

IMPERIAL JAPANESE NAVY'S LOSS TO THE UNITED STATES NAVY IN WW II: AN ANALYSIS

Commander Gurudeep Bala

Introduction

Statistics for 07 December 1941 at Pearl Harbour were stunning: four American battle ships sunk (partially/wholly), 180 aircraft destroyed, 128 aircraft damaged and 2335 American servicemen dead. The corresponding loss on the Japanese side was limited to only 29 aircraft and five midget submarines.¹ But Pearl Harbour was not a one-off highpoint for the IJN in the Pacific Theatre of WW II. Till up to the first half of 1942, IJN operated with impunity scoring numerous tactical successes with minimal losses. In fact by May 1942, Japan took more territory over a greater area than any country in history and did not lose a single major ship. Compared to 105 allied ships sunk and 91 damaged, IJN lost only 27 with none of them being cruisers, battleship or carriers.² Yet, by the end of the war in 1945 not only was IJN completely decimated, but failed to prevent Tokyo from falling. While many reasons could be attributed,

perhaps the single biggest reason could be its inadequate stamina for a long protracted war. If viewed under the lens of master strategists, Clausewitz and Sun Tzu, IJN violated many of their theories while US Navy (USN) followed most of them. IJN's fall from high ground could still facilitate takeaways for modern day Indian Navy (IN) even if the war took place nearly seven decades ago in a much different technological and geo-political setting.

The Technology Bug

The pitfalls of trying to formulate long terms tactics based on technology alone, are many. In December 1941, IJN did indeed possess an array of gadgets; more than any other navy that operated in the Pacific, principally the United States Navy (USN). Long-range type 93 torpedoes, associated *Omori* fire control and Japan's niche superiority in optics gave a distinct advantage during night battles. The much-touted super battleships *Yamato*

¹SCM Paine, *The Wars for Asia 1911-1949* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2012), p 187-188

²*Ibid*

and *Musashi* induced confidence in the IJN and were a cause of worry for opposing navies.³ The *Mitsubishi A6M Zero* too earned the reputation of being the most agile and longest ranged carrier borne aircraft. Such qualities while extremely useful were achieved by compromising on armour of the *Zero* aircraft (the armour was practically zero). However, in the ensuing years, USN not only caught up with Japanese very quickly in such aspects, but also overtook them in most. Meanwhile the Japanese failed to appreciate these changes and were stuck to their original technology and tactics believing that their technology would remain invincible.

IJN ships always longed for a night battle knowing their advantage in optics and torpedo cross firing techniques.⁴ Till the first half of 1942, no US Admiral would have wished to blunder into Japanese battleships in the

dark since at that time they had few ships with radar cover.⁵ At that time, USN ships were not in same league in terms of technology. USN commanders simply denied IJN the opportunity to attack by retreating at crucial moments. The actions of USN commanders were thus in consonance with principles of retreating at crucial junctures and hobbling the army as highlighted by Clausewitz⁶ and Sun Tzu⁷ respectively. However, as the war progressed, USN had increased the number of ships fitted with radar, which give them an early warning of approaching enemy while Japanese still relied on visual sightings. Thus, radar literally stripped the Japanese of their night torpedo tactics combined with optics.

By mid-1942, US fielded improved aircraft such as the *Grumman F6F Hellcat*, which were as agile if not better than those of Japanese. In

³David C Evans & Mark R Peattie: *Strategy, Tactics and Technology in the Imperial Japanese Navy 1887-1941* (Annapolis, Maryland. Naval Institute Press, 1997), p 507

⁴In the twenty first century, a ship or an aircraft fires a torpedo against a submarine. Similarly submarines fire the torpedo against a ship or another submarine. However, in WW II, in addition to this modern day practice, ships and aircraft fired torpedoes against ships also.

⁵Edward S Miller, "Kimmel's Hidden Agenda", *MHQ: The Journal of Military History*, Vol 4, No 1 (Autumn 1991) p 42

⁶Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. & trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989) p 246 - Clausewitz in Chapter 8 of his Book 4 states "The commander who wishes to retreat and is able to do so can hardly be forced into battle by his opponent".

⁷Sun Tzu, *The Art of War*, trans. Samuel B Griffith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979) Para 17, p 80. Sun Tzu in the Chapter on 'Offensive Strategy' said "And if in all respects unequal, be capable of eluding him, for a small force is but booty for one more powerful". The reference to small force is to weapons and equipment.

addition, the use of VT (proximity) fuse meant higher effectiveness of anti-aircraft fire from USN ships. The armour compromise of the *Zero* aircraft began to hurt the Japanese. Similarly, by 1943 US ASW efforts in improved sonar technology and forward throwing projectiles meant Japanese submarines were attacked before they got into a torpedo firing position⁸ thus, mitigating/ overcoming the Japanese submarine force threat. The Japanese had slaved themselves to specific technologies and drew their entire tactics and perhaps even policies, believing in what they perceived as 'wonder weapons'. Unfortunately for IJN, they also had no inkling of what technologies the enemy was developing.

Takeaway for IN. The Japanese had formulated all tactics purely on their equipment and failed to have a back up plan in the absence of the original advantages accorded by that technology. While superior technology could result in victories at the outset, the adversary could either find a counter technology or perhaps simply bypass fighting against them. Even if

the enemy did not have the capability to develop such technology, her friends could pitch in. This is not to say the technology factor must be discounted. On the contrary, technology must be continuously evolved and tactics must not be rooted to just one set of present day technology. An eye on what technologies the enemy and its allies are acquiring, as also the tactics that would be employed with such technologies must be a subject of continuous studies. A directorate dedicated for such activities would not be unjustified.

Script Writing

The Russo-Japanese war of 1904-05 began with thorough planning on all practical accounts and with a surprise attack on Port Arthur.⁹ This single planned operation combined with the opportunity that Battle of Tsushima provided, resulted in minnows Japan not only wresting complete sea control, but also forced the giant Russians to the negotiating table. Nearly 37 years later the equations were not very different from the Japanese perspective. Russia was replaced with United States in

⁸ Evans & Peattie, p 509

⁹ Ibid, pp 59-93

Japanese calculations. USN battleships and their carriers were based at Pearl Harbour - just like Russian ships at Port Arthur in 1904-05. USN crew too was, in Japanese estimation, poorly prepared like the Russians were in 1904-05. To an extent at the beginning of the war, that was a fact. Just like the Battle of Tsushima, which was severely one-sided, a surprise full frontal attack on Pearl Harbour was also expected to be one sided. Tsushima was so devastating, that Russia was more than keen to meet Japan at the negotiation table instead of continuing it with the war.¹⁰ IJN expected that Pearl Harbour too, like Tsushima, would force USN to seek negotiations in a best-case scenario and at worst, ensure non-interference by USN in the foreseeable future of IJN operations in the Pacific and Indian Ocean Regions. No other reaction was expected from USN or more significantly by United States as a country. Neither IJN nor Japan as a

country had a '*what if USA does not react the way we think it should*' contingency. Hence there was no '*other*' strategy thought of. IJN had written a script of how the events would play out and assumed that it would play in that exact way only. 'Will' or 'moral forces,'¹¹ technological and industrial might of USA (leave alone its allies) were not part of the IJN script in 1941. Repeating a plan and hoping to elicit the same response (based on previous experience) from another enemy was IJN's undoing.¹²

Takeaway for IN. Script writing is essential for a victory in military operations, but only if a side has multiple scripts to switch to (based on situations) as the war progresses - IJN had just one!¹³ Thus, an operation must never be hinged on one script in the hope that it would play out only that way. Multiple scripts of all possible reactions by the adversary (both the

¹⁰Dennis Warner & Peggy Warner, *The Tide at Sunrise*, (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2002), p 521

¹¹Clausewitz, pp 136-137 In Book Two, Chapter Two, 'On the Theory of War', Clausewitz explains how "theory becomes infinitely difficult as soon as it touches the realm of moral values". By moral values, Clausewitz means morale of the forces. Thereafter he goes on to explain why "Military activity is never directed against material force alone; it is always aimed simultaneously at the moral forces which give it life, and the two cannot be separated".

¹²Sun Tzu. Para 26, p 100. In the Chapter on 'Weakness and Strengths', Sun Tzu states "Therefore, when I have won victory I do not repeat my tactics but respond to circumstances in an infinite variety of ways". The Japanese however failed completely on this account hoping a repeat reaction from a different enemy despite the same tactics four decades later.

¹³Ibid, Para 28, p 71. In the Chapter on 'Estimates', Sun Tzu explains the need for calculations by which he meant plans first at the national level and then at the strategic level. Sun Tzu said, "With many calculations, one can win; with few one cannot. How much less chance of victory has one who make none at all!"

navy and the country as a whole) and for every such reaction, a counter plan and necessary preparations must be in force. There is another takeaway that must not be missed here. It is wishful to hope that any war/ operation would come to a quick end either by own design or by international intervention, but hope must not become a strategy. Preparations and mind set for a longer war must run in parallel.

Intelligence Operations and Deception

USN, aided by allied intelligence agencies in Australia had a substantial advantage in the realm of signal intelligence over the Japanese.¹⁴ This provided a major edge to USN at regular intervals. For instance, while Adm Chester W Nimitz, (the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet based in Hawaii) based on his intelligence could safely conclude about Midway operation of IJN, the Japanese were not even aware of USS

Yorktown being back in action post repairs.¹⁵ These serious intelligence lapses resulted in perhaps the biggest loss for IJN in a single action wherein it lost four carriers or one-third of its difficult to replace dozen carriers. What was worse, far from zeroing in on ‘intelligence failure’ or ‘enemy intelligence superiority’ as the most likely cause for IJN’s defeat by relatively inferior naval assets of USN which appeared at the right moment at the right place off Midway, IJN commanders simply tried to hide the losses with the hope of keeping their morale high.¹⁶ Unlike the Russo-Japanese war when intelligence poured into Japanese camps¹⁷ even as the war progressed, intelligence was at best reasonable till Pearl Harbour and all but dried up by mid-1942, thanks partly to active US actions in getting rid of all Japanese spies on US soil. This trend indeed continued during the course of the balance of the war where USN could fairly determine IJN’s plans.

¹⁴Williamson Murray & Allan R Millet, *A War to be Won: Fighting the Second World War* (Massachusetts: Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College, 2001) p 189

¹⁵Eric Larrabee, *Commander in Chief - Franklin Delano Roosevelt, his Lieutenants, and their War*, (Maryland: Naval Institute Press, 1987), p 362. Yorktown had sustained major damages during the battle of Coral Sea. She managed to limp back to Pearl Harbour for repairs. Her damages could have been far more had it not been for the damage control undertaken by her proficient crew after fire resulting from enemy bombing. Within three days of dry-docking, she sailed out in an acceptably seaworthy conditions.

¹⁶Paine, p 192.

¹⁷Warner & Warner, p 161

Imperial Japanese Navy's Loss to the US Navy in WW II: An Analysis

Surely, both Clausewitz¹⁸ and Sun Tzu¹⁹²⁰ would have been annoyed that their theories on intelligence were not adhered to by IJN.

USN used deception - not to fool IJN operationally or strategically, but to extract information from IJN about the impending attack on Midway. Station 'Hypo' was the local branch (in Hawaii) of the Communications Security Section of the Office of Naval Communications in Washington. By mid 1942, Hypo was able to intercept 60 per cent of IJN signal traffic and of that was able to decode 40 per cent of the messages; just about adequate to build the big picture. USN suspected that the IJN referred to Midway Island as 'AF' in codes, but without certainty. With approval of Adm Nimitz, a ruse was employed.

Midway Island was known to have fresh water supply issues. Midway was instructed to send a dummy

message stating problems with the island's fresh water evaporator. IJN signal intelligence unit on Wake Island intercepted the dummy message (without knowing it was dummy) and then relayed it to Tokyo. The Wake Island to Tokyo message was again decoded by Hypo, which confirmed that 'AF' in codes meant Midway Island. By end May 1942, construct of the impending Midway operation was determined with reasonable accuracy.²¹ It is not that IJN did not attempt deception. At the strategic level, IJN had dispatched forces to the Aleutian Islands in Alaska hoping that USN would divert all units of Pacific Fleet to Alaska leaving the Pacific open for IJN. Similar was the case at the operational level, with air attacks on and potential invasion of Midway even as Adm Yamamoto (IJN) had his battleships ready to take on USN ships 300 nm in the rear sector of the IJN carrier force headed to Midway. It was exactly the strategy against which

¹⁸Clausewitz, 117. *Entire Chapter Six of Book One, 'Intelligence in War', is dedicated to intelligence and how coincidences must be watched out against.*

¹⁹Sun Tzu, Para 20, pg 100. *In the Chapter on 'Weakness and Strengths', Sun Tzu said, "Therefore, determine the enemy's plans and you will know which strategy will be successful and which will not". However IJN's actions were based more on what they wanted to do instead of accurately determining enemy's plans.*

²⁰Ibid, Para 4, pg 145. *Further, in the Chapter on 'Employment of Secret Agents', Sun Tzu highlights how to gain intelligence when he said, "What is called 'foreknowledge' cannot be elicited from spirits, nor from gods, nor by analogy with past events, nor from calculations. It must be obtained from men who know the enemy situation".*

²¹John Prados, *Combined Fleet Decoded: The Secret History of American Intelligence and the Japanese Navy in World War II* (New York: Random House, 1995), p 319

Clausewitz had warned.²² Specifically with regards to the deception force off Aleutians, had IJN instead augmented the forces off Midway, the result may have been different. On both accounts, Adm Nimitz, called the bluff and instead of defending Aleutians or Midway, directed his Commanders to seek out IJN carriers headed by Adm Nagumo's (IJN) carriers and dodge Adm Yamamoto's super battleships.²³

Takeaway for IN. The importance of intelligence operations cannot be understated. What is however needed is the ability to exploit intelligence not only in the passive sense that IJN undertook, but also in the active sense akin to what USN and its allies undertook. To be able to employ deception in the information network either through information feints or operational actions could be hard to achieve and requires more than assumption that the enemy will buy it. Similarly, having offshore intelligence gathering bases like the allied forces

had all over their area of operations would require political will and a commitment to build strategic cooperation. In addition, even as own intelligence spadework progresses, IN must maintain an eagle's eye on such activities by the enemy in the vicinity, especially on the soil of those countries whose loyalties could swing either way.

Concentration of Forces Undone Outside.... and Inside

Splitting forces on numerous occasions to fulfil perceived tactical requirements as well ineffective deceptions, be it at Coral Sea, Midway or Leyte Gulf²⁴ or other major operations was a major flaw in tactical operations at sea. Repeatedly, huge fleets were split into penny packets thus going against the principle of concentration of forces; a theory that was very relevant in WW II. In 1941, Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) wanted to conquer French Indo China (modern

²²Clausewitz 203. In Chapter Ten of Book Three, 'Cunning', Clausewitz warns against wasting excess forces towards deception, which may not fructify when he says, 'To prepare sham action with sufficient thoroughness to impress an enemy requires a considerable expenditure of time and effort, and the costs increase with scale of deception. Normally, they call for more than can be spared, and consequently so-called strategic feints rarely have the desired effect'. This is not to indicate Clausewitz was against deception. On the contrary he advocates deception by calling it 'Cunning' and its importance in the same chapter even as he concludes it with the above warning.

²³Murray & Millet, p 194

²⁴Larrabee, p 399-409.

day Vietnam), Dutch East Indies (modern day Indonesia), Malaya and even Burma; IJN wanted to pursue a more southern approach in the Pacific Ocean. The never-ending disagreement between IJA and IJN meant a fight for resources and policy maker's attention.²⁵ 07 December 1941 maybe a day of infamy from the perspective of Pearl Harbour thanks to movies and modern day ceremonies commemorating the event. But it was also the exact same day when Japan attacked Thailand, Malaya, Philippines, Wake Island, Guam, Hong Kong and the International Settlement in Shanghai - theatres scattered all over Pacific.²⁶

If 'tactically' wrong decisions resulted in split forces, the 'strategic' failure of poor inter-service relationships cost IJN dear despite Clausewitz being completely opposed to the concept.²⁷ To have multiple theatres for an island nation meant the sea going resources

(essentially IJN resources) were also employed in multiple theatres. Concentration of mass as propounded by Clausewitz²⁸ was wholly betrayed by IJN. Not only was concentration of mass missing against the adversary, but concentration of effort too was missing with IJA and IJN unwilling to even share each other's technology, resources and production facilities.²⁹

Takeaway for IN. The IN cannot escape the fact that its geography has practically two theatres (even if not on the scale of Pacific and Atlantic Oceans) - Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal. Forces will have to be split, but an awareness to the aspect must not be lost and an all round build up to such an effect must not be stopped. Concentration of forces may not be applicable in the tactical sense in the twenty first century - but the theory may well have its own relevance at the operational and the strategic sense. Towards this end, synergy at the

²⁵Evans & Peattie, p 454

²⁶Paine, p 186

²⁷Clausewitz, p 285. In Chapter Four of Book Five, 'The Army's Order of Battle', Clausewitz explains the importance of 'Relationship between the branches of the service' and how to achieve it.

²⁸Clausewitz, p 204. In Chapter Eleven of Book Three, 'Concentration of Forces in Space', Clausewitz explains the need for 'Concentration of Forces'. The naval reader must bear in mind that here concentration refers not merely to tactical situations, but in addition and at times only in the realm of strategic and operational levels.

²⁹Evans & Peattie, p 498. Such was the mistrust between IJA and IJN each service was reluctant to share its production facilities with the other. Even the IFF codes were different for both the services!

strategic level with other forces is inescapable.

Algebra of Forces

Prior initiation of war, IJN had recognized that they had to offset the possible numerical superiority of the allied forces. IJN doctrine relied on the ‘belief’ that superior quality could overcome quantity.³⁰ This theory could probably have been true at best for a quick one off battle. For a protracted war where the adversary had the time to learn and improve, such a strategy could be disputable. However, where the adversary had not only the time, but also quality in the form of overwhelming quantity, which the allied forces and in particular USN did have, IJN strategy could be considered flawed from Clausewitz’s point of view.³¹ Even on the occasions when IJN did enjoy a degree of superiority in numbers, they wasted it by either splitting their forces into smaller groups or by spreading it over large geographical expanse. By the end of

1943, USN alone enjoyed a 10:4 advantage over the IJN in heavy fleet carriers, 9:5 advantage in light carriers and 35:3 advantage in small escort carriers.³² USN enjoyed similar superiority in other classes of ships and aircraft as well. The numerical superiority of US and allied forces ultimately proved too much for IJN in a theatre that extended from Solomon Islands to India.³³

Takeaway for IN. Quantity has a quality of its own. The tendency to get carried away with the belief that state of the art weapons and sensors or for that matter human capital could compensate for lesser numbers on any account could be dangerous. With IN on an expansion drive, this area may seem well under control. But in the strategic algebraic equation, the enemy factor cannot be missed! The enemy, potential enemies and their allies too are expanding. So how much is enough? The answer to that question would have to be reworked continuously. The biggest challenge

³⁰*Ibid*, p 512

³¹Clausewitz 134. In Chapter Two of Book Two titled ‘On the Theory of War’, Clausewitz indicates that numerical superiority too could be considered as a material factor that could make up victory. But he does so with a caveat that numerical superiority alone must not be considered as a winning factor.

³²Murray & Millet, p 337

³³Clausewitz, p 194. In Chapter Eight of Book Three, ‘Superiority of Numbers’, Clausewitz says, “In tactics, as in strategy, superiority of numbers is the most common element in victory”.

would be to sustain adequate quantity of high quality human capital.

Long Distance Logistics in a Protracted War

The outrage stemming from the attack on Pearl Harbour was adequate for Franklin D Roosevelt, the US President to authorise 'unrestricted air and submarine warfare' against the entire 'Japanese Empire'³⁴ and not just IJN. USN and its allies indulged in unrestricted warfare hitting the Japanese supply chains in the Pacific and Eastern Indian Oceans. By the end of the war, Japan's merchant marine had been reduced to one-ninth of its pre-Pearl Harbour capacity, and only half the men and supplies sent from Japan and Manchuria reached the Pacific theatre.³⁵ The vastness of Pacific Ocean and the spread of island chains in it, not to mention bases in South East Asia and accordingly the consequences of extended supply lines were not appropriately assessed by IJN prior embarking on their ambitious

conquest. Where Japanese supply lines through sea were expected to meet uninterrupted requirements of both IJA and IJN, they were instead effectively choked - something Clausewitz had warned against.³⁶ Distant transportation of supplies indeed over vast expanses of the globe rendered IJN to destitution.³⁷

Takeaway for IN. Logistics could become a single point failure for IN in a protracted war spread over a large expanse if it is not prepared and guaranteed to deliver over such a large expanse. Towards that end, infrastructure build up not merely on Indian soil, but around fringes of Indian Ocean Region is crucial. Unless such logistics chains are practiced during peacetime, their success in wartime may not be ensured. In addition, a close study of enemy supply lines, their new logistic bases - existing and potential ones - cannot be ignored. To plan and develop the ability to disrupt enemy supply chains must be pursued vigorously.

³⁴Murray & Millet p 177

³⁵Paine, p 195

³⁶Clausewitz, p 346. In Chapter Sixteen of Book Five, 'Lines of Communication', Clausewitz says, "...disrupting, or cutting communications, causing the enemy to wither and die, and thus be forced to retreat".

³⁷Sun Tzu, p 74, Para 11. In the chapter on 'Waging War', Sun Tzu says, "When a country is impoverished by military operations it is due to distant transportation; carriage of supplies for great distances renders the people destitute".

Strategic Reserve

The IJN failed to gauge the Strategic Reserve³⁸ in terms of its own economic, technological, industrial, logistical and human capital fields when compared to that of the entire United States of America. With each passing operation and each passing day, the Japanese economy continued to plunge; technological prowess became stagnant; industrial output struggled to meet ends; logistical chains were stretched thin; human capital, especially experienced and adequately trained human capital depleted with rapidity. Even when Japan attempted salvaging the situation on the material front, its inability to do so on the human capital front hurt it badly.

From the second half of 1942 to the first half of 1943, Japanese pilots from land-based aircraft suffered an 87 per

cent casualty rate and carrier-based aircraft had an astounding 98 per cent casualty rate.³⁹ One important difference was USN rotated their star performers between operational billets and training so that they could pass their skills to many others; IJN ensured that their best were almost entirely on the battlefield. So, when the elite perished, the quality of training too faded resulting in IJN having to make do with inferior quality volunteers and even conscripts. While quality was the preferred virtue over quantity, the absence of the latter hit IJN hard when it underwent expansion and attrition during the war.⁴⁰ IJN ended up as a force that engaged in protracted campaigns for which the resources of Japan did not suffice.⁴¹ IJN failed to realize prior its Pacific ambitions, that as war progressed their force of attack would diminish⁴² given their limited strategic reserves.⁴³

³⁸ Clausewitz, p 210. In the opening lines of Chapter Thirteen of Book Three, 'The Strategic Reserve', Clausewitz says, "A reserve has two distinct purposes. One is to prolong and renew the action; the second, to counter unforeseen threats".

³⁹ Paine, p 194

⁴⁰ Evans & Peattie, p 325-326, 402-403

⁴¹ Sun Tzu, Para 4, p 73. In the chapter on 'Waging War', Chang Yu comments on the above theory of Sun Tzu, "The campaigns of the Emperor Wu of the Han dragged on with no result and after the treasury was emptied he issued a mournful edict".

⁴² Clausewitz, p 527. In Chapter Four of Book Seven on 'The Diminishing Force of Attack', Clausewitz elaborates on how a force's strength is depleted wrt various factors as the war progressed and a few possible solutions.

⁴³ Ibid, p 567. In Chapter Twenty Two of Book Seven on 'The Culminating Point of Victory', Clausewitz lists the causes of loss in strength for an invading army. IJN failed to take the list of causes for their diminishing force of attack into account for their strategy.

Takeaway for IN. While platforms could be built as backup, IJN's failure in managing human capital during the course of war was a very big failure. To this day, US defence forces ensure that the elite and best are rotated in training billets to pass on their skills to the next generation even during the height of operations - be it World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War or the Gulf and Afghanistan Wars. This singular aspect of managing human capital must not escape IN planners. Reserving the best for operational or staff billets to meet the urgent present could be a compromise of the future. Strategic reserves on other counts would invariably be a nation's look-out and though under little control of IN, must be factored in for a protracted war.

Conclusion

A big shortcoming of IJN was the inaccurate assessment of its

adversary.⁴⁴ That not just USN, but the entire American nation would be outraged at Pearl Harbour and unify themselves to the singular goal of defeating entire Imperial Japan was not assessed by IJN. To fight any country with vast resources, will and manpower would have meant a very difficult enemy to fight against. If however one had to fight an adversary who in addition to the above, also had political, economic, diplomatic and military efforts unified, that country would undoubtedly be the worst enemy to fight against.⁴⁵ By 1941, not only had IJN underestimated its enemy, they overestimated themselves and thus, failed to know themselves correctly; indeed they were in peril before they even began. One cannot miss Sun Tzu's popular theory on the subject, "*If ignorant both of your enemy and of yourself, you are certain in every battle to be in peril*".⁴⁶ Pearl Harbour was meant to be the culminating point of

⁴⁴Ibid, p 586. In Chapter Three of Book Eight on 'Scale of the Military Objective and Effort to be Made', Clausewitz states, "We must gauge the strength and situation of the opposing state. We must gauge the character and abilities of its government and the people and do the same in regard to our own. Finally, we must evaluate the political sympathies of other states and the effect the war may have on them". IJN miserably failed in these theories of Clausewitz. USA as a nation (in addition to US military) not only rose against Japanese actions, but the country gained support from much of SE Asia, non-Japanese occupied China, Britain and Australia.

⁴⁵Ibid, p 81. In Chapter One of Book One on 'What is War', Clausewitz states, "The political object - the original motive for the war - will thus determine both the military objective to be reached and the amount of effort it requires". Somehow, IJN lost sight of its original motive - to secure resources for an island nation.

⁴⁶Sun Tzu, Para 33, p 84. Li Ch'uan further comments, "Such people are called 'mad bandits'. What can they expect if not defeat".

attack⁴⁷ for IJN against USN, but it wasn't to be; neither was any other operation of the Japanese.

Even as USN submarines hit Japanese merchant ships, IJN failed to exploit its submarine force against allied merchant marine. The sense of *Bushido*,⁴⁸ often led IJN to be fixated on the heroic task of taking on only USN war waging platforms and avoiding merchant marine who would have not only been easy targets, but also logistic enablers of USN. Had this been done, perhaps the allied forces would have been forced to devote some of their surface forces for escort duties, especially since they too so deeply depended on sea lanes for their logistical chain in the vast expanse of the Pacific. Instead IJN was rooted to fighting only a symmetric war.⁴⁹

Yet all of the above cannot take away

one of the most serious failings of IJN, which was to mistake tactics for strategy and strategy for the conduct of war.⁵⁰ For IJN everything was hinged on the one decisive battle like the one at Tsushima in 1905. To harbour such an expectation of winning a war, especially the one that covered nearly half the globe was perhaps never going to fructify.⁵¹ In the words of the Adm Isoroku Yamamoto, the IJN's Commander of Combined Fleet, who himself was reluctant to wage war against the United States, "*The outcome must be decided on the first day. If we are ordered to do it, then I can guarantee to put up a tough fight for the first six months, but I have absolutely no confidence as to what would happen if it went on for two or three years.... I hope at the least that you will make every effort to avoid war with America*".⁵² In the end, perhaps that was the only script that played out

⁴⁷ Clausewitz p 528. In Chapter Five of Book Seven on 'Culminating Point of Attack', Clausewitz tries to explain how "purchasing advantages that may become valuable at the peace table, but he must pay for them on the spot with his fighting forces".

⁴⁸ Encyclopaedia Britannica, accessed on 12 August 2015, <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Bushido>

⁴⁹ Paine, p 195

⁵⁰ Evans & Peattie, p 515.

⁵¹ Clausewitz, p 79. In Chapter One of Book One titled 'War Does Not Consist of a Single Short Blow', Clausewitz uses the entire chapter to advocate the theory. This is not to say IJN plans for the entire war was solely dependent on Pearl Harbour. IJN of course had several plans for several fronts. But as far as IJN's calculations wrt USN were concerned, it took it for granted that one decisive blow on Pearl Harbour would simply keep USN out of the war in Pacific and in South East Asia.

⁵² Larrabee, p 364

as predicted - a lack of strategic reserve on all counts. The two principal protagonists - Japan and US - in perhaps the biggest maritime war in the past few centuries provided a multitude

of takeaways for a maritime force like the IN. Ignoring the above and possibly many more lessons when viewed under the eyes of Clausewitz and Sun Tzu could only be at one's peril.



About the Author

Commander Gurudeep Bala, an alumnus of 60th Naval Academy Course and US Naval War College, Rhode Island, USA, was commissioned on 01 Jul 01. As a non-specialist, the officer carried out duties of GO-II Vinash, Flag Lt to FOGA and Commanding Officer, INFAC T 83. A specialist in Communication and Electronic Warfare, he has served as EWO Ranvir, SCO Rajput and Delhi and as Training Coordinator at Signal School. The Officer is currently commanding INS Nishank. The author can be reached at gbalaindia@gmail.com.