

# Trump compares Pearl Harbor to strikes on Iran in meeting Japan's leader

By Daphne Psaledakis and Trevor Hunnicutt

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WASHINGTON, March 19 (Reuters) - President Donald Trump drew a parallel on Thursday between U.S. strikes on Iran and Japan's 1941 attack on Pearl Harbor, as he defended the war he launched against Tehran while meeting Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in Washington.

"We wanted surprise. Who knows better about surprise than Japan? Why didn't you tell me about Pearl Harbor?" Trump replied when a journalist asked why he had not told allies about his war plans.

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"You believe in surprise, I think much more so than us."

Takaichi's eyes widened and she shifted in her chair as Trump, seated beside her in the Oval Office, evoked the moment that drew the U.S. into World War Two.

The Japanese attack on the U.S. naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941, killed 2,390 Americans. The U.S. declared war on Japan the next day, with President Franklin D. Roosevelt calling it "a date which will live in infamy."



U.S. President Donald Trump meets with Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi in the Oval Office at the White House in Washington, D.C., U.S., March 19, 2026. REUTERS/Evelyn Hockstein [Purchase Licensing Rights](#)

The U.S. defeated Japan in August 1945, days after U.S. atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki killed hundreds of thousands of civilians.

Trump's remarks received a mixed reaction on the streets of Tokyo on Friday.

Yuta Nakamura, a 33-year-old engineer with a petrochemical company, told Reuters that Takaichi had been put in "a very difficult situation," praising her for doing well by "avoiding upsetting Trump."

"Personally, I took President Trump's remark as just a joke. But because of her position, if she laughed too much, she'd likely face criticism, so I imagine it was quite hard for her to react."

Tokio Washino, a retiree, said: "Given the historical context of Japan having done that, and with Donald bringing it up as an example, it makes me feel a bit uneasy as a Japanese citizen."

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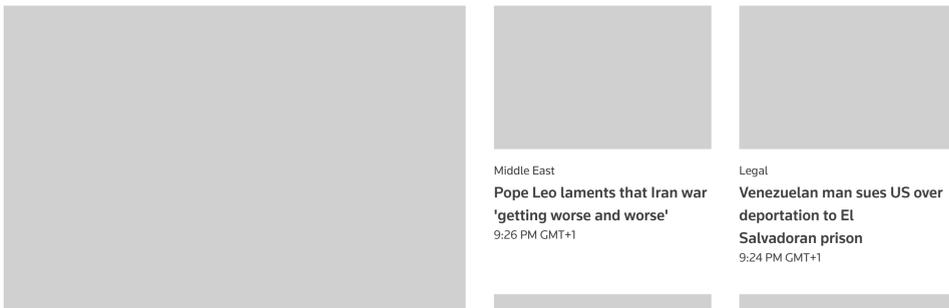
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