

THE FACTOR OF POSITION IN HEMISPHERE DEFENSE

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A study of the geography of western hemisphere defense must, by the very nature of the subject, include the consideration of a multitude of factors. Many statements have been offered regarding our national needs for materials—strategic, critical, and essential—for defense.¹ Other statements deal largely with such topics as naval bases², the merchant marine³, conservation of fuel resources⁴ the Pan-American policy⁵, the extension of the Monroe Doctrine⁶, the foreign policy in relation to the establishment of a favorable exchange of goods⁷, the possibility of invasion⁸, and the Russian-Japanese-American Far Eastern policy⁹. Some, but by no means many, of these publications concern themselves to a degree with the factors of position. None, however, analyze the problem of

United States defense entirely from the positional factor point of view. It is the purpose of this paper to present a discussion on this subject—the factor of position in hemisphere defense.

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Current events of a world-wide scope make this program of hemisphere defense as necessary as any other governmental function. In order to fully realize this critical international situation, we as geographers cannot over-emphasize geographic positions. Napoleon once said, "War is a business of positions," it is a question directly in terms of areas defensible and indirectly in terms of areas to be defended. The question of areas may also be considered directly in terms of items now produced and indirectly in terms of items that could be produced if the source of supply were lost.

The problem of areas and their positional relationships is a reality. Armies and navies do not move around ideas or concepts of ideology. Nor do naval and air bases rest on immaterial concepts of political theory. They exist and move in place. An area, plus other features, has position and time. Position and time constitute a reality. Therefore, a consideration of areas and their positional relationships constitutes a study in geographic reality.

There seems to be virtual agreement that our defense is concerned primarily with the Three Power Pact of Germany, Italy, and Japan with perhaps more than passing consideration to Russia. Defense is largely in terms of possible attack from the position of military, economic, and political aggression. In discussing the positional factor of defense, only attack of a military nature is considered here.

Two points are significant at this juncture. In the first place, in what form will attack come? Obviously the initial form would be by sea or by air. The nature of our defense must, therefore, base itself upon that point. In the second place, what are we as a nation defending? There are several points of view current, but the position taken here is that our first concern is the defense of the United States and her possessions. With these points in mind, let us look to the vital areas that require special attention. These areas are: (1) the Panama Canal and the Central Lowlands of the United States, (2) the eastern seaboard, (3) the St. Lawrence Lowland, (4) Alaska, (5) the Pacific possessions, and (6) the western seaboard.

Unquestionably our first interest to the south is security of the Panama Canal

and the Central Lowlands. With our bases in the Caribbean region, we should be able to prevent the establishment of enemy bases on the Caribbean coast of South America, Central America, and on the islands of the Caribbean. Our second interest in southern defense is the prevention of enemy operating bases on the east coast of South America, particularly the sector south of the Brazilian bulge. It is 3600 miles from our base at Norfolk, Virginia, to Pernambuco at the tip of South America's eastern bulge. It is 3100 miles from Lisbon, the nearest European port, to Pernambuco. Europe is closer than the United States to this eastern coast of South America by approximately 500 miles. The cruising radius of our fleet is 2500 miles. Our bombers can cover 1500 miles. (To these figures the navy adds 10% and the air corps 20% to account for adverse weather conditions.) With our base at Puerto Rico, which will bring our influence 500 miles nearer Pernambuco than Lisbon, our fleet's effective cruising radius will cover the eastern bulge.

Shifting our point of view to Africa we notice that Dakar is 1700 miles from the eastern bulge of Brazil. The Germans have been very active in Dakar, whereas the rest of the French possession has been left relatively alone. Holding Dakar brings Pernambuco within range of active German influence. Rio de Janeiro is 2500 miles from Dakar. The Nazis in Dakar are closer to the whole eastern coast of South America below the bulge than are our bases in the Caribbean. The possibility of the establishment of enemy bases south of the bulge is apparent. Firmly based in this southern area, northward advance could follow.

Our third interest in southern defense focuses on the west coast of South America. Here the United States has a clear advantage, for the east coast of the United States lies vertically above the west coast of South America. This means that the whole of the United States is nearer to the west coast of South America than is Europe. The Panama Canal is 2600 miles from Valparaiso, Chile. (Practically within the 2500 mile cruising radius of our fleet.) The nearest European port is 8000 miles from Valparaiso. The nearest port in South Africa, Capetown, is 4000 miles away. There

are many islands in the Pacific, like Galapagos and Easter Island, that lie but a few hundred miles off the west coast and could be used as enemy bases. The United States, however, has naval and air outposts in the Pacific between these islands and Japanese island outposts.

Let us now consider our eastern seaboard and the St. Lawrence Lowland. Here is the financial, commercial and industrial heart of Canada and the United States. The St. Lawrence Lowland leads into the Great Lakes region, and the Lake Champlain-Hudson River trough. Here is produced 75% of our "heavy" industries — armaments, automobiles, iron, steel, and coal. Here is produced 75% of our wheat, 65% of our corn, 40% of our copper, 74% of our zinc, 46% of our lead, and 100% of our flax. In this heart area are found our largest cities, the center of population, and the focus of railroad transportation and hydro-electric power. To guard this area we depend upon the bases of Iceland, Newfoundland, and the Azores. German military bases in Norway and Africa are only 2000 miles from Newfoundland, 1600 miles from Iceland, and 1500 miles from the Azores. The Azores are situated 2100 miles from New York, Iceland 1300 miles northeast of Newfoundland, and Newfoundland only 1000 miles from New York. The best defense for both Canada and the United States is control of the Atlantic.

The situation in relation to the defense of the western seaboard, at once, demands the discussion of the defense of Alaska and our Pacific possessions. The question also must include Japanese and Russian far eastern military activity.

Our island in Bering Straits, Little Diomedede, is only two miles from Russian owned Big Diomedede. Here the Russians are building air bases. The difficulty of maintaining Big Diomedede is impossible for it is 2500 miles to the nearest point on the Trans-Siberian Railroad and there are no other roads. Alaska is rapidly becoming a powerful military base, both coastal and internal. The real value of Alaska lies in the southern extension—the Aleutian Islands. This string of islands extend from Alaska toward Japan. Dutch Harbor, in the Aleutians, is 2500 miles from Yokohama and Tokyo, the heart of the Japanese Empire, while it is 4300 miles from Yokohama to Seattle. Japan, then, is within the 2500 mile range of our bases—the southernmost tip of the Aleutian Islands, and not the west coasts of continental United States. If we reverse the situation we find the very heart of Japan within striking distance of Uncle Sam.

Japan has also the Pacific possessions to contend with. Chief of these possessions is Hawaii. It is 2000 miles from the Hawaiian Islands to the west coasts of the United States—too far for an air force attack. With the fortification of Galapagos, no fleet could operate between Alaska, the Hawaiian Islands, Galapagos, and the Panama Canal. Japanese fleets are built to operate in Japanese waters with frequent supply bases. The Japanese navy cannot carry fuel enough to attack the west coasts of continental United States.

The factor of position in hemisphere defense is truly a study in geographic reality.