

Why Did Japan Attack Pearl Harbor?

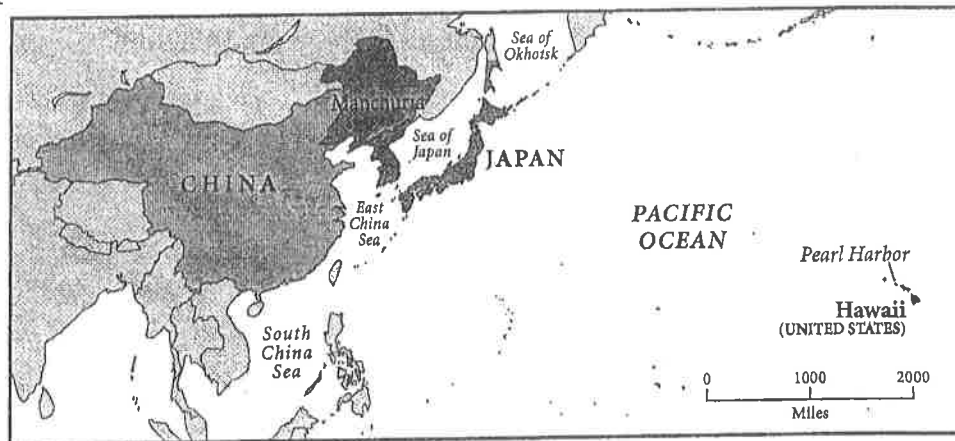
It is possible to argue that the most memorable day in United States history was Sunday, December 7, 1941, the day Japan attacked Pearl Harbor. Within hours America was deeply embroiled in World War II, both in the Pacific against Japan, and in Europe against Japan's ally, Nazi Germany. The world would never be the same.

To begin to understand why Japan attacked Pearl Harbor one must step back at least a few years to the end of an earlier war. In 1919 many of the major world powers met in Versailles, France, to sort out the wreckage of World War I. Among those present were Japan and the United States. One of Japan's interests was to hold on to some islands in the Pacific it had picked up from Germany. President Woodrow Wilson led the American delegation. Wilson's special interest was the creation of a **League of Nations**, an organization to solve future world problems.

In fact, a League of Nations was established. Many nations joined, including Japan. Surprisingly, the United States did not join. Some American leaders simply did not want to get tangled up in the world's problems. The failure of the United States Senate to vote for the League got a mixed reaction in Japan. Some Japanese leaders were quite shocked and disappointed. Others, however, were not surprised. They were suspicious of the United States. And besides some Japanese leaders had been resentful of the Versailles Treaty. They had always seen it as a way for the Europeans and the Americans to maintain the **status quo** – to keep the world divided between the haves and the have-nots. And in the 1920s, Japan was still one of the have-nots.

In the early 1930s things changed. The military gained increasing power in Japan. In 1932 the Japanese established a **puppet state** in **Manchuria**. When the League of Nations objected, Japan itself left the League. In 1937 Japan invaded China.

The United States and President Franklin Roosevelt were upset and worried about Japan's advances in China, but there was an even bigger concern in Europe. That concern was Adolf



Hitler and Nazi Germany. In 1939, Germany attacked Poland. In the next two years German tanks and planes threatened to conquer most of the European continent. France fell. England held on by a thread. In September 1940, Japan signed a three-way pact with Germany and Italy. This was very upsetting to the United States. Roosevelt realized war with Germany was just a matter of time. He had hoped to avoid a war with Japan. He did not want to fight on **two fronts**.

Roosevelt did not get his wish. On December 7, 1941, 361 planes launched from six Japanese aircraft carriers and delivered a surprise attack on the American naval base and airfields at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii.

But why? At the time Japan had half the population of the United States. In area, it was smaller than Sweden. Japanese leaders knew they were taking a big risk. With all this, *why did Japan attack Pearl Harbor?*

Background Essay Questions

1. What event took place at Versailles in 1919?
2. Why did Woodrow Wilson push the League of Nations?
3. Why didn't the United States join the League?
4. Why were some Japanese leaders resentful of the peace treaty at Versailles?
5. What country did Japan invade in the 1930s?
6. The United States supported China. Why didn't the United States go to war sooner against Japan?
7. Define each of the following:

League of Nations

status quo

puppet state

Manchuria

two fronts

Timeline

- 1941, July 16:** Yankee Joe DiMaggio hits in 56th consecutive game
- Dec. 7:** Japan attacks Pearl Harbor
- Dec. 8:** US declares war on Japan
- Dec. 10:** Japan invades Philippines
- Dec. 11:** Germany and Italy declare war on US
- Dec. 22:** All US males 20 to 44 declared eligible for the draft

Document A

Source: Japanese Ministry of Education, excerpts from *The Way of the Subjects*, August 1, 1941.

Note: *The Way of the Subjects* was required reading in most Japanese high schools and colleges.

- An old order ... (European and American) ... is now crumbling.
- The ideals of Japan ... are represented by the principle that the benevolent rule of the Emperor may be extended so as to embrace the whole world.
- Japan is the fountain source of the Yamato race. Manchukuo (Manchuria) is its reservoir and East Asia (including China) is its paddy field.
- The way of the subject is to be loyal to the Emperor in disregard of self, thereby supporting the Imperial Throne coexistence with the Heaven and the Earth.

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Note: The Yamato race refers to a pure, unmixed Japanese people.

Document Analysis

1. What is a “subject”?
2. What is meant by the “old order”?
3. Name three countries that you think might have controlled the “old order”?
4. Who will be the leader of the “new order”?
5. Who will be ruled by the “new order”?
6. The document compares Japan to a fountain. What land will provide water for that fountain? What land will be irrigated by that fountain?
7. Does this document provide a reason why Japan might one day attack Pearl Harbor? Explain.

Document B

Source: Map created from various sources.



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Document Analysis

1. What area did Japan establish as a puppet state in 1932?
2. In what year did Japan begin its occupation of China outside of Manchuria?
3. "Japan is the fountain source of the (pure Japanese) race. Manchukuo is its reservoir and East Asia is its paddy field." Is this quote from Document A supported or not supported by the map? Explain.
4. If Japan were interested in seizing oil fields, what islands might they invade?
5. If the Europeans were busy fighting a war with Hitler, what nation could be expected to block Japan? Explain.

Document C

Source: Chronology adapted from Akira Iriye, *Pearl Harbor and the Coming of the Pacific War*, Bedford/St. Martin's Press, Boston, 1999.

1932		Japan completes occupation of Manchuria.
1937		Japan attacks China.
1938		Japan declares its policy to establish a "new order in East Asia."
1939		US begins an embargo* of aircraft and aircraft parts against Japan.
1940	May	President Roosevelt moves US Pacific fleet from California to Pearl Harbor.
	July	US Congress passes Naval Expansion Act. Promises to triple fleet size by 1944.
1941	July	The United States freezes all Japanese assets and bank accounts.
	Aug.	The United States imposes an embargo on oil shipments to Japan.
	Dec.	Japan attacks Pearl Harbor.

*Embargo = stopping trade

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Document Analysis

1. How many years was it between Japan's attack on China and Pearl Harbor?
2. What is the "new order" that Japan announced in 1938? (See Document A)
3. What evidence is there in 1939 and 1940 that the United States did not like the "new order"?
4. What does it mean to freeze assets and bank accounts?
5. Using context clues from the document, what is an embargo?
6. Judging from this timeline, why do you think Japan attacked Pearl Harbor?

Document D

Source: Adapted from Suzuki Akira, "US Economic Sanctions Against Japan and Its Aid to China during the Sino-Japanese War," *Asia Kenyu*, April, 1986.

Japanese Imports 1937 – 1941						
Petroleum (Oil) in units of 10,000 tons						
Steel and scrap iron in units of 1,000 tons						
	<u>Petroleum</u>		<u>Steel</u>		<u>Scrap Iron</u>	
	<u>Total</u>	<u>US</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>US</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>US</u>
1937	482	380	995	409	242	178
1938	392	316	857	310	136	101
1939	343	291	706	32	256	218
1940	436	291	690	...	139	112
1941	141	88	646	6	20	11

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Note: Japan had few oil reserves and produced very little of its own oil.

Document Analysis

1. What is an import?
2. In the late 1930s, about what percent of Japan’s oil came from the United States:
 10%? 20%? 50%? 80%?
3. Look at the Document B map. Why would Japanese military leaders be interested in keeping up the flow of imported oil?
4. The United States stopped all trade of oil, steel, and scrap iron with Japan on August 1, 1941. There is evidence that President Franklin Roosevelt was worried about cutting off all oil to Japan. What might have been his concern?

Document E

Source: Hideki Tojo, comments at Imperial Conference, November 5, 1941. In Akira Iriye, *Pearl Harbor and the Coming of the Pacific War*, Bedford/St. Martins Press, 1999.

Note: Tojo was both Prime Minister and War Minister of Japan. These comments were made in a closed meeting of Japan's top government and military leaders in the presence of the Emperor.

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The United States has not conceded a single point; it simply makes strong demands on Japan.

... What they insist upon is Japan's acceptance of the principle of the withdrawal of troops [from China].... As I understand it, withdrawal of our troops is retreat. We sent a large force of one million men to China, and it has cost us well over 100,000 dead and wounded, the grief of their bereaved families, hardship for four years, and a national expenditure of several billions of yen. We must by all means get satisfactory results from this.... We can expect an expansion of our country only by stationing troops. This the United States does not welcome.

...[H]ow can we let the United States do as she pleases, even though there is some uneasiness? Two years from now we will have no petroleum for military use. Ships will stop moving. When I think about the strengthening of American defenses in the Southwest Pacific, the expansion of the American fleet, ... I see no end to difficulties.... I fear that we would become a third-class nation after two or three years if we just sat tight.

Document Analysis

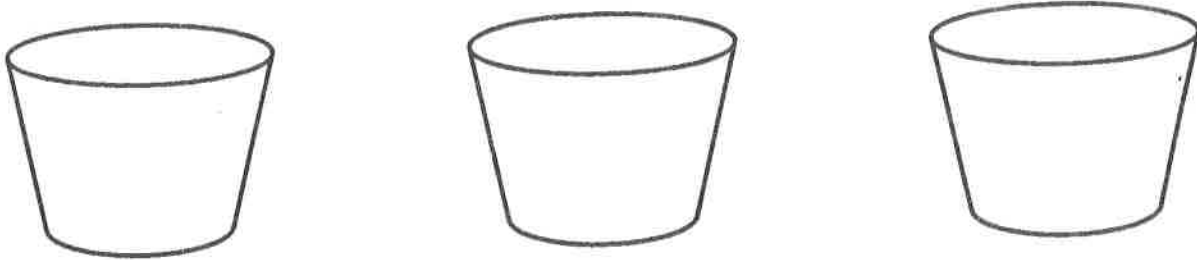
1. Who is the speaker and what is his position?
2. Why does Tojo say that it would be hard for Japan to pull their troops out of China?
3. What is the US position regarding Japanese soldiers in China?
4. According to Tojo, how long will the Japanese supply of oil last?
5. According to Tojo, what will happen to the US navy over the next few years?
6. Judging from this document, why did the Japanese attack Pearl Harbor?

Bucketing – Getting Ready to Write

Bucketing

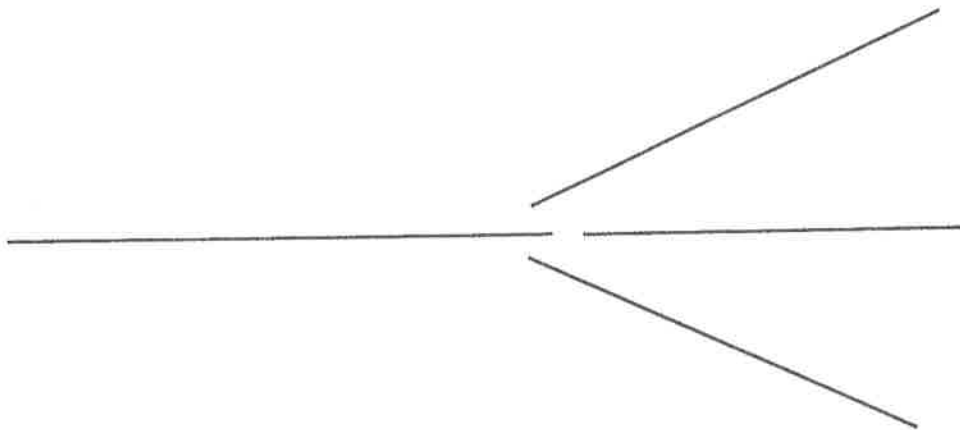
Look over all the documents and organize them into your final buckets. Write final bucket labels under each bucket and place the letters of the documents in the buckets where they belong. It is okay to put a document in more than one bucket. Remember, your buckets are going to become your body paragraphs.

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Thesis Development and Roadmap

On the chickenfoot below, write your thesis and your roadmap. Your thesis is always an opinion and answers the Mini-Q question. The roadmap is created from your bucket labels and lists the topic areas you will examine in order to prove your thesis.



Why Did Japan Attack Pearl Harbor?

Pre- Write Outline

Working Title:

Introduction Paragraph:

Hook/Grabber:

Background:

Stating the question:

Thesis: There were three reasons why Japan attacked _____,
_____, and _____.

Body Paragraph One

Topic Sentence/claim (bucket one) First reason for attack _____
_____.

One piece of evidence that supports this reason:

Analysis of evidence:

A second piece of supporting evidence is

Analysis of evidence:

Concluding/closing argument: