

operations, the War Office gave the G.O.C. Malaya a free hand with regard to such expenditure.

In circumstances such as those which existed after the outbreak of World War II it is recommended that very much wider powers should be delegated to General Officers Commanding in important potential theatres, who would naturally act in consultation with their Financial Advisers.

#### SECTION VI.—THE DEFENCE PLAN.

18. It cannot be too strongly stressed that the object of the defence was the protection of the Naval Base, and later of the Air Bases also, at Singapore.

19. *The Initial Plan of Defence*—When in 1921 it was decided to build a Naval Base at Singapore, it was considered that the security of that base depended ultimately on the ability of the British Fleet to control sea communications in the approaches to Singapore. This it would doubtless have been able to do as soon as it had been concentrated in the Far East. For success, therefore, the Japanese would have had to depend on a "coup-de-main" attack direct on to the Island of Singapore. At that time the range of military aircraft was limited and it was considered that the only area suitable for the operation of shore-based aircraft against Singapore was a strip of land in the vicinity of Mersing on the East coast of Johore. Further, the long sea voyage from Japanese territory would both have limited the size of the expedition and greatly prejudiced the chances of obtaining surprise. It was against this type of attack that the defences were initially laid out. The problem was one mainly of the defence of Singapore Island and the adjoining waters. For this a comparatively small garrison only was required.

20. *The Influence of Air Power*.—The rapid development of Air Power greatly affected the problem of defence. Singapore became exposed to attack by carrier-borne and shore-based aircraft operating from much greater distances than had previously been considered possible. Similarly our own defence aircraft were able to reconnoitre and strike at the enemy at a much greater distance from our own shores.

In May, 1932, the Sub-Committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence, after considering the relative merits of the gun and of aircraft for the defence of fortresses, laid down:

(a) Coast defences should be organized on the basis of co-operation between the three Defence Services, the gun retaining its place as the main deterrent against naval attack.

(b) The first stage of the plan of defence for the Naval Base at Singapore, modified in the light of the latest developments in coast artillery, should be proceeded with. . . . The second stage should await a further recommendation by the Committee of Imperial Defence.

(c) The Royal Air Force should continue co-operate in the defence of Singapore with other forces as might from time to time be considered desirable. Such co-operation should extend to all branches of the defence, including A.A. Defence (Fighters) and offensive operations against aircraft carriers, capital ships and other forms of attack by sea, land and air.

In April, 1933, as a result of Japan's withdrawal from the League of Nations, the Cabinet decided that immediate steps should be taken to increase the defences of Singapore.

As a result of these decisions the question of the location of aerodromes arose. At that time the only Royal Air Force aerodrome was at Seletar on Singapore Island. The construction of two further aerodromes on Singapore Island was immediately taken in hand. Further, in order to obtain the greatest possible value from the range of aircraft, it was urged that new aerodromes should be constructed on the east coast, an area which it had up till then been the policy to leave as undeveloped as possible, consistent with civil requirements, so as to present the enemy with difficult transportation problems should he land on that coast. It was obvious from the start that these aerodromes, if constructed on the east coast, would present the Army with fresh commitments for their defence—commitments which the existing garrison would be quite unable to meet. The danger of constructing aerodromes in an area where the defence forces might not be strong enough to prevent them falling into the hands of the enemy was also obvious. The Army urged that the policy of the development of air facilities on the east coast, with all the military difficulties which it involved, should only be accepted if a guarantee could be given that, in the event of an attack on Malaya, sufficient modern aircraft would be available to operate from those aerodromes. To ensure this, it was felt that there should in any case be a strong Air Force cadre permanently established in the Far East, and that it was unsafe to rely on the mobility of aircraft to concentrate adequate strength there from other parts of the Empire when danger threatened. On the other hand, the siting of the aerodromes was complicated by the fact that the aircraft at that time available in Malaya had a very limited range, and also by the fact that weather conditions sometimes made it difficult to fly over the central mountain range, so that it was undesirable to rely on aircraft based on the west coast for operations off the east coast. The result of this was that, when war with Japan broke out, three aerodromes had been constructed in the State of Kelantan and a further one at Kuantan, and a landing ground at Kahang in Eastern Johore. Although these were strategically well placed for air operations, they were quite inadequately defended either by land or air forces.

In 1936 it was decided to fortify the Island of Penang, though the approved scale of equipment was not immediately available.

21. *The Influence of World Politics*.—In 1937 the defence policy was still based on the fundamental assumption that the British fleet would sail from Home waters immediately on the outbreak of war with Japan and would arrive at Singapore within a maximum of 70 days. It was further assumed that the arrival of the fleet in the Far East would automatically put an end to any danger of the capture of Singapore. It followed from these assumptions that the defence plan only had to provide against such types of operations as the Japanese might hope to complete successfully within 70 days and that the role of the garrison was confined to holding out for that period.