

Japanese strategic planning for the Pacific (1905-1940)

[Japan](#)'s victories and defeats in the [Second World War](#) can be traced back to pre-war planning and lessons learned from previous conflicts. Despite having a heavily militaristic culture and aggressive leaders, Japan was not ready to fight a modern war against Western powers due to lack of heavy tanks and artillery. Japanese training stressed a strong esprit de corps rather than a heavily mechanized fighting force unlike most European powers. This can be traced back to victories in the [First Sino-Japanese War](#) and the [Russo-Japanese War](#) where Japan defeated numerically or technologically superior foes.

Japanese Army Strategy

The Japanese mind-set seemed reaffirmed after victories in [China](#) in the [Second Sino-Japanese War](#) in which smaller Japanese armies routed their Chinese counterparts. However, Chinese soldiers were often poorly trained and lacked a modern [air force](#) or [navy](#). In skirmishes with the [Soviet Union](#) in 1939, the Japanese were crushed by the Soviets' superior armour and artillery. In the early stages of the war against the United States, the Japanese scored early victories when facing off against poorly-equipped outposts but fared poorly later in the war against superior numbers and technology.

Japanese Naval Strategy

During the 1930's, Japanese Army and Navy leaders were involved in a debate over funds and strategy. The Army argued that it needed more men and equipment to defend against Soviet Russia. The navy argued for the "South Seas" operation in which Indochina, Malaysia, and the Dutch East Indies would be brought into the Japanese sphere of influence. In a fool-hardy move the Japanese government endorsed both strategies which put a severe strain on the armed forces. The Navy believed that a large naval battle would be the key to success as it had been in 1905 at the [Battle of Tsushima](#). Early naval plans had the Army occupying Guam and the Phillipines, then luring the United States Navy into a decisive battle. Although that plan was abandoned, the idea of a grand naval battle influenced the attacks on Pearl Harbor and Midway.