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DEFENCE,
WHITEHALL GARDENS,
S.W.1.

*With the
Secretary's Compliments.*

Forwarded with
reference to Major
Hollis' letter No.
I.D./P./8 dated 30/6/37
and for favour of return
to this Office of the
earlier extract.

12th July, 1937.

Printed for the Committee of Imperial Defence. June 1937.

SECRET.

Copy No. 5

COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE.

Extract from the Minutes of the 294th Meeting, held on June 17, 1937.

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(3)—STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF THE PACIFIC ISLANDS.

(C.I.D. Paper No. 1327-B.)

THE COMMITTEE had under consideration a Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Strategical Importance of the Pacific Islands (C.I.D. Paper No. 1327-B).

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the examination of this question had been undertaken at the request of the New Zealand Government. The Report by the Chiefs of Staff had already been the subject of discussion between the representatives of Australia and New Zealand and the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee, and it had been suggested that the representation of Australia and New Zealand on the Interdepartmental Committee, now considering questions relating to the Pacific Islands, would be of advantage. It was of interest to note that a telegram had recently been received from the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific regarding the activities of certain United States Officers at Canton Island.

LORD CHATFIELD, introducing the Report at the request of the Prime Minister, said that the Interdepartmental Committee to which reference had been made was now considering the question as to the islands over which it was important we should establish our sovereignty and which islands were of no value to us. The Committee was now awaiting a reply to a telegram to the High Commissioner for the Western Pacific. The general recommendation of the Chiefs of Staff had been that we should endeavour to establish our sovereignty over any of the Pacific Islands offering facilities for fuelling bases or landing grounds.

In reply to a question by the Prime Minister, Lord Chatfield said that the particular islands which the Interdepartmental Committee had under consideration were those which had previously had little or no significance, from the naval point of view, but had now assumed importance from the air aspect.

MR. ORMSBY GORE said that he would welcome representatives of Australia and New Zealand on the Interdepartmental Committee. The High Commissioner for the Western Pacific was already engaged upon a tour of the islands, concerning the status of which a considerable amount of investigation had already been carried out by the Colonial Office and by His Majesty's ships on the New Zealand Station. An administrative officer had been posted to Christmas Island, which had for some time been one of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands group. The Air Ministry were of the opinion that Christmas Island might be an important point on the Trans-Pacific Air route. In addition, the eight islands comprising the Phoenix group had been included in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands colony. A full despatch had been sent to the High Commissioner asking for his views on the Line group which lay considerably east of the Phoenix group and on the group of four islands having Pitcairn Island as its centre. The British Agent in Tonga was at present investigating Pitcairn with a view to reporting what steps could be taken to provide for its more adequate administration. He (Mr. Ormsby Gore) pointed out that the Islands were extremely poor and could not themselves provide any sums of money for the development of air facilities. The High Commissioner was fully alive to the need for establishing and, where necessary, strengthening the British title to

the Islands and would always be willing to co-operate with the Naval and Air authorities in any directions considered necessary.

SIR ARCHDALE PARKHILL said that Australia was interested in this question. In his view the Islands fell into three categories. First, those over which British control had been established. Secondly, those over which we thought we had control, and, thirdly, those over which doubt existed as to whether anybody had control. His Majesty's Government in the Commonwealth of Australia would like to see the position clarified and our title established to those Islands which might be considered to be of strategical value to us, including those which had become important from the air point of view. The Department of External Affairs in Australia had recently arranged for Captain Taylor, a distinguished aviator, to fly over certain of the Pacific Islands and to make a report on the air possibilities.

Sir Archdale Parkhill expressed himself as extremely glad to co-operate with the Colonial Office in their investigation of this question.

LORD SWINTON remarked that not only were certain of the Islands important from the strategical point of view, but, in addition, they would be vital to the Trans-Pacific Air route. This was a case in which civil and strategical air interests were complementary.

MR. EDEN mentioned that, according to a report received by the Foreign Office, Easter Island, which belonged to Chile, might come on the market. It might be worth while considering whether it would be of any importance to us.

MR. ORMSBY GORE thought that the Island in question was mainly important from an archæological point of view.

SIR JOHN SIMON observed that the Island was too far South to be of value for air purposes.

THE PRIME MINISTER suggested that the discussion on this subject should be adjourned until the arrival of Mr. Nash, who was unavoidably detained at another meeting.

(The discussion was resumed when Mr. Nash entered the meeting at the Conclusion of Minute 4.)

THE PRIME MINISTER, after summarising the discussion which had taken place during Mr. Nash's absence, asked him for his views.

MR. NASH said that the New Zealand Government were particularly interested in the Pacific Islands from the point of view both of their possible value to us and of the facilities they might afford to a potential enemy. The Report prepared by the Chiefs of Staff contained information which would be of the greatest value, and the New Zealand Delegation were now examining it with a view to suggesting any further points for discussion.

CONCLUSIONS.

THE COMMITTEE OF IMPERIAL DEFENCE agreed—

- (i) to approve the Report by the Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee on the Strategical Importance of the Pacific Islands (C.I.D. Paper No. 1327-B), and in particular the Conclusions which were 'that we should endeavour to establish our sovereignty over any of the Pacific Islands offering facilities for fuelling bases or landing grounds. It should be our policy to assist, where feasible, the development of those facilities which would be of value in war. We should at the same time take whatever measures are possible to gain information as to Japanese activities in the Islands';
- (ii) to note that the Secretary of State for the Colonies would arrange for the representation of Australia and New Zealand on the Inter-departmental Committee considering Pacific Questions.

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2 Whitehall Gardens, S.W. 1,
June 17, 1937.