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UNDERSTANDING NEW ZEALAND

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TO MY PARENTS

BERTHA SHIPE MILLER AND HOWARD U. MILLER

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Infinite gratitude is due my wife, Jessie Ashworth Miller, whose generous cooperation contributed substantially to my efforts.

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Introduction

The surrender of Singapore had far-reaching effects upon America. The seriousness of its loss is a measure of its importance. As Dr. Miller points out so well in this timely study of the American Council on Public Affairs, Singapore was far more than another British outpost. It was and will continue to be of tremendous concern to the United States. As long as we remain in need of vital raw materials in the Far East, as long as we have any interest in Australia and New Zealand, just so long will Singapore remain strategically vital to our interests.

This study is an accurate and stimulating account of the conception, construction, and destruction of the naval base at Singapore. It is an illuminating analysis of the difficulties which the United Kingdom faced between 1922 and 1942 in determining the foreign policy of the British Empire. The political, military and naval problems involving Singapore perplexed successive governments of the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the Malay States. At times these problems defied the wisdom and understanding of the British people.

It is, of course, comparatively easy to say that Singapore could have been held if this or that had been done. But there can be no denying that Britain did everything within her power. It is, after all, by no means a simple matter to hold together a great empire open to attack on a score of fronts. In view of the situation that confronted the British government after the fall of Dunkirk, it is amazing that her forces have been so successful since that event. Those who are fond of hurling the taunt "too little and too late" should soberly calculate the amount of force necessary adequately to defend positions and territories scattered around the globe.

The United States has faced difficulties in the Far East not unlike

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those of the United Kingdom—and sometimes with similar results. We have not always been successful. To some observers our failures and those of the United Kingdom seem to be proof positive that democratic governments are unable to meet their international responsibilities. Unfortunately, it is true that democratic foreign policies have frequently been made the football of domestic politics. It is not generally known that, as Dr. Miller reveals in these pages, Singapore was for a long time a football of British politics. However, it does not follow that democratic governments should therefore allow the totalitarian nations to do as they choose. Manifestly, our democratic institutions should be altered to enable our democratic governments effectively to play their proper role in world affairs during both peace and war.

Dr. Miller's story of the role that Singapore has played in the development of the British Empire indicates the need of the United States for similar overseas bases. It foreshadows a future in which the United States, acting jointly with the United Nations, can and will reconstruct a world in which law and order will be preserved by naval and air power, operating from securely-held overseas bases. Events since 1918 have shown that the American people cannot remain oblivious to developments in the rest of the world. We will have to look outward and take more interest in foreign affairs than we have in the past. The prospect of a world in which the United States holds itself aloof—wrapped in splendid isolation—is too unreal to be plausible.

Whether we like it or not, the United States must participate in world affairs or become a hermit nation. We must either lead or be led; there is no middle course.

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Foreword

I gratefully acknowledge the help given me by friends—more especially by colleagues and past and present students—both during the actual preparation of this book and during that far longer period when the views here expressed have been discussed among us. It is impossible to speak too warmly, also, of the help of strangers. Up and down the country my wife and I have met with a warmth and generosity, a quickness of response, and a genuine personal interest that have helped to make the writing of this book an adventure in friendship as well as a fascinating task.

To the Government Tourist and Publicity Department, both at headquarters and at the film studio, I am grateful for unstinted help in connection with illustrations.

Though the responsibility is mine, the book was planned in collaboration with my wife, who is virtually coauthor with me of Chapters IX, X, XI, and XV, and who has helped elsewhere in drafting the expression of views which we have often hammered out together.

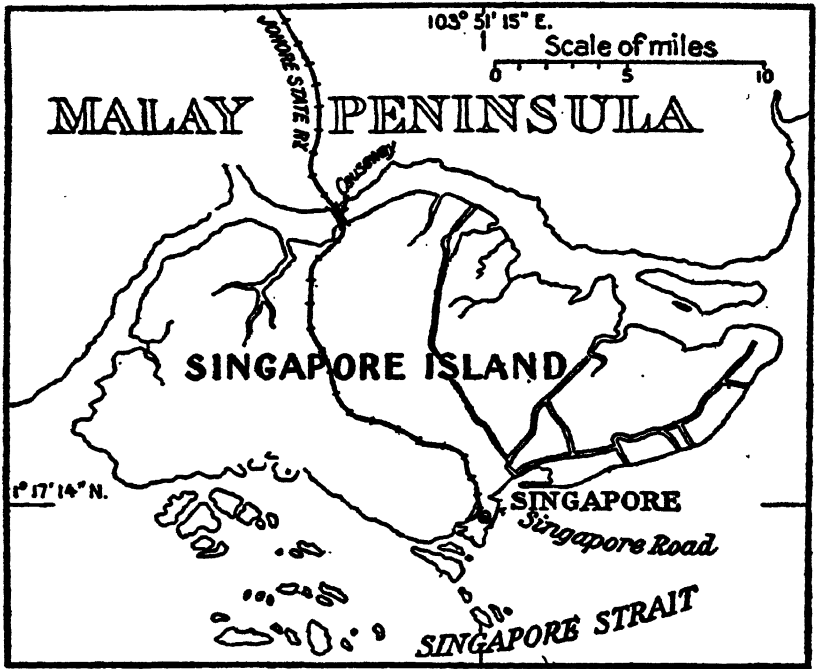
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September, 1943.

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mainland formed valuable parts of the British Empire, Newfoundland became a convenient haven on the route to the northern area, while Bermuda served as a stopping-point and naval base on the way to the southern colonies or to the Caribbean.

In the nineteenth century, the development of steam transportation brought a compelling need for coaling stations, thus greatly enhancing the importance of Britain's existing bases. At about the same time her possessions in the Eastern Hemisphere became more vital than those in the western half of the globe. Consequently, to the posts she already held,² Britain added Nigeria on the Bight of Benin, the Cape of Good Hope at the southern tip of Africa, Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, the island of Ceylon off the coast of India, Malta and Cyprus in the Mediterranean, British Somaliland, Aden on the Red Sea, a controlling interest in the Suez Canal, and a protectorate over Egypt. As a result, the two vital ocean highways to India—the short route via the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, and the longer one around Africa—became dotted with British colonies and holdings designed to facilitate the firm control of these sea arteries. Beyond the heart of the Eastern Empire, communications with the Far East and the South Seas were guarded by Singapore, Sarawak, Labuan, North Borneo, Hong Kong, and Port Darwin in North Australia.

Operating from this world-wide network of strategic bases, the Royal Navy made England for a time the unchallenged mistress of the seas. So effective was this supremacy that, during the nineteenth century, no large power seriously disputed her position. In the early years of the twentieth century, however, the rising German Empire, seeking "a place in the sun," embarked on a naval construction program that offered a threat to Britain's ocean dominance. Confronted with this rival, England found her navy inadequate to guard both the home island and the outlying portions of the Empire. Consequently, Lord Fisher concentrated the main fleet in the North Sea and entrusted to Japan, with whom England had entered into a de-

²Gambia, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, St. Helena, and Gibraltar.

CHAPTER ONE

Rough Island Story

In August, 1872, the novelist Anthony Trollope arrived in New Zealand with his mind full of stories about Maori warriors and exotic scenery, about missionaries and the cannibals who ate them. To his astonishment it seemed that he had found another Britain. Round any corner he might find a scene to remind him of some part of the British Isles—if not in England, then in Scotland or Ireland. On his first night in New Zealand he stayed at a hotel that might have been in any one of a hundred English towns, and had to bargain and bully in the same old way to get a bedroom, a bath, and some supper. So, he cheerfully complained, he had sailed right round the world and yet could not get away from England.

Trollope exaggerated. The colonists had transplanted what they could of England, but the native trees and grasses remained; and as for the people, he soon found that they were developing their own ideas and customs. New Zealanders, like Australians and Americans, were already different in subtle ways from Englishmen and Scots, just as they were different from one another; and in the seventy years that have passed since Trollope's visit these differences have grown. Powerful forces have bound modern New Zealand to what is still sometimes called "home"; politics, sentiment, and economic interest have sometimes made British settlers morbidly conscious of their links with the mother country. Yet these colonists of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries have felt the same kind of influence that acted on their predecessors, the Polynesians who colonized New Zealand six hundred years ago. The story of the Polynesians, ancestors of the modern Maoris, shows how an active and intelligent immigrant people, living in isolation, can adapt its personal habits.

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tion towards Japanese aggression in China.⁵ Exceptional was the attitude of the *Montreal Star*, an ultra-conservative paper, which put on a vigorous campaign for renewal. The province of British Columbia was also inclined to favor renewal if Canada could specifically retain control of Japanese immigration.

American opposition to the alliance should also be noted, since it was probably decisive in influencing Canadian opinion. It was then generally feared in the United States that in the event of a Japanese-American war, Great Britain might be bound by treaty commitments to fight on the side of her yellow partners against her white cousins.⁶ Moreover, a belief prevailed that the alliance had been used by the Nipponese imperialists as a protective cloak for their ambitious policy in China. The Twenty-one Demands, the Nishihara loans, Japan's occupation of Shantung province, her reluctance to withdraw from Siberia, and the failure of the international banking group to make loan agreements which Washington deemed compatible with Chinese independence and integrity, contributed to an ever growing distrust of Japanese aims.

Though the relative importance of the American objections is hard to determine, probably fear of an aggressive Japanese policy in Eastern Asia was the crux of the matter; the danger of England's involvement in a war with the United States was probably nothing more than a good talking point.⁷ This view is supported by a memorandum of the conversation between Secretary of State Hughes and British Ambassador Geddes on June 23, 1921, in which Geddes indicated that the Anglo-Japanese alliance would probably be extended for another year. In his reply, Secretary Hughes did not mention the possibility of British military obligations, but did point out the encouragement which continuation of the alliance would give to Japanese imperial-

⁵Brebner, J. Bartlet, "Canada, the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and the Washington Conference," *Political Science Quarterly*, L (March, 1935), pp. 49-50; Griswold, A. Whitney, *The Far Eastern Policy of the United States* (New York, 1938), p. 274.

⁶The validity of this fear is a controversial question. See Griswold, *op. cit.*, pp. 278-279.

⁷Brebner and Griswold, who have studied the matter carefully, concur in this point of view. See Brebner, *loc. cit.*, p. 48, and Griswold, *op. cit.*, p. 280.

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ism.⁸ In any case, whatever the basis of the objections, it was clear that the United States was unalterably opposed to the renewal of the alliance.

This was the situation when the Imperial Conference met in London in June, 1921.⁹ The statesmen representing the mother country—Lloyd George, Curzon, Balfour, and Lee¹⁰—had decided to continue the alliance. While it was true that Germany's defeat and the Russian revolution had for the time being removed the two major threats which the agreement had envisaged, these leaders feared that India and Britain's vast territorial and economic interests in Eastern Asia and the Pacific now needed protection against the growing menace of Japan. It was often more expedient, they argued, to take political enemies into camp than to ostracize them. They also pointed out that Japan had been a faithful ally in the past and should not be cast aside. Hughes and Massey, the Prime Ministers of Australia and New Zealand, agreed. India's spokesman likewise approved of renewal. General Smuts of South Africa, a supporter of the League of Nations, favored revision of the alliance terms to make them conform with the principles and spirit of the Covenant. In opposition, Prime Minister Meighen of Canada found himself in a minority of one.¹¹

⁸“If the Secretary could speak freely and in an informal and confidential way, he felt that if Great Britain and Japan had any arrangement by which Great Britain was to support the special interests of Japan, the latter might be likely, at the instance of the militaristic party, to be led to take positions which would call forth protests from this Government, and that in making such representations this Government might find itself virtually alone: that the making of such representations might be called for by American opinion and yet might be met with considerable opposition in Japan, leading to a state of irritation among the people in both countries; that such a condition of affairs would be fraught with mischief; that if it were true that the policies of Great Britain in the East were like our own there should be cooperation between Great Britain and the United States, and it should be possible for the United States to find complete support on the part of Great Britain in maintenance and execution; that this was not an attitude antagonistic to Japan, but would be in the interests of the peace of the world.” *Foreign Relations*, 1921, II, pp. 314-316.

⁹This was the first Imperial Conference at which the Dominion delegates were given a voice in the formulation of British foreign policy.

¹⁰Curzon was Foreign Secretary; Balfour, Lord President of the Council; Lee, First Lord of the Admiralty.

¹¹Great Britain, *Conference of Prime Ministers and Representatives of the United Kingdom, the Dominions, and India, Summary of Proceedings and Documents* (London, 1921), Cmd. 1474, pp. 16, 19-20, 30; Griswold, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-288; Brebner, *loc. cit.*, pp. 50-51.

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The actual discussion of the question at the Imperial Conference resolved itself, on the whole, into a debate between the heads of the Australian and Canadian delegations. The strong stand of Prime Minister Hughes in favor of the alliance was especially ardent, perhaps because he had only recently been converted to that point of view. At the Peace Conference of 1918-19, Australia's fear of the "yellow peril" had been stirred by the allocation to Japan of the German islands north of the equator, by Tokyo's insistence that the principle of the "open door" should be applied to the Class C mandates (including those granted to Australia and New Zealand in the South Pacific), and the Nipponese demand for the formal recognition of the principle of racial equality. Japan's attitude appeared to challenge a fundamental article of Dominion faith, the policy of a "white Australia." As a result, Hughes and his political followers had looked with considerable favor upon the American naval building program as a means of providing a new Pacific balance of power. However, when the fall in commodity prices not only brought financial distress to Australia, but rendered relief from England unlikely because of the latter's own economic difficulties, the Dominion began to feel that it could not count on British support in case of a Pacific naval race. At the same time, the rejection of the League Covenant by the United States Senate and that nation's apparent withdrawal from world affairs made Hughes doubtful of the value of the United States as an ally. Hence, he reversed his position on the Japanese alliance, and viewed it as an important safeguard of Australian security.¹²

Canadian Prime Minister Meighen, on the other hand, opposed renewal of the alliance on the ground that it endangered the cordiality

¹²The most thorough study of the discussions at the Conference is that made by Brebner, *loc. cit.* Brebner culled his material from various unofficial sources. This was necessary because the pertinent official white paper and press releases revealed relatively little. However, the *London Times* was not then amenable to official control and several of its "informal and indiscreet" reports, as well as the Canadian Press Association dispatches by Grattan O'Leary of the *Ottawa Journal*, who was very close to Meighen, provide very useful information on the London meetings. Moreover, since 1927, there have been substantial revelations of what happened in 1921. In this connection, Brebner notes that he is particularly indebted to Professor N. A. M. MacKenzie of the University of Toronto. Brebner, *loc. cit.*, p. 46.

of Anglo-American and Canadian-American relations upon which Canada relied for her sense of security. He argued that the alliance was no longer essential, that it was incompatible with the League of Nations' idea of international cooperation, and that it was objectionable to China and the United States. He emphasized that good Anglo-American relations constituted the foundation of British policy, and repeated his proposal—made to Lloyd George in the previous February—for a conference at which Japan, the United States, China, and the British Empire could review Pacific questions. At that point, according to Prof. J. Bartlet Brebner, Hughes exploded and launched into an emphatic discourse that neither tactful interruptions nor even motions to adjourn could stop:

Was Great Britain to abandon and insult a faithful ally merely because the United States, which had broken all commitments, speaking with the voice of Canada, ordered her to do so? Such action would earn contempt instead of favor in the United States, and Japan would be irreparably offended. The British Empire must have a reliable friend on the Pacific. The United States could not be depended upon to do anything and a deeply wounded Japan quite properly would seek revenge.¹³

Though Hughes was supported by New Zealand, India, and the United Kingdom, his espousal of Japan as a "faithful ally" was not sufficiently convincing. Meighen succeeded in persuading the Imperial Conference to shelve the Anglo-Japanese treaty commitments in favor of international cooperation in the Far East. The suggestion that Britain, Japan, the United States, and China should hold discussions on Pacific problems coincided with American efforts to arrange a meeting to consider naval disarmament. The outcome was the Washington Conference of 1921 and 1922, which included on its agenda both armament limitation and political questions of the Pacific area. The resulting agreements were to have profound effects on Britain's Far Eastern position and on her naval policy.¹⁴

In the first place, the Four-Power Pact which grew out of the Washington Conference definitely terminated the Anglo-Japanese alliance. The signatories—Britain, the United States, France, and Japan—were bound by Article I to respect each other's insular pos-

¹³*Ibid.*, pp. 53-54.

¹⁴When the Conference convened it included Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, China, Italy, Portugal, Belgium and the Netherlands.

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sessions and dominions in the Pacific; they further agreed that in the event of a dispute arising out of any Pacific question and involving their rights in regard to such possessions and dominions, the issue was to be submitted to a joint conference for consideration and adjustment. Article II provided that "If the said rights are threatened by the aggressive action of any other Power, the high contracting parties shall communicate with one another frankly and fully, in order to arrive at an understanding as to the most efficient measures to be taken, jointly or separately, to meet the exigencies of the particular situation."¹⁵

To a certain extent, the Four-Power Pact may have been regarded as a substitute for the Anglo-Japanese alliance. It should be observed, however, that while the latter embodied a definite guarantee of armed support, the former merely called for a consultation or an exchange of communications in case a threat to the *status quo* should arise.

The terms of the disarmament agreement, also concluded at the Washington Conference, provided for a limitation of naval bases which even more vitally affected Great Britain's position as a sea power in the Far East. According to Article XIX of this treaty, the United States, the British Empire, and Japan agreed that the *status quo* with regard to fortifications and naval bases should be maintained in stipulated areas. Specifically these were, for the United States, the Pacific possessions except the Hawaiian Islands, and those islands adjacent to the coast of the United States, the Panama Canal Zone, and Alaska—not including the Aleutian Islands; for Britain, they were Hong Kong and the Empire's insular possessions in the Pacific east of the 110th meridian, except the Commonwealth of Australia and its territories, New Zealand, and the islands adjacent to the coast of Canada; for Japan, certain insular territories and possessions, including the Kurile Islands, the Bonin Islands, Amami-Oshima, the Loochoo Islands, Formosa, and the Pescadores.

¹⁵United States Senate, *Conference on the Limitation of Armament, 67th Congress, 2d session, Document 126* (Washington, 1922), p. 890.

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Maintenance of the *status quo* under this treaty implied that no new fortifications or naval bases were to be established in the areas specified, nor any measures taken to increase the existing facilities for the repair and upkeep of naval forces or to strengthen the coast defenses of the territories and possessions named. The treaty did, however, permit the repair and replacement of worn-out weapons and equipment to the extent customary in time of peace.¹⁶ This article was inserted at the insistence of Japan, who feared that development of American bases at Guam and in the Philippines would be a menace to her.¹⁷

The significant Treaty Limiting Naval Armaments also established a ratio of 5-5-3-1.67-1.67 for the tonnages of Great Britain, the United States, Japan, France, and Italy, respectively, in the capital ship and aircraft carrier classes. Great Britain and the United States were limited to 525,000 tons each—Japan to 315,000 tons; capital ships were limited to 35,000 tons standard displacement, and gun caliber was limited to 16 inches. These provisions, in conjunction with those on naval bases, were designed to prevent the Pacific naval powers from carrying on aggressive warfare against each other. The arrangement was of particular advantage to Japan's position in the Pacific, in view of the 3,445 miles separating the American naval base at Pearl Harbor from Yokohama, and in view also of the inability of the British base at Hong Kong either to accommodate a modern fleet or, under the Washington treaty, to strengthen its fortifications. Nor was Singapore, although not included within the limits set by the treaty, equipped at that time to take care of capital ships.

Thus Great Britain, following the Washington Conference, found herself in a perplexing and ominous situation. She no longer had a formal alliance with Japan, and she had no base in the Far East capable of maintaining a modern battle fleet. Furthermore, although no strong navy opposed hers in home waters there was the possibility

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 875.

¹⁷Bywater, Hector C., *Navies and Nations* (New York, 1927), pp. 127-128.

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of danger from the formidable American and Japanese forces operating in the Pacific. Under such circumstances, how was she to protect the Far Eastern portions of her Empire¹⁸ and to safeguard the vast trade from this area which was vital to her life? The Board of Admiralty decided that the solution lay in the construction of a first-class naval base in the Orient.

¹⁸Including, in the South Pacific, the Dominions of Australia and New Zealand with their respective mandates of Papua and Samoa, the territory of New Guinea, and various small islands south of the equator; the Crown Colony of Hong Kong in southern China; the Straits Settlements of Singapore, Malacca and Penang; Labuan; the Federated Malay States—Perak, Selangor, Negri Sembilan, and Pahang—and the unfederated Malay protectorates of Johore, Kedah, Perlis, Kelantan, and Trengganu; the protectorates of Sarawak and British North Borneo; and Ceylon, India, Aden, and the islands of Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean.

CHAPTER II

Sea Routes and Security

The decision of the British Board of Admiralty to recommend the construction of a first-class naval station in the Pacific immediately raised the question where this vital link in Empire defense should be located. Certain basic factors had to be kept in mind. These may, for the sake of convenience, be classified as "position," "security" or "military strength," and "resources."¹

Concerning the first of these criteria, the ideal port should be located in fair proximity to the primary objective, which is, either directly or indirectly, to destroy or neutralize the enemy's armed naval forces. Once that has been accomplished, virtually complete control of the sea passes to the victorious fleet. In other words, to fit the strategic plan, the base must be close enough to the area of operations so that hostile ships can be engaged whenever they put to sea. For example, during the first World War, Scapa Flow was excellently situated for preventing the departure of German ships to distant theatres, and for supporting a blockade; but it was too far away from enemy bases to insure interception of the German High Seas Fleet

¹For example, Rear-Admiral H. J. S. Brownrigg, a recognized authority on naval affairs, sets up "position," "security," and "resources" as the three criteria for a naval base. Captain C. J. C. Little, a director of the Royal Naval Staff College, agrees with him, except for the minor difference of referring to the second specification as "military strength" instead of "security." See Brownrigg, Rear-Admiral H. J. S., "Naval Bases in Relation to Empire Defence," *Journal Royal United Service Institute*, LXXVII (February, 1932), p. 50; and Little, Captain C. J. C., "Naval Bases and Sea Power," *ibid.*, LXXIV (February, 1929), p. 56.

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should the latter attempt to make coastal raids. Hence, in 1917 the British Grand Fleet was moved to Rosyth, on the east coast of Scotland.²

An ideal naval base must lie athwart a recognized sea route, a fact which emphasizes a fundamental difference between military and naval strategy. In the case of land forces, lines of communication follow definite paths, such as roads, railways, or navigable rivers. Since these are vulnerable along their whole length, they require overall protection. Sea communications, on the other hand, are determinate only where the pattern of land and sea masses brings them together at defiles, such as the Straits of Dover, the Straits of Gibraltar, the Suez Canal, or the Straits of Malacca. Thus an army's lines of communication may become vulnerable at any point, whereas those of a fleet can be severed only at the defiles. Gibraltar, for this reason, is an almost unequalled strategic position. Because it is situated at the exact point where control is desired, a fleet can very easily maintain its own sea communications with the station without impairing its liberty of action in watching the Straits. If the base were at Lisbon a greater force would be required for this service.³

The second specification, "security"—involving protection against attack from the sea, the land, and the air—depends on two major factors: the fleet and permanent defenses. A base's chief safeguard against assault from the sea is the presence of the fleet operating from it. Thus, during the first World War, neither the powerful installations of Heligoland nor the light fortifications of Scapa Flow came under fire. On the other hand, the Germans, expecting to meet only inferior sea forces, bombarded Hartlepool, and the British, anticipating little resistance from enemy warships, attacked Zeebrugge. Furthermore, von Spee's attempt upon the Falkland Islands was called off when he learned of the presence of the British fleet.⁴

However, the very mobility of a naval force, which constitutes one of its principal advantages, makes secondary defense of the base a

²Brownrigg, *loc. cit.*, pp. 50-52; Little, *loc. cit.*, p. 57.

³Wilkinson, Captain R. J., "Singapore," *Journal Royal United Service Institute*, LXIX (November, 1924), pp. 687-688; Little, *loc. cit.*, p. 56.

⁴Brownrigg, *loc. cit.*, p. 55; Little, *loc. cit.*, p. 56.

necessity. A squadron employed in one place today may be needed three or four hundred miles away tomorrow. A naval commander, therefore, should never be obliged to give prior consideration to the safety of his port rather than to his major objective, the destruction of the enemy. Hence the base should, in the absence of the fleet, be able to take care of itself for a reasonable time.

This need introduces the problem of permanent defenses. No base, however well fortified, can be expected to hold out indefinitely without relief, but it should be able to resist attack for some time—and for a definite time. As one authority puts the matter, “The defenses provided for its security must be calculated on the time factor and the expected scale of attack, not upon the size of the fleet which is going to use the base—a mistake which is sometimes made.” What is necessary from the point of view of security against sea attack is a combination of strengths—“strength in the base to hold out till relieved, and strength in the fleet to throw in supplies before the strength of the base is exhausted.”⁵

In addition to defense against sea attacks, “security” involves protection against aggression from the land—aggression which may take the form either of a landing as part of a combined operation, or of an assault from the frontier alone. In either case, the port’s natural advantages for defense play an important role. Thus, it is not generally advisable to establish a naval station where an enemy can advance across the border without going afloat. Where a land attack is possible, a large military garrison will be required and the navy will then have the extra burden of guaranteeing the security of communications and supplies for this additional force.⁶

At this point a further element enters the situation. Until the twentieth century adequate safeguards against sea and land attacks were sufficient. Today, however, “security” also involves the task of defense against aggression from the air. Such an offensive may be launched either from a carrier or from land-based planes. Carrier-borne attacks, which necessarily entail great risks to vessels usually more valuable for other purposes, will probably be made only in ex-

⁵Brownrigg, *loc. cit.*, p. 55; also Little, *loc. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

⁶Brownrigg, *loc. cit.*, pp. 56-57.

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ceptional circumstances. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the British success at Taranto emphasize how effective unheralded carrier-borne attacks may be. The greatest danger, however, lies in the proximity of enemy air stations. Large bombers at the present time have an effective radius of about six hundred miles, but the range at which they can deliver the heavy and continuous fire necessary to reduce a well-defended port is considerably less. Prior to the outbreak of World War II, it was frequently asserted that the menace of air attack against overseas naval bases was not as great as might be supposed.⁷ Even at that time the question was a highly controversial one. Recent events have not given a categorical answer. However, improvements in fighting planes, the development of new techniques of air attack, and the use of parachute troops have made it obvious that the threat of an air offensive cannot be ignored. For protection against these dangers permanent defenses in the nature of listening posts and anti-aircraft guns are valuable. However, the best weapon continues to be efficient squadrons of planes operating from the base and able not only to protect the port itself, but also capable of attacking the aerodromes or carriers of the enemy.

“Resources,” the third condition for an adequate naval base, is a broad requirement, covering such considerations as climate, manpower, supplies (including food, fuel, ammunition, and other naval stores), and docking and repair facilities. The first two of these factors call for little comment. The climate should not be of a sort that unfavorably affects the health of the personnel stationed at the port. As for the construction and maintenance of a large base, the problem obviously becomes more difficult if hundreds of workmen must be brought from any considerable distance. An adequate labor supply should be easily available.⁸ With respect to supplies, the region should abound in natural resources, for the greater the variety of essential commodities nearby, the simpler the problem of communications will be. But since it will always be necessary to bring in some of the requisite materials, it is important that the location be one from which the paths of communication can easily be controlled.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 57.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 57; Little, *loc. cit.*, p. 57; Wilkinson, *loc. cit.*, p. 688.

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Perhaps the most important resource of a base is its docking and repair facilities. This is particularly true today when the under-water fittings of ships have become highly complicated, a trend that is steadily growing. As Admiral Bullard pointed out shortly after the first World War:

The old-fashioned liner or frigate was so self-contained that her own crew could do a good deal to maintain her in fighting condition over long periods At Trafalgar some of the vessels engaged had not received a dockyard overhaul for three years, and others had not dropped an anchor for many months. But every ship partaking in the great war of our own time had to be detached from her war station for a dockyard refit at least once a year, and often twice or thrice, especially after an encounter with the enemy.⁹

Thus, it is essential that the docks be large enough to accommodate the naval force expected to operate from that base. It should be noted that the problem of docking has been enormously increased by the development of air power, for a docked ship is peculiarly vulnerable to air attack.

Obviously no British naval station in the Far East met the requirements of either permanent defenses or of adequate docking and repair facilities. However, the problem of deciding which harbor most satisfactorily fulfilled the remaining specifications of "position," "security," and "resources" proved to be a difficult one. Hong Kong had formerly been an important station, but the Washington Naval Treaty required the maintenance of the *status quo* in its fortifications and repair installations. Even aside from such legal restrictions, this Crown Colony had certain obvious disadvantages. Its sea communications were vulnerable to attack by Japan from Formosa, by the United States from the Philippines, and by the French from Indo-China. It was also exposed to land and air attack: the advance of a modern army down the Chinese coast for an assault on the colony might be difficult to prevent, and enemy air bases could be established on the landward side.¹⁰

Since 1931 this analysis of Hong Kong's strategic weaknesses has received complete confirmation. Although Anglo-American friendship eliminated all danger of an attack by the United States, Japan's

⁹Aston, Major-General George, "Japan and Singapore," *Nineteenth Century and After*, XCIV (August, 1923), p. 184.

¹⁰Wilkinson, *loc. cit.*, p. 690.

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occupation of the Spratly Islands and Canton, and her advance into Indo-China brought the land, aerial, and sea forces of an aggressive and hostile power within effective striking distance. Within the first three weeks of the Pacific war of 1941 Hong Kong fell to the onslaught of the Japanese. It had been proved a hopeless outpost of British sea power.

With Hong Kong excluded from consideration, the Admiralty turned to four other possible sites—Colombo in Ceylon; Port Darwin in North Australia; Sydney in Southeast Australia; and Singapore, an island at the tip of the Malay Peninsula. The first two were quickly eliminated—Colombo on the ground that it afforded too little protection to British interests in the Pacific, and Port Darwin on the score of climate and paucity of resources and manpower. The choice then narrowed down to Sydney or Singapore. From the point of view of position it was immediately apparent that Singapore was more centrally located than Sydney, both in relation to strategic centers in the British line of defense and to key points in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. A comparison of the sea distance to key ports in the British Empire clearly brings this out:

DISTANCES FROM SINGAPORE AND SYDNEY

	<i>From Singapore</i>	<i>From Sydney</i>
Hong Kong _____	1,454	4,715
Manila _____	1,370	4,001
Calcutta _____	1,646	6,385
Yokohama _____	2,905	4,375
Port Darwin _____	1,967	2,586
King George Sound. (West Australia) _	2,525	2,136
Colombo _____	1,593	5,607
Aden _____	3,623	7,387
Malta _____	6,000	9,774
Plymouth _____	8,000	11,500

A further positional advantage held by Singapore could be seen by an examination of the four main sea routes into the heart of Britain's Eastern Empire—the Indian Ocean. Two of these led from the

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Atlantic (one via the Cape of Good Hope, the other via the Suez Canal), and two from the Pacific. Of the Atlantic routes the first was already protected by various British bases, while the latter was secure as long as England controlled the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. Of the two maritime highways from the Pacific, the one running south of Australia was flanked by British bases and was, moreover, too long to be practicable for a fleet intending to carry out offensive operations against India. The second, via the Straits of Malacca, was not well guarded and offered direct access to the Indian Ocean from the East. It was thought that a battle fleet based on Singapore, rather than on Sydney or Hong Kong, should be able to protect this fourth and most vulnerable gateway to India.¹¹ In brief, for purposes of defense, it was considered probable that an adequate fleet based on the Straits of Malacca could destroy or neutralize any enemy forces operating against Australia, guard the approach to India from the East, protect Burma and the Persian oilfields, and cover both the main trade routes and its own communications. On the other hand, although a base at Sydney could protect the prosperous East coast of Australia, a fleet based there could hardly have prevented the capture of Singapore—a loss inimical to England's Far Eastern trade.¹²

From the point of view of offensive operations, the position of Singapore also possessed certain advantages. Though ships based there would, it was realized, find it difficult to carry out offensive operations against the Nipponese mainland, some 3,000 miles away, it seemed likely that they could prevent passage of Japanese shipping into the Indian Ocean, thereby subjecting Tokyo's Middle Asian and European commerce to a distant blockade. That Sydney could not play such a role was obvious.

Most authorities conceded the superiority of Singapore with regard to "position," the most important specification of a naval base. The matter of "security," however, was more controversial. It was pointed out that Sydney's isolation in the South Pacific rendered it practically immune from attack by military or aerial forces, and that an

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 688-690.

¹²Report of the Board of Examiners for Army Officers. *London Times*, January 17, 1928; Brownrigg, *loc. cit.*, p. 58.

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enemy fleet would find it very difficult to carry out large-scale action against a base established there. The white manpower of Australia and New Zealand was cited as an additional defensive asset.

In the light of the Japanese capture of Singapore it is interesting to review the arguments advanced as to its "security" value. There was good reason for military experts to believe that the city's peculiar location endowed it with strong protection against sea attack. To the west, for two hundred miles the average width of the Straits of Malacca is under twenty-five miles, while to the east, numerous small islands extend many miles to sea—conditions highly conducive to air, submarine, and minefield defense. Although the Malay peninsula to the north is joined to the island by a causeway, a landing at any point there by a hostile power was deemed to be easily subject to British naval interception. Even if a successful landing were made, it was thought that the Malay swamps and jungles and the imperial land defenses, particularly along the relatively easy terrain of the western shore, would make subsequent advances unlikely. An overland invasion from Thailand was considered similarly difficult since it, too, would involve a long march through Malaya. Furthermore, in view of the lack of important land routes leading to Malaya from modern arsenals, the enemy would, it was believed, have to be supplied by sea—a plan which apparently could be prevented by an adequate naval force based on Singapore. Air attack was also envisaged as difficult since it would have to be launched either from exposed sea carriers or from landing fields so far away as to reduce materially the number of planes employed and the weight of the bombs used.¹⁸ Subsequent events have, of course, shown that these ideas of Singapore's "security" were over-optimistic to a high degree. Absence of an adequate fleet accounted only in part for the ease of the Japanese advance.

With respect to "resources," Sydney is definitely superior to Singapore in climate and possibly in food supply. However, Sydney is forced to depend on long lines of communication for maritime coal and oil. Singapore, on the other hand, stood as the refuelling station between Ceylon and Australia. Singapore's proximity to Burma,

¹⁸Wilkinson, *loc. cit.*, pp. 688-690.

Zealanders were virtually unanimous, and even on the technical methods of doing this there was a higher measure of agreement than on any other big current issue. At this point, however, peacetime controversies shade into the problems of war. Some of the most powerful arguments of those who challenge the ideas of social security and a planned economy are practical ones. Can a country create the machinery to run such a state? Can it do without the crude motives of fear and ambition as incentives to effort? Can the human brain really hold together the complex threads of a modern community? Some of these questions need no answer in wartime, but an efficient war effort depends on the triumphant solution of the remainder. Time marches on—and in war he moves fast and mysteriously. For the present, answers to fundamental questions about New Zealand must be sought on the battlefields of Greece, Crete, and Africa; in the islands of the Pacific; in farms and factories, and the flow of goods toward those who need them; and in the quality and stamina of the home front.

CHAPTER TWO

The Wanderings of the Peoples

The islands of New Zealand are the remnants of a vast continent, christened by geologists Gondwanaland, most of which disappeared beneath the sea millions of years ago. Since man has roamed the earth there have been twelve hundred miles of stormy ocean between New Zealand and the nearest land mass, Australia. Nor do the Pacific Islands form a handy bridge or break the force of wind and current. Norfolk Island and the Kermadecs lie upwards of six hundred miles away, and they are mere specks on the ocean. Beyond them it is upwards of a thousand miles from the coasts of New Zealand to those of the Fiji or the Society Islands: and a total of five thousand miles or more to the mainland of America, Asia, or Africa. Those who come to New Zealand from the main centers of human life must be prepared for thousands of miles of travel and must be willing to navigate for at least twelve hundred miles without sight of land and find a small country set in a vast ocean.

These thousands of miles of open sea govern New Zealand's life and history. They give her a climate vastly different from that of similar countries in much the same latitude in the northern hemisphere: Japan, for example, the British Isles and Italy, or the Atlantic coast of North America. They kept out the human race for centuries after civilizations had risen and decayed in Asia, America, and Europe; free from predatory man, great wingless birds and pre-historic reptiles lived on into modern times. Even after the arrival of man, barriers of distance sifted would-be immigrants by demanding from each individual, generation after generation, the determination—and the physical equipment—for a long and perilous voyage. Finally, those who did penetrate to New Zealand found themselves in

CHAPTER III

Political Considerations

The recommendation of the Admiralty for a vast naval base at Singapore aroused a considerable amount of controversy.¹ Challenging the scheme on grounds of domestic as well as foreign policy, its opponents asserted that the project was both financially reckless and politically dangerous.

In Parliament, it was charged that the money involved in the Singapore plan could be spent to better advantage at home on education, housing, and similar needs. The House of Commons was reminded that the ten million pounds requested by the Admiralty represented ten times the sum being expended on the education and welfare of the English children.² In the words of the *Manchester Guardian*, "How is this nation that is asked to spend ten millions, ten millions that will grow into twenty on this dream of distant danger—how is it living at this moment?" It was pointed out in this connection that inhabitants of Manchester were living in "blocks of back-to-back

¹From 1923, when the Admiralty plan was first introduced into Parliament, until 1935, when work on the base had reached a point where its abandonment was unlikely, questions of policy and technical considerations were issues much discussed by naval experts, political speakers, the press, and the general public. The fundamental arguments for or against the project were reiterated frequently and with emphasis, but only occasionally with new shadings of meaning. For the sake of clarity, therefore, and to avoid tedious repetition, it seems well to consider each of these questions in turn without attempting at this point to analyze public opinion or to correlate the debate with political developments at home and abroad. The latter will be done in connection with Chapter V.

²Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, House of Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2632. (Hereafter cited as Great Britain, *Commons*.)

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houses of the type that a Government tried to forbid in the year 1840, with streets twenty-four feet wide, and back passages so narrow that two people cannot walk abreast." In numerous towns of Scotland, housing conditions were as "squalid and revolting as those that scandalized the first Parliament elected after the passing of the first Reform Bill, when Chadwick described them in the cold passages of a Bluebook." The same conditions, it said, were evident in more prosperous communities.

Turning to school conditions, the *Guardian* referred to a report of the Board of Education which stated that England seemed to be content "for children to be taught by the hundred thousand in classes of such a size that, as a headmaster puts it, a teacher can drill them but cannot teach them." Even more striking was the evidence presented by the Workers' Educational Association to the effect that some of the schools in which children were being taught had been condemned by no less than nine inspectors, who reported that several schools were found with sewage discharging into the playground. Concluded the *Guardian*: "It is to a nation living like this and educating its children under such conditions that the Government declares that it must spend ten or twenty millions from the taxes for Singapore."³ One opponent of the project summed up his argument thus:

If you asked the working people of this country what you are to do with twenty millions of money which you may happen to have available, whether you are to spend it on this fantastic scheme at Singapore or upon things which the people are waiting very anxiously and very urgently for, like housing and education, then I am quite certain, whatever the views of the Honorable Gentlemen opposite may be, that the working people of this country would say unhesitatingly "the Singapore Dock scheme should go to blazes. We want these £20,000,000 spent upon the things which are going to make our lives a little brighter and happier than they are now."⁴

Similarly, it was said to be "utter folly" to sink huge sums "in the mud of Singapore" when the money might better be spent in building up the air defenses of the center of the Empire⁵ or in securing England's oil fuel depots at home.⁶ There was even danger of

³"Singapore—Expense and British Slums," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, XVIII (May 11, 1923), p. 363.

⁴Great Britain, *Commons* (December 9, 1924), 179: 163.

⁵*Ibid.* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2632.

⁶*Ibid.* (March 14, 1935), 299: 628.

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starving the active Navy and cutting down the program of ships if too much money were spent on works ashore.⁷ As for the aircraft needed to protect Singapore, the fact that the home fleet was almost without airplanes and that London was being left unguarded against air raids proved that there were no planes to spare.⁸

According to one opponent, even if home defenses were not of greater immediate concern than more distant bases, should Britain proceed with a project that could not possibly be ready in less than ten years and might then be quite useless?⁹ If, as some claimed, permanent docks were outmoded, if England had no capital ships which could be spared for service in Eastern waters, if a fleet based on Singapore could not protect Australia and New Zealand, if it were clear that in the event of war in the Pacific the major part of England's Eastern trade would cease automatically, was it advisable to spend millions of pounds at Singapore?¹⁰ In the words of the *Daily Mail*, "*The People of this country as it is, are taxed to the very extremity, and they must have relief. True wisdom would therefore lie in avoiding any scheme on which there is not complete unanimity among naval officers; and notoriously there is not such unanimity about Singapore.*"¹¹

There was also a strong doubt in the minds of many as to whether England was in a position to assume the full burden of Empire defense without getting a fair degree of assistance from those on whose behalf the protection was "mainly being devised." A typical statement was that of former Prime Minister Lloyd George, who asserted that before the Government had committed itself to the huge financial responsibilities of an elaborate naval station at Singapore, it should have secured definite guarantees of specific contributions from the interested

⁷*London Daily Mail*, March 6, 1925.

⁸*Ibid.*, March 26, 1924.

⁹Great Britain, *Commons* (March 12, 1923), 161: 1098-1099.

¹⁰For the views of naval experts on these technical matters, see below, Chapter IV.

¹¹*London Daily Mail*, March 6, 1925. See also *London Times*, March 26, 1924; *ibid.*, December 17, 1924; Great Britain, *Commons* (March 23, 1925), 182: 88; *ibid.* (March 23, 1925), 182: 99; *ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1243; *ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1203-1204; *ibid.* (March 14, 1925), 299: 723.

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Dominions.¹² In the same connection, fear was expressed that the original estimates would not cover the entire cost of the enterprise. Asquith, for one, recalled that "anyone who has been through the history of Rosyth . . . knows perfectly well that the estimates are always falsified and always exceeded, and generally greatly and grossly exceeded. It is not a question of £10,000,000, but of what I may describe as an indefinite and immeasurable expenditure."¹³ Or, as the *Daily News* more picturesquely put it, "It is probable that the serpent began his temptations of Eve by pointing out that the apple in question was a very small one, and quite unlikely to be missed." Referring to the adroit "suggestion that the initial expenses of the Singapore dock scheme will be very small," the *Daily News* rejected it:

The answer to this sort of plea is that, if it is true, one of two parties is being imposed upon. Either the scheme is really the little thing which the Government deprecatingly represents it to be—in which case it is impossible to understand why even the most masterful and headstrong of the Departments should have so determinedly set itself to flout public opinion for so mere a bagatelle; or else the plausibly small initial expenditure is really the necessary prelude to a far larger outpouring of public money, and it is the bland consciousness of this which leads the Admiralty to consent to the hood-winking of the taxpayer . . . We shall be immediately committed to the erection of the necessary shore works to guard the . . . dock, of the little army to guard the land side, and of the squadrons of aeroplanes to guard both.¹⁴

The leading labor journal in the United Kingdom attacked the Singapore project on special grounds. It condemned the scheme not only as an unjustified expenditure of money needed for better purposes, but as a purely imperialistic venture:

To the question "Why Singapore?" no reasonable answer is forthcoming.

Yet the answer is plain enough if one takes the trouble to think geographically. There has been endless talk of the Pacific and of the Four-Power Pact. All that is beside the point. Look at the map. Singapore is not in the Pacific. *It is in the East Indies.*

And the East Indian Archipelago is unique. It is one of the most important economic centers of the world—one of the chief sources of two most important raw materials, oil and rubber. And it is owned politically by one of the weakest of European Powers, Holland.

An area of enormous riches, virtually unprotected, is surrounded by terri-

¹²Great Britain, *Commons* (December 9, 1924), 179: 83.

¹³*Ibid.* (July 23, 1923), 167: 104.

¹⁴*London Daily News*, March 20, 1925. See also *ibid.*, December 15, 1923; and *London Daily Mail*, March 6, 1925.

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teries belonging to all the chief predatory Imperialist Powers. Britain, France, America, and Japan all have ports within a few hundred miles of the tempting prize. There is the East Indian situation, reduced to its simplest economico-strategical terms. The natural deduction from it is—Singapore.

Not as a base for an imminent raid on the Dutch Indies. On the contrary, we are being asked to expend many millions of pounds for the defence of the Dutch Indies.

Why? Because we are the champions of little nations in distress? Not a bit of it. The Archipelago is economically important because of its rubber and its oil. The Dutch oil industry is intimately linked up in the Shell-Royal Dutch combine with the powerful British groups. There are heavy British investments in Dutch rubber undertakings.

Holland is too weak effectively to guard the interests of the shareholders in these international concerns. Therefore the British taxpayer is being invited to take on the job. And a cloud of talk about the Pacific discreetly conceals from him the real purpose of the burden he is being asked to assume.¹⁵

However, the major charge brought by most opponents of the scheme rested on the dangerous international repercussions which they were convinced would inevitably follow any reinforcement of Britain's Far Eastern naval fortifications. It was a move, they charged, which presupposed "a world foredoomed to war," the program of statesmen who had "thrown up the sponge, so far as trying to improve international relations" was concerned.¹⁶ It implied domination "by that vile old Latin phrase, 'Si vis pacem, para bellum,'¹⁷ and would strengthen the hands of those who wished Britain to rely for security upon " 'reeking tube and iron shard' and not upon friendliness and a square deal all round."¹⁸

England had signed the Covenant of the League of Nations. Was her signature, asked the Opposition, a scrap of paper? She had signed the Kellogg Pact. Was that an empty form? Was she to honor her signature of those documents by building up an enormous battleship base?¹⁹ To do so could only initiate a new race in armaments. If England started work at Singapore, the Dutch would immediately spend millions fortifying adjacent territories, and the Japanese would also get ready for war. Although the plan did not violate the letter of the Washington Pact, it did break the spirit of the agreement and

¹⁵*London Daily Herald*, April 10, 1923.

¹⁶Great Britain, *Commons* (May 28, 1936), 312: 2240.

¹⁷*Ibid.* (December 24, 1929), 233: 2178.

¹⁸*London Daily Herald*, January 22, 1925.

¹⁹Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2562-2563.

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must "inevitably recommence the competition in Pacific navalism from which it was hoped that Washington had freed the great Powers. That competition, once begun, would involve the expenditure of vastly more than eleven millions. It might easily lead through armament rivalry to war."²⁰ Again England might expect a terrible drain of blood "in spite of her protestations, her tears, and her fears."²¹

These sentiments were emphasized over and over by the opponents of the Singapore plan. Ramsay MacDonald, for example, told the House of Commons in March, 1924, that it was necessary "to consider the matter in a wider relationship." To proceed with the scheme would, he was convinced, exercise a most detrimental effect on England's foreign position:

As we have repeatedly stated, we stand for a policy of international co-operation through a strengthened and an enlarged League of Nations, the settlement of disputes by conciliation and judicial arbitration, and the creation of conditions that will make a comprehensive agreement on limitation of armaments possible . . . our task, meanwhile, must be to establish confidence, and this task can only be achieved by allaying the international suspicions and anxieties which exist today . . . to continue the development of the naval base at Singapore would hamper the establishment of this confidence and lay our good faith open to suspicion. Whilst maintaining our present standard in a state of efficiency, we take the view that it would be a serious mistake to be responsible for new developments that could only be justified on assumptions that would definitely admit that we had doubts as to the success of our own policy ourselves. As a result, we should almost inevitably drift into a condition of mistrust and competition of armaments in the Far East.²²

Sir John Simon echoed MacDonald's anti-militaristic plea,²³ and Viscount Grey voiced the same line of reasoning when he addressed the annual meeting of the National Liberal Federation. He said:

Although Prussian militarism and its methods precipitated the war in 1914, it was the intolerable and menacing growth of armaments that made war in the long run inevitable. The pre-war idea was that armaments must be increased to make security. The post-war reflection was that piling up armaments produced a feeling not of security but of fear; that security could only be produced by a common agreement and determination that disputes were to be referred to some other machinery instead of war for settlement; and that until in that way there was some feeling of security there would be no reduction of armaments.²⁴

²⁰*London Daily Herald*, April 10, 1923.

²¹Great Britain, *Commons* (December 24, 1929), 233: 2178.

²²*Ibid.* (March 18, 1924), 171: 319.

²³*Ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1284.

²⁴*London Times*, May 23, 1924.

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Lord Oxford (Asquith), a former Prime Minister, also "confessed that he had no really sanguine hopes that war could ever become anything but a progressively inhuman instrument for the settlement of international difficulties," and he therefore denounced the "elaborate fortification under the guise of a naval base at Singapore." Recalling that for ten years he had been chairman of the Council of Imperial Defense, he gave it "as his deliberate opinion that neither on the ground of policy nor on the ground of strategy was there the least justification for that expenditure."²⁵

From South Africa, Prime Minister Smuts pointed out that while the Singapore plan might be a sound proposal purely on grounds of naval strategy, "the authority of the British Empire as the protagonist of the great cause of appeasement and conciliation among the nations must be seriously undermined by it."²⁶ In this he was joined by Matthew Charlton and Henry Holland, leaders of the Labor Party in Australia and New Zealand, respectively, both of whom saw in the proposal an incentive to future warfare. It was Holland's "honest opinion that in opposing a proposal such as this we are doing what is best in the interests of our common humanity."²⁷

All of the fears expressed on the general international situation, should the Singapore plan be carried out, were given particular emphasis by reference to England's relations with Japan. Some argued that since the Mikado's Empire constituted no threat to British interests in the Far East, the base was unnecessary. Japan, it was pointed out, had in the past proved herself a meticulously loyal ally. Despite the pro-German leanings of her powerful military party, she had in the First World War carried out her obligations without hesitation, and, in the matter of naval assistance in the Mediterranean, had gone considerably beyond her specific responsibilities. The Anglo-Japanese alliance had been terminated not by her, but by England. However, she had accepted with good grace the new regime

²⁵*Ibid.*, November 19, 1925.

²⁶Great Britain, *Singapore Naval Base* (London, 1924), Cmd. 2083, p. 7.

²⁷New Zealand, *Parliamentary Debates, Legislative Council and House of Representatives* (September 21, 1927), 214: 265; Commonwealth of Australia, *Parliamentary Debates, Senate and House of Representatives* (July 27, 1923), 104: 1756.

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of the Washington Pact, and had lived up to it "in the letter and the spirit." There was absolutely nothing in her past record or her immediate policy which gave "the smallest reason to distrust her; and nothing—beyond the policy of racial discrimination" pursued in the Dominions—to suggest that any conflict of interests was likely to arise.²⁸ Should not the Government, therefore, be censured for delivering the taxpayers' funds to the Admiralty against the advice of the "best men of the Cabinet?" "That money," said Lloyd George, "was to be spent upon some imaginary danger in the Far East, upon the possibility that Japan might some day attack the British Empire. The Japanese were not such fools, but if there had been any danger of the kind it had been completely eliminated for a generation by the terrible earthquake which had destroyed [their] arsenals and invoked a gigantic loss" to their nation.²⁹

To others, the crux of the matter was not the absence of danger to England but the reaction of Japan, and the probable effect on her policy. If behind the polite discretion of her officials a majority, or even a substantial minority, of the Nipponese believed the Singapore base to be intended as a warning, if not as a positive menace, it would be futile to say that their fears were groundless. Denials would not remove suspicions; and international distrust had already cost England and the world far more than any other possible risk against which statesmanship was called upon to insure. That the Japanese were suspicious was obvious. Only the most "perverse stupidity" could blind the English to the fact that, to Tokyo, Singapore represented something more than a future base for the British fleet. It stood as "a new symbol of that white domination of Asia" which all classes in Japan had been taught to dread.³⁰ Indeed, one could not escape the surmise that the new fortifications were being built with a direct eye to Japan. Although in England they might be regarded as a measure of defense rather than aggression, such a distinction was "really a puerile one."³¹ Certainly, said Ramsay

²⁸"The Menace of Singapore," *The Nation and Athenaeum*, XXXVI (December 20, 1924), pp. 434-435.

²⁹*London Times*, October 12, 1925.

³⁰*London Daily News*, March 20, 1925.

³¹"The Menace of Singapore," *loc. cit.*, pp. 434-435.

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MacDonald, if Japan need not worry over a full-fledged Singapore base, too remote for launching a blow against her, then "Japan with the intelligence of which she has proved herself in so many eventualities to be possessed" was entitled to say, "If you cannot hit us, how can we hit you?" In any case, the psychological effect was not good.³² The plans for the base were already helping to revive militarism in Japan, and the first fruits of the new policy would probably be the early introduction of a new tonnage program by Tokyo. And so the "bad old game of competition in armaments" would go merrily on—not the less merrily and disastrously because its fresh inception would be at the other end of the world.³³

In brief, the opponents of the Singapore project preferred to place their reliance on a new world order resting on the League of Nations rather than on the most perfect naval base in the Far East. They believed that the Government could make no finer gesture, nor one better calculated to increase England's influence and security, than to scrap the Singapore plan. To proceed with it would be to assume that the further limitation of armaments was not practical politics, and that Britain must act solely in the expectation of war and without regard for a League of Nations policy to which, as a nation, she was definitely pledged. To carry to its logical conclusion the proposition that she must guard herself against every conceivable possibility of peril would mean the creation of a navy larger than any possible combination that could be brought against her, and an army and air force considerably more powerful than the immense organizations which had helped reduce France to national bankruptcy.³⁴ England, therefore, should discontinue this scheme which was an insult to Japan, a provocative, costly, and totally unnecessary undertaking "inspired by the Admiralty mentality, which, having been robbed of the German menace," had to find "a new menace somewhere and so gratefully discovered one in the Pacific."³⁵ Any course other than repudiation would cause the gravest reactions

³²Great Britain, *Commons* (March 19, 1925), 181: 2536-2537.

³³*London Daily News*, March 24, 1925.

³⁴*Ibid.*, March 26, 1924.

³⁵*Ibid.*, November 15, 1929. See also Australia, *Debates* (July 27, 1923), 104: 1756, and *ibid.* (July 30, 1923), 104: 1792.

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throughout the world, bring the possibility of war appreciably nearer, and constitute a blunder of the first magnitude—the most baleful stroke of diplomacy since 1914.

Meanwhile, the proponents of the Singapore scheme were fighting back. They vigorously refuted the arguments both of reckless extravagance and of dangerous diplomacy. On the contrary, they insisted, the project represented a policy that would lead to greater economy in the Navy. It meant a saving for several reasons. In the first place, a relatively small fleet operating from a well-equipped base could accomplish more than a large fleet which had to send its units thousands of miles for essential repairs.⁸⁶ Secondly, there would be a tremendous reduction in the actual cost of those repairs by making them in the area in which the ships were stationed instead of sending them all the way to England or Malta and back again.⁸⁷

Thirdly, without the base, the efficiency of each vessel in the Pacific fleet was materially impaired by the mere fact that it had travelled from home and could not be overhauled upon its arrival in the Far East. For example, by the time the *Hood* reached Sydney from England, her speed was reduced four knots due to the accretion of marine growth on her hull, and six knots by the time she reached North American waters. Such a loss of capacity could be compared to sacrificing a million pounds of her cost price and might, perhaps, be throwing away the whole vessel in any contest with an adversary nominally inferior.⁸⁸ As one of the directors of the White Star Line pointed out, his company had recently acquired two of the world's largest ships from Germany. Since these could not be dry-docked in the United Kingdom, they had to be sent either to Germany or to America for repairs. However, he declared, he and his colleagues would not be content until they had provided sufficiently large docks in Great Britain. Yet many in England, "faced

⁸⁶*London Times*, March 24, 1925.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, December 17, 1924, quoting a statement by First Lord of the Admiralty Bridgeman.

⁸⁸*Sydney Morning Herald*, May 12, 1924.

with a similar problem in regard to the Navy, were prepared to turn the Navy down." Was this either efficient or economical?³⁹

From the point of view of insurance, likewise, the Singapore project was emphasized as a good investment. Inasmuch as rates varied directly with the risks, and since all goods and ships were insured, thousands of pounds annually would be saved the British if naval protection were assured their hulls and cargoes. For this reason, the *London Times* made the categorical statement that there was not a merchant engaged in commerce with China, Japan, the East Indies, Australia, and even India who would not "give unstinted support to any scheme for the proper protection of British trade."⁴⁰

"Empire insurance," in fact, was a major motive behind the whole Singapore plan. W. C. Bridgeman, First Lord of the Admiralty, explained this idea by using the somewhat homely illustration that one did not buy life insurance or take out protection on a motor car in anticipation of a quick wreck or an imminent death; one simply wished to provide for the unexpected. Therefore, it was "perfectly ridiculous" to say that England was fortifying Singapore because she planned to attack other countries or because she was sure they would attack her.

Although there was no cloud on the horizon, it would be folly to suppose that, in the future, any more than in the past, Britain could be quite certain that she would be free from any unexpected calls to defense.⁴¹ The country wanted efficiency and economy, but no business man, said E. C. Grenfell, a director of the Bank of England, would be so foolish as to eliminate insurance costs as an economy; certainly "the Singapore dock was an insurance for the Empire" and its construction could in no sense be regarded as a needless extravagance.⁴²

Even more vehement were the denials that the Singapore plan represented dangerous international diplomacy. In the first place,

³⁹*London Times*, March 29, 1924.

⁴⁰*Ibid.*, March 4, 1924.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, March 4, 1924.

⁴²*Ibid.*, March 29, 1924.

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there was not the slightest ground for asserting that the new base would constitute a threat, actual or implied, to Japan. As Sir A. Shirley Benn, Conservative Member of Parliament, put this argument, "It seems ridiculous to assume that because we are going to establish a base 3,000 miles away from Japan, the Japanese should think we intend it for the purpose of fighting them. One might as well say that if we were to develop Plymouth, America should get nervous lest we were establishing a base from which to launch attacks against her."⁴³ Similarly, if France saw no threat in the building up of England's air forces, why should Japan see a menace in immobile defenses at Singapore?⁴⁴ Certain groups in Japan, admitted Prime Minister Baldwin, might feel "some suspicion" that the works at Singapore indicated a "lack of confidence" on England's part in the peaceful intentions of her former ally, but Tokyo's official and other well-informed circles "fully realized that improvements of the Singapore dockyard" were "a normal development of naval policy." Moreover, the two countries were "firmly united by their common interest in the preservation of peace, by the treaties signed at Washington, and by the special bond of an historic and valued friendship."⁴⁵

To support Baldwin's picture of the situation, Bridgeman produced two statements by Japanese naval officers with regard to Singapore. He reported that in January, 1923, Vice-Admiral Sakamoto had declared that the construction of the base "should be and is no cause for alarm to Japan, and attempts made to make it appear otherwise are founded on no good reason." In the same year Rear-Admiral Tosu had said:

Some see in this measure a sign that England is no longer our friend. They do not realize that we would do the same if we were placed in a similar position. Official opinion, however, does not regard it in an unfavorable light and we consider that the good feeling and amity existing between our two nations are in no way incompatible with it.⁴⁶

Additional evidence on that point came from Marquess Curzon

⁴³Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2574.

⁴⁴"Statement by the Navy League," *London Times*, February 4, 1924.

⁴⁵Great Britain, *Commons* (February 23, 1925), 180: 1590.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* (March 19, 1925), 181: 2525.

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of Kedleston, who had been at the Foreign Office when the decision to build the new base was made. Addressing the House of Lords, he declared:

Supposing there had been any ground for such apprehension on the part of the Japanese Government, supposing they had thought that the construction of a naval base at Singapore was in any measure directed against them, what would have been their natural action? The Japanese Ambassador would have come round and seen me at once with his interrogations, with his challenge, with his demand for further information. Did he do so? Not in the least. On the only occasion on which the Japanese Ambassador came to see me about the question, he remarked to me that he thoroughly understood our policy, that it was in consonance with what he knew to be our policy, that he himself did not and his Government did not share the apprehension to which I am referring, and that he had no complaint whatever to make. Are we to be more sensitive, more suspicious, and more susceptible than Japan?⁴⁷

Proponents of the Singapore plan likewise repudiated the charge that the new fortifications in any way violated the spirit of the Washington Conference. First Lord of the Admiralty Amery told the House of Commons:

It was fully understood by all the delegations at Washington that we were retaining full freedom of action as regards Singapore. There was no discussion of the particular arrangements we, or any of the other Powers concerned, had in contemplation at naval bases or stations outside the zone explicitly defined in the Agreement.⁴⁸

The most conclusive statements on this point were made by two men whose authority and information their opponents found it difficult to refute. The first, Sir George Pearce, Australian Minister for Home and Territories, gave the following assurance to the Australian Senate:

As one who had the honor to take part in the preparation of that Treaty, and who listened to the discussions, not merely in the Conference itself, but—what was far more important—in some of the Committees and at meetings of the various delegations that were held in secret, the reports of which have not been published, I say, not only is it not an infraction of the Treaty, either in the spirit or in the letter, but that the idea of a base being established at Singapore was clearly and distinctly understood, not only by the British Delegation, but also by the American and Japanese Delegations, to be an essential part of Britain's plan for the defense of its interests in the Pacific.⁴⁹

⁴⁷Great Britain, *Parliamentary Debates, Fifth Series, House of Lords* (March 18, 1924), 56: 826-827. (Hereafter cited as *Great Britain, Lords*.)

⁴⁸*Ibid.* (July 16, 1923), 166: 1870.

⁴⁹Australia, *Debates* (March 27, 1924), 106: 19.

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Lord Balfour, head of the British delegation at the Washington Conference, was equally emphatic. He referred to the rumors "that in fortifying Singapore, the British were trespassing upon the spirit of the Washington Conference, that they were taking a somewhat mean advantage of a technical point which neither the American nor the Japanese Government—the two great Pacific naval Powers—were aware of," and to the criticism that such a procedure was hardly worthy of England. "A more grotesque view could not be entertained," he asserted. Singapore was deliberately omitted from the non-fortification agreement in order that England might do with it exactly as she wished:

We were bound, we were limited as regarded Hong Kong, one of the greatest ports in the world, and we were precluded by the Washington Conference from adding existing fortifications against imaginary naval attacks. Singapore was deliberately left out and the people who suggested that it was a mistake, and that neither the American nor the Japanese sailors knew quite where the line of longitude passed which put Singapore outside or inside of the Pacific, were really talking grotesque nonsense. The lines of longitude were not matters on which sailors differed and disputed. They were absolutely precise, absolutely determinable, and if Singapore happened to lie to the west of the line with regard to which the Washington Conference operated that was, if anything ever was, the line of deliberate policy.⁵⁰

The advocates of the Admiralty plan also refuted the fundamental premise of their opponents, that the construction of stronger fortifications at Singapore would weaken the cause of international cooperation, stimulate an armaments race, and lay British good faith open to suspicion. They maintained, on the contrary, that preparedness was the best insurance of peace; that the League of Nations and the development of international conciliation, though important influences for peace, had not reached the point where sole reliance could be placed on them; and that the existence and prestige of the British Empire was one of the greatest forces for preserving the peace of the world. Therefore, to proceed with the Singapore scheme would be a step not toward war, but toward peace. Amery cited pre-war history to bring out the dangers of a pacifist policy:

From 1906 onwards the Government of this country made gestures for disarmament. It went back on our programme. It weakened itself deliberately. I

⁵⁰*London Times*, November 13, 1923.

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am not blaming it for the object it had in view, but the weak, fumbling ineffective manner in which it was done only created the impression in Germany of want of purpose, and it is clear that the only thing that occurred to them was we were unwilling to face the burden of armaments and to make sacrifices and that therefore Germany was justified in pushing ahead with redoubled vigor. The thing I want the House to realize is that that gesture, several times repeated, was not only a failure, but directly contributed to make things worse. One of the chief causes of the Great War, from which we are still suffering, was the fact that through all these years the Government of this country never contrived to make its real purpose or meaning clear to Germany.⁵¹

Along the same lines Geoffrey Drage, former president of the National Conference on Sea Training, made a prophecy:

In 1930 Japan will be ready, if not before. We are as we were in 1908, only Japan is far more clever than Germany. Peace can be maintained if it is perfectly clear what our policy is in the Far East and that we mean to stand by it. Otherwise, as in the case of the Crimean War, the Boer War, and the Great War, we shall drift into war because the pacifists will once more be taken at their own valuation as qualified to speak for Great Britain. The naval base at Singapore is a test of our resolution.⁵²

Therefore, while the sincerity of Ramsay MacDonald and his adherents was not doubted, it could not be agreed "that to sanction elementary precautions" against the risks of possible conflict would increase the war-making impulses of the world.⁵³ Peace was best maintained by a sense of security,⁵⁴ and although it was a great ideal to trust in brotherly love and the League of Nations, the time was no more ripe for giving up the policing of the seas than it was for giving up the policing of the country. It was much better to carry out the Cromwellian maxim to "trust in God and keep your powder dry" than to weaken England's hold on the Straits of Malacca and lessen the maritime supremacy which that key position gave her.⁵⁵ For it was entirely possible that an emergency might arise in the Far East out of questions in which the Empire was not directly interested but in which His Majesty's subjects in those regions could scarcely avoid being involved. In such circumstances the question of peace or war might very well depend on the confidence of the

⁵¹Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1290.

⁵²*London Times*, March 19, 1924.

⁵³*Ibid.*, March 24, 1925.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, April 23, 1925. Statement by the Navy League.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, July 5, 1924. Statement by Rear-Admiral Davidson.

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British peoples in the ability of the Royal Navy to protect them from a violation of their interests.⁵⁶

Expressions of this point of view came from many sources. For example, Prime Minister Bruce of Australia not only did not believe that the world wanted a guarantee from Great Britain of the sincerity of her motives—"the democratic, peace-loving instincts of her people [were] sufficient evidence of her desire to promote international good"⁵⁷—but he was convinced that the British Empire was the greatest force in the world for peace and that the reduction of its power and prestige would be a "death-blow" to the League of Nations.⁵⁸ As he commented elsewhere:

Our strength relative to the other great Powers has been the basis of the influence for peace which we have wielded in the councils of the nations and through the League of Nations. That strength has depended on the British Navy, its power and mobility. We are convinced a base in the Pacific is imperative for that mobility.⁵⁹

Prime Minister Massey of New Zealand made a similar answer to MacDonalld's demand for international cooperation through an enlarged and strengthened League of Nations. Said Massey:

I feel that I must reply . . . by saying that it may turn out to have been a pity that the League was ever brought into being if the defense of the Empire is to depend upon the League of Nations only. . . . It may also be pointed out that although the League of Nations is undoubtedly an influence for peace, hostile action as between nations has not so far been prevented by it. . . . I protest earnestly on behalf of New Zealand against the abandonment of the proposal to make Singapore a safe and strong naval station because I believe that the Empire will stand as long as Britain holds the supremacy of the sea, but, if naval supremacy is lost by Britain, the Empire may fall, to the detriment of humanity as a whole as well as of its own people, and it is surely the duty of the British Parliament and British Ministers to see that there will be no danger of such a catastrophe so far as it is humanly possible to prevent it.⁶⁰

Lord Curzon emphatically added his voice in protesting against major reliance upon the League of Nations:

In the world in which we now are, and in which, although we hoped the last war would abolish all chance of future wars, none can deny that the clouds are already piling up on the horizon or can look upon the vision as fantastic that war

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, April 23, 1925. Statement by the Navy League.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, March 21, 1924.

⁵⁸Australia, *Debates* (March 27, 1924), 106: 45-46.

⁵⁹Great Britain, *Singapore Naval Base*, as cited, p. 10.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 9.

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may occur in the lifetime of some of those in this room, idealism is a poor substitute for armaments; idealism, even with its eyes open is a rather dangerous thing; idealism with its eyes shut is folly; and idealism, whether it be blind or awake, at the expense of our own interests is nothing short of a crime. This sort of self-abasement, of self-humiliation for the sake of a moral gesture, is not appreciated by other people. They don't put the same interpretation on your acts as you do yourself. They regard it as an abrogation of your position and power, and this self-abasement may be, and often is in practice, an incentive to rivalry and competition on the part of others.⁶¹

Almost identical were views expressed by the *Sunday Times* and the *Morning Herald* of Sydney. Said the latter:

With whatever reassurance we within the Empire may regard the abandonment of Singapore, what really counts is the construction put upon such a policy by foreign powers. To them the abdication by Britain of her position as a Pacific naval Power, which is in plain English what abandonment of Singapore means, will sooner or later convey a clear impression that "the old firm" is going out of business. The British people are proclaiming that they want peace; the surest way of plunging the world into war is for the British Navy to resign its authority in the world.⁶²

Even William M. Hughes, the former Labor Prime Minister of Australia, felt that to abandon the Singapore scheme would be "tragically wrong." He announced that though he was a pacifist, he knew that "pacifism in some circumstances must only be taken in homeopathic doses. Peace is only to be preserved when there is force behind it to compel its preservation."⁶³

Although the leading spokesmen for the Singapore project asserted repeatedly and emphatically that they foresaw no danger in the Pacific, that relations with Japan were most cordial, and that the measure was merely a routine one of economy and efficiency, or at most of ordinary insurance, the main case for Singapore was actually built on the premise of an eventual threat to British interests and on the necessity of protecting Britain's trade, her Dominions, and the unity of the Empire. England's destiny, these advocates argued, might in the future, as in the past, depend on what happened in the most distant seas of the world. Hence, although it was admittedly difficult for inhabitants of "busy, distracted, problem-breeding Europe to envisage the Pacific questions in perspective," it was necessary to take a com-

⁶¹*London Times*, March 29, 1924.

⁶²*Sydney Morning Herald*, March 24, 1924.

⁶³*London Times*, April 4, 1924.

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prehensive view of world affairs.⁶⁴ The Admiralty could not forget that England's was an oceanic empire, that her sea communications extended from one end of the world to the other, and that it was as vital to keep them open in the East as in the West.⁶⁵ Nor was it possible to overlook the dangers in the Far East. It was there, many believed, that the great decisions of the future would be made. The clash of Asiatic with Western civilization, the rivalry of foreign commercial interests in China, the over-population of Japan, the under-population of Australia—all these were important issues in which Great Britain had a deep interest and the solution of which might involve an emergency of the most serious nature.⁶⁶ In these circumstances, it would be suicidal to consider the fleet merely as a coast guard for the United Kingdom. If it were to perform its proper function of imperial defense, if it were to keep open everywhere the seas whose freedom was England's very life and the condition of her existence as an empire, then, it was maintained, the construction of a Far Eastern naval station became a vital necessity.⁶⁷

The extent of England's dependence on her overseas trade was, of course, too obvious to need comment. It was emphasized that no small portion of the total amount came from Eastern sources, the value of British shipping in the area protected from Singapore being no less than £890,000,000 annually.⁶⁸ Expressed in another way, upon any given day of the year, Britain's trade—hulls and cargoes—afloat within the Indian area was worth £81,000,000; within the Australian area, £50,000,000; and within the China area, £26,000,000. The percentage of total imports to the United Kingdom from these combined regions was as follows: tea, 97; jute, 97; zinc ore, 96; rubber, 90; wool, 89; nitrate of soda, 86; hemp, 77; manganese ore, 76; tin ore, 71; rice, 63; cheese and butter, 50. Furthermore, these sources furnished a large

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, March 4, 1924.

⁶⁵Great Britain, *Commons* (March 11, 1937), 321: 1370. Statement by Sir Samuel Hoare.

⁶⁶*London Times*, March 4, 1924.

⁶⁷Great Britain, *Commons* (March 12, 1923), 161: 1098-1099.

⁶⁸*London Times*, April 9, 1924.

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proportion of the frozen meat supply, oils for food and industrial purposes, and 25 per cent of England's imported petrol.⁶⁹

Clearly, stoppage of the Eastern trade alone would be a major disaster to Great Britain. Even the most extreme opponents of the case, it was pointed out, favored building up the air defenses of the home island. Yet what would be the value of such measures if at the same time an adequate Far Eastern naval station were not provided? The menace to England's security from political conditions and potentially hostile forces in the East was at least as great as the menace nearer home,⁷⁰ for even if she herself were not engaged in war, other countries might become embroiled, in which case British shipping would be the greatest victim.⁷¹ Security for England herself would be valueless if her essential foods and raw materials were liable to destruction by attacks on her commerce in distant seas. "Paralysis of all industry and slow starvation," said the Navy League, "would be no less painful an end than extermination by high explosives or poison gas." For this reason, "defense against air raids and defense against slow strangulation by raids on commerce" were not alternatives, but "complementary one to another."⁷²

The extent to which her vital trade might be endangered had been shown by the experiences of World War I. Even when Japan was England's ally the Pacific and Indian Oceans were "the happy hunting-ground of the raider." The *Emden*, the *Wolf*, and the *Moewe* did most of their damage there. The *Emden* alone destroyed 70,000 tons of British shipping in seven weeks. The *Matunga*, with Australian reinforcements for New Guinea aboard, was captured within a week's steaming from Sydney. Twenty-two ships, most of them carrying meat for England, were sunk off the New Zealand coast.⁷³ During that period it had been necessary to detach two capital ships from the Grand Fleet to hunt down Admiral von Spee's squadron in the south-

⁶⁹These figures were computed by the Trade Department of the Admiralty and summarized by Hector C. Bywater in his book *Navies and Nations*, p. 86.

⁷⁰*London Times*, February 4, 1924. Statement by Admiral W. H. Henderson, retired.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, March 4, 1924.

⁷²*Ibid.*, February 4, 1924. Statement by the Navy League.

⁷³*Ibid.*, March 4, 1924.

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ern hemisphere. It was because of the possible recurrence of such conditions, it was argued, that Britain should be able to keep not only a few light cruisers but two or three capital ships in Pacific waters.⁷⁴

The safety of the overseas territories and the unity of the empire, no less than the defense of trade, was from the first advanced as one of the crucial arguments in favor of the base. Next to the "golden link of the Crown," said the Navy League, the fleet was the strongest tie binding the dominions to the mother country. Previously, because it had stood between them and the main force of a potential enemy, it had sheltered them more or less completely from attack, even though its chief strength had been thousands of miles away. But if the potential foe were "nearer to their doors than the protecting naval force, and if that protecting force [were] paralyzed for lack of a base within covering distance, the most profound anxiety" would be aroused for the safety of the overseas territories.⁷⁵ Clearly, in the minds of most advocates of the base there was little doubt of the identity of the "potential enemy." Although official spokesmen, perhaps from diplomatic necessity, referred in vague terms to "a possible threat to British interests," others with less circumspection spoke pointedly of "the Japanese menace" and the "Yellow Peril."

Japan, it was stated, had a population of 376 per square mile and a total annual increase of 700,000, whereas Australia, a vast, rich continent with an undefended shoreline of over 9,000 miles, had only five and a half million people—a density of merely 1.8 persons per square mile.⁷⁶ Moreover, the waters of the Pacific washed the shores of other countries in which the net annual increase was greater than the total population of Australia.⁷⁷ Although relations with all those nations were at the moment very friendly, was it not to be feared that Australia, so abundant and so empty, might be too tempting a prize for some of them? Nor was the case of New Zealand essentially different. And was not Japan, in particular, a menace? Her government was in the hands of a determined, militaristic oligarchy. Five times

⁷⁴Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2742. Statement by Mr. Leopold Amery.

⁷⁵*Ibid.* (February 4, 1924).

⁷⁶Great Britain, *Commons* (March 24, 1924), 171: 1209.

⁷⁷Australia, *Debates* (June 13, 1923), 103: 17; *ibid.* (March 28, 1924), 106: 85.

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since 1874, once every eight years, she had gone to war for the sake of expansion.⁷⁸ Already she had succeeded in obtaining complete control of the Western Pacific and, whether she admitted it or not, she aimed at the mastery of the islands in that area and the continent adjacent thereto.

Moreover, said the supporters of the Admiralty, Japan's revised ship-building program provided for twenty-four 1,500-ton cruisers which were "commerce raiders or nothing."⁷⁹ Britain therefore had to recognize that in Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Borneo, Hong Kong, and her other eastern territories, she was "face to face with a proud, patriotic, warlike, seafaring nation" which had "just emerged from the feudal system" and resembled the England of Elizabethan days. After her demand for racial equality had, to her indignation, been rejected at Versailles, she had "set about getting it, and other things, her own way." Her militaristic government might at any moment "be tempted to aggressive steps to divert domestic attention from the dangerous thoughts" of reformers.⁸⁰ Certainly, as long as Australia and New Zealand retained their "Asiatic Exclusion Acts," there could be no genuine cordiality between them and Nippon. As the leader of the New Zealand Nationalist Party put the matter:

As long as we have Acts which say that Asiatics shall not come freely into this country, they will doubt our sincerity. Are we not determined that we shall keep New Zealand "white"? Are not those Acts directed against the Asiatic races? So long as we maintain them, can we expect that Japan will look upon us with the utmost friendship? It is not reasonable to expect it. The Japanese feel that those Acts are a reflection upon them as a nation. We say plainly that we do not want them to come into this country and become our fellow-citizens. That is behind the exclusion Acts on our statute book. When we say that, we must, if those Acts are not mere words, have the strength to see that they are respected. I do not think the Labour party stands for anything but a "white New Zealand," and we know that the policy of Australia is a "white Australia." As long as we maintain that policy we must rely for its continuance on the strength that is represented by the British Navy.⁸¹

From the point of view of the Dominions, therefore, the construction of the base was a matter of "the utmost urgency"⁸² to be "pushed

⁷⁸Great Britain, *Commons* (March 24, 1924), 171: 1209.

⁷⁹*Sydney Bulletin*, as quoted in *London Times*, March 27, 1924.

⁸⁰*London Times*, March 19, 1924. Statement by Geoffrey Drage.

⁸¹*New Zealand, Debates* (September 21, 1927), 214: 270.

⁸²*London Times*, October 23, 1923. Statement by Sir Henry Barwell, Premier of South Australia.

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on without delay.’’⁸³ To fail to do so would be worse than lack of “Empire vision.” It would be a stark betrayal of those who rallied to England in her “hour of danger and sent thousands of their men across the ocean to shed their blood in defense of [her] interests and [her] homes.” When the next hour of danger struck, should they be told that England was either “too weak or too economical or too timid to extend to them the defense and protection which they had ungrudgingly afforded . . . ?”⁸⁴ Winston Churchill effectively summarized this final and crucial argument when, in criticism of the Government’s decision to discontinue the Singapore project, he said :

Disguise it as they would, wrap it up in a cloak of smooth pretense, cover it with a layer of excuses, hide it in a fog of technicalities, the stubborn brutal fact remained that the decision to abandon the Singapore base left Australia and New Zealand to whatever fate an anxious and inscrutable future might have in store. This was in a few short years of the war in which these very Dominions spent their heart’s blood in our salvation, even before the last dead had been gathered from the battlefields of France and Flanders into the national cemeteries—and then they were told that this was a great moral gesture. It was an act of repudiation, it was an act of ungraceful desertion, and it was a plain refusal, without precedent in the history of our Mother Country, to discharge an Imperial duty.⁸⁵

⁸³Australia, *Debates* (June 13, 1923), 103: 17. Statement by Senator Guthrie.

⁸⁴*London Times*, March 29, 1924. Statement by Lord Curzon.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, March 29, 1924.

CHAPTER IV

Technical Considerations

In addition to matters of policy, technical considerations played a conspicuous part in the debates on the Singapore question. Although the Admiralty had studied these factors carefully before making its report, many persons in both naval and legislative circles took issue with its decision. They focussed their criticism upon several points—the value of the base as a protection for Britain's Far Eastern interests, the feasibility of holding it against assault, the nature of the defenses to be provided, the type of docks to be built, and the efficacy of the capital ships for which they were being constructed.

To these critics it seemed impossible that either Australia or New Zealand could benefit by the establishment of a naval station at Singapore.¹ In the first place, they asked, were preventive measures needed? Was Japan likely to attack either dominion? Had those who entertained such fears with regard to Australia, for example, "worked out how many transports would be needed to carry at least two army corps—nothing less would have any chance against the fighting reserves of the Australian people—their tanks, heavy artillery, aeroplanes, and supplies?" The arrangements necessary for such an expedition, particularly in view of the British cruisers and submarines which would be on hand to intercept it, would be "stupendous." In any case, were such a campaign contemplated, to talk about Singapore as a deterrent

¹Australia, *Debates* (June 13, 1923), 103: 17. Statement by Representative Riley. New Zealand, *Debates* (August 6, 1936), 246: 545. Statement by Col. James Hargent, D. S. O.

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was "quite absurd" inasmuch as it was fully 2,400 miles from the direct line of approach between Japan and Australia.²

With regard to the safeguarding of commerce, it was argued that a fleet based on Singapore would be almost valueless. During World War I England had possessed a fleet with a preponderance of nearly two to one over Germany alone, and an auxiliary navy of 5,000 vessels. She had had the assistance of the American, French, Italian, and Japanese navies; she had had the most favorable geographical position that the atlas could furnish. Yet her main purpose, the protection of trade, could not be carried out.³ Even the Mediterranean, despite the existence of Gibraltar and Malta, two of England's strongest bases, had been practically closed to commerce.⁴ And in the South Pacific one German raider alone had been able to capture forty-two ships.⁵ In view of these facts, how could England hope to deal with the whole Japanese fleet? It seemed "indisputable" that in the event of armed conflict in the Orient, all trade north of Hong Kong would cease automatically, just as commerce had come to a halt in the Baltic and in the Mediterranean in 1914. On the other hand, merchant vessels from Australia and New Zealand did not generally pass through the Straits of Malacca. The few that did could easily be diverted to a more southerly route around the Cape of Good Hope⁶ or through the Panama Canal. The most comprehensive statement of this point of view was made by Rear-Admiral Dewar:

At first sight, Singapore appears to be well situated for the protection of British shipping bound to and from Hong Kong, the Philippines, China, and Japan. As, however, this trade would have to shut down almost entirely [in time of war] owing to the proximity of Japan to its northern terminals, this advantage is more imaginary than real. . . . [Nor] could a fleet based on Singapore offer any protection to the really important trade passing through the Indian Ocean to or from Australia, India, or Ceylon, etc. Singapore is about 2,500 miles from South Australia, 1,500 miles from Calcutta, 1,600 from Colombo, and 1,300 from the nearest point on the Colombo-Melbourne route. Raiding ships and squadrons could

²Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1228-1229. Statement by Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy.

³*Ibid.* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2547. Statement by Mr. Lambert, quoting Rear-Admiral S. Hall.

⁴*Ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1203-1204.

⁵*Ibid.* (March 14, 1935), 299: 628. Statement by Mr. Lambert.

⁶Great Britain, *Lords* (July 1, 1925), 61: 900-901. Statement by Lord Thomson.

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reach the Australian, Indian, and Ceylon focal areas by the Sunda Straits and other channels without going near Singapore. In the event of an intensive attack on British trade in the Indian Ocean, all the Australian and New Zealand trade would probably be deflected via the Panama Canal, in which case it would not pass within 4,500 miles of Singapore.⁷

In answer to these arguments, Lord Curzon, former First Lord of the Admiralty Amery, Lord Sydenham, Lieutenant-Commander Fletcher, and others insisted that whether or not Britain's lines of communication ran through the Mediterranean or around the Cape of Good Hope, Singapore would remain the focal point for the defense of Australia and New Zealand. Though its distance from them was considerable, its position was such that a fleet based there should be able to flank any naval movement launched from the north.⁸ Moreover, they believed that the provision of adequate facilities at Singapore would enable the Royal Navy to protect the Empire's Indian and Pacific trade. Although the island lay athwart only one of the links between those two seas, that link, the Straits of Malacca, was the most important, while the alternate routes—such as the Sunda Straits between Java and Sumatra—were within easy operating distance from the base. Nor did it seem necessary to have a fleet in the Far East equal to Japan's. Lord Sydenham illustrated these points by the following analogy:

Try to imagine the Grand Fleet, based on its home ports, endeavoring to bring to action or to control the operations of the [German] High Seas Fleet based upon American ports. The analogy is not perfect; but the difficulties and the limitations must be apparent. Over a large area of the Western Atlantic the smaller fleet would be secure from attack by a larger force maintained, like our Fleet in the North Sea, in complete readiness for battle, and would be able to act against British trade, while rendering the passage of troops from Britain for the defense (say) of the West Indian Islands impossible. *Mutatis mutandis*, that is the function which a fleet of moderate strength based on Singapore could effectively discharge. Such a function would be essentially defensive and would assert itself only in the event of aggressive action against British trade and territories in the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Covering trade in the latter and flanking naval movements from north to south in the former, a British fleet, able to operate from Singapore, might well prove the best guarantee of peace.⁹

⁷Dewar, K. G. B., "Singapore Naval Base," *Contemporary Review*, 138 (July, 1930), pp. 27-28.

⁸*London Times*, March 24, 1924, January 16, 1924, March 4, 1924; Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1228; New Zealand, *Debates* (August 6, 1926), 246: 310-311; "Britain's Check on Japan," *Literary Digest*, 78 (August 4, 1923), p. 25.

⁹*London Times*, March 24, 1924.

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Like their opponents, the supporters of the Admiralty pointed to the lessons of the Pacific raiders and von Spee's foray into the Atlantic. An adequate base might have prevented such disasters, they said. Was it not highly desirable, therefore, in order to avoid similar incidents in the future, that the Royal Navy be in a position to keep not only a few light cruisers, but two or three capital ships in Pacific waters?¹⁰ Although England herself might not again be engaged in a Far Eastern conflict, her commerce might be the greatest sufferer from the wars of others unless her navy were in a position to take effective action.

A second issue which provoked lively debate, particularly during the early years of the controversy, was the feasibility of protecting the base itself. The most severe critics of the project denied that adequate forces could, or would, be sent to the Orient, and concluded therefore that the base could not be held.¹¹ The more moderate admitted that aid was possible, but feared that it might not be provided with sufficient speed. Typical of the first group was Sir Percy Scott, a veteran controversialist and naval expert, who asked, "If we are at war with Japan, how are our battleships going to get to Singapore . . . ?"¹² Similarly, George Lambert, a Liberal Member of Parliament, could not help thinking that it was "asking too much from the British Navy that it should successfully defend the Singapore Base 8,000 miles away." Presumably that defense would be against Japan, some of whose ports were less than 3,000 miles distant and whose navy numbered 88,000 men as against Britain's 94,000.¹³

The question was also raised whether the Admiralty would ever consent to the division of the battle line which would result from allocating some of its units to Singapore. Sir Archibald Sinclair and General Smuts were among those who agreed that any conflagration in Asia would probably occur simultaneously with war in Europe. In such circumstances it was highly dubious whether the fleet, or any

¹⁰Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2642. *London Times*, March 4, 1924.

¹¹*London Daily Mail*, March 26, 1924; Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1203-1204.

¹²*London Times*, July 21, 1923.

¹³Great Britain, *Commons* (March 14, 1935), 299: 628.

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large part of it, could be sent to the East.¹⁴ In any case, such vessels as might be dispatched would require eight weeks to reach their destination, and before they could take to the open sea for action, another four weeks would elapse.¹⁵ That three-month interval might well prove to be disastrous to the British position. The reply to these criticisms was brief. As Drage summed it up:

How are our battleships going to get to Singapore? . . . The answer is that just as the chart which the Admiralty is about to publish will, their spokesman tells us, show from their records that the battle fleet was able to sweep the whole of the North Sea repeatedly, in spite of aircraft and submarines, so will the battle fleet be able to proceed to Singapore and, if necessary, operate from there. Does the [Opposition] suggest that the cruises mentioned in the Admiralty records did not take place?¹⁶

Pressing the point further, it was insisted that until the fleet reached Singapore, the base could be defended by light naval forces such as destroyers and submarines, by the military garrison, by air defenses, and by mining the narrow waters in the vicinity. For example, General H. Rowan-Robinson, a leading authority on naval warfare, stated that Singapore possessed "depth of defense, the shield of a strong air-detachment provided with good aerodromes, and resources within and without sufficient to cover a siege of almost any length."¹⁷

A third issue—and on this neither the opponents nor proponents of the base could agree among themselves—was the nature of the defenses to be provided. Should they be primarily military or primarily naval? Ramsay MacDonald believed that in order to hold the base, "We are going to create, we must create, we cannot help creating . . . a Pacific Fleet, or what may be the first stage of an alternative."¹⁸ Lieutenant-Commander Kenworthy, on the other hand, although equally opposed to the project, was convinced that the Straits of Malacca could be defended by long-range heavy guns, mines, torpedo-carrying airplanes and submarines, just as Heligoland Bight had been

¹⁴*Ibid.* (March 23, 1923), 182: 99.

¹⁵Great Britain, *Lords* (July 1, 1923), 61: 900-901.

¹⁶*London Times*, July 24, 1923. Statement by Geoffrey Drage.

¹⁷Rowan-Robinson, H., *Imperial Defense* (London, 1938), p. 304.

¹⁸Great Britain, *Commons* (March 23, 1925), 182: 88.

defended.¹⁹ To this Commander Fanshawe, a protagonist of the base, replied that Kenworthy had "conveniently left out the one vital factor that really defended Heligoland Bight, and that was the great might of the German capital ships—the High Seas fleet always lurking behind." Continuing, Fanshawe said: "The base at Singapore is being enlarged to take our capital ships, because unless they loom behind those comparatively light defenses which everybody would put up in defending the Straits, any enemy could pass through the Straits and pass to the south and thus get into the Indian Ocean."²⁰

The essence of the military versus the naval point of view was given in a debate which took place between Lord Sydenham²¹ and Sir Ian Hamilton.²² The former, heartily in favor of establishing a strong naval defense, wrote that if "Singapore were able only to supply and maintain a small cruiser force, it could be taken without difficulty, as was Kiao-chow, and our Fleet, based on Malta, about 6,000 miles away, would be powerless to save the situation." The case was unlike that at Pearl Harbor where the United States possessed an unrivalled location which could "easily be made impregnable." In Malaya natural conditions were such that the projected base would be largely dependent on the naval forces operating from it.²³

In reply, Sir Ian emphasized the importance of providing powerful military defenses. "Japan could never," he stated, "have brought gigantic Russia to her knees had not M. Witte [the Russian Minister] spent millions in equipping Dalny, which the garrison of Port Arthur was not strong enough to cover. Not one of the 11-inch howitzers could have landed without the appliances at Dalny." (This reference was to the guns that were used to reduce Port Arthur.) Continuing with the observation that Britain's main fleet was based on Malta, 6,000 miles from Singapore which itself was 3,000 miles from Japan,

¹⁹*Ibid.* (March 23, 1926), 193: 959.

²⁰*Ibid.* (March 23, 1926), 193: 962.

²¹Governor of Victoria, 1901-1904; Secretary to the Committee of Imperial Defense, 1904-1907; Governor of Bombay, 1907-1913; Vice-President of the Royal Colonial Institute; author of various books on naval subjects.

²²Served as Military Representative of India with the Japanese Field Army in Manchuria, 1904-1905; led the land attack during the Dardanelles campaign in the World War; author of various books on military subjects.

²³*London Times*, March 24, 1924.

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but only half that distance from Formosa, Sir Ian argued that, "If a post upon a line of communications passes nearer to some danger-point than the point from which it can be reinforced, it should either be very lightly held or very strongly held." Therefore, in order to render a fully developed Singapore reasonably secure against a *coup de main*, he believed that the existing garrison should be tripled in strength, that an agreement should be made with India to send only first-class infantry to Singapore, and that a Malayan defense force of 10,000 fighting men should be created. He did not doubt that Singapore could be held unless "we ourselves put out a half-way house and then—half-garrisoning it, as is our wont—make a present of it to the wrong people."²⁴

Lord Sydenham replied briefly to Sir Ian. He had always, he observed, maintained that "the defense of an outlying base must be mainly naval—not 'purely naval,' because moderate local defense is necessary against surprise. When, in 1704, the garrison of Gibraltar consisted of 80 officers and men, unable to man a quarter of the guns available, capture was invited." Similarly, in equipping Dalny, some 600 miles from the bases of a fleet superior in all respects to that of Russia in these waters, Witte "clearly gambled with fortune." Moreover, the 11-inch howitzers which the Japanese were able to bring from their coast defenses against Port Arthur were "certainly effective." Nonetheless Lord Sydenham could not admit that the millions spent on equipping Dalny brought Russia to her knees. In his opinion that defeat came about through different factors:

. . . the success of the Japanese turned upon their command of the Yellow Sea. If the Russians had disposed of a thoroughly efficient fleet based on Port Arthur or Vladivostok, the whole aspect of the war would have been different. Their belated and hopeless attempt to save the situation by ordering the Baltic Fleet to meet inevitable disaster is a warning which may well be remembered.²⁵

The value of elaborate permanent bases such as those planned for Singapore was another problem debated by naval experts. The issue was first raised by Lyonel Clark, a well-known writer on naval engineering, who, in a letter to the *Times*, admitted the necessity of pro-

²⁴*Ibid.*, March 25, 1924.

²⁵*Ibid.*, March 27, 1924.

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viding adequate accommodations for the fleet if the British Empire were to be preserved. However, he questioned the wisdom of spending large sums of money on a base that could not be ready, even if it were required, in less than ten years. Were permanent bases such a success that Britain had to go on forever installing them? Clark believed that history gave a negative answer. For example, in 1896 the introduction of the bilge keel as a permanent fitting for capital ships of the Royal Navy had the effect of making all existing docks "incapable of accommodating these vessels when under war conditions—that is, with a list or down by head or stern." Similarly, the addition of anti-torpedo bulges to post-Jutland capital ships (making necessary a beam of 106 feet) had resulted in the obsolescence of the dockyards at Gibraltar, Malta, Singapore, and even of Rosyth, a base not finished until the war was well advanced. Since he had twice in the course of a generation seen all the finest and latest Admiralty docks, at home and abroad, written off as useless, Clark felt himself bound to express concern when for a third time he saw England working along the same lines that had failed her in the past. Were these "costly palaces and edifices," he asked, the only solution to the problem?

Just as history had, to his mind, proved the inefficacy of permanent bases, so Clark drew on past experience for the substitute he proposed—a series of floating docks. (The Admiralty had already planned to construct one floating dock, and the question therefore was whether all the docks should be of this kind.) In the event of an unexpected conflict in the Pacific, Britain's contemporary naval position there would correspond, Clark thought, to the situation of the Grand Fleet at the opening of the World War. In order to guard the North Sea, that Fleet, in August, 1914, had found it necessary to operate off the northern coast of England and Scotland. However, since Rosyth had not yet been finished, the only facilities for its maintenance were in the Channel. Under these circumstances, the Admiralty rose to the occasion and dispatched to Invergorden a dock which was large enough to tackle any unit of the Grand Fleet. This dock was ready for work on September 21, 1914, that is, within six or seven weeks after the declaration of war. It was soon followed by repair ships, store ships, and everything

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necessary, including a second smaller dock. These enabled Lord Jellicoe to create a very effective base. Would it not be well, asked Clark, for England, before committing herself to anything final at Singapore, to see whether she could not repeat that episode, this time with a properly thought-out and correlated Invergorden? Should the expected attack not develop against Singapore but against Australia or, as was more likely, against New Zealand, there was no reason why the navy, just as it had "sent a Portsmouth to Invergorden," should be unable rapidly to transfer a floating base to King George Sound, Port Darwin, Sydney, Jervis Bay, or Wellington.²⁶

A joint meeting of the Institution of Naval Architects, the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland, and the North-East Coast Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders also discussed the relative value of floating and permanent bases. Several of the speakers asserted that a floating base which would be readily transferred to any point desired would be cheaper and would render more effective service than a permanent base at Singapore or elsewhere. Among them, W. J. Berry, a director of Naval Construction, conceded that under certain conditions a floating dock might be used to advantage since it could in times of emergency be sunk to great depths and could be trimmed or listed to any reasonable extent to dock badly damaged ships. But Captain Altham of the Royal Navy, although admitting that a floating dock might serve the purpose of an operational base, argued that it would be necessary to have behind it a fully developed main base with complete facilities for docking, repairing, and replenishing the fleet. In other words, because it could fulfill only a limited number of the requirements of a large fleet, he did not think that a floating base could prove an effective substitute for the station proposed at Singapore. To be at all suitable such a movable base would have to include artillery, submarine boom defenses, anti-aircraft guns, and perhaps other means for defense and repair work. A dock of that kind would take months to reach its destination and would call for the employment of a great many auxiliaries. The ultimate result would be that the

²⁶*Ibid.*, March 26, 1924.

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maintenance units would reach a number out of all proportion to the fleet itself. In conclusion, and as a final argument against the use of the floating dock, Captain Altham pointed out that to send a battle fleet to Singapore ahead of its main base, with the nearest naval dockyard 7,000 miles away, "would be to court disaster."²⁷

The last and, in some ways, the most highly technical issue raised in connection with Singapore was the efficacy of the capital ship for whose accommodation the new docks were being built. Was it not unwise, asked the critics of the plan, to spend millions of pounds on a dreadnought base when that type of vessel had been "rendered useless" by the mine, the torpedo, the submarine, and the airplane? It was admitted that in former days the capital ship had been responsible for maintaining the sea communications of the Empire. It had "held the ring" so that lighter and faster vessels could protect British commerce and harry that of the enemy. But it would not be able to play its customary role in the future, said the critics, because it had not been developed to withstand the threats of the weapons being perfected against it. Referring to the possibilities of adapting the capital ship to these perils, Sir Percy Scott was emphatic: "That is just what has not been done, and cannot be done."

The new situation was illustrated in part by the inability of the battleships bombarding Turkish forts in 1915 to remain stationary off the Dardanelles after enemy U-boats appeared. Although this was an isolated incident, it was to be expected that with further improvements of the mine, torpedo, submarine, and airplane, the ship of the line would become progressively less effective. This was the opinion of Admiral Mark Kerr. "Man's efforts in weapons," he stated, "were always for more range, speed, and invisibility," and in those developments the air held the final word. He believed, therefore, that the "present form of battleship should be an aeroplane-carrying ship with aircraft carrying 21-inch torpedoes, others with depth-charge bombs and smoke bombs, and with some fighting machines as well." The vessel should be fitted with blisters, well subdivided, and carry a secondary armament of 6-inch guns for defense

²⁷*Ibid.*, June 26, 1924.

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against submarine destroyers. Imperial communications "would be kept inviolate by mines and flotillas of air, surface, and under-surface craft." In view of these and other developments which were to be expected, the Singapore plans were, he thought, "akin to building a stable to hold an elephant when it might in the end be wanted to house a terrier"²⁸

Specific reply to Admiral Kerr was made by two proponents of the capital ship. Lord Curzon suggested that if the present type of vessel were obsolete, the proposed type would be even more vulnerable and less efficient.²⁹ Admiral Sturdee elaborated the same point at greater length :

Due to the comparative short radius of action of aeroplanes, airplane carriers are necessary. These ships are of necessity large, unprotected ships, which are vulnerable to attacks from the air, the surface, and the sub-surface, i.e., from bombs, guns, and torpedoes. They will thus be a continual matter of pre-occupation to the Admiral-in-Command owing to their great size and vulnerability. The greater the value attached to them, the more certain the enemy is to make his direct attack on them. They will thus require all the protection possible to keep them afloat, and will prove a source of weakness unless the fleet has equally powerful ships to those of the enemy. . . . The powerfully armed ship with screening vessels is as much required for the protection of the airplane carrier as for the battleship. Whatever vulnerability the battleship is credited with, the airplane carrier possesses to a larger extent.³⁰

Advocates of the Singapore project also flatly contradicted those who stated that the capital ship had been outmoded by the mine, the torpedo, the submarine, and the airplane. Sir Percy Scott, in particular, drew fire for his categorical statement that the ship of the line could not be successfully developed to meet the threat of the weapons used against it. Viscount Curzon bluntly challenged Scott's views :

With regard to the defense against submarines, why is it that Sir Percy Scott consistently and completely ignores the enormous developments in acoustic detection of submarines which have taken place since the war? I understand that Sir Percy Scott's war service was as a member of the Board of Invention and Research. Can it be that he is unaware of any of these new inventions?³¹

²⁸Speech at a meeting of the Royal United Service Institute as quoted in *London Times*, December 15, 1923.

²⁹*Ibid.*, December 15, 1923.

³⁰Sturdee, F. C. D., "The Importance of Battleships, Cruisers, and Suitably Placed Bases for Maintaining the Overseas Communications," *Journal Royal United Service Institute*, LXVIII (November, 1923), p. 631.

³¹*London Times*, July 25, 1923.

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Others pointed out that against submarines, not only listening devices but bulges and zig-zagging had proved to be highly effective; against mines, there were bulges and paravanes;³² against air attack, there were such defenses as zig-zagging, smoke screens, anti-aircraft fire, and increased strength of deck armor.³³ In the frequently quoted words of Lord Jellicoe, the "supporters of [each] new device have pronounced the speedy disappearance of the line-of-battleship, but instead the line-of-battleship has in each case been altered and means found to counter the latest danger to its existence."³⁴

Those who favored the construction of docks at Singapore, capable of berthing capital ships, rested their final argument on "the colossal power of the strongest type of ship afloat" and its superiority over other surface vessels. Only a battleship, they asserted, was equal to a battleship. It remained as true today, as it had in the past, that a cruiser was unable successfully to engage the larger vessel in broad daylight. So well recognized was this fact that "it was not etiquette for such a ship in a general engagement to open fire on a frigate or smaller vessel unless the smaller vessel had the temerity to fire." How then, while other sea powers continued to construct these so-called useless vessels, could England abstain from building the number allowed by the Washington treaty? As long as the United States and Japan maintained capital ships in the Pacific, should not Britain have adequate accommodations for her vessels in those waters?³⁵

The lessons of World War I were held to be clear in this

³²The paravane was invented by Lieutenant-Commander Burney, R. N. There are two types: the protector paravane, which protects a vessel against mines, and the explosive paravane, which is designed to detonate when it comes into contact with a submarine. A ship 400 feet in length is usually equipped with two paravanes—one for the port side and the other for the starboard. On larger vessels additional protection is desirable.

³³Sturdee, *loc. cit.*, pp. 623-640; Drage, Geoffrey, letter to *London Times*, July 24, 1923; *London Times*, October 4, 1923; Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2553-2555.

³⁴*London Times*, July 24, 1923.

³⁵Former First Lord of the Admiralty Amery, address at the Royal Colonial Institute, as quoted in *London Times*, February 14, 1924; Prime Minister Bruce of Australia, as quoted in *ibid.*, January 16, 1924; Sturdee, *loc. cit.*, p. 630.

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respect. What had caused the German Fleet to keep so close to its home ports? Was it fear of British submarines, or was it the threat of having to meet the Grand Fleet in action? Why were the German battle-cruisers, after bombarding unfortified towns, so anxious to return to their bases even though in so doing they risked the submarine menace? The answer was to be found in the power of the Grand Fleet. What would have happened to the Empire if England had ceased to build battleships, as some had recommended, before 1914, and if the British force had been inferior to that of the Germans? Would England still be able to say that no armed enemy subject had landed in any part of the Empire, or that the merchant ships of the enemy had been confined to their harbors while hers had been able to bring troops from all parts of the Empire to the vital points of Europe? The importance of the capital ship had also been demonstrated by events in the southern hemisphere. After Coronel, the *Scharnhorst* and the *Gneisenau* had controlled those waters until equally strong ships had been sent from England to meet them. How, it was asked, would the advocates of air and submarine defense propose to deal with a similar situation in the future, if England did not have ships as powerful as those of the enemy?

Even the failure of battleships to drive home the Dardanelles attack in the face of submarines was rejected as a valid criticism. That failure, according to the sea-power advocates, was to be regarded as a reflection on the manner in which the fleet had been used. All previous experience indicated that before seriously trying to capture a first-class fortress, particularly when a long channel had to be cleared of mines, an army was necessary to accompany the expedition. The lack of an adequate military force, and not the weaknesses of the capital ship, was alleged to be responsible for the fiasco at the Turkish straits.³⁶

For these reasons, champions of the capital ship had only the highest praise for the part it had played in British history. Admiral Sturdee eulogized this backbone of British sea power in the following terms:

³⁶Sturdee, *loc. cit.*, pp. 623-640.

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The ship of the line has a great record; it has enabled the Empire to be formed, it has developed it, it has saved this country from invasion during the centuries, it has covered the lesser vessels and allowed them to carry out subsidiary operations, such as driving the enemy off the high seas, while it has enabled ours to flourish and expand at their expense. With these great services to its credit let all patriotic Britons beware before they abolish this well-tried instrument of warfare, in order to replace it with other types which are still in their infancy and have yet to prove their worth in war in defending our far-flung world Empire.³⁷

Former First Lord of the Admiralty Amery also extolled the virtues of the capital ship:

The fleets of the future will each be a great complex, including many forms of vessels, but the capital ship will always remain the kernel of that complex. And the nation that endeavours to do without it will find that all the lighter forms of craft will be driven off the sea by the nation which has behind it the more powerful craft.³⁸

The well-known naval expert, Archibald Hurd, agreed with these estimates. The battleship would "continue to be the center around which fighting fleets in the future would be built," and on that issue, he said, there was no difference of opinion among responsible authorities, either in England, the United States, or Japan. The matter had been "repeatedly investigated and always with the same result."³⁹

The investigations to which Hurd referred have now been supplemented by a mass of evidence on the performance of the capital ship under war conditions and may, therefore, be studied to better advantage in connection with those developments.⁴⁰ It may be noted, however, that although to the Admiralty, these experiments consistently indicated the value of the ship-of-the-line in any scheme of imperial defense, to others the proof was less clear. The mind of the public, thought Admiral Sturdee, was considerably confused by the contradictory statements of the "experts," and the same was true of the manner in which the whole Singapore question had been presented to it.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 630.

³⁸*London Times*, February 14, 1924.

³⁹"Britain's Check on Japan," *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

⁴⁰See below, Chapter VII.

CHAPTER V

Building the Base

In 1923 Great Britain, still in the throes of post-war readjustment, was faced with difficult problems both at home and abroad. Economically, the international trade on which she depended for much of her well-being was almost paralyzed. Not only were many of her former European customers temporarily ruined, but the financial provisions of the peace settlement had further checked the flow of trade, and two new rivals, the United States and Japan, had invaded her world markets.

As a result of these and other factors, the coal mines, the merchant marine, the cotton mills of Lancashire, and in fact all her major industries were in a state of acute depression. The number of unemployed, mounting rapidly, had reached two million. Moreover, during the five war years, the national debt had multiplied more than twelve-fold, and the interest charges on it were tremendous. To this burden was added the steadily increasing cost of the dole and of various projects undertaken in the hope of alleviating unemployment. These costs, combined with the theory that England should pay as she went along and not build a greater debt for future generations, brought about a drastic rise in taxes. The estimates for 1920 called for £1,425,000,000, nearly nine times that of the notorious Lloyd George budget which only a decade earlier had seemed so excessive; yet the nation in 1920 was much poorer than it had been in 1909. With unemployment increasing, taxes rising, foreign trade well under the pre-war level, Brit-

ain was rapidly becoming characterized by "a poverty-stricken working class and a drastically taxed middle class and aristocracy."

Needless to say, these conditions were reflected in the political scene. Together with a number of unsuccessful ventures in foreign policy,¹ they gradually undermined the prestige of the Lloyd George government which had been re-elected in 1918. In 1922 the Conservatives, who comprised the main support of the Coalition ministry, voted to act as a separate party. Lloyd George immediately resigned, Bonar Law was invited to form a cabinet, and the general elections held shortly afterward established the Conservatives in office with a moderate majority. The Liberal Party, which had divided in 1916 when Asquith's followers refused to join the Coalition ministry, went to pieces, and the Laborites, whose strength increased as the economic clouds darkened, became for the first time His Majesty's Opposition. Such was the general situation in 1922 when the new orientation of sea power and the ratification of the Washington treaties brought to the fore the problem of adequate Far Eastern preparation for Britain and the Board of Admiralty advised the creation of a modern naval station at Singapore.

At that time the equipment of the base consisted of five government-owned drydocks, of which the largest had a depth of about 3 feet, a length of 873 feet, and a breadth of only 93 feet. Since post-Jutland capital ships, provided with anti-torpedo bulges, had beam measuring from 101 to 106 feet, they obviously could not be accommodated or repaired in these docks.² The naval authorities recommended, therefore, that the existing facilities be scrapped and an entirely new base be constructed in the "Old Strait" about three miles east of the causeway connecting the island of Singapore with the mainland. This, it was estimated, would involve an expenditure of £1,500,000, broken down as follows: (1) wharves, basins, railways, roads, dredging berth for the floating dock—£5,100,000; (2) graving dock—

¹The Genoa Economic Conference and the intervention in Turkey, the latter generally known as "the Chanak affair."

²Hall, Walter Phelps, and Albion, Robert Greenholgh, *A History of England and the British Empire* (Boston, 1937), Chapter XXX.

³Cornish, Vaughan, "Singapore and Naval Geography," *United Empire* XVI (August, 1925), p. 509.

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£1,000,000; (3) offices, dwellings, and other buildings—£420,000; (4) workshops, storehouses, and magazines—£1,780,000; (5) contingencies—£1,200,000; and (6) machinery—£1,100,000. These figures included no provision for military or aerial defense.⁴

The Cabinet took definite action on the Admiralty's recommendation in February, 1923, and in March of that year the Bonar Law Government introduced the plan into Parliament. The main task of the Navy, as stated by First Lord of the Admiralty Amery, was "not to act as coast guard to the United Kingdom, but to keep open everywhere the seas whose freedom is our very life-breath and the condition of our existence as an Empire." To accomplish this objective, the Navy must be free to go anywhere at any time. This it could not then do because Britain had neither the supplies of oil nor the docking and repair facilities required to give the necessary mobility. The battle fleet could neither be sent to nor maintained in the Far East, for no dock within British territory in that area was capable of accommodating a modern capital ship. Describing these handicaps, Amery said:

It is to remedy that situation that we are gradually building up our chain of oil reserves at the various strategic points on our ocean routes, and that we are now making a beginning on a very small scale with the necessary provisions for eventually creating at Singapore a Naval base capable of dealing with the requirements of a fleet of modern capital ships . . . the position of Singapore on the direct route to the Far East and on the flank of our commercial and strategic line of communications with Australia is naturally the one best suited for our purpose. It is for us almost what the Panama Canal is to the United States, our gateway to the Pacific.⁵

For these reasons Amery requested the immediate appropriation of £200,000 "for preparatory work," the remaining expenditure to be spread over a long period of years with "only comparatively small sums" required in the near future. In view of the financial condition of the country it was not surprising that George Lambert, a member of the Opposition, immediately challenged the wisdom of expending a large amount of money for the leisurely construction of a dockyard which when built would, he feared, be entirely out of date.⁶

⁴Great Britain, *Commons* (March 24, 1924), 171: 924.

⁵*Ibid.* (March 12, 1923), 161: 1098-1099.

⁶*Ibid.* (March 12, 1923), 161: 1106.

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In May, 1923, Bonar Law, mortally ill, retired, to be replaced by Stanley Baldwin. It soon became known that Baldwin, when presenting his naval estimates to Parliament, intended to request substantial appropriations for the Singapore project. Immediately a general discussion arose. Anticipating the debate at Westminster, the *London Times* and the *Manchester Guardian* lined up on opposite sides of the question. The *Times* was firmly in favor of the scheme, summing up the matter thus:

It is the business of statesmanship to look ahead—a function that has been too often abdicated in recent years by those who preferred the demagogue's habit of being prompted by the public opinion of the moment After mature consideration, the Cabinet, acting upon the advice of the Committee of Imperial Defense, have come to the conclusion that the development of Singapore as a naval base is necessary, and we are prepared to trust and to support them. They alone have all the data for forming a proper judgment, and as much expert advice as they desire.⁷

The *Guardian*, on the other hand, condemned the Singapore plan without mincing words:

It is, in fact, the scheme of one group among our deeply divided admirals. And, on the off chance that the theories of this group may be right, the Government has been persuaded to pour out from ten to twenty millions sterling at a time when there is overwhelming evidence that far the weakest point in our defenses is not the naval defenses of Australia, but in the air defenses of London. As compared with the nakedness of Southern England, Australia is thickly armor-plated against the gravest of all modern military and naval dangers, by simple remoteness. If she needs further defense she might fairly be asked, at the approaching Imperial Conference, to provide it in the most modern, most effectual, and the cheapest form—that of aircraft.⁸

Parliament opened its debates on the naval estimates in July, and public discussion increased at once. Editorial writers and platform speakers, legislators and civilians, liberals and conservatives, both within England and in the Dominions, joined in the controversy, elaborated and expanded, stated and restated the political and technical arguments for and against the base. At Westminster, opinion divided largely along party lines. Ramsay MacDonald, spokesman for His Majesty's Opposition, and Herbert Asquith, Liberal leader, launched the attack against the project. They were supported both

⁷*London Times*, June 30, 1923.

⁸"Glum Silence About Singapore," *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, XVIII (May 4, 1923), p. 343.

by their party members⁹ and by the Labor and Liberal press. The *Daily Herald*, official organ of the Labor Party, and the liberal papers, the *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily News*, were particularly emphatic in their denunciation of the scheme as an extravagant misuse of public funds, blundering diplomacy, and technical misjudgment.¹⁰

The Conservatives—led by Leopold Amery, Lord Curzon, and Lord Balfour¹¹—and backed by such journals as the *London Times* and the *Daily Telegraph*, upheld the Ministry in its contention that post-war naval rivalries and the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance made it necessary to provide improved facilities for the fleet in the Pacific.¹² Technical experts were, of course, called upon to testify for each side. The newly won Conservative majority in the House of Commons, however, made the passage of the bill a routine matter, and work on the base was initiated almost immediately.

In the Pacific Dominions the division of opinion was less clear-cut. As in England, the Conservatives endorsed the project, while Labor opposed it as a provocation of Japan and as an imperialistic venture which would “precipitate its victims into the whirlwind of war, bringing in its train disaster, tears, and anguish.”¹³ However, a vague feeling of insecurity resulting from Japan’s new status as a Pacific power and the emphatic demand in both countries for a “white Australia” and a “white New Zealand” combined to lessen materially the volume of audible criticism.

In Australia Prime Minister Bruce early indicated that the official attitude was one of approval. The Australian press, with the exception of the Labor organs, went even farther. It not only rejoiced that “Now the gateway to the East will be held by a powerful guardian, able to open or close that strategic door, able to flank any Pacific

⁹Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2543, 2547, 2559-2563, 2606, 2632.

¹⁰*London Daily Herald*, April 10, 1923, July 29, 1923, October 23, 1923; *Manchester Guardian Weekly*, XVIII (May 11, 1923), p. 363; *London Daily News*, July 24, 1923.

¹¹Great Britain, *Commons* (July 19, 1923), 166: 2553-2555, 2584, 2615, 2629, 2642.

¹²*London Daily Telegraph*, July 25, 1923; *London Times*, June 1, 1923, July 24, 1923, July 25, 1923, November 13, 1923, December 15, 1923.

¹³Australia, *Debates* (July 30, 1923), 104: 1792.

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sorties upon Australia,"¹⁴ but urged that Australia assume her share of the expense. Parliament, however, was noticeably less responsive to the suggestion of financial aid. Matthew Charlton, leader of the Labor Party, objected to the plan on grounds of policy, and stated bluntly: "We have never previously agreed to assist Great Britain in defense preparations outside of Australia. The load of debt we have to carry now is quite heavy enough . . ." ¹⁵ Others, who did not view the project as intrinsically dangerous, nevertheless feared that its location would militate against its value to their continent, and hence objected to granting financial support.¹⁶ Still others, with less consistency, admitted its strategic worth but believed that Australia could not afford to vote funds for its prosecution.¹⁷

To these objections the advocates of Australian aid replied that although Singapore was far distant, as long as the British fleet was located there and remained in command of the Pacific, there would be no danger of a raid on the Commonwealth's coastal cities. On the other hand, if the base were at Sydney or Port Stephens, those cities themselves, as well as the country's seaborne commerce, would be in the very center of operations. To the *Sydney Morning Herald* the matter was simple:

It has not been shown that Singapore is not excellently situated for the base of a fleet which is designed to protect Australia Those who disagree . . . appear to hold . . . that the proper way to defeat an enemy attacking Australia is to meet him in Australian coastal waters or on Australian soil, where Australian promoters might make huge profits from the cinema pictures of the spectacle: but where the enemy would, even if defeated, be able to wreak most damage upon Australian property. It must bemuse such people to ponder why Nelson did not stay in the Channel to receive the French fleet instead of chasing it to the West Indies.¹⁸

If the strategic value of the base were once granted, said another paper, Australian aid must be forthcoming, for certainly "the race that reared the Anzacs cannot become a race of mendicants and spongers."¹⁹

¹⁴"Britain's Check on Japan," *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

¹⁵Australia, *Debates* (July 27, 1923), 104: 1737.

¹⁶*Ibid.* (August 8, 1923), 104: 2317.

¹⁷*Ibid.* (August 6, 1923), 104: 2154.

¹⁸*Sydney Morning Herald*, May 21, 1923.

¹⁹*Sydney Sun*, as quoted in "Britain's Check on Japan," *loc. cit.*, p. 25.

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Despite these spirited expressions there continued to be an obvious reluctance on the part of all political parties in Parliament to withdraw from the urgent necessities of national development "a single penny beyond the barest minimum" required for national defense.²⁰ Though Prime Minister Bruce made vague statements to the effect that Australia would do her share, no positive measures of any sort were taken.

The story was much the same in New Zealand, though she had strong precedents for assuming a part of the financial burden of Singapore. As early as 1887, she had given concrete expression to her tradition of solidarity with England. In that year New Zealand had agreed to contribute £20,000 annually to the cost of the British Navy. In 1903 the sum was raised to £40,000, in 1908 to £100,000, and in 1909 the gift of a battle cruiser was made to the home fleet. After World War I a change in policy was initiated. A New Zealand Division of the Royal Navy was created, "the vessels of which were to be stationed in New Zealand waters, manned in part by New Zealand personnel, and in peace controlled exclusively by the New Zealand Government."²¹ This squadron, which was to be part of an Eastern Fleet of the Empire, replaced the former financial contribution to the British navy.²² Thus, when the question of the Singapore project arose, general sentiment in New Zealand proved to be enthu-

²⁰"Australia and the Imperial Conference," *Round Table*, XIV, p. 378.

²¹New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, *Contemporary New Zealand* (Auckland, 1938), pp. 248-249.

²²This action was in accordance with recommendations made by Sir James Allen, Minister of Defense, in his report to the Committee of Imperial Defense in 1913. He proposed that there be created a Pacific Fleet consisting of local units from Great Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand: "By 'local units' I mean such units as each country ought and can afford to contribute for its own harbor and coast defense and for the purpose of a common sea-going fighting force. By 'Eastern Fleet of Empire' I understand a combination of the sea-going fighting portions of each unit, having as its main objective the protection of the seaways of the Pacific, and of sufficient power to support the Advisors of the Sovereign in any diplomatic questions, and especially those in which the Dominions of the Pacific may be interested. It should be supplemental to the British Fleet; should not be moved from the Pacific except for the most urgent reasons, but must be at the disposal of the Advisors of the Sovereign when war broke out or if war were imminent." Allen, Sir James, *New Zealand and Naval Defense* (N. P., 1929), p. 7. Similar recommendations were made in 1919 by Viscount Jellicoe.

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siastic. The majority of the press not only applauded Britain's decision to strengthen her Far Eastern position, but stressed the importance of financial aid on New Zealand's part. The position of the *Wellington Evening Post* was typical:

It is evident that this is an expense which is being undertaken as much for the British Dominions in the Pacific and Far East as for Britain herself. Indeed, it is more for the Dominions, since a naval war in the Pacific would menace the trade of Great Britain, but would challenge both trade and security in the Dominions. Surely then, the Dominions should support the policy with deeds as well as with words. If we object to a payment which assures us both trade-protection and security, we are not Imperialists. We are not even Little New Zealanders.²³

Prime Minister Massey agreed that the base was "necessary not only for the defense of Australia, New Zealand, and the colonies in the Pacific Islands, but to the whole defense system of the Empire."²⁴ However, although he strongly favored the establishment of the base, his Government, for the time being, made no recommendation to Parliament, and New Zealand, like Australia, contributed nothing to the cost of the project.

The Imperial Conference, held in London in the fall of 1923, afforded an excellent opportunity for a thorough discussion of the question. Although no record of the debates has been published, a formal resolution adopted at the meeting confirms the impression of Dominion opinion gained from a study of the press and Parliamentary debates. The Conference noted that the deep interest of Australia, New Zealand, and India in the provision of a naval base at Singapore was "essential for the mobility necessary to provide for the security of the territories and trade of the Empire in eastern waters."²⁵

It should be stated that Canada, while bordering the Pacific Ocean, did not express much concern over the Singapore plan. The official Canadian attitude was expressed by Prime Minister Mackenzie King who, in reply to a question on this point, said, "I think it is for the British Government to determine their own policy and for us to ex-

²³*Wellington Evening Post*, June 11, 1923. See also the *Evening Post*, March 12, 1923, and July 24, 1923; *Christchurch Weekly Press*, May 10, 1923; "Australia and the Imperial Conference," *loc. cit.*, p. 378.

²⁴*London Times*, September 29, 1923.

²⁵Great Britain, *Imperial Conference, 1923, Summary of Proceedings* (London, 1923), Cmd. 1987, p. 17.

press no opinion concerning it.²⁶ This statement is of peculiar interest in view of the active part Canada had played only two years before in securing the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance.

As for Japan's attitude during these developments, it is obvious that the Singapore plan was bound to arouse considerable attention in Tokyo. Japanese officials were not, at first, very voluble on the subject. The general tenor of their public statements was that the British Empire had a perfect right to build a naval base at Singapore, but that the step was unnecessary in view of Japan's lack of aggressive intentions. In an interview, Count Uchida, the Foreign Minister, declared:

The plan could be justified in view of the abrogation of the Anglo-Japanese alliance. It conflicted in many ways with the spirit of the Washington Treaty, but it was a British internal affair, and Japan could not interfere. There was nothing in Anglo-Japanese relations requiring such an extensive undertaking . . . The agitation against it, however, was started by British statesmen like Lord Grey, and not by the Japanese.²⁷

Similarly, Lord Curzon reported that the Japanese Ambassador in London not only had lodged no protest, but had expressed complete understanding of the British position.²⁸ Admiral Takarabe, the Minister of the Navy, admitted that the naval experts of the nations at the Washington Conference were cognizant of the British plan to strengthen the Singapore base, but added that "Japan must now look to her national defense, because Singapore is only two days' steaming from Formosa."²⁹ Nor was the Japanese press greatly concerned over the project at the outset. Declared the *Japan Times and Mail*:

We see no occasion for any particular alarm. We might well be alarmed if there was the slightest indication of any power going to command the supremacy of the Pacific. But the great ocean, which will be the arena of future international political tournaments, is destined to be divided into three parts under as many powers, America, Great Britain and Japan, who will, respectively, be supreme in the eastern, southern, and western portions.³⁰ [Moreover, there was] too

²⁶Dominion of Canada, *Debates of the House of Commons* (May 4, 1923), 157: 2469-2470.

²⁷*London Times*, July 23, 1923; *London Daily News*, July 24, 1923.

²⁸Great Britain, *Lords* (March 19, 1924), 56: 826-827.

²⁹"Britain's Check on Japan," *loc. cit.*, p. 24.

³⁰"Dividing the Pacific," *Japan Times and Mail*, Weekly Edition, XLIV, 19 (May 12, 1923), p. 883.

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good an opinion of British good faith to believe that the First Lord of the Admiralty purposely concealed the truth when he said in the course of the debate on the naval works bill that . . . "there could be no suggestion of a menace to Japan or any idea that we contemplated the danger of strained relations with Japan or any other power, otherwise we should be proceeding in a much more urgent fashion."⁸¹

Some Japanese papers were, of course, less tranquil. Several feared the Singapore base bill to be the outcome of "the anachromatic [*sic*] and mistaken idea that Japan is a menace to India and Australia, and the antiquated illusion that trade follows the flag, under which the Conservatives in England are still laboring."⁸² Any suspicions of Japan's territorial aspirations were completely unfounded.⁸³ It was, moreover, "extremely regrettable to the Japanese to have the possibility of an Anglo-Japanese conflict suggested by Britain's new policy" when they were resolved "to regard Britain as an ally forever, irrespective of whether or not a treaty of alliance exists between the two nations."⁸⁴ Although the project was not contrary to the letter of the Washington Treaty, it was, "in a sense, contrary to the fundamental spirit of the naval agreement"⁸⁵ and it would surely disturb the Far Eastern situation. Should other powers follow the example of Great Britain, the spirit of the Washington naval agreement and the League of Nations would be overridden.⁸⁶

Gradually, the tone of the Japanese press became hostile. By December, nine months after the Singapore plan had been introduced into Parliament, a representative statement was that of the *Yorodzu*, which proclaimed it to be "imperative that all nations outside England should offer a strong, united front against the British plan, in the cause of the freedom of the seas. . . . So long as she refuses to abandon the plan, England is disqualified to preach freedom or ex-

⁸¹"British Naval Bill," *ibid.*, p. 882.

⁸²"The Singapore Base," *Japan Chronicle*, Weekly Edition, 1351 (May 17, 1923), p. 691. Quoting the *Yomiuri*.

⁸³"The Singapore Base," *ibid.*, 1357 (June 28, 1923), p. 913. Quoting the *Tokyo Asahi*.

⁸⁴"The Singapore Base," *ibid.*, 1361 (July 26, 1923), p. 125. Quoting the *Jiji*.

⁸⁵*Ibid.*, p. 125. Quoting the *Tokyo Nichi-Nichi*.

⁸⁶"Singapore Naval Base," *Japan Times and Mail*, Weekly Edition, XLIV, 19 (May 12, 1923), p. 887. Quoting the *Chugai Shogyo*.

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pound peace to the world, and as such she deserves the strongest censure.³⁷

In the meantime work had already begun at Singapore. The Government of the Straits Settlements had indicated its support of the new naval station and had helped to defray part of the cost by giving the Admiralty the site—469 acres of land expropriated from the United Rubber Plantations Company at a cost of \$225,000.³⁸ In January, 1924, it was reported that preliminary work had been started, communications were being opened up, and arrangements had been made for the construction of the water supply, residences, and quarters for workmen. Liabilities amounting to about £150,000 had been incurred.³⁹

At this point the political scene in England shifted. The continued increase of unemployment called for some sort of stringent action, and to Stanley Baldwin the introduction of protective tariffs seemed to afford the best, if not the only, remedy. However, since his predecessor, Bonar Law, had promised not to bring up the question of protection, the Prime Minister decided that he must have the sanction of the voters before acting. Late in 1923 he requested a general election. In the battle at the polls, fought largely over the issue of protection, but conditioned also by the Irish situation and European politics, the Conservative Party won the largest number of votes but failed to obtain a majority. Although in the House of Commons they had about sixty-five more members than the Laborites, and nearly a hundred more than the Liberals, those two combined had about ninety more than the Conservative total. The Liberals thereupon decided to support the Labor Party, and Ramsay MacDonald became Prime Minister.

MacDonald had long been a professed pacifist. In 1914 he had opposed England's declaration of war against Germany and then resigned his seat in the House of Commons. Throughout the war he had refused to serve and had thereby incurred wide criticism. Four

³⁷"A Menace to Japan," *Japan Chronicle*, Weekly Edition, 1381 (December 13, 1923), p. 815.

³⁸*London Times*, October 26, 1923.

³⁹Great Britain, *Commons* (January 17, 1924), 169: 275.

years after the Armistice, however, he was again returned to Parliament where he became head of the Labor Party and an active leader in the peace movement. His party, likewise, had taken a strong stand against re-armament.

When the results of the December general election made it likely that a change of Government was imminent, the opponents of the base began to voice their hopes that the project would now be dropped. Although Singapore had played no part as a campaign issue, the *Daily News* foresaw as the "first felicitous and tangible result of the General Elections" that the country would "be saved the loss of a sum that would have amounted ultimately, in the minds of competent experts, to at least £20,000,000."⁴⁰ The *Daily Herald* similarly doubted whether any Government could now gain support for the plan in the House of Commons: "We feel pretty confident," it said, "that neither Labour nor the Liberals are in the least likely to try."⁴¹ When MacDonald did go into 10 Downing Street in January, it seemed more than probable that these predictions would prove to be correct.

The Admiralty, however, was not reconciled to the abandonment of the scheme. It was rumored that Lord Beatty would make Singapore a direct personal issue and that the Government's opposition to the plan was crumbling. Concern lest this be true brought forth strong protests from the Labor and the Liberal press. The *Daily Herald* focused its attack directly upon the First Lord of the Admiralty:

Now Lord Beatty is on a new tack. He wants to make British flesh creep by talking about danger to trade. He hints darkly at interruption of food supply. He draws attention to the cheapness of insuring 800 million pounds worth of commerce with a few cruisers costing only two millions each.

That was an illustration used in the lecture to newspaper men, and it forces us to suggest that the First Lord of the Admiralty should at once stop this kind of propaganda. Here is a question on which the Government has one view and the Naval Lords another. The Naval Lords have no right whatever to use a Government department for the purpose of persuading the press that they are right. Attention should be called to this in the House of Commons.

Further, every opportunity must be taken to explain the Singapore scheme and to show that it is, as the Prime Minister has called it, a "colossal folly."⁴²

⁴⁰*London Daily News*, December 15, 1923.

⁴¹*London Daily Herald*, December 29, 1923.

⁴²*Ibid.*, March 5, 1924.

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The *Daily News* addressed a stiff warning to the MacDonald Government. It spoke in forthright terms:

. . . Are Labor statesmen, above all others, ready to abandon a conviction and betray a promise merely because a popular Sea Lord threatens to resign? To simple minds, untouched by the glamor of Lord Beatty's personality, this may seem a question *pour rire*. Singapore, however, is no laughing matter. It is a matter which, in our judgment, must now be regarded as a crucial test of the honesty, good faith, and moral courage of Mr. MacDonald's administration. If the Government fails in the test, it will fail miserably; and it will deserve to fall.⁴³

The Government, in the meantime, had maintained a discreet silence. To the inquiries of the Opposition, it replied that it was making an examination of the merits of the case before announcing a decision. It did, however, take steps to keep the Dominions informed of its position. On February 20, a telegram was sent to the Governors-General of Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the Union of South Africa, and to the Governor of Newfoundland, stating that for the time being no further expenditure would be incurred on the Singapore naval base and that a Cabinet committee had been formed to examine the whole question.⁴⁴ Two days later, a similar statement was sent to the Governor-General of the Irish Free State.⁴⁵ On March 5, telegrams to the Dominions (March 6 to the Irish Free State) announced that the Cabinet committee had made a report which favored dropping the scheme, and invited their views on the subject.

The comments of the Dominions and the Irish Free State reached London between March 7 and 11. Only the Union of South Africa endorsed the Cabinet report. Prime Minister Smuts wired as follows: "Purely on the grounds of naval strategy Singapore base may be sound proposal, but the authority of the British Empire as the protagonist of the great cause of appeasement and conciliation among the nations must be seriously undermined by it. I welcome the abandonment of the scheme."⁴⁶ Canada and the Irish Free State did not desire to express any views on the matter, but the Prime Ministers of Newfoundland, Australia, and New Zealand were emphatic in their

⁴³*London Daily News*, March 3, 1924.

⁴⁴Great Britain, *Singapore Naval Base*, as cited, p. 5.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p. 7.

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assertions that it would be unwise not to proceed with the naval base at Singapore. Bruce of Australia argued that both the League of Nations and the peace of the world were dependent in no small degree on the strength of the British Navy, its power, and its mobility. Massey, representing New Zealand, usually characterized by her unquestioning faith in British policy, not only repeated most of the arguments that had hitherto been advanced in favor of the project, but protested vigorously against making the defense of the Empire "depend upon the League of Nations only."⁴⁷

On March 17 Prime Minister MacDonald told the Dominions that, after examining their replies, the Government still felt bound to carry out the policy of which it had informed them,⁴⁸ and on the following day he reviewed the subject before Parliament. He and his colleagues had, he said, given careful consideration to the proposal to develop the naval base at Singapore. They had studied closely the reasons which had led to the adoption of the project, and the arguments in support of its continuation from the point of view of naval defense. At the same time, they had had to consider the matter in relation to their foreign policy as a whole. That policy held as its fundamental aim the development of an enlarged League of Nations, the encouragement of international co-operation, the settlement of disputes by conciliation and judicial arbitration, and the creation of conditions which would make possible a comprehensive limitation of armaments. These ends could be achieved only by the establishment of confidence and the elimination of international suspicions and anxieties. They had come to the conclusion, therefore, that they could not ask Parliament to proceed with the Singapore scheme. To do so would retard the development of confidence, lay British good faith open to suspicion, and imply that they themselves doubted the success of any policy based on international co-operation and good will. It would lead inevitably to the creation of mistrust and the initiation of an armaments race in the Far East.⁴⁹

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 9-10. For Prime Minister Massey's statement, quoted at greater length see above, p. 36.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

⁴⁹Great Britain, *Commons* (March 18, 1924), 171: 319.

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The official announcement of the Government's policy let loose a flood of criticism. Lord Curzon, Winston Churchill, Leopold Amery, Sir Robert Horne, and other well-known Conservatives, strong advocates of the Singapore project, led in the denunciation of its abandonment;⁵⁰ prominent business men, including Sir Arthur Balfour, president of the Associated British Chambers of Commerce, urged that the base be completed "whatever the cost";⁵¹ influential naval officers—among them Admiral H. Henderson, Admiral A. P. Davidson, and Rear-Admiral Sueter—expressed concern for the future of British sea power;⁵² the *London Times*, in one editorial after another, portrayed the dangers inherent in MacDonald's policy;⁵³ and numerous local Chambers of Commerce passed resolutions in favor of the base.⁵⁴ The active and powerful Navy League had already sent messages to its branches throughout the world, pointing out that expert opinion based upon the most careful consideration had decided upon the development of Singapore as "the only plan which under post-war conditions adequately and economically fulfilled the needs for the defense of the Empire," and urging its members to resist any endeavor to abandon it or to delay its prosecution.⁵⁵

In the course of the ensuing discussion every angle of the case in favor of the project was reviewed at length. The technical advantages of permanent docks, the value of the base from the standpoint of increased economy and efficiency for the navy, its non-provocative and purely defensive character, the dangers which beset British trade and territories in the Pacific, the futility and risks involved in moral gestures toward disarmament, the complete lack of "Empire vision" shown in "betraying" the Dominions and "repudiating an Imperial duty"—these arguments formed the basis of the attack. In addition, MacDonald's critics probed what they considered two particularly vul-

⁵⁰Great Britain, *Lords* (March 18, 1924), 56: 826-827; Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1182, 1190, 1209, 1234, 1228-1229, 1290; *London Times*, March 29, 1924, March 5, 1924.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, January 31, 1924, March 29, 1924.

⁵²*Ibid.*, February 4, 1924, July 5, 1924, June 26, 1924; Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1209, 1234; *ibid.* (July 31, 1924), 171: 2370.

⁵³*London Times*, March 4, 1924.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, May 22, 1924.

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, February 4, 1924.

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nerable points in his position—his method of “Dominion consultation” and his policy of home defense. In the House of Commons, Sir Robert Horne made the following accusation :

We were informed that His Majesty’s Government were consulting with the representatives of the Dominions upon this question, but I confess I have never seen consultation take a more discourteous form. What His Majesty’s Government did was to announce to the Dominions that they had come to a decision. Without communicating to them the view which they had arrived at, and so far from consulting them, having announced their view, they proceeded to give the Dominions the opportunity only of making protests.⁵⁶

The *Auckland Herald* expressed the same view even more sharply. It charged that a fundamental principle of Empire relationships was at stake :

Inevitably there arises a doubt as to whether anything remains of the consultative scheme built up laboriously in recent years. It would appear that the Labor Government has dealt it a destructive blow. The question is not affected by any discussion of the pros and cons of the Singapore proposals themselves. That lies outside the constitutional issue. The Committee (Imperial Defense) and the Conference (Imperial Conference, 1923), exercising powers definitely given to them as responsible Imperial authorities, brought the proposals to the notice of the British Government, and Mr. Ramsay MacDonald’s Cabinet has treated the proposals as if they had never been made. India, Australia, and New Zealand, as the overseas territories most closely concerned, have requested that the proposals be given effect, and the Secretary of State for the Colonies has told the Commons that the view that these territories deem urgently important has not been considered by his Government. This is not merely the collapse of consultation. It is the wanton destruction of it.⁵⁷

A matter of even greater moment, it was thought, was the inconsistency being shown by the Government in carrying out its policy of establishing confidence and creating conditions that would make possible a comprehensive agreement on the limitation of armaments. Only a few days before, MacDonald had announced a decision to strengthen the home air force and to increase the fleet by five cruisers and various subsidiary vessels. Why, asked the Opposition, if the Prime Minister imagined that France would see no threat in England’s air preparations, should he think that Japan would recognize a menace in immobile defenses at Singapore? If cruisers were not an incentive to rearmament, why should a naval base be so regarded? If the one did

⁵⁶Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1182.

⁵⁷“As New Zealand Sees Singapore,” *Literary Digest*, 81 (May 10, 1924), pp. 19-20.

not impugn England's good faith, why should the other? If it were necessary to spend money on the home air force because England's security might possibly be imperilled by French planes, was it not equally important to construct the base at Singapore so that in an emergency a British fleet could operate in the Pacific and Indian Oceans for the protection of Australia, New Zealand, India, and the Eastern trade? Certainly the menace in the East was at least as great as the one nearer home.⁵⁸ Why, then, did MacDonald choose such an inconsistent course of action? To Sir Robert Horne, at least, the answer was clear:

This is not a large gesture to the world; it is a backward nod to the people who sit behind him. It is a sop to the Pacifists who gave him their votes on the ground that he was going to scrap armaments, and who are now getting restless because they see the change of policy in his naval and air preparations.⁵⁹

If the Prime Minister's opponents were vitriolic in their criticism, his adherents were equally emphatic in their support, and to the somewhat colorless explanations offered by Government spokesmen were added the more forcible comments of the Labor and Liberal party members and press. J. A. Thomas, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, answered the charge of failure to consult the Dominions by stating that the Government knew their views before beginning the investigation, and that no discourtesy was involved since they were fully informed in regard to each step which was taken.⁶⁰ Similarly, C. G. Ammon, Parliamentary Secretary of the Admiralty, assured a Labor meeting at New Cross that the Cabinet had not been guilty of inconsistency in authorizing the new naval vessels while dropping the Singapore project, for the ships involved were not "part of a huge building program," but were necessary to maintain the lines of commerce and "to see that there was no lawlessness on the high seas." On the other hand, if work had been continued on the base, it would have committed England to a "naval armaments race in the Pacific with the certainty of a war there."⁶¹

The *Daily Herald* gave a more striking explanation of the Labor

⁵⁸Great Britain, *Commons* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1190.

⁵⁹*Ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1194.

⁶⁰*Ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1299.

⁶¹*London Times*, April 28, 1924.

policy. It did not attempt to deny the validity of the question, "How can a Cabinet composed mainly of men opposed to armament decide to spend two and one-half million pounds more on air squadrons?" It replied that the Cabinet was compelled in this instance to do what the mass of the nation wished: "At present the bulk of the British people is suspicious and afraid of the policy of relying in our foreign relations upon goodwill, and comradeship, not upon force." The Prime Minister felt this to be a "false image," and, the *Herald* was confident he would do his best to convert the people to his point of view. However, the "very worst way of drawing them" would be to force upon them a change for which they were not yet prepared, a step which would cause the Labor Government "to be instantly replaced by one certain to increase armaments to a far greater extent."⁶² A few days later the same newspaper launched a derisive counter-attack against one of Singapore's most ardent supporters:

The issue by the Navy League of a manifesto threatening terrible consequences if the Singapore Naval Base is not made reminds us of past follies into which this band of fanatics has coaxed and bullied us, and of the disasters which the German Navy League brought upon Germany. [It was through] such manifestos as this that the German League aroused in a large number of Germans that spirit of vain-glorious aggressiveness which helped so lamentably to bring about the war and the misfortunes of the German people ever since. Our Navy League is just as blind to realities, just as much a slave to old catch-words and worn-out traditions.⁶³

Sir Percy Scott, a retired Admiral as well as a prominent publicist and author, was equally caustic in his comments on the Navy League. He had never, he observed, had much faith in the opinions and prognostications of that organization. It "thought I was a fool because before the war (on June 15, 1914) I wanted to inform the public . . . that 'submarines were not toys.' They published that my views were premature, ill-advised, and likely to do serious harm, but that my prophecy might come true in twenty years. They only had eight weeks instead of twenty years to realize the full potentiality of the submarine danger." In the present instance, Sir Percy agreed with the League on the importance of the Singapore naval station. But, he said, England had already spent millions on it, and, as a result, had

⁶²*London Daily Herald*, March 8, 1924.

⁶³*Ibid.*, March 13, 1924.

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facilities there large enough to accommodate the largest ships required for the protection of her trade and colonies. For this reason he strongly objected to "the Admiralty's wicked proposal to build docks, which are not wanted there, for our prospective battleships at a cost of, probably, 30 millions of money, the whole of this money to go to foreign labor, when we have so many unemployed in the United Kingdom, and no air defense for the heart of our country." This, he concluded, is what "I and many others consider a disgrace to our country, and if the present Government allow it they will be traitors to their country and their party."⁶⁴

Many Government partisans ignored the issue of home defense but repeated their firm conviction that to continue work on the base would be an irreparable blunder, with serious international repercussions. The liberal papers, the *Daily News* and the *Nation*, for example, preferred "to put their faith in the policy which inspired the Washington treaties and to risk something on the permanence of the new atmosphere in the Pacific."⁶⁵ Others, firm believers in disarmament as the most effective means of achieving peace, deplored the Government's stand in regard to the air force and cruisers, but maintained that the abandonment of Singapore was a step in the right direction. Viscount Grey of Fallodon, speaking in the name of the Liberal Party, said that in connection with foreign affairs "the change of Government had not been for the worse, but for the better." As far as he could judge, "British influence in the hands of the present Government was being used consistently and steadily" toward the ends of international cooperation and disarmament, and although "their action at home about the five cruisers invited criticism, on the other hand their action about the Singapore base met with liberal support. . . ."⁶⁶

In Australia and New Zealand, debate followed much the same lines, but the protests were more widespread than in England. Although the Labor Party in both Dominions formally endorsed Mac-

⁶⁴*Ibid.*, March 15, 1924, March 17, 1924; *London Daily Mail*, March 19, 1924.

⁶⁵*London Daily News*, March 26, 1924; "Britain's Naval Project Abandoned," *Literary Digest*, 81 (April 12, 1924), p. 19. See also a statement by the president of the Peace Society, *London Times*, June 17, 1924.

⁶⁶*Ibid.*, May 23, 1924. See also a statement by Sir John Simon, Great Britain, *Commons* (July 31, 1924), 171: 2370.

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Donald's action,⁶⁷ the Conservative Parties, the Australian Country Party, the Associated Chambers of Commerce,⁶⁸ and the press were, among others, almost as one in their opposition. As far as can be judged from available material, support of the Labor position was almost non-existent outside of its down ranks, and even there the sentiment was hardly unanimous.⁶⁹ Not only were the colonials much more keenly aware of the so-called "Yellow Peril," but their own unpreparedness, and hence their great dependence on the British Navy, gave the matter an urgency and gravity in their eyes which it did not have for most of the English. To them the base was a necessary center for co-ordinating the "local unit" Pacific Fleet portrayed by Sir James Allen and Viscount Jellicoe.

The result in the Dominions was twofold—a distinct feeling that they had been deserted by the Labor Government and a widespread conviction that Australia and New Zealand must now take additional steps to safeguard their own defense. "A very great and staunch-hearted section of Australians," wrote the Sydney correspondent of the *London Times*, "was deeply disappointed in British Labor in consequence of the decision to shelve the Singapore proposal." Many of them did not hesitate to say, "We gave of our best for Britain, and the graves in three continents are witness of it, but now Britain has let us down." The correspondent added that although these men spoke with bitterness, they did not believe the people of Britain as a whole would continue "to let them down." They would not accept the Singapore decision as final because when they looked at the world situation as it was developing at that very moment, they were sure that fate would "force upon Britain the construction of that vital base," and they prayed that the work might not be delayed too long."⁷⁰

Other statements were of a similar character. At a Melbourne banquet, Prime Minister Bruce, who had already lodged a formal protest against the action of the London Government, told the officers of the Special Service Squadron then in the Commonwealth's waters that

⁶⁷*Ibid.* (March 25, 1924), 171: 1301.

⁶⁸*London Times*, May 22, 1924.

⁶⁹For the opinion of former Labor Prime Minister Hughes, see p. 37.

⁷⁰*London Times*, May 31, 1924.

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the decision regarding Singapore had caused "the deepest regret among the vast majority of Australians." This was particularly true because, although MacDonald had argued that "the construction of the base would create an atmosphere of suspicion," he had increased the home air force. It was "difficult to see how this distinction could be drawn, and still more difficult to avoid the suspicion that a problem close at hand had been given greater attention than a distant one."⁷¹

On the floor of the Australian Parliament the same arguments were heard.⁷² Dr. Page, leader of the Country Party, repeatedly stressed them. The defense discussions at the Imperial Conference, he pointed out, were "based absolutely on the assumption that Great Britain would construct the Singapore base."⁷³ It was a matter which went "to the root of Australia's well-being, and on it devolved the question whether the country would be allowed to develop peacefully, as it had done for one hundred and thirty years, or whether it would have to provide for its own defense as well as its development."⁷⁴ In the past the Empire's policy had been to maintain the fleet at "an adequate strength" wherever British interests were principally threatened, and it was "essential, unless this policy were to be changed," to proceed at once with the construction of a Far Eastern naval station.⁷⁵

In New Zealand the issue was not debated in the legislature, but Prime Minister Massey expressed his conviction that final abandonment of the Far Eastern naval base would be "a great disappointment to all British citizens in the Pacific."⁷⁶ A member of the Legislative Council, Edward Newman, in a letter to the *London Times*, asserted that "rightly or wrongly" the Pacific Dominions considered the Singapore base a necessity for their protection. That opinion was "founded on reports given by the highest authorities on the subject of naval defense" and was "strongly held by the people of Australia and New Zealand especially." Therefore, although he fully recognized that a colonial had no right to interfere with English politics, he could not

⁷¹*Ibid.*, March 21, 1924.

⁷²Australia, *Debates* (March 27, 1924), 106: 69, 77.

⁷³*London Times*, February 7, 1924.

⁷⁴Australia, *Debates* (March 27, 1924), 106: 59.

⁷⁵*London Times*, February 7, 1924.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, March 20, 1924.

help observing that this was "not English politics"; it was "Imperial politics," therefore a citizen of Wellington or Sydney had "just as much right to a voice in Imperial questions as a citizen of London or Edinburgh." He added that although it was the custom in England to laugh at the "Yellow Peril," Australia and New Zealand were "inclined to take a different view." They were nearer what probably would be the danger zone in the next war, and they knew "a little more about the subject than most English people."⁷⁷

The *Wellington Evening Post* likewise regretted "the ridiculous system which makes the defense and the foreign policy of the Empire the sport of party changes on mostly irrelevant issues in the parent state."⁷⁸ As for those who opposed the base on "international grounds," the *Post* ridiculed their logic:

British territory and British commerce in the Pacific are almost defenseless at the present time: the Singapore Base would strengthen that defense; therefore, though no alternative scheme has been suggested, the base must be abandoned. There is one powerful navy in the Pacific already; the Singapore scheme would provide a base for another; for this reason, also, the scheme must be abandoned. These arguments, which in their topsy-turvy inconsequence recall the logic of the mad tea-party in "Alice in Wonderland," are passing for sober statesmanship with the trustees of the Empire's defenses to-day. . . . [The Government is deliberately abandoning its obligations and responsibilities in the Pacific in the hope] that Japan may be "conciliated" by an unchallenged monopoly of power in the Pacific, and that at the worst the League of Nations may give the help which the British Navy is not to be allowed to give. The greatest Empire that the world has ever seen cannot long remain so if its defense is to be permanently conducted on these novel principles.⁷⁹

A few Dominion advocates of the base, including Prime Minister Massey, were "optimistic enough to hope" that the project would not be given up completely, but would be carried on by the next succeeding Government. In the meantime, there was nothing to do, stated the Prime Minister, but to exercise patience and be ready to urge a resumption of operations as soon as the proper opportunity offered itself.⁸⁰ Others expressed the hope that MacDonalld was not really abandoning the Admiralty plan, but was keeping it in reserve as a threat.⁸¹

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, June 9, 1924.

⁷⁸*Wellington Evening Post*, June 9, 1924.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, March 29, 1924.

⁸⁰*London Times*, March 20, 1924.

⁸¹*Christchurch Weekly Press*, March 27, 1924.

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Still others felt that it would have been better to "bargain for conciliation of possible enemies" while the fleet was at its highest pitch of mobility and effectiveness, rather than to face them with the reduced moral strength which the relinquishment of the Singapore scheme would entail.⁸²

On the whole, however, the most important reaction was a conviction that as long as other countries pinned their faith to well-fortified bases, the Dominions could hardly take the risk of depending exclusively on pious wishes—that they must take immediate steps to provide in whole or in part for their own defense.⁸³ As the less moderate element expressed it: "If British Labor dismantles the firm foundations of the fortress that was designed to preserve the Empire from aggression, it is time for Australia to do what it can do—and must do—to protect herself. . . . If Britain betrays us by the hands of a Socialist Government, we must build at our own cost a base that Mr. Ramsay MacDonald cannot destroy."⁸⁴

Others, in a more temperate tone, pointed out what had been emphasized from the first, that the Dominions' advocacy of the project was greatly weakened by their failure to contribute any financial support. In 1923, it was noted, Britain had spent 26s. 8d. per head on the Navy as against Australia's 8s. 1d. and New Zealand's 4s. 7d.⁸⁵ In other words, the British taxpayer had assumed the burden of safeguarding the trade routes over which most of the imports and exports of Australia and New Zealand travelled. It was perhaps fortunate, thought this group, that through some action such as MacDonald's, the Dominions had been forced into a realization that they must share in the responsibility for their own protection. "The right sort of young man," remarked the *Sydney Bulletin*, was "often benefited by

⁸²"Australia: III. Australian Opinion on the British Labor Government," *Round Table*, XIV, 607-608; *The Dominion*, as quoted in *London Times*, March 28, 1924.

⁸³*Sydney Daily Telegraph*, quoted in Marks, George E., *Watch the Pacific* (Sydney, 1924), p. 104; *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 13, 1924; *Sydney Sunday Times*, March 23, 1924; "Australia: III. Australian Opinion on the British Labor Government," *loc. cit.*, pp. 607-608; *London Times*, March 28, 1924; *Wellington Evening Post*, March 20, 1924.

⁸⁴*Sydney Sun*, quoted in Marks, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

⁸⁵*Sydney Bulletin*, quoted in *London Times*, March 27, 1924.

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being suddenly thrown on his own resources, after a life of ease and luxury," and the same rule applied "in the case of the right sort of young nation."⁸⁶

To both the moderates and the extremists, however, the important question remained as to what defense steps should be taken. As soon as it had become evident that the Labor Government might discontinue work at Singapore, Prime Minister Massey, in the name of New Zealand, had hastened to offer Great Britain £100,000 toward the cost of the base, and Prime Minister Bruce had promised that Australia would make a "substantial contribution." After MacDonald's decision, however, Australia abandoned this idea and instead approved a naval building program which provided for the construction of four cruisers. A few days after this plan was announced, the *Wellington Evening Post* effectively summarized the position of the southern Dominions:

. . . [It is] quite possible that the temporary abandonment of the Singapore base may prove to have been an advantage to those southern democracies and to the whole Empire. The essential weakness of Australia's demand for the prosecution of the scheme was that it was a demand for the expenditure of other people's money. This weakness stood out very clearly in Mr. Bruce's otherwise powerful reply to the British Government's communication on the subject. He had not gone into the question of cost, because he understood that the decision of the British Government was arrived at "on the basis of principle rather than expenditure," but Australia was not unmindful of her obligations, and he would propose a substantial contribution. An eleventh—or twelfth—hour announcement of this kind served to emphasize the fact that all of Australia's insistence on the value of the Singapore scheme had not hitherto had a sixpence behind it New Zealand's offer of £100,000 put Mr. Massey in a better position, but he never disguised his opinion that it was inadequate.

The abandonment of the scheme has had the great advantage of bringing Australia and New Zealand face to face with the realities of the position and enabling them to appreciate their insecurity and their responsibility. The efforts which they are now about to undertake will put them in a far stronger position for renewing their advocacy of the Singapore base when it comes up again for discussion. . . . Whatever happens at Singapore our trade routes must be protected, and we cannot decently look to others to shoulder the whole burden!⁸⁷

In Canada, where little interest had been shown at the outset of the Singapore plan, there was only a slight reaction to the abandonment of the project. Again, Representative Woodsworth brought the subject to the attention of the Canadian House of Commons, com-

⁸⁶*Ibid.*, March 27, 1924.

⁸⁷"New Zealand, I. Naval Problems," *Round Table*, XIV, pp. 859-860.

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plained that Canada could not allow herself "to be more or less committed to policies" in which she had "no voice whatever," and lamented the fact that with regard to the Singapore question she had not offered any advice.⁸⁸ Prime Minister Mackenzie King, in a brief reply, stated that his Government had had "no communication with any of the other overseas Dominions on this subject, excepting such communications as took place at the Imperial Conference." Such correspondence as had taken place with the British Government since that time had "related merely to the form in which the announcement of policy should be made in the British Parliament."⁸⁹ In other words, Canada's official attitude in the matter was quite aloof.

But in Japan enthusiasm reigned when the decision to discontinue work at Singapore was announced. Baron Matsui, the Foreign Minister, in an interview with the *London Times* correspondent, declared that though he realized the base was not designed in hostility to his country, which was not a potential enemy of Great Britain, he was nonetheless glad that the project was being halted. Since no other Eastern naval power was involved, the Japanese people would have been disturbed by the needless measures at Singapore. Said Baron Matsui:

Our membership in the League of Nations, our very definite Naval Agreement, the Four-Power Treaty, and other associations we have in common with Great Britain are highly regarded by us. Moreover, there is no issue on which our nations disagree and, as far as can be seen into the future, no serious question is likely to arise between us. It is incorrect to suppose that we are constructing auxiliary ships on a scale that would create rivalry with other powers. We are more than content with the Naval Agreement. We intend to adhere to the spirit as well as to the letter of that treaty and hope it will be repeatedly renewed and continue indefinitely to form a bond of understanding among the naval powers, insuring peace upon the seas.

Japan's desires for peace are not only sentimental but are based upon our requirements. Our best interests and best sentiments—as competent students of Eastern and Pacific situations must agree—are happily in harmony. Our foreign trade is vital to us and we have no wish to impair or endanger it. . . . The recent extensive demonstration of sympathy we received after our terrible disaster from your country among the first and foremost touched us deeply and gave us another reason for appreciation of sterling British friendship.⁹⁰

Vice-Minister of the Navy, Vice-Admiral Okada, was equally

⁸⁸Dominion of Canada, *Debates* (March 20, 1924), 160: 509.

⁸⁹*Ibid.* (March 24, 1924), 160: 589.

⁹⁰*London Times*, April 7, 1924.

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pleased with the discontinuance of work at Singapore. To a representative of the *Japan Advertiser* Okada said:

Such a decision would give the world assurance that Great Britain is pledged to abide by the spirit of the Washington Treaties and afford the nations her splendid example.

Great Britain has nothing to fear from Japan. If Britishers will remember what Japan did during the war, they should realize that the expenditure contemplated at Singapore would be only a waste. If Japan had any ambitions inimical to British interests, the war would have afforded her a rare opportunity to carry them out.

We believe, however, that our relations with Great Britain will continue to be characterized by unwavering friendship.⁹¹

The attitude of the Japanese press is accurately summed up by the following statements which appeared in the *Osaka Asahi* and the *Jiji*. The former, a highly influential journal, remarked:

The suspension of the Singapore scheme means the removal of one serious menace to Japan, and consequently the news must have been received by the Japanese people with immense satisfaction. . . . The British Government has been saved from the charge which would otherwise be laid against it of violating the spirit of the Washington Treaty, and this is a matter of sincere congratulations for the peace of the Far East.⁹²

The opinion of the *Jiji* was similar. It offered this interpretation of the event:

For Britain to create a new and gigantic naval base near the territorial waters of Japan, is, even if it is not in direct violation of the Washington treaties, objectionable as tending to provoke a naval race with Japan, especially because the geographical position of Singapore leaves no doubt as to Japan being the country against whom the project is directed. . . . The news is therefore very welcome to the Japanese people that the Labor Cabinet has made up its mind to discontinue the scheme.⁹³

Even the *Japan Times and Mail*, although it remained "as unchanged as ever" in its conviction that the Singapore project did not menace Nippon, welcomed MacDonald's action:

We must confess . . . that we are in a rather small minority in this country . . . a large majority of people, including those in naval circles, being persuaded that the scheme, against which the Laborites formerly voted, is aimed at the Japanese navy, the Empire of Japan.

While we see no reason for altering our stand on the question under review,

⁹¹"Britain's Singapore Project Abandoned," *loc. cit.*, p. 19.

⁹²"Japan and the Singapore Base," *Japan Chronicle*, Weekly Edition, 1396 (March 27, 1924), pp. 432-433.

⁹³*Ibid.*, 1396 (March 27, 1924), p. 433.

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we do not hesitate to declare it most desirable that England forego the Singapore plan for the sake of appeasing the Japanese mind—that the project is dropped not only by the Laborites in power but by the British Empire for good.

Its abandonment will not make England and her colonies any the less safe, while it would save her the folly of unnecessarily paying for the discontinuance of the Anglo-Japanese alliance and of superfluously inviting Japanese and, for that matter, the world's suspicions.⁹⁴

At Singapore itself, not only was no work done between January and November 1924, but the plant and the materials were put up for sale.⁹⁵ Shortly thereafter MacDonald gave additional evidence that his determination to abandon the Far Eastern base was but a part of his general plan to promote international confidence and disarmament. At the Fifth Assembly of the League of Nations in September, 1924, he joined with Premier Herriot of France in sponsoring an ambitious plan of collective security, the Geneva Protocol.⁹⁶ Hardly had this been done, however, when the political situation in England changed. The Labor Ministers, without previous experience in public office, had made numerous mistakes; Liberal support, at no time enthusiastic, was withdrawn; and when the Prime Minister tried to re-establish friendly relations with Russia, his opponents were able to make it appear that the Labor Party was encouraging the growth of a "Red menace" within England.

Thus when, in November, MacDonald called for a test of public

⁹⁴"The Singapore Project," *Japan Times and Mail*, Weekly Edition, XV (March 8, 1924), p. 236.

⁹⁵Great Britain, *Lords* (July 14, 1924), 58: 503.

⁹⁶The Geneva Protocol stigmatized aggressive war as an international crime. "To prevent such wars, it stipulated that the nations adhering to its terms must agree (1) not to go to war against other signatories who abided by their international obligations; (2) to refer all justiciable disputes to the World Court and all political quarrels to the League Council or to special arbitration committees; (3) not to mobilize armed forces while a dispute was being arbitrated; (4) to regard as 'aggressor' any nation which refused to submit a difference to peaceful settlement or which rejected an arbitral decision and resorted to war; (5) to recognize the power of the League Council to declare an economic boycott against such an aggressor state; (6) that the costs of any war be 'borne by the aggressor state up to the limit of its capacity,' but that such indemnity include no cessions of territory; and (7) to participate in an international conference for the reduction of armaments. No part of the protocol was to go into effect until the efforts of this conference should have resulted in at least partial disarmament." Langsam, Walter Consuelo, *The World Since 1914* (New York, 1936), p. 213.

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opinion, the general election went strongly in favor of the Conservatives, who won approximately 410 seats. The Liberals had only 40, and Labor about 150. Although in terms of votes cast the Conservative victory was not as decisive as it appeared when counted in the form of parliamentary seats, its large majority in Commons insured the success of its legislative program. Accordingly, MacDonald's foreign policy was to be reconsidered. Once more the fate of the Singapore project, which had already passed through one cycle of adoption and abandonment, was to be changed by reason of an election in which it had played little part.

CHAPTER VI

Completing the Base

The new Conservative Government showed no inclination to continue MacDonald's program. One of its first acts was to reject the Geneva Protocol, and on December 9, 1924, the Prime Minister informed the House that it had been decided to renew work on the Singapore project.¹ As before, the change of policy immediately evoked a vast amount of discussion and, this time likewise, opinion divided sharply along party lines. On the one hand, MacDonald, Lord Oxford, Lloyd George, backed by the members of their parties and by the Labor and Liberal press, vigorously denounced the plan.² On the other, Prime Minister Baldwin, First Lord of the Admiralty Bridgeman, and Lord Balfour, supported by the Conservative party and press, and enthusiastically endorsed by the Navy League, energetically defended it.³

Thus, both within Parliament and outside it, argument again raged over questions of expense, Singapore versus social service, the probable effect on relations with Japan, the implications of the Washington Conference, the efficacy of unilateral disarmament, and technical considerations in regard to the defense of the base and the protection of

¹Great Britain, *Commons* (December 9, 1924), 179: 88.

²Statements representative of the Opposition viewpoint during this time may be found in: Great Britain, *Commons* (December 9, 1924), 179: 83, 163; *ibid.* (March 19, 1925), 181: 2536-2537; *ibid.* (March 23, 1925), 182: 88, 89, 117-118; *ibid.* (March 22, 1926), 193: 959; Great Britain, *Lords* (July 1, 1925), 61: 900-901; *London Daily Mail*, March 6, 1925; *London Daily News*, March 20, 1925, March 24, 1925; *London Daily Herald*, January 22, 1925; *London Times*, October 12, 1925, November 19, 1925; "The Menace of Singapore," *The Nation and Athenaeum*, XXXVI (December 20, 1924), pp. 434-435.

³Statements representative of the Conservative view are to be found in: Great Britain, *Commons* (December 9, 1924), 179: 87-88; *ibid.* (February 23, 1925), 180: 1590; *ibid.* (March 19, 1925), 181: 2525; *ibid.* (March 22, 1926), 193: 962; Great Britain, *Lords* (March 4, 1925), 60: 385-386; *London Times*, December 1, 1924, January 22, 1925, January 28, 1925, March 24, 1925, November 7, 1925.

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Britain's Far Eastern trade and Dominions. The debates were characterized by but slight change in emphasis. The one new aspect of the matter introduced into the discussion at this time was the relation of the base to the Geneva Protocol.

According to MacDonald, the reward for sacrificing Britain's Far Eastern naval station during his Ministry had been the comprehensive attempt at international organization embodied in the Protocol. Conversely, the decision to resume work meant the abandonment of the new method of handling international questions and the announcement to the world that Great Britain had gone back to the old system for her security, which was only a "false security." Moreover, the Conservatives in rejecting the Protocol had, he thought, clearly demonstrated their lack of faith in international agreements. They had refused to support an attempt which forty other nations had declared themselves willing to make "in order to begin the habit of arbitration."⁴

To this the Conservatives replied that except through the subtle medium of atmosphere, which, being all-pervasive, could be made to connect anything with something else, it seemed impossible to link the abandonment of the base with the Protocol. As far as the *London Times* could ascertain, it was "safe to say that, during the elaboration of the Protocol in Geneva last September, no single reference to Singapore was ever made in public, or for that matter, in private either."⁵ In any case, had the agreement been carried through, it would have involved an increase rather than a decrease in English naval strength, for its effectiveness depended ultimately on the ability of the British fleet to enforce the decisions made at Geneva. Over and above its ordinary duties the Navy would have had to be "prepared to carry out additional obligations in respect of economic penalties." It was to be regretted, said Sir William Mitchell-Thompson, speaking for the Conservatives, that the people who "professed their great anxiety to have the Royal Navy reduced to the barest minimum were also anxious to police the world." This the Baldwin Ministry, although it wished to strengthen and support the League of Nations, had no intention of

⁴*London Times*, March 21, 1925; *ibid.*, March 28, 1925.

⁵*Ibid.*, March 21, 1925.

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doing. "It realized that the cost of such an undertaking would be too heavy for the British taxpayer . . . and realized also that the clamant necessity of the day was rigid economy."⁶

At the Imperial Conference of 1926 another question, that of Dominion aid, was formally raised by England. Prime Minister Baldwin told the delegates that the preparation of the base was "most urgently needed" from the point of view of Imperial defense, hence that his Government felt justified in asking those parts of the Commonwealth which were specially interested in the Far East "to consider most carefully" whether there was any way in which they could cooperate in the development of Singapore. There could be, he thought, no more valuable contribution to the defense of the Empire as a whole.⁷

In reply, Australian Prime Minister Bruce restated his Government's support of the project, but pointed out that since it had in 1924 entered upon a five-year naval building program it would be unable to contribute to the cost of the base in the immediate future.⁸ On the other hand, Prime Minister Coates of New Zealand not only endorsed Baldwin's action but expressed the belief that gifts from the Dominions were in order. "As I understand it," he stated, "the policy of developing Singapore as a naval base is approved, and the work is to be continued at considerable cost. That being so, and on the principle that he who gives at once gives twice, it seems important that offers of assistance from the Dominions and India should be made."⁹

The Conference itself reaffirmed the resolutions that had been adopted at the 1923 meeting, one of which favored the establishment of a first-class naval base at Singapore. It also placed on record the following observation:

Impressed with the vital importance of ensuring the security of the world-wide trade routes upon which the safety and welfare of all parts of the Empire depend, the representatives of Australia, New Zealand, and India note with spe-

⁶*Ibid.*, March 26, 1925.

⁷Great Britain, *Imperial Conference, 1926, Appendices to the Summary of Proceedings* (London, 1927), Cmd. 2769, pp. 165-166.

⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 184.

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cial interest the steps already taken by His Majesty's Government in Great Britain to develop the naval base at Singapore with the object of facilitating the free movement of the fleets. In view of the heavy expenditure involved, they welcome the spirit of co-operation shown in the contributions made with the object of expediting this work.¹⁰

In the meantime, parts of the Empire other than those represented at London were indicating their support. The Straits Settlements had in October, 1923, donated land;¹¹ the Crown Colony of Hong Kong in 1925 gave £250,000;¹² and in November, 1926, the Federated Malay States promised the sum of £2,000,000.¹³

All these gifts were made before tangible evidence of Dominion support was forthcoming. However, Prime Minister Coates on returning to Wellington advised his Parliament, in accordance with the views he had expressed at London, that New Zealand was not bearing a fair share of the cost of Empire defense. In the United Kingdom, he pointed out, the expenditure for the Navy was about £1 5s. per capita, in Australia about 17s., and in New Zealand slightly less than 8s. He therefore proposed that New Zealand make a £1,000,000 contribution to the Singapore project, an undertaking which in his opinion was essential not only for the adequate defense of the Commonwealth, but for the protection of the trade routes on which its prosperity, even its very existence, depended. Such a move was in no way inimical to Japan, toward which his Government had only the friendliest of feelings, nor would it indicate an unwillingness to cooperate with the League of Nations. In that connection he declared:

We should work quietly and definitely in the direction of helping the League of Nations to accomplish what it will accomplish if given the time. In the meantime no one can say that the League of Nations is an effective protection against aggression or against interference with trade, or indeed, with peoples, and it is essential in our own interests that we should do our share towards protecting our trade routes and assisting Empire defense.¹⁴

The discussion evoked by this recommendation was comparatively slight. Henry Holland, leader of the Opposition, charged that in giv-

¹⁰Great Britain, *Imperial Conference, 1926, Summary of Proceedings* (London, 1926), Cmd. 2768, p. 35.

¹¹See above, p. 67.

¹²Great Britain, *Commons* (March 4, 1925), 181: 414.

¹³*Ibid.* (November 24, 1926), 200: 429.

¹⁴New Zealand, *Debates* (September 21, 1927), 214: 254-259.

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ing the sum named by the Prime Minister, New Zealand would be bearing an undue share of the burden. "That £1,000,000," he said, "is more than one-eighth of the total cost—an enormous proportion." However, the main objection of his party was based not on financial considerations themselves, but on a desire for the maintenance of peace throughout the world. "It is our honest opinion," he stated, "that in opposing a proposal such as this we are doing what is best in the interests of our common humanity. For that reason, we as a party must oppose the proposal which the Prime Minister has placed before the House. . . ."¹⁵

Representative Armstrong also spoke in support of this view. China, Japan, and other nations were not, he was convinced, likely to be satisfied to have Britain act as a self-appointed policeman for the Pacific. They, too, would establish bases and an armaments race would begin. The result would be, as far as New Zealand was concerned, "increased taxation of the people and more unemployment following the increased expenditure for war purposes."¹⁶

Supporters of the Government policy were not much more active in expressing their views than the Opposition. Sir Maui Pomare, a member of the Executive Council representing the native Maoris, endorsed the proposal as a measure of self-protection and of co-operation with England, without whose navy "the British Empire would not exist for a week." Two other representatives favored it as a relatively inexpensive form of insurance as well as a moral gesture of Empire solidarity.¹⁷ The importance of maintaining a "white New Zealand" was emphasized by George Forbes, leader of the Nationalist Party. According to Forbes:

. . . a large majority of the people of New Zealand are fully in sympathy with the decision arrived at. Wherever I have gone—at whatever public function I have attended—I have found no division of opinion in that respect; and I am pleased to note that even in the ranks of the Labour party not all the members are opposed to the principle involved. . . . Considering the advantages we are likely to gain from the establishment of the base, I am sure no reasonable man would say we are making too great a contribution towards the scheme.¹⁸

¹⁵*Ibid.* (September 21, 1927), 214: 265.

¹⁶*Ibid.* (September 21, 1927), 214: 288.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 273, 277, 283.

¹⁸*Ibid.*, 269-272.

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Following this somewhat apathetic discussion, the New Zealand House of Representatives authorized, by a vote of fifty-one to ten, a contribution to the base of £1,000,000, to be made over a period of eight years.¹⁹ The brevity of the debate was due apparently not to lack of interest in the project, but to the unanimous support given it by the public. In the words of Walter Nash, secretary of the Dominion Labor Party, a majority of his countrymen favored it as a purely defensive measure, on the following grounds:

1. That the British fleet is one of the great securities for the peace of the world.
2. That this security can only be maintained by providing the fleet with means to operate effectively.
3. That a naval base at Singapore is the one place from which the fleet can operate effectively in the Pacific area.
4. That if you exclude the Pacific from the area in which the British fleet is effective you exclude one of the greatest instruments for maintaining world peace.²⁰

In Australia, as in New Zealand, the Conservative victory of 1924 had been hailed as a ray of hope for the Eastern naval station. The press rejoiced that there would now be a resumption of the project "without which the Empire in the Pacific is utterly defenseless" and Great Britain's influence for world peace "gravely weakened"—the scheme which more than ever had become "the keystone of the Empire's safety."²¹ Only labor, as represented by the *Sydney Labor Daily*, continued its opposition. In its opinion:

The Singapore base is wanted by John Bull in order that he may do as he may please in Siberia and China, and may intimidate other Asians, and exploit their mineral and other resources.

We could defend Australia, as many experts have repeatedly proved, without the huge ships of war for which the Singapore base is being constructed. . . .

Australia has nothing to gain from Singapore; and providing her defenses be in order, nothing to fear from her possible enemies.²²

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 290.

²⁰*London Times*, September 23, 1927. Nash's statement is of particular interest in view of the fact that he was a prominent member of the party which opposed the project. It should be noted, also, that these findings in regard to New Zealand opinion are not in accord with those of Ian G. Milner who, in his recent study, *New Zealand's Interests and Policies in the Far East* (New York, 1940), p. 22, states that the Government's action in contributing £1,000,000 to the base "called forth a good deal of criticism in Parliament and the press."

²¹*Sydney Morning Herald*, *Sydney Daily Telegraph*, *Sydney Sun*, as quoted in *London Times*, November 3, 1924; *Sydney Sunday Times*, November 2, 1924.

²²*London Daily Herald*, March 31, 1925.

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Despite the enthusiasm with which news of the renewal of work at Singapore was received, the reluctance to contribute to the cost of the base, so clearly shown by the Australian Parliament during the first Baldwin Ministry, continued and was, indeed, intensified by the belief that Australia, having adopted a defense program involving an expenditure of £7,500,000, could not now afford to "burn the candle at both ends."²³ Consequently, the stand taken by Prime Minister Bruce at the Imperial Conference in 1926 produced comparatively little criticism.

By the end of 1927, however, a note of doubt as to the policy Australia should pursue had become discernible. On the one hand, the problems of the North Pacific were regarded as so momentous as to arouse a widespread feeling of relief that they could be considered an Imperial responsibility. On the other, the fact that the United Kingdom was constructing the base without any Australian contribution was unsatisfactory to many. At the same time there was some question as to the ultimate aim of British policy. It seemed to envisage a Pacific fleet such as Lord Jellicoe suggested in his report, yet there was no sign that either Britain or Australia could or would authorize the expenditure involved in that recommendation.²⁴ The result of these conflicting ideas was a general confusion of Australian opinion which, taken in conjunction with her own naval building program, undoubtedly explained Australia's continued failure to follow New Zealand's example in making a financial contribution.

Meanwhile, the trend in world affairs was not reassuring. Although the Locarno Pact in 1925, the admission of Germany into the League of Nations in 1926, and the signing of the Kellogg-Briand Pact in 1928 had helped to relieve the tension in the international situation, and seemed to offer some hope for the growth of a system of collective security, progress had not been achieved in the equally important field of disarmament. At the meetings of the League Preparatory Commission, a spirit of fear, jealousy, national pride, and eco-

²³Australia, *Debates* (June 11, 1925), 110: 99; *ibid.* (August 12, 1926), 114: 5454.

²⁴'Australia, I. Australia and Pacific Relations,' *Round Table*, XVIII, pp. 397-398.

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conomic rivalry had prevailed. Similarly, the Geneva Naval Conference of 1927, called at the instance of President Coolidge, resulted in failure. The American delegation had proposed that in each of three ship categories, cruisers, destroyers, and submarines, a total tonnage restriction be set up with the same ratio between Japan, England, and the United States that had previously been accepted for capital ships—namely 5: 5: 3. The Baldwin Ministry, however, insisted upon “practical” rather than “mathematical parity” with the United States, and maintained that England’s need to protect 80,000 miles of trade and commercial routes made it impossible for her to accept any restriction on her right to build small cruisers with six-inch guns. It wished, on the other hand, to limit the building of 10,000-ton cruisers with eight-inch guns, the type claimed by the United States to be best suited to her needs because of the paucity of American naval bases. The conference, therefore, broke up with no results, save possibly an increase in suspicion and ill-will between America and Britain. The large naval building programs adopted by Japan, the United States, and Great Britain, during the years 1924-1926, remained unmodified.

Events in the Far East were no more encouraging. In April, 1927, the Japanese Government which, with Baron Shidehara at the Foreign Office, had pursued the so-called friendship policy with China, was replaced by that of General Baron Tanaka, proponent of the “positive policy.” The effect of the change was soon revealed by the despatch of two military expeditions to Tsinan, Shantung, and by a more vigorous assertion of Japanese “rights” in Manchuria. Though these moves did not, at the moment, appear to threaten British interests, they were considered by Labor to be evidence of a rising militarism in Japan—a tendency encouraged, if not directly instigated, by the Conservatives’ determination to strengthen the British naval position in the Far East, just as Baldwin’s policy at Geneva was said by his opponents to weaken the cause of disarmament and collective security.

Whether the Conservative naval program, of which the Singapore project remained a key part, was a causal factor, a result, or merely a coincidence in the world trend remains a moot point. While it is

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probably inaccurate to assume any direct relationship between British policy and Japanese political developments of 1927, it was true, nonetheless, that England's plans to fortify Singapore were meeting with increased criticism from her former ally.

Even in 1924 the venture had aroused resentment in Tokyo, despite the fact that Baron Shidehara, the conciliatory Minister of Foreign Affairs, had found no fault with the British project. The establishment of the base did not, he had declared, "affect Japanese interests in the slightest. It appeared that the work was to be spread over ten years. How international relations would change in ten years it was impossible to say, and it was inconceivable that the scheme had been adopted by the British Government in anticipation of possible trouble between Britain and Japan ten years hence."²⁵ But more typical of Japanese opinion was the blunt statement of Premier Kato that "Personally, I don't like the Singapore base scheme."²⁶ This was clearly the attitude of the majority of the press, although prior to the formal announcement of resumption of work on the base, the comments were rather mild. The *Osaka Mainichi*, for example, remarked that such action on the part of the new British Cabinet would "be found very regrettable by the Powers, for it runs counter to the ideas of international good faith which are gradually being fostered among the peoples of the world."²⁷ The *Yamato* likewise thought it would be unfortunate "not only for Britain but for world peace, if the new Conservative Cabinet resuscitated the scheme which its predecessor gave up as a menace to the peace of the Far East in the teeth of the pressure and objection of a certain Dominion. Such a course would undermine the achievement which the Labor Cabinet attained to the admiration of the whole world."²⁸

The actual announcement of the decision to reverse MacDonald's policy intensified the bitterness of the Japanese newspapers. The plan was now denounced not merely as "regrettable" but as dangerous. According to the *Osaka Asahi*:

²⁵"Foreign Affairs," *Japan Chronicle, Weekly Edition*, 1436 (January 1, 1925), p. 12.

²⁶"The Naval Race," *ibid.*, 1435 (December 25, 1924), p. 60.

²⁷"Japan's New Anxiety," *ibid.*, 1430 (November 20, 1924), p. 681.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 681.

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There is no reason to believe that peace cannot be maintained in the Far East unless Britain's main squadron is dispatched to this part of the world. . . . Even if it [the Singapore base] does not contravene the letter of the Washington Treaty, it at least constitutes a serious offense against the spirit of the Washington Conference, in that it is a stepping-stone for Britain to compete for the domination of the Pacific, which means the disturbance of the tranquillity of the Pacific.²⁹

The *Chugai Shogyo* stated that not only had there been no developments in the international situation which made necessary the revival of the project, but that in the nine months since it had been dropped conditions had improved. "To be . . . candid," it said, "it is inimical to the peace of the Far East."³⁰ The *Miyako* likewise called into question "the sincerity of the Conservative Cabinet which has decided to revive the scheme given up by its predecessor in the midst of the world's approbation, notwithstanding the fact that there has occurred no change in the surrounding circumstances in the interval."³¹

During the next few years, as work on the base progressed, Japanese hostility steadily deepened. The remarks of the press reflected an increasing tendency to regard the project not only as a general threat to peace, but as a direct menace to Japan and to the good relations between the two countries. The *Osaka Asahi* made this forthright comment:

The fortification of the port excites the ill-feeling of the Japanese toward their former ally. It will break down Japanese sympathy toward Great Britain, and it is harmful to our mutual good understanding. The naval base at Singapore will greatly endanger the peace of the East instead of safeguarding it. . . . Suspicion will say that the scheme is a promise of British activities in the Far East with the aid of the United States, or else British professional militarists, whose practice has been to maintain their position by emphasizing the existence of a menace to British interests in the East, may have found British rivalry in Japan and the United States whom they regard as having taken the place of a formidable Germany. But Great Britain being in a position to court the favor of the United States, they may have selected Japan as their objective.³²

Another typical statement was that of the *Chugai Shogyo*, which insisted that it was "highly inconsistent of Britain to pose as the chief

²⁹"The Singapore Base," *ibid.*, 1435 (December 25, 1924), p. 859.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 860.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 860.

³²"Singapore 'A Menace to Asia,'" *Literary Digest*, 84 (February 14, 1925), p. 20.

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advocate of world peace" and, at the same time, "obsessed by imperialistic prejudices," to build a strong naval base at Singapore. Australia seemed to be "very enthusiastic over the scheme," but if she were "free from aggressive design herself, she need not feel the necessity for such a strong base," for past history "most eloquently" showed that Japan knew better than "to adopt an aggressive policy towards others without provocation."³³ Equally representative were the comments of the *Hochi* which boldly advised "the Conservative Government of Great Britain to abolish the plan in question, if it pays any attention to the public opinion of Japan," and the *Jiji* which frankly said that "the fortification of the port stings the nerves and susceptibilities of the Japanese people."³⁴ The *Kokumin* stated bluntly that the base was for aggressive purposes: "This can be seen by the very large scale on which it is planned."³⁵

The height of Japanese indignation at the project was reached by the well-known journalist, Ito Masanori, who said:

When the Conservative Government declared that it was arming against nobody, it was, no doubt telling a deliberate lie. . . . No amount of false excuses on the part of the Conservative Government can preclude the irresistible conclusion that the Singapore scheme is directed against Japan.

Mr. MacDonald, the former Premier of the Labor Cabinet, hit the nail right on the head when he strongly denounced the whole scheme as destructive of the balance of naval strength in the Pacific, with the inevitable result that it would stimulate a race in armaments.

Thus, in the event of the completion of the Singapore naval scheme, Japan will see British dreadnoughts on the seas within her sphere of influence. The prospect of a big fleet of dreadnoughts and submarines being kept ready for action at a place nine hundred miles nearer to Japan than Hawaii cannot be regarded by the Japanese without a feeling of much uneasiness. What will be the position of the Japanese navy then? Could it possibly be content with its present strength, when a strong British squadron was newly organized and was operating in the Chinese seas, in addition to the American navy in the Pacific? It is more than probable that such a situation would give rise to a general cry for naval expansion among the Japanese people. It is also to be feared that the hostility of the Japanese people against Britain will then considerably grow.³⁶

³³"Japan and Singapore," *Japan Chronicle, Weekly Edition*, 1538 (December 16, 1926), pp. 714-715.

³⁴"Editorial Views of Japanese Press," *Trans-Pacific*, XII, 3 (April 4, 1925), p. 8; "Editorial Views of Japanese Press," *ibid.*, XIII, 45 (November 6, 1926), p. 8.

³⁵"Japan and Singapore," *Japan Chronicle, Weekly Edition*, 1538 (December 16, 1926), pp. 714-715.

³⁶*Ibid.*, p. 714.

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Although the Nipponese press, in general, paid less attention to the subject during the latter half of the Baldwin Ministry, its hostility did not decrease. Indeed, such comments as the following continued to emphasize the threat to Japan seen in the Singapore scheme :

In event of its completion, it is sure to constitute a more serious menace to Japan than the fortified Pearl Harbor. . . . The remarkable increase in the navigating power of warships has greatly reduced distances in recent years, and in proportion as these distances have been reduced the menace has been increased. . . . British battleships and submarines at Singapore can attack Nagasaki or Sasebo and return to their naval base without refuelling. . . . This danger is destined to increase in the future. . . . Britain pretends that the Singapore base is important to her for defensive purposes, but seeing that it proves such a serious menace to Japan, the Japanese people clearly have the right to ask Britain to abandon the scheme.³⁷

Despite the criticism, the British Government moved steadily ahead with its plans to create a first-class base at Singapore. Preliminary surveys, re-arrangement of plans, and new estimates were necessary before construction could be resumed. It was also discovered that a considerable indirect loss, which could not be accurately estimated, had resulted from the cessation of work under MacDonald. In addition to the fruitless employment of staff, the cost of their passage out and home, and compensation to local firms for cancelled contracts, some work—such as anti-malaria precautions and the erection of temporary buildings—had to be done over again. However, because the chief measures taken during the first Baldwin Ministry—the clearing of the dense jungle and the drainage of the swampy location of the base—had not required much in the way of plant or material, “little direct monetary loss” had been occasioned by MacDonald’s disposal of part of the equipment. Also, so far as was known, no deterioration had occurred in the materials on hand.³⁸

As a result of new studies, the total estimate for the cost of the base was reduced from £11,000,000 to £7,000,000. This was made possible, according to Bridgeman, “by a more careful survey on the ground of what is necessary, and also by leaving out certain facilities for storage and repair work which are not absolutely necessary, and which, if unfortunately the political outlook were to become clouded,

³⁷“Singapore Base,” *ibid.*, 1566 (June 30, 1927), p. 707.

³⁸Great Britain, *Commons* (February 11, 1925), 180: 175.

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could be erected in a very short time.³⁹ The revision did not, however, include the cost of a new floating dock nor of an air station at Singapore, neither of which was provided for in the original estimates but which were now considered essential.

When the Singapore base was first envisaged, the Admiralty had planned to remodel for use in the Far East one of the two German floating docks acquired after World War I.⁴⁰ The other was to be utilized at Malta, but towing it there proved to be very difficult. Since it was obvious that towing all the way to Singapore would be highly dangerous, it was decided to have a new dock built—one constructed in such a manner that it could be taken to the Far East in sections.⁴¹

The order for such a dock was officially given on November 16, 1926.⁴² Rapid progress in construction was made, and less than two years later, April 27, 1928, the Board of Admiralty invited members of the Institution of Electrical Engineers and representatives of the engineering and technical press to visit the nearly completed work. They found a huge structure displacing some 50,000 tons and capable of accommodating the largest ships of the Royal Navy. Each longitudinal side consisted of a perpendicular and rectangular wall 855 feet long, 15 feet wide, and rising some 50 feet above the water line. Composed of ship plates, these were topped by an assortment of hatchways, ventilators, capstans, raised skylights, and a covered line of "live rail." The walls themselves were separated by, and dropped sheerly to, a platform 150 feet wide where the vessels entering the dock would rest on blocks similar to those at the bottom of any dry-dock, except that in this case there were three lines of them. All three could be used to shore up the heaviest vessels for repair work. Otherwise three small ships could be docked at the same time. The stern end of the dock was open, but the forward end had a light steel lattice bridge formed by two brackets moving on hinges to a nose point like the gates of a lock, but only running halfway down to the platform.

³⁹*Ibid.* (March 14, 1927), 203: 1680.

⁴⁰*Ibid.* (March 19, 1925), 181: 2521.

⁴¹*Ibid.* (March 22, 1926), 193: 967.

⁴²*London Times*, November 17, 1926.

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The under-water structure of the dock consisted of large tanks which, when filled, caused the platform to sink, thus making it possible to take a vessel in. It could be regulated in such a manner as to insure that the dock was on a level keel or to enable it "to be trimmed" to admit a damaged ship. By emptying the tanks the docked ships could then be raised out of the water. With pumping equipment capable of expelling 30,000 tons of water per hour, a large vessel could be berthed and raised above water in about four hours. This operation was controlled by 90 switch-operating keys brought to narrow tables running along each side of the small control cabin above the fore end of the starboard deck. The floating dock also contained "engineering workshops fitted with the most modern types of machine tools, and a plating shop, with plating slabs, tools, sheer forge, and well-lighted benches, and two sets of portable plant for welding." According to the same description, the electrical equipment itself, lodged within the dock walls, was composed of the following units: three 1,000-volt, three-phase, alternating current generators for main power and pumping; a 225-volt, two-wire, direct current system for auxiliary generation, lighting, and power; a 20-volt, direct current, two-wire system for control of dock operations; a double telephone system, one part with central exchange and another direct, to enable the dock-master to get in touch immediately with any portion of the vessel; a complete plant for supplying ships in the dock with electrical energy for lighting and power when their own machinery was idle; and lastly, provisions for supplying submarines in dock with electrical energy for charging their large storage batteries at 330 volts.⁴⁸

The contract for towing the 50,000-ton floating dock to Singapore was let to a Dutch firm at a cost of approximately £200,000. The first section left the Tyne on June 21, 1928, and the second a week later. Of the 7,500-mile voyage, which occupied nearly four months, the most difficult part was the trip through the Suez Canal where, with but fifteen feet to spare on either side, the dock was at the same time so high out of the water as to be liable to catch the wind. The passage

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, April 28, 1928.

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was made safely, however, and both sections arrived at Singapore in the middle of October.⁴⁴

The second phase of the project which, like the new floating dock, was not included in the 1927 estimates for the base, was the construction of a £576,000 air-station on the island of Singapore. Not only would this, explained Sir Samuel Hoare, Secretary of State for Air, form a cardinal link in the Imperial line of communications, but, as a part of the naval base, it could be used for defensive purposes.⁴⁵ Similarly, on March 12, Sir L. Worthington-Evans, Secretary of State for War, announced that in 1929 the army would spend £125,000 to set up heavy guns and a garrison at Singapore.⁴⁶

Inasmuch as the Baldwin Ministry held office nearly four and a half years (from November, 1924 to June, 1929), it was able during that time to make substantial progress on the construction of the base. By March 14, 1929, the preliminary clearing of the site had been completed, the floating dock successfully towed the vast distance to Singapore, and the contract let for the larger engineering works and the graving dock, to be completed within seven years.⁴⁷ The total expenditure (as of March 31, 1929) was £1,443,355, of which £913,655 was for the floating dock and £529,700 for works on shore such as clearing the land, draining the swamp, and building a berth for the floating dock. Of the sum spent, £1,174,000 had come from the contributions of Hong Kong, New Zealand, and the Federated Malay States. The balance of £269,355 was borne by the Navy budget.⁴⁸

With work at the base proceeding according to schedule, the Conservatives might well have entertained the thought that their plans for a Singapore naval base would be a reality by 1935. However, the wheel of political fortune had now completed another full revolution. The domestic situation had grown so unsatisfactory that when, in 1929, the Conservative Government brought about a general election,

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, June 1, 1928, June 19, 1928, August 6, 1928, October 13, 1928, and October 17, 1928.

⁴⁵Great Britain, *Commons* (March 12, 1929), 226: 1023-1024.

⁴⁶*Ibid.* (March 12, 1929), 226: 1091-1092.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*

⁴⁸*Ibid.* (April 24, 1929), 227: 891.

the Labor party won a majority of the votes. It gained 287 seats, the Conservatives 260, and the Liberals only 59.

In June Ramsay MacDonald again became Prime Minister. Even though the seriousness of Britain's financial situation made domestic affairs of paramount concern, the attention of the Government was directed almost immediately to the question of naval policy. The friction between the United States and Great Britain, engendered by the failure of the Geneva Conference, had been greatly intensified in the fall of 1928 by the publication in a Hearst newspaper of a report of secret Anglo-French disarmament talks. This revelation had been followed in February, 1929, by an act of Congress authorizing the construction of fifteen 10,000-ton cruisers and one aircraft-carrier at a cost of \$274,000,000. To check what threatened to be an extravagant naval race, President Hoover lost no time, when the Labor Cabinet entered office, in expressing the desire of the United States to find some formula for naval limitation.

London welcomed these overtures, and conversations were initiated which continued for some months. Thereafter events moved rapidly. On July 23, Hoover publicly urged the necessity of a reduction of American military expenditures. The following day, MacDonald announced the suspension of work on several British warships under construction. Hoover responded promptly with a similar move in regard to American vessels, whereupon the British Government stated that it was willing to reduce the demands for cruiser strength upon which it had insisted in the previous conversations. On October 4, MacDonald arrived in New York on a good-will visit, and on October 8, after he had talked with Hoover, invitations to a new naval conference were dispatched by the British Government to the United States, Japan, France, and Italy.

Against this background, and in view of their action in 1924, the Laborites might have been expected to abandon the Singapore project a second time. However, during the five years that had since elapsed, the expensive main contract had been let, a great deal of work had actually been done, and a large proportion of the cost incurred had been borne by Dominion and colonial contributions. Because of these factors MacDonald temporarily delayed an announcement of policy.

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However, in November, First Lord of the Admiralty Alexander told the House of Commons that the Government had decided that the work "already contracted for" should be "slowed down as much as possible," that all work that could be suspended should be held up, and that no new work should be embarked on "pending the results of the Five Power Conference."⁴⁹

Of the overseas territories, the Dominions alone were informed of this decision. The Opposition, therefore, claiming that postponement of work involved an important change of policy, severely criticized the Ministry for not consulting Hong Kong, the Federated Malay States, and the Straits Settlements since each had made valuable contributions toward the cost of the project.⁵⁰ The Government, in its reply, insisted that retarding the work at Singapore did not constitute a change of policy. Its spokesman, the Under-Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, gave assurance to the House: "When there is a decision on policy, when, if eventualities should arise, it becomes necessary to make a change of policy, before that time arrives there will be the fullest consultation not only with the Dominions but with the Colonies, the Federated Malay States and Hong Kong, who are also concerned."⁵¹

Even in Australia and New Zealand, which had been notified of the Government's decision, there was, as in 1924, considerable resentment at the procedure followed by the Laborites. "Informing," it was complained, was very different from "consulting." The *Auckland Star*, for example, thought that the Imperial authorities should have taken the Dominions completely into their confidence before finally resolving on a step that so vitally concerned their safety and the interests of the whole Empire.⁵² The *Sydney Morning Herald* warned that New Zealand, Hong Kong, the Malay States, and Australia were all "vitally interested" in the work being carried through, and the question of doing so was "hardly any longer one for the Brit-

⁴⁹*Ibid.* (November 13, 1929), 231: 2012.

⁵⁰*Ibid.* (November 21, 1929), 232: 852.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 858.

⁵²*London Times*, November 18, 1929.

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ish Parliament alone.’⁵³ The *Wellington Evening Post* expressed resentment over London’s apparent inclination to pursue an independent course. No one would deny, it stated, that Great Britain, as the “senior partner” and the one that bore the main burden of naval defense, must have a majority vote on the issue. However, she had voluntarily granted a voice in policy, hoping that the Dominions would ultimately recognize the responsibility as well as the privilege of partnership. There had already been some recognition of this responsibility, and it would be regrettable if the growing disposition to share the burdens of naval defense were checked by Britain’s resumption of full authority. Moreover, the *Post* feared that without full consultation the impression might be deepened that the Labor Government’s policy centered in the United Kingdom, and that “the Empire which Mr. J. A. Thomas had discovered in 1924” was as yet unknown to some of his colleagues.⁵⁴

More pronounced was the criticism leveled against the Government for linking the problem of the base to the forthcoming naval conference. The Conservatives professed to see no connection between the two. The Singapore station, they argued, was meant to give mobility to the fleet in Eastern waters, to save the time and expense of going to Malta for repairs. If the conference resulted in no reduction of cruiser strength, the need for Singapore would be the same; if there were a reduction it would be all the more important to a smaller fleet. In any case, until the time should come for a ruling that capital ships were in no circumstances to be employed to protect British lives and interests in the Far East, the vital importance of the base would remain unaltered.⁵⁵

In the Dominions, the suspension of work at Singapore pending the outcome of the conference gave rise to the apprehension that the base was to be used as a lever for securing concessions on other matters. The serious implications of such a policy and the unfavorable reaction produced by it, were pointed out by a number of papers, of

⁵³*Sydney Morning Herald*, July 26, 1929.

⁵⁴*Wellington Evening Post*, November 19, 1929.

⁵⁵Statements by W. C. Bridgeman, *London Times*, January 16, 1930; Rear-Admiral Davidson, retired, *ibid.*, November 21, 1929; editorial, *ibid.*, November 16, 1929.

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which the *Melbourne Herald*, the *Melbourne Argus*, and the *Sydney Morning Herald* may be taken as representative. Australia, according to the first of this group, cordially supported the League of Nations and all efforts which might be made toward disarmament. However, if this meant "the jealous retention of naval power in northern waters and the use of the Dominions' interests as insignificant counters for bargaining," it would be strange indeed if public opinion did not undergo "notable changes."⁵⁶ The *Argus* likewise reached the "disturbing conclusion" that the Labor Cabinet was making "the base a pawn in the political game." Such behavior, it concluded, "when serious consequences are at stake cannot be indulged in with impunity."⁵⁷ The *Sydney Morning Herald* made this vigorous protest:

If British statesmen are hopeful of increasing the machinery of peace by weakening the strength of the naval arm in Pacific waters they must be peculiarly obtuse. If they propose to use Singapore as a factor in bargaining at the London Conference their motives will be even more despicable. To play fast and loose with the base would involve a cheapening of Britain's Imperial policy, and the dominions and colonies chiefly concerned should be the first to make that fact clear if and when they are called upon to give their views.⁵⁸

The English proponents of the Singapore project were not slow to seize upon such dissatisfaction to reinforce their own position. In particular, the Conservative members of Parliament, the *London Times*, and the Navy League took this as their opportunity to emphasize that the base had been designed to secure the safety of Britain's trade routes the world over, that it had been declared by the Dominions beyond the seas to be essential for their own security, and that they had contributed "very largely" toward its cost. To delay its construction at this point, without their consent and approval, was "but a sorry return" for their services and was "little short of betrayal of their confidence."⁵⁹

The Government emphatically repudiated the charge that it was using the base as a diplomatic football. First Lord of the Admiralty Alexander, declared that "under no circumstances" would the deci-

⁵⁶Great Britain, *Commons* (December 24, 1929), 233: 2167.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 2167-2168.

⁵⁸*Sydney Morning Herald*, November 20, 1929.

⁵⁹*London Times*, November 15, 1929, August 2, 1929, November 16, 1929; Great Britain, *Commons* (December 24, 1929), 233: 2167-2168.

sion to slow down the construction activities be used "in any sense or form as a bargaining factor." He took the position, however, that if such a large expenditure were to be made, it ought to be administered with the "wisest economy" and with the "most careful consideration" of the situation that would emerge from the Conference.⁶⁰ Although the Government spokesmen carefully refrained from saying so, it was clear from statements in Parliament and in the press that a large element in the Labor and Liberal Parties still regarded the project as a provocative, costly, and totally unnecessary undertaking, and hoped that as a result of the conference it would be abandoned.⁶¹

The Japanese papers did not, at this time, evince much interest in the Singapore problem, but such comments as they did make expressed satisfaction that work was to be retarded. The *Hochi*, for example, applauded MacDonald's decision as "not only consistent with the attitude" which the Labor Party had always adopted toward the scheme, but as "consonant with the pacific spirit" which pervaded the world. Its only regret was that the British Government did not go a step farther and abandon the undertaking entirely. It added, however, that if the temporary suspension of work was prompted by a desire to secure a more favorable position for Britain at the forthcoming disarmament conference, the Labor Cabinet could not escape the "accusation that it betrayed its avowals of sincerity of purpose." In conclusion, it insisted that although the base was seemingly defensive in nature, it was essentially aggressive, that it was directed against Japan, and that Nippon's representative at the scheduled conference should bring forward the question of its abandonment in order to make the "Pacific really worthy of its name."⁶² The *Asahi* also congratulated Britain on having slowed down construction, remarking that Singapore was "only good for British imperialistic adventures in the Pacific anyhow . . ."⁶³

The Japanese Government did not follow the *Hochi's* suggestion

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, 2192.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, 2178; *London Daily News*, November 15, 1929.

⁶²"Singapore Base," *Japan Chronicle, Weekly Edition*, 1692 (November 28, 1929), p. 582.

⁶³"Japan's Naval Programme," *ibid.*, 1695 (December 19, 1929), pp. 645-646.

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of making an issue of Singapore at the conference. The official attitude was given to the press by Baron Wakatsuki, spokesman for the Japanese delegation, who remarked that "at present" Japan had no intention of raising the question of the base. "We are not informed," he said, "whether Great Britain will retain it, but, of course, if it were retained that would be a weapon." He added that if Great Britain should decide to abandon it, that would be "splendid."⁶⁴

The London Naval Conference, which achieved qualified success in the signing of a new Three-Power Naval Treaty, took no action in regard to Britain's projected Far Eastern naval station. A few days before the meeting adjourned, however, the Prime Minister promised Parliament to review the whole Singapore question in the light of the new agreement and "in full consultation with the overseas Governments of the British Commonwealth concerned."⁶⁵ This was done at the Imperial Conference held in London, October 1 to November 14, 1930. Unfortunately, the Summary of Proceedings of the Conference contains no account of the discussions that took place, nor, apparently did British or Dominion spokesmen issue any official statements that make it possible to determine with complete accuracy the exact stand taken by their representatives.

The attitude of both Australia and New Zealand, however, was expressed informally at this time by their respective High Commissioners. For Australia, Major-General Sir Granville Ryrie stated that if work on the base was not continued, "the people of Australia would feel they had been left in an awkward predicament. They would be left up in the air if any trouble happened in the Pacific."⁶⁶ Sir Thomas Wilford spoke for New Zealand. "If Britain did not want Singapore," he said, "Japan did." New Zealand looked on Singapore as a base which would insure the Empire's safety in the Pacific. "If this or any other Government did not proceed with the base, New Zealanders would consider that they had been abandoned."⁶⁷ Another indication of New Zealand's official position was given in July, 1929,

⁶⁴*London Times*, December 18, 1929.

⁶⁵Great Britain, *Commons* (April 17, 1930), 237: 3094.

⁶⁶*London Times*, October 22, 1930.

⁶⁷*Ibid.*, October 22, 1930.

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when it was suggested that the Dominion's annual contribution to the base be transferred to the relief of her unemployed. In reply, the Prime Minister, Sir Joseph Ward, stated that the Government attached "the greatest importance to the naval base at Singapore, and would not be willing to reconsider the contributions payable by New Zealand."⁶⁸ From these quotations, which are in complete agreement with the general tone of the Dominion press, it may be presumed that the Governments of both countries continued to support the project.

The final decisions of the Imperial Conference were given in the official report, which contained the following summary:

As a result of discussion between representatives of the United Kingdom, the Commonwealth of Australia, and New Zealand, it was recommended that the present policy of the ultimate establishment of a defended naval base at Singapore should be maintained and that the Jackson contract [for the graving dock] should be continued. It was, however, also recommended that, apart from the latter expenditure and such as will be required for the completion of the air base on the scale at present contemplated, the remaining expenditure, *i. e.*, that required for completing the equipment of the docks and for defense works, should be postponed for the next five years, when the matter could be again reviewed in the light of relevant conditions then prevailing.⁶⁹

The decision finally reached was thus a compromise between the Conservative plan for a first-class Far Eastern naval station and the Labor program of peace through disarmament. For this a number of factors were in part responsible. In the first place, although public opinion was divided along much the same lines as it had been in previous years, general interest in the subject had dwindled, for both in England and in the Dominions economic problems greatly overshadowed everything else. Secondly, in Australia the Conservative Government had been replaced by Labor, with the result that less resistance to a policy of delay was to be encountered from that source.⁷⁰ Thirdly, the policies of the Dominions and the Home Government were clearly at variance, and to preserve a semblance of unity, compromise was necessary. Fourthly, as already pointed out, the extent of the work done, the amount of money spent, and the contributions received from overseas territories made it more difficult than in 1924

⁶⁸New Zealand, *Debates* (July 31, 1929), 221: 763.

⁶⁹Great Britain, *Imperial Conference 1930, Summary of Proceedings* (Ottawa, 1931), p. 38.

⁷⁰*Wellington Evening Post*, November 15, 1929.

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to shelve the project entirely. Finally, the limited success of the London Naval Conference, the vehement opposition of the Japanese naval authorities to the agreement reached, and the warning by Tokyo that in 1936 she would demand naval parity may have caused MacDonald to abandon his earlier insistence that the base be relinquished as "a moral gesture toward disarmament."⁷¹

The Labor Government adhered strictly to the recommendations of the Imperial Conference, but, like its previous ministry, its term of life was brief. In the midsummer of 1931, an acute financial crisis created a state of emergency greater than any the country had faced since the war. The Cabinet resigned, to be replaced by a National Coalition Government with Ramsay MacDonald at the head. The new Ministry, which consisted of approximately an equal number of Laborites, Liberals, and Conservatives, was opposed by a few independents and by the greater part of the Labor Party from which MacDonald, Snowden, and other Coalition adherents had been forced to resign. The general election in October went entirely in favor of the new National Party, which secured 554 seats in the House of Commons as against 52 for Labor.

The new Government proceeded to reverse the policy of its predecessor, deciding that it would be unwise to limit the expenditures at Singapore to the work already undertaken. In spite of the recommendation of the 1930 Imperial Conference, it was convinced that funds should be voted for sufficient repair facilities. In its naval estimates of March, 1932, it accordingly asked for additional appropriations. The Civil Lord of the Admiralty, Captain Euan Wallace, told the House that the scheme provided for in the new budget contemplated "an adequately equipped base at Singapore," with "a graving dock capable of taking the largest ships, a wharf over 2,000 feet long for berthing, a store wharf, fuelling wharf, electrical generating station, dockyard workshops, storehouses, houses and quarters, hospital for natives, and a little distance away, an armament depot. . . ." If, on the other hand, the program recommended by the Imperial Conference of 1930 were adhered to, the graving dock, the generating station,

⁷¹*Ibid.*, October 21, 1930.

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and the workshops would not be complete, and Singapore would not be a "satisfactory or a workable naval base."⁷²

The acceptance by Parliament of the 1932 naval estimates marked the last major change of policy in regard to the base. The reasons for this, as for the step taken by the Coalition Government, are fairly clear. Despite the leadership of MacDonalld and the active part played by Snowden and other former Labor leaders, the general tone of both the domestic and foreign policies followed by the National Party Cabinet showed a predominantly Conservative influence. With the passage of time this tendency increased. It was natural, therefore, that work on the base, for more than a decade a part of the Conservative program, should have been continued. Moreover, both Stanley Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain, who became Prime Ministers in 1935 and 1937, respectively, had, from the first, been advocates of the Singapore plan.

Paralleling this trend in domestic politics were the developments on the international scene. In 1931, Japan's venture into Manchuria not only initiated a new period of tension in the Far East, but the failure of the League to adopt restraining measures heralded the destruction of any hopes that may have been cherished for a system of world order based on collective security and disarmament. Thereafter, the rapid rise of Hitlerism, Italy's aggression in Ethiopia, and the intervention of the Axis Powers in Spain completed the process of disillusionment. At the same time, Japan, after her initial successes in Asia, started a vast naval building program, withdrew from the Washington and London Naval Treaties, and sought further conquests in China. Her adherence to the anti-Comintern pact in 1936 bridged the situations in the East and West and made more concrete the apparent world-wide threat to the British Empire's trade, communications, and security. The extent to which London's vacillation was responsible for the appearance of chaos in international affairs is not germane to the present study. It is clear, however, that the road of appeasement followed by England's various Governments between 1931 and 1939 in no sense precluded a policy of rearmament and of

⁷²Great Britain, *Commons*, (March 15, 1932), 263: 238-239.

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strengthening imperial defenses—defenses in which Singapore represented a vital link. Although it would probably be a mistake, in view of the history of the base during the decade 1921-1931, to assume that the decision to complete it was determined to any great extent by the course of world events after 1931, it is undoubtedly true that the increasing tension in Europe and Asia did lead to an acceleration of work on the project, and to the provision for more elaborate air and land protection.

Finally, in connection with the policy adopted by the Coalition Cabinet in 1931, it should be pointed out that despite the recommendation of the Imperial Conference there was a growing feeling that, having gone so far in the construction of the base, Britain might well go a little farther. In the words of Lord Stanley, the Financial Secretary to the Admiralty, the Labor Party had been doing something even worse than "digging a hole just to have the pleasure of filling it up again." By adopting the truncated scheme, it had dug a hole and left it there for "no purpose whatever." He did not think that the strictest economist would object to spending £8,750,000 on a dock from which the Navy could get some value, rather than £7,500,000 on a grave which was useless "except as a memorial to Mr. Alexander's term of office."⁷³

After 1931, public discussion of Britain's Singapore project was slight. The regular presentation of the naval estimates afforded opportunity for pacifist and Labor members of Parliament to reiterate their stand on the issues of peace, imperialism, and the expense and weaknesses of the base itself.⁷⁴ Government spokesmen usually replied briefly, if at all, by reference to the responsibilities of Empire defense and to the disastrous repercussions in the Dominions should the plan be abandoned.⁷⁵ Occasionally a public speaker sought to assure the world in general, and Japan in particular, that the new

⁷³*Ibid.* (March 12, 1934), 287: 152-153.

⁷⁴*Ibid.* (March 12, 1934), 287: 61; (March 19, 1934), 287: 908-909; (March 14, 1935), 299: 628; (May 28, 1936), 312: 2240.

⁷⁵*Ibid.* (March 12, 1934), 287: 66; (March 19, 1934), 287: 910-911; (March 14, 1935), 299: 723; (March 11, 1937), 321: 1370.

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naval station was for defensive purposes only.⁷⁶ On the whole, however, the matter was ignored both on the platform and in the press.

In New Zealand, likewise, there was little interest in Singapore during the period 1931-1938. Hence an analysis of that Dominion's attitude toward the project must rest largely on an examination of the policy pursued by its Government—a course in which the public apparently acquiesced. In general, it would seem that the decision of the National Coalition Ministry to go beyond the recommendations of the Imperial Conference was warmly received. This approval cannot be attributed, as is frequently done, to the effects of Japan's incursion into Manchuria, for at the moment the Dominion Government and people, overwhelmed by economic difficulties, were showing comparatively slight interest in the Sino-Japanese conflict. Rather it was a continuation of their already expressed belief that the British Navy was the cornerstone of their security and the station at Singapore a necessary pivot for co-ordinating Imperial defenses in the Pacific. It was also noteworthy that, although during the depression years the general defense appropriations were greatly reduced, the annual contribution to the base was made regularly.

In 1935, for the first time in New Zealand's history, a Labor Cabinet entered office. The new Ministry almost immediately showed its independence of the mother country by charting a course in foreign affairs based firmly on collective security, sanctions, and allegiance to the Covenant of the League—a course highly critical of the appeasement program then being followed by Britain in the Far East and to a slightly lesser extent in Europe. This fact, combined with Labor's former denunciation of armaments as conducive to war and its antipathy toward the Singapore project might well have been expected to lead it toward an independent defense policy.

By 1935, however, and particularly after the outbreak of the "China Incident" of 1937, Japan's southward advance more directly menaced New Zealand's interests. Thereupon the Labor Government, realizing that the Dominion was unable to provide single-handedly

⁷⁶For example: Sir Cecil Clementi, Governor of the Straits Settlements and High Commissioner for the Malay States, *London Times*, June 5, 1934; Winston Churchill, *ibid.*, May 1, 1937; Sir Samuel Hoare, *ibid.*, July 23, 1936.

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for its own security, accepted the necessity of full cooperation in Imperial defense schemes. Like its predecessors, it entered whole-heartedly into plans for coordinating its naval and air forces with those of Australia and Britain. It was supposed that any joint action would be centered on Singapore. To this extent the base acquired a new significance from New Zealand's point of view. At the same time there was a growing fear that if Britain became involved in a European war, not only would Tokyo be encouraged to move against British Malaya and the Dutch East Indies, but the British Navy, engaged in the Atlantic and Mediterranean, would be unable to send sufficient forces to Singapore to cope with the situation. Greater emphasis, therefore, began to be placed on the air force, coast defenses, and independence in armament supplies. The new attitude of New Zealand toward Singapore was well expressed in the following quotation:

Considering again the case of Japan, the naval forces which are even now available in the Western Pacific would probably be sufficient to deter an expedition intended to invade New Zealand. On the other hand, a probable objective of a raiding party would be to prevent or dissuade New Zealand from dispatching any forces overseas to the assistance of any other part of the Commonwealth. New Zealand's Commonwealth membership renders her in this respect more likely to be attacked than if she stood alone. Against such a raid there would be no defense other than that with which New Zealand could provide herself, for any force which can reasonably be expected to be based on Singapore would be of little assistance. To prevent raids of this type would require a naval force strong and numerous enough to keep the waters of the Southwestern Pacific completely free from enemy vessels. The last war shows how difficult this would be. . . . Naval forces operating from the Singapore base or indeed from Australia, then, appear to play an important part in the defense of New Zealand, although their greatest value is deterrent rather than protective. The fact of the existence of the Singapore base with a certain minimum of naval forces based upon it is likely upon all grounds of common sense to induce the possible enemy to decide against dispatching an invading force, and of course the greater the strength of these forces, the greater the deterrent. Nevertheless, if New Zealand can be conquered by the casual ships which may slip through the screen provided by the Singapore forces, Singapore is not of much value to her. Its value rests upon the assumption that a major expedition would be necessary to achieve a successful invasion. This assumption, however, is true only if New Zealand has a defense organization of her own which makes some reasonable attempt to deal with the question of home defense.⁷⁷

In Australia, except for the fact that no financial contribution was made to the base, the situation was much like that in New Zealand.

⁷⁷*Contemporary New Zealand*, Chapter XV, quoted in Milner, *op. cit.*, pp. 95-96.

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Public discussion of Singapore was slight, but its importance as a necessary center for co-ordinating imperial defenses was generally accepted.⁷⁸ Thus, between 1931 and 1936, the Lyons Government, which was the non-Labor coalition, emphasized, on the one hand, a policy of closer friendship with Japan and avoided any action at Geneva which would antagonize that power, but, on the other, assured Parliament that it recognized Singapore's significance to Australia and would advocate its early completion.⁷⁹ After 1936, the reversal of the policy toward Japan, the development of a trade war between the two countries, Nippon's further expansion into Asia, the crumbling of the system of collective security, rising tension in Europe, and Japan's signature of the anti-Comintern Pact steadily increased Australia's sense of insecurity.

As in New Zealand, these events had a two-fold effect in Australia. They gave new emphasis to the plans for co-operation at Singapore, and they led to an acceleration of the Dominion's own defense measures. A statement by Prime Minister Lyons, although made in August, 1938, reflects accurately the position of the Government during the period under discussion. The main objectives of his Ministry's defense policy, he said, were the maintenance of free passage of seaborne trade and the prevention of raids on, or an invasion of, Australia. To achieve these aims the development of the Australian naval forces and effective co-operation with the British at Singapore were necessary. As the Prime Minister put it:

It is an unavoidable geographic fact that the first line of defense of the Commonwealth is naval, and if we expect a British fleet to be based on Singapore as a safeguard to Australia, we must be prepared to co-operate and provide for the squadron in our own waters. With such security, provided the enemy is kept at arm's length, our shores are maintained inviolate, and our overseas trade moves freely to its markets throughout the world. In a world armed to the teeth and with small states existing on the sufferance of powerful neighbors and looking for allies, it is not likely that the Australian people will accept a policy of non-cooperation which would deprive them of Britain's powerful aid in such uncertain times as these. Our people are wise enough to realize that our defense

⁷⁸*Melbourne Argus*, February 5, 1934; *ibid.*, February 15, 1934; *Sydney Morning Herald*, February 15, 1938.

⁷⁹*Australia, Debates* (May 24, 1932), 132: 1245.

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rests on two pillars, one of which is our own maximum effort, and the other Empire co-operation.⁸⁰

The Australian Labor Party strongly criticized the "dependence" on Britain and advocated a more self-sufficient policy with emphasis on air strength rather than on naval forces. Its reasons were presented by John Curtin, leader of the Opposition, who became Prime Minister in the latter part of 1941. At the time of the debate over Singapore, Curtin said:

If an Eastern first-class power sought an abrogation of a basic Australian policy, such as the White Australia policy, it would most likely do so when Great Britain was involved or threatened to be involved in an European war. Would the British Government dare to authorize the despatch of any substantial part of the fleet to the East to help Australia? . . . The dependence of Australia upon the competence, let alone the readiness, of British statesmen to send forces to our aid is too dangerous a hazard upon which to found Australia's defense policy.⁸¹

One faction of Labor went even farther than that in its criticisms. In July, 1937, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, meeting in Melbourne, announced that it was opposed to the British and Australian rearmament plans and in favor of a policy of collective security through the League of Nations.⁸² The election campaign of 1937, fought mainly on the issue of defense, gave some indication of the strength of these various groups. The Labor Party, repudiating the stand of the Australian Council of Trade Unions, came out strongly in favor of aerial armaments and a "self-reliant policy." The Government, although not ignoring the importance of air power, placed its emphasis on naval co-operation with Britain. The outcome has been well summarized in these words:

Curiously enough, public interest in this election . . . was not very marked. Discussions as to the relative merits of aerial and naval defense were perhaps a little too technical for the ordinary voter, and the issue of co-operation or non-cooperation with Britain was not raised sufficiently clearly, except perhaps in New South Wales, to arouse very heated debate. Nevertheless, Imperial sentiment is extremely strong among all classes in Australia and a suspicion, carefully nursed by the Government forces, that Labor's policy might mean isolation from Britain

⁸⁰*Ibid* (August 24, 1938), quoted in Shepherd, Jack, *Australia's Interests and Policies in the Far East* (New York, 1940), pp. 99-100.

⁸¹Australia, *Debates* (November 5, 1936), quoted in Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁸²*Melbourne Herald*, July 30, 1937.

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may be held to account, in no small measure, for Labor's defeat and the old Government's return to office.⁸³

Thus, if only indirectly and as a part of a larger policy, co-operation with Britain at Singapore would seem to have been endorsed by the Australian electorate.

Before proceeding with a description of progress on the base, one other matter deserves consideration because of its possible strategic implications. In 1936 it was rumored that the value of Britain's costly Far Eastern naval base might be materially nullified by Japan's construction of a canal across the Isthmus of Kra, the narrow strip of land under Siamese sovereignty, separating the Indian Ocean from the Gulf of Siam and connecting the southern part of the Malay Peninsula with Siam proper. Such a canal had been proposed in the latter half of the nineteenth century by two English engineers, Tremeneere and Schomberg. However, the development of Singapore and the many serious obstacles in the building of such a waterway had caused the English to lose interest.

The French, on the other hand, who were eager to lessen the domination which Britain held over the trade routes to the Orient, revived the idea. Several Frenchmen proposed definite routes for the canal, and Gallic imperialists dreamed of a new era of prosperity for Indo-China and of a French monopoly over the commercial highways of the world—Panama, Suez, and Kra. In 1883 the French Government, with the consent of the King of Siam, sent an expedition to survey the peninsula. The Siamese King's representative on the expedition, A. J. Loftus, an Englishman, reported unfavorably on the canal project. The conclusions of the French engineer are not known, but during the Anglo-French crisis over the Siamese question in the summer of 1893, it was rumored that the French were seeking to force a canal concession from the King of Siam. Consequently, Lord Rosebery protested to Paris. The French Government, in turn, denied any intention of seeking concessions on the Kra peninsula.⁸⁴

The British and French solved the crisis of 1893 by agreeing to

⁸³Shepherd, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

⁸⁴Ronan, William J., "The Kra Canal: A Suez for Japan?" *Pacific Affairs*, IX (September, 1936), pp. 406-409.

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keep Siam as a buffer state between their respective spheres of influence in Southeastern Asia. However, in a treaty with Siam concluded on April 6, 1897, England secured provisions which would keep any other power from building the Kra canal or even getting a foothold in the vicinity of Singapore.⁸⁵ This treaty was replaced on March 10, 1909, by another in which Siam ceded the Malay States of Kelantan, Trengganu, Kedah, and Perak to Great Britain. The articles guaranteeing to Siam the protection of Britain as against third powers were not included in the new text, but an exchange of identical notes took place to this effect:

. . . the Siamese Government shall not cede or lease, directly or indirectly, to any foreign government any territory situated in the Malay peninsula south of the southern boundary of the Monthon of Rajdburi, or in any of the islands adjacent to the said territory; also that within the limits of the above defined territory a right to establish or lease any coaling station, to build or own any construction or repairing docks, or to occupy exclusively any harbor the occupation of which would be likely to be prejudicial to British interests from a strategic point of view, shall not be granted to any foreign government or company.⁸⁶

This agreement apparently precluded the building, without British consent, of any waterway across the Kra isthmus by states other than Siam or Britain. It should be noted, however, that Siam herself was not debarred from constructing the canal with foreign capital; hence it was possible that a third power might initiate the project under nom-

⁸⁵Anglo-Siamese Treaty of April 6, 1897:

"Article I. . . . The King of Siam engages not to cede or alienate to any other power any of his rights over any portion of the territories or islands lying to the south of Muong Bang Tapon.

"Article II. Her Britannic Majesty engages on her part to support . . . the King of Siam in resisting any attempt by a third power to acquire dominion or to establish its influence or a protectorate in the territories or islands above named.

"Article III. Her Britannic Majesty having engaged by the preceding article to support . . . the King of Siam in resisting any attempt by a third power to acquire dominion or to establish its influence or a protectorate in the territories or islands above mentioned . . . the King of Siam engages not to grant, cede, or let any special privilege or advantage, whether as regards land or trade, within the above specified limits, whether to the government or the subjects of a third power without the written consent of the British Government, and Her Britannic Majesty engages to support the King of Siam in the execution of this article." *British and Foreign State Papers* (London, 1913), CII, 124-125. Also Ronan, *loc. cit.*, pp. 408-410.

⁸⁶*British Foreign and State Papers*, CII, 131; Ronan, *loc. cit.*, p. 410.

inal Siamese auspices. The possibility that Japan might do so seemed to be at the basis of the rumors current from 1934 to 1936.⁸⁷

If built by Nippon, the new canal would have enormous strategic and commercial implications. It would reduce the distance from Ceylon to Hong Kong by about six hundred miles. A saving of two days would be effected by fast steamers in the Europe-Far East trade, and even more time proportionately would be gained by slower cargo ships. The chief beneficiaries of the waterway would be Japan, French Indo-China, the Philippines, China, and Siam. The greatest commercial losers would be the British, and perhaps the Dutch. Not only would Singapore, in that case, be reduced to a third-class port, but English merchants would suffer because of the closer proximity of the Indian and Near Eastern markets to Japan.⁸⁸

In 1936 a question in the House of Commons elicited from Sir Thomas Inskip the definite statement that the Kra canal, with all its unpleasant implications for the British commercial and strategic position in Malaya, was no more than a rumor.⁸⁹ Although such a waterway might be a long-range Nipponese objective, it was for the moment in the category of grandiose plans yet to be realized. Nevertheless, reports of the project continued for several years to appear in the Asiatic and Western press.

In the meantime, accelerated somewhat by a gift of £500,000 from the Sultan and the State of Johore,⁹⁰ construction of the Singapore base made rapid headway. The floating dock which had been towed from Britain to Malaya was officially declared open by Sir Hugh Clifford, the Governor of the Straits Settlements, on August 14, 1929. By July, 1933, developments had reached the stage where the presence of a base ship was required, and the monitor *Terror*, with a complement of 13 officers and 202 men, was assigned to this service.⁹¹ In March, 1936, the main contract—that for the graving dock and ancillary units—was completed.⁹²

⁸⁷Ronan, *loc. cit.*, pp. 410-411.

⁸⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 411-412.

⁸⁹Great Britain, *Commons* (April 9, 1936), 310: 2956-2957.

⁹⁰*Ibid.* (July 4, 1935), 302: 1696; *London Times*, May 3, 1935.

⁹¹Great Britain, *Commons* (July 27, 1933), 231: 2012.

⁹²*London Times*, March 9, 1936.

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This progress was accompanied by plans for co-ordinating the Empire's defenses in the Pacific. In January, 1934, admirals of Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand met aboard the cruiser *Kent* at Singapore—their first formal meeting in thirteen years. The agenda of the conference was secret, but it was believed to include discussions of Singapore's future as a naval center, the Far Eastern situation, and general policies concerning the schedule of work at the base.⁹³ Following these consultations, manoeuvres combining the air, land, and naval arms were held between December 12 and 16, 1934, for the purpose of testing the defenses of the base. A total of twenty-one ships from the China station as well as the full strength of the available air and army forces participated.

According to the local authorities, the defending bombers rendered landing by the attacking force "practically impossible."⁹⁴ In October, 1936, further war games, a "small combined operations exercise," were held. The attacking force consisted of the Middlesex Regiment and the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers. The Navy co-operated with H.M.S. *Terror*, the base ship at Singapore, and the sloops *Grimsby* and *Folkestone*. Defending troops were provided by the Singapore Volunteer Corps, with Royal Artillery personnel manning the Malakang Mati defenses. Both sides were assisted by aircraft of the Royal Air Force.⁹⁵ Manoeuvres on a still larger scale took place during the first two weeks of February, 1938. Twenty-four warships of the East Indies and China squadrons, British and native troops of the Singapore garrison, units of Royal artillery, and seven bombardment squadrons of the Royal Air Force participated.⁹⁶ The tremendous

⁹³The officers who attended the conference were: Admiral Sir Frederick Dreyer, Commander of the China Station; Vice-Admiral Martin Dunbar-Nasmith, Commander-in-Chief of the East Indies Squadron; Vice-Admiral George Francis Tyde, First Naval Member of the Australian Naval Board; and Rear-Admiral Frederick Sturges Watson, First Naval Member of the Naval Board of New Zealand and Commander of the New Zealand Station. *Japan Chronicle, Weekly Edition*, 10 (February 1, 1934), p. 146. See also *New York Times*, January 24, 1934.

⁹⁴*London Times*, December 13, 1934; *Japan Chronicle, Weekly Edition*, 1956 (December 20, 1934), p. 855.

⁹⁵*London Times*, October 8, 1936.

⁹⁶*New York Times*, February 14, 1938.

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naval station was officially opened on February 14, 1938, with elaborate ceremonies.⁹⁷

At this occasion, peculiar significance was attached, in many quarters, to the presence of the American cruisers *Trenton*, *Memphis*, and *Milwaukee*. These were the only foreign naval vessels in attendance. Moreover, it was the second American visit to the port in less than two years. In November, 1936, twelve cruisers and destroyers headed by the flagship *Augusta*, had come from Manila, simultaneously with the arrival of a Dutch squadron of cruisers, destroyers, and submarines from the Netherlands East Indies. Despite official denials, the demonstration was generally regarded as an indication of the solidarity of interest between the United States and England. In the eyes of some, it was even more—it was a “direct challenge to Japan to tread warily henceforth where American and British rights in China are concerned.”⁹⁸

Although the English press had been debating the question of Singapore for fifteen years, the formal opening of the base inspired amazingly little attention. The Labor and Liberal opponents of the

⁹⁷A detailed description of the completed base was not released, and the press reports at the time contained surprisingly little information. The general picture given by more recent accounts is as follows:

Fronting on twenty square miles of deep water—an area large enough to berth the entire British Fleet—was the base itself. Within the four square miles encompassed by its boundaries were machine and repair shops, factories, cranes, power plants, and storage houses—said to be the most complete and complex industrial unit in the Far East outside of Japan. Here a fleet could be repaired almost as quickly as in England. The two great drydocks, the floating dock towed from Southampton and the 1,000 foot King George V graving dock, were each capable of accommodating a 50,000 ton battleship. Roads and railroads criss-crossed the yard, the radio station was the most powerful in the East, and much of the essential equipment was present in duplicate. There were, for example, two power stations, two mains bringing water from the hills of Johore, and two large reservoirs to supplement this supply. Water mains went through the yards in two directions so that in case of fire there would be the equivalent of two complete water systems.

The details of the defense works of the base were carefully guarded. However, the base was thought to have been provided with 16-inch or larger guns to keep hostile battleships at a distance, 8 or 12 inch guns to dispose of reconnoitering cruisers, quick-firing 6-inch guns for enemy destroyers, 3-inch batteries for hostile mine sweepers, and machine guns to protect the water front from a surprise landing.

⁹⁸“ ‘Gibraltar’ of the Far East,” *loc. cit.*, p. 9.

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project, the *Daily Herald* and *Daily News*, ignored the occasion completely. The Conservative *Daily Telegraph* and the independent *Daily Mail* ran feature articles, but did not make editorial comment. Only the *London Times* and the *Manchester Guardian Weekly* carried leading articles on the subject. Despite the absence of extensive comment, however, it seems safe to say that by February, 1938, the completion of the base was regarded by both Britons and colonials with considerable satisfaction. Gibraltar, Malta, Aden, a controlling interest in the Suez Canal, and suzerainty over Egypt—these were fortresses of the British Empire along the great trade routes of the world. That Singapore, “not the least of these outposts of law and order,” was now ready to play her part was to many “one of the consolations and hopes of gloomy days.”⁹⁹

⁹⁹*Wellington Evening Post*, February 17, 1938.

CHAPTER VII

Setback at Singapore

The Japanese attack in the Pacific on December 7, 1941, cast the hard, cold light of reality on the multitude of words that had flooded platform and press during the debate on the Singapore naval base. Had the opponents of the project been correct in their argument that new fortifications at Singapore would lead to war with Japan? Or, as its advocates maintained, had the plan been wise from the standpoint of international politics? What had been its effect on the position of the United States and Holland? What roles would they play in its defense? What were the weaknesses of the Singapore bulwarks? Did the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* shortly after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor prove that capital ships had become obsolete? These and other questions were thrown into vivid perspective by the opening phases of the Japanese onslaught.

There can be no doubt that the construction of the base had not added to the cordiality of Anglo-Japanese relations. It was natural, perhaps, for Tokyo to resent the presence of strong fortifications located astride her trade route to the Indian Ocean and the West. On the other hand, few today would argue that the preparations at Singapore were a major factor in the outbreak of war, or that the "New Order" would not have assumed its menacing proportions if Singapore had not been built. Japan's course after 1931—the conquest of Manchuria, the denunciation of the Washington Naval Treaty, the occupation of the Spratly Islands, the invasion of China, the penetration of Indo-China and Thailand, and the attack on Great Britain, the

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ited States, and the Netherlands Indies—left no doubt that her real aim was complete domination of the Orient. To have abandoned Singapore would not have altered that aim, lessened the threat to the British Empire, nor prevented the outbreak of war.

The colonial empire of Holland, no less than that of Britain, found itself threatened by the overweening ambitions of Japan. The Netherlands Indies constitute one of the earth's richest treasures. Their production of oil has been an important item in the world's supply; their agricultural yield has been enormous; their vast, thinly populated areas are potentially as rich as Java when similarly developed. The defense of this great prize presented a serious problem. It might have been expected, therefore, that the Dutch would have welcomed an increase in the Singapore fortifications of a strong and friendly neighbor. This has been the conclusion of numerous observers. For example, Nicholas Roosevelt, a former Vice-Governor of the Philippines, has stated that Holland hailed the construction of the base with enthusiasm and relief.¹ However, Amry Vandenbosch, a widely recognized authority, has not agreed. In his view, the Dutch, at least prior to 1940, realized that the base might "attract as well as ward off dangers of attack," and therefore, they were "not unanimously of the opinion" that it improved their position.² Certainly it is true that in the Far East, as in Europe, the Dutch Government for a time depended on a course of strict neutrality in attempting to preserve her territorial integrity. In the 1920's, when the League of Nations seemed to give promise of bolstering the security of small nations, Holland oriented her foreign and defense policy in relation to that organization. In 1924, for example, a proposed naval building program was given up because developments at Geneva rendered "undesirable a definite plan of defense extending over a number of years." Similarly, in 1927, she announced that the protective measures taken

¹Roosevelt, Nicholas, "Strategy of Singapore," *Foreign Affairs*, VII (January, 1929), p. 321. See also Gardiner, William Howard, "America and Britain in the Far East," *Fortnightly Review*, CXVI (November, 1924), p. 606, and Hills, Lennox A., "The Policies and Interests of Great Britain and Holland in the Far East," *American Political Science Review*, XXXII (August, 1938), pp. 728-9.

²Vandenbosch, Amry, *The Dutch East Indies* (Los Angeles, 1941), p. 384.

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in the East Indies were based on two principles—first, the maintenance of peace and order in the archipelago, and, secondly, “the fulfillment of the Netherlands’ military duties as a member of the society of nations.” This, it was explained, meant “cooperation in League military sanctions against an aggressor and the preservation of strict neutrality in conflicts between other powers.”³

After 1936 the failure of the League to take effective action in regard to Italy and Japan, and the general increase of tension in world politics caused Holland to undertake a substantial expansion of her armaments program. In addition to appropriating money for light naval forces and airplanes and increasing the outlay on military defenses, she authorized, on April 29, 1940, the construction of three battle-cruisers of 27,000 tons each.⁴ In foreign affairs, however, she still sought to continue a policy of strict neutrality. Although it was repeatedly rumored that she had reached an agreement with England regarding the maintenance of the status quo in southeastern Asia, such an understanding was officially denied and its existence doubted by leading Dutch students of the problem.⁵ Moreover, as late as the summer of 1939, when Japanese ambitions in the East Indies had grown quite apparent, the Dutch Premier was careful to give public assurance that the Netherlands government was not represented at the Franco-British defense conference held at Singapore.⁶

The invasion of Holland by the Nazis in May, 1940, threw all her plans for the protection of the Indies into confusion and brought about a transformation of her foreign policy. Strict neutrality gave place to active co-operation with Great Britain and the United States. This was made clear in October and November, 1940, when delegates from the Dutch East Indies attended the Delhi Conference which laid plans for mobilizing the resources of Britain’s Eastern Empire.⁷ Similarly, in April, 1941, E. N. van Kleffens, Dutch Foreign Minister, conferred in Manila with Sir Robert Brooke-Popham, British Com-

³*Ibid.*, pp. 344-345.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 348.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 384; also Roosevelt, *loc. cit.*, p. 321.

⁶Vandenbosch, *op. cit.*, p. 389.

⁷Greenburg, Michael, “Britain Mobilizes Her Eastern Empire,” *Far Eastern Survey*, X (March 26, 1941), p. 58.

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mander-in-Chief in the Far East, and Admiral Thomas E. Hart, head of the American Asiatic Fleet.⁸ Batavia also resisted the sweeping demands made by a Tokyo economic mission for increased supplies of raw materials and for extensive mining and fishing rights; these negotiations, begun in August, 1940, collapsed in June, 1941. The only concession made to Japan was an agreement allowing her to raise her imports of Netherlands Indian oil from 494,000 to 1,800,000 tons annually.⁹

In yielding on the oil issue and in standing firm on the other demands, the Dutch were, according to reports, sustained by the British and American Governments. Further evidence of such collaboration was forthcoming when Japan occupied Saigon in July, 1941. The Netherlands East Indies cancelled the oil agreement made with Japan the previous November and, following similar action by the United States and Great Britain, froze Nipponese assets in territories under Dutch control.¹⁰ Thus, before the Japanese attack, the Netherlands had been giving England diplomatic support in the Far East. The extent to which the Dutch might be expected to contribute to the Allied war effort had earlier been summed up by Captain W. D. Pules-ton, an American student of the question. Referring to the Netherlands Indies, he said:

[It has] created a naval force of small cruisers, gunboats, destroyers, submarines, mine layers, motor torpedo boats, and flying boats especially designed for operations in those waters which will give the Japanese Fleet some trouble unaided and will be a welcome increment to any fleet operating in that region. . . . In 1939 [it] consisted of the *Java* and the *Sumatra*, 7,000-ton cruisers carrying ten 5.9-inch guns, speed 30 knots; the *Tromp*, of 3,500 tons, carrying six 5.9-inch guns and six 21-inch torpedo tubes, speed 33 knots; six or seven destroyers, of 1,650 tons, carrying four 4.7-inch guns, two 3-inch anti-aircraft guns, and six 21-inch torpedo tubes; eight submarines of moderate size but very seaworthy craft. Each submarine is armed with one 3.5-inch gun and the larger ones carry eight 21-inch torpedo tubes. In addition there were forty to fifty large sea-planes, mainly Dornier flying boats, and a considerable force of observation and fighter planes. In 1939 there were also being built some fourteen motor torpedo boats of 15 tons, capable of making 38 knots, and carrying two 18-inch torpedo tubes. Since that time the Netherlanders have increased their submarines to possibly fifteen and their flying boats to about seventy-five, have added to their ob-

⁸"The Fortnight," *Far Eastern Survey*, X (April 21, 1941), p. 73.

⁹"News of the Month," *Amerasia*, V (April, 1941), p. 94, and V (July, 1941), p. 228; "The Fortnight," *Far Eastern Survey*, X (June 30, 1941), p. 133.

¹⁰"News of the Month," *Amerasia*, V (August, 1941), pp. 279-280.

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servation and fighter planes, and have completed about a dozen of their motor torpedo boats.

Captain Puleston's conclusion that "the little Netherlands Navy has distinct alliance value"¹¹ was borne out by its brilliant performance in the early months of the Pacific fighting. Thus Holland's active co-operation with the Anglo-American front in the Far East constituted an important asset for the British defense of Singapore. Conversely, the capture of Singapore by Japan resulted in the outflanking of the Netherlands East Indies on the west, rendering it an easier prey for the southward moving forces of the Rising Sun.

As a great power with important economic, political, and territorial stakes in the Pacific, the United States has consistently advocated the Open Door, the territorial and administrative integrity of China, and "an international order under law." The "New Order in East Asia" was clearly a direct challenge to American policy and interests. Although Washington repeatedly reminded Japan of the treaty violations involved in her China "incident," gave moderate material as well as moral aid to Chiang Kai-Shek, and denounced the Japanese commercial treaty, the United States did not, prior to 1940, go any further to restrain the Japanese advance. In the critical summer of 1940, however, the enlargement of Tokyo's declared aims to include not only control of China but also of southeastern Asia stirred fresh misgivings in the United States. The announcement came at a time when the American rearmament program had focused attention on the vital importance of Malayan tin and rubber, and when the growing co-ordination of her military and defense policies with those of Britain made her keenly aware of the strategic significance to the democracies of the Singapore area. Because England in her struggle against Germany was depending heavily upon men and war materials from the East, the seizure of the base by a hostile power would greatly weaken the British position in Europe as well as in Asia. This, coupled with Japan's formal alliance with the Axis, brought into sharp relief the ominousness of the Far Eastern situation. In the Pacific as well as in the Atlantic, increased Anglo-American co-operation against

¹¹Puleston, *op. cit.*, pp. 129-130.

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aggression became the order of the day. This was cemented into an active alliance by the Japanese attack in December, 1941.

To implement the policy of collaboration in the Pacific, secret discussions between the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, Australia, and the Netherlands took place throughout the autumn and winter of 1940-1941. Little information as to their content has been revealed. It is significant, however, that shortly after the conversations began Britain agreed to re-open the Burma Road to the transit of military supplies for Chiang Kai-Shek's armies. In addition, there could be little doubt that the possibilities of joint action against Japan for the defense of Singapore and adjacent areas were thoroughly canvassed and the technical groundwork actually laid.¹² Concrete measures were taken in February, 1941, when the Thai-Indo-China border dispute led to a war scare in the South Pacific. Both Great Britain and the United States acted quickly and apparently in concert. The former sent additional air squadrons to British Malaya, mined the waters in the neighborhood of Singapore, and moved troops to the Thai frontier. The United States renewed its warning to its nationals to leave the Far East, and on February 11, the day the new Japanese Ambassador, Admiral Nomura, arrived in Washington, President Roosevelt told his press conference that although he did not anticipate war with Japan, "such an eventuality would not interfere with American aid to Great Britain." At about the same time Congress, which on two previous occasions had refused to do so, voted funds to improve the harbor and to strengthen the fortifications at Guam. Similar grants were made for Samoa and Alaska. Air defenses in the Philippines were also reinforced.¹³

The co-operation of the Western Powers during February augured well for further collaboration in the Orient. On March 11 the lease-lend measure, providing aid for both China and Britain, was signed. In the same month a flotilla of four American cruisers and nine destroyers paid a visit to Australia and New Zealand—an incident which emphasized the possibility of using American warships in the south

¹²Farley, Miriam S., "America Maneuvres in Asia," *Far Eastern Survey*, X (July 14, 1941), p. 151.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 153.

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Pacific, basing them at Singapore.¹⁴ This was soon followed by the conference, already mentioned, at Manila between General Brooke-Popham, Foreign Minister van Kleffens, and Admiral Hart. Shortly thereafter came the Dutch rebuff of Japan's economic demands.

Finally, when in July, 1941, Nippon renewed, on a large scale, her advance into Indo-China, London and Washington retaliated quickly by freezing Japanese assets, Great Britain denounced her commercial treaty with Tokyo, and President Roosevelt incorporated the armed forces of the Philippines into those of the United States.

Simultaneously with these restraining measures, conversations were carried on at Washington with a view to reaching a comprehensive settlement of all outstanding issues between Japan and the United States. As early as June 25, 1941, Secretary of State Hull presented a draft proposal to Ambassador Nomura, and on November 17 further discussions were opened with Japan's special envoy, Saburo Kurusu, who had been hurriedly sent to the United States for the ostensible purpose of speeding a peaceful solution. At the same time, continued consultations with Great Britain, Australia, the Netherlands, and China gave the impression, as they were undoubtedly intended to do, that the ABCD powers were determined to act in concert to check further Japanese aggression. Meanwhile, the British had despatched the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* to Singapore. Clearly it was hoped that the American fleet, most of which was presumed to be in the Pacific, and the British forces based at Singapore would constitute a combination which the Japanese would hesitate to challenge.

When on December 7 the Japanese militarists cast the die, they not only pitted their "New Order in East Asia" against "an international order under law," but they also struck directly at America's most important territorial stake in the Orient, the Philippine Islands. Unlike Singapore, the Philippines were included in the non-fortification clauses of the Washington Naval Treaty. When that agreement was terminated at the end of 1936, the Tydings-McDuffie measure granting the Commonwealth its independence on July 4, 1946, had already been passed. Under its terms, the United States was respon-

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 154.

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sible for the defense of the archipelago until 1946 and provision was made for negotiations in regard to a continuation after that date of facilities for the American fleet. Congress, however, refused to appropriate the huge sum necessary to turn the Luzon station into a first-class sea base. Although military, naval, and aerial defenses in the Philippines were strengthened in 1941, the measures taken were "too little and too late." The major bases of Cavite on Manila Bay and Olongapo on Subic Bay were incapable of withstanding the Japanese attack, and the American Asiatic Fleet which had been stationed in the Philippines was forced to withdraw to other ports, probably in the Dutch East Indies. While the Dutch bases could accommodate the cruisers and destroyers of the American Asiatic Fleet, they could not repair the battleships of the American Pacific Fleet. For the latter only a base as completely equipped as the one at Singapore could suffice.

In this connection a vital question needs to be considered, that of the vulnerability of the capital ship in view of the instruments that have been perfected against it. World War I was particularly illuminating in regard to the capacity of the battleship to withstand the mine, torpedo, and submarine. At the beginning of that conflict, German U-boats scored several startling successes. For example, the three armored cruisers, the *Aboukir*, the *Cressy*, and the *Hogue*, were torpedoed and sunk on September 22, 1914.¹⁵ Approximately a month later, on October 28, a newly built super-dreadnought, the *Audacious*, went down after striking a mine.¹⁶ As an answer, naval architects soon developed the "bulge," and the practice of subdividing the hull below the water-line. The efficacy of these measures was at once apparent. When, off the Belgian coast, the 8,000-ton *Terror* was hit by three torpedoes in succession, she remained afloat and was able to proceed to port under her own steam. In a few weeks she was again in service. On another occasion, the *Erebus*, a sister ship, was struck by a "distance controlled motor boat, carrying a charge of 500 pounds of T.N.T. which detonated amidships." The "bulge" so effectively absorbed the shock that the hull itself suffered no injury; not even a

¹⁵Brodie, Bernard, *Sea Power in the Machine Age* (Princeton, 1941), p. 358.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 301.

leak was started. During the remainder of the war, many bulged vessels were torpedoed but not one was sunk.¹⁷ Nevertheless, in the second month of the second World War one capital ship, the *Royal Oak*, was struck by three torpedoes from a submarine which had penetrated the defenses of Scapa Flow. She was the first post-dreadnought battleship to be lost as a result of under-water attack. Her destruction led some authorities to believe that Germany had developed a more potent torpedo.¹⁸ It would seem, however, that the *Royal Oak*, lying at anchor, was a particularly vulnerable U-boat target.¹⁹

The first World War also saw the development of effective counter-measures against the submarine itself. The problem was two-fold—first, to detect the undersea craft, and then to destroy it. A satisfactory combination was found in the hydrophone and the depth-bomb. These weapons, employed by destroyers and other small vessels, sank a number of U-boats. Even when submarines survived such attack, the experience often proved so nerve-racking to the crews as seriously to impair their morale. Other important measures perfected during this time by the British Naval Staff included “a great advance in the provision and use of aircraft for anti-submarine work, combined with an improvement in the type of aerial bombs; the development of a special type of shell for use against submarines; and the development and adoption of an efficient mine, the Mark H, which the British had thus far lacked.”²⁰

In the post-war period, improvements continued to be made in devices for detecting submarines. A much more sensitive instrument than the hydrophone, the “Asdic,”²¹ was developed by the British. According to Dr. Bernard Brodie, this secret weapon is some sort of radio beam which rebounds on striking metal surfaces. It simplifies the task of stalking the submarine and gives each individual patrol

¹⁷Bywater, Hector C., “The Battleship and its Uses,” *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, LII (March, 1926), p. 412.

¹⁸Brodie, *op. cit.*, pp. 372-373.

¹⁹In November, 1941, the Royal Navy lost the *Barham* in the Mediterranean, probably as the result of submarine attack.

²⁰Brodie, *op. cit.*, pp. 317-318.

²¹Named after the initial letters of the Anti-Submarine Detection Indicator Committee.

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craft a much greater effectiveness than was possible in the first World War. Aircraft, too, which play an important role in the detection and destruction of U-boats, have been developed enormously in power, reliability, and cruising range.²²

During the years 1914-1918 the effectiveness of the mine, the torpedo, the submarine, and their counter-measures were given a rather thorough trial. The potentialities of the airplane, on the other hand, had not then been fully developed. Consequently, there was little knowledge on the question of the battleship's vulnerability to air bombardment. To develop information on this subject a number of exhaustive tests were made. The United States Army Air Force conducted such experiments off the Virginia Capes in 1921 and off Hatteras in 1923, during which several battleship targets were sunk by bombardment from the air. The most modern vessel destroyed was the 22,400-ton *Ostfriesland*, a former German ship launched in 1909. It had no deck armor to protect it against direct hits, and no "bulges" to guard it against the mine-like effects of "near-misses." Furthermore, the target was stationary and the bombers attacking it were not hindered by anti-aircraft fire or opposing aircraft. Before going down the *Ostfriesland* received sixteen direct hits and three near-misses out of sixty-nine bombs aimed at her.²³

Another series of tests was carried out in 1924 on the then modern battleship, *Washington*. Though uncompleted (the ship was being scrapped under the provisions of the Naval Limitation Treaty of 1922), she did have some protective deck armor which a 1,440-pound shell and a 2,000-pound bomb dropped from 4,000 feet failed to penetrate. Despite additional damage from three bomb and two torpedo charges, the *Washington* rode out a gale for three days. It took a salvo of 14-inch shells from the guns of another battleship to sink her.²⁴

The most complete peace-time study of the vulnerability of the capital ship to air attack was made by the British. Between 1921 and 1936 the Board of Admiralty carried out a series of tests designed to

²²Brodie, *op. cit.*, pp. 333-334.

²³"Professional Notes: Battleship vs. Airplanes," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, L (December, 1924), pp. 2081-2086.

²⁴"Professional Notes," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings*, LI (May, 1925), pp. 636-642.

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ascertain the penetrating capabilities of various bombs and the thickness of deck armor necessary to resist such bombs. In 1936 the results obtained were carefully examined by a committee of distinguished men.²⁵ This committee was satisfied that, as a result of the experiments, the Admiralty was in a position to make accurate calculations regarding the deck thickness necessary to resist various kinds and weights of bombs when dropped from certain heights, and to estimate the effect of the near-miss as well as the direct hit. The information furnished to the committee, it was said, was being applied both to the construction of new ships, and to the modernization of existing ones.²⁶

The Admiralty in co-operation with the Air Ministry also studied the accuracy both of level and of dive bombing. In regard to the first, the staffs were able to determine the number of hits which could be expected under peace conditions, with average personnel, from a height of 10,000 feet, and at a speed of 100 knots per hour. They pointed out, however, that under actual war conditions the accuracy of level bombing would be affected by "anti-aircraft fire, avoidance of action on part of the target, increased height, and fatigue of personnel after long flights."²⁷

On the exact importance of these factors the Air Ministry and the Admiralty disagreed. The former held that inaccuracy of aim caused by shells bursting close to the aircraft was "not likely to be appreciable," that the psychological effect of anti-aircraft fire would vary at different stages of the campaign and with the types of personnel available, that the "only safe assumption" was that the enemy would use "the best-trained and most intrepid of his airmen." The Admiralty, on the other hand, insisted that non-vital gunfire would have a "physical effect not less serious than the bumpiest and most difficult weather conditions," and that the psychological effect of anti-aircraft

²⁵The investigating group, a special sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defense, included Sir Thomas Inskip (chairman), Viscount Halifax, Malcolm MacDonald, M.P., and Walter Runciman, M.P. Admiral of the Fleet Sir Ernle M. Chatfield, First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff, and Air Chief Marshal Sir Edward L. Ellington, Chief of the Air Staff, were the group's expert advisers.

²⁶Report of a Sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defense *On the Vulnerability of Capital Ships to Air Attack* (London, 1936), Cmd. 5301, pp. 5-6.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

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fire was "likely to lead to increase in height of release resulting in further loss of accuracy." The investigating committee found it impossible to adjudicate between the two opinions, but suggested that, "however high the standard of training of the attacking pilots, the excitement of action, the deterrent effect of close shell bursts, the fact that they have to attack the gun itself and not some object beyond, are all factors which must affect statistics arrived at under peace conditions."²⁸

In regard to dive bombing, the committee found that the special anti-aircraft weapons which the Admiralty had developed to deal with that type of attack should "result in a very powerful concentration of fire" which must, though to what precise extent it was impossible to say, "affect the accuracy and morale of the attacker."²⁹ In general, however, the findings regarding dive bombing were not conclusive. Therefore it was recommended that further joint experiments be made to determine the effect on accuracy of variation of angle of dive, height of release, and possible errors after long flights.³⁰

After full and careful consideration of all the information available, the investigating committee, in conclusion, noted two points. The first was that, although aircraft had constantly improved in speed and power of manoeuvre, they had likewise increased in size and hence offered a larger target to the defender. At the same time, progress had been made in the number and calibre of anti-aircraft guns, in the weight of their shells, and in the accuracy and rapidity of their fire. The airplane, therefore, was to be considered as vulnerable as ever.³¹ Moreover, in its attacks on naval units, it would continue to be hindered by such variable factors as darkness, weather conditions, and difficulties of navigation and reconnaissance.³² The second finding of the committee emphasized that it was impossible to build an invulnerable capital ship:

... Capital ships cannot be constructed so as to be indestructible by bombing from the air. This would probably be true even if factors of speed, arma-

²⁸*Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 10.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 8.

³¹*Ibid.*, p. 10.

³²*Ibid.*, p. 12.

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ment, and weight were disregarded in the design of the ship so that the thickness of the defensive armor could be indefinitely increased. If this fact, which we regard as being beyond the possibility of doubt is kept in mind, it throws light on some of the more extravagant criticisms of the policy of building capital ships. The critics have written and spoken as if the issue was between those who deny and those who assert the vulnerability of capital ships to air attack. That is not the real question. In circumstances favorable to an attack from the air which could be driven home by a large and powerful force, the most heavily armored capital ship could no doubt be destroyed, or at least seriously crippled. It is impossible to do more than speculate as to the chances of such a combination of circumstances or as to the degree of success likely to be attained by the attacking force. The real question that arises on the assumption that capital ships are indispensable is whether their design is such as to secure the maximum of immunity from air attack. We have . . . made inquiries in quarters other than the Admiralty as to whether the capital ships of his Majesty's Navy are so designed and we are satisfied that everything is done that experience could suggest, or skill and money could provide.³³

In brief, it was reported that the capital ship was well but not completely protected against air attack; that although not "invulnerable," she was much less likely to suffer vital injury than were other types of ships; and that only a protracted bombardment by numerous planes could seriously damage or sink her.

The conclusions reached by the committee have been borne out by the events of the present war. Several clashes between German air squadrons and the British fleet in the open waters of the North Sea resulted in clear-cut victories for the naval forces—capital ships were not sunk or even damaged appreciably.³⁴ Mass raids by the Luftwaffe on battleships at Scapa Flow were also a failure. In these engagements the vessels at anchor did not possess the defensive advantages of great speed and a zigzag course that the high seas give. But their own anti-aircraft fire plus the permanent air defenses of the base apparently afforded adequate protection to the fleet when it was stationed there.³⁵ Also, as the report predicted, the capital ship has proved less vulnerable to air attack than has any other type of vessel.

The investigating committee's warning that large naval vessels might be endangered by the continuous and heavy attack of land-based

³³*Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

³⁴For example, on April 9, 1940, during a continuous afternoon attack by German planes on the British fleet in the North Sea, one "very heavy bomb" hit the *Rodney*. Although ten men were wounded, her deck armor prevented injury to the vessel itself. Brodie, *op. cit.*, p. 409.

³⁵Brodie, *op. cit.*, p. 408.

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bombers has also been substantiated. During the Norwegian campaign the Admiralty was unwilling to take the risk of sending considerable naval forces into the Skaggerak off the shores of German-occupied Denmark. Not only was there a formidable amount of Nazi sky forces based on that peninsula, but the British fleet would have had to operate at great distance from its home ports and without the support of its own land-based fighter planes. According to Churchill, it was feared that if the Navy had attempted to maintain a Skaggerak patrol the losses inflicted upon it from the air would soon have constituted a "naval disaster."

Such a disaster did occur when the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* were sent to the bottom of the South China Sea by massed Japanese aerial attack. In this instance the enemy employed thirty-five high level and fifty torpedo bombers. The exploit conclusively proved the efficacy of the torpedo-carrying plane when unopposed by other aircraft. The loss of these vessels was ironic in that the British themselves had first demonstrated the deadliness of the torpedo bomber. In November, 1940, the Mediterranean fleet, having failed to lure the Italian naval squadron from its base, sent twelve carrier-borne torpedo bombers into the harbor at Taranto. Three anchored battleships were struck. Aerial reconnaissance indicated severe damage to two of the vessels. In the case of the *Bismarck*, likewise, carrier-borne torpedo planes scored several hits that slowed up the Nazi vessel and enabled British surface units to destroy it.

Did Taranto, the sinking of the *Bismarck*, and the destruction of the *Prince of Wales* and the *Repulse* prove the superiority of air power over sea power in general and over the capital ship in particular?³⁶ The answer would seem to be in the negative. At Taranto it was superior capital-ship strength that enabled the carrier berthing the planes to approach within striking distance. A perfect co-ordination of British ships and planes plus evident ineptitude on the part of the enemy resulted in the debacle of the Italian fleet.

As for the *Bismarck*, the *Repulse*, and the *Prince of Wales*, these episodes likewise underlined the point that the question at issue is

³⁶A discussion of the *Haruna* case has not been included because adequate and accurate reports were not available.

not so much that of ship versus plane as of proper co-operation between strong surface units and the air arm of the fleet. Although the *Repulse* carried planes, they were in hangars and not out on reconnaissance. Consequently they were put out of order by the first bombs that hit the ship. Moreover, although a Japanese plane had been sighted at about dawn, Admiral Sir Tom Phillips did not radio for R. A. F. help until six hours later—fifteen minutes after the first raid had occurred. British planes did appear on the scene but the damage had already been done. In taking his fleet into enemy waters without air protection, Admiral Phillips had violated a cardinal tenet of modern naval strategy—the injudiciousness of risking capital ships in the vicinity of enemy air power unless such vessels are accompanied by an adequate air screen. The British commander either had not noted or had forgotten the principles revealed in the Norwegian campaign. Similarly, the *Arizona*, although at anchor, might not have been sunk if the air defenses of Pearl Harbor had been functioning properly.

Conversely, the hunt for the *Bismarck* gave evidence of the brilliant results to be achieved through co-ordination of the air arm and surface units of the fleet. Both cruisers and airplanes played an important role in tracking down the German battleship. Torpedoes from carrier-borne planes crippled its steering gear and slowed up the vessel. However, it took shells from heavy 14- and 16-inch guns mounted on some of the Royal Navy's heaviest dreadnoughts, as well as torpedoes from cruisers and destroyers, to finish the job. In brief, though capital ships may be vulnerable in narrow waters and though they may be easy prey for enemy aircraft unless protected by their own planes, the *Bismarck's* short venture into the open ocean emphasized once more that, in controlling the high seas, a preponderance of capital-ship fire-power is needed to counteract the heavy artillery of enemy capital ships. Domination of the seas will still go in a large measure to the navy with the dreadnought strength to hold the ring while its lighter forces take care of the sea lanes.

Realization of this fact in connection with the Pacific theatre focussed the spotlight on Singapore, especially after the Japanese proceeded to score a series of rapid victories in the areas north of the base. But certain earlier developments had contributed to the Nip-

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ponese advances. Following the collapse of France in the summer of 1940, Japan had gained complete control of the northern part of Indo-China, including the harbor of Haiphong and the air bases of Tongking. In July, 1941, her position was further strengthened when Vichy signed a protocol agreeing "to cooperate militarily for the defense of Indo-China." This enabled Tokyo to establish herself at the naval base of Saigon, to take over numerous airfields, and to flood the country with troops. The day after the outbreak of war, Thailand, perhaps in accordance with prearranged plans, "surrendered" and the complete route was thus cleared for an overland attack on British territory.

Although the sinking of the *Repulse* and the *Prince of Wales* gave Japan command of the South China Sea, only a few invasions of the east coast of Malaya were attempted. Instead, troops, tanks, and planes were rushed from Indo-China through Thailand and deployed quickly on the northern frontier. This formidable striking force outnumbered the British defenders in both men and matériel. The main body moved south over the good roads and communications of the tin and rubber country of western Malaya while smaller groups penetrated British outposts in the jungles on the eastern side of the peninsula. By occupying all the western coast of Malaya the Japanese placed themselves in a position to interfere with British communication lines running through the Straits of Malacca. At the end of January, 1942, after less than two months of fighting, the defenders of Singapore had evacuated the mainland to take a stand on the island itself, and the linking causeway was blown up.

Meanwhile, Japanese successes on other fronts were no less spectacular. The surprise attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, caught the American army and navy unprepared and rendered them temporarily unable to dispatch relief to the Far East. The fall of Guam and Wake Islands on December 11 and December 24, respectively, cut the most direct route between Hawaii, the Philippines, and Singapore. The capitulation of Hong Kong on December 25 and the abandonment of Manila and the Cavite naval base on January 2 deprived the Allies of their best positions for launching attacks on the Japanese lines of communication between the homeland and their over-

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seas forces. The occupation of Sarawak on December 25 not only gave Japan access to potential sources of oil but completed another step in her march on Singapore. The next phase of advance carried her to Tarakan off the coast of Dutch Borneo and to the Minahassa arm of the Celebes. She thus controlled both shores of the entrance to the Macassar Straits—the main passageway to Java from Davao in the southern Philippines. Still another Nipponese prong reached British New Guinea, New Britain, and the Solomon Islands flanking the Torres Strait, one of the alternate routes from Hawaii and Sydney to Singapore, thus securing bases directly menacing Australia. Northwest of Malaya the capture of Moulmein not only decreased the likelihood of an Allied thrust from Burma against the Japanese rear but menaced Rangoon.

A beleaguered Singapore became a desperate problem to the Allied strategists. It had been prepared in advance with elaborate fortifications and supplies to withstand a long siege. Its land and aerial defenses had been strengthened for protracted resistance and its neighboring waters heavily mined. The immediate task was to hold it at all costs, for even if immobilized, it could serve to check-mate large Japanese forces. However, the attackers' superiority in numbers and matériel, and their command of the air enabled them to overwhelm the defenders in short order. On February 15, London announced the unconditional surrender of Singapore. The "impregnable" fortress had gone down before a land and air attack.

The repercussions of the fall of Singapore were enormous. The Indian Ocean was opened to forays by Japanese raiders. India, East Africa, and the British position in the Middle East became seriously menaced. Australia, New Zealand, and their supply lines to Europe were jeopardized. China's chief supply route was severed. Outflanked on the west, the Dutch East Indies capitulated to the Japanese. With Malaya, Borneo, Java, and Sumatra in their possession, the Nipponese gained control of the potential supplies of oil, tin, rubber, rice, and iron needed for a long war. To win that war the Allies must eventually make desperate, and probably costly, efforts to regain Singapore. The island remains the most vital key to the control of the Pacific and Indian Oceans. Domination of those seas constitutes an indispensable prerequisite of Allied victory.

Bibliographical Note

Official documents and publications are an invaluable source of information about the Singapore naval base. Debates of Great Britain, Australia, and New Zealand provide detailed data on its history, give the arguments raised in defense of and against the project, and reveal the positions taken by the different political parties on the question. Next to the Parliamentary Debates, most valuable are various documents of the British Government. The report *On the Vulnerability of the Capital Ship to Air Attack* presents the best available peace-time material; *Correspondence with the Self-Governing Dominions and India regarding the Development of Singapore Naval Base* offers significant information on the official attitude of the British and Dominion Governments toward the project.

Of the unofficial sources, numerous books on Malaya, imperial defense, naval strategy, and sea power in the Pacific furnish background material both of a general and of a technical nature. Noteworthy are *Malaysia* by Rupert Emerson, *Sea Power in the Machine Age* by Bernard Brodie, *The Armed Forces of the Pacific* by Captain W. D. Puleston, *New Zealand's Interests and Policies in the Far East* by Ian F. G. Milner, *Australia's Interests and Policies in the Far East* by Jack Shepherd, *The Restless Pacific* by Nicholas Roosevelt, and *Imperial Defense* by Major-General H. Rowan-Robinson. The *Journal of the Royal United Service Institute* and the *Proceedings of the United States Naval Institute* also contain full and illuminating arti-

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cles on the Singapore base and on general problems of naval strategy, the characteristics of a secure base, and the value of capital ships.

Several important British periodicals have served to some extent as a forum for the discussion of the Singapore project. The *Nineteenth Century*, the *Contemporary Review*, the *Fortnightly*, the *Saturday Review*, the *Spectator*, and the *Outlook* may be referred to for articles by leading journalists, outstanding naval experts, and prominent politicians. Some American periodicals—namely *Foreign Affairs*, *Pacific Affairs*, the *American Political Science Review*, the *Political Science Quarterly*, *Asia*, *Amerasia*, and the *Far Eastern Survey*—are valuable not only for material on Singapore but also for their discussions of international relations in the Pacific area.

Among the newspapers, the most useful is the London *Times*. This daily reported more fully on all developments connected with the base than any other paper. Although the unofficial mouthpiece of the Conservative Party, it did not hesitate to open its columns to both the opponents and advocates of the Singapore project. Other newspapers showed much less interest in the question and are useful chiefly for editorial comment. In all cases they followed the party line. The *Daily Telegraph*, like the *Times*, presented the Conservative view; the *Manchester Guardian*, the *Daily News*, and its successor, the *News Chronicle*, gave the Liberal view; and the *Daily Herald* represented Labor opinion. The independent *Daily Mail*, like the Labor and Liberal press, opposed the base. The Wellington *Evening Post*, the Sydney *Morning Herald*, the Melbourne *Argus*, the Sydney *Sunday News*, the Sydney *Sunday Times*, and the Christchurch *Weekly Press* combine to reveal a clear cross-section of both press and party opinion in Australia and New Zealand.

The Japanese newspapers were particularly vocal on the Singapore question and material from that source is abundant. The weekly editions of the British-owned *Japan Chronicle*, the American-owned *Japan Advertiser*, and the native *Japan Times and Mail* not only expressed their own views on the subject but also presented excellent summaries and representative quotations from the Japanese-language dailies.

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