

Viewpoint: Admiral Kimmel at Pearl Harbor

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FDR and Washington, D.C., have taken steps that have angered the Japanese. Americans are watching events in Europe, and they look at the Pacific arena as a sideshow. The president sees Adolf Hitler as a danger to the peace and stability of the world. In the meantime, the Japanese are slowly stewing and watching every step the United States takes. When FDR fired Admiral Richardson for opposing administration policy, the Japanese perceived it as a threat to their sphere of influence. Admiral Richardson opposed the creation of a separate Pacific Fleet and he was adamantly opposed to stationing the battle fleet at Pearl Harbor, where it is vulnerable to attack. Positioning American's Pacific Fleet so close to islands and bases vital to the security of the Japanese Imperial Navy has them all on edge. Today, everything that FDR and the administration do is seen as menacing to the Japanese.

The billions that America has spent on Lend-Lease, especially the share that has gone to Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, is an affront to Japan and seen as open aid to the enemy. Claire Chennault and his band of aviators, the Flying Tigers, hired by the Chinese Nationalist government, are seen as assistance from the United States. The Japanese have become mired down in the war with China: they've been there for four years with no end in sight. Now they find the U.S. insisting on Japan's total withdrawal from China, after expenditure of so much blood and money. FDR's embargo on raw materials and supplies vital to the Japanese has not brightened the picture. Japan is heavily dependent on supplies of oil, aviation gasoline, steel, metals, machinery, and other raw materials, and being cut off from the trade has only furthered angered Japan's military.

Japan has always been wary and mistrustful of the United States, looking upon us as a nation that has interfered with Japan's interests, acting as spoilers. The Japanese resented Theodore Roosevelt's peace initiatives during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, when they sought greater gains in Manchuria and on the Asian mainland. They also felt slighted by Wilson and the United States at the Versailles conferences, when Japan was not given territory in China that they felt they had earned by assisting the Allied powers.

The United States was quick to perceive that Japan was a potential threat to American interests in Asia. The war plans of the United States include the scenario that the Philippines will be vulnerable to Japanese attack, probably the first place where Japan will strike. I have command of the Pacific Fleet stationed at Pearl Harbor, and I have asked my superiors in Washington, D.C., to keep me informed of any new developments vital for the security and safety of this base. I have been constantly assured that I will be immediately informed of any changes in the overall situation. American cryptologists have successfully broken the Japanese diplomatic code ("Purple") and the five-number military code. All of these transcripts are rapidly forwarded to naval headquarters in Washington, D.C., for translation and immediate disclosure to the president.

Radio transcripts, messages sent by Japan to the embassy in the United States, and other coded messages being sent to Japanese bases indicate some action is being considered. General Douglas MacArthur in the Philippines has already been placed on alert, as have all United States installations in the Pacific. The embargoes are hurting the Japanese. The imposed precondition to negotiations that Japan must withdraw from China and Indochina has angered their military leaders. Both sides have hardened their positions, and agreement and compromise are impossible at this point. FDR and our military leaders feel the Japanese will strike and that the blow will fall on the Philippines. Japanese troop movements and transports are believed to be moving to the south into Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Thailand, and Burma.