WAR CABINET,

IMMEDIATE MEASURES REQUIRED IN THE FAR EAST.

W. P. (40) 222,
(Also G. O. S. (40) 425).

25TH JUNE, 1940.

REPORT BY THE CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE.

In the light of recent developments in Tokyo, and pending the completion of a full appreciation, we submit the following conclusions and recommendations which are based on preliminary work we have already carried out in an examination of our strategy in the Far East in the new situation.

(a) The strategic importance of our position in the Far East remains as great as ever, particularly in view of our dependence upon the economic weapon to defeat Germany.

(b) The principal counters to Japanese aggression are the U.S.A. and Russia, and Japan's large military commitment in China. Our policy should be to induce U.S.A. to declare her vital interest in the status quo in the Far East. We should also encourage Russia and the U.S.A. to lend all the assistance in their power to Chiang Kai Shek.

(c) We cannot spare a fleet for the Far East at present. It is all the more important, therefore, that we should do what we can to improve our land and air defences in Malaya so that at worst we retain a foothold in the area. The provision of equipped troops from the United Kingdom would take time and would prejudice Home Defence. Provision from the Middle East is, in our view, impossible if we are to maintain our position in that theatre. The only other sources are India and Australia.

(d) India could make one brigade available now and increase this force to one division in September. These troops are at present earmarked for service in Iraq or Iran. The situation in the Middle East may develop rapidly and Indian troops are not only closer to that scene of action, but better adapted than Australians for service in most parts of Africa.
(c) Australia has indicated that further contingents will be ready to sail as follows:

5,000 men by mid-July, a further 34,000 men by the end of August, in addition to 2 Squadrons of aircraft.

We recommend that the Australian Government should be requested to send one division and 2 Squadrons (in addition to the one now being sent) to Malaya as soon as possible and we attach a draft telegram to that effect for approval. In that telegram it will be seen that we are asking particularly for one of the Home Defence Militia divisions to be made available, since they alone are equipped.

Should this request be met, it will be necessary to arrange for additional reserves of food and ammunition for the Malaya garrison at an early date.

(f) To show a firm front to Japan we should retain at present both our battalions at Shanghai. Should however the U.S.A. prove willing to take over the policing of the British section of the International Settlement the question of the withdrawal of these units should be reviewed.

(g) We should retain our present garrison at Hong Kong to fight it out if war comes. The presence of large numbers of British women and children at Hong Kong would be a serious embarrassment and since evacuation might not be possible in the event of a sudden Japanese attack we recommend that they should be moved now, either to the Philippine Islands or to Australia. We do not think that the Japanese would interpret this step as a sign of weakness, rather the reverse.

(h) We recommend that authority be accorded now to the Governor of Malaya to institute the necessary measures to bring the Malayan defences up to a state of readiness, which will enable them to be fully effective within five days warning. We submit a draft telegram at Annex II.

(Signed) C.L.N. NEWMILL.

JOHN DILL.

T.S.V. PHILIPPS, V.C.N.S.

Cabinet War Room.

Commonwealth telegram No. 280 of 12th June.

25th June, 1940.
ANNEX I.

DRAFT TELEGRAM.

To: Government of Australia.

Copy to Government of New Zealand (for information).

1. In spite of the deterrent effect of Japan's military commitments in China, the possible hostility of the United States of America and Russia and our military and economic strength, there are indications that Japan may be contemplating moves to improve her strategic and economic position. While it is not thought that war with Japan is necessarily imminent, the Chiefs of Staff are reviewing Far East strategy. Their views are briefly as follows:

2. Security of our Imperial interests in Far East lies ultimately in our ability to control sea communications in South Western Pacific for which purpose adequate fleet must be based at Singapore. We appreciate your anxiety in respect of the despatch of a Fleet to Singapore. Since our previous assurances in this respect, however, the whole strategic situation has been radically altered by the French defeat. Naval dispositions are now dependent on retaining in European waters sufficient Naval forces to match both German and Italian Fleets. In present circumstances, therefore, we cannot send a Fleet to the Far East.

3. Meantime strategic importance to us of Far East both for Empire security and to enable us to defeat enemy by control of essential commodities at source has increased.

4. Japanese advance in China and Hainan has increased threat to Malaya and any further advance into French Indo-China, Dutch possessions or Thailand would endanger still more our position at Singapore which is the key point in Far East. Owing to increased range of aircraft and development of aerodromes, particularly in Thailand, we can no longer concentrate on defence of Singapore Island alone but must consider defence of Malaya as a whole, particularly security of up-country landing grounds. For this reason and because we cannot spare a fleet for the Far East at present, it is all the more important that we should do what we can to improve our land and air defences in Malaya.

5. In your telegram No. 290 of 13th June you mention the possibility of supplying further land forces. The Chiefs of Staff consider that the urgent move of one Division and two Squadrons aircraft to Malaya is desirable as an added immediate deterrent. They ask particularly whether one Division equipped as fully as possible, could be made available, drawing if necessary on your militia pool of equipment. They consider that employment in Malaya would for the time being at any rate be in best interests of the Empire.

6. If owing to equipment or other difficulties you cannot make a whole division immediately available, Chiefs of Staff recommend move by brigade groups as they become ready.
ANNEX II.

Draft Telegram.

To: Governor, Straits Settlements and Malaya.

Chiefs of Staff have been considering Far East situation and on their recommendation Cabinet have decided that our defences in Malaya should be placed and maintained in a state which will enable them to be fully effective within five days' warning. You may now take all action you consider necessary for defence without further reference to me. This does not imply that a Japanese attack is imminent, but there are sufficient indications of Japanese intention to improve her strategic and economic position to justify us in taking full emergency measures. Australia has been asked to provide one division and two further squadrons aircraft for service in Malaya at a very early date.