Pearl Harbor

Almost as soon as the attacks occurred, conspiracy theorists began claiming that President Roosevelt had prior knowledge of the assault on Pearl Harbor. Others have claimed he tricked the Japanese into starting a war with the United States as a “back door” way to go to war with Japan’s ally, Nazi Germany. However, after nearly 65 years, no document or credible witness has been discovered that prove either claim. Most scholars view Pearl Harbor as the consequence of missed clues, intelligence errors, and overconfidence.

The causes behind the Japanese attack are complex and date back to the 1930s, when Japan undertook a military/colonial expansion in China—culminating in a full-scale invasion in 1937. America opposed this expansion and used a variety of methods to try to deter Japan.

During the late 1930s, FDR began providing limited support to the Chinese government. In 1940, Roosevelt moved the Pacific fleet to the naval base at Pearl Harbor as a show of American power. He also attempted to address growing tensions with Japan through diplomacy.

When Japan seized southern French Indo-China in July 1941, Roosevelt responded by freezing Japanese assets in the United States and ending sales of oil to Japan. Japan’s military depended upon American oil. Japan then had to decide between settling the crisis through diplomacy or by striking deep into Southeast Asia to acquire alternative sources of oil, an action that was certain to meet American opposition.

Japan chose to continue its diplomatic talks with the United States while at the same time secretly preparing for a coordinated assault throughout the Pacific. Japan’s leaders hoped that a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor would destroy American resolve and cripple the American navy for at least six months, giving Japan time to consolidate its new empire.

Draft of December 8, 1941 War Message to Congress:

President Roosevelt’s handwritten revisions – visible in this December 7 draft of the speech---made the “Day of Infamy” speech one of the most memorable in American History.
PROPOSED MESSAGE TO THE CONGRESS

December 7, 1941.

Yesterday, December 7, 1941, a date which will live in infamy,

the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked

by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.

The United States was at the moment at peace with that nation and was

continuing the conversation with its Government and its Emperor looking

toward the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. Indeed, one hour after

Japanese air squadrons had commenced bombing in Hawaii and the Philippines

the Japanese Ambassador to the United States and his colleague delivered

to the Secretary of State a formal reply to a recent message, from the

Secretary. This reply contained a statement that diplomatic negotiations

must be considered at an end, and contained no threat or no hint of an

armed attack.

It will be recorded that the distance of Hawaii, the isolation of

Hawaii from Japan make it obvious that these attacks were deliberately

planned many days ago. During the intervening time the Japanese Govern-

ment has deliberately sought to deceive the United States by false

statements and expressions of hope for continued peace.
The attack yesterday on Hawaii and the attack on the Island of Guam have caused severe damage to American naval and military forces. Very many American lives have been lost. In addition American ships have been torpedoed on the high seas between San Francisco and Honolulu.

Yesterday the Japanese Government also launched an attack against Malaya. Japan has, therefore, undertaken a surprise offensive extending throughout the Pacific area. The facts of yesterday speak for themselves. The people of the United States have already formed their opinions and well understand the implications these attacks have on the safety of our nation.

As Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy I have, of course, directed that all measures be taken for our defense.

Long will we remember the character of the onslaught against us.

No matter how long it may take us to overcome this instant national emergency, the American people will in their righteous might win through to absolute victory.
I speak the will of the Congress and of the people of this country when I assert that we will not only defend ourselves to the uttermost but will see to it that this form of treachery shall never endanger us again. Hostilities exist. There is no mcing the fact that our people, our territory and our interests are in grave danger.

I, therefore, ask that the Congress declare that since the unprovoked and dastardly attack by Japan on Sunday, December seventh, a state of war exists between the United States and the Japanese Empire.

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Dr. Harry.