

Tasty Historiography Bites

Historian	Thesis / Main Ideas
<i>The Road to War</i>	
Bix, Herbert	The road to war between Japan and the USA was influenced mainly by Emperor Hirohito himself. Hirohito was both deeply involved in Japan's military policy and deluded as to the reality of Japanese military affairs. His hawkish policy forced Japan to maintain an extensive defensive perimeter and engage in a protracted war with the USA. This war was longer and bloodier than it had to be because to the end, Hirohito believed the war could be won, even when the reality of continuous severe defeats opened up the home islands of Japan to Allied bombing.
Toland, John	The USA is mostly to blame for the breakout of war in the Pacific. Japan had legally acquired French Indochina yet the USA still decided to react with excessively punitive economic sanctions that would drain Japan of many vital resources, especially oil. Japan did not intend to go to war with the USA because they understood well the total imbalance of industrial resources and capacity. The Americans were never genuine in their diplomatic negotiations, which were seen either as ultimatums or as strategic delays that would further weaken Japan's military position. Roosevelt had evidence that suggested a surprise Japanese attack. Overall, industrial capacity was the early indicator of who would be victorious in the war.
Bell, Philip	Whereas the Japanese invasion of China solicited only a minor response from the USA, the events in French Indochina brought a sudden hardline change in American policy. By 1941, Japan, Italy and Germany had all conducted dramatic expansion, which changed their isolationist outlook. American economic sanctions against Japan were justified because the Japanese proposition regarding Indochina was essentially a threat of war in which the French had little chance but to accept. This shift in American policy had forced Japan's hand of war, which was to be a limited decisive operation at Pearl Harbour followed by a defensive perimeter in the south Pacific.
<i>Pearl Harbour</i>	
Bell, Phillip	The USA was indeed presented with evidence of a Japanese attack, but they neglected this evidence. The attack was a complete surprise essentially because of consistent blunders and oversights in US intelligence which were racially influenced. Pearl Harbour was a significant turning point for a number of reasons: it was the event that made WWII a truly global conflict; it changed the scope of Japan's war; it catapulted the US into global superpower status.
Hanyok, Robert	The radio silence and deception plan supporting the Pearl Harbor Striking Force worked as well as any of the Japanese planners could have hoped. The American command at Pearl Harbor was caught totally unaware. American naval intelligence did not suspect an attack largely because the Japanese radio silence and deception supplied seemingly valid intelligence that substantiated these beliefs.
Jacobsen, Philip	Questions why revisionists are "so hesitant to give the Japanese credit for a well-executed secret operation." Allied signals intelligence (including the British in Singapore and the Canadians on Vancouver Island) did not pick up any

	relevant transmissions that would have betrayed the Japanese strike force steaming for Hawaii. The Japanese had a strict policy of radio silence that was part of their established military doctrine.
Villa & Wilford	Sufficient intelligence existed in 1941 to allow the Allies and the Americans to predict the possibility of a Pearl Harbor attack, although it remains unclear whether this was discounted as improbable or purposely ignored. US intelligence had relevant Japanese codebooks in their possession and the US Navy had intercepted thousands of encrypted messages. Some of these spoke of shallow water torpedos and carrier strike groups, which would have indicated an attack on Pearl Harbour.
<i>Naval Warfare</i>	
Hone, Thomas	The importance of aircraft carriers over battleships was not immediately understood. The early stages of the war was characterized by an experimental process of naval tactics in which failures and missteps led to a gradual refinement in the use of aircraft carriers. Carriers were safest and most effective if they were allowed to roam and to attack—to take, and then stay on, the offensive. Using carriers at night and as support for amphibious landings were particularly risky tactics.
Sturma, Michael	While unrestricted submarine warfare presented some moral dilemmas (especially when targeting small civilian watercraft), it was an incredibly successful tactic by the USA that sunk hundreds of Japanese naval vessels and thousands of merchant ships – so much so that they began running out of targets and more emphasis needed to be placed on aerial bombing campaigns.
Toland, John	Despite heavy shipping losses, the Japanese were slow to adapt to attacks by American submarines. These attacks precipitated stark shortages of material in Japan. When the Japanese finally invested more in destroyer escorts, the American submariners effectively countered with “wolf pack” style raids.
<i>Atomic Bombs and the Japanese Surrender</i>	
Ralph, William	By 1945 senior political leaders abrogated the responsibility for the air war over Japan to LeMay, and devastation followed. Arnold and LeMay are essentially war criminals, as their firebombing campaign was both unnecessary (limited to no military-industrial impact) and murderous, leading to the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the destruction of dozens of Japanese cities.
Bell, Phillip	Conventional bombing was so effective that the atomic bombs were not seen as particularly special from a military point of view. Of the Soviet invasion, the tacit American understanding that the Emperor could retain his status, and the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the atomic bombs had the greatest impact on the Japanese decision to surrender as they produced a psychological as well as materiel effect that was not matched by the Soviet intervention. The American use of atomic weapons were primarily directed at winning the war – impressing the Soviet Union was only a secondary factor to their use.
Giangreco, D	American military planners assessed possible civilian casualties in the event of an American invasion of the Japanese Home Islands. While some evidence suggests civilians were receptive to American peace messages and efforts to reduce civilian casualties, there were serious doubts about achieving the same success with civilians on the Home Islands. Japan’s military commanders

	indoctrinated and organized civilians on the Home Island to join the war effort as guerrillas, which would have led to high casualties.
Toland, John	General LeMay's firebombing campaigns led to the unprecedented slaughter of civilians. While the Japanese were banking on the USSR to act as mediators for a peace settlement, this was complicated by the Soviet intention to invade Manchuria (to gain the spoils of war promised by the USA) and Truman's aloofness (once he found out about the successful test of the atomic bomb). Ultimately, it was the Russian declaration of war (not the atomic bombs) that drove home to the Japanese leaders that no negotiated peace was possible.
Bix, Herbert	Hirohito is at fault for prolonging a losing war and delaying the peace process. From the very start, he was a major protagonist of the events going on around him. Before the Battle of Okinawa he had constantly pressed for a decisive victory. Afterward he accepted the need for an early but not an immediate peace. He then steered Japan toward continued warfare rather than toward direct negotiations with the Allies. He continued to procrastinate until the bomb was dropped and the Soviets attacked.
Bell, Phillip	The defeat of Japan in 1945 was the result of an accumulation of events, rather than of two explosions, however powerful. A continuation of bombing raids and an intensified blockade would not work to end the war because it would take too long. The logical outcome was an invasion of the home islands, in which casualty estimates were unacceptably high. The two atomic bombs bear the greatest weight in the final Japanese decision to surrender. The Soviet invasion, however formidable, was after all a military campaign like many others, and it was not directed against the Japanese homeland. The atomic bombs produced a shock of a different order, and had a psychological as well as a materiel effect. Impressing the USSR (as a precursor to the Cold War) was a factor in the decision, although a secondary one.

Savoury Historiography Entrees

The Road to War

"In the first six to twelve months of a war with the United States and Great Britain I will run wild and win victory upon victory. But then, if the war continues after that, I have no expectation of success." -

Admiral Yamamoto, in a statement to cabinet minister Matsumoto Prime Minister Konoe

"Japan is expanding, and what country in its expansion has ever failed to be trying to its neighbors? Ask the American Indian or the Mexican how excruciatingly trying the young United States used to be once upon a time." – **Foreign Minister Matsuoka**

"Our candid idea at the time was that the Americans, being merchants, would not continue for long with an unprofitable war." – **Colonel Masanobu Tsuji**

Bix, Herbert. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2016).

- **Hirohito was deeply involved in Imperial and military policies:** "From 1941 onward, the high-command machinery steadily became more elaborate. The emperor widened and deepened his access to include just about all military intelligence.... Hirohito routinely received drafts of developing war plans and full explanations of operations, accompanied by detailed maps, informing him why an operation should be mounted and the units that would be carrying it out."
- **War in China the most significant factor towards military policy of 1941:** "Of the background factors that influenced policy decisions during 1941, the deadlocked China war, then in its fourth year, was the most significant. Here, however, the conventional image of a Japan whose military 'had its hand full' or was 'tied down' in China is somewhat misleading. The war was indeed bogging down Japan's large continental army. Yet precisely because Japan was fighting in China, its army and navy had been able to expand the industries, stockpile the weapons, and secure the enormous funds needed to confront the United States and Britain during the fall and early winter of 1941."
 - "Confronted with military strangulation by oil embargoes and the choice of admitting defeat in China, thereby abandoning a large part of his continental empire and probably destabilizing the monarchy he had inherited, Hirohito opted for the third alternative: war against the United States and Britain."
- Once France had been conquered by Germany, Vichy France allowed Japanese troops to move through French Indochina (modern day Vietnam and Cambodia) in preparation for their offensives against the Dutch East Indies and British Malaya. This provoked powerful economic sanctions by the US, which shocked Hirohito.
- **Hirohito and Imperial Cabinet were Hawkish towards USA policy:** "Naval Chief of Staff Admiral Nagano had suggested war with the United States... five days *before* the United States froze Japanese assets and followed with an oil embargo."
 - "Clearly, in the early days of November Hirohito's mind had become fixed on war. He no longer agonized over the deadlocked negotiations with the United States."

- **A continued offensive will break USA 'will to fight':** After the successful attack at Pearl Harbour, the victories of the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island, Hong Kong, the Dutch oil fields of Borneo and Java, pushing farther into the Southwest Pacific and threatening Australia by capturing Bougainville, the Japanese Imperial Headquarters "did not... stop its 'drive to the south' and shift to a more flexible strategy.... Hirohito was now as intoxicated by victory as his senior commanders.... and declared: 'In order to force Britain to submit and the United States to lose its will to fight, we shall continue expanding from the areas we have already gained.'" This strategy, argues Bix, forced Japan to maintain much to large a defensive perimeter and forced it into an eventual war of attrition with the USA.
- **Hirohito's assessment and understanding of military situation is not grounded in reality:** Hirohito did not fully comprehend the significance of the American victories at the Coral Sea and Midway. It wasn't until the next year that they recognized the campaign against the Americans was more important than that against China.
 - Hirohito recognized the potential danger of Japan's loss of Guadalcanal as "the start of the American-British counteroffensive" and the beginning of the war of attrition he sought to avoid.
 - "Despite the cumulative impact of one major defeat after another, the determination of Hirohito and the high command remained undaunted.... Hirohito's reaction to this dismal state of affairs is of paramount importance in assessing the role he played in the war. Confronted with certain defeat, he dug in his heels and refused to accept it."

Toland, John. *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (1970).

- **On the American embargo of Japan:** All trade between the US and Japan stopped and "the fact that America had been Japan's major source of oil imports now left Japan in an untenable situation. To the New York Times it was "the most drastic blow short of war."" International law favored the Japanese, since they had secured the Indochina bases by negotiations with a government (Vichy France) recognized by the U.S. and other nations.
 - Most Japanese leaders concluded that the U.S. was determined to have a war, and preferred to wait until Japan had no oil to fight it with. "Under such circumstances, we had better take the initiative," said Naval Chief of Staff Nagano "a cautious and sensible man." But no one believed Japan's chances would be good in a war against the U.S.
- **Comparing American-Japanese industrial capacity:** "In steel, he said, the ratio was 20 to 1; oil more than 100 to 1; coal 10 to 1; planes 5 to 1; shipping 2 to 1; labor force 5 to 1. The overall potential was 10 to 1." As a result "The military leaders [of Japan] had finally agreed, after long arguments, to avoid war with the United States even at the cost of major concessions."
- **Japanese influenced towards war by slow pace of US diplomatic efforts:** Toland presents the dilemma of the Japanese Imperial Cabinet: if they enter into a war with the USA immediately, they could possibly lose. If they wait to enter a war, they would surely lose. **Roosevelt and the Americans seemed to be dragging out diplomatic discussions in order to reduce Japan's**

military position in just this way. On October 5, 1941, Japanese military leaders concluded there would be no diplomatic settlement and recommended a decision for war.

- Prime Minister Konoye and other pro-peace leaders were discouraged, but still wanted to avoid war even if it meant withdrawal from China, national humiliation and economic suffering. The army, represented by Tojo, refused to consider full withdrawal from China. Tojo predicted the withdrawal of Japanese troops would lead to a communist triumph in China. However, Tojo was willing to give the negotiators until the October 10 deadline to avoid war. On October 15, the deadline for peace, there was an effort to create a new Japanese cabinet, without Konoye, who resigned. He was replaced by Tojo.
 - America had, in fact, already started fighting Japan in China. The Army believed this showed the U.S. was not interested in a peaceful settlement, and was just stalling to build up its forces while crippling Japan with the embargo.
- **Japanese expansionism a response to Western imperialism:** Japan's "course of aggression had been the inevitable result of the West's efforts to eliminate Japan as an economic rival after World War I, the Great Depression, her population explosion, and the necessity to find new resources and markets to continue as a first-rate power."
 - **Diplomatic agreements were consistently viewed as American ultimatum:** Sometimes, these were complicated with mistranslations, such as when the Japanese believed they would have to return Manchuria to China. Ultimately, US Secretary of State Cordell Hull "had committed one of the most fatal mistakes a diplomat could make – driven his opponents into a corner with no change to save face and given them no option to capitulation but war." Toland believes that if Hull had not been so inflexible in his negotiations, the Japanese would have extended them long enough to see that Russia wouldn't be defeated by Germany. Then they would not have dared to fight the U.S., Netherlands, Britain, China and Russia.
 - **Some evidence Roosevelt might have suspected a surprise attack:** Roosevelt thought there might be a Japanese surprise attack as early as December 1, but possibly it would be against the Dutch or British, not the U.S.
 - Still on December 3, 1941 U.S. intelligence officers say papers being burned at the Japanese Embassy in D.C. and concluded war was imminent.
 - On December 3, the Japanese naval cipher was changed, blinding American intelligence, which had broken the prior code.
 - Because they already had the Japanese note decoded, George Marshall sent out a warning message to the Panama Canal, Pearl Harbor, Manila and San Francisco. "But Hawaii could not be raised because of atmospheric conditions." This was a few minutes after noon, December 8, 1941, Washington D.C. time.
 - Several sightings of Japanese intruders were ignored in Pearl Harbor just before the attack
 - **Significance of industrial capacity to Japanese war effort:** By May 1943 the industrial situation was a grave cause of concern to the Japanese military and elite. Already "Losses of materiel in battle could no longer be replaced and even the minimum requirements of the Army and Navy

could not be met.” Resources from conquered areas failed to reach Japan “because of Japan’s limited merchant marine and America’s devastating submarine assaults on the ships taking the long trip north.” Japan struggled to raise its industrial production while America’s soared. Despite some success in 1943, “shipping remained the most crucial problem.”

Bell, Phillip. *Twelve Turning Points of the Second World War* (2011).

- **On the sudden change in American reactions towards Japan:** The Japanese occupation of French Indo-China, which began as essentially a threat of war in which the French had little chance but to accept, brought about a swift and harsh American response in the form of economic sanctions that would essentially see Japan run out of oil within two years. This American response was uncharacteristic of their Asian diplomacy in the last decade, which had seen the height of isolationism. The Japanese invasion of mainland China had solicited only minor sanctions from the USA and “grande prose”.
 - One explanation for this strong reaction was that the Americans had broken the Japanese code (Operation MAGIC) and were reading their internal telegrams, which “tended to reveal only decisions, and not the process of argument... and therefore conveyed an impression of a single-minded Japanese policy.... This impression had a strong influence on the severe American reaction to the occupation of Indo-China.”
 - By 1941 the USA had witnessed the incredible expansion of both Germany and Japan, who were allies – this led to an anti-appeasement movement in American diplomacy: “The very fact that the United States had reacted only cautiously and mildly to Japanese conquests in China between 1937 and 1940 became in itself a reason to respond firmly when the Japanese moved into southern Indo-China.”
- “The Japanese government had chosen war, not in some general sense, but in the form of a specific operation [Pearl Harbour]

Pearl Harbour

“True combat power is arms multiplied by fighting spirit. If one of them is infinitely strong, you will succeed.” - Asahi Shimbun newspaper

“Japan never declares war before attacking.” – Billy Mitchell, 1932

“Yesterday, December 7, 1941 — a date which will live in infamy — the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.” - President Franklin

D. Roosevelt, 8 Dec 1941, the day after Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbor

Key Debate:

1. Did United States intelligence services have evidence that the Japanese were planning to attack Pearl Harbour (Revisionist), or was it a complete surprise (Traditionalist)?
2. Following this, did President Roosevelt allow the attack on Pearl Harbour to occur in order to provide him with the means of going to war with Japan and escaping American isolationism?

For the landmark **Traditionalist** work on this subject, see Gordon Prange's *Day of Deceit and Pearl Harbour Redefined*.

Bell, Phillip. *Twelve Turning Points of the Second World War* (2011).

- **Failures to properly recognize Japanese threat:** “To prepare for the assault, Japanese Naval Intelligence asked the Consulate in Hawaii to prepare a grid of the waters at Pearl Harbour, with the normal positions of warships marked on it. American intelligence officers intercepted this request, made on 24 September, but astonishingly did not grasp its significance, and did not pass it on to naval and military commanders. The Japanese made meticulous preparations. They were also lucky.”
 - The Americans put a good deal of effort into assessing Japanese intentions, and two senior intelligence officers speculated of a possible Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbour, but nothing was done about improving defenses because resources (planes) were not available and, even more importantly, there was “the fixed belief among Americans that the Japanese were simply unable to carry out an air attack on Pearl Harbour.” The mistake of underestimating the Japanese was made largely on “racial grounds”.
 - While Bell notes that the attack was a complete surprise, he also adds that a US destroyer attacked and destroyed “an unknown submarine” in the harbour at 6:40 AM, an hour and a half before the attack, which should have alerted shore defenses (but didn't).
- **Psychological effects vs. Strategic effects:** “The psychological effects of Pearl Harbour were more far-reaching than the strategic consequences, and more difficult to deal with.”
 - All ships damaged or sunk were in shallow waters, which made salvage and repair feasible. In total, six out of eight ships returned to service.
 - The three aircraft carriers of the Pacific Fleet were not in the harbour at the time and thus were not damaged.
- **Pearl Harbour was a turning point, but what type?**
 - Pearl Harbour transformed the type of war waged by Japan, from a relatively isolated war in China to a great Pacific war of conquest.
 - Pearl Harbour catapulted the USA into the war, “then in the next four years [it] became... the greatest power in the world.”
 - Pearl Harbour helped Britain win the war (bringing the USA into the conflict) but in the long term the British Empire never recovered and the British position in the world was weakened: “It was the end of an era for the British Empire and its most distant members.”
 - Pearl Harbour transformed “what had been essentially a European war into a world war.”
 - Pearl Harbour also brought home a change in the nature of naval warfare and sea power. The long era in which the battleship had been the main weapon of sea power came to an end, and the aircraft carrier took its place.”

Hanyok, Robert. "Catching the Fox Unaware': Japanese Radio Denial and Deception and the Attack on Pearl Harbour" in *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (Autumn, 2008).

Traditionalist

- Pearl Harbour was "a total surprise to the American commands in Hawaii and Washington. The completeness of the surprise.... Was due largely to the success of the Japanese cover plan of radio denial and deception in hiding the existence, makeup, purpose, and timing of the attack."
 - American radio intelligence officers were only left with "scraps" of information that were "intentionally misleading"
- "Some claim that the Striking Force did not maintain complete radio silence or that Tokyo's radio deception failed to fool the Americans.... [R]ecent writings on the subject of Pearl Harbor intelligence... can be dismissed easily. [The accepted idea] is that the Kido Butai transmitted radio messages as it crossed the Pacific and was tracked by the U.S. Navy. [The supporting evidence] has been expertly dismantled in books and articles."
- Long-standing Japanese plans for war with America, which American planners knew about, called for the bulk of the Japanese fleet to remain in home waters and await the American Pacific Fleet. A change to a pre-emptive strike on Pearl Harbour was thus a surprise for the US. The US "failure to discover and understand the Imperial Japanese Navy's radical turns in strategy and organization left American radio intelligence vulnerable to the later Japanese radio silence and deception."
- "In Washington, just about three hours before the attack, Secretary of State Cordell Hull met with Secretary of War Henry Stimson and Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox to review the latest Japanese diplomatic messages and intelligence. Among the papers in their folders was a report on the location of combat ships of nations around the world, including Japan. Compiled by the Office of Naval Intelligence, the report combined recent information that, in turn, primarily relied on radio intelligence reports from Hawaii and the Philippines. It placed all six carriers and the two battleships of the Striking Force in either Sasebo or Kure [Nagasaki and Hiroshima, on the home islands]."
- "The radio silence and deception plan supporting the Pearl Harbor Striking Force worked as well as any of the Japanese planners could have hoped. The American command at Pearl Harbor was caught totally unaware. Even the last-moment discovery of a Japanese mini-submarine could not crack the conventional assessment by the Americans that the Japanese navy was set in its prewar defensive posture. American naval intelligence held to this view largely because the Japanese radio silence and deception supplied seemingly valid intelligence that substantiated it."

Jacobsen, Philip. "Radio Silence and Radio Deception: Secrecy Insurance for the Pearl Harbour Strike Force" in *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (Winter, 2004).

Traditionalist

- **Intro criticizes evidence used by Revisionists:** "Despite solid documentation that the Japanese Strike Force maintained strict radio silence, recent revisionists have seriously misinterpreted new US archival releases in an effort to 'prove' that US Officials acquired advance knowledge of the

Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Using twenty-year-old 'remembrances', long dismissed claims that the British also acquired such 'foreknowledge' have been recently resurrected and supplemented with similar Canadian allegations. Instead of code-breaking, it is now suggested that such 'foreknowledge' was acquired by tracking the Strike Force by direction finder bearings and 'fixes'. However, these revisionist claims are fraught with a wide range of serious errors that render them baseless. Therefore, their allegations of advance knowledge of the attack and suggestions of a deliberate US failure to warn Hawaiian military officials must be completely disregarded as without any foundation whatsoever."

- "There were no such radio transmissions by the Strike Force on any frequency, by any signal mode or output power from which radio direction finder bearings or any other technical analysis results could have been obtained by any Allied country or service. No such Sigint [Signal Intelligence] was gathered by the US Navy at Corregidor or Hawaii, by the British at Singapore, nor by the Canadian Navy at Esquimalt. US intelligence personnel have vehemently denied acquiring such information. Had there been such information from first level British or Canadian sources it would have been passed on to their local or regional cooperating US naval officials unless one would ascribe serious secret agendas to such British and Canadian officials in this regard."
- "Instead of devoting so much ink to wild speculations of careless Japanese radio transmissions that would have put the secrecy of their attack on Pearl Harbor in jeopardy, why can't we see the plain truth in all the contemporary Allied and Japanese documentation? The *Kido Butai* had a policy of mandatory radio silence and a strict prohibition against any emitting signals of any sort in any part of the radio spectrum in order to pull off one of the greatest surprise attacks of all time. Why are we so hesitant to give the Japanese credit for a well-executed secret operation by dredging up such nonsense as these high-level, but unsupported, post war 'remembrances' long after the fact?"

Villa, Brian and Timothy Wilford. "Signals intelligence and Pearl Harbor: The state of the question" in *Intelligence and National Security*, Vol. 21, No. 4 (August 2006).

Revisionist

- **Overview of historiography:** "In recent times, Pearl Harbor historiography has shifted towards the question of whether or not the Pearl Harbor attack could have been predicted through intercepted signals. The recent prodigious output of books and articles on this subject makes it necessary to reflect upon how the debate has developed. Some traditionalists (who believe that the Pearl Harbor attack surprised US and Allied authorities) continue to criticize revisionists (who believe that intercepted signals may have provided foreknowledge of the attack)... Similar criticisms of revisionists continue to the present day, but such criticisms are unfounded as relevant evidence concerning pre-Pearl Harbor signals intelligence, drawn from both archival and anecdotal sources, suggests that the revisionist thesis merits further scholarly attention."
- **Traditionalists:** "According to traditionalists, Allied-American decryption of Japanese diplomatic and naval codes yielded no warning of the impending attack. In support of traditionalist claims, several American and British official war histories state categorically that neither the principal Japanese diplomatic code... nor the... Japanese naval code... offered advance warning of Japan's intention to attack Pearl Harbor."

- “Considering 1941 eye-witness accounts... the thesis that Allied officials had the ability to predict a Pearl Harbor attack is one that some traditionalists may accept. Yet they will correctly note that the case for specific foreknowledge is based mainly upon post-war accounts. For traditionalists, multiple post-war sources are not enough to support the revisionist position. They will nonetheless have to explain why several participants in wartime intelligence and covert operations made such claims, all quite independently.... **It is clear that an entire class of evidence cannot simply be ignored in support of a traditionalist thesis.**”
- **Revisionists:** “Revisionists believe that some details concerning the Pearl Harbor attack may have come from decrypted Japanese naval messages, although they are not certain of what was read, considering the primary evidence that is currently available.”
 - Revisionists point to the **successful theft of Japanese codebooks** from the Japanese consulate in New York as evidence that American intelligence operatives could read up-to-date Japanese encrypted messages.
 - “Furthermore, in 1941 the USN intercepted a number of Japanese naval messages that some historians believe pointed to a Pearl Harbor attack. From September to December 1941, the USN intercepted over 26,000 Japanese naval messages of which about 90 per cent were encrypted in JN-25B [which Wilford claims the US could decrypt].... National Security Agency (NSA) historian Frederick Parker observed that a number of these intercepted messages revealed Japanese plans and training exercises concerning the North Pacific. Parker believed that the USN could not read these messages when intercepted in 1941, but nevertheless summarized the intelligence value of the intercepts: ‘An objective extraordinarily far from Japan, the ambush of anchored capital ships, shallow-running torpedoes, six major carriers in a strike force, carrier fuel stored on deck, and a demonstrated interest in the waters of the northern Pacific – all these pointed inexorably to Pearl Harbor’”
- **According to Villa and Wilford, the strongest possible arguments Traditionalists could make are:**
 - “that Allied strategists ignored signals heralding the Pearl Harbor attack because an overwhelming amount of contrary information pointed to a Japanese first strike in Southeast Asia.”
 - That “the baneful influence of ‘group think’ could... explain why the obvious was ignored.”
- **Conclusion suggests evidence is shifting to support revisionism:** “Integrating all available evidence, it appears that sufficient intelligence existed in 1941 to allow the Allies and the Americans to predict the possibility of a Pearl Harbor attack, although it remains unclear whether the relevant intelligence was discounted as improbable or purposely ignored.”
 - Villa and Wilford call on historians to pursue more archival evidence and primary sources, especially those still considered classified by a variety of governments (Britain, USA, Canada).

Naval Warfare

“When I assumed command of the Pacific Fleet in 31 December, 1941; our submarines were already operating against the enemy, the only units of the Fleet that could come to grips with the Japanese for months to come. It was to the Submarine Force that I looked to carry the load until our great industrial activity could produce the weapons we so sorely needed to carry the war to the enemy. It is to the everlasting honor and glory of our submarine personnel that they never failed us in our days of peril.” -

Fleet Admiral Chester William Nimitz

“The mindless rejoicing at home is really appalling; it makes me fear that the first blow against Tokyo will make them wilt at once...I only wish that [the Americans] had also had, say, three carriers at Hawaii...” - Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto (1942)

Hone, Thomas. “Replacing Battleships with Aircraft Carriers in the Pacific in World War II” in *National War College Review*, Vol. 66, No. 1 (Winter, 2013).

- There is a simplified myth in which the losses of battleships at Pearl Harbour “facilitated a straightforward substitution of carriers for the battleship force,” but this is not what happened: “Instead, it was a mixture of innovation and adaptation.... [in which] the end result was the foundation of the U.S. Navy that is familiar to us today.”
- “What aviation had brought to naval warfare... was not only the ability to strike enemy ships and bases from the sea but, especially, the ability to gain information about the enemy while preventing the enemy from doing the same with regard to friendly forces.”
- “Despite the unknowns attached to carrier operations, several things were clear from the prewar fleet problems. First, it was essential for any carrier to get in the first strike against an enemy. That was because carriers under concerted air attack were almost impossible to defend.’ Second... it was critical to conduct effective scouting in order to find the enemy’s carriers. Third, carriers did not belong in night surface engagements.... Fourth, tying the carriers to an amphibious operation involved very high risk. Carriers were safest and most effective if they were allowed to roam and to attack—to take, and then stay on, the offensive.”
 - Battle of Coral Sea (4-8 May 1942) was an attempted US carrier ambush of a Japanese carrier force covering amphibious operations.
 - Midway (3-6 June 1942) was a successful American ambush of the main Japanese carrier force
 - Guadalcanal (August – October 1942) was an example of poorly conceived doctrine, as US carriers had “one foot nailed to Guadalcanal” as they covered American ground operations there. Placing carriers in a defensive role led to the loss of two carriers at Guadalcanal.
- The American operations in the Marshalls, Marianas, and at Leyte Gulf demonstrate an evolving carrier doctrine that is still used by the US Navy today. While much of the history about the Pacific naval campaign is surrounded by myth-making biographies of American admirals, doctrinal changes occurring from adaptation from early campaigns (1942) and innovation in later campaigns (1943-44) brought about the replacement of the battleship by the aircraft carrier as the Navy’s premier strategic warship.

Sturma, Michael. "Atrocities, Conscience, and Unrestricted Warfare: US Submarines during the Second World War" in *War in History* (2009).

- "Drawing on comparisons with Allied aerial bombing campaigns, it is argued that, while the submarine war involved a similar blurring of combat and atrocity, submariners frequently acted on their consciences in encounters with the enemy and civilians."
- "The trajectory of **the submarine war in the Pacific paralleled the air war in some ways**. At the same time, in comparison with the air war, individual conscience played a significant role in the way 'unrestricted' submarine warfare was conducted."
- **Practical reasons for unrestricted submarine warfare:** "Apart from a desire for revenge, there were also practical reasons for a policy of unrestricted submarine warfare. While American battleships were devastated at Pearl Harbor, the submarine base survived unscathed. The submarine fleet remained intact, with over 50 boats operational. The idea of risking this important resource by stopping and searching merchant ships for war materials hardly seemed realistic."
- **Submarine warfare was so successful they began running out of merchant ships to attack and so began targeting smaller vessels like junks, sampans and trawlers:**
 - "During the course of the war US submarines would sink not only over 200 Japanese naval vessels, but over 1000 merchant ships"
 - "As the war progressed, though, submarine attacks on small craft became increasingly common. By late 1944 and 1945, when Japanese merchant ships became scarcer, there were increasing numbers of American submarines on patrol. From the beginning of 1943 the number of operational submarines in the Pacific more than tripled by the end of the war. During the first half of 1944 they were sinking an average of 200 000 tons of Japanese shipping every month. By the end of the year, however, merchant ships were becoming scarce and American aircraft were assuming a dominant role in the Pacific campaign."

Toland, John. *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (1970).

- **Impact of US submarine warfare:** The U.S. engaged in unrestricted submarine warfare against Japan as soon as the war started; the Japanese had not prepared for that. "Within six months American submarines had torpedoed so many solo merchantmen that the First Convoy Escort Fleet was established." But only eight destroyers were assigned to escort service "out of sympathy for destroyer commanders, who detested the monotonous task of herding transports. In the first year of war 139 cargo vessels had sunk. There was a shortage of cargo ships. Even though there was a lack of materials for production in Japan, and a lack of food and ammunition at the front, more escorts were not provided until March 1943, and even then the total number of destroyers was only 16. Meanwhile, the U.S. improved its submarines. In November 1943 four non-battle worthy aircraft carriers were added to escort duty. In March 1944 the convoy system seemed to be working, but after a few months the U.S. responded effectively with "wolf pack" raids.

Atomic Bombs and the Japanese Surrender

"We knew the world would not be the same. A few people laughed, a few people cried. Most people were silent. I remembered the line from the Hindu scripture, the Bhagavad-Gita; Vishnu is trying to persuade the Prince that he should do his duty, and to impress him, takes on his multi-armed form and says, 'Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds.' I suppose we all thought that, one way or another." - **J. Robert Oppenheimer**

"Please try to understand this. It's not an easy thing to hear, but please listen. There is no morality in warfare. You kill children. You kill women. You kill old men. You don't seek them out, but they die. That's what happens in war." – **Paul Tibbets**, pilot of the *Enola Gay*

"If we are prepared to sacrifice 20 million Japanese lives in a kamikaze effort, victory will be ours." – **Admiral Takijiro Onishi**

"If I had lost the war, I would have been tried as a war criminal." – **General Curtis LeMay**

Key Debates:

1. What was the most significant factor impacting the Japanese decision to surrender: Soviet invasion, atomic weapons, or the promise that the Emperor would not have to abdicate?
2. What was the purpose for using the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki: to win the war or to send a message to the Soviets?
3. Can the American firebombing of Japanese cities be justified from a moral or military standpoint?

Ralph, William. "Improvised Destruction: Arnold, LeMay, and the Firebombing of Japan" in *War in History* (2006).

- Ralph describes the firebombing of Tokyo, which "kicked off a firebombing campaign" and by official estimates "267 171 buildings were levelled (one-quarter of the city), and 1 008 005 Japanese were left homeless. The subsequent campaign "laid waste to more than 60 of Japan's largest cities and killed hundreds of thousands of its civilians by the end of the Second World War.
- The firebombing of Tokyo and other Japanese cities "represented a radical departure from the position the USA had taken at the onset of fighting. In 1939 US President Franklin D. Roosevelt had requested that combatants refrain to the greatest extent possible from inflicting civilian casualties, and US policy mirrored the request, following the doctrine of daylight 'precision' bombing developed by the Army Air Corps in the interwar years. Yet by the end of the war the USAAF was waging essentially an indiscriminate firebombing campaign against all of urban Japan."
 - This policy was not systematic or preordained, rather it evolved from the relationship between the USAAF commander, General Henry Arnold, and his subordinates in the field. Arnold had grown to trust a young field commander, Major General Curtis LeMay, so much that he sent him to bomb Japan with just one criterion – get results.
- "[W]hile air attacks 'contributed a substantial percentage to the overall decline in Japan's economy, in many segments of that economy their effects were duplicative' because of the naval blockade. 'Most of the oil refineries were out of oil, the alumina plants out of bauxite, the steel mills lacking in

ore and coke, and the munitions plants low in steel and aluminum.’¹⁰⁹ In other words, the urban area attacks burned down factories that were closed and killed workers who had already lost their jobs.”

- Viewed in the light that LeMay and especially Arnold made military decisions in large part to further their political goals, the conduct of the USAAF was egregious. There was not a plan formulated that called for firestorms in 67 Japanese cities, and there was no consensus decision even to attack the initial 6. Bombs hit factories and home shops, but they also hit hospitals, schools, and homes. In these buildings were mostly women, children, and old men. [Arnold and LeMay] knew this, [yet they] went ahead, describing the raids in triumphant terms.

Giangreco, D. *Hell to Pay: Operation Downfall and the Invasion of Japan, 1945-47* (2009).

- “Japan was a defeated nation long before the *Enola Gay* lifted off from Tinian Island with its cargo of a single bomb that would kill tens of thousands instantly and as many as 80,000 later from residual blast and radiation deaths.”
 - “After the war many Japanese leaders, both civilian and military, claimed to have known that this end was inevitable after either the fall of the Marianas or the Philippines. Others said that the insight – shocking to those steeped in *bushido* tradition – struck them after Iwo Jima, or Okinawa, or when the first American fighter planes appeared over Tokyo. An American might argue that defeat for the resource-poor Japanese could clearly be seen when they failed to dislodge the Marines on Guadalcanal or when they expended most of their best pilots in a failed effort to stem the American tide in the Solomons. Or was it the battle of Midway? Even before Japanese aircraft failed to find and destroy the US Pacific Fleet’s carriers at Pearl Harbour, Admiral Yamamoto famously remarked, ‘I shall run wild for six months or a year, but I have utterly no confidence for the second or third year.... I hope you will endeavour to avoid a Japanese-American war.’”
- **There were some very high estimates of Japanese civilian casualties in the event of an American invasion:** The American Shockley-Wright report theorized that five to ten million Japanese could die if America invaded the Home Islands. Similarly, Admiral Tikijiro (vice chief Naval General Staff) remarked, ‘If we are prepared to sacrifice 20,000,000 Japanese lives in a special attack effort, victory shall be ours!’”
- American military planners flirted with the idea of biological weapons that could wipe out Japanese crops, but this idea was abandoned as they realized the amount of food they would need to ship to captured areas to prevent the civilian population from starving.
- Military planners considered civilian casualties in the event of an American invasion of Kyushu. Many Japanese civilians committed suicide or were killed by Japanese soldiers in places like Saipan and Okinawa. Despite high civilian casualties in Okinawa, there was evidence that civilians were receptive to American peace leaflets urging them to wear white and seek medical assistance with specially-trained Army and Navy personnel. They were not as confident that Japanese civilians on the Home Islands would react the same way.

- The Japanese Army used a variety of means to attempt to mobilize the civilian population against possible American invaders. One was the creation of a Home Guard, which was designed to assist the Japanese military by providing information, suppressing dissent, and fighting the invaders using guerilla tactics.
- “The practical reality of these activities and unceasing drumbeat of noxious propaganda was that the Japanese militarists were well on their way to succeeding in their final effort to erase the line between civilians and soldiers among the population.

Toland, John. *The Rising Sun: The Decline and Fall of the Japanese Empire, 1936-1945* (1970).

- **LeMay begins firebombing campaigns:** Japanese production was largely dispersed into small factories of less than 30 workers. In March 1945 General Curtis LeMay decided to increase effectiveness by scattering incendiary bombs over wide areas. March 9, 1945 was the first such attack, with 333 bombers. LeMay knew “the slaughter of civilians would be unprecedented.” The target was the 3 by 4 mile area of downtown Tokyo, which housed about 750,000 low-income workers and small factories. There were no Japanese fighter planes to oppose the bombers. “Huge balls of fire leaped from building to building with hurricane force, creating an incandescent tidal wave exceeding 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit.”
- **The Japanese were hoping that the Russians would broker a peace deal with the United States** for them, not realizing that Stalin had already decided to attack Japan in Manchuria. Other initiatives were underway as well, as of June 24, 1945: although Japan “had turned down two offers to negotiate in Sweden,” negotiations in Switzerland were getting under way. But the Americans insisted on unconditional surrender, which was unacceptable to the Japanese, despite vague indications the Emperor might be kept in a symbolic role.
- **Truman’s atomic diplomacy and the significance of a Russian invasion:** More confident in the success of the atomic bomb, Truman became ambiguous with the Russians over whether they should invade Manchuria, while the Japanese still hoped the Russians would stay neutral and broker a peace deal. On August 6, the atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima. Then on August 9th Nagasaki was bombed; yet, it was the Russian declaration of war that drove home to the Japanese leaders that no negotiated peace was possible.
 - President Truman did decide to call off two further atomic bombings of Japan, “tentatively scheduled for August 13 and 16” while peace was negotiated.

Bix, Herbert. *Hirohito and the Making of Modern Japan* (2016).

- **Hirohito at fault for prolonging a losing war and delaying peace process:** “At the end of the war as at its beginning, and through every stage of its unfolding, Emperor Hirohito played a highly active role in supporting the actions carried out in his name. When he is properly restored in the overall picture as supreme commander, the facts become abundantly clear: Neither (a) American unwillingness to make a firm, timely statement assuring continuation of the monarchy... nor (b) the anti-Soviet strategy in the stance of Truman and Byrnes, who probably preferred use of the atomic bombs over diplomatic negotiation, were sufficient in and of themselves to account for the use of

the bomb, or for Japan's delay in surrendering. Rather, Emperor Hirohito's reluctance to face the fait accompli of defeat, and then to act decisively to end hostilities, plus certain official acts and policies of his government, were what mainly kept the war going, though they *also* were not sufficient causes for the use of the bomb. In the final analysis, what counted on the one hand was not only the transcendent influence of the throne but the power, authority, and stubborn personality of the occupant, and on the other the power, determination, and truculence of Harry Truman."

- "From the very start of the Asia-Pacific war, the emperor was a major protagonist of the events going on around him. Before the Battle of Okinawa he had constantly pressed for a decisive victory. Afterward he accepted the need for an early but not an immediate peace. And then he vacillated, steering Japan toward continued warfare rather than toward direct negotiations with the Allies. When the final crisis was fully upon him, the only option left was surrender without negotiation. Even then he continued to procrastinate until the bomb was dropped and the Soviets attacked."

Bell, Phillip. *Twelve Turning Points of the Second World War* (2011).

- "We now recognize the explosion of the two atomic bombs... as a turning point in world history and the beginning of the nuclear age. But at the time, and in relation to the defeat of Japan and the end of the Second World War, the atomic bombs were simply weapons among many others. The defeat of Japan in 1945 was the result of an accumulation of events, rather than of two explosions, however powerful."
- While the invasion of the Philippines itself was of little military value (rather, it was a propaganda victory as it was the liberation of American territory by MacArthur), the preceding Battle of Leyte Gulf was a crushing military defeat for Japan's navy, who lost four carriers, ten cruisers, nine destroyers, and three battleships, including the *Musashi* (one of the largest battleships ever built)
 - The battle of Leyte was also significant because it "introduced a new type of war at sea – the Japanese use of *kamikaze* tactics, suicide attacks in which pilots crashed their aircraft and bomb-loads into American warships."
- "Indeed, these two great battles of Iwo Jima and Okinawa made a profound impression on the Americans, of all arms and all ranks. To capture two islands of no great size they had lost about 18,000 dead and 54,000 wounded. The prospect of invading the Japanese home islands, where losses might be multiplied many times over, was daunting in the extreme, and weighed heavily on American minds and spirits."
- "By the end of July 1945 all but a very few cities in Japan had been bombed, with devastating results. War production had been drastically reduced, perhaps by a half. Many oil refineries had been put out of action. Civilian casualties were heavy – estimates varied between 300,000 and 800,000 dead, which meant a true count was impossible. About eight million people had lost their homes. This destruction was on a scale greater than that which was wrought later by the atomic bombs, and it is not surprising that American strategists did not regard these new weapons as being exceptionally destructive..."
- Commenting on options for ending the war, Bell says that a continuation of bombing raids and an intensified blockade would not work, mainly because it would take too long. The logical outcome was an invasion of the home islands, in which "the anticipated level of casualties... was terrifyingly high." Using a casualty rate of 35 percent (as on Okinawa), this meant that 268,000 men would have

been killed or wounded just taking Kyushu, the southern home island. These casualty estimates make sense of the American attempts to get the USSR to join in the invasion of Japan.

- “On the whole... and in view of the Japanese military mindset of the time, it was striking that the vast majority of the armed services agreed to capitulate and lay down their arms. This could only have been achieved by the express and publicly declared will of the Emperor. In turn, the Emperor would only have acted as he did in the situation created by the atomic bombs and the Soviet intervention in the war.”
- “In the story of these nine days, it is difficult to compare and evaluate the different elements that brought about the Japanese surrender. One Japanese historian emphasises the Soviet entry into the war, arguing that this had ‘a greater effect on the decision by Japanese leaders to end the Pacific war’ than the atomic bombs. The author of a recent history of the Second World War writes simply that the question of whether the bombs or the Soviet intervention was more important ‘cannot be answered’. One of President Truman’s most distinguished biographers concludes that: ‘In such a welter of events and decisions it is not possible to describe any single factor as a sine qua non.’ But despite such testimony, it seems right to single out the two atomic bombs as bearing the greatest weight in the final Japanese decision. The Soviet invasion, however formidable, was after all a military campaign like many others, and it was not directed against the Japanese homeland. The atomic bombs produced a shock of a different order, and had a psychological as well as a materiel effect.”
- “Finally, there has been much discussion... as to how far the motive behind the use of the atomic bombs was to save lives... and how far the purpose was to impress the Soviet Union and strengthen the American hand in securing a favourable peace settlement. In this interpretation, the atomic bombs appear as the first shots in the Cold War rather than the final round of the Pacific War.... The bombs were built to be used, and they would have been used against Germany or Japan irrespective of the state of relations with the Soviet Union – they were ‘weapons for victory’, as Robert Maddox’s book on the matter is entitled. It is also true that the Americans believed that their possession of atomic weapons would impress the Soviet Union and strengthen their diplomatic hand – a significant but essentially secondary purpose.”