
CANADA AND THE FAR EAST IN 1939

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Mackenzie King grew apprehensive as he listened to the B.B.C. radio broadcast of Big Ben striking the midnight hour to announce the arrival of 1939. "I thought deeply of the significance of the strokes of that bell," he wrote in his diary,

of what had been saved to the world of anguish, this year, but even more of the possibilities of the New Year. The despatches I read this afternoon speak of Germany likely to force war because of an interior condition and of the possibility of Italy doing the same. It is all part of the madness of these dictatorships with their false doctrines and of the economic nationalism which has destroyed the friendly intercourse of nations, and helped to substitute international hate for international goodwill. One can only pray that in the Providence of God, war may be averted in the new Year.'

The Canadian prime minister had good reason to feel pessimistic about the chances for peace in the coming year. Everywhere he looked the world seemed in turmoil, or close to it. The menacing situation in Europe remained uppermost in his mind, of course. But the Far East, too, concerned Mackenzie King. As he explained to a visitor in late January after being told that Japan had turned aside overtures from Italy and Germany to form a military alliance: "I don't trust Japan. I think there is some subterfuge here. I am sure all three have had an understanding from the beginning." By early September he believed that Japan might even try to strike at Canada. "What may the Japanese not do in the Orient!" he exclaimed in his diary. "There are raiders and submarines on both the Atlantic and the Pacific coasts, and pocket cruisers. I have no doubt that we shall have some bombing of our coast and possibly some inland bombing as well."³

In many ways, Japan's pursuit of a "New Order" in the Far East forced a larger dilemma on Canada than the one created by European circumstances. On the one hand, policy makers in Ottawa were well aware that

Canada had limited interests in the Far East, and even more aware that these were not worth fighting over.⁴ On the other hand, they realized that Far Eastern developments (and their response to them) could have a disastrous impact on Canada's position between Britain and the United States. For, unlike the situation in Europe, where Anglo-American relations generally harmonized, in the Far East relations between Britain and the United States were characterized by a growing rivalry.⁵ The danger of becoming entangled in an Anglo-American rift was all too obvious to that small group of men in Ottawa mindful of the impact that diverging American and British interests had on Canadian foreign policy during the Far Eastern Crisis in 1932.⁶ Worse still was the possibility of getting dragged into a war with Japan either through the United States or Britain and the potential threat that posed to national unity. This had been apparent at least since the mid-1930's.⁷ It became something of a reality in 1939 because, while a crisis erupted over the Danzig Corridor in Poland during the summer, a crisis of equal magnitude raged over the British Concession at the Chinese treaty port of Tientsin. Canada came close to facing the prospect of entering a war against Japan instead of against Germany.

At the heart of Canada's Far Eastern dilemma lay the "undeclared" Sino-Japanese war, which had been escalating since its outbreak in July 1937. By the beginning of 1939 the Japanese occupied more than 1,500,000 square kilometres of Chinese territory and they had claimed some 800,000 Chinese lives. Through a series of earlier offensives, the Imperial Army had captured key strategic centres in China, notably Canton and Hankow, and had forced the National Government of Chiang Kai-shek to retreat to Chungking. Then, in November and December 1938, the Japanese government issued a number of statements calling for a "New Order" in East Asia. This was followed by a triple-pronged policy designed to destroy the Chinese war effort by wooing the Germans into converting the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact into a military alliance against the Soviet Union (in the belief that by neutralizing a potential Soviet threat from the north, the Japanese war effort would somehow receive a boost); by exploiting the growing rift within the Kuomintang between Chiang and Wang Ching-wei; and by seeking to undermine Chinese currency. None of these measures worked. The Germans wanted a military alliance that was directed at all powers instead of merely against the Soviet Union. Wang defected and began negotiations with the Japanese for setting up a puppet government in the occupied territory, but they dragged on until 1940. The attempt to undermine Chinese currency was similarly thwarted by British and American stabilization loans to China.

Ultimately, the failure to achieve these objectives only hardened the Japanese determination to bring China to its knees. Throughout 1939 Japan sought to tighten its hold on the occupied areas and to make a more concerted attack on the ever-faltering Chinese currency. Initial moves in this direction were made with the seizure of Hainan Island off the South China Coast in February and the prohibition of North Chinese currency (fapi) in March. This was accompanied by new and more threatening gestures towards Britain, the one country that Japan began to view as the chief obstacle to its ambitions in the Far East. The aim was to drive a wedge between the United States and Britain and then to force the British into a Far Eastern "Munich" by exerting pressure on the International Settlements at Shanghai, Amoy, and the island of Kulangsu, and especially on the British Concession at Tientsin.⁸

These developments were closely watched in Canada, but Ottawa could do little to influence their outcome.⁹ In early January, O.D. Skelton, the under-secretary of state for external affairs, and Mackenzie King's trusted advisor, pointed out that the "Japanese invasion of China has not yet been checked. Practically all the northern and eastern territories, and particularly the industrial and commercial centres, have been conquered." Although he believed that the likelihood of British or American military intervention remained small as long as Japan did not threaten their vital interests, he could perceive a hardening in the attitude of both London and Washington in the direction of a "definite possibility of an attempt to use economic weapons."¹⁰ So far as Skelton was concerned, the imposition of economic sanctions against Japan would lead to war and there was no sign that the Americans or the British were willing to give each other a military commitment before applying sanctions.¹¹ He wanted the Canadian government to remain neutral and to avoid pursuing any policy that could provoke Japan. As was usually the case, Skelton expressed particular concern over British policy and the limited options left to Canada:

It is very illuminating as to the forces behind much of British foreign policy to note how aloof the British Government was when it was only a question of rescuing China from murder and loot, and how interested she is becoming when it is a question of saving the trade of British firms in Shanghai which hitherto have been very pro-Japanese and contemptuous of China. Meanwhile Canada is supposed never to think of her own interests in foreign policy.¹²

The under-secretary may have been overestimating the political influence of British trading firms, but his observation regarding the threat to British interests was correct. In late January Hugh Keenleyside, the Department of External Affairs' resident expert on Far Eastern matters, reported that the Japanese prime minister, Baron Hiranuma, and his foreign minister, Arita Hachiro, had recently made statements which "constitute one of the most significant contributions to the history of Japanese foreign policy since Peary's [sic] 'Black Ships' ended Japanese seclusion in 1854." In part of his statement, Baron Hiranuma said: "As for those who fail to understand to the end and hereafter persist in the opposition to Japan, we have no other alternative than to exterminate them." When the Japanese Foreign Office was asked whether this threat applied only to the Chinese, an official replied that "the translation is correct as it stands."¹³ Then, following the Japanese occupation of Hainan Island, Keenleyside warned that "[I]f the Japanese retain control of the Island and develop it as a Japanese naval base it will finally seal the doom of Hong Kong and it will be a direct threat to the usefulness of Singapore ... This action by the Japanese will completely alter the strategic situation in the Eastern and Southern Pacific." So far as Keenleyside was concerned, the threat to Britain was obvious and so, too, was the potential for war.¹⁴ It is interesting to note that Britain's Dominions Office, perhaps fearing Ottawa would use the Far Eastern situation in order to escape European commitments, downplayed the Japanese seizure of Hainan. Within the Foreign Office and the Admiralty, however, officials expressed the view that Japan's actions were part of a long-range plan to absorb Borneo and Malaya and that the annexation of Hainan had been undertaken at the instigation of Germany and Italy.¹⁵

Mackenzie King, for his part, sought to remain aloof from Far Eastern affairs. His government had adopted an official policy of neutrality shortly after the outbreak of the Sino-Japanese war and he was determined to keep it that way. The prime minister's uppermost fear was that Canada would get dragged into an Anglo-Japanese war (or worse, into a simultaneous Anglo-German-Japanese war) without American support. But he was also concerned about the possible implications for Canada if the United States and Japan became involved in a conflict. He therefore did all that he could to prevent Canada from being placed in a situation where it could be held responsible for creating an "incident." For example, when the British Columbia members of the House of Commons tried to push through an act to exclude Japanese immigrants from Canada, he recorded in his diary that he warned them of "the position in Japan and the embarrassment which

the passing of any exclusion measures would be to the British Government and the danger of the reaction to the parts of the Empire.”¹⁶ The exclusionist policy was subsequently blocked in the House, to the great relief of the prime minister and, indeed, the British.¹⁷

Mackenzie King's acute sensitivity over Canadian involvement in Far Eastern matters was further demonstrated by an episode involving Canada's chargé d'affaires at the Tokyo Legation, E. D'Arcy McGreer, and his wife, shortly after the Japanese seizure of Hainan Island in February. Lady Craigie, wife of British Ambassador Sir Robert Craigie, was gathering the wives of other diplomats together once a week to roll bandages for wounded Japanese soldiers. One Japanese newspaper quoted her as saying that she thought it was the duty of all women stationed in Tokyo to work hand-in-hand with the Japanese women because Japan was facing an emergency.¹⁸ Recognizing the obvious attempt to mollify the Japanese and unwilling to compromise Canada's neutrality, McGreer objected to his wife taking any part in the operation. Offended by McGreer's attitude, Craigie stopped by the Canadian Legation to tell him that “when I decided that it was quite correct to hold these meetings, you also might have known that it was quite correct.” McGreer explained that if the Canadian public caught wind of the situation, his government would be embarrassed. Skelton certainly approved of McGreer's stand and condemned Craigie for having “the gall to call at the Legation to voice his disapproval of the fact that Mrs. McGreer had not been attending these meetings.” Mackenzie King was even more upset, and wrote a personal note explaining that he not only approved of McGreer's position “but would disapprove either he or his wife taking any action which in either *Canada* or Japan might give rise to misunderstanding as to Canada's complete neutrality ... in this Sino-Japanese war.”¹⁹

Mackenzie King believed that he had some good reasons for pursuing a policy that would prevent Canada from being placed in a position where it could be held responsible for creating an international incident. International incidents could lead to war and he had no desire to see national unity upset by Canadian involvement in any Far Eastern crisis. Moreover, as he noted sourly in his diary, a war in Asia was “not worth the lives of white men for ‘Business Interests’.”²⁰ He also believed that Canada might be attacked if a war involving either Britain or the United States and Japan broke out in the Pacific. On more than one occasion he expressed the view that “Japan was very dangerous” and that Canada “might be faced with a world situation at any time” which necessitated better defences on the west coast.²¹

In fact, Canada military authorities had been expressing increasing concern over the defence of British Columbia since the termination of the Anglo-Japanese alliance in the early 1920s and especially since the Far Eastern crisis of 1931-33. By 1936 they were warning that "the liability of direct attack on Canada by Japanese forces has become a matter requiring urgent consideration and action in view of the menacing situation which continues to develop in the Far East."²² The problem attracting particular attention was the maintenance of Canadian neutrality in the event of an American-Japanese war, a problem that was further complicated by Canadian obligations under the terms of the Anglo-American Treaty of 1871. The treaty gave Canada sovereignty over sections of the Straits of Juan de Fuca, but Japan might argue that these were international waters. If Canada failed to prevent the Japanese from entering or utilizing those areas, the United States could respond by using their armed forces to protect their interests.²³ The services argued that Canada's geographical proximity to and commercial relations with the United States would leave the country open to charges of non-neutrality by either the Americans or the Japanese, which could lead to a situation where the United States would move arms and men into Canada in order to protect American security, thereby violating Canadian sovereignty. "As Canada is, for practical purposes, incapable of resisting such a United States invasion there would be no course open except the humiliating one of accepting the violation of her sovereign rights," warned military officials.²⁴

Mackenzie King agreed with his military advisors, especially after the American president, F.D. Roosevelt, informed him of "having [in] a number of leading Senators and asking them the question, what would the United States do if Japan attacked British Columbia. The agreement being instantly, why, of course, we would go in and help to prevent her getting a foothold."²⁵ His apprehension was further fuelled by Roosevelt's 1938 declaration at Kingston, Ontario, that "the United States will not stand idly by if the domination of Canadian soil is threatened by any other empire."²⁶ True, Mackenzie King publicly spoke of Canada's "obligations as good friendly neighbour," and said that "should the occasion ever arise, enemy forces should not be able to pursue their way either by land, sea or air, to the United States across Canadian territory"²⁷ Privately, however, the prime minister was perturbed by Roosevelt's "guarantee." "Roosevelt's assurance only added to our responsibilities," he recorded in his diary, "that we would have to see that our coasts were so defended that no enemy forces could operate from Canadian territory against the United States." Toward the end of January 1939 he wrote that he "pointed out to the

Cabinet that they must not mistake what the President said at the Thousand Islands Bridge; that it was not that the United States would not allow Canada to be dominated by any other Empire or country than the British. That if she had to come here and save us, the Empire being dominated, it would mean that Canada would become a part of America."²⁸

The prime minister and his military officials were by no means the only ones expressing concern over the possibility of a Japanese attack on the West Coast. In early January 1938 Dr. Chang-Lok Chen, the Chinese consul general in Ottawa, delivered a widely reported speech to the Ottawa Gyro Club in which he said that "it was folly for Canada to take the view that she was secure from all attacks, that the Monroe Doctrine would protect her or that England would always be ready to come to her rescue." Canadians, he warned, "would 'rue the day' they neglected their western defences." Similar comments were made by Thomas Wu, associate editor of the *Shing Wha Daily News* and spokesman for the Ontario Chinese Patriotic League, who added: "If anyone with an unbiased mind looks at the situation in British Columbia they can see the Japanese menace." In addition, there were inflammatory press articles blasting the state of Canadian defence.²⁹

Some allowance must be made for the fact that military authorities were seeking to use the Far Eastern situation in order to wring more money from the government for a larger defence budget and that Chinese representatives were attempting to raise more support in their fight against Japan.³⁰ Nevertheless, mounting concern over the Far East led to a secret meeting between high-ranking Canadian and American military officials in January 1938. Both sides agreed that if war broke out in the Pacific, the Japanese would conduct raids on the west coast from cruisers and aircraft carriers and the Americans believed that the Japanese would try to use the coast of British Columbia as a base for air or submarine operations.³¹ Shortly after these meetings, the Canadian General Staff produced an interim plan of coast defence.³²

By 1939 there was a genuinely held belief that a Japanese attack on Canada, however limited, was a possibility. In late January General T.V. Anderson, the chief of the General Staff, drew up a memorandum projecting "scales of attack" by Japan which ran as follows: "Occasional medium attacks, definite risk of torpedo, bomb or gas attack. Maximum of twelve aircraft from enemy cruisers, armed merchant vessels or improvised carriers."³³ Commodore P.W. Nelles, chief of the Naval Staff, and one of

those who had attended the talks with the Americans in 1938, added to this at the end of January with the comment that, though the actions of Germany must be given first consideration, "the possible actions of Japan must be taken into account." He projected Japanese attacks by "up to 2 5" [two five-inch] Cruisers, 2 Submarines, 2 Minelayers, and 2 Armed Merchantmen to attack our West Coast ports and/or trade in British Columbian waters."³⁴

As the Far Eastern situation continued to deteriorate, the probability of a war in that part of the world involving either Britain or the United States became almost as significant for the government as the European situation. Ottawa responded by giving priority status to the defence of the west coast of Canada until the summer of 1938 and by installing additional defences on the Pacific Coast, particularly in the form of artillery. Four of Canada's six destroyers were also stationed on the west coast. There was also a press campaign designed to demonstrate how well-defended British Columbia was.³⁵ These measures were rather meagre and designed to mollify public opinion more than to provide for a strong defence. For example, coastal artillery did not match the range of Japanese battleships. But throughout the 1930s the government struggled with financial exigency, and it was difficult to raise either public awareness or public support for substantive rearmament.

Increasingly frustrated by their failure to defeat China, the Japanese began exerting pressure on the international settlements and especially on the British Concession at Tientsin. After a series of minor incidents involving Chinese terrorists, a crisis broke when the Japanese blockaded the British Concession on 14 June 1939. Craigie later wrote that the crisis was like "a volcano whose sudden eruption threw into the political firmament all the pent-up feelings and animosities which had been simmering and boiling beneath the surface since Japan's invasion of China two years earlier."³⁶ The issues revolved around the circulation of North Chinese currency, the refusal of the British to hand over some fourteen million dollars of Chinese silver reserves sealed in Concession vaults, and the anti-Japanese activities carried out from the Concession by Chinese guerrillas.³⁷

The crisis had alarming implications for other parts of the world. British policy had been based on the assumption that war would break out in Europe first and then perhaps spread to the Far East. Now, as the British prime minister, Neville Chamberlain, pointed out, "it looked as though it might be the other way round: for, if we sent our fleet to Singapore to deal

with Japan, the temptation to the Axis Powers to take advantage of the situation would be almost irresistible."³⁸ From Washington, the British ambassador, Sir Ronald Lindsay, cautioned London against any action "that could be construed as a return to [a] policy of appeasement." He warned that concessions to Japan would be made at the risk of alienating the United States.³⁹ While expressing a desire to send a fleet to the Pacific, the Americans did not want to cooperate with Britain or give a guarantee of armed support in the event that Japan pushed the issue to war.

Though Ottawa remained aloof from the crisis, there was considerable concern over what could happen. In early June Lester B. Pearson, first secretary in the High Commission in Britain, had informed Ottawa of Craigie's analysis of developments in Japanese policy. The ambassador reported that Japan was attempting "to drive a wedge" between Britain and the United States. Pearson recognized that the Foreign Office did not agree with the ambassador, but he believed that there might be some truth to the allegation in view of recent Japanese approaches to the United States regarding the possibility of finding a solution to the tension in Europe.⁴⁰ Two days after the blockade of the Concession, Canada's high commissioner to London, Vincent Massey, passed on Craigie's warning that the "Japanese may have forced [the] issue at Tientsin, where United States interests are not so great, to drive a wedge between the two Governments."⁴¹ Skelton agreed. He believed that from the Japanese "standpoint the time was well chosen, with German-Polish relations strained, and the Anglo-Russian negotiations up in the air. The place was equally well chosen, as the United States has no special interest in Tientsin, and it was easier therefore to drive a wedge between Great Britain and the United States." Though Skelton did not think that the British could retaliate without American support, he began to allow for the shadowy prospect of war. "It would be ironical," he wrote to Mackenzie King, "if, after declining to take any action against Japan to save the millions of Chinese from slaughter and starvation, we should find ourselves engaged in economic or military conflict in defence of concessions established after the Opium Wars." He went on to suggest that if Canada was asked to join in some form of economic retaliation, "we would desire to obtain some assurance from Washington as to support in the event of conflict."⁴²

The type of assurance Skelton wanted from the Americans was not forthcoming. From the Washington Legation, Escott Reid reported that, although the Americans seemed to be adopting a stiffer policy, it was not working out that way in practice: non-interventionist sentiment in

Congress was growing, Congress turned down requests for funds to improve the harbour at Guam and the naval air base at Wake Island, and there was no sign that the American public would back a policy of economic sanctions with military force. Moreover, Merchant Mahoney, the chargé d'affaires at the Washington Legation, informed Ottawa that the chief of the Far Eastern Division of the State Department told him that "he did not foresee new developments in the Far Eastern policy of the United States."⁴³ In other words, the Americans would continue to sit back and await further developments. Without American support, London was forced to give Craigie a great deal of latitude to stage as graceful a withdrawal as possible. After several weeks of hard bargaining, the British had to accept the humiliating formula Craigie and the Japanese foreign minister, Arita, produced on 24 July as the basis for the negotiation of a settlement of the Tientsin crisis.⁴⁴

The British retreat came as a great disappointment to the Americans. The secretary of state, Cordell Hull, later wrote that "[I]t was disturbing in that Japan had won a victory in her never-ending quest for recognition of 'special rights,' or 'special interests,' or 'special requirements' in China."⁴⁵ On 26 July, the American government gave Japan the necessary six months' notice for the termination of the 1911 American-Japanese commercial treaty. Washington's move surprised both Tokyo and London. The British were delighted at the rebuke delivered to Japan, but they were upset because the Americans had not notified them beforehand of the decision. Craigie rightly believed that Washington's decision was "just another flash in the American pan."⁴⁶

Nevertheless, the American decision threw the British government into a quandary. The Cabinet discussed the Far Eastern situation at a series of meetings in early August and it decided to examine the possibility of abrogating the Anglo-Japanese Commercial Treaty of 1911, to which Canada was a party (it is also worth noting the foreign secretary's comment at one of these meetings that "the position in the Far East was now causing him more anxiety than the position in any other part of the world").⁴⁷ On 16 August London asked Ottawa for its views on the denunciation of the Commercial Treaty.⁴⁸

Ottawa replied to the British request on 21 August. "It has not been found possible," the telegram began, "in the brief time thus available to secure definitive consideration of the question by the Canadian Government ... While we consider it is essential for full understanding of

the situation ... we do not wish to imply that they would offset our desire to cooperate with the United Kingdom and the United States in any action which they might take, particularly so in view of the long-range interests involved." In the event, the government decided that it would stand by Britain.⁴⁹ But the question had been rather carefully considered even before the British made their request and the various discussions clearly demonstrated the limited parameters of Canadian policy. Pursuing his customary neutralist stance, Skelton wrote on 1 August: "It is not our business to offer any advice on the Tientsin negotiations at this eleventh hour, but if the negotiations break down and the British decide to follow the United States' example in denouncing the treaty, I do not suppose we could do otherwise." Nevertheless, he went on to warn that "[I]t must be borne in mind that if reprisals are made they will fall largely on Canada, and while I do not think there is any likelihood of reprisals taking a military form it is clear that if they did come in the Pacific the United Kingdom could not give any adequate support."⁵⁰

A few days later, one of Skelton's officials, Norman Robertson, pointed out that under the Canadian tariff structure Japan would revert from a "most-favoured-nation" status to the general tariff, while American and British tariff structures would not necessarily alter their trading relationship with Japan. The danger here was that Canada could be left taking "directly punitive measures against Japanese trade at a time when neither the United Kingdom nor the United States were committed to taking similar measures."⁵¹

Although Skelton and Robertson believed that Canada should follow the British, they wanted a separate Canadian denunciation which would assert Canadian independence and avoid the appearance of taking the lead. Skelton, in particular, argued that Canada "should try not to get out in front."⁵² Mackenzie King agreed, but he also feared that "with Japan, Italy and Germany together in secret conclave it is hard to believe that plans are not already made for simultaneous attacks in the Orient and Europe – a ghastly and appalling [sic] situation."⁵³ The fate of the world was in the hands of the great powers and Canadians could only hope that peace would prevail.

By the middle of August 1939, the negotiations that had been taking place between Craigie and Arita had broken down. The Foreign Office decided that it would no longer seek to conciliate Japan for fear of both alienating the United States and undermining the Chinese war effort. It

was time to take a firm stand. Chamberlain agreed. Japan "had made things impossible," he wrote, "... and we must deal with the consequences as best we can."⁵⁴ The Japanese were equally adamant, and towards the end of August it seemed almost certain that Britain would go to war with Japan.⁵⁵ The situation was saved, most ironically, by the Germans. The announcement of the Nazi-Soviet non-aggression pact on 22 August threw Japan into a state of confusion. Japanese diplomacy had been governed by the 1936 Anti-Comintern Pact and Germany's betrayal of that agreement came as a great shock. The Japanese premier resigned on 25 August, on the grounds that the emperor had been given false advice, and the Cabinet fell a few days later.

The Nazi-Soviet pact made war in Europe a certainty; it also made certain there would be no immediate expansion of the war in the Far East. Germany invaded Poland on 1 September and Britain declared war on Germany on 3 September. Canada followed suit on 10 September. On 5 September, the new Japanese government informed Britain that it would remain neutral in the European war. Meanwhile, and to the surprise of none, the United States also declared its intention to remain neutral.

Despite the fact that after 22 August most Canadian policy makers knew that a war with Germany was imminent, the Far Eastern situation continued to be a source of concern. "The world position has changed since 1914, particularly in the Pacific," cautioned O.D. Skelton. "The defence of Canada," he stressed,

should be put in the foreground. Many statements have been made in the past year or two as to the impossibility in the event of war of Canada avoiding attack. If that is so, our first business is to avert that attack. Clearly any attack will be on a minor scale, but that minor scale may be greater than our shore and off-shore defences can meet. It should be emphasized, further, that we cannot in this war ignore the Pacific as we did in the last. (We have a potential enemy, not a friend, facing us there.) There is a big job in defending our coasts.⁵⁶

Allowance must be made for the fact that Skelton, who was basically opposed to Canadian participation in the war against Germany, was attempting to concoct an iron-clad argument so that Canada could keep its European commitment small. But his observation contained more than a grain of truth. As Hugh Keenleyside pointed out in early September:

The importance of Japan as the possessor of the third largest navy in the world, as the only major power in Asia and the Western Pacific, as the home of one of the greatest merchant fleets in existence, as a strong industrial nation, as the possessor of a highly efficient army, based on a healthy population of over seventy million, and as the inveterate opponent of the U.S.S.R., (which is now apparently prepared to cooperate with Germany) can hardly be exaggerated.⁵⁷

Many Canadians believed that, as a small power with a population of barely 11 million and an almost non-existent Pacific defence system, their country presented Japan with a potentially inviting target through which it could strike at its enemies. This belief would grow over the next two years, and the eventual Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941 would send British Columbia into a state of panic and confusion that would have costly repercussions.

That Canada demonstrated some concern over the Far Eastern situation in 1939 should come as no surprise. As early as 1935 Lester Pearson, then representing Canada at the League of Nations, wrote:

It is almost platitudinous now to state that Canada's position becomes impossible if Great Britain and the United States drift apart on any major [Far Eastern] issue. Like many other platitudes, however, this one involves a fundamental truth. Canada is a British Dominion. She is also an American State. She cannot permit herself to be put in a position where she has to choose between these two destinies. Either choice would be fatal to her unity; indeed to her very existence as a State.⁵⁸

Fortunately, Canada was not placed in this position in 1939. Instead of supporting Japan's aggressive policies, Germany signed a non-aggression pact with the Soviet Union, thereby alleviating the tension in the Far East between Japan and Britain, and, at least for a time, between Britain and the United States. The Canadian government was thus spared the difficulty of having to decide whether to go to war with Japan at Britain's side and facing the problems that such a conflict would have raised in Anglo-American, Anglo-Canadian and Canadian-American relations. Nevertheless, the possibility was there in 1939, and it is well for historians to realize that Mackenzie King's government faced not one, but two, potential threats to Canadian

unity during that fateful year. If anything, this makes King's aversion to overseas commitments all the more understandable and his accomplishment of taking a united Canada into the Second World War all the greater.

NOTES

1. National Archives of Canada [hereafter NA], W.L.M. Mackenzie King Papers, Diary, 31 December 1938.
2. *Ibid.*, 30 January 1939.
3. *Ibid.*, 6 September 1939.
4. *Ibid.*, see especially 26 and 30 August 1937; and NA, Department of External Affairs Records [hereafter DEA], vol. 723, file 64 (1-2), Loring Christie Memoranda, "Note on Departmental Conference," 20 October 1937 and "Consultations on Far Eastern Situation," 21 October 1937.
5. See especially Christopher Thorne, *Allies of a Kind: The United States, Britain, and the War against Japan, 1941-1945* (London, 1978), ch. 1; and S.W. Roskill, *Naval Policy Between the Wars*, Vol. 1 (London, 1968).
6. See Donald C. Story, "Canada, the League of Nations and the Far East, 1931-33: The Cahan Incident," *International History Review*, III (April 1981), 236-55.
7. If not in the 1920's. See especially Roger Sarty, "'There will be trouble in the North Pacific': The Defence of British Columbia in the Early Twentieth Century," *BC Studies*, 61 (Spring 1984), 3-29; *Documents on Canadian External Relations* (hereafter DCER), vol. V, no. 344, 336-9, McNaughton Memorandum for Bennett, "Sino-Japanese Dispute, Possible Canadian Commitments In Respect To ...," 24 February 1934; and Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto, 1988), 179-83.
8. Bradford Lee, *Britain and the Sino-Japanese War, 1937-1939* (Stanford, 1973), 274ff; and Kyozo Sato, "Japan's Position before the Outbreak of the European War in September 1939," *Modern Asian Studies*, 14, 1 (1980), 129-43.
9. It is actually quite remarkable how much newspaper space was accorded to the Far East, especially in central Canadian newspapers. Ottawa, for its part, received regular reports on Far Eastern developments from the British government, and detailed, if somewhat dry, reports from E. D'Arcy McGreer, the chargé d'affaires at the Canadian Legation in Tokyo.
10. King Papers, vol. 211, file 2011, Skelton Memorandum, "Recent Developments in Sino-Japanese Conflict," 7 January 1939.
11. Skelton had developed this belief during the Far Eastern Crisis of 1931-1933. See James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: Appeasement and Rearmament* (Toronto, 1965), 7-8.

12. King Papers, vol. 211, file 2011, Skelton Memorandum, "Recent Developments in Sino-Japanese Conflict," 7 January 1939.
13. DEA Records, vol. 1754, file 804 (XIII), Keenleyside Memorandum, "Japanese Foreign Policy," 24 January 1939.
14. *Ibid.*, Keenleyside Memorandum, "Seizure of Hainan by the Japanese," 13 February 1939.
15. *Ibid.*, MacDonald to King, 25 February 1939; Lee, 176; and Public Record Office, Kew, England (hereafter PRO), Cabinet Records (hereafter CAB), CAB 24/284, C.P. 76(39), Halifax Memorandum, 30 March 1939.
16. King Diary, 10, 30 January 1939.
17. The British expressed more than a passing concern over this issue. See material in PRO, Foreign Office Records, FO 371/23560.
18. Tokyo *Nichi Nichi*, 16 February 1939.
19. DEA Records, vol. 794, file 467, McGreer to Skelton, 15 February 1939; McGreer to King, 11 March 1939; Skelton to King, with King's minute, 11 March 1939; King to McGreer, 16 March 1939; and McGreer to Skelton, 23 March 1939.
20. King Diary, 30 August 1937; and see also 26 August 1937.
21. *Ibid.*, see especially 11 January 1938; and 7, 22 July 1938.
22. Queen's University Archives, C.G. Powers Papers, vol. 67, file D-2000, Memorandum by the Joint Staff Committee, "An Appreciation of the Defence Problems Confronting Canada with Recommendations For the Development of the Armed Forces," 5 September 1936. This document is also reprinted in Eays, 213-22.
23. *DCER*, V, no. 344, 336-9, McNaughton Memorandum for Bennett, 24 February 1934; King Papers, vol. 124, file 913, Walter Hose, "Memorandum on Naval Policy," 30 July 1926; *ibid.*, vol. 75, ff.06411ff., Hose to King, "Memorandum on the Question of Canadian Naval Defence," n.d.
24. *DCER*, VI, no. 97, 88-99, "Appreciation of Canada's Obligations with Respect to the Maintenance of Neutrality in Event of a War between the United States of America and Japan," 14 October 1936; NA, Department of National Defence Records (hereafter DND), vol. 2505, file HQS 1066, Major B.D.C. Treatt Report, 1936; DEA Records, vol. 3429, file 1-1930/41, Hose Memorandum, "The Naval Defence of Canada," 26 August 1936.
25. King Diary, 31 July 1936.
26. It would now appear that Roosevelt was indeed troubled about the state of defence in British Columbia. The American Minister to Canada, Norman Armour, recorded in 1937 that Roosevelt said that "Canadian defenses were ... not only entirely inadequate, but almost nonexistent" and the President "felt that more should be done by the Canadian and American governments in developing a coordinated plan of defense for that important section of territory lying between northern Washington and the 'panhandle' of Alaska." (United States National Archives (hereafter

- USNA), Washington, D.C., Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, RG 84, vol. 284, box 1486, Armour Memorandum, 9 November 1937. I am indebted to Alan Mason for providing me with this reference.)
27. Quoted in Eayrs, 183-4; and King Diary, 20 August 1938. Roosevelt's speech was aimed at Japan as much as it was at Germany.
 28. King Diary, 20 August 1938 and 27 January 1939. Note also the entry for 19 January 1939: "If we ever cease to depend upon the British fleet on the Pacific coast and the Atlantic, and place our whole reliance in the U.S., there would be no independent Canada left; if Canada was left at all, it would be one of the States of the American Republic." (19 January 1939).
 29. Records of the Foreign Service Posts of the Department of State, vol. 4, box 1490, Armour to Hull, 11 January 1938; Ottawa *Citizen*, 6 January 1938, which also contained an article titled "Canadian Defence Weakness 'Menace' to U.S. Security"; Toronto *Star*, 8 January 1938.
 30. Though it should be noted that there is no evidence to suggest that the military was deliberately seeking to exaggerate the military threat. It is also worth pointing out that in December 1941 the research section of the Japanese Ministry of War in collaboration with the Imperial Army and Navy General staffs prepared secret blueprints that had Alaska, the Yukon, British Columbia, Alberta, Washington state and Central America coming under the jurisdiction of Japanese Governments-General. Imperial War Museum, London, International Military Tribunal for the Far East, exhibit 1334, transcript 11969-73, Ministry of War, Research Section, "Land Disposal Plan in the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere," December 1941.
 31. King Papers, vol. 157, file 1411, Ashton Memorandum, "Conversations on Defence Questions," 25 January 1938; Nelles Memorandum, "Conversations held in Washington, D.C., on the 19th and 20th January 1938." See also FO 371/22107, Pirie Memorandum, 22 January 1938. The meetings were attended by General E.C. Ashton, chief of the general staff and Commodore P.W. Nelles, chief of the naval staff, and Major-General Malin Craig, chief of staff of the United States Army and Admiral William Leahy, chief of naval operations.
 32. NA, Ian Mackenzie Papers, vol. 30, file X-27, General Staff Memorandum, "The Interim Plan of Coast Defence," 31 January 1938.
 33. DEA Records, vol. 721, file 47, Anderson Memorandum, "Statement of Military Precautionary Measures in Canada," 28 January 1939.
 34. NA, Mackenzie Papers, vol. 32, file X-52A, "Appreciation of the Situation," 30 January 1939.
 35. See, for example, *The Globe and Mail* (Toronto), 3 December 1938, front page article bearing the title "Canada's Pacific Forts Among World's Finest"; and the Toronto *Daily Star*, 15 July 1939, which carried a piece titled "B.C. Defences To Rank With Best In World." These were considerable overstatements, to say the least. See also T. Murray Hunter, "Coast Defence in British Columbia, 1939-1941: Attitudes and Realities," *BC Studies*, 28 (Winter 1975-76), 3-28.

36. Robert L. Craigie, *Behind the Japanese Mask* (London, 1946), 72.
37. See Peter Lowe, *Great Britain and the Origins of the Pacific War* (London, 1977), 72-102; Lee, 174-204; and *Documents on British Foreign Policy* (hereafter DBFP), third series, vol. IX.
38. Quoted in R. John Pritchard, "The Far East as an Influence on the Chamberlain Government's Pre-war European Policies," *Millennium*, 2 (Winter 1973-74), 17-18; and see Lee, 189.
39. DBFP, third series, vol. IX, no. 264, 227-8, Lindsay to Halifax, 26 June 1939.
40. King Papers, vol. 211, file 1678, Pearson to King, 9 June 1939.
41. DEA Records, vol. 723, file 64(1-2), Massey to King, 16 June 1939. In all probability, this telegram was drafted by Pearson.
42. King Papers, vol. 211, file 1678, Skelton Memorandum for King, 19 June 1939.
43. NA, Escott Reid Papers, vol. 5, file 2, Draft Telegram of 20 July 1939; DEA Records, vol. 1754, file 804 (XIII), Mahoney to King, 20 July 1939 (drafted by Reid); Mahoney to King, 26 July 1939.
44. DBFP, third series, vol. IX, no. 365, 313, Craigie to Halifax, 23 July 1939; DEA Records, vol. 1754, file 804 (XIII), McGreer to King, 24, 27 July 1939.
45. Cordell Hull, *The Memoirs of Cordell Hull*, vol. 1 (New York, 1948), 635.
46. DBFP, third series, IX, no. 444, 382-3, Craigie to Halifax, 1 August 1939. Lee, 196, attempts to argue that the Americans were seeking to stiffen Britain's hand. There is little evidence to support this claim. Hull himself later admitted that the idea of abrogating the treaty had been discussed for some time. See Hull, *Memoirs*, I, 636; and see also Jonathan Utley, *Going to War with Japan, 1937-1941* (Knoxville, Tenn., 1985), 62-3. Utley demonstrates that rather than seeking to bolster Britain's attitude, Hull and Roosevelt were seeking to preempt domestic legislation which would have damaged Hull's Asian policy.
47. Quoted in Lee, 198.
48. FO 371/23567, Circular B., no. 273, London to Ottawa, 16 August 1939.
49. *Ibid.*, no. 46, Ottawa to London, 21 August 1939.
50. King Papers, vol. 211, file 2011, Skelton to King, 1 August 1939.
51. *Ibid.*, Robertson Memorandum, 5 August 1939.
52. DEA Records, vol. 723, file 64(1-2), Skelton Memorandum for King, 19 August 1939.
53. King Diary, 21 August 1939.
54. Quoted in Lee, 201.

55. Craigie, in his *Behind the Japanese Mask*, 73-4, wrote that the younger Japanese officers (who often wielded more power than their superiors) "were determined to exploit the affair to the point of war." He added that Whitehall had information "showing that the Japanese General Staff had their plans fully laid for a single-handed war with Great Britain."
56. King Papers, vol. 395, file 52, Skelton Memorandum, "Canadian War Policy," 24 August 1939.
57. DEA Records, vol. 776, file 365(1), Keenleyside "Memorandum For Dr. Skelton," 3 September 1939.
58. NA, H.D.G. Crerar Papers, vol. 13, file D.M.C. & 19A, L.B. Pearson, "Canada and the Far East," April 1935. This was reprinted under the pseudonym "T," "Canada and the Far East," *Foreign Affairs*, 13 (1934-35), 388ff.