

At various times strong support for the proposal was expressed in the Dominion. The Right Hon. W. F. Massey, protesting against the suggestion that the plan be abandoned, declared: "It may turn out to have been a pity that the League of Nations was ever brought into being if the defence of the Empire is to depend upon the League of Nations only. I earnestly protest on behalf of New Zealand against the abandonment of the proposal to make Singapore a safe and strong naval station." The Hon. Walter Nash, then Secretary of the New Zealand Labour Party, said that the majority of his party favoured the base as a purely defensive measure on these 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 a means to operate effectively; (3) that the naval base at Singapore is the one place from which a fleet can operate effectively in the Pacific area; (4) that if you exclude that area from the area in which the British Fleet is effective you exclude one of the greatest instruments for maintaining world peace." In Australia, too, the proposal was supported, but, having begun to build up a naval force of her own, Australia was unable to contribute to the cost.

As the base neared completion manoeuvres were held to put it to the test. Air, land, and naval forces took part in manoeuvres held between December 12 and 16, 1934, twenty-one ships from the China Station, as well as the full strength of the available air and land forces. According to the local authorities, the defending bombers made a landing by the attacking force "practically impossible."

Seven years later to a month the real test came. On December 7, 1941, Japan struck in the Far East. The moment was favourable to her design. With the resources of thirteen continental nations behind them, the German armies were flooding into Russia and threatening Britain in the Middle East. German planes and U-boats were blockading the British Isles and were ceaselessly attacking the sea life-lines to the United States, to the northern Russian ports,

and through the Mediterranean to India and the Dominions. The United Kingdom, besieged from the air and the sea, still stood in imminent danger of invasion by land. The United States, although neutral, was heavily committed to supplying Britain with arms and food.

Carrier-borne aircraft crippled the United States Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbour and soon destroyed the United States Far Eastern Air Force. Relief from here for the Far East became impossible. Then the fall of the United States "stepping-stones" of Guam and Wake Islands on December 11 and December 24 cut the direct route between Hawaii, the Philippines, and Singapore. The surrender of Hong Kong on December 25 and of Manila and the Cavite naval base in the Philippines on January 2 cost the Allies positions from which the lines of communication between the Japanese homeland and the enemy forces overseas might have been attacked—if the Allies had had the necessary strength. The capture of Tarakan off the coast of Dutch Borneo gave the enemy control of the entrance to the Macassar Straits, the main passageway to Java from Davao in the Philippines. Another prong reached British New Guinea, New Britain, and the Solomon Islands flanking Torres Strait, one of the alternate routes from Hawaii and Sydney to Singapore. North-west of Malaya the capture of Moulmein menaced Rangoon and guarded the Japanese in Malaya from a possible British attack on their rear from Burma. Singapore was cut off. On February 15 the fortress surrendered. Mr. Curtin described its loss as "Australia's Dunkirk," and Mr. Churchill, in reporting the surrender of the island and the 70,000 British troops defending it, offered to the House of Commons "hard and heavy tidings of a great and far-reaching military disaster."

With the fall of Singapore the Indian Ocean was opened to Japanese raiders, India, East Africa, and the British position in the Middle East were threatened; Australia and New Zealand were placed in direct danger with their supply lines open to attack; China's chief supply route was cut. Outflanked