

NAVAL DEFENCE.

Thirteenth Day.

8 May 1907.

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CHAIRMAN: I understand that different members of the Conference have had interviews with the Admiralty, and the First Lord is now prepared to state to the Conference the result of those interviews and try to get your decision on the whole subject.

Lord TWEEDMOUTH: Lord Elgin and gentlemen, since we last met I have had the opportunity of having conversations with various of the Prime Ministers, and also with their colleagues, and they have had some conferences with some of my colleagues at the Admiralty also. I do not know that I have any very definite plan to propose to you. I can only repeat what I said before, that at the Admiralty we are most anxious to meet the wishes of the various Colonies. But, of course, the real difficulty is that the position varies in the different Colonies and they have very different wants.

The basis that I think we want to go upon is in the first place to acknowledge that it is perfectly impossible in modern warfare to improvise defence; we must have it ready. That is the case with the army, no doubt; but it is still more so in any naval operations, because you require to have the ships, and you require to have the men and officers, who have to undergo a long and severe training.

Now the situation, it seems to me, is this. I will take a colony separately, or I will take Australia and New Zealand together, because the agreement with New Zealand and with Australia is a tripartite one—New Zealand, Australia and ourselves. We all hang together in the existing agreement, and all are mutually bound. Australia now gives a sum to the Admiralty of 200,000*l.* under certain conditions, and New Zealand gives 40,000*l.* The Cape Colony gives 50,000*l.*, Natal 35,000*l.*, and Newfoundland 3,000*l.*

As I understand, Australia puts forward a proposal that the agreement of 1902 should be ended, and that Australia should start something in the way of a local defence force. I do not know how far New Zealand concurs in that suggestion. Sir Joseph Ward asked for some information on the subject, and he had some talk at the Admiralty about it. He asked that some information might be given to him with regard to the cost of such a local defence, which in effect was to be founded on the establishment of a force of submarines. I do not know what is Sir Joseph's view, but I think it is rather important I should know the exact position he takes up if he adopts the idea of the possible establishment of a submarine service. I think shortly, it may be stated that each submarine would probably cost about 50,000*l.* capital expenditure for building, and probably each submarine might cost about 8,000*l.* to keep going every year—I mean, to pay the men and keep it in repair, maintain the necessary appliances, and so forth. Then comes a question as to the manning of a submarine, because that is a very important matter. The submarine men must be very highly trained. I think there would be two ways of meeting that. One would be by sending the men over to this country and getting them trained here, and probably the training might be done in a year. I think it would certainly take a year before the men would be competent to do the duties required of them in a submarine. Or it might be done in another way. Provided the flotilla were large enough, we could send a crew, or more than a crew, out to the Colony which would be able to train men belonging to the particular Colony in the work they had to do.

Then comes the question of South Africa. There, again, I believe the idea of submarines is not altogether opposed to the opinion of the South African representatives, and I believe that the establishment of a flotilla of submarines by degrees would be favourably considered, at any rate in Cape Colony; I do not know what Mr. Moor would say with regard to Natal. As I understand, the South African Colonies as a whole would like to have some