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Module 1: Fundamentals of Strategy D14

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Session 1.3 / FA #3

Prompts

- Your answer should be 350-500 words in length. Additionally, you are required to respond to at least two of the Blue Team DBF answers. These responses should be a minimum of 100 words in length and are due NLT 48 hours after the initial post due date.
- **Due:** The primary post is due on NLT Monday at 2359 and the secondary posts are due NLT Wednesday at 2359.

1. Gold Team

a. Please answer the following question:

- ***Who did a better job of prewar preparation for the Pacific War – the United States, Japan, or were both unprepared?***

2. Blue Team

a. Please answer the following question:

- *According to Clausewitz, “The first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgment that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish...the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its*

nature.” Did Japanese leaders embark on the Pacific War with a sound anticipation of the likely nature of the war?

Gold Answer

GOLD POST:

On the surface, Japan was better poised for war in the Pacific. The surprise assault on Pearl Harbor was executed with surgical precision, catching an unready American fleet by surprise. But this tactical victory obscured fundamental strategic failures. And upon closer inspection, neither combatant came into the war fully prepared, but in different ways. Japan was operationally ready but strategically unwise. Although slow to get going, the United States went to war with a coherent strategic template in mind, one that was based on maritime logic. All in all, the US did a better job and seems to have been more ready for war when measured by Clausewitzian critical analysis and the likes of Mahan and Corbett.

With the benefit of hindsight, Japan’s prewar efforts were tactically bold but strategically unsustainable. Although Japan had extensive plans for its Southern Operations, it manifested what Paine describes as “a peripheral strategy,” expressed in isolating China through the West, particularly the United States, Britain, and the Dutch. Paine maintains that this was Japan’s “peripheral strategy designed to change the balance of resources between China and Japan by using naval expeditionary forces to open many new secondary theatres” (Paine, *Naval Power and Expeditionary Wars*, 70). Evans and Peattie reinforce this, noting Japan’s naval orthodoxy “remained wedded to the concept of... the decisive battle” and failed to grasp the protracted nature of maritime conflict (Evans and Peattie, *Kaigun*, 460). Japan’s even more staggering

victory at Pearl Harbor sprang from a deeply flawed doctrine, it turned out, that found Japan on the wrong side of history. Evans and Peattie maintain that Japan drew all the wrong lessons from previous wars, since its early wartime experiences “extensively shaped [its] view of naval warfare in eventually detrimental ways,” leading to an overconfidence in the notion of decisive battle and to being unprepared for the challenges of attritional total war (Evans and Peattie, *Kaigun*, 484).

The United States, on the other hand, adopted a maritime-centric strategy that would be essential in the long run. Baer details how Admiral Stark’s “Plan Dog” memo envisioned a Europe-first strategy but still emphasized protecting Pacific interests and sea lanes (Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 190). Even though tactical readiness lagged, Baer acknowledges that “the Navy was not ready for a two-ocean war” in 1941, the intellectual groundwork was in place (Baer, *One Hundred Years of Sea Power*, 158). The U.S. knew it had to first establish sea control, then project power across the Pacific. As D. Clayton James observes, the U.S. was focused on a strategic envelopment rather than immediate confrontation, a far more measured and flexible approach than Japan’s rigid operational schema (James, *Makers of Modern Strategy*, 731).

Clausewitz provides a final perspective. His focus on critical analysis, asking what other options existed, illuminates Japan’s strategic failure to see the bigger picture. There does not appear to have been any serious reassessment of long-term risks. As Clausewitz says, “war is never an isolated act,” and Japan plunged into a second major war at the outset of a first major war, becoming fatally overstretched in the process (Clausewitz, *On War*, 78).

In conclusion, neither country was well prepared. Japan got off to a good start, but it was the United States that came into the war with the kind of strategic clarity and flexibility that Clausewitz and Corbett would find as the true basis of military success.

Blue Response #1

Great post, Emmanuel. You did a good job of displaying how the leaders of Japan made some calculated decisions, such as the Pearl Harbor attack, but miscalculated the true nature of the war that they were entering. Clausewitz's observation that the most important decision is to "establish...the kind of war" you are fighting goes straight to this. Japan appears to have anticipated a short, sharp campaign that would compel the United States to the negotiating table, but not an extended, industrial-level war of attrition. The rush for rapid expansion and offensive blows failed to consider the cost of governing a massive empire and the political and economic vitality of the United States. By grievously underestimating both the duration and the scope of the conflict, they tried to fight a war other than the one it really was, exactly the kind of mistake Clausewitz warns against.

Blue Response #2

Great points, Warren. I am pretty sure you are right to center Japan's defeat in the lack of a coherent grand strategy. Misjudging the kind of war that one is entering is the most dangerous error a commander can make, Clausewitz notes, and it appears that Japan made that error. Your mention of Evans and Paine illustrates just how divided Japan's leadership was, and how that division played havoc with strategic clarity. The challenges Paine details are particularly telling where only two of twelve emerged, yet they gambled on a speedy victory and underestimated the American response. I also enjoyed reading your inclusion of Yamamoto's famous quote expressing doubt about a long war. That's telling. Although Japan's early planning may have

been detailed and tactically brilliant, it was lacking in strategic unity and based on few realistic assumptions about the enemy, and its fateful decisions led it almost inevitably to defeat. They were not ready for the kind of war they wound up fighting.