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DISPUTED ISLANDS IN THE PACIFIC.

Valley
6/4

The State Department's memorandum of February 8th last suggesting discussions concerning the status and use of those Pacific Islands the sovereignty over which is in dispute, has been considered carefully and the following observations are now offered.

2. A certain contrast exists between the British and the American interest in these islands. The British interest is partly to be able to utilize them for purposes of aviation, both civil and military; but also to use them for purposes of colonisation by the inhabitants of other British islands in the Pacific. The advance of civilisation and of hygiene has brought about a problem of over-population the nature of which was explained in documents communicated to the United States Ambassador in London in May, 1938. The problem is now very acute, giving serious concern to the British authorities, and remedial measures cannot brook delay. Among these the most promising is the transfer of inhabitants from the over-populated to suitable uninhabited islands and schemes for effecting this are being actively pursued.

3. On the other hand, if the position is understood correctly the American interest is not concerned with the acquisition of mere territory as such, nor with questions of re-settlement. American desires are, it is believed, confined to the acquisition of certain outposts for aviation, perhaps

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both civil and military. The American objectives have not however hitherto been defined and this fact must necessarily inject an element of uncertainty into the suggestions which follow.

4. We should not be averse to discussing the status and the use of the islands in relation to a general system of air navigation, but it is only right to state in advance that although in the case of some islands the British claim to sovereignty may not be unassailable, over others, to some of which we think (although we have no certainty) that the United States Government may desire to lay claim, we consider our title so indisputable that we cannot hold out the hope that our view would be changed by discussion.

5. In such a case arbitration naturally springs to the mind and we should ordinarily be glad to seek an arbitral award which would decide the issue of sovereignty beyond possibility of question. But in the present case we should be reluctant to follow this procedure. It would necessarily be accompanied by the drawback of calling international attention to the existence of differences on colonial questions between the two governments. It might well result in attempts by other Powers to assert claims to the islands in question. And it might even start a general movement on the part of other Powers to appropriate islands in the Pacific. Nevertheless, if the United States Government should strongly desire to

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have recourse to arbitration, we should be prepared to acquiesce.

6. Should the United States Government however share this reluctance to go to arbitration, and should they be willing to discuss the whole question of Pacific aviation in its widest aspects, then it is our belief that we might find it easier to examine and discuss the common needs of both governments with a view to seeing whether their attainment could be facilitated.

7. As regards the use of the islands of the Western Pacific for civil aviation, we would suggest the formal adoption of the broad principle that each party should make its islands available for purposes of civil aviation to the aircraft of the other.

8. It is the development of aviation in the Pacific which alone has lent international importance to the questions discussed above. The United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand are no less concerned than the United States in securing through rights for their aircraft. None of the parties can attain its desire without the cooperation of the others which should be granted willingly and on a basis of complete reciprocity. We therefore desire to repeat and to urge the United States Government to accept an invitation to enter into a conference with His Majesty's Governments in the United Kingdom, in the Commonwealth of Australia, and in New Zealand for the discussion of trans-Pacific Aviation. The Agenda for such a conference should include the conditions on which landing rights may be granted both in intermediate islands and in terminal territories.

9. All of His Majesty's Governments concerned desire to work in the closest possible harmony with the Government of the United States and in this spirit the hope is earnestly expressed that the United States Government will agree to participate in the proposed four party conference at the earliest date that may be practicable.

BRITISH EMBASSY,
 WASHINGTON, D. C.,
 April 5th, 1939.

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