

An Eerie Message From Pearl Harbor

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In the wake of the recent events in the South China Sea, one is inevitably drawn back to an earlier time in history, December 1941.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was the beginning of the abrupt end of complacent military strategy for the United States. There is also an ongoing debate about how much FDR knew and, and if he knew about the impending attack, why didn't his staff inform the commanders at Pearl Harbor well in advance.

There are serious works that study the fore-knowledge of the sitting President and his Cabinet members regarding their possession of specific information detailing the intent of the Japanese to launch an attack on Pearl Harbor, regarding specific information detailing the timing of the attack, and that there were tactical military orders issued by the senior military in D.C. that would prevent discovery of the approaching Japanese fleet as part of a cover-up to keep the commanders at Pearl Harbor in the dark. The research presents the argument that there was an Executive Branch plan to guarantee that the Naval Base at Pearl Harbor and the Army Air Corp assets at Hickam Field would remain as vulnerable as possible to a Japanese attack, so as to elicit the greatest outrage from the American public, galvanizing them for war.

The important point is that - *the attack occurred*. Most significant in the aftermath of the attack was the ability of the United States to create the powerful Navy required to vanquish the Empire of Japan.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was "merely" the opening strike in the War in the Pacific against the U.S. and England. The very same day of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Japanese successfully attacked the Philippines, causing the United States to lose its most strategic American forward base in the South Pacific.

The Philippines may have been lost again, after almost eight years of incessant sabotage of U.S. foreign policy and its Navy by President Obama.

During the early 1930's, the U.S. ignored Japanese aggression in Manchuria and China, and continued to supply Japan with million of tons of scrap steel, which Japan used to expand their Navy. At the same time the U.S. continued to downsize its Navy and limit new ship construction. Japan ignored treaties that prohibited building warships that exceeded international agreements on naval tonnage.

Japan continued its land grab, and when Japanese troops landed in Indochina in July 1941, the U.S. finally took action. [FDR froze all Japanese assets](#) in the U.S., prohibited the export of vital materials and closed the Panama to Japanese shipping. [Britain and the Dutch East Indies followed suit and cut off 85% of Japan's fuel oil.](#)

The U.S. understood that in reaction to its moves, there was the threat of an imminent Japanese invasion of the Philippines. To strengthen their military position in the archipelago nation, the War Department reactivated retired General Douglas MacArthur, already in the Philippines commanding the Philippine Army. MacArthur assumed a Japanese attack would occur in the Spring of 1942. He formulated his plans on promised bombers, tanks, and guns, believing there was adequate time in which to build a proper defense.

Although promised, the supplies were either unavailable due to prior commitments to lend lease support for England, or limited cargo transport capability, or - what was available and ready to go - was scheduled to be shipped after Japan had already attacked Pearl Harbor, British and Dutch assets in SE Asia, and the Philippines.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was an attempt to disable American Naval power in the Pacific, the remaining obstacle to a Japanese conquest of all of South East Asia. Britain's capital ships, lacking air cover and sufficient escorts, soon fell prey to Japanese air attacks - the pattern of naval warfare that would dominate the open ocean conflicts in the Pacific.

The attack on Pearl Harbor was followed immediately by the Japanese assault on the Philippines, the most strategic American forward base in the South Pacific. The United States' inability to defend the Philippines in 1941, demanded three years of combat to regain the territory.

Prior to the Japanese attack, the American military presence in the Pacific was sufficient to protect U.S. commerce. But, the self confidence of a previously unchallenged modern navy, proved to be its greatest weakness. When war did come, it wasn't the U.S.'s strengths that mattered, but its weaknesses that left it vulnerable.

The U.S. is the worlds largest economy, and as such it depends on sea transport, both for import and export. Aside from its military capability, the strength and size of a navy determines its ability to project force and prevent harm to its ocean going shipping.

Protection of its merchant ships goes back to the founding of the nation. From the 1792 construction of three frigates, intended to stop captures for ransom by the Barbary states, the U.S. Navy hesitantly grew. By the War of 1812 there were 23 ships; and the Navy kept growing from that time on. Until the period just prior to WW2, the US would never be without a sufficient number of ships to protect its commerce or ward off any potential enemy - that is until today.

[The long term territorial plan of China](#), the world's second largest economy, has been to control an area in the South Pacific that Americans paid for dearly to

regain in WW2. China may now have accomplished their goal without firing a shot - what Japan needed a massive navy combined with military offensives to accomplish.

[China has declared a disputed area in the South China Sea to be within its sphere of influence](#). This area is immediately West of the Philippines. Over the past several years, the PRC has established a permanent military presence there with the construction of artificial islands, threatening China's regional neighbors. [The South China Sea is important](#) because \$5 Trillion in yearly trade passes through it. The countries surrounding the Sea look at China's military build-up as an attempt to control the shipping routes and the Sea's natural resources.

It is this activity, which motivated President Obama to declare a rebalance to the East in 2011.

The U.S. has tremendous capability to respond to any all-out attack by China or North Korea. They don't have sufficient depth of non-nuclear capability to suppress naval attacks without potential serious loss and injury. [There are concerns](#) about the vulnerability of its forces in forward operating areas, especially within the First Island Chain.

The U.S.'s main force projection is their Super Carriers. And, its Navy's confidence is based upon the fact that it has not suffered the loss of a Fleet Carrier since 1943; nor has it lost any vessel to an enemy in almost as many years; but that may be because recently they have not faced an adversary that posed a true naval threat. They do not have sufficient assets to protect all of their [Carrier Strike Groups](#) (CSG) if they were all deployed simultaneously.

In speaking to U.S. Navy Lt. Benjamin Anderson, spokesperson, Navy Office of Information, I was told:

"Our Navy today has the capabilities and capacity to decisively succeed in accomplishing any mission required of us, anywhere in the world at any time."

Still, several concerns have been raised by consultants and military observers as to US Naval capability in near future conflicts, especially in the Pacific.

In trying to get a handle on what assets would constitute an optimal CSG, that would allow it to accomplish its mission with the greatest risk deterrence, the best perspective I could get from the Navy spokesperson was:

"The current configuration of a carrier strike group (CSG) is the Navy's best option for supporting and protecting all of our carriers as they operate forward, providing presence and safeguarding U.S. interests. To speculate on future CSG configurations would be premature."

But, that implies several different configurations, used in different deployments. The most secure CSG would consist of the Carrier's (CVN) air wing defensive aircraft, three Cruisers (CG), six Destroyers (DDG) and three Frigates (FFG) plus 3 to 4 Attack Submarines (SSN) and support ships. [All of the Navy's frigates have now been decommissioned](#), and the ships designated to replace them are Littoral Combat Ships (LCS), predominately the Independence Class; designed for coastal encounters and less well armed than escort ships specifically designed to screen a Carrier.

The U.S. now has 11 CVN's with another ten planned. The Navy also has nine Amphibious Assault Vessels (LHD), that many consider "escort carriers." An open ocean deployment of all 20 aircraft carriers would require 30 CG's, 120 DDG's and 30 FFG's or their replacements. Currently the U.S. Navy has 22 Cruisers, 63 / 73 Destroyers, between 60 and 80 SSN's. There are only 13 LCS's planned, but these are needed to operate in small groups in areas like the South

China Sea and the Persian Gulf. There are 55 Attack Submarines in service and more Virginia Class vessels planned, but as they come into service they will replace the Los Angeles Class ships.

Although, the U.S. is focused on the Pacific - just like WW2 - the Navy must be prepared for a two ocean fight. Regardless of the capabilities of each CSG, there are not enough assets to cover all areas.

"And while the U.S. ...is developing new military capabilities to strengthen the rebalance, [the anti-access/area denial \(A2/AD\)](#) challenge is increasing and concerns are growing about the ability of potential adversaries to hold at risk forward-deployed and forward-operating forces throughout the region. Chinese... strategy places a premium on investments in A2/AD capabilities, which includes long-range cruise and ballistic missiles, advanced integrated air and missile defense (IAMD) systems, and submarines. The goal of these systems is to restrict or outright deny an attacker freedom of entry or maneuver. Chinese investments in cyber; electronic warfare (EW); a blue-water navy; missiles; and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) are reminders of China's plans to push the U.S. out of the region in a conflict. These capabilities give China the ability to hold at risk U.S. installations and naval assets in the Western Pacific, U.S. allies and partners, and the freedom to use international air and waterways on which the U.S. economy depends. China's strategy could undermine the U.S. military's ability to defend U.S. interests in the Asia-Pacific."

Even beyond the assets -

".. [the more game-changing leaps](#) have been made in the development of robust Chinese electronic warfare capabilities, cyber capabilities, and the PLA's multilayered approach to dealing with U.S. regional bases and alliances, each of which poses unprecedented challenges for senior U.S. planners and decision makers. Chinese EW arguably is the most important part of the A2/AD revolution, and yet it is poorly understood in the West. In short, the key information systems that enable U.S. joint operations—satellite communications, the global positioning system (GPS), tactical datalinks, and high-frequency (HF) communications could be fundamentally degraded, or even rendered unusable, especially the closer U.S. forces get to Chinese territory."

More humbling is the fact that the U.S. has little or no green water / littoral capability - small fast ships that can maneuver in restricted areas such as the Gulf of Hormuz or in maneuverability restricted areas in the South China Sea. Our Nuclear submarines, designed for deep water operation, are too large and require too much draft to be able to operate in the more shallow waters.

Their new Freedom Class Littoral Combat Ships (LCS) are said to be replacements for the larger decommissioned frigates and the smaller [Cyclone Class coastal patrol boats](#). The new LCS's are neither small enough to effectively operate as littoral ships, nor large enough to effectively operate as a CSG escort. Additionally their multi-modular defense package has had serious teething problems.

More distressing is that:

In 2002, a [DOD Persian Gulf war game](#), small, agile speedboats swarming a naval convoy inflicted devastating damage on more powerful warships. The team, representing the U.S., lost 16 major warships - a carrier, cruisers and amphibious vessels.

While President Obama has tough talked a shift of military focus to the Pacific, [China is not impressed](#), gaining new strategic military advantage in the South China Sea and increasing its blue water navy.

[There are concerns](#) that President Obama only created the illusion of a new strategic plan, while doing nothing substantial to further it. In some ways he weakened the U.S.'s position by creating an enemy out of the Philippines, a former ally, in a region with potentially disastrous maritime disputes between China and its neighbors.

More so, it has been reported [that the Obama administration has no clear policy](#) since President Obama announced the shift to the Pacific in 2011. To date, the administration has not articulated a clear, coherent, or consistent strategy for the region. [A 2016 advisory report delineates](#) shortcomings in almost all areas of preparation, including Navy capital ships

And, just when the U.S. is working on developing closer ties in SE Asia with joint military exercises, Washington has irritated two long standing partners in the region. [Thailand](#) has increasingly turned toward China, and the Philippines. Philippine President Duterte went to Beijing for economic talks. [He says he wants the U.S. Navy out of the Philippines](#) while pursuing closer ties to China and Russia. His visit to Beijing signaled a change in the Pacific balance of power.

The Obama Administration has sewn the seeds of the destruction of the U.S.'s global influence around the world. The U.S. - China relationship has become much more tense and hostile. Our relations with Russia have deteriorated, and North Korean [language aimed at the U.S. has become more bellicose](#). In spite of

the fact that its Navy is many times larger than any other navy in the world, it may not be large enough to effectively survive a conflict against China, Russia, Korea and Iran, a scenario that must be looked at seriously in light of new Russian and Chinese global alliances and strategic positioning.

North Korea has limited but credible naval capabilities in the North Pacific; and in the South, the U.S.'s once formidable presence in the Philippines is now in doubt. They have no allies in the world today that have a Navy sufficiently strong to be of any overwhelming help in the event of a two ocean war.

Contrastingly, prior to the outbreak of WW2, in spite of a false confidence that the U.S. was oceans apart from any future conflict, the plans and policies that would give the U.S. the Navy needed to vanquish the Japanese were underway.

In 1941, The United States Pacific Fleet was moved to Pearl Harbor in preparation for a possible attack by Japan. Eerily similar, is the announced shift to the Pacific to counter the threat by China. But, unlike then they have not already begun increasing their naval capability.

In 1933 the U.S. was in economic depression, and had an isolationist Congress. Still, President Roosevelt, who had been Assistant Secretary of the Navy during WW1, oversaw the passage of what should be considered among the most important legislations in the nation's history, the *Vinson-Trammell Expansion Program*, followed by more legislation, up to and including the 1940 First and Second *Two-Ocean Naval Expansion Act(s)*. By 1944, the U.S. had hundreds of the most modern ships of all kinds. They had a sufficient number of escort vessels to protect their capital ships, and enough depth in their fleet and air wing to replace lost or damaged assets.

There are critics who say that:

"..the Navy has put a [low priority on producing cogent strategy papers that tell how its warships and combat aircraft would counter moves by China... or explain why it needs a larger fleet.](#)"

"The Navy runs the risk that change in the strategic environment outpaces the institution's ability to change along with it. ... There's just a risk that the Navy wakes up one day to find that slow, incremental change results in a nasty surprise on the field of battle."

The concern, prevalent among those having done analysis for the U.S. Department of Defense, is not that the U.S. is lacking assets for today's geopolitical situation, but that they have no **plans** for threats just over the horizon, were they to occur before planned assets are on line; and that they have no specific strategic plan for the Rebalance to the

For those Americans, and American allies, promoting a strong American Naval presence in the Pacific, the hope is that President Trump has read some naval history, or at least will listen carefully to critics of the U.S. Navy status quo.