

World War II in Korea

Hans Bromin

Celina High School, Celina, TX

INTRODUCTION

The Second World War started in September 1, 1939 and continued for six years ending on the 2nd of September, 1945. Being a war that involved virtually the entire world, one would expect that there was a solid reason as to why the world went into war. This, however, is not the case. There are a number of events cited as the cause of World War II. Some sources claim that World War II was simply a continuation of world war two. Other sources point at a conflict between China and Japan after Japan seized Manchuria from China. Italy's defeat in the battle of Adowa in Ethiopia is also cited as one of the reasons for a second global war (Coetzee & Shevin-Coetzee, 2011). The war saw the Axis powers on side which included Germany, Italy and Japan with the Allies on the other side which included France, Soviet Union, U.S.A., Great Britain and China. With just a few countries mentioned to fight against each other, one would wonder why the war is called a world war. While other nations are not mentioned as key players, they all had a part to play. These major countries were at the time colonial masters. When they went to war, they got help from their colonies. Japan for instance, ruled over Korea and got immense help from the country. This paper aims at looking at the role played by minor nations specifically Korea in World War II.

CAUSES OF WORLD WAR II

The cause of World War II remains a mystery. However, a few points are forwarded as the true causes of the deadliest war to have ever crossed the face of the earth. The peace of Paris is cited to a major cause of World War II. At the end of World War I, a treaty was signed in Paris. This treaty, however, did not satisfy all parties. Some felt aggrieved and were determined to fight for an equal share. The losing side in the First World War including Germany and Austria did not subscribe to the Paris agreement (Coetzee & Shevin-Coetzee, 2011). This agreement called for the losers to give up arms and consequently demanded that they make reparations. Signing of this agreement was not an easy task. Germany, for instance, had to be threatened for it to sign the treaty.

Economic concerns also played a huge part in causing this war. World War I had left countries in a bad economic state. Countries had over spent on military and lost millions of soldiers. Replacing their positions would cost huge amounts of money. Europe, however, took a short time to recover economically. This would, nevertheless, be short lived as the Great Depression in the U.S. had huge impacts on Europe. Due to the economic downfall, countries were eager to take on any opportunity to generate more wealth. The First World War had ended with losers being punished to the advantage of winners. As a result, a new war was welcome if winners would go ahead and be compensated by the losers.

Nationalism is also cited as one of the causes of World War II. After World War I, people grew extremely patriotic to their countries. Winners had all reasons to be proud of their countries. They felt that they had conquered the world. Surprisingly, the losing countries had more patriotism growing. People either believed that they had been short changed or that they would have another day where they would win. This extreme patriotism would ensure that virtually everyone supported any move by the government especially in attacking those they believed had denied them victory.

Dictatorship had started spreading in many countries. People were not given a chance to voice their concerns especially if it would go against what the rulers wanted. Dictatorship was the result of numerous political unrest in countries as well as the worsening economic state of these countries. For recovery, leaders believed to have better ideas and would not listen to other opinion. Countries such as Japan, Soviet Union, Italy and Germany had dictators who did what they thought was right. With dictatorship, it was easy to go back to war right after another war which had contributed to the poor state of global economy.

Failure of appeasement between Great Britain and Germany is also cited as one of the major causes of World War II. Czechoslovakia became an independent country right after the World War as German encroached on more territories, Czechoslovakia was surrounded by German territory. This meant that Germany had overpowered the country and thus was an easy target. Sudetenland, an area in Czechoslovakia was occupied by Germans. This caught the attention of Hitler and

he decided to seize it. Great Britain stood with Czechoslovakia preventing any attack by Germans. However, as a way to appease the Prime Minister of Britain allowed Hitler to have Sudetenland with the condition that he would not ask for more territory (Media Rich Learning, 2004). Hitler would, however demand more territory and in 1939, he seize the rest of Czechoslovakia. This caused bad blood between Germany and Great Britain.

ROLE OF MINOR NATIONS IN WORLD WAR II

While initially the war touched mostly a few major nations, minor nations would eventually be involved. The minor nations came to support their friendly nations and thus escalated the war. While in the beginning only a few countries were willing to join the big nations, by the end of the war, only a few countries had managed to stay neutral. Minor countries from Europe, Asia, America and even Africa participated in the war as minor contributors. In Africa, one of the most important minor countries to be involved in the war was Kenya. Kenya acted as a training ground for the British soldiers. In World War II alone, Kenya contributed a total of 98,240 Askaris into the Kings Africa Rifle which fought for Britain's interest (Iriye, (2014). The Kenyan soldiers were also used in the Burma campaign against the Japanese. The Burma War was one is where Britain and Japan as two major countries. In Asia, one of the minor countries involved in the war was Korea. At the time, Korea was under the rule of Japan. World War II was a significant event to Korea. The end of the war also marked the end of Japanese rule over the country. In World War II alone, more than 100,000 Koreans had become members of the Imperial Japanese Army. Many of them would die in war.

In Europe, there were plenty of minor countries joining the war. A good example is Finland. Finland was under the interest of the Soviet. It would, however refuse the Soviet Union to build some of its military bases in that country. Consequently, Soviet Union attacked it. After the attack, it unsuccessfully sought help from United Kingdom. After UK denied Finland help to stop invasion by the Soviet Union, Finland sought help from the Nazi. Nazi cooperation with Finland led to an attack by the Soviet Union leading to start of the Continuation War (Iriye, (2014). This would see Britain declaring War on Finland. A few minor countries would later declare war on Finland as well. These countries included New Zealand, Canada, Australia and South Africa. The war continued with the relations between the Nazi and the Finnish almost became an alliance. Finland would later be compelled end its relations with Germany for it to regain peace. This happened after Germany surrendered. It would then realize complete peace with the UK and the Soviet Union.

In down south, New Zealand is an example of minor countries that rallied behind their colonial masters. The country declared War in 1939 immediately after Britain had declared war. New Zealand issued a statement saying, *"With gratitude for the past and confidence in the future, we range ourselves without fear beside Britain. Where she goes, we go; where she stands, we stand. We are only a small and young nation, but we march with a union of hearts and souls to a common destiny"* (Lyons, 2016). New Zealand contribution in the war was profound. It sent troops to serve in North Africa, Italy and Greece. It also offered a good number of pilots to serve in the war. After Britain, New Zealand was second in per capital casualties suffered among all the commonwealth nations.

Brazil was initially not interested in the war. It remained neutral until 1941 after it caved gave in to the request by the U.S. to have bases which the U.S. would use as bases for patrolling South Atlantic. Brazil would later persuade other American countries to cut diplomatic and economic relations with the axis powers. This came after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the declaration of war against the U.S.A. by the Fascist Italy and the Nazi Germany. After the American countries agreed to cut relations with the Axis Powers, Germany and Italy would extend warfare against such nations (Coetzee & Shevin-Coetzee, 2011). Brazil would continue supporting the allied nations helping these nations gain control over South Atlantic. Brazil would later cave in to popular pressure and agree to send 25,000 troops to help fight in the Italian campaign.

KOREA IN WORLD WAR II

All the major nations in World War II turned to the minor nations for help at one time. Any time when a country goes to war, it requires a lot of resources. Some of these resources are used to feed the military while others are to sustain the war through acquisition of weapons. In big wars, countries are not able to sustain themselves. As a result, they choose to borrow hence incurring colossal amount of debts. During World War II era, countries had managed to seize other countries turning them to colonies. These colonies would then supplement the major countries with food and in some cases men to fight in the war. During World War II. Korea was a Japanese protectorate. Later, it was annexed into Japanese borders under the Japan-Korea Annexation treaty (Lee, 1998). Japan would later start the puppet nation of Manchukuo where it started various industries. As the industries grew, Korea benefited from the improved infrastructure. Later, as Japan grew in population and expanded its military, it allowed Korea to start heavy industries such as mining. All these were in a bid to raise

enough resources to feed the expanding Japanese military. Korea proved to be a key partner to Japan as it also provided the country with rice, timber and fish (Tsurumi, 2015).

World War II started in different times in different parts of the world. In Europe, many scholars cite 1939 as the year when World War II started. In the U.S., World War II is said to have started in 1941 when Japan attacked USA (Lyons, 2016). In Asia, World War II started in 1937 when Japan launched total war against China. This attack by the Japanese empire on the Republic of China was referred to as Second Sino-Japanese War. This war began with the Marco Polo Bridge incident. Dispute between troops from the two countries escalated into a fully-fledged war. Two years into the war, Japan labor force shrunk considerably. Most men were fetched from their work places and taken to war. This resulted in a drop in production back home. This development called for a quick response to salvage the situation. This led to the recruitment of Koreans to work in Japan. As the war continued, more resources were needed thus more Koreans were taken to Japan to work. By the end of the Second Sino-Japanese War, more than five million Koreans worked in activities that directly helped Japan's war mission.

All this while, Koreans had not participated directly in the ongoing war. 1938, Japanese army had started to fall short in numbers. As a result, the Japanese army welcomed Koreans to help them fight against China. Initially, the Korean wing was only allowed to fight in Manchukuo. In Manchukuo, they only served in anti-insurgency roles. As the war progressed, the involvement of the Korean army grew and was involved in numerous other areas. By the time Japan attacked the U.S., Korean army was involved in major and minor attacks across the Pacific (Lyons, 2016). The Korean army earned a good reputation for their skills. They fought for Japan with loyalty never seen before. Japan's persistence in war called for more men to join the war. This time, Japan not only fought in the Second Sino-Japanese war, but also engaged in other ways with United Kingdom and U.S.A. As a result, more men were required to serve in the army. In 1944, a directive was given requiring all Korean men who did not work in various in Japan to register in the Japanese Army. By the end of the war, a total of 242,341 Koreans had actively fought in World War II under Japan's wings.

Everything would not remain as good for Japan. Korea increasingly got tired serving Japan. Almost two million Koreans had moved to Japan by the end of the war. Three quarters of this people chose to return back to Korea while the rest chose to remain in Japan. In 1941, the Korean government which was in exile at the time in China declared

war on Japan. In doing so, it shifted its allegiance from the Axis powers to the Allied side. The Korean government organized volunteer groups to fight the Japanese. They were helped by China, Soviet Union and USA. As World War II came close to its conclusion, Russian troops moved overran Northeastern China and crossed into Korea (Lowe, P. (2014). Japan would later surrender. The run of events caused America to rush to Korea to curb Russian influence in the country (Lee, 1998). Japanese living in Korea would later be deported back to Japan.

KOREA WOMEN AS COMFORT WOMEN

During war, women and children suffer the most. Men leave for army camps while women are left back at home. In most cases, women are forced to prepare food and take the food to their husbands and sons. In America, Women played a much bigger role. As the war continued, more men joined the military. This led to a shortage in workforce. To prevent a drop in production, women volunteered to work in these industries. Women also played a crucial role in providing nursing services to injured soldiers. During World War II, Korea was under Japan. This meant that the women were not as free as those in America and other places. In Korea, the Japanese army contracted women to work in various areas. These areas included cooking, nursing and laundry. Many women joined in the call to help the army considering that even some Korean men also served in the army. After joining the military camps willingly, some of the women would later be detained near military barracks. These would be used as comfort women. They would be sexually abused over and over. Prostitutes would also be recruited and taken to various stations abroad as comfort women (Tsurumi, 2015). Later, as the Japanese army expanded, there was a rise in demand for comfort women. Determined to win the war, Japan provided its troops with everything they deemed necessary to win the war. This called for more women to be taken as comfort women. With many women having left already, there was a shortage of women. This led to the forceful abduction of young girls from poor families. These girls would be fraudulently taken from their homes some with the promise of good jobs. They would then be taken to military camps where they too would be used as comfort women by the Japan soldiers. These women can be said to have played a role in World War II. Because of their services, Japan's soldiers were able to fight. Not all women were used as comfort women. Some were given the promised jobs such as cooking and nursing.

CONCLUSION

World War II goes down as the longest and fiercest war to have happened on earth. While it revolved around major nations, nations with minor interests in the war also joined. Some nations such as Korea, however, participated in the war forcefully. Their colonial masters required them to contribute a good number of soldiers while also help raise enough food

to sustain the war. In World War II, Korea served in both sides. First, its allegiance was with the Axis powers. Later, as it fought Japan, it joined forces with China, Soviet Union and USA. There were many casualties that resulted from this war. Korea also registered a number of deaths among its soldiers. This war also led to close to a million Koreans opting to remain in Japan. Korean women also suffered as a result of this war. They were taken captive and used as comfort women by the Japanese soldiers. By the end of World War II, Japan surrendered and moved back to its country allowing the Korean government to its affairs.

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