

# Primary Sources: *The Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905*



## Introduction

Below is a series of sources from before, during, and after the end of the Russo-Japanese War. The sources illustrate American and Japanese perspectives and assessments of the conflict.

As you read each source, consider the views and assumptions being made. What context was each author writing from and what are the "stakes of the war" from that context? How might this inform the author's perspective?

Consider also if there are things that the authors writing at the time of the war might be missing, and how those writing shortly after the end of the war come to assess its meaning.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

INTRODUCTION

AMERICAN NEWS BEFORE THE WAR STARTED

AMERICAN NEWS AFTER THE WAR STARTED

KOGORO TAKAHIRA, A JAPANESE POINT OF VIEW

AN AMERICAN MAKES MEANING OUT OF THE WAR AS IT HAS ENDED

# Primary Source 1: *American News Before the War Started*

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This newspaper article from *The Los Angeles Times* appeared in the United States before Japan's surprise attack on Russia's Port Arthur naval base, but after diplomatic negotiations had broken down.

Source: "Japan and Russia," *The Los Angeles Times*, January 24<sup>th</sup>, 1904, p.E8

## Japan and Russia.

*The London Times* is perhaps the best authority respecting the relative fighting strength of Japan and Russia. The *Times* correspondents are experts. Allowing for a bias in favor of Japan, their conclusions may be accepted as the best opinion attainable.

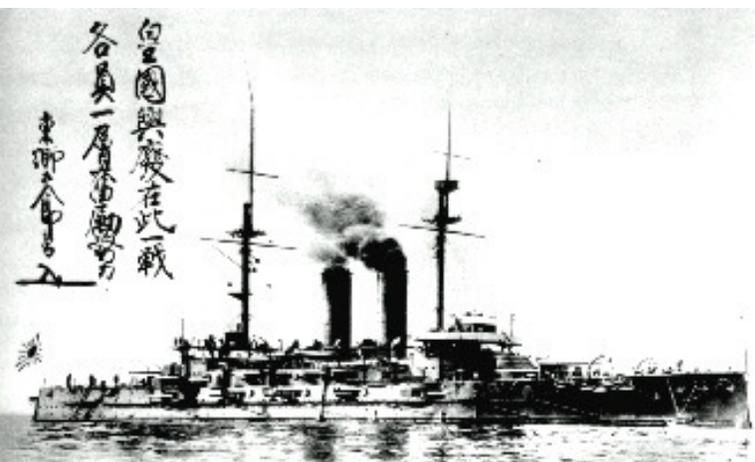
*The Times* says Japan has much the better chance on sea, and as to the land, a fairly even change.

Japan has six battleships to Russia's eight, but the former are much superior. The Japanese ships are of one grade and can therefore be more easily handled. A fleet of warships is like a chain - it is no longer than its weakest link. A fleet of war vessels must adapt itself to the capacity of its poorest ships. Japan has six armored cruisers to Russia's five. In protected cruisers Japan has fourteen to Russia's eight.

Another advantage for Japan!

She had four fine dock yards "capable both of constructing and repairing vessels of any class." Russia's docking facilities are totally inadequate. So great is the preponderance it is believed Russia will hardly risk an open right on the sea.

As to the army: Japan has about 200,000 men with a reserve force of 430,000. Russia's force in the East is about 200,000. Her reserves, of course, run into the millions.



**Japanese battleship Mikasa, the flagship at the Battle of Tsushima**

Japan will win on the sea, say experts, either by defeat of the Russian fleet or its blockade. As to Japan's fighting show on land military authorities disagree. In the long run, it would seem, Russia must win. Japanese velocity cannot overcome Russia's momentum. The Japanese soldiers are superior in bravery, discipline, initiative and enthusiasm, but they will go against a stone wall.

The cost in human lives, years, ruin, suffering - the experts do not figure these.

# Primary Source 2: *American News After the War Started*

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On February 8, 1904, Japan launched a surprised attack on the Russian naval base at Port Arthur. This news article in the *Los Angeles Times* was thus engaged with the potential outcome of the war.

Source: "Japan Cannot Conquer Russia," *Los Angeles Times*, February 28th, 1904, p. 6.

## **JAPAN CANNOT CONQUER RUSSIA**

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### **ADMIRABLE STATEMENT OF FAIR EAST SITUATION**

### **United States Army Officer, an authority on Military Conditions There, Forecasts Results of War. Russian Cannot Possibly be Whipped**

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[BY DIRECT WIRE TO THE TIMES.]

WASHINGTON (D.C.). February 27 - [Exclusive Dispatch.] Japan and Russia may continue their fighting for years without either nations gaining material advantage. This was the opinion of an American army officers, given in a paper read before the War College in Washington this week. The officer, who belongs to the General Staff and who was with the American soldiers who marched to Peking,\* is accepted here as one of the most reliable authorities on military conditions in the Far East. It was prepared and read before the Japanese troops landed near Vladivostok. Extracts of its are herewith given:

"The strategic value of command of the waters surrounding Japan and Lao Tang peninsula is of very great importance to Japan. The value to Russia is not so great, as Russia has communication by land with home, her base of supplies and source of reinforcements.

"Realizing the vital importance of controlling the seas, Japan's first move was to insure the predominance of their navy over that of Russia in eastern waters and she now controls the waters necessary for the conduct of any land operations which she may contemplate.



**Japanese troops crossing  
the Yalu River, 1904**

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\* Peking is an obsolete English spelling for Beijing, the capital of China.



***Japanese cavalry cross the Yalu River, 1904***

"What was the next move? Knowing ones now look for a great battle along the Yalu.\*\* Look rather for attacks upon the railroad leading from Russia to Manchuria, simply because that is the plain common sense thing to do. If that railway is cut, the Russian army in Manchuria will be isolated and Japan will then find herself called upon to face an army smaller than her own, separated several thousand miles by land from its source of strength and with no means of communicating therewith by water. In the meantime Japan will jealously guard her present advantage upon the seas. The fleets at Vladivostock and Port Arthur will be watched and every move made by either will be known and promptly met.

"Now that Japan has control of the ocean, Russian cannot conquer her. She cannot invade Japan. She cannot prevent her receiving supplies. On the other hand, Russia's army in the East will fight and hang on as long as life is in its members. If the army is cut off from Russia by the destruction of the great Siberian railway, it will still fight. It may be destroyed, but that will not conquer Russia. Japan can never conquer Russia. She can give her a set-back in the East: she can worry and harass her: but Russia will come back with strength and vigor. Her resources are as inexhaustible as our own. Her people are as proud and patriotic as our own.

"Japan will find her strength taxed mightily. Her army will be sadly worn before arriving where the Russian army in Manchuria will await her. It will be sadly shattered before that army is beaten, if ever it will be beaten. If the powers of the world do not interfere, the war will last for years. As it now stands, neither nations can be conquered by the other ... Whether other nations will be drawn into the conflict is a question that is agitating the minds of navy men. This will not be the case unless causes for interference should arise which are not now discernable."



***Retreat of the Russian Army after the Battle of Mukden, 1905***

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\*\* The river that forms much of the border between Russia-occupied Manchuria at that time Japanese-occupied Korea.



**Takahira Kogoro**

## Primary Source 3: *Kogoro Takahira, A Japanese Point of View*

In 1904, as the war was still underway, the journalist James Martin Miller began preparing the United States' government's official history of the Russo-Japanese War. February 9, 1904, the day after the war broke out, Miller dictated the statement made by the Japanese ambassador to the United States, Kogoro Takahira. In this passage, he explained the decision of the Japanese government to attack Russian ships at Port Arthur.

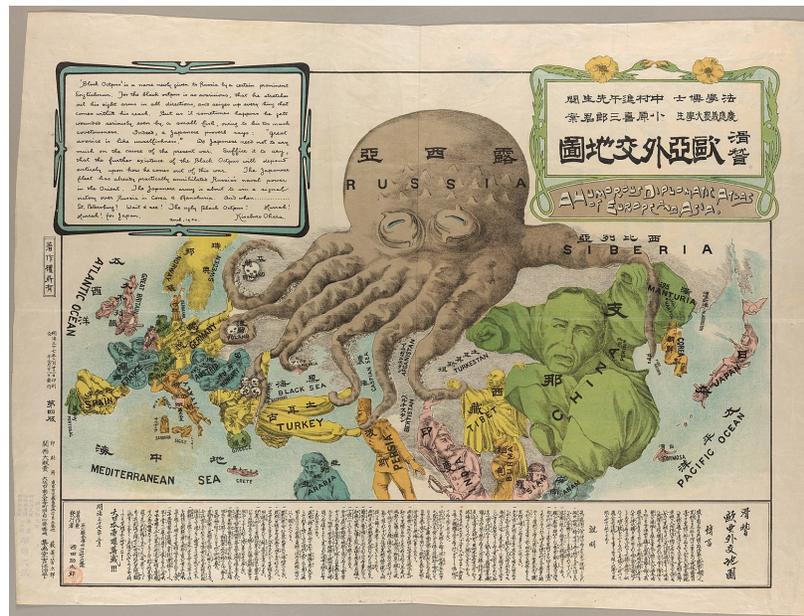
Source: J. Martin Miller, *Official History of the Russian-Japanese War* (n.p.: J. Martin Miller, 1904), 7-11.

Even though my government did begin the war by attacking the Russian fleet at Port Arthur, there is nothing irregular about it; the action would need no explanation of defence. I simply mention the act in the interest of historical accuracy...

I take it for granted that the present crisis in the far East is a matter of grave concern to you and the [American] readers of your book. The hope that I may go further and assume that, in some measure at least, the opinions you have formed is favorable to the cause which my country represents. But whatever your attitude or that of your readers may be, whether in perfect agreement with mine or not, it is not to your sympathy but to your judgment I would appeal....

All who are familiar with the Eastern situation know that a number of the powers have interests in common in China - interests of the greatest value.... Japan took the initiative because the impending peril, while it threatened others in a measure, was to her a matter of far greater moment...

The position assumed by Japan was the logical result of her environment and of the inexorable necessities of national safety. Considerations not merely of self-interest or self-respect, but of self-protection, have led her to where she now stands. The increase of her military and naval strength had been criticized as an indication of a desire for national aggrandizement at the cost of others. Even if it were not the fact, as it unquestionably is, that her progress along more peaceful lines has been as notable as her military and naval growth, no more convincing was the dictate of wise precaution.



**Anti-Russian satirical map produced by a student at Keio University during the Russo Japanese War**



**Japanese infantry march into Seoul, Korea, 1904**

The burden upon the nation's resources is not a light one, but think of the infinitely heavier burden Japan would have to bear if, instead of her present neighbors, a potential enemy of uncertain purpose and overwhelming strength was firmly entrenched upon her vast threshold. It is this contingency against which we have to guard, but in attempting to do so we have never sought to impede in any manner the development of the legitimate ambitions of other nations or the enjoyment by them of vested rights lawfully acquired.

From the outset the representations made in Japan's behalf have been confined without clearly defined limits. They may be summed up in a word - respect for the territorial integrity and independence of China and Korea; faithful observance of treaty stipulations, and due recognition of the validity of the special interest created by existing conditions.... Japan's action was in pursuance of clear duty and assured right, and was fully warranted by her conventional relations with both China and Korea...

In 1895 Japan gained a foothold in Manchuria\* by right of conquest. Russia thereupon took the initiative in intervening on the ground that Japan's occupation of the Li Liao-Tung Peninsula\*\* was a menace to the peace of the East and the integrity of China. Afterward, first through undertakings nominally peaceful and subservient to Chinese sovereignty, then on the pretext based on internal disorders in China, but at no time justified by actual conditions, Russia herself took armed possession of the whole of Manchuria. She bound herself by treaty to withdraw in 1903, but subsequently made withdrawal contingent upon stipulations, an acceptance of which would not have left a vestige of real sovereignty to China. Did not this give Japan as good a right to intervene in 1903 as Russia did in 1895? To the ordinary intelligence it would appear that the peace in the East and the integrity of China were menaced quite as much in one case as in the other.



**Detail of woodcut scene from the Russo-Japanese War, 1904**

\* The area in far northeastern China that borders both Russia and Korea.

\*\* Today called the Liaodong Peninsula, today part of far eastern Russia near the border with Korea. On April 17, 1895, China ceded this area to Japan as the result of a war between the two over control of Korea (which Japan won). A week later, Russia claimed the Liaodong Peninsula was part of China, though Russia took control of it and built a naval port at Port Arthur (present-day Lüshunkou).

**Getsuzō, woodblock print of  
The Battle of Lioyang, 1904**



But Japan had another and stronger reason for intervention. Russia, once the absolute mistress of Manchuria, held Korea at her mercy. When she could, with little effort, sweep away the feeble resistance of that kingdom, it did not require extraordinary foresight to perceive that she would not permit even an independent Korea to remain as a possible embarrassment to her future control of the North Asian litoral.\*\*\* Indeed, the immediate past furnishes significant proofs that Russian agents, official and unofficial, pursuing the line of policy which some term astute diplomacy, but others know by a harsher name, were blazing the pathway to that very goal.



**Depiction of Japanese assault on Russian  
forces, 1904**

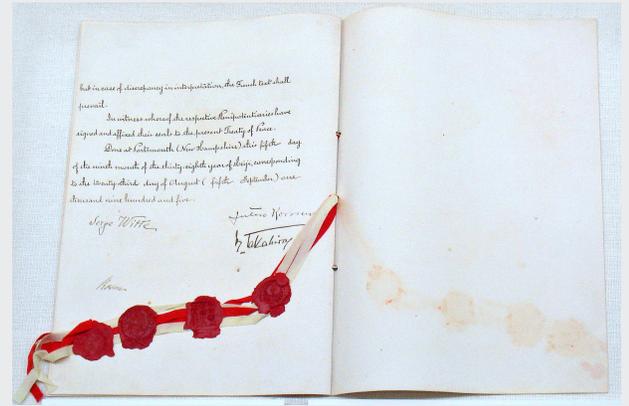
Herein lay the real menace to Japan, not alone to her commercial and industrial interests, but to her national repose and security. For this reason she has intervened, not from motives of petty jealousy or hopes of territorial conquest, not, least of all, because of ranking memories of the Liao-Tung recession. While the present crisis is in a sense the offspring of Russia's action in 1895, the Japanese people are content to deal with existing issues and to leave to impartial history the decision of who played the more honest part in that affair.

The record of all that had occurred will soon be open to everyone, and I feel assured that you will find it ample justification for what I have said. I am confident also that you will see it in good reason to believe that while this issue was not of my country's seeking, she will face it calmly and firmly, not in a spirit of over-confidence, as one underestimating a powerful adversary, but with the assured conviction that in the words of your great President, she is following the right, as God gives her to see the right, and in the end justice must prevail.

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\*\*\* Litoral here means coastline.

# Primary Source 4: An American Makes Meaning Out of the War as it Ended



**Japan-Russia Treaty of Peace,  
September 5, 1905**

Sydney Tyler was an American journalist who covered the Russo-Japanese War. At the end of the war, he wrote a popular illustrated history of the war. In the introduction - written by the publisher P. W. Ziegler - and the first pages of Chapter 1 written by Tyler himself, contemporaries reflected on the meaning of the war for the history of the United States and the world.

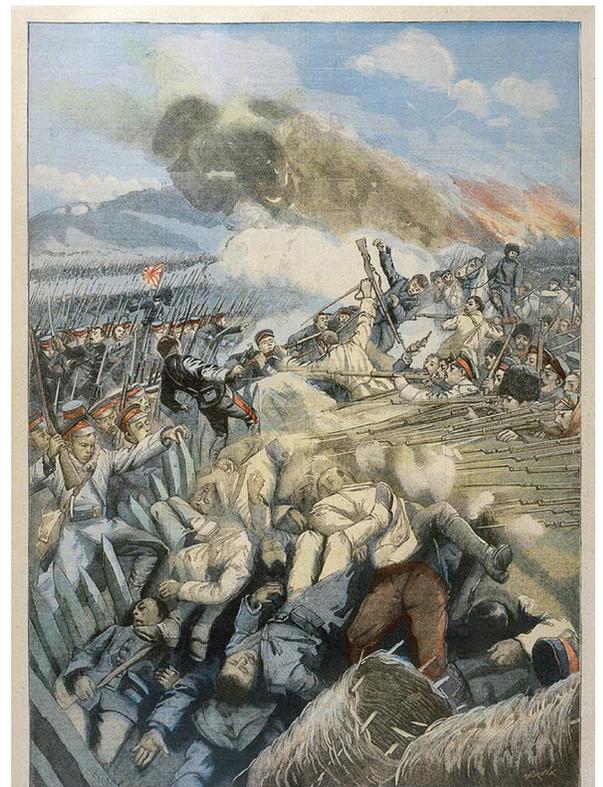
Source: Sydney Tyler, *The Japan-Russia War: The Greatest Conflict of Modern Times* (Philadelphia: P. W. Ziegler Co., 1905), 5-7, 13-16.

## INTRODUCTION

The Japan-Russia War goes into history as the greatest military struggle the world has ever known. Its story, therefore, rivals in interest those of the great wars of the past which have been an increasing inspiration in every field of art and literature. The political machinations of great and little kings, of famed prime ministers, of peoples and states have attracted attention in more or less limited circles, but the world's wars have appealed to every class and rank. The world's vast army of readers have never wearied of the classic stories of feats of arms by men and armies told of the dawning days of world history; the tales of later map-making struggles of Asia, of Europe, of America, have never grown old or dull. So in the Orient of today. The great political battles which have centered in China and Japan for the last half century have interested the few. But to-day the attention of the world is centred on the lands bordering the Pacific, because a war has waged; because the world human family loves the stories of valorous deeds, of military achievement, and the history-making that is done with the sword.

...From the opening of the struggle to its close there was never a moment when stupendous events were not either in the process of making or so imminent that the civilized world held its breath. A single year's campaign in Manchuria and around famed Port Arthur furnish three land battles, greater in the number engaged in the awful cost of life, in the period of duration, than is presented in all of the pages of history. The siege of Port Arthur had no duplicate among all recorded military achievements. The opening of the second year of the war added a battle, that at Mukden, so vast, so brilliant from the standpoint of the victors, so disastrous from the standpoint of the defeated, that it has been accorded by masters of strategy a niche by itself in the chronicles of war. The author saw this wonderful panorama of events unfolded. His story bristles with dramatic touches, flashes of enlightening description that bring the scene home to the reader with a vividness that thrills.

**Depiction of a Japanese assault  
during the Battle of Mukden**



American readers have a more immediate interest in the struggle than the universal love of the stories of battle. With Japan victor over Russia, with the great Muscovite Empire deprived of a foothold on the Pacific, Japan and America remain the only Powers there to divide the rich spoils of Oriental commerce. Our possessions, the Philippines, are Japan's nearest neighbors, and their proximity to Japan, their bearing upon the Asiatic problem open the way for events of more ordinary importance, if not of seriousness. Already the statement has been made that Japan covets these Islands. Will the United States, one day be called upon to go to war in their behalf? The question is one which no American can ignore. The nation must educate itself to decide one day, the issue, for or against a struggle with this wonderful little Empire, the Great Britain of Asia. This volume, therefore, in addition to its value as a chronicle of a marvelous series of bloody battles is educational, the pioneer, blazing the way to an appreciation of events, of possibilities for our own country which lie in the story of Japan's overwhelming success....

## CHAPTER 1: CAUSES OF THE WAR

Never since the great Napoleonic wars which convulsed Europe a century ago has the world witnessed an appeal to arms so momentous in its issues and so tremendous in its possibilities as that which had just been tried between Russia and Japan in the Far East. The great internecine struggle in the United States in the middle of the last century, the disastrous duel between France and Germany which followed, and England's recently-concluded campaign in South Africa, have each, indeed, left a deep mark upon history.\* But while their import was at most Continental, if not local, the conflict between Japan and Russia is fraught with consequences which must inevitably be world-wide in scope.

There is no civilized Power in either hemisphere whose interests are not more or less directly concerned in the question - Who shall be the dominant Power in the China Sea? For the while course of the world's development in that quarter must depend on whether the mastery remains to the obstructive and oppressive Colossus of the North or to the progressive and enlightened island-Empire which ... has sprung fully armed from an ancient civilization into the very van of modern progress. It was no mere dynastic jealousy or racial animosity that brought about this fateful collision. It was the inevitable antagonism of two irreconcilable destinies. "Two stars keep not their motion in one sphere"; and the ambitions of Russia and the aspiration of Japan cannot find room for fulfillment together. One or the other must be crushed....



**Punch political cartoon: "The Sands Running Out, The Tsardom was badly shaken by its war with Japan," 1905**

\* Here, he referred to the American Civil War (1861-1865), the Franco-Prussian War (1870), and the Boer War in British-ruled South Africa (1899-1902).



### ***Sunk Russian Pallada cruiser at Port Arthur***

But if the issue was immediately of such paramount significance to the two combatants, it was only less charged with import for all Asia, Europe and America. The victory of Japan would incontestably give her the predominance in the Far East, commercially as well as politically. Not only would she be a formidable trade rival to the European nations whose methods she has so successfully adopted, but she should be able to influence the conditions under which that trade was carried on. The immensely valuable and as yet imperfectly developed markets of China would be practically within her control; and European Power would not longer be able to impunity to seize naval bases and proclaim exclusive spheres of influence in Chinese territory...

But the anxious concern of the world in this Far Eastern war was based not only upon a calculation of material interests. Every civilized Government had before its eyes the imminent danger of other countries being dragged into the conflict. The situation was such that at any moment some untoward incident might set Europe ablaze. The specific obligations of France to Russia under the term of the Dual Alliance, and of Great Britain to Japan under the Treaty of Alliance in 1901, made the limitation of the struggle to the original combatants not only difficult, but even precarious. The breach of neutrality by any third Power would have at once compelled France to join with her Russian ally, or Great Britain to come to the assistance of Japan.... From such an Armageddon the factors which determine the balance of the power throughout the world, and therefore the development of national destinies, could hardly have emerged without profound modification; and the ultimate establishment of peace would have found many more international rivalries and antagonisms resolved than those which are immediately connected with the Far East. Lord Beaconsfield\*\* once said that there were only two events in history - the Siege of Troy and the French Revolution. It seems more than possible that the Russo-Japanese war will have to be reckoned as a third supreme factor in the progress of the world.

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\*\* This refers to Benjamin Disraeli (1804-1881), the former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom.

# Image Citations:

## Page 1:

Torajirō Kasai, Japanese print of the Battle of Port Arthur, 1904, Library of Congress, Public Domain,  
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## Page 2:

Japanese battleship Mikasa, the flagship of Admiral Tōgō Heihachirō at the Battle of Tsushima, photographed c. 1905, Public Domain,  
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## Page 3:

Japanese troops crossing the Yalu River, 1904, from Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East, P.F. Collier & Son, Public Domain,  
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Japanese cavalry crossing the Yalu River, 1904, from Russo-Japanese War: A Photographic and Descriptive Review of the Great Conflict in the Far East, P.F. Collier & Son, Public Domain,  
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Takahira Kogoro, Japanese ambassador leaving the U.S. in 1908, Library of Congress, Public Domain,  
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Japanese infantry marching through the main street of Seoul, in James H. Hare, Russo-Japanese War, 1904-1905, New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1905, pg. 39, Public Domain,  
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Getsuzō, The Battle of Liaoyang, 1904, Sharf Collection, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Public Domain,  
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Japanese assault on entrenched Russian forces, 1904, October 7, 1904, Public Domain,  
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## Page 8:

Japan-Russia Treaty of Peace, September 5, 1905, CC: BY-SA 3.0, World Imaging,  
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An illustration of a Japanese assault during the Battle of Mukden, Mary Evans Picture Library, Public Domain,  
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## Page 9:

"The Sands Running Out," cartoon first published in January 4, 1905, from The New Punch Library, Vol. 1, London, 1932, pg. 44, Public Domain,  
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**Page 10:**

Pallada cruiser at Port Arthur, photographed the day after the Japanese conquered it, January 4, 1905, Ernesto Purzagli, Public Domain,

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portarthur\\_\(13\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portarthur_(13).jpg)