

# The attack on pearl harbor (1941) and the world trade center (2001): a comparison



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There have been numerous tragic events that have occurred in human history. Two important events took place on December 7, 1941 and on September 11, 2001. Although, these events were 60 years apart, many historians wonder if these unfortunate events were triggered by the government of the United States. Another question was did the United States trigger these events because they wanted to go to war with another country? In addition did any of this back fire on the American government?

When looking back to the Pearl Harbor incident, people believed that the American government had prior knowledge about the tragedy that was about to occur. However, the Americans were unaware of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. In contrast, the American government has come forth and admitted that they knew in advance about the Japanese attacks in the Pacific. However they didn't act on warning officers and commanders about the danger that will place their lives in peril. The American people and their government were unaware of the events of September 11, but they knew that Pearl Harbor was going to happen. Miscommunication and internal inefficiencies caused many problems in getting information from Washington D.C to the American Pacific outposts.

The plot of the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks were devised by Al Qaeda. Osama Bin Laden was the mastermind behind the attacks. He planned the destruction of the World Trade Center, The United States Capitol Building and the Pentagon. The only attack that was unsuccessful was the attack on the United States Capitol Building. It was on the flight United 93 where Americans stood up and revolted against the terrorists. In the December 7, 1941 attack by Japan, the United States had already discovered their intentions to attack China, but did not uncover anything about attacking Pearl Harbor. However, the United States was aware that there was a possibility of a Japanese invasion in the Pacific.

It was noted that the destruction of the World Trade Center was inevitable due to the lack of knowledge before the attacks. It was quite impossible to predict that aircrafts were

going to be hijacked and be used as guided missiles. However, due to the frantic scramble of people in many areas during that fateful day, communication was jumbled. The tragedy of Pearl Harbor occurred because officers didn't get information due to the primitive communication means and the inefficient use of intelligence officers. If they had better equipment and more efficient use of ONI officers, the tragedy at Pearl Harbor could've been avoided.

The movie United 93<sup>1</sup> is another example that demonstrates that the American people and their government were unaware of the attacks that were going to occur. The American officials at Boston Center didn't know that all the aircrafts that were used during the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks were to be used as guided missiles. The flights listed below were used during the attacks. They are shown with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) code in brackets. They were American Airlines Flight 11 (AAL 11), United Airlines 175 (UAL 175), American Airlines 77 (AAL 77), and United Airlines 93 (UAL 93). Each hijacked aircraft had team of 4 – 5 members on board each craft. The following is a list of aircrafts and the hijackers on the flight<sup>2</sup>. AAL 11 is a Boeing 767, the hijackers included: Mohamed Atta (Egyptian Pilot), Abdul Aziz al-Omari (Saudi), Satam al-Suqami (Saudi), Wail al-Shehri (Saudi), Waleed al-Shehri (Saudi); this aircraft departed at 7:59 and its target was North World Trade Center. UAL 175 is a Boeing 767, the hijackers included: Marwan al-Shehhi (Emirati pilot), Ahmed al-Ghamdi (Saudi), Hamza al-Ghamdi (Saudi), Fayez Banihammad (Emirati), Mohand al-Shehri (Saudi); this aircraft departed at 8:14. AAL 77 is a Boeing 757, the hijackers included: Hani Hanjour (Saudi pilot), Majed Moqed (Saudi), Salim al-Hazmi (Saudi), Nawaf al-Hazmi (Saudi), Khalid al-Mihdhar (Saudi); this aircraft departed at 8:20. UAL 93 is a Boeing 757, the hijackers included: Ziad Jarrah (Lebanese pilot), Ahmed al-Nami (Saudi), Ahmad Ibrahim al-Haznawi (Saudi), and Saeed al-Ghamdi (Saudi); the aircraft departed at 8:42. AAL 11 crashed into World Trade Center Tower 1 at 8:46. UAL 175 crashed

into the Second World Trade Center at 9:03. AAL 77 crashed into the Pentagon at 9:37.

UAL93 crashed into a field in Shanksville, Pennsylvania at 10:03.<sup>3</sup> Before UAL 93 crashed into the fields of Pennsylvania, an aircraft passing by saw it “waving his wings”. What the pilot witnessed was the hijackers trying to defeat the passengers.<sup>4</sup>

When the hijackers took over the cockpit, they tried to warn and assure the passengers that everything is alright and that they are going to turn back to the airport for their demands. However, this failed due to the fact that the pilots didn't know how to use the communication channels. They piped the message through the public air-wave instead of the internal system. On UAL 93, during the revolt by the passengers, the hijackers even tried to cut off the oxygen in the cabin to try to stop the revolt, however the captain wasn't able to do so, or didn't care to cut off the oxygen. By 10:02, the hijackers were “defeated” and they drove the aircraft to the ground. In the last minutes of UAL 93, in the cockpit, you hear the hijackers praying to their God, Allah.<sup>5</sup>

During the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, 2, 973 people lost their lives that day.<sup>6</sup> The New York fire department lost 343 firefighters, which was the highest death count for any fire department. The Port Authority Police Department lost 37 officers, which was the highest death toll for police departments. The New York Police Department lost 23 officers, which was the second highest death toll for police departments. There have been numerous discussions about fire safety plans, fire drills on evacuation and more 911 centres that handle such calls since 1993.<sup>7</sup> However, in the book, *Perfect Soldiers*, Terry McDermott wrote that “Every FAA rule must pass a cost-benefit analysis before being enacted. For many years, the FAA had employed more economists than security inspectors.”<sup>8</sup> If the FAA had implemented the American no-fly list, 9/11 might not have happened. A member of the Al-Qaeda named Omar, remarked on 9/11 that “these hours were awesome, for you engage in a great battle with all its dimensions, a huge battle ... It is a military operation that is unconventional against

the mightiest force on Earth, who possess all the weapons and intelligence equipment and the spy satellites while her agents are spread all over the world. And you are facing them on their own backyard, amidst their forces and their soldiers, with a group of youths numbering nineteen.”<sup>9</sup>

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese launched an assault on Pearl Harbor. To most Hawaiians, December 7, 1941 was a peaceful Sunday. At 8:00 A.M., people were awake, laid back and were enjoying their day on the island. Unbeknown to many Hawaiians, when they heard guns going off and huge explosions were sounding from Pearl Harbor that they were under attack. A man named Ronald Oba was a writer at Times Magazine and wrote an article about his experiences that fateful day. He said that he was enjoying the sunny morning and as the eldest son of his family of Japanese immigrant, he was awarded pancakes. He thought that when he heard gun noises and shells going off, he thought that it was just the standard military exercise that day. He saw the Battleship Arizona, Battleship West Virginia and Battleship California go up in flames. As a Zero hugged the ground flying pass him, he saw the pilot looking down at him and saw the Japanese “Rising Sun” logo. Many people on Hawaii no longer trusted the Japanese-Americans on the island. The village elders decided to burn anything that linked back with their ancestral homeland. These included swords, photos of the Emperor, flags, and even shortwave radios (which could've been turned into transmitters). However, the FBI still went into the Japanese-American homes and rounded up all the language teachers, martial arts instructors and other businessmen to concentration camps. Sometimes, they were held at gunpoint while rounding them up. Even Japanese-American soldiers serving in the US military were force to leave service and their rifles taken away from them.<sup>10</sup>

It was a known fact that China would be invaded in 1935 a possibility of an attack on the United States in a short period of time. The US military has been breaking into Japanese

codes since 1924.<sup>11</sup> To counter the Japanese efforts to crack American codes, the Americans introduced the PURPLE project in 1939.<sup>12</sup> The United States had Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) outposts monitoring Japanese communication traffic since the end of World War I. However, they closed these monitoring centres in 1935 in Beijing and in 1940 in Shanghai.<sup>13</sup> In the 1933 Report, it was revealed that the Japanese had intentions of attacking China in order to take over its resources. It also revealed that Japan had intentions to counterattack American troops and battleships if they got into conflict.<sup>14</sup> One observer who was in the Philippines stated that during the 1930s, everywhere you look, you'll find Japanese traffic throughout the radio waves.<sup>15</sup> By the end of October 1938, the Japanese suddenly changed their encrypted code from the "Blue Book", which they have been using since 1931, to the "Black Code". It was also known as "JN-25."<sup>16</sup> Due to the constant switching of codes, the United States was unable to keep up and it cost them dearly on December 7, 1941. The reason that this worked against them was because many of the lateral messages were encrypted and they were unable to decrypt them by 1941.

Until 1941, the United States constantly supplied the Japanese with weapons to undertake not only the Chinese army but also the French and the Netherlanders. This was due to a very confusing U.S foreign policy in the Far East. It was confusing because China had an Open Door Policy from the U.S while Japan had special status in Manchuria and Shantung Peninsula. To the U.S Navy it caused serious problems because this gave more land to Japan from China. Another reason was that it posed serious threats during an attempt of aerial bombings on Japan. The threat was that if they ever needed to ditch any aircraft over China, they would have to go into the "Manchuria."

The United States had already developed a war plan against the Japanese as early as 1904 – 1905. The U.S Navy colour coded the war plan as the *Navy's Orange War Plan*. This war plan had been revised numerous times between 1930 – 1941. The revision was WPL 13.

Further plans were created such as WPL 42, WPL 44 and WPL 46.<sup>17</sup> Each of the WPLs were commonly known as the Rainbow Plans.

After the fall of France in 1940, the Americans immediately prepared to defend its borders. This was achieved by co-operating and supporting the British Commonwealth and China. Also, it was done by the co-operation of certain South American countries. There were a variety of measures undertaken to a “progressive” mobilization and to accelerate the production of war materials. In addition, there was a possibility of having people drafted into service. Lastly, they began to prepare for the “almost inevitable” conflict against the totalitarian powers.<sup>18</sup> During the depression years, the United States built up their naval intelligence because they recognized that Japan's Pacific threat was too enormous to ignore and they felt that they had to take defensive measures.

The lines of communication from Washington D.C to the command bases throughout the Pacific region were very primitive until long after December 7, 1941. There were encrypted and intercepted messages that were enciphered and then they were redirected to Washington D.C. There were a variety of messages such as traffic logs and routine Japanese messages were mailed to Washington D.C. Usually, the mail was bundled up into a package and forwarded once a week aboard a commercial ship or on USS *Chaumont*. The USS *Chaumont* travelled from California to China. After 1935, the packages could be sent through Pan American Airways “Clipper”, which had a strongbox built into the aircraft and it could be only accessed with a key by authorized personnel that can access the contents. There was a gap in the chain of information because the American government diverted its staff members from one organization to another, even if the personnel had never been trained to handle such data in the past. This meant that there were many inexperienced people sorting out highly important information and this was one of the causes of the tragedy of Pearl Harbor.

On May 7, 1940, the American Navy transferred its headquarters from San Pedro,

California to Pearl Harbor. There were numerous admirals and high-ranked officers that opposed this move because it would expose themselves to the Japanese attacks.

Unfortunately, in the end, they were correct. As early as July 1941, traffic intelligence reports showed Japanese air and naval concentrations. From July to December 6<sup>th</sup>, the summaries from Hawaii demonstrated frequent “allusions” to the “formation of Task Forces” and forthcoming “hostile actions.” This emphasized the similarities between current activities and those which occurred in the Japanese naval and military campaigns in South China and Indochina.<sup>19</sup>

The Japanese started invasion plans of the Pacific as early as November 10, 1941. They plan to capture all the small islands in order to defend their empire later in the war. The fleet that was to attack Pearl Harbor consisted 10 battleships, 6 cruisers, 112 destroyers and 65 submarines.<sup>20</sup> The Japanese also had large numbers of auxiliary vessels, tenders, minesweepers, and escorts. Between early September to December 4<sup>th</sup> 1941, US COMINT units Pearl Harbor, Corregidor and Guam intercepted and forwarded to Washington at least 26, 581 Japanese naval messages in the fleet general purpose system (JN-25), a fleet minor-purpose system, a merchant vessel-navy liaison system, a merchant vessel-navy five-letter cipher and a naval attaché cipher.<sup>21</sup> The method of attack and objective of the Japanese Strike Force were revealed in messages intercepted between October 21 and November 4, 1941. As soon as the PURPLE machines were available to the US Army and Navy cryptanalysis, they soon sent all the translated diplomatic messages to both ONI and Military Intelligence Service (MIS) everyday. The Japanese had in fact sent warning messages on the diplomatic messages to the Philippines and Hawaiian commands on at least 3 occasions, November 24, 27, and 29<sup>th</sup> of 1941.<sup>22</sup> By late November, U.S Navy officials in Washington, Pearl Harbor and Manila have recognized that war with Japan was imminent. Then on December 6<sup>th</sup>, 1941, it was confirmed that a Japanese amphibious force was travelling through the Gulf of Siam.<sup>23</sup>

According to the Independent Institute's report, Franklin D. Roosevelt and his top military commanders knew in 1940, when Germany and its Axis Powers signed an alliance treaty with Japan; they knew that this gave them the opportunity to break the Isolationist movement was occurring inside the United States. Furthermore, he knew that the American public wanted nothing to do with "Europe's War"<sup>24</sup>. The report also shows that the United States knew about a Japanese invasion and that the United States wanted to go to war.<sup>25</sup>

The facts above indeed shows that both Pearl Harbor (1941) and 9/11 attacks (2001) are not parallel due to the fact that the American awareness was different in two very different time. In 1941, the Americans already knew about it and in 2001, so far they had no warning of the attacks. However, it should be noted that more information shall be declassified in the future under the US Freedom of Information Act. In the future, there may be further information to give us, the public a better insight to the real information on both Pearl Harbor and 9/11. Also, it could start eliminating some of the conspiracy theories which have been floating freely for more than half a decade. Once these classified information are declassified we can have a more precise evaluation if the unfortunate events were actually triggered by the United States government or if they were actually unnoticed by the Americans and their government.

In my opinion, both events were very tragic, there was a great amount of innocent lives lost. The American government and its citizen had to endure those tough times to recuperate and to rebuild what they had lost. Coincidentally, both events triggered a war immediately after with the attackers. In 1941, US President Franklin D. Roosevelt immediately declared war on Japan for the attacks and then in 2001, US President George W. Bush also declared war on Afghanistan after Al-Qaeda had attacked them. Furthermore, I think both events may have favoured the American government a bit, because they wanted to go to war and they used the tragic events as an excuse for the war.

## Endnote

1. United 93 (film)
2. McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers*, p. xiii – xiv
3. 9/11, “9/11 Commission Report”, p. 50 – 51
4. 9/11, “9/11 Commission Report”, p. 28
5. CBC, “CBC News”
6. 9/11, “9/11 Commission Report”, p. 311
7. 9/11, “9/11 Commission Report”, p. 280
8. McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers*, p. 236
9. McDermott, *Perfect Soldiers*, p. 233
10. Time Magazine, “Dec 7, 1941”
11. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 1
12. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 21
13. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 7
14. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 10
15. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 16
16. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 19
17. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 27
18. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 29
19. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 39
20. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 40
21. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 43
22. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 46
23. NSA, “*Pearl Harbor Revisted*”, p. 47
24. Independent Institute, “*Truth About Pearl Harbor*”
25. Independent Institute, “*December 7, 1941: A Setup From the Beginning*”

## Resources

1. The 9/11 Commission, "*The 9/11 Commission Report*", W.W Norton & Company Inc., New York City, New York, The United States of America, 2004.
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<http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/sep11/>.
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4. Greengrass, Paul, *United 93*, Universal Pictures, Willowdale, Ontario, Canada, 2006
5. The Independent Institute, "*The Truth About Pearl Harbor*", The Independent Institute, 2003, <http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=445>
6. The Independent Institute, "*December 7, 1941: A Setup From the Beginning*"  
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<http://www.independent.org/newsroom/article.asp?id=103>
7. McDermott, Terry, *Perfect Soldiers*, Harper Collins Publishers Inc., New York City, New York, USA, 2005
8. Time Magazine, "*Dec. 7, 1941*", Time Magazine, USA, 2003.  
<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1004503-1,00.html>