

FINAL EDITION.

18th April, 1939.

DEFENCE CONFERENCE, 1939.

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the secrecy of this document.

SECRET.

Notes of Proceedings on the First Day of
Meeting of the Defence Conference, held
on 14th April, 1939.

PRESENT:

NEW ZEALAND

Delegates

Rt. Hon. M. J. Savage, P.C.
Hon. P. Fraser
Hon. W. Nash
Hon. F. Jones
Hon. D. G. Sullivan
Major-General J.E. Duigan, C.B., D.S.O.
Commodore H. E. Horan, D.S.O., R.N.
Group-Captain H.W.L. Saunders, M.C., D.F.C., M.M.
C. A. Berendsen, Esq., C.M.G.
B. C. Ashwin, Esq.
L. J. Schmitt, Esq.
Lieut.-Col. W. G. Stevens.

Advisers

Commander A. B. Fanshawe, R.N.
Paymaster-Captain E.L. Tottenham, O.B.E., R.N.
Colonel O. H. Mead, D.S.O.
H. Turner, Esq.
Group-Captain L. M. Isitt, R.N.Z.A.F.
Wing-Commander A. de T. Nevill, R.N.Z.A.F.
T. A. Barrow, Esq.
A. R. F. Mackay, Esq.
J. R. Middleton, Esq.
Squadron-Leader E. A. Gibson (afternoon only)

Secretariat

Lieut.-Commander T. Ellis, R.N.
Captain D. T. Maxwell, N.Z.S.C.
Squadron-Leader E.M.F. Grundy, R.A.F.
F. Shanahan, Esq.
H. G. Nicholls, Esq.

UNITED KINGDOM.Delegates

Sir Harry Batterbee, K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O.
 Sir Harry Luke, K.C.M.G.
 Vice-Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, K.B.E., C.B., R.N.
 Major-General P. J. Mackesy, C.B., D.S.O., M.C.
 Air-Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, K.C.B., D.S.O.

Advisers

Captain W.D. McN. Graham
 Major A. H. Stafford (afternoon only)
 H. H. Vaskess, Esq., O.B.E.
 Lt. F.R.J. Nicholls, R.A.

Secretariat

G. E. Boyd Shannon, Esq.
 N. E. Costar, Esq.

AUSTRALIA.Delegates

Vice-Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin, K.B.E., C.B., R.N.
 Colonel V. A. H. Sturdee, C.B.E., D.S.O.
 Wing-Commander G. Jones, D.F.C., R.A.A.F.

Advisers

Commander J.C.D. Esdaile, R.A.N.

Secretariat

Paymaster Captain J. B. Foley, O.B.E., R.A.N.

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1. His Excellency the Governor-General, having opened the Conference, withdrew.
 2. The Right Hon. the Prime Minister was elected Chairman of the Conference and the Hon. Mr. Fraser as Deputy-Chairman.
 3. A welcoming address was delivered by the Chairman, ~~and~~ was replied to by the heads of the United Kingdom and Australian Delegations.
 4. Approval for certain administrative arrangements having been obtained, the Conference went into Committee to discuss the Agenda on Strategical Problems as set forth in Paper D.C.12 (see annex to this paper)

5. After expressing New Zealand's desire regarding the purposes of the Conference, the Chairman invited Mr. Berendsen to express his views.

6. Mr. Berendsen, in his address, said he wished to confine his remarks to one subject, which appeared absolutely fundamental to a proper consideration of items (a) and (b) on the Agenda - the question of knowing the strength of the reinforcements and the time in which they could be expected to be available in the Pacific.

7. In considering the problems set by (a) and (b) - the main problems of the Conference - the Conference must, in ordinary prudence, assume the worst possible situation, namely, a war with Germany, Italy, and Japan simultaneously; a war in which Japan had joined from the very commencement. They might also assume that an enemy would himself fix the date of the commencement of hostilities, thereby having his forces in position beforehand.

8. He set out certain propositions from which he concluded that the strength and time of arrival of reinforcements in the Pacific was of primary importance in the consideration of Pacific defence schemes.

9. He pointed out that in certain C.I.D. papers a "very considerable delay" had been predicted before the fleet could leave the Atlantic should certain conditions eventuate, and that for a certain time naval forces in the Pacific would be inadequate to match the Japanese. It appeared that this period must be at least seventy days, during which the Japanese would have unquestionable naval control of the Pacific, the only limitation on their actions being their strength and the dictates of caution.

10. Air Marshal Sir Arthur Longmore, in replying, referred to the reasons for the difficulty of definitely forecasting the final number of ships to be allocated and their time of arrival in the Far East. In dealing with the probable time of Japan's entry into the war and subsequent strategy, he remarked on Japan's present preoccupation in China and the necessity for her to take into account the potential threat both from the U.S.S.R. and the United States of America.

11. Admiral Sir Ragnar Colvin explained that while the present combined naval forces of Australia and New Zealand are insufficient to counter a strong enemy naval force, they are nevertheless reasonably adequate to afford a high degree of protection to trade in the Tasman Sea. He stated that the position regarding capital ships available to be sent to the Far East by Great Britain would be very much more satisfactory after 1940.

12. In answer to a question by Mr. Nash, Admiral Colvin stated that Great Britain had at present nine capital ships building and projected, and that this represented the maximum capacity of the ship building industry in that country.

13. He also pointed out the distance Japan would be away from her base should she decide to operate in the vicinity of Singapore; he then explained certain aspects of trade war and trade protection.

14. The Hon. Mr. Jones asked for information regarding the probability of an attack on Australia, New Zealand, and Fiji from the Caroline Islands. He also asked the reason for defending Port Moresby. This was explained by Admiral Colvin.

15. Admiral Colvin considered that the Tasman Sea would be the most probable area for Japanese operations should they decide to go south.

16. Major-General Mackesy made a statement regarding the length of time Singapore could be held. It was estimated that a period not exceeding ninety days might elapse between the outbreak of war and the arrival of the fleet. A further twenty days might elapse before the arrival of supply convoys. He assured the meeting that the arrangements at Singapore are adequate to enable the garrison to hold out for this length of time.

17. Mr. Ashwin expressed the opinion that it would be to the advantage of Japan to make an early attack on Singapore, which might be pre-arranged with Germany and Italy.

18. Admiral Colvin expressed doubt as to the likelihood of a simultaneous entry into war by Germany, Italy, and Japan, and thought that Japan was more likely to "sit on the fence" until the situation became favourable to her, and Major-General Mackesy pointed out that such an attack would involve a very large expedition with careful organisation of convoys, movements, etc.

19. The Hon. Mr. Nash then asked which was the nearest Japanese base to Singapore from which an attack on Singapore could be made.

20. Admiral Colvin replied that the nearest first-class base was in Japan itself, but it would be possible to embark troops in the Pescadores.

21. Mr. Jones asked if the first attack would be on Hong Kong, and Major-General Mackesy replied that that was anticipated.

22. On re-assembling after the luncheon interval, Mr. Savage stated that as he had an urgent call he would suggest that the Minister of Defence, the Hon. Mr. Jones, should act in his absence. Before retiring Mr. Savage referred to the need for setting up special committees, but realised that there were certain difficulties to this. He would leave it to the Conference to decide.

23. Sir Ragnar Colvin continued the morning's discussion by defining certain terms that were in common use, as it would appear that there was some doubt as to the exact meaning of some expressions, such as "base", "advance base", "dock", "floating dock", etc.; and after defining these terms Sir Ragnar indicated the location of various types in various parts of the Empire. Different types of warships were also explained.

24. To move a Japanese division would take some twenty to twenty-five merchant ships, stated Sir Ragnar Colvin, and to send a considerable force would necessitate a very big convoy. It should be borne in mind that such a force would require a continual stream of further ships to maintain supply.

25. Mr. Ashwin, dealing with the vulnerability of Singapore and the experience gained by the Japanese in landing on the China coast, requested information in regard to the possibility of the Japanese embarking troops and landing sufficient of them in the vicinity of Singapore before the latter could be reinforced.

26. Sir Arthur Longmore explained that the Japanese landings in China had been made against very little opposition. In the defence of Singapore this would not be the case, and it was explained how air reconnaissance would prevent any landing being made undetected.

Mr. Ashwin asked as to the effect of weather conditions. Sir Arthur Longmore explained that though Singapore was subject

to tropical downpours the conditions were generally favourable for air reconnaissance.

27. Mr. Ashwin asked if what he envisaged was a practicability.

28. Sir Arthur Longmore explained that the capture of Singapore by the Japanese could not be entirely ruled out, but he was trying to explain the measures by which its capture was being made improbable.

Sir Ragnar Colvin added that it would be best if we could be strong at every point, but we could not possibly do that, and so must secure ourselves against the most probable operations.

29. The Hon. Mr. Sullivan asked for information as to the relative strengths of Japanese air power and the Air Forces at Singapore.

30. Sir Arthur Longmore explained that the actual aircraft at Singapore after reinforcement amounted to some 160 (ten squadrons). The number that the Japanese could get to Singapore before the establishment of an advance base was dependent on whether they were using their aircraft carriers for that purpose, but he considered that they would not be likely to risk their carriers in the early stages of a war, and that the number of machines available at the outset might be quite small.

31. Mr. Nash asked for elucidation on the question of the time that would elapse before the relief of Singapore.

32. General Mackesy explained that this was ninety days from the outbreak of war with Japan, but the period before re-provisioning which was something different, would be greater - perhaps twenty days more.

33. Mr. Nash asked if it was not likely that the three probable enemy powers would synchronise their entry into the war and place their forces in the most advantageous position and strike simultaneously.

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34. Sir Arthur Longmore stated that much was guesswork in this respect, and it would be difficult for the three powers concerned to produce a concrete plan.

35. After some discussion on the degree of co-operation which existed between Germany, Italy, and Japan, Mr. Jones suggested that if the three clauses (i), (ii) and (iii) were discussed, some idea could be gained of what is likely to happen if Japan attempted to capture certain bases in the Western Pacific.

36. Mr. Sullivan raised the question of food ships leaving New Zealand and Australia, and Sir Ragnar thought that the majority of the traffic would be maintained. He did not consider that we need assume a complete isolation of New Zealand.

37. Mr. Jones then asked if the Conference desired to discuss item 1 of the Agenda.

38. Sir Arthur Longmore, speaking for the United Kingdom delegation, said that they would prefer to take the three items 1 to 3 together. Excluding Singapore, the possible scales of attack in the South-Western Pacific were reviewed by Sir Arthur, and it was suggested that their application to the particular items on the Agenda might then be considered.

39. After some discussion between Mr. Nash and Sir Arthur Longmore as to the effectiveness of commerce raiding, the Chairman referred to the expected scale of attack as laid down in C.I.D. papers, and wished to know if this still held good with the British Delegation.

40. Sir Arthur Longmore stated that there had been no change.

41. Sir Ragnar Colvin explained that Australia had mounted guns as a protection for certain vulnerable points to keep off raiding forces. "Raiders will not risk damage as they are a long way from home, and this is a point to be remembered."

42. Mr. Sullivan asked if the deduction from this was that the only motive for raiding would be interference with trade.

43. Admiral Colvin replied "No", and explained that raiders might well attack vulnerable points (e.g. Port Kembla in Australia) as well as trade.

44. In answer to a question by Mr. Ashwin, Admiral Colvin stated that Australia had been advised by the C.I.D. to use the same probable scale of attack as New Zealand.

45. Commodore Horan stated that he considered that the fact that Australia was defending Port Moresby would force the Japanese to find a base further to the East, and that this base would obviously be Fiji, into which they could walk tomorrow. From this base they would be able to menace the trade of Australia and New Zealand.

46. MR. BERENDSEN here interposed to ask if the United Kingdom Delegation drew any distinction between the scale of attack before and after the arrival of the fleet at Singapore.

47. ADMIRAL COLVIN replied that, though the intensity of attack might be greater before, the scale would remain the same.

48. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE then replied to Commodore Horan stating that the question of the defence of Fiji was bound up with the scale of attack.

49. SIR ARTHUR then went on to discuss the various scales of attack and their application to Fiji, and, in particular, attack by armed merchant cruisers in a hit-and-run raid.

50. COMMODORE HORAN stressed the point that Fiji was the only fuelling station for the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy outside New Zealand, and also an important cable station on the All-Red Route from Canada. He considered that a garrison should be despatched before the outbreak of war, because there would be no escort for ships available afterwards.

51. MAJOR-GENERAL DUIGAN agreed, but pointed out that this was a matter for the Government since no regular troops existed.

52. ADMIRAL COLVIN said that, although he recognized the importance of Fiji, he did not rate it as high as did the New Zealand Delegation, because he considered that evasive routeing would largely reduce the threat to shipping. But he also pointed out that many of the other islands had suitable anchorages, although it would not be possible for the enemy to live on the country as it would be in Fiji.

53. GROUP-CAPTAIN S.UNDERS pointed out that if we could establish a base in Fiji we could deny the use of the other islands to Japan.

54. The ADMIRAL replied that this point would be dealt with in a later item of the agenda.

55. After some discussion, COMODORE HORAN, in reply to MAJOR-GENERAL MACKESY, said that it was the view of the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff that if we held Fiji we could keep the other islands.

56. ADMIRAL COLVIN then stated that Japan was known to have fortified Palau and Truk, and that it was anticipated that she had fortified also one island in the Marshall Group. This would appear to be a threat to the route of the American fleet between Pearl Harbour, Honolulu and the Phillipines.

57. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE then suggested that the whole of Item (a) (1) of the AGENDA had been cleared up. SIR RAGNAR COLVIN agreed.

58. MR. NASH then raised the question of Western Samoa and, after some discussion, it was agreed that Japan would not gain much by an attack thereon.

59. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE considered that if Fiji were properly defended and had an air-striking force also this would help to cover Western Samoa.

60. COLONEL STEVENS asked if the United Kingdom Delegation had considered an intermediate scale of attack between actual invasion and a tip-and-run raid.

61. ADMIRAL COLVIN replied that, although Australia was raising an army of 70,000 men, he did not think that he, as a member of the Service, could go beyond the officially envisaged scale of attack.

62. MR. JONES then moved that the discussion should proceed to clause (b).

63. MAJOR-GENERAL DUIGAN stated that the strength of the Fiji defence force was insufficient to protect Fiji and that, in his opinion, a battalion of infantry could be in possession of Suva a few hours after landing. There were numerous gaps in the reefs which had been worked by Japanese motor sampans on several occasions, and he had no doubt that they had valuable information regarding suitable landing places.

64. MR. JONES asked if aircraft could protect Fiji and GROUP CAPTAIN SAUNDERS replied that ground forces would also be necessary.

65. MR. NASH then raised the question of the New Hebrides and Solomon Islands.

66. SIR HARRY LUKE said that a paper on all the islands under his jurisdiction, as High Commissioner for the Western Pacific, was being circulated to the Conference.

67. After some discussion MR. ABEWYN asked if it would be possible to kick the Japanese out if they gained possession of the islands.

68. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE replied that the main object was to locate the enemy, and that subsequently it was a matter of attacking them with whatever forces were available.

The Conference then adjourned until 4.15 p.m.

69. MR. NASH raised a point in regard to procedure. He considered that, after going right through the Agenda as at present, certain matters could be referred to a Committee to prepare a report for the main Conference to consider.

70. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE questioned whether it was worth while taking up the time of the Conference on matters capable of being settled by a Committee.

71. MR. NASH explained that, so far as the Pacific air routes were concerned, it would be possible for the New Zealand Delegation to give a cursory account of what had been done, and then to discuss it.

72. MR. JONES stated that it was understood that that matter was to be held over until Captain Johnston's arrival on Monday.

73. The discussion was resumed on sub-clause (2) "Ships Trading with the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia."

74. SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE said that there was one point with regard to (a) (1), (2) and (3), and he would like GENERAL MACKESY to read an extract from a paper which dealt with the scale of attack on New Zealand.

75. GENERAL MACKESY explained that he had some material which threw some light on the matter. It was one of the answers to the New Zealand Delegation at the Imperial Conference of 1937. Dealing with raids it said this:-

"The strength of a raiding party from a single cruiser or armed merchant cruiser would be unlikely to exceed 200 men, and the actual scale of attack on any particular port or area would probably be governed by the extent and type of facilities which the enemy hoped to destroy."

The point was that the 200 men would be landed from one ship, but there might be several ships. 200 men was quite clearly not the maximum.

76. MR. BERENDSEN pointed out that the extract which had been read came from the paper based on a specific naval strength which has not been achieved.

77. ADMIRAL COLVIN explained that it still might apply even if it had been achieved.

78. MR. SCHMITT then raised the question of the defence of Nauru and Ocean Islands, and, after some discussion, SIR RAGNAR COLVIN stated that it would be a hopeless defence policy that aimed at making all these small islands secure. The aim is to arm local militia and make the taking of them as unpleasant a job as possible and to depend as far as we can on our mobile forces to safeguard them.

79. MR. JONES then suggested that the Conference proceed to sub-clause (2).

80. MR. SCHMITT asked for information as to the effect on trade should ships be diverted to the Cape route.

81. COMMODORE HORAN explained that this should be avoided, if possible, mainly due to fuel considerations.

82. SIR RAGNAR COLVIN stated that the Admiralty would exercise control over all British shipping in time of war.

83. The position regarding Australian and New Zealand capabilities as to the supply and arming of merchant ships was then discussed.

84. SIR RAGNAR COLVIN explained the type of vessel that will be required.

85. In reply to questions ADMIRAL COLVIN stated that, in his opinion, attacks on trade in Australian and New Zealand waters were more likely to be made by armed merchant cruisers than by submarines. He expressed concern that New Zealand was unable to provide any armed merchant cruisers, having regard to the importance of trade protection in the Tasman Sea.

86. COMMODORE HORAN explained that there were no ships on the New Zealand register that were entirely suitable for conversion to armed merchant cruisers, and he expressed his concern as to possible operations by enemy raiders immediately on the outbreak of war. He cited the case of a German organization for arming their merchant ships, which might have been used off the Chilean coast had war broken out last September.

87. ADMIRAL COLVIN explained that the necessity for convoy in the Pacific was unlikely, except in the case of troop transports.

88. With regard to evasive routing in the Pacific COMMODORE HORAN suggested that the Navy Office, Melbourne, should control the Tasman, and the Navy Office, Wellington, the waters to the East of New Zealand.

89. ADMIRAL COLVIN concurred in this suggestion.

The question of air assistance in the defence of territories was discussed.

90. ADMIRAL COLVIN said that he looked upon aircraft as a most valuable weapon for overseas reconnaissance, but pointed out that they had inherent limitations, including their inability to "visit and search", which is essential to establish the identity of vessels, and SIR ARTHUR LONGMORE explained the accepted policy for co-operation between the three Services, where the work of one is made more effective by the help of another.

91. A suggested statement for the Press was read by the Chairman, and passed by the Conference, which then adjourned until Saturday, 15th April.

Annex to Notes of Proceedings on the First Day
of Meeting of the Defence Conference, held on
14th April, 1939.

D.C.12.

Provisional Agenda
(Second edition).*

Item of Original Agenda	Subject	Paper by New Zealand Delegation.
	<p style="text-align: center;"><u>1. Strategic Problems.</u></p>	
(a)	Possible lines of action by enemy Powers against Empire interests in the South Western Pacific in period before arrival of naval reinforcements, including:- (i) operations to capture bases in the Western Pacific; (ii) nature and scale of possible operations against Empire Trade; (iii) nature and scale of possible operations against Australian and New Zealand territory.	
(b)	Measures necessary to defend:- (i) Pacific Islands and Mandated Territories, notably Fiji, Tonga, New Hebrides and Solomon Islands; (ii) Ships trading with the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia; (iii) Australian and New Zealand territories.	D.C.1.
(c)	Most effective means of co-operation with the United Kingdom in defence of the British Commonwealth after providing for security in South Western Pacific, including schemes for mutual reinforcement.	D.C.2.
(d)	Co-ordination of defence policy in peace and war.	D.C.3.
(g)	Possible effect of German demands for Mandated Territories.	D.C.5.

* First edition was Paper D.C.8.

Item of Original Agenda	Subject	Paper by New Sealand Delegation.
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2. Supply Problems.

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| (e) | Sources of supply of equipment
after outbreak of war; | D.C.4. |
| (f) | Scales of reserves of supplies,
including fuel and equipment; | |
| (h) | Economic aspect of war, including
probable effect on trade and shipping. D. C. 6. | |

3. Trans-Pacific Air
Route.

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| (j) | Policy in relation to Trans-Pacific
air route and United States activi-
ties in the Pacific. | D.C. 7. |
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