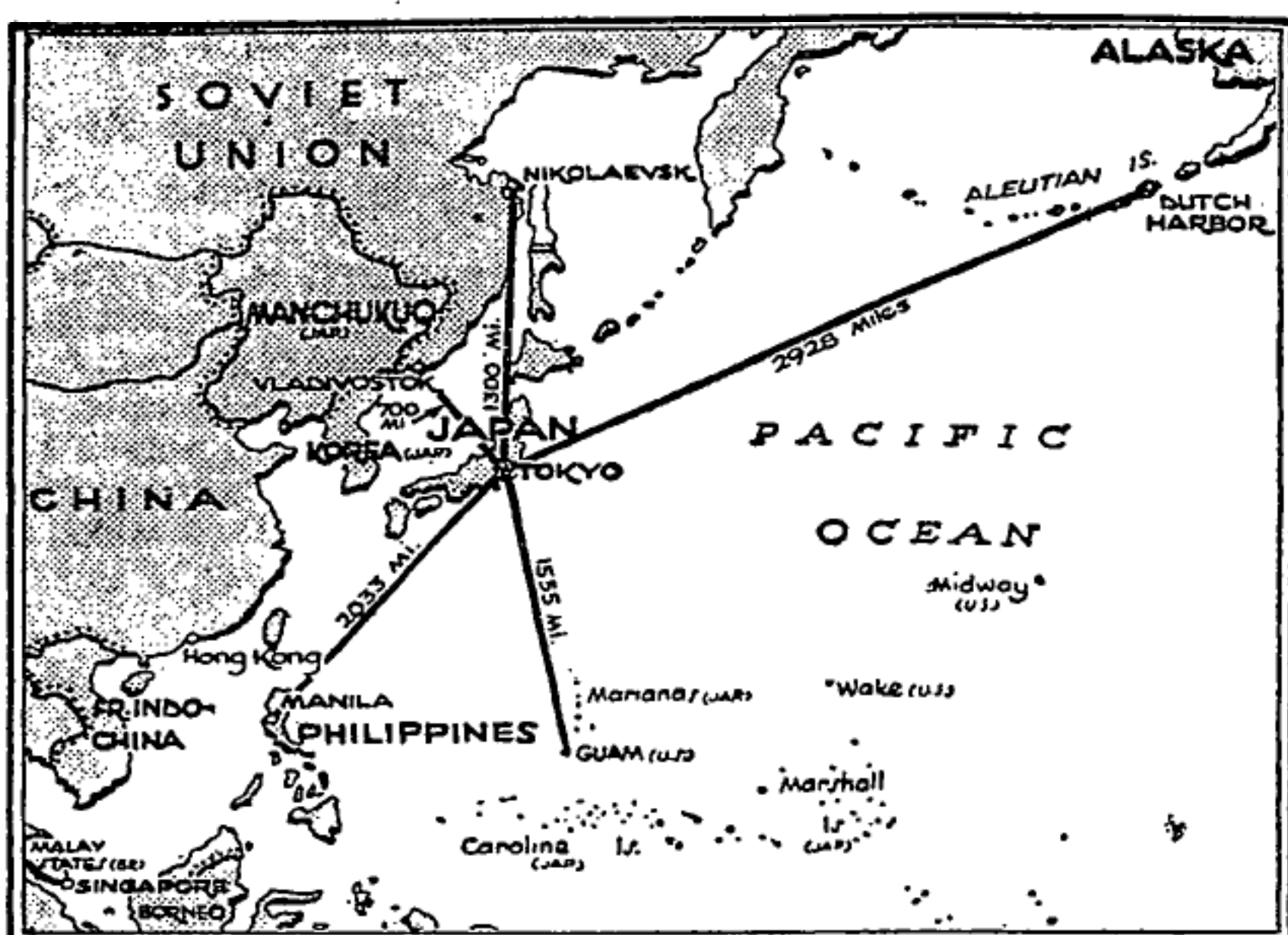


JAPAN'S RELATIVE POSITION IN THE PACIFIC



Airline distances between some key Pacific points.

Philippines as a Fortress

New Air Power Gives Islands Offensive Strength, Changing Strategy in Pacific

By ARTHUR KROCK

Special to THE NEW YORK TIMES.

WASHINGTON, Nov. 18—The long-accepted thesis that, in event of war in the Far Pacific, the United States could not defend the Philippines and therefore would not try has been demolished by recent developments of war-making and foreign policy.

Whether this fundamental change in the military strength of the United States is as much news to Japan as it will be generally, is uncertain. The President and Secretary of State Cordell Hull may already have conveyed it to the special Japanese plenipotentiary, Saburo Kurusu, with the further information—also a new fact—that our ability to “defend” the Philippines includes ability to attack any Far Eastern power that strikes at the islands.

But if the conversations in Washington have thus far been only “exploratory,” as Mr. Hull describes them, the Japanese envoy may not yet have been acquainted with the impressive new set of circumstances.

The changed condition, reversing all our military plans for war strategy in the Far Pacific should war arise there, is the consequence of two developments that were not anticipated when the axiom was laid down that we could not defend the archipelago and must retire to Hawaii in event of Far Eastern war. One is the naval alliance with Great Britain, joining for all practical purposes the fleets of the two nations in the Pacific. The other is the coming of age of aircraft in battle.

Former View of Situation

The agreed principle was formerly that the Philippines could not be defended and that Japan could not be effectively attacked by the American Navy unless her fleet had previously been engaged and defeated in a Pacific area no more favorable to Japan—from the viewpoint of supplies—than to the United States. Some military experts foresaw nothing but a stalemate otherwise, with Japan's vital imports cut off by the American fleet and the Japanese fleet obstructing our own import line.

A strong concentration in the Philippines of heavy American bombers, held superior in most re-

spects to the Japanese, and the full cooperation of the British Navy with that of the United States, has completely changed the forecast. And there are two other lesser factors responsible for the change—prepared air positions in Alaska, making possible a pincer attack by air on Japan, and the extension of the lease-lend program to the Soviet, which opens up terminal and service points in Siberia for American fighting planes that have flown from Manila.

These developments, the result of intensive efforts by the War Department that were carried out secretly, have put the United States in a very strong position in the Far Pacific. An attacking fleet against the Philippines would be the target of a large and powerful group of some of the best fighting planes in the world, with a range extending well beyond the coasts of the archipelago. These planes would be supported by Navy units essential to defensive warfare.

If the American commanders decided to “defend” by attacking, there are enough bombing planes, and of sufficient strength, to drop bombs on Japan, land in Siberia, refuel, and rebomb and repeat the enterprise on a return trip to Manila.

Would Free U. S. Fleet

This new establishment in the islands would release the United States Fleet in the Pacific for heavy operations in conjunction with the British Fleet. That would create a naval force outnumbering the Japanese and capable of making an attack of its own.

Before Mr. Kurusu leaves Washington he may have been officially acquainted with these new circumstances of war-making in the Far Pacific area, for official transmission to his government, which is considering the grave question of peace or war. But whether he learns it officially or in some such way as reading this dispatch, the surprising information will probably have an important effect on the progress of the American-Japanese peace discussions.

There are supporting details, equally reassuring to the United States, which remain locked among the secrets of the War and Navy Departments.