomb on Japan?

- To impress the Russians and prevent Russian expansion
- To see the results after spending so much money on the development of the atomic bomb
- To force the Japanese to surrender
- To prevent the loss of American military personnel

Timeline

Timeline of American History 1931–1945

Year	Domestic Policy	Foreign Policy
1931		Manchurian Crisis
1933		Adolf Hitler came to power in Germany
1937		Japanese invasion of China
1938		Munich Agreement
1939		Britain & France declared war; End of US Neutrality Laws
1940	America First Committee set up	German defeat of France; Battle of Britain
1941		Lend-Lease plan approved; US Marines sent to Iceland; German invasion of Russia; Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour; Formation of the Grand Alliance
1942	Revenue Act	Anglo-American invasion of N. Africa; Battle of the Coral Sea; Battle of Midway
1943	War Labour Disputes Act; Office of War Mobilisation	Anglo-American invasion of Italy
1944		Anglo-American invasion of France
1945	Death of Franklin Roosevelt; Truman became President	Surrender of Germany; USA used atomic bombs against Japan; Surrender of Japan

USA 1941–1945: Answers to Tasks

The effect of the Second World War

- **Unemployment:** *Unemployment was ended – people were needed in the services or in the war industries.*
- **The armaments industry:** *This benefited by first providing arms to the British and French and then to the US forces.*
- **Taxation and government spending:** *Both rose in order to pay for the war effort.*
- **Government borrowing:** *This also increased in order to pay for the war effort.*
- **The power of the federal government:** *This grew further as the government used its power to direct the war effort.*
- **Women's employment:** *This increased as women were needed to replace the men where the men had gone to join the armed forces.*
- **African-Americans and race relations:** *Many were called up and joined the war effort, but American units remained segregated; race riots broke out because of the different levels of freedom.*
- **Japanese-Americans:** *These were forcibly interned.*

US foreign policy in the 1930s

1. Why did Roosevelt pay little attention to foreign affairs in his first two terms of office?
His people wanted to stay aloof from international affairs and the main priority was to restore the American economy.
2. How successful was American foreign policy initiatives in the 1930s, such as the attempt to sponsor world disarmament? *These had got nowhere.*
3. Why, from an American viewpoint, was there little reason for optimism about the international situation in 1937?
The League of Nations had effectively collapsed and aggression seemed on the increase.
4. Why did the USA find it difficult to comprehend British foreign policy?
The British policy of Imperial policy seemed designed to exclude the USA from trade with the British Empire and many believed Britain would try to embroil the USA in any British dispute.
5. Why did Roosevelt reject the idea of American neutrality?
He did not believe the Americans could be neutral because the USA was too big and too powerful.
6. What was Roosevelt's attitude towards the Soviet Union?
He was the first to formally recognise the Communist government in Russia.
7. What was Roosevelt's attitude towards Latin America?
He wanted to develop a 'Good neighbour' policy towards the other American states.
8. What criticism has been made of US foreign policy between the world wars?
The claim has been made that, if only the Americans had taken a much sterner position and dealt firmly with aggressor states, then the Second World War could have been avoided.
9. Why is it unlikely that a more determined American foreign policy would have made any difference to the events of the 1930s?
In the 1930s Hitler considered the USA to be a 'mongrel' nation, low on the list of racially competent states. As a result the Nazis in Germany were unlikely to pay much heed to Washington regardless of American decisions.
10. Why was the USA in a difficult position by the end of the 1930s?
The obvious allies for the Americans were the British and the French. However, France was, with good reason, seen as politically unstable whilst British foreign policy seemed prepared to grant the Germans whatever they wanted. In many ways the Americans risked alienating Germany and Japan without securing a firm alliance with France or Britain (neither of whom had asked for US assistance in the late 1930s anyway).
11. Why did Hitler consider that he could ignore the United States?
He also knew that the Americans continually refused to take any part in any agreement that might result from the Munich talks. Thus the Germans could easily afford to discount the American position, whatever Washington might say or do.

The Neutrality of the USA 1939–1941

1. Which of the following statements show American neutrality in the first years of the Second World War, and which do not? Explain your answers.
The following are deemed to be considered statements of neutrality: 1939 (a), (d), (e) and (f). The remaining statement all call into question American neutrality.
2. What exactly was Lend-Lease?
This allowed the President of the United States to "sell, transfer title to, exchange, lease, lend or otherwise dispose of any defence article to the government of any country whose defence the President deems vital to the defence of the United States".
3. Why was Lend-Lease crucial to the British war effort?
Without it the British were unlikely to be able to continue to pay for their war effort.

4. Why did America First oppose Lend-Lease?
They argued that the measures taken were not 'steps short of war' but 'steps on the way to war'. They felt that FDR was plotting to take the USA into Europe's conflict, and they regarded his tactics as deceitful.
5. Why was the United States described as the 'arsenal of democracy'?
It was the Americans who provided the weapons for the war effort by the democracies of Britain and France.
6. Was the United States neutral between 1939 and 1941? Explain your answer.

Indicative Content:

It is likely that responses will state that the USA was not neutral – indeed, all the evidence points against it, such as: the American provision of arms for Britain and France but not for Germany, e.g. 'cash and carry' and 'lend-lease'; American warships used to protect convoys to Britain; the occupation of Greenland and Iceland; the 'Europe First' strategy and the declaration of war aims even though the USA was not at war; the order to shoot at German submarines.

Roosevelt and War

These statements and viewpoints are to be considered by students, who should use their reasoned judgement to come to valid conclusions about the actions of Roosevelt.

Relations between the USA and Japan

All of these aspects can be found in the text and are relevant towards the relationship between Japan and the USA. The student needs to find each reference, consider whether it suggests an improvement, worsening or continuation in that relationship, and then comment accordingly as to why they think this.

Pearl Harbour

1. *A description of the events at Pearl Harbour should include the date, the wave formation used by the Japanese, the purpose of the Japanese attack and the result of the attack.*
2. *The statements relating to the position of the Japanese do suggest that Pearl Harbour was not only a mistake, it was unnecessary. The main evidence for this was the failure of the Japanese military to win any war game simulation against the USA and the impracticality of the Japanese ever being able to launch an invasion of the USA. The attack was only likely to awaken a 'sleeping giant', whilst a more considered strategy that avoided American possessions may have kept the USA out of the war.*

Roosevelt and Pearl Harbour

1. *The accusation against Roosevelt is that he knew about the impending attack as a result of the Americans having broken the diplomatic code. He then did nothing because he knew a Japanese attack would arouse the fury of the American people, allowing him to take the USA into the war, which is what he wanted.*
2. *The evidence cites the broken Japanese codes and the absence of the aircraft carriers from Hawaii, which meant that they had been deliberately ordered away.*
3. *The evidence against is more convincing. The Americans had not broken the Japanese military codes, only the diplomatic ones. They knew war was imminent but had no idea when or where. The movement of the aircraft carriers was routine, and if ordered to stay away from Pearl Harbour, why did the USS Enterprise seek to return and give battle? Finally, if the President knew of the impending attack on Pearl Harbour, why line up the warships at anchor so conveniently for the Japanese torpedo planes? In any case, the commander of the fleet at Pearl Harbour – Kimmel – had been informed of the developing situation, but chose not to take it seriously or inform the army commander.*

The Role of the Americans in the Second World War

All of these aspects can be found in the text and are relevant towards the American role in the defeat of the Germans and the Japanese. The student needs to find each reference and make reference to it in their presentation, describing its importance or relevance.

The use of the atomic bomb

All these statements have been used to explain the use of the A-bomb on Japan. It is a matter for reasoned student judgement as to which is the most convincing.