

PEARL HARBOR WARNINGS

27 November and 3 December 1941

Message Sent by Navy Department, 27 November 1941:

This dispatch is to be considered a war warning. Negotiations with Japan looking toward stabilization of the conditions in the Pacific have ceased and an aggressive move is expected with the next few days. The number and equipment of Japanese troops and the organization of the naval task forces indicates an amphibious expedition against either the Philippines, Thai, Kra Peninsula, or possibly Borneo. Execute an appropriate defensive deployment preparatory to carrying out the tasks assigned in War Plan 46 [The Navy's war plan]. Inform district and army authorities. A similar warning is being sent by the War Department.

Department of Army dispatch, 27 November:

Negotiations with Japan appear to have terminated to all practical purposes, with only the barest of possibilities that the Japanese Government might come back and offer to continue. Japanese future action unpredictable, but hostile action possible at any moment. If hostilities cannot, repeat, cannot be avoided, the United States desires that Japan commit the first overt act. This policy should not be construed as restricting you to a course of action that might jeopardize your defense. Prior to hostile Japanese action you are directed to undertake such reconnaissance and other measures as you deem necessary, but these measures should be carried out so as not, repeat, not to alarm civil population or disclose intent. Report measures taken. Should hostilities occur, you will carry out the tasks assigned to Rainbow Five [the Army's war plan] so far as they pertain to Japan. Limit dissemination of this highly secret information to minimum essential officers.

Message sent by Chief of Naval Operations, 3 December:

Highly reliable information has been received that categorical and urgent instructions were sent yesterday to Japanese Consular posts at Hongkong, Singapore, Batavia, Manila, Washington and London to destroy most of their codes and ciphers at once and burn...confidential and secret documents.

THE PROBLEMS OF WARNING: WHAT SOME EXPERTS SAY

The only constant in international politics is the unexpected

Wallace J. Thies

Nations rarely suffer surprise for lack of warning, but fall victim with astonishing regularity because they fail to respond to warning.

Richard Betts

Surprise is a basic and recurring event in human life. Still, neither the repeated occurrence of surprises nor our assumption that life has surprises...makes us any less vulnerable to its impact. In most cases of surprise *we do not ignore the probability of a potential occurrence but rather tend to reject it as unlikely*. Therefore, when it actually does happen, it takes us “by surprise” since we had expected it to occur later or in a different place or manner. Sometimes our imagination is too limited even to entertain the possibility of surprise, preventing us from envisaging the event in any way. [Italics added]

Ephriam Kam: Surprise Attack. 1988. p. 7

Warning is a necessary but insufficient condition for avoiding surprise. *Without response, warning is useless*. Warning is evidence filtered through perception; response is action (alert, mobilization, and redeployment) designed to counter an attack. [Italics added]

Richard Betts. Surprise Attack. 1982. p. 87.

The policy-maker, unlike an academic analyst, can rarely wait until all the facts are in...He is very often under strong pressure to do something, to take some action, even if all the facts are not yet available to him or where a careful assessment of current data would provide useful results.

The capacity of human beings to deal with *situations of vast complexity is very limited*. The human mind needs a highly simplified “map” of a situation if it is going to be capable of taking any action or making a decision. These maps are subjective, generally being based on and springing from deeply held values. [Italics added]

Robert Bowie, as quoted in Ernest R. May, *Knowing One's Enemies*. 1986. p. 4 [Note: Bowie is a former Director of NFAC, CIA, ca. 1977-80].

If You Care to Follow Up...

Books available either in Fairfax County libraries or at Borders, etc.

Betts, Richard. *Surprise Attack: Lessons for Defense Planning* (1983)

Best overall book on the topic of warning and surprise..

Cohen, Eliot and Gooch, John. *Military Misfortunes: The Anatomy of Failure in War*. (1991)

Useful account of military failures--1915 through 1973

Coll, Steve. *Ghost Wars*. Penguin Books (2004)

Detailed account of US Government/CIA involvement in Afghanistan, the rise of al-Qaeda, and the buildup to 9/11.

Commission on the Intelligence Capabilities of the United States Regarding Weapons of Mass Destruction [The Robb-Silberman Report] Washington (2005)

Examination of the Iraq WMD problem, with recommendations.

National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States. *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004).

The road to 9/11, including background on the hijackers, with recommendations.

Prange, Gordon. *At Dawn we Slept: The Untold Story of Pearl Harbor* (1988).

Probably the best account of the circumstances that led to Pearl Harbor.

This is a small sampling of the literature. If you wish to delve deeply into the origins of the Iraq war and its aftermath, among others check *Fiasco*, by Tom Ricks, *Hubris*, David Corn and Michael Isikoff, and Bob Woodward's trilogy, especially his last *State of Denial*.