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SECRET.

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COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

Extract from the Minutes of the 333rd Meeting, held on October 6, 1938.

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(8)—THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

(C.I.D. Paper No. 1463-B.) (7)

(Previous Reference : C.I.D. Minutes of the 331st Meeting, Minute 14.) (10)

(3)
(2) THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a letter from the Colonial Office dated the 23rd July, 1938, enclosing a copy of a despatch dated the 13th June, 1938, from the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific relating to proposals for the development of air routes in the Pacific (C.I.D. Paper No. 1463-B.) (7)

SIR COSMO PARKINSON recalled that the Committee in July last had approved proposals made by the New Zealand Government for the development of four strategic air routes in the Pacific, radiating from Fiji. They had welcomed an offer by the New Zealand Government to begin the development of the first of these routes, from Fiji to the Gilbert Islands, at their own expense. The New Zealand Government were intending to begin the reconnaissance of an aerodrome at Fiji early in October. The High Commissioner for the Western Pacific raised two points in the despatch which was now before the Committee. He asked, first, why land aircraft were to be used in an area where there were numerous sheltered waters suitable for the use of seaplanes. The second point was the necessity for providing anti-aircraft defences at the proposed aerodromes. Would not the development of these routes be a two-edged weapon, in that it might facilitate air action by the Japanese against our own territories? These were questions for the Service Departments to answer.

Recently a further complication had arisen, in that the Air Ministry now wanted to develop the Fiji-Phoenix Islands-Fanning and Christmas Islands route first, and not the Fiji-Gilbert Islands route, as previously agreed. The Colonial Office would have no objection to this proposal of the Air Ministry, but it would have to be arranged with the New Zealand Government.

SIR CYRIL NEWALL said that the scale of attack on Fiji would hardly warrant the provision of anti-aircraft defences.

SIR ROGER BACKHOUSE supported this view, and urged that there were many other places which had far higher claims for anti-aircraft defences than Fiji.

SIR WARREN FISHER thought that it would be absurd to hold up the development of these routes on the argument put forward by the High Commissioner. Other countries would be developing air routes in this area, if we did not do so ourselves.

SIR CYRIL NEWALL said that land aerodromes had been decided on because the aircraft in New Zealand which would be operating on these routes in war were land aircraft. New Zealand had no seaplanes.

SIR KINGSLEY WOOD explained that the Air Ministry wished to start on the Fiji-Phoenix Islands-Fanning and Christmas Islands route first because it was probable that the air route from America would run through the Christmas Islands. There was a danger that the United States would try to stake out a claim on these islands, as they had done in the case of Canton Island. It was therefore important for us to get in first.

SIR EDWARD HARDING said that the change of plan had not yet been put to the New Zealand Government, and it was conceivable that they might not be so ready to bear the cost of the development of this route, but the Dominions Office could approach them immediately and explain the reasons.

CONCLUSIONS.

THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE agreed :—

- (a) That there was no reason to delay the development of the four strategic air routes in the Pacific referred to in paragraph 3 of C.I.D. Paper No. 1455-B on the grounds that additional defences would be necessary for the protection of the aerodromes.
- (b) To take note that the development of these routes for use by land aircraft, as opposed to seaplanes, was necessary because the only aircraft available in New Zealand for operating on these routes in war were land machines.
- (c) That, owing to recent developments, it was now desirable that the development of the Fiji-Phoenix Island-Fanning and Christmas Islands route (Route "B" in C.I.D. Paper No. 1455-B) should have priority over the development of the Fiji-Gilbert Islands route (Route "A").
- (d) To invite the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs to inform the New Zealand Government without delay of Conclusion (c) above and to ask for their co-operation in this matter on the same basis as previously offered for Route "A."

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*Richmond Terrace, S.W. 1,
October 6, 1938.*
