

WikiLeaks 1941

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Over 2,400 American sailors, soldiers and airmen were killed in Pearl Harbor 69 years ago today. Had we had an equivalent of WikiLeaks back in 1941, however, the course of history could have been very different. FDR would have found it much more difficult to maneuver the country into being attacked in the Pacific in order to enable him to fight the war in Europe, which had been his ardent desire all along.

One leak—just one!—almost torpedoed Roosevelt's grand design.

In mid-1941 he incorporated the Army's, Navy's and Air Staff's war-making plans into an executive policy he called "Victory Program," effectively preparing America for war against Germany and Japan regardless of Congressional opposition and the will of the people. His intention was to lure public opinion into supporting the Program because the increase in weapons production promised meant more jobs and a healthier economy. A supporter of the [America First Committee](#), Senator [Burton K. Wheeler](#), obtained a copy of the Victory Program, classified [Secret](#), from a source within the Air Corps, and leaked it to two newspapers on December 4, 1941, the *Chicago Tribune* (a serious newspaper back then) and the *Washington Times-Herald* (long defunct). Vocal public opposition to the plan erupted immediately, but ceased three days later, on December 7, 1941. Congress soon passed the Victory Program with few changes. The Japanese performed on cue.

Imagine the consequences had the *Chicago Tribune* and the *Washington Times-Herald* published a series of other leaks over the preceding few months, including the following:

Berlin, 27 September 1940. U.S. Embassy reports the signing of the [Tripartite Pact](#), the mutual assistance treaty between

Germany, Italy, and Japan: "It offers the possibility that Germany would declare war on America if America were to get into war with Japan, which may have significant implications for U.S. policy towards Japan."

Washington, 7 October 1940. Having considered the implications of the Tripartite Pact, Lt. Cdr. Arthur McCollum, USN, of the Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI), [suggests a strategy](#) for provoking Japan into attacking the U.S., thus triggering the mutual assistance provisions of the Tripartite Pact and finally bringing America into war in Europe. The proposal called for [eight specific steps](#) aimed at provoking Japan. Its centerpiece was keeping the U.S. Fleet in Hawaii as a lure for a Japanese attack, and imposing an oil embargo against Japan. "If by these means Japan could be led to commit an overt act of war, so much the better," the memo concluded.

Washington, 23 June 1941. One day after Hitler's attack on Soviet Russia, Secretary of the Interior and FDR's advisor Harold Ickes wrote a memo for the President, saying that "there might develop from the embargoing of oil to Japan such a situation as would make it not only possible but easy to get into this war in an effective way. And if we should thus indirectly be brought in, we would avoid the criticism that we had gone in as an ally of communistic Russia."

Washington, 22 July 1941. Admiral Richmond Turner's report states that "shutting off the American supply of petroleum to Japan will lead promptly to the invasion of Netherland East Indies: "[I]t seems certain [Japan] would also include military action against the Philippine Islands, which would immediately involve us in a Pacific war."

Washington, 24 July 1941. President Roosevelt says, "If we had cut off the oil, they probably would have gone down to the Dutch East Indies a year ago, and you would have had war." The following day he freezes Japanese assets in the U.S. and imposes an oil embargo against Japan.

London, 14 August 1941. After meeting the President at the Atlantic Conference, Prime Minister Winston Churchill noted the “astonishing depth of Roosevelt’s intense desire for war.” PM is aware that FDR needs to overcome the isolationist resistance to “Europe’s war” felt by most Americans and their elected representatives.

Washington, 24 September 1941. Having cracked the Japanese naval codes one year earlier, U.S. naval intelligence deciphers a message from the Naval Intelligence Headquarters in Tokyo to Japan’s consul-general in Honolulu, requesting grid of exact locations of U.S. Navy ships in the harbor. Commanders in Hawaii are not warned.

Washington, 18 October 1941. FDR’s friend and advisor Harold Ickes [notes in his diary](#): “For a long time I have believed that our best entrance into the war would be by way of Japan.” Yet four days later opinion polls reveal that 74 percent of Americans opposed war with Japan, and only 13 percent supported it.

Washington, 25 November 1941. Secretary of War Stimson writes that FDR said an attack was likely within days, and [wonders](#) “how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without too much danger to ourselves... In spite of the risk involved, however, in letting the Japanese fire the first shot, we realized that in order to have the full support of the American people it was desirable to make sure that the Japanese be the ones to do this so that there should remain no doubt in anyone’s mind as to who were the aggressors.”

Washington, 26 November 1941. Both US aircraft carriers, the Enterprise and the Lexington, are ordered out of Pearl Harbor “as soon as possible”. The same order included stripping Pearl of 50 planes, 40 percent of its already inadequate fighter protection.

Washington, 26 November 1941. Secretary of State Hull demands

the complete withdrawal of all Japanese troops from French Indochina and from China.

Tokyo, 27 November 1941. U.S. Ambassador to Japan Grew [says](#) this is “the document that touched the button that started the war.” The Japanese reacted on cue: On December 1, final authorization was given by the emperor, after a majority of Japanese leaders advised him the [Hull Note](#) would “destroy the fruits of the China incident, endanger [Manchukuo](#) and undermine Japanese control of Korea.”

San Francisco, 1 December 1941. Office of Naval Intelligence, ONI, 12th Naval District in San Francisco found the Japanese fleet by correlating reports from the four wireless news services and several shipping companies that they were getting signals west of Hawaii. There are [numerous](#) U.S. naval intelligence radio intercepts of the Japanese transmissions.

Washington, 5 December 1941, 10 a.m. President Roosevelt writes to the Australian Prime Minister that “the next four or five days will decide the matters” with Japan.

Washington, 5 December 1941, 5 p.m. At Cabinet meeting, Secretary of the Navy Frank Knox says, “Well, you know Mr. President, we know where the Japanese fleet is?” FDR replied, “Yes, I know ... Well, you tell them what it is Frank.” Just as Knox was about to speak Roosevelt appeared to have second thoughts and interrupted him saying, “We haven’t got anything like perfect information as to their apparent destination.”

Washington, 6 December 1941, 9 p.m. At a White House dinner Roosevelt was given the first thirteen parts of a fifteen part decoded Japanese diplomatic declaration of war and said, “This means war!” [he said to Harry Hopkins](#), but did not interrupt the soiree and did not issue any orders to the military to prepare for an attack.

As per that old cliché, the rest is history...

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