

MEMORANDUM ON SEA-POWER, 1939.

- (1) To Germany, the command of the Baltic is vital. Scandinavian supplies, Swedish ore, and above all, protection against Russian descents on the long, undefended northern coast-line of Germany, (in one place little more than a hundred miles from Berlin), make it imperative for Germany to dominate the Baltic. We may therefore be sure that in the opening phase, she will not compromise her command of this Sea. Thus, while submarines and raiding cruisers, or perhaps one pocket battleship, may be sent out to disturb our traffic, no ships will be risked which are necessary to the Baltic command. The German Fleet, as at present developed, aims at this as its prime and almost its sole objective.

If this be true, no very large British naval forces will be needed to watch the debouches from the Baltic or from the Heligoland Bight. British security would be markedly increased if an air attack upon the Kiel Canal rendered that side door useless, even if only at intervals.

- (2) Assuming Italy is hostile, which we may perhaps hope will not be the case, England's first battlefield is the Mediterranean. All plans for sealing up the ends, c to

must be discarded in favour of decisive victory there. Our forces alone should be sufficient to drive the Italian ships from the sea, and secure complete command of the Mediterranean, certainly within two months, possibly sooner.

The submarine has been mastered, thanks very largely to Lord Chatfield's long efforts at the Admiralty. It should be quite controllable in the outer seas, and certainly in the Mediterranean. There will be losses, but nothing to affect the scale of events.

(3) In my opinion, given with great humility, (because these things are very difficult to judge) an air attack upon British warships armed and protected as they now are, will not prevent full exercise of their superior sea power. The British domination of the Mediterranean will inflict inevitably injuries upon Italy which may be fatal to her power of continuing the war. All her troops in Libya and in Abyssinia will be, as I said: "cut flowers in a vase." The French and our own people in Egypt could be reinforced to any extent desired, while theirs would be overweighted, if not starved. If the French Fleet and French naval bases are added to our own, this task is what the Admiralty should readily accept. Not to

hold the Mediterranean would be to expose Egypt and the Canal, as well as the French possessions, to invasion by Italian troops with German leadership. We cannot tolerate this on any account. Moreover a series of swift and striking victories in this theatre, which might be obtainable in the early weeks of a war, would have a most healthy and helpful bearing upon the main struggle with Germany. Nothing should stand between us and these results, both naval and military.

- (3) On no account must anything which threatens in the Far East divert us from this prime objective. In war one only has to compare one evil with another, and the lesser evil ranks as a blessing.

If Japan joins the hostile combination, which is by no means certain, for she has her hands full, all our interests and possessions in the Yellow Sea will be temporarily effaced. We must not be drawn from our main theme by any effort to protect them. Only if the United States comes in against Japan could we supply even a squadron of cruisers to operate with them. On this tableau we must bear the losses and punishment, awaiting the final result of the struggle.



(4) The farthest point we can hold in the conditions imagined is Singapore. This should be easy. A fortress of this character, with cannon which can hold any fleet at arm's length only requires an adequate garrison and supplies of food and ammunition, preferably for a year; but even six months would probably do. Singapore must hold out till the Mediterranean is safe, and the Italian fleet liquidated.

Consider how vain is the menace that Japan will send a fleet and army to conquer Singapore. It is as far from Japan as Southampton from New York. Over these two thousand miles of salt-water, Japan would have to send the bulk of her fleet, escort at least sixty thousand men in transports in order to effect a landing and begin a siege which would end only in disaster if the Japanese sea-communications were cut at any stage.

One can take it as quite certain that Japan would not run such a risk. They are an extremely sensible people. They would have the opportunity of obtaining for the time being complete satisfaction for all their ambitions in the Yellow Seas. Their fleet protects their homeland and overseas empire from the worst perils. To send a large part of their strictly limited naval

naval forces on a wild adventure such as the siege and reduction of Singapore, will never commend itself to them until England has been decisively beaten, which will not be the case in the first year of the war. If, per impossibile, they were to attempt it, a British victory in the Mediterranean might be followed a few months later by a decisive naval relief of Singapore. Do not therefore let us worry about this bugbear. Minor naval dispositions may be made to increase the deterrents against an attack on Singapore, but you may be sure that provided it is fully armed, garrisoned and supplied, there will be no attack in any period which our foresight can measure.

- (5) As long as the British Navy is undefeated, and as long as we hold Singapore, no invasion of Australia or New Zealand by Japan is possible. We could give Australasia a good guarantee to protect them from this danger, but we must do it in our own way, and in the proper sequence of operations. Can one suppose that Japan, enjoying herself in the mastery of the Yellow Sea, would send afloat a conquering and colonising expedition to Australia? It is ludicrous. More than one hundred thousand men would be needed to make any impression upon Australian manhood. The sending of such an expedition

would require the improvident diversion of the Japanese fleet, and their engagement in a long, desultory struggle in Australia. At any moment a decision in the Mediterranean would liberate overwhelming naval forces to cut any such expedition from its base.

One does not know what the attitude of the United States would be to an attempt by Japan to conquer and colonise Australia. It would be easy for the United States to tell Japan that they would regard the sending

(5)

of Japanese fleets and transports south of the Equator as an act of war. They might well be disposed to make such a declaration, and there would be no harm in sounding them upon this very remote contingency.

I am aware of the promise that we made to send a powerful fleet to the Pacific, but this would be folly in the opening stages of the war, and I am sure if the strategic argument is laid before the Australian Commonwealth, they will play the game by us as they have almost always done. Tell them the whole story, and they will come along. In the first year of a world war, they would be in no danger whatever in their homeland, and by the end of the first year, we may hope to have cleaned up the seas and oceans.

allow, than the domination of the Baltic. Here is the



My main conclusion in this section is that there is no danger of Japan sending large expeditions against Singapore or Australia until matters have been decided in Europe; and that if they did so, so long as we hold Singapore, they would be placing themselves at a great disadvantage. No, they will take Hong Kong and Shanghai, and clean us out of all our interests there. But then, if we are still alive, we will put that right later on.

- (6) Assuming that the foregoing argument is accepted, and that events generally conform to it, that our command of the Mediterranean is unquestioned and that no expedition has been launched against Singapore or Australia, the question would arise where the next operation of the British Fleet should be. This is a matter we cannot attempt to decide at this stage. But clearly the one great naval offensive against Germany is the Baltic. If, for instance, we had to-day a superior fleet in the Baltic, one might almost say for certain that Germany would not declare war. We have not got the naval power to attempt this before the Mediterranean has been conquered, but there is no hypothetical operation which should be studied more carefully, and for which plans should be made for use should conditions allow, than the domination of the Baltic. Here is the

sole great offensive against Germany of British sea-power. Ardent officers should be set to work for a year upon the problems of entering the Baltic and living there in indefinite ascendancy. Kronstadt presents itself as the chief base. However, much blood will have flowed under the bridges before any question of application can arise. But if we are happy in the Mediterranean, and no Japanese expedition had been launched (which it will not be) in the Pacific, this would be the sov'r'an plan.

(Initialed) W.S.C.

25.3.1939.