

North Wind Averted: Operation *Barbarossa* and the Pearl Harbor Attack

James D. Perry

Institute for the Study of Strategy and Politics

In November 1941, the Japanese Foreign Ministry informed their embassy in Washington that if war was imminent, it would broadcast a code in the middle of the daily Japanese news broadcast. The code indicated the country with which Japan expected to break diplomatic relations:

- “East Wind, Rain”: relations with America in danger
 - “West Wind, Clear”: relations with Britain in danger
 - “North Wind, Cloudy”: relations with Russia in danger
- American policy sought to prevent Japan from attacking Russia. Thus, the title of this paper is “North Wind Averted”.

After Germany launched her invasion of the USSR – Operation *Barbarossa* – in June 1941, Washington feared that Japan would invade Siberia to support her German ally. To avert this, Washington diverted Japan's attention southwards with an oil embargo and reinforcement of the Philippines. In late November, Moscow seemed about to fall. Washington, fearing a Japanese move against Siberia, decided to force Japan to move south immediately. To achieve this goal, on November 26, 1941, Secretary of State Cordell Hull delivered the “Ten Point Note” to Japanese Ambassador Kichisaburō Nomura. The Ten Point Note contained demands that were clearly unacceptable to Japan. As a result, the Japanese proceeded with their plans to attack Pearl Harbor and seize the resources of Southeast Asia.

Most accounts of the road to war in 1941 focus so narrowly on events in the Pacific that they fail to perceive the impact of Operation *Barbarossa* on Washington's thinking and dismiss any concerns about a Japanese attack on the Soviets. For example, Gordon Prange, and Roberta Wohlstetter conclude that although Washington had evidence that Japan would attack the USSR, this "false" evidence should have been ignored, because the "real" evidence indicated a southern advance and an attack on Pearl. In Wohlstetter's terminology, the true "signals" warning of an attack on Pearl were obscured by the false "noise" warning of an attack on Siberia:

"Signals announcing the Pearl Harbor attack were always accompanied by competing or contradictory signals... useless for anticipating this particular disaster... a large group of competing signals was announcing Japanese preparations to move north and attack Siberia... [This] was a favorite hypothesis in Washington, and was held right up to the week of the Pearl Harbor attack by the President and many of his advisers."¹

Similarly, Prange asserts that Washington was "looking in the wrong direction," anticipating attacks in Southeast Asia and on Siberia, but not on Pearl Harbor. He dismisses the evidence of a move north, claiming that the Japanese Navy wanted above all to secure the raw materials of the south, and would never have allowed the Japanese Army to attack Russia.² Prange fails to comprehend that had America taken no distracting initiatives, or had the USSR collapsed, Japan might well have moved north in September and then secured the southern resources afterwards.

¹ Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 3, 101.

² Gordon W. Prange, *Pearl Harbor: The Verdict of History* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1986), 125-126.

In December 1941, Edwin T. Layton was an intelligence officer on the staff of the commander of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Husband E. Kimmel. In his postwar book, Layton contended that a Japanese attack on Siberia was the “fixation” of his nemesis, Admiral Richmond Kelly Turner, then the head of the Navy’s War Plans Division. Layton argued that Turner neglected to provide Honolulu with the intelligence needed to avert Pearl Harbor, and then covered up this dereliction. Layton, who was not privy to all the information available in Washington, stated that Turner’s fixation was “based on no good evidence” but elaborated no further.³

The retrospectively “false” indications of a Japanese move north in the summer and autumn of 1941 coincided with three great crises on the Eastern Front: the July Battle for the Frontiers, the October Battle of Bryansk-Vyazma, and the November-December Battle for Moscow. From June onwards, German officials and the Japanese Ambassador to Germany called for Japan to attack Siberia. These telegrams were intercepted by American codebreakers, and fundamentally influenced the decisions in Washington.

By July 1, Germany had smashed through Soviet frontier armies, and advanced halfway to Moscow and Leningrad. Army Group North reached the city of Pskov, inflicting 90,000 casualties on the Soviets and destroying 1,000 tanks. Army Group Center destroyed 417,729 Soviet troops, 4,799 tanks, and 1,177 aircraft in the Bialystok-Minsk pocket. Army Group South faced the strongest Soviet forces. In the Dubno-Lutsk-Brody area the Soviets and Germans fought a larger tank battle than they did in 1943 at the Battle of Kursk. Still, Army Group South inflicted 231,207 casualties on the Soviet Southwestern Front

³ Edwin T. Layton, *And I Was There* (New York: William Morrow, 1985), 123-124.

and destroyed 4,381 tanks.⁴ The German high command brashly believed the war was already won.⁵

On June 28, German Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop informed the Japanese that Germany would soon crush Soviet resistance, and urged them to take “speedy military action against Soviet Russia.” An attack on the Soviet Far East would help Japan solve her China problem and would deter the Americans from entering the war.⁶ Ribbentrop made another call for Japanese intervention on July 1. He claimed that Soviet resistance would be broken “perhaps in only a few weeks” and urged them “to seize Vladivostok as soon as possible” and to establish a direct connection between Germany and Japan.⁷

Japan was well-informed about events on the Eastern Front through her ambassador in Berlin, General Hiroshi Ōshima, who had a cordial relationship with Ribbentrop and Hitler. Ōshima sent frequent detailed reports to Tokyo analyzing German progress in the USSR and the destruction inflicted on the Red Army. Ōshima repeatedly urged Tokyo to attack the USSR.⁸

The American government was privy to the diplomatic exchanges between Germany and Japan because US Army cryptographers had broken the Japanese diplomatic code. German requests for Japanese intervention against the USSR, and Ōshima’s reports on the war, were decrypted in the summer and autumn of 1941.

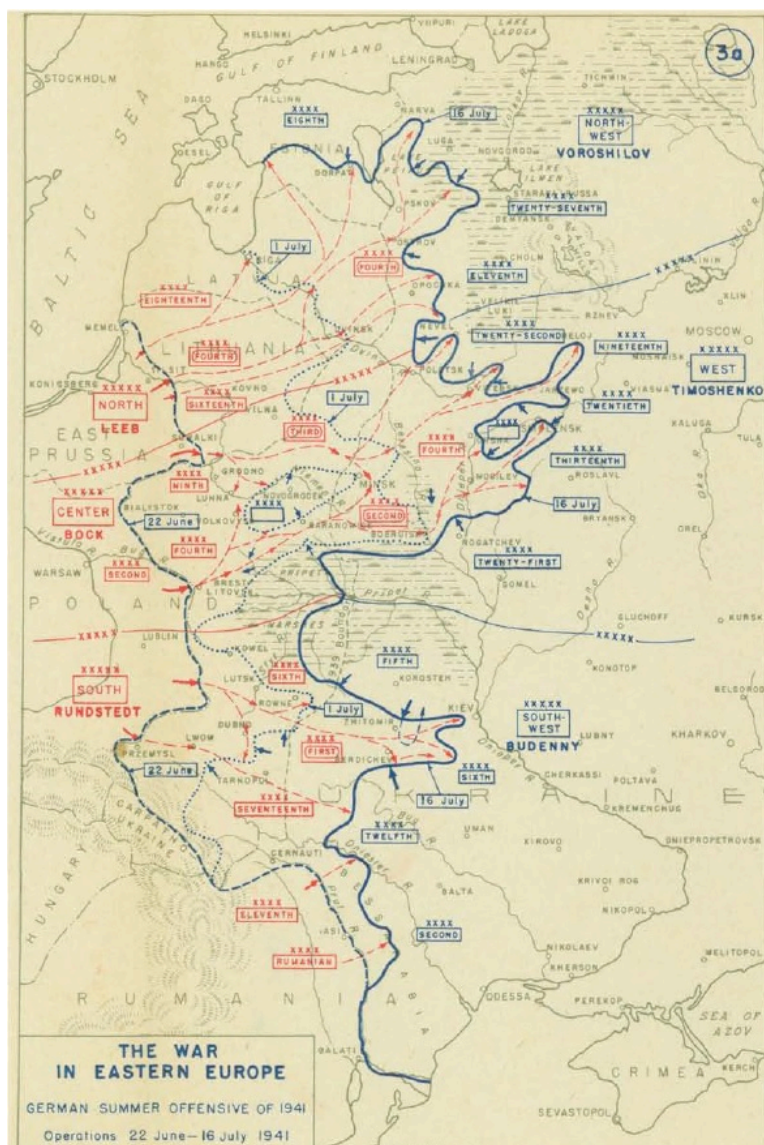
⁴ Gregory Liedtke, *Enduring the Whirlwind* (Solihull, UK: Helion Books, 2016), 118, 127, 146.

⁵ David Stahel, *Operation Barbarossa and Germany’s Defeat in the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 196-197, 201.

⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, Volume XIII (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1954), 40-41

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

⁸ Carl Boyd, *Hitler’s Japanese Confidant* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1993), 27-28.



Source: Department of Military Art and Engineering, United States Military Academy, *War in Eastern Europe, June 1941 to May 1945* (West Point, NY: United States Military Academy, 1952).

The Army Chief of Staff, General George Marshall, as well as President Roosevelt and Secretary of State Hull, had access to this intelligence, which created the strong perception of a Japanese threat to Russia and of the possibility of a Soviet collapse.⁹

The Japanese cabinet debated how to react to the German attack on the USSR. Foreign Minister Yōsuke Matsuoka, who had negotiated the Japanese-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact of April 1941, agitated for a Japanese attack on Siberia. Other cabinet members noted that Japan was not ready for war with the Soviets. They wanted to move south, to seize the resources of Southeast Asia and establish a defense perimeter, before moving north against the Soviets. However, the cabinet decided to reinforce Manchuria. This would allow Japan to attack the USSR if a favorable opportunity emerged, while not compromising preparations for a move south. On July 2, Japan informed Germany of the results of their deliberations:

"Japan is preparing for all possible eventualities regarding the Soviets in order to join forces with Germany in actively combatting the communist menace. Japan is keenly watching developments of conditions in Eastern Siberia in particular, determined as she is to destroy the Communist system established there."¹⁰

The message also noted that Japan had decided to occupy southern French Indochina in order to restrain and pressure Britain and the United States. (Japan had occupied northern French Indochina in September 1940 in order to stop China from receiving arms and supplies through the port of Haiphong.)

American intelligence observed this Japanese debate. Roosevelt described it as a "real dragdown and knockout fight..."

⁹ Ibid., 28-30.

¹⁰ Department of Defense, *The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume II Appendix (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1977), 372-373.

to decide which way they are going to jump – attack Russia, attack the South Seas (thus throwing their lot definitely with Germany), or whether they will sit on the fence and be more friendly with us.”¹¹

In July, Japan mobilized and rushed troops from China to Manchuria. Japan had to decide by mid-August whether or not to attack Siberia in early September so that operations could conclude in mid-October before winter set in.¹² These preparations were duly noted in Washington; American diplomats in Manchuria reported the arrival of large numbers of Japanese troops.¹³

Japanese war plans involved defeating Soviet forces in the Maritime Province, then redeploying to Western Manchuria and severing the Trans-Siberian Railway. The Kwantung Army needed strong air support to break through Soviet fortifications and to eliminate Soviet heavy bombers that threatened Japan. But, the Kwantung Army only had 600 aircraft in June 1941 to deal with 2,800 Soviet aircraft in Siberia.¹⁴ War with the Soviets thus required the participation of the Japanese Navy, which had 1,000 carrier-based aircraft and several hundred land-based bombers.¹⁵ Japanese Vice Admiral Kondo, the naval chief of staff, explained the critical importance of naval aviation for an attack on Siberia to the German Ambassador on July 17:

“Unfortunately it was impossible for Japan to go into action immediately in view of the lack of preparations and the strength of the Russian adversary. It was hardly practicable to withdraw large forces from China. For the Navy it was primarily a question of committing sufficient naval air forces against about 2,000 remaining

¹¹ Waldo Heinrichs, *Threshold of War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 122.

¹² Alvin Coox, *Nomonhan* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 1038.

¹³ Heinrichs, 123.

¹⁴ Coox, 89-91, 1036.

¹⁵ *Naval Operations Against Soviet Russia*, Department of the Army Monograph, 1950.

combat and pursuit planes of the Russian Far East Army. The naval air force, which is the backbone of the Japanese Air Force and also takes a decisive part in land operations, was partly tied down in China. Other units had to stand by for defense against possible actions by the Americans in East Asia.”¹⁶

American policy from June 1941 through June 1942 sought to ensure that Japanese naval aviation remained engaged against American forces and thus was not available to attack the USSR.

Washington regarded Japanese occupation of French Indochina as a possible precursor to an attack on Russia. In addition to providing a springboard for an attack on Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, French Indochina provided a way to deter the British from helping the Soviets if Japan attacked them.¹⁷

In July, Army Group Center again drove east. Panzer spearheads linked up east of Smolensk, less than 200 miles from Moscow, on July 27. They encircled another large Soviet force, inflicting 759,974 casualties by the time the pocket was reduced.¹⁸ In the north, the Germans penetrated the Luga defense line, 75 miles from Leningrad, but halted due to Soviet counterattacks and the need to bring infantry forward and secure the flanks. Stubborn Soviet resistance in Ukraine continued to hinder the progress of Army Group South. The German supply system was hard-pressed to sustain distant forces over the poor Soviet road network.

American government officials believed the German offensive had stalled.¹⁹ The question was how best to support Russia and check the Axis until the onset of bad weather. Roosevelt dispatched Harry Hopkins to Moscow to ask Stalin

¹⁶ *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, 159.

¹⁷ Prange, 124.

¹⁸ Liedtke, 137.

¹⁹ Heinrichs, 136-139.

what he needed. To discourage Japan from attacking the USSR in the critical period before the Siberian winter, Roosevelt imposed an oil embargo on Japan on July 26. Naval Intelligence studies in 1941 indicated that Japan imported 90% of its oil, mostly from the United States, and would exhaust her stockpiles within six months to a year if imports were frozen.²⁰ Roosevelt had long understood that an oil embargo would force Japan to seize the oil fields of the Dutch East Indies. In October 1940, he instructed Hull “not to shut off oil from Japan... and thereby force her into a military expedition against the Dutch East Indies.”²¹ On July 19, 1941, Roosevelt received a study written by Admiral Turner and approved by the Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Stark. The study argued that an embargo should not be imposed, because:

"An embargo would probably result in a fairly early attack by Japan on Malaya and the Netherlands East Indies, and possibly would involve the US in early war in the Pacific. If war in the Pacific is to be accepted by the US, actions leading up to it should, if practicable, be postponed until Japan is engaged in a war in Siberia."²²

Turner's perspective was a narrowly American one—diverting Japan into Siberia would buy time to improve American defenses in the Philippines. Roosevelt took a broader, long-term view—diverting Japan south with the oil embargo was better than allowing Japan to join the German attack on Russia.

On July 31, Harry Hopkins met Stalin. He reported to Roosevelt that Stalin intended to hold the Germans on the Leningrad-Smolensk-Kiev-Odessa line until October 1, when bad

²⁰ Edward Miller, *Bankrupting the Enemy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2007), 164, 221.

²¹ Robert Dallek, *Franklin D. Roosevelt and American Foreign Policy, 1932-1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 242-243.

²² Wohlstetter, 119.

weather would halt offensive operations.²³ Japan had to be kept in check with an oil embargo at least until then.

As Washington expected the embargo to force Japan to turn south, it was necessary to increase military strength in the region. Roosevelt recalled General Douglas MacArthur to active duty, and placed US Army forces in the Philippines and the Philippine Army under his command. The Philippine Army would mobilize its reserves over the course of 1941, increasing its strength by 75,000 men. Unfortunately they were poorly trained and equipped when war broke out. US Army ground reinforcements that reached the islands before Pearl Harbor were not large – light tanks, artillery, and 8,563 men – although a million tons of equipment approved for the Philippines had not arrived due to shipping shortages.²⁴

More importantly, the Army Air Forces proposed to station hundreds of B-17 bombers and P-40 fighters in the islands. This proposal was approved in August and B-17s began arriving in September via a 10,000-mile over-water flight.²⁵ Secretary of War Stimson believed that their arrival “completely changed the strategy of the Pacific and lets American power get back into the [Philippine] Islands in a way which it has not been able to do for twenty years.” General Marshall thought that the B-17s “would have a profound strategic effect and it might be the decisive element in deterring Japan from undertaking a Pacific War.”²⁶

In August, Roosevelt sailed to Placentia Bay in Newfoundland to meet Churchill. Anglo-American relations with Japan were a key topic of discussion. The British wanted a joint British, American, and Dutch warning to Japan not to make any

²³ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1941*, Volume I (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1958), 811.

²⁴ Louis Morton, *The Fall of the Philippines* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1952), 48-50.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 37-38.

²⁶ William H. Bartsch, *December 8, 1941* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2003), 97-98.

“further encroachment” in the Southwestern Pacific.²⁷ Roosevelt agreed to issue a strong warning to Japan (though not in parallel with the British), but on returning to Washington, did not do so.²⁸ Instead, he gave the Japanese a meaningless, unthreatening message that America would safeguard its rights and its citizens.²⁹ This had no deterrent value. It also failed to refer to Britain, undercutting the impression, which Churchill wanted to convey, that America and Britain were acting in concert. Some argue that Roosevelt toned down the warning because he wished to play for time. However, he more likely watered down the warning because a strong Anglo-American warning might have deterred a Japanese move south. This would have left Japan with the option to move north, which Roosevelt did not want her to do.

The British also desperately wanted an American pledge of aid, and preferably a promise to declare war, if the Japanese attacked Britain’s vulnerable Far Eastern empire. After the conference, many critics claimed that Roosevelt had made a secret deal to defend the British—“a de facto Anglo-American alliance against Japan” that would “commit our forces to war even if it was British rather than our territory that the Japanese struck first.”³⁰ Roosevelt made no such secret commitment. Even so, in late 1941 the Japanese believed that a de facto American and British agreement actually existed, and the two powers would take joint military action against Japan if necessary.³¹

In the aftermath of the conference, the British decided to strengthen their fleet in the Far East; two battleships and an aircraft carrier were all they could spare.³² This nominally

²⁷ Robert Sherwood, *Roosevelt and Hopkins* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1948), 354.

²⁸ Heinrichs, 155.

²⁹ Sherwood, 356-357.

³⁰ Layton, 134. See also Sherwood, 355.

³¹ Joint Committee on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack, *Hearings*, Part 12 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1946), 206, 227. (Hereafter *Hearings*.)

³² The carrier never arrived—fortunately, because the Japanese would have sunk it, too.

supported Roosevelt's strategy of creating a threat in Japan's rear to divert them from an attack on Russia. Unfortunately, this naval force, along with the weak ground and air garrison in Malaya, were incapable of deterring or defeating Japan. The British realized this, but Singapore was a third priority after the defense of Britain itself and Egypt.

Some observers have criticized the recklessness of American policy in late 1941:

"The belief that a scratch force of American bombers and a few British warships could be transformed by diplomatic bluff into a 'big stick' that would force the Japanese to halt their southward advance was a gamble foredoomed to failure. By embarking on a deterrent policy before the military forces were installed in the Philippines to make it credible, *Britain and the United States succeeded in making a preemptive strike an attractive option to the Japanese.*"³³

This was obvious at the time. When the future Air Force commander in the Philippines, General Lewis Brereton, was briefed on the plan to deploy bombers to the islands, he objected that fighter cover and an air warning service should be deployed first. Otherwise, the bomber force could be "the decisive factor to incite an aggressive enemy to attack." However, his objections were overruled.³⁴

What this view fails to appreciate is that drawing Japan south was *exactly the idea*. Otherwise, Japan might have attacked the USSR. Roosevelt believed it was more important to keep Russia in the war than to delay war with Japan until strong defenses were in place in the Southwest Pacific. From a global perspective, it would be far more difficult to defeat Germany if

³³ Layton, 133 (emphasis added).

³⁴ Bartsch, 144.

Russia collapsed. On the other hand, any losses to Japan could eventually be recouped. Moreover, those losses would primarily be inflicted on European colonial empires that Roosevelt believed should be dismantled after the war. As 1941 progressed, the danger to Russia meant that Washington could not stall for time in the Pacific until the Philippines had been fully strengthened. Japan had to be incited to move south, regardless of allied military weakness.

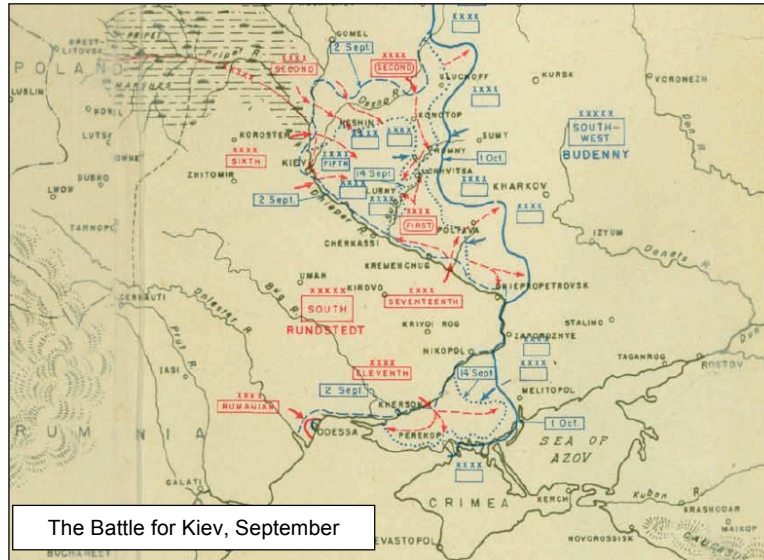
In Russia, the Wehrmacht halted until late August. Then, Army Group Center turned south, thrusting behind the Dnepr line and annihilating the defenders of Kiev. Battles in the Ukraine between July and September inflicted over 700,000 casualties on the Soviets and eliminated the threat to Army Group Center's flanks.³⁵ Army Group South then pushed into the industrially vital Donets region. In the north, the German advance isolated Leningrad on September 8; the city remained under siege until January 1944.

The drive on Moscow resumed October 2. On October 7, Stalin sued for peace through a Bulgarian intermediary, offering Germany the Baltic States, Byelorussia, Moldavia, and Ukraine. Hitler rejected the overture.³⁶ By October 16, over 700,000 (and perhaps as many as one million) Soviet troops and 2,785 tanks had been encircled and destroyed in the double encirclement battle of Bryansk-Vyazma.³⁷

³⁵ Liedtke, 148.

³⁶ Dan Reiter, *How Wars End* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 116-120.

³⁷ Liedtke, 143.



The Battle for Kiev, September



The Battle of Bryansk-Vyazma, October

Source: *War in Eastern Europe, June 1941 to May 1945.*

This brought the Germans within 100 miles of Moscow, whose residents began evacuating in panic. Ōshima sent several messages to Tokyo in October arguing that Moscow was about to fall, perhaps causing Russia to collapse, and Japan should intervene when it did:

“Japan should, at this time, speedily reinstate the true aims of the Tripartite Pact. In that light, she should establish a definite course with regard to the war in Europe, so as to bring about the materialization of the East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. We should forget all else in the interest of attaining this goal. As one means, we should, as I suggested in my message #1229, make use of the confusion at the time of the fall of Moscow to eliminate the threat to us in the north.”³⁸

The time for a “good weather” Japanese attack on Siberia had passed, and Japan had already decided to move south. However, the possibility remained of a limited attack to seize Vladivostok and the Maritime Province. Washington believed that Japan would move north if Moscow fell or if the Kwantung Army in Manchuria obtained a 3:1 numerical superiority over the Siberian garrison.³⁹ The Soviets transferred 12 divisions and 1,000 tanks from Siberia to the west in late 1941. They raised new divisions in the Far East to replace them. Numerically, the Kwantung Army and the Soviet Siberian garrison were roughly equal at the end of 1941. Japanese intelligence did not believe, at any point in 1941, that the Soviets were fatally weak.⁴⁰

³⁸ *The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume III Appendix, 440. See also 436-437.

³⁹ Wohlstetter, 123, 155-156, 164. Heinrichs, 190-191.

⁴⁰ Coox, 1052, 1055.

This Japanese conclusion was not apparent to outside observers. On October 21, the Chinese government reported to the American military attaché that “the Japanese will begin an offensive in Eastern Siberia within two weeks.”⁴¹ American naval intelligence concluded that “due to the recent weakening of Russian forces the Japanese have the position and strength to attack Siberia.”⁴² Wohlstetter notes, “the plausible hypothesis of a Siberian campaign occupied the center of naval attention” in October.⁴³ Similarly, US Army intelligence estimated that “the Maritime Provinces and Vladivostok unquestionably could be captured by the Japs.”⁴⁴ Roosevelt wrote to Churchill, “the Jap situation is definitely worse and I think they are headed north.”⁴⁵

Ominously, General Tojo, who was known for his “wholly pro-German” attitude and violent loathing of the USSR, became Prime Minister the day after Moscow began evacuating. Many news reports interpreted his rise as a prelude to a Japanese attack on Siberia.⁴⁶ Although there was ample evidence that Japan would attack south, “the conjunction of the German threat to Moscow with the fall of the Konoe cabinet gave greater prominence in American official minds to the northern vector than the southern.”⁴⁷ For example, US Army intelligence concluded:

“The resignation of the Japanese cabinet has created a grave situation. If a new cabinet is formed it will probably be strongly nationalistic and anti-American... hostilities between Japan and Russia are a strong possibility. Since the US and Britain are held responsible by Japan for

⁴¹ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Diplomatic Papers 1941, The Far East* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1956), 544.

⁴² *Hearings*, Part 15, 1844.

⁴³ Wohlstetter, 162.

⁴⁴ *Hearings*, Part 16, 2140.

⁴⁵ Warren F. Kimball, ed., *Churchill & Roosevelt: Their Complete Correspondence*, Volume I (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 250.

⁴⁶ Wohlstetter, 158, 165. See also *FRUS 1941, The Far East*, 541.

⁴⁷ Heinrichs, 192.

her present desperate situation, there is also a possibility that Japan may attack these two powers.”⁴⁸

General Short, the Army commander in Hawaii, interpreted this estimate to mean war between Japan and Russia was the most likely future development, and war between Japan and America was less likely. He was instructed to take “due precautions” and tightened up his measures against sabotage.

Roosevelt decided to fix Japanese attention on the south by increasing American power in the Philippines. He ordered aircraft—particularly heavy bomber—deployments to the islands accelerated, as well as additional ground combat units and a submarine squadron.⁴⁹ American force levels in the Philippines were carefully monitored by the Japanese consulate in Manila, and these reinforcements were noticed.⁵⁰

The War Department studied the employment of bombers in the Western Pacific and concluded in early October that B-17 and B-24 bombers based in the Philippines, Singapore, Rabaul, and Australia could control large areas of the Western Pacific and interdict any Japanese invasion of the Philippines.⁵¹ Chief of the Army Air Forces General “Hap” Arnold believed that the B-17 could reach southern Kyushu from bases on northern Luzon, and the B-24 could strike Osaka and Tokyo.⁵² In reality, bombing Japan from the Philippines was not feasible at all with B-17s. Without landing rights in Siberia, B-24s could only reach Kyushu from the Philippines.⁵³

⁴⁸ Wohlstetter, 132.

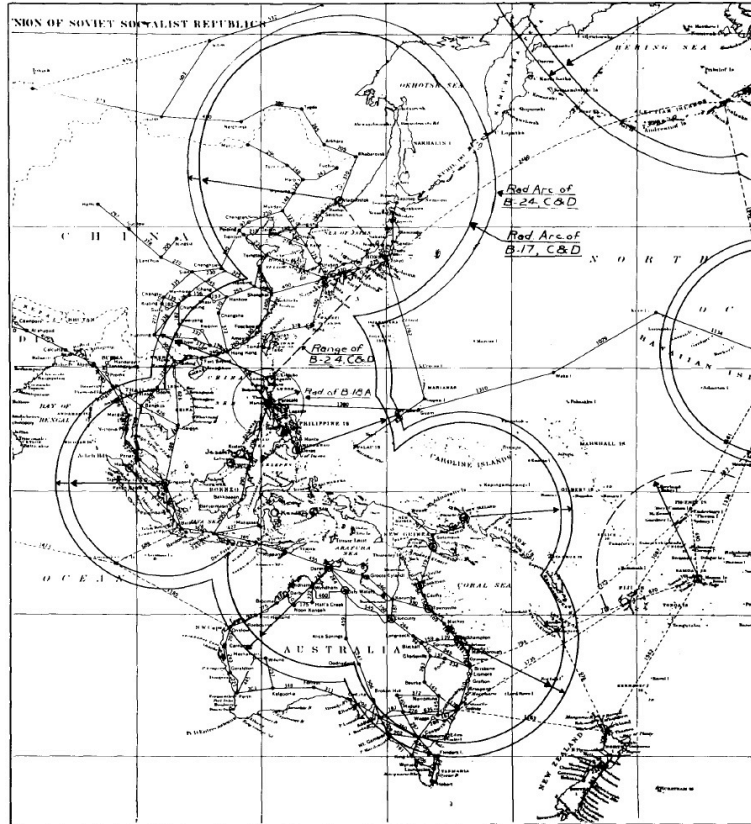
⁴⁹ Heinrichs, 194.

⁵⁰ For example, *The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume IV Appendix, 157, 167-169.

⁵¹ Subsequent war experience showed that high-altitude bombers had very little ability to hit moving ships at sea.

⁵² Bartsch, 102; Michael S. Sherry, *The Rise of American Air Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1987), 109.

⁵³ Aparri to Nagasaki is a 2,200-mile round trip; to Osaka, a 2,800-mile round trip; and to Tokyo, a 3,250-mile round trip. The longest wartime B-17 mission was from Britain to Trondheim, a 1,900 mile round trip. The longest wartime B-24 mission was a 2,500-mile round trip attack on Balikpapan with a reduced bomb



Map prepared for Stimson in October 1941. The map assumed ranges of 1,000 miles for the B-17, which was excessive, and 1,200 miles for the B-24, which was roughly correct. The vulnerability of Japan to attack from Vladivostok is quite evident.⁵⁴

War experience showed that prewar aircraft statistics were exaggerated; the practical combat radius of the B-17 was 600 to 700 miles with a full bomb load.⁵⁵ In late 1941, however,

load. The 1943 Ploesti raid was a 2,400-mile round trip. Aparri to Tokyo to Vladivostok is 2,300 miles, feasible for the B-24 but not the B-17. From Aparri without landing rights in Siberia, the B-24 could reach all of Kyushu but not Honshu. See Bartsch, 463n10, 467n10.

⁵⁴ George C. Kelly, "The influence of the B-17 on U.S. strategic planning in 1941," *Theses and Dissertations*, 1760 (Lehigh University, 1975), 47.

⁵⁵ Wesley Frank Craven and James Lea Cate, eds., *The Army Air Forces in World War II*, Volume VI (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), 205-206.

the administration acted as if bombing Japan with the B-17 was possible. In a letter to Roosevelt on October 21, Stimson advocated using bombers in the Philippines and Siberia to put Japan in a pincer:

"A strategic opportunity of the utmost importance has suddenly arisen in the southwestern Pacific. Our whole strategic possibilities of the past twenty years have been revolutionized... From being impotent to influence events in that area, we suddenly find ourselves vested with the possibility of great effective power. [The bomber force in the Philippines] bids fair to stop Japan's march to the south and secure the safety of Singapore, with all the revolutionary consequences of such action.

Simultaneously with this southwestern Pacific opportunity, another such chance is opening in the northwestern Pacific... [In Siberia there is] the opportunity for another use of these bombers supplementary to the one I have just described in the south. That locality can possibly form the base of a northern pincer movement of American influence and power, this time not only to protect against aggression of Japan *but to preserve the defensive power of Russia in Europe*. Its operation would fit into and supplement the operation from the south by permitting a circular sweep of these bombers which would greatly increase their safety by permitting those in the south, after passing over Japan and stopping at Vladivostok, to proceed to safety in the north...

The power of such a completed north and south operation could hardly be over-estimated. The control over the Western Pacific which it would

open could hardly fail to have immense powers of warning to Japan as well as of assurance to Russia.”⁵⁶

General Marshall had a similar broad vision of bombers in the Philippines assisting the Soviets:

“The conception is that if we can build up quickly, considering the fact that these planes can operate from Fort [sic] Darwin and Australia, from New Britain; from Singapore and the Dutch East Indies; *possibly even Vladivostok*, we can cover that whole area of possible Japanese operations... it practically backs the Japanese off and would certainly stop them on the Malaysian thing. *It probably would make them feel they didn't dare take the Siberian thing* and I think it has a better than 50% chance of forcing them practically to drop the Axis.”⁵⁷

One problem with this concept was that from 1941 to 1945, Russia adamantly refused to permit American aircraft to base in Siberia, as this would surely provoke a Japanese attack. Secondly, despite accelerated reinforcements, a meaningful bomber threat from the Philippines could not be posed until mid-December. Philippine defenses would not be truly ready until February 1942.⁵⁸ In October, Stimson asked Hull, who was negotiating with the Japanese, to downplay the existence of the bombers in the Philippines and stall the outbreak of war for a few months.⁵⁹ Such diplomatic subterfuge was pointless. The Japanese were tracking the arrival of the B-17s and were already alert to the prospect of American bombers in Siberia. In September, Ambassador Nomura asked Japanese consulates

⁵⁶ *Hearings*, Part 20, 4442-4444 (emphasis added).

⁵⁷ Heinrichs, 196 (emphasis added).

⁵⁸ Even then, the idea that a few hundred aircraft with weak and vulnerable basing and logistical support could have such a dramatic effect is dubious at best.

⁵⁹ Bartsch, 103-104; Sherry, 107.

on the West Coast to determine whether “the United States is preparing now for the eventuality when a considerable bombing force will have to be transferred to the Siberian area.”⁶⁰ On October 23, Japanese newspapers accused the US of seeking Siberian bases for use against Japan, and there was a practice blackout in Tokyo.⁶¹

On November 15, General Marshall discussed the shuttle-bombing plan with selected reporters. He explained that America was increasing her strength in the Philippines in order to wage “offensive war against Japan” using B-17 Flying Fortresses.

“If war with the Japanese does come, we’ll fight mercilessly. Flying Fortresses will be dispatched immediately to set the paper cities of Japan on fire. There won’t be any hesitation about bombing civilians—it will be all-out. Arrangements are being made to provide landing fields for Flying Fortresses in Vladivostok, and it’s likely that landing fields can be provided with safety in China. The B-17 Flying Fortresses cannot make the round trip to Japan from the Philippines—not quite. But they can fly over the Philippines to Vladivostok. And the new B-24s, which will be dispatched to the Philippines as soon as they start coming off the line, can make the round trip.”

Marshall indicated that information about bombers in the Philippines would eventually be leaked to Japan in order to deter Japan from going to war. Until then, however, secrecy was vital. Premature public release would cause “Army fanatics in Japan... to demand war immediately, before we were better fortified.” Marshall emphasized that the “danger period” was “the first ten

⁶⁰ *The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume III Appendix, 169.

⁶¹ Wohlstetter, 165.

days of December,” and “if we get by that, we’re OK until February.”⁶²

Secrecy was not preserved. An article in *US News* on October 31 showed Tokyo, the “city of rice-paper and wood houses,” being bombed from the Philippines, Guam, Vladivostok, China, and Alaska.⁶³ The November 19 *New York Times* article, “Philippines as a Fortress; New Air Power Gives Islands Offensive Strength, Changing Strategy in Pacific” was clearly based on Marshall’s briefing. The article noted the threat of a “pincer attack” between the Philippines and Siberia. It also stated that after Japanese negotiators learned of this plan, it would “probably have an important effect on the progress of the American-Japanese peace discussion.”⁶⁴

The article’s author, Arthur Krock, was the Pulitzer Prize-winning head of *The New York Times* Washington Bureau. Krock was one of the most respected journalists in America at the time, and very unlikely to make an unauthorized leak. Most likely, the administration asked him to publish the story in order to highlight the threat from the Philippines even before the “danger period” was past. Most authors argue that the administration was attempting to deter war by intimidating Japan, and consider that the deterrent failed.⁶⁵ Yet the administration clearly knew that revealing the deterrent too soon would only force Japan to destroy it. Therefore, the “leak” was not a deterrent but an effort to incite Japan to move south immediately. The story notified Japan that she could not allow the buildup in the Philippines to proceed unchecked. Any plans to attack Siberia in the winter would thus have to be put on hold.

In November, Washington wanted to force Japan to move south due to unfavorable developments on the Eastern

⁶² Robert Sherrod’s memorandum of the conversation is online at <http://marshallfoundation.org/library/digital-archive/robert-l-sherrod-memorandum-for-david-w-hulburd-jr/>

⁶³ Sherry, illustration between pp. 146 and 147.

⁶⁴ Sherry, 112.

⁶⁵ Sherry, 113. Heinrichs, 197-199.

Front. Army Group South conquered the Donets and all of the Crimea except for Sevastopol. Rostov fell on November 21, threatening the loss of the Caucasus and the Persian Gulf lend-lease route. Army Group North captured Tikhvin on November 8, tightening the siege of Leningrad.

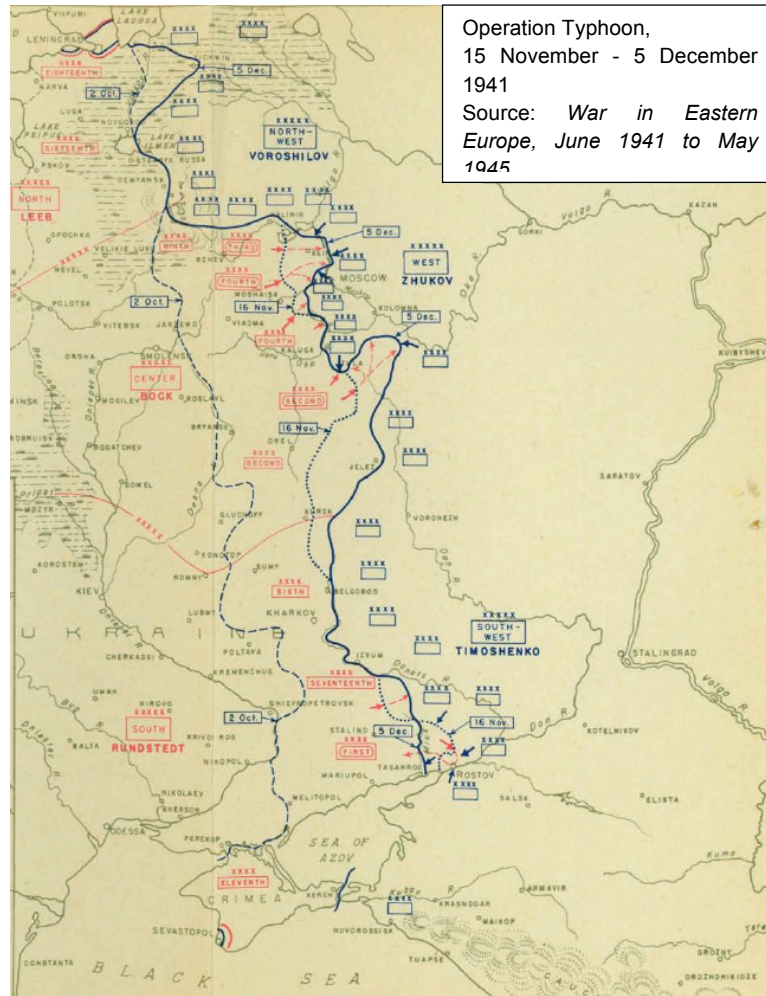
Army Group Center's progress had stalled for a month due to muddy ground and the need to regroup and resupply its forces after the Bryansk-Vyazma battle. On November 15, the ground froze, and the advance resumed. The Germans intended to encircle Moscow from the north and south. The opposing front-line forces were approximately equal:

"Bock's army group resumed its offensive on 15 November with a force estimated by the Soviets at 233,000 men, 1,880 guns, 1,300 tanks, and 600-800 aircraft. By this time, the Western Front's forces... numbered 240,000 men supported by 1,254 guns and mortars, 502 tanks, and 600-700 combat aircraft. Zhukov's defenses were anchored on well-prepared defenses extending from Kalinin in the north to Tula in the south."⁶⁶

Although the numerical odds were even, the Soviet defenders were close to their sources of supply while German logistics struggled to sustain the offensive. Moreover, unknown to the Germans, the Soviets had assembled a powerful reserve, including major forces withdrawn from Siberia, in preparation for a counterattack. Soviet strategy was to bleed the Germans, halt their advance, and then attack the overextended enemy before he could transition to a defensive.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ David M. Glantz, *Before Stalingrad* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing, 2003), 163.

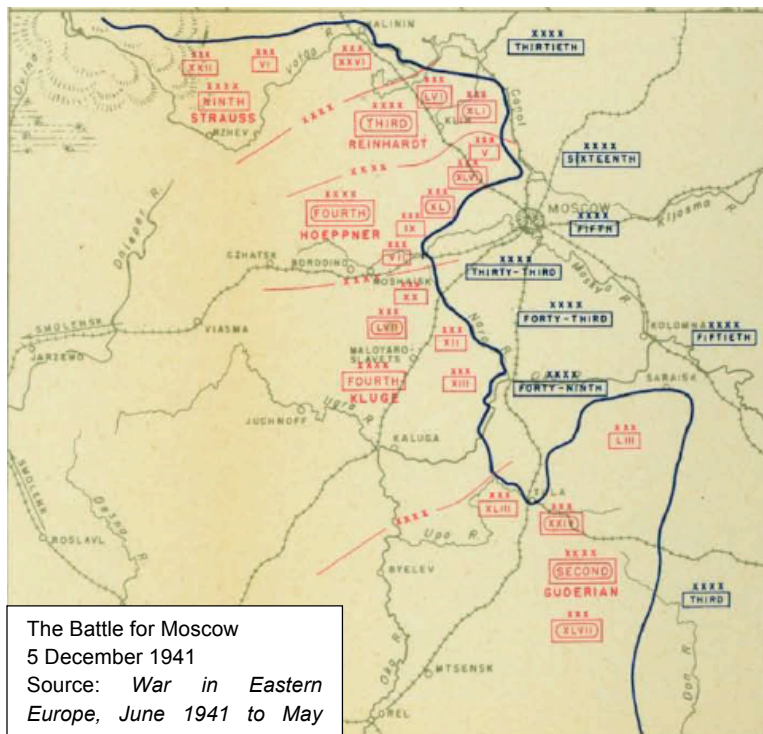
⁶⁷ Earl F. Ziemke and Magna E. Bauer, *Moscow to Stalingrad* (Washington, DC: Army Center of Military History, 1987), 63-64.



Outside observers, unaware of Soviet plans or reserve forces, believed that the Wehrmacht was on the verge of victory in the final week of November. The world press reported that the “overpowering” German attack had reached within 25 miles of Moscow. Roosevelt told Henry Morgenthau on November 26 that Moscow was falling.⁶⁸ Meanwhile, in the Pacific, Japanese

⁶⁸ Heinrichs, 213.

invasion fleets sailed for Southeast Asia, and the Pearl Harbor strike force sortied from the Kuriles.



Such was the global situation when Hull presented Nomura with the "Ten Point Note," thereby abandoning the "Modus Vivendi" and the last prospect for peace. From a purely American perspective, it would have been more sensible to conciliate the Japanese and buy time to complete the Philippine buildup. Indeed, Marshall and Stark advised Roosevelt on November 5 that war "should be avoided while building up defensive forces" at least until March 1942, and they recommended, "no ultimatum be delivered to Japan."⁶⁹ They preferred an agreement with Japan that would "tide the situation over for the next several months."⁷⁰ Even after the Ten Point

⁶⁹ *Hearings*, Part 14, 1061-1062.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 1065.

Note was delivered, they stated that “the most essential thing now, from the United States viewpoint, is to gain time” in order to improve Philippine defenses.⁷¹ Clearly, the President disagreed. His actions showed that from a global perspective, there was a compelling immediate need to force Japan to move south to keep her off Russia’s back.

The Modus Vivendi originated in the period in October when German progress towards Moscow had halted. If the Germans were truly stopped for the winter, then putting off war with Japan for three months in order to strengthen the Philippines further made sense. The Modus Vivendi developed by the State Department envisaged America and Japan pledging not to advance “across any international border in the Pacific area” (this would have protected the USSR as well as Britain, Siam and Holland). Japan would withdraw her forces from southern French Indochina, and strictly limit the number of forces in northern French Indochina. America would remove the embargo on oil exports to Japan, and encourage Britain and Holland to do the same. Finally, America urged Japan to conclude an armistice with China and enter peace negotiations.⁷² Essentially, this would have reset US-Japanese relations to what they were before Japan occupied southern French Indochina and Washington imposed an oil embargo.

If the flow of oil resumed under the Modus Vivendi, then Japan would very likely have deferred her attack. Nonetheless, and despite military recommendations to the contrary, Roosevelt decided to drop the Modus Vivendi. Instead, Hull presented Japan with the Ten Point Note on November 26.⁷³ The Ten Point Note proposed a non-aggression pact between America, Japan, Britain, China, the Netherlands, Siam, and the USSR. Japan would withdraw “all military, naval, air and police forces from China and from Indo-China.” Hull knew that Japan wished to station troops in China “for an indefinite period” and would not

⁷¹ Wohlstetter, 249.

⁷² Wohlstetter, 234-235.

⁷³ Text of the Ten Point Note: Wohlstetter, 236-237.

accept immediate and unconditional withdrawal.⁷⁴ Japan would recognize Chiang Kai Shek as the only legitimate government in China. (In 1940 the Japanese created a pro-Japanese regime in occupied China under Wang Ching Wei. This provision of the note required Japan to abandon Wang, which Japan obviously would not accept.) Point Nine of the note would require Japan to withdraw from the Tripartite Pact she had signed with Germany and Italy in 1940. Hull knew that this was unacceptable to Japan. For example, Japanese Ambassador Saburō Kurusu had told Roosevelt and Hull on November 18 that Japan's "honor as a great power" made it impossible for her to violate the terms of the pact.⁷⁵

In return for the above concessions, Japan and America would negotiate a trade agreement, and America would remove the oil embargo on Japan. As Wohlstetter notes, the Hull Note was "a most extreme and uncompromising statement of American terms."⁷⁶ When Hull delivered the note, Kurusu expressed incredulity at its provisions. He said it would cause his government "to throw up its hands" and asked whether a *modus vivendi* was possible. Hull responded that the Ten Point Note was Washington's final position.⁷⁷

After Pearl Harbor, the administration and its defenders denied that the Hull Note was an ultimatum.⁷⁸ To admit this would concede the administration made war inevitable by backing Japan into a corner as critics argued.⁷⁹ Hull later claimed

⁷⁴ *The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume III, 74, 91.

⁷⁵ *The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume IV, 56.

⁷⁶ Wohlstetter, 237.

⁷⁷ Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States, Japan 1931-1941*, Volume II (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1943), 765-766.

⁷⁸ In Congressional testimony, Hull stated that "Japanese warlords" had "tried to distort and give a false meaning to our memorandum of November 26 by referring to it as an ultimatum. This was in line with a well-known Japanese characteristic of utilizing completely false and flimsy pretexts to delude their people." *Hearings*, Part 2, 437. See also 559, 592.

⁷⁹ For example, see Charles Beard, *President Roosevelt and the Coming of the War 1941* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 246. George Morgenstern, *Pearl Harbor* (New York: Devin Adair, 1947), 102. Charles Callan Tansill, *Back Door To War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1952), viii.

that the Note was merely a basis for continued negotiations.⁸⁰ Yet MAGIC intercepted Tokyo's response on November 28 that "this humiliating proposal" was unacceptable and negotiations were "de facto ruptured."⁸¹ Denials rested on a legalistic interpretation of an ultimatum as a threat of war unless certain demands were met within a certain time.⁸² In this view, Hull presented proposals that he knew were not acceptable, but he did not threaten war or set a time limit, and thus his note was not an ultimatum.⁸³ Prange contends that the Ten Point Note did not represent an ultimatum, simply a sincere expression of American principles.⁸⁴ He does not explain why Hull picked that particular moment to stand on principle, when the need to strengthen the Philippines required a few more months of compromise.

A common argument is that Hull withdrew the *Modus Vivendi* for the Ten Point Note because the Chinese, with British support, opposed the *Modus Vivendi*.⁸⁵ China had fought Japan for four years before Washington imposed an oil embargo on Japan. The idea that China could not have withstood three months relaxation of the embargo is simply untenable. Some also contend that the Ten Point Note did not force Japan to go to war because she had already decided on war and her carrier strike force had sailed.⁸⁶ However, the carrier strike force sailed under orders to return if Japanese-American negotiations succeeded.⁸⁷ Presentation of the Hull Note ensured that the recall order was not given.

In any event, Roosevelt, Stimson, and Hull very clearly understood that Japan would "soon cut loose"—i.e., attack

⁸⁰ Hearings, Part 11, 5371.

⁸¹ *The "Magic" Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume IV, 118.

⁸² Prange, 181.

⁸³ Norman Hill, "Was There an Ultimatum Before Pearl Harbor?" *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 42, No. 2 (Apr. 1948), 355-367.

⁸⁴ Prange, 184.

⁸⁵ Prange, 182, Wohlstetter, 241-242.

⁸⁶ Prange, 191.

⁸⁷ James William Morley, *The Final Confrontation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 351.

south—as a result of the Note.⁸⁸ That was the effect they wanted the Note to achieve, and whether or not it was legally an ultimatum is irrelevant. The only question that remained, as Stimson put it, was “how we should maneuver them into the position of firing the first shot without allowing too much danger to ourselves.” To this end, Roosevelt directed the creation of a “defensive information patrol” in the South China Sea, consisting of American patrol boats stationed in the path of Japanese invasion forces.⁸⁹ The vessels were bait designed to goad the Japanese into attacking an American warship.

On November 29, Ōshima sent Tokyo a memorandum of a conversation with Ribbentrop. Ribbentrop noted that Japanese-American negotiations had broken down, and stated,

“Should Japan become engaged in a war against the United States, Germany, of course, would join the war immediately. There is absolutely no possibility of Germany's entering into a separate peace with the United States under such circumstances. The Führer is determined on that point.”⁹⁰

This repeated a similar point made the previous August, when Ōshima reported that “Hitler had said that if a clash occurs by any chance between Japan and the United States, Germany will at once open war against the United States.”⁹¹ When these telegrams were translated in Washington, they provided the valuable knowledge that war with Japan would precipitate a German declaration of war on America. This was an additional incentive for Roosevelt to keep the oil embargo in place and force Japan to attack.

In the final week of peace, the Japanese fleets had sailed, and Japan seemed to be moving south. However, the

⁸⁸ Wohlstetter, 251, 258.

⁸⁹ Wohlstetter, 240, 262-263.

⁹⁰ *The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume IV appendix, 383.

⁹¹ *The “Magic” Background of Pearl Harbor*, Volume III appendix, 400.

possibility remained that the weakening of the Siberian garrison and the fall of Moscow would provoke a move north. Apparently, FDR feared this even on December 5, which further explains his determination to force Japan's hand. As he said to the Secretary of the Navy, Frank Knox:

Knox: "We have very secret information... that the Japanese fleet is out at sea."

Roosevelt: "We haven't got anything like perfect information as to their apparent destination."

Knox: "Every indication is that they're going south, Mr. President. That's the obvious direction."

Roosevelt: "But it's not absolutely certain that they wouldn't be going north. You haven't yet information that they're not going north."

Knox: "They might be, but it's not likely."

Roosevelt: "They might be going north. There's no evidence that they're not going north."⁹²

Frances Perkins, in her memoirs, reported Roosevelt saying, "They might be going north. That's always a possibility. To cut the Russian supply lines now would hurt the European war. Perhaps they'll entrench themselves further in the northern waters."⁹³

Many analysts of America's road to war in late 1941 fail to appreciate that Roosevelt's central concern was the survival of Russia. Although the American military would have preferred to delay war with Japan until March 1942, when Philippine defenses would have been stronger, or even 1943, when the vast naval shipbuilding program would begin to bear fruit, the

⁹² John Toland, *Infamy* (New York: Doubleday, 1982), 294.

⁹³ Frances Perkins, *The Roosevelt I Knew* (New York: Viking Press, 1946), 378.

need to divert Japan from attacking Siberia in late 1941 was paramount. Unfortunately, America was unprepared for war during the period of maximum danger to Russia, and had to accept the painful consequences. Roosevelt did not need “foreknowledge” of the impending Pearl Harbor attack for this thesis to hold. There is clear evidence that by November 26, he expected and *wanted* the Japanese to move south.

Wohlstetter's failure to appreciate the Pacific implications of the Russo-German war does not entirely invalidate her model of strategic surprise. She dismisses the evidence of a Japanese attack on Siberia as “noise” because the attack never took place, but this reflects too great a degree of hindsight. Japan really was preparing to attack the USSR, and would have done so if conditions were favorable. When the enemy changes his plans, all previously “correct” signals become “incorrect” noise.

The Japanese failure to attack Siberia was one of the crucial strategic blunders of World War II. The failure to concentrate against the only Allied major power that Germany and Japan *could* defeat ensured the defeat of the Axis. Had Japan attacked Russia in 1941, she would have tied down the troops which counterattacked the Germans at Moscow. She would also have cut the Pacific route through which Russia eventually received half of her lend-lease supplies—including the supplies she used to attack Manchuria in 1945. A subsequent drive into the Indian Ocean in 1942 could have linked up with the Germans advancing from Libya and the Caucasus, expelled the British from the Middle East, captured the Middle Eastern oil, and denied the Persian Gulf lend-lease route. Even if the Allies did not sue for peace as a result of these developments, the war would certainly have been prolonged significantly.