



Hideki Tojo was born in Tokyo, [Japan](#), on 30th December 1884. He joined the [Japanese Army](#) and his military service included periods in Switzerland and Germany.

Promoted to major general in 1933 he became head of the Kwantung Army's military police in September 1935. After becoming a lieutenant general he became chief of staff to the Kwantung Army (March 1937-May 1938).

In May 1938 [Fumimaro Kondoye](#) appointed Tojo as his vice minister of war. However, after six months in this post he returned to the armed services and took command of the army's aviation.

Tojo held extreme right-wing views and was a supporter of [Nazi Germany](#). He also feared the long-term plans of [Joseph Stalin](#) and in 1938 he advocated pre-emptive air strikes on both [China](#) and the [Soviet Union](#).

In July 1941 Tojo was appointed by [Fumimaro Kondoye](#) as minister of war. He advocated an aggressive foreign policy and strongly opposed plans by [Shigenori Togo](#) to remove Japanese troops from [China](#) and [Korea](#).

Tojo became prime minister on 16th October 1941. He initially backed the foreign office's efforts to reach agreement with the [United States](#). However, when convinced that a negotiated deal was possible, ordered the attack on [Pearl Harbor](#) on 7th December, 1941.

As well as prime minister Tojo also held the posts of minister of war, home minister and foreign minister. From February 1944 he was also Commander in Chief of the General Staff.

Tojo, aware that [Japan](#) was unable to win the war, resigned from office after the loss of [Saipan](#) in July 1944. He shot himself in the chest just before he was arrested by the US Military in 1945. Tojo survived and after being nursed back to health was tried as a war criminal. Hideki Tojo was executed on 23rd December 1948.

Hideki Tojo kept a diary while in prison between 1945 and 1948. In the diary he explained the reasons why Japan became involved in the Second World War.

Immediately before the beginning of the Great East Asian War (Second World War), Japan was still engaged in the unfortunate Sino-Japanese War, which had already gone on for more than four years. Throughout that period, Japan had made honest efforts to keep the destruction of war from spreading and, based on the belief that all nations of the world should find their places, had followed a policy designed to restore an expeditious peace between Japan and China. Japan was ensuring the stability of East Asia while contributing to world peace. Nevertheless, China was unfortunately unable to understand Japan's real position, and it is greatly to be regretted that the Sino-Japanese War became one of long duration.

Clearly, this Sino-Japanese War of more than four years was a considerable burden on Japan's national power and an obstacle to the maintenance of peace in the Pacific. From the point of the view of the nation's power, it was obvious that while we were fighting the Sino-Japanese war, every effort was to be made to avoid adding to our enemies and opening additional fronts. Naturally, this was the view of those who then held positions of responsibility.

In the past, the theory had been: advance towards the north while defending the south, or advance to the south while defending the north. However, as the Sino-Japanese War dragged on, the only objectives that bore consideration were: (1) a swift peace between Japan and China; (2) the maintenance of international peace; and (3) the restoration of national power.

It was for this reason that Japan: (1) attempted to establish peace with China through negotiations, sometimes through American mediation; (2) strengthened the Russo-Japanese Neutrality Treaty [April 1941] in the hope of avoiding war with the Soviet Union; and (3) tried as much as possible to use diplomatic means to respond to signs that relations with the United States were worsening, even though in so doing it was necessary for Japan to endure things that were unendurable.

Despite Japan's desires and efforts, unfortunate differences in the ways that Japan, England, the United States, and China understood circumstances, together with misunderstandings of attitudes, made it impossible for the parties to agree. Up until the very end, these were important reasons for the outbreak of war, and from Japan's point of view, this is a matter of great regret.

In dealing with the China problem, the British and American side, which had particularly strong interests in China, should have based its judgments about the origins of the problem on direct observation of the actual circumstances at the time. Moreover, both sides should have considered the point of view and survival of the one billion people of East Asia, who were awakening to world development. Rather than be trapped in the

narrow-minded maintenance of old power structures, it was necessary that both sides deliberate together, work harmoniously, and take a broader view of mutual prosperity, cooperation, and the establishment of stability in East Asia.

Cordell Hull wrote about negotiations with the Hideki Tojo government in 1941.

Little good as we had had to expect from the Konoye Cabinet we had even less to expect from the Cabinet headed by Premier General Hideki Tojo after October 17. Tojo, who had been Minister of War, continued even as Premier to be an active Army officer. He was a typical Japanese officer, with a small-bore, straight-laced, one-track mind. He was stubborn and self-willed, rather stupid, hard-working, and possessed a quantity of drive.

The new Foreign Minister, Shigenori Togo, was a typical Japanese Foreign Office official, a good technician in his craft but also rather narrow in his views and unable to gain a broad perspective.

The new Cabinet almost immediately stated to us with emphasis, through Togo in Tokyo and Nomura in Washington, that they wanted to continue conversations with us and reach an agreement for peace in the Pacific. They sought to impress upon us that they supported the assurances of peaceful intentions so often conveyed to us by the Konoye Cabinet.

This was on the surface, of course. Other developments were ominous. Japanese military movements continued in Manchuria and Indo-China. The anti-American campaign went on in the Nipponese press. Navy and Army officers made inflammatory speeches. The director of the naval intelligence section of Imperial Headquarters said in a public address, "The Imperial Navy is itching for action, when needed." And Ambassador Grew cabled me on October 25 information from a reliable informant that it was only as a result of pressure from the Emperor that the Tojo Cabinet became committed to an attempt to conclude the conversations with us successfully.

In his prison diary Hideki Tojo explained why Japan decided to attack Pearl Harbor on 7th December 1941.

The main American naval forces were shifted to the Pacific region and an American admiral made a strong declaration to the effect that if war were to break out between Japan and the United States, the Japanese navy could be sunk in a matter of weeks. Further, the British Prime Minister (Churchill) strongly declared his nation's intention to join the fight on the side of the United States within 24 hours should war break out between Japan and the United States. Japan therefore faced considerable military threats as well.

Japan attempted to circumvent these dangerous circumstances by diplomatic negotiation, and though Japan heaped concession upon concession, in the hope of finding a solution through mutual compromise, there was no progress because the United States would not retreat from its original position. Finally, in the end, the United States repeated demands that, under the circumstances, Japan could not accept: complete withdrawal of troops from China, repudiation of the Nanking government, withdrawal from the Tripartite Pact (signed by Germany, Italy and Japan on September 27, 1940). At this point, Japan lost all hope of reaching a resolution through diplomatic negotiation.

Since events had progressed as they had, it became clear that to continue in this manner was to lead the nation to disaster. With options thus foreclosed, in order to protect and defend the nation and clear the obstacles that stood in its path, a decisive appeal to arms was made.

War was decided upon at the Imperial Conference on December 1, 1941, and the shift to real operations was made at this point. However, even during the preparations for action, we laid our plans in such a manner that should there be progress through diplomatic negotiation, we would be well prepared to cancel operations at the latest moment that communication technology would have permitted.

Hideki Tojo attempted to defend himself against the accusation of war crimes.

1. I deny that Japan "declared war on civilization."
2. To advocate a New Order was to seek freedom and respect for peoples without prejudice, and to seek a stable basis for the existence all peoples, equally, and free of threats. Thus, it was to seek true civilization and true justice for all the peoples of the world, and to view this as the destruction of personal freedom and respect is to be assailed by the hatred and emotion of war, and to make hasty judgments.
3. I would like to point out their (my accusers') inhumane and uncivilized actions in East Asia ever since the Middle Ages.
4. In the shadow of the prosperity of Europe and America, the colored peoples of East Asia and Africa have been sacrificed and forced into a state of semi-colonization. I would point out that the cultural advance of these people has been suppressed in the past and continues to be suppressed in the present by policies designed to keep them in ignorance.
5. I would point out that Japan's proposal at the Versailles Peace Conference on the principle of racial equality was rejected by delegates such as those from Britain and the United States.

6. Of two through five above, which is civilization? Which is international justice? Justice has nothing to do with victor nations and vanquished nations, but must be a moral standard that all the world's peoples can agree to. To seek this and to achieve it - that is true civilization.

7. In order to understand this, all nations must hate war, forsake emotion, reflect upon their pasts, and think calmly.

In his memoirs General [Douglas MacArthur](#) wrote about his decision to try Hideki Tojo as a war criminal.

Probably nothing during my administration of the occupation gave me deeper concern than the obligation to act upon the judgment of the International Military Tribunal of the Far East. I had approved penalties adjudged against enemy field commanders or other military personnel who had permitted or committed atrocities against soldiers or civilians who had fallen under their custody during the war, but the principle of holding criminally responsible the political leaders of the vanquished in war was repugnant to me. I felt that to do so was to violate the most fundamental rules of criminal justice. I believed, and I so recommended, that any criminal responsibility attached to Japanese political leaders for the decision to wage war should be limited to an indictment for the attack on Pearl Harbor, since this act was effected without a prior declaration of war as required by international law and custom. I was then relieved of all responsibility having to do with the actual trial procedures before the International Military Tribunal, which started sitting in Tokyo January 19, 1946. The tribunal was composed of distinguished jurists from the Allied powers nominated by their respective governments. My obligations did not even include the selection of those to be tried. My only duties were to pass on the final judgments of the tribunal and to enforce the sentences.

By the terms of the Potsdam declaration, I was to see that "stern justice shall be meted out to all war criminals." We had no trouble finding the individuals who were accused. Within a few weeks we had imprisoned such diverse characters as "Tokyo Rose" and Prime Minister Tojo. The number of such prisoners ran into the hundreds. We made a distinction between major and minor war criminals. "Tokyo Rose" was considered a minor one. So were the many guards at the various prisoner camps who had mistreated our people. They were tried and appropriate punishment was imposed. There were only twenty-eight major war criminals. These were the people in political offices and other positions who actually were responsible for taking Japan to war. Of these, only twenty-five were brought to trial, the other three dying or going insane before entering the courtroom. All twenty-five of those who stood trial were found guilty, including Prime Minister Tojo.