

OXFORD IB DIPLOMA PROGRAMME



CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF 20TH-CENTURY WARS

COURSE COMPANION

David M. Smith

OXFORD

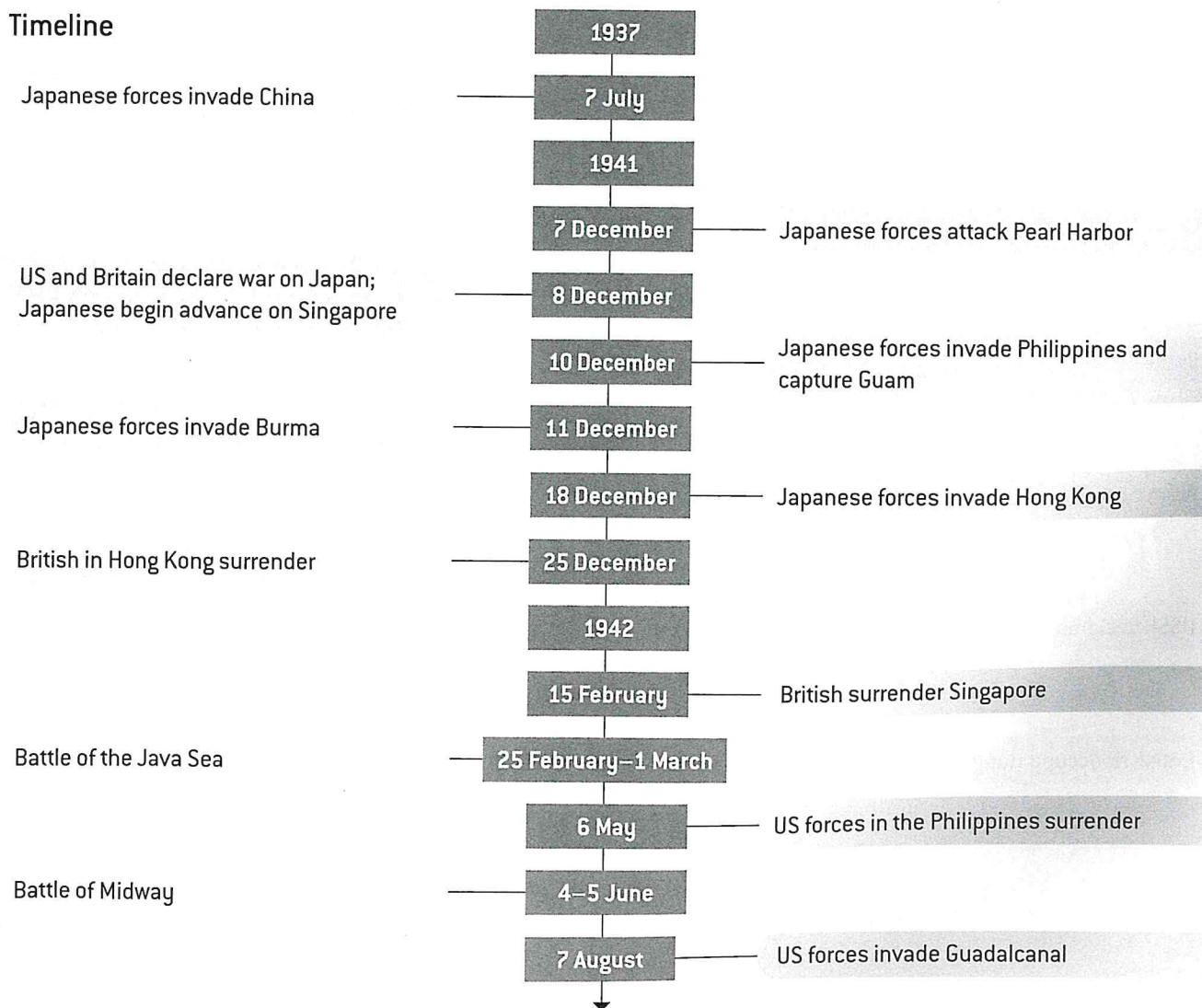
7 THE SECOND WORLD WAR IN THE PACIFIC: TOTAL WAR

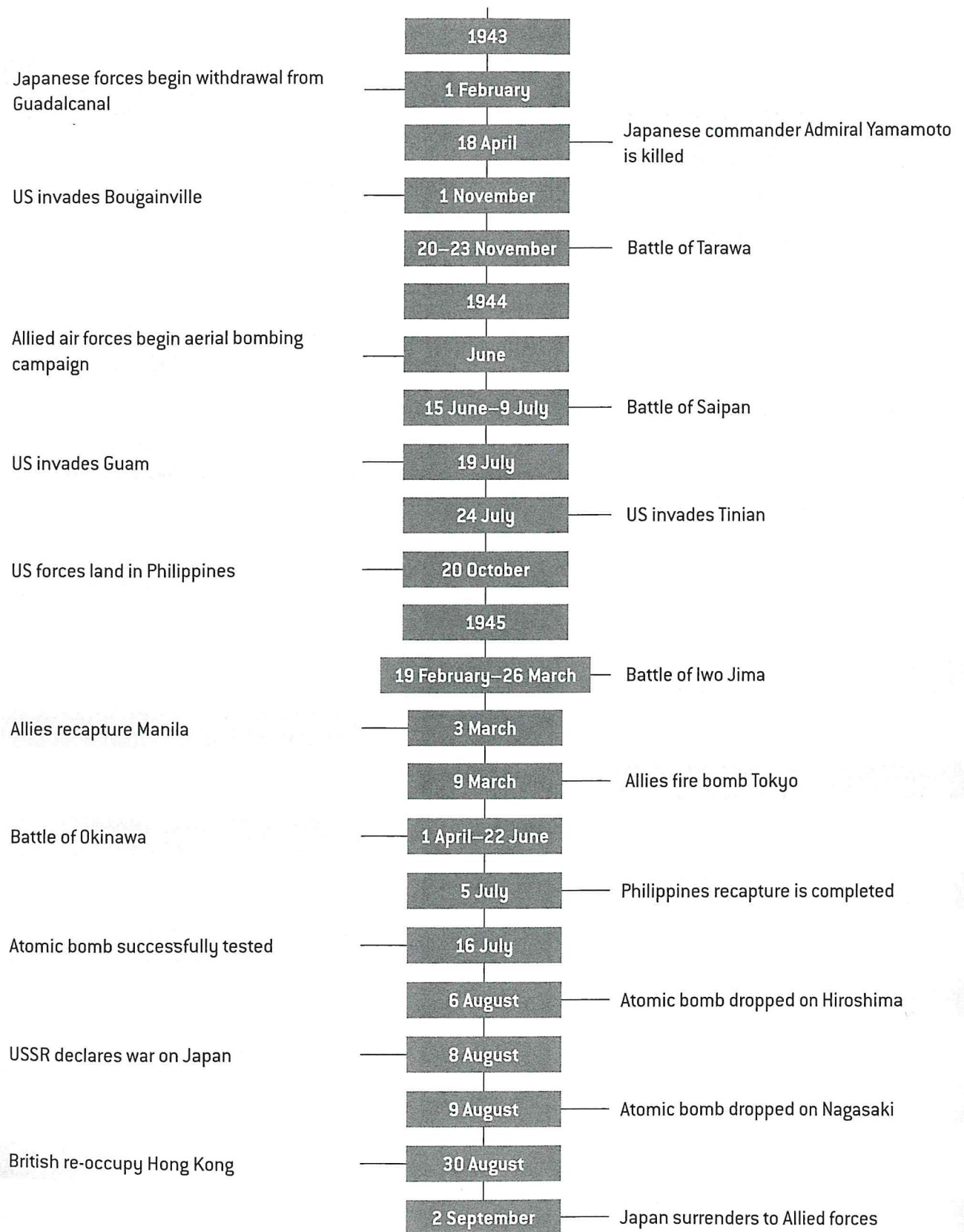
Global context

As with the Second World War in Europe, the war in the Pacific erupted out of the complex ideological and economic context of the 1930s. The Great Depression affected all countries. Many sought refuge in protectionist trade policies that exacerbated the economic situation and isolated some of the states most adversely affected by the global depression. This isolation caused many of these states to look inward which in turn fostered a sense of defiance, and eventually in some states such as Japan, a form of ultra-nationalism.

The ultra-nationalists saw expansion and a sort of neo-mercantilism as a way out of the economic catastrophe that was the depression. The situation in Asia and the Pacific was further complicated by the existence of European imperial administration, underpinned as they were by racist philosophies. An anti-imperialist sentiment had long been simmering in the region and Japan attempted to manipulate this while at the same time building its own empire at the expense of other Asian nations.

Timeline





7.1 Causes of the Second World War in the Pacific

Conceptual understanding

Key questions

- To what extent was Japanese foreign policy driven by economic and nationalistic concerns?
- To what extent could diplomacy have avoided a war in the Pacific?
- To what extent were the issues in the Pacific linked to the European tensions?

Key concepts

- Cause
- Consequence

Long-term causes

The First World War

Although Japan provided aid to the Allies during the First World War, the country was busy expanding her markets at the expense of the western powers, occupied as they were with the war. Imports and exports increased by 300% during the war. Japan had expanded her influence by occupying German colonies in the Pacific and gave China an ultimatum of 21 demands for concessions within its territory. They became the key importer of raw materials and exporter of manufactured goods throughout eastern Asia. However, as the global economy began to recover and switch back to civilian production after the war, Japanese manufacturers suffered from renewed competition. Likewise, her agricultural sector, still mostly small scale, could not compete with the more efficient farming of the West and the falling commodity prices of the mid-1920s. Foreshadowing US policy in the 1920s and 1930s, China erected tariff barriers in attempts to protect their own fledgling industrialization against the cheaper Japanese products. This would set Japan and China on a collision course.

Like those of its future Axis partners, the Japanese delegation to the Paris Peace Conference was to be disappointed with the eventual settlement. She claimed the right to all the German possessions in the Pacific, but was "awarded" the League of Nations mandates to those north of the equator, this despite a pledge from Britain to support such claims. Japan had also hoped to claim all of the extra-territorial trading concessions Germany had enjoyed in China prior to the war, while China had argued that all such concessions should be abolished. The conference gave half of these concessions to the Japanese thereby

satisfying neither side. Likewise Japan was frustrated in her attempts to enshrine racial equality in the covenant of the League of Nations, demonstrating to her that as far as the western powers were concerned Asia was to be treated as a retainer at the imperial table rather than an equal partner.

Washington Naval Conference

In an effort to avert a naval arms race between the United States, Britain and Japan in the Pacific, the US invited nine nations involved with Far East concerns to Washington in 1921. The treaties signed at Washington made significant inroads in naval disarmament and limiting the future growth of navies. The US, Britain, and Japan destroyed over 60 ships between them. The Five Power Treaty signed in Washington established the ratio of capital ship tonnage that each of these powers could possess at 5:5:3 and re-established the status quo in terms of naval fortifications in the Pacific for the duration of the treaty. The Nine Power Treaty, also signed at Washington, guaranteed China's sovereignty. While these agreements were important steps toward establishing a working peace in the Pacific, it froze the inequities established at Versailles in place. As the influence of militarists and nationalists grew, Japan increasingly bridled under these restrictions. When Japan argued that the ratio should be equal, Britain and the US refused and Japan did not renew the treaty in 1936.

Ultra-nationalism

On the surface Japan was a liberal democracy overseen by a divine emperor. There was, however, no mechanism for responsible government. In reality a number of large families along with the navy and the army exercised a great deal of political and economic influence. This influence was linked closely to the economic health of the country, which was in turn linked closely to an expanding empire, an empire necessary to provide raw materials and markets for finished goods.

As the Japanese economy began to falter in the 1920s, a fundamentalist movement grew in importance preaching a return to the ways of the Samurai and pre-Meiji Japan. Ultra-nationalism and anti-western sentiments were an important part of this "new" doctrine. This movement found adherents in the army and the army was politically powerful. After the Wall Street Crash of 1929 bit hard into the already frail Japanese economy, civilian influence in the government evaporated and the serving military officers who also held important government ministries argued that expansion was the only answer to the problem of shrinking markets and China was to be the target. The ultra-nationalism that was at the heart of this revival and subsequent expansion saw Japan as the natural leader in East Asia. It envisioned a periphery, rich in oil and other resources, serving an industrialized centre – Japan – and in turn buying its finished product. This relationship would later find expression in the vague organization called the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere – in fact a tool of imperial control.

Class discussion

To what extent was Japanese ultra-nationalism similar to fascism?



Short-term causes

Great Depression

As the Great Depression began to spread around the world and tariff walls grew higher, the Japanese government responded with **deficit financing**. The ultra-nationalists and militarists in the government demanded that much of this borrowed money go to rearming the military, which they would then argue was the tool by which the economic crisis could be solved. When Prime Minister Takahashi tried to curtail this spending, he was assassinated. By 1937 over two-thirds of Japanese government expenditure was on armaments. This radical expansion of the military had to be fed and the lands of China appeared to be the source in a sort of neo-mercantilism.

deficit financing

Government spending that is dependent on loans, thus pushing the government's budget into a deficit.

Japanese expansion

The lack of civilian control of the military and, indeed, the government began to tell in the early 1930s. The alleged murder of a Japanese officer in the Chinese city of Mukden and the staged explosion on a nearby Japanese-owned rail line gave the Japanese military a pretext to occupy Manchuria. The reality is that far from an act of Chinese aggression, it was the act of a rogue Japanese military unit. Nevertheless Tokyo supported the expansion and by 1932 had set up a protectorate called Manchukuo under the puppet Chinese emperor **Pu Yi**.

Pu Yi

The last emperor of the Manchu dynasty in China. Pu Yi came to the throne in 1908 at the age of three and was emperor until he abdicated in 1912. After the Japanese invaded Manchuria in 1931 they installed him as the emperor of a territory renamed Manchukuo.

The Chinese government complained bitterly to the League of Nations. While there seemed a political will on the part of the smaller members of the League to act, they had little means to do so. The US urged the League to enforce the Kellogg-Briand Pact to which both China and Japan had been signatories. Unwilling to commit any troops to Manchuria, the League sent the Lytton Commission to investigate and compile a report. The report placed blame on both the Chinese and the Japanese. It also found, however, the resulting territory of Manchukuo to be illegitimate and in violation of the Nine Power Treaty. As a result of the report the Japanese withdrew from the League.

The League had clearly failed its first major test. Collective security had failed to prevent a state from using force to expand at the expense of a weaker neighbour. Economic sanctions were unpalatable to the powers given the fragile state of the global economy. Garnering support for a military adventure to defend a remote part of China only 12 years after the last war and given the economic state of the powers was likewise an impossibility. Understanding the essential weakness of the League, the Japanese government went further, issuing the **Amau Doctrine** declaring China to be within the Japanese sphere of influence and calling on all other countries to remove themselves from all Chinese economic and political affairs. This was a clear rejection of both the "Open Door" policy and the US Stimson Doctrine of 1932, which stated that the US would not recognize any treaty that infringed on US commercial rights in the region.

Amau Doctrine

A doctrine of 1930s Japanese foreign policy that reserved the right of Japan to act unilaterally to preserve "order" in East Asia.

The Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the West's inability to stop it was illustrative and set the stage for international relations for the rest of the 1930s. Agreements and treaties were only useful insofar as countries were willing to back them up with force. In the difficult economic times of the 1930s, states would choose to protect trade at the expense of

national self-determination. It was a lesson learned by the future Axis Powers, but not the future Allied Powers. It also illuminated the degree to which US and Japanese policy in the region was contradictory. Should each of these countries continue along its foreign policy path, it was hard to see how they would not come into some sort of conflict.

Sino-Japanese War and US reaction

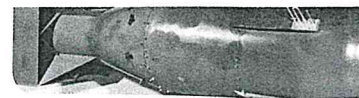
In February of 1936 a group of junior officers in the Imperial Japanese Army attempted to overthrow the civilian government and assassinate Prime Minister Okado. The coup failed and a number of the perpetrators were executed. This incident, however, had the strange consequence of causing the military to tighten its control of the government, which helped ensure that military solutions to foreign policy issues would take precedence over diplomatic answers.

This ascendance of the military to ever-greater political control prompted the Japanese to pressure the Chinese government for more concessions. When Nanjing refused further concessions, a dispute on the Marco Polo Bridge in Beijing was used as a pretext for a full invasion. The Japanese army made short work of Jiang Jieshi's forces, forcing him out of the capital of Nanjing, and killing some 250 000 civilians in the weeks after the city fell. Within a year the Japanese army had captured much of the Chinese coast and close to its entire north-east. This aggression clearly threatened US interests in the region and they extended loans to Jiang's government. US businesses also traded oil and steel with the Japanese, which the invaders ate up in larger and larger quantities. Eventually the war with China would cost the Japanese government over \$5 million a day. This dependence on US resources would prove to be a serious and strategic liability, one that would propel the Japanese government to war with the US.

In essence, the Japanese determined that they needed to expand in order to keep what they had. This expansion would eventually threaten US, British and Dutch holdings in south-east China. Any resources the Japanese could take from the region would be threatened on their journey back to the home islands by the US protectorate in the Philippines. Something would eventually have to give.

War plans

There is competition between the branches of any military and Japan's was no exception. The army's reputation had been sullied by the attempted coup of 1936, but it was still politically very powerful. The navy, the more conservative branch, had never really taken to the rabid nationalism of the army. All branches of the military want to demonstrate that it is the more vital to the national interest and thus claim a greater influence and share in the distribution of resources. The Japanese army thus argued for a solution that emphasized land operations against the Soviets. This plan, known as the "north programme" was tested in the late summer of 1939 when a Japanese division engaged a Soviet force under the command of Georgi Zhukov on the Mongolian border. The Japanese were overwhelmed and



withdrew. From that point, the “south programme” which would push the search for resources and hegemony into Indo-China was dominant. The “south programme” gave more strategic planning influence to the navy. It would also likely clash with western interests in the region.

The fall of France in June 1940 and the signing of the **Tripartite Pact** with Italy and Germany seemed to open the way for the expansion of Japanese influence into the French colony in Indo-China. With her right flank protected by a non-aggression pact with the Soviets, Japan had by the summer of 1941 occupied the entire colony.

Tripartite Pact

An agreement signed on 27 September 1940 by Japan, Germany and Italy. The pact pledged its signatories to mutual aid should any of them be attacked by a country not then at war.

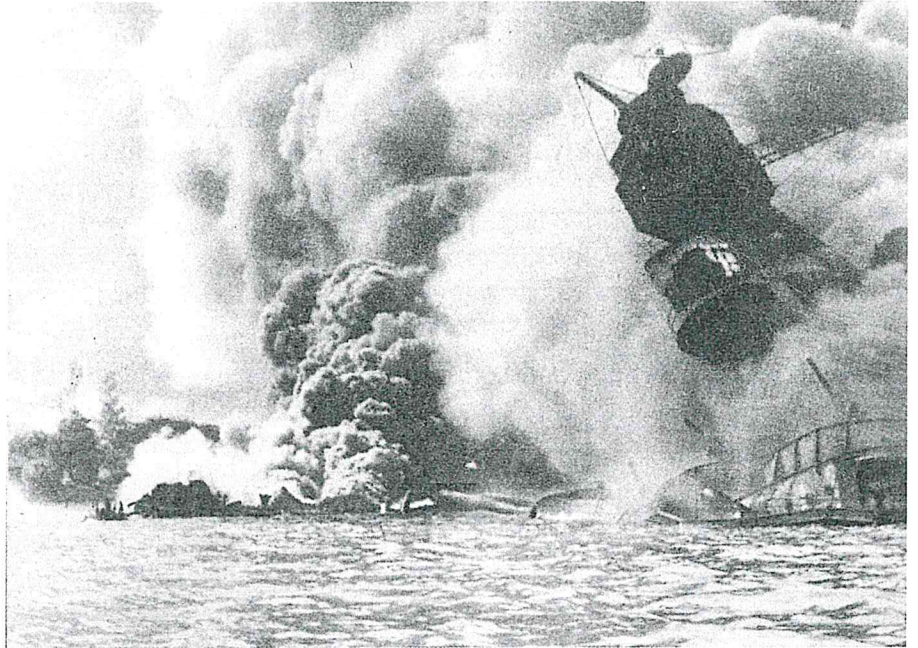
Pearl Harbor

The months leading up to the attack on the US naval base in the Hawaiian Islands saw a flurry of diplomatic wrangling between the United States and Japan. The US was determined that Chinese territorial integrity be restored and free trade be reopened. The Japanese were just as determined to not forfeit their recent gains, nor to have their strategic plans be subject to western approval.

In July 1941 the Japanese army occupied all of Indo-China and Roosevelt learned, through radio intercepts, that the Japanese were developing military plans at the same time as they claimed to be negotiating in good faith. Roosevelt ordered an embargo, supported by the British and Dutch, on all trade with Japan. This cut the Japanese military off from over 80% of its oil and much of its steel and had the effect of putting the negotiations with the US on the clock. Japan's oil reserves were low and if war with the US was coming, the faster the better, before fuel shortages made combat impossible. This was the view of the commander of the Japanese Imperial Navy and chief military planner, Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto. Yamamoto had studied in the US and understood its awesome industrial strength and military potential; he hoped that his government could avoid a war with the United States. In the event that such a war did come he believed that the Japanese could be reasonably successful for six months to a year. Should the war continue beyond that, Yamamoto had little confidence that they could win. This formed the outline of Japanese strategic thinking in the fall of 1941. Should war be necessary, they would act quickly, expanding their empire's defensive perimeter from which they could negotiate from a position of strength.

Yamamoto was tasked with developing the attack plan. It would contain three assaults. The Japanese army would land and overpower the US outposts on Guam and Wake Islands. A larger force would land in the Philippines. The main focus of the operation was a surprise aerial attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. Waves of torpedo and dive bombers would launch from aircraft carriers that had snuck across the Pacific. The goal was to damage the US fleet to such an extent that it could not carry on operations in the Pacific, thereby giving Japan a free hand to consolidate its gains. Surprise was vital for this operation. The ongoing negotiations in Washington and the US Pacific Fleet's tradition of standing down on Sundays gave the Japanese the confidence that this surprise could be achieved.

The US Pacific Fleet was indeed surprised. Over two-thirds of the available anti-aircraft guns went unmanned and there was precious little ammunition for those that were. It took a little over an hour for two waves of bombers to sink four battleships and heavily damage three others. Twelve other vessels of varying sizes were also damaged and 200 aircraft were destroyed, most of them on the ground. By the end of the day the US had suffered 2,700 casualties of which just over 2,000 were dead.



▲ Ships of the United States navy burn at Pearl Harbor. What are the moral implications of attacking before a formal declaration of war? To what extent are such declarations anachronisms?

While the damage caused by the raid was stunning, it was far from the unqualified success the Japanese needed it to be. Despite what was hit during the raid, it is perhaps more significant to consider what was not hit on 7 December 1941. The US aircraft carriers had not been in Pearl Harbor that morning and their survival meant that the US could regain the initiative in the Pacific in short order. The dockyards and huge oil tanks were not heavily damaged, ensuring that Pearl Harbor was still very much an operational base, able to fuel vessels and repair those that had been damaged. Indeed it is a testament to the industrial strength of the US that of the four battleships sunk at Pearl Harbor that morning two were raised and repaired within two and a half years.

Class discussion

What role did luck play in the events of 7 December 1941?