



2011-017

Jeffrey Record. *A War It Was Always Going to Lose: Why Japan Attacked America in 1941*. Washington: Potomac Books, 2011. Pp. 184. ISBN 978-1-59797-534-6.

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The story of Japan's decision to attack territories of the United States, Great Britain, and the Netherlands in Southeast Asia in December 1941 has often been told. Jeffrey Record, Professor of Strategy at the Air War College (Montgomery, AL) and long-time Democratic staffer and defense policy analyst, has recounted it at book-length once more. Rather than having anything especially new to say, he is solely interested in revisiting established literature on Japan's decision to launch a "war it was always going to lose" in a search for "lessons of history" applicable to contemporary US foreign policy, especially in the Middle East. This openly presentist motivation should not surprise: Record writes in his Preface that his earlier book on the "mythology of appeasement" at Munich¹ was also prompted by a search for hard lessons with which to counter the arguments of "neoconservatives enamored of preventive war" (vii). Some will applaud this foray into "applied history," others will deplore such an approach to historical scholarship. If Record's putative "lessons learned" have been cherry-picked based upon prior policy preferences, we may well ask whether they have any use beyond the merely polemical or partisan.

A mere 131 pages of succinct and angular text summarize the history of the "case study" of the Japanese decision to attack the ABCD powers in Southeast Asia in December 1941. Record's main method is simply to quote at length those interpretations he agrees with, rather than argue from their evidentiary findings. He often draws on outdated studies from the 1950s, some deeply derivative of the first deterrence debates of the Cold War, that better fit his polemical purposes than the work of more recent military and diplomatic historians based on Japanese sources.² He frequently cites obsolete American analyses, replete with Cold War terminology of "containment" and "rollback," to explain Japanese motivations, too neatly categorizing what happened in late 1941 as mutual "failed deterrence" (113).

Franklin Roosevelt is criticized for diplomatic and economic moves that Americans saw as deterrents, but which Tokyo viewed as highly aggressive. Japanese decision-making is criticized, rather more oddly, for failing to "deter" the United States from an antagonistic policy of "rollback" of the Japanese Empire beginning already in the summer and fall of 1941, when positions on both sides were rapidly hardening. Japan's diplomacy is depicted as a failed response to American efforts at deterrence through all-out "economic warfare," which even Record's own evidence contradicts (53-61). This line of argument downplays the opportunism of Japanese military and political elites in seeking long-term autarky and regional domination, and, in the shorter term, an escape from the China War, which Japanese sources show to have been prime motivations. This gap between fact and theory reflects the author's preoccupation with extracting lessons on the problems of deterrence, cultural misunderstanding, and faulty decision-making—lessons much belabored by political scientists and international relations [IR] theorists over the past thirty years or so, but which Record feels are again urgently relevant in the twenty-first century.

This book is not a history of the Japanese decision for war. Instead, it seeks to provide sophisticated historical arguments for contemporary policy makers who oppose a hard-line US policy toward Iran (130-31). It poses this central question: "Are there lessons of value [in the decisions of 1941] to today's national security decision makers?" (2). Record emphatically refuses to dismiss Japan's leaders (as he claims many do) as suicidal, fatalistic, reckless, mad, or delusional, though he admits "many had wildly exaggerated ideas of Ja-

1. *The Specter of Munich: Reconsidering the Lessons of Appeasing Hitler* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2006).

2. See, e.g., Edward Drea, *In the Service of the Emperor: Essays on the Imperial Japanese Army* (Lincoln: U Nebraska Pr, 1998) and *Japan's Imperial Army: Its Rise and Fall, 1853-1945* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2009).

pan's destiny and ability to fulfill it" (3). Instead, "it is the central conclusion of this study that *the Japanese decision for war against the United States in 1941 was dictated by Japanese pride and Japan's threatened economic destruction by the United States*" (6; original italics). Arguing against the strict, "rational decision-making paradigm" of IR theory, he adds: "The Japanese, like the Germans (and later, the Israelis), displayed a remarkable incapacity for sound strategic thinking" (6). Gratuitously dragging Israel into the discussion without explanation is the first of many departures from the events of 1941 for the sake of airing some personal or policy grievance in the here and now. Tangentially relevant events and statesmen of World War II are also considered fair game for unsupported editorial comment. Thus, Record writes off as "sheer luck" (11) the fulfillment of Winston Churchill's calculation that Great Britain could remain in the war with Germany until the Soviet Union, the United States, or both entered as its strategic allies.

After further introductory material in chapter 1, the second chapter, "Sources of Japanese-American Tension," mixes "realist" and "liberal" critiques of various aspects of prewar Japanese-American relations, including "American racism and immigration policies, the Open Door and American moralism, naval competition, Japan's seizure of Manchuria and US refusal to recognize its conversion into the puppet state of Manchukuo, Japanese aggression in China, Japan's alliance with Nazi Germany, Japan's manifest imperial ambitions in Southeast Asia, and US economic sanctioning of Japan" (13). Chapter 3 swiftly surveys developments between 1937 and 1941: on the one side, Japanese aggression in China and planned aggression in Southeast Asia; on the other, American failure to deter Japan through overly aggressive sanctions and to appreciate that Japan, like Germany, was inherently undeterrable. This casts doubt on the suitability of this particular "case study" to yield useful lessons about deterrence. Chapter 4 treats Japanese decision-making in the critical period from the fall of France in June 1940 to Tokyo's decision for war in late 1941. Chapter 5 returns to the theoretical futility of "mutual deterrence." Record starkly oversimplifies the joint failure to avoid war: "the United States was not deterred by Japanese threats because Americans were confident they could win any war with Japan, and the Japanese were not deterred by US threats because they preferred death before dishonor" (14).

Chapter 6 asks "Was War in the Pacific Inevitable?" Record uses "inevitable"—an adjective generally avoided by professional historians aware of the fundamental contingency of history—indiscriminately as suits a given argument. He nevertheless concludes that war could have been averted had Roosevelt followed a policy of appeasement rather than escalating economic confrontation, since neither China nor Southeast Asia were vital to American interests and might have been surrendered to the Japanese. He correctly points out the recklessness of Japan's imperial ambitions, strategic aspirations, and overeagerness to fight the United States and Great Britain, even while engaged in a hugely expensive war with China that many Japanese already called "The Quagmire." The Imperial Japanese Army's plans for offensive war against the Soviet Union perhaps as early as 1943 further exemplify a delusional geopolitical lust. Desiring to emulate German victories in Europe, Japan conceived the desperate hope of ending the China War by closing overland supply routes from Southeast Asia, eliminating British and French support for Chiang Kai-Shek, and foreclosing American opposition by a demoralizing victory over Britain. Those elements of high-level Japanese thinking are prominent in the literature, but not in Record's account of "Why Japan Attacked America in 1941." Is that because such a particular set of conclusions does not produce general lessons about diplomatic deterrence for a target audience of American policy makers?

What valuable lessons then purportedly flow from the Japanese "case study"? First, "fear and honor" so motivate state behavior that formal assumptions of rational decision-making must be leavened with cultural understanding, especially as American policy makers probe the miasma of the greater Middle East: "there is no substitute for knowledge of a potential adversary's history and culture" (123). This is supposedly a special problem for the United States, where "cultural ignorance" abounds. Second, "deterrence lies in the mind of the deteree, not the deterrer" (124). This merely restates the old idea of "credible threat," with the caveat that credibility be assessed not abstractly but from the perspective of one's opponent. Third, "strategy must always inform and guide operations" (125). Such advice would carry more weight if the book dealt at all with the disconnect between Japanese operations and strategy. Fourth, "economic sanctioning" can be

“tantamount to an act of war” (126). Fifth, reliance on presumed “spiritual superiority” to compensate for fundamental material weakness is foolhardy, because “Clausewitz was right; the best strategy is to be strong” (127). Finally, “‘inevitable’ war easily becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy” (129). The same might be said for “lessons learned.”