

## ✓ Question <sup>[2]</sup>

**What is the photograph's date, title, and creator?** 1905; A dead war monster—Russian battleship 'Peresvet' wrecked by Japanese shells, Port Arthur harbor; and Underwood & Underwood. The source provides detail: in the summer of 1905 Japan and Russia were at war, fighting a naval battle in a calm water-area near a coastline where ships load and unload, and if the title is an accurate indication of this battle (and the war) Russia is losing.

**What type of person might have created this photograph, and for what purpose?** The juxtaposition of the person and the battleship seems important. The photographer may be highlighting the lives and concerns of everyday citizens against the chaos and destruction of war. The photographer is unknown; the copyright owners are (Elmer) Underwood & (Bert) Underwood, brothers who started a photography company to provide newspapers and magazines compelling images to accompany articles and help sell more copies.<sup>[3]</sup> The Underwoods had a full-time staff and also purchased images from free-lance photographers.

**Was it personal or published, candid or posed, amateur or professional?** Seemingly random because the wrecked ship and the person on the beach are both independent of the photographer. Yet, somewhat posed in the sense that the photographer obviously wanted both in the viewfinder.

This floating item could be a sea mine, then called a "torpedo" because of its resemblance to the "torpedo fish" (an electric ray that can produce a 220-volt charge).<sup>[7]</sup> Sea mines were a relatively new and controversial weapon used to devastating effect in this war. More than twenty ships—battleships, cruisers, destroyers, etc.—were lost due to the thousands of mines that floated untethered atop the sea or were tethered to the sea floor, hidden below sea-level.<sup>[8]</sup> **Did the use of sea mines break international law?** Both Russia and Japan thought they did not. Many other nations thought they did, arguing that sea mines were an unfair, dishonest, "indiscriminate attack" that posed great risk to civilians and commercial vessels. The uncertainty underscored the importance of having a common understanding. Following this war, nations attending the 1907 Hague Convention agreed to several international laws restricting the use of sea mines (unanchored sea mines were illegal unless made harmless after one hour of being set, sea mines could not target civilians or commercial vessels, all sides must remove sea mines after the war).<sup>[9]</sup>

This person may be wearing a traditional Chinese (Mandarin) hat and seems to be working to collect seafood for a meal or to sell at market. Lushun is known for excellent scallops that often live in shallow water, under rocks, and in muddy conditions; they are a key export for the region.<sup>[10]</sup> This person may symbolize those who were neutral in this war, especially China and Korea. At the time, however, it was unclear to the international community what rights and duties neutrality held. **Does "neutrality" comprise any rights or responsibilities beyond being free from attack?** For example: could neutral nations rescue shipwrecked sailors or wounded soldiers? Could nations at war rest and refuel their ships at neutral nations' ports? Could neutral nations trade with only one combatant or must they trade with all... or none? What should happen if neutral nations' commercial vessel were suspected of carrying contraband?<sup>[4]</sup> Russia, Japan, and their supporters answered these questions very differently, which underscored the importance of having a common understanding. After this war, the 1907 Hague Convention attempted to resolve questions surrounding neutrality (i.e., neutrals could aid wounded combatants, but they could not return to military operations, combatants could only stay in a neutral nation's port for 24 hours, neutral nations could sell to any or none of the combatants and remain neutral).<sup>[4]</sup>

The Baiyu Mountain Range in Manchuria, a region of Northeast China. It overlooks the harbor and port city of Lushun (Westerners called it "Port Arthur" after British Admiral William Arthur who surveyed the area). Japan took the highly-valued, all-season port from China in 1895, but was made to return it because of threats from several European nations, including Russia, who feared Japan's emergence as a world power. Russian leaders then coerced and bribed China to lease them Lushun in 1897. Seeing Russia as a rival to its colonial ambitions in East Asia, Japan attempted to negotiate, then attacked Russia: the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05. Some call it the first modern war because both sides pledged to adhere to international rules for war, explained their actions according to international law, and sought approval from an international audience.<sup>[4]</sup> The Japanese won stunning victories on land (Battle of Mukden) and at sea (Battle of Tsushima). Russia was humiliated and settled for a negotiated peace (Treaty of Portsmouth) that included its withdrawal from East Asia and recognition of Japan's control of Lushun and Korea. Domestic unrest from the disastrous war led to the Russian Revolution of 1905.

## ✓ Observe

Unknown Photographer [Underwood & Underwood]. (1905).  
*A dead war monster—Russian battleship 'Peresvet' wrecked by Japanese shells, Port Arthur harbor.*<sup>[1]</sup>



The Russian battleship *Alexander Peresvet*, named after a 14th century warrior-monk. There's extensive blast damage to its bow and starboard side, and the stern is partially sunk... the "war monster" died in the harbor seven months before this photograph.<sup>[5]</sup> Earlier, the *Peresvet* survived the controversial start of war, a Japanese surprise attack on the Russian fleet at Lushun. Russia and Japan were competing for control and influence in Asia and when Russia refused to negotiate, Japan withdrew its diplomats and issued an ultimatum, promising "to take independent action necessary to defend our position menaced by Russia." Two days later Japan attacked.<sup>[4]</sup> **Did the surprise attack break international law?** Russia argued a formal declaration of war must proceed any hostilities. Japan argued formal declarations of war had never been customary, plus the ultimatum was clearly an informal declaration. The international community was divided on the question which underscored the importance of having a common understanding. After the war, this issue was a major concern of the 1907 Hague Convention. Article 1 of the subsequent treaty read: "Hostilities must not commence without previous and explicit warning in the form of either a declaration of war or an ultimatum with conditional declaration of war."<sup>[6]</sup>

## ✓ Reflect

**How does this photograph compare with other evidence?**

Much of the information gathered from this photograph coheres with texts from the 1899 and the 1907 Hague Conventions' treaties. This photograph explores international law as it concerns conduct of war, other photographs may explore outer space, national sovereignty, or the environment.

**Why might other evidence (messages and data) agree or disagree with this photograph?**

Other photographs or texts may explore international law from different perspectives that answer the overarching question differently. Other sources may have different reasons for presenting data, such as to make their perspective seem more reasonable, or to present the "other side" in a worse way.

**What else do you need or want to know about this image?** To what degree was international law followed after the 1907 Hague Convention? What subsequent conventions have met and what requirements have they added to international law? Is "international law" enforceable? What should policy-makers do when international law conflicts with their national interests?

Unknown Photographer [Underwood & Underwood]. (1905). *A dead war monster—Russian battleship 'Peresvet' wrecked by Japanese shells, Port Arthur harbor.*<sup>[1]</sup>



The original photograph was developed into two for a stereoscope viewfinder, a device that looked like a pair of binoculars and produced a three-dimensional effect. This activity will proceed with one of the two.

**Citations: [#] throughout the primer and lesson**

1. Unknown Photographer (Underwood & Underwood, Inc.). (June 19, 1905). *A dead war monster—Russian battleship 'Peresvet' wrecked by Japanese shells, Port Arthur harbor*. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. see <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3f06353>
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18. This photograph is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.
19. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/russia-touts-new-generation-blinding-laser-weapons-2022-05-18/>
20. <https://www.csis.org/analysis/when-elephants-fight-outer-space>
21. <https://www.wired.co.uk/article/ukraine-russia-satellites>

Citations →