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Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942

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Beyond articles on Soviet naval and maritime subjects that appear regularly in the *Proceedings*, *Naval War College Review*, and *Navy International*, there are relevant articles in the periodicals *Problems of Communism* (published by the US Information Agency), *Strategic Review* (US Strategic Institute), and the commercial publications *International Defense Review*, *Armada*, and *Naval Forces*. The annual March issue of *Air Force Magazine* is a Soviet Aerospace Almanac which contains a wide range of articles, some of which relate to naval activities.

Finally, the reader is recommended to the British magazines *Air International* and *Flight International* for details of Soviet naval aircraft.



“Willmott deals harshly with the reputations of a number of Allied and Japanese commanders. Two such cases are Gen. Douglas MacArthur and his so-called defense of Luzon and Adm. Chuichi Nagumo’s conduct of the Pearl Harbor attack. However, Willmott also shows that Allied failures in East Asia were not all caused by worthless commanders but also by the fact that except for the Americans the Allied governments did not have a strategy . . . and were thus overtaken by events.”

Willmott, H.P. *Empires in the Balance: Japanese and Allied Pacific Strategies to April 1942*. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 1982. 487pp. \$24.95

HP. Willmott’s *Empires in the Balance* is a brilliant analysis of the events leading up to the Second World War in the Pacific and the first five months of that conflict. There is no new information in *Empires in the Balance* and it is based entirely on secondary sources, but what Willmott has done is to break away from the narrow nationalist view of events at the beginning of the Pacific war. Instead, the author gives a broad analysis of the actions of both the Allies and the Japanese while portraying a number of events from very new and different points of view.

An example of Willmott’s original perspective can be seen in his assessment of Pearl Harbor. From the number of battleships sunk, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor was a success. But when this attack is placed in a wider historical context by Willmott, Pearl Harbor is the beginning of the Japanese road to defeat. First and most important, Pearl Harbor politically united the American people as nothing else could and made the utter and absolute defeat of Japan the major objective of the United States. Also, the Japanese muffed the attack itself by sinking for the most part only battleships and by not attacking Pearl Harbor again and again until it was

rendered useless as a military and naval base. By sinking the battleships at Pearl Harbor and no aircraft carriers, the Japanese ended the conflict within the US Navy between battleshipmen and aviators; for with no battleships, American task forces would have to be organized around aircraft carriers. By not destroying the military and naval installations at Pearl Harbor, the Japanese gave the Americans the means to base aircraft carrier task forces and submarines in Hawaii to conduct offensive operations in the Central and Western Pacific. Another example of how Willmott turns traditional concepts upside down is his analysis of the Japanese campaign in the Philippines and Bataan. It is commonly thought that the American defense of Bataan tied down a large number of Japanese forces which could have been used to better advantage elsewhere. Willmott shows conclusively, however, that after American air power had been destroyed and American naval forces withdrawn to the Dutch East Indies, American forces on Bataan and elsewhere in the Philippines did not affect Japanese operations at all even though the Americans outnumbered the Japanese two to one.

One of the most striking things that Willmott points out is the great economy of force employed by the Japanese in their conquest of European colonial empires in East Asia and the Western Pacific. The British defenders of Malaya outnumbered the Japanese attackers five to one; yet the Japanese, using such "secret" equipment as bicycles and the "unusual" tactic of turning the flanks of British positions, conquered Malaya and Singapore with ease. Willmott also points out that London and Washington reacted differently at the beginning of the war in the Pacific. As soon as the shooting began the Americans for the most part wrote off places such as the Philippines, Guam, and Wake Island. The British on the other hand reinforced places that were indefensible, such as Hong Kong, before the beginning of the fighting; and when the war with the Japanese began, they continued to throw good money after bad by large-scale reinforcement of such places as Singapore long after it should have been clear that the Japanese were going to conquer them. The British 18th Division was almost literally marched off transports at Singapore into Japanese prison camps.

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The book ends with the Japanese victorious everywhere but without any strategic options. As Willmott sees it, in the fifth month of the war the Japanese had only three strategic choices. Invade Australia, which would be a dead end. Attack the Americans in the Eastern Pacific, which is what the

Japanese did and suffered a defeat at Midway. Willmott suggests a third possible strategy for the Japanese: to mount an offensive in the Indian Ocean by taking Ceylon, bypassing India, and attacking the Persian Gulf region with the objective of destroying the Allied position in the Middle East.

Empires in the Balance is well written and intellectually demanding to the point where it is almost impossible to do it justice in a short review. It should be read by anyone who is interested in warfare. Although dust jacket endorsements are usually suspect, Antony Preston's comment on the dust jacket of *Empires in the Balance* is absolutely correct: "There is nothing quite like it in print."

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Potter, William C. *Nuclear Power and Nonproliferation: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*. Cambridge, Mass.: Oelschlager, Gunn & Hain, 1982. 304pp. \$25 paper \$9.95

The subject of the proliferation of nuclear weapons, and how proliferation may or may not relate to peaceful nuclear power production, is extremely complex. In order to give a coherent presentation of the field one must be able to deal with subjects as diverse as the technologies for nuclear power production and for plutonium reprocessing, political motivations for acquiring nuclear weapons, the history of attempts to control proliferation, competition in the international nuclear export market, and the trade and technology transfer policies of several major industrialized nations. Further, one must deal with the arcane policy debates within the United States over such concerns as the relative effectiveness of blanket policies of technology denial as compared to

more discriminating strategies in inhibiting proliferation.

Potter's intention is to give us such a presentation; he seeks "to provide a broad, interdisciplinary perspective on the major issues of nuclear power and proliferation. It is intended to serve as an introduction to the field and to provide a reference source for the non-specialist." To a great degree the volume satisfies these objectives in a very satisfactory way. Chapters are devoted to historical, technological, economic, and political aspects of both nuclear power and nonproliferation policies and strategies. Issues are summarized clearly and logically, and the political aspects of nonproliferation control strategies are discussed in a balanced way. *Balance* is too frequently lacking in discussions of nuclear power. To see it in Potter's book is a refreshing change from the many emotional, illogical, and above all impractical discussions that abound in other efforts in this area.