

Growth of Japanese Power

Ever since the Japanese had defeated the Russians in the war of 1904-1905, their ambitions seemed boundless. They had a firm grip on Korea and the Liaotung Peninsula and they had stationed a large army in Southern Manchuria to guard their railway interests. Now the Japanese looked towards the new Chinese Republic, created after the anti-Manchu revolution in 1912. Japanese power had increased enormously during the First World War, in which they captured Germany's Far Eastern possessions and ran their industries at full capacity to produce ships and war munitions for the Allies. After the war, the Japanese fleet was the strongest in the Pacific. Japan seemed to have made the largest profits of all the countries involved in the war.

Japanese Problems

But Japan had developed too quickly. More and more Japanese left the land and the fishing industry to seek work in the factories. Food prices—rice was the staple diet—doubled during the war, while the population was increasing at the rate of nearly a million a year. All of these factors caused hardship for the Japanese people. There were riots to protest a scarcity of rice in 1918; in 1923 matters were made worse by earthquakes that wrecked most of Tokyo and Yokohama.

Throughout the Twenties the threat of unemployment hung over the heads of millions of people. Japan's problem was largely one of maintaining its industries at a high and profitable level of production. To do this it needed a constant supply of precious raw materials—iron ore, wool, aluminum, rubber—that had to be imported. To pay for these imports, Japan had to sell its manufactured goods and raw silk abroad. Selling these goods became almost impossible during the Great Depression and the Japanese searched desperately for a way out of their troubles. Their army decided that if they needed more land, more markets, and more raw materials the answer was to increase the size of the Imperial Army and take

them. This view was not shared by the emperor and his government in Tokyo. They were almost as surprised as the rest of the world when, in 1931, the news was announced that Japanese troops were starting an occupation of the whole of Chinese Manchuria.

The Manchurian Affair

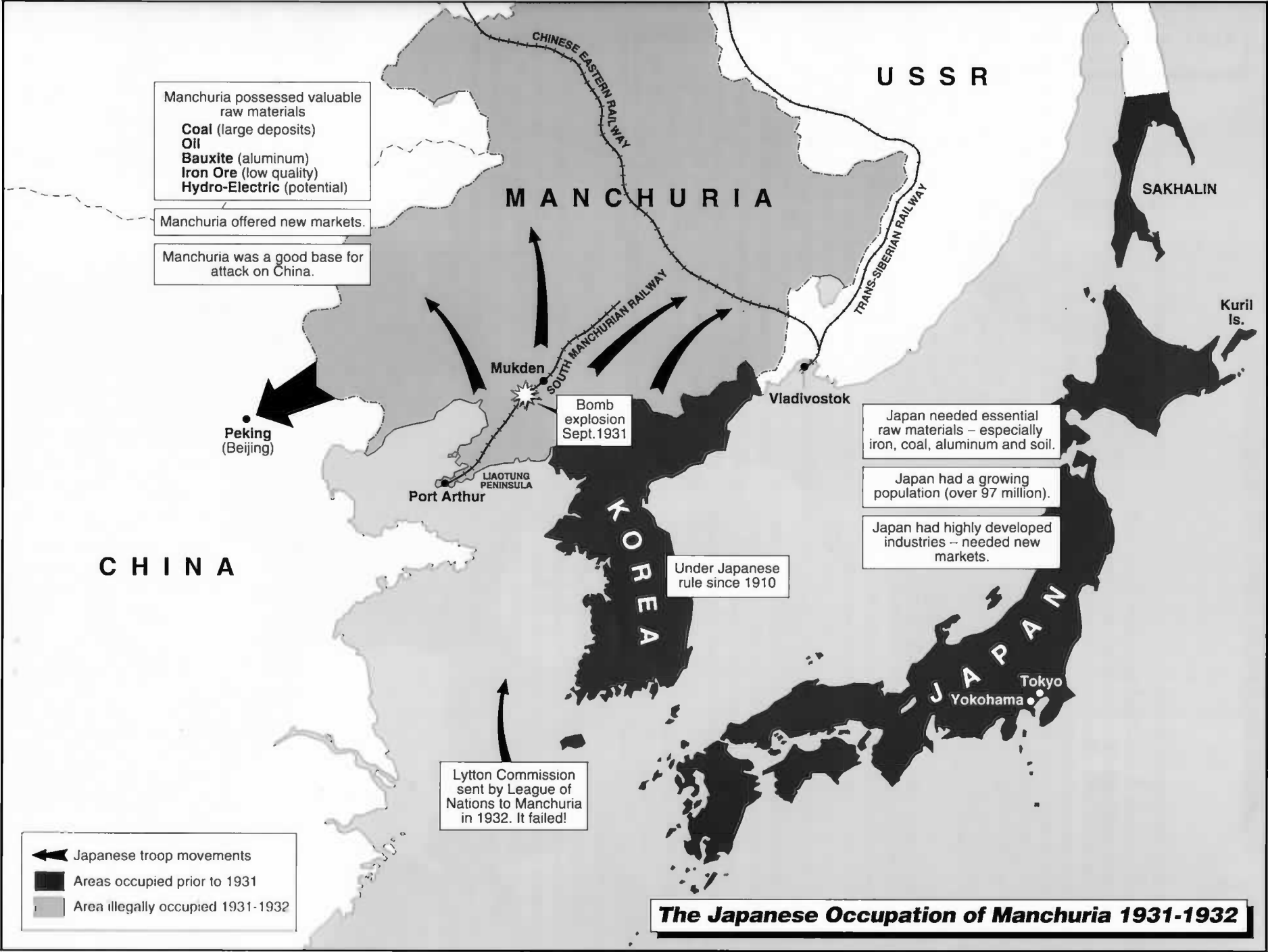
This act of aggression was a deliberate breach of the Covenant of the League of Nations. Would the League act to stop the Japanese army? China appealed to the League for help; the Japanese retorted that China had committed an act of war by detonating a bomb on the South Manchurian Railway that disrupted Japanese commerce. The League asked both sides to stop fighting, but the Japanese troops continued to fan out across Manchuria. Finally, the League sent out a Commission of Inquiry under Britain's Lord Lytton to resolve the affair. But before Lytton could report back to the League, the Japanese had annexed the whole of Manchuria, renamed it Manchukuo and recognized its "independence" in September 1932. One month later Lord Lytton condemned Japanese aggression! In 1933 Japan resigned from the League, taking Manchuria with it.

The Significance of the Manchurian Affair

The Manchurian Affair of 1931-1933 had three very important results for world history. First, it showed that the League of Nations was incapable of enforcing world peace and that, in the words of a British newspaper "a straight road back to 1914 lies open." Second, it encouraged European dictators to try similar tactics in Africa and Europe. And third, the Japanese had no more qualms about extending their empire by armed force. They launched a full-scale attack on China in 1937. This attack was fiercely resisted by Communist guerrillas under Mao Tse-tung and Nationalist armies led by Chiang K'ai-shek, but continued until the Sino-Japanese struggle merged with the story of the Second World War.



Japanese troops enter Harbin, Manchuria, February 1932



Manchuria possessed valuable raw materials
Coal (large deposits)
Oil
Bauxite (aluminum)
Iron Ore (low quality)
Hydro-Electric (potential)

Manchuria offered new markets.

Manchuria was a good base for attack on China.

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MANCHURIA

CHINESE EASTERN RAILWAY

TRANS-SIBERIAN RAILWAY

SOUTH MANCHURIAN RAILWAY

Mukden

Vladivostok

Bomb explosion Sept. 1931

Japan needed essential raw materials – especially iron, coal, aluminum and soil.

Japan had a growing population (over 97 million).

Japan had highly developed industries – needed new markets.

Peking (Beijing)

Port Arthur

LIAOTUNG PENINSULA

KOREA

Under Japanese rule since 1910

CHINA

JAPAN
 Tokyo
 Yokohama

Lytton Commission sent by League of Nations to Manchuria in 1932. It failed!

← Japanese troop movements
 ■ Areas occupied prior to 1931
 ■ Area illegally occupied 1931-1932

The Japanese Occupation of Manchuria 1931-1932