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Background to the Pacific War: The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis of 1933–1938

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separate volume, and therefore not mentioned here, it could provide even more striking examples of the importance of historical studies in the renewal of Church life. The Church, as a living and continuing organism must always renew herself through a return to the sources of her being. But for such a return to be authentic, it must be based on sound historical knowledge, of the type represented in this volume.

JOHN N. SCHUMACHER

BACKGROUND TO THE PACIFIC WAR

THE UNITED STATES AND THE FAR EASTERN CRISIS OF 1933-1938. From the Manchurian Incident through the Initial Stage of the Undeclared Sino-Japanese War. By Dorothy Borg. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. 674 pp. Bibliography. Notes. Index.

On 7 July 1937, Japanese troops conducting field maneuvers near the Marco Polo Bridge, thirteen kilometers from Peiping, clashed with soldiers of General Sung Che-yuan's 29th Army. The Chinese and the Japanese, as usual, reported different versions of how the shooting started. But Joseph C. Grew, United States Ambassador to Japan, was not unduly alarmed—the incident was another irritant in Sino-Japanese relations, but unlikely to assume crisis proportions.

By 31 July, however, the Japanese were in control of Tientsin and by this time Grew had revised his initial assessment of the Marco Polo Bridge Affair. In concluding one of his reports to the State Department, he wrote: "I should like to feel that history will regard the record of American action in this most critical and pregnant period in Far Eastern affairs as exhaustive, constantly helpful, and impartially correct (298).

History has been less than kind to Ambassador Grew and his colleagues. Whatever the merits of American diplomacy in the 1930's may have been, it was apparently not effective enough. It is easy to assume that the failure to prevent war was the failure of the diplomats. This is, of course, to oversimplify matters. The efforts of the diplomats must be assessed in the light of the limits that historical circumstances impose upon the operations of diplomacy. Equipped with a knowledge of both the diplomatic record as well as the historical framework,¹ Doro-

¹ U.S. Far Eastern diplomacy also formed the burden of an earlier work, *American Policy and the Chinese Revolution, 1925-1928* (New York: The American Institute of Pacific Relations and the Macmillan Co., 1947).

thy Borg undertakes the task of evaluating the American performance during the crucial and exceedingly complex period of the mid-1930's in her latest book *The United States and the Far Eastern Crisis, 1933-1938*.

This monograph is No. 14 in the Harvard East Asian series published by the East Asian Research Center at Harvard University. The study is based primarily on the published and unpublished papers in the State Department files. With the wealth of materials at her disposal, Borg strikes a fine balance between a blow-by-blow account of each diplomatic maneuver and a broad summary of foreign policy trends. A judicious sampling of contemporary editorial opinion places the development of American foreign policy against the background of domestic politics.

Borg's objective is to present the events of the 30's as they were seen at the time by American statesmen and diplomats. There is little attempt to analyze the Japanese assessment of events and the degree to which they were influenced by American decisions. The narrowness of the perspective is more than compensated for by the insights it allows into the personalities of the human agents involved. The skillful use of diaries, memoirs, and personal correspondence transforms what otherwise could have easily developed into a dreary calendar of documents into the intensely human story of men caught in the painful process of having to make up their minds.

What characterized American foreign policy in the Far East from 1933 to 1938 was, according to Borg, an unusual degree of passivity. She points out that throughout the mid-1930's American policy was not to support China against Japan, but to maintain peace between Japan and the United States. To secure this objective, the Roosevelt administration might have adopted any of three methods: appeasement, deterrence, or inaction. The administration, according to Borg, chose the policy of inaction and maintained this policy even after the conflict between China and Japan had escalated into a war.

This policy of inaction or non-involvement was pursued with singular fidelity. The willingness to conciliate Japan only stopped short of any move implying American approval of Japan's policies. Thus, Hull consistently opposed Japanese proposals for any joint political declaration because it might be interpreted as "moral endorsement by the United States of Japan's action" (97). In spite of this reservation however, it remains quite difficult not to identify what Borg calls a policy of inaction as a policy of appeasement. Certainly, the United States showed herself willing to go a long way to reduce the risk of war with Japan. She was willing to dissociate herself with

the League of Nations. She was willing to endanger Anglo-American solidarity in Asia. She was even willing to abandon her Pacific possessions without adequate defenses.

In spite of rapid changes in the international situation during the mid-30's, American policy remained remarkably consistent, even static. The American response to the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war in 1937 was limited to expressions of concern. British proposals for joint Anglo-American efforts at mediation were politely, if somewhat circuitously, rejected. The Powers, Britain in particular, and a number of American Foreign Service officers were awakening to the inadequacies of a non-involvement policy. But the administration remained wary of any plans for collective action, especially one that would go beyond moral censure. Borg wonders whether the administration, in its concern to avoid conflict with Japan, might not have overrated revolutionist opposition to collective action "while overlooking important manifestations of internationalist support" (539).

At the Brussels Conference, the roles which the United States and the Powers played in the Manchurian crisis were curiously reversed. England, France, and Russia expressed to the United States their willingness to support sanctions against Japan. But they would go no farther than the United States was prepared to go. The alarm manifested by the Powers over the Far Eastern situation led Roosevelt to comment that "some of the great powers with territorial interests in the Far East were behaving like 'scared rabbits'" (421). The American attitude in general, and Roosevelt's remark in particular drew a rejoinder from the French Premier: "the Premier said that it was quite true that France and England and the other democracies were behaving like 'scared rabbits' but so nearly as he could see 'the rabbit which was behaving in the most scared manner since there was no gun pointed towards it was the United States'" (421).

Herbert Feis claims (*The Road to Pearl Harbor*: Princeton University Press, 1950) that the Brussels Conference provided the last good chance to work out a stable settlement of the Sino-Japanese conflict. He implies that the proper action then might have prevented the Pacific war. It is possible to argue, however, that firm action at Brussels would only have pushed Japan into the arms of Nazi Germany and, thus, only hastened the outbreak of war in the Pacific. In any event, it would seem, from Borg's account, that the tragedy of Pearl Harbor was not American failure to prevent war but American unpreparedness to fight it.

It is difficult, even with the benefit of hindsight, to see how American diplomacy, by itself, could have preserved peace in the Paci-

fic. Power was, after all, what counted in the calculus of those who controlled events in Japan. In the last analysis, the choice of war or peace cannot be taken away from the would-be aggressor. It is always possible, as Grew pointed out, for a state to commit "what might well amount to national 'hara kiri' in a mistaken conception of patriotism" (116). For this reason, Grew always maintained that the tactful conduct of day-to-day diplomacy be supported by military preparedness:

Theodore Roosevelt enunciated the policy "Speak softly but carry a big stick." If our diplomacy in the Far East is to achieve favorable results, and if we are to reduce the risk of an eventual war with Japan to a minimum, that is the only way to proceed. Such a war may be unthinkable, and so it is, but the spectre of it is always present and will be present for some time to come. It would be criminally short-sighted to discard it from our calculations....again, and yet again. I urge that our own country be adequately prepared to meet all eventualities in the Far East (117).

At about the same time that Grew was thus memorializing Washington, Stanley Hornback was outlining to the Secretary of State his views regarding the American posture in the Far East:

That which should be the policy of the United States with regard to the Far East can readily be summed up in one sentence: a) to act with justice and with sympathy, as a 'good neighbor'... b) to speak softly; and c) to carry a big stick (117).

In pursuing the 'good neighbor policy,' however, the administration apparently gave little thought to the possibility that Japan might in time refuse to tolerate the United States as a neighbor. Throughout the mid-1930's, the United States spoke softly. But because she failed to provide herself with the big stick, her words failed to carry very much weight. It should be a source of comfort to the victims of American unpreparedness in World War II that in today's current crises, the American desire for peace does not impair her readiness for war.

EDILBERTO DE JESUS, JR.

FATHER DE LA COSTA ON NATIONALISM AND LITERATURE

THE BACKGROUND OF NATIONALISM AND OTHER ESSAYS.

By Horacio de la Costa S.J., Manila: Solidaridad Publishing House, 1965. x, 89 pp.

The new publishing house and bookshop on Padre Faura Street, owned and managed by Mr. and Mrs. Francisco Sionil Jose, is named after the well-known patriotic newspaper for which Rizal and the Filipino patriots in Spain wrote their essays. To judge from its