



Japanese Intentions for the Pearl Harbor Bombing

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Relations Between America and Japan Before December 7th, 1941

Communication between both America and Japan was problematic due to the fact that Japan's government could not accurately describe what they wanted in a peace agreement. They would switch opinions depending on how the war went. As America's government pushed the Japanese government to give a firm answer, they began to want narrow and difficult agreements. Over time Japan came out with a not so favorable peace agreement they called modus vivendi. The draft proposal included: No armed advancement on Southeastern Asia and the Southern Pacific area, Japan will withdraw troops from French Indochina once they have peace with China (the American government knew this would not work seeing that Japan and China had been at war for four and a half years already) or overall Pacific peace through the Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, a plan to create an empire over all of East Asia, both countries will cooperate with securing goods and assets to Netherlands East Indies, back to the original way of trading and economic relations, and America cannot interfere as Japan and China make peace. On seeing this proposal (which was handed from the Japanese ambassador in America to the Secretary of State), America began to modify the document more to their liking which seemed as more equal for both countries. Around late December, Japan has seen America's draft and is very displeased that the government felt the need to make changes. Japan's government did not accept this draft but still wanted to cooperate with America. All of Japan's and America's relations up to that point was a ploy to give Japan time to plan and execute the attack on Pearl Harbor.

The relationship that was created was intended to give Japan the upper hand in planning their attack on the U.S. Once the U.S. made several changes to the Japanese peace agreement, modus vivendi, the Japanese were not pleased with the changes and this only furthered their plans to attack. The mastermind of this attack, Isoroku Yamamoto, has hopes of attacking the United States to bring a peace agreement before Japan was "beaten to her knees." Despite their war efforts and Tojo's goals to create a war with the U.S., Japan lost the war and Hideki Tojo was later executed by the United States of America.

Many believe that Hawaii was one of 50 of the United States when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor, however, Hawaii did not become a state until August of 1959 and the bombing was in December of 1941. The Japanese wanted to attack the U.S. and create war but they needed a way in first. Since Hawaii is located between the U.S. and Japan, Japanese soldiers attacked the U.S. Naval Base inside the Hawaiian territory. Looking at the ideology of Japan's war tactics, this poster analyzes previous Japanese and American relations as well as the manifestation of the plan to bomb the United States and the goals for this plan.



Japan practices a mock run of the bombing prior to the installment of Pearl Harbor, 1941.

The Plan for Attacking Pearl Harbor

The mastermind of the plan was Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, Commander-in-Chief of the Combined Fleet. The plan arose from several issues- 1.) Japan had eyes on the British Dutch Pacific Islands for oil resources, 2.) if war broke out, Japan wouldn't last long against the US, and, 3.) Yamamoto hoped that by striking fast and hard, against the US- specifically the aircraft carriers and battleships, "there might be a chance of negotiated peace before Japan was beaten to her knees." Also, the Japanese feared that any strike against British or Dutch territories would facilitate US aggression. While Yamamoto was strictly against war with the US, risking not only his career, but also his life on the fact, the oil embargo proved to be an ultimatum for war. The force selected was 23 warships, 353 attack planes- 274 bombers and 79 fighters, and 27 submarines. On the diplomatic side, ambassadors were told, once the plan was underway, to feign peace so that the Americans would not become "unduly suspicious." The Imperial Conference pinpointed a 30-minute gap between attacking and declaring war, Vice-Admiral Nagumo- the leader of the strike force, ruined this plan, attacking 35 minutes early, giving no time for the declaration of war. Other Japanese forces were coordinating deception plans. When the attack proved contrary to Yamamoto's hope, other Japanese commanders were shocked because they believed that Yamamoto "possessed great insight into the American psyche."

Goals of the Pearl Harbor Attack

What was the ultimate goal of attacking Pearl Harbor? What could the Japanese hope to accomplish with this act of terror? To answer these questions, we turn to Hideki Tojo, a general of the Japanese army at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Tojo kept a diary while he was in prison, and in this diary he explained the reasoning behind attacking the United States, amongst other topics of the war. According to Tojo, it was decided on December 1 that Japan would declare war on America and England. A letter notifying the State Department of the decision was to be delivered by Ambassador Nomura five days later. Japan's ultimate goal in attacking Pearl Harbor was to create war with America. Tojo prepared himself for questioning by going so far as to writing down answers to questions he believed he would be asked during an interrogation. One such question related to the reasoning behind declaring war with America. Tojo, along with many of his colleagues, decided that war was the best option for Japan's long term well-being. They believed that due to the strained relationship with America, Japan would ultimately be attacked. Pearl Harbor was attacked in order to spark a war with America as a precautionary measure against being attacked first.

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