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"Tora! Tora! Tora!" and Sept 11

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The attack on Pearl Harbor was the first foreign attack on American soil since the Second Anglo-American War in 1812. The shock to Americans was immense. It is no wonder that the events of Sept 11 are described as a contemporary version of the Pearl Harbor attack.

Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment Japan released a timely DVD version of "Tora! Tora! Tora!" in Japan last year. This film was originally produced in 1970, but in the aftermath of the Sept 11 attacks, we can see the movie from different perspectives.

"Tora! Tora! Tora!" shows the attack on Pearl Harbor objectively, telling both sides' stories simultaneously without any prejudice or jingoism in an American-Japanese co-production that was quite unusual in 1970. For example, this film portrayed the Japanese not only as human beings but also as smart, disciplined military professionals. The first half of the film shows diplomatic, military and intelligence events and developments on both sides that culminated in Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, while the second half of the film is a vivid re-creation of the attack itself.

This classic film reminds me of the differences in national character between Japanese and Americans. Both General Hideki Tojo, who was the minister of war, and Japanese rank-and-file soldiers were quite enthusiastic about fighting the United States.

But other commanders, especially Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, commander of the combined Japanese fleet, were quite reluctant to go to war. Yamamoto knew quite well that against the might of America, the best Japan could do was to buy itself a little time. In other words, Yamamoto foresaw the fallacy and long-term consequences of resorting to military power.

This film correctly demonstrates that even in the militaristic Japan of the 1930s and the 1940s, conflict existed between Japanese "hawks," who wanted to go to war, and "doves," who still sought a peaceful resolution. Some of the high-ranking military commanders as well as many civilian leaders were willing to consider peaceful alternatives.

In contrast to diverse opinions of resorting to military means in militaristic Japan, the overwhelming majority of Americans openly supported the military solution to the Sept 11 attacks. Few Americans questioned the wisdom of President George Bush's decision to bomb Afghanistan or considered the negative impacts of this decision on other parts of the world, such as heavy casualties among Afghan civilians and a large number of refugees fleeing to neighboring countries.

Japan is believed to be a homogenous country while the United States is a country of diversity. Nevertheless, people were discouraged from openly expressing anti-war opinions and Arab-Americans became targets of assaults in the United States.

Admiral Yamamoto is quoted as saying: "We have aroused a sleeping giant, and filled him with a terrible

resolve." Americans regarded the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor as a sneak attack that was ethically the lowest of deeds.

This unforgivable event fed the vehemence of the American people's "terrible resolve." The Japanese, a race Americans regarded with fear, contempt, and suspicion, had accomplished this surprise attack, which further fueled American fury and determination to fight back until the very end.

The United States won the cold war and has remained the only superpower in the world. This mighty country, however, was attacked by a group of terrorists, which damaged Americans' amour-propre and stiffened their resolve to deal not only with terrorists but also with anyone that criticizes the United States.

Just as President Franklin D Roosevelt made the best use of Japan's Pearl Harbor attack to redirect anti-war public opinion to support the U.S. entry into war, President Bush, whose approval rating was low before Sept 11, used them and manipulated American public opinion to support his militaristic approach.

The Japanese seemed to have diverse opinions when they faced a severe crisis while Americans demonstrated unanimity in responding to crisis. In both democratic countries, accepting diverse opinions and being careful not to be manipulated by the government continue to be important issues

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