

Sir L. Parkinson
(deputy)
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COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

OVERSEA DEFENCE COMMITTEE.

THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

Note by the Secretary.

At the time of the Imperial Conference in June 1937 the New Zealand Government requested that consideration should be given to the strategic importance of the Pacific Islands. The Chiefs of Staff accordingly examined the problem and prepared a Report (C.I.D. Paper No. 1327-B), in which they came to the following conclusion:-

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"We conclude that we should endeavour to establish our sovereignty over any of the Pacific Islands offering facilities for fuelling bases or landing grounds. It should be our policy to assist, where feasible, the development of those facilities which would be of value in war. We should at the same time take whatever measures are possible to gain information as to Japanese activities in the Islands."

2. This Report was considered by the New Zealand Government, and in a despatch dated 20th May, 1938, they stated their proposals for action to give effect to the conclusion reached by the Chiefs of Staff. They also suggested that the United Kingdom Government might think it desirable that representatives of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand should meet at some suitable place to discuss Pacific Islands matters.

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3. This despatch was considered by the Chiefs of Staff, who stated (C.I.D. Paper No. 1455-B) their agreement with the steps which the New Zealand Government proposed to take and made tentative suggestions on the subject of the United Kingdom Government representation if the conference between the three countries, the exact object of which was not clear to them, were to be held.

10 4. The Committee of Imperial Defence at their 331st Meeting (Minute 14 (c)) invited the Dominions Office to take up with the New Zealand Government the question of a conference between representatives of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand to discuss Pacific Islands matters. The Dominions Office, before making a definite communication on the subject to the New Zealand Government, made enquiries of other Government Departments to ascertain whether those Departments considered that the conference, if held, should be confined to strategic matters, or whether political and other questions should be included.

5. Some divergence of opinion was apparent in the answers to these enquiries, and on 24th November a meeting was held at the Foreign Office to discuss inter alia what reply should be sent to the New Zealand Government to their proposal for a conference. At this meeting it was agreed that it would be desirable to hold such a conference, especially in view of the developments which were taking place at Christmas Island and the Phoenix group. It was further agreed that it would be advisable for political and commercial as well as strategic matters to be discussed at the conference. In order that the requirements of all

interested Departments should be co-ordinated, it was decided to request the Oversea Defence Committee to meet and draw up a draft agenda for the conference, which the Dominions Office could then include in their reply to the New Zealand Government.

6. In order that this matter may receive attention at an early date, members are requested to forward their views for circulation as soon as possible.

(Signed) E.I.C. JACOB.

Secretary,
Oversea Defence Committee.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.,

1st December, 1938.