



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on December 7, 2011

Remember WHAT about Pearl Harbor?

Pearl Harbor was a Pacific outpost where our naval vessels and men were left in harm's way to provide Japan with the target it was looking for, to make an attack President Roosevelt was waiting for. The attack, on the "date that will live in infamy," would provide the United States with overwhelming justification for entering World War II against the Axis powers.



I also know we are supposed to "Remember the Maine," the incident of alleged sabotage that sparked the Spanish-American War that left the United States in possession of Puerto Rico and the Philippines and a permanent naval base in Cuba. But I don't remember the exact date of that incident that occurred in 1898.

Neither do I remember the date of a 2002 conversation I had with a friend who seemed determined to support the policy of George W. Bush to create a war with Iraq. Our nation was already at war in Afghanistan as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, and the Bush administration seemed to be saying that war with Iraq was the logical next step. Many had assumed, therefore, that Iraq and that old villain from Central Casting, Saddam Hussein, had something to do with masterminding the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and the aborted planned attack on the White House. There was no evidence to bear that out, but it was hard to hear the facts over the beating of the neocon war drums.

So at some point in that summer of 2002, I asked my good Republican friend why he believed we needed to go to war with Iraq. His answer startled me.

"Because I believe my government."

Here was an educated man born in 1957. He was, I calculate, not quite in second grade when the Gulf of Tonkin incident took place, so he probably had no more clue as to what really happened in the Tonkin Gulf on that August 1964 night than members of Congress had when they promptly backed President Lyndon Johnson's bombing raid against Hanoi with the Vietnam Resolution, authorizing the President to take whatever measures necessary to protect American military personnel in South Vietnam, where they were officially functioning as advisors to the South Vietnamese military. The floor leader in the Senate for the nearly unanimous passage of that resolution was J. William Fulbright of Arkansas, Chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee and later a bitter critic of the U.S. war in Southeast Asia. Only two Senators, both Democrats, voted against the resolution that later was held up as a "functional declaration of war." They were (drum roll, please) Wayne Morse of Oregon and Ernest Gruening of Alaska. They claimed, and history bore them out, that the administration had not provided evidence of an unprovoked attack on U.S. vessels by the North Vietnamese.



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In fact, it would become clear that even President Johnson and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara did not know what happened as they planned and authorized the retaliatory attack. A taped recording of telephone conversations between the two men made plain they were unclear about what actually took place that evening and that their main concern was that the bombing raid be launched in time for the 11 p.m. (Eastern Daylight Time) newscasts.

All of this occurred, as I said, when my friend who trusts his government was somewhere between first and second grade, or possibly between kindergarten and first grade. He had, however, read some history and I specifically recall his telling me that he had read Pulitzer Prize winning journalist David Halberstam's bestselling book about the Vietnam War, called *The Best and the Brightest*. Halberstam told the whole story in that book of the bogus attack on the U.S. ships, which were accompanying South Vietnamese vessels making raids on the North Vietnam coast when (or if) they were fired upon. So the North Vietnamese were apparently acting in self-defense, rather than seeking a war with the United States. Yet the fat was in the fire, so to speak. The United States had another "Remember the Maine" moment.

And my friend was in high school when the Watergate scandal and its even more scandalous coverup came to light. And revelations about the whitewash by an official government commission of President Kennedy's assassination. And he might have come across the history of the U.S. spy plane shot down over Soviet territory in 1960. The reconnaissance plane, piloted by Gary Powers, was said to be a weather plane blown off course by the government, the government in which my friend believes, almost religiously. When Secretary Khrushchev was apprised of what was aboard the plane, he expressed mock surprise that CIA Director Allen Dulles had such a deep professional interest in the weather.

All of which suggests that perhaps our government is not all that believable, despite my friend's abiding trust. And it makes me wonder what has happened to the spirit of American conservatism — that self-consciously conservative/libertarian movement I joined in the Goldwater days of my youth. For my friend is of that Republican conservative persuasion. My mind went back over the decades to the Goldwater Victory Rally in New York's Madison Square Garden in late October 1964. To be sure, Sen. Barry M. Goldwater, running for President against Democrat Lyndon Johnson, was a hawk on Vietnam and had swallowed the Gulf of Tonkin story as a babe would drink his mother's milk. But on most matters, it was clear the Goldwater crowd did not think Johnson's government was to be trusted. We did not "believe our government."

Goldwater himself, when we finally stopped cheering long enough to let him speak, voiced his contempt for Johnson's banalities. So did the legendary Clare Boothe Luce, who spurned the pro-Johnson slant of husband Henry Luce's *Time-Life* publications, to support Goldwater. The feisty Mrs. Luce was not one to mince words. She had once called the far Left former Secretary of Agriculture and Vice President of the United States Henry Wallace "Stalin's Mortimer Snerd," after ventriloquist Edgar Bergen's famous puppet of that name. She had also famously said of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt that he "lied us into a war" into which, she believed, he ought to have honestly and courageously led us.

That Roosevelt, having done his best to provoke an attack by Germany, succeeded in maneuvering Japan into firing the necessary first shot at Pearl Harbor has been abundantly documented. James Perloff, for example, [in a 2008 article](#) for *The New American*, showed conclusively that the December 7 attack that we remember at this time each year was a surprise to our commanders at Pearl Harbor, but not to Roosevelt and his minions in Washington, D.C. (See also [Day of Deceit](#) by Robert B. Stinnett, 2008, and [Back Door to War](#) by Charles Callan Tansill, 1952.) The verdict has been accepted by



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historians, including Roosevelt apologists, many of whom contend that such deception was necessary to lead a reluctant nation into a necessary war — what some have called “the Good War.” But lie and deceive Roosevelt did, as he plotted to bring us into the war while promising to do his best to keep the nation at peace.

A lot has changed in the intervening 70 years. The United States under President George W. Bush did not attempt to maneuver the government of Saddam Hussein into initiating the attack that would start the Iraq War. Bush could start that war on his own initiative and the American people, like my friend and most members of Congress, supported him in that. Bush, in effect, became the Tojo of the 21st century by striking the first blow, though the war with Iraq was surely no surprise attack, as it had been advertised for roughly a year before the beginning of “Operation Iraqi Freedom” and the shock and awe campaign that launched it. But it was either a war of aggression by the United States or that phrase no longer has any meaning.

Much ink has been spilled and paper consumed on America’s “loss of innocence” over Pearl Harbor, 9/11, the Kennedy assassination, or some other cataclysmic event. America, the “exceptional nation,” lost her innocence in the Garden of Eden, like the rest of sinful humanity. But we have lost much in the way of candor in the last 70 years. For one thing the United States used to call the Department of War by its proper name. Now we call it “Defense.” Does anyone really believe that what we have been doing in Iraq is or was a defense of the United States? We now fight wars, as the late columnist Joseph Sobran observed, in the subjunctive, attacking and invading nations for what they might do with weapons they may or may not have. And if Senate Republicans and some Democrats have their way, our government will soon be locking up American citizens on the mere suspicion that they may have been aiding and abetting “terrorists,” as terrorism is defined by the government of the United States.

The United States in 1940 and 1941 repeatedly spurned overtures by Japan to reach an agreement on spheres of influence in the Pacific and to negotiate a withdrawal of Japan from most of China and other Asian lands in which she had found herself bogged down in the kind of quagmire that has since become familiar to generations of Americans. The obvious alternative to diplomacy was war. Despite the secrecy of the diplomatic maneuvers aimed at ensuring, rather than preventing, the bringing of war to the United States, government officials left a “paper trail.” Secretary of War Henry Stimson noted in his diary on November 25, 1941 the consensus of Roosevelt’s war council: “The question was how we should maneuver them into ... firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves.” It would appear Washington’s covert planners of war underestimated the damage that would be done on the “date of infamy” by the naval and aerial forces of Japan, as much of our Pacific fleet was destroyed and more than 2,400 Americans lay dead amidst the flames and wreckage. And like the White House conspirators who managed to bring us into a second war with Iraq in just 12 years, Roosevelt’s war council seriously underestimated the length and cost of the “cake walk” over our foes in the East.

“We can wipe the Japanese off the map in three months,” wrote Navy Secretary Frank Knox. As [Patrick J. Buchanan observes](#), four years of the most savage and intense fighting in the history of human warfare produced “scores of thousands of U.S. dead, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, the fall of China to Mao Zedong, U.S. wars in Korea and Vietnam, and the rise of a new arrogant China that shows little respect for the great superpower of yesterday.”

Former U.S. Senator Rick Santorum of Pennsylvania, now a Republican presidential candidate, told me in a recent campaign appearance in New Hampshire that we need to keep our troops in Germany and Japan 66 years after the end of World War II and 20 years after the breakup of the Soviet Union



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because Germany and Japan have militaristic cultures and would be dangerous if armed again. I asked what, then, had happened to American culture that necessitated Germany warning us of the dangers of militarism on the eve of our Iraq War. Santorum shrugged.

"Must be a bunch of damn pacifists over there now," I suggested.

"Well, some of them are," he agreed.

The German and Japanese people no doubt believed their respective governments when they said war was forced upon them. The American people did the same when the George W. Bush regime beat the drums for war with Iraq.

On this day, December 7, a week after only two Republican members of the U.S. Senate (Rand Paul of Kentucky and Mark Kirk of Illinois) voted against provisions of a Defense Authorization Act that would declare the "homeland" part of the worldwide "battlefield" and give the President power to lock up terror suspects, both foreign and American citizens, [indefinitely and without charge or trial](#), perhaps it is time Republican conservatives realized that the greatest threat to American life and liberty comes not from Baghdad, Seoul, or Tehran, nor even from the frenzied minds of al-Qaeda terrorists. It comes from our own government in Washington, D.C. As Barry Goldwater said during the height of the Cold War, "Sometimes I fear centralized power in Washington, D.C. more than I fear Moscow."

Sometimes it appears the old Stalinist regime is operating again under new management, with headquarters in Washington, D.C. *National Review* and *The Weekly Standard* fit in quite nicely as the new *Pravda* and *Izvestia* respectively.



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