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Copy No. 31

C.P.(47) 147

5th May, 1947.

CABINET

CEYLON CONSTITUTION

Report by the Chiefs of Staff

In accordance with the invitation of the Colonial Affairs Committee we have examined the military implications of the proposals put forward by the Secretary of State for the Colonies in C.(47) 4 (Annex to C.P.(47) 144).

Strategic Importance of Ceylon

2. The maintenance of the security of our sea and air communications is one of the basic requirements of Commonwealth strategy.

Ceylon derives its importance from the commanding position it occupies in relation to our sea and air communications in the Indian Ocean. In any future war we should require to use Ceylon as a base from which to defend these communications.

The Island forms an essential link in our cable and wireless network to Australia and the Far East. It is also the centre of our Naval intelligence organisations for countries bordering the Indian Ocean.

3. Inability to use Ceylon would deprive us of the only existing main fleet base between Malta and Singapore and would seriously weaken our control of the Indian Ocean. If in addition we were unable to use ports and airfields in India, our sea communications in the Indian Ocean and our air routes to Australia and the Far East would be gravely endangered.

Defence Requirements in Ceylon

4. In broad terms our defence requirements in Ceylon are:-

(a) In peace the right to base naval and air forces in Ceylon and to maintain the necessary facilities there: the right to station limited land forces as a nucleus organisation for the defence of the Island: the retention of our cable and wireless facilities.

(b) In war, the right to develop the above facilities.

Ability to obtain our defence requirements.

5. The Secretary of State for the Colonies proposes that His Majesty's Government should make an immediate announcement granting full independence within the British Commonwealth, instead of requiring her, as contemplated in the White Paper of 1945, to achieve Dominion status by a process of evolution, during which period defence matters would be reserved to the Government.

In return for this grant of independence the Secretary of State for the Colonies hopes that Ceylon would be willing to negotiate special agreements with His Majesty's Government for safeguards in respect of Commonwealth defence and external affairs. The grant of independence would, however, be made unconditional and before these special agreements had been drawn up.

6. It is clear, therefore, that the issue of independence for Ceylon has got to be faced sooner or later - either immediately if the latest proposal is adopted, or at some future date if the policy in the White Paper of 1945 is adopted. In either case it is vital to the security of the Commonwealth that we should obtain our defence requirements in Ceylon by some form of reservation or agreement.

7. The immediate grant of unconditional independence is admittedly a gamble on the good faith of the leader of the Moderate Party and on his chances of being returned to power. In view of the magnitude of the issues at stake, and with experience of the Egyptian negotiations fresh in our minds, we are convinced that from the military point of view this risk is unacceptable.

Conclusion

8. We conclude, therefore, that the grant of independence to Ceylon, whether now or later, must be accompanied by reservations which will ensure that our defence requirements will be adequately and permanently met.

TEDDER  
J.H.D. CUNNINGHAM  
P.E.W. SIMPSON (V.C.I.G.S.)

5th May, 1947.