The recent spat between Japan and China is the latest in a series of outbursts between the two nations. What started as a Chinese objection to Japanese interpretation of history especially with reference to the latter’s acts against China during the fourth quarter of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, has now snowballed into a major controversy which could threaten the fragile relationship between them.

The current episode started simmering when the Chinese began circulating an online petition protesting against Japan’s bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council. A series of violent protest rallies were held in many Chinese cities. The protestors stoned vital Japanese business units as well as the Japanese embassy and consulates. Japan demanded an apology from China for these attacks while China asked Japan to tender an apology for the wrong interpretation of history in its textbooks.

The latest spat between Japan and China is related to the former’s attitude to war-time history. The issue has brought into sharp focus the policy of Militarism pursued by Japan in the last quarter of the 19th century and in the first half of the 20th century.

In this essay, we will analyse as to what exactly was the policy of Militarism? Why did Japan pursue it? What were the stimulants and the consequences of such a policy of Militarism?

**Origin of Militarism**

One of the most important events that dominated the last quarter of the 19th century was the rise of Japan as a great military power. The Meiji Era or the Period of Transition (1867-1894) is considered to be the most important period in the history of modern Japan. This period saw the emergence of Japanese nationalism and its attendant Militarism. The Shogunate came to an end. Now the power, once again, came into the hands of the Emperor Mutsuhito, who became the progenitor of the Meiji Restoration.

During this period of transition (1867-1894), Japan experienced some revolutionary changes. In 1867, a constitution was proclaimed. She had successfully revised the unequal treaties signed with foreign powers and as a consequence, she gained commercial and customs autonomy. Japan reorganised its educational system based on foreign methods. If France provided the model of organisation, America supplied the basic curriculae. The period saw the rapid development of the navy, rail network, postal system, banking system, industry, currency, agriculture, etc. The army was modernised and its weapons systems were upgraded. Under the guidance of Yamagata, the nation’s military strength was divided into (a) Regular Army, (b) Reserves, and (c) National Army. It was organised on the model of the European military system.

In short, the Meiji Era laid the foundation for the emergence of Militarism. It gave Japan the required strength, support, security, and above all, the supreme confidence to unleash her forces of imperialism and Militarism. There are several factors that fostered the development of Japanese nationalism and Militarism.

**Factors that fostered the development of Militarism**

**Samurai tradition:** The Samurai, the
trigger-happy warrior class of Japan, served the Shogunate with unconditional loyalty. The long period of peace did not lessen the martial zeal of the Samurai. But the Shoguns encouraged the Samurai to pursue cultural pursuits and learn the history of the land, which widened their mental horizon. This actually had a very different effect: the learning impressed upon them that the Emperor was the spiritual head of the nation and the Shoguns were the usurpers. This was responsible for the end of the Shogunate and the beginning of the Meiji Era. The Samurai tradition incited nationalism which, in turn, promoted Militarism. These two sentiments are clearly reflected in the Meiji Era.

**Over-population:** Japan comprises four main islands and a large number of small islands, most of them uninhabited. Mountainous topography characterises most of the land. Coupled with this was the problem of the rapidly increasing population, which drove the militarists to go in search of new lands.

**Raw materials:** During the Meiji Era, Japan witnessed industrialisation, which gave impetus for the modernisation of Japan. The scarcity of raw materials for the industrial units made the Japanese rulers search for lands which could provide the raw materials and in turn, stimulate the economy. This need for raw materials fanned the fires of Militarism.

**Markets for the finished goods:** The search for the protected markets is one of the most potent reasons for the rise of Japanese Militarism and imperialism. Japan had achieved industrial and economic progress to an extent that she needed protected markets for the consumption of Japanese goods without any fear of competition.

A rapidly growing population, the need to secure raw materials and the search for protected markets all made Japan begin the campaign to search for colonies. In the beginning, Japanese could settle in the vast lands of USA. But soon their entry and settlement were capped with irksome rules and regulations. The Monroe Doctrine also barred the Japanese from entering into America. Further, Britain, France, Russia, The Netherlands, and Germany had established a firm foothold in different parts of Africa and Asia. All these factors made Japan’s chances of possessing colonies difficult. However, Japan’s desperate desire for markets and colonies of her own, made her implement the policy of Militarism.

**Expansionist societies:** The growth of nationalism coupled with Militarism resulted in the emergence of expansionist societies, which by means of propaganda, spread expansionist doctrines in Japan. These had come into being specially after the ‘Triple Intervention’, which had throttled Japan’s urge to expand.

**Western imperialism around Pacific:** Western imperialism in the neighbourhood of Japan also influenced the Japanese leaders to pursue the path of imperialism. Britain, Russia, and Germany were very busy in expanding their hold over the islands in the Pacific Ocean. The French in Indo-China, Russia in Siberia, and The Netherlands in Indonesia captured large chunks of territories. In 1898, the USA occupied Hawaii and The Philippines. The presence of Western powers in their vicinity made the Japanese leaders nervous. They thought that their claim on these territories was legitimate because they were situated in the vicinity of Japan. In a nutshell, Western imperialism inspired Japanese Militarism and nationalism. It was only natural that Japan, now economically sound and militarily prepared, would stake her claim for hegemony in the Far East.

**Impact of Japanese Militarism**

Japan unleashed her force of imperialism and Militarism in the name of settling her boundary disputes and finally ended in wars and annexations. In 1875, Russia and Japan concluded a treaty by which the boundary disputes were solved. By this treaty, Japan surrendered all her claims to the Sakhalin in exchange for all the islands of Northern Kuriles, which were hitherto occupied by Russia. In the last quarter of the 19th
century, Japan occupied Loochoo Islands which were under the control of China. Next, she occupied and annexed Bonin Islands.

Japan, now confident and strong after such annexations, launched an attack on China. Korea became a bone of contention between China and Japan. The political, strategic and economic factors pressed Japan to embark upon a career of conquest. In the Sino-Japanese War, Japan defeated China. Japanese military and naval victory over China marked the beginning of a new era in the Far East. The roar of the Japanese guns in the Yalu River Valley made the world sit up and take notice of the rise of a great power in the making. Militarism and imperialism were the direct results of the Japanese victory in the Sino-Japanese War of 1895.

The Treaty of Shimonoseki concluded at the end of the Sino-Japanese War, acknowledged the supremacy of Japan over Formosa, Pescadores and the Liaotung Peninsula. That means China lost her control over these regions. China opened four cities (Shashih, Suchow, Chungking, and Hangchow) to Japan for commercial and industrial purposes. China recognised the independence of Korea, and thereby, accorded an opportunity for Japan to enter into a treaty with Korea. This treaty enabled Japan to exploit Korea politically and economically.

**Triple Intervention and Anglo-Japanese Alliance**

The ink on the Treaty of Shimonoseki had hardly dried when the three European powers - Russia, Germany, and France - forced Japan to return Liaotung Peninsula to China. Drained by the war against China, Japan could not risk another war especially against the combined might of three European powers. Thus, Japan returned Liaotung Peninsula to China and in exchange, received 3 crore taels.

The Triple Intervention and the consequent loss of Liaotung Peninsula made Japan realise that she could no longer function independently or remain unaffected by the external factors on the international scene. Further, Japan realised that the Western powers respected military might more than anything else. Thus, Japan decided to have an alliance with some European nation, so that she could enjoy the fruits of her future victory undisturbed by outside intervention. At the same time, the Russian menace in Persia (Iran), Afghanistan and in the Far East, German commercial and naval ambitions, and the division of Europe into two war camps, forced Britain to search for friends. Further, Britain opened China to West and maintained intense commercial relations with her. Now, Russia also showed interest in China and started dominating some portions in Manchuria. This activity gave some serious and anxious moments to Britain and Japan. It was in this background, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance was concluded in 1902.

The Anglo-Japanese Alliance remains one of the most important pacts in the history of international relations. This alliance was no less than a merger of Japan into European politics. For the first time in history, an Asian power had entered into an alliance with an European power on equal footing and prestige. This alliance enabled Japan to follow her policy of imperialism and militarism without any fear or hindrance. The Russo-Japanese War of 1905 and the annexation of Korea in 1910 were the outcome of this alliance.

**Russo-Japanese War of 1905**

The Triple Intervention in 1895, which robbed Japan of the fruits of the Sino-Japanese War, was as a bitter pill for Japan. Further, Korea and Manchuria became a bone of contention between Japan and Russia. The rapidly-increasing population of Japan, her growing economic prosperity and industrialisation, the question of national security, internal politics, and above all, the imperialistic and militaristic ambitions goaded Japan to concentrate her attention on Korea and Manchuria, and hence, a war with Russia lay in the logic of history.

The Japanese declaration of the war surprised Russia and the European powers. Due to the
initiative taken by American President Roosevelt, the war came to an end with the Treaty of Portsmouth being concluded in 1905. By this treaty, Japan got Sakhalin Island, Port Arthur, Dalian, Liao-tung Peninsula, etc. Japan's dream of continental expansion, dimmed by the Triple Intervention, had now become a reality. This war made Japan a competitor of European powers for the spoils of China. Japan could now follow the imperialist path with more vigour and greater enthusiasm. The Japanese victory over Russia stimulated the rise of nationalism in Asia. Japan's victory destroyed the myth of the invincibility of the Western supremacy. Japan, intoxicated by the victory over Russia, annexed Korea in 1914. The early phase of Japanese imperialism fulfilled her desire to get great power credentials. Japan now began to be ranked among the great powers of the world. Emperor Mutsuhito found Japan of bricks but left it of marble.

**Japanese Militarism (1914-1945)**

The rise of ultra-nationalism and Militarism were at the root of Japanese imperialism. These forces played a predominating part from the first quarter of the 20th century. The First World War saw major European powers engaged in a grim struggle. Now, Japan felt free to exploit the situation to her own advantage.

After the outbreak of the War, while Britain wished to keep Japan off the war, Japan could neither could remain neutral nor did she wish to remain so. The Anglo-Japanese Alliance stipulated that the two nations would consult each other whenever the peace of the Far East and India was disturbed. The First World War did disturb the peace of the region and threatened the interests of Japan and Britain. Japan decided to enter the war and on August 15, 1914, she served on Germany the "Shantung Ultimatum". Germany did not give reply to the ultimatum and as a result, Japan declared war on Germany and occupied the entire Shantung Peninsula in clear violation of international laws as well as ignoring the fundamental issue of Chinese neutrality.

Now, Japan served on China the controversial "Twenty-one Demands". The Japanese policy of expansion lay behind this infamous set of demands. Japanese occupation of Shantung Peninsula, Southern Manchuria, and Mongolia, Yangtse Valley, and Fukien, and the Chinese recognition of the same, formed the essence of the "Twenty-one Demands".

China was shocked at the "Twenty-one Demands". Historians consider this episode as the starting point of the strident Chinese anti-Japanese sentiment. The USA, which was opposed to the "Twenty-one Demands", openly sympathised with China. Russia, France, Britain, and Italy concluded secret treaties with Japan in 1916-17, according to which, they had recognised Japan's rights over Southern Manchuria and Inner Mongolia. The only power which refused to recognise the supremacy of Japan on the continent was the USA, and Japan tried her best to smoothen the corners in that direction. Thus, aggressive Japanese nationalism and Militarism alienated the support of the USA.

**End of the First World War (1918)**

The surrender of Germany in 1918 shocked the Japanese. The Japanese had assumed that the Germans would continue their advance on the European continent for a long time. Though Japan failed to get Shantung Peninsula, Marshall and Caroline Islands, and her declaration of equality of races was not ratified at the peace conference, the First World War definitely elevated Japan to a new status. By virtue of her position as a Charter Member of the League of Nations (Japan held a permanent seat in the League Council) and as one of the great powers, Japan participated in all major international conferences that were held in 1920-25.

**Japan and the Washington Conferences (1920-22)**

The end of the First World War altered power equations. After the war, Britain, America, and Japan emerged as the three dominating powers in the Far East. The strained relations between
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Japan and America regarding the immigration rules, the growing naval arms race between the three major powers, the activities of communist USSR, and strengthening of the spirit of nationalism were some of the problems that engaged the attention of the great powers. To address these complex issues, the Washington Conferences were held in 1920-22. Restoration of peace and the need to check the naval arms race were the two main aims of the Washington Conferences. The Washington Conferences produced six treaties and thirteen resolutions, which saw the end of Anglo-Japanese Alliance. Inferior naval ratio was accorded to Japan. The territorial integrity of China was recognised. Japan was asked to restore the entire lease-hold territory of Shantung Peninsula to China.

It would be naive to think that Japan’s hegemonistic designs in the Far East had been checked. The inferior naval ratio accorded to Japan, did not mean much to Japan as she was left almost impregnable and in complete command of the coast of China from where she could not be dislodged by the Anglo-America combination. The non-fortification clauses checked Britain and the USA from raising fortifications in Hong Kong, etc. Though Japan agreed to withdraw from Shantung Peninsula, she strengthened her grip on Manchuria. She now adopted a policy of peaceful and economic penetration taking full advantage of the atmosphere of peace and goodwill generated by the conference.

In 1927, the Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka summoned Eastern Regions Conference to outline Japan’s continental policy. The conference was attended by Japan’s top military and civil officials. The Conference decided to use the policy of economic penetration in China. If necessary, the use of force to back the policy of economic penetration was mooted. It is believed that after the Eastern Regions Conference, Tanaka told the Mikado (Emperor): “To conquer the world one must first conquer Asia. To conquer Asia one must first conquer China. To conquer China one must conquer Manchuria. To conquer Manchuria one must first conquer Korea.”

Final phase of Japanese Militarism (1929-41)

This phase of Japanese history was dominated by Tanaka and Tojo, both hardcore imperialists. The neo-militaristic policies of Tanaka became apparent when he ordered the mobilisation of the Japanese forces for the invasion of Tsinan. There are several factors that forced Japan to invade Tsinan.

- Japan, at this time, was under the firm grip of militarists who were obsessed with imperialism and expansion.
- To secure raw materials and to procure markets for the finished products.
- The world-wide economic depression of 1929 created a great demand for cheap Japanese goods. This forced Western countries to check the free flow of Japanese goods, and hence placed restrictions on the flow of Japanese goods. The decline in Japanese silk exports to USA ruined the lives of thousands of Japanese farmers who depended on American markets. The militarists began to preach that Japan’s hope of economic salvation lay in exploiting fully the resources of Manchuria.
- At this time, the Nationalist Government of China (KMT) was tightening its grip on Manchuria. The KMT members were preaching nationalism in Manchuria and were trying to bring Manchuria closer to China. The vast Chinese population in Manchuria (70% of the population was Chinese) made it China in the real sense. The Government of China planned to lay rail lines in Southern Manchuria from a point where the Japanese controlled-railroad ended. China’s plan made Japan restive and Sino-Japanese interests conflicted with one another.
- However, the biggest irritant was the period of the leasehold of Liao-tung Peninsula. This Peninsula, after the Triple Intervention, was leased to Russia for a period of 25 years by China. After the defeat of Russia in 1905, the
lease was transferred to Japan. Later on, by the treaties of 1915 (Twenty-one Demands), Japan extended the period of lease from 25 years to 99 years. The Nationalist Government of China did not recognise the treaties of 1915 as these were imposed on China by force. In 1928, the lease period of 25 years came to end, and Japan’s occupation of the Peninsula, in the eyes of Chinese, was illegal and not acceptable.

• The lease period of the Manchuria Railway ended in 1923. But Japan, which based her claims on the treaties of 1915, persisted in her control over the Railway. Thus, the dispute over the Manchuria Railway contributed to the friction between Japan and China.

• Further, the treaties of 1915 gave the Japanese citizens and settlers in Manchuria the right to purchase property along with the rights of the extra-territoriality. These rights only added fuel to the fire.

Thus, the Japanese militarists decided to expand their sway over Manchuria. Japan had built up a very strong force - Kwantung Army - purportedly to defend railroads, Japanese life and property as well as commercial interests in Manchuria. In this already volatile situation, the Nakamura incident proved to be the last straw that broke the proverbial camel’s back.

**The Nakamura Incident (1931)**

A Japanese militaryman, Captain Nakamara, was said to have been murdered by Chinese soldiers in 1931, though the exact circumstances of his death could never be ascertained. The same year, a section of the Southern Manchurian railroad was destroyed in a bomb explosion. The loss was not serious but its responsibility was fastened on the Chinese. The Kwantung Army moved into action, captured Mukden, the capital of Manchuria. Japan was fortunate, for at this time, the world-wide economic depression had left the major powers grappling with their own serious problems. Also, at this time, China was still engaged in a fratricidal war. In Japan, the militarists, for all practical purposes, held the reins of the government.

The Japanese occupation of Manchuria forced China to realise the seriousness of the situation. The Chinese being unable to withstand Japanese onslaught militarily, resorted to a boycott of Japanese goods inflicting great financial losses upon the Japanese. To tackle the menace of boycott and to shift the aggression away from Manchuria, Japan landed a force on the international city port of Shanghai. Immediately, China reported the matter to the League of Nations. Though Japan, warned of dire consequences by the League, fumed over the League’s resolution, she had to eventually withdraw her forces from Shanghai.

**Creation of Manchu-kuo (1932)**

While Japan was engaged in the Shanghai War, she successfully produced a movement for independence in Manchuria, and in 1932, the birth of a new state of Manchu-kuo was proclaimed. Pu Yi, the last of the Manchu emperors, was crowned the King of the newly created kingdom. Immediately, Japan concluded a treaty with Manchu-kuo by which she secured many privileges and concessions. In the name of defending privileges in Manchu-kuo, Japan created her own administration in the leased areas, increased the strength of the Kwantung Army and assumed the right of extra-territoriality. All these measures turned Manchu-kuo into a virtual dependency of Japan.

Though the European powers refused to recognise an independent Manchu-kuo, its development under the tutelage of Japan was phenomenal. In a nutshell, Manchuria became the economic life-line of Japan, feeding her with the much-needed raw materials and food stuffs on the one hand, while providing a protected market for her finished goods on the other. At this time, Manchuria possessed far greater stability than at any time in her recent past.
**Consequences of the Japanese occupation of Manchuria**

In Japan, the political parties were left out of the decision-making process and were, in fact, relegated to the background. Now, the militarists and imperialists stamped their authority on the political system and the general public. This paved the way for the rise of General Tojo to power. Also, the facile victory in Manchuria emboldened Japan to pursue a more aggressive policy in China and other places. In 1933, when the League objected to its actions in Manchuria, she left the world body by tendering her resignation from its membership. The Manchurian crisis openly showed the failure of the collective responsibility of the members of the League of Nations to maintain status quo. The occupation of Manchuria by Japan alarmed Russia, Britain, and USA who had special interests in the region. Russia strengthened her defences in Outer Mongolia. Also, Britain and USA came together to defend their interests in the Far East against the rising Japanese threat.

**Intervention in Inner Mongolia and North China**

The occupation of Korea (1910) and the successful conversion of Manchu-kuo into a dependency of Japan (1931-32), stimulated the Japanese imperialistic hunger. Japan, after the occupation of Manchuria in 1933 intervened in the internal affairs of Inner Mongolia. She occupied many towns and administrative areas. Japan installed a sophisticated communication network to aid her progress. Now, Japan invaded North China with an intention to detach areas like Hopei, Shansi, and Shantung from the government of Nanking, and constitute a separate political-economic unit under its own protection. The Kwangtung Army invaded the region and compelled China to withdraw her armies from the northern part of Hopei, and to declare the area north of the Great Wall as a demilitarised zone. In 1934, the famous *Amau Declaration*, which is also characterised as the ‘Japanese Monroe Doctrine”, was proclaimed by the Japanese foreign minister Hiroto Koki. According to this declaration, which was purely imperialistic in nature, Japan had an important place in East Asia and it was her duty to maintain peace in the region. It said that Japan would oppose any move sponsored by China calculated to threaten the peace of the Orient. Japan would also oppose any move by other European powers to do the same. It would also object to the supply of loans or war materials to China. From 1933-35, the Kwangtung Army virtually dominated the Nanking government. Under the guise of sympathy for the people of these occupied regions, Japan now initiated a movement to establish an independent administration in North China. Japan propagated that the people of the region were restive and desired to be free, a propaganda tool designed to hide its imperialist ambitions. Japan also succeeded in creating the Hopei-Chaher Political Council, which was kept under the military control of Japan. Japan also put pressure on China to accord recognition to Manchu-kuo, and to assist Japan in suppressing communism. These actions only spurred the Chinese to take up arms against the Japanese.

In 1937, the most infamous act committed by Japan in China took place. The “Rape of Nanjing”, as the incident is referred to, took place, where in Japanese soldiers massacred nearly 3,70,000 people. An estimated 80,000 women and girls were raped, many of them were then mutilated or murdered.

The already cold Sino-Japanese relationship came under great pressure, when the anti-Japanese feelings rose to a feverish pitch in China. The anti-Japanese feelings manifested in the coming together of arch-rivals KMT and the Communists, under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek. Between 1937 and 1941, an undeclared war was fought between Japan and China. This period saw the Chinese uncompro misingly resist the brutalities of the Japanese soldiers on the civilian population in Chinese towns and villages.
Japan, before launching a total war against China, signed the Anti-Comintern Pact with Nazi Germany in 1936 to check the spread of communism. Italy signed the pact in 1937 and transformed it into the Tripartite Agreement against Communist activity. History records this triple alliance as the “Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis”.

The chief reason for the Japanese concentration upon North China was the availability of rich natural resources like coal, iron, and other minerals in the region. She rallied her army and in a matter of a few months, a greater part of China including Nanking was occupied. In the conquered region, a puppet regime was installed. However, the Chinese did not lessen the intensity of their resistance against the occupying power. They began to attack the supply lines of the enemy, which cut-off vital supplies, thus frustrating the Japanese. When the Second World War broke out, the undeclared war between Japan and China also merged into it.

Japan and the Second World War (1939-45)

America formed a coalition with European powers, called the ABCD (America, Britain, China and Dutch) to check the growing Japanese threat in the Far East. At this time, General Tojo became the chief of the newly-created Military Aviation Department. The Japanese imperialist policy now manifested itself in slogans like “Asia for Asians”.

Despite the ABCD coalition, Japan hoped that by striking swiftly, she could bring her rivals to the negotiating table. The Japanese first dominated Indo-China and secured favourable terms from France. (At this time, France was in control of Indo-China.) In Europe, around the same time, France was beaten by Germany.

In Asia, continuing her relentless march, Japan defeated the Dutch and occupied Indonesia—a very important source for petroleum, rubber, and other mineral wealth. On December 7, 1941, Japanese warplanes launched a devastating raid on the American Naval Base in Pearl Harbor. Japan’s bold act brought America into the war. The next day, Britain, The Netherlands, and China formally declared war on Japan.

Japan notched many spectacular successes in the first few months after the Pearl Harbor attack: The British, American, and the Dutch territories in the Pacific Ocean were occupied by Japan; in 1942, Japanese forces captured Kuala Lumpur and forced Britain to withdraw from Singapore. In a matter of months, Japan also became the master of Burma and Hong Kong. In order to secure her occupation, Japan sought the willing co-operation of the people in the conquered territories. In this context, she tried to capitalise on the anti-White and anti-West sentiment of the occupied people, and projected herself as a liberator. The Asian Monroe Doctrine and the slogan “Asia for Asians” received positive response from the occupied people.

All good things come to an end, however good the going is. So was the case of Japan’s relentless march, which now began to suffer setbacks. The tide turned against the Japanese when the American fleet gained a great success in the Battle of Coral Sea and the Battle of Midway in 1942. In the intervening years (1942-45), Japan suffered many defeats. In 1945, Tokyo was bombarded. In 1945, at the Yalta Conference, the USSR agreed to wage war against Japan, and in return, the Allies promised her all those territories and facilities in Korea and Manchuria, which the

**What is the Yasukuni Shrine?**

The Yasukuni Shrine - the name means ‘peaceful country’ - was founded in 1869 on the orders of Emperor Meiji. It is dedicated to the souls of about 2.5 million Japanese men, women and children who died in the name of their country since that time. The Yasukuni Shrine remains a potent symbol of how the Japanese, intoxicated by militarism, once collectively lost their reason and were fed fantastic myths, of racial superiority and the Emperor’s divinity.
USSR held before 1905. Soviet Russian forces invaded Manchuria and wiped out Manchu-kuo’s independent existence. In Europe, the Axis powers (Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy) were defeated leading to their surrender. The Allied forces now called upon Japan to surrender. But Japan led by hardcore militarists, refused to surrender. In the uncertainty that followed, the US dropped two atomic bombs - on Hiroshima (August 6) and on Nagasaki (August 9) - killing nearly 2,50,000 people. Shaken by this, Japan offered to surrender unconditionally. On September 2, 1945, in the presence of the American General MacArthur, Japanese officials signed the surrender document on the American battleship Missouri in the Tokyo Bay.

In the initial stages, the militarist policies pursued by Japan did raise her status on the global power stage, but only for a temporary period. The neo-nationalism of the Japanese induced them to think that the occupied regions belonged to them. These militarist policies resulted in the Sino-Japanese War (1890), Russo-Japanese War (1905), and in the formation of Anglo-Japanese Alliance (1902). The infamous “Twenty-one Demands” served on China by Japan, the Shantung Ultimatum, the undeclared Sino-Japanese War in 1937-41, the Manchurian Crisis of 1931, the formation of Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis, and finally, the Pearl Harbor attack of 1941, were all manifestations of Japanese Militarism. Japan, after the Second World War, was almost reduced to ashes. Japan faced an uphill task of economic, political, social, and military reconstruction. But all this also had one important and positive international impact: Japan was, indirectly, responsible for securing freedom to many countries in Asia including India, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Indo-China, and Indonesia.

**Present**

It is in the light of the past, we should seek to understand the present. The past is a necessity to understand the present. Chinese leaders say Japan will not deserve a permanent seat on the UN Security Council until it faces up honestly to its wartime misdeeds. One textbook which has angered the Chinese failed to make any assessment of the number of Chinese civilians killed in the infamous Rape of Nanjing. The internationally accepted view is that hundreds of thousands died in an orgy of sexual violence and killing by Japanese troops.

At the same time, international relations analysts believe that along with the war legacy, these developments should also be viewed in the context of the recent past that has created friction in bilateral ties between the two countries. These include the dispute over oil exploration in the East China Sea, Chinese submarine incursion in the Japanese waters late in 2004, the Chinese objections over a solution of the Taiwan issue being earmarked as a “common strategic objective” by both countries in the Japan-US Joint Declaration, and the new Japanese National Defense Program Outline 2005, which calls for being “attentive” towards China’s modernisation of the armed forces, nuclear, and missile power.

Japan’s Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s expression of “feelings of deep remorse and heartfelt apology” at the Afro-Asian Conference at Bandung, seemed to have smoothened ruffled feathers for the present. But, “whether this apology will mark the ‘end of history’ remains a moot question”.  

(The author, Mr Bharat Jain, is a member of the academic team at T.I.M.E.)