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WESTERN PACIFIC.

OFFICE OF THE HIGH COMMISSIONER  
FOR THE WESTERN PACIFIC,  
SUVA, FIJI,

SECRET.

13th June, 1938.

Sir,

(Serial 151)

I have recently received from the Governor-General of New Zealand a copy of a secret despatch, dated the 20th May, which has been addressed to the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, and for your convenience of reference I attach copies to this despatch. You will doubtless wish to receive at an early date any comments which I may wish to make from the point of view of Fiji and the Western Pacific, and I therefore anticipate such a request.

20. 5. 38.

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2. The extent of the future strategic importance of the Pacific Islands to the British Empire is set forth, in paragraph 1 of Lord Galway's despatch, in the quotation from C.I.D. Paper C.O.S. 586. The despatch then proceeds to envisage the Fijian and Tongan Groups as the key to New Zealand, and to draw the conclusion that it is essential to prevent

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The Right Honourable  
THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE COLONIES.





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an enemy from establishing himself in this area. Fiji, and by inference the Island of Viti Levu, being selected as the best focal point, it is stated that "the provision of landing grounds and other facilities for the operation of air reinforcements, will be an important addition to the existing means of defence." The existing means of defence are, as you are aware, extremely meagre. Suva, the capital and the oil-fuelling station, possesses no anti-aircraft guns and no artillery. It has been presumed that air attack will not assume serious proportions and that the main danger would be a cruiser attempting to land raiding parties to seize or destroy the cable <sup>station</sup> and the wireless station as well as the oil fuel depots. There is no question that suitable landing facilities for aeroplanes on Viti Levu would provide a valuable addition to the defences of Fiji by enabling air reinforcements to arrive from New Zealand. Incidentally I feel that the existence of an aerodrome in Suva or anywhere else as part of a defence scheme should also connote anti-aircraft guns and defences. Nor is it clear to the layman why aeroplanes with their concomitant necessity of aerodromes should be selected for reconnaissance purposes in an area where nature has been lavish  
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in the provision of sheltered waters suitable for the use of seaplanes.

3. The proposal to use Fiji as a focal point, from which might run a series of aerodromes on the Routes A. B. C. D. seems to me to open up wider possibilities. I gather that the aerodromes are to be undefended - indeed they could scarcely be defended in present circumstances - and if that is the case, may they not prove a double-edged weapon? This seems to apply particularly to Route A, which the New Zealand Government proposes to take first. It leads straight from Suva to the Marshall Islands, but it also leads straight from the Marshall Islands to Suva and might facilitate the air attack which, in present circumstances, from ships, is not considered likely to be serious. Whether or not any re-fuelling stores are kept on the route it would remain an inviting and open road. It is possible that the general improvement of coordination of wireless services in the Western Pacific, which is now under consideration, and the local scheme for establishing local wireless links throughout the Gilbert and Ellice Islands may obviate some of the need for air reconnaissance in that direction other than by occasional seaplane visits.

4. I need hardly say that I am wholeheartedly





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heartedly in favour of proceeding, as soon as your advisers consider it desirable, with the provision of landing facilities for aeroplanes in Fiji, both seaplanes and land planes, and the necessary technical and professional advice would doubtless be available from New Zealand and would be welcome.

5. If you decide to approve in principle the proposals made by the New Zealand Government I shall of course render every possible assistance to the officers detailed to make preliminary surveys. It will be realized that on any save the largest islands the clearance of space necessary for an aerodrome would very seriously affect the living resources of these already over-populated atolls, but if the strategic need is conceded such considerations are relatively minor matters which can be dealt with by some of the measures for transfer of population to other islands of the Pacific which I have now under consideration.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your most obedient,

humble servant,

*A. H. Richards*

High Commissioner.