

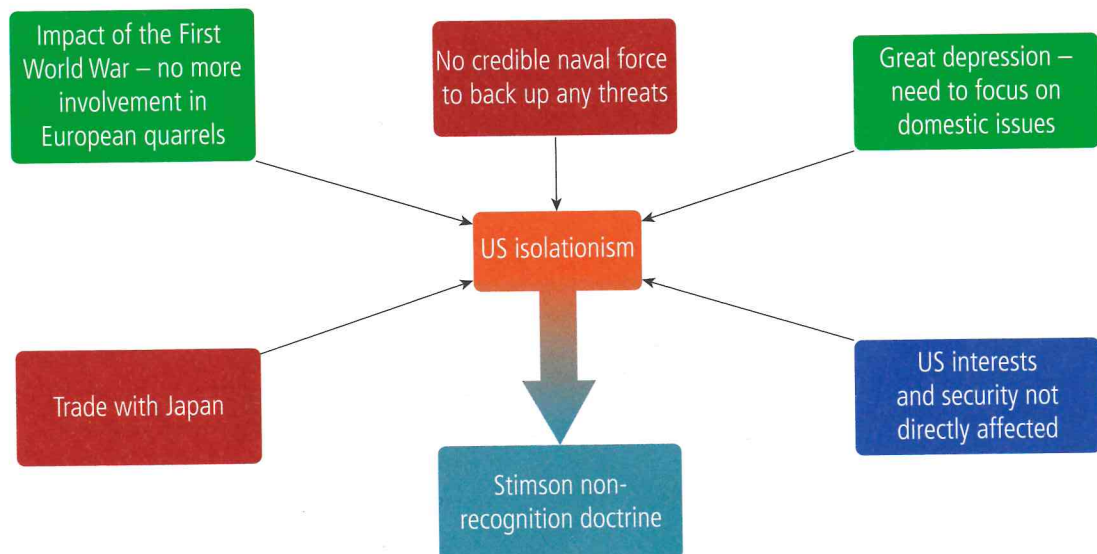
The USA's response to Japanese actions 1931–37

The USA's main foreign policy concern in the 1930s was to stay out of international crises and to pursue its own interests; in other words, "isolationism". After the First World War, many in the USA felt that they did not want to get dragged again into disputes which did not directly affect them. The Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the ensuing economic crisis only served to reinforce the United States' concentration on its own issues.

Thus, although the USA was concerned by Japan's actions which were a violation of Chinese territorial integrity and also of the "open door" policy which had been advocated by the US, President Hoover took minimal action. US interests and security were not directly threatened by the Manchurian incident and the focus of the administration was on the economic crisis. In any case, the USA lacked a credible naval force in the Pacific as Congress had refused funds to bring naval strength up to the Washington Treaty and London Treaty limits.

As with Britain, there were other self-interests for the USA to take into account. The USA had trade and investment interests in Japan which it did not want to jeopardize; indeed the USA had far more important trade ties with Japan than with the much larger Chinese Republic. In addition, Ambassador Nelson T Johnson, the US envoy to China, commented that *"the development of this area under Japanese enterprise may mean an increased opportunity for American industrial plants to sell the kind of machinery and other manufactured goods that will be needed"* (Boyle, 1993: 179). The Chief of the Far Eastern Division of the State Department, Stanley K Hornbeck further commented that *"US interests might best be served if the Japanese were kept involved in an indecisive struggle in an area where the United States had no truly vital interests – such as Manchuria"* (Boyle, 1993: 179).

The response of the US government was to issue a non-recognition doctrine (also called the Stimson Doctrine after Secretary of State Henry Stimson)



▲ The reasons for the USA's isolationism



on 7 January, 1932 in which the USA declared that it would not recognize any agreement that violated China's territorial or administrative integrity or that went against the open door policy or the Kellogg-Briand Pact. This non-recognition doctrine allowed Hoover to uphold international law but also to avoid committing to economic sanctions.

When Roosevelt was inaugurated as president in March 1933, he continued with the same limited response to Japan. His attention was focused on solving the economic crisis through his "New Deal" policies and, outside of the USA, Hitler's policies took most of the USA's attention. Meanwhile, the USA continued to export strategic materials to Japan throughout the 1930s. The British ambassador in Washington reported:

[Roosevelt's] view is that there is nothing to be done at present to stop [the] Japanese government and that the question can only be solved by the ultimate inability of Japan to stand the strain any longer. His policy would be to avoid anything that would tend to relieve that strain.

Source skills

A cartoon by David Low, "Silence", published in the UK newspaper the *Evening Standard*, London on 11 November 1938.



▲ The text reads, "League of Nations; Foundation stone of a New Order, laid 1918; Peace hath her sacrifices"

First question, part b – 2 marks

What is the message of the cartoonist regarding the Stimson Doctrine?

Source skills

Richard Storry. *Japan and the Decline of the West in Asia 1894–1943* (1979).

But the Hoover Administration in Washington, so far from contemplating military sanctions of any kind, was not prepared to use America's economic muscle against Japan. Moral force, exemplified by the "non-recognition" policy, was the only weapon; and if one can scarcely, in fairness, blame Stimson for making use of it, especially in the year of presidential elections,

the fact remains that it exacerbated nationalist feeling in Japan, was of no practical help to China, and advanced America's own interests in no way at all.

First question, part a – 3 marks

What, according to Storry, was the impact of the USA's "moral force" response to Japanese aggression?

The USA's response to events 1937–38

The hesitant approach of the Americans continued after 1937 despite the fact that Japan's military and economic actions were now becoming a threat to the USA. Japan's ambitious naval building programme, launched in 1936, upset the balance of power in the western Pacific. In addition, the economic penetration into north and central China, following their military invasion threatened US interests in those regions and the whole concept of the "open door" policy.

Class discussion

Review question

Refer back to Source A on page 65. What are the similarities between the motives for the USA's lack of action and the motives for Britain's lack of action over the Manchurian incident?



Neutrality Acts

1935 – If there was a war then the USA would not supply arms to either side.

1936 – No loans could be made to belligerents.

1937 – Warring countries could only purchase arms from the USA if they were paid for and taken away by the purchaser.

ATL Communication skills



Watch the bombing of USS Panay at:

http://www.criticalpast.com/video/65675061828_USS-Panay_Japanese-dive-bombers_manning-machine-guns_motor-sampan, or go to www.criticalpast.com and search “Japanese bombers attack USS Panay”.

Roosevelt had some sympathy with China’s position, as did the US media. Roosevelt, along with other prominent Americans, gave financial aid. However, none of this translated into political intervention. Indeed, between July and November 1937, the USA rejected ten British appeals for participation in a joint offer of mediation in the Sino-Japanese conflict and to make a show of naval strength. Roosevelt’s actions were in any case limited by several laws called Neutrality Acts which enforced the USA’s isolationist stance by preventing US involvement in conflicts that did not specifically involve the USA.

A potential crisis which did actually involve US interests and so could have led to more direct US intervention developed when a US gunboat, the Panay, which was escorting three small oil tankers on the Yangtze river, was bombed and sunk by a Japanese aircraft on 12 December 1937. However, when the Japanese quickly apologized and offered compensation, many Americans were relieved that a conflict had been avoided.

Public opinion in 1937 was overwhelmingly in favour of isolation with 7 out of 10 Americans in favour of a withdrawal of US citizens from China in order to avoid the possibility of a confrontation with Japan. The USA sent representatives to the Brussels conference in 1937 (see page 67) but showed itself unwilling to go beyond verbal condemnation against Japan. In one speech in 1937, Roosevelt seemed to promise more than this when he called for a “quarantine” on aggressors to put a stop to the “world of disorder”. This “quarantine speech”, seemed to indicate a willingness to impose sanctions against Japan. However, if this was his intention, Roosevelt had to quickly back down in the face of public outcry from isolationists.

In fact, not only did the USA *not* impose economic sanctions, its trade with Japan until 1939 played a key role in supporting Japan’s war effort against China. The USA bought large quantities of Japanese silk and was a major supplier of oil, scrap iron and automobile parts. It also met nearly 40% of Japan’s total needs for metals, cotton and wood pulp.

Why did the USA change its policy towards Japan after 1938?

During 1938, the USA began to carry out a more aggressive policy towards Japan. Roosevelt did not share the sentiments of the isolationists regarding the Neutrality Acts which treated aggressor and victim alike. Thus in 1938, using presidential powers, Roosevelt chose not to apply the Neutrality Acts to China and to give more active support to the nationalists, starting with an oil loan of \$25 million. China’s Finance Minister HH Kung correctly saw this as a change of policy:

The \$25 million was only the beginning, further large sums can be expected ... this is a political loan ... America has definitely thrown in her lot and cannot withdraw.



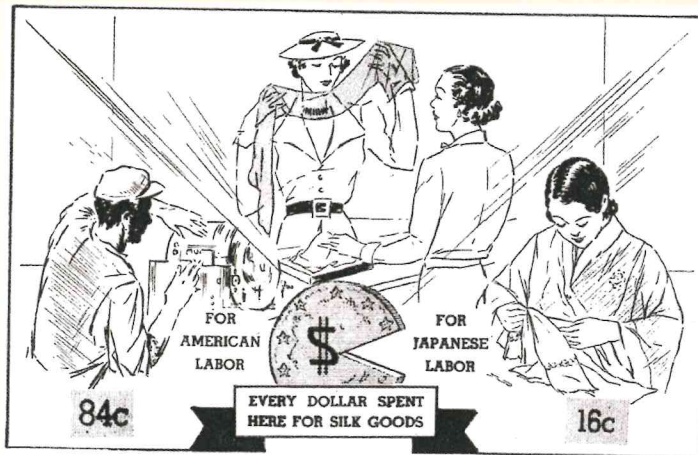
Why did America now start to resist Japanese expansion? The announcement by Japan that it wished to create “a new order in East Asia” was the turning point (see page 45). In addition, there was growing concern in the US that Jiang might respond to overtures from Japan to join with them in this “new order”. This would put Japan in an invincible position.

Another factor was the possibility that if the USA did not give enough aid to Jiang, the Soviets might increase their support for the Nationalists, thus further increasing their influence in China. US public opinion also began to swing in favour of Roosevelt’s campaign to end the neutrality laws.

The international context was key for changing US attitudes. The German victories in the spring and summer of 1940 had encouraged the Japanese in their expansionist policies for fear of “missing the bus” (Hayashi, 1959). In September 1940, Japan entered into a the Tripartite Pact with the European fascist powers Germany and Italy. This stated that if Japan, Germany or Italy was attacked by any third power not then engaged in the European War or the China War, the other two Axis powers would aid the victim of the attack. This convinced many Americans that the war in Europe and the war in Asia were the same war.

Source skills

An American poster supporting a no-sanctions policy against Japan.



If this American woman refused to buy silk as usual she would hurt U. S. workers six times as much as she’d hurt Japan.

First question, part b – 2 marks

What is the message of this source concerning any attempt to impose sanctions on Japan?

ATL Communication and thinking skills

“Fireside chat”; a radio broadcast to the people of the USA by Franklin D Roosevelt on 29 December 1940

... Never before since Jamestown and Plymouth Rock has our American civilisation been in such danger as now.

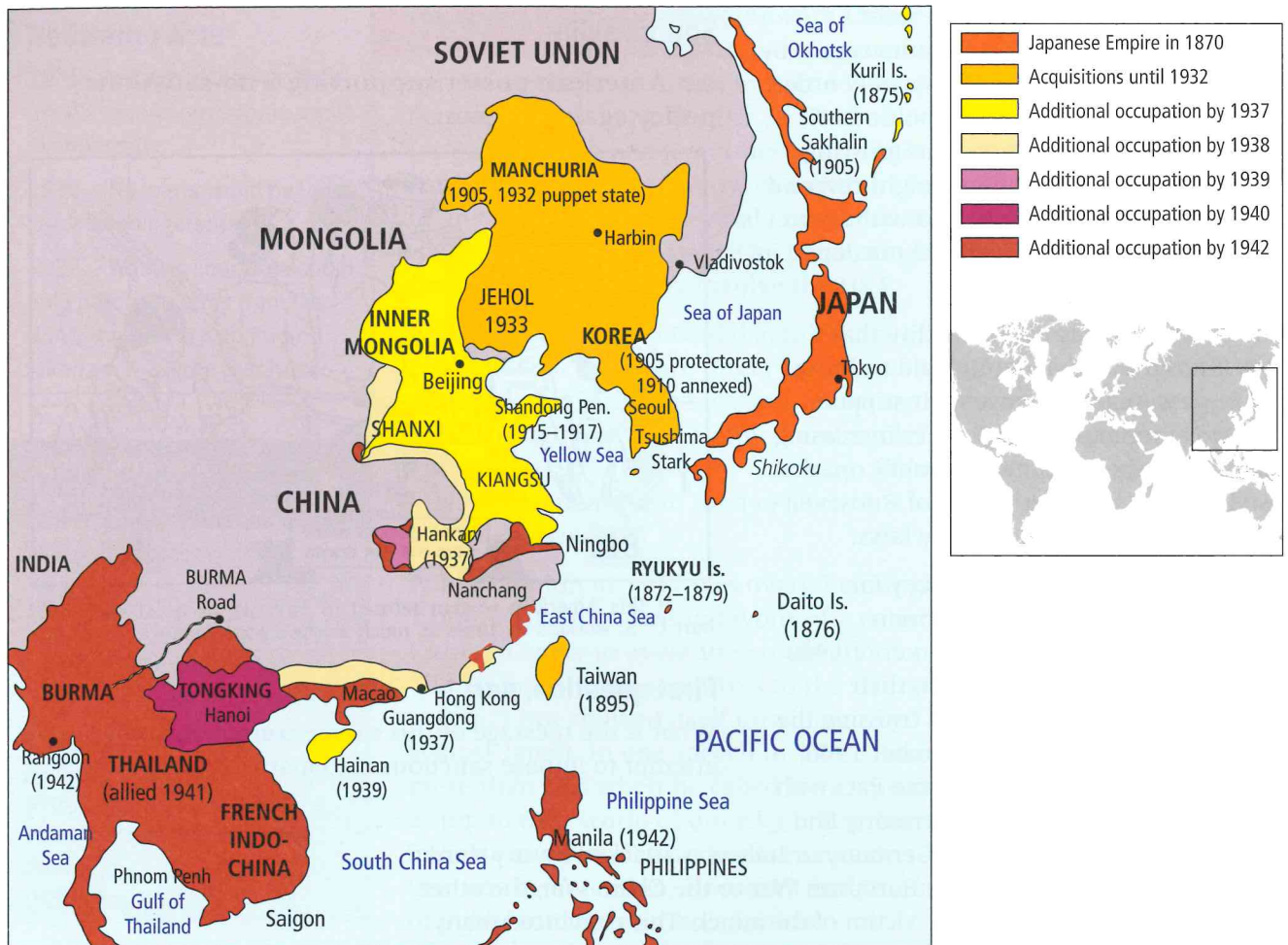
For, on September 27, 1940, by an agreement signed in Berlin, three powerful nations, two in Europe and one in Asia, joined themselves together in the threat that if the United States of America interfered with or blocked the expansion program of these three nations – a program aimed at world control – they would unite in ultimate actions against the United States.

... Does anyone seriously believe that we need to fear attack anywhere in the Americas while a free Britain remains our most powerful naval neighbour in the Atlantic? Does anyone seriously believe, on the other hand, that we could rest easy if the Axis powers were our neighbours there?

If Great Britain goes down, the Axis powers will control the continents of Europe, Asia, Africa, Australia and the high seas – and they will be in a position to bring enormous military and naval resources against this hemisphere. It is no exaggeration to say that all of us, in all the Americas, would be living at the point of a gun – a gun loaded with explosive bullets, economic as well as military.

... We must be the great arsenal of democracy. For this is an emergency as serious as war itself. We must apply ourselves to our task with the same resolution, the same urgency, the same spirit of patriotism and sacrifice as we would show were we at war ...

- 1 What message is Roosevelt attempting to convey to the American people in this radio broadcast?
- 2 With reference to the origin, purpose and content of Roosevelt’s “fireside chat”, assess the values and limitations of this source for examining American attitudes towards the international situation.



The advance to war: US pressure on Japan

American reaction to the Tripartite Pact was ... unexpectedly strong

– Pyle, 1996: 201

In January 1939 “a moral embargo” was placed on planes and aviation parts sales, and in February 1939 credit to Japan was stopped. In July of the same year a long-standing trade agreement with Japan was suspended. A year later a partial trade embargo on aviation and motor fuel and high-grade melting scrap was put in place.

Throughout 1940 and 1941, as Japan advanced, the USA gave millions of dollars of aid to China. Following the temporary closure of the Burma Road supply route to China in October 1941, the USA agreed more loans to China and, by the summer of 1941, a hundred P-40 US fighter planes were sent to replenish the depleted Chinese air force. Simultaneously, the USA also put economic pressure on Japan.

In July 1941, when Japan moved south rather than moving north to attack the Soviets, the USA responded by freezing all Japanese assets. It then imposed a trade embargo in November which included oil. Britain and the Netherlands also imposed a total trade embargo. As Japan was totally dependent on imported oil from the USA, this created a crisis for the Japanese government who now believed that the Western powers were attempting to encircle Japan and destroy its “rightful place” in the world.

The Burma Road

The **Burma Road** is a road linking Burma with the southwest of China. The road is 717 miles (1,154 kilometres) long and runs through mountainous country. Parts of it were built by approximately 200,000 Burmese and Chinese labourers between 1937 and 1938. The British used the Burma Road to transport materials to China before 1941.



If its oil reserves ran out, Japan would be unable to continue the war in China. Japan could not risk this happening. There followed negotiations and a diplomatic mission to the USA. However, agreement stalled over the fact that the USA insisted that Japan withdraw from China. Japan may have agreed to a withdrawal from southern Indo-China, but could not agree to removing its forces from China as this would be unacceptable to the military and the Japanese people. In order to get the resources they needed the Japanese decided that a war of conquest was necessary (see page 49).

Source skills

Source A

The US Ambassador to Japan, Joseph Grew, in 1939, offering his assessment of Japan's reaction to sanctions.

A treatyless situation plus an embargo would exasperate the Japanese to a point where anything could happen, even serious incidents which could inflame the American people beyond endurance and which might call for war. The Japanese are so constituted and are now in such a mood and temper that sanctions, far from intimidating, would almost certainly bring retaliation, which in turn would lead to counter-retaliation. Japan would not stop to weigh ultimate consequences ... I think that our dignity and our power in themselves counsel moderation, forbearance and the use of every reasonable means of conciliation without the sacrifice of principle ... In our own interests, particularly our commercial and cultural interests, we should approach this problem from a realistic and constructive standpoint.

First question, part a – 3 marks

What, according to Source A, were the reasons why sanctions against Japan were a bad idea?

Source B

Max Hastings. *Retribution: The battle for Japan 1944–45* (2007).

It is a fascinating speculation, how events might have evolved if the U.S. and its Philippines dependency had been excluded from Japanese war plans in December 1941; had Tokyo confined itself to occupying British Malaya and Burma, along with the Dutch East Indies. Roosevelt would certainly have wished to confront Japanese aggression and enter the war – the oil embargo imposed by the U.S. following Japan's advance into Indochina was the tipping factor in deciding Tokyo to fight the western powers. It remains a moot point, however, whether Congress and public sentiment would have allowed the president to declare war in the absence of a direct assault on American national interests or the subsequent German declaration of war on the United States.

First question, part a – 3 marks

What key points are made in Source B regarding US policy towards Japan up to December 1941?

TOK

In small groups investigate current inter-state tensions. How has the global community responded? Which nation seems to be the aggressor? Explore if the UN has responded, has there been a crisis or issue referred to at the Security Council and was there a UN resolution? Feedback your findings to the class. Consider the international response to Japan's action up to 1941. As a class, debate the extent to which we learn from history.

What was the reaction of the USA to the attack on Pearl Harbor?

The attack on Pearl Harbor united the American people for a war against Japan. Congress agreed to Roosevelt's request for a Declaration of War on 8 December with only one dissenting vote. This was wonderful news for Churchill who confidently remarked:

Hitler's fate was sealed. Mussolini's fate was sealed. As for the Japanese, they would be ground to powder. All the rest was merely the application of overwhelming force.

Class discussion

Some historians have suggested that Churchill and Jiang had both gambled on the USA entering the war in Europe and the Pacific. Both leaders aimed to hold out until US military and economic force would win the global war. From the evidence in this Chapter, how far do you agree that this was Jiang's position?

ATL Thinking and social skills

President Roosevelt's speech to the United States Congress on 8 December, 1941

Yesterday, December 7, 1941 – a date which will live in infamy – the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at peace with that nation and, at the solicitation of Japan, was still in conversation with the government and its emperor looking toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific.

Indeed, one hour after Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in Oahu, the Japanese ambassador to the United States and his colleagues delivered to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent American message. While this reply stated that it seemed useless to continue the existing diplomatic negotiations, it contained no threat or hint of war or armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii from Japan makes it obvious that the attack was deliberately planned many days or even weeks ago. During the intervening time, the Japanese government has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.

The attack yesterday on the Hawaiian islands has caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. Very many American lives have been lost. In addition, American ships have been reported torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday, the Japanese government also launched an attack against Malaya.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Hong Kong.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked Guam.

Last night, Japanese forces attacked the Philippine Islands.

Last night, the Japanese attacked Wake Island.

This morning, the Japanese attacked Midway Island.

Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of

yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications to the very life and safety of our nation.

As commander in chief of the Army and Navy, I have directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Always will we remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people in their righteous might will win through to absolute victory.

I believe I interpret the will of the Congress and of the people when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost, but will make very certain that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again.

Hostilities exist. There is no blinking at the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

With confidence in our armed forces – with the unbounding determination of our people – we will gain the inevitable triumph – so help us God.

I ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December 7, a state of war has existed between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

<http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/franklin-delano-roosevelt/pearl-harbor-speech-december-8-1941.php>

Question

In pairs examine the key points made by President Roosevelt in his response to the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

You can also watch Roosevelt's speech here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IK8gYGg0dkE>

See an annotated draft of part of the speech at <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/day-of-infamy/images/infamy-address-1.gif>

Listen to the radio address here: <http://www.archives.gov/education/lessons/day-of-infamy/images/infamy-radio-address.wav>



Full document question: USA's actions with regard to Japan, 1930–41

Source A

Memorandum handed by Secretary of State Henry Stimson to the Japanese ambassador in Washington on 22 September 1931:

This situation [in Manchuria] is of concern, morally, legally and politically to a considerable number of nations. It is not exclusively a matter of concern to Japan and China. It brings into question at once the meaning of certain provisions of agreements, such as the Nine-Power Treaty of February 6, 1922, and the Kellogg-Briand Pact.

The American Government is confident that it has not been the intention of the Japanese Government to create or to be a party to the creation of a situation which brings the applicability of treaty provisions into consideration. The American Government does not wish to be hasty in formulating its conclusions or in taking a position. However, the American Government feels that a very unfortunate situation exists, which no doubt is embarrassing to the Japanese Government. It would seem that the responsibility for determining the course of events with regard to the ending of this situation rests largely upon Japan ...

Source B

A US cartoon from 1938 by Clifford Kennedy Berryman (Laocoon refers to a classical Roman statue on which this is based).



Source C

Stimson speaking in 1947 about America's response to Japan's action in Manchuria.

What happened after World War One was that we lacked the courage to enforce the authoritative decision of the international world. We agreed with the Kellogg-Briand pact that aggressive war must end. We renounced it and we condemned those who might use it. But it was a moral condemnation only. We thus did not reach the second half of the question – what will you do with an aggressor when you catch him? If we had reached it, we should easily have found the right answer, but that answer escaped us for it implied a duty to catch the criminal and such a choice meant war. Our offence was thus that of the man who passed by on the other side.

Source D

Herbert P. Bix, an American historian writing in an academic book *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2000).

The massacres [of Nanjing] and the sinking of the USS Panay were neither quickly forgotten, nor forgiven – either in China or in the United States ... In the depression-racked United States, press reports of the massacres and the sinking of the Panay received rare front-page attention. The Asian news momentarily raised international tensions, stimulating a wave of anti-Japanese, pro-Chinese sentiment that never entirely abated. Since the late nineteenth century, Americans had tended to view China not only as a market to be exploited but also as a proper field for the projection of their idealism and essential goodness in foreign relations. President Roosevelt's refusal to impose sanctions against the vulnerable Japanese economy came under criticism from a new movement to boycott the sale of imported Japanese goods.

First question, part a – 3 marks

According to Stimson in Source A, why should the USA not directly intervene in the Manchurian crisis?



First question, part b – 2 marks

What is the message of Source B with regard to the USA's isolationist position?

Second question – 4 marks

With reference to origin, purpose and content assess the values and limitations of Source C for historians studying the reasons for the USA's isolationist position in the 1930s.

Third question – 6 marks

Compare and contrast the view expressed in Source A and Source C regarding the USA's response to the Manchurian crisis?

Fourth question – 9 marks

Using the sources and your own knowledge examine the reasons for the USA's change of attitude towards Japan between 1931 and 1941.

ATL Thinking skills

Here are wider questions that you could get for a fourth question in the source paper. Using the information and sources in this chapter, discuss each question with a partner, setting out your arguments for and against. What sources in this chapter could you use to help you answer each question?

1 "The League of Nation's failure to take stronger action over the Manchurian crisis encouraged the Japanese to go further in its expansionist policy." To what extent do you agree with this statement?

- 2 Examine the importance of the actions of the West in determining Japan's actions between 1931 and 1941.
- 3 To what extent did events in China contribute to Japan's expansionist policy between 1931 and 1941?
- 4 Discuss the reasons for the changes in US policy towards Japan between 1931 and 1941.

Source help and hints

A cartoon published in *Outlook*, a US Magazine, in 1931.

**First question, part b – 2 marks**

(See page 61.)

What is the message of Source B concerning Japan's actions in Manchuria?

Examiner's hint: Note the symbolism being used in the cartoon – always use your contextual knowledge to help you interpret a source. Here the gateway to Manchuria is not only showing Japan going into China, it also suggests that Japan is violating the "open door" principle as well as the Kellogg-Briand pact.