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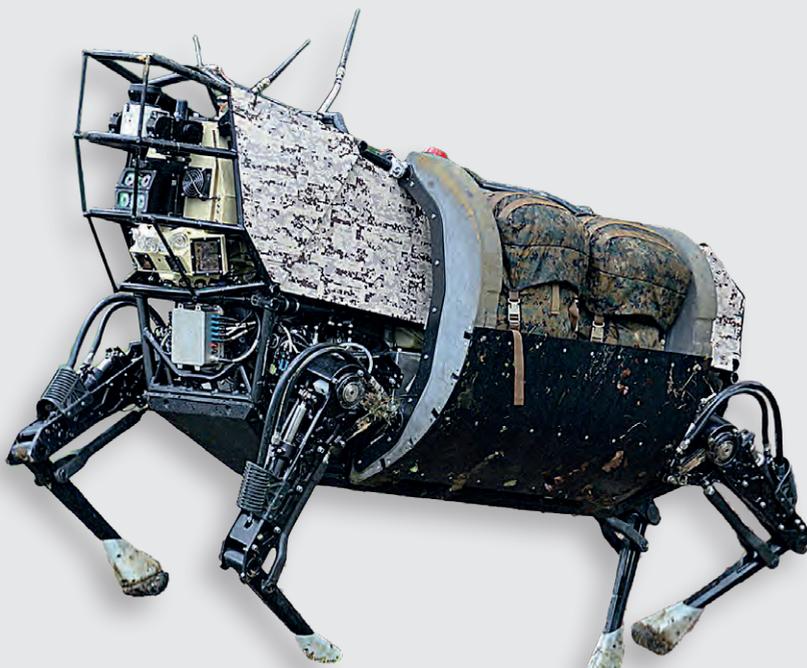
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**Storia Militare Contemporanea**

a cura di

PIERO CIMBOLLI SPAGNESI



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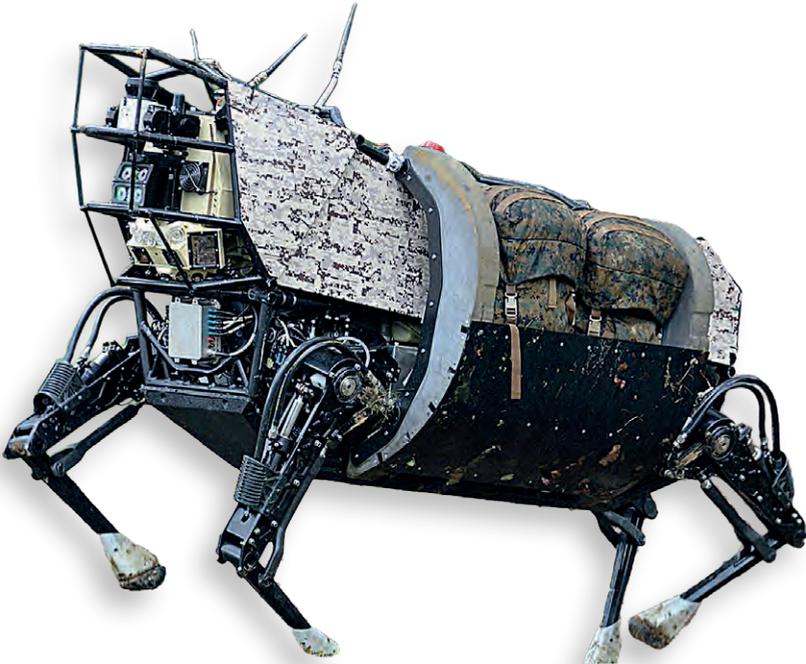
# ANTOLOGIA MILITARE

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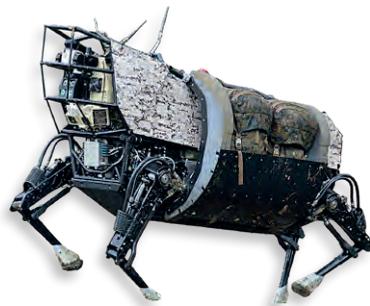
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Legged Squad Support System robot prototype, 2021, DARPA image.  
Tactical Technology Office, Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency,  
U.S. Department of Defense, 2012 (wikipedia commons)

# The Shanghai Incident (1932)

## An Analysis Based on Some New Italian Sources<sup>1</sup>

by ROCCO MARIA COLONNA

**ABSTRACT.** Shanghai has experienced several political and social crises throughout history. This paper aims to reconstruct fully one of the most disruptive of these occurrences: an undeclared war – known as the Shanghai incident – fought by Japanese and Chinese armies over five weeks (28<sup>th</sup> January – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1932). In particular, the essay intends to address this matter from a military point of view and therefore tries to retrace all the events of the war carefully (from the initial pretext to the final armistice) and to identify accurately the actual causes and ultimate outcomes of the conflict. Moreover, in the interests of completeness in adding new information, the study considers a broad series of Italian archival documents neglected by the scientific literature.

**KEYWORDS:** MILITARY HISTORY; HISTORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS; HISTORY OF SHANGHAI; HISTORY OF COLONIALISM; CONTEMPORARY HISTORY.

### 1. Introduction

Shanghai experienced many critical situations throughout its colonial history (1843-1943)<sup>2</sup>. Frequently, these arose out of foreign residents' will to preserve – sometimes with the threat of force – rights and interests against actual or presumed hostile acts of Chinese authorities or civilians. In other

1 In this article, the transliteration of Chinese and Japanese nouns follows the pinyin and Hepburn systems respectively. In addition, personal names follow Chinese and Japanese onomastics rules, with surnames preceding first names.

2 There are several publications on this historical period. For example, see James V. DAVIDSON-HOUSTON, *Yellow Creek: The Story of Shanghai*, London, Putnam, 1962; Ching-lin HSIA, *The Status of Shanghai*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1929; George LANNING and Samuel COULING, *The History of Shanghai*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1921; John W. MACLELLAN, *The Story of Shanghai, from the Opening of the Port to Foreign Trade*, Shanghai, North-China Herald, 1889; Carlos A. MONTALTO DE JESUS, *Historic Shanghai*, Shanghai, The Shanghai Mercury, 1909; Francis L. H. POTT, *A Short History of Shanghai*, Shanghai, Kelly & Walsh, 1928.

terms, foreigners and the Chinese came into conflict several times in Shanghai due to the sensitivity of the former towards any act perceived as infringing their economic privileges, legal immunity, self-government, or social status.

Additional factors also led to frictions and disputes in Shanghai. The instruments of violence and coercion at foreigners' disposal played a key role, since these – just by their existence – did not encourage friendliness and tolerance in relations with natives. In this context, it is essential to note that foreign settlements in Shanghai, namely the International Settlement and the French Concession (see map. 1), took advantage of their police and defence apparatuses<sup>3</sup> and – in case of significant emergencies – direct military intervention by the Great Powers.

The spread of nationalism among the Chinese population contributed to exacerbate tensions in Shanghai. In fact, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, while the nation concept was meaningless to the Chinese, the Shanghai microcosm enjoyed a long period of harmony<sup>4</sup>. However, throughout the first part of the twentieth century, when nationalism became more common in China, clashes between foreigners and the Chinese in Shanghai intensified considerably. For example, it was here that the Chinese tried out, for the first time, a powerful tool to oppose foreign imperialism: the boycott<sup>5</sup>.

Japanese imperialist activity also affected Shanghai's social and political landscape throughout the first decades of the twentieth century. Indeed, the growing Japanese expansionist ambitions in China resulted in a glaring enmity between Chinese and Japanese residents in Shanghai. This enmity grew because of the jingoist attitude that the Japanese presented in Shanghai, with their threatening paramilitary, military, and patriotic associations<sup>6</sup>.

In general, crises in Chinese-foreign relations disturbed Shanghai several times, with severe consequences in some cases. One of the most dramatic epi-

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3 Warren D. SMITH, *European Settlements in the Far East*, London, Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1900, pp. 107, 115-116.

4 Xiaoqing YE, «Shanghai before Nationalism», *East Asian History*, 3 (June 1992), pp. 33-52.

5 Sin-Kiong WONG, «The Making of a Chinese Boycott: The Origins of the 1905 Anti-American Movement», *American Journal of Chinese Studies*, 6, 2 (October 1999), pp. 123-148.

6 Mark R. PEATTIE, «Japanese Treaty Port Settlements in China, 1895-1937», in Peter Duus, R. H. Myers and M. R. Peattie (eds.), *The Japanese Informal Empire in China, 1895-1937*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1989, pp. 206-209.

sodes occurred at the beginning of 1932, when the Japanese began a short undeclared war with the Chinese due to a careless and unjustified military action in the Zhabei district.

This incident is at the core of this essay. The following pages provide a detailed overall reconstruction of the military events of this incident, using the overlooked documentation kept by two Italian archives: the Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito e the Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale<sup>7</sup>. In particular, among these archival documents is a highly significant report on this incident written by military attaché Omero Principini, representing the leading source of information for the present analysis. In the interest of completeness, this essay also provides a thorough description of the origin and repercussions of the 1932 incident.

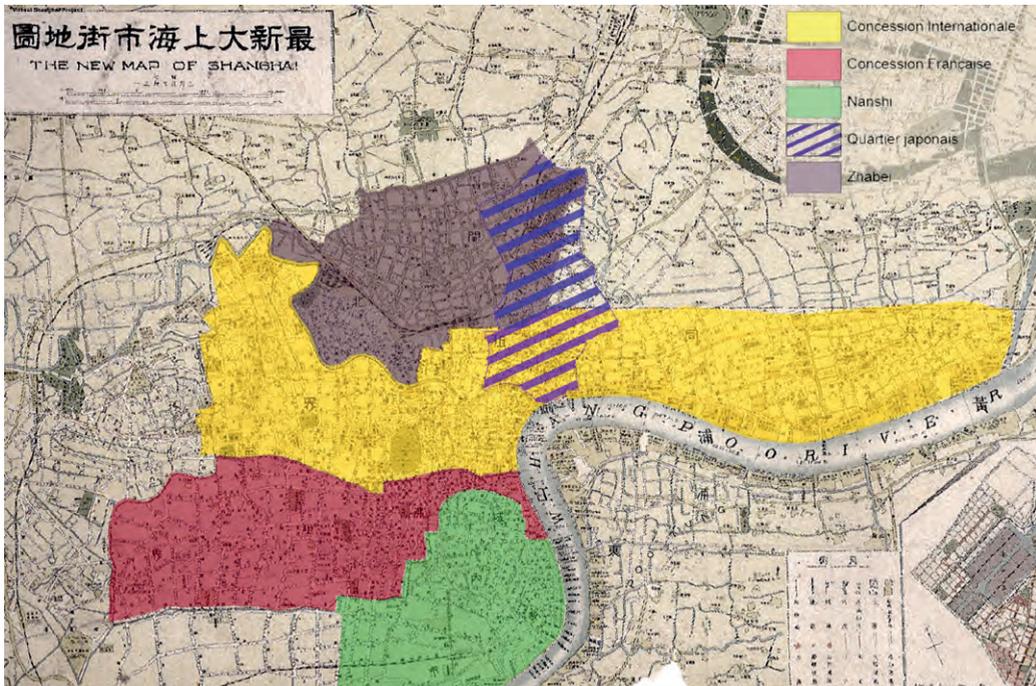
Notably, the Italian documentation proved to be as effective as American, British, Chinese, or Japanese sources in fully reconstructing the Shanghai incident<sup>8</sup>. In this sense, since there is almost no difference in quantity and quality of the information provided by the Italians compared to in documents from other countries, the detailed Italian files on the Shanghai incident are a sign of Italy's increased interest in Chinese matters in the Thirties rather than an innovative source of information on the incident in question. Indeed, the fascist regime decided to pursue a greater political and economic penetration in China in the early Thirties<sup>9</sup>, so, given their dreams of grandeur, Italians could not ignore the causes,

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7 These two institutions keep many sources on China and its relations with Italy. Two contributions provide a general overview of them: Alessandro GIONFRIDA, «Le fonti archivistiche relative alla Cina presso l'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito», in Alessandro Vagnini e G. C. Sung (eds.), *La memoria della Cina. Fonti archivistiche italiane sulla storia della Cina*, Roma, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2008, pp. 121-133; and Andrea E. VISONI, «Le fonti dell'archivio storico-diplomatico del Ministero Affari Esteri per lo studio dei rapporti tra Italia e Cina», in Alessandro Vagnini e G. C. Sung (eds.), *La memoria della Cina. Fonti archivistiche italiane sulla storia della Cina*, Roma, Edizioni Nuova Cultura, 2008, pp. 29-47.

8 Readers can compare this essay with information on the Shanghai incident provided by Donald A. JORDAN, *China's Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001. This book, indeed, gives a good insight into the Shanghai incident and cites a wide range of American, British, Chinese, and Japanese sources.

9 Giorgio BORSA, «Tentativi di penetrazione dell'Italia fascista in Cina: 1932-1937», *Il Politico*, 44, 3, (Sep. 1979), pp. 381-419.



Map of Shanghai in the Thirties, colorized as follows: grey for the Zhabei district, purple strips for the Japanese residential area in Shanghai, yellow for the International Settlement, red for the French Concession, and green for the old Chinese city. The dashed line in Zhabei shows the Shanghai-Nanjing railway. Author: Isabelle Durand (2009). Source: Virtual Cities Project (Institut d'Asie Orientale).

evolution, and consequences of the Shanghai incident.

## 2. *The Roots of the Shanghai Incident*

The Shanghai incident must be understood in the context of its time, during which France, Japan, the Netherlands, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America competed in keeping or expanding their political and economic influence over the Pacific Ocean in the Thirties<sup>10</sup>. In particular, Japan tended to seek hegemony over that ocean, stealing territories and resources from

<sup>10</sup> Giuseppe FIORAVANZO, «Un grande problema. Il problema del Pacifico», *Rivista militare italiana*, 11, 4, (1933), pp. 479-494.

China due to the latter's geographical proximity and military weakness<sup>11</sup>.

The proximate causes are more complex and require careful analysis to exclude some deceptive assumptions. Firstly, the hypothesis that the Japanese provoked the incident because of their will to gain a position of pre-eminence in Shanghai is erroneous. Indeed, according to the facts, the Japanese lacked such a will at the beginning of the Thirties<sup>12</sup> since they benefitted from an active role in the management of the International Settlement<sup>13</sup> and a sound economic position in the trade taking place in the port of Shanghai<sup>14</sup>. Additionally, the Treaty of Shimonoseki provided the Japanese with peaceful ways to gain further benefits in Shanghai, acknowledging their right to establish an exclusive settlement at their discretion<sup>15</sup>.

Secondly, there is no basis for the assumption that Japan caused the incident intending to force the world to recognise the creation of the puppet state of Manzhouguo as a *fait accompli*<sup>16</sup>. The Japanese government had not even been enthusiastic about the Manchurian venture of its army, and it is not conceivable that Japan would try to stabilise its control over Manchuria with a new show of strength<sup>17</sup>. Such an assumption would have been plausible if these events had occurred a few years later, after military authorities subjugated Japanese politics

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11 Ibidem, pp. 480, 491.

12 Archivio dell'Ufficio Storico dello Stato Maggiore dell'Esercito (AUSSME), archive collection L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 7.

13 The members of the executive branch of the International Settlement, known as the Shanghai Municipal Council, came from a limited number of countries traditionally. Therefore, even though subjects and citizens of more than 35 countries lived in the International Settlement, only the British, the Chinese, the Japanese, and Americans had access to the Shanghai Municipal Council regularly in the Thirties. See Isabella JACKSON, *Shaping Modern Shanghai. Colonialism in China's Global City*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, pp. 65-66.

14 Robert Y. ENG, «The transformation of semi-colonial port city: Shanghai, 1843-1941», in Frank Broeze (ed.), *Brides of the Sea: Port Cities of Asia from the 16th-20th Centuries*, Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1989, pp. 137-138.

15 John VAN ANTWERP MACMURRAY, *Treaties and Agreements with and Concerning China, 1894-1919*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1921, vol. I, pp. 91-92. As far as the author of this paper is concerned, the Japanese did not take advantage of this possibility to establish an exclusive settlement because they did not want to renounce the social prestige deriving from living with other foreigners in the International Settlement.

16 Ian NISH, *Japanese Foreign Policy in the Interwar Period*, Westport, Praeger, 2002, p. 82.

17 AUSSME, archive collection L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 7.

and turned Japan into a stratocracy.

Equally groundless is the idea that the Shanghai incident was a diversion to lead the international community to look away from the occupation of Manchuria<sup>18</sup>. Indeed, there is no evidence to support this speculation, though it has a logical internal coherence. The only indication in favour of this theory is the testimony of the Japanese military attaché claiming to have orchestrated the occurrence of the Shanghai incident, Tanaka Ryūkichi<sup>19</sup>. It is safer to state that the Shanghai incident largely drew attention away from the Japanese occupation of Manchuria because the unrest jeopardized an enormous set of business interests, which were of greater concern to the other outside powers<sup>20</sup>.

In light of the above, only two explanations remain for the Shanghai incident: 1) the strained Sino-Japanese relations and 2) the uneasiness of the Imperial Japanese Navy. Regarding Sino-Japanese relations, the Chinese people in Shanghai declared a boycott on Japanese goods in September 1931 as a retaliation for the occupation of Manchuria<sup>21</sup>. In turn, the boycott had detrimental effects on Japanese residents in Shanghai<sup>22</sup>, since many of them had a job related to the trade between China and Japan somehow or other. The boycott's consequences and the anti-Japanese propaganda supporting it led the Japanese to crave an act of force<sup>23</sup> to restore economic and commercial normality in Shanghai.

Regarding the uneasiness of the Japanese navy, the reader must know that the Shanghai incident also occurred in the context of a rivalry among the Japanese

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18 Ikuhiko HATA, «Continental expansion, 1905-1941», in Peter Duus (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Japan. The Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1988, vol. VI, p. 297.

19 Donald A. JORDAN, *China's Trial by Fire: The Shanghai War of 1932*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2001, p. 39.

20 Ian NISH, *Japan's Struggle with Internationalism: Japan, China, and the League of Nations, 1931-3*, London, Kegan Paul international, 1992, p. 90.

21 This boycott has its root in the Wanbaoshan incident (2nd July 1931): one of the most violent disputes between the Chinese and Korean settlers in Manchuria. On that occasion, the Japanese, having gained control over Korea already and aiming to occupy Manchuria, took the side of the Korean immigrants. This stance was enough to irritate the Chinese to trigger growing economic retaliation. See The Osaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *A Synopsis of the Boycott in China*, Osaka, Hamada Printing, 1932, p. 9.

22 James W. MORLEY (ed.) *Japan Erupts: the London Naval Conference and the Manchurian Incident, 1928-1932*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1984, pp. 305-306.

23 Mamoru SHIGEMITSU, *Japan and her Destiny. My Struggle for Peace*, New York, E. P. Dutton, 1958, p. 74.

Armed Forces. The Imperial Japanese Navy desperately wanted to repeat the army colleagues' success in Manchuria<sup>24</sup>, even without the Japanese government's consent<sup>25</sup>. Within this framework, Shanghai represented a marvellous opportunity, since all its social and political tensions provided the Imperial Japanese Navy with a pretext for military action: the defence of the lives and interests of the Japanese residents.

### *3. The Shanghai Incident: Beginning and Successive Phases of the Hostilities*

The Shanghai incident took place after a chain of unhappy events. The first was the death of two Japanese monks at the hands of a Chinese mob that assaulted them on 18<sup>th</sup> January 1932<sup>26</sup>. Due to this offence, the Japanese consul (Murai Kuramatsu) promptly presented the mayor of Shanghai (Wu Tiecheng) with an ultimatum, asking for adequate compensation for the dead monks and the dissolution of all the Chinese associations promoting the boycott of Japanese goods in the city. Of course, if the mayor of Shanghai had ignored such requests, the Japanese authorities in Shanghai would have taken drastic measures in retaliation<sup>27</sup>.

The Chinese did not reply to the Japanese immediately; on the contrary, they started concentrating troops in Shanghai, just as the Japanese did simultaneously. Given this tense situation, the authorities of the International Settlement called an emergency meeting of the defence committee on January 27<sup>th</sup> to take necessary precautions because of a potential conflict between the Chinese and the Japanese. In particular, the meeting agreed to build defensive works to prevent soldiers

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24 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 8.

25 Archivio Storico-Diplomatico del Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (ASD), Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 573, Mamelì to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 3<sup>rd</sup> February 1932.

26 In 1956, Tanaka Ryūkichi stated he had planned this incident, paying the Chinese who assaulted the Japanese monks. See Shuge WEI, *News under Fire: China's Propaganda against Japan in the English-Language Press, 1928-1941*, Hong Kong, Hong Kong University Press, 2017, p. 112.

27 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 379, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1932.

and potential Chinese evacuees from entering the International Settlement<sup>28</sup>. During the same meeting, the captain of the Japanese landing party, Samejima Tomoshige, not only confirmed a possible intervention of the Imperial Japanese Navy in Shanghai but also refused to commit to postponing an attack until after the completion of the defensive works in the International Settlement<sup>29</sup>.

Eventually, the mayor of Shanghai accepted the Japanese ultimatum on January 28<sup>th</sup>, portending a peaceful solution to all the controversies. However, the Japanese naval force stationed in Shanghai decided to up the ante, and its commander, Rear Admiral Shiozawa Kōichi, asked the mayor of Shanghai to persuade the Chinese troops to withdraw from the city by midnight. At the same time, Shiozawa informed the defence committee of the International Settlement that he had the power to launch an attack outside the settlement at any moment<sup>30</sup>.

In light of these alarming developments, the authorities of the International Settlement called a new, urgent meeting of the defence committee to proclaim a state of emergency<sup>31</sup>. This resolution entailed the implementation of a defence scheme assigning some of the Great Powers present in Shanghai (namely Japan, the UK, and the USA) sectors of the international Settlement and its vicinity to protect militarily. According to the scheme, there were four sectors, and the defence of each from turmoil depended on the said Japanese landing party, the Shanghai Volunteer Corps (a local militia consisting mainly of British subjects), the British defence force, and a regiment of American marines<sup>32</sup> (see map. 3).

Nevertheless, the situation seemed to ease by the late evening of January 28<sup>th</sup> because the mayor of Shanghai again acceded to the Japanese requests. Despite this agreement, shortly before midnight, the Japanese landing party sprang into action, entering the Chinese district of Zhabei with two pretexts: to take control of

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28 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 389, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 27<sup>th</sup> January 1932.

29 Ibidem.

30 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Primo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave "Libia" Guido Bacci, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932, p. 2.

31 Ibidem.

32 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Piano per la difesa internazionale del settlement di Shanghai (riassunto del testo inglese) allegato al primo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave "Libia" Guido Bacci, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

the sector assigned to them by the defence scheme of the International Settlement and to safeguard the Japanese community residing there. This unexpected move triggered a violent reaction from the Chinese troops still in Zhabei due to the lack of time to withdraw properly.

In short, the Shanghai incident arose from a violation of territorial sovereignty<sup>33</sup>. However, to clarify the matter, it is worth underlining that the International Settlement claimed to be responsible for the safety of the Japanese residing in Zhabei, even though this district was not part of the settlement and belonged to the Chinese city of Shanghai. This glaring contradiction originated from long-standing administrative disputes<sup>34</sup> and caused several provocations during the years, like the expedition of armed foreigners into Chinese territory. On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1932, the same pernicious dynamic was at work: the Imperial Japanese Navy sent its landing party to Zhabei, albeit the Japanese residing there (see map. 2) had taken shelter in the International Settlement<sup>35</sup>, and the Chinese had accepted all the Japanese ultimatata.

Therefore, the truth is that the Imperial Japanese Navy had been looking for a military confrontation with the Chinese at any cost in order to occupy Zhabei<sup>36</sup> and put a curb on the anti-Japanese activities that radiated from there to all the rest of Shanghai. However, the Imperial Japanese Navy could not reveal its motives openly. For this reason, it gave the abovementioned two pretexts to occupy Zhabei and justified the suddenness of the operation under the guise of defeating the Chinese before they heavily outnumbered Japanese forces<sup>37</sup>.

The conflict lasted for five weeks (28<sup>th</sup> January – 4<sup>th</sup> March 1932) and went

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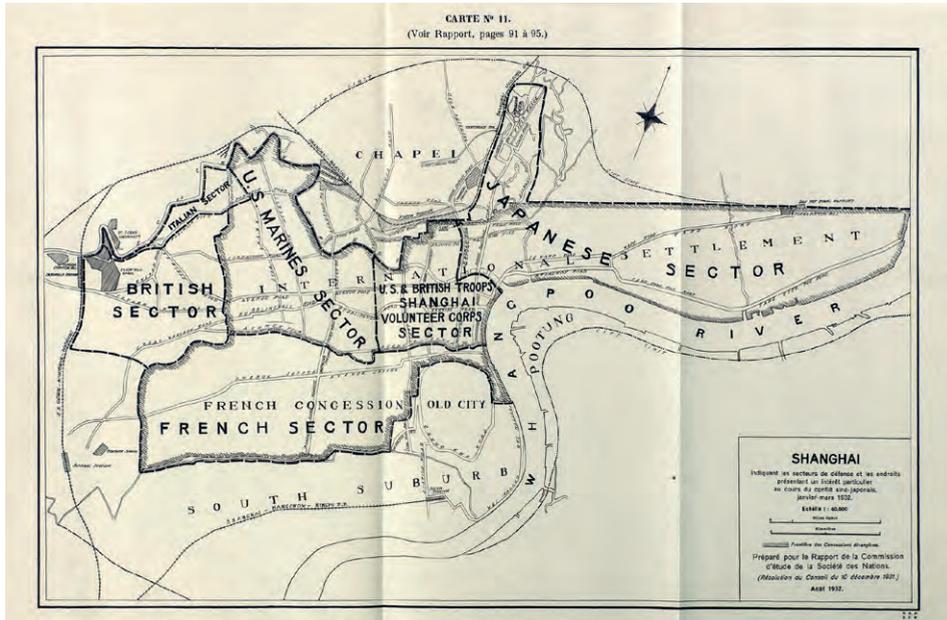
33 William C. JOHNSTONE, *The Shanghai Problem*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1937, pp. 272-274.

34 The International Settlement asserted sovereignty on territories beyond its borders because it had been building roads on them for several years, boosting foreign immigration to some parts of the Chinese city of Shanghai. Among these territories was the northern external roads area, namely the side of Zhabei where the Japanese settled en masse and for the defence of which which the Imperial Japanese Navy mobilised in 1932. See William W. LOCKWOOD, «The International Settlement at Shanghai, 1924-34», *The American Political Science Review*, 28, 6 (December 1934), p. 1037. See map. 3.

35 JOHNSTONE, *The Shanghai Problem*, cit., p. 273.

36 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 22.

37 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 427, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 29<sup>th</sup> January 1932.



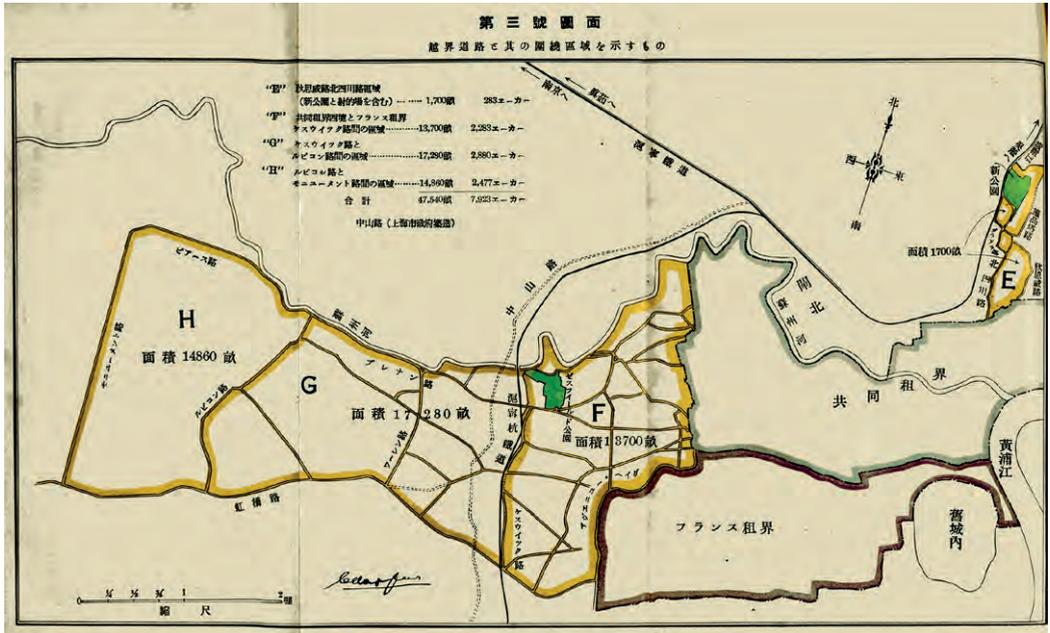
Map of the four sectors identified by the defence scheme of the Shanghai International Settlement. Author: League of Nations (1932). Source: Virtual Cities Project (Institut d'Asie Orientale).

through three phases. Throughout the first phase, the Imperial Japanese Navy tried to occupy Zhabei, but Chinese forces resisted all the attacks successfully. During the other two phases, the Imperial Japanese Army replaced the navy and defeated the Chinese resistance in Zhabei after a first failed attempt.

### 3.1 *The First Phase of the Conflict (January 28 – February 7, 1932)*

The first phase of the conflict was divided into two parts due to a fragile truce that lasted from January 30<sup>th</sup> to February 2<sup>nd</sup>. This phase took place entirely in Zhabei, an urban environment where the Japanese aggressors came across countless obstacles. In fact, Japanese operations lost their momentum and dynamism because of all the houses and buildings catalysing the fragmentation of the military initiative in an endless series of firefights<sup>38</sup>. Additionally, Japanese operations suffered from the defensive works erected by the Chinese 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army and

38 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 22.



Map of the external roads of the International Settlement and the areas encompassed by them. The letter E marks the northern external roads area where the Japanese settled en masse and for the defence of which the Imperial Japanese Navy started the hostilities in 1932. (N.B. The Japanese expression *kyōdō sokai* 共同租界 means International Settlement). Author: Richard Feetham (1931). Source: Virtual Cities Project (Institut d'Asie Orientale).

the impossibility of employing artillery due to the proximity of the International Settlement to the battleground.

Obstacles hampering Japanese military action were evident from the first two days of the conflict when 1.500 Japanese navy sailors and reservists tried to penetrate the eastern part of Zhabei. Their purpose, set by Rear Admiral Shiozawa, was to reach and cross the railway connecting Shanghai with Nanjing, completely crushing the Chinese under the command of General Cai Tingkai<sup>39</sup>. Yet this plan failed because four Chinese battalions succeeded in limiting the Japanese advance, thanks precisely to the help of hindrances such as houses, buildings, and defensive works<sup>40</sup>. Hence, the Japanese managed to reach and cross only the most

39 Cai Tingkai led the Chinese 19th Route Army with lieutenant Jiang Guangnai. See D. JORDAN, *China's Trial by Fire*, cit., p. 97.

40 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai,

northern part of the railway in Zhabei at the end of their operation (see map. 4).

At that moment, some American and British mediators were able to freeze the situation, concluding a truce between the warring parties. This truce called for a suspension of the fighting and establishment of a neutral zone between Chinese and Japanese troops. The idea was to push the Chinese to withdraw at three kilometres from the frontline and the Japanese to retreat into the International Settlement. However, the government of Japan considered this plan unacceptable and rejected it on February 2<sup>nd</sup><sup>41</sup>. Likely, the Japanese feared compromising the prestige of their armed forces with such a rapid retreat. They ultimately accepted the truce to gain time to send reinforcements to Shanghai<sup>42</sup> rather than to set the stage for a diplomatic solution to the conflict in progress.

In this context, the truce rested only on a temporary ceasefire and the prohibition of summoning reinforcements to Shanghai, even though Chinese and Japanese troops both transgressed both measures. Indeed, Japanese and Chinese military authorities blamed each other for continuing violations of the truce, with the former accusing the latter of even deploying plainclothes soldiers for surprise attacks<sup>43</sup>.

The Japanese received intense criticism during this brief military stasis. The Chinese accused them of having provoked a conflict in open violation of three international treaties forbidding war to solve controversies: the Covenant of the League of Nations (1920), the Nine-Power Treaty (1922), and the Kellogg–Briand Pact (1928)<sup>44</sup>. For their part, westerners blamed the Japanese for the summary executions of Chinese civilians<sup>45</sup> and the unauthorized use of the International

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gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 22.

41 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 507, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1932.

42 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 443, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1932.

43 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telespresso n. 72, attached document: «The Shanghai Incident of January, 1932. Facts ascertained up to February 7<sup>th</sup>, 1932», 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932. An authoritative study proved that the Japanese came up with the accusation of plainclothes soldiers as an excuse to cover up the killing of innocent civilians. See Joshua A. FOGEL, «‘Shanghai-Japan’: The Japanese Residents’ Association of Shanghai», *The Journal of Asian Studies*, 59, 4 (November 2000), p. 936.

44 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 481, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 31<sup>st</sup> January 1932.

45 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 590, Galeazzo Ciano

Settlement as a landing place for troops and weapons<sup>46</sup>. Westerners also accused the Japanese of not respecting the defensive scheme of the International Settlement since they kept crossing over into sectors assigned to troops of other nationalities<sup>47</sup>.

Given these circumstances, it is easy to understand why the conflict began again two days after the start of the truce. Two events marked the resumption of the hostilities: the naval bombardment of Nanjing by the Imperial Japanese Navy (2<sup>nd</sup> February 1932) and the launch of a failed Japanese attack against the Wusong forts (February 3-7, 1932)<sup>48</sup>. The bombardment of Nanjing was minor and took place because of a misunderstanding of some orders, whereas the attacks against the Wusong forts occurred because the Japanese expected to conquer them easily<sup>49</sup>.

In Zhabei, on February 2<sup>nd</sup>, the conflict resumed with a heavy aerial bombardment that the Japanese carried out after spuriously blaming the Chinese for restarting the hostilities<sup>50</sup>. Nonetheless, the Japanese failed to turn the tide of combat, despite the reinforcements received in terms of navy sailors, warships, and aeroplanes from the homeland. The Japanese stubbornly persisted in their idea of crossing the railway en masse, focussing their efforts on the spot where they had crossed already without breaking the Chinese line irremediably (see map. 4). The result was disappointing: the Chinese – themselves supplied with more soldiers

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to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 5<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

46 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, *telespresso* n. 63, attached document: «nota di protesta inviata al Console Generale del Giappone», 5<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

47 The solution to this problem was reached only on February 4<sup>th</sup> when the Japanese accepted to retreat to their sector. See ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 577, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

48 Italian documents refer to the Wusong forts frequently, but they were at two separate places: one was near the village of Wusong, whereas the other one was close to Baoshan or Sizin.

49 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), pp. 27-29. The Japanese justified the attack against the Wusong forts by asserting that some artillery shells launched from there had hit three of their cruisers. ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, *telespresso* n. 72, attached document: «Comunicato del Consolato generale Giapponese a Shanghai (3 febbraio 1932)», 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

50 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Primo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave “Libia” Guido Bacci, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932, p. 6.

and weapons – halted the new Japanese advance near a waterway whose bridges they blew<sup>51</sup>. The Japanese tried to renew their attack a little further north on February 5<sup>th</sup>, but the Chinese also stopped this offensive thanks to their effective use of machine guns<sup>52</sup>.

After this additional failure, the Japanese kept attacking with bombers almost exclusively. The aeroplanes in question took off from the seaplane tender *Notaro* and the aircraft carriers *Kaga* and *Hōshō* and carried out unceasing attacks against Zhabei and the Wusong forts. In particular, bombardments against Zhabei took place daily and became increasingly indiscriminate in response to the vigorous resistance of the Chinese<sup>53</sup>. Two of the most destructive raids resulted in the devastation of the office of the Commercial Press – guilty of printing anti-Japanese pamphlets<sup>54</sup> – on January 29<sup>th</sup> and in the dropping of incendiary bombs on Zhabei on February 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup><sup>55</sup>. These bombardments were even more destructive due to the inefficiency of the Chinese air force, which lacked the men and equipment needed to oppose the Japanese counterparty.

The aerial bombardments against Wusong forts differed from those against Zhabei (February 2-7) in two ways: they were combined with naval bombardments and focused on military targets only. These raids aimed to facilitate the occupation of a place that – even though distant from the theatre of combat – was strategic to control the entrance to the port of Shanghai. Therefore, several ground assaults followed the bombardments against the Wusong forts between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of February, though they were all unsuccessful. Indeed, the bombardments had no impact on the Chinese garrisons of the forts since the latter could withstand the assaults of Japanese navy infantry with machine guns after having hidden in trenches during air raids.

In short, the first phase of the conflict was a complete failure for the Japanese

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51 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 25.

52 Ivi, p. 26.

53 Christian HENRIOT, «A Neighbourhood under Storm. Zhabei and Shanghai Wars», *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 9, 2 (December 2010), p. 304-314.

54 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 23.

55 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, report entitled «L'impiego dei mezzi aerei nel conflitto di Shanghai (29 gennaio - 3 marzo 1932 - X.)», 15<sup>th</sup> June 1932, p. 1.

naval authorities in Shanghai because they seriously underestimated the Chinese determination to resist Zhabei's occupation. In addition, this military debacle led to several consequences, such as Shiozawa's replacement by Admiral Nomura Kichisaburō on 8<sup>th</sup> February 1932. Moreover, the failure induced the Imperial Japanese Army to take the lead in Shanghai, relegating the Japanese navy to a subordinate role in the conflict. So great was the humiliation suffered by the Imperial Japanese Navy that some journalists had to exaggerate facts to justify the situation. Zumoto Motosada, for example, tried to defend the honour of the Japanese navy, stating that it had to deal with exceedingly overwhelming forces<sup>56</sup>.

If nothing else, the end of this phase of the conflict resulted in a substantial reduction of damages to foreign colonies in Shanghai since the theatre of the operations started moving ever further north of Zhabei. However, compared to the French Concession, the International Settlement suffered much more damage due to its proximity to the battleground. Notably, this colony had to endure accidental but frequent explosions of bombs and shells within its boundaries<sup>57</sup>, not to mention the challenging task of receiving numerous Chinese refugees<sup>58</sup>. In addition, like the rest of the city of Shanghai, the international settlement had to face a complete paralysis of the economy for the rising costs to insure goods against war risks and the inability to deliver wares<sup>59</sup>.

On February 5<sup>th</sup>, to solve all these problems, westerners tried to pave the way for peace negotiations by again suggesting the creation of a neutral zone in Zhabei. Nevertheless, this diplomatic initiative, launched by the British Admiral Howard Kelly, failed due to Japanese reluctance<sup>60</sup>.

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56 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 6, article of *The Herald of Asia* translated in Italian as «Operazioni attorno a Shanghai», May 1932.

57 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 616, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1932. All the reports of these incidents are in: Shanghai Municipal Archives, *The Minutes of Shanghai Municipal Council*, Shanghai, Shanghai Classics Publishing House, 2001, vol. XXV, passim.

58 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Primo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave "Libia" Guido Bacci, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932, p. 3.

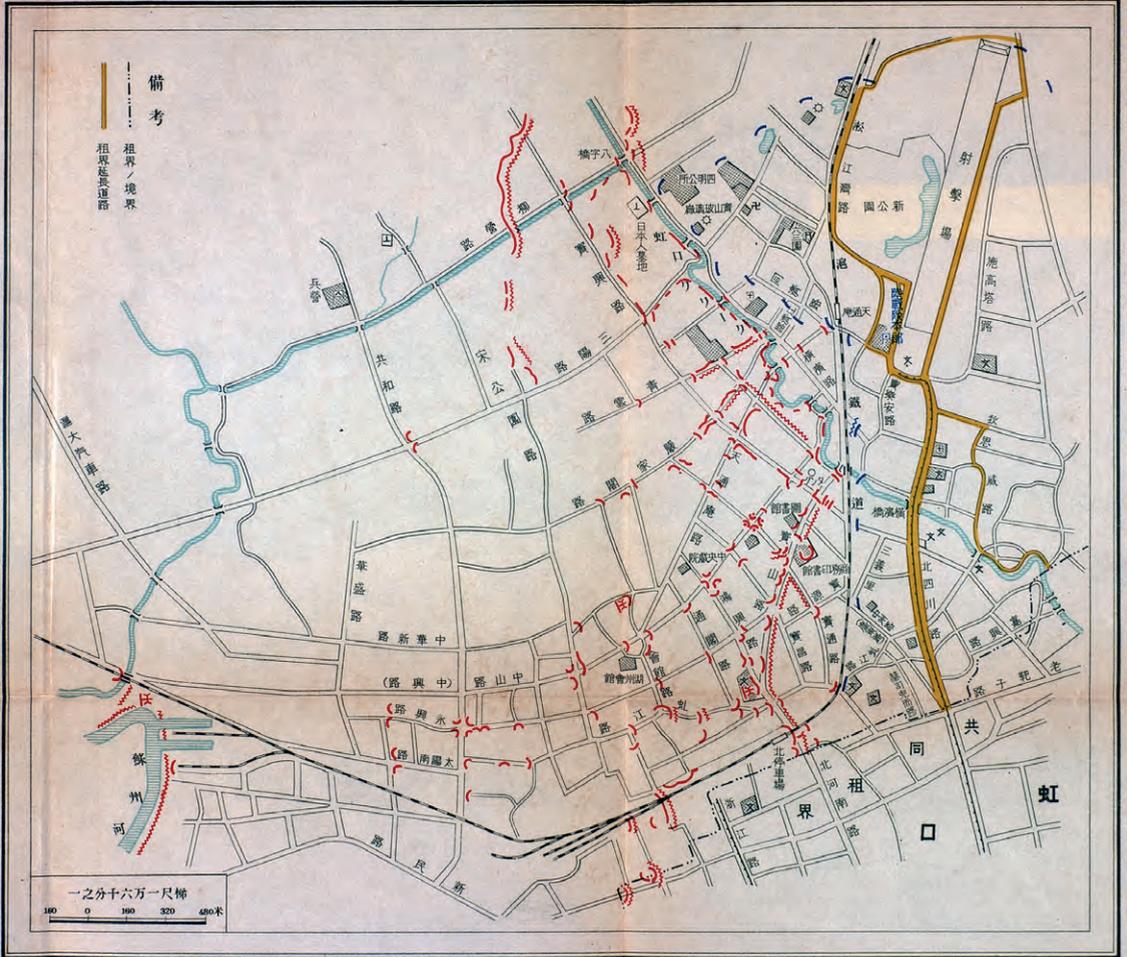
59 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telespresso n. 203879, Pagliano to Regie Ambasciate di Parigi e Londra, Regio Ministero delle Corporazioni e Istituto Nazionale esportazioni, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

60 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Secondo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave "Libia" Guido Bacci, 16<sup>th</sup> Fe-

### 上海閘北概見圖

昭和七年一月下旬

附圖第三十七



Overview of the Zhabei district after the first phase of the conflict. Red and blue signs indicate Chinese and Japanese troops, respectively. This map clearly shows where the Japanese succeeded in crossing the Shanghai-Nanjing railway (symbolized by a dashed line). Author: Unknown. Source: Virtual Cities Project (Institut d'Asie Orientale).

### 3.2 *The Second Phase of the Conflict (February 7-27, 1932)*

The second phase of the conflict began with the arrival of the first echelon of the Imperial Japanese Army in Shanghai on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932. Before any other effects, this development increased the apprehension of Western powers, which were gradually more worried about their economic interests in Shanghai. For this reason, the Japanese assured them that their new initiative – similar to many others that had happened throughout Shanghai's history – was free from imperialistic intents, essential, and proportional to the threat posed by the Chinese<sup>61</sup>. In fact, according to Japanese authorities, the deployment of the army aimed at a more effective defence of the Japanese residents in Zhabei, as well as alleviation of anxiety among other foreigners living in Shanghai<sup>62</sup>. Essentially, the Japanese described the arrival of their army in Shanghai as an earnest and selfless endeavour in order not to further worry westerners.

The Japanese interpretation of the newest military developments depended on the contemporary diplomatic context. Indeed, inundated with Chinese pleas for diplomatic help, the international community started aligning against Japanese military operations in Shanghai. During this diplomatic counteroffensive, the Chinese even appealed to Benito Mussolini to tell the Italian government that Japan was acting regardless of the international treaties and that the Great Powers should have stopped it<sup>63</sup>.

In any case, the first echelon of the Imperial Japanese Army – represented by the 24<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade – disembarked at Zhanghuabang (a little south of Wusong village) and in part at the International Settlement<sup>64</sup>, triggering a wave of Chinese complaints about the need to keep the settlement neutral<sup>65</sup>. Initially, the Japanese

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bruary 1932, p. 2.

61 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 613 and 613 bis, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

62 Ibidem.

63 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, translation of a telegram from the Chinese legation in Rome to Benito Mussolini attached to the note n. 231, 8<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

64 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 613, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 7<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

65 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 622, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 9<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

focused their efforts on the former landing place, where they still had to conquer the forts in the area or, in other words, end the Battle of Wusong. In this respect, a new attempt to occupy the Wusong forts took place on February 7<sup>th</sup>, but the Chinese garrisons resisted<sup>66</sup>. Another attempt failed on February 13<sup>th</sup><sup>67</sup>, even though the Japanese tried to facilitate it with heavy preliminary artillery bombardments<sup>68</sup>.

The Japanese maintained confidentiality regarding these latest failures; they tried to pass off the attempt to occupy the Wusong forts on the February 13<sup>th</sup> as a stratagem to distract Chinese garrisons from the ships carrying the rest of the Japanese army despatched to Shanghai<sup>69</sup>. The latter – grouped in the 9<sup>th</sup> Division and under the command of General Ueda Kenkichi<sup>70</sup> – disembarked without authorization at the International Settlement<sup>71</sup> by February 16<sup>th</sup>. The Japanese lined up this unit in an area between Shanghai and Wusong, with a large concentration of men and equipment near the village of Jiangwan<sup>72</sup> and the positioning of the 24<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade on the right side of the formation. The arrival of the bulk of the army led the Japanese to build an improvised aerodrome near the westernmost part of the International Settlement<sup>73</sup>, with the scope to host the bombers that arrived with Ueda and his division.

However, before hostilities resumed, combat almost ceased between the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of February. During this period, General Ueda kept organising his

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66 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Secondo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave “Libia” Guido Bacci, 16<sup>th</sup> February 1932, p. 3.

67 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 680, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

68 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 634, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 10<sup>th</sup> February 1932; and telegram n. 654, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

69 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), pp. 34-35.

70 Ibidem, pp. 36-37.

71 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 677, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

72 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 701, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 15<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

73 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, report entitled «L'impiego dei mezzi aerei nel conflitto di Shanghai (29 gennaio - 3 marzo 1932 - X.)», 15<sup>th</sup> June 1932, p. 5.

forces and presented the mayor of Shanghai and General Cai with an ultimatum based on three requests: complete cessation of hostilities and the withdrawal of the Chinese troops to twenty kilometres from Shanghai, the dismantling of the Wusong forts, and the suppression of all anti-Japanese associations in the city<sup>74</sup>. General Cai and the mayor of Shanghai forwarded this presumptuous ultimatum to the Nanjing government, which rejected it on February 19<sup>th</sup>, suggesting that Chinese and Japanese troops should have withdrawn both at twenty kilometres from the frontline<sup>75</sup>.

Convinced of the need to restore their military honour, the Japanese dismissed the Chinese suggestion, resuming hostilities in a different area from the first phase of the conflict. As mentioned above, the theatre of combat moved north of the Zhabei district, where the Japanese hoped to avoid the problems that occurred when attacking Chinese troops in an urban environment. Nonetheless, the chosen place, namely the area surrounding Jiangwan village, posed a series of other obstacles typical for a countryside zone, such as the lack of roads, a high number of watercourses without bridges and difficult to ford, and the presence of many tumuli of considerable dimensions<sup>76</sup>.

Hence, despite the absence of urban hindrances, the new theatre of military operations ended up being disadvantageous for the Japanese. Indeed, Japanese troops could locate enemy snipers only with difficulty and recognise Chinese defensive works only from aeroplanes. In addition, the Japanese could not employ tanks properly or strike deep into Chinese territory due to the high probability of running into natural or artificial obstacles<sup>77</sup>. Moreover, the Chinese were ready to fight back against Japanese troops thanks to reinforcements received from other divisions of the 19<sup>th</sup> Route Army and the 5<sup>th</sup> Army under the command of General Zhang Zhizhong.

The Japanese launched two full-scale offensives within this detrimental battleground. Both revolved around attacking the Chinese line covering the distance from Shanghai to Wusong, focussing on the seizure of Miaohang and Jiangwan

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74 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 6, article of *The Herald of Asia* translated in Italian as «Operazioni attorno a Shanghai», May 1932.

75 Ibidem.

76 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), pp. 30-31.

77 Ibidem.

villages (see map. 5). Particularly, according to the Japanese plan, the 24<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade was to attempt the occupation of Miaohang, whereas the 9<sup>th</sup> Division was to try to conquer Jiangwan. After these two seizures, the Japanese hoped to occupy Zhabei, forcing Chinese troops to leave the district to avoid encirclement<sup>78</sup>.

The first offensive took place between February 20<sup>th</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> and followed the prearranged plan, with the Japanese preventing a potential intervention by the Chinese garrisons of the Wusong forts with an intensive naval bombardment against them<sup>79</sup>. This advance – insufficiently supported by bombers, tanks, and artillery – met with considerable Chinese resistance and was halted: the Chinese defensive works and plans were accurate enough to turn the Japanese attack into a fiasco<sup>80</sup>. In fact, by the end of February 22<sup>nd</sup>, the troops under the command of General Ueda succeeded only in approaching Miaohang, even though Japanese bombers completely wrecked the hopes for an intervention by the Chinese Air Force by destroying Hongqiao and Suzhou airports on February 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup><sup>81</sup>. Additionally, the Japanese bombed and severely damaged the Shanghai-Nanjing railway and Longhua station<sup>82</sup>, impeding Chinese troops from receiving reinforcement by train.

The second offensive lasted from the 25<sup>th</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of February and occurred after the Japanese had received an adequate supply of ammunition. During this attack, Japanese troops seized Miaohang and Jiangwan thanks to a more effective employment of bombers and artillery. Nevertheless, the Chinese did not capitulate, since the Japanese men and equipment were insufficient to attack the village of Dachang and break the second defensive line positioned by General Cai. Therefore, besides the occupation of Miaohang and Jiangwan, the Japanese had

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78 Ibidem, p. 42.

79 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Terzo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave “Libia” Guido Bacci, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1932, p. 3.

80 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 6, article of The Herald of Asia translated in Italian as «Operazioni attorno a Shanghai», May 1932.

81 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 130.

82 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Terzo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave “Libia” Guido Bacci, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1932, p. 4.

enough resources only to destroy the two airports of Hangzhou on February 26<sup>th</sup><sup>83</sup>.

In summary, like the previous one, the second phase of the conflict ended with the Japanese requiring reinforcement. The Japanese had once again underestimated the forces necessary to crush Chinese resistance, with the consequence that they had to arrest their offensive at a critical moment. In this context, General Ueda called unofficially for reinforcement from the homeland on February 24<sup>th</sup>, obtaining the organization and the arrival of a whole expeditionary force in a few days<sup>84</sup>.

Again like the first attempt, the second phase saw accidental damages suffered by westerners. Episodes of this kind happened less than in the first phase but kept occurring occasionally. The most remarkable cases were the accidental killing of two British soldiers by Chinese artillery on February 16<sup>th</sup><sup>85</sup> and the damage of the Italian cruiser *Libia* by some artillery projectiles during a failed Chinese counter-attack in Zhabei on February 22<sup>nd</sup> and 23<sup>rd</sup><sup>86</sup>.

Due to these incidents, westerners tried to restart negotiations for a truce. The path towards cessation of hostilities and reconciliation between the warring parties began on February 28<sup>th</sup>, when Admiral Kelly promoted some negotiations between Chinese and Japanese representatives on the cruiser *Kent*. On this occasion, Kelly's initiative did not fail but developed slowly because neither of the belligerents was seriously interested in peace, even though the Chinese and the Japanese were aware of the impossibility, respectively, of resisting indefinitely and meeting the high costs of military operations in Shanghai<sup>87</sup>.

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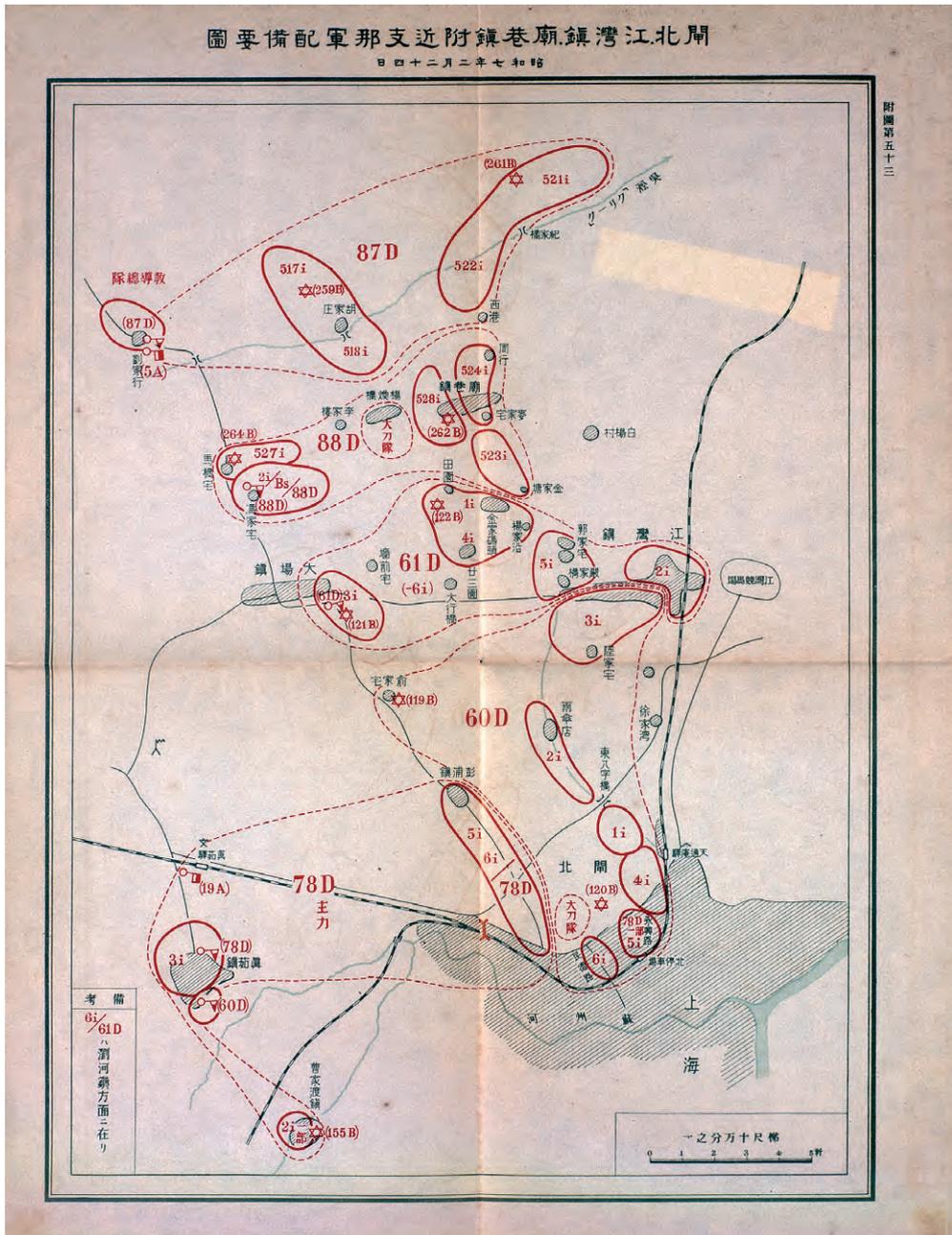
83 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 130.

84 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, Terzo rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave "Libia" Guido Bacci, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1932, p. 4.

85 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 752, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 17<sup>th</sup> February 1932.

86 For further information on this incident, see ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 7, file 1, sub-file 3.

87 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 25, file 1, Quarto rapporto sugli avvenimenti di Shanghai del capitano di vascello della Regia nave "Libia" Guido Bacci, 5<sup>th</sup> March 1932, p. 3.



Map showing the Chinese line-up in Jiangwan (江灣鎮) and Miaohang (廟巷鎮) villages.

Author: Unknown. Source: Virtual Cities Project (Institut d'Asie Orientale).

### 3.3 *The Third Phase of the Conflict (February 27 – March 4, 1932)*

The end of the Japanese offensive of February 25-27 marked the beginning of the third phase of the conflict. It lasted just five days due to the Japanese will to restore their military honour as soon as possible and the intense activity of international diplomacy: the Japanese expedited the end of combat to cancel the humiliations suffered and avoid the possibility of the League of Nations condemning the conflict in Shanghai before a victory on the battlefield<sup>88</sup>. International diplomacy even set March 3<sup>rd</sup> as the ideal end date of the conflict, as that was the day of the meeting of the Special Assembly of the League of the Nations that would have condemned Japanese aggression in Shanghai<sup>89</sup>.

Therefore, the Japanese rushed to gather in Shanghai as many soldiers and equipment as possible by the beginning of March. The authorities of the Imperial Japanese Army grouped all these reinforcements in an expeditionary force consisting of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division and several extra-divisional units, which disembarked near Wusong on February 29<sup>th</sup> and March 1<sup>st</sup><sup>90</sup>. With this human and material help, the Japanese not only replaced dead and wounded soldiers but also increased their forces.

Japanese leaders in Tokyo gave the command of the expeditionary force to General Shirakawa Yoshinori, who arrived in Shanghai on February 29<sup>th</sup> and promptly took over the coordination of the Japanese troops in Shanghai from General Ueda. Therefore, Shirakawa was the author of the plan to force Chinese troops to abandon their positions. General Shirakawa conceived a flanking manoeuvre that – even before it completely materialized – led the Chinese to abandon their defensive line in the whole area of Jiangwan. This manoeuvre was also successful because the Chinese, lacking men and ammunition, considered withdrawing wiser than resisting<sup>91</sup>.

Shirakawa enacted his plan on February 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>. During those two days,

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88 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 60.

89 Lucio TONDO, *La crisi di Shanghai. Gli Stati Uniti e il contenimento del Giappone (1932)*, *Nuova Storia Contemporanea*, 14, 2 (2010), p. 64.

90 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), pp. 60, 62.

91 *Ibidem*, p. 64.

ships of the Imperial Japanese Navy bombarded the Wusong forts, letting some contingents of the 24<sup>th</sup> Mixed Brigade penetrate the area controlled by Chinese garrisons<sup>92</sup>. In addition, this operation was combined with a major offensive in Zhabei, where the Japanese landing party that started the conflict was still operating<sup>93</sup>. In this way, the Japanese held Chinese forces in the Zhabei and Jiangwan areas, while Shirakawa began an encircling manoeuvre further north, at Liuhe.

Convenient for disembarkation and scarcely guarded by the Chinese, the area of Liuhe village was ideal for presenting a deadly threat to the back of the Chinese deployment around Jiangwan. To be exact, the Japanese located a safe landing point near the outlet of the Qiyakou (Qiliaokou) River, and there, at the dawn of the 1<sup>st</sup> of March, they decided to disembark part of the 11<sup>th</sup> Division (five battalions, two gun batteries, and two companies of corps of engineers)<sup>94</sup>. By March 3<sup>rd</sup>, this little military formation seized the Chinese villages of Qianli, Liuhe, and Loutang, initiating the encircling manoeuvre.

This manoeuvre succeeded because the Chinese army lacked men to defend the Liuhe area. In addition, the Japanese were forward-looking in concentrating almost all of their forces in the Jiangwan area, forcing the Chinese 19<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Armies to do the same with their few residual resources. Lastly, the Japanese launched a full-scale offensive near Jiangwan to ensure the success of the operation in progress in Liuhe and hold as many Chinese troops as possible near Jiangwan village.

The Chinese quickly realized that the Japanese initiative around Liuhe represented a threat, so they began withdrawing en masse to Kunshan and Suzhou on March 2<sup>nd</sup>. At the same time, the Imperial Japanese Army set off in pursuit of the Chinese troops and, by the end of March 4<sup>th</sup>, had occupied Dachang, Nanxiang, Jiading, Wusong, Sizilin, Huangdu, and, eventually, the district of Zhabei. Given these developments, Japanese forces achieved what they had demanded with General Ueda's ultimatum at the beginning of the second phase of the conflict: the retreat of Chinese troops to twenty kilometres from Shanghai. This result

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92 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 6, article of *The Herald of Asia* translated in Italian as «Operazioni attorno a Shanghai», May 1932.

93 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 908, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1<sup>st</sup> March 1932.

94 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 67.

was enough to satisfy the Japanese, who – through a public statement by General Shirakawa – affirmed that they had achieved all their objectives and, therefore, were ready to cease hostilities<sup>95</sup>.

Peace negotiations took place as the fighting stopped. In truth, as mentioned before, the negotiations began unofficially on February 28<sup>th</sup> aboard the *Kent* and culminated in two fruitless armistice proposals during the end of February and the beginning of March. However, the negotiations became official only when a resolution of the League of Nations – adopted on March 4<sup>th</sup> – encouraged the warring parties to settle their dispute peacefully, offering the assistance of the League itself and that of some diplomatic representatives of France, Italy, the UK, and the USA.

After the League of Nations initiative, the negotiations started on March 14<sup>th</sup> and continued for almost a month. Nevertheless, on April 11<sup>th</sup>, peace talks reached an impasse on the scheduling and procedures for the Japanese withdrawal from Shanghai. In particular, the Chinese insisted on Japanese troops evacuating from Shanghai soon after the ratification of the armistice agreement, whilst the Japanese wanted their forces to stay in Shanghai as long as there were risks to the safety of their compatriots residing in the city<sup>96</sup>.

Efforts to break the stalemate succeeded on 26<sup>th</sup> April 1932, when a proposal of the British diplomat Miles Lampson met with the approval of Chinese and Japanese representatives<sup>97</sup>. On this basis, the negotiations resumed on April 28<sup>th</sup> and, despite the death of General Shirakawa in a bomb attack<sup>98</sup>, ended with an armistice on May 5<sup>th</sup>. The agreement revolved around three points: 1) the Chinese troops would remain in their positions pending later arrangements with the Japanese, 2) the Japanese troops would withdraw to the International Settlement and streets in Zhabei populated by Japanese subjects, and 3) a commission would be created to certify the actual withdrawal of the Japanese from Shanghai<sup>99</sup>.

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95 ASD, Serie Affari politici 1931-45 (Cina), box 13, file 1, telegram n. 938, Galeazzo Ciano to Regio Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 3<sup>th</sup> March 1932.

96 *The Monthly Summary of the League of Nations*, Geneva, Information Section of the League of Nations, 1932, vol. 12, pp. 131-134.

97 Ibidem.

98 Ian NISH, *Japanese Foreign Policy*, cit., p. 82.

99 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, typewritten drafts (unknown author and date).



#### 4. Conclusion

Given the significant losses and devastation, the 1932 incident was one of the most dramatic moments of crisis in Shanghai's history. When it ended, the Chinese estimated about 4.000 deaths and 7.700 wounded military personnel among 63.000 soldiers deployed, whereas the Japanese casualties amounted to 1.000 deaths and 8.600 wounded military personnel out of a total of 47.000 army and navy soldiers deployed<sup>100</sup>. Additionally, the Shanghai incident greatly affected the Chinese population, causing about 6.000 deaths, 20.000 civilians wounded<sup>101</sup>, and 1.2 million displaced<sup>102</sup>.

Besides these casualties, the Shanghai incident resulted in several other consequences. Firstly, the conflict provided the Japanese with a chance to conduct some military experiments that attracted foreigners' attention. In particular, Japanese forces employed some devastating incendiary bombs during air raids over Zhabei, catching the interest of Western experts<sup>103</sup>. As noted by the historian Luigi Emilio Longo, Japanese aerial bombardments over Zhabei perfectly put into practice the ideas of Giulio Douhet about strategic bombing in aerial warfare<sup>104</sup> and, to some extent, represented a model for other bloody actions of the same kind: Guernica (1937), Warsaw (1939), Rotterdam (1940), London (1940-41), Hamburg (1943), Dresden (1945), and Tokyo (1945)<sup>105</sup>.

Secondly, the Shanghai incident triggered studies, as observers wished to draw from it. For example, Major Guglielmo Scalise wrote an essay including interesting observations on the forces and equipment employed during the conflict.

100 JORDAN, *China's Trial by Fire*, cit., p. 189-90.

101 Christian HENRIOT, *Shanghai 1927-1937*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1993, p. 94.

102 FOGEL, "*Shanghai-Japan*", cit., p. 936.

103 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, «Operazioni militari intorno a Shanghai, gennaio-marzo 1932» (a booklet by Omero Principini), p. 143.

104 Luigi E. LONGO, *L'attività degli addetti militari italiani all'estero fra le due guerre mondiali (1919-1939)*, Ufficio Storico SME, Roma 1999, p. 126.

Giulio Douhet (1869-1930) was an artillery official and theorist of the command of the air doctrine. In his opinion, after the First World War, nations should have employed air forces to accomplish armies' and navies' strategic goals because aerial bombardments could heavily strike industrial production and terrorise civilians.

105 Ronald J. GLOSSOP, *Confronting War: An Examination of Humanity's Most Pressing Problem*, Jefferson and London, McFarland, 2001, p. 50.

In detail, Scalise's essay noticed the effectiveness of trench warfare in stopping a better equipped enemy forced to operate within hostile territory and emphasized the dangers deriving from underestimating the enemy's forces<sup>106</sup>.

Thirdly, the Shanghai incident played a role in the degeneration of the Japanese political system. Japanese nationalists considered the armistice signed to end the incident unsatisfactory and started fiercely criticizing their government. This disapproval resulted in the killing of Prime Minister Inukai Tsuyoshi at the hands of the secret society of the Black Dragon and in the rise to power of Saitō Makoto, incidents which contributed to the subjugation of Japanese politics by military authorities<sup>107</sup>.

Fourthly, the conflict of 1932 marked two substantial changes in the dynamics of imperialism in China. The first change was the end of the traditional neutrality of the International Settlement due to the Japanese idea of exploiting the settlement as a military base throughout combat<sup>108</sup>. Before the Shanghai incident, the International Settlement had not experienced violence like this because foreigners based the existence of the settlement on its neutrality in every possible conflict in its vicinity<sup>109</sup>. In other words, from its establishment on 21<sup>st</sup> September 1863, the International Settlement dealt only with its self-defence, but the Japanese broke with this tradition.

The second change corresponded with a drastic reconfiguration of foreigners' imperialist ambitions in China. Put otherwise, the non-participation of Western powers in the conflict against the Chinese symbolized the end of all imperialist impulses in China, except those of Japan. Indeed, Western powers did not support Japan in any way in 1932 since they, endorsing the Open Door Policy<sup>110</sup> after

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106 Guglielmo SCALISE, Sull'impiego delle forze e dei mezzi nel conflitto cino-giapponese 1931-1932, *Rivista militare italiana*, 11, 2 (February 1933), pp. 235-253.

107 AUSSME, L-3 (studi particolari), box 184, file 5, typewritten drafts (unknown author and date).

108 William C. JOHNSTONE, International Relations: The Status of Foreign Concessions and Settlements in the Treaty Ports of China, *The American Political Science Review*, 31, 5 (October 1937), p. 947.

109 This tradition started towards the end of the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864). See Hosea B. MORSE, *The International Relations of the Chinese Empire*, London, Longmans, Green, and Co., 1918, vol. 2, p. 124.

110 The Open Door Policy was a statement of principles to preserve Chinese territorial integrity and establish equal conditions among powers trading with China.

decades of old-fashioned imperialism, had stopped considering convenient any direct control over territories belonging to China.

Eventually, the Shanghai incident emphasized the military skills of the Chinese army. This force proved able to confront a better-organized and armed enemy, compensating for its deficit in equipment with ingenuity. Nonetheless, the Japanese confronted the Chinese army again in Shanghai between August and November 1937, defeating it through fast acquisition of air command above the city<sup>111</sup>. Later, pushed by their plans of subjugating all of the Far East, the Japanese also occupied the International Settlement coinciding with the attack on Pearl Harbour<sup>112</sup>, ending any potential resistance to their power in Shanghai.

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<sup>112</sup> AUSSME, G-29 (addetti militari), box 101, file 4, telegrams n. 2730 and 2731, Omero Principini to Supermiles, 8<sup>th</sup> December 1940.

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# MAP SHOWING JAPANESE-CHINESE WARFARE NOW IN SHANGHAI

(PRICE: 40 CTS) BY C. Y. SOO

FEB. 24, 1932

On the map, H indicates the Headquarters of the Japanese Naval Forces, located by the side of an extension road. H indicates the Headquarters of Japanese Army being established at Ying Hsianglung village in the International Settlement. H indicates the different quarters where their forces landed.

The section west to North Honan Road and south to the Soochow Creek has been guarded by the different forces of the International Settlement. Since the outbreak of the war at Shanghai Jan. 28th 1932, Japanese have taken over all the rights of the Police stations in the north and eastern parts of the International Settlement and have been using it as whole Hongkew district in the Settlement as the base of military operation. They started the war by attacking the North Railway Station, Tien Tong An Station and other sections of Chapei. Having been repelled by the Chinese 19th Route Army, the Japanese changed their tactics after Feb. 7th and turned their attacks on Woosung and Kiangwan with the aid of more than forty battleships. Three airplanes carried and one hundred twenty aeroplanes. They raped Chinese women, shot with machine bullets, destroyed the Chapei waterworks and the Woosung lighting-houses, took away the floating drums in the river and killed the civilians as well as the sailors of the Cross Association. The Japanese battleships often hid themselves among foreign battle ships or merchantships and discharged cannons toward land where Chinese defenders could hardly return fire on them.

It was reported that Japanese disguising as the Red Cross salvagers and carrying with pistol, bullets and poison gas bombs, entered into Chinese sectors and attacked the Chinese soldiers.

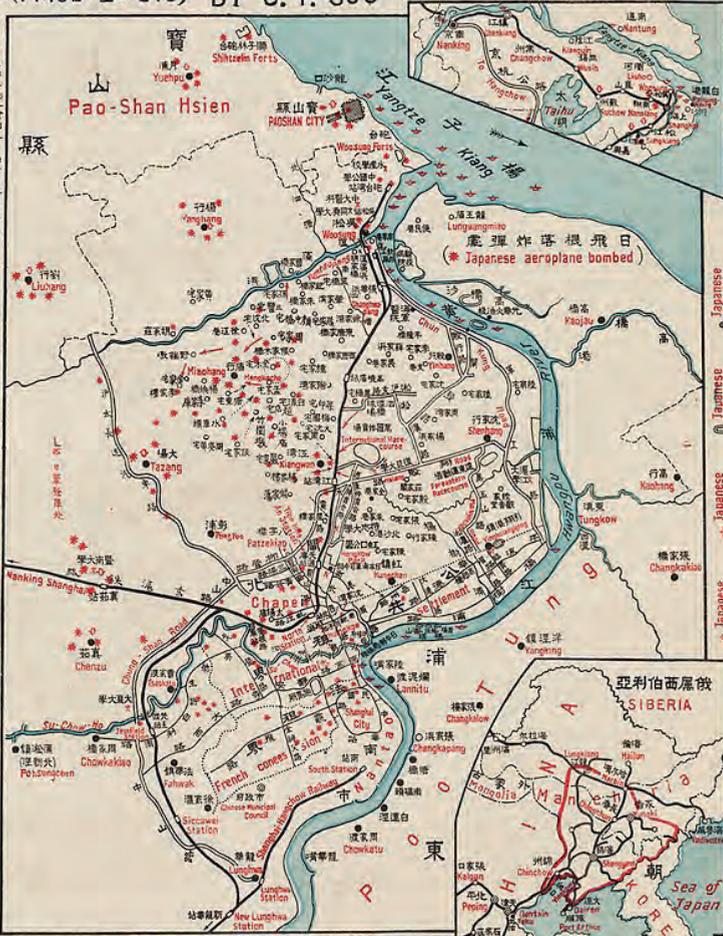
The districts of Chapei Kiangwan and Woosung have totally been destroyed by fires from Japanese bombardments from Japanese battleships and airplanes. All the educational institutions and cultural establishments at the above districts such as Commercial Press and Tung Chi University etc. are indicated as have become ruins. Losses are incalculable. Thousands and thousands of Chinese and civilians have been killed and wounded. A Japanese aeroplane bombed a refuge camp where there were 8000 refugees who fled from other places to Shanghai due to the flood, killed over fifty inmates and wounded a number of them. For this cruel act Mr. Simpson sent a strong protest to the League of Nations on Feb. 12th 1932. There are more forty-nine refugee camps and 25479 refugees in the Settlement and 160000 unemployed persons have been

increased by warfare. Although west to North Honan Road and South to Soochow Creek there are ten thousand foreign guarding forces at the International Settlements, Japanese aeroplanes still bombed some places as indicated in that location. According to the reliable reports, during the period from 28th Jan. to

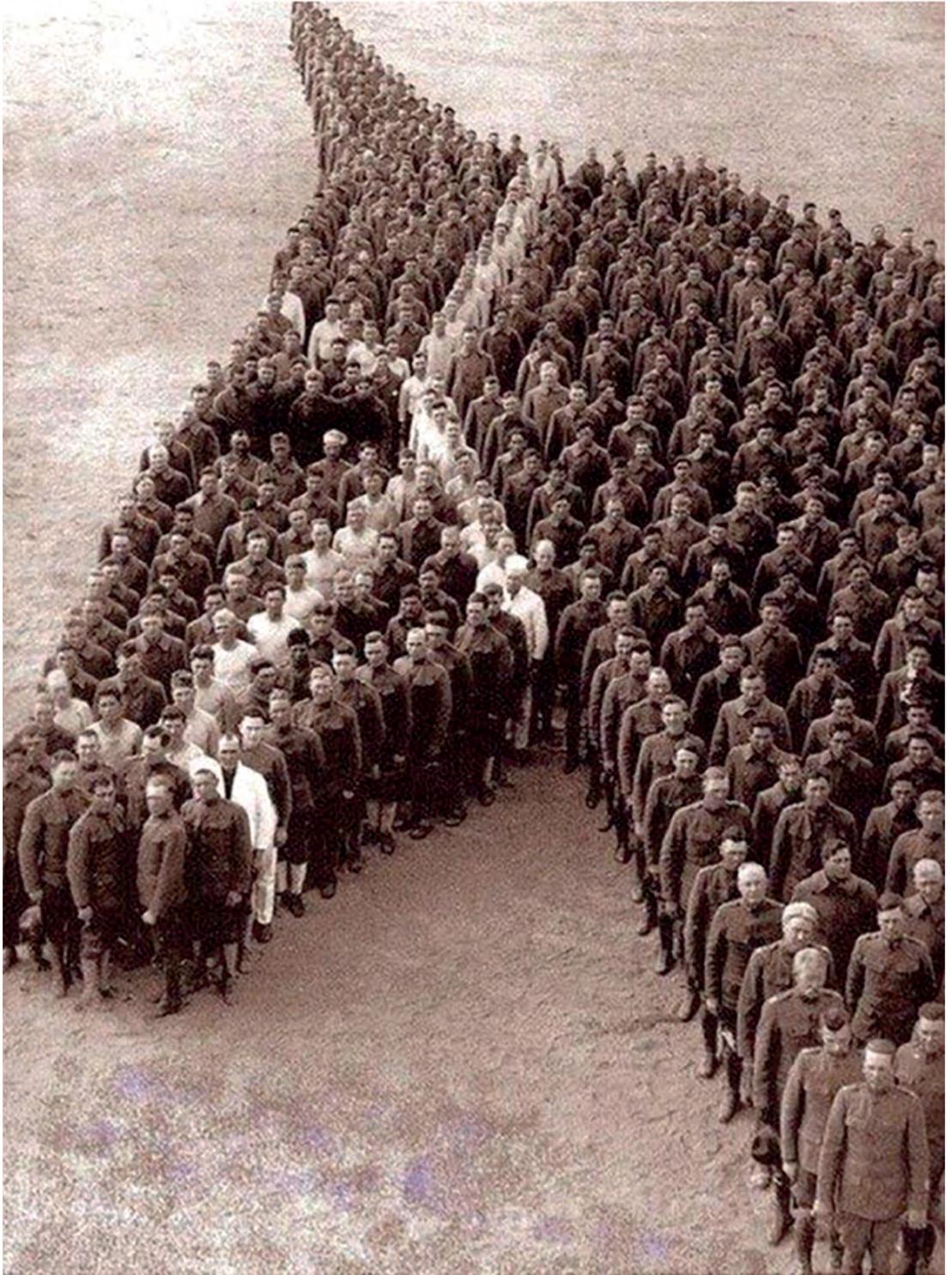
23rd Feb. 1932, the number of killed and wounded soldiers on Chinese side is about three thousand while that on Japanese side is nearly twenty thousand.

The totality of Japanese forces now in Shanghai is over fifty thousand and reinforcements are still rushing to front from Japan.

The JAPANESE have occupied the whole of MANGURIYA which ten per cent the area of CHINA, and with a population of 25,000,000. It holds the area of FRANCE and is four times as large as JAPANESE.



Map of the fighting in Shanghai Su, Chia-jung, 1932 (wikimedia commons)



650 Officers and Enlisted Men of Auxiliary Remount Depot N° 326 Camp Cody, N. M., In a Symbolic Head Pose of "The Devil", Saddle Horse ridden by Maj. Frank Brewer, remount commander / Photo by Almeron Newman, *Rear 115 N. Gold Ave., Deming, N.M.*.(1919)  
Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

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