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NEW ZEALAND.

WELLINGTON,

S E C R E T.

20th May, 1938.

My Lord,

(1m-37)

At the instance of my Prime Minister, I have the honour to inform Your Lordship that His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have recently given considerable attention to the strategic importance of the Pacific Islands, and have noted the views expressed in C.I.D. Paper C.O.S.586 (Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee). In this Paper, after suggesting that in War Japanese activities in this area would be limited to raiding operations, the Chiefs of Staff go on to say:-

"8. Air forces maintained in Australia and New Zealand could also take part in operations against raiders. As aircraft ranges increase, it will become possible to extend these operations to the Pacific Islands area, and any development of air facilities in this area should, therefore, prove of strategic value.

9. Any operations against raiders would be facilitated by a good intelligence service in the Pacific Islands, comprising wireless stations at numerous positions.

10. From our point of view, therefore, the Pacific Islands are of strategic value in so far as they provide us with fuelling bases for our Naval forces, possible landing grounds for our Air Forces, and positions for the establishment of wireless stations. Moreover, if our system of communications can be sufficiently developed the chances of Japan using any Islands in our possession as fuelling bases would be considerably reduced.

Conclusions.

11. We conclude that we would endeavour to establish our sovereignty over any of the Pacific Islands offering

facilities

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. The programme of air development which is now in progress in New Zealand will, by 1940, provide two regular squadrons equipped with long-range aircraft capable of reaching the Pacific Islands and operating therefrom for any of the purposes mentioned above. Their ability to do so will depend, however, on the provision of the necessary air route facilities. Although much useful information on the topography of the islands has been obtained by ships of the New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy during recent cruises, data is still lacking on many points, and any conclusions as to the facilities which can be provided must be regarded as tentative. Inspection of the map indicates that the movements of aircraft would be facilitated by the provision of some central point from which routes would radiate. This point should be to the north of New Zealand in the Fijian or the Tongan Groups. Suitable areas for the development of a landing ground are available in these Groups, of which the former is preferable owing to its size, and the greater facilities which it offers.

3. There is also a further aspect which is of especial importance to New Zealand. The increased range of aircraft now brings Auckland and much of the North Island within the range of bombers based on the Fijian and Tongan Groups. It is therefore essential that an enemy should be prevented from establishing himself in this area, and it is clear that the security of these islands is of strategic importance to

New Zealand

New Zealand. 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.

4. In any system of routes it appears that Fiji should be regarded as a focal point, and the route New Zealand-Fiji should be the first to be developed. Future development might then take the form of extending this route to the north, north-east and east, the purpose of these routes and the facilities necessary for their operation being considered in more detail below.

Route A: Fiji - Gilbert Islands. Paragraph 11 of the C.O.S. Report quoted above refers to the necessity of gaining information of Japanese activities. Little is known of the extent of the defences which the Japanese have prepared in the Marshall Islands, but their position just north of the Equator provides a convenient base for any vessels raiding into the South Pacific. It will therefore be desirable to establish a chain of landing grounds through the Gilbert and Ellice Colony terminating sufficiently far north to bring the Islands of the Marshall Group within reconnaissance range of aircraft. Intermediate landing grounds would have to be provided along this route, especially where it crosses the belt subject to violent cyclonic storms, but these landing grounds could be used to assist in the administration of the Islands, the provision of medical aid, etc. The population of the Gilbert and Ellice Group, excluding Ocean Island, is approximately 100 Europeans and 30,000 Natives, whilst the Islands have a considerable local trade. Linking up the larger Islands by air could not fail to prove of value to the administration. Further investigation is required before the relative suitability of the Islands can be assessed, but from the information now available it appears that the majority of the Islands are flat and possess sufficient area.

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The chief difficulty will be the effect on the local food supply should it be found necessary to cut down any considerable number of coconut palms.

Route B: Fiji - Phoenix Islands - Fanning and Christmas Islands.

This route would pass through Samoa, the Union Group, and the Phoenix Islands, and would link up at Christmas Island with Route C referred to below, which traverses the northern Cook Group and the Line Group. The reconnaissances which have so far been undertaken indicate that there should be no insuperable difficulties in organizing a landplane route. His Majesty's Government in New Zealand have already agreed to garrison Fanning Island in war, and this group will provide means of connecting up with that garrison. It will also follow the line of any future trans-Pacific commercial landplane route, and any development work which is undertaken is likely to be of ultimate commercial value.

Route C: Fiji - Samoa - Northern Cook - Line Group.

Reports so far received suggest that landing strips can be obtained in the majority of the Islands, but fuller information will be necessary before any final conclusions are reached.

Route D: Fiji - Tonga Islands - Cook Islands.

Further information is necessary, especially as regards facilities in the Cook Islands. These Islands can also be reached direct from New Zealand.

5. The four routes referred to above would enable aircraft to reach the greater part of the South Pacific if the need arose. Owing to the distances, there can never be any question of a continuous patrol, nor is it advocated that aircraft should be permanently stationed in this area; but the provision of landing facilities along certain main routes will enable aircraft to be flown to any desired area should

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the necessity arise.

6. It is appreciated that no final decision can be reached until further surveys have been undertaken. His Majesty's Government in New Zealand would therefore like to be informed if His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom concur in principle in the establishment of the routes described above, and whether, as a first step, they agree to a full survey being made of Route A: Fiji-Gilbert and Ellice Islands.

7. Owing to the importance of this route to the security of New Zealand, His Majesty's Government in New Zealand are willing to bear the cost of undertaking the technical work of such a survey and providing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom with a full report.

8. His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia and the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific have been supplied with a copy of this despatch for their information. His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom might possibly think it advisable that representatives of all three countries (Great Britain, Australia and New Zealand) should meet at some suitable point to discuss Pacific Islands matters; but His Majesty's Government in New Zealand do not suggest that this should delay the expression of opinion from His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom on the points raised in the two preceding paragraphs.

I have, etc.,

(Sgd.) Galway.

GOVERNOR-GENERAL.

THE RIGHT HONOURABLE

LORD STANLEY, P. C. , M. C. ,

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DOMINION AFFAIRS.