

36. The question of direction and control of the operations of the Far Eastern Fleet is of great importance. Whatever improvement takes place in the methods of communication between the British Admiralty and the Far East it is inevitable that the great distance must result in difficulty and delay. A point of still greater importance is the lack of such intimate knowledge by the Admiralty of Far Eastern questions—political, naval, and military—as will be possessed by those on the spot.

37. It was very clearly exemplified during the late war that it was difficult to visualize and realize, at a distance of even some three thousand miles, the conditions existing in the theatre of war. It will be far more difficult to realize these conditions if the theatre of war were (say) ten thousand miles distant. For this reason I am convinced that the British Admiralty would find it necessary to decentralize the direction of the operations of the Far Eastern Fleet to a very considerable extent, and the question arises as to the authority to whom the direction should be given.

In my view an Admiral afloat should not be the central authority. He cannot take the same broad view of the whole situation as an officer on shore, who is kept in constant touch by land wire and wireless telegraphy with the situation in all parts of the theatre of war. Incidents arise which do not directly concern the Commander-in-Chief afloat, or of which he may not be in a position to realize the importance. The Commander-in-Chief afloat, again, can never have the same facilities for sifting the value of information received.

38. I am therefore of opinion that the general direction of the operations of the Far Eastern Fleet would be best carried out by a Flag Officer of high rank residing on shore at Singapore, and assisted by a strong staff. The Commander-in-Chief afloat and the Flag Officers commanding the units of the Far Eastern Fleet should all come under him in war, although, except when placed under his command for the purpose of fleet exercises, the Dominion navies would not come under him in peace. The Admiral in chief command at Singapore should visit such places in the Pacific and Indian Oceans as are of importance for naval purposes in war, in order that he may have a very intimate knowledge of the general situation. It would also be most desirable that he should visit the Dominions so that he may become familiar with the problems which confront them. He should be assisted in his duties by information furnished to him by the Naval Boards of New Zealand and Australia and the Naval Authorities in other Dominions; and he should, of course, be in constant touch with the Admiralty and the officers commanding the British Squadrons in China and the East Indies.