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Geography of The Pacific War

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Social Science

SOME WAR AND POST WAR PROBLEMS

GEOGRAPHY OF THE PACIFIC WAR

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ABSTRACT

Three major routes to Japan lead across the major ocean, still ironically termed "Pacific." The shortest San Francisco-Yokohama route, some 4,500 miles, skirts the foggy northern margin; it exceeds by well over 1,000 miles the New York-London route arching northward in the Atlantic. Distance, low visibility, slow fouling of vessels, and automatic cleaning of hulls when warships enter the glacier-derived waters of our northern inlets all favor this route for eventual attack upon Japan.

A second route, 1,000 miles longer than the first, passes Honolulu and Midway Island. A third, and yet longer route, extends southwest from Honolulu, thence west by way of New Guinea and northern Australia. The short northern route takes travelers well north of the latitude of Duluth; the second lies partly south of Tropic of Cancer; and the third leads its users well south of the equator.

The Pacific comprises about half the earth's salt water area; it measures approximately twice Atlantic size. No earlier war involved such a tremendous battlefield or necessitated such grand scale planning.

Acquisition of Alaska, happily flanking much of the northern route to Japan, did not please all statesmen of the time. We value Alaska now for the minerals, furs, and other commodities currently produced, but more as a site for advanced bases: Anchorage, Fairbanks, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor. The 1,500 mile overland, inland route from end-of-steel near Ft. St. John may help us hold Alaska and supply U.S.S.R. even should sea control be strongly disputed or lost.

Just beyond Alaska lie insular and peninsular portions of Siberia coveted by us as taking-off places from which to bomb Japan. We hope Siberia, with its recently expanded population and recently tripled area of cultivated land, can defend her territory if attacked. Oil, aluminum, and manganese might give Asiatic Russia some difficulty; not likely iron, copper, lead, gold, zinc, and coal. Kuznetz Basin, some 2,000 miles from German and Japanese frontiers, contributes half of Siberia's 40,000,000 tons of coal; the only Siberian mines under immediate threat, mines producing about one-third Kuznetz tonnage, lie in Vladivostok area. These mines form a partial invitation to Japanese conquest, but U.S.S.R. likely would not attack Japan with her railway north of Lake Baikal unfinished.

With Japanese increasing conquest our trade dwindles: soybeans from Manchuria and tung oil, dried eggs, and coarse carpet wool from China proper. Even tungsten shipments disappeared with closure of the Burma Road. From the Philippines we no longer absorb agricultural surpluses of tobacco, sugar, abaca (manila hemp), and coconut products, the latter two of which have important war uses. We also lost a source of manganese and of chromite; copper and iron represent lesser losses but Japan made four significant gains.

In cutting us off from the hot humid lands producing some 98% of all our rubber imports Japan dealt us a body blow; by the end of 1944 probably three-fourths of civilian owned pneumatic-tired vehicles will lie dormant. Synthetic rubber, in which we stand a poorer third to Germany than she does a second to Russia, holds little promise for civilians till 1945. We are not quite so nearly severed from sources of tin but Bolivia can supply but a minor part of our ordinary consumption.

Perhaps we may deny ourselves pepper with little inconvenience; nearly all commercial pepper is derived from Netherlands Indies. Loss of oil resources of the same islands weakens but does not stagger United Nations; demolition likely prevented much of positive gain to the Japanese. Tankers and reserve oil from other sources must supply United Nations forces in Australia.

Most plantation supplies of quinine and of kapok, both largely Japanese, can no longer be drawn upon by non-Axis peoples. Cashew nuts, jute, and tea can not so readily come from India. The war must work great hardship on thousands of Japanese farmers for well over ninety per cent of our recent silk imports originated there.

The relatively insignificant number of Japanese in our Pacific border states equal but a tiny fraction of one of the major cities closely spread over southern Hondo, main Japanese island. Condensation of major war industries here makes for efficient bombing whenever United Nations choose to attack. Island plants should be devastated before time elapses for Japan to construct new plants on the mainland.

Nine fast bomber hours from San Francisco, stands our Pacific outpost acquired in 1883. The deep, spacious, intricate inlet indenting the coast of Oahu ten miles, we since term Pearl Harbor. An enemy in force passes at great risk east of Hawaii to approach our coast Panama to Alaska. Guam and Wake, within striking distance of Japanese communications and power lines, were early, but we hope temporary, losses.

Despite great area and great distances we shall come again to command the Pacific. Eventually, we can cut supply lines to outposts recently taken by Japan; having retaken the outposts, we can, in turn, bring our enemy to terms and again have our share of the desirable goods of the Orient — properly shared, we trust, with our

onetime enemies. Paraphrasing the remark of a famous Englishman, —having met disaster like men, may we meet success like gentlemen.

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FOUNDATIONS OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN JAPAN AND THE UNITED NATIONS

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In an address before the American Historical Association in 1940, Dr. Hu Shih, Chinese Ambassador to the United States, advanced the hypothesis that Japan had adopted the externals of western material civilization, while maintaining unchanged the essential core of her ancient culture. Japanese thought and behavior patterns still follow the established traditions, and the Japanese in the privacy of his home is a totally different person from the Japanese business man in his office or shop, for example. Westernization, then, has penetrated to no real depth the life of the Japanese nation.

Dr. Hu's observation suggests an interesting approach to the problem of the basic conflict between Japan and the United Nations which burst into open warfare with the attack on Pearl Harbor December 7, 1941. The question which it raises is whether Japan on the one hand and the United Nations on the other had yet reached the point where they sufficiently understood the psychological functionings, the thought processes, and the motivating ideas of each other. It will be the thesis of this brief paper that the present conflict is a result, in part at least, of this divergence in cultures; and also of two other basic issues—the matter of race superiority and inferiority, and the clash of vital national policies.

The intangible divergence in mental processes is well illustrated by the following quotation from the *Japan times weekly* for October 12, 1939:

At the outbreak of the China affair, Japan tried to present her case before the world in a simple and straight-forward manner. Yet, some of the Powers not only refused to listen, denouncing whatever Japan stated as "propaganda" in its sinister aspects and shoving it aside, but obligingly went to the extent of hurling slanderous remarks and insulting comments. Japan remained stoically silent in the face of this calumny, certain in belief that those Powers would realize their own folly sooner or later.

Such protestations of injured self-righteousness are utterly incomprehensible to the western mind. This and other Japanese statements seem so completely at variance with the logic of the facts that the western reader is amused at Japanese duplicity and naivete. One writer, however, answers that to the Japanese this is not pre-