



graphic: Peter Veres

War Against Asia

The War Against Asia was originally driven by the needs of New England trading corporations. In their unincorporated form these businesses had traded with China and other areas of Asia even before the American Revolution. In the first half of the 1800s trade with Asia grew and American merchants increasingly assumed the corporate form to conduct trade.

Much of Asia was already colonized by European powers by 1800. China, the most important US trading partner in Asia, was open to US trade. But Japan was not; it had become an isolationist country back in the 1600s. The war to rip off Mexican land in 1846 and the subsequent entry of California into the United States highlighted the importance of Asian trade routes. The US Navy sailed to Japan in 1853, starting a war that continues (in Iraq and Afghanistan) to this day. Japan, at gunpoint, signed the Treaty of Kanagawa, allowing US merchants (corporations) to trade in Hakodate and Shimoda.

While Japan, in response, modernized at a furious pace, a different corporation, the Sugar Trust, demanded and got a war to seize Spanish colonies that specialized in growing cane sugar. In addition to Cuba and Puerto Rico, the Philippines were declared a colony of the United States in 1898. The local Filipino democracy movement fought for several years. Thousands of American soldiers and hundreds of thousands of Filipinos, many of them civilian women and children, were killed in the struggle.

China was not neglected. The US navy and troops helped the European powers control Chinese ports in the late 1800s, and supplied troops to put down the attempt (Boxer Rebellion) in 1900 of the Chinese to regain independence.

The use of military might to control economic resources came to a peak in World War II. While some Chinese struggled unsuccessfully to evict foreign nations, the Japanese followed a path copied from industrialized, imperial Western powers. Japan grabbed northern China. The US controlled Chiang Kai-shek, who claimed to control most of the rest of China. After Germany invaded Poland in 1939, Japan offered to enter the war against Germany, on the side

of the US and Great Britain. But the US and Britain believed that Asians should be subjugated, not allowed to become rival imperial powers. They demanded that Japan withdraw from China. They imposed an embargo on Japan which would cripple industry. In 1941 the Roosevelt regime issued the Hull Ultimatum, which was essentially a declaration of war on Japan (unless the Japanese withdrew from China). Despite the fact that there was war in Europe but not yet in the Pacific, President Roosevelt moved a battle fleet to Hawaii where it would be ready to strike at Japan. The Japanese were able to strike first and disable much of the fleet at the Battle of Pearl Harbor.

When the Japanese had clearly lost the war, but had not yet surrendered, Democratic President Truman committed the most horrendous war crime in world history, the purposeful mass destruction of the civilians at Hiroshima and Nagasaki using atomic bombs.

US corporations entered their heyday after World War II, masters of the world. But already Asians were fighting to evict the occupying powers. The communists were able to evict Chiang Kai-shek from China in 1949, even though he had received massive amounts of military aid from the US. The Vietnamese evicted France in 1954, only to find themselves invaded by the United States in 1964.

Many corporations in the military-industrial complex benefited from the Vietnam War, World War II, and other phases of the war. More important, war is about protecting the corporate system in general. Nations that do not agree with the corporate agenda are perceived as dangerous; pretexts have always been found to attack them. But adopting the corporate agenda can also be dangerous for a nation, as Japanese history illustrates.

Fast forwarding to the present, the United States War Against Asia continues in Afghanistan and Iraq.

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