

The soviet japanese neutrality pact history essay



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On April 13, 1941, an agreement was signed by the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) and the Empire of Japan. The impact of this agreement was long reaching in its effect on the nations directly involved to make war, as well as on other nations as the second global war of the 20th Century engulfed the world. The signatories to the pact, Japan and the Soviet Union, each viewed the other with hostility, distrust and suspicion having faced off in a prior conflict in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05, which was ended by the Portsmouth Treaty, the terms of which left the Soviets embittered, over the loss of the southern half of Sakhalin. Additionally, the Russians were stunned by the loss of their navy ships at Port Arthur by a surprise Japanese attack in February 1904, wiping out Russia's Pacific Fleet. " The defeat of 1905 at Japan's hands had never been forgotten by Russians, whether Tsarist or Soviet..."[1]Japan emerged as the dominant force in East Asia, even though the war ended through a negotiated settlement rather than an outright military victory. Misgivings were set aside and both Japan and the USSR found good reasons to agree to a pact: The Soviets hoped to ensure against the possibility of a Japanese attack from the east as Stalin kept a watchful eye on German movements and conquests in the west that were moving the Nazi juggernaut ever closer to USSR's border. Japan, on the other hand had ambitious expansionist plans for South East Asia's resources which were desperately needed to continue building their war machine and Japan did not want to be forced to expend troops guarding against any Russian moves across China. Thus, both nations, wary of each other, signed an agreement that each knew they would break if and when the time was right.

The pact between the Soviet Union and Japan, a simple, straightforward document was signed in Moscow on April 13, 1941, by representatives of the two nations: Yosuke Matsuoka and Yoshitsuga Tateka for Japan and Vyacheslav Mikhailovich Molotov for the Soviet Union. The document contained four short articles. Article One avowed that both parties agreed to maintain " peaceful and friendly relations;"[2]Article Two stated that if one party became embroiled in hostilities with a third party the other party to this agreement would remain neutral; Article Three directed that the agreement would come into force on the day of ratification by both parties and remain in effect for five years. If neither party denounced the pact in the fourth year, it would automatically be prolonged for the next five years, and Article Four stated that the ratification should take place as quickly as possible and the instruments of ratification exchanged in Tokyo, as soon as possible thereafter.

In addition to the main pact, a side agreement was reached between Japan and the Soviet Union. Each pledged to respect the " territorial integrity and inviolability"[3]of Manchukuo for Japan and the Mongolia People's Republic for the Soviet Union. In essence this was a swap of territories in which each side wished to maintain control. This exchange assured the Soviets that a vast expanse of land would buffer Russia's eastern borders and that Japan would not be sending troops across Mongolia into the Soviet's back door. Japan received the assurance that the Soviets respected Japanese hegemony in Manchukoa; both nations were playing for time.

In 1941, the relatively new Soviet Union, roughly 25 years old, was still weak after the bloody revolution of 1917. Internal politics had been as bloody as <https://assignbuster.com/the-soviet-japanese-neutrality-pact-history-essay/>

the revolution itself and Josef Stalin, " the man who turned the Soviet Union from a backward country into a world superpower," although at unimaginable human costs,[4]believed he had scored a great advantage for his nation with the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact of 1939, in which the Soviets and the Nazis agreed to carve up Poland and leave each other alone. On September 27, 1940, however, Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact which strengthened Japan's power in the Pacific. Stalin could not risk a possible Japanese advance, and the Pact between his nation and Japan afforded the Soviets protection in the east, ensuring that Japan would not undertake a march through China...at that time. Stalin was well aware that his nation could not fight a two front war, and although he hoped that Germany would not attack in spite of the warnings of his best military men, Stalin kept a wary eye on the Nazi invasion of small Slavic nations west of the Russian border. Unlike the Soviets who were pursuing defense actions to protect their borders, the Japanese were formulating offensive battle plans for invasion.

At the turn of the 20th Century, Manchuria loomed large in the history of Soviet-Japanese relations. Both nations had interests in Manchuria. For Japan, Manchuria represented a land of much coveted natural resources as well as an expanse of land that if, in Russian hands, represented " a dagger pointed at the heart of Japan." [5]The ensuing 1904-1905 Russo-Japanese war ended with the Portsmouth Treaty of September 1905, the terms of which were sufficiently favorable to Japan, except that Russia refused to pay reparations. Thus, the cost of the war, without any reparation from Russia, left the Japanese people shouldering a heavy tax burden and caused much

anger and unrest, as well as anti-American sentiments because America and the Japanese leadership " failed to win an indemnity and other concessions for Japan." [6] Needing to take action to ease the hardships of its poor economy the strategy became to invade, occupy and colonize Asia for their much needed resources.

Japan's actions in the Pacific, however, were overshadowed by the drama of Germany's lightning strikes and successes in Europe, while the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy, fueled Japan's drive into Asia because they understood that the Pact " reduced the Nazi-Soviet pact to a dead letter." [7] The Neutrality Pact with the Soviets, therefore, meant that Japan would be free to move all of its forces away from mainland China and into actions to take British, French and Dutch possessions in Asia. [8] This neutrality enhanced Japan's war-making ability because when Matsuoka Yosuke went to Moscow from Berlin in 1941 to renew the treaty, " he knew that Germany intended to go to war with the USSR," [9] and a war on Russia's western front ensured Stalin's attention would remain focused in Europe. At the same time, however, Japan's relations with the United States had deteriorated badly and Japan feared an oil embargo by the United States. With the Neutrality Pact protecting Japan from any actions by the Soviets, the Japanese were able to focus their attentions on negotiating with the U. S. and planning military strategy and tactics for the Pacific. When the negotiations failed to produce the desired result, Japan chose a course of action similar to the one they took in 1904: a surprise attack; this time against the U. S. Fleet at Pearl Harbor.

By 1943, the momentum of the war turned from the Axis powers to the Allies. Japan began to view the Soviets with some trepidation for " as long as Germany and the USSR were locked in a death grip, Japan could concentrate her forces against the United States." [10] With the defeat of the German 6th Army on the Volga in February 1943, the war between the Nazis and the Soviets turned in the Russian's favor. The Japanese attempted to extend the Pact with the Soviets in order to ensure their ability to focus on fighting the Americans but the Soviets were no longer as anxious as the Japanese to extend the treaty. " In October 1943, Molotov had told the head of the US Military Mission...that the USSR would join the war in the Pacific as soon as Germany was defeated." [11] Thus the advantages of the Soviet-Japanese Neutrality Pact tilted in favor of the Soviet need for time and concentration on their European border. The Japanese somewhat underestimated how the Americans would react to the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and defeat and devastation in 1945 was their punishment for that miscalculation.

Had the Soviets and Japanese not signed the Neutrality Pact, Hitler's army might have had more success in Russia because Stalin would have been compelled to keep troops on the eastern borders. Japan might not have been able to swallow up South East Asia with such success because they would not have committed all of their troops to the invasions of the South-East Asian territories. If the Soviets and the Japanese had not signed the Neutrality Pact, the strategies and tactics no doubt would have been altered, the end result of the war, however, would have been the same.