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SECRET.

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COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

Extract from the Minutes of the 331st Meeting, held on July 27, 1938.

(14)—STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

(C.I.D. Paper No. 1455-B.)

(Previous reference: C.I.D. Minutes of the 294th Meeting, Minute 3.)

THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Strategic Importance of the Pacific Islands (C.I.D. Paper No. 1455-B).

LORD CHATFIELD, introducing the Report, said that the Governor-General of New Zealand had referred to His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom a proposal by the New Zealand Government to develop certain air routes in the Pacific. This proposal originated from a Report by the Chiefs of Staff which had been sent to New Zealand as a result of the Imperial Conference of 1937. The New Zealand Government proposed to develop four air routes radiating from Fiji, which lay about 1,000 miles to the north of New Zealand. As a first step, it was proposed to survey the most important of these routes—from Fiji to the Gilbert and Ellice Islands. The New Zealand Government had undertaken to bear the cost of this survey. The Chiefs of Staff were entirely in agreement with this proposal, which was an admirable example of Dominion co-operation in Imperial Defence. In Paragraph 8 of his despatch the Governor-General had also referred to a suggestion that representatives of Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand might meet at some suitable point to discuss Pacific Islands matters. It was not clear whether their intention was to include financial and commercial as well as strategical aspects. If strategical aspects only were to be discussed, the Chiefs of Staff had suggested that the Commodore Commanding the New Zealand Division and the Group Captain attached to the New Zealand Air Force should be authorised to represent His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom. If, however, the discussions were to be on a wider basis, it might be advisable for the Air Officer Commanding, Singapore, and the Commander-in-chief, China, to be represented, rather than that the discussions should be conducted by officers under the New Zealand Government.

MR. MACDONALD suggested that if the proposed conference took place the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific should also be invited to attend.

LORD STANLEY remarked that the proposal for a conference, as put forward by the Governor-General, was at present very tentative. He suggested that the Dominions Office should take up this question with New Zealand.

CONCLUSIONS.

THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE agreed:—

- (a) To approve the Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the proposals put forward by the New Zealand Government for surveying air routes in the Pacific (C.I.D. Paper 1455-B).

- (b) That the Secretary of State for the Dominions in communicating the concurrence of His Majesty's Government with the proposal put forward by the Government of New Zealand, should be invited to include an expression of appreciation of the promptitude with which they have followed up the recommendations contained in C.I.D. Paper No. 1327-B and of their willingness to bear the cost of a survey of Route "A."
- (c) That the Dominions Office should take up with the New Zealand Government the question of a conference between representatives of Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand to discuss Pacific Islands matters.
- (d) With reference to Conclusion (c) above to take note of the views of the Chiefs of Staff as to the Service representatives who should attend the Conference, and of the Secretary of State for the Colonies that the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific should also be associated with it.

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2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,
July 27, 1938.