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Fascism and the Russo-Japanese War

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Lead: In 1904 political forces within both Japan and Russia were pushing their governments toward war. Leading the war cries in Japan were proto-fascist groups that soon took over Japanese society.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: The much anticipated Russo-Japanese War did not go as expected. Most of the world predicted a quick Russian victory, but instead, Japan, whose resistance to outside influence was legendary, had taken

full advantage of the five decades since the 1854 visit of U.S. Naval Commodore Perry. In short order, the Japanese Army and Navy sliced through Russia's formidable and over-confident, but clearly dated and unprepared military establishment.

On the Manchurian mainland at the Battles of the Yalu River, Nanshan, Mukden and at the siege and fall of the vital Russian garrison outpost of Port Arthur, historians and eyewitnesses testified to obvious Japanese combat superiority.

Earlier the Czarist government, seeing the war as necessary to preserve its East Asia possessions and shore up support for the regime back

home, had reinforced its threatened Pacific squadron by sending most of the Baltic Fleet thousands of miles to the Far East under Admiral Zinovii Petrovich Rozhdestvensky. Over three days in late May, 1905, at the crucial naval Battle of Tsushima off the southeast coast of Korea, the Japanese fleet of Admiral Togo Heihachiro (hay ha chee row) cut up the numerically superior, but old and out-of-date, poorly led and trained Russian fleet. With these losses Russian power in East Asia was shattered.

U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt presided over the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Portsmouth which brought the War to an end in

September 1905. Russia ceded to Japan Russia's claims to Korean territory, leases to Port Arthur and the Liaotung Peninsula and half of Sakhalin (sa ka 'leen) Island.

In Russia the humiliation was the spark leading to the abortive Revolution of 1905, a severe suppression by the Czarist government of press freedoms and what liberal parts of Russian society existed, and a restriction on nascent democratic institutions such as the Duma. This reactionary approach by Russia's leaders plus their foolish, useless and bloody pursuit of victory in World War I led to the abdication of the Czar, the collapse of the infant post-war Russian democracy and the

rise of the Bolsheviks.

The image of Japan as a society supposedly filled with docile subjects dutifully accepting the decisions of the government quickly evaporated when the news of the Treaty was broadcast at home. Ultra-nationalists and newspaper editorials whipped up popular resentment against what they felt was an unjust result of Portsmouth. Ignoring the fact that by the end of the war, Japan had been running out of the money, men and material to keep it going, these super-patriots wanted Japan to annihilate Russia and take over more territory on the mainland.

Riots and attacks on foreign

embassies were accompanied by calls for the government to resign. This public fury at an unsatisfactory resolution of a war it had clearly won soon dissipated, but Japanese society began to move in a fascist direction. Ultra-nationalists infiltrated the government, the military and all parts of Japanese society and began to call for the end to political parties and political opposition. By the 1930s, what little democracy Japan boasted at the turn of the century had largely disappeared. Japan's national energy was undoubtedly bent on imperial domination of East Asia and it willingly joined with the Fascist powers of Europe in provoking the Second World War.

Research assistance by Colin Taylor, at the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

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