# ORDINARY VOICES IN AN EXTRAORDINARY ERA

By Jonathan Fennell, Grant Golub and Jadwiga Biskupska, November 17, 2026
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00:00:37 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** Welcome to A Better Peace, the War Room Podcast. I'm Jadwiga Biskupska, the Harold K. Johnson Visiting Professor of Military History, and I'll be your host today. It's a pleasure to have all of you with us. I'd like to introduce one colleague and one guest in order to launch a short series of reflections on War Room commemorating the 85th anniversary of Pearl Harbor on the 7th of December 1941. So first I'll introduce my colleague here at the U.S. Army War College. Grant Golub is Assistant Professor of American History in the Department of National Security and Strategy here at the U.S. Army War College. He received his PhD in International History at the London School of Economics and his undergraduate degree from Princeton University. He is the author of the book *Warriors in Washington: Henry Stimson, the U.S. Army, and the Politics of American Power in World War II* from Cambridge University Press in 2025. I'd also like to introduce our special guest today, Professor Jonathan Fennell. Jonathan is professor of the history of war and society at King's College London. He completed his doctorate in modern history at the University of Oxford. He is co-director of the Sir Michael Howard Centre for the History of War and co-founder and president of the Second World War Research Group, which is where I met him first. Jonathan's 2019 book, *Fighting the People's War: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* from Cambridge University Press in 2016, won the Royal United Services Institute Duke of Wellington Medal for Military History and the 2020 Society for Army History Historical Research Templer Medal for the History of the British Army in 2020. His most recent book is the subject of our conversation today, and it is just freshly out in the United States and called *Collapse: A Global History of the Second World War, 1931-1941.* It was published initially in Britain by Viking in 2026 and has just emerged in the United States. This book, Collapse, is the first of a new three-part series that explores the causes, conduct, and consequences of the greater Second World War. It's great to have you with us today, Jonathan.

**BH**

00:02:49 **Jonathan Fennell:** Thanks for having me.

00:02:52 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** So let's start out with a few questions about this book and we'll trade off here. So you'll be badgered by both of us. And the first question is, why this book? Why now? Why a three-part new history of the Second World War in the 2020s? We're three generations out from the war. What new things do you have to say about the war and what new audiences do you want to reach?

00:03:17 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, well, I have the dream that all historians aspire to. I have a series of new sources which sheds a huge amount of new light, I think, on the war. These sources are censorship and morale reports. So, the ordinary soldier and his loved ones back home are exchanging letters the whole time. These letters are read by the authorities for obvious disciplinary reasons to make sure that no secrets are given away. But they're also used to get a sense of attitude, sentiment, mentality, morale. And then these incredible rich sources for plotting experience, and I have them for everybody. I have them for the Soviets. I had them previously for *Fighting the People's War* for the British and Commonwealth armies. I have U.S. censorship reports which are absolutely remarkable. And I reckon the reports used in Collapse are based on a contemporaneous reading of 200 million letters sent during the Second World War. And I don't think, well certainly there's any history of the Second World War that can claim to explore sentiment, mentality, attitude with that kind of depth. And frankly, I'm not sure there's any book on any war that has been able to do something to that depth in terms of attitude. So I'm kind of really excited, and by, you know, centering the experience of ordinary people, I think there's a new story that emerges and that's the core driver.

00:04:44 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** So who is the audience you're looking for here? We're thinking about when I began my research, when you began your research, the last survivors of the Holocaust, the last veterans of the Second World War were still alive. They're the generation of my grandparents here in the United States. Who do you want to talk to now and what do you have to say to the new generation?

00:05:06 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, I want to reach the general public that has ideas or maybe even set ideas about the history of the Second World War. And I think at a time when so much of the post-war, inverted commas, kind of settlement seems to be fraying around the edges, I think it's a moment, an important moment to reflect again on why it is we created the world the way it is today. The extent to which the war represented a complete collapse of civilizational norms, of

the way countries interacted, the deep seriousness of it. I think this, in part, what I'm driving towards is to connect again with the public about this war, look at it through a different lens and tell a different story. And perhaps maybe just remind us, it's interesting, the title of the podcast, remind us of how precious peace is. A better peace was the purpose of the war. And let's think again about why it was fought, how it was fought, and what lessons we should take from it.

00:06:16 **Grant Golub:** Yeah, Jonathan, just following up on Jadwiga's question, I specifically wanted to ask what you want the descendants specifically of the victorious allied armies to understand about the war that their ancestors fought. We're thinking, of course, about our students here at the U.S. Army War College, your students at King's, and military practitioners more broadly. But World War II is obviously invoked more than any other conflict to make all sorts of arguments about all sorts of things, but especially related to defense spending, for example, I know in British public discourse. So how should we be thinking about, as the descendants of those victorious Allied armies, how should we be thinking about World War II today?

00:07:05 **Jonathan Fennell:** I think there's a number of kind of core themes that run through the book that I think are really relevant to practitioners today. I mean, there's a huge amount on strategy and what constitutes effective strategy. And it places ordinary experience much more centrally to the story. So it doesn't for any second ignore the role of great leaders and military commanders. But it contextualizes their ability to shape events. It puts, it kind of places ordinary people at the center in terms of the drivers of the cause of the war, the conduct of the war, and ultimately the consequences of the war. And I think it just reminds us today of the power of the people and the agency of ordinary people. So, to start with, I think that's a key aspect of the book that military practitioners today and strategists might be aware of. Concepts of morale and mobilization are absolutely at the heart of this story. And if they're at the heart, then other kind of processes of meaning-making become more significant. I talk about concepts of legitimacy, so how you get individuals to buy into risking their one and only life for a cause, for an objective, and treated with the kind of seriousness that we might typically think about with regards to logistics or military organization. So it shifts, I think, some of the kind of the key drivers to places maybe that we didn't necessarily expect. So much of the story of the war is about material superiority. The allies ultimately won because they built more weapons on a scale that the Axis couldn't get close to. Certainly in the part of the war that I'm concerned with in Collapse, force-to-force ratios are almost always in the allies' favor, and they lose and they lose badly. So engaging with what is happening, the interaction between morale and doctrine and force-to-force ratios I think is really interesting and I think instructive for the modern military. And I guess, last of all, it's useful for us because we're so kind of almost indoctrinated into seeing warfare as kind of a material problem. And that's a big lesson of the war. Japan and Germany started a war in

spite of the fact that they knew that materially they were going to be on the wrong side for almost all of it. And so it was a set of priorities that they placed that we need to kind of reconnect with in terms of the kind of risk appetite and the primacy that they placed on morale. So yeah, I think that's a starting place for the discussion.

00:09:48 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** I'd like to follow up on that by thinking about Britain and the British Empire. You could define yourself in a lot of ways. I define you as a historian of the Second World War, but also a historian of the British Empire, maybe more specifically the British Empire at war. And before this book, the geography of your previous book was a British imperial geography. So can you say something about the geography of this book? Where is the heart of your source base? Where is the heart of your argument after you write this first book? And I know there's two more coming and we can talk about that in a bit. What is the geography of this argument? From 1931 to 1941, where is the war? What are the things you're most interested in?

00:10:33 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, so if let's say the first contribution is to move the center from the great men to collective experience. Another part is to take more seriously a number of the players in this period and specifically to take more seriously China and Italy. And when we do that, yes, the geography of the story changes and also the chronology that kind of changes. If we take China seriously, I think we start this story back in 1931. And if we take Italy's story, well, the decade of fascist wars begins in 1935. So the 1930s become a much more central part of the story. And I'm absolutely drawn into the stunning interconnectedness of everything that is happening in this period. I think we have a tendency to treat the kind of destabilization in China and the destabilization in Europe as regional wars, unconnected, that then collide into a global war on the 7th of December 1941 when the United States come into the conflict. And what I argue in *Collapse* is the kind of globality of the war is present much, much earlier than that. There is an interaction between what is happening in Europe and especially in China with regards to, say, where resources are being sent. Stuff that goes to China by almost definition cannot go to the civil war that's occurring in Spain. And so everything is kind of connected. There's a causality. There's a thread running through every decision. So I think, this is truly a global history. I mean, that is what, thankfully the reviews are recognizing that. And again, then it's, I think it starts to open up different avenues of understanding this war.

00:12:28 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** We write about the past and we research the past, but we're thinking about the present. Maybe you'll modify this a bit, but I would say that there's at least two huge camps of World War II historians. Those who study the war in Europe, the war that Hitler starts, which is where I put myself in that camp, sidelining Mussolini a bit, who I know

comes up more in this book, and then those who study the war in the Asia-Pacific. And since the end of the Cold War, simply more information is available to us about the Asia-Pacific. So we're better able to research that conflict, not simply from the American perspective, from the Anglo-American perspective, but from the perspective on the ground. So in your estimation, as you've been writing this book, how much is the turn to China and the turn to incorporating East Asia into this story? How much is that about the past and how much is that about the present?

00:13:20 **Jonathan Fennell:** I mean, I think so Rana Mitter has written ever so persuasively about this, that there is a big aspect here of the present driving our kind of historical interest. It's always thus, right? We write about the past in light of our current interests. And there's just no avoiding the significance of China in the 21st century, the fact that it is a communist state and the fact that the communist state emerges as a direct consequence of its experience in the Second World War. So the rise of China and the rise of communist China becomes a central part of the story of the Second World War that we're more kind of attuned to now than we were in the past. I think also the way China is telling the story of the war has changed. It desires now, as you know, this is one of Mitter's core arguments. It desires now to be taken very, very seriously on the international stage. And if you think of the Second World War almost as a kind of a foundational myth for our modern world, the fight against fascism broadly defined, right, is what sets it all up. Well, then it's important that China was part of that kind of foundational moment. So I think our interests of the present are driving a different way of thinking about the war. And the literature on China and the Asia-Pacific war now is just stunning. It's in-depth in the way that it was for the war in Europe decades ago. It's really catching up. And it's allowing us to just better understand the interconnectivity. Ideas move between theaters. Material moves between theaters. Priorities shift because of what is happening in one part of the world and what's not happening in another. So I think, we better understand how everything is connected now. That's great.

00:14:59 **Grant Golub:** Yeah, I think what's really interesting about that point, Jonathan, is the way that the United States saw what was happening in the Asia-Pacific, particularly, and the broad-based connections between large parts of American society and the plight of what the Chinese were experiencing at the hands of the Japanese, right? Because there was a lot of religious connections, right? A lot of American elites had been born or raised in China because their parents were Christian missionaries there. And so they felt a lot of connections with what China was going through fighting the Japanese. And there was a lot of mobilization, at least, or attempts at mobilization on the American home front to try and support more China's war against Japan, and you can see that a lot in the domestic political debates around, okay, the United States isn't going to get involved in the war, but we need to aid those who we would consider our allies, right? So it's not only China, but it's also the Republicans in Spain in particular once that war

begins in 1936, and you sort of see, you know, to your point about the interconnections, right, them all sort of drawing those between what's happening in Asia, what's happening in Southern Europe, and then of course what's later happening in Eastern Europe when Hitler decides to invade Poland. So sort of thinking about that point, I wanted to ask how you view the role of the United States in this period, right? Because the first book, Collapse, is thinking about 1931 to 1941, right? The U.S. doesn't officially get involved in the war until the Pearl Harbor attacks. How do you view the United States in this decade, even though it's not actually on the ground fighting?

00:16:45 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, so in one chapter, I set out the kind of material kind of ratios between the two sides. And usually, you know, there's a very clear kind of delineation there. On the Allied side, you put, you know, Great Britain and France, the United States and the Soviet Union. But for much of this period, the Soviet Union is fighting, is really, in many ways, supporting Axis priorities as a consequence of Molotov-Ribbentrop. And I identify the United States as neutral, which I think is a little, you know, a little punchy. But it also tells a certain truth that it's on the outside. It's beginning to ratchet up. It's a support, especially materially, and that is important. But its absence is, I think, deeply challenging given what we know is going on. And I was recently reading the American censorship reports for Tunisia. So when the Americans kind of first contact, if you will, and they're extraordinary documents, this is for volume two, you know, and American soldiers are arriving and there's kind of this, it seems to me, an awakening of, oh my gosh, it really is this bad. You know, people are suffering and actually, my security is not actually at the white picket fence at the edge of my house. It's almost unbelievable. It might well be in Tunisia and it's certainly in Europe. So I think there's this kind of, and scholars have kind of obviously gone into this, right, this kind of awakening of how, in spite of the fact that there's an Atlantic Ocean and a Pacific Ocean, America is connected to these global dynamics and ultimately can't avoid it. And it gets sucked in, right? And that's what leads us to Pearl Harbor.

00:18:32 **Grant Golub:** Yeah, it's interesting because Roosevelt in the speech he makes in December 1933 when he's announcing the Good Neighbor policy, right, he talks about how we need to essentially throw off the yoke of Washington's advice from his farewell address about the United States avoiding entangling alliances and actually need to place the front lines of U.S. security on the Eurasian continent, in Europe, in Asia, and that the security of the United States itself and the American people and the American way of life is interconnected and bound up with the security of the people living in Europe and Asia, right? But he's making that argument during his first year as president, and it's not really resonating with people, right?

00:19:18 **Jonathan Fennell:** Well, it's bleak, isn't it? I mean, you're in the middle of the depression, which is, for the United States, utterly destructive. I mean, this is a country that doesn't really have the amenities to deal with this kind of unemployment. And so at all times, Roosevelt's hands are tied. I mean, to what extent can he really engage internationally in a proactive, aggressive way? He really can't. He has to look in. And that I think is instructive again for the modern practitioner, the extent to which shaping domestic prosperity, shaping domestic attitudes and morale enables engagement with overseas issues. You know, the home front is the core front. I can't say how often, you know, in terms of the fighting story of the war, for ordinary soldiers it's really about letters and mail. And meaning through that lens. So that, I think for America in particular in the 30s, dynamics at home are really limiting their ability to engage in this emerging global conflict.

00:20:27 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** Picking up on that question of alliances, and obviously the Anglo-American alliance becomes the heart of the grand alliance that wins the war. But that's not really a story that emerges fully by 1941. I assume that's in the second two books.

00:20:43 **Jonathan Fennell:** Correct.

00:20:44 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** So what I'd ask you is to comment, especially on this first decade. It looks in the first decade like the alliance that we now call the Axis has much more going for it. And the other thing to double back on the point about geography is as someone who is an American but studies Eastern Europe and the Eastern Front, it strikes me that there are two kinds of belligerents in the war. And I'll run this idea past you. There are those who, like the Americans and the British, have a division between front and home front. And yes, there are real problems on the home front, but they fight a war elsewhere, right? So for the British, obviously that's changed during the Blitz, but there are not, you know, thank God, German ground troops in Britain. And then there are other belligerents that fight a war, at least at some point at home where front and home front collapse. And I study those people. And so the front and home front division strike me as a very pretty privileged division to have. What can you say about the other half of the belligerents, the ones who fight a war at home who don't have this front-home front division? And I'm, of course, particularly thinking about Eastern Europe, but there are many other belligerent states that end up in that category.

00:21:55 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, I mean, I think it's deeply fascinating and I think you're 100% right that the dynamic for the Axis is different. And in many ways, and Daniel Heninger

has written a very interesting book on the Axis. I think it's in German and I think it is about to be translated into English, which I think is good for everybody interested in the subject. And there is this kind of ugly but half-effective kind of coalition of ideas and ideologies and efforts that does work as some sort of a team up until, let's say the end of book one, which is December 1941. And for the Axis and for the belligerence that you're describing, it is a different story because maybe it's just easier to understand the purpose of the war if you are occupied, if you are, if the gap between home and front is much less obvious. I've been kind of thinking on this. To come back to the American letters and censorship reports for Tunisia, the thing that benefits America is distance. So it can build a massive factory in Detroit and get the benefits of scale. But distance plays out in a different way for the American soldier. It means he can't be connected to his loved one back home in the way that a German soldier might receive a letter quite quickly. It seems to me that in Tunisia in 1942 and 43, there's an absolute breakdown in the mail system. And so the American soldier is left almost completely disconnected from home. And so it's then very, much, much harder for the soldier to navigate what is happening, to place a precise meaning. You know, if you're a German soldier and you're getting a letter on a daily basis and the home front's been bombed, it's quite easy to create a meaning and kind of the meaning escalates and develops over the course of the war. So I like your distinction. I think it's instructive. And it's placing experience at the heart of it.

00:24:05 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** And then our last group then, of course, is the Soviet soldier who has both problems, at least after June 1941, right? As he fights a war at home or he or she fights a war at home, but their mail didn't always work all that well. But I don't know if you used Soviet soldiers' letters. You used some.

00:24:23 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, I've got a whole pile of Soviet censorship reports, which are extraordinary sources. So actually, in the last week, I've been reading through the Soviet censorship reports for Stalingrad. For a historian, it's deeply, deeply interesting. And I have them for the Germans and the Italians and the Soviet Union in this period. So it's really rich seeing how it's all interacting. I thought I'd get nothing from the Soviet censorship reports. I thought that censorship would be so intrusive and everybody would be so afraid that we wouldn't see the voice of the Russian or Ukrainian soldier. And the exact opposite is true. So they actually only bring in overweening censorship at the start, I think it's of July 1941 at the heart of the crisis. But the volume of letters is so great and the attempts to censor every letter is so ridiculous that very, very quickly I think Russian soldiers realize the chances of their letter being actually censored is very small. And I've been looking at some of the statistical stuff. I think it's like a 0.5% chance that your letter gets kind of crossed out somewhere. So I mean, you know, I'll take those odds in a moment of heightened everything. I want to get through to my loved one back home. They mostly wrote what they thought. Now, there are reports. Well, it's not funny, I suppose. There are

reports where they're very clearly identifying people by name. They're in the censorship reports. This guy in this unit is saying this. And of course, he's been dealt with. But the war on the Eastern Front is so vast, you know, and I think you know this better than me, so vast that it's possible for huge numbers of people to be treated very poorly and still not be treated that way yourself. And to really think that the really bad stuff is always happening to someone else, because it's just such a huge country and the scale of the conflict is absolutely massive. See, I've been fascinated by the Soviet censorship reports. They're very bleak at times. There's no shortage of criticism of the regime, which I think is interesting. And of course, you see human beings. You see human beings who miss their wives. You see female soldiers who miss their fellows. You see hope for the future. And I think that's a really powerful aspect of the approach also, which is a highly ideological war. It's still human beings trying to make sense of their world in the way that we do today. And that's useful to remember.

00:26:58 **Grant Golub:** Jonathan, I'm sort of curious to hear more about the comparisons between soldiers who are in the same army but fighting different places and comparing those experiences to like a British soldier fighting in East Africa versus fighting in North Africa or a German fighting on the Eastern Front versus one who had fought in France. What can you tell us more about the comparisons between those experiences?

00:27:22 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, I mean, there's amazing jealousies at times. There are different dynamics animating different parts of the war. Of course they are, right? That's how we make a living as historians, trying to understand the immense complexity of something as big as this. So I'll just give you an example of stuff I was just reading before we came on. I was reading some Italian censorship reports for July 1941 and the Italian forces arrive in the Soviet Union and all of a sudden there's a lot more stuff in there about Jewish people and attitudes and antagonisms, which you obviously don't see much in North Africa. There's a greater emphasis on propaganda and trying to inculcate a certain series of thought processes within the soldiers. So you get the sense of a much more ideological war in the East almost from day one compared to what I was seeing in the censorship reports for North Africa. Fascinating reading the German censorship reports for say January, February, March 1942, so at the height of the winter crisis following the failure to take Moscow. And there is this overwhelming desire for leave. It is like a massive tidal wave of frustration and anger. They had been promised that they would sacrifice now and there be something in it for you. And when that doesn't materialize, they're bitter. And who are they really bitter at? Well, they're bitter at the German soldiers, you know, cushy, apparently cushy job in France. You know, they get home regularly, you know, they see it in the letters. And so, yeah, you do see these very interesting comparisons, jealousies play out across experience.

00:29:05 **Grant Golub:** Yeah, based on your research for this book, I'm curious, and based on what you were just saying, if you could talk more about then the experiences between the quote-unquote ordinary individuals that you're really trying to focus this book on, the soldiers who are actually fighting the war compared to the experiences of senior military leaders and the statesmen who are directing those wars and how you sort of find their understanding of the war being either similar or different.

00:29:35 **Jonathan Fennell:** That's really interesting, isn't it? So what I'm picking up so far, and it's kind of fascinating me, and I've still got to work it out a little bit for book two and book three, is, you know, for those at the top end of the war, I think there's a strong ideological driver right from the start. You know, there's a series of objectives that are clear in certain people's heads. For those lower down the chain, that ideological dimension seems to gradually emerge and develop as a consequence of experience. For some, for sure, it's ideology from the start. But what I'm picking up from the censorship reports, and it becomes more obvious as the further I get in, right? So I'm now writing book two, and I can see just an increased use of reference in the German censorship reports to Hitler and fighting for the ideas as everything gets more stressed, ideology is emerging from experience. So I think there's some interesting processes. I'm fascinated by how ordinary people, certainly in the context of book one, are quite separate from the core ideas of the war that we've become all so familiar with. They are absolutely centered on family and what's happening back home and find it very hard to care for, the war is this founding myth of the modern world. They don't see it thus, 31 to 41. It's a massive imposition in their everyday lives. And they'd frankly, of course it is, they frankly prefer to be somewhere else. And so finding a way to make sense of the war for ordinary people, to mobilize them, it becomes, you know, I think it's the core story of book one. And let's face it, the French struggle, the French fail and the state falls to make a clear case. And for the practitioner today, if you think about French doctrine in 1940, it is a doctrine that is shaped by an assessment of ordinary people and their ability. The French do not want to have a standing army in the interwar period. So you don't have a highly trained, highly competent core. And so the idea is you have to fight a war not of movement, but of control, the Battle of Method. And you make up for this via willpower, via the spirit of the republic. And when that fails to materialize, the whole doctrinal edifice falls to pieces. So yeah, connecting public belief, public morale with doctrine, I think is fascinating. And I think it explains an awful lot more about why things played out. So I think book one is really hugely about these emotional dynamics. Book two necessarily will be connected much more to what's happening in Detroit and the transformation of the American economy and, you know, how in the world you build this many weapons so quickly. It's a slightly different story.

00:32:46 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** As we close out here, we've been talking for a while. We could be talking about this all day. Let me sort of zoom out to some big picture things. This is, of course, as we've said, the first volume of a trilogy. It goes 1931 to 1941. I have some questions, I'm sure Grant does as well, about how you're organizing the rest of the war. But I want to push you a little bit on this, because when I think of this war, when I teach it to students, when I teach it to my undergraduates in Texas, I tell them how you define a war is about whose agency you're privileging. And what I tell them is I'm teaching them a course in 15 weeks on the war that Hitler starts and that I follow in my narrative, the strategic offensive. And many other people teach classes a very different way. You could look at 20 syllabi. You could look at how the war is covered here at the U.S. Army War College, and you'd get 20, 30 different versions of this. But you say, and I'm going to quote you to you if you don't mind, Jonathan. This is from, I think, the conclusion to *Collapse*. "The year 1941 did not constitute the beginning of a global war, but the transition to something even more destructive, a transcendent apocalyptic struggle that was global in terms of its reach." So one of the big claims you make in this first book is this war, the Second World War, is singular and global and it begins in 1931. Part of my question is going to be, well, then when does it end? And I'm thinking about that because that's not how I think about the war. I think about it as multiple conflicts in different places that came together, that fused. And then the part I have to explain is, well, when did they fuse and how did they fuse and what's going on? We have other colleagues who conceive of this in the plural as the Second World Wars. But if we conceive of this as historians, as one huge conflict that lasts roughly 20 years. We can do that, right? We can teach that way. But that's an awfully threatening narrative to states and armies today, right? The Russian Federation is not beginning its commemoration of the Second World Wars or their Great Patriotic War from 1931. They're beginning in 1941. For Americans to begin this war in 1931 is interesting but somewhat problematic. For Britons, it might be less so. For the Germans, they are not thinking about this in 1931. So in terms of making an argument that this is one big war that starts in 1931 and it should not be waited until 1939 to start the story, what do state narratives, what do national commemorations do? How do you push back against that? Because this argument serves some actors, some historians, but not others.

00:35:18 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, I mean, I'd start with saying the narrative that you've described, I think, is absolutely the dominant narrative, overwhelmingly so. And it's absolutely fine for America to tell its story of the war from an American perspective. And it's absolutely fine for Britain to tell its story of the war from a British perspective. And from a British perspective, the way it's always been told, it's September 1939. From an American perspective, it's December 1941. That's just fine. Now, as historians, I think, and especially if you want to claim to try and do global history, we have to broaden the net and we have to include the viewpoint of a Chinese agricultural laborer in Henan province and give it the same weight as a sharecropper in the American South. And I think when we start to do that, it justifies a slightly

different chronology and periodization of the war. From a Chinese perspective, it is frankly ridiculous to say that the war starts in December 41. They are in the heart of it. I mean, I think historians would probably comfortably say, you know, July 1937, and there's enough historians that would say now, yeah, okay, well, actually 1931. For the Italian population, they are in the thick of it also from 1935 really onwards. I mean, the realities at home in terms of inflation just kicks off from 1935 on. Everything is defined by war or the interaction between what's possible domestically and what's happening internationally. So I think if we treat everybody's perspective with the dignity it deserves. I think we can talk about a war that is global much, much earlier. And again, I was very struck, often with the Soviet Union in the middle of the globality of events, even as early as the mid-30s. I mean, when we talk about the Cold War, we can talk about the war in Korea, we can talk about the war in Vietnam, but if we treat them as separate things, we misunderstand the whole dynamic, don't we? And I think there's a bit of that playing out with the 1930s too. If we treat Spain, Ethiopia and China as separate, half connect, I think we actually misunderstand each one. China only survives because of foreign intervention. You know, as brave as the Chinese people were, without the resources that are coming from the United Kingdom, from Germany, from Italy, from the Soviet Union, it goes down. And I think the dynamics that are happening in Spain are hugely shaped again by the extent to which resources are coming in and out. And again, those resources can't go everywhere. They go to one place or the other. So belligerents and leaders are making decisions with an eye on the globality of the problem. After 1931, Britain starts to rethink its posture. It starts to rearm effectively, at least internally in terms of thinking about creating the committees that are going to prepare the country for another war. So I think there's a solid argument to make. At the same time, I think it's absolutely fine to make the other perspective too, to look at it from our own perspective. What I'm encouraging is to look at it, to really step back from our national story and try and see a global perspective.

00:38:46 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** I think I'm going to claim here the last question. If we talked about space, we can also talk about time. And you have some work cut out for you with the next two books. We've also been talking in the Second World War Research Group about the 100-year anniversaries, the centenaries of the war. So my question for you is, are you going to have volumes two and three out by, is it 2039 you're aiming for or maybe 2031? So what does the rest of the project look like for you as you're still writing the second two books in this series?

00:39:16 **Jonathan Fennell:** Yeah, thanks. So I have about a year and a half, two years to produce book two and then something similar for the following volume. It's a lot. It's highly ambitious. I've done all the research, really. I mean, there's bits and pieces I'm trying to pick up, but I have the core sources that are going to drive books two and three and I needless to say have some idea where it's going. And it's really exciting actually because actually, my source base is

better for book two than it was for book one. And I think book one was pretty rich in terms of primary sources. So I have hope.

00:39:56 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** Hope is not a strategy, but I think it's a great book writing plan.

00:40:03 **Jonathan Fennell:** Listen, it is the historian's dream to find a series of sources like this. Okay, I've got to be careful. Italian historians have looked at the censorship reports for Italy. German historians have looked, you know, but to look at them all together I think is unique. And when you have an opportunity like that, I think you just got to go all in and see where it takes you. So I've got, yeah, three or four hard years ahead of me, but hopefully it'll be worth it.

00:40:33 **Jadwiga Biskupska:** I hope so too. And I think now we have on this podcast revealed the secret dreams of historians to a larger audience of military practitioners. I hope they don't exploit it when they realize what we've been up to all this time, which is just finding untouched sources that we can spend a very great deal of time with. And all of us are nodding here vigorously. Gentlemen, thanks so much for discussing this today. This is, as I mentioned at the outset, the first in a series of discussions inspired by the upcoming 85th anniversary of Pearl Harbor, which, as Jonathan would say, is certainly not the beginning of the global Second World War, but it is still without question an important turning point in that global conflict and certainly an important point for Americans to think back on and American allies to think back on. So thank you so much, Grant, for joining me today and Jonathan for joining me today. It was great speaking with you both. And thanks to all of you, to our audience for listening in. Please send us your comments and suggestions for this and future episodes. Please also subscribe to A Better Piece on your podcatcher of choice and most importantly, tell a friend about the program so that we can continue to grow this community for conversations like this one. This conversation is over, but we look forward to welcoming you again. Until next time from the War Room, I'm Jadwiga Biskupska.

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And that concludes our program. Thank you for listening. The views expressed on this podcast reflect those of the speakers and do not necessarily reflect the views, policies, or positions of the U.S. Army or the Department of War. Let us know what you think. Provide us your feedback,

comments, or suggestions through our webpage at warroom.armywarcollege.edu. And have a great day.