



Japan 1941: Countdown to Infamy

By Eri Hotta

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A *Kirkus Reviews* Best Nonfiction Book of the Year

A groundbreaking history that considers the attack on Pearl Harbor from the Japanese perspective and is certain to revolutionize how we think of the war in the Pacific.

When Japan attacked the United States in 1941, its leaders, in large part, understood they were entering a war they were almost certain to lose. In a groundbreaking history that considers Pearl Harbor from the Japanese perspective, certain to revolutionize how we think of the war in the Pacific, Eri Hotta poses essential questions overlooked for the last seventy years: Why did these men—military men, civilian politicians, diplomats, the emperor—put their country and its citizens in harm's way? Why did they make a decision that was doomed from the start? Introducing us to the doubters, bluffers, and schemers who led their nation into this conflagration, Hotta brilliantly shows us a hidden Japan—eager to avoid war but fraught with tensions with the West, deluded by reckless militarism, tempted by the gambler's dream of scoring the biggest win against impossible odds and nearly escaping disaster before it finally proved inevitable.

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Editorial Review

From Booklist

This is an interesting, sometimes admirable, but frustratingly flawed effort to examine the lead up to the attack on Pearl Harbor from a Japanese perspective. Hotta, born in Tokyo and educated in Japan and the U.S., portrays the dilemma faced by the Japanese government and military in 1941. The war with China had no end in sight and drained Japan of men and limited resources. The political class was divided over the wisdom of territorial expansion, and even the military had its share of doubters, including some who feared the Soviet Union more than the U.S. Even among the military “hawks” there was concern that war with the U.S. was doomed to fail. Unfortunately, Hotta comes close to blaming the victim when she indicts American policy makers for their failure to understand Japan’s views. For example, she condemns U.S. demands that Japan withdraw from China as “high-handed,” as if Japan’s wanton, savage behavior there was acceptable. This is a useful look at the other side of the story, but the fact remains that Japan bears the full responsibility for launching a self-destructive war. --Jay Freeman

Review

“Hotta illuminates the extraordinary ideological and military predicament in which Japan found itself in the months before the attack on Pearl Harbor...[She] brings to life the key figures of a deeply divided Japanese leadership...[and] scrupulously details [their] negotiations and squabbles...against a backdrop of dauntingly complex domestic and international maneuverings.”

—*The New Yorker*

“Outstanding...In lucid prose, Hotta...persuasively sketches the very distinct personalities shaping the decisions that drove Japan toward war....She makes it clear that there are two versions of the Asia-Pacific War in China and Japan that hardly meet at all...[and] concludes that after 1945, Japan’s actual ‘past, with its improbable story of how the war came to pass, became another country.’ It is a country that policymakers in Tokyo, Beijing, and Washington should seek to understand, not least through this humane and fair-minded book.”

—Rana Mitter, *The New York Review of Books*

“Chilling...Constitutes a warning of the literally earth-shattering dangers that can emerge when the political system of a powerful nation fails to work.”

—*The New York Times Book Review*

“Hotta’s groundbreaking work is both a fascinating history and a cautionary tale for those who wield power today.”

—*The Dallas Morning News*

“[Hotta’s] account is a warning to any country that would talk itself into a foolish war.”

—*The Seattle Times*

“In this focused, informed and persuasive book...Hotta effortlessly returns us to the moment just before the dice were so disastrously rolled. From a perspective little known to Americans, a masterful account of how and why World War II began.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“A fascinating read for anyone interested in Japan’s involvement in World War II...While scholarly and

thoroughly researched, it's also a highly enjoyable read...A real page turner."

—*Library Journal*

"In this fast-moving, persuasive account of Japan's road to Pearl Harbor, Eri Hotta describes the pathetic leadership of a country who argue among themselves endlessly when the crisis across the Pacific requires decisive action to preserve the peace. It is a story of self-delusion, irresponsibility, and ignorance from which Japan is not entirely free even today."

—Akira Iriye, author of *Pearl Harbor and the Coming of the Pacific War*

"This ambitious, groundbreaking history builds new layers atop a story that we thought we knew."

—*Everyday eBook*

"Finely nuanced...[Hotta] forcefully reframes how we should consider the Japanese with respect to their positions as emerging world powers in [an]...era of international turmoil.

—*Asian American Literature Fans*

"Riveting...This important book should be in every major library. It will interest anyone attempting to make sense of Pearl Harbor, the Pacific War, or bureaucratic dysfunction and its possibly tragic consequences."

—*Choice*

From the Hardcover edition.

About the Author

Eri Hotta, born in Tokyo and educated in Japan, the U.S., and the U.K., has taught at Oxford, in Tokyo, and in Jerusalem, specializing in international relations.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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