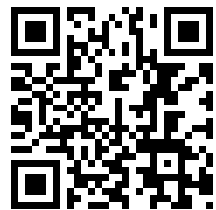


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**HISTORY OF  
THE SECOND WORLD WAR  
UNITED KINGDOM MILITARY SERIES  
Edited by J. R. M. BUTLER**

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CAIRO, AUGUST 1942

*Left to right, back row:* Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur Tedder, General Sir Alan Brooke, Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, Rt. Hon. R. G. Casey.

*Front row:* Field-Marshal Rt. Hon. J. C. Smuts, Rt. Hon. Winston S. Churchill, General Sir Claude Auchinleck, General Sir Archibald Wavell.

# GRAND STRATEGY

VOLUME III

June 1941—August 1942

by

J. M. A. GWYER

(Part I)

and

J. R. M. BUTLER

(Part II)

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# **PART II**

by

**J. R. M. BUTLER**

**Chapters XVI–XXVIII**

**Appendices and Index**



## CHAPTER XVI

# THE LOSS OF SINGAPORE

FROM THE MIDDLE of December 1941 to the middle of January following, the managers of British policy were divided between Washington and London. The War Cabinet and Defence Committee continued to meet under the chairmanship of Mr. Attlee, and the Chiefs of Staff Committee under that of Sir Alan Brooke, since 1st December C.I.G.S. designate and from 25th December C.I.G.S. in his own right.

The immediate task of those at home was, however belatedly, to build up resistance to the Japanese. Apart from the new war in the Far East and its catastrophic opening, the situation had been changed from what it was in November by three main facts: the Russians had halted the German invasion and seemed safe until the spring; Rommel had been defeated in North Africa though his forces were still in being; above all, as the Prime Minister impressed on his deputy, we were 'no longer single but married',<sup>1</sup> married to a power whose help was essential for the winning of the war and whose immense resources, as yet undeveloped, would in time ensure her a dominant voice in its direction. The Americans had recently confirmed their fundamental and vital decision to regard Germany as the prime enemy, who must be defeated first, but plans for a coalition strategy had still to be worked out; such understandings as existed for co-operation with the British in the Far East had been upset by Pearl Harbor.

The long-term strategy, therefore, aimed at containing the Japanese until a superior fleet could be built up in the Pacific; the immediate need was to hold the essential points in the East Indian island barrier and Malaya until reinforcements could arrive. Events were to show that this latter need could not be met, thanks to the government's previous policy of deliberately starving the Far East, as a non-active front, in the belief, or at least the hope, that it would be soon enough to take the necessary steps when Japanese aggression became imminent. The Chiefs of Staff had warned the Prime Minister in May 1941 that three months' notice was required if reinforcements were to arrive in time. From July of that year, when the Japanese advanced into southern Indo-China, or at least from November, when information as to their designs became known to the Americans, it should have been clear that aggression was intended;

---

<sup>1</sup> W. S. Churchill, *The Second World War* (henceforward cited as Churchill), III, 607.

but the government continued to believe that the war party in Tokyo might be restrained.<sup>1</sup> As it turned out, Japanese efficiency on land and in the air was grossly underestimated, and our weakly defended outposts fell far sooner than we had expected. As Wavell put it, 'The Japanese were too quick for us'. It is true, of course, that we simply did not possess the resources to be strong at all the vital points, and this was due to the half-hearted rearmament policy in the nineteen-thirties for which governments, parliaments and people shared responsibility. Hence all that could be done in the winter of 1941-2 was to try to plug holes in the crumbling dykes to stay the advancing tide.

'We have assumed responsibility', the Prime Minister had said in a parting message to the Chiefs of Staff Committee in London, 'for the defence of Malaya, Burma and India. Hitherto they have not been menaced, and we have not had the resources. Pray do all in your power to get men and materials moving into India, and reinforce with Air from the Middle East as soon as the battle in Libya is decided in our favour. An effort should be made to send armoured vehicles at the earliest moment after a Libyan decision'.

Unfortunately it was still the case that we had not the resources. There was no general reserve, no central pool, either of men or of equipment or of ships. An attempted invasion of the United Kingdom was still possible: it would take the Germans much less time to move air and land formations from Russia to the shores of the Channel and North Sea than for the British to recall forces sent round the Cape. For the despatch of such comparatively small trained forces as could be spared from the United Kingdom the necessary shipping did not exist. Besides, we had other commitments. It was of supreme importance to maintain Russia's resistance and, though the decision to send ten squadrons of the Royal Air Force to support her southern flank had been rescinded on 9th December, we were still pledged to send her the hundreds of tanks and aircraft promised at the Moscow Conference in September. Of greater immediate force were the claims of the Middle East. 'Crusader' was in full blast, and it was still hoped that Auchinleck might push on to Tripoli and beyond to the frontier of Tunisia. The feeling at the meeting on the night of 11th December, before the Prime Minister left, had been against diverting large forces from the Middle East, but, as he said, the position there had been eased by the victories in Libya and in Russia, and we must take advantage of this fact to engage the Japanese. Our strategy for the present 'would have to be directed to making the Japanese use large forces in their operations and thus provide vulnerable communications which we could attack'.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. x above.

There remained the difficulty of shipping. In order to send two divisions from the United Kingdom to the Middle East the Prime Minister had had to beg transport from the President in September 1941, and a system of periodical convoys had been worked out in the greatest detail so as to make the utmost use of our own shipping. Moreover, owing to the Japanese naval successes convoys in eastern waters must now be strongly escorted, and for this reason as few convoys as possible should be sailed. Our difficulties were further increased by the progress of the Japanese forces on land. Already on 16th December, by occupying Victoria Point in the extreme south of Burma, an essential stage on the air route from India, they had ensured that air reinforcements—except heavy bombers, which could still be flown direct—could arrive only by sea.<sup>1</sup> Sea convoys must pass through either the Malacca Strait or the Sunda Strait between Sumatra and Java, and, as the Japanese advanced, their shore-based aircraft would soon be able to close both these passages, and eventually the port of Singapore itself, to our shipping. Even before the final catastrophe the passing of reinforcements to Malaya became a military operation in itself.

On 12th December the Commanders-in-Chief in the East were told that our policy was now to send all reinforcements we could to the Far East and India, except that units or equipment then in the Middle East or Iraq should not be withdrawn. This proviso did not apply however to reinforcements actually on their way to these latter theatres. Seeing how meagre were the reinforcements available for the Far East their apportionment was no easy problem. The Japanese occupation of Siam now threatened Burma, which had hitherto been neglected and was almost bare of troops. To Sir Alan Brooke it already seemed that the essential thing was to make sure of Burma, but the Chiefs of Staff Committee put on record that, while we could not afford to use up elsewhere all the formations intended for the defence of Burma, yet it was of extreme importance to sustain as far as possible the defence of the Malay peninsula.

On 19th December the Defence Committee approved with slight amendments a staff report on strategy in the Far East. The loss of Northern Malaya was now known, and also the serious damage done to the two battleships, *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant*, in Alexandria harbour. This disaster was a crippling blow to the Admiralty's plan of building up a powerful capital-ship fleet in the Indian Ocean; pending its assembly, they said, we must rely mainly on aircraft-carriers. The battles of the Coral Sea and Midway later in the year showed the soundness of this judgement but we possessed at this time

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<sup>1</sup> See Map 8.



only four modern carriers.<sup>1</sup> Machinery for the unified direction and co-ordinated action of the Allies, said the report, was urgently needed and would, it was hoped, result from the discussions at Washington; but there was 'no one base which would be acceptable to both powers as affording sufficient protection to their interests, at which our own and American forces equal or superior to the Japanese can be assembled'. Nevertheless it was 'very necessary that the United States forces should act offensively on sea, land and in the air and at once'. Such a suggestion, made within a fortnight of Pearl Harbor, was unreasonable; the authors of the report overestimated the American capacity to strike as much as our Allies usually overestimated our own. In order to protect our vital interests, the report went on, and provide the means for a future offensive, we must hold Burma (particularly Rangoon and the Irrawaddy basin) and Ceylon; Singapore Island and South Malaya; Sumatra and Java and Timor. All these 'vital' areas, except Ceylon, were in fact to be lost in the next few months; indeed the report itself envisaged the possible loss of Malaya. Even so we must hold 'the other essential points in the East Indies, retention of which provides a barrier to the Indian Ocean and Australia'.

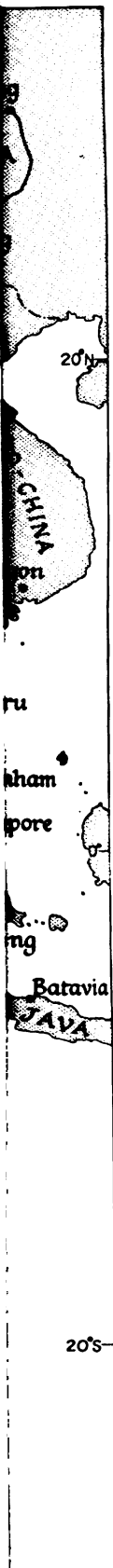
Definite proposals for the dispatch of land and air reinforcements followed. It was noted that General Wavell had been instructed to send two brigade groups to the Far East, and that the first of these would leave for Malaya on 22nd December and the second, with a squadron of light tanks, very early in January. India should start to develop Rangoon as a base for a force which might ultimately reach four divisions and fifteen air squadrons. Wavell was shortly to visit Chiang Kai-shek, whose offer of help in the defence of Burma had been gratefully accepted. Twelve Blenheims from the Middle East had already started for Singapore and the first monthly instalment of fifty Hudsons would soon be available from home.<sup>2</sup>

The representatives of the Navy and the Royal Air Force explained that certain points must be borne in mind. Admiral Sir Henry Moore, Vice-Chief of the Naval Staff, said that in the waters round Singapore we should have to rely for the time being on submarines and small craft. Sir Wilfred Freeman, Vice-Chief of the Air Staff, pointed out that recent naval losses in the eastern Mediterranean had made it necessary to increase our air strength in that region in compensation; he reminded the Committee that air forces could not operate without ground staffs and equipment and were therefore, to that extent, not strategically mobile. The reinforcements proposed were the largest that could be moved in the shortest period of time.

<sup>1</sup> *Formidable, Illustrious, Indomitable, Victorious*; there were also the *Furious*, built in 1917 and frequently used as a ferry, and the smaller *Eagle* and *Hermes*, built in 1924.

<sup>2</sup> Not all these aircraft actually arrived.





At a meeting on 27th December the Defence Committee approved a long signal from the Chiefs of Staff Committee to Washington representing their views on what could safely be sent to the Far East after taking into account the needs of the Middle East. The comprehensive report on which it was based took account also of the fact that the Prime Minister and President were known to look with favour on the idea of an Allied move into North-West Africa, even without an invitation from the French, on the assumptions that it was essential to forestall the Germans in that region and that the British Libyan campaign achieved complete success. In this matter the report concluded that 'Crusader' should certainly be pressed to a successful end but 'Acrobat',<sup>1</sup> though most desirable, must not be allowed to stand in the way of Far East reinforcement. No major enemy offensive in the Middle East was likely in the first half of 1942 and the forces which they suggested as immediately necessary for the security of essential points in the Far East could be provided without undue risk to the Middle East. Shipping for the moves proposed should be available, provided we could retain the six United States troopships lent to us, and could provide escorts.<sup>2</sup>

After the necessary decisions had been taken in London and Washington, they were embodied in two signals of 1st January, 1942. The first, addressed to the Commander-in-Chief, Far East, and stating the general strategic policy for operations in the Far East theatre, has already been quoted.<sup>3</sup>

The second telegram was addressed to the Commanders-in-Chief, Far East and Middle East, and others. It gave the reinforcement policy approved in principle by the British government and stated first the 'governing considerations'.

(a) Security of Singapore and of sea communications in the Indian Ocean is second only to the security of the United Kingdom and the sea communications thereto.

(b) The defeat of Germany must remain our primary object. Consequently for the present we should not divert more of our resources than are necessary to hold the Japanese.

(c) "Crusader" should be exploited to the greatest possible extent, subject to the condition that it must not prevent the despatch of essential reinforcements to the Far East.'

The paragraphs following stated in detail the redistribution of forces required and the action already taken. Malaya was to receive two more divisions, one British and one Indian, and one armoured brigade of light tanks; its air-strength was to be brought up to eight

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<sup>1</sup> Code-word for an advance into Tripolitania.

<sup>2</sup> Only two of the six were in fact lent to us, but shipping capacity proved elastic beyond all expectations.

<sup>3</sup> Page 380 above.

light bomber, eight fighter, and two torpedo-bomber squadrons and a flight of general reconnaissance land-planes. Burma also was to receive two divisions, to be found from Indian or East African formations, and a light tank squadron, and was to be made up to six light bomber and six fighter squadrons. For the Netherlands East Indies the Australian government would be asked to transfer two divisions from the Middle East; any additional air forces must come from America.<sup>1</sup> 'In principle' all the army reinforcements would now be drawn from formations either already in the Middle East or intended to be sent to that theatre, or to Iraq, from India in 1942; the losses to the denuded theatres would be made good from the United Kingdom as soon as possible.

Some of the intended moves were prevented by the rush of events, but the principles on which they were based came at once under severe criticism from the Australian government. Both in Australia and in New Zealand, as disaster followed disaster in the course of the war, anxiety had been growing as to their safety should Japan join our enemies, and with it a feeling that their point of view was not sufficiently appreciated in London.

From November 1941 onwards a former Australian prime minister, Sir Earle Page, had as special envoy of the Australian government attended meetings of the Cabinet and Defence Committee when matters affecting his country were under discussion and he had expressed particular concern as to the air defences of Singapore. His fears were now shown to be justified. The Australian civil representative at Singapore cabled of 'a landslide collapse'; only large-scale fighter reinforcements could save the situation. Divisions, not brigades, were wanted.

The last chapter has referred to the stream of disgruntled telegrams which flowed from Canberra during Mr. Churchill's absence in America. The President himself was embarrassed, then and later, by the apparent 'strained relationship' between the United Kingdom and Australia; while resolved to give Australia all possible help he preferred to deal direct with Mr. Churchill.<sup>2</sup>

The unhappy controversy continued for some time. The Australians, for instance, were by no means satisfied with the summary of the British Chiefs of Staff's report on strategy in the Far East, as approved by the Defence Committee, which had been communicated to them on 23rd December. Their military advisers were particularly

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<sup>1</sup> The two Australian divisions were 6th and 7th; their diversion was approved by their government.

<sup>2</sup> R. E. Sherwood, *The White House Papers of Harry L. Hopkins* (1949; published in the U.S. as *Roosevelt and Hopkins*; henceforward cited as *Sherwood*), p. 513.

critical of the naval section of the report. They could not understand the failure to provide for prompt offensive action by a combined Anglo-American fleet in the Pacific or the statement that no single base was acceptable for the two fleets. Consequently they condemned the proposal to assemble a separate British capital-ship fleet in the Indian Ocean and in the meantime to rely mainly on aircraft-carriers. Their criticisms were considered by the Defence Committee on 31st December and the Chiefs of Staff were invited to send their comments to Sir Earle Page who was present at the meeting.

On 3rd January, however, Mr. Churchill forwarded to Mr. Curtin a note by the First Sea Lord which explained that in view of our own and American naval losses there could be no question at the moment of providing a combined fleet capable of dealing with the main Japanese fleet. But the Australian Chiefs of Staff were wrong in thinking that even when a combined fleet had been achieved superior in numbers to the Japanese it would be quite easy to bring about fleet action with the enemy and that the Pacific problem would then be solved. It might be extremely difficult to bring on a fleet action except in areas where the Japanese had air superiority and where air attack might change the whole course of the fighting. It might therefore be greatly to our disadvantage to reinforce the American Pacific Fleet and leave the Indian Ocean insufficiently protected. It was not till 19th January that Mr. Churchill informed Mr. Curtin, as a 'deadly secret', of the loss that the Navy had sustained by the damage done to the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* on 19th December, as well as by the sinking earlier of the *Barham* on 25th November.

On the wider issue Mr. Curtin on 18th January restated the Australian case, namely that for years the recognized needs of Malayan defence had been neglected and that governments in London had shown unjustified complacency as to the position in the Far East. Mr. Churchill replied next day that he had no responsibility for the neglect of our defences and the policy of appeasement which preceded the outbreak of the war. But since he became prime minister 'the eastward flow of reinforcements and aircraft had been maintained' to the utmost limit of our shipping capacity and other means of moving aircraft and tanks.

'... I deemed the Middle East a more urgent theatre than the now christened A.B.D.A. area. We had also to keep our promises to Russia of munitions deliveries. No one could tell what Japan would do, but I was sure that if she attacked us and you the United States would enter the war and that the safety of Australia and ultimate victory would be assured.

'... I am sure it would have been wrong to send forces needed to beat Rommel to reinforce the Malay Peninsula while Japan

was still at peace. To try to be safe everywhere is to be strong nowhere. . . . The blame for the frightful risks we have had to run, and will have to run, rests with all those who, in or out of office, failed to discern the Nazi menace and to crush it while it was weak. . . .'

To this Mr. Curtin replied: 'Just as you foresaw events in Europe, so we feel that we saw the trend of the Pacific situation more clearly than was realized in London'—a claim which, Mr. Churchill commented, could 'only be judged in relation to the war as a whole. It was their duty to study their own position with concentrated attention. We had to try to think for all'.<sup>1</sup>

The fact was, of course, that, whereas even in 1939 we were most reluctant to add a war in the East to the war in which we were engaged in Europe, after the collapse of France and Italy's entry into the war we were quite incapable of waging one successfully in Asia single-handed.

There was another Power deeply concerned in the war in the Far East. 'What about China?' Mr. Churchill had asked the President. 'I suggest China is primarily your concern and that you will weave her in with the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington while keeping us constantly informed and will bring everything to final solution there'.

'Weaving in' China was no easy task, principally because of the widely different points of view of Chungking and the western capitals. As seen from Chungking, the intervention of the British Empire and the United States merely marked a new phase in a war against Japan which had been going on since July 1937. During these years China had been playing a lone hand, constantly disappointed by the Western Powers' appeasement of Japan. But now, the Chinese Generalissimo assumed, a flow of munitions and other forms of help from the West would immediately begin, and he himself, as the head of the most populous country in the world and the hero of years of resistance, would play a leading part in directing the strategy of the war.<sup>2</sup>

The Americans had long regarded themselves as China's chief benefactors and natural protectors. They had granted her recently a large dollar credit, they had made Lend-Lease assistance available to her, and they had allowed United States citizens to form the American Volunteer Group to help her in the air. The Americans had also a vastly exaggerated notion of China's military strength, as Mr. Churchill discovered to his surprise on arriving in Washington; he warned Wavell that China bulked as large as Great Britain in

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 12-16.

<sup>2</sup> See H. Feis, *The China Tangle* (Princeton 1953), p. 4.

many American eyes. In fact, if he could epitomize in one word the lesson he had learnt in the United States, it was 'China'.

The British also were convinced of the importance of maintaining China's resistance. Since January, 1941, they had had a military mission (No. 204, under Major-General L. E. Dennys) at Chungking and they too had granted China a credit, though much smaller than the American. But they held a far less favourable opinion of China's effective military strength and they felt that such exiguous resources as they possessed could be more economically used elsewhere. They stood, however, in a special strategic relation to China, in that the only land-route by which supplies could reach her from outside was the Burma Road, which crossed the frontier mountains from Lashio in Burmese territory. Immediately on the outbreak of war Chiang Kai-shek assured the British and American liaison officers at Chungking that all Chinese resources would be placed unreservedly at the disposal of their countries for the prosecution of the war and that he was prepared to make any sacrifice for the common cause. He had ordered immediate preparations for an offensive to support Hong Kong—nothing came of this—and he would like to send troops to serve in Northern Burma if Burma could supply rations. General Dennys advised that the most valuable indirect help that China could give was by containing the greatest possible Japanese effort in China. He reported home that Chiang Kai-shek's attitude was satisfactory and Chinese morale high, but the main problem was to get the Generalissimo's orders translated into effective action on the part of the war-zone commanders. This difficulty always remained.

On 15th December, when air losses in Malaya had become serious, Dennys and Major-General J. Magruder, his American opposite number, told Chiang Kai-shek that we needed all possible help from China to weather the present crisis. He replied that he regarded the defence of Burma as the defence of China and would send an army-corps of 50,000 men tomorrow, but he could not give an immediate answer to our request for the diversion to Burma of some Lend-Lease material recently arrived at Rangoon. He evidently felt sore, Dennys reported, that 'he had never been taken into our confidence for fighting this war'.

President Roosevelt had in fact on 14th December suggested that Chiang Kai-shek should summon a conference of the interested Powers at Chungking.<sup>1</sup> The Russians did not attend, but Wavell and the American General Brett were present at a secret meeting on the 23rd. It was agreed that the first essential was to make Rangoon and

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<sup>1</sup> See M. Matloff and E. M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1941-42* (Washington 1953: henceforward cited as Matloff). The President at the same time suggested to Stalin to hold a similar conference, his idea being 'to avoid any hurt feelings or groundless suspicions in Chungking or Moscow'.



Burma secure and to continue supplies through them to China. Chinese forces would in the meantime continue to contain the Japanese armies on Chinese soil. Besides this the Generalissimo offered two Chinese armies—Chinese armies were roughly equivalent in strength to British divisions—for the defence of Burma, but only on condition that they were not mixed up with non-Chinese formations and had their own lines of communication. Wavell, however, was for the present only prepared to accept two divisions of the Fifth Chinese Army in Burma, preferring to hold the Sixth Army in reserve in the Kunming area. Wavell's motives were mainly but not entirely administrative. 'It was obviously better', he signalled, 'to defend Burma with Imperial troops than with Chinese, and Governor [of Burma] particularly asked me not to accept more Chinese for Burma than was absolutely necessary.'<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless in spite of Wavell's denials the story persisted that he had 'refused Chinese help', and it was unfortunate that Chiang Kai-shek should have met with this rebuff at their first interview. Perhaps a more articulate or less forthright man than Wavell could have avoided it.

Some further misunderstanding and ill-will were caused at about the same time by an incident at Rangoon, where the British were unreasonably accused of having deliberately held up and converted to their own use some Lend-Lease material intended for China.<sup>2</sup>

The Generalissimo was no doubt piqued by his failure to obtain the place he thought his due in the councils of the Allies, and he was inclined to magnify anything he could regard as a slight on his country or himself. He accepted however the A.B.D.A. scheme and, as we have seen, it was in order to convince him of the Allies' determination to maintain the supply route to China that Burma, contrary to British strategic opinion, was included in the A.B.D.A. area.<sup>3</sup>

In the meantime news from Malaya was going from bad to worse.<sup>4</sup> After the abandonment of Kedah and Penang there was no prolonged resistance to the Japanese advancing rapidly down the west coast and also threatening the right flank of the 3rd Indian Corps by a mountain road from the east coast. 'The object of our defence' had been defined by the Chiefs of Staff in 1937 as 'to prevent any Japanese action which would deny the base facilities of Singapore to our fleet on arrival'. They had recognized in the new circumstances of 1940 that the protection of the Naval Base required also the defence of air

<sup>1</sup> This may have been due to rationing difficulties.

<sup>2</sup> See S. W. Kirby and others, *The War against Japan* (H.M.S.O. 1958, henceforward cited as Kirby), II, 17-21.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 376 above.

<sup>4</sup> See Chap. XII above, Map 9 and Kirby, I, Chap. xrv.

bases in the north. The use of these had now been lost to ourselves, but it was still thought essential to deny to the enemy the airfields in Central Malaya 'from which they could threaten the arrival of convoys'. Accordingly, in order to hold the enemy as far north as possible General Percival, after a visit to the front on 18th December, ordered 3rd Corps to stand west of the Perak river, withdrawing across it only when forced to do so; this strategy was endorsed on the same day at a conference at Singapore summoned at President Roosevelt's suggestion and attended by British, United States, Dutch, Australian and New Zealand representatives with Mr. Duff Cooper in the Chair.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister, however, had been disquieted by the losses incurred without visible result in the early fighting in Malaya and he had signalled on 16th December warning the Chiefs of Staff Committee that, since nothing compared in importance with the 'fortress' of Singapore, troops must be available for its 'prolonged defence'. But Singapore was not a fortress. It was an island the size of the Isle of Wight, separated from the mainland by a narrow strait in which lay the Naval Base. The Naval Base was the point of real strategic importance, but its fixed defences were planned only against attack from the sea; air-attack from the north could render it valueless. The city of Singapore, moreover, had a civil population of nearly a million, whose maintenance must render prolonged defence of the island impossible. Mr. Churchill's strategic flair was at its weakest when he lacked first-hand acquaintance with the theatre of operations.

Sir Alan Brooke was inclined to agree that the correct strategy was to concentrate on the defence of a line in North Johore covering Singapore, but considered that this was a matter for Brooke-Popham, the Commander-in-Chief, to whom he signalled: . . . 'It is impossible to judge the conduct of the campaign from this distance. But it would appear vitally important to conserve your military resources sufficiently to continue opposition to Japanese on mainland and to ensure at least the defence of a line in Northern Johore long enough to enable reinforcements to arrive.' Mr. Churchill, however, insisted that it was for the government to assign his task to the Commander-in-Chief: in view of our incapacity to prevent Japanese landings in the peninsula, he should be told to confine himself to the defence of Johore, but this should not preclude his employing delaying tactics and demolitions on the way south and making an orderly retreat.

Brooke-Popham in answer to the C.I.G.S. stated his plan of defence as follows:

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<sup>1</sup> This conference was called in connexion with the President's idea of inter-Allied conferences at Chungking and Moscow.

'Object is to ensure security of Singapore naval base. Naval forces sufficient only for local operations, convoys and some interference on sea routes. Air forces back on southern bases able to give little support except reconnaissance . . . Broad policy is to continue opposition to the enemy on the mainland to cover the arrival of our reinforcements. Singapore and Johore are liable to heavy scale of sea-borne attack so long as enemy has command of the sea. Fortress troops and A.I.F.<sup>1</sup> have therefore not been drawn upon. . . . Plan is to delay southward move, not to give ground unless forced to, subject to condition that 11th Division must remain in being as a fighting formation. Large amount of material in Kuala Lumpur area requires the enemy to be held off from this area as long as possible. . . . The approaches towards south and west, from Kelantan and Kuantan [on east coast] have still to be blocked. . . .'

The C.I.G.S. replied on 22nd December that the government fully agreed that the vital issue was to secure the Singapore Naval Base. No other considerations must compete with this. They approved the Commander-in-Chief's plan to employ delaying tactics and his policy of continuing opposition on the mainland in order to cover the arrival of reinforcements and the execution of all possible demolitions. It was for him to judge when and to what line he must fall back, having regard to the danger of suffering too heavy losses, before the arrival of reinforcements. 'A scorched earth policy must be rigidly applied and no arms, foodstocks or other valuable material must be left intact for the enemy.'

Thus the C.I.G.S. maintained his principle that it was for the Commander-in-Chief to fix the times and stages of retirement while stating Mr. Churchill's objection to the frittering away of our forces. Later, on 9th January, the Prime Minister told Wavell that he highly approved the manner in which the rearguard operation had been conducted so as to inflict the greatest loss and delay upon the enemy.

In point of fact the matter was settled by the Japanese; the impetus of their victorious advance against our dispirited and exhausted troops, lacking as these were in air or armoured support, was so overwhelming that nothing more than delaying actions was in any case practical until the Japanese came in contact with the fresh Australian brigades on the northern Johore line on 15th January.

In spite of Percival's hope to hold the Japanese for some time west of the Perak River they were allowed to cross that important obstacle unopposed on 24th and 25th December, and our defeats which followed at Kampar and Slim River involved the loss of Central Malaya. The enemy entered Kuala Lumpur on 11th January,

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Imperial Force.

capturing much valuable material which there had been no time to remove or destroy.<sup>1</sup>

Malaya was now part of the A.B.D.A. area under the supreme command of General Wavell. General Pownall, who had arrived at Singapore on 23rd December, took over from Brooke-Popham on the 27th but only held his command for a few days before it was absorbed in Wavell's. Duff Cooper's mission ended at the same time. Brooke-Popham before leaving thought it only just to the commanders in Malaya to remind Whitehall that, although the integrity of Singapore had long been classified by the Chiefs of Staff as vital, the estimate by G.O.C., Malaya, of the necessary land forces, with which both he himself and the Chiefs of Staff had agreed, had not been attained; and that, when the Japanese attacked, our aircraft, including reserves, were some 370 short of agreed requirements. He pointed out also that the enemy's probable plan had been correctly judged by those on the spot.

General Pownall on 27th December, after a two-days visit to the forward area, reported that his impression was not so much that the morale of the troops engaged was bad as that young troops had found the first shock of war very trying and lost confidence for the time being. But Wavell, visiting Malaya a few days later on the way to take up his new command in Java, reported on 8th January, the morrow of the Slim River disaster, that in the opinion of their commanders the formations and units of 9th and 11th Divisions, with very few exceptions, were no longer fit to withstand attack, and the position had become 'somewhat critical'. Next day, after discussion with Percival and Major-General Gordon Bennett, the Australian commander, he signalled his plan for fighting 'a decisive battle' on the north-west frontier of Johore, making use of the as yet uncommitted Australian troops. He hoped that these would succeed in delaying the enemy until the collection of reserves enabled us to deliver a counterstroke, though this could not be before mid-February. It would be a 'time problem' between the rate of the Japanese advance and the arrival of our reinforcements. On 12th January he was hoping to have three Australian divisions along with the British 18th Division for the defence of Malaya and to use Indian troops from Malaya and India to garrison the Netherlands East Indies. He realized however that the enemy had the initiative, and we might be forced to use reinforcements, as they arrived, at the point of greatest danger. And that is what occurred.<sup>2</sup> With few exceptions,

<sup>1</sup> See Kirby, I, Chap. xvii.

<sup>2</sup> First to arrive were 45th Indian Brigade on 3rd January, followed by 53rd British Brigade on 13th January, 44th Indian Brigade with 7,000 Indian reinforcements on 22nd January, an Australian machine-gun battalion with 1,900 untrained infantry reinforcements on 24th January, and the remainder of 18th British Division (54th and 55th Brigades) on 29th January.

none of the troops which arrived in January were in fit condition to oppose an enemy of the Japanese calibre, and they had in fact to be thrown into the battle piecemeal. Great difficulties also attended the dispatch of air reinforcements: 'the air forces in the Far East continued to be a wasting asset and air superiority could not be gained'.<sup>1</sup>

On 16th January, the day after he had officially assumed command of A.B.D.A., Wavell signalled that the Japanese advance had been much more rapid than he had hoped, and the Prime Minister on his return from the United States was horrified to learn from him that 'until quite recently' nothing had been done to construct defences on the north side of Singapore Island to prevent the enemy crossing the Johore strait. In fact, according to Sir John Kennedy, then Director of Military Operations, 'the island had never been considered defensible from close attack—the channel was narrow, mangrove swamps impeded the fire of the defences; and the aerodromes, water-supply and other vital installations were within artillery range from the mainland'.<sup>2</sup> On the 19th Wavell reported that schemes were now being prepared for the defence of the northern part of the island. 'I must warn you, however', he continued, 'that I doubt whether island can be held for long once Johore is lost . . . Singapore defences were constructed entirely to meet seaward attack.' Part of the garrison had already been sent forward to Johore and many of the troops remaining were of doubtful value. Nevertheless he still hoped that Johore might be held until the next convoy arrived.

The Commander-in-Chief's depressing signals, from 19th January onwards, clearly called for a review of our strategy at the highest level. Hitherto it had been assumed, though indeed the C.I.G.S. had been far from confident, that Singapore would hold for some months and would provide a base for a counter-offensive.<sup>3</sup> Now it seemed that the lynch-pin of our Far Eastern strategy might break in the near future, and the question arose whether this disastrous possibility should affect our reinforcement plans.

21st January was a day of meetings in London. The Chiefs of Staff had before them in the morning a minute from the Prime Minister noting that Wavell's signal gave little hope of a prolonged defence of the Island. The fall of Singapore would be a terrible shock to India, but if it could only hold for a few weeks it was not worth while losing all our reinforcements and aircraft. On the other hand 'the loss of Burma would be very grievous'. By 'muddling things and hesitating to take an ugly decision' we might lose both Singapore and the Burma Road.<sup>4</sup> At a further meeting, in the evening, Mr. Churchill

<sup>1</sup> Kirby, I, 262.

<sup>2</sup> *The Business of War* (1957), p. 196.

<sup>3</sup> Sir A. Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide* (1957, henceforward cited as Bryant), p. 285.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill, IV, 50.

said he was in favour of sending reinforcements to Singapore if there was a reasonable chance of holding the fortress; if not, we should not shrink from the necessity of sending them to Burma. The C.I.G.S. insisted that it must be left to Wavell, in the light of his estimate of the length of possible resistance and of the reinforcements he knew to be on the way, to decide whether or not Singapore should be written off; he also stressed the importance of Sumatra as a link in the barrier-chain of Dutch islands. In the meantime Commander-in-Chief, India, was asked to send to Burma from India three British battalions, to be replaced in due course.

The Defence Committee, meeting later that night, came to no decision as to the diversion of reinforcements. The Prime Minister's mind was turning to the importance of Burma. Taking the widest view, he is recorded as saying, Burma was more important than Singapore. It was the terminus of our communications with China which it was essential to keep open. The Americans had laid the greatest stress on the importance of keeping China fighting on our side. It might be that some of the reinforcements destined for Malaya ought rather to be sent to Burma. 'We did not wish to throw good money after bad.' But the Committee decided to wait before opening the matter with Wavell; as an immediate issue the battle of Johore and the defence of Singapore should receive the highest priority.

In the event no action was taken and the two brigades of the 18th Division which had not yet arrived at Singapore followed the earlier brigade to their common doom. The choice before the Defence Committee was a difficult one. Nobody expected that the defence of Johore and the Island would collapse as quickly as it did, and the unfit condition of this Territorial division after its months of sea-voyage and lack of appropriate training was not realized. Nevertheless, as the Prime Minister has since confessed, 'There is no doubt what a purely military decision should have been'; but the thought of the loss of prestige if we had abandoned this 'renowned key-point' proved too strong. What the sentimental reaction in the Commonwealth might have been was indicated by a message from Mr. Curtin.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian government were anxious about the threat to Port Moresby and northern Australia represented by the recent Japanese capture of Rabaul in the Bismarck Archipelago, and desired British support for their request for American naval and air assistance. Moreover, they said, the Australian people, having volunteered for service overseas in large numbers, found it difficult to understand why they must wait so long for an improvement in the situation. But

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<sup>1</sup> See Churchill, IV, 51-52. Wavell seems to have been determined to use 18th Division in Malaya: See Kirby, I, 319.

the sting of the message was with reference to Malaya. Sir Earle Page, who had been present at the meeting on the 21st, had reported that the Defence Committee had been considering the evacuation of Malaya and Singapore. After all the assurances given in the past, this would be regarded, not in Australia alone, as 'an inexcusable betrayal'. Even in an emergency, reinforcements should be diverted not to Burma but to the Netherlands East Indies.

This signal was considered by the British Cabinet on 26th January. The Prime Minister regretted that the Australians had not been informed by their representative of the Defence Committee's decision to give the highest priority to the defence of Johore and of Singapore Island. In any case no decision could have been taken on so grave a matter as the diversion of reinforcements without full consultation with the Dominions. It went without saying that Australian forces serving overseas must move homewards to the defence of their own country now that danger threatened it. But all the available shipping was at present mortgaged for essential military movements.

By this time it was clear that the battle for Johore had been lost. The Japanese, exploiting their command of the sea to make further landings, proved irresistible to the opposing troops. On 28th January Percival, as he had been authorized to do by Wavell, ordered that our forces should be withdrawn to the Island by the 31st. This move was carried out and the causeway connecting it with the mainland was demolished that morning. It was also decided, with Wavell's approval, to move all but two token flights of fighters from Singapore to Sumatra, since three of the four airfields on the Island were now exposed to artillery fire from across the strait. The bombers had already departed to Sumatra.

Wavell, who visited Singapore on the 31st, reported with characteristic understatement that we had a 'rather anxious period ahead'. As late as 3rd February he still reported that there was 'every intention and hope' of holding Singapore. In the last few days considerable reinforcements had arrived; their convoys were fortunate in getting through, only the last suffering appreciably from enemy air-attack. But none of these fresh troops, with the exception of an Australian machine-gun battalion, were fit for battle against a first-class enemy force.

On the night of 8th/9th February, the Japanese effected a crossing of the 800-yard Johore strait. Their tactics and drive were too much for the defending forces and after less than a week, on 15th February, when the immense population of the city were short of water, the British force surrendered. Some 80,000 men from the United Kingdom, India and Australia went into captivity.

The causes of the British defeat have been fully discussed elsewhere and only a brief summary is possible here.<sup>1</sup>

Two days before the capitulation General Percival signalled home his assessment of the Japanese army as a warning of what might be expected in other campaigns in the Far East. Its success was due, he said, primarily to superior training, previous war experience, discipline and morale. 'Other factors, notably air superiority and possession of tanks, contributed to this success, but were not determining factors.'<sup>2</sup>

Other weaknesses on the British side apart from the purely military must of course be taken into account, some of long standing which could not be remedied by efforts made in the last few months. In a country of so mixed a population as Malaya no spirit of national resistance could be expected against an Asian invader. Not all the area was under direct British rule, and the interests of the native rulers could not be disregarded. The relaxing climate was inimical to sustained exertion, and the need of maintaining production in a region of such economic importance hindered the recruitment of labour for purposes of defence. Worst of all, perhaps, no single authority existed to co-ordinate military and civilian effort.

Wavell gave his opinion two days after the surrender that if we could have held out long enough in Malaya and Singapore to make it possible to build up a strong air force in the Netherlands East Indies we could have kept the Japanese ships and convoys from approaching the island barrier and gradually pushed the enemy back. We appeared to have lost the race against time by a month, through the failure of Malaya and Singapore to hold out that much longer; but the Malayan front seemed to 'crumble' in his hands.

'The trouble goes a long way back; climate, the atmosphere of the country (the whole of Malaya has been asleep for at least two hundred years), lack of vigour in our peacetime training, the cumbersomeness of our tactics and equipment, and the real difficulty of finding an answer to the very skilful and bold tactics of the Japanese in this jungle fighting.

'But the real trouble is that for the time being we have lost a good deal of our hardness and fighting spirit . . .'<sup>3</sup>

Several weeks later, after reading reports which had come out of

<sup>1</sup> Kirby, I, Chap. xxvii (Retrospect). General Percival's appreciation is given in Part IV of his dispatch of 25th April, 1946, *Operations of Malaya Command, from 8th December, 1941 to 15th February, 1942*, Supplement to *London Gazette* of 26th February, 1948; and from a wider point of view in *The War in Malaya* (1949).

<sup>2</sup> Writing later after a study of all the evidence available to him General Percival has stated as his considered opinion that the Japanese air and sea superiority, and the fact that they had tanks and we had none, were decisive factors.

<sup>3</sup> To the C.I.G.S., 17th February; quoted from Kennedy *op. cit.*, pp. 197-8; Kirby, I, 468.



Singapore, Wavell said that 'the main effect of this mass of statements' was that 'our system of government, our military training and our whole life in the east were suffering from complacency and underestimate of the Japanese menace and never recovered from the first rude shock'.

Praiseworthy efforts had been made since General Percival's arrival to improve the situation, but the fact remains that the Japanese troops had been trained to a point of physical and moral toughness which their opponents could not equal. It must be recognized, however, that conditions in Malaya only reflected, if in greater degree, the unreadiness of the whole British people for war. British governments in the 'thirties, by failing to provide for the contingencies of war against Japan as well as Germany and Italy, had gambled with the safety of the countries in the Far East for which they were responsible. After the French collapse had upset calculations in the Mediterranean and south-east Asia, the bluff was called. When at length in the summer of 1940 the strategic necessity of holding the whole of Malaya was accepted in London and the decision taken to entrust the main responsibility for its defence to the Air, the forces required could not be found.

Thus, to quote General Percival's Dispatch, 'the policy of relying primarily on air-power was in fact never implemented. In consequence of the above policy the Army dispositions were designed primarily to afford protection to the bases from which the air forces when available would operate. In the event the Army had to bear practically the whole weight of the Japanese attack with little air or naval support. This was the main cause of defeat.'<sup>1</sup>

From the moment when the Japanese obtained control of airfields in Indo-China the fate of Malaya was sealed. The naval disasters of the Allies in December 1941 gave Japan the well-known advantages of maritime supremacy. In the Malayan campaign the land forces of the Commonwealth, some of them but newly arrived, many short of experienced officers and nearly all inadequately trained, if trained at all, in jungle fighting, were outfought by the picked Japanese troops trained and conditioned in country and climate not unlike Malaya.<sup>2</sup> Even more important, the Japanese were inspired by a fanatical patriotism and determined on victory at all costs. Even the best troops in the world, however, under the most inspiring leadership, could not have held out indefinitely when sea and air were controlled by the enemy.

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<sup>1</sup> Paras. 598, 599.

<sup>2</sup> Some troops, notably the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders and the Australians, who had spent some time in reserve areas, made good use of their jungle training.

## CHAPTER XVII

### THE HOME FRONT, January–May 1942

WHEN THE Prime Minister returned to England on 17th January he had much to report to the House of Commons and also much criticism to meet. The cessation of the blitz and the postponement, if only that, of a renewed threat of invasion had caused a relaxation of tension in the country and a decline from the heroic mood of the previous year. It was clear that on land and in the air the German enemy was principally concerned with his eastern front. The danger of an immediate collapse of Russia had been averted, and even the Battle of the Atlantic was going much better for the British than in the spring. It was natural that criticism unexpressed in the months of supreme peril and effectively dealt with in the debates of May and June 1941<sup>1</sup> should break out again when new but more distant disasters might suggest that the higher direction of the war was at fault.

Since the summer there had been a good deal of grumbling in Parliament from Members claiming to represent opinion in their constituencies. They spoke of a ferment and a sense of frustration. It was said that production was not being efficiently handled; that there was still much waste of effort and that potential reserves of enthusiasm and energy were being neglected. There were demands for a Ministry of Production. Another common complaint was that not enough was being done to help Russia. The stubborn defence by her armies, so unexpected by the experts, aroused profound, even passionate admiration, especially in Labour quarters. Could not more spectacular assistance be rendered her than the dispatch of munitions and raw materials and the bombing of Germany and the diversion of German aircraft from the Eastern front? Even before Stalin on 18th July appealed to Mr. Churchill to establish a front against Hitler in the north of France or in the Arctic, Mr. Aneurin Bevan had declared in the House that 'to try to effect a second land front is an urgent necessity'.<sup>2</sup>

Before the outbreak of war with Japan little if any anxiety was

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<sup>1</sup> See Vol. II, 459, 515.

<sup>2</sup> *Correspondence between the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the U.S.S.R. and the President of the U.S.A. and the Prime Minister of Great Britain during the Great Patriotic War of 1941–45* (Moscow, 1957; henceforward referred to as *Soviet Correspondence*), I, 12: *House of Commons Debates*, 5th Series, Vol. 372.

expressed with regard to the security of the Far East, but the early calamities in that region inevitably provoked complaints of the strategy which had lost us two great ships and had starved Malaya of aircraft. Sympathy was expressed with the Australians whose homeland now lay open, it might seem, to invasion, and it was asked whether the Dominions had been, and whether they were now being, adequately consulted as to matters which concerned them so closely. By the end of January not only had the Japanese overrun most of the Malay peninsula but there was disappointment in Libya also. So far was Rommel from having been destroyed or even bundled out of Cyrenaica that he was actually counter-attacking and driving our forces before him.<sup>1</sup>

There was also growing criticism of the composition of the government, on grounds of both personality and principle. In the Prime Minister himself there was hardly any lack of confidence; gratitude and admiration for his leadership in 1940 were still too strong. But Members of the Left kept up the cry for ousting the 'men of Munich', whose political record was held to debar them from playing a proper part in a war in which Soviet Russia was our ally. There was a good deal of feeling too on other grounds that some members of the government were not pulling their weight. And even the Prime Minister was criticized for taking too much on himself; while demands were fairly common for a War Cabinet consisting solely of members without departmental responsibilities or for one selected solely on grounds of merit and not of the need to maintain a balance of parties.

These various criticisms and many others were most strongly expressed in a three-day debate at the end of January, when Mr. Churchill asked the House of Commons for a Vote of Confidence, himself opening and closing the discussion.<sup>2</sup> He had considered such a declaration of continued support necessary, he said, because irresponsible criticism, if unchallenged, might give rise to misleading impressions outside. The world should know what backing these criticisms had, and the government itself should know how it stood.

While admitting that he felt the weight of the war even more heavily than in 'the tremendous summer days of 1940', he claimed that the Middle East showed a vast improvement over the position three or four months ago when the Nile Valley was menaced at the same time from west and north—the latter 'a more remote but in some ways more deadly attack'. Now the Caucasus and Baku and the Persian oilfields were denied to the enemy. The decision to send to Russia raw materials and munitions for which our troops had for

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<sup>1</sup> See next Chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 377, 27th, 28th, 29th January.

long been 'waiting thirstily' was 'a decision of major strategy and policy' for which he felt no regrets. On the other hand to have yielded to the clamour for a 'Second Front Now' would have meant another and far more disastrous Dunkirk. The real point at issue was whether the government had acted rightly in giving priority to Russia, Libya and the Levant-Caspian area over the Far East. With Germany and Italy on our hands we had never been in a position to provide effectively for the Far East. It had therefore been the policy of the government 'at almost all costs to avoid embroilment with Japan' until we were sure that the United States would also be engaged. It had seemed unlikely that after refraining from attacking us in 1940 at our weakest moment the Japanese would do so in the last six months of 1941, when the United States fleet at Hawaii would threaten their rear. He took full personal responsibility for all that had happened, and he foresaw much more trouble 'rolling towards us, like waves in a storm'.

Mr. Churchill went on to describe the inter-Allied organization recently created in agreement with the Americans. The vanguard of the American forces was already in the United Kingdom and their navy was linked in the most intimate union with the Admiralty both in the Atlantic and in the Pacific; we should plan our naval moves together 'as if we were literally one people'.

This last claim must in the light of present knowledge be regarded as an aspiration rather than a statement of fact. The naval catastrophes which the two powers had recently suffered had dislocated their inchoate plans for common action in eastern waters and except in the East Indies intimate union was regrettably lacking.

In his reply on the third day the Prime Minister again defended the policy which had not sent earlier reinforcements to the Far East. It was right to send to Russia munitions from the want of which Malaya suffered. It was right to launch the offensive in the Western Desert since it was necessary to repel the German threat to Egypt in order to set free forces and transport to meet what seemed an impending attack from the Caucasus; Libya was the only region where we could open a second front and draw off German air-strength from Russia; moreover, because his reinforcement route by sea was so vulnerable, the campaign in the Middle East was fought on terms most costly to the enemy. 'Should we have been right,' he asked,<sup>1</sup> 'to sacrifice all this and stand idly on the defensive in the Western Desert and send all our available forces to garrison Malaya and guard against a war with Japan which nevertheless might not have taken place, and which, I believe, did take place only through the civil government being overwhelmed by a military *coup d'état*?'

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<sup>1</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 377, column 1013.

In any case Mr. Churchill was entirely unrepentant as to the general policy; he defended the dispatch of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* to Malaya as intended to deter Japan, if possible, from going to war, or, failing that, from sending troop convoys into the Gulf of Siam while the United States Pacific Fleet was at Hawaii.<sup>1</sup>

The government's triumph in the division that followed (464-1) showed that there was no desire—at least none that dared express itself—for a change in the leadership, but the Prime Minister could not be unaware that the House was not equally content with all his colleagues and that the demand for a Ministry of Production was still vocal. He had himself in a debate on 29th July, 1941, stated his reasons forcibly against such a change.<sup>2</sup> The present system, he had then said, provided 'a single co-ordinating plan for the programmes of the three Services based upon our strategic needs'. He himself, as Minister for Defence, had prepared a general scheme, a war supply budget, which had been finally approved by the Cabinet on 31st March. The execution of the plan was confided to the three Supply departments—the Controller in the Admiralty, the Minister of Supply, and the Minister of Aircraft Production. The allocation of raw materials, when there was competition, was satisfactorily dealt with by the Production Executive under the chairmanship of the Minister of Labour. The creation of a Minister of Production would merely insert an unnecessary piece of machinery between himself and his advisers; it would duplicate his own functions.

Such had remained his opinion until his recent visit to America, but he was now converted to the need for a change. Now that discussions with both Russia and the United States about the allocation of munitions had become necessary, it was desirable that they should be conducted on the British side 'through a single channel and, if possible, by a minister capable of representing the interests of British war production as a whole'.<sup>3</sup> More particularly, as Mr. Churchill told the House on 10th February,<sup>4</sup> the appointment of Mr. Donald Nelson as chairman of the United States War Production Board had called for the appointment of a British equivalent, and he had decided to offer the post of Minister of War Production to Lord Beaverbrook. The three existing Supply departments would retain their separate identities under their respective chiefs, the new Minister, who would be a member of the Cabinet, 'exercising general

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill stated the government case in fuller detail in the Secret Session of 23rd April, when he gave particulars of our naval losses.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 373, columns 1274 ff.

<sup>3</sup> See M. M. Postan, *British War Production* (1952), p. 251.

<sup>4</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 377, columns 1402 ff.

supervision', concerting and co-ordinating their actions. He would carry out all the duties hitherto exercised by the Production Executive, excepting only those concerned with manpower and labour, which would remain under the control of the Minister of Labour and National Service.

A White Paper was issued setting forth the position.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Beaverbrook's contacts with the United States and the Russians—of whose claims for assistance of every kind he had become an uncompromising advocate—as well as his dynamic energies, had marked him out as the obvious choice for the new office; but it had not been found easy to define his powers in a way that he would accept, and after holding it for only a fortnight he resigned on grounds of health. He was able, however, to render useful service as head of a Supply Mission in the United States. The Prime Minister announced on 12th March that his successor as Minister of Production would be Captain Oliver Lyttelton, formerly President of the Board of Trade and at the time Minister of State in the Middle East. The meticulous White Paper was withdrawn, but Captain Lyttelton's functions would be the same as Lord Beaverbrook's: he was 'charged with chief responsibility, on behalf of the War Cabinet', of which he was a member, 'for the business of war production as a whole, subject of course to the policy of the Minister of Defence and of the War Cabinet itself', but no new ministry incorporating the existing Supply departments would be set up.<sup>2</sup>

On 24th March, opening a debate on Production, the new Minister told the House that, having actual control of the three ingredients of war production—raw materials, machine tools and, in co-operation with the Minister of Labour and National Service, of labour—he was satisfied that his powers were both adequate and precise. In order to relate production 'closely and continuously' to strategical requirements, he was setting up with the Cabinet's approval a general staff of War Production, to include his Chief Adviser on Programmes and Planning, Sir Walter Layton, and the Assistant Chiefs of Staff of the three Services, together with the highest technical officers of the three Production ministries; this staff would serve the Defence Committee, of which he would himself be a member. He would continue to keep in close touch with Lord Beaverbrook in America.

Captain Lyttelton remained as Minister of Production till the end of the war. His Joint War Production Staff, which held its first meeting on 30th March, came to take over, to a large extent, the functions of the Defence Committee (Supply),<sup>3</sup> while he himself,

<sup>1</sup> Cmd. 6377.

<sup>2</sup> See Churchill, IV, 66–8, 74, *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 378, column 1205.

<sup>3</sup> The D.C.(S) held only seven meetings in 1942, and none between 17th July and 14th December.

leaving the responsibilities of the three Supply ministries unimpaired, acquired as a co-ordinator, by virtue of his membership of the War Cabinet, an authority which they lacked. In the course of the year he paid two visits to the United States which achieved important results.<sup>1</sup>

Other changes followed. On 24th February the Prime Minister announced to the House of Commons 'a major reconstruction of the Government'.<sup>2</sup> 'After nearly two years of strain and struggle it was right and necessary that a government called into being in the crisis of the Battle of France should undergo both change and reinvigoration'. He was sure that we had now 'achieved a more tensely-braced and compact administration'. The changes affected both the War Cabinet and other Ministers of Cabinet rank.

The War Cabinet would now consist of seven members instead of eight, Sir Stafford Cripps, our late ambassador in Russia, coming in in place of Mr. Greenwood and Sir Kingsley Wood, the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Churchill had never accepted the view that it should consist wholly of Ministers free of departmental duties. Besides himself, who would continue to combine the office of Minister of Defence with the premiership, there would be three Ministers with departments: Mr. Attlee, the leader of the Labour Party, who would now, as well as being recognized as Deputy Prime Minister, take over the Dominions office, thus ensuring the representation of Dominion views at the highest level; Mr. Eden, the Foreign Secretary; and Mr. Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour and National Service. The three other members would have no departmental duties: Sir Stafford Cripps, who as Lord Privy Seal would relieve the Prime Minister of the arduous responsibilities of the leadership of the House of Commons; Sir John Anderson, Lord President of the Council, who, as Mr. Churchill put it, presided over what was 'in certain respects almost a parallel Cabinet concerned with home affairs'; and Captain Oliver Lyttelton, the new Minister of Production.<sup>3</sup>

Changes outside the War Cabinet included the appointment of Lord Cranborne to succeed Lord Moyne as Secretary for the Colonies and Leader of the House of Lords. Sir James Grigg, Permanent Under-Secretary at the War Office, replaced Captain Margesson as Secretary of State—a constitutional innovation which several Members, without disputing the new Minister's ability, thought undesirable as a precedent. Colonel Llewellyn became Minister of Aircraft Production in succession to Colonel Moore-Brabazon, his place

<sup>1</sup> See below, Chap. xxiii. A full description of the powers and development of the Ministry of Production is given in Postan, *British War Production*.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 378, column 36.

<sup>3</sup> Technically Captain Lyttelton had been a member of the War Cabinet while Minister of State at Cairo, and his successor, Mr. R. G. Casey, was to hold the same rank.

as President of the Board of Trade being filled by Dr. Dalton, who was succeeded at the Ministry of Economic Warfare by Lord Selborne.

The changes on the whole were well received; they met much of the criticism recently expressed in Parliament and the Press. Sir Stafford Cripps's appointment was welcome, not by any means only in Labour quarters, both for his own high qualities and as affording relief to the Prime Minister, who in the opinion of many was still carrying too much weight. As the tide of our disasters mounted in the course of the year, the view was strongly expressed in both Houses that in the interests of efficiency he should divest himself also of the office of Minister of Defence. He was himself however resolute that it was essential that he should retain it. 'It is most important,' he has written, 'that at the summit there should be one mind playing over the whole field, faithfully aided and corrected, but not divided in its integrity. I should not of course have remained Prime Minister for an hour if I had been deprived of the office of Minister of Defence'.<sup>1</sup>

In the debate of 24th February he explained 'the method by which the war has been and will be conducted'. He insisted that there was nothing which he did or had done as Minister of Defence which he could not do as Prime Minister. 'As Prime Minister I am able to deal easily and smoothly with the three Service Departments, without prejudice to the constitutional responsibilities of the Secretaries of War and Air and First Lord of the Admiralty'. . . There is of course no Ministry of Defence and the three Service Departments remain autonomous. . .<sup>2</sup> 'For the purpose of maintaining general supervision over the conduct of the war,' he said, 'which I do under the authority of the War Cabinet and the Defence Committee, I have at my disposal a small staff, headed by Major-General Ismay, which works under the long-established procedure and machinery of the pre-war Committee of Imperial Defence and forms a part of the War Cabinet secretariat.' While he took constitutional responsibility for all that was done or not done, he did not, of course, conduct the war from day to day himself; it was conducted from day to day, and plans were prepared, by the Chiefs of Staff in Committee. These three officers, who sat together every day and often twice a day, gave executive orders and directions to the Commanders-in-Chief in the various theatres. 'They advise me, they advise the Defence Committee and the War Cabinet on large questions of war strategy and supply. I am represented on the Chiefs of Staff Committee by Major-General Ismay, who is responsible for keeping the War Cabinet and myself informed on all matters requiring higher decision.' The Chiefs of

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 80.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 378, columns 40 ff.



Staff were relieved of a great mass of secondary questions by the Vice-Chiefs' Committee, and both had at their disposal the three-Service Joint Planning Staff and Joint Intelligence Staff.<sup>1</sup> Besides this the three staffs of the Army, Navy and Air Force were in constant collaboration at all levels where combined operations were involved.

Each of the three Chiefs of Staff had the professional executive control of his own Service.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Churchill's practice, he said, was to leave them to do their own work, subject to his 'general supervision, suggestion and guidance'. Out of 462 meetings of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in 1941, most of them lasting over two hours, he had presided at only 44 himself. In addition, there were the meetings of the Defence Committee, at which the Service Ministers were present as well as other ministerial members, and there were the Cabinet meetings at which the Chiefs of Staff were present when military matters were discussed.

Such was the machinery which, as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, he had 'partly elaborated and partly brought into existence'. He was satisfied that it was the best that could be devised to meet the present difficulties and dangers, and he had no intention of making any serious or fundamental change in it.<sup>3</sup>

But criticism was not silenced. Our continuing failures in the Far East, coupled with the escape of the *Gneisenau* and *Scharnhorst*<sup>4</sup> and the disappointments in Libya, caused a fairly widespread feeling that something was wrong at the top. Changes in the machinery for the central direction of the war were again pressed for by members of both Houses of Parliament, including some who had lately held high office and others with recent Service experience. Prominent among the first were Lord Hankey, a member of the government till only a few weeks previously, and Admiral of the Fleet Lord Chatfield, Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence in the Chamberlain War Cabinet.<sup>5</sup>

It was asserted in the Lords that the existing staff structure, with its apex in the Chiefs of Staff Committee, failed in respect of precision and provision for the future. With an efficient system, would it not have been foreseen that after the defection of France in 1940 Indo-China could no longer be relied on to bar Japanese aggression against Malaya? In respect of operations too a failure in team-work between the Services was apparent: Lord Cork could speak from personal experience of the lack of such co-operation in Norway, and did not

<sup>1</sup> Usually the Chiefs met in the morning and the Vice-Chiefs in the afternoon, but the meetings of both were numbered in a single series.

<sup>2</sup> The First Sea Lord exerted an operational control which his colleagues did not.

<sup>3</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 378, columns 41-43.

<sup>4</sup> See below, p. 500.

<sup>5</sup> See *House of Lords Debates* of 24th, 25th February, 25th March, 22nd April, 5th May: *House of Commons Debates* of 24th, 25th February, 19th, 20th May.

our inability to stop the German ships in the Channel prove the absence of a common plan?

Lord Swinton, who had played a distinguished part before the war in the organization of the Air Ministry, put forward a plea for a Great General Staff—an inter-service body ‘permanently in session’ and ‘working as a single unit to prepare joint plans . . . on the prevision of the great strategical operations which will be necessary to meet any emergency’. The notion of a Great or Combined General Staff found considerable support, but its supporters were not all thinking of the same thing, and the expression was therefore not perhaps a happy one. Lord Chatfield had received the impression that what was intended was ‘a great machine run by the Services which was going to dominate our strategy and ensure that no more bad decisions were made . . . something like the German Great General Staff or the Japanese Great General Staff which run the war for their respective countries’. Anything of that sort, he said, was inconceivable in a country where civil control was accepted, and where ‘the military machine is not an executive machine but an advisory machine’.

Lord Swinton, however, said that he had ‘always insisted that the Great General Staff must be responsible to the Chiefs of Staff in their corporate capacity’. He had always ‘flatly refused to accept any divorce between planning and responsibility for action’. But this principle apparently did not exclude ‘a great Combined General Staff, devoting itself entirely to strategy, with its economic consequences, and adequately served in personnel’. On a later occasion, however, he said that he was ‘in full agreement with those who hold that the Great General Staff must be the Chiefs of Staff in their corporate capacity’.<sup>1</sup>

By then the government had presented a White Paper<sup>2</sup> setting out at length the organization of the War Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff with their sub-committees, with separate provision for Strategical, Executive and Future Operational Planning. These three sub-committees all reported to the Joint Planning Committee, consisting of the Directors of Plans of the three Services, who in turn reported to the Chiefs of Staff. There were some critics who would have liked the Joint Planners to live and work in a separate building so as to acquire a corporate spirit uncontaminated by departmental prejudices, but in the official view it was essential for a realistic approach that they should remain in the closest touch with their departments. The existing organization did therefore to a considerable degree meet the wishes of those who desired a Combined Staff; but the Chiefs of Staff

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<sup>1</sup> *H. of L. Debates*, Vol. 122, columns 32, 853, 127, 439, 825.

<sup>2</sup> *Cmd.* 6351 of 22nd April.

could not be only a planning body, they were forced to concern themselves with many matters besides strategy. Nor did the system provide for direct representation of the economic, the technical or the scientific point of view among the military advisers of the government, though of course these were represented on other bodies included in the organization of the War Cabinet and served by the secretariat under Sir Edward Bridges.

Professor A. V. Hill insisted in the Commons debate of 24th February that

‘the fundamental axiom in modern war is that an exact knowledge of weapons and equipment is necessary at the highest level of all as the essential basis, not only of strategy and tactics, but even, one may say, of policy itself . . . Nor can the sort of technical knowledge which is necessary for those who have to guide our strategy now be acquired as a part-time job by an elder statesman whose historical outlook inevitably leads him to think in terms of earlier wars.<sup>1</sup> It requires the full-time attention of a technical section of a combined General Staff, composed for the main part of young and able officers of all arms who have grown up with modern weapons and equipment. No such joint technical section exists at present to guide the councils of the Minister of Defence. . . It seems to many of us, therefore, to be essential that a great General Staff should be instituted, not merely a collection of advisory committees, but a body with executive functions, of which the technical section of which I have spoken should be a part, to deal with the general strategy of the war. This cannot be done piecemeal by the Chiefs of Staff of the three Services, briefed by their separate staffs, even meeting daily to sort the matter out. A full-time staff is required with no other functions and with executive power, to consider strategical problems as a whole. Since the policy and supply and manpower are necessarily involved in strategy and tactics on the world scale, it would seem essential that a Deputy Minister of Defence should be appointed to sit in the War Cabinet to represent the combined staffs and to present their conclusions to the Cabinet as a whole’.<sup>2</sup>

Lord Swinton, who had done much to associate leading physicists with the operational and strategic plans of the Air Ministry, expressed similar views, though without such concrete suggestions. It appeared that the government scheme did not provide for such an integration of Chiefs of Staff, Directors of Production and scientists in a single body as had existed under the Committee of Imperial Defence and he asked how the need was met now. Lord Hankey, also, urged that the

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<sup>1</sup> Was this an allusion to Lord Hankey’s Scientific Advisory Committee (See Vol. II, 354) who reported to the Lord President of the Council?

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 378, column 125.

services of scientists should be used 'in the central control of the war', as well as in the Departments and Commands.<sup>1</sup>

The need for the representation of economics, technology and science at the levels where strategy was decided could also be used to support the widely expressed desire for an independent chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. It was argued that it was wrong in principle that the executive head and spokesman of one Service should also act as chairman, and as such convey and interpret the views of his colleagues as well as his own to the government, especially when their views conflicted. This could be done better by a fourth member who, having no Service axe to grind, would be better able to bring about agreement and in any case to report the Service views impartially. It was also argued that an independent chairman, free from the burden of exacting departmental duties, would have the time for looking ahead and for bringing to the notice of his colleagues the various interests, strategic, economic, scientific etc., for which a combined general staff was advocated.

Sir Edward Grigg, recently an Under-Secretary in the War Office, summed up his ideal chairman's position as threefold: he should be a watchdog, from the professional side, to see that nothing was overlooked; a co-ordinator, to 'make sure that, in production policy and also in the allocation of strength, a proper balance between the Services is observed'; and thirdly, 'a filter and sifter of plans' for the War Cabinet. He should be 'a cold, analytical, professional man, working without any political colour, to put up, in the first instance, for ultimate decision by the War Cabinet, absolutely unprejudiced and uncoloured professional advice'. Lord Hankey saw the chairman's duties as 'to take charge of the whole Staff organization, drive it along and see that it is functioning'. He was sure that 'these duties are beyond the possibilities of either the Prime Minister or the C.I.G.S., both of whom have such overwhelming responsibilities to fulfil'.<sup>2</sup>

But obvious difficulties appeared if one tried to envisage this functionary more closely. Was he to be a Service man or a civilian? Was he to be a Super-Chief of Staff, or merely a co-ordinator? In any case it would be hard to find a man possessed of all the necessary qualities, and no name was mentioned in these debates, though later on, in July, that of Wavell was suggested.

The objections were perhaps most forcibly stated by Colonel Oliver Stanley, who after acting as Secretary of State for War under Chamberlain in 1940 had served for eighteen months as a member of the Future Operations Planning sub-committee. A civilian chairman, he said, would import political considerations at a stage where only

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<sup>1</sup> *H. of L. Debates*, Vol. 122, columns 830, 838.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 380, column 98; *H. of L. Debates*, Vol. 122, column 837.

military were in place. A Service super-chief could not express to the Cabinet the views of one of the three Chiefs of Staff—should he dissent from his two colleagues—as well as that officer himself; while a mere chairman, having no executive control, could never be equal in authority to the heads of the Services. But while he saw no good in an ‘independent chairman’, he thought the committee would profit by the inclusion of a ‘swinger’—an additional member free from departmental duties who could be ‘put on to some particular job’, of which he suggested instances, or act as ‘a follow-up-man’; Lord Louis Mountbatten was now, as Chief of Combined Operations, a member of the Committee, but he had his own responsibilities and could not, said Colonel Stanley, be charged with more general duties.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, however, the higher direction of the war could not be discussed without reference to the position of the Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, or rather of Mr. Churchill. The desire was almost universal to help and not to displace him but many doubted whether his way of working with the Chiefs of Staff gave the best results. Did he not press them too hard, both in using his tremendous force of personality to compel their assent, and in wearing down their minds and bodies by keeping them arguing until the small hours? ‘Nobody is at his best,’ said Lord Chatfield, ‘in the middle watch.’<sup>2</sup> Was it desirable that they should always have his representative, even so tactful and personally acceptable a one as General Ismay, sitting with them and reporting their discussions? And was it not wrong in principle that the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff should come to the Defence Committee or Cabinet not as purely military advice, but as advice already influenced by the Prime Minister’s ideas? This last point was made, without naming names, by Colonel Stanley as an argument against a civilian chairman. It was suggested that Mr. Churchill had interposed himself between the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet in such a way as to make independent judgement by the latter difficult and to reduce their authority, while his prominence as Minister of Defence lowered the status of the Service Ministers, members though they were of the Defence Committee. But further, it was asked, apart from saving the time of those of the War Cabinet who were not members of it, what purpose did the Defence Committee serve? Both Lord Hankey and Colonel Stanley—who regarded Ismay’s unobtrusive presence at the Chiefs of Staff meetings as wholly beneficial—considered it an unnecessary wheel in the machine. Mr. Churchill in fact made much less use of the Defence Committee in 1942 than in the previous year; he preferred the less formal ‘staff conferences’ to which he could summon anyone

<sup>1</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 380, columns 112 ff; for Mountbatten’s position, see p. 514 below.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of L. Debates*, Vol. 122, column 466.

whose presence he thought desirable. Meetings of the Defence Committee seem to have been reserved for special occasions when other than military views needed to be heard.<sup>1</sup>

But for the most part these parliamentary discussions are of interest only as evidence of contemporary informed opinion. Mr. Churchill had made his own views clear and was not likely to change them. His knowledge of war—if not of the latest techniques—from both study and experience far exceeded that of any of his critics. He was widely read in military history and he had seen active service as a cavalry subaltern and in command of a battalion. Except for the Foreign Office he had held all the great civil offices concerned with the waging of war: he had been First Lord of the Admiralty, Secretary of State for War, for the Air and for the Colonies, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Home Secretary, President of the Board of Trade and Minister of Munitions. He was no ordinary civilian Minister; indeed he was no ordinary man. Parliament and the country had the good sense to recognize this, and no alternative to him was ever seriously suggested. It was true that, as he said, there was nothing that he did as Minister of Defence which he could not do as Prime Minister. But the additional title pointed the fact that he regarded the conduct of the war on its military side as his particular province and that to sit in close and constant consultation with the Chiefs of Staff was a natural part of his duties.

Diaries and memoirs published since the war have emphasized the strain thrown on his advisers by Mr. Churchill's temperament and by what they considered wasteful diversions of the planners' time and energies to the study of unpromising schemes. But all have testified to the greatness of his leadership. Lord Ismay, who stood in a very special relationship to him and to the Chiefs of Staff, has loyally insisted that hard as he pressed his professional advisers he never adopted a purely military decision against their firm and final opinion.<sup>2</sup> It was fortunate that in Sir Alan Brooke, whom the Prime Minister appointed chairman of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in succession to Sir Dudley Pound from 9th March, they had a spokesman of iron nerve who could prove as tough and obstinate in discussion as Mr. Churchill himself when a professional question was involved. The strain was severe and often exasperating. Lord Ismay admits that his chief was inconsiderate, but denies that, in view of the greatness of the cause and of the man, his subordinates had any just grievance. Lord Hankey, while often critical of Mr. Churchill and inclined to prefer the Lloyd George system to which he himself had contributed so much, declared that all his own suggestions were

<sup>1</sup> Seventy-five meetings of the Defence Committee (Operations) were held in 1941; only twenty in 1942, of which only seven were held after April, and none in May or June.

<sup>2</sup> *The Memoirs of Lord Ismay* (1960), pp. 164, 173-6 and Chap. XIII generally.

'subordinated to one overriding principle, and that is that the Prime Minister of the day, who has so tremendous a responsibility, must have a machine and methods that suit him'.<sup>1</sup> Sir Alan Brooke, though often chafing at his chief's way of doing business, had no doubts that, the Prime Minister being the man he was, there could be no intermediary between him and the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>2</sup>

Matters were not so easily settled with regard to the Dominions, now asserting their status as independent nations. Members at Westminster, as was said above, besides expressing sympathy with Australia and New Zealand in their exposed position, wanted to know whether their views were properly represented in the decision of policy, and Mr. Churchill had referred briefly to the subject in the January debate.<sup>3</sup> In fact the problem how to ensure that the Dominions had their due say in the conduct of the war was found to present peculiar difficulties. The Anglo-American decision to defeat Germany first had been originally taken in the early months of 1941 and renewed in December without Dominion participation. In London the rightness of this decision might seem axiomatic, but in the Pacific lands it was otherwise, and the Prime Minister was perhaps too ready to assume that the policy which commended itself to him and the President should be acceptable to the Dominions.

In the case of Canada, whose recent splendid contribution of a billion Canadian dollars had been gratefully welcomed, the difficulty never became acute, both for geographical reasons and because of her closer personal contacts with the United Kingdom and the United States. In the case of South Africa Mr. Churchill's long friendship with General Smuts and their similarity of outlook ensured easy relations. The Australian and New Zealand governments, however, were critical of United Kingdom policy not only with regard to the dispatch of reinforcements. Now that the war had spread to their own quarter of the globe they felt entitled to a larger share in its general direction.<sup>4</sup> The attempt, not wholly successful, to meet their wishes is illustrated in the story of the Pacific Council. We had always been ready, the Prime Minister told the Commons on 27th January,<sup>5</sup> to form an Imperial War Cabinet containing the Prime Ministers of the four Dominions. Whenever any of them had come to London they had taken their seats at our table as a matter of

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<sup>1</sup> *H. of L. Debates*, Vol. 122, column 444.

<sup>2</sup> See Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide*, p. 307.

<sup>3</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 377, column 613.

<sup>4</sup> See P. N. S. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs* (O.U.P. 1958), pp. 110-15, 132 ff.

<sup>5</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 377, columns 613-15, 27th January, 1942.

course. Unfortunately, it had not been possible to get them all together at the same time, whereas the presence of Dominion representatives of lesser status who had no power to take decisions was not quite the same thing and raised 'some serious problems'.

On 19th January, Mr. Churchill, as has been said,<sup>1</sup> after long discussion at Washington, proceeded to offer to Australia and New Zealand, as a means of securing that they, along with the Dutch, should be continuously associated with the whole conduct of the war against Japan, a 'Far Eastern Council on the ministerial plane' meeting in London, over which he would himself preside. It would be served by a group of Dominion liaison officers in consultation with the United Kingdom Joint Planners, and would focus and formulate the views of the represented Powers to the President. Mr. Churchill's proposal was anything but acceptable to the governments of the two Dominions. To them it seemed obvious that in the higher direction of the war in the Pacific the preponderant voice would be that of America and the major decisions would be taken *at Washington*. As Mr. Fraser put it, the suggested scheme made no provision for 'direct and continuous access to the power which, under the arrangement so far proposed, is solely responsible for the conduct of naval operations in that portion of the world which includes New Zealand'. The Australian government, supported by a unanimous decision of their Advisory War Council in which all parties were represented, took a similar view. They desired not only that an accredited representative of Australia should have the right to be heard in the British War Cabinet in the formulation and direction of policy but also that a Pacific War Council should be established at Washington comprising representatives of the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, China, the Netherlands and New Zealand. 'This body would be a Council of Action for the higher direction of the war in the Pacific and would have associated with it the Joint Staff already established on which the members of the Pacific Council would also have representatives of their Services if they so desired.'

The first request was granted at once, and the privilege was of course made available to the other Dominions. But with regard to the matter of a War Council it took some time to come to an arrangement which the two Dominions would, if somewhat reluctantly, accept.

On the one hand Mr. Churchill was convinced that the Dominions would be better served by the scheme on which he and the President had agreed. The Far Eastern Council in London, so far from being an advisory body, would be the centre at which the views of the United Kingdom, the Australian, the New Zealand and the Netherlands

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 374, above.



governments were focused and formulated on the staff as well as on the ministerial plane and effective decisions reached, and no decision could be taken either in Washington or in London which did not take full account of the views of those four governments. If the orders of the A.B.D.A. Powers to the Supreme Commander were to be framed by a body in Washington representing all those Powers, the representatives of the governments concerned, other than of the United States, would be less favourably placed for expressing the views of their governments.

On the other hand the Dominion governments felt strongly on the matter, and the Prime Minister was told that the King was anxious about the bitterness which might develop in those countries if the United Kingdom did not go some way to meet them. The Prime Minister in his reply to the Palace remarked that 'Access to the supreme power is exceptionally difficult', but 'It is always good to let people do what they like and then see whether they like what they do'. He agreed on reflexion that there was a good deal of logic in the Dominions' point of view, and after a few days the matter was passed to the President.

Mr. Roosevelt replied that, in his view and that of his advisers, all political matters concerning Australia, New Zealand and the Netherlands East Indies should continue to be handled in London, while military matters should be resolved at Washington; but to have all these countries represented each by three men on the Joint Staff considering A.B.D.A. problems would result in an altogether unwieldy body; their representatives should however be called in to discuss matters involving 'their national interest and collaboration'. But when immediate decision was required these officers must be ready to give their individual advice without waiting for their governments' formal assent.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Churchill approved of these proposals, but said to the President that he assumed that the Far East Council would make recommendations to Washington on military as well as political matters.

'The purely military would go from our Chiefs of Staff Committee in London to the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee in Washington. The political aspects would be dealt with either through the Foreign Office and State Department or, when necessary, between you and me . . . When the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington were dealing with something affecting the A.B.D.A. or the Anzac area, or even larger matters, it would be natural for them to invite representatives of the Military Missions of Australia, New Zealand and Holland to attend the discussion.'

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Hopkins some weeks earlier had remarked that 'everybody and his grandmother' had wanted to be on the 'appropriate joint body' then under discussion. Sherwood, p. 481.

The President's views were passed on to the Dominion Prime Ministers, who felt bound to acquiesce though they were not satisfied, and the first meeting of the Pacific War Council, as it was to be called, was held in London on 10th February. Mr. Churchill, Mr. Attlee and Mr. Eden represented the United Kingdom; Mr. Amery, India and Burma; there were representatives also of the Netherlands, Australia and New Zealand, besides the three British Chiefs of Staff and General Ismay.<sup>1</sup>

The Council held four meetings in February and four in March, but it cannot be said to have played any important part in the direction of the war. This, on the British side, was now substantially in the hands of Mr. Churchill and the Chiefs of Staff, with occasional reference to the Defence Committee and Cabinet, and it was out of the question that they should share their responsibility and authority. The Dominions, however, attained their desire soon afterwards in the establishment of a parallel Pacific War Council in Washington, which met for the first time on 1st April with the President in the Chair.<sup>2</sup> Here the Dominion representatives came into direct personal contact with the supreme American authority. But the Council did not itself direct policy. The American Chiefs of Staff not only disliked the idea of duplicate councils in London and Washington but represented that their own attendance as advisers to such a body in Washington would not be in accordance with United States constitutional procedure, under which they reported to the President direct. Neither they nor their British colleagues in fact attended, nor had they any link with the Pacific Council except in the person of the President. What the Council did was to give its members the opportunity of obtaining information and stating their views. 'Such an opportunity', as Professor Mansergh says, 'was a psychological necessity for the Pacific dominions, abruptly confronted with the actual danger of invasion and sensitive, especially in the case of Australia, lest their peril be overlooked in the making of global strategy.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> A representative of China was present at the fourth and later meetings.

<sup>2</sup> The Canadian government at the end of March claimed the right for Canada to be represented on the Pacific Council wherever it sat, and Mr. Mackenzie King attended a meeting in Washington on 15th April (C. P. Stacey, *Six Years of War* (Ottawa, 1955), p. 320).

<sup>3</sup> P. N. S. Mansergh, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p. 139.





# MIDDLE EAST

## The Western Flank

Map 6

- Limit of Wavell's advance Feb 1941.....
- " " Battleaxe June 1941.....
- " " Auchinleck's advance Jan 1942.....
- " " Italian advance Sept 1940.....
- " " Rommel's advance May 1941.....
- " " Rommel's " June 1942.....

- Defences.....
- Supply Ports.....
- Forts.....



CYPRUS

S E A



CHAPTER XVIII  
ROMMEL'S RIPOSTE:  
THE THREAT TO MALTA

**B**ETWEEN THE Prime Minister's return from America and the debate in the House of Commons prospects in the Middle East had changed greatly for the worse.<sup>1</sup>

'Crusader' had achieved important successes. It had relieved Tobruk. It had regained Cyrenaica with its airfields and the port of Benghazi. But it had also suffered a succession of disappointments. The enemy had not succumbed to the first rush of Auchinleck's November offensive, but had opposed to it an aggressive resistance which caused a change of command in Eighth Army. Next, Rommel had succeeded in extricating his battered and exhausted force and establishing it in a strong position forward of El Agheila, beyond which the Italians had been driven nearly a year before. And now he was to upset our calculations again.

Auchinleck had thought it possible that 'Rommel might stage a counter-offensive with the object of throwing us back and possibly recapturing Benghazi', but he did not think this likely, or likely to succeed, and on 12th January he told the Prime Minister that he was convinced that we should press forward with 'Acrobat', to Tripoli; at least we must capture the Agheila position.<sup>2</sup> But a few days later, on the 15th, he had to accept General Ritchie's opinion that owing to maintenance difficulties we should not be able to resume the offensive until 11th-15th February, and he so informed the C.I.G.S.; in the meantime all our efforts would be directed to building up supplies at Benghazi.

But before the end of January Benghazi was again in enemy hands. Rommel, reinforced by some fifty tanks and supplies newly arrived from Tripoli and confident of the weakness of his enemy's forward troops, counter-attacked on the morning of the 21st. The British were in no position to fight a defensive battle against a determined assailant. One of the lessons of the war in Western Cyrenaica was that only at the south-western and south-eastern corners of the Benghazi bulge could a secure halting-place be found. But the British Command, set on a further advance and underrating Rommel's resilience and further hampered by difficulties of supply, had accepted the risk

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<sup>1</sup> See Map 6.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 243.

of leaving their scattered forces in exposed positions. Just as in the spring of 1941, General Playfair points out, 'the British dispositions had again been such as to invite attack without possessing the necessary strength to meet it'.<sup>1</sup> Rommel was not the man to refuse such an invitation or fail to exploit it.

On 7th February, when our troops were back at Gazala some forty miles west of Tobruk, the three Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East assured the Chiefs of Staff that our object was still to destroy the enemy forces, especially the German, in Cyrenaica and then occupy Tripolitania, and therefore to resume the offensive as soon as possible. But the date when we could do so depended on the relative rates at which we and the enemy could build up armoured formations and on 'our ability to maintain a sufficiently superior force forward in Western Cyrenaica' should the enemy decide, as was likely, to await our offensive. Owing to our inferiority in tank performance we must enjoy at least 50 per cent numerical superiority in tanks if we were to have a reasonable chance of beating the enemy's armour on ground of his own choosing.

For the present, Ritchie had been instructed to hold a line covering Tobruk, which was essential as a supply base for the resumption of the offensive, but Auchinleck warned him:

'If, for any reason, we should be forced to withdraw from our present forward positions, every effort will still be made to prevent Tobruk being lost to the enemy; but it is not my intention to continue to hold it once the enemy is in a position to invest it effectively. Should this appear inevitable, the place will be evacuated, and the maximum amount of destruction carried out in it, so as to make it useless to the enemy as a supply base.'

Ritchie was therefore instructed to avoid his forces 'being invested in Tobruk in the event of our having to withdraw to the east of that place'. The Commander-in-Chief's decision was approved by his colleagues—the Navy were strongly disinclined to repeat the costly effort of maintaining a beleaguered garrison—and it was duly reported to London. Whether or not, however, it was communicated to the Prime Minister, he did not realize its importance, and he may have been misled by Auchinleck's assurance of 27th February that the 'real value' of the new position was that it 'provides security for Tobruk and therefore forms admirable base for future offensive'. This was certainly how the offensively minded Commander-in-Chief regarded it.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See I. S. O. Playfair and others, *The Mediterranean and Middle East* (H.M.S.O. 1960, henceforward cited as Playfair), III, 142-3; see also John Connell, *Auchinleck* (1959, henceforward cited as Connell), pp. 422-7.

<sup>2</sup> Playfair III, 197-8; Cunningham, *A Sailor's Odyssey*, p. 464; Kennedy, *The Business of War*, p. 243.

While Rommel was still retreating, Auchinleck, in an urgent personal appeal to the C.I.G.S., had declared that experience now proved that our tanks were inferior in hitting power and in mechanical reliability to the German Marks III and IV; this was the view of all the commanders who had recently been in battle. It was essential to produce remedies for the known defects in our tanks and to arm them with 6-pdr. guns in place of our 2-pdr. guns which were outraged by the enemy.

Complaints of the defects of our tanks, and of the inferiority of our 2-pdr. anti-tanks guns to the German 50-mm. gun—not to mention the 88-mm. dual-purpose gun—were a perpetual feature of the campaign at this time; comparisons of mere numbers seemed irrelevant and provocative.<sup>1</sup> Moreover much petrol, when its supply might be vital, was wasted through the defects of the British containers. When the situation in Libya was considered by the Defence Committee on 2nd March, Captain Lyttelton told them that the troops' loss of faith in their equipment had had its effect on tactics. Commanders felt that they could not rely on the efficiency of the striking-force which must guard the desert flank. The Committee asked Mr. Attlee to inquire into the matter; the upshot of his long report of 2nd June was that the Crusader tank was pressed into production before the pilot model had been adequately tested and before defects had been detected and rectified. There had been need of haste, and speedy production had been obtained at the cost of mechanical reliability and fighting efficiency. It was a sad story. It was unfortunate in the circumstances that the Prime Minister, in his desire to encourage the House of Commons, had assured them on 27th January that our men had met the enemy for the first time on the whole with equal weapons. His assertion had not gone unquestioned, though other Members defended it.<sup>2</sup>

It could not be fairly alleged, however, that our defeats were wholly due to the inferiority of our weapons. We were outclassed in tactics too. The handling of our 25-pdr. field-guns was effective, but artillery, infantry and tanks had not yet learnt to work together. What, however, a German general considered the fundamental weakness of the British—as was indeed recognized by them—was the tendency to disperse their armour in small packets instead of massing it at the point of decision.<sup>3</sup> In the hope of remedying this defect Auchinleck accepted the C.I.G.S.'s suggestion that Major-General R. McCreery should go out as his adviser in matters concerning the armoured forces.<sup>4</sup> The fact was that warfare in the desert, with its

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<sup>1</sup> For a full discussion see Playfair, III, Appendix 8.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 377, column 597.

<sup>3</sup> General F. Bayerlein, *Rommel Papers* (ed. B. H. Liddell-Hart, 1953), p. 184.

<sup>4</sup> Bryant, p. 339; Connell, pp. 474-6, 684.



problems of navigation, communications and maintenance, was something quite novel, and our commanders, lacking a sound tactical doctrine, were slower in learning its lessons than the Germans. Moreover, as General Playfair points out, they had had little, if any, experience of manœuvring large forces even in familiar country. On the other hand, said Auchinleck, the support rendered by Air Vice-Marshal Coningham's Desert Air Force had been 'magnificent'. The Navy too had done wonders in their efforts to put supplies into Tobruk and Benghazi.

The pause in the desert afforded an opportunity for reconsidering the command of Eighth Army. The appointment of a staff officer without experience of high command had been made at a crisis in the battle, and after the recent set-back London probably did not expect it to be permanent. However when the C.I.G.S. suggested a change Auchinleck made it clear that he wished to retain Ritchie.<sup>1</sup>

From the British point of view the failure to carry the advance past the Agheila defile into Tripolitania was disappointing. But much more serious was the loss of the advanced airfields in the Benghazi-Derna bulge. Their possession by the enemy would make it a very expensive affair to run convoys to Malta from Egypt, and running them from Gibraltar was ruled out for the present by our recent losses of capital ships. Malta was very short both of aircraft and of food and other supplies and was no longer usable as a base for surface ships. So long as Malta was in such straits the enemy would be able to pass to Africa, by the short sea-route from Italy, the supplies and reinforcements which Rommel needed to deny the British the vital airfields and in due course to advance towards Egypt. The loss of Malta would also mean that it would no longer be possible to use the island as a staging point for bombers bound for the Middle East.

Thus the pattern was an intricate one. Without Malta we could not prevent the passage of supplies to Rommel; so long as Rommel was well supplied he could deny us the Benghazi airfields; without the Benghazi, or at least the Derna and Martuba airfields, we could not pass a convoy to Malta; and unless we could supply Malta it could not hold out for more than a few months. The situation had changed completely from November when Raeder complained to Hitler that 'today the enemy has complete naval and air supremacy in the area of the German transport routes'. Since September U-boats had been moving into the Mediterranean from the Atlantic, and by 12th December no less than thirty-six, according to Raeder, were either already there or on the way. But yet more troublesome to us were the

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<sup>1</sup> Connell, p. 476.

activities of the *Luftwaffe*, formidably strengthened by the arrival of Field-Marshal Kesselring in Sicily at the end of the year with powerful reinforcements withdrawn from the Russian front. This was an event of crucial importance; it threatened Malta with the fate of Crete, and the island now bulked large in the strategy of both sides.<sup>1</sup>

Rommel's counterstroke formed no part of the Axis grand strategy; it was a brilliant improvisation, executed without the authority or even the knowledge of either the Italian or the German high command.<sup>2</sup> An *O.K.W.* Intelligence report of 16th January, five days before he attacked, took it for granted that the British were no longer threatened on either flank. It was true that, apart from possible attempts to capture Tripolitania or to land in Crete and possibly also in Greece, they would scarcely be able to do more than protect their possessions in the Middle East, even in 1942. But for this purpose their forces were adequate, even if they were threatened simultaneously from the Caucasus and Libya, a contingency which seemed unlikely to occur in 1942. Mussolini's pessimism went further: he doubted if it would be possible to hold even the present line in Libya.<sup>3</sup> Even after Rommel launched his attack his Italian superiors did all they could to restrain him, and as late as 1st February the Duce insisted that his principal duty was to defend Tripolitania.

German naval opinion, on the other hand, was pressing more than ever for a more active strategy in the Mediterranean. Reporting to Hitler on 13th February, Raeder urged that now was a golden opportunity for launching an attack on Egypt and the Suez Canal. Not a single heavy British ship in the Mediterranean, he said truly, was fully seaworthy. 'The Axis rules both the sea and the air in the Central Mediterranean.' The recent change of government in Egypt, he added, might well affect the internal situation in a country where the British had to depend on 40,000 Egyptians to defend their communications.<sup>4</sup> 'Except for Singapore, the British position is at present weakest in the North Africa-Suez area.' On 25th February the Naval Staff argued that 'a successful operation in the near future against the main artery of the British Empire . . . would prove of vital importance to the war as a whole. Sea-communications would be established with Japan and Anglo-American operations dealt a serious blow.' Again on 12th March they urged that the present favourable situation might never occur again. Preparations for an

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<sup>1</sup> See *Fuehrer's Naval Conferences* (henceforward quoted as *F.N.C.*; printed in *Brassey's Naval Annual* 1948), 13th November, 1941; *Playfair*, III, 21, 108.

<sup>2</sup> *Rommel Papers*, p. 181.

<sup>3</sup> *The Ciano Diaries* (ed. H. G. Gibson; New York, 1945), 20th January.

<sup>4</sup> The British government had insisted on the appointment of Nahas Pasha as Prime Minister on 4th February, after the resignation of Sirry Pasha.

offensive aimed at the Suez Canal should be ordered now and transports prepared. It was also important, for the success of the operation, to occupy Malta or at least neutralize it by a continuance of air-attacks. The Italian High Command was likewise strongly in favour of the capture of Malta, which would so greatly ease the supply position in North Africa, and hoped to complete preparations by the end of July. A number of plans had been considered, including one received from the Japanese after the capture of Singapore. But the German Army Staff took a different view of operations in the Mediterranean. According to Admiral Weichold, the German naval representative in Rome, General Halder did not favour an offensive against Egypt; it could only succeed if supported by an advance from the Caucasus, which was out of the question for 1942. In any case Malta would have to be captured first.

Hitler himself, after the failure to deal the intended knock-out blow to Russia in 1941 on which his far-reaching plans for the future had depended, was still mainly occupied with the Eastern Front, in halting the Russian winter offensive and preparing for a spring campaign to secure the oilfields of the Caucasus. But he was also seriously concerned with the possibility of an Allied invasion in the north or west of Europe. He was not greatly interested in the Mediterranean, which he continued to regard as primarily an Italian theatre, though, as was usual with Italian ventures, it needed some German support. Even when, as in March 1942, in accordance with the Navy's representations he was 'inclined to undertake an offensive against the Suez Canal', he made it a condition that the *Luftwaffe* must remain intact in the Mediterranean. If it had to be used elsewhere (in Russia or in the West) the offensive could not be carried out. The early capture of Malta would be most helpful, but he was afraid the Italians would again postpone it. He would discuss the matter with Mussolini at their next meeting.<sup>1</sup>

For the next six weeks until the meeting of the Dictators at Salzburg at the end of April, the fluctuations in the Axis plans for operations in the Mediterranean are somewhat bewildering, now Malta and now Libya taking priority. There were hesitations too as to the method in either case. The problem of Malta was 'Sea Lion' in miniature; could the island be reduced by bombing alone, such as it was subjected to for most of this period, or was a landing necessary?

With regard to Libya, it came to be accepted that the initial offensive should not be pushed farther than Tobruk and the frontier of Egypt, leaving the advance on the Delta to a later stage. This was Rommel's own opinion after a meeting with Mussolini on 18th March, and he is further reported by Cavallero, the Italian Chief of

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<sup>1</sup> *F.N.C.*, 12th March.

Staff, to have considered at this time that the attack on Tobruk could not take place till after the summer. This squared with Hitler's decision that the operation to capture Malta should precede the assault on Tobruk, as Kesselring told Cavallero on 21st March, and a modicum of German help including parachute troops was promised. Raeder too, on 13th April, urged on Hitler that it was 'imperative to take Malta as soon as possible' and again pressed him to launch the offensive against the Suez Canal not later than 1942. The Italians had in mind a *coup de main*, but no date for it was fixed and Rommel was now anxious to anticipate a British offensive in the Desert. On 24th April he expressed his intention to attack at the end of May or beginning of June. Hitler had come round to the same opinion and informed Mussolini at their meeting on the 30th that such was his decision. A directive followed on 4th May, by which the attack on Malta (Operation 'Herkules') was postponed till mid-July, or mid-August at latest, in order not to clash with Rommel's move against Tobruk, which was to be completed by 20th June. Later in May Hitler is reported to have 'again expressed very sceptical opinions about the Italian plan' so long as the *Wehrmacht* was tied down in Russia. It was a question of not only capturing the island but holding it, and supplying it would be 'a perpetual bloodletting'. If Tobruk were taken it would be possible to drop Malta, since the link with the army could then be maintained from Crete. But 'Herkules' should be 'borne in mind',<sup>1</sup> though he doubted if it could be successfully carried out.

These changes of emphasis are not surprising. In Hitler's mind the Mediterranean remained secondary. Russia and the West must have the first call on German forces. He was still nervous about an Allied attack in the west or far north and unwilling to lock up too large a part of the *Luftwaffe* too long in the Mediterranean area. The reduction of Egypt in 1942 was not essential, and Malta was not preventing supplies from reaching Africa. Repeated air-attacks in April had already eliminated the island as a naval base and its airfields had been heavily damaged; even though the scale of attack would now lessen, harassing raids would suffice to prevent their repair. Moreover the Pyrrhic victory of Crete had shown how expensive an opposed landing might prove; and could the Italians be trusted not to bungle it?

To turn back to the British side, the unhindered passage of an Italian convoy to Tripoli on 4th and 5th January had forced Admiral Cunningham to recognize that our existing surface forces were now powerless to intervene in face of the enemy's superior strength, while such of our air forces as were trained for maritime operations could

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<sup>1</sup> O.K.W. War Diary, 20, 21st May. The expression used is '*geistig vorzubereiten*'.

not maintain adequate reconnaissance, let alone provide an adequate striking-force. Unless some naval, and strong air, reinforcements were shortly forthcoming, he could not see how Malta could be maintained, far less the enemy's supplies to Tripoli stopped. Nor could a sea-borne attack on Malta be ruled out.

At the same time the Chiefs of Staff, enclosing a summary of an Intelligence appreciation of 3rd January, warned Malta that it appeared 'next on the list'. The air-attack on the island had already begun, said the report, but the difficulty of a combined operation would probably postpone it until it was seen whether Malta could be neutralized by air alone. Owing to the increasing scale of air-attack on Malta, its reserves of ammunition and stores would be heavily reduced, while reinforcement would become progressively difficult.

So true was this that, whereas in January when the 'Bulge' of Cyrenaica was in British hands three out of four ships carrying general supplies, and two with oil, had discharged their cargoes at Malta, none had arrived in February, when the army was back at Gazala. As things then stood the island had supplies till the end of June, except for some kinds of oil, while certain sorts of stores were running low. In the meantime it was subjected to the intensive attacks, culminating in April, of the reinforced *Luftwaffe*; these failed to reduce the island but were effective enough to make possible the passage of supply ships to Rommel, with unhappy results for Eighth Army.

While there were thus the strongest reasons for resuming the offensive in Libya at the earliest possible moment, Auchinleck was bound to bear in mind his responsibilities for his northern flank, or front. It is possible that he allowed them to weigh on him too heavily.<sup>1</sup>

The Defence Committee, on the advice of the Chiefs of Staff, had decided on 31st December that the land-forces in Iraq and Persia should be transferred to Auchinleck's command from India, and the change took effect on 12th January.<sup>2</sup> These regions were already included in Air Marshal Tedder's command, and the C.I.G.S. argued that since Middle East might be attacked from Libya, from Turkey or from the Caucasus it was necessary that all these fronts should be controlled by one commander who could transfer his reserves as the situation demanded. From the aspect of grand strategy the northern front was of the highest importance as constituting the only sound line of defence for the oilfields of the Persian Gulf, now all the more

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<sup>1</sup> See Map 7.

<sup>2</sup> Brooke had been in favour of the transfer as early as 10th December, and Auchinleck had not dissented; Connell, pp. 415-16.

essential to our war effort in view of the probable loss of the Netherlands East Indies and Burma. It was possible, moreover, at this time that the Germans might overwhelm the Russians in the spring and cross the Caucasus barrier in time to make the threat to the oilfields actual. Had they done so any forces that we could oppose to them must have been quite ineffective to stop them. But it was highly unlikely that the Germans could force their way through South Russia and Turkey simultaneously, and as the year wore on the chances of their crossing the Caucasus early enough to cause any serious threat to the oilfields diminished. The possibility of a sudden Russian collapse, however, remained, and no one could envy the position of a commander in Egypt burdened with an exposed and indefensible northern flank. Nevertheless, while the Russian front held, the immediate danger was in the west, and it was only after disposing of Rommel that our forces could hope to play an effective part east of Suez. Certainly in the light of present knowledge we can see that Cairo's apprehensions as regards the north were unjustified.

German plans of June 1941 for operations to follow the successful conclusion of the Russian campaign had envisaged a concentric attack on the British position in the Mediterranean and Near East from Libya through Egypt, from Bulgaria through Turkey, and if necessary from Transcaucasia through Persia; an operation against Tobruk should be prepared for November 1941. But plans drawn up in October of that year were less ambitious. It was hoped that an offensive launched in the spring of 1942 would first lead to the seizure of the Caucasus oilfields, then open the passes from Iran to Iraq, and finally permit the capture of the Iraq oilfields in the autumn of 1942, when the weather favoured the commitment of large ground forces. The essential pre-requisite for such far-reaching operations was the seizure of the west bank of the lower Volga from Stalingrad to Astrakhan.<sup>1</sup> Hitler agreed that the capture of the oilfields in Asia must be put off till the spring; he spoke of the Caucasus as the first objective in 1942, the aim being to reach the southern frontier of Russia in March or April.<sup>2</sup> In fact, owing to the success of the Russian winter counter-offensive and the need to refit and replenish the exhausted German armies the German preliminary operations in South Russia did not start till May, and the main spring offensive not till 28th June.

While Rommel's army was still in retreat in January, the Middle East Defence Committee warned the government of the effect on the northern front of withdrawing from it the formations ordered to be

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<sup>1</sup> *Fuehrer Directive 32* (draft as revised 30.6.41). See the U.S. Army pamphlet *The German Campaign in Russia, Planning and Operations (1940-42)*, pp. 110-12.

<sup>2</sup> *The War Journal of Franz Halder (Halder Diary)*, 7th, 19th November, 1941.

diverted to the Far East.<sup>1</sup> They pressed that these should be replaced at least one month before the date when the enemy might be expected to attack on the northern front, which they had hitherto been taking as 1st April.<sup>2</sup> They regarded the matter as urgent for three reasons. First there was the probable effect on the Turks when they learnt that considerable British forces were being withdrawn from the Middle East, especially as their attitude to us was already lukewarm. Secondly there was the extreme importance of the Persian and Iraq oilfields in view of what was happening in the Far East; and thirdly there was the necessity of keeping open the Persian supply route to Russia.

On 20th February, on being told by the War Office of further possible diversions from their theatre, the Middle East Defence Committee again called attention to the deficiencies which these would entail for the northern front. They pointed out that, excluding armoured divisions, the minimum number of infantry divisions for holding the line Kazvin-Hamadan in Persia as well as Iraq and Syria and the Libyan front had been accepted by the Chiefs of Staff as seventeen, to which five brigade groups should be added for internal security. This figure of seventeen could be reduced to twelve if we did not attempt to defend Persia or Mosul or Syria north of the line Damascus-Lebanese Tripoli. But with the proposed allocation of only eight infantry divisions and five brigade groups it was clear that 'we cannot maintain our position in the Middle East in the face of an attack from the north, and that we are, in fact, relying on this attack not taking place'. They realized that the enemy would have 'large distances to cover and great supply problems to solve', but one must 'prepare for possible eventualities'. This signal was evidently drafted in a somewhat despondent mood, for its authors were 'forced to conclude that, although we hope to be able for some months to hold our present positions in Libya, and possibly even to gain ground in Cyrenaica, we will be unable to do more than cause some delay to an enemy advance through Iraq and Syria on the Persian Gulf and the Suez Canal'. Accordingly they urged that shipping should be made available for the dispatch to the Middle East at once of at least four infantry divisions.

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<sup>1</sup> The Middle East Defence Committee consisted of the Minister of State and the three Commanders-in-Chief. Later on (on 13th May) the Prime Minister reminded Cairo that this body 'was set up by the late Minister of State [Lyttelton] as a convenient means of bringing all parties on the spot into harmonious consultation with himself, but it is not recognized as an entity having executive responsibility in operational questions'. He had been annoyed at receiving signals as from the Committee instead of from Auchinleck in his own name (Connell, p. 503).

<sup>2</sup> On 15th January Middle East estimated 1st April as first date when enemy could attack in W. Anatolia, and 21st May as a 'reasonable target date for an attack on Transcaucasia from general line Baku-Batum'.

General Auchinleck was much more confident about holding our present positions in Libya than this signal suggested. He was in fact preparing a strong position in front of Tobruk, some 36 miles square, from Gazala near the sea to Bir el Hacheim. But the weak northern front continued to harass and distract him. When the burden in the Middle East was eased in the autumn by the creation of a separate P.A.I.C. command it was not to benefit Auchinleck; even as in July 1941 the creation of a Minister of State to relieve the Commander-in-Chief of political and economic worries came too late to benefit Wavell.

It was just at this time, as it happens, that Captain Oliver Lyttelton, the first holder of the post in Cairo, was recalled to London to become Minister of Production. His performance of his duties had given such satisfaction and assistance to the Commanders-in-Chief that they petitioned the Minister of Defence that a successor should be appointed who, like Captain Lyttelton, had the confidence of the Minister at home and who was a member of the War Cabinet, and that he should be served by an adequate staff. Captain Lyttelton was eventually succeeded by Mr. R. G. Casey, the Australian Minister in Washington, but for the next critical weeks Sir Walter Monckton took his place.

In a signal of 17th February the C.I.G.S. had shown himself sympathetic to the increased difficulties caused to Auchinleck by the loss of three of four divisions. 'I realize,' he said, 'that your plans for regaining Cyrenaica may have to be abandoned in favour of a defence of the Egyptian frontier and that you will be on little more than an internal security basis, on your Northern Front. The weakening of Middle East does not mean that we are now discounting the potential threat to both your Western and Northern Fronts during 1942. It is a question of reinforcing where we are most immediately threatened.'<sup>1</sup> But the Prime Minister viewed the situation otherwise. He was expecting to hear plans of a renewal of 'Crusader' and he signalled on the 26th: 'I have not troubled you much in these difficult days, but I must now ask what are your intentions. According to our figures you have substantial superiority in the air, in armour and in other forces over the enemy. There seems to be danger that he may gain reinforcements as fast as, or even faster, than you. The supply of Malta is causing us increasing anxiety, and anyone can see the magnitude of our disasters in the Far East. Pray let me hear from you. All good wishes.'

This inquiry crossed with a long signal of the 27th from Auchinleck which raised a storm in Downing Street; the waters were not calm again until the end of March. After giving details of how he intended

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted by Connell, p. 454.



to hold the new Gazala-Bir Hacheim position and of the estimated strength of the enemy compared with his own he said that he fully realized the critical condition of Malta and the need to recover the advanced landing grounds, but that in view of the enemy's probable resources in armour he might not feel justified in attacking before June 1st; 'to launch major offensive before then would be to risk defeat in detail and possibly endanger safety of Egypt'. He proposed in the meantime to build up an armoured striking-force and reserves of supplies as fast as possible; in certain circumstances he might try to advance 60 or 70 miles to Derna.

This signal in its turn crossed with one from the Chiefs of Staff of the same day replying to the gloomy Middle East telegram of 20th February. 'We agree,' they said, 'that prevention of enemy reinforcements for Libya and probably also ultimate fate of Malta depends on recapture of air bases in Western Cyrenaica. We appreciate that the timing of another offensive will depend on building up adequate tank superiority, and that its launching may necessitate taking considerable risks in other parts of Middle East Command. Nevertheless, we feel that we must aim to be so placed in Cyrenaica by April dark period that we can pass substantial convoy to Malta.' In the meanwhile they suggested to Middle East that a further attempt should be made to pass a convoy to Malta in the March dark period. At the same time they recommended to the Defence Committee in London the C.I.G.S.'s proposal that Malta should be included in Middle East command, in order to emphasize the interdependence of the two and ensure co-ordination; the consequent instructions were sent out on 3rd March, to take effect on the 11th.

There was thus a clear difference of view; the Chiefs of Staff urging that the West Cyrenaican airfields must be in our possession by mid-March or April at latest, Auchinleck not proposing a major offensive before June.

The Prime Minister was 'deeply grieved' at the proposed delay; he had thought Auchinleck would strike in March at latest, and he was 'looking to the Eighth Army to repair the shame of Singapore'. Mr. Attlee likewise thought that if we were to accept 'an indefinite stalemate' in Libya we must reconsider our whole strategy.

The new situation was discussed on 2nd March by the Chiefs of Staff and the Defence Committee, to whom Captain Lyttelton, lately returned from Cairo, described the defects in our armour and the effectiveness of the German tactics. In place of a stinging message to Auchinleck which the Prime Minister had drafted in his anger, a milder one was sent as from the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>1</sup>

'We are greatly disturbed by your review of the situation. The

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, p. 338; Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

dominant factor in the Mediterranean and Middle East situation at the present time is Malta. It may not have been known to you when you wrote your review that, if we do not succeed in running a substantial convoy into Malta by May, the position there will be critical. The loss of Malta or even its effective neutralization will mean that the Axis will be able to reinforce Libya almost without hindrance and at any rate much faster than we can. Supplies of aircraft to the Middle East will also be seriously affected. A convoy can only be run into Malta if we can use the landing grounds in Western Cyrenaica. Hence the recapture of these in the near future is vital to your whole situation.'

Auchinleck's review seemed to them 'heavily biased in favour of the enemy' in its comparison of tank strengths and to ignore our present but transient superiority in the air. 'We consider that an attempt to drive the Germans out of Cyrenaica in the next few weeks is not only imperative for the safety of Malta, on which so much depends, but holds out the only hope of fighting a battle while the enemy is still comparatively weak and short of resources of all kinds.' The Levant-Caspian front was also affected, denuded as it was 'by the unavoidable calls of the Far East'. Its prospects in the summer were poor if we had 'meanwhile allowed the enemy to build up in Africa a force which will pin down our remaining strength to the defence of Egypt's western flank. Viewing the war situation as a whole, we cannot afford to stand idle at a time when the Russians are straining every nerve to give the enemy no rest and when it is so important to increase by every possible means the drain on the German armed forces'.

Auchinleck was pained by this rebuke. It seemed to him, he said in a private message to the C.I.G.S., 'to fail so signally either to appreciate facts as presented from here or to realize that we are fully aware of the situation as regards Malta in particular or Middle East in general . . . You know that many other factors besides mere issue of tanks to units govern readiness of formations for battle and I will be grateful if you will explain this to Chiefs of Staff and Defence Minister. This applies particularly when new types of tanks are received such as General Grants with more powerful weapons necessitating change in tactical procedure. . . .'

He found it hard to reconcile the censure in this signal with the sympathetic understanding conveyed by the C.I.G.S.'s earlier message of 17th February.<sup>1</sup> Sir Alan Brooke replied that the situation had changed. The danger to Malta was now more clearly seen, whereas the Middle East had been allowed to retain two of the divisions then under consideration for withdrawal.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Above, p. 249

<sup>2</sup> See Connell, pp. 462-3.

Along with this private protest from Auchinleck came an official reply from Cairo to the Chiefs of Staff's signal of 27th February urging an offensive timed to cover the passing of a convoy to Malta in April. This, said the Commanders-in-Chief, would require the recapture of Benghazi; but, whereas from the naval and air points of view the early resumption of a major offensive was 'possible and desirable', from that of the Army to make the attempt before the April dark period was likely to lead to failure; it might well not be possible before late June or early July. However, the situation was being closely watched and an offensive would be launched as soon as it was justified.

This was followed up next day by an official reply from Cairo to the signal of 3rd March authorized by the Defence Committee. The point at issue, the Commanders-in-Chief claimed, was not confined to the question whether or not we could save Malta. It was a question whether or not in the effort to save the island we were to jeopardize our whole position in the Middle East and the security of Egypt, as was quite possible if our new armoured force were destroyed in a premature offensive. At present we could only continue to run convoys in the hope of getting some of the ships through, and it was proposed to make use of the March and April moonless periods.

Finding the Commander-in-Chief immovable at long range, the Prime Minister on 8th March invited him to come home for a few days for consultation. Unwisely he refused, and remained unshaken by the unanimous advice of the Chiefs of Staff and General Ismay that he should do so. Remembering the pressure put on him in London in August 1941 he shrank from the drain on his energy which renewed discussion would involve without, he was sure, any balancing advantage; in the present 'fluid' state of affairs he felt that his duty was to remain on the spot.<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister would not accept Auchinleck's suggestion that the C.I.G.S. and Chief of the Air Staff should come out to the Middle East for a conference, but seriously considered replacing him, suggesting various names. Brooke, explaining why they were unsuitable, gave his own opinion that if a change was to be made the best solution was to effect a return swap between Auchinleck and Wavell; but Mr. Churchill minuted, 'I could not do this'.

Matters, however, had not yet come to a head. The Prime Minister was persuaded by the Chiefs of Staff not to press his request to Auchinleck to return—the General might have some early minor offensive in mind—and was content to repeat to him the 'deepest anxiety' felt by the Chiefs of Staff and Defence Committee as the result of his signal of 27th February: the delay he proposed would

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<sup>1</sup> Connell, pp. 266-8, 464-6, 472-4; Churchill, IV, 262.

endanger Malta; there was no certainty that the enemy could not reinforce faster than he; his tank estimates were unacceptable; if he could beat the enemy's armour to the extent of an advance to Derna, which he seemed to think possible, why should he not press his advantage and go farther? It would give the Prime Minister 'the greatest pain to feel that mutual understanding had ceased', and in order to avoid this he proposed that Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal, *en route* for India on his historic mission, and Lieut.-General Sir Archibald Nye, the V.C.I.G.S., should confer with him in Cairo. For this purpose General Nye was armed with a formidable list of twenty questions to be put to the Middle East authorities.<sup>1</sup>

To the Prime Minister's annoyance his two emissaries proved to be Balaams; sent out to curse they could only bless. In a signal of 20th March, which had the approval of Auchinleck, of Air Marshal Tedder, of the senior naval officer present, and of Sir Walter Monckton, acting Minister of State, Cripps stated that at the present time our strength neither in tanks nor in the air was such as to give any reasonable chance of a successful offensive.<sup>2</sup> He agreed with Auchinleck that to attempt to make an attack before mid-May would be to take an unwarrantable risk. An attack then might hope to seize Derna, but it might well be two months before Benghazi could be reached. What Auchinleck feared was that an attack should develop in Syria, in the north via the Caucasus or Turkey, or upon Cyprus, in which case it would be necessary to withdraw a considerable proportion of the air forces from the Western Desert and surrender air superiority. The signal urged the immediate dispatch of heavy bombers capable of reaching Tripoli; Cripps was confident that they could be used in the Middle East to better purpose than against Germany.

In a following message to the Prime Minister Cripps said he had 'no doubt as to Auchinleck's offensive determination', but thought 'his Scottish caution and desire not to mislead by optimism' caused him to over-stress in statement the difficulties and uncertainties of the situation.<sup>3</sup> The answers to the Prime Minister's twenty questions, as received from General Nye, went into great detail, especially in the matter of tanks—the relative strength likely to be available to both sides and the training of armoured formations. Nye agreed with Cripps in finding that the Commander-in-Chief 'is well aware of every detail touching on the problem [of making tanks available], and no one could be more determined to expedite readiness of formations for battle'. But the idea of an offensive aimed at Derna only had been abandoned; since, as now appeared, the enemy had the whole

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 262-3.

<sup>2</sup> The temporary loss of air superiority was 'due largely to heavy diversions to East'.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted, Connell, p. 469.

of his armour forward, a limited offensive was likely to demand the same superiority in tanks as one designed to win the whole of Cyrenaica and had therefore nothing to recommend it except that from the administrative point of view it might be feasible earlier. The answers also brought out the enormous discrepancies which must exist between the number of tanks on the strength of the army in Egypt and the number of 'runners' in the hands of forward units and available for an offensive. Apart from those under repair or being reconditioned, several weeks were needed to enable crews to work their tanks efficiently, especially when these were of new types. 'As a general rule' it could be taken that all formations required 'at least one month's training after being re-equipped if they are to do themselves and their equipment full justice in continuous offensive operations.'

The Defence Committee, with these telegrams before them, reluctantly accepted 15th May as the earliest date by which an offensive could be expected; the Commanders-in-Chief hastened to reply that this must not be regarded as a firm date.

And so the matter stood for a month. A *détente* had been reached.

Meanwhile the dangerous isolation of Malta was demonstrated by the fate of the convoy which left Alexandria on 20th March. Despite Admiral Vian's brilliant action in the Second Battle of Sirte, where his light cruisers and destroyers defeated a vastly superior Italian force, only two ships of the convoy reached Valletta and these were bombed in harbour; only a fifth part of the precious cargo could be landed. It had been intended to run convoys in April and May also, but recent experience showed that it was essential first to strengthen the air defence of the island. Before the end of June more than 170 Spitfires were flown in to Malta off carriers escorted from Gibraltar; for two ferrying trips (on 20th April and 9th May) President Roosevelt kindly placed U.S.S. *Wasp* under British orders. Nevertheless the island was so critically short of ammunition and food that when the Defence Committee discussed its needs on 22nd April it seemed unlikely that it would be able to hold out beyond the end of June at latest.

Possibilities of relieving Malta were debated at length. It was agreed that a convoy from either west or east required an escort of capital ships and carriers. This ruled out a convoy in May, and there need therefore be no interference either with the Madagascar operation<sup>1</sup> or the proposed May convoy to Russia. But every effort must be made to run ships to Malta from Alexandria in June, though this

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xx.

would be cutting it fine, and the Prime Minister suggested that Admiral Somerville, with the *Warspite* and three carriers from the Eastern Fleet, should 'make a dart into the Mediterranean and see the convoy through in style'. They should have time for this excursion between the Madagascar operation and the projected concentration of the Eastern Fleet, with reinforcing battleships from the Home Fleet, in the Indian Ocean at the end of June. The Prime Minister's proposals were approved in principle, though the Admiralty made reservations with regard to the risk to shipping off the east coast of Africa if left unprotected. But the First Sea Lord, who was away in Washington, convinced the Chiefs of Staff on his return that it would be 'absolutely wrong' to use carriers in the Eastern Mediterranean, and this proposal was dropped.

The Defence Committee further decided on 22nd April that, great as had been General Dobbie's services as Governor of Malta, he was now a tired man and the time had come when he should be relieved. In his stead Lord Gort should be transferred from his command at Gibraltar; with his reputation for dogged courage he seemed exactly the man for the stubborn endurance required. His title was 'Supreme Commander of the Fighting Services and Civil Administration in Malta', but he would in general be guided by the policy laid down by the Middle East Defence Committee.

The danger to the northern front was not forgotten in London. On 31st March the Chiefs of Staff approved the final form of a report on strategy in the Middle East and Mediterranean. The present was a critical year, it said, since the Persian and Iraq oil supplies were essential if we were to continue the war in the eastern theatre; they were important for Australia too owing to the shortage of tankers which might supply her from America. Germany's first major offensive was bound to be directed against Russia, and if she secured the Caucasian oilfields the defeat of Russia might well follow, with grave danger to our own oil supplies in the Persian Gulf. The report estimated that if the South Russian armies collapsed the Germans might reach Baku in August and the Hamadan-Kermanshah line by October-November with three to five divisions and 200-300 aircraft. The Persian oilfields would be in danger of bombing from September.

The calls of the Far East and shortage of shipping might prevent us, in the worst case of a Russian collapse and Turkish acquiescence in German demands, from ensuring the security of the Middle East. It was therefore of the utmost importance to maintain Russia's resistance and put all possible pressure on the Axis in order to relieve her. This called for an early offensive in Libya and for building up a

powerful air force in the Middle East, where our naval strength had been so much reduced. Aircraft in bulk could come only from America; we needed from her especially fighters and light bombers. A summary of the report was accordingly telegraphed to Washington as well as to Cairo.

The Foreign Office were always fearful lest our failure to meet Turkey's requirements for material aid might weaken her resistance to Axis pressure. The course of events during the winter in Libya, in the Far East and on the confines of India had made our offers of the previous summer less and less realistic.<sup>1</sup> But it had also become clear that even had the divisions and squadrons been available the inadequacy of communications from Syria into Anatolia and of the Anatolian airfields would make their dispatch impossible; this was largely due to the reluctance of the Turks, out of fear of Germany, to allow the entry of British reconnaissance and construction parties. On 9th January Ankara had been told that all we could send as a first instalment was the twenty-six Royal Air Force squadrons with four brigade groups for their protection, but this must depend on the improvement of communications and the prior installations of base facilities in Anatolia. M. Inonu, the Turkish President, was greatly disappointed at the delay which must elapse before the British formations could arrive, especially since the Turks intended to fight in strength in Thrace against a German attack.<sup>2</sup> He asked if we could not send tanks and aircraft without British personnel in order to save time, but this suggestion the Chiefs of Staff could not approve, by reason of our own needs and the shortage of shipping. There was also a difference as to strategy. The Turks very naturally did not wish to surrender Istanbul and the European shores of the Straits without fighting, whereas the British thought that the Germans could best be stopped in the highlands of Anatolia; what mattered for our purposes was to hold the Taurus barrier. The Turks might be excused for supposing that this was all the British cared about.

Informed British and American<sup>3</sup> opinion in Ankara was to the effect that the Turks would fight if attacked, but the Foreign Office continued anxious. On 4th April Mr. Eden asked the Chiefs of Staff how matters stood as regards our commitments to Turkey. They replied on the 21st that there had been no recent alteration of policy. But our air and anti-aircraft strength in the Mediterranean would not at present allow us to send twenty-six Royal Air Force squadrons with proper anti-aircraft protection to Turkey, and we should not send the four brigade groups except to accompany the squadrons.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. vii above.

<sup>2</sup> The J.I.C. said on 26th April that the Turks had 30 divisions sited for the defence of the Straits.

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood, p. 557.

The Middle East Command were strongly opposed to the dispatch of a small air force, since anything that we could offer at that time would mean 'a useless and unjustifiable sacrifice', except that our promise stood to make four fighter squadrons immediately available if Turkey were attacked. We did not intend to withdraw any more land formations from the Middle East if we could possibly avoid it. Thus if an emergency arose in the near future we might be pressed for political reasons to send more than the military situation justified. In the meantime all we could do was to continue and if possible increase the trickle of specialized equipment we were sending; as part of it we could offer 3,000 bombards, a new type of anti-tank weapon, in May and June.

The amount of help we could supply was disappointing, and it was difficult to blame the Turks for accepting a tempting German offer at this time to sell them a large quantity of war material. A Turkish delegation went to Berlin in May and signed an agreement whereby delivery of about 170 tanks would begin in July. As the Foreign Office put it, 'in 1939 we and the French granted the Turkish Government an armaments credit of £25 million. Today, three years later, no more than half of this has been used. If, therefore, the Germans fulfil their promises, they will be supplying Turkey in a sixth of the time with three times as much equipment as we have done'. Nevertheless the Turks assured us that the transaction contained no military or political commitments, and in fact the Germans had provided no tanks by the end of August.<sup>1</sup>

In June the Foreign Office drafted for the Prime Minister a message to President Roosevelt suggesting that their two countries should make a joint offer to the Turks, operative after November, of 1,000 tanks and 1,000 anti-aircraft guns. The Chiefs of Staff, however, were alarmed. Our own requirements of tanks and anti-aircraft guns, they said, would continue to outstrip stocks and new supplies by a large margin for some time to come. 'We consider that with the existing uncertainty of the situation in the Middle East it would be quite wrong to become committed to a large supply programme to Turkey which we might bitterly regret later on, particularly as there is no guarantee that an offer, even of the quantities suggested, would tip the scales in our favour.'

15th May was still the accepted date for the launching of the offensive in the Western Desert when a signal of the 6th from

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<sup>1</sup> According to the U.S. Army pamphlet, *The German Campaign in Russia—Planning and Operations (1940-42)*, p. 126, Hitler offered the Turks 150 million marks' worth of military equipment, but the deal was not consummated because Turkey refused to allow German submarines, etc., to pass the Straits into the Black Sea.



Auchinleck, giving his up-to-date appreciation, raised another storm. After estimating the number of tanks which each side would have at its disposal by the beginning and by the middle of June he went on to say that, whereas the Middle East Command had hitherto considered that for adequate superiority for an offensive they needed two cruiser tanks for every one German and parity with Italians, they had now revised their opinion. In view of the American General Grant tanks and the 6-pdr. anti-tank guns now becoming available, of our superior reserves, of the use which could be made of infantry tanks, and of the fact that our tank formations were now, it was hoped, trained on sounder lines, he was prepared to accept a 3-2 superiority over the German tanks. Nevertheless he now proposed to postpone his offensive until 15th June. To start earlier would incur the risk of tank losses and only partial success, and might in the worst case lead to a serious reverse with extremely dangerous consequences. Should the fresh Italian *Littorio* armoured division arrive in the battle zone by 15th June our offensive would have to be postponed till August; while, if we had to divert air forces to aid Turkey or to the northern front, we should be unable, unless the enemy's fighter strength were correspondingly reduced, to launch an offensive at all.

This was a most unwise signal, if only because it seemed to ignore the predicament of Malta. It also seemed to ignore a personal signal of the previous day from the Prime Minister ending up—'we feel that the greatest help you could give to the whole war at this juncture would be to engage and defeat the enemy on your Western Front. All our directions upon this subject remain unaltered in their purpose and validity, and we trust you will find it possible to give full effect to them about the date which you mentioned to the Lord Privy Seal' [viz. 15th May].

The Prime Minister's signal had been occasioned by one from the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East, of 3rd May suggesting, in view of the danger to India in the event of a westward Japanese advance as forecast in a summary of a recent Chiefs of Staff appreciation, that the right policy might be to send to India all the land-forces we could spare, standing on the defensive in the Middle East and abandoning the idea of an offensive in Libya in the summer of 1942.<sup>1</sup> The suggestion was coolly received by the Prime Minister, who replied that the Chiefs of Staff paper had been 'prepared on the British principle of facing the worst, which, when applied in the House of Commons in Secret Session,<sup>2</sup> had a most exhilarating and heartening effect'. The

<sup>1</sup> See below pp. 483-4, for the Appreciation; the summary contained the paragraph: 'If Japanese press boldly westwards . . . Indian Empire is in grave danger. Eventual security of Middle East and its essential supply lines will be threatened.' For a full statement of Auchinleck's views see Connell, pp. 486-93; his earlier career had given him a special interest in India.

<sup>2</sup> On 23rd April.

Japanese could not do everything at once and we had no reason to suppose that a heavy invasion of India was imminent or certain.

It is not therefore surprising that Auchinleck's signal of 6th May, proposing to postpone his offensive until mid-June at earliest, came as an unpleasant shock in London and greatly angered Mr. Churchill. Meetings were held on the 8th of the Chiefs of Staff and the War Cabinet, including Sir Stafford Cripps and Captain Lyttelton, at which the Service Ministers were present. After Ministers had given their opinions individually the Cabinet accepted the view of the Chiefs of Staff that Auchinleck seemed to have paid insufficient attention to the desperate position of Malta, or to the indications of an early German offensive, but that he should not be *ordered* to attack at the earlier date. Accordingly he was told that the Chiefs of Staff, the Defence Committee and the War Cabinet were agreed that he would be right to attack the enemy and fight a major battle if possible during May, and the sooner the better; they were prepared to take full responsibility.

But the Middle East Defence Committee came back next day with a reasoned rejoinder, asking that consideration should be given to certain points.<sup>1</sup> First, the fall of Malta, which in its present neutralized state had little influence on the enemy's maintenance in North Africa, would not necessarily be fatal to the security of Egypt; secondly, even if we launched an offensive in May, it would probably, for supply reasons, be at least another two months before we could operate aircraft from landing grounds near Benghazi; thirdly, 'to launch an offensive with inadequate armoured forces' might 'very well result in the almost complete destruction of those troops', and so endanger the defence of Egypt; fourthly, it might well be to our advantage if the enemy attacked us in our present positions, giving us the opportunity for a decisive counter-offensive.

But this was too much for London. The Chiefs of Staff concluded that 'the best course would be for the Middle East to be given discretion to postpone their attack until mid-June on the understanding that it would then be synchronized with the Malta convoy'. But it was generally agreed by the Cabinet that Malta was of supreme importance and that a battle should be fought to save it. A signal was accordingly sent to Auchinleck to the effect that the Chiefs of Staff, Defence Committee, and War Cabinet accepted the risks to Egypt as definitely less grave than such a disaster as the loss of Malta, and that the very latest date for engaging the enemy which they could approve was one which provided a distraction in time to help the passage of the June dark-period convoy.

Mr. Churchill thought it possible that this ultimatum might bring

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Casey presided for the first time on 6th May.

the Commander-in-Chief's resignation, but Auchinleck acquiesced, while pointing out that the two considerations of distraction for the Malta convoy and of readiness in the attacking forces might prove conflicting. In view of the narrowness of our superiority both on land and in the air the success of a major offensive could not be regarded as certain.

The Prime Minister in a heartening message replied that of course the government realized that success could not be guaranteed. 'There are no safe battles.' But they had full confidence, so he said, in the Commander-in-Chief and his glorious army. Mr. Churchill himself would feel even greater confidence if he would take command personally in Libya, as he had done for a time in November. But Auchinleck felt it would be wrong for him to become immersed in tactical problems in Libya when the claims of the northern front might at any time demand attention. He gave reasons too for not recalling to Egypt the New Zealand Division, then in Syria, as the Prime Minister had also suggested.<sup>1</sup>

The last three months had seen an unhappy development in the relations between the Commander-in-Chief, Middle East, and the Minister of Defence. The situation was all too reminiscent of that which had led to Wavell's dismissal.

In the hope of making Auchinleck's path easier, Sir John Dill, then C.I.G.S., had written him a letter of advice in June 1941 when he was about to assume the command. It dealt with 'pressure from Whitehall'. This pressure, Dill said, often came from very broad political considerations; these were sometimes so powerful as to make it necessary to take risks which from the purely military point of view might seem inadvisable. The main point was that Auchinleck should make it quite clear what these risks were. He might even find it necessary to dissociate himself from the consequences. Moreover he should look ahead and in good time should put clearly before the government how he viewed the situation and what action he proposed to take. He should point clearly to the risks involved, and explain which he was, and which he was not, prepared to accept. He should also state the resources he considered necessary, and what he could do, and what he could not do, if he did not receive them. Auchinleck had replied that the pressure had already begun, but that Dill might be quite sure that he would give his opinion firmly and without reservation and that if he thought a risk unjustifiable he would say so.<sup>2</sup> Auchinleck also had a good friend at court in General Ismay who tried to explain to him how the Prime Minister should be handled.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Churchill, IV, 275-7.

<sup>2</sup> See *Grand Strategy*, II, p. 530, Kennedy, *op. cit.*, p. 135, Connell, p. 248.

<sup>3</sup> See letters of 28th August, 1941, 3rd April, 1942, Connell, pp. 295, 472.

Mr. Churchill hoped great things of his new Commander-in-Chief, and Auchinleck wrote him several long letters in accordance with Dill's and Ismay's advice. But, warned by Wavell's fate, he was not going to risk another 'Battleaxe' after the *débâcle* of January 1942. He knew how formidable Rommel could be in battle against inexperienced commanders and unreliable tanks. He was also genuinely worried about the northern front, our Achilles' heel, as Brooke referred to it.<sup>1</sup> Nor can one disregard the support his opinion received from two such able men as Cripps the civilian and Nye the soldier—and a soldier in whose judgement the Prime Minister had great confidence. But unquestionably Auchinleck made a great mistake in refusing, against weighty advice, the Prime Minister's request that he should come to London for consultation. There could be no comparable need for his presence in Iraq at that time. His refusal, in this matter as in several others, especially with regard to personal appointments, could only give to both Churchill and Brooke an impression of unreasonable obstinacy.

The C.I.G.S. was in a difficult position. Determined to be loyal to his chief and his subordinate both, he regretted the Prime Minister's constant proddings of the Commander-in-Chief, but he was gradually losing confidence in Auchinleck. He found him too little sensitive to the importance of Malta, too much impressed by calculations of tank strengths, and above all unwise in his choice of men. Auchinleck himself, whom Mr. Churchill would have liked to see in direct command of Eighth Army, was unequal to the triple task of supervising Ritchie, corresponding with the Prime Minister and providing against the threat to the northern front. Besides less suitable names the Prime Minister is said to have suggested Sir Harold Alexander to command in the Middle East, but his time was not yet come, and when it came he was relieved of responsibility for the Persia and Iraq front.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, despite such doubts and questionings, a better understanding between London and Cairo had been achieved when, on the night of 26th May, the enemy attacked. In November, when the two armies were both poised for battle, Auchinleck had struck first. Now it was Rommel's turn.

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<sup>1</sup> Letter of 16th May, Connell, p. 502.

<sup>2</sup> See Bryant, p. 339, Connell, p. 471. Kennedy, *The Business of War*, p. 225.



## CHAPTER XIX

# THE LOSS OF BURMA: THE REVISION OF STRATEGIC AREAS

THE LOSS OF Malaya and Singapore was from every point of view catastrophic. Once again, as at Hong Kong, the British Empire had failed to preserve from invasion and enemy occupation a people to whom it owed protection. On the economic side we were deprived of valuable resources of rice and rubber and tin. On the naval side the Japanese had acquired a strategic base from which their fleet could dominate the Indian Ocean and threaten its coasts. Besides two capital ships, one of them brand new, we had lost four infantry divisions.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps worst of all was the manner of the loss. This had been, at least on land, no epic resistance against great odds, no long-protracted siege. After the sinking in a few minutes of the two great ships a few days after their much publicized arrival, the world had learnt of a large British army being hustled from point to point down the Malay peninsula in a few weeks by an Asian force not numerically superior and after less than a week's confused fighting on the Island capitulating in ignominious defeat. It was learnt afterwards that the Japanese had achieved in seventy days what they had only hoped to achieve in a hundred. Mr. Churchill spoke of the fall of Singapore as the 'greatest disaster to British arms which our history records'.<sup>2</sup> Professor Mansergh comments that, whether or not this was true from the military point of view, 'It is not to be doubted that politically, whatever the outcome of the war, the inglorious surrender of this island base set a term to the British Empire in Asia. The Japanese,' he points out, 'had achieved something more than a military, they had won a psychological victory.'<sup>3</sup>

A review of Allied strategy was clearly called for, the immediate need being to decide whether it was more important to attempt to hold the Netherlands East Indies or Burma.<sup>4</sup> Wavell's commission had in fact been a hopeless one. When he left India on 6th January

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<sup>1</sup> The total battle casualties of the British and Commonwealth forces during the ten weeks campaign were 138,708, of whom over 130,000 were prisoners of war. The Japanese battle casualties, as given in their official records, were under 10,000.

<sup>2</sup> Sherwood, *The Whitehouse Papers*, p. 506.

<sup>3</sup> *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, p. 143.

<sup>4</sup> See Map 8.

the Japanese had already occupied Manila in Luzon and Davao in the extreme south of the Philippines as well as British North Borneo and Sarawak. When he opened his A.B.D.A. headquarters on 15th January, he reported, in a general appreciation of the situation in the southwest Pacific, that with his present resources he saw no possibility of affording General MacArthur the support he seemed to expect in the Philippines. Wavell apprehended no immediate threat to Sumatra or Java, but troops and anti-aircraft equipment were needed at once, while the establishment of further Japanese air bases in South Borneo and Celebes, where the Allied advanced air bases had already fallen, would bring the naval base at Sourabaya and other objectives in Java within effective bomber range. He expected the Japanese to try to cut the vital supply route between Australia and the Netherlands East Indies by seizing Amboina and Timor, which latter island was within bombing distance of Darwin. On the 24th he repeated that Java was very inadequately defended, but he believed that the land defence of both Java and South Sumatra should be comparatively secure after the arrival of the two Australian divisions from the Middle East.

The threat to Burma was more recent than that to the Dutch islands, but since the Prime Minister returned home from America the needs of Burma had become insistent. Hitherto Burma had ranked low on every priority list and there had been no consistent policy as to its defence. It had been tossed, as Lord Slim had put it, from one command to another:

‘The basic error was that not only did few people in Burma, and no one outside it, expect that it *would* be attacked, but there was no clear or continuous decision as to who would be responsible for defence preparations or for the actual defence if it *were* attacked. . . . In the space of about sixteen vital months there had been five separate superior headquarters in turn responsible for the defence of Burma, and for practically the whole of that time administrative had been separated from operational control. . . . Added to this was the usual chronic shortage of troops, and of equipment for even the troops we had.’<sup>1</sup>

Wavell in his dispatch speaks of the ‘cardinal mistake’ in putting Burma under Far Eastern Command in November 1940, and not under India, for which it was ‘a vital bulwark’. This decision had been belatedly reversed, on Sir Alan Brooke’s proposal, soon after the outbreak of war with Japan, but in spite of protests from Wavell and from London it had been included a few weeks later in A.B.D.A. command. ‘The American Chiefs of Staff,’ the Prime Minister told Wavell, ‘insisted on Burma being in your command for the sole

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<sup>1</sup> *Defeat into Victory* (1956), pp. 10, 11.

reason that they considered your giving your left hand to China and the opening of the Burma Road indispensable to world victory.'

On 21st December Wavell, while still Commander-in-Chief, India, flew to Rangoon and next day he sent in his appreciation. Burma, he said, was at present very far from secure; its great weakness from the strategic aspect was its dependence on Rangoon as its only port of entry.<sup>1</sup> He stated its requirements as two bomber and two modern fighter squadrons, urgently needed, and a divisional headquarters and two brigade groups, besides warning apparatus and anti-aircraft guns for the defence of Rangoon and the airfields. He arranged for Major-General T. J. Hutton, his Chief of the General Staff in India, to take over the command of the land forces in Burma. On 1st January the Chiefs of Staff informed Wavell of the reinforcements which they proposed to send to Burma eventually. In fact two partially trained Indian brigade groups, with Headquarters 17th Indian Division, arrived during January, but even so the Army in Burma was unfit for war with a major military power, and the country was unprepared to face invasion.<sup>2</sup>

The Japanese had bombed Rangoon and occupied Victoria Point in December, but they had not been expected to embark on a serious invasion of Burma while still occupied in Malaya. Yet Hutton had warned Wavell on 20th January that the Japanese might 'launch at any time an attack greater than we can withstand with troops and air forces now available. There are signs that this may have already started and I cannot guarantee safety of Burma with forces now available.' In fact that very day the Japanese crossed the frontier in force from Siam with the obvious intention of capturing Moulmein on the east bank of the broad Salween River; within a few days all the three airfields on the Tenasserim coast from which fighters could escort bombing operations against Rangoon were in Japanese hands. As we saw in a previous chapter,<sup>3</sup> the needs of Burma were considered at the meetings held in London on 21st January, the Prime Minister expressing the opinion that, as a strategic object, it was more important to keep the Burma Road open than to retain Singapore, and India was asked to send three British battalions to Burma as soon as possible. The idea of diverting to Rangoon two brigades of the 18th Division was discussed but no decision was taken.

The British strategic plan was to concentrate the British (including the Indian and Burmese) formations in South Burma, in order to contain the advancing Japanese 15th Army of two divisions, while the

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<sup>1</sup> See Map 9.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 405. On 27th December, 1941, there was in Burma only 1st Burma Division of two Indian and two Burma brigades, besides the Rangoon Garrison. Kirby, II, 439, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xvi, p. 416.



two promised Chinese armies would guard the hill country to the north on both sides of the upper Salween. It was again, as in Malaya, a question of holding the enemy until reinforcements could arrive, but again the skill and speed of the well-trained enemy proved too much for our troops. Wavell however was optimistic. On 26th January, after a visit to Rangoon, he did not consider the situation in Burma immediately serious, provided that the promised land and air reinforcements arrived in time and that a naval flotilla could keep clear the approaches to the port. On 6th February, after visiting the Salween front—the Japanese had occupied Moulmein on 31st January—he proposed the diversion of 7th Armoured Brigade (from Middle East) to Burma, where it would be invaluable during the dry weather, rather than to Java. ‘This should make Rangoon and Burma safe during critical next few months before monsoon, and may enable offensive to be taken and heavy defeat inflicted on enemy.’ Such a diversion would involve some risks to Java but the danger and the opportunity to defeat the enemy were both much less there than in Burma.

Wavell confessed afterwards to a serious error of judgement in underestimating the danger to Burma and also the weakness of our troops. The vast extent of his command prevented him, for all his energy and mobility, from paying more than short sporadic visits to its various sectors, and as in Malaya so in Burma his failure to recognize the degree of superiority of the Japanese forces led him into unjustified optimism. By 12th February the Japanese had established themselves west of the Salween and the first important action of the campaign was fought on the Bilin River on the 16th–19th, after which the British retreated to the more effective obstacle of the Sittang. Our failure to stop the Japanese was now causing doubts in Burma and in India of Hutton’s qualities of leadership, excellent Chief of Staff though he had shown himself at Delhi, and the C.I.G.S. asked Wavell his opinion, suggesting Sir Harold Alexander as his substitute. Wavell himself was surprised and disturbed by a realistic signal of 18th February from Hutton envisaging the possibility of our not holding Rangoon. Hutton had been Wavell’s own appointment, but his chief now agreed to his supersession, and it was arranged on the 19th that Alexander, then holding Southern Command at home, should start for Burma forthwith.<sup>1</sup> Hutton, who became Alexander’s Chief of Staff, had, like Wavell himself, been set an impossible task.

Meeting on 16th February, the day after the surrender at Singapore, the Cabinet learnt that Palembang, the important base in southern Sumatra, had also fallen to the Japanese, who were now

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, p. 311, Churchill, IV, 146.

threatening the islands on the eastern side of Java. Wavell had signalled on 13th February that 'if Southern Sumatra is lost prolonged defence of Java becomes unlikely'. From the purely strategic aspect there were advantages in diverting one or both of the Australian divisions (from the Middle East) to Burma or Australia. But any abandonment of the Dutch East Indies would obviously have grave moral and political repercussions. 'This message,' he ended, 'gives warning of serious change in situation which may shortly arise necessitating complete re-orientation of plans.'

To the Cabinet it was 'clear now that Japan was a most formidable and dangerous antagonist. . . . Our military performance in Malaya had left much to be desired. . . . In retrospect it now seemed a pity that we had sent the 18th Division to Singapore. When we had done so, we had thought that by doing so we should enable the defence of the fortress to be continued for at least a month. . . . The same question had now to be faced as regards Sumatra and Java. The maintenance of our line of communication with China by the Burma Road was of the utmost importance.' The question would have to be considered by the Pacific War Council on the following day.

Meeting later that evening the Defence Committee took the view that the right policy was to concentrate on the defence of Burma, India, Ceylon and Australia, but the views of the Dutch must be heard first. Arrangements should provisionally be made for the leading Australian divisions from the Middle East to proceed to Australia and for the brigades of the British 70th Division to move to Burma and Ceylon with all possible speed.

Next morning the Prime Minister and Chiefs of Staff had before them a long and important signal from Wavell. It now seemed pretty clear that Java would fall before the Australian Corps could arrive. The loss of Java, though a severe blow from every point of view, would not be fatal, whereas Burma and Australia were 'absolutely vital' for the war against Japan. In the circumstances, which were different from those of the previous year when he believed that we had a 'good fighting chance' of checking the Germans in Greece, he could not advise the employment of the Australian Corps in Java. At least one division, he thought, two, if administratively feasible, should be diverted to Burma, where their presence must have a great influence on Japanese strategy by threatening invasion of Siam and Indo-China, and a heartening effect on China and India. Australia could be reinforced, if necessary, from America.

On 15th February a telegram had been received from Mr. Curtin summarizing the views of his government on the employment of the Australian Imperial Force. On general grounds, now that Japan was in the war, they would wish their forces to serve in the Pacific theatre; after the fall of Singapore, Australia must be regarded as the

main base for operations against Japan. They believed that Australia was in jeopardy and would remain so until the Allies had regained superiority at sea, which could not be until May at the earliest. It was therefore a matter for urgent consideration whether part at least of the Australian Imperial Force should not be diverted to Australia. In a later telegram, of 17th February, Mr. Curtin definitely asked that both 6th and 7th Divisions, with the Corps troops, should return home. Thus important political as well as military issues were at stake when the Pacific War Council met on the evening of 17th February.

Much sympathy was felt for the stout-hearted Dutch, but the correct military policy seemed plain. Java should be resolutely defended by the forces already in the island, but army reinforcements on the way should be diverted to Burma, Ceylon or Australia, and Canberra should be asked to allow their 7th Division, the fighting troops nearest to Rangoon, to proceed to Burma. This decision was approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The British 70th Division also, less one brigade to Ceylon, should move to Burma and the 6th and 9th Australian Divisions should return to Australia from the Middle East as soon as possible.<sup>1</sup>

As is well known, the Australian government, acting on the advice of their Chiefs of Staff, in spite of strong pressure from both Mr. Churchill and President Roosevelt refused to allow the 7th Division to be diverted to Rangoon.<sup>2</sup> Once again, as in the case of Tobruk in the previous autumn, Mr. Churchill found that the Australian government and their military advisers were not prepared to bow to the opinion of the Commander-in-Chief concerned, though backed by outside political authority, however august, when national interests were, as they thought, imperilled. The Australians overestimated the immediate danger to their territory, but their feelings can easily be understood. All their four trained divisions had been sent thousands of miles overseas; one, owing, as they believed, to the defects of British policy, had been lost in Malaya, while the other three were far away in the Middle East; they may be excused for not wishing to risk the total loss of one of these in another distant campaign.<sup>3</sup>

Whether the arrival of the division could have saved Rangoon is very doubtful. Hutton's opinion, expressed to the War Office on 23rd February, was that the operation was a gamble which might have disastrous consequences if the division were caught disembark-

<sup>1</sup> The 6th, 7th and 9th Australian Divisions were all in the Middle East; the 8th had been lost in Malaya.

<sup>2</sup> See Churchill, IV, 136-46; Kirby, II, 55-58, 102.

<sup>3</sup> Two brigade groups of 6th Australian Div. were, however, lent as temporary reinforcements of Ceylon. See Chap. xx below.

ing, but that in view of the advantages to be gained it seemed worth attempting. Maintenance from stocks was possible for about twelve days, but would afterwards depend on the regular arrival of shipping at Rangoon from India. Looking back, however, it is difficult to dispute the argument of the Australian official historian that it is unlikely that, even if the division had disembarked at Rangoon at the earliest possible date—26th or 27th February for the foremost brigade—its arrival would have saved the city and rendered possible the continued use of the port.<sup>1</sup>

The story of the British retreat to the Sittang and the circumstances of the disastrous blowing of its only bridge on 23rd February, by which the greater part of the 17th Division was cut off on the far bank, has been told by General Kirby. On the 27th, Japanese patrols were across the river, the last serious obstacle barring the way to Rangoon, and their main bodies crossed on 3rd March. Wavell was inclined to attempt to hold the bombed and half-deserted city, at the risk of seeing the garrison surrounded. Alexander, arriving on 5th March, was at first of the same opinion but next day he decided to evacuate. By great good fortune the garrison effected their escape from the enclosing enemy, who entered Rangoon on 8th March.

Disaster followed quick in the Dutch islands.<sup>2</sup> The Japanese occupied Batavia on 6th March, and the Allied forces in the Netherlands East Indies surrendered two days later. The outer islands of the Barrier, Southern Sumatra and Bali, had already fallen, as had the partly Dutch, partly Portuguese, island of Timor on 23rd February. On 19th February Darwin on the Australian seaboard underwent a devastating raid by ship-borne and land-based aircraft. More to the east, with a further threat to Australia, the Japanese, who as early as 23rd January had captured Rabaul in the Bismarck Archipelago, crossed to New Guinea and on 8th March occupied Lae and Salamaua in the eastern extension of that great island. In a gallant but vain attempt to prevent the invasion of Java the Allied naval striking force under the Dutch Admiral Doorman suffered crippling losses at the battle of the Java Sea at the end of February; all the five cruisers involved, including the *Exeter* of River Plate fame, were destroyed.<sup>3</sup> It was the annihilation of what remained of Allied naval strength in the East Indies.

At this time, when the first phase of their Southern Operations was

<sup>1</sup> L. Wigmore, *The Japanese Thrust* (Canberra, 1957), pp. 460–5.

<sup>2</sup> See Map 8.

<sup>3</sup> The other cruisers were *Perth* (Australian); *Houston* (United States); *De Ruyter* and *Java* (Dutch). For an account of the battle see S. W. Roskill, *The War at Sea* (H.M.S.O. 1956, henceforward cited as Roskill), II, Chap. 1.

reaching a successful conclusion, the general staff of the Japanese Army and Navy started to plan for the next phase. In the joint discussions the naval section at Imperial General Headquarters emphasized the necessity of occupying Australia in order to cut sea and air communications between Australia and New Zealand and the United States, since it was becoming clear that the United States was planning to use Australia as a base for the counter-offensive. The Army section strongly opposed this suggestion, considering that the occupation of Australia was clearly beyond their fighting strength. The soldiers argued further that such an operation must fail because owing to shortage of shipping the necessary military supplies could not be maintained. In any case it was not possible to provide the ten or more divisions thought necessary to carry out such an operation. In the end it was decided to give up the idea of invading Australia in favour of a plan to occupy the Fiji Islands, Samoa and New Caledonia. In this way it was hoped to isolate Australia by using Japanese naval and air forces based on these islands to cut the sea-routes between Australia and the United States. Mr. Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff were therefore justified in refusing to accept the belief that a serious invasion of Australia was intended. The Australian government on the other hand were justified in taking the possibility seriously.

With Singapore and almost the whole of the Philippines gone and the loss of the Dutch islands seen to be impending, the primary purpose of the A.B.D.A. command had patently failed. Its vast area was moreover now split into two widely separate sections. The defence of both Burma and the north-west coast of Australia was no task for a single commander. Accordingly A.B.D.A. Headquarters was allowed to dissolve quietly on 25th February. In handing over to the Dutch that day the command of what still remained under Allied control, Wavell signalled to the Combined Chiefs of Staff that he deeply regretted the failure to hold the A.B.D.A. area. 'It was a race against time and enemy was too quick for us.' He wished to record his admiration for the American, British and Dutch air forces, which had attacked the enemy on every possible occasion, often against heavy odds and hampered by adverse weather and inadequate ground installations. Nobody, except himself, could think of holding Wavell responsible for the failure to defend the Dutch islands, but it was with a deep sense of humiliation that he bade farewell to the doomed garrison before leaving Java for Colombo. He himself was only relinquishing one hopeless task for another of extreme difficulty. He was to resume forthwith his former appointment as Commander-in-Chief in India, which now again included responsibility for Burma and such co-operation as was possible with China.





On the 22nd the Prime Minister had signalled to him : 'I hope you realize how highly I and all your friends here as well as the President and the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington, rate your admirable conduct of operations in the teeth of adverse fortune and overwhelming odds.'

The erosion of the A.B.D.A. area by the Japanese advances made necessary some fresh demarcation of strategic responsibilities in the Far East. On 18th February the President cabled to the Prime Minister :

'... I have been giving a good deal of thought during the last few days to the Far East. It seems to me that we must at all costs maintain our two flanks, the right based on Australia and New Zealand and the left on Burma, India and China. It seems to me that the United States is able because of our geographical position to reinforce the right flank much better than you can and I think that the United States should take the primary responsibility for that immediate reinforcement and maintenance using Australia as the main base. While the defence of Java looks difficult, I believe we both should fight hard for it, but we must plan for the more southerly permanent base to strike back from. This will include some of the islands farther north, such as New Caledonia and Fiji.

'Britain is much better prepared to reinforce Burma and India, and I visualize that you would take responsibility for that theatre. We would supplement you in any way we could just as you would supplement our efforts on the right flank. The United States should continue to move our supplies, principally aircraft, through into China because I think that it is important that we have an effective offensive operation from there.

'Let me know what you think of this. . . .'

On the same day the British Mission in Washington had reported that the idea was 'gaining ground' that the southern advance of the Japanese had 'emphasized the division of the Pacific and Indian Oceans into distinct theatres'. They thought that these views, though sound in themselves, tended 'to overlook the imminent problems of defence of Australia which must be taken into consideration in framing strategy and allotting areas of command. The United States' military and political interest in China is likely also to give rise to difficulties in agreeing upon allocation of forces and areas of Allied strategical control.'

The British Chiefs of Staff concurred in principle, but noted that the proposal would have to be put before the Dutch, Australian and New Zealand governments. They agreed that in the new circumstances the best method of strategic control was a system of areas



within each of which one Power would be responsible, but the military policy of that Power within its area should be in accord with the general policy agreed between London and Washington for the conduct of the war as a whole. They suggested what the physical dividing line should be, and after full discussion between the two capitals this matter was settled by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

The British Chiefs of Staff had before them on 11th March a telegram of the 9th from the President to the Prime Minister containing his considered proposals for a three-fold division of responsibilities.<sup>1</sup> The whole operational responsibility for the Pacific area would rest upon the United States acting through the United States Chiefs of Staff.

‘There will be in Washington an Advisory Council on operational matters with members from Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands East Indies, and China, with an American presiding. Canada could be added. The Pacific Council now sitting in London might well be moved here; at any rate the operational part of its functions, including supply, should operate from here. You may think it best to have a Pacific Council in London considering political questions.’

The Supreme Commander in this area would be an American, the ‘local operating command’ in each of the countries under him being assigned to a national of that country.

‘The middle area extending from Singapore to and including India and the Indian Ocean, Persian Gulf, Red Sea, Libya and the Mediterranean would fall directly under British responsibility. All operating matters in this area would be decided by you. But always with understanding that as much assistance would be given to India or Near East by Australia and New Zealand as could be worked out with their governments. We would continue to allocate to it all possible munitions and vessel assignments. It is understood that this presupposes the temporary shelving of “Gymnast”.

‘The third area would include the protection of the waters of the North and South Atlantic and would also include definite plans for the establishment of a new front on the European Continent. This would be the joint responsibility of Britain and the United States.

‘The grand strategy of actual operations in the three areas would remain as they are today the subject of study and decisions by the Combined Staffs both here and in London, and the Joint

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<sup>1</sup> See Sherwood, p. 514; Churchill, IV, 174-5. The position in the Pacific was viewed in Washington as so grave that early in March ‘there was even serious talk of abandoning Australia and New Zealand to the enemy’ (S. E. Morison, *History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II* (Boston, 1949), IV, 246), but such suggestions were quashed by Admiral King as well as by the President.

Committees on shipping, on raw materials and on munitions would continue to function as they do now subject to our joint approval.'

Such was the majestic concept which the President modestly described as 'operational simplifications'.

The British Chiefs of Staff gave general approval to the American proposals, but certain comments were made by them and by Ministers. It was argued that the boundary should not be rigidly geographical but should be alterable in accordance with strategic developments. It was urged too that in order to apply pressure on Japan a co-ordinated naval strategy must be maintained. The Pacific War Council, when the scheme came before them on 10th and 12th March, considered that their meetings in London ought to continue and that they ought not to be divested of all responsibility for military decisions.

The Prime Minister made these points in a long telegram of 17th March to the President. 'Nothing must prevent the United States and British Navies from working to a common strategy from Alaska to Cape Town.' This common strategy could only be directed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff acting directly under himself and the President in constant contact and agreement. As regards the advisory bodies which would have to be consulted on larger issues, these would have to be duplicated; there would in fact be two Pacific Councils. 'The one in Washington, lying as it will in close touch with the American executive machinery in the Pacific area, will naturally have more practical and more effective influence upon events than its reproduction in London.' But it was not possible to draw a line between strategic and political matters, and the Pacific Council in London would discuss the whole state of the war against Japan, sending its opinions from time to time to the similar body in the United States. In the same way the Pacific Council in Washington would convey to London their opinions about the war in the Indian theatre. From this it followed that the United States and United Kingdom should be reciprocally represented on the two councils. He suggested also that staff officers from Australia, New Zealand, the Dutch and the Chinese should be available in Washington to serve the American staffs on operational matters; they might also be the technical advisers of their countries' representatives on the Washington Pacific Council.

The Dominion governments approved in general of the redivision of command areas which assigned them to the American sphere, and the Australians were glad to join in the appointment on 17th March of General Douglas MacArthur, who had just arrived in Australia by the President's order after an adventurous journey from the Philippines, to the supreme command in their theatre. They were

nevertheless dissatisfied, as they had been when the Pacific War Council was first formed, with the subordinate part assigned to them in the direction of the war in the Far East. They were not content with a merely advisory role. They hankered after representation at Washington on a body which should be a 'council of action' and 'deal with questions of policy and the provision of forces and supplies'; its Australian member should have as his technical advisers an inter-service staff 'who for the purpose of Anzac strategy should be associated with the American Chiefs of Staff as the joint body for advice to the Pacific War Council on the larger issue'.

Mr. Churchill noted that the Australians must settle this with the Americans and, as we have seen, the Pacific Council which held its first meeting in Washington on 1st April was not a policy-making body. The argument against too many cooks had great force.<sup>1</sup> But on one point the Australians were successful: in accordance with their wishes the boundary between the British and American spheres was shifted so as to include the west coast of Australia in the latter.

The British Chiefs of Staff, while finally accepting the President's proposals in principle, felt that these were not clear as to 'minor strategy' in the Atlantic Area, but were sure that such questions would solve themselves in practice. They urged that China should rank as an independent theatre, not included in any of the three proposed.

The division of command areas as finally approved on 4th April is shown in Map 10. It will be seen that Australia falls in the South West Pacific area, but New Zealand in the South Pacific; General MacArthur was Supreme Commander of the former area, Admiral Nimitz of the latter.

At meetings of the Pacific War Council in London in March Sir Earle Page had remarked that Australia was an integral part of the British Empire and at first sight there were objections to handing over the strategic control of that area to an American military body, and his New Zealand colleague had agreed. Mr. Churchill, however, in reporting to Mr. Curtin and Mr. Fraser his approval of the President's proposals, assured them that 'The fact that an American commander will be in charge of all the operations in the Pacific area will not be regarded by His Majesty's Government as in any way absolving them from their determination and duty to come to your aid to the best of their ability, and if you are actually invaded in force, which has by no means come to pass and may never come to pass, we shall do our utmost to divert British troops and British ships rounding the Cape, or already in the Indian Ocean, to your succour, albeit at the expense of India and the Middle East.'

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xvii above.

As matters turned out, the direction of the war in the whole Pacific theatre was kept almost entirely in American hands; especially on the naval side, the British Chiefs of Staff were often quite in the dark as to what was being done.

The dangers to which the new area of British responsibility was exposed had been in the mind of the Chiefs of Staff for some time. On 21st February, a few days after the fall of Singapore and a few days before the disintegration of Wavell's A.B.D.A. Command, they had issued an appreciation of the situation in the Far East. It was then still hoped to hold Rangoon, if not the Dutch islands.

The report pointed out that once Japan had effectively breached the Malay Barrier she would have a clear run into the Indian Ocean, where we were dangerously weak in all respects. By attacks on Ceylon and India she could raise overwhelming problems of internal security and induce instability in Indian forces in all theatres of war. The Allies possessed no naval base from which a single combined fleet could cover both the Indian and the Pacific Oceans, and thus the strategy for each must be considered separately. For the defence of our sea-communications in the Indian Ocean, where we were building up an Eastern Fleet, there was at present no secure naval base.<sup>1</sup> We must therefore defend Ceylon, develop the secret base at Addu Atoll in the Maldiv Islands and construct additional bases for reconnaissance and striking forces. Measures were being taken to strengthen Ceylon and it was also important to send land and air forces to India both to secure her against attack from without and to preserve internal security and morale.

In what was to become the area of American responsibility, Australia, especially the east and south-west, must be regarded as one of the main bases from which the eventual counter-offensive would be launched. Australia was insecure at present, but as there were no United Kingdom forces available it must fall largely to the United States to reinforce that area, while the Australian divisions serving outside the Japanese war area should in due course be recalled to their own country. There was no immediate threat to New Zealand, but her defences should be improved in view of the possible loss of Fiji and the French dependency of New Caledonia.

Shortage of time and of shipping compelled us to find the necessary British reinforcements at the expense of the Middle East, where we must accept great risks, hoping that matters would develop favourably in the Ukraine and in Turkey. The shipping situation was

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<sup>1</sup> See Map 3.

very grave and might be a governing factor in our strategy in 1942 and largely in 1943 also. 'To move overseas from England the land and air forces necessary to replace the formations in the Middle East and give additional strength in the Far East we must exploit our shipping resources to the utmost and if necessary incur a temporary reduction in the import programme.' It was to be hoped that the United States would protect the essential air and naval bases on the air reinforcement route across the Pacific, concentrate air and land forces in Australia, and provide for the defence of Fiji, New Caledonia and New Zealand, while building up a strong Pacific fleet and attacking Japanese sea-communications.<sup>1</sup>

The British high command were confronted with difficult decisions as to the allocation of inadequate resources not only between the Middle East and Far East theatres but also between the different regions bordering the Indian Ocean which now lay open to attack by a Japanese fleet enjoying the use of Rangoon as well as Singapore.

On relinquishing A.B.D.A. and resuming the Indian command Wavell found himself once again in the familiar circumstances of vast responsibilities and exiguous means. He was particularly anxious about the position in India itself. By mid-February 1942 the only formations left in the command were 14th Division less one brigade, 7th and 19th Divisions consisting of little besides their infantry, and 34th Division which, less one brigade, was in Ceylon. In the air the situation was worse; in Bengal, for the defence of Calcutta, there was one fighter squadron equipped with eight Mohawks, in Assam an improvised fighter squadron armed with aircraft normally used in India for army co-operation. 'The number and size of the existing airfields, most of which were sited for the defence of the North West Frontier, fell far short of requirements. Apart from this shortage of airfields, the air defence was dangerously handicapped by the absence of any warning system covering north-east India and of radar to protect Ceylon and the long length of India's eastern shores.' A matter of extreme gravity was the poverty of communications in eastern and north-eastern India, which required a completely new administrative lay-out facing east.<sup>2</sup> The fact was that the thought of invasion from the east had never been entertained. Communication with Burma was normally by sea. A road from Imphal in Assam across the mountains via Tamu on the Burma frontier to the River Chindwin was under construction, but it was not till the end of April that even a fair-weather road reached Tamu; beyond Tamu, to Kalewa in Burma, there was nothing but a cart-track. A road

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<sup>1</sup> United States 41st Division was due to leave America early in March and to arrive in Australia a month later.

<sup>2</sup> See Kirby, II, pp. 49-54 and Chap. III generally.

farther north from Ledo via Fort Hertz to Myitkyina was only a project.

The political stresses which increased the anxieties over India are outside the scope of this book. The successive British defeats naturally lowered British prestige and shook confidence among Indians of a British victory; Indian nationalists might regard the belated British offers of partial self-government, with the option of independence after the war, as 'post-dated cheques upon a bankrupt Empire'.<sup>1</sup> The difficulty of coming to terms with Congress was accentuated by the refusal of Moslems to be ruled by Hindus, and the Cripps Mission (22nd March to 12th April) failed to secure agreement. At present India was in no immediate danger on land. But as the Burma army retreated up the Irrawaddy valley there appeared the probability that the Japanese would move up to Akyab on the coast and bomb Calcutta, not only the largest city in India with a vast population but the centre of the Indian war industries.

The army in Burma was in a most unenviable position. It was fortunate to have two such chiefs as Alexander and Slim,<sup>2</sup> commanding Burma Army and Burma Corps respectively, but the loss of the only port had meant that the Allied forces must fend for themselves, living on such supplies as Hutton's forethought had sent up-country from Rangoon. Throughout March and April the Japanese continued to press northwards, threatening to capture the Irrawaddy oilfields, to cut China's land communications with India and to destroy the Allied forces before they could reach the Assam frontier or retire into China. Almost impassable to a modern army at any time owing to the lack of roads through the forest-clothed mountains, the frontier area would become entirely so when the monsoon broke in May.

The Burma Army for the most part was not such as any general would have chosen to command during an exhausting retreat before a victorious enemy enjoying superiority in the air. The recently arrived 7th Armoured Brigade rendered splendid service, but the last reinforcement, 63rd Indian Infantry Brigade, had, as Alexander said, been 'thrown into battle straight off ship', partially trained and without its transport—a state of things all too reminiscent of Malaya. Part of the force had been engaged in continuous retreat since January and had suffered heavy losses. The Burma units had never inspired much confidence and the native population if not disaffected was at best neutral. The force as a whole had had no training in jungle warfare, whereas the Japanese were adepts in this technique. Further, our troops were tied to the roads, since no means

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<sup>1</sup> Gandhi, quoted by Mansergh, *Survey, etc.*, p. 148.

<sup>2</sup> Lieut.-Gen. Sir W. J. Slim had been brought over from Iraq in March.

existed of supplying them off the two roads from Rangoon to Mandalay; attempts to organize animal transport were unsuccessful. Another point of weakness was the lack of co-ordination with the Chinese forces on Alexander's left flank. The Chinese fought bravely but their co-operation on any particular occasion could not be counted on. This was due partly to different systems of staff and command, partly to the inconsistencies of the Generalissimo. Chiang Kai-shek was an easy ally to nobody, but his relations with the British had been soured by the early misunderstanding with Wavell. As British disasters mounted, his opinion of our efficiency sank lower and lower and he came to distrust our loyalty. His criticisms rose to a head in April when after a visit to Burma he sent the Prime Minister a message pouring scorn on the confusion in the war area, the poor morale of the Burmese, and our weakness in the air—a message which Mr. Churchill needed all his patience to answer politely, confining himself to an explanation of the difficulties of air reinforcement.

Complications which might have turned out more serious than they did arose from the equivocal position of Major-General J. W. Stilwell, sent out from the United States in February, as the President's personal representative with the Generalissimo. Stilwell's four functions, as then reported to Wavell, were to supervise and control all arrangements for United States air contribution to the defence of China; to command, under the Generalissimo, all the United States forces in China and such Chinese forces as might be assigned to him, it being understood that should any of these forces engage in joint operations in Burma they would come under the Supreme Commander of the A.B.D.A. area; to represent the United States government on any international War Council in China; and to control and maintain the Burma Road in China. In fact, he was Chiang Kai-shek's chief military adviser and Chief of Staff.<sup>1</sup>

On Stilwell's arrival at Chungking after the dissolution of A.B.D.A. the Generalissimo proposed to the President that all Allied troops in Burma, including the British, should come under the American general's orders. This was not accepted, but Stilwell told Alexander on 14th March that Chiang Kai-shek had put him in independent command of all Chinese troops in Burma. Stilwell and Alexander however found it possible to co-operate while leaving the question of command in abeyance; Stilwell would continue to command the Chinese 5th and 6th Armies. This arrangement was agreed to by the President and Prime Minister; as the result, however, of a visit to Chungking by Alexander at the end of March, the Generalissimo,

<sup>1</sup> For the complexities of Stilwell's position see Romanus and Sunderland, *Stilwell's Mission to China* (Washington, 1953), pp. 86-96.

whom he found most friendly, stated definitely that, in order to secure unity of command and pending decision in London and Washington, all Chinese forces in Burma would be under British command. Stilwell, while retaining command of the Chinese armies under Alexander's general direction, accepted this arrangement and the two continued to work together loyally and amicably. As time went on, Stilwell was to find relations with Chiang Kai-shek as difficult as did the British, but in 1942 he was much the more favourably regarded at Chungking.<sup>1</sup>

As the retreat continued into central and northern Burma, the question of the British forces' final destination required decision, but it was not at first urgent. Wavell called attention to the poor communications and absence of supplies on the route to India, whereas a force in north-eastern Burma would find reserves of stores and, if it could be maintained, would be strategically well placed to attack, in concert with the Chinese, the flank of a Japanese advance overland towards India. In London it was argued that the military disadvantages of a withdrawal in either direction were great; if our forces moved north-east they would be a wasting asset; if north-west, they would be unable to bring their heavy equipment with them though they could be re-equipped in India. The balance was fine, the overriding factor being the political effect on China, of which the Generalissimo must be the judge. At first both Wavell and Alexander took it for granted that we must keep in touch with the Chinese at all costs, and the Prime Minister on 4th April expected Alexander's 'greatly reduced forces' to 'fall back into China with the Chinese armies'. For a time the two generals had under consideration a plan by which part of the force might withdraw into China and part into India—a plan which, however, did not commend itself to Slim<sup>2</sup>—but as Japanese pressure increased Alexander decided, with the approval of the Chinese and of Stilwell, that no British troops should make for China. The decision was obviously a wise one, for on 29th April, the same day that the Allied forces evacuated Mandalay, the Japanese occupied Lashio, thus cutting off retreat by the Burma Road. Contact between the British and Chinese was however maintained, since two Chinese divisions succeeded in making their way over the mountains into Assam. The withdrawal of the British force, without their tanks or heavy equipment, from Burma was completed by 20th May. The monsoon had broken a week earlier, putting an end to further land operations in this theatre for several months.

The fact that the bulk of the force thus made good their escape, after a long retreat under inexpressibly hard conditions of heat,

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<sup>1</sup> See Kirby, II, 153–6: *The Stilwell Papers*, ed. J. F. C. Fuller (1949).

<sup>2</sup> *Defeat into Victory*, p. 75.



thirst and fatigue, without air-support and without hope of reinforcement, bears witness to remarkable fortitude on the part of the troops and skill on that of their commanders. The story of the great achievement has been told from personal experience by Lord Slim, and from the official papers by General Kirby and his colleagues.

But the loss of Burma was a severe blow both to British prestige and to effective co-operation with China. Wavell in his Dispatch spoke of it as 'from a strategical point of view our most serious reverse of the Japanese war'. Henceforth the only means of contact with China was by air 'over some of the worst flying country in the world', and even this was for some time merely a trickle; only 80 tons reached China over 'the Hump' in May, only 106 in June.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Kirby, II, 220; Feis, *The China Tangle* (Princeton 1953), p. 42.

## CHAPTER XX

# THE INDIAN OCEAN AND THE SOUTH SEAS

**D**URING THE LAST weeks of the campaign in Burma the Japanese had been scoring successes east and west. The gallant defence by the small United States forces in the Philippines had come to an end in the Bataan peninsula on 9th April and in the island fortress of Corregidor on 6th May. By the end of March the enemy had landed naval detachments on the northernmost islands of the Solomon group.

On the western flank after the reduction of the Dutch islands and the battle of the Java Sea the Japanese fleet had, as the British Chiefs of Staff put it, a clear run into the Indian Ocean. On 23rd March Japanese forces occupied the Andaman Islands, from which the British had withdrawn on the 12th, and established an air base; the Nicobars were in any case undefended. On the 27th Admiral Sir James Somerville, who had recently rendered great services with Force H at Gibraltar, relieved Admiral Layton in command of Eastern Fleet at Colombo. The intention of the Admiralty, ever since the loss of the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse*, had been to build up another fleet in the Indian Ocean, but the watch over the *Tirpitz*, lurking in her Norwegian fiord, called for a force of modern battleships in the North Sea.<sup>1</sup> Thus as a result of our recent losses all that was available for Somerville, besides the four old and slow R-class battleships, was the *Warspite*, just returned from refitting in America, and two large and one small aircraft-carriers with seven cruisers, sixteen destroyers and seven submarines. So ill-matched for speed were his capital ships that he felt bound to operate them in two divisions, one fast and one slow, and this, as the near future was to show, made his force still more vulnerable by such a fleet as it was in the power of the Japanese to send against him. Nor were his possible bases secure. Neither Colombo nor Trincomalee was adequately defended against air attack, and still less was Addu Atoll.

Apart from acting as a deterrent to a Japanese attack—a role which was not likely to be successful unless co-ordinated with the American fleets, of whose movements and intentions we had little information—the Eastern Fleet was responsible for convoys. The escorts it could provide were generally limited to one or occasionally

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<sup>1</sup> For the *Tirpitz*, see p. 500 below.

two cruisers, and Somerville's predecessor had ruefully remarked that by comparison with the 'appalling' risks run in the Indian Ocean a convoy on the Atlantic route enjoyed 'blissful security'.

There could be no two opinions about the strategic importance of Ceylon, since a powerful enemy fleet based on the island would be in a position to threaten the reinforcement routes via the Cape to either the Red Sea or Calcutta as well as the vital oil route from the Persian Gulf. The Admiralty signalled to Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, on 6th March that the risk of losing two R battleships would be justified if it would 'appreciably interfere with an invasion of the island'. But how the island should be defended was not so clear. Wavell, visiting Ceylon with Air Marshal Peirse on 26th February after the dissolution of A.B.D.A., had appreciated that the immediate danger was a raid of the type of those on Pearl Harbor and, more recently, Darwin. He believed that the defence of Ceylon was properly the affair of the Navy and Royal Air Force and was averse to locking up in the island troops sorely needed in India. A force of three brigades with local troops and the necessary anti-aircraft units should be sufficient. The Joint Intelligence Committee agreed that a raid on the Pearl Harbor pattern was to be expected, but the conveyance and maintenance of an invasion force (estimated at two divisions) would be difficult. The Chiefs of Staff, while agreeing with Wavell that the defence of Ceylon was mainly a naval and air problem, took the view that since sufficient naval and air forces could not be got there in time an increased garrison was the only immediate insurance that we could provide. The size of the garrison, they knew, was Wavell's responsibility, but in this case essential interests outside his command were involved.

Wavell was not convinced. He reasoned that if we lost command of the sea and air round Ceylon to such an extent as to enable the Japanese to bring a sea-borne force to the island no numbers of our troops were likely to save it. He was more apprehensive of an attack on India, for which the enemy could provide shore-based air cover by working up the Burmese mainland and west coast. His conclusion was that Ceylon should be given sufficient defence to prevent raids from aircraft carriers and to protect ports and airfields against 'smash-and-run' landing parties, but that our main air forces must be concentrated on securing air superiority in Upper Burma and north-eastern India, and that as large land forces as possible should be made available for the defence of the latter.

On 18th March the Defence Committee approved a reply to Wavell in which the Chiefs of Staff, while agreeing that the fleet to be concentrated in the Ceylon area by the end of the month would be unable to prevent the coastwise movement of the enemy up the Burmese mainland, yet maintained that so long as our fleet

remained in being the Japanese would have to employ a 'major fleet' in order to provide permanent cover for the communications of any direct sea-borne attack on the east coast of India or Ceylon. Such a commitment they would be unlikely to accept, particularly if pressure were applied by the reviving United States Pacific Fleet.

But the debate continued.

Before the end of March the garrison of Ceylon had been raised to the equivalent of two divisions and some eight squadrons of the Royal Air Force and Fleet Air Arm. The land troops included two brigade groups of the 6th Australian Division; these had been offered by their government, on the suggestion of Sir Earle Page, as a temporary loan during the emergency. The loan was very welcome, so much so that the two brigades were retained, with the reluctant acquiescence of their government, a good deal longer than the latter intended. Mr. Churchill minuted the Chiefs of Staff that the Australian troops 'ought to stay seven or eight weeks, and the shipping should be handled so as to make this convenient and almost inevitable'.<sup>1</sup>

A further precaution was taken at the insistence of the Prime Minister, who was determined that the co-ordination of military and civil activities should be more efficient than in Malaya. On 5th March, Admiral Layton was appointed Commander-in-Chief, Ceylon, with authority over all naval, military, air and civil authorities in the area, including the Governor. On military matters he would report to Commander-in-Chief, India; on civil, to the Secretary of State for the Colonies. It was a unique appointment and one that immediately bore fruit.<sup>2</sup>

On 1st and 2nd April the Chiefs of Staff discussed an elaborate appreciation of the situation in India and the Indian Ocean as it was likely to develop in the next six months. This paper, together with the recent report on the Middle East and Mediterranean area,<sup>3</sup> should provide a basis for balancing the respective needs of the two theatres for reinforcements.

The conclusion emerged that in our present weakness all round—at sea, in the air, where we particularly needed torpedo bombers, and on land, where we were short of equipment and of British cadres for building up Indian formations—a bold policy on the part of Japan might do us 'irreparable damage' before the United States could make her strength effectively felt. 'An invasion of Bengal, an assault on Ceylon, or an attack on our Eastern Fleet would each if successful

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 154. D. McCarthy, *South-West Pacific Area, First Year* (Canberra, 1959), pp. 118–19.

<sup>2</sup> The Cabinet had proposed to call Admiral Layton Military Governor, but his designation was changed at the request of the Colonial Office.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 455.

prove a devastating blow to us!' In fact, as was emphasized with heavy type, 'we are in real danger of losing our Indian Empire—with incalculable consequences to the future conduct of the war'. 'Japan's boldest move, and one that, if successful, would give her the greatest strategic advantage', would be an invasion of Ceylon, but her more likely course of action was 'a step-by-step move coastwise via Burma'. Our eventual security and ability to return to the attack were dependent on regaining control at sea. In the meantime the biggest factors influencing Japan were the United States fleet in the Pacific and our Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean. 'The measure by which they will deter Japan from further forward moves will depend not only on their strength as fleets in being but on their offensive activities.' We had no detailed information of United States intentions in the Pacific and the influence which United States forces could exercise in containing Japan must remain an unknown factor.<sup>1</sup>

In the next few days the Chiefs of Staff had before them a report on the inter-relation of strategy in the Middle East and in India. It pointed out that both theatres depended on the security of sea-communications in the Indian Ocean, and both protected and in the last resort were dependent on the supplies of oil from Abadan. Strategically they were one theatre, but with the present dispositions of our own and enemy forces the danger to India if the Japanese adopted a bold offensive policy was greater than the danger to any part of the Middle East command with the possible exception of Malta. Regarding our three immediate requirements as (a) to launch a Libyan offensive, in order to help Russia, save Malta and encourage Turkey; (b) to secure Ceylon; (c) to defend Calcutta; they concluded that our policy should be, in first priority, to build up as soon as possible formidable forces in the Indian Ocean, and, as a corollary, to provide for the local defence of Ceylon; subject to this, to concentrate on the Libyan offensive, accepting the grave risks of a Japanese incursion into Bengal. We must continue to rely on Russian resistance securing our northern front in the Middle East.

Referring to our weakness at sea, the report urged that any naval forces which could be spared should join the Eastern Fleet. It was unlikely that even with American assistance we should be able to assemble a fleet equal to that which the Japanese might concentrate against us. However, the threat which the Pacific Fleet could bring to bear would influence the naval strength which the enemy would be prepared to employ in the Indian Ocean. This containing effect would be much increased if the United States were able to seize and

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<sup>1</sup> 'I am in complete ignorance of what the Pacific and Asiatic fleets are doing.' Commander-in-Chief, Eastern Fleet, to Admiralty, 6/3.

hold Pacific bases within striking range of vital Japanese sea-communications. We should therefore represent to the United States the importance we attached to their co-operation.

American naval action in the Far East was confined to the strategic defensive by the Allied decision to defeat Germany before Japan and, practically, by the need to recover from the disaster at Pearl Harbor. 'But this policy,' says Admiral Morison, 'never implied mere passivity. It did not preclude raids, attrition tactics by submarines, or the exploitation of favourable opportunities for united offensives'. On 14 March the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff 'recommended a limited deployment of American forces into the South West Pacific, with the object of securing the antipodes and putting such pressure on Japan as to prevent any further westward or south-west offensive on her part'; Admiral King had already urged the completion of a base in the New Hebrides with a view to an eventual advance through the Solomon and Bismarck archipelagos.<sup>1</sup>

The British Admiralty were in correspondence with Admiral King as to the possibility of co-operation, but the First Sea Lord, as he told his colleagues, did not see what action the United States Pacific Fleet could take to induce the Japanese to keep their fleet in the Pacific if they were determined to move it into the Indian Ocean. Nevertheless he signalled to Admiral King on 3rd April pointing out the harm that might be done by a sudden Japanese sally into the Indian Ocean and asking if the Pacific Fleet could do anything to deter the enemy from such a venture; he also emphasized the need for an interchange of information.

The Prime Minister followed up this signal with a message to the President on the 7th when the anticipated danger had occurred: 'As you must now be decidedly superior to the enemy forces in the Pacific, the situation would seem to offer an immediate opportunity to the United States Pacific Fleet which might be of such a nature as to compel Japanese naval forces in the Indian Ocean to return to the Pacific, thus relinquishing or leaving unsupported any invasion enterprise which they have in mind or to which they are committed.'

This message was considered by the President with his Chiefs of Staff and the British Joint Staff Mission on 9th April, but it appeared that there was 'no present idea of moving [the] battlefleet from San Francisco'. Nevertheless Admiral King had let the First Sea Lord know on the 8th that he had already taken, and was now expediting,

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<sup>1</sup> S. E. Morison, *History of U.S. Naval Operations in World War II*, III, 218-20; IV, 245-7.

Admiral Ernest J. King combined the posts of Chief of Naval Operations and Commander-in-Chief of the Navy.

measures to relieve pressure in the Indian Ocean. The nature of these measures was not specified and it is still uncertain what Admiral King had in mind; the reference may be to the concentration of ships which resulted in the battle of the Coral Sea or to early preparations for island landings.<sup>1</sup>

Early in April the Japanese struck. On Easter Sunday, the 5th, aircraft flown from their First Air Fleet (the formation which had attacked Pearl Harbor), consisting of five fleet carriers supported by four battleships and two heavy cruisers, bombed Colombo; Trincomalee was similarly attacked on the 9th. Admiral Somerville, who had just arrived to take command of Eastern Fleet, had received some warning; both harbours had as far as possible been cleared of ships, and fighters were ready. Nevertheless these were overwhelmed by the enemy's superiority in the air and sustained heavy losses. Considerable damage was also done on shore. Somerville was fortunate in that the Japanese failed to discover his major units or his secret base at Addu Atoll, but the two heavy cruisers, *Cornwall* and *Dorsetshire*, and the light carrier *Hermes*, which were sailing independently, were bombed and sunk. The Japanese fleet returned unscathed, except for a few aircraft. Another Japanese naval force, striking north-west into the Bay of Bengal, sank over 92,000 tons of shipping on 6th April and launched its aircraft to bomb the Indian coast in the neighbourhood of Vizagapatam. Little damage, however, was done, except by causing a panic which impelled many inhabitants to flee inland. The Japanese further flaunted their superiority by sending submarines to work off the west coast of India, where they sank some 32,000 tons of shipping.<sup>2</sup>

We now know that after their successful Easter foray the Japanese high command rejected proposals aiming at further westward expansion in favour of action in the Pacific directed towards the Solomons, and later against Fiji and Samoa. The fear so often expressed by Western strategists that they would join hands with the Germans in the Middle East proved to be a bugbear; the nearest our two enemies came to co-operation was a largely ineffective plan for a division of submarine areas.

But there could be no assurance on the British side that the Indian Ocean and its shores would be immune. The ill-balanced Eastern Fleet withdrew partly to Bombay, partly to Kilindini on the coast of Kenya, to concentrate later at Kilindini. Ceylon would eventually

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<sup>1</sup> I owe these suggestions to Captain Roskill and Admiral S. E. Morison. For the battle of the Coral Sea, see below, p. 492. Between 16th and 20th April, United States Intelligence learnt that the Japanese were planning an attack on 3rd May. It was not till after the victory of Midway (4th-6th June) that the Pacific Fleet was able to take the offensive; see Morison, IV, 12-15.

<sup>2</sup> See Kirby, II, Chap. vii.

become again the main base for the fleet and it remained our policy to defend the island but, until it was adequately secured against air-attack and the Eastern Fleet was stronger, Kilindini would be used as the main base. The Chiefs of Staff were now of opinion that the loss of Ceylon would be a lesser evil than the risk of the destruction of the Eastern Fleet.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister, who had received no answer to his signal of 7th April to the President, appealed to him again urgently on the 15th. Seeing that the Japanese had felt able to detach nearly a third of their battle fleet and half their carriers, a force which we should be unable to match for several months, we were threatened with the loss of Ceylon and an invasion of eastern India, entailing the loss of all contact with the Chinese. Worse still, the Japanese might become the dominating factor in the Western Indian Ocean, holding up our convoys and cutting our own oil supplies as well as supplies to Russia. 'With so much of the weight of Japan thrown upon us we have more than we can bear.' If the United States Pacific Fleet could not yet exercise compulsive pressure on the Japanese naval command, could the President not temporarily reinforce Somerville, or alternatively, relieve the *Duke of York* at Scapa? We should also welcome some United States heavy bombers in India.

The President in reply referred cryptically to measures now in hand by the Pacific Fleet which it was hoped would prove effective and which would be made known to the Prime Minister shortly. A month later the First Sea Lord referred with appreciation to 'the action taken by the United States Fleet in April in an endeavour to relieve the Japanese pressure on the Indian Ocean'.<sup>2</sup> Answering the Prime Minister's other request, the President objected to a concentration of 'mixed forces' at Colombo; he preferred to help by reinforcing the British Home Fleet and sending land-based aircraft to guard the coasts of India and Ceylon.

The demonstration of our inability to prevent the activities of the Japanese at sea naturally strengthened Wavell's demands for reinforcements for India. After the Easter raid he thought that our weakness in shore-based aircraft might well lead to an early expedition against southern India or Ceylon. On 12th April he signalled somewhat bitterly: 'Appreciate difficulties, but unless effort is made to supply our essential needs, which I have not overstated, I must warn you that we shall never regain control of Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal and run risk of losing India.' On the 14th, after a meeting at Bombay, Wavell, Somerville and Peirse, the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, sent an urgent joint demand for air reinforcements.

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<sup>1</sup> Compare with p. 482 above.

<sup>2</sup> To Stark, 19th May; see pp. 485-6. above.



The Chiefs of Staff replied on the 16th that they realized the position and were doing all they could; some heavy bombers were being sent to India, but they gave technical objections to the dispatch of Halifaxes; 80 per cent of the aircraft used against Germany were medium bombers, such as the Wellingtons which India would receive via Malta. The Prime Minister did his best to reassure Wavell by telling him what aircraft were being sent him and of the proposed additions to the Eastern Fleet in the next few months. But in the meantime, he said, the defence of Ceylon was more urgent than the defence of Calcutta. Aircraft could not be provided for the long eastern Indian coast line, but was it really likely that the Japanese would think it 'worth while to send four or five divisions roaming about the Madras Presidency?' Wavell replied that, far from doing this, the Japanese might land in southern India in order to seize air bases to threaten Ceylon. For the next two months, until the assembly of the reinforced Eastern Fleet at the end of June, India would be in grave danger.

Wavell was the more indignant when on the 29th April he was informed by the C.I.G.S. that the two Australian brigades in Ceylon might have to return to their own country 'fairly soon', and further that two British brigades (of 5th Division) and one East African might not be available for the defence of the island 'for some considerable time'. The War Cabinet, he replied in an angry telegram with which the Viceroy, Lord Linlithgow, concurred, 'must really make up their minds whether or not they propose to defend India and Ceylon seriously'. If they did, to reduce the slender garrison of the island by five brigades was 'sheer madness', since it was recognized that the air forces which were being provided were quite inadequate to prevent seaborne invasions such as the absence of a naval force enabled the Japanese to carry out unchecked. On the mainland he had three incomplete divisions to defend north-east India and a field-force of one partially trained division to defend the rest of the country. There was also the political aspect.

'India has sent all her troops as soon as sufficiently equipped and trained (and usually before) to fight outside India at request of His Majesty's Government. There are at present the equivalent of about seven Indian divisions in the Middle East, a much larger and better trained force than is available in India itself. There is continuous pressure here for these troops to return to India to defend their home country. I have so far been able to resist this, and to do something to maintain sinking Indian morale by assurances that His Majesty's Government are determined to give every possible assistance to defence of India and that large reinforcements are arriving now. I cannot honourably continue to give these assurances if reinforcements for India are constantly

diverted or deferred like this. I must request firm policy which will be adhered to.'

He asked that this telegram should be laid before the War Cabinet, but the request was not granted.

The Prime Minister in reply promised Wavell that the two Australian brigades should not leave Ceylon until relieved by two brigades of the British 5th Division, and argued that on the whole and in the long run India would gain by what the government proposed.<sup>1</sup>

The reason for these changes of plan was that the Cabinet had decided on 24th April to proceed with an operation which had long been in the mind of the Prime Minister and his advisers but now seemed urgent in view of the Japanese naval superiority in the Indian Ocean. This was the seizure of Diego Suarez at the northern end of the great French island of Madagascar, then under Vichy's control.

The denial of the Mediterranean passage had increased the importance of the reinforcement and supply route round the Cape. Athwart our communications in the Indian Ocean lay Madagascar, and after the Vichy government's capitulation to the Japanese in Indo-China it seemed unlikely that it would resist a demand from them for the use of the bases in the island for their submarines. At the time of the outbreak of war in the Far East the Chiefs of Staff were discussing reports on how best to forestall the enemy.<sup>2</sup> Much the most important strategic point on the island was the naval base of Diego Suarez, a landlocked sheet of water on the east side of its extreme northern tip and one of the finest natural harbours in the world. The Vichy garrison was understood to consist of 6,000 troops, mostly native, and a few aircraft.

Apart from the need of securing surprise, which was thought essential, and finding troops, shipping, assault-craft and a covering force, there was the question who should take part in the enterprise. General de Gaulle had written to the Prime Minister suggesting a joint plan of action with the Free French; the Chiefs of Staff raised no objection to this in principle and indeed saw advantages in the Free French garrisoning the island after its occupation, but 'from the security and joint planning point of view' it would be preferable not to bring them in till the last moment. Dakar was in everyone's mind. A South African force would have been welcome but was not then

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<sup>1</sup> In view of the understanding on which the two Australian brigades had been lent Mr. Churchill's decision to retain them was somewhat high-handed. On 30th April he told Mr. Curtin that he hoped to relieve them 'about the end of May'. See p. 483 above.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chap. xrv.

available; an American contingent was thought politically desirable but was not forthcoming.

Of alternative schemes proposed, a purely naval *coup de main* was ruled out; a regular combined operation would be necessary and the claims of Madagascar would have to be balanced against those of the Canaries, the Portuguese Atlantic Islands and a North-West African landing. But by 18th December the Chiefs of Staff had approved a plan and designated commanders. Planning and preparations were nearing completion when on 10th January the Chiefs of Staff reached the conclusion that the Madagascar plan ('Bonus') should be dismounted in favour of the North-West African ('Gymnast'). The Prime Minister agreed, and so the matter rested for nearly two months.

In spite of urgings from General Smuts, who looked on Madagascar as 'the key to the safety of the Indian Ocean', and from General de Gaulle, who repeated his offer to bring the island over if given naval and air assistance, the Prime Minister held as late as 1st March that Madagascar must still have a low priority and he informed General Smuts that in present circumstances we were not prepared to provide the necessary forces. But within a few days 'Bonus' was revived. It may be that the imminent fall of Rangoon turned the balance. On 7th March, the day before the Japanese occupied the city, the Prime Minister, while rejecting a mixed expedition, minuted that while Ceylon had first priority Madagascar came next and must be urgently considered. From now onwards matters moved swiftly. 30th April was suggested as a provisional zero date, and the naval covering force should be supplied from Force H at Gibraltar. The scale of the land-force was raised to three brigades and a commando, and on 18th March the Chiefs of Staff discussed the revised plan (now called 'Ironclad') with Major-General R. G. Sturges who was to command the land-force, the commander of the combined operation being Rear-Admiral E. N. Syfret.<sup>1</sup> The convoy from the United Kingdom sailed on 23rd March. The accession of Laval to power at Vichy raised hesitations among the Chiefs of Staff as to the wisdom of taking such provocative action at this moment, but on 24th April it was decided to proceed with the operation and the Cabinet gave their approval. General Smuts pressed for the occupation of other points, such as the bases of Tamatave and Majunga on the east and west coasts, but the Prime Minister held that this was not necessary, however desirable. 'Portsmouth could be held with the enemy in Caithness.' Our object was not to occupy the island ourselves but to deny it to 'a far-flung

<sup>1</sup> The combined force included H.M.S. *Ramillies*, *Illustrious*, *Indomitable*, *Devonshire* and *Hermione*; 29th Independent Brigade Group and two brigade groups (13th and 17th) of 5th Division and No. 5 Commando.

Japanese attack', and it was urgent that the two brigades of 5th Division should move on to India.

'Ironclad' went off well, the operation being launched on 5th May and completed on the 7th. The President let Vichy know that it had his full approval. An offer from General Smuts of a brigade group for further operations was gratefully accepted, and the question whether the victorious force should not be used to bring over the rest of the island was again considered; but for the same reasons as before—the need of getting two at least of the three brigades to reinforce India as soon as possible—it was decided on 16th May to abandon operations against Tamatave and Majunga. General Sturges remained as Fortress Commander at Diego Saurez.

The expedition was an insurance against a risk which seemed very real during the months of March and April when a Japanese fleet was free to prowl about the Indian Ocean and play havoc with our shipping. The C.I.G.S. however, who on 11th December had suggested that it might be 'a reasonable gamble not to undertake this operation', felt as late as 24th April that we had 'little to gain by it'; his Director of Military Operations was definitely against it.<sup>1</sup> The event proved them right; the Japanese had no intention of using Diego Suarez themselves, while the British occupation of the base did not prevent two Japanese submarines from damaging the *Ramillies* in the harbour on 29th May. On the other hand Wavell's fears that the delay in reinforcing India might have serious results were not justified. A point in favour of the enterprise which no doubt appealed to the Prime Minister was that here at last the British were seizing the initiative and proving that such an operation need not be a repetition of Dakar. 'We must not lose our faculty to dare,' he said, 'especially in dark days.'

The remainder of Madagascar was not won over by the Allies until September. During the summer desultory negotiations were carried on with the Vichy-French authorities at Tananarive, the capital, but without result. At length on 18th July the Prime Minister decided that, now the situation in India was less urgent, we should make a finish of the affair, and on the 25th the Chiefs of Staff recommended that the operation should be carried out as soon as possible, so as not to interfere with the mounting of the North-West African expedition; if done at all, it must be done before the rainy season began in October. The Cabinet agreed on 11th August, and the necessary action was in fact taken by forces under Lieut.-General Sir William Platt.<sup>2</sup> Tananarive was occupied on 23rd September, a fortnight after

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, p. 365; Kennedy, *Business of War*, pp. 214-15.

<sup>2</sup> These included 29th Brigade, 7th South African Brigade, 22nd East African Brigade. General Platt had successfully conducted operations in Eritrea in 1941 and was at this time in command in East Africa.

the first landing, and thereafter there was little serious fighting, though the Governor did not surrender until 6th November.<sup>1</sup>

So far as the Japanese were concerned, the Indian Ocean had for some months been a backwater. But as the immediate danger to Ceylon and India receded the danger to Australia and New Zealand became more immediate. The Japanese Navy's idea of invading Australia had indeed been abandoned, but the minds of the higher command were none the less centred on the south-west Pacific. Their immediate objectives were Port Moresby on the south coast of New Guinea, some 400 miles from the north-east coast of Queensland, and various points in the Solomon group, with the ulterior purpose of cutting the Allies' reinforcement route by the seizure of New Caledonia and Fiji. On the 3rd May they occupied the island of Tulagi in the Solomons, not far distant from the larger island of Guadalcanal, of which so much was to be heard later. But the Japanese attempt to land at Port Moresby was foiled by the United States Navy at the battle of the Coral Sea (7th, 8th May), famous as the first fleet action contested solely by shipborne aircraft and also as the first decisive check to Japanese naval power. Nevertheless, as at Jutland, strategic victory fell to the fleet which sustained the heavier losses.<sup>2</sup>

The war had come very close to Australia. As early as 19th February, Darwin had been bombed with devastating results, and on the following day Timor, where there were Australian troops, was invaded. So it was not surprising that the governments of Australia and New Zealand, neither of which Dominions had ever known war within hundreds of miles, should now feel anxious as to their security and press for greater material assistance from the United Kingdom and United States. There was indeed a natural feeling in both Dominions that the proper place of their own trained formations, now serving overseas, was at the present juncture at home, and we have seen how Australia insisted on the recall of two of her divisions, then in process of transference from the Middle East to the East Indies.<sup>3</sup> An obvious objection to more such moves was the immense diversion of shipping which they would require, and soon after the break up of A.B.D.A. the Prime Minister appealed to the President. While expressing the hope that United States naval superiority in the Pacific would be restored by May and setting out our own plans for naval reinforcement in the Indian Ocean, he described our present

<sup>1</sup> Kirby, II, 142-4.

<sup>2</sup> See Morison *op. cit.*, IV, 21-64; Kirby, II, 226-8; Roskill, II, 35-36. The United States lost the fleet carrier *Lexington*, the Japanese the light carrier *Shoho*; each side had a fleet carrier damaged.

<sup>3</sup> See above, p. 468.

weakness on land on the Levant-Caucasus front and asked if the United States could offer to send a division each to Australia and New Zealand; this might induce them to retain their own two divisions in the Middle East, thus saving shipping. He explained how the needs of maintaining the army and of building up the air and anti-aircraft forces in the Indian theatre would prevent us at present from sending more than three divisions in March, April and May on the two-months voyage to the east. He also asked if the United States main naval forces could give increasing protection in the Anzac area.

The President was most helpful and on 10th March the Prime Minister was able to inform Mr. Curtin and Mr. Fraser that he had agreed to dispatch the two divisions asked for conditionally on the retention of the same number of Dominion divisions in the Middle East. The President had also promised to provide shipping to move two British divisions from the United Kingdom in April and May, additional to 5th Division which was about to sail and two more which would sail in the next few months in British ships. The apportionment of these five British divisions between the Middle East and India would depend on how things were going when they had rounded the Cape.<sup>1</sup> The two Dominion prime ministers might be sure that the presence of considerable United States forces in the Anzac area would emphasize to the United States the importance of protecting that area by its main seapower and also of accelerating the equipment of the existing Dominion forces. To Mr. Fraser he added: 'You have never asked for the withdrawal of your division and we have admired the constancy of spirit and devotion to the cause which has animated your government and people.'

Both Dominions agreed that their divisions might remain in the Middle East, where in the crisis of the late summer they rendered invaluable service. But the Dominions were not satisfied. Mr. Fraser did not believe that the arrival of one 'green' American division would ensure the safety of his country, which was believed by his advisers to require six divisions. The Australian Chiefs of Staff considered that until adequate naval and air forces were available a minimum of twenty-five divisions was required to defend their country against the possible scale of attack. They expected Port Moresby to be attacked within a few days of 13th March and Darwin early in April. Alarmist messages were also received at the end of March from Dr. H. V. Evatt, the Australian Minister for External Affairs, who was then in Washington. Describing the position of Australia for the next two months as 'a desperate one' he asked if she could not be granted the 'entire United Kingdom allocation' of

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<sup>1</sup> In the event only 2nd Division went to India: 8th Armoured Division and 44th and 51st Infantry Divisions went to the Middle East.

munitions for six weeks. This might make Mr. Churchill 'the saviour of Australia'. Dr. Evatt hoped that he would also agree to the return of the Australian division still in the Middle East, since the President no longer insisted on its remaining as the condition on which he would allow the reinforcement of Australia by a second United States division.<sup>1</sup> The President was in fact disturbed by what appeared publicly to be 'a rather strained relationship between Australia and the United Kingdom', as evidenced by disagreement over the handling of the appointment of Mr. R. G. Casey, the Australian Minister in Washington, to succeed Captain Oliver Lyttelton as British Minister of State at Cairo.

Mr. Churchill, replying to Mr. Curtin and to Dr. Evatt, said that if Australia were being 'heavily invaded', say by eight to ten Japanese divisions—as distinct from localized attacks in the north or mere raids elsewhere—we would divert to her aid the troops continually passing from the United Kingdom to the East, of which the 2nd Infantry Division, the first to sail, would be rounding the Cape at the end of April or beginning of May. But he was by no means convinced that Australia was the Japanese chosen target and we must be careful not to direct our limited reserves to theatres where there would be no fighting.<sup>2</sup> It would be a mistake to recall the Australian division in the Middle East now; the two brigades lent for Ceylon would return to Australia as soon as shipping could be found.<sup>3</sup> It was not possible to transfer to Australia—to the confusion of existing plans—the whole flow of British production for six weeks.

At the same time, on 1st April, the Chiefs of Staff approved a report which took account of their Australian *confrères'* views on the defence of their country. They agreed that Japan intended to capture Port Moresby and probably Darwin also, but they did not believe that 'a genuine invasion of Australia' formed part of her present plans. She was more likely to try to place herself astride the eastern and western reinforcement routes to Australia by the occupation of Samoa, Fiji and New Caledonia on the one side and Fremantle on the other. Since, however, Australia was now in the American zone of responsibility, they made no detailed proposals. Speaking generally, they thought that in the present circumstances the only sure means of

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<sup>1</sup> In addition to 41st U.S. Division, due to sail on 18th March. Mr Curtin had expressed 'great anxiety' at the retention of the Australian division in the Middle East; the President said that the responsibility must be Curtin's.

<sup>2</sup> In a note of 3rd April to Mr. S. M. Bruce, the High Commissioner in London, through whom Dr. Evatt's telegrams had come, he pointed out that he had 'never said anything about diverting troops to meet [mere] threats'.

<sup>3</sup> They in fact remained until mid-July, when they followed the other four brigades of 6th and 7th Divisions which had been recalled home. These troops in due course saw plenty of fighting, repelling the various Japanese attacks in New Guinea from July onwards and suffering heavy casualties.

protecting eastern Australia and New Zealand would be a move of the United States main fleet into those waters, but it could not be expected to remain there indefinitely. The aim of the Allies must therefore be to build up in Australia and New Zealand air, land and local naval forces capable of holding out until the fleet could return and sever Japanese communications. But it would be wrong to over-insure in Australia to the prejudice of the Middle East and India, and we had also to consider Russia who was likely sooner or later to come into conflict with Japan.

The Chiefs of Staff had on 18th March approved a full report on the defence of New Zealand, which they found to be primarily a naval problem, and on 10th April they repeated their opinion that in the absence of adequate naval and air power the land-forces required to guarantee security would be far beyond the resources of the United Nations.

The Australian government were not to be easily convinced that their country's interests were properly regarded at the highest level, and Mr. Churchill was surprised, seeing that Australia was now in the American sphere, to receive a signal of 28th April from Mr. Curtin purporting to forward representations by General MacArthur as to the inadequacy of the forces allotted to him for the defence of Australia; he asked for the diversion to Australia, pending the return of 9th Australian Division from the Middle East, of the next two British divisions rounding the Cape, for an aircraft-carrier, and for more shipping on the Australian-American run. Mr. Churchill, however, believed that Mr. Curtin was 'using General MacArthur' to make these demands, and, after inquiring of the President whether he had authorized the General to act as he had done, he returned a firm refusal to Mr. Curtin, repeating his earlier arguments. The President assured him that MacArthur would be instructed to address all future requests to Washington.<sup>1</sup>

The next approach was made through Dr. Evatt, who attended meetings of the War Cabinet in May as Special Envoy from his government. Australian apprehensions had not been dispelled by the result of the battle of the Coral Sea. The Japanese naval covering force had, it was true, been turned back, but the troops in their transports had not been destroyed and lived to invade another day.

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<sup>1</sup> Evidence is conflicting as to whether MacArthur intended Curtin to forward his views to Washington. According to a letter of 28th April from Curtin to the General (quoted by S. Milner, *Victory in Papua* [Washington 1947], p. 28) MacArthur at a meeting on 20th agreed that Curtin would do well to ask Mr. Churchill for the assistance mentioned. MacArthur, however (see Matloff, pp. 212-15), maintained that he had only expressed his views at Curtin's request for his personal information and had not intended that he should transmit them to Washington.

Milner's book, like that of Matloff and Snell, forms part of the official History of the U.S. Army in World War II.



At a meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on 12th May Dr. Evatt pleaded that everything possible should be done to spare Australia the horrors of invasion, which he believed to be more imminent than was supposed in London, and to send reinforcements before the emergency occurred. Although Australia was in the American sphere, her government hoped the British Chiefs of Staff would use their influence to ensure that Australian interests were given a fair hearing by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. This was rather a change of note from Mr. Curtin's loud appeal to America in December.

Sir Alan Brooke pointed out that there were insufficient forces for every theatre and that in the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff a large-scale invasion of Australia was unlikely. Sir Charles Portal explained that we assigned munitions on an agreed plan with the United States and it was not only Australia which was short. The same ground was covered at a second meeting on 28th May.

The fullest and most fruitful discussion of Australia's case was that in the Cabinet on 21st May, as a result of which it was agreed to send forthwith from the United Kingdom three Spitfire squadrons, two of them manned by Australians, as a special contribution to Australia in an emergency.<sup>1</sup> Although it would have been more economical to divert Kittyhawk aircraft from the United States, the symbolic effect of sending Spitfires from England, Dr. Evatt said, could be very great. Before Dr. Evatt left for Australia General Ismay, with the Prime Minister's approval, wrote him a letter recording the result of the discussions.

Curiously enough, it was not till now, Dr. Evatt said, that he or his government had been clearly apprised 'that the strategy for the conduct of the war by the United Nations remains as it was agreed upon between the Combined Chiefs of Staff in December last, namely, that efforts should be concentrated first upon the defeat of Germany, and subsequently upon the defeat of Japan'. The Australian Chiefs of Staff, he noted, had had no part in this decision, and its wisdom was open to doubt.

The dispatch of the aircraft of the three squadrons was, it is true, delayed by a decision of 22nd June in order to meet the more pressing needs of the Middle East, but by that time the Prime Minister could point out, in a notable understatement, that the American victory at Midway had 'had a material effect on the naval situation in the Pacific and on the imminence of the threat to Australia'. After a talk with Admiral King on 11th June, Admiral Little, the naval member of the British Joint Staff Mission at Washington, observed to Pound: 'The circumstances of the Midway engagement should lead to better appreciation of naval strategy by

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<sup>1</sup> There were seven Australian squadrons in the United Kingdom.

Dominions and understanding that naval units should not be allocated to limited areas as has been proposed from time to time.'

It had indeed been the Japanese intention to isolate Australia by occupying the Fiji Islands, Samoa and New Caledonia, but the Doolittle bomber raid on the homeland, on 18th April, caused a change of plan, whereby priority was given to the occupation of Midway and the Aleutian Islands. Admiral Yamamoto had for some time been recommending the seizure of Midway, and the Naval High Command now supported him, while the Army consented to the postponement of the expedition against Fiji and Samoa if an attack on the Aleutians were combined with that on Midway. The Americans' Intelligence led them to expect that the Japanese were planning this enterprise,<sup>1</sup> and Admiral King, through Admiral Stark, the senior United States naval representative in London, asked if Eastern Fleet could lend a carrier to replace temporarily the United States ships which were being moved north to counter it. Alternatively could the British, by sea and air, raid Japanese bases in the eastern part of the Indian Ocean? The Admiralty, with the Prime Minister's approval, felt bound to decline either suggestion: to detach one of the three carriers in the Eastern Fleet would make us weak in both the Indian and the south-west Pacific Oceans, while it would be unsound to risk our surface forces within reach of enemy shore-based aircraft; nothing that we could do would bluff the Japanese into altering their dispositions in the Pacific.

But all turned out well. The American success at Midway (4th-7th June) was decisive: the Japanese lost all the four carriers employed and many experienced pilots, and as a result of their defeat they first postponed for two months the attempt to seize the islands in the South Pacific and finally abandoned it. Though much desperate fighting was to follow on the islands and seas neighbouring Australia, the victory at Midway proved the real turning point in the Pacific war.

The London government's relations with Wellington were generally easier than with Canberra, and Mr. Churchill spoke of New Zealand's consistently helpful and generous attitude. When it was proposed from Washington to move to Fiji the United States division allotted to New Zealand, he refused his sanction unless the New Zealand government agreed, which rather regretfully they did. 'They have never made a fault,' he minuted, 'nor must we.'

The Chinese, on the other hand, it was hard to persuade that we were doing all we could to help them. The British government were not blind to the importance of maintaining Chinese resistance. There

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<sup>1</sup> See Morrison, IV, 13.

were never less than twenty-five front-line Japanese divisions operating in China, as well as an equal number of independent brigades, making a total of about a million men. If Chinese resistance had collapsed, most of these divisions would have been available to fight elsewhere. The problem was how to help China in view of our own desperate shortages and the closing of all contact with her by land. Nevertheless it was clear from interviews of the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary with the Chinese Ambassador that his government were deeply disappointed with us, and negotiations about a loan dragged wearily on throughout the summer.

But the whole situation, said the Prime Minister at the beginning of July, was changing. 'We must adapt ourselves to this rapidly changing scene. A great easement has come to us in the Indian Ocean compared with the March-April position. At any time the Japanese may involve themselves with Russia. India has been reinforced. Ceylon is getting into good order.' The Americans moreover were taking the offensive in the Pacific. Early in July Admiral Nimitz gave orders for the seizure of Guadalcanal and Tulagi in the Southern Solomons, and the landings were effected on 7th and 8th August.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See endpaper.

## CHAPTER XXI

# CONVOYS AND BLOCKADE: RAIDS AND SUBVERSION

**T**HE AGREED STATEMENT of American and British strategy, as issued in a joint memorandum by the two Staffs in January 1942,<sup>1</sup> mentioned among the essential features of our strategy:

- The maintenance of essential communications.
- Closing and tightening the ring round Germany.
- Wearing down and undermining German resistance by air bombardment, blockade, subversive activities and propaganda.
- The continuous development of offensive action against Germany.

In this and the following chapter we shall consider briefly how these tasks were performed in the months with which we are concerned.

Apart from the holding of bases and staging points on strategic routes, such as Gibraltar, Malta, Freetown, Victoria Point and Fiji, for which land garrisons were needed, the maintenance of essential communications was, not to mention the Merchant Navy, a matter for the Royal Navy and Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force. The extension of the war in recent months had greatly enlarged these responsibilities, for they now included the protection of the Arctic convoys bound for Russia and of convoys and troops movements to India and the Far East. Nevertheless the primary area of maritime operations remained the Atlantic, since it was there that in 1942 lay our greatest danger, the possibility that we might be prevented from continuing the war by the interruption of our supplies of munitions, raw materials and food. In the last months of 1941 the toll of sinkings in the Atlantic had strikingly dropped, but this comparative immunity was not to last. Whereas in December 1941 the Allies lost ten ships of 50,682 tons in the North Atlantic, in January 1942 they lost forty-eight of 276,795 tons, and in June 124 ships of 623,545 tons.<sup>2</sup> Far the greater part of the losses was due to the U-boats, with attacks from the air a long way behind, but we had also to guard against surface ships, both warships and disguised raiders. The latter were

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix VIII.

but a minor nuisance: only three were at work, and they mainly in the South Atlantic and Indian Oceans. But the German ships of war were still capable of causing us much trouble.

First among them ranked the newly commissioned *Tirpitz*, of 40,000 tons, sister-ship of the *Bismarck* and more powerful than any British ship afloat. By her move on 15th–16th January from the Baltic to Trondheim she had seriously increased the responsibilities of Admiral Sir John Tovey and the Home Fleet at Scapa. Her strategic function, as stated by Admiral Raeder, was, first, to protect the German position in the Norwegian and Arctic areas by threatening the flank of enemy operations against the north of Norway and by attacking White Sea convoys; and, secondly, to tie down heavy enemy forces in the Atlantic so that they could not operate in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean, or the Pacific.<sup>1</sup> From both these aspects the *Tirpitz* was very successful and though frequently attacked from the air she remained a thorn in our sides until finally sunk by the Royal Air Force in November 1944.<sup>2</sup> It was always possible that she might attempt a break-out into the Atlantic like the *Bismarck* and do untold damage. This, according to Raeder, had been previously intended but the idea had been dropped 'because of the general oil situation, the enemy situation and the need for her presence in the Northern area'.<sup>3</sup>

The Fuehrer was obsessed with the danger of a British return to Norway and declared that the German fleet must use all its resources for its defence. If the British knew their business they would attack northern Norway at several points and aim at taking Narvik, thus exerting pressure on Finland and Sweden which might be 'of decisive importance for the outcome of the war'. He had been reassured by Raeder's opinion that the British did not intend in the near future to attack the Azores, Cape Verde, or Dakar, or to 'abandon East Asia for a time in order to crush Germany and Italy first'. So he was resolved to concentrate the main strength of the fleet in Norwegian waters.<sup>4</sup> The pocket-battleship *Scheer* and the heavy cruiser *Hipper* were there already,<sup>5</sup> and he now insisted, against naval advice, that the battle-cruisers *Scharnhorst* and *Gneisenau*, as well as the cruiser *Prinz Eugen*, which were all at length ready for operations, should break out from Brest and make their way up-Channel with a view to joining the fleet in Norway. This hazardous feat they accomplished, though not unscathed, on 11th and 12th February, despite all the

<sup>1</sup> *Fuehrer's Naval Conferences*, 29.12.41.

<sup>2</sup> The *Tirpitz* was immobilized for several months by midget submarines in September 1943; S. W. Roskill, *The War at Sea*, III, i (1961), 68.

<sup>3</sup> *F.N.C.* 13.11.41.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.12, 12.12.41, 12.1.42.

<sup>5</sup> The pocket-battleship *Lützow* was still under repair, after being torpedoed on 13th June: Roskill, I, 484.

efforts of the Navy and Royal Air Force; their success was due to failures in the first instance in air reconnaissance but also in the co-ordination of the attacking forces.<sup>1</sup>

The escape of the three ships was a severe blow to British prestige, all the more painful as falling just when the doom of Singapore was imminent. But from the point of view of naval strategy it had its advantages, since it was no longer necessary to divert ships and aircraft to guard against the possibility of such a foray into the Atlantic as the two battle-cruisers had carried out in the early months of 1941.

'We have always had to allow for the ships at Brest breaking out,' the First Sea Lord wrote to the American Admiral Ghormley on 17th February, 'and the fact that they are now in the North Sea has decreased and not increased our responsibilities. In fact we have sent *Rodney* to refit, which we should not have been able to do so long as the ships were at Brest.' Nevertheless there was now a considerable concentration of enemy ships in Norwegian waters, and it was judged desirable to keep at Scapa three capital ships besides an aircraft-carrier.<sup>2</sup>

To provide these ships was not, however, a simple matter. In bringing forward the new naval construction programme in April the First Lord declared that the Navy was now bearing 'a far greater strain than at any time since the war began'. Most notably its strength had been reduced by a grievous series of losses among capital ships. In the Mediterranean the *Ark Royal* and *Barham* had been sunk in November, while on 19th December the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* had each been put out of action for several months, besides which we had lost at the beginning of December two cruisers sunk and one badly damaged.<sup>3</sup> On 10th December the *Prince of Wales* and *Repulse* were sunk off the east coast of Malaya. The Navy was thus left without a single modern battleship to face the Italians in the Eastern Mediterranean or the Japanese in the wide waters east of the Cape; there were only the four R-class veterans of pre-1918 construction, which were unequal to fighting the Japanese ships, though the Prime Minister protested against their being ignored, saying that if they were worth risking men's lives in they ought to be counted among our capital ships. The Eastern Fleet in the Indian Ocean was reinforced in March by the *Warspite*, now repaired, and three aircraft-carriers, but its commander, Admiral Somerville, was still, as he

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<sup>1</sup> See Roskill, II, 149-61.

<sup>2</sup> Both the German battle-cruisers had in fact been damaged by mines, and the *Gneisenau*, after being bombed in dock later in the month, never saw service again. But the Admiralty were unaware of the damage done. Roskill, II, 158, 161.

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, I, 535: *Galatea* sunk by U-boat, 14.12; *Neptune* sunk, *Aurora* damaged by mines 19.12.

put it, 'the poor fox', liable to be hunted by the powerful Japanese pack.<sup>1</sup> There remained at the Admiralty's disposal the *Duke of York*, a new ship only recently worked up, and the *King George V*, the *Nelson* and the *Rodney*, all of which were due for refitting; also the battle-cruiser *Renown*, and the carrier *Victorious*. On the day of the disaster in Malayan waters the First Lord urged that 'in the situation created by the loss of three capital ships in a fortnight, it is important to make every human effort possible to speed up the completion of the *Anson* and *Howe* and grant them 1 (a) priority.'<sup>2</sup> The Prime Minister agreed.

Besides the ships of the Home Fleet based on Scapa, there was the *Malaya* at Gibraltar, in accordance with the Admiralty's policy of keeping a battleship with Force H to watch the western gate of the Mediterranean. Accordingly when in March the Cabinet decided to employ this force for the operation against Diego Suarez the Prime Minister felt obliged to ask the President if the United States could fill the gap at Gibraltar during the next three months by sending 'say, two battleships, an aircraft-carrier, some cruisers and destroyers'. The President was willing to help, but preferred to do so by temporarily reinforcing the Home Fleet at Scapa.

In welcoming the President's proposals in March for a re-allotment of American and British strategic areas, Mr. Churchill had insisted that 'nothing must prevent the United States and British Navies from working to a common strategy from Alaska to Cape Town'. But in fact, even before the disastrous battle of the Java Sea and the dissolution of A.B.D.A., liaison between the two fleets in eastern waters scarcely existed. It had to be explained to the Australians that, with the one primarily concerned with the Indian Ocean and the other with the Pacific, common action was impossible; even co-ordinated action was not found easy. Indeed co-operation amounted to hardly more than one admiral asking the other if he could take supporting action on some particular occasion, as was the case at the time of the Japanese raid on Ceylon mentioned in the last chapter.

Even in the Atlantic, co-operation was not as close as the Admiralty would have liked. The First Sea Lord felt that 'until our two fleets in the vital North Atlantic area work to one common doctrine and in complete harmony there is little chance of exercising any economies in forces we each employ'. Why should we not, for instance, co-ordinate our refitting periods? But if the British often could not get Americans to act just as they wished they usually found that in a specific case their Allies would give generous help. Such had been the case when the President responded to Mr. Churchill's appeal of 14th March by agreeing to send a new United States battleship, the

<sup>1</sup> Roskill, II, 29.

<sup>2</sup> The *Barham* was sunk on 25th November, 1941. *Anson* joined the Home Fleet in August 1942, *Howe* later in the year.

*Washington*, to Scapa.<sup>1</sup> A month later, in the hope of reaching a closer understanding on the professional level, the Prime Minister sent the First Sea Lord to Washington to talk over matters with Admiral King.

Admiral Pound reported home on 21st April, as the result of 'long and frank discussions' with King, that nothing was likely to happen in the Pacific in the near future which would relieve the strain in the Indian Ocean.<sup>2</sup> But in view of the situation in those waters the task force sent to join the Home Fleet for the period of the Madagascar operation would remain at Scapa until the *Malaya* returned to Gibraltar. Rather than send another battleship to join the *Washington* at Scapa, King was prepared to base U.S.S. *North Carolina* at Argentia in Newfoundland, in position to head off the *Tirpitz* should she elude us in the passage between Scotland and Greenland; if a break-out occurred he would place not only the *North Carolina* but also any other suitable ships in the North Atlantic under Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet. Pound referred to this last arrangement as 'a great advance' and thought there was now a good case for releasing the *Duke of York* from Scapa for other duties, if Commander-in-Chief, Home Fleet, agreed.

The First Sea Lord's report was considered by the Defence Committee next day, 22nd April, in relation to the provisioning of Malta, the next Russian convoy, the Madagascar operation and the reinforcement of the Eastern Fleet. In accordance with the views of Admiral Tovey, who reminded the government that the sea approaches to the British Isles were 'the only area where the war can immediately be lost', it was agreed, at the cost of postponing a Malta convoy till June, not to withdraw the *Duke of York* from Scapa until the *Nelson* and the *Rodney* had completed their working up after refitting.

The discussion offers an example of the flexibility of sea-power and also of the importance of a correct decision in the case of an individual ship, since its movement might decisively affect operations in a distant quarter of the world. It shows too how the need of the older British ships to refit, as well as uncertainty as to possible enemy action, made the maintenance of adequate strength at the vital points a matter of delicate timing. It was only gradually that the Eastern Fleet could be built up to provide anything like security for Ceylon and the waters to the west of it, much less to act offensively. On 24th April the Prime Minister told the President that we hoped to assemble

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<sup>1</sup> The *Washington* formed the nucleus of 'Task Force 99', which also included the carrier *Wasp*.

<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to reconcile Pound's report with the signal of 8th April (see above, p. 485) and his letter to Stark of 19th May (p. 487). Had the U.S. Fleet taken some action earlier than 21st April?



in the Indian Ocean by the end of June a force including *Duke of York*, *Renown*, *Warspite*, *Valiant*, the four R-Class battleships and three armoured aircraft-carriers. 'Here would be a fleet which, if not strong enough to fight the Japanese Navy, would be at any rate capable of dealing with a very heavy detachment.' As matters turned out, this plan had to give way to the decision to carry out the North-West African landings in the autumn.

The disaster off the Malayan coast had emphasized the need for aircraft-carriers. It was indeed only due to an accident that the two doomed ships had not been accompanied by the carrier *Indomitable*. Of such ships four were now in commission<sup>1</sup> and two more were due to complete in 1943. The construction programme presented in April 1942 proposed to build another two, besides one already ordered, of this type, but also as short-term policy to order four 'intermediate' carriers of a lighter type taking less time to build.<sup>2</sup> We hoped also to obtain from American yards fifteen auxiliary aircraft-carriers, which were in fact converted merchant ships, suitable for escort duties, and the Minister of War Transport had ere this been called upon to provide for conversion eight ships already in service.

The Fleet Air Arm expanded between September 1941 and September 1942 from 387 front-line aircraft to 546, but the rapidity of the expansion 'made it inevitable that its squadrons should be constantly diluted by semi-trained crews'. Lack of training as well as the slow speed of the aircraft contributed to the failure of the attack on the *Tirpitz* by Albacores of the Home Fleet on 9th March.<sup>3</sup> In July 1942 the Defence Committee declared that the equipment with fighters of the most modern type of all the fleet aircraft-carriers must have priority over everything else.

Besides more carriers the Admiralty proposed to build sixteen fleet destroyers of a larger type (2,250 tons). The First Sea Lord explained that these ships were thought necessary to provide adequate anti-aircraft armament when screening heavy ships. 'It is agreed,' he wrote in April, 'that in the future the command of the sea area within reach of strong enemy forces of shore-based aircraft must normally be exercised by our own aircraft and light forces, unless our heavy ships can be protected by our own shore-based fighters. There remain the ocean spaces, in area more than half the world. In these ocean spaces the battle fleet, with its aircraft-carriers providing reconnaissance, striking power and fighter protection and its destroyers providing anti-submarine and anti-aircraft protection, will exercise command of the seas.'

<sup>1</sup> *Formidable*, *Illustrious*, *Indomitable*, *Victorious*.

<sup>2</sup> The number was eventually raised to sixteen. See Postan, *British War Production*, pp. 289-90.

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, II, 85-86, 122-3, 451: see below, p. 508.

The Prime Minister however, for a time doubted the wisdom of building these large destroyers, which would take longer to complete than 'Hunts'. 'The Naval Staff,' he wrote in September, after the American naval victories in the Pacific, 'have still got in their minds the picture of another Battle of Jutland. But this is certainly not going to happen. On the other hand, the numbers for escort will be a desperate need in 1943. . . .'<sup>1</sup>

In the Battle of the Atlantic the second half of 1941 showed a welcome improvement as regards losses of merchant ships over the first, for which various causes may be assigned: the coming into service of the escort vessels ordered at the outset of the war, which at length made continuous surface protection for convoys possible; more effective tactics by escort groups; the provision of air-escort from Canada, Iceland and the British Isles to an extent that left uncovered only a gap of 300 miles in mid-Atlantic; extended assistance from the United States under new neutrality regulations, and the withdrawal of a number of U-boats to the Mediterranean.<sup>2</sup> But the battle had by no means been won. The output of U-boats was increasing rapidly; the total in commission rose from 158 in July 1941 to 249 in January 1942; the number of those operational from 65 to 91.<sup>3</sup> Then at the end of 1941 the belligerency of Japan vastly extended the area of danger to our sea-communications, while in the west the U-boats were at length free to play havoc with American shipping.

Nevertheless, when reporting to Hitler in November 1941, Raeder drew a gloomy picture of the German Navy's prospects owing to shortages of labour and of oil. Whereas the total monthly requirements for fuel-oil of the German and Italian navies amounted to 200,000 tons, the total monthly supplies were only 84,000 tons, and the total stocks only 410,000 tons. A month later Raeder was naturally more cheerful, apart from the very critical oil situation, which had caused 'an intolerable restriction on the mobility of our vessels'. Conditions in the Atlantic would be eased by the Japanese successes and the strain on British merchant shipping would increase. In January there would be a large addition to the number of U-boats. Moreover Darlan had offered to give the German Navy information concerning the disposition of British naval forces due to his knowledge of British Intelligence methods in the past.<sup>4</sup>

The actual achievements of the U-boats in the next few months far

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<sup>1</sup> The 16 fleet destroyers were eventually sanctioned.

<sup>2</sup> See Roskill, I, Chap. XXI.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, I, App. Q.

<sup>4</sup> *F.N.C.*, 13.11, 12.12.41.

exceeded their commanders' expectations,<sup>1</sup> and in addition the Allies suffered heavy losses in the Far East. In June 1942 the sinkings, in all waters, by submarines alone were over 700,000 tons—the rate which the German Naval Command considered necessary in order to offset new construction.<sup>2</sup> By July there were 140 U-boats at work, out of a total fleet of 331. During the seven months January–July 1942 only thirty-two had been sunk by the Allies.<sup>3</sup> In December, February and March the Japanese seized or sunk large quantities of merchant ships in the Pacific area, and in March and April they destroyed much tonnage in the Indian Ocean. But otherwise the vast increase was due to operations in the North Atlantic: here the amount of tonnage lost rose from some 50,000 (10 ships) in December 1941 to over 534,000 (95 ships) in March.

It was with difficulty that Raeder prevailed on Hitler to allow the U-boats to seize the opportunity presented by America's entry into the war to attack the undefended coastal traffic off the east coast of America and in the Caribbean. He was more interested in the Mediterranean and in the Far North. But from mid-January until the Americans decided in April to adopt the convoy system, which the British Admiralty had long been urging upon them, the U-boats enjoyed a second 'happy time'.<sup>4</sup> And yet there were never more than sixteen to eighteen operating at a time between Nova Scotia and Florida; in March and April the number was more like six to eight.<sup>5</sup>

The course of the Battle of the Atlantic in the first seven months of 1942 has been vividly described by Captain Roskill. Despite the deficiency in Allied escort craft it was now possible to provide continuous surface escort for convoys, British, Canadian and United States groups co-operating to take them in charge at fixed ocean meeting points. Improved tactics and weapons had their reward, but the experience of the last war should have taught the lesson that air-cover also was needed to give adequate protection, and there was still a wide gap between Iceland and Newfoundland where this could not be provided. Pending the arrival of the auxiliary aircraft-carriers on order, the need could only be met by very-long-range shore-based aircraft, but for these there was hot competition, as will be shown in the next chapter.

As well as for the escort of convoys the Admiralty wanted shore-based aircraft for bombing the U-boats' bases on the French Atlantic coast and for patrolling the waters in the Bay of Biscay and north of

<sup>1</sup> *Memoirs of Admiral Dönitz* (tr. R. H. Stevens, 1959), p. 223.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 227. In fact the monthly average for the first seven months of 1942 was 508,143 (Roskill, II, 104).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 111–13.

<sup>4</sup> The first 'happy time' was in the summer of 1941.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.





Scotland through which they passed to their destructive work. So long as they were finding their victims off the American seaboard or in the Caribbean, patrols over their transit areas were the only means by which our shore-based aircraft could harry them; but when the introduction of convoy and other improved American measures of defence drove them out into mid-Atlantic the long-standing controversy as to the best method of attacking them revived. The Admiralty and Coastal Command were at one in their desire for more long-range aircraft; but whereas Air Chief Marshal Joubert preferred the method of hunting for U-boats in passage orthodox naval doctrine maintained that far greater success was won by attacking them when they gathered round the convoys, and the figures of sinkings prove the soundness of the naval view.<sup>1</sup>

Summing up the results of these seven months, Captain Roskill grants that 'the enemy had reason to be satisfied over the achievements of his U-boats. They had sunk an enormous tonnage of Allied shipping (681 ships of 3,556,999 tons in all, of which 589 ships of over three million tons were sunk in the Atlantic and Arctic theatres), and at astonishingly small cost to themselves. Only 3.9 per cent of the U-boats at sea had been destroyed, and the rate of sinking inflicted on the Allies had been kept at the high figure of some 300 tons per U-boat per day throughout the period.'<sup>2</sup>

In the later months of the year the Allies fared better. In the second half of 1942, wrote Dönitz, there could no longer be any doubt that in spite of the Germans' great successes the enemy had tactically gained the upper hand with his counter-measures.<sup>3</sup>

An additional and particularly grievous burden was laid on the Navy by the decision of the British and American governments in the autumn of 1941 to help in the transportation to Russia of the supplies they promised to make available for her.<sup>4</sup> Much the greater part of these supplies was to be dispatched by sea round the North Cape to Murmansk or to Archangel in the White Sea. The distance to be covered was between 1,400 and 2,000 miles and the round trip took at least three weeks. The conditions which the convoys had to face were dangerous and arduous at all times of year: in winter the ice forced them closer to the enemy's air bases, in summer the darkless nights gave him longer opportunities of reconnaissance and attack.

The early Russian convoys, of which the first sailed from Iceland on 29th September, 1941, suffered but slight losses, not having to meet

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<sup>1</sup> See Roskill, III, i; 262-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Idem.*, II, 111.

<sup>3</sup> *Memoirs*, p. 265.

<sup>4</sup> See Map 5; Chap. xxv below and Roskill, II, Chap. v.

much opposition. Up to the end of 1941 only one merchant ship was lost out of sixty-four in nine convoys and the early convoys of 1942 were likewise fortunate. But from the end of February the concentration of German ships and aircraft in the far north made the passage far more hazardous; a sortie by the *Tirpitz* on 6th March might, but for thick weather, have wrought disaster, though but for this weather she might herself have suffered damage from the British squadron seeking her, and the Germans were henceforward loth to risk her in such operations. But it was now necessary for British heavy ships to cover the passage of every convoy, and its sailing involved a major operation by the Home Fleet. In the course of them the cruisers *Edinburgh* and *Trinidad* were sunk, not to mention destroyers; these losses would have been borne more willingly had there been on the Russian side more vigorous co-operation in defensive measures and a more generous appreciation of the tremendous exertions of the Navy and the gallantry of the merchant crews, many of which were American, under conditions of extreme hardship and peril.

On 18th May the First Sea Lord wrote to Admiral King:

‘These Russian Convoys are becoming a regular millstone round our necks and cause a steady attrition in both cruisers and destroyers . . . The whole thing is a most unsound operation with the dice loaded against us in every direction, but at the same time I do, of course, recognize the necessity of doing all we can to help the Russians at the present time. What we do not know is how much what we are sending them really means to them. If the armaments we are sending them are absolutely vital to them at the present moment then of course we must continue to despatch them, but if it would do almost equally well if they arrived in July instead of during May and June then there is an unanswerable case for ceasing to endeavour to run these convoys whilst we are hemmed in by the ice.’

The large outward convoy of thirty-five ships which sailed three days after this letter was written brought in three-quarters of its cargo at the loss of seven ships; owing to the overriding needs of Malta, the next was not sailed until the very end of June, but the losses of this disastrous enterprise, P.Q.17, due in part to injudicious signals by the Admiralty, were so out of proportion to the amount of cargo delivered that the government decided to suspend further sailings for the present.

The protection of our essential communications in other theatres is dealt with elsewhere. In the Mediterranean the Malta convoys, apart from individual ships, were for some months unable to penetrate the German air screen, to say nothing of the Italian fleet and German U-boats; while in the Indian Ocean our Eastern fleet could not venture to operate east of Ceylon after the Japanese conquest of

Malaya. At a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington on 21st April Admiral Pound emphasized the danger from the Japanese in the western half of the Indian Ocean; they could not only cut our military lines of communication but stop our oil supplies, which owing to the shortage of tankers could not be replaced from the western hemisphere.<sup>1</sup>

The urgent need for more escort vessels was stressed at a meeting at the White House on 23rd June attended by the President and Prime Minister. Admiral Little, the permanent Admiralty representative on the Combined Chiefs of Staff, 'urged the necessity for more escort vessels as the only way of defeating the submarine campaign, the success of which depended upon the morale of the submarine crews. The battle could never be won merely by renewing and expanding the merchant fleet'. It was agreed that, though this must involve interference with the output of merchant ships during 'the vitally important period between the autumn of 1942 and the summer of 1943', the first essential was to accelerate the delivery of escort vessels by every possible means.

The Admiralty's hopes of large-scale assistance in escort vessels from the United States were disappointed, since most of the American production was needed to protect American ships; indeed they had to agree to divert to the United States Navy ten corvettes of British construction and twenty-five under construction on British account in Canada. 'Despite the highest priority,' says Mr. Duncan Hall, 'the production of escorts in the United Kingdom in 1942 was far below need; but 72 destroyers were completed out of 135 under construction. In the late summer the Royal Navy had only 445 escorts as against requirements put by the Admiralty at 1,050.' There was in fact 'a serious lag in the combined production of escort vessels'.<sup>2</sup>

The Admiralty were also insistent, as we have seen,<sup>3</sup> on the need of strengthening Coastal Command of the Royal Air Force with long-range shore-based aircraft. Their demands involved a long controversy with the Royal Air Force, and it was not until 1943 that naval requirements were met.

Besides the maintenance of essential communications the joint memorandum of the Allied Chiefs of Staff in January 1942 mentioned 'closing and tightening the ring round Germany' and the enforcement of blockade. Here too the Navy had its historic part to play.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Raeder (*F.N.C.* 13.2.42) there were fifteen Japanese submarines operating in February in the Bay of Bengal and the waters round Ceylon, Sumatra and Java.

<sup>2</sup> H. D. Hall, *North American Supply* (1955), p. 398. Cf. Roskill, II, 92, for numbers required and available in March 1942.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 506 above.



After the fall of France the traditional method of interception and contraband control at sea had been largely superseded by the system of control at source, based on the compulsory navicert and the refusal of port facilities for bunkering and refuelling to ships not so furnished. This change had been made necessary by the vast extent of the area in Europe thenceforward under Axis control, and according to Professor Medicott 'the new arrangements . . . had been adequate, with very little naval assistance, to deny to Germany practically all ocean-borne supplies, except those carried in enemy or Vichy blockade runners, or in Vichy ships in convoy'.<sup>1</sup> The various measures constituting control at source would not, of course, have been effective without the threat of naval action in the background, even though the Admiralty confessed in October 1942 that owing to the strain on the Navy the blockade had 'for a long time been carried on with little more than bluff.' The entry of the United States into the war naturally rendered control at source much more effective, by the development of export licensing and pre-emption ('preclusion'), but the belligerency of Japan made naval interception again important. As Professor Medicott puts it:

'Japan's entry into the war and her subsequent conquests had created a new enemy area of great size and economic wealth, and had placed at the disposal of Japan supplies of raw materials sufficient to make good most of her own long-term deficiencies and also most of the principal existing deficiencies of Germany. At the same time it had greatly increased the Japanese need for a number of manufactured and semi-manufactured products obtainable from Europe.'

Thus, as was stated in a memorandum of 21st March, 1942, by Lord Selborne, Dr. Dalton's successor as Minister of Economic Warfare,

'the principal problem of blockade, which has hitherto been the denial of neutral resources to one enemy, has become in 1942 the denial to two enemies of access to the products of each other's dominions. This can only be done by the fighting services. So once again a major part of the blockade will depend directly on naval interception, assisted probably more than in the earlier period by air reconnaissance and attack.'<sup>2</sup>

Thus blockade-running offered valuable prizes to the enemy. The Ministry believed that, say, a dozen cargoes 'would relieve Germany's essential needs for 1942 in rubber, wolfram, tin, hemp and wool—if wool became available to Japan—and might take back to Japan ball-bearings, precision instruments and machine-tools sufficient to be of real assistance in the expansion of her industry'.

<sup>1</sup> *The Economic Blockade*, II (1959), 153.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 12.

Accordingly they put at the head of the list of the objects of Allied economic warfare: 'to prevent the two enemy dominions from establishing economic exchange by blockade running; still more, of course, to prevent their opening regular communications by land or sea'.<sup>1</sup>

The United States appears to have retained a traditional objection to the use of belligerent rights at sea; she preferred less dramatic methods. So the interception of blockade-runners was left in the main to the British, operating from bases at Gibraltar, Bermuda and Trinidad.<sup>2</sup> Up to the summer of 1942, however, 'the balance of success undoubtedly lay with the enemy'. To quote Captain Roskill's figures, in the period April 1941–May 1942 out of sixteen ships which left Japan for Europe twelve arrived, carrying some 75,000 tons of cargo; on the reverse route, between September 1941 and June 1942, all the six which attempted the journey reached port. No ship was intercepted between November 1941 and November 1942.<sup>3</sup> From the late autumn, however, the Allied counter-measures, which now included more effective air-sea co-operation, enjoyed much greater success. Apart, moreover, from the blockade-runners German coastwise traffic suffered heavy losses from both minelaying and direct attack by the Royal Air Force.<sup>4</sup>

The outbreak of war with Russia had closed to Germany the supply route across her eastern frontier, but the subservience of Vichy and British naval weakness allowed her considerable imports through French territory. After June 1941 the greatest leak in the blockade was through the western Mediterranean and Unoccupied France.<sup>5</sup> French ships under naval escort might carry to Marseilles African products such as cobalt and molybdenum, of which Germany stood in need, or supplies imported into French North-West Africa from outside. The British desire to restrict these imports to the minimum was thwarted by the more lenient attitude of the United States towards the Vichy government. The British did not deny the value of this contact as a possible means of putting pressure on Pétain, but were more suspicious as to the ultimate destination of much of the oil and other supplies which the United States on grounds of humanity or expediency proposed to send to North Africa. The British were anxious to confine such imports to consumer goods and to exact a *quid pro quo* in respect of African products

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<sup>1</sup> Either by the Cape of Good Hope route (11,000 miles from Singapore) or by the Cape Horn route (17,000 miles), there were some enemy ships which could make the journey without refuelling (*Ibid.*, II, 13).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 47–51, 154.

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, II, 183, App. N.

<sup>4</sup> See tables in Roskill, I, 512, and II, 395.

<sup>5</sup> See Medlicott, II, 343 and Chap. XII generally; see also Sir E. L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy during the Second World War*.

made available to Germany. The United States was as determined as the British, however, to stop the transport of food and trucks from Marseilles to Tunis, or of oil from Algeria, for the use of the enemy forces, which the Vichy government were known to have authorized. At about the same time, in February 1942, the French battleship *Dunkerque* was moved from Oran to Toulon for repair without the promised notice. The Murphy-Weygand agreement of the previous year, by which American observers were admitted into North-West Africa for the ostensible purpose of controlling the handling of imports from America, provided a valuable source of information for the Allies, but any hopes of improved relations with Vichy were frustrated by such sinister events as the dismissal of Weygand in November 1941 and the return of Laval to power in the following April.

In the case of Spain, the respective attitudes of the United Kingdom and the United States were reversed. The British did not now believe that Franco intended to throw in his lot with the Axis: so long as the outcome of the war remained uncertain he would maintain an independent line as far as Spain's economic condition allowed. It was therefore desirable to provide Spain with necessary supplies 'wisely controlled', and obtain from her in return wolfram, mercury, iron-ore, wool and other Spanish products. The Americans in this case were more suspicious, but a comprehensive Anglo-American agreement with Spain eventually came into force in July 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Even, however, the most stringent and effective enforcement of the blockade could not by itself have compelled the surrender of a country enjoying the resources of the wide territories controlled by Germany in 1941. Her supplies of food, if lacking in variety, were adequate. Her conquests in the north and west had ensured her supplies of iron. Her position as regards oil was much more precarious, but it was hardly affected by the blockade. She relied on her initial stocks, greatly supplemented by capture in 1940, on imports, especially from Rumania, and on home production of synthetic oil.

The War Cabinet continued to receive optimistic reports on the German oil situation. They were assured by their committees in December 1941 that it was now at a crucial stage, but that the capture of Maikop and Grozny oilfields in the Northern Caucasus would supply Germany with five million tons per annum, though effective sabotage might reduce her gains to half a million in the first six months. A report of February 1942 estimated that from now onwards the Axis reserve of oil had been cut to the irreducible minimum necessary to allow distribution, and that henceforward the enemy

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<sup>1</sup> See Medlicott, II, 282-91.

would be obliged to balance his expenditure of oil against income. This conclusion was confirmed by a report of May 1942 to the effect that:

'(a) As long as Germany's present scale of warfare against Russia continues, her oil supplies are insufficient to meet the full demands of the armed forces and industry. Her remaining stocks are small and not much more than sufficient to maintain the distribution system of German Europe.

(b) Germany is likely therefore to be faced shortly with the alternatives of (i) still further restricting allocations to civil use, thereby affecting, directly or indirectly, the industrial output upon which her armed forces depend; (ii) reducing the scale of her activity in war zones.'<sup>1</sup>

The Germans in fact only balanced their oil account for 1941 by drawing on their stocks to the extent of 1·2 to 1·5 million tons. The year 1942 was likewise very critical for Germany and ended with the account barely in balance. She obtained nothing to speak of from the Caucasus. A breakdown in supplies of fuel for the war machine was only averted by the drastic reduction of civilian consumption and the gradually expanding output of the synthetic oil industry. But disaster was averted. 'The reversion to the defensive after Alamein and Stalingrad was to mark a general improvement in the German oil position which was to continue until the Allied Bomber Offensive in the spring of 1944.'<sup>2</sup>

'At no stage,' says Professor Medlicott, 'was Germany decisively weakened by shortages due to the blockade alone'; nor, he argues, was this ever expected by the Ministry of Economic Warfare itself. 'Essentially . . . the purpose of all economic-warfare measures was to "soften up" the enemy before the decisive attack, which would have to be delivered by the armed forces.'<sup>3</sup>

Pending the launching of more ambitious projects 'the continuous development of offensive action against Germany' had largely to take the form of raids.

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<sup>1</sup> In April 1942 a new procedure for studying and reporting on enemy oil questions was introduced: the J.I.C. would circulate reports, based on the estimates of Sir Harold Hartley's Technical Sub-Committee on Axis Oil, to the Chiefs of Staff and to Mr. Attlee, as Deputy Chairman of the Defence Committee, who might bring them before the Defence Committee or Cabinet. Mr. Attlee would undertake the co-ordinating duties hitherto performed by Lord Hankey and the Hankey and Lloyd Committees would be discontinued.

<sup>2</sup> I am indebted to an unpublished paper on the German oil situation by Miss P. McCallum.

<sup>3</sup> II, 630-1.

Harassing the coasts of German Europe by frequent raids had been part of the British strategy ever since Dunkirk. It had three objects: to maintain an offensive spirit in our own troops, to force the enemy to spread out his own forces on defensive tasks over an immense coastline, and to attack points of strategic importance. The origin and early growth of the Combined Operations organization created for this purpose were described in Volume II.<sup>1</sup> Its impetuous and headstrong Director, Admiral of the Fleet Sir Roger Keyes, had never seen eye to eye with the Chiefs of Staff and differences of view led to his retirement in October 1941. The Chiefs of Staff, in a memorandum of 27th September, affirmed the two principles that, while responsibility for advising the government on the strategical aspects and general feasibility of any operational plan must rest with themselves, the detailed planning and execution must be in the hands of the force commanders from the moment that these had been appointed for any particular enterprise. But over and above these two kinds of responsibility there was need for a special inter-service organization which could give its full time to studying the requirements of Combined Operations and assisting in the training of the troops. In the place of the former Director there was now to be an 'Adviser on Combined Operations', and Lord Louis Mountbatten, a young and rising naval officer, was selected for the new post. He would have a dual function: as Adviser he was to be consulted at all stages of an inter-service operation overseas, while he would exercise command of training bases and craft in the United Kingdom as Commodore. In March by the Prime Minister's wish he was elevated to the position of 'Chief of Combined Operations' with the rank of Vice-Admiral (and corresponding rank in the other Services) and the right to sit as a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee when general matters as well as matters directly touching Combined Operations were discussed.

Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, had also an important part to play. The time had come, said the Chiefs of Staff in their memorandum of 27th September, 1941, to begin to train a large part of Home Forces for an eventual large-scale operation overseas, and it was 'logical for the detailed planning and execution of such operations and the training of the troops to be employed to be carried out by Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, in conjunction with the appropriate Naval and Air Commanders-in-Chief'. He would also be responsible, so far as concerned the Army, for the planning and execution of 'small cross-Channel raids'. In October he was specifically authorized to carry out raids, in consultation with the Adviser

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<sup>1</sup> See pp. 258-61; also B. Fergusson, *The Watery Maze* (1961).

on Combined Operations, on the French, Belgian and Dutch coasts, and in November was further charged to prepare a plan for 'a large-scale raid of some duration with the object of effecting considerable destruction and inflicting the maximum number of casualties'. In framing his plan he was to 'take account of the scarcity and difficulty of construction of tank landing-craft' and was warned that shipping and assault-craft provisionally put at his disposal for 1st April, 1942, might be required elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> The directive of November 1941 was cancelled on 13th February, when Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, was instructed to plan and prepare for a return to the Continent to take advantage of a deterioration in German morale and strength in the West, but 'a vigorous policy of small raids' was to continue.

The shortage of assault vessels was critical. Seeing that the enemy controlled all the ports of north-western Europe, landings would have to be made over open beaches, and special craft were therefore essential. They were equally essential for the intensive training which amphibious warfare demanded, and there were not enough to meet the requirements of both training and actual operations. The assignment of craft to the one purpose meant their denial to the other. In particular the retention of the considerable force earmarked for the possible seizure of the Canary Islands (Operation 'Pilgrim') locked up valuable assault-craft and shipping until February 1942.<sup>2</sup> Lack of landing ships and smaller craft became the continuing obstruction in Allied strategical planning from 1942 onwards.

At a meeting of the Defence Committee on 14th April, at which the American proposals for an invasion of the Continent were approved in principle, Mountbatten declared that this plan altered the whole picture of Combined Operations against the Continent.<sup>3</sup> The plans which we had so far been evolving all fell short in one way or another for lack of essential resources. This would all be changed when the great flow of American forces began, and we should be enabled to plan that real return to the Continent without which we could not hope to win the war. The Chiefs of Staff noted a few days later that they had already approved a policy of raids to be undertaken in the summer of 1942 on the largest scale that the available equipment would allow. They would be carried out on a front extending from the north of Norway to the Bay of Biscay and would be planned and

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<sup>1</sup> These included 2 Infantry Assault Ships, 5 Raiding-Craft-Carriers, 3 Tank Assault Ships, 55 Tank Landing-Craft and about 370 other landing-craft.

<sup>2</sup> 'Pilgrim' represented an amalgamation of the existing Atlantic Islands schemes in July 1941; it required a naval force including a battleship, 4 carriers, 3 cruisers and some 27 destroyers, besides assault-craft and shipping for 24,000 troops and 2 fighter squadrons.

<sup>3</sup> See Chap. xxiv.

launched by the Chief of Combined Operations in consultation with the Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces.

Three useful raids were in fact carried out during the winter and spring. In the first, on 27th December, 1941, a force little more than a commando strong did considerable damage to the enemy at Vaagso, off the Norwegian coast, took ninety prisoners and brought back thirty-six Norwegian loyalists. In the second a small body of parachutists succeeded in capturing secret equipment required for examination by our scientists from the German radar station at Bruneval on the north coast of France, and destroyed the station. The third, a larger and very daring affair, was of considerable strategic importance. On the night of 27/28 March a small combined force contrived to make their way up the estuary of the Loire to St. Nazaire, where the old destroyer *Campbeltown*, filled with delayed-action high explosive, rammed and destroyed the gates of the only lock on the Atlantic coast capable of docking the *Tirpitz*; the great ship was thus denied the possibility of retiring for repair should she, like the *Bismarck*, suffer damage in an Atlantic foray. The lock was out of action for some eighteen months.<sup>1</sup>

When the United States came into the war and joint operations on the Continent were in prospect, it was clearly desirable that the two countries should share the same doctrine and methods of amphibious warfare. During his April visit to London, General Marshall agreed to Admiral Mountbatten's suggestion that American officers should join his Combined Operations Headquarters and so was born the idea of an integrated Allied headquarters which spread virtually to all theatres of war. After a series of meetings with American generals in London at the end of May, Admiral Mountbatten paid a visit to Washington. He explained to the Combined Chiefs our organization and the equipment that we were devising, such as hollow cables for pumping petrol under the Channel, and arrangements were made for the co-ordination of training and technique. Mountbatten on his return was to deal on matters concerning combined operations with Major-General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who was just about to start for England to command United States land-forces in the European theatre.<sup>2</sup> Each of these two officers had recently received exceptional promotion, and each was destined to be charged before the end of the war with responsibilities of the highest order.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xx for the successful combined operation at Diego Suarez in May and Chap. xxviii for the Dieppe raid in August.

<sup>2</sup> Eisenhower amusingly describes his first meeting with Mountbatten in *Crusade in Europe*, p. 75.

Yet another of the approved weapons of Allied strategy was subversion. Subversive activities included sabotage, co-operation with raids carried out by regular forces, as at Lofoten, Bruneval and St. Nazaire, and the promotion and support of 'resistance' movements. All were organized by Special Operations Executive (S.O.E.), whose official chief was the Minister of Economic Warfare.

The origin of S.O.E. in July 1940 was explained in Volume II.<sup>1</sup> In its early months it suffered from the suspicions of an upstart felt by older organizations and embittered by personal animosities. Until September 1941 the same Minister was responsible both for clandestine activities in the occupied countries and for subversive propaganda, but the two were then separated, propaganda becoming the province of the Political Warfare Executive (P.W.E.) under the Foreign Office. Relations were easier when Lord Selborne succeeded as Minister of Economic Warfare in February 1942, giving up any share in the conduct of propaganda. An understanding with the Foreign Office was expressed in an informal agreement of May 1942; it was accepted that the S.O.E. was an executive and operational and not a policy-making body, but decisions might have to be taken in cases where the distinction was not obvious; in some regions military considerations should predominate, in others political. The whole field of operations was in fact rife with complications due to internal political differences, as between monarchists and communists in Greece and Yugoslavia and in the special case of General de Gaulle and the Free French.

With the entry of America into the war the place of 'subversive activities' in grand strategy inevitably changed. So long as it was clear that Germany could put into the field armies vastly superior in numbers to those of the British Commonwealth, and while the survival of Russia as a military power was doubtful, it seemed plain that, if and when Germany was sufficiently weakened by the blockade and by bombing to make an armed landing by the Allies feasible, such British troops as could force a landing would be only a spearhead, which must be followed up by patriot armies, hitherto training in secret. Even in December 1941, in the strategic paper on 'The Campaign of 1943' which he wrote on board the *Duke of York*,<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill spoke of 'the corpus of the liberating offensive' as being supplied by 'the uprising of the local population' after 'the vanguard' of the Allied armies—which he estimated at forty armoured divisions or 600,000 men—had forced a landing. Mr. Churchill foresaw that the captive countries would never by themselves be able to revolt; it would be necessary for the Allies to arm them. But in fact this general

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<sup>1</sup> p. 261.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. XIII above.



rising, as he had envisaged it, never took place. As it became possible it became superfluous. 'With the full mobilization of America and the unexpected military resurgence of Russia it was no longer necessary to depend strategically on the "Fourth Arm". Sabotage, guerrilla warfare, secret armies could still contribute to the execution of a plan but they were henceforward quite secondary in the making of it.'

The resistance movement which had been longest in existence and from which much might have been hoped—the Polish—was out of reach of effective help. It was a Polish patriot, General Sikorski, who in April 1942, having in view the creation of a second front in Europe, urged the formation of a combined staff composed of officers of all the occupied countries. The C.I.G.S. agreed with the need for plans and preparations, not only for subversive activities but for the creation of patriot armies; but the Chiefs of Staff considered that supplies for 'secret armies' should continue to be restricted to the accessible countries of western Europe,<sup>1</sup> and that planning should be left in the hands of S.O.E. who kept in touch with representatives of the countries concerned.

On 11th May, when the Cabinet had agreed that preparations for a landing on the Continent should proceed without delay, the Chiefs of Staff approved a directive to S.O.E. to conform with the general plan for operations in 1942 and 1943 'by organizing and co-ordinating action by patriots in the occupied countries'. They were to take particular care to avoid 'premature large-scale risings', but should endeavour to build up and equip para-military organizations in the area of the projected operations for cutting the enemy's communications and generally disorganizing his movements and rear services. By a second directive of the same day S.O.E. were instructed to prepare the ground for negotiations leading to an unopposed Allied intervention in French North Africa.

In France S.O.E. worked both through its own agents and in co-operation with General de Gaulle. In September 1941 de Gaulle formed the Free French National Committee, which the British Government recognized 'as representing all Free Frenchmen, wherever they may be [viz. inside France as well as outside], who rally to the Free French movement in support of the Allied cause'. In November the government expressed formal approval of a nation-wide resistance movement in France, but would not associate themselves with 'political propaganda designed to secure the post-war establishment in France of any particular form of government or any particular persons as government'. During the ensuing months a number of popular movements in France were coming to accept de Gaulle's

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<sup>1</sup> Greece and Yugoslavia were the responsibility of Middle East Command.

leadership and were 'linked to London by tolerably good communications'. But 'the notion of a Gaullist secret army was still a vague project'.

De Gaulle disliked the independent activities of S.O.E. in France, while complaining that it did not give more effective support to his own. On the other hand the Foreign Office would not admit that the National Committee as yet spoke for a very large majority of French citizens. The Allies, after Laval had become President of the Council on 14th April, had hopes of an arrangement with General Weygand, and the second directive of 11th May tended that way. The difficulties of the situation on the British side were accentuated by de Gaulle's temperament, while the General resented the refusal of the British to take him into their confidence, a refusal due largely to their distrust of his headquarters' discretion.

Difficult as were de Gaulle's relations with the British, they were much worse with the Americans. The United States attitude was governed by the desire not to break with Vichy, and the State Department's coolness towards the Free French was turned to exasperation by de Gaulle's *coup de main* against the Pétainist garrisons of the islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon in December 1941. Not until July 1942 did Washington recognize the French National Committee in London.

It was at this time that de Gaulle changed the designation of his followers from Free French to Fighting French. The wisest policy for the British, as the Foreign Office saw it, was 'to continue our efforts to bring as much as possible of France and the French empire back into the war at our side; to support all the forces of French resistance, wherever they may be and whatever their allegiance, without binding ourselves exclusively to any; to continue to support General de Gaulle; and at the same time to encourage him to strengthen his organization by the enlistment of such representative Frenchmen as he can persuade to come over and join him.'

The case of the Balkan countries was very different from that of France. The Pétain government had broken faith with the British. The Greek and the Yugoslav governments had been driven from their countries because of their opposition to the Germans and were under British protection. But it became clear that, to say the least, a strong section of their nationals who were resisting the Germans most stubbornly at home had no wish to receive back these governments or the régimes they stood for. Not surprisingly the two points of view were reflected in different attitudes in London, the Foreign Office feeling an obligation of honour to the royal governments with which they had been in contact, while S.O.E. agents on the spot tended to back the most effective fighters.

In the Greek case the Foreign Office were determined to support

the government of King George, whereas S.O.E. became convinced that feeling in Greece was overwhelmingly republican. The S.O.E. representatives in the Near East were therefore anxious to assure leaders in Greece that the British government 'would not impose the Greek King on his people at the end of the war without some prior expression of popular opinion', but Lord Selborne insisted that the policy of S.O.E. must be in conformity with that expressed by the Foreign Office. About this time, spring 1942, the recently formed Popular Front, known as E.A.M., became active, and a guerrilla movement was started in the mountains independently of S.O.E., which had been mainly concerned in promoting sabotage. From henceforth it became S.O.E.'s concern to support the guerrilla by providing the necessary supplies; it was only later that its military value and its possible political consequences became controversial.

The most important of the resistance movements in this period was the Yugoslav. The British believed its leader to be Colonel Mihailović, a Serb loyal to the exiled government of the boy-king Peter. It was not for months that London learnt that the 'Četniks', on whose support Mihailović relied, were bitterly opposed, even to the point of civil war, by the Communist 'Partisans' under Tito, the name assumed by Josip Broz. Both groups had been in arms ever since their country was overrun by the Germans and Italians after the disastrous *coup d'état* of March 1941. But their methods were different. Mihailović was inclined to make discretion the better part, or at least a considerable part, of patriotism and he maintained some contacts with the Quisling Nedić government at Belgrade. The Partisans, regarding Mihailović as a traitor and recking nothing of reprisals, were much more aggressive in their tactics and politically gave their loyalty to Soviet Russia rather than to the King.

The S.O.E. were represented in Yugoslavia from September 1941; policy was discussed at the highest level in October when the Soviet government, anxious for a diversion at all costs in their hour of danger, urged through their ambassador in London that the revolt should be encouraged in every possible way and that the British and Russian governments should work closely together for that purpose. At this crisis they regarded the political differences in Yugoslavia as unimportant. The Foreign Office was enthusiastically in favour of increasing our assistance. The rising, they said, was 'assuming the proportions of a national revolt . . . If we are able to keep the Yugoslav revolt going and to develop it, it may not only become a serious threat to the enemy occupation which will oblige the Germans to withdraw troops from other theatres, but it will also enable us to assure the Soviet Government that we are doing everything possible to create the second front in the Balkans which they desire.' At a

Staff Conference on 4th November the Prime Minister said that everything possible must be done to keep the rebellion going and provide the vital arms and supplies. The Chiefs of Staff sent the necessary instructions to Cairo, but declared their opinion that at present we were not in a position to give substantial military aid. This being so, we ought not to encourage the Yugoslavs to spread the fighting to the towns, where they must be ruthlessly crushed by the Germans; we should rather furnish them with the supplies needed to keep the movement alive in the hills.

Such a cautious attitude was scornfully criticized by some enthusiasts in S.O.E., but when all energies and hopes were concentrated on 'Crusader', due to be launched within a fortnight, it was hardly to be expected that more than a minimum of equipment or transport should be spared for Yugoslavia.

It was just at this time that the real relations between Četniks and Partisans became known. They had just started fighting one another and, after the failure of a conference between Mihailović and Tito on 20th November, 1941, there was no possibility of their working together. The British continued to do their little best to supply Mihailović, whereas it became clear before long that the Russians had no intention of restraining the Partisans. It was after the period of this volume that the British became convinced that the Yugoslav leader who from the military point of view deserved support was not Mihailović but Tito.

The Foreign Office urged in November 1941 that other enemy-occupied countries, in weighing the probable value of British assistance, would tend to regard Yugoslavia as a test case. In March 1942 the War Office estimated that there were in that country five German, seventeen Italian and four Bulgarian divisions. It was obviously desirable to keep as many as possible locked up there, and British aid, if it could be spared, would be well spent. But could it be spared? There was no question of sending men other than a few liaison officers and wireless operators; what was wanted was arms, ammunition and equipment, but these could be conveyed only by submarine or by air, which meant aircraft of long range, in other words bombers. In the conditions of extreme shortage prevailing at this time in the Middle East it is not surprising that these, if found at all, were found only with great reluctance and at rare intervals. Bomber Command could not be expected to share the opinion of the Director of S.O.E. operations that 'at this moment' (November 1941) 'supplies dropped in Yugoslavia are worth any number of bombs dropped in Germany'.

It was the misfortune of S.O.E. everywhere, as a new organization and one seldom able to provide concrete proof of the value of its operations, to come low on the list of priorities, especially when

asking for aircraft. Favoured by the blessing of the Chiefs of Staff in August 1941, it had by February 1942 secured for its use from home airfields two squadrons, Nos. 138 and 161, including at this time four Halifaxes, sixteen Whitleys, two Wellingtons and six Lysanders. For its far-ranging activities this was not much.

## CHAPTER XXII

### THE USE OF AIR-POWER

UNTIL AMERICA entered the war the bomber offensive had seemed the only way of bringing victory in sight. 'The Navy can lose us the war,' Mr. Churchill wrote in September 1940, 'but only the Air Force can win it.'<sup>1</sup> The accession of Russia hardly changed this common opinion, since until the autumn of 1941 her early defeat was generally expected. But when the United States became our ally and grand strategy had to be reviewed the primacy of the bombers was open to challenge. Now at last an invasion of the Continent aiming at the destruction of the German forces in the field became a practical possibility. Strategic bombing might still be necessary to 'soften up' German resistance, and indeed 'ever-increasing air bombardment by British and American forces' was recognized by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in January 1942 as essential, but it could no longer claim its former pre-eminence as the principal means of winning the war. Nevertheless it retained a special prestige in British minds, and notably in the mind of the Prime Minister, as the most direct and immediate method of striking a blow at the heart of Germany and bringing home to her the consequences of aggression.

The development of theory and practice in Bomber Command has been treated in great detail by Sir Charles Webster and Dr. Noble Frankland in their volumes in the present series, and frequent reference will be made to them in these pages.<sup>2</sup>

Participation in the Battle of the Atlantic by attacks on Brest in the spring of 1941 had caused diversions of our bomber strength, but on 15th June of that year the Defence Committee approved the Chiefs of Staff's recommendation that our long-term policy should be 'the direct attack of the morale of the German people'. At this time, however, Bomber Command was quite incapable of carrying such a policy to success. Its heavy bombers were far too few. Moreover experience had shown that daylight bombing produced little effect and prohibitive casualties, while it was becoming clear that we did not yet possess the means for accurate navigation and aiming at night. Scientific devices and improved tactics were to provide the solution in the future, but for the present the only answer seemed to be to drop a heavier weight of bombs on larger targets.

At the end of November 1941 Bomber Command possessed fifty-four operational squadrons with 955 aircraft, but the average number

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill did not of course mean that the Air Force could win the war unaided.

<sup>2</sup> *The Strategic Air Offensive against Germany* (4 vols., H.M.S.O., 1961).

of aircraft with crews available during that month was only 506. Further, of the fifty-four squadrons, only seven, 109 aircraft, were equipped with heavy bombers. What is surprising is that in the following year the Command did not expand, but rather contracted, in numbers of aircraft. In October 1942 the average number with crews fit for operations had shrunk to 408. On 1st October the Command included only thirty-five operational squadrons, with 632 aircraft, besides sixteen squadrons not operational. But this reduction is misleading. Of the operational squadrons twenty-one, with 369 aircraft, were now equipped with heavy bombers, including 147 Lancasters, 129 Halifaxes and 84 Stirlings; there were also now 19 Mosquitoes. Thus, if numbers were less, there was a great improvement in types and striking power. At the end of October 1942 the bombload stood 40 per cent higher than when the first-line strength was over 40 per cent greater.<sup>1</sup>

The contraction in numbers was due partly to the transfer of squadrons to other commands (510 aircraft between January and September 1942) and partly to failures in production. As for the future, there was by April 1942 no serious expectation of reaching anything like the 4,000 heavy bombers of 'Target E' by the spring of 1943; 2,640 by April 1944 seemed a more probable figure. But any such grandiose plans had to be abandoned as the result of the American decision, embodied in the Arnold-Towers-Slessor agreement of 21st June, 1942, that henceforward, in principle, American aircraft should be manned by American crews wherever possible.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand this decision hastened the building up in England of the United States Eighth Air Force, who flew their first operation, in daylight and without loss, against the marshalling yards at Rouen on 17th August. Before long Germany would be subject to constant bombing by the British at night and the Americans by day.

Matters were very different in the autumn of 1941. The limited capacity of the bomber offensive at that time was demonstrated by the results of an operation on the night of 7th November, when of a force of 400 aircraft sent to attack Berlin and other targets 37 failed to return. Such losses seemed to the Cabinet inadmissible and the Air Ministry were instructed that both Fighter and Bomber Commands should husband their strength until the spring.<sup>3</sup> During the winter, Bomber Command were told their primary task was to renew their attacks on the three German warships at Brest; on 17th/18th December the *Gneisenau* was slightly damaged and the *Scharnhorst* for the time immobilized, but none of the ships was actually hit.<sup>4</sup> Such attacks as

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<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for these figures to a paper by Mrs. Oakley.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 556.

<sup>3</sup> Webster and Frankland, I, 186; Churchill, III, 748.

<sup>4</sup> Roskill, I, 491.

were made on other targets were as ineffective as before. Not more than a quarter of the aircraft dispatched arrived within five miles of their objective, even in clear weather, and on cloudy or hazy nights only about a twentieth.

But in February 1942 a period of greater achievement opened. On 9th February Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Secretary of State for Air, urged that the policy of 'conservation', or restriction of the activities of the Bomber Force, should now be abandoned. He gave as reasons that this was the time of year to get the best effect from concentrated incendiary attack; to resume our offensive on a heavy scale would 'enhearten and support the Russians'; the coincidence of attacks with Russian successes would further depress German morale; and a new navigational aid [*Gee*] was about to come into service, which it was important to exploit before the enemy devised counter-measures. He proposed therefore 'that the heavy bomber force be employed without restriction until further notice on the attack of industrial areas and selected precise targets in North-West Germany, and in particular in the Ruhr and Rhineland'.

The Cabinet had already, on 2nd February, sanctioned the bombing of certain munitions factories in occupied France, and after the escape of the German ships had removed the reason for bombing Brest the Prime Minister approved the resumption of the full offensive, 'subject always to our not incurring heavy losses owing to bad weather and enemy resistance combined'.<sup>1</sup> A directive to Bomber Command was issued accordingly; it stated further that the primary object of the operations 'should now be focused on the morale of the enemy civil population and, in particular, of the industrial workers'.

On 5th March the Prime Minister received a further request from the Chief of the Air Staff for the resumption of 'Circus Operations' by Fighter Command, with a view to wearing down the German fighter force and so helping the Russians. Bombers, said Sir Charles Portal, would be sent to attack important objectives in France with the purpose of inducing German fighters to accept combat with our own. The Prime Minister agreed, on the understanding that we should not lose more aircraft than we destroyed.

Such was the approved policy when Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris succeeded Sir Richard Peirse at Bomber Command on 22nd February. For the rest of the war his dynamic personality and his almost fanatical belief in the possibilities of strategic bombing were a force to inspire his subordinates, while on every possible opportunity he pressed his views on his superiors.

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<sup>1</sup> The Prime Minister's personal action was presumably due to the failure of the Chiefs of Staff to agree on a recommendation to the Defence Committee. See Webster and Frankland, I, 330 f.n. 2.



The new chief took over his command at a time when its recent performances had been unimpressive and confidence in its capacity was waning. Sir Stafford Cripps, the new Leader of the House of Commons, referred in the debate on the war situation on 25th February to the doubts of some Members whether the devotion of so large a proportion of our resources to bombing Germany, with apparently not very much effect, was worth while, and suggested that the government might perhaps consider a change of policy.<sup>1</sup> But the Prime Minister was always faithful to the Bomber Offensive. In particular at this time he spoke of the need of 'taking the weight off Russia during the summer by the heaviest air offensive against Germany which can be produced, having regard to other calls on air-power, and anything else we can think of'. He was supported by his scientific adviser, Lord Cherwell, who claimed, in a minute of 30th March, judging by the effect of the German bombing of English towns, that the heavy bombing of the fifty-eight largest German cities over a period of fifteen months would break the spirit of the people. Fallacies in these calculations were pointed out by Sir Henry Tizard, whose more sceptical conclusions as to the amount of damage which could be done in the time mentioned were backed by the statistical methods of the Admiralty's Operational Research division.<sup>2</sup> But, while the estimates of one eminent scientist might be more realistic than another's as to both the weight of attack that could be delivered and the effect it could produce, there were bound to be many uncertain factors. The Chiefs of Staff and the Prime Minister adopted a suggestion by Sir Charles Portal that an independent authority, not necessarily a technical expert but someone used to sifting evidence, should undertake an official inquiry. But Mr. Justice Singleton's investigations produced only vague and hypothetical conclusions. His terms of reference posed the question: 'In the light of our experience of the German bombing of this country, and of such information as is available of the results of our bombing of Germany, what results are we likely to achieve from continuing our air-attacks on Germany at the greatest possible strength during the next six, twelve and eighteen months respectively?' His findings were that great results could not be hoped for within six months; this period should rather be regarded as leading up to, and forming part of, a longer and more sustained effort. Much depended on what happened in Russia. The effect of a German failure in Russia would be greatly enhanced by an intensified bombing programme in the autumn and

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<sup>1</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, 378, column 316.

<sup>2</sup> See Webster and Frankland, I, 331-5 where Cherwell's paper is printed. For Tizard's comments and Cherwell's reply see Birkenhead, *The Prof. in Two Worlds* (1961), pp. 250-3. See also *Brassey's Annual*, 1953, where Professor Blackett, as he states, is quoting from memory.

winter. 'And if this was coupled with knowledge in Germany that the bombing would be on an increasing scale until the end, and with realization of the fact that the German Air Force could not again achieve equality, I think it might well prove the turning-point—provided always that greater accuracy can be achieved.'<sup>1</sup>

A series of successful operations, however, had already begun to restore confidence. On 3rd March the Renault factory at Billancourt near Paris was attacked by 235 aircraft, of which 223 were believed to have reached the target. On the night of the 28th, Bomber Command claimed a major success at Lübeck: photographs showed that 200 acres including the central core of the beautiful but all-too-inflammable old city had been destroyed. Omitting attacks in bad weather, it was estimated that in March and April some 40 per cent of the aircraft dispatched had dropped their bombs within five miles of the aiming point, whereas in the previous three months, without the new navigational aid, only 26 per cent had done so. But the attacks which caught the national imagination and gave some idea of what might be expected in the future were the three 'Thousand' raids, beginning with that on Cologne on the night of 30th May, followed by those on Essen (1st June) and on Bremen (25th June). These great efforts were of the nature of *tours de force*, drawing on the training groups of Bomber Command and, in the case of Bremen, on Coastal Command also. Only the first in fact accomplished much—about 600 acres of Cologne were shown to have been destroyed—and it was not found possible to repeat them on the same scale.<sup>2</sup>

The actual effects of these and other raids of this period on the German economy were greatly overrated, but they could plausibly be used to support the policy of the strategic offensive.

It was never of course seriously proposed to abandon this weapon against Germany. It was a question of 'nicely calculated less or more' in the allotment of our inadequate resources between a number of claimants. For instance at a meeting of the Defence Committee (Supply) on 12th February, 1942—the first and last presided over by Lord Beaverbrook as Minister of Production—Colonel Moore-Brabazon, his successor as Minister of Aircraft Production, commented that our air programme was completely rigid and that the increase now under way was entirely in heavy bombers. We certainly wanted a large force of heavy bombers, he said, but now that it had proved impossible to use them by day the project was not fulfilling our hopes. Meanwhile the production of fighters remained constant; these were essential for home defence and we might lose the war through a shortage. There was also a growing need for aircraft to

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in full in Webster and Frankland, IV, App. 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 388–94, 402–8. Forty aircraft, on an average, failed to return from each of these raids.

co-operate all over the world with the Army. We should be continually seeking new uses for the aircraft we were producing; the demand by the Army should have been overwhelming for a tank-destroying aircraft, and were we, he asked, making the best use of our 34 Liberators in preparing them for use by Bomber Command? After several other points had been raised the Committee charged the Chiefs of Staff to examine the question of the danger of air-attack on the United Kingdom in 1942; was an increase in guns and fighters required to defend our centres of production? The Minister of Aircraft Production was asked to report on the possibility and implications of increasing the output of fighters and to discuss with the Secretaries for War and Air his suggestions for alternative uses of heavy bombers and fighters in world-wide operations. This meeting produced a Chiefs of Staff report to the effect that so long as the major commitment of the German forces was in the east our fighter strength seemed adequate; we had all the seventy-five squadrons of day fighters which had been agreed by the Air Ministry as the minimum, and all but two of the thirty night-fighter squadrons.

The allocation of the long-range aircraft represented by the heavy bombers was one of the most difficult decisions the government had to make. There was strong competition for them from various quarters. In the first place, they were in demand for overseas theatres. Both Wavell and the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East were stirred by news of one of the early large-scale raids on German towns to suggest that some at least of those hundreds of aircraft might be more profitably employed in meeting their own urgent needs. 'It certainly gives us furiously to think,' said Wavell, 'when, after trying with less than 20 light bombers to meet attack which has cost us three important warships and several others and nearly 100,000 tons of merchant shipping, we see that over 200 heavy bombers attacked one town in Germany.' From April 1941, onwards, Cairo were asking for heavy bombers to interfere with the Axis supply traffic and bomb Tripoli, particularly at times when we had lost the use of the forward airfields near Benghazi.

Mr. Churchill's reaction to such criticism was expressed in a minute on 16th April, 1942, to Mr. Attlee: 'Everybody would like to send Bomber Command to India and the Middle East. However, it is not possible to make any decisive change. All that is possible is being done. I should be very glad if you would see C.A.S. and hear what he has to say. The question is one of precise detail. It is no use flying out squadrons which sit helpless and useless when they arrive. We have built up a great plant here for bombing Germany, which is the only way in our power of helping Russia. From every side people want to

break it up. One has to be sure that one does not ruin our punch here without getting any proportionate advantage elsewhere. . . .'

The Air Staff were very willing in principle to provide heavy bombers for the Middle East. The difficulty was to find suitable aircraft which could be spared. Machines for Egypt had to be 'tropicalized', and the teething troubles to which new types were always subject were aggravated in countries remote from the factories and unable to provide experienced ground staffs. In order to save shipping the Air Ministry's preference was to send American types direct from the United States. A few Liberators had arrived before America entered the war; the Chiefs of Staff then resolved to form two heavy bomber squadrons in the Middle East equipped with this type; in March 1942, however, eight of the twenty-two aircraft earmarked for this purpose were diverted to Coastal Command, and shortly afterwards it was decided to send the two squadrons to India, while providing duplicate ground equipment in Egypt. In compensation it was proposed to base two Halifax squadrons in Egypt, and in June Air Marshal Tedder was allowed to keep the newly arrived Liberators there for a time and also to have a call on those of the United States Army intended to bomb the Rumanian oilfields (Operation 'Halpro'). Mr. Casey, the Minister of State, had made a further personal appeal to the Prime Minister pointing out that as we no longer had the ships to control the Central Mediterranean heavy bombers were urgently needed to make possible the relief of Malta and attack the enemy's ships and ports. On which Mr. Churchill had minuted; 'For the last fifteen months Middle East has pressed for heavy bombers. Air Ministry have effectively resisted this by pointing out on each occasion that it will take three months to establish them there. But the resultant situation is serious, and may be the subject of censure when all these matters are reviewed.' The Chief of the Air Staff in reply went over the past history; he could now say that in July 1942, with the help of 45 Liberators (from India and the United States) recently offered by the Americans, Middle East might expect to have 105 heavy bombers at their disposal. These expectations were not realized, but the Air Staff declared, in September 1942, that since January 90 Wellingtons and 32 Halifaxes had been diverted from Bomber Command to the Middle East.

The settlement of the differences with the other two Services was naturally a more difficult matter; they involved questions of fundamental organization and ultimate control. In each case the affair had a long history.

In the summer of 1941 the Army was still thinking of a new German attempt at invasion after the expected collapse of Russia. It had been impressed by the powerful support rendered by the

*Luftwaffe* to the German Army in the campaigns of 1939 and 1940 and desired that the expansion of the Royal Air Force should provide a largely increased number of squadrons whose primary duty should be to support the Army and whose training should fit them to perform it effectively. Sir John Dill, the C.I.G.S., asked for 109 Army Support squadrons,<sup>1</sup> plus troop-carriers and gliders to carry two brigade groups each of 5,000 men with light tanks and artillery, and aircraft, at home and in the Middle East, to drop 2,400 parachutists in one trip. Sir Charles Portal replied that the acceptance of such a proposal would hopelessly upset the planned programme of the Royal Air Force and not really help the Army, since 'the war can only be won by the development of our air-offensive on a scale which, together with the effects of economic pressure and propaganda, will break the German will to continue fighting'. Instead of the 109 squadrons asked for he offered forty-four divided according to the precedent of the British Expeditionary Force of 1940 between an Air Component under the direct orders of the Army Commander-in-Chief and an Air Contingent commanded by a high officer of the Royal Air Force whose duty it was, in consultation with him, to give all possible support to the Army.

By 23rd July, 1941, the controversy had been reduced to the following terms:

'... The War Office point of view is that in addition to the existing 14 Army Co-operation squadrons, 40 more squadrons should be allotted to the Army at home. After these additional squadrons have been fully trained in Army co-operation, the War Office are prepared to lend them to Bomber and Fighter Commands, as circumstances permit.

'C.A.S. agrees that 6 more squadrons should be allotted to Army Co-operation, making 20 in all. He considers that the Army will be assured of the Army Co-operation they require if, over and above these 20 squadrons, a number of bomber squadrons are specially trained to work in close support of the Army. The training of certain squadrons of Bomber Command in this work is... now in progress and by the middle of September it should be possible to say how far the above view is justified.'

There was also lively controversy as to the nature and quality of the aircraft allotted to the Army. Reports of inadequate co-operation between air and armoured forces in Libya led the Prime Minister to raise the matter as a practical issue. 'The lack of effective and intimate contact,' he wrote, 'between the air and the ground forces calls for a drastic reform,' and he went so far as to accuse the Air Ministry of having been 'most hard and unhelpful both to the Army and to the Navy in meeting their special requirements'.

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<sup>1</sup> Fifty-four at home, fifty-five overseas.

In October 1941, after a number of exercises in Army-Air co-operation had been held, the C.I.G.S. raised the whole question again. Great progress, said Sir John Dill, was being made in the organization, equipment and training of the Army, not merely for the defence of the country but to take its part in the final overthrow of Germany, except in the essential matter of air-support. His practical proposals were much as before, but he insisted on the basic principle that the squadrons allotted for close support of the Army should, for training and operations, be regarded as 'an integral part of the Army itself'. The Chief of the Air Staff for his part reaffirmed the principle that these squadrons, over and above the twenty expressly set apart for Army Co-operation, should remain in Bomber and Fighter Commands. The two papers were discussed by the Chiefs of Staff on 13th November but a decision was again deferred.

Sir Alan Brooke, as C.I.G.S., was quite as insistent as his predecessor that the existing system was prejudicial to the Army, and he returned to the charge in March 1942 when recent events in the Far East had confirmed the General Staff's view. 'The outstanding lesson of the war,' he said, 'has been that land forces inadequately supported from the air are doomed to failure when opposed by a modern enemy equipped with suitable types of aircraft and adequate air forces trained for close co-operation with land forces'. Our Army, on the other hand, had to make do with 'types originally intended for other purposes or which had proved unsuitable for other roles'. If the Air Ministry could not ensure that the squadrons allotted to the Army were provided with aircraft, armament and crews suited to its special requirements the only alternative would be for the Army to have its own Air Arm as the Navy had. He proceeded to put forward concrete proposals, which now included Bomber Transport Squadrons to carry three airborne divisions, one in each of the three theatres—Home, India and Middle East.

Sir Charles Portal replied at length to this paper and at the same time to one from the Navy. The two demands together, he said, involved in fact 'the division of the Air Force into three separate services', whereas the secret of the *Luftwaffe's* success, as shown in effective co-operation with the Army and Navy, was that it was a single force *centrally organized*. The point at issue was whether or not we should continue to maintain a centralized and flexible force which could be concentrated to meet the dominant strategic need of the moment. He stated that delays in the expansion of those branches of the Royal Air Force which chiefly concerned the Army were due to disappointments in supply from the United States, the need for reinforcing the Middle East and Far East, and the commitment to Russia. The decision to send aircraft to the Middle East rather than the Far East was that of the Defence Committee, and Auchinleck had spoken

enthusiastically of air assistance in 'Crusader'. But the number of squadrons asked for by the Army for 'intimate' support was excessive by any standard. He proposed to allot fifty-five squadrons for Army support at home, of which twenty should be under direct Army control; if and when 'seeking to obtain a decision on land', it would in addition be given the full support of all available air forces.<sup>1</sup> A similar principle would be applied abroad.

The Prime Minister was impressed by the arguments in this paper and commended them to the attention of the General Staff. A further exchange of memoranda between the two Staffs narrowed the difference as to numbers, if not as to organization, but Brooke still felt deeply that the Army's interests were being neglected.<sup>2</sup> The Chiefs of Staff took note of the extent of agreement reached. The debate continued, however, nor was the General Staff's position modified when discussion with the Americans of the organization required for a grand-scale invasion of the Continent had produced a paper from the Air Staff proposing an entirely novel system of organization and command.<sup>3</sup> A Supreme Commander was now envisaged, with a single Air Officer under him commanding-in-chief the British and United States Air Forces. 'Virtually the entire Metropolitan Air Force', apart from Coastal Command and units of Fighter Command engaged in the normal air defence of Great Britain, would now be 'engaged in effect on Army Support in the widest sense, including the achievement of air superiority over the battle area'. The proposal was rejected, unwisely, as his Secretary of State thought, by the C.I.G.S. on the ground that it did not provide for continuous and intensive co-operation with the Army during training, and violated the fundamental principle that 'the military commander on all levels, to whom the operational control of aircraft has been delegated, must be able to deal face to face with an executive R.A.F. commander who is authorized actually to issue orders to the supporting R.A.F. formations to implement the military commander's instructions'.

Nor were difficulties settled at a Staff Conference on 5th October, 1942, with Mr. Churchill in the chair. It was, however, agreed that co-operation in the field should follow, in principle, the system now admitted to be working well in the Western Desert, namely close and constant consultation between the Army and Air commanders at every level, occupying the same or adjacent headquarters, and the utmost flexibility in using all the available air forces in support of the Army as circumstances demanded.<sup>4</sup> Sir Alan Brooke, however, was

<sup>1</sup> As was done in 1944 for 'Overlord'.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., Bryant, pp. 385-7.

<sup>3</sup> Referred to as the Slessor paper.

<sup>4</sup> In a minute of 7th October, 1942, the Prime Minister referred to paras four and five of his directive of exactly a year earlier. Churchill, IV, 801; III, 443 (partly quoted above, Chap. IX, p. 221).

not satisfied. He was afraid that Ministers' devotion to the bombing offensive might result in our losing the war in all theatres for want of air-support and being left with the largest bombing force in the world at home to hand over to the Germans.

An agreed statement, signed by the two Secretaries of State, was eventually submitted to the Prime Minister on 10th June, 1943; it was concerned with the organization of the Royal Air Force for support of cross-Channel operations. The portion allotted to provide direct support to the British/Canadian armies in the field would be known as the Tactical Air Force; its relations with Headquarters, British Army Group, would conform generally to those established in the 'Torch' campaign between the North African Tactical Air Force and Eighteenth Army Group. This reorganization had involved the dissolution of Army Co-operation Command in the Royal Air Force.

Agreement on this most vexed question had thus to wait until a time many months after the period treated in this volume, a time when an invasion of Great Britain was no longer thought possible and attention was concentrated on a great Allied enterprise demanding the full energies of the nations involved.

The long controversy had been due primarily to the general shortage of aircraft which enforced limitation of supplies; also to the Army's feeling, dating from at least May 1940 and Sir Alan Brooke's memories of the retreat to Dunkirk, that our land-forces had never had the support they needed and such as the German army enjoyed, and a related feeling that the Air Ministry was not really interested in the needs of the Army. For this reason Sir James Grigg thought it desirable for the Army that the Slessor plan should be accepted for the present, on condition that the essential structure of Army Co-operation Command was preserved, in order that it might be reconstituted if the Slessor plan was not found satisfactory. 'Of course,' he wrote, 'the difficulties caused by the shortage of aircraft are immense, but even so I am not satisfied that the Air Staff have not put us at the bottom of the list as regards aircraft, training and communications. And they will go on doing this so long as we have the position where no *important* member of the R.A.F. hierarchy is in a position where his professional reputation depends on the success of Army Co-operation.' This imputation the Air Ministry denied, attributing the Army's deficiencies simply to the general shortage all round.

No less controversial were the claims of the Navy, which raised fundamental issues as to our main strategy for winning the war. The controversy centred on the use of long-range aircraft in the maritime



war. It ranged over both organization and numbers. During the winter, as we have seen, the primary role assigned to Bomber Command was to attack the German warships at Brest. It was the Secretary of State for Air's paper of 9th February asking for a change in policy which brought the Admiralty into the arena.<sup>1</sup>

For air action outside the comparatively short range of the Fleet Air Arm the Admiralty depended on Royal Air Force Coastal Command, of which they had in April 1941 secured operational control.<sup>2</sup> They now proposed that local coastal commands, working under naval operational control, should be instituted abroad. This proposal was uncompromisingly opposed by the Air Staff, as bound to destroy the flexibility essential if air-power was to exert its full strength. Control by a naval commander-in-chief abroad, they said, would be quite a different thing from control by the Admiralty, where the development of the war as a whole and not merely naval needs could be taken into account. The precise organization required abroad must depend upon the theatres; in the Middle East co-operation was satisfactory. The past successes of the *Luftwaffe* were in fact due to the flexibility resulting from a central direction of the entire force. The Air Staff's rejoinder was evidently considered as conclusive, for the present, as against local coastal commands.

The continuing subject of dispute was the number and types of aircraft required to give Coastal Command the reinforcement made necessary by the increasing U-boat attack and the extension of the naval war to the Indian Ocean as well as to the Western Atlantic. On receiving the Air Ministry paper of 9th February the Admiralty immediately put in a provisional claim for long-range aircraft for both theatres. They asked for two squadrons of long-range general reconnaissance aircraft from Bomber Command to work from Ceylon and Rangoon and for four squadrons of Catalina flying-boats to work in the western half of the Indian Ocean; they also asked for 6½ Wellington squadrons to attack U-boats in the Bay of Biscay and for 81 Fortresses or Liberators to extend patrols farther out into the Atlantic.

This statement of immediate needs was followed on 5th March by a memorandum from the First Sea Lord summarizing the naval situation with regard to both surface ships and the U-boat war on shipping. From both points of view the strength of our land-based aircraft working over the sea must be substantially increased, for the three

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<sup>1</sup> See Roskill, II, 78-90; Sir John Slessor in *The Central Blue* (1956), pp. 366-71 reviews the controversy with experience as a Bomber Group Commander and also as A.O.C. in C. Coastal Command.

<sup>2</sup> In June 1942, Coastal Command had 10 flying-boat squadrons (including 4 forming) and 31 G.R. and fighter squadrons (including those on loan); one of the 31 was armed with Liberators, and one with Fortresses.

purposes of protecting shipping, attacking U-boats and bombing U-boat building-yards. It was essential to create an adequate striking force of torpedo-bombers, but this must take time and meanwhile Bomber Command must be prepared to reinforce Coastal Command. Specific figures of requirements were given. Further the Navy must be 'intimately associated with the training in sea operations of personnel of Coastal Command'.<sup>1</sup>

The first of these papers drew a rejoinder from the Air Ministry. They made much of the argument that long-range general reconnaissance duties could not be usefully undertaken by aircraft not fitted with A.S.V. radar,<sup>2</sup> and that to fit the device to existing aircraft was a lengthy process. Without it, their considered opinion was that

'Squadrons of Bomber Command could best contribute to the weakening of the U-boat offensive by action against the principal industrial areas of Germany within our range, including the main naval industries and dockyards. To divert them to an uneconomical defensive role would be unsound at any time. It would be doubly so now when we are about to launch a bombing offensive with the aid of a new technique of which we have high expectations and which will enable us to deliver a heavy and concentrated blow against Germany at a moment when German morale is low and when the Russians are in great need of our assistance.'

The Air Ministry agreed however that they must do something to help directly in the maritime war; subject to the allocations of the Anglo-American Munitions Assignment Board being made good, the Admiralty's requirements would be more than fulfilled by the end of the year. As immediate assistance, they could offer for the Indian Ocean four Catalina squadrons (two from Coastal Command) but no Wellingtons; for Coastal Command's reconnaissance work at home they would earmark all the Fortresses allocated to Great Britain in 1942, and would lend one Whitley squadron from Bomber Command (to be fitted with radar). No Wellingtons could be spared, but Coastal Command would be receiving a number of radar-fitted flying-boat squadrons between May and December 1942. The numerous discussions showed that there was disagreement between the Navy and the Air Force both on matters of fact, such as the performance of aircraft and the importance of A.S.V. radar, and on matters of policy. The Chief of the Air Staff said that compliance with the Admiralty's demand would mean 'a considerable reduction in the strength of Bomber Command. The question was whether the war effort would be best assisted, and the maximum help to Russia given, by maintaining

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<sup>1</sup> The Navy always insisted on the necessity of special training for aircrews who were to work in maritime operations.

<sup>2</sup> Air-to-surface vessel. Some aircraft in Coastal Command were fitted with early types, but most had none: the 10-cm. type (Mk. III) was on trial but not yet in use.

the maximum offensive against Germany or by diverting resources to defensive patrolling over the sea'. The First Lord on the other hand claimed that the sea battle was now the vital issue.

The suggestion that operations against U-boats were 'defensive' was always a red rag to the Navy. To them the term as used by the Air Staff seemed to imply ineffectiveness or wasteful effort. In point of fact the bombing of U-boat shelters and construction yards as well as of industrial centres at this time had very little result, whereas the near future was to show how effectively U-boats could be attacked by shore-based aircraft escorting or supporting convoys. Taking the word 'defensive' in its ordinary sense apart from such implications, the Navy could rightly claim that one method of killing U-boats was as 'offensive' as another; in a wider context, however, operations of which the primary purpose was to protect merchant ships, although they involved killing U-boats, were surely defensive. But need the word convey any stigma of discredit?

The Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff, with the Prime Minister presiding, discussed the rival claims of bombing Germany as against escorting convoys in the North-West Approaches, patrolling transit areas in the Bay of Biscay and reinforcing the Middle East and Indian Ocean theatres. Our inability to satisfy them all was recognized and Mr. Churchill appealed to the President. Could not the arrival of the United States bomber groups due in July 1942 be hastened? Even 100 American heavy bombers working from England before the end of May would enable us to meet the urgent needs of both Bomber and Coastal Commands. But the appeal was made in vain.

Decision was at length reached in mid-April 1942 as to the immediate reinforcement of Coastal Command at the expense of Bomber,<sup>1</sup> but this left over the fundamental difference of opinion between the Naval and Air staffs concerning the best use of our air forces. The debate naturally involved questions as to the shipping situation, the actual effect of aircraft in the campaign against the U-boats and the results achievable in the bombing of Germany. Satisfactory evidence in all of these cases was difficult to obtain; we have seen how vague were Mr. Justice Singleton's findings on the last point.

The whole question, under the heading 'Employment of the R.A.F.', was discussed by the Chiefs of Staff on 24th June, in the absence of the Prime Minister and C.I.G.S. in America. The First Sea Lord had written insisting as 'a question of supreme urgency' on an immediate increase in the strength of the land-based air forces working with the Navy, in view of the fact that 'the gravity of our

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<sup>1</sup> See Roskill, II, 84.

position at sea increases day by day: sinkings at the rate of the last three months were equivalent to the loss of eight million mercantile tonnage in a year, and every month an additional twenty U-boats were commissioned'. New mercantile tonnage did not equal our losses. To this the Chief of the Air Staff had replied that he was not convinced, looking forward, that the peril at sea was as great as the First Sea Lord argued. It was not clear that the entire effort devoted to the U-boat war was used to the best advantage. 'The dividend paid by bomber squadrons working in this role is known to be a very small one.' It might be more repaying to bomb U-boats under construction. But the real point was whether an increase in the air forces working with the Navy was worth the price of curtailing the air-offensive against Germany. Whereas at the beginning of 1942 Bomber Command contained fifty-eight squadrons (1,000 aircraft) compared with forty-four squadrons (720 aircraft) now, Coastal had risen from thirty-five squadrons of 482 aircraft to forty-one of 568 aircraft. It was a 'depressing thought that after nearly three years of war so great a proportion of our effort should still be used in a defensive role'. Sir Charles Portal reacted still more strongly against a suggestion by Mr. S. M. Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, that a small high-powered committee, under a Cabinet Minister, other than Chiefs of Staff, should be appointed to advise the Cabinet on 'how our aerial offensive power against the sea can be strengthened both on a long-term basis and immediately'.

In the discussion on the 24th June the Chief of the Air Staff defended the present policy of allotting the minimum to defensive and the maximum to offensive purposes. 'Only 11 per cent of the Air Force effort was employed on bombing Germany. With any further encroachment, large-scale bombing would cease.' The First Sea Lord protested that our whole war effort was hampered by our lack of shipping. The position showed no sign of early improvement. Time was the essential factor. The V.C.I.G.S. (Lieut.-General A. E. Nye) argued that besides the ships there were the cargoes and the crews to think of. 'The essence of the whole matter was to decide what was a diversion from our major policy.' He had been unable to find how our policy had been arrived at, or when the Chiefs of Staff had advised the government on the matter.<sup>1</sup>

The meeting did not favour Mr. Bruce's proposal, but agreed that the First Sea Lord and the Chief of the Air Staff should each nominate an officer 'to review and advise the Chiefs of Staff on the general policy for the employment of the air forces' on the basis of the priority laid down at Washington, viz.:

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<sup>1</sup> They never had done so; it had been the Prime Minister's decision. See footnote on p. 525.

- (1) minimum necessary fighter defence of the United Kingdom;
- (2) minimum necessary allocation for securing our vital communications and interrupting those of the enemy;
- (3) maximum possible provision for the offensive both direct and in support of land operations.

Rear-Admiral E. J. P. Brind and Air Vice-Marshal J. C. Slessor were nominated for this duty and their report was received on 2nd July. Their recommendations, however, were not acceptable to the Chief of the Air Staff, who preferred a plan for using aircraft from Bomber Command on sorties to assist Coastal Command until the latter should obtain the desired total of 54 long-range general reconnaissance machines. This proposal was accepted, though without enthusiasm, by Admiral Pound, and the Chiefs of Staff were at length able to present agreed recommendations to the Cabinet on 18th July; along with various technical proposals to meet the Navy's needs they included one that in future a Director of Air Co-operation in the Admiralty should work in closest touch with the Director of Operations (Naval Co-operation) in the Air Ministry.<sup>1</sup>

Though Mr. Churchill minuted the Chiefs of Staff's proposals 'Proceed as proposed' and they were so informed, this was not the end of the controversy, for he thought it better that the plan should be submitted to the Cabinet along with Mr. Bruce's paper of 16th June. The discussion took place on 12th August, when the Prime Minister was on the way to Moscow. Mr. Bruce had in a second paper described the Chiefs of Staff's proposals as most unsatisfactory and illogical—they had not followed the accepted priorities, in which the offensive had been subordinated to the defence of our communications—and at the Cabinet meeting on 12th August he reaffirmed his opinion that the needs of aircraft for the war at sea should receive a higher priority, even at the cost of some delay to the bombing offensive's full effect; he thought in particular that more aircraft should have been allotted to the defence of Ceylon. The meeting took no decisions, but called for information on various points, which was supplied afterwards by the Air Ministry.

The decision eventually came from the Prime Minister, and it was in favour of Bomber Command. In his 'Review of the War Position' of 21st July,<sup>2</sup> he wrote that, although the bombing of Germany was no longer the only possible means of victory,

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<sup>1</sup> On 21st July Sir Dudley Pound wrote in a private letter: 'You will be glad to know that the battle over the Air, which has been in progress for several months, has now been concluded satisfactorily from our point of view. Except for an increased number of bombers operating over the Bay of Bengal there will be no very startling change as the building up of our requirements must necessarily depend on the output of aircraft. There has, I feel, been a real change of heart on the part of the Air Ministry, which has possibly been brought about by the general feeling that the sea was not getting its fair share. . . .'

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 781ff.

'It would be a mistake to cast aside our original thought . . . that the severe, ruthless bombing of Germany on an ever-increasing scale will not only cripple her war effort, including U-boat and aircraft production, but will also create conditions intolerable to the mass of the German population.

'It is at this point that we must observe with sorrow and alarm the woeful shrinkage of our plans for bomber expansion. The needs of the Navy and the Middle East and India, the short-fall of our British production programmes, the natural wish of the Americans to fly their own bombers against the enemy, and the inevitable delay in these machines coming into action, all these falling exclusively on Bomber Command have prevented so far the fruition of our hopes for this summer and autumn. We must regard the bomber offensive against Germany at least as a feature in breaking her war-will second only to the largest military operations which can be conducted on the Continent until that war-will is broken. Renewed intense efforts should be made by the Allies to develop during the winter and onwards ever-growing, ever more accurate and ever more far-ranging bomber attacks on Germany. . . .'

In the weeks following, as a counter to demands involving the further weakening of Bomber Command, he circulated, though he considered them overstatements of a good case, papers by Sir Arthur Harris and Lord Trenchard setting out the full-blooded bomber doctrine. At length on 17th September he minuted the Secretary of State for Air and the Chief of the Air Staff: 'It is necessary that the Bomber Command at home should be raised from 32 operating squadrons, which it now has, to 50 squadrons, fully operative by the end of the year.'<sup>1</sup> The balance was to be made up partly by contributions from Coastal Command, the Airborne Division and other theatres, partly by reorganization in Bomber Command itself, but mostly by fresh construction, part promised and part to be secured by increased exertions. The objections of the Navy and Army were overborne, and the Prime Minister's plan was accepted, though by the end of the year only forty-four of his fifty squadrons were operational.

Mr. Churchill was of course fully alive to the danger in the Atlantic. In a memorandum of 24th October, 1942, headed 'Policy for the Conduct of the War', he wrote:

'There preys upon us as the greatest danger to the United Nations, and particularly to our Island, the U-boat attack. The Navy call for greater assistance from the Air. I am proposing to my colleagues that we try for the present to obtain this extra assistance mainly from the United States, and that we encroach as little as possible upon our Bomber effort against Germany, which is

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 793.

of peculiar importance during these winter months. I have, on the contrary, asked for an increase in the Bomber effort, rising to 50 squadrons by the end of the year. Thereafter our bombing power will increase through the maturing of production. It may be that early in 1943 we shall have to damp down the Bomber offensive against Germany in order to meet the stress and peril of the U-boat war. I hope and trust not, but by then it will be possible at any rate to peg our bomber offensive at a higher level than at present. The issue is not one of principle, but of emphasis. At present, in spite of U-boat losses, the Bomber offensive should have first place in our air effort.'

But the U-boat war was not neglected. Early in November Mr. Churchill convened the first meeting of the 'Cabinet Anti-U-boat Warfare Committee', on which the United States was represented by Mr. Averell Harriman and Admiral Stark. Its purpose was 'to give the same impulse to anti-U-boat warfare as had been applied to the Battle of the Atlantic and night A/A defence'. To follow the proceedings would be to stray yet farther beyond the limits of this volume; but the measures taken, in Captain Roskill's words, 'satisfied, to a considerable extent, the needs which the Admiralty had been pressing since the previous March. . . . It may therefore be said that the "Battle of the Air" of 1942 was closed by the meeting of the Anti-U-boat Committee on the 18th of November'.<sup>1</sup>

No such controversy arose in the case of Fighter Command. A hundred fighter squadrons in the United Kingdom<sup>2</sup> might indeed seem over-insurance against anything the enemy was likely to attempt. We know now that Hitler gave orders for the cancelling of 'Sea Lion' on 13th February, 1942,<sup>3</sup> but it was quite possible that an air blitz might be repeated, and in fact it was actually attempted in a novel form in 1944. The Joint Intelligence Committee reported their conclusion that 'so long as the major commitment on the Russian Front continues, the strength of the German Air Force on the Western Front is unlikely to exceed some 1,000 aircraft of all types. . . . If the campaign against Russia were brought to a successful conclusion by the Germans during 1942, some three months would elapse before air operations against the British Isles could be developed to full intensity'. Nevertheless it was a much simpler matter for the Germans to transfer aircraft from the east to the west of Europe than for the British to recall to the United Kingdom fighters which had been sent long distances overseas.

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<sup>1</sup> Roskill, II, 88-9.

<sup>2</sup> Seventy-five day and thirty night squadrons.

<sup>3</sup> *F.N.C.*

The serious drain on our fighters was the monthly quota of 200 promised to Russia in September 1941.<sup>1</sup> The promise was made before Japan entered the war against us, but the government continued to regard it as binding. It was moreover generally admitted to be a vital British interest that Russia should maintain her resistance. But the loss of these aircraft which would have meant so much to the Far East would have been more easily accepted had the Russians vouchsafed us information of how they were using them, and to what effect.

The concordat of 18th November with the Admiralty does not of course answer the question whether the allocation of aircraft between Bomber and Coastal Command in 1942 was the best that could have been made on the information then available, but more recent knowledge is relevant.

We know now that 1,664 merchant ships, of the Allies or neutral, with a tonnage of nearly eight millions, were lost by enemy action in 1942. This devastation covered a period when shipping was urgently needed for the maintenance of the Allied war effort, for the conveyance of food and raw materials to the United Kingdom and other countries and for the transport of munitions as well as of troops. Every sinking meant the loss not only of the present cargo but of the future services of the ship and, only too probably, of her trained crew. More than a thousand of these ships, with a tonnage of nearly 5½ millions, were sunk in the North Atlantic. Of the total loss in all theatres, 1,160 ships of over 6¼ million tons were sunk by submarines. We know that the Germans had 91 U-boats fit for operations in January, 196 in October. We know that of 85 sinkings of enemy submarines in 1942, whose cause is known, 32 were due to surface ships, 35 to shore-based aircraft, and six were shared between them. We know also that in the whole course of the war only 25 ships—one per cent of the total sunk by U-boats in Home Waters, the Atlantic and the Arctic—were sunk when in convoy with both surface and air escort.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know what any of these figures would have been if more or less aircraft had been allotted to Coastal Command. But undoubtedly the mastery of the U-boat menace in May 1943 was largely due to the increased number of Liberators then assigned to work over the sea, and one must suppose that, if even a few more long-range aircraft could have been made available for the purpose earlier, more U-boats and less merchantmen would have been sunk; it should

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. VI above.

<sup>2</sup> See Roskill, II, Apps. O and J; III, i, 262-5.



be noted, however, that the Liberators working in 1943 were fitted with 10-cm. radar, whereas this type was not in use in the summer of 1942.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the supply of Liberators from the United States was most disappointing—it seemed to the British that an unnecessary number was reserved for the Pacific—while sailors and airmen differed as to whether a squadron or two of Lancasters, of which Bomber Command had four in May, would help appreciably to close the gap in the Atlantic convoy route.<sup>2</sup> In the event, the Navy, aided by Coastal Command, succeeded in maintaining our life-line and even in providing the necessary cover for the landings in Africa, but only at the cost of tremendous efforts and severe losses. In a paper of 5th October, 1942, on ‘The Needs of the Navy’, the Admiralty declared that ‘the foundation upon which the whole structure of our strategy rests is in danger. Unless certain steps are taken urgently to relieve the situation in which the Navy finds itself, our ability to secure our sea-communications and hence to win the war, regardless of the type of offensive chosen, will be impaired’.

The Royal Air Force challenged the Admiralty view of the danger as exaggerated and made much of the argument that bombing was at that time the only weapon by which we could strike a vital blow at Germany. Research since the war, however, shows that the actual effect of the strategic air offensive in 1942 was not nearly as great as was believed by Bomber Command or by the Ministry of Economic Warfare.<sup>3</sup> Their optimism was partly the result of underestimates of the difficulties of navigation and aiming and consequently of overestimates of the material damage done, but it was mainly due to a ‘radical misconception’ by British experts of the condition of the German economy. ‘Throughout the year all appreciations were based on the theory that the German economy was already strained to the utmost so that an injury to it would be felt throughout the whole structure’; whereas in fact ‘so far from the German economy being tightly stretched it was still very resilient and had a large cushion not only of stocks but of industrial capacity devoted to semi-luxuries and other goods of no real necessity to the welfare of the people’. Such was the result of Hitler’s belief that the war would be a short one, and also of military jealousy of civil interference.

‘In 1940–41,’ say the historians of the offensive, ‘the damage inflicted on the German economy by Bomber Command had been negligible. In 1942 some substantial damage was done if not such as had any appreciable effect on war production.’ In fact in 1942 German ‘production increased by 80 per cent and the total production of the year was 50 per cent higher than that of 1941. And this

<sup>1</sup> See p. 535, footnote 1.

<sup>2</sup> Six Lancasters were lent to Coastal Command for a month in June–July 1942.

<sup>3</sup> See Webster and Frankland, I, 473–92, from whom I quote.

rise in production went entirely into the war effort, for civilian production had decreased'. Nor can any striking effect on German morale be substantiated. 'It is clear,' say the historians, 'that a people that could withstand the assault of 1943 cannot have been very much disturbed by the much lighter attack of 1942.'

Even in the case of individual raids, although photographs were giving a true picture of the damage done, the permanent effect was much less than supposed, owing to efficient organization of recovery. In Lübeck production reached 80 to 90 per cent of normal within a week. Even at Cologne, after the first of the Thousand raids, 'within two weeks the life of the city was functioning almost normally'. After the attack on the French factory at Billancourt, where over 2,000 trucks were lost, after four months production was higher than before.

As for the attacks on submarine construction, 'the effect of the large number of attacks on the ports', say the historians, 'was negligible'. Submarine construction continued to rise. 'The claim of Bomber Command that it could do more to help the Battle of the Atlantic by bombing submarine construction yards rather than the ports from which they set out was not substantiated.'<sup>1</sup>

Besides the effect on the German economy and morale, the effect on strategy must be taken into account. At a later date Allied bombing had the result of diverting German aircraft production from bombers to fighters, from weapons of offence to weapons of defence. This process, however, say our historians, had 'hardly begun' by 1942; but there was undoubtedly a diversion of fighters from the other fronts to the defence of the Reich against the attacks of Bomber Command. The night-fighter force was more than doubled during the year, and 'though the claim by the Chief of the Air Staff in November 1942 that fifty per cent of the German fighters had been left on the Western front is exaggerated, if all the fronts be taken into account, it is true that the number of fighters on the Eastern and Western fronts tended to become about equal as the year went on, and this must have had a sensible effect on the fighting on the East front where the *Luftwaffe* was used almost exclusively for army co-operation'.<sup>2</sup> Assistance to Russia was, of course, one of the reasons regularly insisted on by the Air Staff for maintaining and intensifying the bombing offensive.

There was also 'a considerable increase in personnel and material devoted to the anti-aircraft organization' of the Reich, which should be added to the credit side of Bomber Command.

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<sup>1</sup> Later in the war, bombers not only destroyed many U-boats in port but significantly slowed down the production of the new, more formidable types; Slessor, *op. cit.*, pp. 470-1.

<sup>2</sup> Webster and Frankland, I, 490, 481; see also below p. 646, for the help given to Russia.

Neither, however, the actual physical damage done in Germany, nor the weakening of the German people's will to carry on the struggle, nor the assistance rendered to the Russian armies was sufficient to justify the claims made *at that time* for a priority for the bomber offensive. It seems doubtful, too, whether under the conditions of that time—the renunciation of long-range bombing by daylight and the continuing difficulties of navigation and aiming at night—a mere increase in the number of squadrons would have resulted in any proportionate break in German morale. Viewed in retrospect, the case for favouring Bomber Command in 1942 must rest on the argument that it was only by trial and error, by training and experience, that the Command could ever achieve its great results of the last years of the war, and it must be remembered that it was only by a narrow margin of time that the air superiority was assured which made possible the success of the invasion of the Continent in 1944. It can be argued too that in 1942 any further withholding of the means of acting to its full capacity would have sapped the confidence and enthusiasm of the crews, as it would certainly have aroused the fury of their Chief. Undoubtedly that year was a critical one in the operational development of the Command, though the actual achievement, as measured by its impact on the German economy, was much less than was believed at the time. On the other hand the diversion of more long-range aircraft from Bomber Command in 1942 need not have affected the United States bombing effort, which played so large a part in the final stages of the air offensive.

The controversy narrows down to this: could Bomber Command without endangering its future effectiveness have spared such a diversion of long-range aircraft to Coastal Command in the summer of 1942 as would have caused a significant decline in our losses of ships with their precious cargoes and crews? Where so many of the relevant factors are hypothetical, opinions on the correctness of our air policy in 1942 will continue to differ, but it is difficult not to agree with those who believed that in the shipping emergency of that year increased assistance to the war at sea would have been worth a slight reduction in the strength of the strategic air offensive.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### SUPPLY, January–August, 1942

**I**N THIS CHAPTER it is intended to set out briefly the British position in the matter of military supply from the time of the entry of America and Japan into the war, regarding, first, raw materials and manpower and then some of the indispensable instruments of war, whether produced at home or across the Atlantic. It is based largely on the monographs on these subjects in the civil series of this history.

The accession of the United States to the Allied side, with her immense resources in manpower and industrial strength, ensured victory in the long run. But, just as in the strategical field several months of disaster had to be endured, so on the side of supply, in Professor Postan's words, 'the first phase of the Anglo-American alliance turned out to be one of unrelieved stringency. At the end of 1941 American war industry was still in the early states of expansion and was not to be fully employed or working at maximum rates until well into 1943'.<sup>1</sup>

From the purely British point of view, moreover, along with great gain, the American participation brought certain disadvantages.<sup>2</sup> The country whose peacetime munitions industries had largely been employed, if not created, in producing to British orders now naturally thought first of its own needs, and it was inevitable that in the competition Britain should suffer. As the American forces and their needs expanded, the British planners were increasingly hampered by uncertainty as to how much of their stated and approved requirements they could count on receiving.

Even from the purely British point of view the swelling tide of American production was none the less of immense benefit.

'The value of munitions supplies,' says Mr. Wrigley, 'furnished to Britain in 1942 was more than double that of the previous year's receipts . . . and although United Kingdom and Dominion production was also very much on the increase the proportion of total Commonwealth supplies that was procured from the United States rose from 11½ to 17 per cent. This year, in fact, may be regarded as the first in which American munitions supply was a really important factor in the growth of Britain's war-making power as a whole.'<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *British War Production*, p. 198, see Chap. vi above.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chap. xv, pp. 388–393.

<sup>3</sup> H. Duncan Hall, C. C. Wrigley and J. D. Scott, *Studies of Overseas Supply* (1956), p. 31 (Chaps. I–IV are by Wrigley).

Nevertheless the strain on British industry was severe. Professor Postan has shown how, over and above the fulfilment of current programmes, fresh demands were created by the more ambitious plans made possible by American participation, and how consequently the period of intense industrial effort was prolonged.<sup>1</sup> Moreover strategic developments led to revisions of the priorities assigned to certain weapons. 'Requirements had to be constantly reassessed in the order of military urgency, and the course of war production was therefore bound to be highly unstable. Yet the general tendency towards expansion, though repeatedly checked, was never arrested.'<sup>2</sup>

The early months of 1942 were a time of great anxiety in nearly all the various fields of supply. 'The shortage which on the morrow of Pearl Harbor appeared most dangerous and most immediate,' says Professor Postan, 'was that of raw materials.' This was due partly to the Japanese conquests—the occupied territories had supplied 90 per cent of the world's output of rubber, as well as much tin and hemp—partly to American competition, notably for steel and copper, partly to the shipping shortage. The problem was tackled in Washington by the Combined Raw Materials Board and, although it seemed at one time that we might have to draw heavily on our stocks, the corner was turned. 'At no time during the period was munitions production in the country interrupted or even slowed down by a failure in the supply of raw materials.'<sup>3</sup>

This result was however partly due to another shortage, that of labour.

'The year 1942,' says the historian of manpower, 'opened with what was to be for the Ministry of Labour the hardest task it had so far handled in mobilising the manpower of the country. The Armed Forces had not yet reached their full strength and, to keep pace with their requirements, a greatly expanded programme of arms and equipment had been drawn up . . . The outlook at the beginning of 1942 was certainly daunting, and throughout the year the labour supply situation gave rise to continuing anxiety.'<sup>4</sup>

In the autumn of 1941 the Ministry produced a survey of manpower showing both the Service and the industrial demands for labour for the twelve months ending June 1942, as well as the estimated distribution of men and women employed in July 1941. On

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<sup>1</sup> British war production had been planned to reach its peak in 1942. *British War Production*, p. 196.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 201.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 211–14.

<sup>4</sup> H. M. D. Parker, *Manpower* (1937), pp. 180–1. I have also used an unpublished monograph on the *Allocation of Manpower* (1949) by A. V. Judges.

this basis the Lord President's Committee proposed and the government accepted a stiffening up of National Service obligations. All persons between the ages of 18 and 60 were to be liable for some form of National Service: young men were to be called up to the Forces at 18½, and women were for the first time to be liable to conscription. The necessary legislation was passed in December.

In the meantime the government had approved proposals for a large increase in the programme of heavy and medium bombers to be completed by July 1943, involving an accession—of some 850,000 in all—to the number of workers in the aircraft industry. The Army too, which had some months previously exceeded the 'ceiling' of 2,195,000 men authorized in March 1941, was demanding a yet further increase in view of the new commitments imposed by the war in the Far East and prospective landings in Europe or Africa; it had assumed responsibility for equipping some twenty-three armoured and seventy-three infantry divisions, Commonwealth and Allied, by 1st April, 1943, besides smaller formations. The Admiralty also, in view of the continuing strain of the Battle of the Atlantic, pressed in October 1942 for a greater proportion of the national effort to be allotted to naval construction, and for the additional numbers required for manning new construction to be forthcoming in 1943 and thereafter.

These competing demands, seen against the background of a labour pool now reaching its limits, caused the government to insist on a stricter inquisition into the respective needs of the Services and supply departments.<sup>1</sup> High-level ministerial committees were appointed to examine the claims of the Army and Air Ministry. When in October 1942 the Ministry of Labour produced a fresh survey of manpower, Mr. Ernest Bevin emphasized its main lessons as being that 'the mobilization of the manpower of the country had reached a stage where, on the basis of the latest demands, there were not sufficient men and women to meet the requirements of both the Forces and industry and at the same time to maintain the necessary civilian standards and amenities'.<sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister referred the matter to the Lord President in order to focus, for submission to the War Cabinet, the issues to which the survey gave rise. It was now clear that some system of rationing was inevitable. The number of men and women that it might be hoped to obtain must first be ascertained and then demands must be adjusted to meet the available supply. 'Manpower resources,' says Mr. Parker, 'did not match the current programmes. Service strengths had been planned in the past on the assumption that a

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<sup>1</sup> Parker, *op. cit.*, Chapter x.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

substantial proportion of supplies required to equip them would be forthcoming from America, and manpower policy had been framed in the hope that from 1943 onwards the munitions industries would have passed their peak and would be able to contribute increasing numbers of men to the Armed Forces. These assumptions had turned out to be mistaken. . . .’ He proceeds to quote the Lord President’s conclusion, ‘that substantial cuts would have to be made in the present programme of the Armed Forces and strategical considerations would have to decide where the reductions should be made’.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister accepted this necessity and after the comments of the Departments had been received the War Cabinet in December authorized a scheme of allocations for the period July 1942—December 1943 which made cuts of a million all told in the original demands for additional manpower.

‘Shipping,’ Sir Winston Churchill has written of this period, ‘was at once the stranglehold and sole foundation of our war strategy.’<sup>2</sup> While the immense capacity of American shipbuilding was eventually to prove our salvation, the immediate result of the United States’ as well as the Japanese intervention in the war was increased stringency. The intervention of Japan, besides the loss of thousands of tons of Allied shipping, by sinking or by capture, in eastern waters and the denial to us of eastern ports, caused a huge demand for ships to convey men and munitions to the new theatre, whereas American belligerency afforded the German U-boats a rich harvest of destruction off the coast of the United States and in Caribbean waters where such defensive measures as had been provided were wholly inadequate. Some striking figures of the steep rise in Allied losses in the early months of 1942 have been given in a previous chapter, and complete figures apportioning the losses between theatres and between different assailants will be found in an Appendix.<sup>3</sup> It need only be said here that whereas in the whole of 1941 the loss of tonnage was under 4½ millions it amounted in 1942 to over 7¾ millions.

In June 1941 the Joint Planners, in their ‘Review of Future Strategy’, had forecast that since our shipping resources were so limited we should not, even if America entered the war, for some time have enough shipping to undertake any new large-scale military commitment involving an ocean passage. By the end of the year the situation had improved, and it was hoped that British and American shipbuilding would at least put our import programme out of danger. But in fact the total of new Allied building was only a little

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<sup>1</sup> Parker, p. 178.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 176.

<sup>3</sup> See Chap. XXI above, pp. 506, 507; Appendix VIII.

more than 7 million tons, whereas, as we have seen, the tonnage lost was nearer 8 million.<sup>1</sup> It was not till the second half of 1942 that the spurt in American building began to take effect, and owing to her own requirements the United States was unable to increase her help to us as we had hoped. She did, however, deliver to us between October 1941 and November 1942 sixty cargo ships, each of 10,000 deadweight tons, which we had ordered in December 1940. 'This acquisition alone was equal to a third of the United Kingdom output in 1942, which was the peak year in British merchant shipbuilding.'<sup>2</sup> In the meantime the situation was saved by the resources of British experience and ingenuity in the handling of shipping.

To what a degree the war had already strained our economy may be seen from the fact that, whereas before the war imports into the United Kingdom averaged about 54 million per annum, our total imports for 1941 were 30½ million tons. The shrinkage continued, and for the first half of 1942 imports were at the rate of 24½ million—only 2 million above the figure which the Lord President's Committee had put as the lowest possible if we were not to eat into our stocks to a dangerous extent.<sup>3</sup> At a meeting of the Defence Committee in January 1942, just before the Prime Minister returned from Washington, Mr. Attlee asked whether the Chiefs of Staff were fully informed as to our difficulties as regards shipping, to which the C.I.G.S. replied that the present shortage did not allow us to send out the formations we wished nor the reinforcements required to make good deficiencies in existing formations. A paper from the Ministry of War Transport showed how tonnage allotted to the Services, including shipments to Russia, had risen, and the Chiefs of Staff called on the Service Departments for an estimate of the space they would require for military movements in the next twelve months.

Though the shortage showed itself both in cargo vessels and in vessels available as troopships, it was over the latter that the Defence Committee were specially perturbed. They were less easily found and less easily replaced; they needed to be faster and they had the greater need of escort. The Chiefs of Staff reported that we should like to move 510,000 men from home to the Indian Ocean in the course of the year, 295,000 by the end of June. But we had the shipping for only 415,000 and 120,000 men respectively. Every available British ship was in use and we understood United States troop capacity to be only about a third of our own (90,000 as compared with 280,000). A

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<sup>1</sup> Roskill, II, 218.

<sup>2</sup> *Studies of Overseas Supply*, pp. 32–33; H. D. Hall, *North American Supply* (1955), p. 179. According to Miss Behrens, *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War* (1955), p. 264, taking an average ship, 10,000 deadweight tons was equivalent to 7,000 gross tons.

<sup>3</sup> Hancock & Gowing, *British War Economy*, pp. 128, 267, 421; see also R. J. Hammond, *Food*, Vol. I (H.M.S.O. 1951).



committee under Lord Leathers, Minister of War Transport, was already considering possible economies, and the War Office were urged to reduce their scales of equipment and transport. But the need for more cargo ships was urgent too, and it was thought necessary to appeal to America for help with regard to both.

Lord Leathers accordingly drafted a message for the Prime Minister to send to the President, and two important signals were the result.<sup>1</sup> In the first he asked if the United States could lend us shipping to carry two complete divisions (40,000 men) to the Indian Ocean during the next critical four months, loading if possible in the United Kingdom in April and May. Our own utmost efforts would not enable us to send more than 180,000 men out of the 295,000 required for the Middle East, India and Ceylon. He asked also for information as to the monthly amount of cargo shipping which we might expect from the American building programme in order to allow us 26 million tons of imports by the end of the year. In the second signal, calling attention to the grave deterioration in our affairs since the Japanese struck on 7th December and asking for fuller information of American strategic plans in the east, he again emphasized the desperate need of shipping. Shipping would be saved if the President would obviate the need of recalling Australian and New Zealand divisions from the Middle East to their homelands by sending two American divisions in their stead to the two Dominions;<sup>2</sup> and could not the proposed American increase in man-lift be greatly scaled up by the summer of 1943?

A long reply from the President was received on 8th March.<sup>3</sup> While recognizing the magnitude of the problems confronting the British in the Indian Ocean and the need of reinforcing India and the Middle East, he pointed out the heavy responsibilities of the United States for the defence of Australia and New Zealand and their sea approaches, which required the use of combat-loaded transports. To loan transports to Britain would seriously reduce possibilities of offensive action elsewhere, such as the dispatch of American land forces to the Continent of Europe in 1942. Nevertheless he agreed to provide shipping to move the two British divisions to the Middle East, though this would mean withdrawing eleven cargo ships from sailings for Burma and the Red Sea, and also to send two American divisions to Australia and New Zealand, at the further cost of withdrawing twenty-five Lend-Lease cargo ships for one voyage. He was not prepared to adopt the Prime Minister's suggestion as to increased man-lifting capacity; he said, however, that the personnel shipping under the United States flag could at present lift about 130,000 men,

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 167-9.

<sup>2</sup> See above, pp. 492-3.

<sup>3</sup> Partly printed in Churchill, IV, 172.

and should be able to carry another 75,000 by June 1943.<sup>1</sup> He did not give the estimates asked for as to cargo shipping.

Miss Behrens has explained the infinite complexity of the shipping problem as it confronted the Ministry of War Transport in the first half of 1942. Certain ships were suitable for employment in certain areas only. In some ports, notably the North Russian, the lack of unloading equipment caused interminable delays. Convoys had to be made up of ships of approximately the same speed. Sailings had to be adjusted both to suit the dispatch of troops with their munitions and to provide the imports needed by those countries of the free world for which Britain was responsible as well as for her own population.

The principal cause of all the shipping difficulties was vehicles. 'The tanks and aircraft that had to be shipped, intractable objects though they were, were very few by comparison with the vehicles'.<sup>2</sup> The vehicles dispatched from the United Kingdom and United States on their long journeys to the Middle East in the first half of 1942 increased much more than proportionately to the numbers of troops, and it was then the custom to ship them on wheels. In the second quarter of that year they were being transported to all destinations at the rate of 294,000 a year. At a later stage important economies resulted from improved methods of packing, *viz.* by shipping them dismantled and assembling them on arrival. Much the same applied to human cargo; it was found possible to pack many more bodies in the same ship-space. The *Queens*, which before Pearl Harbor had not carried more than 6,000 men, were found capable of holding 15,000 at a pinch.<sup>3</sup> Thanks to these and other improvements in organization, whereas the average number of men moved in a month in convoys round the Cape had been 36,600 in the last five months of 1941, it was something over 65,000 in February–May 1942 and at the beginning of June there was more room than the Chiefs of Staff required. Miss Behrens points out also that in 1942 the British lent the United States more troopships than they borrowed.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless the tremendous efforts made by the shipping authorities could only take effect gradually. On 5th April, 1942, the Naval Staff, in a report prepared after consultation with the Ministry of War Transport, declared that the uncertainties of the shipping situation were probably now greater than at any previous time in the war. It seemed that the aggregate Allied output of new tonnage in 1942 would about balance losses, but that losses in tanker tonnage

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<sup>1</sup> R. M. Leighton and R. W. Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy, 1940–3* (Washington 1955) p. 204; Matloff and Snell, *Strategic Planning, etc.*, p. 162.

<sup>2</sup> *Merchant Shipping and the Demands of War*, p. 297.

<sup>3</sup> The *Queen Elizabeth* and *Queen Mary* were first used in May 1941 to carry troops from Australia to Suez; in the summer of 1942 they carried troops from New York to the U.K. and from the U.K. to Suez; *ibid.*, p. 274.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 275–6.

would not be made up.<sup>1</sup> It was now clear that further thought must be given to the questions raised by the shipping stringency, and on 17th April Sir John Anderson, the Lord President, after consultation with the Ministries of Production and War Transport, suggested to the Prime Minister that there was a need for 'some regular arrangement to secure that the shipping situation and its implications for our war effort as a whole are continuously studied and that decisions can be rapidly reached on question of principle'. Accordingly a committee, known as the Shipping Committee, was set up on 6th May, under the chairmanship of Mr. Harcourt Johnstone, Secretary of the Department of Overseas Trade, to keep the shipping situation under review and also to settle questions of inter-departmental concern involving the current use of shipping; it superseded the existing Import Executive.

The First Report of the committee concluded that if we were not to eat into our stocks and also reduce consumption to unwarranted limits we must ask the United States to increase their assistance. 'The United States Government have, however, hitherto been unwilling to commit themselves in advance to afford us any definite measure of assistance, though they have always been ready to help us in meeting any urgent and specific need.' This conclusion was affirmed even more strongly by the Lord President's Committee, who urged also the importance of making all possible economies in the Services' use of shipping. The points involved were so important and some of the assumptions so disputable that the Prime Minister decided to hold a special meeting of the Cabinet to discuss them. By the time that this meeting was eventually held, on 28th July, 1942, the committee had presented a Second Report showing progress made and suggesting further possible measures with a view to reducing the military use of shipping without a modification of military plans. The Prime Minister himself, in his 'Review of the War Position' of 21st July, had ranked the crisis in sea-borne tonnage as a 'salient feature' of the war second only to 'the immense power of the German military machine'. There was no reason to assume that we should not get through 1942 safely, but with an eye to 1943 we must not run our stocks down unduly nor should we assume that the British people should be expected to make a greater sacrifice of their pre-war standard of life than the Americans. We ought therefore to 'come to a solemn compact, almost a treaty, with the United States about the share of their new building we are to get in 1943 and 1944'.<sup>2</sup>

The Cabinet on the 28th went over the whole ground and reached

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<sup>1</sup> American building did not catch up losses till May 1942; British building, not till the second quarter of 1943. *Statistical Digest of the War* (H.M.S.O. 1951), Table 155.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 782.

certain provisional conclusions which it confirmed on 13th August. The chief decision was to ask the United States for a definite undertaking to allocate to the areas of British responsibility enough tonnage to allow us a non-tanker import programme of 25 million tons in 1942 and 27 million tons in 1943. Eventually, but not until April 1943, the United States undertook to provide the 7 million tons of shipping required to ensure the United Kingdom an import programme of 26 million tons for that year. Estimates of consumption had in fact been exaggerated, and no undue hardship had been suffered in 1942.<sup>1</sup>

Generally speaking, the Combined Shipping Boards did not produce results satisfactory to the British. This appears to have been due partly to defects of organization in America, resulting in the virtual absence 'of any effective mechanism at all for deciding between British and American claims. . . . In the summer of 1942,' writes Miss Behrens, 'a variety of United States Government agencies were all competing for shipping space; there was no machinery for co-ordinating their demands, and the pressures they exerted operated in arbitrary and unpredictable ways.' Among these pressures those of the fighting Services were irresistible, and in particular 'there could be no limit to the insatiable appetite of the Pacific theatres'. 'Except in terms of the broadest general principles there was no combined strategy in shipping matters'.<sup>2</sup>

Even better than building new ships was preventing those in service from being sunk. One merchant vessel saved, it was claimed, was worth two building, plus the lives of the crew and the value of the cargo. It was therefore essential that they should be adequately escorted, but unfortunately they and their escorts were competitors for labour and materials and space in the yards. Obviously a reasonable balance had to be struck, but throughout the year the Admiralty and Ministry of War Transport asserted their rival demands. On the whole the demand for warships prevailed. When in May the Minister of Production called attention to the lag in the completion of new construction for the Navy and Merchant Service, especially in destroyers and convoy-escort vessels, the Defence Committee (Supply) approved the Prime Minister's proposal that within the Admiralty's programme the order of priority should be: first, capital ships due for completion in the near future; second, destroyers and anti-submarine vessels; third, merchant-ship repairs; fourth, other naval construction; and fifth, new merchant-ship construction. He placed the latter last because even by great exertions we could not expect to improve the figure by more than, say, 100,000 tons a year, which

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<sup>1</sup> Behrens, *op. cit.*, p. 365; Hancock and Gowing, *op. cit.*, p. 432.

<sup>2</sup> Behrens, *op. cit.*, pp. 287-92.

would be a bagatelle compared with the vast output maturing in the United States. In fact the British output of new merchant ships in 1942 was 1.3 million tons, whereas the target for that year had been fixed in March 1941 at only 1.1 million.<sup>1</sup>

Yet another competitor for sea-going craft was Combined Operations. As the Allied strategists turned their thoughts more and more to landings on the coasts of Europe or Africa—landings for which at first no ports were likely to be available—the need for landing craft of all types became more insistent. For these large-scale enterprises the numbers and types of assault craft ordered for such minor affairs as the Norway campaign or commando raids were obviously inadequate. As early as July 1941 Mr. Churchill, with his usual foresight and breadth of conception, had urged upon the President the conversion of at least 200 merchant ships to carry some 15,000 tanks.<sup>2</sup> In 1941 and 1942 the demand for escort vessels had priority, but even before the United States entered the war the British supplementary naval programme presented in November 1941 envisaged the production of 300 tank landing-craft (LCT) in British yards by March 1943. When the 1942 programme was presented in April, the Americans had agreed to create capacity for 700 more, but not more than 175 were expected to be ready for British use by March 1943.

Figures given by Professor Postan show the immense increase in the number and tonnage of landing-craft under construction in the United Kingdom in 1942: 518 of 104,400 tons in the first quarter, 1,361 of 270,600 tons in the fourth. The corresponding figures of vessels completed are 72 in the first quarter, 173 in the fourth, or 521 in the whole year.<sup>3</sup>

The construction of large ocean-going tank landing-ships was for the most part left by agreement to the Americans, since British yards were fully occupied. The American production of landing-craft in general was slow in starting; they did not stand high on the Navy's list of priorities for the first six months of 1942. But after overseas landings had been discussed in London in May and in Washington in June they rose to the head of the list, and for the next few months American production was showing spectacular results.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Postan, *op. cit.*, p. 300-1. It is a striking testimony to the effectiveness of the convoy system that throughout the war losses in *convoy* never exceeded the ability of the British alone to replace them by new construction.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, III, 484. Rear-Adm. L. E. H. Maund, *Assault from the Sea*, p. 73, says that the idea of tank landing-ships was suggested by the abortive attack on Dakar in September 1940.

<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, pp. 284-6, 292-3; *Statistical Digest*, Table 112. I am indebted to unpublished papers by Miss D. McKenna and Miss D. J. Dawson.

<sup>4</sup> See Hall, *North American Supply*, 356-8; Sherwood, p. 558; Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, pp. 376-82.

As to the need of vast quantities of aircraft and tanks there had never been any hesitation. In the demands they made for materials and labour the two were rivals, and it was not till July 1941 that tanks were granted equal priority in British programmes. By the end of that year tanks were being produced in the United Kingdom at the rate of 626 monthly, which in numbers if not in quality equalled the German production; the great majority were still infantry tanks (Matildas being replaced by Valentines) and not the cruisers particularly desired in the Middle East.<sup>1</sup>

For any possibility of attaining the numbers required by the Army we depended on the United States and, to a less degree, on Canada. In July 1940, when the War Office wanted 3,000 cruisers by the middle of 1941, 2,000 were ordered from the United States. In the spring of 1941 prospects from the British point of view were disquieting, and the Prime Minister in June made a personal appeal to the President for 2,000 medium tanks by the end of the year. In fact only 1,032 tanks were delivered to us in 1941, and only a small proportion of these were mediums. But in the following year American production increased enormously and the British received 4,389 medium tanks, or about a third of their supplies from all sources.<sup>2</sup> For in spite of the welcome accession of Stuart and Grant and, at the end, Sherman tanks from America, the battles described in this volume were mainly fought with tanks of British manufacture.

Tanks, and self-propelled guns, were also received from Canada, but it was in vehicles for the Army, especially in 3-ton and 15-cwt. trucks, that Canada can claim to have made her specific contribution.<sup>3</sup>

The effort of aircraft production suffered many disappointments in spite of its eventual triumphant success. So far as production in the United Kingdom was concerned they were due to failure to attain the optimistic targets set up at the beginning of the war and accepted until January 1943. The original figure of 2,300 aircraft monthly was never reached, though in each of the months of 1942 about 2,000 were delivered, including an ever-increasing number (81 in January, 179 in July) of heavy bombers of a size and complexity never dreamed of three years before. Throughout 1942 the aircraft industry 'was by far the largest single claimant to additional factors of production, and more especially to labour'; but though production rose steadily in the first half of 1942 it was found necessary at the end of the year to adopt a more 'realistic' programme which showed serious declines on its predecessors.<sup>4</sup>

Disappointments were also frequent in orders from America. They

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<sup>1</sup> See Postan, *op. cit.* pp. 183-93, 353.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 175, 217; Wrigley, *op. cit.*, pp. 27, 34.

<sup>3</sup> Wrigley pp. 50-51.

<sup>4</sup> Postan, *op. cit.*, pp. 485, 123-6, 303-8.

were due partly to exaggerated estimates of what American industry could produce before being geared up to its full capacity by the stimulus of war, partly to the insistence of the American Services, when war became first imminent and then actual, on appropriating to their own ill-equipped forces munitions which the British had expected to receive.

The British disappointments in 1941 have been recounted in an earlier chapter.<sup>1</sup> It soon became clear that the Slessor agreement of March of that year had broken down, and the later Arnold–Portal agreement reached in Washington in January 1942, covering ‘allocations to the members of the United Nations for six months and including a tentative programme of allocations for a further six months’, also proved ineffective. As Mr. Duncan Hall puts it, the two sides ‘eyed the agreement from a different angle. From the point of view of the Royal Air Force the long-term deliveries provided for under the agreement were essential to the planning of expansion, training and operations. From the American side they began to look more like diversions from American requirements of a similar character needed urgently by the growing Air Force so that they too might take part in the fight.’ Thus, to quote Mr. Wrigley, ‘deliveries to the British rose only from 5,194 aircraft in 1941 to 6,847 in 1942. The most grievous disappointment was the supply of heavy bombers, on which great hopes had been pinned. Receipts in 1942 amounted to only 176 planes against 135 in 1941, although total American production of these types had multiplied more than eight times. In this field American supplies were less than ten per cent of British production in 1942.’<sup>2</sup>

The assertion of a new principle by the President in May seriously curtailed the development of the Royal Air Force. There was now in the United States a large number of trained crews and it was decided that wherever possible American aircraft should be manned by Americans; aircraft built in America should not, therefore, be sent to complete British programmes if there were American pilots and crews ready to take them over and fight them. The President had no wish, however, to reduce British air-strength in any theatre; he was prepared to reinforce British areas by American formations. Eventually on 2nd July the Combined Chiefs of Staff approved a new scheme, known as the Arnold–Slessor–Towers agreement, signed on 21st June, by which the United States would ‘allocate aircraft to Great Britain to equip and maintain certain existing and projected squadrons of the Royal Air Force, and of Dominion Air Forces operating in theatres of British and Combined Strategic responsi-

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<sup>1</sup> Chap. vi, pp. 150 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Hall, *op. cit.*, 360–2; Wrigley, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

bility, for which units of the United States Army Air Forces cannot be substituted'—thus excluding Bomber Command in the United Kingdom. The United States would also 'assign to and maintain in theatres of British and Combined strategic responsibility certain United States Air Forces by dates which have been agreed'. Thus American units totalling some nineteen heavy and six light bombardment groups and eighteen pursuit groups would be distributed between the various theatres—United Kingdom, Middle East and India.<sup>1</sup> The Air Staff noted that whereas under the Arnold-Portal agreement we were to have received 5,500 aircraft from America in the seven months June-December 1942 we should now not receive more than 2,500.<sup>2</sup> We could now only hope to have about 100 squadrons on American types by 1st April, 1943, whereas we had planned to have 159. Of the squadrons lost at least 35 would have been in overseas theatres, and their loss would have to be set against the 40 squadrons which General Arnold now promised to send to theatres of British responsibility. 'Broadly speaking, however,' the Secretary of State commented to Mr. Churchill, 'the losses of the Royal Air Force should be compensated for by the arrival of heavy and medium bomber squadrons of the United States Air Forces.' The main weakness of the agreement, in Sir Charles Portal's view, was that it would result in 'a definite loss of impact against the enemy' unless the promised American units were adequately trained and operational in their theatres by the promised dates, and on these two points he was sceptical, and with some justification.<sup>3</sup>

The cluster of Combined Boards set up at Washington in January 1942 did not include one to deal with production as a whole, though this had been among the British proposals.<sup>4</sup> It was soon recognized, however, on both sides of the Atlantic that some such body was required to harmonize and integrate the efforts of the two countries. In suggesting to the President in April that some more 'combined' bodies, such as one for food, were desirable, the Prime Minister remarked that our long-range programmes of war production were not yet covered by the existing machinery. He had also in mind 'a single controlling body over the Combined Boards', and proposed, if the President agreed, at once to nominate a representative. The need had become apparent after the strategic discussions with General Marshall in London, at which it was decided to work out a combined

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<sup>1</sup> See Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 363-4; Leighton and Coakley, *op. cit.*, pp. 275 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The actual figures were 3,048 aircraft in 1942 (some in exchange for 350 Spitfires) and 175 Catalina flying boats.

<sup>3</sup> See Wrigley, *op. cit.*, 175-8.

<sup>4</sup> See Chap. xv, Sect. iv above.



Order of Battle for April 1943; it was emphasized when at the end of May the British Joint War Production Staff drew up a paper showing in some detail the increased British commitments and concluding that even if we received all the aid we could expect from the United States we must face a period of particular stress until the middle of 1943.<sup>1</sup>

Early in June 1942 Captain Lyttelton, the Minister of Production, paid a fortnight's visit to Washington which resulted in the creation of a Combined Production and Resources Board, with himself and Mr. Donald Nelson, Chairman of the United States War Production Board, as its two members.<sup>2</sup> It had become clear to him, he said, that the American Army authorities were tending to exercise an ever-increasing control over United States production; he had been told that they were setting the production sights at levels which bore little relation to possibilities, and it appeared probable that the American programmes would be approved without any reference to British requirements of materials or components. On his return he reported that his fears had been justified: the American programme of production was based on a notional establishment of forces which was in no way related to immediate strategic needs or immediate production possibilities. The President had agreed, however, and the Prime Minister had given his approval, to the creation of a board which should combine the production programmes of the United States and the United Kingdom into a single integrated programme adjusted to the requirements of the war, as indicated to the Board by the Combined Chiefs of Staff, and to all relevant production factors. It should, 'in close collaboration with the Combined Chiefs of Staff, assure the continuous adjustment of the combined munition programme to meet changing military requirements' and to this end the two bodies should keep one another currently informed as to their respective requirements and possibilities.<sup>3</sup>

Before he left Washington Captain Lyttelton attended a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, which expressed general approval. General Marshall said that having found unity of military command successful we now looked for corresponding success in unity of administration. He felt confident that all concerned in operating the organization would work closely together without Service prejudices, determined only to find the best and quickest way of solving the complicated problems of production.

But, as it turned out, the new Board obtained only a limited success. It did not act as 'a single controlling body over the Combined

<sup>1</sup> See Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 377 ff; for the J.W.P.S. see Chap. xvii, p. 425.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. xv, p. 399 above.

<sup>3</sup> Text in *Studies of Overseas Supply*, pp. 498-9. Canada, also, became a member of the Board.

Boards', in the Prime Minister's original phrase; it did not secure 'a single integrated programme', nor even a combined Order of Battle for 1943. Captain Lyttelton's later report showed profound disappointment. He had hoped, he said in a paper of 29th September, that the production of raw materials and components vital to the British programme would proceed as part of an agreed plan and no longer as a result of negotiations on each individual point, based on the statement of a British deficiency. But things had not turned out this way; the United States Chiefs of Staff had never produced their part of the combined Order of Battle. They proposed instead 'to calculate their requirements on the following basis: (a) total forces which can be transported and maintained in transoceanic theatres based on forecasts of available shipping and escorts; (b) total United States forces required for defence of Western Hemisphere, in training, or in use as strategic reserves'. This last stipulation, he said, gave a blank cheque to the War Department to set out the requirements of whatever army they proposed to raise in the United States.

In the hope of countering 'the extravagant demands' of the War Department he drafted a telegram which the Prime Minister sent to the President in October urging a downward revision of the combined programmes in certain respects, such as inflated American figures for tanks and small-arm ammunition. The President in a reply prepared by his Chiefs of Staff agreed that it was desirable to scrutinize production programmes; he thought the most effective procedure to secure the careful examination of our combined requirements was for periodic review by the Combined Munitions Assignment Board and by the Combined Chiefs of Staff. As for the Prime Minister's specific figures, he said that the targets for medium and heavy tanks from the United States had already been reduced and could be reduced further if United Kingdom requirements were now in excess of operational needs; but he did not encourage the questioning of specific requirements by the Combined Production and Resources Board, which should rather analyse the total United States and United Kingdom requirements which had been presented to them and then advise the Combined Chiefs of Staff if it was found that the realities of production made it necessary to revise them. The close collaboration between the Board and the Combined Chiefs of Staff which had been envisaged at the creation of the Board had in fact never existed.

If the limited powers of the Combined Production and Resources Board made long-term planning difficult for the British, it was all the more important for them to obtain firm advance commitments from the Munitions Assignments Board established in January. There were in fact two of these boards, one in Washington and one in London. Each made allocations from the resources under its own control: the

traffic was two-way.<sup>1</sup> But increasingly the greater volume flowed eastwards, and it was in Washington that decisions of the greatest moment to the British were taken.

It was agreed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 24th March that the relative priorities of theatres were to be based on their relative strategic importance and the imminence of active operations, and 'the amount of munitions assigned to the theatres should be based on the size of the forces actively engaged and the existing state of their equipment; the probable period of active operations, and the probable character of the operations'.

This was very satisfactory to the British since not only were the Middle East and India-Burma-Ceylon put high in the priority list, along with the United Kingdom as regards air-operations, but the forces actively engaged would for some time be preponderantly British; this remained so even when on 10th June operations on the continent of Europe were added to the category of highest priority. Such was the agreed basis. Its importance, as the American historians of Global Logistics say, lay, 'in the definite confirmation by Combined Chiefs of Staff action that the principle of strategic need and not national interest would be the guide for assignments' by the Munitions Assignments Board.<sup>2</sup> But the Americans were determined that the development of their great army and air force must not be unduly delayed, and as time went on, as the part of the burden of the war borne by the United States increased, the British found it harder to obtain their expected share of American production, although to them 1942 was a year of continuous crisis.

As Captain Lyttelton reviewed the operation of the Washington Board in September, he deplored its failure to fulfil the spirit of the agreement that assignments should be in accordance with strategic needs.

'For example, the assignment of Army equipment produced in the United States is controlled almost entirely by the views of the United States War Department, whose primary concern is to build up a vast American Army. Assignment for the British Empire can only be secured by putting forward claims substantiated to the last detail, whereas the United States claim for the remainder is put forward on the general proposition that the material is all needed by the Army, without regard to holdings or operational requirements. Fortunately, the output in the United States of many of the essential types of Army equipment, such as tanks, has been so large that our interests have not suffered unduly.'

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xv above, pp. 393-9, where the origin of the arrangement is described; see also Sherwood, pp. 484-5, Leighton and Coakley, *op. cit.*, pp. 247-53. For its working see *Studies, etc.*, pp. 253 ff; Hall, *op. cit.*, pp. 358-64; Leighton and Coakley, Chap. xi.

<sup>2</sup> Leighton and Coakley, p. 274.

But the situation as to aircraft was much less satisfactory. One agreement after another had been broken, he said. As for assignments in general, he feared that even in the case of items where production would be 'on an increasingly stupendous scale', we should be hard put to it to secure our share of the common pool.

In November Captain Lyttelton paid a second visit to Washington. Several agreements reached on this occasion were based on a more realistic acceptance of the situation as it had developed.<sup>1</sup>

It is clear that the tremendous emergency of 1942—the shock to the United States of Japanese aggression and the change from neutrality to war, the successive disasters sustained by British arms in the East and the threat to our life-line in the Atlantic—led to hard bargainings in Washington and to many disappointments in London. It is less embarrassing to give than to receive, and the British felt acutely the difficulty of effective planning when the degree and dates of the fulfilment of our vital requirements were so uncertain. American historians speak of 'a certain wariness' with which their countrymen received the first British plans for a combined organization; they say that Lieut.-General Brehon B. Somervell, the head of Services of Supply, was resolved that 'the British should have no part in shaping the American production program'.<sup>2</sup> There was clearly suspicion that the British might play their longer experience and well-trying machinery to the disadvantage of American interests. On the other hand British negotiators were disconcerted by the lack of organization and clearly defined authority in Washington, accustomed as they were at home to a neat system whereby strategy and supply were adjusted to one another by the machinery of the War Cabinet committees and secretariat, working up to the parallel Operations and Supply branches of the Defence Committee, on which both military and civil interests were represented, under the supreme authority of the Minister of Defence and War Cabinet. In the United States there was no War Cabinet, no Defence Committee, no Bridges, no Ismay—only at the top the President and such familiars as Harry Hopkins, whom he might for any purpose consult and employ. It was evident too that military circles were disinclined to share their authority or their confidence with civilians and that even between the two Services there was, put it mildly, no firm tradition of co-operation.

But while it would be wrong to conceal the anxieties and irritations to which American methods often gave rise among the British, the emphasis should rather be on the remarkable success of the co-operation. If the Americans felt that as the war developed they must give first place to the arming of their own forces for the common

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<sup>1</sup> See Postan, *op. cit.*, pp. 241–8.

<sup>2</sup> Leighton and Coakley, pp. 249, 266.

purpose, they were most generous in meeting immediate British needs. Even Somervell, said a British general in 1943, 'would give me the shirt off his back if he was satisfied that I needed the shirt',<sup>1</sup> and the prompt dispatch of the 300 Sherman tanks to the Middle East after the fall of Tobruk was an example of this practical generosity.

Nor must one ignore the total effect.

'In the second quarter of 1942,' writes Professor Postan, 'the American output caught up the British; by early autumn the weighted average of American output was more than twice that of British munitions; airframe weight was twice, army weapons two and three-quarter times, merchant shipping nearly six times as great as the corresponding British production . . . The strategic plans as they emerged from the Washington conversations in the autumn of 1942 assumed that nearly 100 per cent of the Allied requirements for transport aircraft, nearly 100 per cent of their self-propelled guns and of 40-ton tank transporters, and a very high proportion of landing craft, light bombers, tanks and army transport would come from American sources. In addition, the Allied needs of merchant shipping over and above the 800,000 to a million tons produced in British yards were to be covered by the United States, and so was a large proportion of the combatant vessels such as the auxiliary aircraft carriers, which could be made by modifying or adapting merchant vessels.'<sup>2</sup>

The American historians are probably justified in their claim that in 1942 'the most urgent British requests were met and neither of the most vital fronts, the Middle East and the United Kingdom, suffered inordinately from lack of American equipment . . . Granted that the British did not get as great a proportion of American production during 1942 as they had hoped, still most of their urgent strategic requirements were satisfied and munitions withheld played their part in preparing the U.S. Army for the great campaigns of the next two years'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wrigley, *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>2</sup> *British War Production*, pp. 244, 246.

<sup>3</sup> Leighton and Coakley, pp. 274-5, 294.

## CHAPTER XXIV

# A SECOND FRONT? THE MARSHALL PLAN

**T**HE BRITISH AND American governments, in their discussions in Washington in December 1941, confirmed their acceptance of the decision of the previous February, that, as 'a cardinal principle' of Allied strategy 'only the minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres should be diverted from operations against Germany'. This principle was never abandoned, though the extent of the Japanese conquests caused a much greater diversion of forces to the Pacific and Indian Oceans than had been foreseen in December, and though the principle itself at moments seemed endangered by differences of opinion in high quarters. With these qualifications, operations against Germany always held pride of place in Anglo-American strategic thinking. There was agreement too that 'a return to the Continent' should be envisaged for 1943, but what form operations against Germany should take in 1942 became a matter of acute controversy. Decision oscillated between two main alternatives, a landing in North-West Africa or a landing on the Channel coast of France. The eventual choice of the former was the resultant of two forces—the determination of the President and the Prime Minister to have their troops in action against Germany in 1942 and the refusal of the British Chiefs of Staff to countenance a landing in the north of France that year.

To Mr. Churchill and Sir Alan Brooke, however, the North African project was much more than a mere compromise or second-best solution. It was the first move in the application of the classical strategy whereby the power superior at sea uses its mobility to compel the enemy superior on the major land-front to disperse his forces in order to meet attacks at points favourable to the assailant. In the western theatre in 1942 Germany retained an easy preponderance on land; in the conditions of the Russian campaign she could exploit her excellent system of east-west communications so as to maintain the necessary margin of superiority over whatever force the Allies might succeed in landing on the Channel coast. But her north-south communications, and lateral communications in the south of Europe, were far less satisfactory, and by actual or threatened landings on the Mediterranean shores of the Axis empire the Allies might force her to divert thither formations which she could not readily recall and whose

loss would impair her ability to resist a cross-Channel invasion. Then and only then would the latter operations have a chance of success. Whereas Americans criticized the British for proposing diversions of Allied effort, the British purpose was to cause such diversions of Germany's effort as would reduce her relative strength at the point of final decision. This was to look some way into the future, but such ideas were familiar to British military thought.

An essential feature of the strategy agreed at Washington, based as it was on a memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff, was to close and tighten the ring round Germany and gain possession of the whole North African coast.<sup>1</sup> By seizing this coast, the paper claimed, we might open the Mediterranean to convoys, thus enormously shortening the route to the Middle East and saving the considerable tonnage employed in the long haul round the Cape. Another of the essential features was 'the continuous development of offensive action against Germany', but it was not then thought likely that in 1942 any large-scale land-offensive against Germany except on the Russian front would be possible. We must be ready, however, to take advantage of any opening that might result from the war of attrition to conduct limited land offensives. The British delegates on their return from Washington reported that the President 'set great store' on the organization of a combined Anglo-American expedition to North Africa and for some weeks 'Super-Gymnast', as this scheme was called, received much attention.<sup>2</sup>

The discussions at Washington have been described in Chapter XIV. Both the President and the Prime Minister were attracted by the idea of an Allied liberation and occupation of North-West Africa. Mr. Churchill thought that matters would soon come to a head in that region. A force was standing ready in the United Kingdom to sail. 'If, at the same time, the United States forces could enter the Moroccan coast by invitation and a stream of supplies could be furnished, a favourable basis would have been created for an offer to Vichy of the alternatives of blessings or cursings.'

The President agreed that the operation should be studied. He thought it was important for the morale of the American people that their Army should get into action against Germany at an early date—a motive which carried decisive weight later on. The Prime Minister also showed the trend of his present thinking by remarking that the possible moves which had been discussed represented a series of practical steps which might be taken by the American forces in the

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xiv above and Appendix I.

<sup>2</sup> 'Gymnast' was the code-word for an operation conceived as purely British; as a combined enterprise it was named 'Super-Gymnast', but 'Gymnast' was often used to cover either case.

near future, and did not imply a mass movement of vast numbers. There was neither a theatre of war suitable for great armies, nor was there shipping to transport them.

Neither the British nor the American staff however were enthusiastic about the North African project, and, when a few days after the Prime Minister's return Rommel's counterstroke knocked 'Acrobat' on the head, it became clear that 'Gymnast' was not a feasible operation for the present. All shipping was needed for reinforcements for the Far East and for supplies for the United Kingdom; our naval, air and anti-aircraft resources were stretched to the limit and landing-craft were wanted for the raids on the enemy's coastline which formed an important part of our strategy. The Chiefs of Staff on 31st January approved a report to this effect, and the Prime Minister accepted their recommendation that, while planning for 'Gymnast' should continue, no shipping or troops should be reserved for it. At length on 3rd March Mr. Churchill based his request to the President for the loan of shipping on the assumption that 'Gymnast' was out of the question for several months, and the President complied on that understanding. The staffs of both countries agreed that planning for it had now become academic; 'the bitter experience of the past' indicated that no co-operation could be looked for from the Vichy French; on the contrary they would continue to aid the Axis, either secretly as in Tunisia or openly as in Indo-China, until such time as the Axis was on the run.

We must turn to the rival proposal that the main Allied effort against Germany in the next few months should take the form of a landing on the French Channel coast.

The prospect of a return in due time to the Continent for the final assault on Germany had been in the mind of the British high command ever since the summer of 1940, but so long as Britain stood alone against a triumphant Germany the prospect could only be remote, nor did the degree of her rearmament enable her to contemplate it when the German armies turned against Russia for what seemed likely to prove an early victory. Even after the United States had entered the war with her vast resources in manpower the British planning staff in the course of their Atlantic voyage thought that shortage of special landing-craft would limit the Allied forces in the final assault, even in the short cross-Channel passage, to some seventeen divisions, half of them armoured. 'We should not therefore be able to use large American forces from the United Kingdom in the final phase. Similar limitations would no doubt operate in any offensives against Europe from the Mediterranean basin carried out by American forces.' This opinion may now seem astonishing, but it was not challenged by the Americans, and it shows how little the potentialities of the American industrial effort were as yet grasped in



either country.<sup>1</sup> The Allied statement on strategy envisaged that in 1943 the way might be clear for a return to the Continent, across the Mediterranean, from Turkey into the Balkans, or by landings in western Europe, such operations being the prelude to the final assault on Germany itself. But, while we must be ready to take advantage of any German weakness to attack the enemy on land, no large-scale land offensive against Germany seemed possible in 1942 except on the Russian front. This was the view of the British Chiefs of Staff, with which their American colleagues agreed.

The requirements of tonnage for the Far East in the early months of 1942 ruled out the possibility of any large-scale overseas expeditions in the West. But towards the end of February the Russian counter-offensive was dying down; the German armies, in spite of the terrible losses and hardships they had suffered largely owing to Hitler's senseless refusal to give ground, had been by no means broken and might be expected to return to the attack in the spring. The summer would be a most critical time for Russia and consequently for the entire Allied cause, and particularly for the British should the enemy threaten our oil supplies from the Persian Gulf. Accordingly the possibility of giving direct aid to Russia came to figure most urgently in Allied counsels.

When on 5th March President Roosevelt called a meeting to discuss the Prime Minister's appeal for a loan of shipping and for the dispatch of two United States divisions to Australia,<sup>2</sup> Mr. Stimson, the Secretary of State, objected to such a dispersion of American forces. The correct policy, he urged, was to send an overwhelming force to the British Isles and threaten an attack on the Germans. This 'would now have the effect of giving Hitler two fronts to fight on if it could be done in time while the Russians were still in. It would also heavily stimulate sagging British morale'.<sup>3</sup> On discussion turning to air dispositions, General Arnold suggested that, after provision had been made for the defence of the Pacific theatre and for a bombing offensive based on India, all available striking force should be concentrated in the United Kingdom for the bombing of Germany and her occupied territories. The main object of this offensive would be to draw enemy air forces from the Russian front. Air Marshal Evill said that United States bombing forces would be welcomed in England, but pointed out the need of strengthening the Middle East and also the unlikelihood, in the light of British experience of 1941, of diverting any large part of the German Air Force from the Eastern front within a short period, since a night offensive could only be slow-

<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xiv, pages 357-8 above.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 492.

<sup>3</sup> H. L. Stimson and McG. Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War* (New York, 1947), p. 416.

acting and our fighters had not the range to escort bombers to reach vital targets by day. General Arnold, however, as the Joint Staff Mission reported, 'was inclined to dispute the difficulty of pinning the German Air Force to a fight in the West, and, when pressed, ended by a suggestion that he envisaged a simultaneous land/sea operation to establish a bridgehead on the Continent which would thus constitute a focus for the air struggle. This suggestion we countered strongly, pointing out its impossibility in the present state of our shipping and so long as the morale of the German Army and Air Force remained unbroken'. As the Joint Staff Mission saw it, the essentials in these difficult days were: (a) The security of Britain; (b) The security of the United States; (c) The continuance of all possible assistance to Russia; and (d) The prevention of a junction between German and Japanese forces, *i.e.*, Germany reaching the Indian Ocean.

Evidently the Joint Staff Mission did not consider that 'all possible assistance to Russia' implied an attempt to land on the Continent in the next few months. The idea of drawing German air forces away from the Eastern front, however, figured largely in the discussions of the early summer.

The Joint Staff Mission asked if the Chiefs of Staff at home agreed with these findings. The Prime Minister thought they laid too much emphasis on defence. The Chiefs of Staff, he said, concurred with him in preferring to state 'the essentials' as:

- (a) Assumption of offensive against Japan by attacks on her captured islands and homeland and by harrying her communications. . . .
- (b) Taking the weight off Russia during the summer by the heaviest air-offensive against Germany which can be produced, having regard to other calls on our air-power, and anything else we can think of.
- (c) British mastery of the Indian Ocean. . . .

On 10th March the Chiefs of Staff had discussed an outspoken report on 'offensive operations' by their planning staff, which began:

'Apart from the supply of material, we are giving no direct help to Russia, though our Middle East operations and our air-offensive are, to a limited extent, making Germany divert forces that might otherwise be thrown in to the Russian campaign. This is not enough . . . Our greatest contribution to a German defeat would be the creation of a major diversion in the West designed to upset German plans and divert German forces from the East. Lack of shipping precludes the strategy of such a diversion anywhere except across the Channel.'

On purely military grounds the planners thought the arguments for creating such a diversion 'overwhelming'. 'By so doing we should

bring into action some part of the great forces locked up in this country during a period which may prove the most critical of the war. The question is—can it be done?’ What they had in mind was the seizure and retention of a bridgehead on the Continent. Their present view was that ‘shipping, forces and air-support could be found without interfering with our main overseas movements or prejudicing the security of this country’; they read the Joint Staff Mission’s signal of 5th March to mean that the President and United States Chiefs of Staff were also considering the establishment of a bridgehead on the Continent. The date by which they hoped the operation might be mounted was mid-May; they recommended that a single commander should be appointed forthwith. He should be left in no doubt in his directive that his aim was to return to and stay on the Continent. The code-word for such an operation was ‘Sledgehammer’.

These recommendations went a good deal farther than any previous reports. As early as 2nd January, during the absence of the Prime Minister and his advisers, the Chiefs of Staff Committee at home, with Sir Alan Brooke presiding, had had before them a comprehensive ‘outline plan for landing a force on the Continent in the final phase’, on the assumption that Germany had no longer any prospect of victory but hoped to avoid the full consequences of defeat. The strength was to include six armoured and six-and-a-third infantry divisions and six army tank brigades; the assault force would consist of five infantry brigade groups and five army tank battalions. The idea was to advance rapidly into the Ruhr district, but the operation would have to be postponed unless German military power had been sufficiently reduced by the early summer of 1943. Sir Alan Brooke did not approve the tactical role proposed for the force when established on the Continent, but he thought that the report contained much useful information. We should be prepared, he said, to act at an earlier date than that envisaged, even though such an opportunity might now seem remote. The Committee referred the recommendations of the report to Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, in consultation with the naval Commander-in-Chief, Portsmouth, and the chiefs of Bomber and Fighter Commands and invited Home Forces to prepare and periodically review an outline plan for ‘operations on the Continent in the final phase’.

On 11th February the Joint Planners advised that by the autumn continued Russian successes might lead to a decline in the strength and morale of the German garrisons in the West, and that by the spring of 1943 or even earlier we might be justified in seeking to establish ourselves permanently on the Continent. This venture might take the form either of ‘a hasty return against crumbling opposition in 1942’ or of a deliberate assault in 1943 with larger forces (‘Round-

up').<sup>1</sup> Sir Bernard Paget, Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, was accordingly directed, in conjunction with the Admiralty and Air Ministry, to plan and prepare for a return to the Continent to take advantage of such an opportunity. At the same time he was to press on with a vigorous policy of small raids. The Adviser on Combined Operations, Lord Louis Mountbatten, was to be consulted at all stages of planning.

Such was the background at Chiefs of Staff level when the urgent plea of the Planners for more direct support of Russia was considered on 10th March. The Directors of Intelligence, present for part of the meeting, thought it unlikely that an operation on the coast of France would succeed in diverting land forces from the Russian front unless accompanied by a popular rising on a large scale, and the Foreign Office representative did not expect this to occur unless it was clear that the Allied forces had come to stay.

The Directors of Plans argued that 'the summer of 1942 was likely to be decisive on the Russian front, and it was vitally important that we should do our utmost to influence the course of operations in south-east Europe'. Owing to the shortage of shipping it was only across the Channel that we could hope to exert any real pressure on the Germans. It would be wrong to consider the effect that offensive operations this summer might have on our capacity to undertake 'Round-up' in 1943, since if Russia collapsed 'Round-up' would be 'indefinitely postponed'. A force of eight to ten divisions was contemplated, the limiting factors being landing-craft, of which Mountbatten calculated that we were unlikely to have enough before July at earliest, and the possibility of the early capture of a suitable port. The planners thought that if our diversion succeeded we might well lose the land force employed, but the gain on the Russian front might be worth the price.

The mention of Russia's desperate need as the argument for a cross-Channel attack while Germany's strength was still unbroken was something new in our planning; previous ideas had been based on the assumption that such an operation would become feasible only when Germany had been weakened by other means. Now, on the contrary, notions of a 'sacrifice' attack were in the air. But they could not stand up to the facts. When the project was considered more closely in London the practical difficulties of an opposed landing were found to be so great as to convince the British that a major operation on land in 1942 must be ruled out except in the opposite, the original, hypothesis of an imminent German collapse. We shall see that the existence of the two contrary hypotheses could lead to confusion.

It was agreed by the Chiefs of Staff in discussion that the object

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill considered 'Round-up' a 'boastful, ill-chosen name'.

was to help the Russians by forcing Germany to divert as large a force as possible from the Eastern front, and for this it was important to attack some objective to whose loss the enemy would be really sensitive. The respective merits of Cherbourg, Le Havre and the Pas de Calais were then canvassed, the great advantage of the latter being that only there could the Metropolitan Air Force provide effective protection. On the other hand the coast defences were particularly strong and the shelving beaches awkward for our landing-craft. The Pas de Calais was generally favoured except by Mountbatten, who thought it entirely unsuitable and all along advocated the Cherbourg area. He urged the importance in any case of starting at once to develop the English Channel ports, which measures of defence against invasion had largely rendered unusable. The Chief of the Air Staff favoured the Pas de Calais as the region where we could best hope to destroy German aircraft and so divert air forces from Russia. Mountbatten maintained that for psychological and other reasons the operation should be planned either as a short-term raid or as a permanent lodgement on the Continent. To have in mind an ultimate withdrawal would be disastrous; we should be prepared, if necessary, to fight it out to the last man. But the C.I.G.S. disliked the whole plan: we could not afford to lose six or eight of our best divisions in a diversion of this nature; we proposed to send four or five divisions overseas in the next few months, and the reduction of Home Forces by eleven or twelve divisions would leave us perilously weak in the event of an ultimate German attempt at invasion. The Committee, however, agreed to instruct the Directors of Plans, in consultation with the Commodore, Combined Operations, to examine the report as to the possibilities of assisting the Russians as much as possible by forcing Germany to divert the maximum sea, land and air forces from the Eastern front.<sup>1</sup>

Sir John Dill's views were much the same as Sir Alan Brooke's. 'If some land-offensive on a considerable scale in Europe were possible,' he told the Prime Minister, 'then, of course, nothing would better help the Russians and the cause generally. But the facts that [the] German fighting machine is still intact and that we are short of shipping in general and landing-craft in particular militate against any useful landing being undertaken. I am sure that we must prepare to strike quick and hard when German morale begins to go, but at present we cannot do more than be prepared for that day which may come much quicker than most of us suppose.' Dill was also very doubtful 'whether any air-offensive we can develop from [the] United Kingdom within the next few months will divert enough

<sup>1</sup> At this meeting Mountbatten sat for the first time as a member of the Chiefs of Staff Committee, though only for items concerning Combined Operations. From 16th March, he was entitled as Chief of Combined Operations to attend all meetings as a full member.

German forces to have any decisive effect on the enemy offensive against Russia and the Middle East Command. Was this not proved by our air-offensive of last year?

The frequent discussions held by the Chiefs of Staff in the next few weeks were hardly more favourable to 'Sledgehammer'. After the Planners had given their considered views responsibility for more detailed examination was entrusted to the three commanders who would be most closely concerned with an actual operation—Sir Bernard Paget, Sir Sholto Douglas, Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Fighter Command, and Lord Louis Mountbatten.

Our Intelligence thought the Germans were sure to launch an offensive on the southern section of the Russian front with the Caucasian oilfields as their objective, and the Planners were agreed that our future largely depended on these coming battles. Nevertheless they concluded that in the present state of our preparations no sustained land operations could be staged on the Continent in time and in strength to achieve our object. On the other hand, by forcing on Germany large-scale air-operations we might well deny her eastern armies the air-support needed for success; but to compel her to fight we must either simulate a sustained operation or carry out a major raid. The Chiefs of Staff on 21st March approved a directive to the three commanders on these lines, namely to prepare a brief appreciation with the object of diverting air forces from the Russian front. The operation was to include a major deception plan threatening a permanent return to the Continent.

A report by the three commanders, discussed on 28th March, concluded that the limited object stated by the Chiefs of Staff could be achieved by air action, whereas, unless German morale was breaking, a re-entry into France in 1942 with our present resources was unlikely to succeed; should we however be forced to take such action the Calais region was probably the most hopeful. If a combined operation was to be attempted this summer an immediate decision was required. They did not favour a deception plan. In the discussion General Paget said that he did not think that under present conditions a bridgehead could be permanently held; Sir Charles Portal was doubtful whether we could by air-operations create the wastage of German fighters necessary to help the Russians. The Chiefs of Staff agreed in preference for the Calais region, and invited the three commanders to investigate the limited 'Sledgehammer' plan further.

They were accordingly surprised when further examination of this plan produced a long and elaborate report from the commanders concluding that the occupation of a bridgehead for a considerable time was practicable against the present scale of defences, provided that the maintenance problem could be overcome, and recommending that the operation should be mounted with the intention of

carrying it out if general conditions remained the same and the German forces were extended in Russia or a Russian victory seemed probable. The optimistic conclusion was qualified, however, by so many assumptions which seemed unlikely to be realized, and in any case the possibility of success was made dependent on a military situation in Russia so contrary to that envisaged as demanding our assistance, that the Chiefs of Staff were not impressed.<sup>1</sup> They invited the commanders to consider what we could do in the event of the Russians, not the Germans, being hard pressed, and asked the chiefs of Fighter and Bomber Commands to prepare an appreciation on the possibilities of an air-offensive in the west intended to destroy as great a part as possible of the German Air Force, immediately after the launching of the German spring offensive.

The Chiefs of Staff also took into account the effect on the local population should an Allied force re-embark a few days after landing and fail to support a patriot rising such as might have broken out contrary to our wishes; if this led to brutal German repression we could hardly expect any help from patriots when 'Round-up' was launched later. However it was thought advisable, even though the conditions permitting of 'Sledgehammer' were unlikely to occur, to have plans prepared in case circumstances such as would justify 'Round-up' obtained in the latter part of the year; General Paget said that such plans were being studied continuously.

From this difficult meeting Sir Alan Brooke drove to the airport to meet two American visitors charged with momentous proposals. For four weeks he and his colleagues, first with the Directors of Plans and later with the three commanders, had been discussing how we could help Russia in 1942 and had come to the conclusion that though the seizure of a bridgehead in the Calais area was possible in certain circumstances, of which the weather was not the least important, it was most unlikely that our limited supply of landing-craft would enable us to maintain it and almost certain that we could not hold it through the winter. They had not taken into account, it is true, the reinforcements which might be expected from America, but these would not dispose of the crucial issue of landing-craft. And it was soon to appear that American reinforcements in 1942 must be very small.

Brooke and Paget had both faced the German Army in the field in the present war and both realized from experience the dangers of a re-embarkation in the face of a stronger enemy; both knew from

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<sup>1</sup> The report estimated that there were 29 German divisions in France and the Low Countries. 'Enemy reinforcements, of the order of 2 or 3 divisions, or considerable strengthening of the coast defences prior to the assault would render operation impossible.'

their months of responsibility for the defence of Great Britain how difficult an opposed landing could be made. The staff of Combined Operations had been studying tactics and construction of craft since 1940, and had carried out several raids; for two years before that the Inter-Service Training and Development Centre had been concerned with the same problems.<sup>1</sup> Altogether the British staff and commanders could claim to speak of the implications of an assault from the sea with knowledge unequalled in the West. But of the Chiefs of Staff's sincere desire to do all that was possible to relieve Russia there should be no doubt. Commenting on a remark from the Joint Staff Mission in Washington they signalled on 6th April: 'We consider that [the] importance of helping Russia in 1942 is so great that consideration of [an] offensive in 1943 should not prevent us from doing anything we can, however small, this summer.'

In Washington, as in London, the agreed strategy that Germany's defeat should be the prior aim had been pushed into the background by the urgent need to halt the Japanese advance in the Pacific. To quote the American official history, 'the main body of [U.S.] Army troops moved from January through March went to the Pacific, most of them to Australia and New Caledonia'.<sup>2</sup> But the Army were eager, after meeting the Navy's reasonable requirements for the Pacific, to take early action to 'draw off from the Russian front sizeable portions of the German Army, both air and ground'. This policy was expressed in a memorandum of 28th February by Major-General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Chief of the War Plans Divisions in the War Department.

'We should at once develop, in conjunction with the British, a definite plan for operations against North-west Europe. It should be drawn up at once, in detail, and it should be sufficiently extensive in scale as to engage, from the middle of May onward, an increasing portion of the German Air Force, and by late summer an increasing amount of his ground forces.'<sup>3</sup>

The United States Joint Strategic Committee proceeded on 6th March to consider this proposal; they were thinking, say the American historians, in terms of a British-American air-offensive to be begun in the last two weeks of July 1942 followed by an assault with ground forces six weeks later. Owing to Mr. Churchill's requests for the loan of troopships to convey British and United States forces to the Middle East, not more than 40,000 United States troops would be available in the United Kingdom by 1st July, and this 'obviously would prevent effective American participation in an offensive in Europe in mid-1942'. The United States Chiefs of Staff

<sup>1</sup> See L. E. H. Maund, *Assault from the Sea* (1949).

<sup>2</sup> Matloff, p. 148.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159.



thereupon agreed that it was desirable to begin to build up forces in the United Kingdom, and the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 24th March charged the Combined Planning Staff to examine the British and United States studies for an offensive in Europe and report on the following lines:

- (a) Is it possible to put the ground-forces on the Continent during 1942 with sufficient support to give reasonable assurance that they can be maintained there?
- (b) Is an invasion of the Continent early in 1943 a possibility? If so, the estimates of the British and American Planning Staffs should be reconciled.
- (c) If the answer to (a) above is in the negative, how does this affect U.S. participation in or assistance to the British defence of the Middle East in 1942?<sup>1</sup>

The British Joint Staff Mission, reporting on this meeting, thought there was now hope of progress towards a more definite formulation of agreed strategy, which had hitherto been delayed by differences of opinion between the United States Staffs, notably on the feasibility of a Continental offensive in 1942.

But the matter was now taken up at a higher, a political, level. In his personal telegram of 9th March to the Prime Minister, in which he proposed the creation of three areas of strategic responsibility,<sup>2</sup> the President remarked that provision for the Atlantic area would include 'definite plans for the establishment of a new front on the European Continent', as a joint responsibility of the two countries. 'I am becoming more and more interested in the establishment of this new front this summer, certainly for air and raids. . . .'

Mr. Harry Hopkins too was interested. In a memorandum to the President of 14th March on 'Matters of immediate military concern' he urged that 'Arnold's plan in England [*sic*] should be pressed home.'<sup>3</sup> There is nothing to lose. The bridgehead does not need to be established unless air superiority is complete. I doubt if any single thing is as important as getting some sort of a front this summer against Germany'.

On the 18th the President in a letter to the Prime Minister said that he expected to send him in a few days a more definite plan for a joint attack in Europe itself.<sup>4</sup> On the military side, too, the matter was taken up independently of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The

<sup>1</sup> Matloff, p. 180 footnote 27, states that the British study used by the combined planners was the old J.P. paper of 24th December, 1941, in which the code-word 'Round-up' occurs.

<sup>2</sup> See above, Chap. XIX, p. 572.

<sup>3</sup> Referring to the White House meeting on 5th March, see p. 566 above. Sherwood p. 523.

<sup>4</sup> Churchill, IV, 177.

Combined Planners fell to their work in accordance with the instructions of the Combined Chiefs on 24th March, but before they could produce a report Eisenhower gave Marshall a memorandum urging the importance of having a target on which to fix our sights and arguing for the many advantages of a cross-Channel attack.<sup>1</sup>

On the same day, 25th March, Marshall received the President's approval of the idea of such an operation. The Secretaries of War and the Navy and the other American Chiefs of Staff and Hopkins were present at the meeting. 'Hopkins suggested that as soon as the plan had been perfected by the [American] Joint Chiefs of Staff it should not be taken up with the British members of the Combined Chiefs of Staff [in Washington] but should be taken up directly with the highest British authorities.'<sup>2</sup>

So an outline plan was prepared in the War Department, and after its approval by Marshall and by the President Marshall and Hopkins left with it, arriving in London on 8th April. In the meantime the President had cabled and written to Mr. Churchill with reference to a joint Anglo-American attack in Europe which he hoped would please Stalin. The plan his emissaries would present to the British had his 'heart and *mind* in it'.<sup>3</sup>

The visit was of the utmost importance in the development of the grand strategy of the Allies. Agreement was reached for the first time as to an invasion of the Continent, and on a grand scale; it was the beginning of integrated operational planning; it was the first meeting of Marshall and Brooke, the American organizer of victory and the Prime Minister's principal adviser on strategy. It was of immense value to the Allied cause, but in a way it was unhappily timed. It occurred at the moment of the greatest apparent threat to British interests in the Far East. On 5th April aircraft from a Japanese fleet had bombed Colombo; on the 6th Japanese aircraft bombed the coast of India; and on the 9th, the day after the American visitors' arrival in London, Trincomalee was bombed also. In the course of their raid the Japanese sank two heavy cruisers and a carrier and there was no knowing what further damage they might not do in waters both east and west of India which our naval strength was unequal to defend.<sup>4</sup> 'We are not far off the last ditch,' said the Planners, 'so far as Japan is concerned.' 'With so much of the weight of Japan thrown upon us,' Mr. Churchill told the President, 'we have more than we can bear.' The Prime Minister's own burden was aggravated by the fact that now was the crisis of the Cripps

<sup>1</sup> Matloff, pp. 181-2.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 182; Stimson, *op. cit.*, pp. 416-17.

<sup>3</sup> Matloff, p. 183; Sherwood, p. 516; Churchill, IV, 280-1.

<sup>4</sup> See above, Chap. xx, pp. 486.

negotiations in Delhi, with regard to which he did not welcome the President's well-meant but ill-informed suggestions; this did not seem the moment for gambling with the safety of India. It was inevitable therefore that the minds of the British high command should be largely occupied with the defence of the lands washed by the Indian Ocean, and this may have given the Americans the impression that they were lukewarm in their support of the great design in Europe.

The discussions lasted from 8th to 14th April, ending with a meeting of the Defence Committee at which the two Americans were present.

General Marshall unfolded his proposal to the Chiefs of Staff on the morning of the 9th.<sup>1</sup> Broadly it looked to a landing in the north of France between Le Havre and Bologne of 48 divisions (30 American, 18 British) supported by some 5,800 combat aircraft in, say, April 1943, for which the main decision must be made now, 'to avoid continued dispersion of means' as well as for reasons of administration and training. An advantage of the plan was that during the preparatory period it offered the opportunity to act promptly, either by 'a sacrifice attack' if the imminence of Russian collapse required desperate action, or 'if the German forces were almost completely absorbed on the Russian front', or if there were an evident deterioration of the German military power.

General Marshall said that the purpose of his visit was to reach a decision as to what form the main Anglo-American effort was to take, and when and where it was to be made. He had two main considerations in mind: the maintenance of Russian resistance and the need of the United States army to gain war experience. By the middle of September there should be in the United Kingdom one United States armoured and two and a half infantry divisions and five Air Groups. Seeing that no larger American forces could be available he could not press for an 'emergency operation' before that time. The British then explained what our views were on the subject of a landing in 1942, how seriously we regarded the situation in the Indian Ocean and the Middle East, and what raids we had executed or planned. Sir Charles Portal thought that from the air point of view September was either too early or too late; we could not afford more casualties than might result from one or two months' fighting; the question was whether we could force the Germans to fight under conditions advantageous to ourselves.

The Chiefs of Staff drew up a formal reply and discussed it with General Marshall on 14th April. They entirely agreed that plans should be prepared for major operations on the Continent by American and British forces in 1943 on the lines of his paper. As

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<sup>1</sup> Printed in full, Appendix III.

regards 1942 our action would be governed by the situation in Russia. If Russia was being defeated we might be compelled to make a supreme effort to draw off German forces from the Eastern front. This situation might arise any time after June, and we should welcome the early arrival of American air forces, especially heavy bombers. The subsequent arrival of American land forces would enable us to reinforce the expeditionary force on the Continent if we had succeeded in establishing a bridgehead. Since the weather breaks before the end of September, we should have to launch the operation in August at latest in order to ensure the capture of a port by the third week of September. But the Chiefs of Staff wished to point out that the action envisaged against Germany might be entirely vitiated unless we contrived to hold Japan in the meantime, and they emphasized the need of American naval and air assistance in the eastern theatres.

General Marshall said that the main limiting factor in the plan was shortage of tonnage. He thought that we might be forced to take action on the Continent in the next three or four months; there was no doubt that once one had one's view firmly centred on a project problems became greatly eased. But he was anxious that dispersion of forces should be reduced to a minimum; it was essential that our main project, for operations in Europe, should not be reduced to the status of a residuary legatee for whom nothing was left. Sir Alan Brooke assured him that we were all completely in agreement as regards 1943, but if we were forced this year to undertake an operation on the Continent it could only be on a small scale, and its slight military value must be weighed against the danger of Germany and Japan joining hands in the Indian Ocean area. It was agreed that an American planning staff should come over to work with the British.

'Dispersion of effort' became something of a bugbear to the Americans. Marshall had reported home on the day before this meeting that it would require 'great firmness' to avoid 'further dispersions'<sup>1</sup> and on the afternoon of the meeting the British planners gathered that 'in spite of our efforts and intentions to the contrary the Americans thought their mission had failed and that we did not mean to do real business on their plan—this because of our insistence on the seriousness of the situation developing in the Middle East and Indian Ocean'.

The result of the meeting of the Defence Committee that evening, however, was satisfactory to the Americans. Marshall expressed great relief that 'agreement had been reached on basic principles for a frontal assault on the enemy in Northern France in 1943'. Two points of doubt had arisen in the course of his discussions with the British.

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<sup>1</sup> Matloff, p. 189.

The first was whether sufficient material would be available from the United States for the support of the Middle East and India; on this, he had that day sent instructions for the United States bomber force under General Brereton in India to be placed at the disposal of the British. On the second, the practicability of a landing on the Continent, other than a large-scale raid, in 1942, he thought that we might be compelled to do this and must in any case prepare for it. Brooke said that the Chiefs of Staff were in full agreement with General Marshall's proposals for 1943; operations in 1942 were governed by the measure of success achieved by the Germans in Russia. We had felt that matters would come to a head before September and that we might have to act before then. Sir Charles Portal, referring to possible operations in the summer or autumn of 1942, said that it was necessary to bear in mind the difference between air-operations across the Channel and the landing of an expeditionary force. The former could be stopped at will. In the latter case we should have to maintain the effort as long as the troops were on the Continent, and we must be sure therefore that our air strength was sufficient to carry operations through to the end.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, as Sir Alan Brooke noted in his diary, 'we accepted their proposals for offensive action in Europe in 1942 perhaps, and in 1943 for certain'.<sup>2</sup> It was natural, in view of the situation in the Indian Ocean and the possibility of a German drive towards the Persian Gulf, that the British, both in the discussions in London and in the Prime Minister's correspondence with the President, should place the emphasis of their 'reservations' on the need to make due provision for the defence of those regions—paradoxical though it was that the Americans, contrary to the pull of public opinion in their own country, should be pressing for Germany first while the British urged the importance of the war against Japan.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless Mr. Churchill was able to assure the President that 'broadly speaking, our agreed programme is a crescendo of activity on the Continent, starting with an ever-increasing air-offensive both by night and day and more frequent and larger-scale raids, in which United States troops will take part'; while the President, replying, expressed his delight at the agreement reached with his emissaries, who had informed him of the unanimity of opinion as to their proposals. Both the British on a long view and General Marshall, as representing the United States Army, had of course an interest in furthering a Western strategy as against the preference of Admiral King and the United States Navy for the Pacific; the Navy were not opposed, however, to the idea of a cross-Channel attack.

<sup>1</sup> See Churchill, IV, 283 ff; Sherwood, pp. 540 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Bryant, p. 355.

<sup>3</sup> Sherwood, p. 542; Bryant, p. 362; Churchill, IV, 287.

The Cabinet on 29th April approved the Prime Minister's summing-up of the situation, that while our preparations should proceed on the basis that we should make a resolute effort to capture a bridgehead on the Continent in the late summer we were not committed to carry out such an operation this year. Unfortunately this was not explicitly stated in the record of the 'momentous' meeting of the Defence Committee on 14th April which the Americans attended; understandably Mr. Churchill, feeling bound to make an important reservation with regard to our needs in the eastern theatre, did not wish to qualify his agreement more than seemed necessary.<sup>1</sup> Brooke did indeed insist that operations in 1942 must be governed by developments on the Eastern front; but the Chiefs of Staff's own memorandum of 8th April stated that the Defence Committee 'gave general approval to the proposals . . . for Anglo-American operations in western Europe in 1942 and 1943'. In the minutes of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, however, for 21st April it is noted that Marshall 'found the views of the British Chiefs of Staff were almost in complete accord with his own *regarding operations proposed for 1943*'.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Winston Churchill writes in his book that, while wholly in favour of a frontal assault in France in 1943 and determined that some important operation against Germany must be staged in the meantime, he thought a cross-Channel attack in 1942 less attractive than other alternatives. However he was 'very ready to give "Sledgehammer" a fair run with other suggestions before the Planning Committees'. He was 'almost certain the more it was looked at the less it would be liked'.<sup>3</sup> Lord Alanbrooke's Diaries as well as the minutes of meetings reveal with what grave doubts he himself viewed British or American proposals to open a western front at this time to help the Russians. His instinct and all his experience kept him rootedly opposed to a premature expenditure of our limited resources on a venture of extreme technical difficulty against an unshaken enemy whose rate of reinforcement would be faster than ours. While admiring Marshall as a great organizer as well as a great gentleman he did not rate his strategic ability high and formed the impression that he did not realize the implications of such an expedition.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No agreed minutes of this meeting were kept, but a record was made by General Ismay. In his *Memoirs* (p. 249) he regrets that the British did not express their views 'more frankly'.

<sup>2</sup> The words underlined were not in the original minutes; their insertion was authorized by a corrigendum dated 22nd April.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, IV, 288-9, where Cherbourg is mentioned, with Brest, as Marshall's proposed objectives.

<sup>4</sup> Bryant, pp. 354, 357-60.

After the departure of the visitors, accompanied by Sir Dudley Pound, the Chiefs of Staff approved a paper setting out a scheme for the development of Anglo-American operations in western Europe in 1942 and 1943 in accordance with the decisions of the Defence Committee. It proposed :

- (a) The conversion of the United Kingdom into an advanced base for operations in western Europe.
- (b) The development of preparations on a front stretching from the Shetlands to the Bristol Channel.
- (c) A series of raiding operations to be carried out during the summer of 1942, coupled with
- (d) An active air-offensive over north-west Europe.
- (e) The capture of a bridgehead on the Continent within the area in which adequate naval and air-cover can be given during the summer of 1942 if opportunity occurs.
- (f) A large scale descent on western Europe in the spring of 1943.

‘Our air-offensive,’ the paper ran, ‘may in itself achieve a measure of diversion, but we must be prepared to employ land forces in order to compel a heavier diversion of air forces. The situation may arise in which we shall have the opportunity to capture a bridgehead and possibly to extend this so as to include a port, enabling us to establish our forces on the Continent before the weather deteriorates at the end of September. We must clearly be prepared for such a situation.’

The Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, the Commander-in-Chief, Fighter Command, and the Chief of Combined Operations were charged with the working out of the necessary plans. The same three officers, who had already, in conjunction with the naval staff and other commands of the Royal Air Force, been entrusted with the responsibility for planning ‘Round-up’, would now extend the project on the general lines of Marshall’s proposals, and United States planning staffs would be associated with British. ‘The object of “Super-Round-Up” will be to destroy German forces in Western Europe.’<sup>1</sup> The activities of the Special Operations Executive and of the Intelligence services should be directed to conform to the general plan.

The Chiefs of Staff proceeded to nominate three Force commanders for ‘Sledgehammer’, but Mr. Churchill was only willing to confirm them provisionally until General Marshall had been consulted: his own idea was that Sir Harold Alexander, if free from Burma in the near future, should be Supreme Commander of all the forces employed.

The War Cabinet were informed of the recent discussions and their

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<sup>1</sup> On the analogy of ‘Super-Gymnast’, this code-word connoted the participation of the Americans in ‘Round-up’.

implications, including the need to provide accommodation for the 'considerable numbers' of American troops expected to arrive in the country. They agreed with the Prime Minister 'that we should go ahead, at full speed, with the plans for operations on the Continent, and that we should continue, without relaxation, our pressure on the enemy's air force.'





## CHAPTER XXV

# AID TO RUSSIA

ON 20TH MAY, five weeks after Hopkins and Marshall had returned to Washington, another advocate of a second front in Europe arrived in London in the person of M. Molotov, the Soviet Commissar for Foreign Affairs. This was not, however, his only purpose and before describing his discussions on the subject in London and Washington it will be convenient to review in their wider aspect the plans of the Western Powers for maintaining the Russian war effort. It is as such that they should be regarded; for the popular demands for help to Russia in western countries inspired by political sympathy or admiration for the fortitude of her armies and people should not obscure the fact that it was of enormous military importance to the West to sustain an eastern front that was engaging some 200 enemy divisions and 2,000 aircraft, many of which might otherwise have been used to overwhelm the British position in the Middle East, move through Spain into Morocco or renew an attempt at invasion.

There were several possible ways of helping Russia. In the first place she sorely needed supplies, both of finished munitions and of raw materials; we saw in an earlier chapter how the Western Powers, represented by Lord Beaverbrook and Mr. Harriman, set about meeting these needs.<sup>1</sup> Then again it might prove feasible to dispatch armed forces to fight alongside Soviet armies on the northern or southern section of the Russian front; difficulties of transportation and maintenance would limit the size of such contingents, but Russia had no lack of manpower, and it would be as tokens that they would be appreciated. But the kind of assistance which the Soviet government desired and demanded above all was a large-scale attack on Germany in another quarter which should force her to divert formations from the Eastern front to meet it. We saw in the last chapter how important a part the wish to render such assistance played in British and American strategic planning in the early months of 1942. The most effective form would be a landing of Western armies on the Continent; but pending such a consummation the progressive bombing of Germany from the air might be expected to divert German fighters and anti-aircraft formations from the east and in the long run to wear down the enemy's industrial capacity and his will to continue the war.

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<sup>1</sup> Chap. vi.

All such methods of help would afford Russia relief while the struggle lasted. But her rulers were not content with this. They had also political interests for which they were determined to secure British support, and these demands they insistently pressed until the end of May 1942. The Foreign Secretary's discussions with M. Stalin in Moscow have been described in an earlier chapter.<sup>1</sup> On the political side they had been inconclusive, but on the military side the Soviet Premier had shown an unexpected comprehension of the difficulties in which the British found themselves as the result of disasters which had crowded upon them since the Eden mission had been arranged; on the other hand the halting of the German offensive early in December had reduced the tension in Moscow. With regard to the Far East Stalin made it clear 'that the antagonism between the Soviet Union and Japan could only be settled by force and he hoped that in the spring the Russians would be able to help us against the Japanese'. And if at the same time the Russian armies were successfully pushing the Germans to the west, would it not then be possible, he asked, to discuss the question of opening a second front in Europe, either in the Balkans or somewhere else, so that the Germans could be attacked from the west as well as from the east?<sup>2</sup>

Mr. Eden said he was willing to discuss the question now: one of the reasons for our attacking in Libya was to acquire a base in North Africa for a possible attack on Europe at some later date, and we did not at all exclude the possibility of such an attack.

Stalin accepted the decision that a second front in Europe was not practicable at the present time, and he had not resented being told that we were unable under present conditions to send the Royal Air Force squadrons to Russia as we had intended. Failing a second front, he would have liked some British troops to be sent to fight in the Soviet Union, either in the north, perhaps on the Leningrad front, or in the south; if that were ruled out he made a third suggestion, for a joint operation against the port of Petsamo and the north of Norway in a month or six weeks time.<sup>3</sup> After discussion between Marshal Shapovnikov, General Nye, the V.C.I.G.S., and General Mason-Macfarlane, head of the military mission to Russia, it was agreed that the British Mission in collaboration with the Soviet staff should work out an outline plan in sufficient detail to enable the British Chiefs of Staff to decide whether or not British forces could participate.

But the projected operation was stillborn. Mason-Macfarlane reported on 31st December that he had been unable to get a word on the subject from the Russians. Next day he signalled that they wished

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Stalin had asked for a second front as early as 18th July, 1941, and again on 3rd September (*Soviet Correspondence*, I, 13, 21).

<sup>3</sup> See Chap. XIII above. Petsamo was at this time in Finnish territory.

to receive a definite acceptance in principle before taking any further step—which was flatly contrary to the British understanding of the previous agreement. On the 5th he had to report that the Russians had cancelled the operation on the ground that the Finnish General Staff had got wind of it, but he thought it more than possible that the Kremlin had for other reasons decided against proceeding with it. Stalin told our ambassador on 28th March that a British leakage had caused the abandonment of the plan, but the Foreign Secretary denied the possibility of this. It must be supposed that the refusal of the British Chiefs of Staff to accept the project even in principle until they had an outline plan before them aroused in Soviet minds suspicions of the sincerity of their willingness to co-operate.

The Foreign Office were much disappointed. As the first outward and visible sign of Anglo-Russian co-operation at sea, on land and in the air it would have had 'a far-reaching psychological effect which would certainly facilitate our political relations with the Soviet Government generally'. Later, in January, both the naval and the army heads of the military mission in Moscow suggested that the plan should be revived in view of the recent German attempts to interrupt our Arctic convoys, and the Russian Chief of Naval Staff was said to agree. But the British Chiefs of Staff thought that with so much else on hand we could probably not supply the necessary naval, air and shipping resources, and further that if we now took the initiative the Russians might expect us to provide the larger share. So the plan was left in its grave, but the idea of an operation in the far north made great appeal to Mr. Churchill, and much was to be heard of 'Jupiter' later on.<sup>1</sup>

At the end of February the Prime Minister drafted a message informing Stalin of the withdrawals and diversions of British formations from the Levant-Caspian front made necessary by the Japanese offensive, while assuring him that the convoys of munitions to Russia would continue. The Foreign Office suggested that a reference was desirable to Eden's December talks with Stalin on the subject of possible Russian action against Japan, hinting that even if Stalin could not commit himself to any such direct action in the near future he might at least move troops in such a way as to affect Japanese dispositions. But the Prime Minister thought it unwise to make any such proposal just when we were announcing our own inability to lend Russia fighting support, especially in view of Auchinleck's declared intention of not renewing his offensive until June.<sup>2</sup> In the end the draft was not sent; in a telegram of 9th March the Prime Minister merely informed M. Stalin that he had given express

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<sup>1</sup> See note at end of Chap. xxvii.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. xviii.

directions that the promised supplies should not be interrupted or delayed, and that we were resuming a heavy air-offensive upon Germany by both day and night. 'We are continuing,' he added, 'to study other measures for taking some of the weight off you.'

The agreement of October 1941 on supplies for Russia<sup>1</sup> had looked no farther than the end of June 1942, and in the spring it became necessary to decide on the programme of supplies to be provided by the United States and United Kingdom after that date.

Mr. Eden, as chairman of the Allied Supplies Executive,<sup>2</sup> was able to report in the autumn of 1942 that in spite of the fresh situation created by the war with Japan all the British quotas of military and non-military items of major importance due under the original agreement had been made available in full: 1,822 fighter aircraft, 2,443 tanks with ammunition, 3,001 M.T. vehicles, etc., etc. The words 'made available' should be noted. Not all these supplies had arrived in Russia: 288 fighters and 470 tanks had been sunk *en route*, and there were always large numbers piling up at British or American or Icelandic ports awaiting shipment. But the Western governments were not in default: they had never undertaken to deliver the promised supplies in Russia. The relevant clause in the Protocol stated that all materials would be 'made available at centres of production'. The two governments would 'give aid to the transportation of these supplies' and would 'help with the delivery'. In fact they had provided nearly all the shipping. In two important items, rubber and tin, the original quota had not been met owing to the Japanese conquests, and reduced quotas for the last three months of the period had been accepted. In the case of some raw materials the Soviet authorities had revised priorities for the available shipping space in favour of other items. In some cases the promised quotas had been exceeded. We had asked for no payment from the Soviet government for military supplies; they were provided on Lend-Lease terms. For other supplies cash or credit terms had been agreed to.

Arrangements for continuing the flow after June 1942 were discussed in London in March and April. The spread of the war to the Far East had made it doubtful whether we could fulfil the oral undertaking given by Lord Beaverbrook in Moscow that, subject to enemy action and *force majeure*, we would increase our quota by 50 per cent for the second half of 1942 and by twice as much from January 1943 onward. The Allied Supplies Executive had therefore suggested that the question of future supplies should be discussed on

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. vi above.

<sup>2</sup> This committee, set up on 15th October, 1941, with Beaverbrook as its first chairman, superseded the Hankey Committees for the Co-ordination of Allied Supplies.

an Anglo-United States-Soviet basis in the light of the general war situation and of Allied strategy, in order to secure the best distribution of common resources. They hoped that such discussions, which should be held in Moscow, would lead to a full disclosure of strategic plans and other matters affecting the allocation of supplies and would start a regular system of consultation between the three governments. It was learnt however from talks with Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Harriman that the President did not favour a conference, and it was agreed that a joint Anglo-American approach should be made to Russia, in which each country presented its own separate schedule of what it could offer.

Accordingly on 29th May the President on behalf of the United States and the United Kingdom presented to the Soviet government a list of supplies amounting to eight million short tons,<sup>1</sup> out of which the Russians were to select a programme of high-priority items up to a limit of 4.4 million short tons—three-quarters to be sent by the northern route and one-quarter by the southern.<sup>2</sup> So far as possible the two Western countries would supply the shipping for as much of the programme as could not be carried in Soviet ships. But the programme might have to be varied to meet unforeseen developments.

The British offer included, as under the former Protocol, 200 fighters and 250 tanks monthly for the last six months of 1942. This Second Protocol was accepted by the Soviet government on 7th July and, though not signed till later, was regarded as having effect from 1st July, 1942.

There remained however the problem of getting the supplies to Russia. After Japan had entered the war the sailing of British and American ships to Vladivostok was no longer possible, and though Russia was not at war with Japan few Soviet ships were available. In any case the long land journey through Siberia was unsatisfactory. The only effective channels of supply were the northern route to Murmansk and the White Sea and the southern route to the Persian Gulf; each of these however suffered from serious drawbacks.

The limiting factor for the northern route was its exposure to attack in Arctic waters by land-based aircraft, U-boats and, more recently, surface ships. The Russians consistently failed to admit or to appreciate the difficulties and dangers attending the course of the Arctic convoys; they seemed to think nothing of the consequent loss

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<sup>1</sup> Viz. tons of 2,000 lbs.

<sup>2</sup> The Ministry of Production calculated that on a basis of 6,000 short tons per ship (which was far in excess of present loading) it would be possible to lift a joint programme of 4.4 million short tons (allowing 10 per cent margin for losses) in 60 ships per month (45 by North-Russian route, 15 by Persian Gulf).

of valuable ships, both warships and merchantmen, and the strain on the crews. Each convoy involved moreover the diversion of part of our all too few escort craft from their duties in the Atlantic. The Admiralty were very sensitive on this point. The First Sea Lord maintained that twenty-five ships should be the upper limit for a convoy on this route; two convoys of twenty-five ships a month was probably the absolute maximum, and he would much prefer one a month with a stronger escort. At the end of April there was a heavy accumulation, especially in Iceland, of ships loaded for North Russia, and the Prime Minister had to resist strong pressure from the President to sail larger or more frequent convoys than the Admiralty thought justifiable. Three convoys, of twenty-five or thirty-five ships, every two months, he said, was the extreme limit of what we could handle. It seemed unreasonable, too, that the Navy should be called upon to make these efforts, and valuable merchant ships and their crews risked, without our having any real knowledge of Russian production or Russian needs.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the severe hardships and hazards from storm and ice normal to winter voyaging in those inhospitable regions, the early convoys had not fared badly.<sup>2</sup> But the convoy dispatched at the end of May (P.Q. 16) carrying 125,000 tons of cargo lost nearly a quarter of it, including 147 tanks and 77 aircraft, and seven of its thirty-five ships.<sup>3</sup> In June, owing to the overriding needs of Malta, none was sailed until the very end of the month, when two large outward and homeward convoys started, with disastrous results to the former (P.Q. 17). Out of thirty-six merchantmen and three rescue ships which set out from Iceland on 27th June only eleven of the convoy and two rescue ships survived; 430 tanks, 210 aircraft and 3,350 vehicles were lost as against 164, 87 and 896 of each class delivered.<sup>4</sup>

This catastrophe provoked discussions in the Defence Committee on 10th and 13th July. The next convoy would normally leave Iceland on the 23rd, but the Committee had to consider the effects on the next Malta convoy of keeping to this timetable; also the danger of employing heavy ships in the Barents Sea and the risk of sending to Russia by this route the six Royal Air Force squadrons promised in the Molotov conversations.<sup>5</sup> The First Sea Lord could not guarantee that a single ship would get through if the next convoy attempted the passage under present conditions, and the Chiefs of Staff felt bound to recommend that sailings should be suspended. The Committee were informed that there was no hanging back on the part of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Churchill, iv, 230-2.

<sup>2</sup> See Chap. xxi, above, p. 506.

<sup>3</sup> Roskill, II, 132.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 136-43.

<sup>5</sup> See below, p. 598.

merchant seamen; they had in fact rejected less perilous alternatives in order to remain on this route. But the risks were considered too great and it was agreed to sail no more convoys for the present. Since most of the ships in the planned convoy were American, the President's concurrence was obtained.

It fell to the Prime Minister to break the unwelcome news to M. Stalin, and this he did in a long signal of 17th July. The Russian reply of 23rd July was highly provocative. Stalin gathered that 'the British Government refuses to go on supplying the Soviet Union with war materials by the northern route'. According to Russian naval experts the arguments of the British were quite untenable. 'Given goodwill and readiness to honour obligations, steady deliveries could be effected with heavy loss to the Germans.'<sup>1</sup> As has been explained above, the Western Powers were under no obligation to convey the supplies to Russian ports. Nevertheless the Cabinet decided that no written answer was required to this 'bitter message' as Mr. Churchill called it. The reasons for the suspension of the convoys were, however, to be explained to M. Maisky and his Naval Attaché.

Stalin's signal, if not excusable, was understandable in view of the dangerous condition of affairs at the front at the end of July.<sup>2</sup> But before we return to the main stream of Anglo-Soviet negotiations something must be said of the southern supply route.<sup>3</sup>

The limiting factor here was the capacity of the ports in the Persian Gulf and of the means of transportation inland. Both needed to be developed on such a gigantic scale if anything more than a trickle of supplies was to reach Russia that the Soviet always pressed rather for the use of the northern route. Nevertheless, as disasters multiplied on the Arctic runs and especially after the catastrophe to the June convoy, the importance of the less exposed southern route increased.

In his message of 17th July which so angered Stalin Mr. Churchill said that we were prepared to send to the Persian Gulf immediately some of the ships which were to have sailed in the next Arctic convoy. He gave figures of the extent to which it was hoped to develop the capacity of the trans-Persian route by the autumn. To this Stalin replied, truly but not graciously, that it was obvious that deliveries by the Persian ports could in no way make up for the discontinuance of deliveries in the north.

The possibilities of the southern route had been first considered by the British in August 1941 and had been discussed with the Russians

<sup>1</sup> See Churchill, IV, 239-42; *Soviet Correspondence*, I, 52-56.

<sup>2</sup> See below, p. 599.

<sup>3</sup> Map 7; see Leighton and Coakley, *Global Logistics, etc.* Chap. xx, XXI; Coakley in *Command Decisions* (Washington, 1960), Chap. ix; Playfair, III, 425-6.



at the time of Mr. Eden's visit to Moscow in December. From the Gulf ports a single-line railway ran through mountainous country to Tehran and on to the Caspian port of Bandar Shah; a branch line running westwards from Tehran had not been completed as far as Tabriz. Such roads as there were had not been constructed to bear heavy traffic and in bad weather might be unusable. Slight as these facilities were, they could not be entirely devoted to the needs of Russia. They had also to serve the Persian civil population, the British troops who might be stationed in the country, and the Polish forces in process of evacuation from Soviet territory, as well as to carry the stores intended for their own improvement.

The capacity of the railway in the autumn of 1941 was put at two to three trains a day in each direction, or 350-400 tons; in the December discussions it was thought that this could be raised to twelve trains a day. There was great need of locomotives and rolling stock, and also of lorries for the roads. Work was put in hand, but until the danger to the Arctic convoys was realized in the spring this work was not likely to receive a high priority when other demands for men and materials were pressing. A War Office report of 26th April showed the monthly capacity of the South Persian ports as 97,000 tons, of the railways with the existing rolling stock as 39,000 and of the roads as 23,000. The target was 148,000 tons for the ports and 72,000 for the railway; no estimate was hazarded for the roads. The expansion of transportation facilities was said to be limited not so much by the rate of construction or repair of the railways and roads as by the rate of delivery of rolling stock and trucks from America. But in his telegram of 17th July to Stalin Mr. Churchill could only say that by October we hoped to increase the monthly capacity of the Trans-Persian routes to 75,000 tons, and the loadings (exclusive of trucks and aircraft) due to arrive at the ports to 100,000 tons.

The Americans were not satisfied with the present or projected flow of supplies to Russia now that the northern route had become so precarious, and a few days before Mr. Churchill sent his signal to Stalin Mr. Harriman suggested to the President that the United States should take over the management of the Trans-Persian railway. The President approved and promptly put the suggestion to Mr. Churchill. An American mission had been concerned with Lend-Lease supplies to Russia in the Gulf region for some months, but it lay of course within the sphere of British strategic responsibility and the German advance towards the Caucasus in July brought nearer the possibility of British forces being engaged in operations in northern Iraq or Persia. There were thus different interests to be provided for. Eventually in August, after discussions at Tehran, where the Prime Minister and Mr. Harriman spent a few hours on their way to Moscow, and later at Cairo, Mr. Churchill signalled to the President grate-

fully accepting the proffered help. The railway and the ports, he said, would be managed entirely by Americans, though the allocation of traffic would have to be retained in the hands of the British military authorities for whom the railway was an essential link in their lines of communication.<sup>1</sup> A scheme was finally approved by the Combined Chiefs of Staff in September, under which the British Commander-in-Chief was to control 'priority of traffic and allocation of freight' but would not interfere with the flow of American supplies to Russia unless operational needs or internal security required it. However 'the transition from British to American operation took longer than planned, and the Americans also took longer to make their operation effective'.<sup>2</sup>

We must now turn back to the discussions begun between the Foreign Secretary and the Russian Premier in Moscow in December but broken off when deadlock was reached on the question of the Soviet Union's frontier after the war. Mr. Eden had undertaken to consult the United States and the Dominions and on his return he promptly took the matter up in a telegram to the Prime Minister, then at Washington; he felt that Stalin would take our attitude as the 'acid test' of our sincerity in desiring good relations with his country; in a later paper for the War Cabinet he stated the case for making concessions to Russia in view of the importance of co-operation with her after the war; it was to our interest that she should be strong, and in any case, unless the Germans won the war, it would clearly be impossible to force her to give up territories which she now held. But we must not sacrifice the goodwill of the United States to please Russia and he argued that this difficult question should be discussed with the President forthwith. Mr. Churchill from the outset felt the objections strongly. The 1941 frontiers of Russia 'were acquired by acts of aggression in shameful collusion with Hitler'. The transfer of the peoples of the Baltic States to Soviet Russia against their will would be contrary to all the principles for which we were fighting. In any case there could be no question of settling frontiers before the Peace Conference. The President was known to hold the same opinion. Our sincerity was involved in the maintenance of the principles of the Atlantic Charter, to which Stalin had subscribed and on which we depended for our association with the United States. No one could tell how the balance of power would lie at the end of the war, but it seemed likely that the Soviet Union would need the aid of the United States and the British Empire for reconstruction far more than we should then need theirs.

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 461.

<sup>2</sup> See Leighton and Coakley, pp. 577, 583.

The Cabinet on 6th February were deeply divided on the wisdom of acceding to the Soviet demands but agreed to explain the position, without committing themselves, to President Roosevelt. M. Maisky, when informed that we had done so, remarked that it was with Great Britain, not the United States, that his government wished to conclude a treaty, and called attention to the long interval since the Moscow conversations. Lord Halifax reported that the President's reaction was unfavourable: he was confident that he could reach agreement with Stalin direct. This suggestion perturbed the Cabinet; they were anxious to keep negotiations on a tripartite basis, and they expressed their views in a memorandum for Mr. Winant, who would be seeing the President in a few days.

On 7th March the Prime Minister asked the President to give us a free hand in signing the proposed treaty, and he told Stalin that he had made this request. The President failed in a conversation with M. Litvinov, the Soviet ambassador at Washington, to change the Russian attitude, nor was the American attitude affected by a visit of Lord Beaverbrook to Washington. But the Cabinet decided that, for the sake of good relations with Russia both during the present critical state of the war and after the war, it was necessary to meet the Soviet demands, all the more so that, apart from supplying war material, we were unable to give the Soviet army direct help 'in the coming German attack in the Ukraine'. Not only was it our official policy to give Russia all the help we could, but Members of Parliament as well as the President were constantly expressing admiration for the Russian armies and desire that we should do more to aid their gallant resistance. American opinion, our Ambassador reported, was much less sympathetic to Russia, and it was with reluctance that the President acquiesced in the British proposed action, though he could not approve it.<sup>1</sup> On 8th April accordingly the British Cabinet agreed to invite Molotov to come to London to negotiate a treaty on the basis of the Soviet terms, namely the recognition of Russia's 1941 frontier with the Baltic States.

A few days afterwards President Roosevelt also invited Stalin to send Molotov and a general to Washington in the immediate future to discuss 'a very important military proposal involving the utilization of our armed forces in a manner to relieve your critical Western Front'. This invitation was no doubt partly intended to mollify the Russians who were well aware of the President's known dislike of their territorial claims.<sup>2</sup> Certainly the three themes of territorial claims, Second Front and supplies of munitions were closely connected.

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<sup>1</sup> For the reactions of the President and the State Department see *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1942*, III, 494 ff. (Washington 1961).

<sup>2</sup> H. Feis, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin* (Princeton 1957), p. 61, where the President's invitation is described as 'hurried and premature'. Cf. Sherwood, p. 531.

Stalin took his time to accept both invitations, and even then an interval of a month elapsed before Molotov arrived in London on 20th May. His arrival had been preceded by hard bargaining conducted through Maisky, and conversations seemed again to have reached deadlock, largely because the British government refused to disinterest themselves in the future of Poland. A way out was eventually found by the adoption of a new form of treaty, which Eden had had in mind since the 18th; it dropped all mention of frontiers and instead provided for a twenty-years pact of mutual assistance.<sup>1</sup>

In a minute to Mr. Eden of the following year Mr. Churchill said that the reason we sheered off making the agreement in its earlier form was the perfectly clear menace of a considerable division of opinion in the House of Commons. American influence was no doubt potent on both contracting parties; Mr. Winant had a fruitful talk with Molotov on the 24th, and the near approach of a German summer offensive may well have made the Russians less rigid. At the meeting on 22nd May at which the Chiefs of Staff were present Molotov asked Churchill what the British government thought of the prospects of Soviet success, and what would be their attitude if the Soviet failed to hold out against the German effort in 1942.

But the conclusion of a treaty was by no means the Russians' only purpose. At the first meeting, on 21st May, Molotov said that he had come to discuss two questions, that of a treaty and that of a second front, and it was the latter which his government considered as on the whole the more important. 'The question was in a sense a military one, and for that reason and because President Roosevelt had suggested it he had brought with him a major-general who was informed on questions of detail. But the question was primarily a political one, and discussion of it should be conducted on political lines with Great Britain and the United States.'

This statement is curious and, perhaps, illuminating. It seems of a piece with Stalin's often expressed view that the launching of a Continental invasion was purely a matter of good will on the part of the Western Allies; military considerations need hardly count. We have seen him take the same line with regard to the Arctic convoys. But it is possible that Molotov meant that the question was one of grand strategy. He is reported as having told President Roosevelt that the decisive point was whether prospects of Allied success were better in 1942 or 1943, implying that Russia's plight in the latter year might be serious.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Published as Cmd. 6376 (Treaty Series). The Treaty was signed on 26th May and ratified at Moscow on 4th July.

<sup>2</sup> See *Foreign Relations of the U.S. 1942*, III, 576.

In his conversations with Mr. Eden in Moscow Stalin had not pressed his desire for the opening of a second front in Europe. But now, in May, with the near prospect of a renewed German offensive, the question had become of extreme importance and Stalin had eagerly taken up on 20th April the President's suggestion of an exchange of views. The Russian winter offensive had been intended as a spoiling attack on a grand scale, to cause the German armies such losses in men and material as would cripple the offensive they were bound to launch in the spring. In this aim the Russians were partially successful. The Germans suffered enormous casualties in battle and from the exceptionally severe weather; they no longer possessed the *élan* of 1941, and the opening of their main offensive was delayed until the end of June.<sup>1</sup> But the initial successes of the Russians had not forced the enemy to surrender any essential positions and had by no means destroyed his offensive power. By the end of March the front was more or less stabilized with the Germans still holding Kharkov and Dnyetropetrovsk, and on 5th April Hitler announced to his staff his intention to resume the initiative. His purpose was to 'wipe out the entire defence potential remaining to the Soviets and to cut them off as far as possible from their most important sources of supply'. He intended to 'hold the central part of the front, in the north to bring about the fall of Leningrad and effect a junction with the Finns by land, and on the south wing of the army front to force a break-through into the Caucasus area'. The object of this last, main operation would be 'to destroy the enemy before the Don in order to gain the oil region in the Caucasian area and to cross the Caucasus mountains'.

In reply to M. Molotov, at the first London meeting, Mr. Churchill said that the United States and British governments were resolved to invade the Continent as soon as possible with as large a force as possible, but the question would have to be explored on technical lines; he had already in the previous August suggested to the President the construction of the largest possible number of landing-craft.

The matter was further discussed next morning at a private meeting of which Sir Winston has given an account in his book.<sup>2</sup> The object of his visit, Molotov said, 'was to learn how the British Government viewed the prospects of drawing off in 1942 at least forty German divisions from the U.S.S.R.'. The Prime Minister explained how greatly the difficulties of an oversea invasion had been

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<sup>1</sup> Halder noted in his Diary (2nd July) the losses of the German Armed Forces for the year 22nd June, 1941, to 21st June, 1942—killed 271,612, missing 65,730: of these, the losses for the five summer months of 1941 were: killed 162,314, missing 33,334; for the five winter months: killed 88,977, missing 26,319.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 297-300.

increased by the coming of air power: this limited our choice to the Pas de Calais, the Cherbourg tip and part of the Brest area. We were studying the possibility of landing a force in one or more of these areas this year, but the crucial point was landing-craft. With the best will in the world, however, we could not hope to draw off large enemy land-forces from the Eastern front in 1942. In the air it was different; in the various theatres we were already containing about half the German fighter and a third of the bomber strength, and we planned to force air battles over the Continent which would compel the Germans to reduce their air-strength in the East unless they were prepared to see the whole of their fighter force in the West destroyed. We should welcome any sound plan for giving further help to Russia this year, but a landing which resulted in a fiasco would not benefit Russia or the Allied cause as a whole.

Molotov then proceeded to Washington, where he arrived on 29th May.<sup>1</sup> In a conference next day with the President, at which Marshall and King were present, he repeated his question whether the Western Allies could undertake such offensive action in 1942 as would draw off forty German divisions. If so, the war would be decided in 1942; if not, the Soviets would fight on alone. He had not, he said, received any positive answer in London, but the Prime Minister had invited him to pass through London on his way home, and had promised him a more concrete answer then. 'The President then put to General Marshall the query whether developments were clear enough so that we could say to Mr. Stalin that we are preparing a Second Front. "Yes", replied the General. The President then authorized Mr. Molotov to inform Mr. Stalin that we expect the formation of a Second Front this year.' General Marshall explained however that while we had the troops, 'all adequately trained', and the munitions, 'the difficulties lay in transport'.

On the 31st the President discussed with Hopkins, Marshall and King the final statement he was to make to Molotov. He was eager to encourage the Russians by saying something specific, but was persuaded not to mention August as the date for opening the Second Front. At his last meeting with Molotov, on 1st June, he repeated that he expected to set up a Second Front in 1942. The official statement (issued in Washington and London on 11th June) ran: 'In the course of the conversations full understanding was reached with regard to the urgent tasks of creating a Second Front in Europe in 1942.' This Russian draft was accepted by the President in spite of Marshall's plea that 1942 should not be mentioned.<sup>2</sup> Mr. Roosevelt's insistence was to cause the Allies no small embarrassment.

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<sup>1</sup> See Sherwood, pp. 559 ff.

<sup>2</sup> From the record of Professor S. H. Cross, who was present as interpreter. See Sherwood, pp. 565, 575, 581-2; also *Foreign Relations of the U.S., 1942*, III, 577-83.

Although it was admitted that the major share in a cross-Channel operation in 1942 must fall to the British, they were not consulted as to this statement, and the first they knew of it was from Molotov on his return from the United States. This was the more surprising in that on 28th May, before Molotov arrived in Washington, the Prime Minister had mentioned to the President 'the difficulties of 1942'.

At a meeting on 9th June, at which the Prime Minister and Messrs. Attlee and Eden were present, Molotov 'asked the British Government to consider the formation of a Second Front in 1942'. His own government, he said, had agreed to consider a reduction in the tonnages of supplies under the Protocol (this was an American suggestion) if that would make such an operation more possible. The President, he added, had expressed his readiness to risk the sacrifice of 100,000 to 120,000 men in the first instance 'even though that might lead to a second Dunkirk'; but he himself (Molotov) 'thought a mere six to ten divisions would be ineffective'.

'In regard to the question of the Second Front', the Prime Minister is recorded to have said that 'it was very important that the Soviet Government should know exactly where they stood. . . . Actually at the present time all preparations were being made to attempt to land about six divisions in France in the autumn of this year. . . . But whether it were to be actually attempted or not must depend on the situation when the time came. . . . It was not a question of providing large vessels such as those used in the Russian convoys, but of special landing craft. . . . Therefore he did not see how the President's proposal to cut Russian tonnage requirements would help towards the solution of the problem involved in effecting a landing on a highly fortified strip of coast. . . . While all preparations were going forward for an attempted landing on this scale, he must not be taken as promising that when the time came the force would actually be put ashore. . . . His Majesty's Government were also studying the possibility of undertaking an operation in the Far North, in the Petsamo region, if that would be of any interest to the Soviet Government'. . . . So much for 1942. But, 'as M. Molotov knew, British and American armies were fully resolved to invade the Continent in 1943 to the strength perhaps of forty or fifty divisions, which would increase subsequently to the limit of possibility'. Mr. Churchill 'quite understood that there was a danger point in 1942 and that Germany might be stronger in the West in 1943. Therefore he would be very glad if it were possible to do in 1942 what was planned to do in 1943'.

Molotov thanked him for his statement as to the possibility of landing six divisions this year and of an operation in the North. The Russians would welcome the latter but it would not be the equivalent of a real second front in 1942.

In order to make the British position absolutely clear, the Prime

Minister on the following evening (10th June) handed an *aide mémoire*<sup>1</sup> containing the following paragraphs to Molotov, by whom, he told the Cabinet, it had been well received:

'We are making preparations for a landing on the Continent in August or September 1942. As already explained, the main limiting factor to the size of the landing force is the availability of special landing-craft. Clearly, however, it would not further either the Russian cause or that of the Allies as a whole if, for the sake of action at any price, we embarked on some operation which ended in disaster and gave the enemy an opportunity for glorification at our discomfiture. It is impossible to say in advance whether the situation will be such as to make this operation feasible when the time comes. We can therefore give no promise in the matter, but, provided that it appears sound and sensible, we shall not hesitate to put our plans into effect.'

At the Cabinet on 11th June at which the Prime Minister reported his discussions with Molotov it was generally agreed that we should not attempt any major landing on the Continent in 1942 unless we intended to stay there and that all plans and preparations for such a landing 'should be pressed forward with the greatest vigour, on the understanding that the operation should not be launched except in conditions which held out a good prospect of success'. This decision was to prove of the highest importance.

On the same day, in announcing in the House of Commons the conclusion of the treaty,<sup>2</sup> the Foreign Secretary quoted without comment the communiqué drafted by Molotov and agreed to by the President. It would indeed have been impossible to give any explanation without either providing the enemy with valuable information or dissociating ourselves in some way from the Americans, which was obviously undesirable. Making a virtue of necessity Eden had pointed out to Molotov that the imprecise statement would be useful in keeping the enemy guessing. But it had evident disadvantages which were promptly to appear.

Our Ambassador in Russia, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, reported that the signing of the treaty had greatly improved both popular and official feelings towards Great Britain. But, in spite of the clear warning conveyed by the Prime Minister to Molotov both in conversation and in writing, the Russians, said the Ambassador, were assuming that a second front would be opened that year and took the line that they had received a pledge binding both the United States and Great Britain. On instructions from the Foreign Office he reminded Molotov on 4th July of the guarded wording of Mr. Churchill's *aide mémoire*; Molotov had replied that the British attitude

<sup>1</sup> Printed in full in Appendix IVa.

<sup>2</sup> *H. of C. Debates*, 11th June, Vol. 380, column 1352. See Appendix IVb.



had been made clear to him and the Soviet Government 'understood it well'. It was out of the question, however, that the Ambassador should contradict the Russian assertions publicly, and so the Russian people might sincerely believe that a precise obligation had been accepted. But the Soviet government had no excuse. No doubt their endorsement of the popular belief encouraged the spirit of resistance at times when things were going badly at the front, and the allegation could be useful as an additional reproach when relations with the Allies became strained again over the intermission of the Arctic convoys.

Unfortunately the Prime Minister had yet another disappointment to announce in his message to Stalin of 17th July. The *aide mémoire* of 10th June presented to Molotov had suggested the dispatch of six R.A.F. squadrons (four fighter and two fighter-bomber) to Murmansk in order to release Russian squadrons for employment elsewhere, or a revival of the Petsamo project. Were the Russians interested? No answer was received until the 20th, when, after a reminder from Mr. Churchill, Stalin thanked him for the 'promise' to send six squadrons and asked when they would arrive. As to the suggestion of joint operations in the far north, Stalin liked the idea but asked whether British naval and land forces were to take part, and, if so, on what scale.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister's suggestion of such operations had caused some embarrassment to the Chiefs of Staff. It will be remembered that the Petsamo project had been raised by Stalin with Mr. Eden in December and soon dropped by the Russians for reasons which the British never understood. The British had not then been asked to supply land-forces. But the Prime Minister had long had in mind a more ambitious scheme in the far north, to which he always remained faithful, though he could never win for it any enthusiasm on the part of his military advisers.<sup>2</sup> He mentioned it to the President at the end of May as a landing in the north of Norway which seemed 'necessary to ensure the flow of our supplies next year to Russia'. It would involve the capture of the airfields used by the Germans, and 'if the going was good', he told the Chiefs of Staff, 'we could advance gradually southward, unrolling the Nazi map of Europe from the top'. The operation would be carried out in the first instance independently of the Russians. Study by the Joint Planners and the Chiefs of Staff convinced them that a much larger force than the Prime Minister had thought would be needed and the C.I.G.S.

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<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Correspondence*, I, 51.

<sup>2</sup> For 'Jupiter' see note at end of Chap. xxvii.

considered the whole idea thoroughly unsound.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless at a meeting with the Prime Minister on 8th June, when prospects of 'Sledgehammer' were fading, they agreed to study it further; it was at this meeting that the offer of six squadrons to the Russians was approved. The aircraft were to be dispatched by the northern sea-route, but the unhappy fate of P.Q. 17 caused the cancellation of the next convoy, in which they were to have sailed, and the suspension of later ones. So the Prime Minister had to explain to Stalin that the 'obstacles to sending further convoys at the present time equally prevent our sending land forces and air forces for operations in Northern Norway.'<sup>2</sup> He suggested, however, that 'our officers should forthwith consider together what combined operations may be possible in or after October, when there is a reasonable amount of darkness'.

To this suggestion Stalin returned no answer. But the Soviet Ambassador had already informed the Foreign Office (on 18th July) that 'in view of the difficult situation on the Soviet-German front Soviet troops are in no position to take an active part in the operation in the region of Murmansk or Kirkenes'.

Stalin's exasperation, as was said above, is understandable. After the spring thaw fighting had begun again in the south. By the end of May the Germans had conquered all the Crimea except the fortress of Sevastopol, which held out until 1st July, and had repulsed Timoshenko's offensive directed towards Kharkov. In June they carried out with success limited advances in that region, prior to launching their main offensive on 28th June. By 23rd July, the date of Stalin's message, Army Group B under General von Weichs had conquered most of the country on the right bank of the Don from Voronezh to its mouth, including nearly the whole of the Donetz basin, and were pushing forward in a south-easterly direction. On that day, the 23rd, Rostov fell, but the Germans failed to encircle the large numbers of Russian troops which they had hoped to. Their captures in all these operations were however very large. By the middle of the month their thoughts were already turning to Stalingrad and they knew that the city would be obstinately defended.<sup>3</sup>

On the same day, 23rd July, claiming that in the course of a campaign of little more than three weeks the far-reaching objectives which he set for the southern wing on the Eastern front had to all intents and purposes been attained, Hitler issued a fresh directive.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Bryant, p. 340.

<sup>2</sup> *Soviet Correspondence*, I, 54. The need to send this message was the more regrettable in that Stalin had recently agreed that 40 American bombers on their way to Russia might be diverted to Egypt. *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>3</sup> *Halder's Diary*, 16.7, on which day he speaks of 'the forthcoming battle of Stalingrad'

<sup>4</sup> *Fuehrer Directive 45* of 23.7.

After destroying the enemy forces south of the Don, Army Group A under Field-Marshal List was to capture the entire east coast of the Black Sea; another force was to cross the River Kuban and occupy the plateau of Maikop and Armavir, while a third was to capture the Grozny area. Subsequently the far more important Baku oilfields were to be captured by an advance along the Caspian coast. 'Because of the decisive importance of the petroleum production of the Caucasus for the continuation of the war,' the German Air Force was not to attack the production centres and tank installations there, or the trans-shipment ports in the Black Sea, unless this was absolutely necessary for the success of the Army's operations.<sup>1</sup>

Compared with these vast movements, executed or in prospect, the British offers of assistance to the Russians could not seem other than paltry. But the German advance towards the Caucasus implied also a serious threat to the British position in the Middle East. To this theatre we must now return.

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<sup>1</sup> On this same day, 23rd July, Halder speaks of 'a fit of insane rage' on Hitler's part, in which he violently attacks the General Staff. 'The situation is getting more and more intolerable. . . .'

## CHAPTER XXVI

### GAZALA – TOBRUK – ALAMEIN

ROMMEL'S *riposte* in January had been an inspired improvisation. His offensive in May had been long planned and had secured priority over the assault on Malta.<sup>1</sup>

He opened his attack punctually on the evening of 26th May. He had at his disposal two German armoured divisions and one motorized, and two light infantry regiments; one Italian armoured division, one motorized and four non-motorized;<sup>2</sup> some 320 German and some 240 Italian tanks. Against him Ritchie had, in his two Corps (13th and 30th), two armoured divisions (1st and 7th, comprising three armoured brigade groups besides three motor brigades or brigade groups and two infantry brigade groups), two Army tank brigades, and three infantry divisions (50th, 1st and 2nd South African), with a further infantry division (5th Indian) directly under Army command. The British armour consisted of 575 cruiser and light tanks (167 Grants) and 276 infantry tanks, with 145 cruisers (75 Grants) of the 1st Armoured Brigade under orders to join.<sup>3</sup> In the air the enemy had in North Africa 497 serviceable aircraft (312 German); the British Desert Air Force about 190, not counting reinforcements available at no great distance.<sup>4</sup>

The intricate story of the Battle of Gazala, which by the end of June had Rommel's forces pressing against the Alamein defences sixty miles from Alexandria, has been fully told by General Playfair.

The British prepared position extended some 45 miles from Gazala on the coast to Bir Hacheim inland; it consisted of a series of manned 'boxes', at unequal intervals from one another, covered by a belt of minefields. The port of Tobruk lay another 40 miles to the east of Gazala.

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xviii, pp. 443.

<sup>2</sup> 15th and 21st Panzer, 90th Light; 15th Light Infantry Brigade; Ariete, Trieste, Pavia, Brescia, Trento, Sabratha.

<sup>3</sup> Comparison of respective tank strengths needs caution. Not only were numbers being continually altered by casualties and by their repair or replacement from reserve, but numbers alone mean little. What mattered was superiority in manoeuvrability, reliability, armour, range and penetration of guns and anti-tank guns. For detailed analysis see Playfair, III, 214-15, 220, App. 8. See also *Crisis in the Desert* (S. African Official History, 1952), pp. 10-13; Liddell Hart, *The Tanks* (1959), II, 154-7. Rommel (*Rommel Papers*, p. 245) writes: 'It had repeatedly been the superiority of certain German weapons over the British equivalents that had been our salvation.'

<sup>4</sup> The rest of the R.A.F. in the Middle East (not under Coningham's command) amounted to 'some 739 serviceable aircraft'. The Axis had about 1000 (215 German) serviceable aircraft scattered about the Mediterranean, excluding Libya and the mainland of Italy. Playfair, III, 220-1.

During the night of 26th/27th May Rommel led his mobile forces round the southern flank of the British position, hoping to destroy the British armour, surround and isolate the other British formations by attacks from east and west, and capture Tobruk within four days. These hopes were not fulfilled. Both sides lost heavily in tanks; by the night of the 29th the German armour, short of ammunition and fuel, was stranded and pinned against the eastern side of the minefields. But now the tide turned. The British lost their opportunity and Rommel soon regained the initiative, having opened passages through the minefield for his supply columns.

A British attack on 5th June on the German armour in 'the Cauldron' failed with heavy loss, largely owing to a lack of co-ordination of the command. On the night of the 10th/11th the Free French garrison of Bir Hacheim were forced to withdraw after several days' gallant defence. The 12th and 13th saw the decisive defeat of the British armour in the area round the track-junction known as 'Knightsbridge', north-east of the Cauldron. The three British armoured brigades, whose tank strength on the morning of the 12th was just over 200 (83 Grants, 59 Crusaders, 64 Stuarts), had lost half their tanks by noon on the 13th and were yet further seriously reduced by nightfall.<sup>1</sup> Our forward bases were now in danger and stores were removed from Belhamed (about 20 miles south-east of Tobruk) with its million and a half gallons of motor-fuel.<sup>2</sup> There was danger also to the two divisions (50th and 1st South African) of General Gott's 13th Corps holding their positions from Gazala southwards. Ritchie, with Auchinleck's approval, had decided on the evening of the 12th not to withdraw them, but on the morning of the 14th he ordered Gott to bring them back into Army Reserve, which as it turned out meant a retirement to the Egyptian frontier. Auchinleck sanctioned this decision, but insisted that Eighth Army must hold positions west and south of Tobruk, and it was his intention that the two withdrawn divisions should be available for this purpose.<sup>3</sup>

Another difficult decision was now involved, with regard to Tobruk, then garrisoned by 2nd South African Division. Apart from the vast stores which it contained, Tobruk was valuable as a port so long as it could be protected from the air. It was also valuable as a

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<sup>1</sup> See Playfair, III, 240-3; Liddell Hart, *op. cit.*, II, 178-80.

<sup>2</sup> Playfair, III, 245 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 1st S. African Division and part of 50th retired along the coast, while the rest of 50th (less one brigade which had been lost after stubborn fighting in the Cauldron) broke through the Italian position and reached the frontier by a circuitous route through the desert.

fortress threatening the flank of a force advancing against Egypt: it would have to be either captured or masked. But its importance had been inflated sentimentally by its long siege in 1941 and its connexion with Dominion forces, then Australian and now South African.

Auchinleck had laid down in February that Eighth Army was to retain the use of Tobruk as long as possible, but was not to hold it if in danger of investment.<sup>1</sup> Now it was clearly in danger of investment and a decision was called for. The Commander-in-Chief was still determined that the fortress must not be invested, which implied that in the last resort it should be evacuated after the destruction of such stores as could not be removed. Ritchie, less confident of his ability to keep the enemy away from Tobruk, proposed 'to fight alongside Tobruk and to prevent it being invested' but, if he failed, 'to allow Tobruk to be invested rather than to order the garrison to fight its way out in difficult circumstances'. He was afraid that Rommel by a rapid advance might block the eastern exits.

The Commander-in-Chief was now receiving anxious messages from London. Up to the end of May reports from Cairo had sounded satisfactory. As the days passed the delay was disappointing, but as late as 11th June the Prime Minister complimented Ritchie on 'his dogged and resolute fighting'. 'Although, of course, one hopes for success by manœuvre or counter-stroke, nevertheless we have no reason to fear a prolonged *bataille d'usure*. This must wear down Rommel worse than Ritchie because of our superior communications.' Two days earlier he had told Auchinleck that he might expect to receive the 8th Armoured and 44th Infantry Divisions from home, then rounding Africa, unless Australia were threatened with serious invasion, which seemed very unlikely in view of the Japanese losses in the Coral Sea and Midway battles. On 14th June, however, after the evacuation of Bir Hacheim and the defeat of our armour at Knightsbridge, the Prime Minister was perturbed to hear that the two divisions in the Gazala position were being withdrawn; he presumed there was no question in any case of giving up Tobruk, and added that the C.I.G.S. agreed with him. Tobruk had not so far been mentioned from Cairo, but Auchinleck next day (15th) assured Mr. Churchill that although he did not intend that Eighth Army should be besieged there, he had no intention whatever of giving up Tobruk. The Prime Minister was evidently not altogether reassured by this reply and signalled on the same day: 'We are glad to have your assurance that you have no intention of giving up Tobruk. War Cabinet interpret . . . your telegram to mean that if the need arises, General Ritchie would leave as many troops in Tobruk as are

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<sup>1</sup> See above, Chap. xviii, p. 440.

necessary to hold the place for certain.' There is no mention of Tobruk in the minutes of the War Cabinet meeting on Monday, 15th June, at which the Chiefs of Staff were present, but no doubt the Prime Minister expressed the sense of his colleagues and advisers. Auchinleck took refuge in a compromise. He signalled on the 16th to Ritchie: 'Although I have made it clear to you Tobruk must not be invested, I realize that its garrison may be isolated for short periods until our counter-offensive can be launched.' And to the Prime Minister: 'War Cabinet interpretation is correct. General Ritchie is putting into Tobruk what he considers an adequate force to hold it, even should it become temporarily isolated by enemy.' Auchinleck still hoped of course that this would not occur, but that it would be possible to hold the enemy away from the eastern approaches to the fortress. He signalled to the C.I.G.S. on the 19th, however, that Tobruk was temporarily isolated but was strongly held by 2nd South African Division with two other brigade groups, some fifty infantry tanks and artillery and supplies, it was believed, for eighty days; Ritchie and Gott both had great confidence in the commander's ability to carry out his task.

In the light of this exchange of signals one can understand Mr. Churchill's dismay when in discussion with President Roosevelt at the White House on 21st June the news was broken to him that Tobruk had fallen.<sup>1</sup> This, he said, was one of the heaviest blows he had received during the war. Apart from the shattering effect on Commonwealth prestige it involved the loss of some 33,000 men taken prisoner and huge quantities of stores.

Rommel, after his defeat of our armour in the Knightsbridge area, had proceeded to mop up our various strong-points west and south of Tobruk, and now, supported by the concentrated onslaught of 150 bombers, led the Panzer divisions to a vigorous assault on the fortress from the south-east. The Desert Air Force had been compelled to abandon their airfields within range, and Ritchie could do nothing to help.

The reasons for the disaster, says General Playfair, are plain enough. In view of the Middle East decision in February not to accept a second siege the defences had not been properly kept in repair. Neither Auchinleck nor Ritchie realized the extent of the defeat of their armour and their consequent inability to hold up the onrush of Rommel's victorious columns. The local commander was inexperienced and any plans that had been made for resisting a full-scale attack from an unexpected quarter miscarried. Neither Auchinleck nor Ritchie appears to have, at this time, contemplated

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<sup>1</sup> See p. 628 below; Churchill, IV, 343.

the evacuation of the fortress, so it is unlikely that the intervention from London affected the result.<sup>1</sup>

The long battle had evidently been sadly mismanaged. After the Knightsbridge defeat the Minister of State in Cairo, Mr. Casey, reported to the Prime Minister that, while he had all possible confidence in the Commander-in-Chief himself as regards his leadership and the way he was conducting the battle, he only wished that he could be in two places at once—in Cairo and directing the Eighth Army's battle in person. He had even thought that it would be a good thing that Auchinleck should go forward and do so. This was in line with the Prime Minister's own suggestion to Auchinleck just before the battle started, but the General for the present remained unpersuaded.

The abortive British offensive had been closely related in the minds of the Prime Minister and Chiefs of Staff to the passage of supplies to Malta. Ever since the glorious failure of the March convoy they had been racking their brains as to how this was to be brought about. It might well have been supposed that our inability to recover the Benghazi and Derna airfields had sealed the island's fate. Even to fly-in Spitfires had required special naval operations from Gibraltar. But in mid-June an ambitious dual operation was carried out, in which convoys were sailed simultaneously from Gibraltar ('Harpoon') and Alexandria ('Vigorous'). Seventeen merchant ships sailed in the two convoys, but only two—from the west—reached Malta, carrying 15,000 tons of stores; these, it was calculated, should, if the harvest was good, enable the island to hold out, so far as food was concerned, until the end of September. It was accordingly decided not to attempt to run a convoy in July.<sup>2</sup>

The enemy's high command also, and especially the Italians, had Malta in mind. According to *Comando Supremo's* directive of 5th May operations in Africa were to end by 20th June, and even if Tobruk were taken the advance was not to proceed beyond Sollum. Operation 'Herkules' against Malta was to follow early in July. Kesselring however, at Rome on 10th June, in view of Rommel's success so far, obtained for him an extension of time which would involve the postponement of the Malta operation for three or four weeks, viz. until the first half of August. Mussolini, anxious as to the naval shortage of fuel-oil, asked that it should not be delayed later than August; he wrote that otherwise it could not take place that year, and he appealed to Hitler on this point.

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<sup>1</sup> For the Tobruk episode see Playfair, III, 245-9 and Chap. xi; *Crisis in the Desert* Chaps. viii-xi; Connell, Chap. xx; Kennedy, *The Business of War*, pp. 242-5.

<sup>2</sup> See Playfair, III, Chap. xiii; Roskill, II, Chap. II.



The German Naval Staff were also pressing: from the point of view of strategy they considered the occupation of Malta 'an absolute necessity', and the conditions might never again be so favourable.<sup>1</sup> But Hitler remained sceptical: he distrusted Italian efficiency, and German forces were tied down on the Eastern front. And now Rommel's easy capture of Tobruk offered a dazzling alternative. Rommel himself, who had just been promoted Field-Marshal, was urging that he should be allowed to defeat the enemy in position at Sollum and continue the pursuit deep into Egypt. His main reason, he has written, was to destroy 'the tattered remnants of the Eighth Army' before they had been strongly reinforced from the Middle East, in which case 'the British would have nothing left in Egypt capable of opposing our advance to Alexandria and the Suez Canal'.<sup>2</sup> On the same day, 23rd June, Hitler wrote to Mussolini declaring that this was a historic moment which might alter the whole course of the war. In 1941, he said, the British, though they were almost within sight (*sic*) of Tripoli, had withdrawn forces for Greece instead of pushing ahead. This had enabled the Germans and Italians to reconquer Cyrenaica, and they must not now make the same mistake as the British. If on the other hand the enemy was given no respite he might even be forced to evacuate Egypt, with consequences of world-wide significance. The German offensive in the East, which was being prepared by opening the route through Sevastopol, would help to bring about the downfall of the whole eastern fabric of the British Empire.

Mussolini agreed that this was the historic moment for the conquest of Egypt but insisted that air reinforcements must be sent to Sicily in order to neutralize Malta which was again taking toll of convoys to Africa. Kesselring at a conference at Derna on the 25th gave practical reasons for not advancing beyond El Alamein; Cavallero said that it would be useless to proceed into Egypt unless Malta was again under pressure, to which Kesselring replied that the Axis was not strong enough to carry out the two operations at the same time. At a further conference next day (26th) Rommel announced that the army was preparing to attack the Mersa Matruh-Siwa line that afternoon and that the offensive would be continued either to Alexandria or via Cairo to the Suez Canal; if his tanks succeeded in breaking through the enemy positions that afternoon they should be in Cairo or Alexandria by the 30th. The upshot of these discussions was that Mussolini ordered that the main body of the Axis forces should first occupy the pass between the Arab Gulf and the Quattara Depression (*viz.* the Alamein position) and that

<sup>1</sup> *F.N.C.* 17th June.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Eighth Army was now extremely weak, with a core of only two fresh infantry divisions' (presumably New Zealand and 10th Indian Divisions), *Rommel Papers*, p. 233.

when the enemy's resistance had been broken the advance should be continued to reach the Suez Canal. So the fateful decision was taken which saved Malta from a repetition of her April ordeal. Mussolini left for Africa on the 29th, prepared for a triumphal entry into Cairo; on 2nd July he telegraphed instructions to Rome concerning the future government of Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Success and Hitler had persuaded him to agree to the postponement of '*Herkules*', but Cavallero, Kesselring and von Rintelen were all of opinion that these far-reaching schemes for advance into the Delta were a mistake so long as the supply position was so precarious.

Mr. Churchill was always at his best when things looked really bad and on the 22nd he signalled to Auchinleck that though 'naturally disconcerted' by news which might well put us back to where we were eighteen months ago he did not feel despondent about the defence of the Delta. He hoped no one would be unduly impressed by the spectacular blows which the enemy had struck at us. The main thing now was for the Commander-in-Chief to inspire all his forces with 'an intense will to resist and strive and not to accept the freak decisions produced by Rommel's handful of heavy armour'. The United States authorities were promising the utmost help, and the President had already ordered the 2nd United States Armoured Division to leave for Suez; this generous offer was a few days later at General Marshall's suggestion converted into the still more acceptable offer of 300 Sherman tanks and 100 self-propelled guns, which should arrive before the end of August. Help in the air was also forthcoming. As emergency measures the President allowed the retention in Egypt of the 'Halpro' force of heavy bombers intended to bomb the Rumanian oilfields before proceeding to China and the diversion to Egypt of a small force of heavy bombers in India recently transferred to Stilwell's command. Moreover three Groups in the United States—one heavy bomber, one medium bomber and one fighter—and a light bomber squadron were to reinforce the Middle East as soon as possible.<sup>2</sup>

In London the Cabinet met on Sunday night, 21st June, with Mr. Attlee in the chair, to consider the situation in the Middle East in the light of the news of the fall of Tobruk received that day. They were concerned with two issues: to approve the proposal of the Middle East Defence Committee that Eighth Army should fight only a delaying action at the Egyptian frontier (Sollum) and put up its main resistance at Mersa Matruh 125 miles farther east, and to consider an appeal for reinforcements. The Middle East's proposal rested on our weakness in armour, without which the frontier defences were untenable, whereas a further retreat would lengthen the enemy's

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<sup>1</sup> *Ciano Diaries*.

<sup>2</sup> Matloff and Snell, pp. 246-9.

communications and give more time for our reinforcements to arrive. The Cabinet somewhat reluctantly approved the proposal, while expressing their view that the frontier position should be held as long as possible. The need for reinforcements, especially for heavy bombers from the United States, was urged in a signal from Mr. Casey, who had more than once before emphasized this point; we also required more submarines in the Mediterranean. The Chief of the Air Staff and the First Sea Lord explained the difficulties in meeting these requests, but it was agreed to divert to the Middle East from India 127 tanks and 24 Hurricanes which could arrive in the first half of July.

The event soon showed that so far from being able to stop the enemy on the frontier we could not stop him at Mersa Matruh either, where Auchinleck had looked forward on the 23rd to fighting 'a decisive battle . . . under many advantages for us'. Things were evidently going very wrong. Characteristically taking full responsibility himself for all that had happened, he suggested to the C.I.G.S., then in Washington, that he should be relieved of his command.<sup>1</sup> 'For this theatre,' he said, 'originality is essential and a change is quite probably desirable on this account alone, apart from all other considerations such as loss of influence due to lack of success, absence of luck, and all the other things which affect the morale of an army. It occurred to me that you might want to use Alexander who is due here in a day or two [from India].'

His suggestion was not accepted, but his decision on the 25th to take over command of Eighth Army himself from General Ritchie was approved by the War Cabinet, by the Prime Minister and by the C.I.G.S., all of whom expressed their full confidence in him. This was perhaps an overstatement, but undoubtedly the change gave widespread satisfaction, though it laid on Auchinleck a double burden of responsibility. The temporary appointment of Ritchie in the crisis of November 1941 was justifiable, but it would have been natural and fairer to Ritchie, when the front was stabilized in February, to entrust the command to an officer with greater experience. As it was, Auchinleck had thought it necessary to be constantly advising and supervising Ritchie. Unfortunately the change was now made too late to prevent the disorganized retreat of the army, but not too late for the enemy to be held at the last ditch.

Auchinleck was at pains to explain to the Prime Minister the factors which counted in desert warfare. 'Infantry,' he said, 'cannot win battles in the desert so long as the enemy has superiority in armour. Guns and armour and just enough infantry to give them and their supply organizations local protection are what is needed . . . we cannot have too many guns or too many tanks, and the tanks must

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<sup>1</sup> Connell, pp. 608-9, 23rd June.

be American medium tanks which can stand up to German tanks, and not Crusaders with only 2-pounder guns in them, though Crusaders with 6-pounder guns should be all right.' Moreover, he said, 'we have learnt by experience that troops fresh from United Kingdom are a liability rather than an asset in desert fighting until they have had the requisite training'. We are 'trying to train an army and use it on the battlefield at the same time'. This applied to commanders, for we were still 'an amateur army fighting professionals'.

Throughout these critical days the work of our air forces in attacking the enemy's advancing columns was invaluable. The Minister of State reported that Tedder, who was 'a tower of strength and common sense', had also gone forward on the 25th to give personal encouragement to the officers and men of the Desert Air Force, and the Air Marshal received a message of appreciation from the War Cabinet. Tedder replied on the 26th that Air Vice-Marshal Coningham's force had for the past 36 hours put forth an effort which is unique.<sup>1</sup>

On taking over command from Ritchie, Auchinleck was determined at all costs 'to keep Eighth Army in being'. He reversed the decision to make a final stand at Matruh and decided to hold the enemy at El Alamein 120 miles farther east, where the existence of the impassable Quattara Depression 38 miles from the coast created a position whose flanks could not be turned. His decision was a wise one, for despite the arrival of the fresh New Zealand Division (from Syria) at Matruh the enemy broke through there after hard fighting on the 26th, 27th and 28th. By the 30th the Eighth Army was back at El Alamein.

At this most anxious moment, when the fate of Egypt hung in the balance, the Prime Minister was called upon to fight a battle of his own on the home front. Sir John Wardlaw-Milne, chairman of the House of Commons Select Committee on National Expenditure and of the Conservative Foreign Affairs Committee, had tabled, on 25th June, a motion of no confidence in the central direction of the war. He had, it is fair to say, offered to postpone his motion, but Mr. Churchill insisted that in order to avoid possible misunderstandings abroad the issue must be settled at once. On the same two days, 1st and 2nd July, the Lords likewise debated a motion calling attention to the conduct of the war with special reference to events in North Africa and in the Mediterranean.

The people, it was said by a recent member of the War Cabinet, had received the news of the fall of Tobruk with bewilderment and bitter disappointment. They had never felt so profound a shock since

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Rommel Papers*, p. 245; 'continuous round-the-clock bombing by the R.A.F.'

the dark days of Dunkirk. Things had gone wrong when they ought not to have gone wrong. Mr. Churchill himself admitted 'a recession of our hopes and prospects in the Middle East and in the Mediterranean unequalled since the Fall of France'.

The speakers pressed for an explanation of our recent disasters. Why was our Army not better armed and equipped with guns and tanks? Why had we no dive bombers? Why no transport aircraft? Who was responsible for the decision to hold Tobruk and who for the decision to surrender it? Did not the whole course of events show that Mr. Churchill was taking too much upon himself? The cry was again raised for a super-chief of staffs, and much of the argument of the earlier debates was repeated.<sup>1</sup> A novel suggestion, however, put forward by the mover of the resolution, was that a royal duke should be appointed Commander-in-Chief of the Army.<sup>2</sup>

Captain Lyttelton in the Commons and Lord Beaverbrook in the Lords, defending the government, told the story of gun and tank production. The bareness of the country in June 1940 had forced us to concentrate on the most urgent needs. 'There come times in war,' said Captain Lyttelton, 'when we cannot afford to interrupt the production of serviceable but inferior weapons in order to work out at leisure the prototypes and production of weapons which, when they come into the hands of the troops, would surpass those in the hands of the enemy.' 'Urgency and crisis,' he said, 'are the foes of reliability and perfect mechanical design.'

Taking a broad view, Mr. Churchill claimed that the strength and prospects of the United Nations had greatly improved since the turn of the year. The outstanding feature was the steady resistance of Russia, coupled with the fact that so far Hitler had opened no major offensive against her.<sup>3</sup> The second feature of importance was the growth of Allied air-power. Moreover India and Ceylon were now strongly defended and, thanks to the brilliant American naval victories, a mass invasion of Australia was highly improbable. The duty of the House, he declared, was to sustain the government or change it. Much harm had been done abroad by the two-days debate in May. A decision was called for. He had no intention of surrendering the part he played in the general conduct and supervision of the war. He again summarized the existing system, referring without comment to the machinery of 'the Combined General Staff'—thus confidently assuming that the organ so often asked for already existed.<sup>4</sup> In no circumstances would he agree to be stripped of his

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xvii above.

<sup>2</sup> See *H. of C. Debates*, Vol. 381, column 228.

<sup>3</sup> The German summer offensive had actually started on 28th June.

<sup>4</sup> It is clear from the context that Mr. Churchill was not referring to the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

responsibilities for Defence to make way for some military figure or other unnamed personage to assume the general conduct of the war and dominate the government by threats of resignation. He called upon the House to reduce the assailants of the administration to 'contemptible proportions' by their votes and show the world that there was 'a strong solid Government in Britain'.

His critics succeeded in raising 25 votes against 475 for the Government. There had in fact been something unreal, almost absurd, about the debate from the beginning, since, whereas the mover of the resolution demanded that Mr. Churchill's powers should be restricted, the seconder, Sir Roger Keyes, complained that the Prime Minister was obstructed by the Chiefs of Staff, and especially by the First Sea Lord, and ought to have a freer hand. The Admiral said that it would be 'a deplorable disaster if the Prime Minister had to go', though this would have been the inevitable result if the motion had been carried.

For some days it was not certain that even the Alamein position would hold. The 50th and 10th Indian Divisions had been withdrawn to the Delta to reorganize and refit after fighting their way out from Matruh. Our armour was very weak, though numerically superior to the enemy's, and the rest of the troops engaged in the long retreat were bewildered; the breaking up of formations into small battle-groups had increased their disorganization. The 9th Australian Division, though now in Egypt, had not yet arrived at the front and 8th Armoured Division was still on the sea.<sup>1</sup>

Had Rommel been able to mount a strong attack in the first days of July he would no doubt have succeeded in forcing his way through to the Delta, but he too had suffered heavy casualties and his troops were exhausted. Since Gazala he had been reinforced by the Italian *Littorio* Armoured Division, but his formations were now far below strength.<sup>2</sup> At Matruh he had only 60 tanks. In spite of the loot he had secured at Tobruk his ever-lengthening line of communication and the constant interference of the Royal Air Force made maintenance extremely difficult. At sea, too, revived activity in Malta after the recall of *Luftwaffe* formations to Russia was showing results in the sinking of his supply ships. Rommel also complained bitterly of the inefficiency and slackness of the Italian supply system in Rome.<sup>3</sup> His army was in fact at the end of its tether.

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<sup>1</sup> The infantry formations holding the Alamein position were the New Zealand, 1st South African and 5th Indian Divisions, and 18th Indian Brigade just arrived from Iraq. For 'battle-groups' see Playfair, III, 254, 286, and 342; Sir H. Kippenberger, *Infantry Brigadier* (O.U.P. 1949), p. 138.

<sup>2</sup> B. Liddell Hart, *The Tanks* (1959), II, 187.

<sup>3</sup> Figures in Playfair, III, 327; *Rommel Papers*, pp. 243, 266.

Nevertheless the Commanders-in-Chief in Egypt were bound to make provision for the possibility of our resistance at El Alamein giving way. In a 'most secret and personal' appreciation addressed to the C.I.G.S. on 28th June Auchinleck said that he could not resume the offensive until his armoured force had been rebuilt; his intention, with which Tedder agreed, was to keep Eighth Army in being as a mobile field-force and resist by every possible means any further attempt by the enemy to advance eastwards. Should withdrawal from Alamein be forced on us the bulk of Eighth Army would retire towards Cairo; 1st South African Division, withdrawing towards Alexandria, would join up with the Australian Division and with other forces being improvised in the Delta and constitute Delta Force. According to the direction of the enemy's further advance one of these two forces would oppose him frontally while the other would attack his flank and rear. Auchinleck himself would control both from an improvised operational headquarters outside Cairo; Eighth Army would be commanded by his Chief of the General Staff, Lieut.-General T. W. Corbett, who had been acting for him in Cairo since his replacement of Ritchie.<sup>1</sup> These provisional arrangements appear to have given rise to misconception; they led to the belief in some quarters that 'the abandonment of Egypt' was envisaged. Certainly they became too widely known. 'Some of the measures adopted at this time,' says General Playfair, 'seemed to the men in the ranks inconsistent with a firm determination to fight.'<sup>2</sup>

Alexandria being now within range of fighter-escorted day bombers, Admiral Sir Henry Harwood, who had succeeded to the Mediterranean command in May, moved the wounded *Queen Elizabeth* out of harm's way and most of his ships sailed for Port Said or Haifa. The Admiralty told him that they were not prepared to let his cruisers, fleet destroyers and submarines be sent out of the Mediterranean without their own approval.

What might have turned out to be an awkward affair arose with regard to the squadron of French warships under Admiral Godfroy immobilized in Alexandria harbour since June 1940. The British government were determined that should we be forced to evacuate the port the French ships should neither remain there nor be sailed, as their Admiral wished, to Bizerta where likewise they would be liable to be seized by the enemy. Admiral Godfroy on the other hand refused to sail his ships through the Canal to an American port

<sup>1</sup> General Corbett, like Auchinleck himself an Indian army officer, lately commanding a corps in Iraq, had in February replaced Lt.-General Arthur Smith as C.G.S. Middle East.

<sup>2</sup> Playfair, III, 333-4; see also Kippenberger, *op. cit.*, p. 139; Connell, pp. 621 ff. where Auchinleck's Appreciation is printed. Such words as 'envisaged' or 'contemplated' can easily cause misunderstanding.

without orders from Vichy. Fortunately it was never found necessary for the Army to withdraw from Alexandria.<sup>1</sup>

The Minister of State, nevertheless, on the 28th thought that the Prime Minister should realize that the enemy's reaching the Delta was 'not an impossibility'. It was Auchinleck's intention, of course, to fight him all the way back to the Delta and in the Delta, and preparations were being pushed forward. Orders had been issued that every man capable of fighting should be mobilized. Mr. Churchill commended this attitude in a signal reminiscent of the great days of 1940. 'Everybody in uniform must fight exactly as they would if Kent or Sussex were invaded. Tank-hunting parties with sticky bombs and bombards, defence to the death of every fortified area or strong building, making every post a winning-post and every ditch a last ditch. This is the spirit you have got to inculcate. No general evacuation, no playing for safety. Egypt must be held at all costs.'<sup>2</sup>

Alan Moorehead<sup>3</sup> gives a vivid picture of Cairo in these days—civilians struggling for transport to Palestine, official secret documents being burnt, and the streets jammed with traffic. But while there was 'a great deal of tension and anxiety behind these moves', there was 'no outward panic. The astonishing thing was that the people at large took the crisis so calmly. Beyond the heavy traffic and the queues waiting round the banks there was nothing to show that the enemy might in a day or two be in the town. The Egyptians especially behaved with fatalism and patience.'

By 4th July the crisis was over. Enemy attacks made in no great strength had been repelled, and Rommel soon went back to the defensive. By mid-July he confessed that 'it had proved impossible to follow up our success in the Marmarica to final victory . . . The British had brought my formations to a halt'.<sup>4</sup> Mr. Churchill, fresh from his own victory in the House of Commons, sent an enthusiastic signal to Tedder, acclaiming 'the brilliant, supreme exertions' of the Royal Air Force. 'The days of the Battle of Britain are being repeated far from home.' He told Auchinleck too that he could not 'help liking very much the way things seem to be going'.

Even at this time Middle East Command were unable to devote their whole attention to the battle at their gates. The German summer offensive on the Eastern front was now in full career. Sevastopol had fallen on 1st July, Voronezh a few days later, and on the southern flank a freshly formed Army Group was about to start an attack aimed eventually at the Caucasus.

In a signal of 9th July the Middle East Defence Committee asked

<sup>1</sup> Playfair, III, 316; Roskill, II, 74.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 383.

<sup>3</sup> *African Trilogy* (1944), p. 355 (published by Messrs. Hamish Hamilton, Ltd).

<sup>4</sup> *Rommel Papers*, p. 254; see also p. 260.



for guidance from London in view of the situation which would arise if the campaign in the north went badly for the Russians. They reckoned that in the worst case we might have to meet a threat to Northern Persia by 15th October or, less likely, to Northern Syria and Iraq by 10th September if the enemy came through Anatolia. To meet these threats we had in those regions portions of only two infantry divisions, some partially equipped Allied contingents, and no air forces of any consequence. Ever since Japan came into the war we had in fact been relying entirely on Russia to guard our approaches to Egypt and the Persian Gulf. Assuming that our present policy of securing the Delta from the west was correct, we were quite incapable of meeting an attack from the north without large reinforcements—one armoured division and six or four infantry divisions, according as the fighting went in the Western Desert, and aircraft to raise the total in the Command to 95 squadrons. The Committee asked what our policy would be if the Russian resistance broke and we could receive no reinforcements for our northern front. Would it be better to move forces from the west and risk Egypt or continue our present policy and risk the Persian oilfields?

The Prime Minister replied rather coldly that they were only too well aware at home of the bareness of the northern front. It was quite impossible to send six or even four divisions before the end of October. If Auchinleck could defeat Rommel and drive him at least to a safe distance by the middle of September, it should be possible to strengthen the northern theatre by two divisions already in the Middle East (9th Australian and New Zealand) and one (51st) now on the way. Others could follow. But if Auchinleck failed to defeat Rommel we should continue to depend on the Russian front holding. However, there was no need to assume that it would break, or that, even if it did, any substantial enemy forces could operate in Persia as early as October; the War Office thought there might be no serious threat before the spring.

Mr. Churchill refrained from answering the Middle East's request for guidance and instructions as to the respective importance to be attached to Egypt and the Persian Gulf in the last resort.

Auchinleck said that he understood the implications of the Prime Minister's telegram, namely that unless he could destroy the German forces in the desert we stood to lose Iraq and the oil if the Russian front broke. His aim was to destroy them as far east as possible.

The initiative had indeed passed to the British for, though Mussolini waited for a fortnight longer before returning to Rome and though hard fighting continued at Alamein, the 3rd July was the turning point. Auchinleck in the next few weeks launched attack after attack, with devastating effect on the Italian formations, culminating in two all-out attempts to break through. But he had not the

necessary reserves and his infantry and armour had still not learned to work together. At the end of the month, after very heavy losses, he, like Rommel, was reduced for the present to a defensive role.<sup>1</sup>

By his determination and his imperturbability Auchinleck had once again saved the situation. He was now confidently holding a position from which a further assault from Rommel could be repelled and an Allied offensive resumed when decisive superiority in men and material had been created. But even a nation which loves to hail its disasters as triumphs could hardly look back on the campaign of the first half of 1942 with satisfaction. We ought not to have been defeated at Gazala; it ought not to have been necessary to put up a desperate defence sixty miles from Alexandria. The Eighth Army had not been welded into a cohesive force; it lacked, as has been said above, a common doctrine as to the employment of armour in battle, and co-operation between armour and infantry was so defective as to destroy mutual confidence. A commander must bear responsibility for the failures of those under him, and it is for his choice and retention of his subordinates that Auchinleck, for all his splendid qualities and his great services, has been chiefly and, it would seem, justifiably criticized.

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<sup>1</sup> For the 'Fighting in the Alamein Line', otherwise the 'First Battle of Alamein', see Playfair, III, Chap. xiv; *Crisis in the Desert*, Chaps. xv-xviii; Kippenberger, *op. cit.*, Chaps. xi-xiii; *Rommel Papers*, Chap. xi; Connell, Chaps. xxii, xxiii.



CHAPTER XXVII  
ANGLO-AMERICAN STRATEGY  
RECONSIDERED:  
THE DECISION FOR 'TORCH'

**T**HE ACCEPTANCE OF a combined Anglo-American strategy based on the Marshall plan gave genuine satisfaction on both sides. So far as 1943 was concerned agreement was complete, but with regard to 1942 it was differently interpreted. The British welcomed the American initiative and looked forward, in the Prime Minister's words, to 'a crescendo of activity on the Continent';<sup>1</sup> but the staff discussions of the last weeks in London had confirmed Sir Alan Brooke's feeling that, unless circumstances altogether changed, a major cross-Channel operation in 1942 was unlikely to succeed and might prove a real disaster; circumstances however might change, and he, like the Prime Minister, was willing to give 'Sledgehammer' 'a fair run'.<sup>2</sup> They, however, as we saw earlier,<sup>3</sup> viewed cross-Channel operations in a wider context. They viewed them as the crowning effort in a series of attacks made possible by Allied maritime superiority at different points on the European coastline with the intention of causing such a dispersion of German divisions as would give a cross-Channel invasion a reasonable chance of success. Bitter experience had brought home to the British the truth of the ancient historian's maxim that war never moves on prescribed lines. For this reason they wished to retain the advantages of a flexible strategy as long as possible and not to be forced to a final decision till the last moment. The Americans' attitude was different; for the massive onslaught which they contemplated they thought it necessary for reasons of administration and training to have inflexible plans and a firm date; they liked agreements to be in black and white. The record of British land operations in the present war—Norway, Greece, Singapore, the repeated repulse in Libya—had not been such as to impress Americans with British strategic ability. Unfamiliarity with the technique of combined operations led them to discount the difficulties of an opposed landing. As Mr. Stimson saw it, 'the rate of construction of a number of landing barges should not be allowed to lose the crisis of the World War. And yet that is the only

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 287.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 289.

<sup>3</sup> Chap. xxiv, p. 563.

objection to the offensive that, after talks with the British here, I have heard made'.<sup>1</sup> Marshall appears to have believed that the efficiency of a first-class American business executive could undoubtedly put the matter through. The awkward point as regards 1942 was that such an operation would have to be a mainly British affair.

By the end of May misgivings were felt in Washington as to whether the British were remaining true to the agreed policy. According to Robert Sherwood, the Prime Minister's cable of 28th May to the President was 'the first danger signal to Roosevelt and Hopkins, Marshall and King, that British thinking was beginning to veer toward diversionary operations far removed from the main point of frontal attack across the Channel'.<sup>2</sup>

This message, covering a report of the conversations with Molotov, stated: 'We are working hard with your officers and all preparations are proceeding ceaselessly on the largest scale. Dickie [Mountbatten] will explain to you the difficulties of 1942 when he arrives. I have also told the Staffs to study a landing in the north of Norway, the occupation of which seems necessary to ensure the flow of our supplies next year to Russia . . . Auchinleck's news tonight indicates that the battle in Libya has begun. This may be the biggest encounter we have ever fought . . . We must never let "Gymnast" pass from our minds. All other preparations would help, if need be, towards that.'

In order to understand this telegram we must go back to the planings in London consequent on the decisions arrived at during Marshall's visit.

The previous discussions had been unfavourable to 'Sledgehammer' except in conditions where the German forces had already been weakened, that is to say, when the Russian need of help would no longer be desperate. The renewed discussions were to reach much the same result, but the implications of a landing were again thoroughly debated from all points of view. 'No one can say now,' declared the Chief of the Air Staff in a paper of 2nd May, 'whether or not we shall be able to undertake "Sledgehammer" this summer,' but it was necessary to give the Force Commanders a clear directive and a target date; it might become 'strategically and politically essential to land on the Continent'. The Chief of Combined Operations said that the limiting factor as regards both the size of the force and the date was the lack of suitable shipping, especially tank landing-craft. Even if the initial assault succeeded, we should not have the craft to maintain it over the beaches in the absence of a port, and the ports of Calais and Boulogne were almost certain to be blocked. There were indications, he said, that the American programme for assault

<sup>1</sup> 27th March: *On Active Service in peace and war*, p. 418.

<sup>2</sup> Sherwood, p. 559.

shipping would not be fulfilled, and this might affect 'Round-up' also.<sup>1</sup> A paper from the Ministry of War Transport explained the effect on our imports and on the movement of war supplies overseas of the withdrawal of the shipping required; the initial demands could be met 'at a price', but results would be serious if 'Sledgehammer' developed into a major invasion of the Continent.

On 8th May the Chiefs of Staff had before them the views of the Force Commanders and of General Paget, Air Marshal Douglas and Admiral Mountbatten.<sup>2</sup> The Force Commanders 'considered that on account of its dependency on the weather, the difficulties of maintenance and the lack of sufficient special landing craft "Sledgehammer" with the resources available is not a sound military operation'. With this conclusion the three senior officers were in general agreement. They were convinced that it was feasible only if German morale cracked; to carry it out as an emergency measure in the event of a Russian collapse would be courting disaster without materially aiding Russia. The C.I.G.S. thought that, since the conditions making 'Sledgehammer' possible might not arise, we should examine the possibility of a large-scale raid—say of two to four divisions, to last from one to four weeks—in order to achieve our object of drawing off air forces from the Eastern front. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that a plan should be prepared for a major raid, about the middle of July, on the French coast within the area of fighter protection; plans for 'Sledgehammer' should however be kept in a state of preparedness.

Meanwhile planning for 'Round-up' was continuing, and an inter-departmental committee had been set up under the chairmanship of Sir Findlater Stewart, an eminent Civil Servant, to deal with questions arising under 'Bolero', the code-word for the movement of United States troops to the United Kingdom.<sup>3</sup> On 26th May Paget, Douglas and Mountbatten presented a progress report on 'Sledgehammer', for which the maximum British force would be six divisions. Seeing that the operation was now envisaged only in the case of a crack in German morale, the assault could be launched outside the area of effective fighter protection, and they were considering the coast between Cherbourg and the River Canche. By this time Molotov had come and gone and was off to Washington. His suggestion

<sup>1</sup> 'The Landing-Craft Problem' from the United States point of view is discussed by Matloff and Snell, pp. 192-4. 'The idea of using large numbers of specially constructed craft for landing operations was so new that no generally accepted doctrine had been developed. The Army knew very little about landing craft and, during the first years of the war, the Navy was urging other types of construction, with the result that landing craft requirements were not determined until too late to affect "Sledgehammer".' See also Meyer in *Command Decisions* (Washington 1960), pp. 179 ff.; Leighton and Coakley, pp. 376-82.

<sup>2</sup> The Force Commanders were Vice-Admiral B. H. Ramsay, Lieut.-Gen. K. A. Schreiber, Air Vice-Marshal T. Leigh-Mallory.

<sup>3</sup> 'Bolero' was often used by American writers to include cross-Channel operations generally.

that we should aim at drawing off forty German divisions from Russia had been met by Mr. Churchill's assertion that we already had confronting us in the various theatres 44 Axis divisions (25 in France and the Low Countries) but that we should not hesitate to put into effect this year any sound and sensible plan to do more to draw the weight off Russia.

On 27th May the Prime Minister held a conference with the Chiefs of Staff and General Paget, Sir Sholto Douglas and Admiral Ramsay. Evidently with his talks with Molotov in mind, he asked what operations we could launch in Western Europe if heavy fighting continued throughout the summer on the Russian front but no decision was in sight. He was told that in the face of unimpaired German resistance the scale of a landing was limited by the numbers and types of landing-craft, and with those at present available we could not put ashore more than 4,300 men and 160 tanks in the first flight. This would not enable us to secure a bridgehead, since we had not enough airborne forces to capture the coast defences from the rear. Mr. Churchill remarked that it would be looking for trouble to try to force a bridgehead in such conditions: it would be no help to the Russians to know that we had made a gallant but fruitless attempt to open a second front. An assault in the area proposed would moreover probably cause a patriot uprising with terrible consequences to our supporters if we failed. In view of the military arguments he was not prepared to give way 'to popular clamour' for the opening of a second front in Europe in these circumstances. He then turned to what he thought was, from the military point of view, a more attractive project, namely to land one or two divisions in northern Norway in the late summer to seize the airfields from which the enemy harassed our Russian convoys. This operation might well be the prelude to the 'rolling-up' of the German forces in Norway, and he would like the Chiefs of Staff—who showed no enthusiasm for it—to report to him on its implications.<sup>1</sup> In the meantime the study of 'Sledgehammer' should continue. Nevertheless 'Sledgehammer' was now doomed, and the Americans were right in attaching the significance they did to the message which Mr. Churchill sent the President next day, though wrong in believing that British reluctance extended to 1943 as well as to 1942.

The President however was by no means prepared to give up the idea of 'Bolero' proceeding to definite action in 1942. Molotov was now at Washington and Mr. Roosevelt was anxious to give him solid grounds for hope of relief in Russia's time of trial. Mountbatten, as we have seen, was disturbed about the slow production of landing-craft in the United States and he had offered to go to America to find

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<sup>1</sup> See note on 'Jupiter' at end of this chapter.

out how matters stood; the Prime Minister was glad that he should take this opportunity to explain to the President the practical difficulties, as the British saw them, of 'a medium-scale operation' in 1942.

Further study in London was yet more unfavourable to 'Sledgehammer'. On 1st June before leaving for America Mountbatten described to the Chiefs of Staff how the mounting of either this operation or a smaller one ('Imperator') would prejudice training for 'Round-up', owing to the shortage of landing-craft, and suggested that it would be wiser to drop them, while carrying out an important raid on Dieppe ('Rutter') which had been proposed for the end of June.<sup>1</sup> Sir Charles Portal urged that some operation on a larger scale must be prepared, if only as a desperate venture if Russia were in dire straits, and the Committee agreed to report to the Prime Minister on the situation as they saw it.

The report recommended that plans and preparations for 'Sledgehammer' should be completed, except for the decision to take up shipping and assemble landing-craft; such a decision must be made by 1st August or the operation would be ruled out by weather. In the meantime preparations should proceed and assault shipping be assembled for 'Imperator', the implications on the combined training for 'Round-up' being accepted. The situation should be reviewed earlier in July. 'Rutter' should in the meantime take place at the end of June.

The Prime Minister agreed that 'Sledgehammer' should be planned to take advantage of a crack in German morale, but he saw no use in 'Imperator'.<sup>2</sup> 'Imperator' was accordingly dropped, but it was decided to carry out 'Rutter' in June or in July. Mr. Churchill was now convinced that there should be no substantial landing in France unless we intended to remain and that there could be no such landing in France this year unless the Germans were demoralized by another failure against Russia. In the course of a general review of the state of planning in all theatres, made to the Cabinet on 11th June, he secured the acceptance of these principles; he had on the previous day explained to Molotov<sup>3</sup> that we were not in any way committed to 'Sledgehammer'; but it was right that all preparations for it should go forward.

The Cabinet's decisions of 11th June proved the death-blow to 'Sledgehammer'.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Imperator', conceived as 'our response to a "cri de coeur" from the Russians', was intended to bring on an air battle by seizing, say, Boulogne and holding it for a week or two. 'Rutter' was to be a 'butcher and bolt' raid on the Continent, the Prime Minister told the Cabinet, of about 24 hours' duration, employing some 6,000 to 7,000 men.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 310-11.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Chap. xxv.



Next day the Prime Minister received Mountbatten's report of his visit to Washington. He had attended two meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff and discussed with them matters concerning combined operations—plans, technique and training. General Eisenhower had now been appointed to command United States forces in the European theatre, and Mountbatten would work with him. Mountbatten also had a long conversation on 9th June with the President.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Roosevelt, he said, had stressed the great need for American soldiers to be given the opportunity of fighting as soon as possible and 'wished to remind the Prime Minister of the agreement reached the last time he was in Washington, that in the event of things going very badly for the Russians this summer, a sacrifice landing would be carried out in France to assist them'.<sup>2</sup> Mountbatten had 'pointed out that no landing that we would carry out could draw off any troops since there were some twenty-five German divisions already in France and landing-craft shortage prevented our putting ashore an adequate number. The chief German shortage lay in fighter aircraft and all our efforts were being bent towards provoking fighter battles in the West'. He had assured the President that we were planning an operation to follow up a crack in German morale by a landing in France in the autumn, which could be started at two months' notice. But the President was not, he said, prepared to send a million soldiers to England on the off-chance of 'Roundup' being on in the spring of 1943, unless he could have a guarantee that they would be given a chance to fight, whatever happened in Russia.

The President had suggested, said Mountbatten, that 'about six' British divisions should remain in England, and that in place of them six United States divisions should be sent to North Africa, either round the Cape to fight in Libya or to Morocco to join hands with the Army of the Nile and reopen the Mediterranean. In the latter connexion he had been 'very struck' by the Prime Minister's recent reminder of 'Gymnast'.

Mountbatten's report decided the Prime Minister to pay another visit to Washington. The thousand-bomber raid on Cologne and the splendid American victory at Midway had greatly heartened the Allies, but news from the Middle East was confused at the best: Rommel's offensive had evidently met with some success, and the

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<sup>1</sup> He sent the President a resumé of his report to the Prime Minister, which has been printed almost in full in Sherwood, p. 587.

<sup>2</sup> There is no reference to a 'sacrifice landing' in the printed report of the discussions between the President and the Prime Minister in Washington, and none has been found in the American records. There seems to have been some misunderstanding. Was this in Mr. Churchill's mind when he told Brooke on the 13th that 'he considered Roosevelt was getting a little off the rails'? (Bryant, p. 397).

The Marshall plan (paragraph 5(a)), see Appendix III, did envisage 'a sacrifice attack' should 'the imminence of Russian collapse' require 'desperate action'.

condition of Malta was alarming. Dill confirmed, from a conversation with Hopkins, that the President, while dead set to put as large United States forces in the field as possible in order to sustain Russia, was now thinking of other ways of doing so besides an offensive in Europe, which was 'losing ground' in his mind; Marshall, however, seemed to fear that unless operations were pressed to the limit now there would be no chance of doing anything in Europe in 1942, whatever the conditions, and little of a serious invasion in 1943. For Mr. Churchill, who looked on 'Sledgehammer' as now most unlikely, it seemed the golden moment to follow up his own suggestion of 'Gymnast' to the President.

But he had by no means lost interest in, or rather enthusiasm for, 'Round-up' when the time was ripe. He had outlined the operation to the Cabinet as one of grand conception, involving an assault on the Continent employing no less than a million American troops, together with about twenty-one British divisions, of which six or seven would be armoured. The enemy coastline would be assaulted in force at many points. There was no limit to the scope or the objectives. The earliest suitable date was 1st May, 1943. Before leaving for America he elaborated his ideas in an imaginative paper for the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>1</sup> For such an operation 'the qualities of magnitude, simultaneity, and violence' were required. 'At least six heavy disembarkations must be attempted in the first wave. The enemy should be further mystified by at least half a dozen feints.' While intense fighting was in progress at one or two points a virtual walk-over might be obtained at others. 'Jupiter' should be already in progress; besides this he looked for landings or feints in Denmark, Holland, Belgium, the Pas de Calais (where the major air battle would be fought), on the Cotentin Peninsula, at Brest, at St. Nazaire, at the mouth of the Gironde. If, on the fifteenth day, 700,000 men were ashore, if air supremacy had been gained, if the enemy was in considerable confusion, and if we held at least four workable ports, we should 'have got our claws well into the job'.

This was certainly not Marshall's notion of 'Round-up' and the paper may have helped to convince both him and Eisenhower, who received copies, that Mr. Churchill was not really interested in 'Round-up' at all. Mr. Stimson, too, has stated that the Prime Minister 'never really liked "Bolero".'<sup>2</sup> But, as Mr. Churchill asked, what was meant by 'Round-up'? The Americans were not wedded to any particular area in the north of France, and so long as a number of separate assaults are co-ordinated there need be no violation of the principle of concentration of effort. The British Commanders-in-Chief,

<sup>1</sup> Printed in Churchill, IV, 316.

<sup>2</sup> D. D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (1948), p. 79; Stimson and Bundy, *On Active Service in Peace and War*, p. 423.

to whom the Prime Minister's memorandum was referred by the Chiefs of Staff, had no difficulty in pointing out that many of his suggestions were logistically impracticable; that feints were unlikely to deceive the enemy and were anyhow excluded by our shortage of assault shipping; and that landings in Denmark, Holland or Belgium would be unsound diversions of effort. In particular, the mounting of 'Jupiter' in 1943 would have no immediate beneficial effect on the main operations and would result in no advantage which could offset the weakening of military effort in the principal theatre. Diversions in the Biscay area, on the other hand, which would use assault-craft of a different type from those suitable for cross-Channel attacks, were acceptable in principle. In general the Commanders-in-Chief claimed that their own planning for 'Round-up' met the Prime Minister's points so far as possible. The Chiefs of Staff took note of their comments and agreed to give them further consideration.

Mr. Churchill's intention, as he stated, was not to provide a blueprint but 'to give an idea of the scale and spirit' which alone could justify hopes of success. He was an 'ardent believer in "Round-up"', but whereas the Americans conceived it as a single frontal assault he, influenced no doubt by the frightful cost and frequent failure of such assaults in the first war, wished the Allies to attack the Germans in both front and flank, as he was soon to explain to Stalin.

Mr. Churchill and his party left for America by air on 17th June. The 19th and 20th were spent by the President and Prime Minister in *l'ite-a-l'ite* conversations at Hyde Park in which, as well as ideas on a second front, they discussed the Battle of the Atlantic and also a very secret matter of the highest importance.

Nuclear research had by the summer of 1941 reached the point at which scientists felt justified in advising the government that a uranium bomb of enormous destructive power could probably be constructed before the end of the war and might prove decisive. The report of the so-called 'Maud' committee to this effect was referred by Mr. Churchill at the end of August to the Chiefs of Staff, who 'recommended immediate action with the maximum priority'. It was also referred to Lord Hankey's Scientific Advisory Committee and after its conclusions had been endorsed by them the work was placed under the direction of a special panel of the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, with the cover name of 'Tube Alloys'. Sir John Anderson, advised by a consultative council, was to be the Cabinet Minister responsible.

Work on similar lines had been proceeding in America, and information had been exchanged between scientists of the two countries. On 11th October, 1941, President Roosevelt suggested to

the Prime Minister that efforts should be 'co-ordinated or even jointly conducted', and after official conversations had taken place in London Mr. Churchill assured the President of our desire to collaborate. Lord Hankey's committee had recommended that a pilot plant should be built in the United Kingdom and if possible a full-scale plant in Canada, but in the summer of 1942 it became clear that for geographical, strategic and above all financial reasons the plants for this immensely costly enterprise must be built in the United States. An informal agreement to this effect was reached by the President and Prime Minister at Hyde Park on 20th June. Mr. Churchill's 'whole understanding was that everything was on the basis of fully sharing the results as equal partners', but matters did not work out so: the American authorities in charge were for various reasons reluctant to admit the co-operation of their Allies and it was not till August 1943 that conditions more satisfactory to the British were established.<sup>1</sup>

While the two statesmen were discussing policy at Hyde Park the C.I.G.S. and General Ismay attended meetings of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. On 20th June, explaining that the visit was the outcome of Mountbatten's report to the Prime Minister on his talk with the President, Sir Alan Brooke said Mr. Churchill had felt it desirable to discuss with the President and his staff the co-ordination and possible reorientation of our combined policy. The crux of the matter was the degree to which we could rely on the Russian front holding. If it held, the prospects of an offensive on the Continent were good, and the situation in the Middle East would be relieved of the danger of a German threat to the oilfields and the Persian Gulf; but if Russia collapsed the creation of a front in the West would be very difficult and the Middle East would have to be further reinforced. If it proved impossible to establish a Western front, some form of 'Gymnast' should be considered and we could use some of the forces provided for the former operation.

Brooke then mentioned the various projects for relieving pressure on the Russians in 1942 which the British Chiefs of Staff had been considering. A force of not more than six divisions could be used for a landing in the Pas de Calais, but it seemed unlikely that an enterprise on so limited a scale would divert any appreciable part of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Churchill, IV, 339-42; Sherwood, p. 596; letter from Hankey in *The Times* of 11th August, 1945; G. P. Thomson in the *American Scientist* of January 1953; R. W. Clark, *The Birth of the Bomb* (1961). For American accounts see R. G. Hewlett and O. E. Anderson, *The New World 1939-43* (Vol. I of a history of the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1962), Chap. VIII 'An uneasy partnership'; and Lt.-Gen. Leslie R. Groves, *Now it can be told* (New York, 1962), Chap. IX, 'Negotiations with the British'. From these accounts it appears that the President gave Mr. Churchill vaguely worded general assurances which his technical advisers succeeded in whittling down.

German army from the Eastern front, and we should be hard put to it to maintain our force when landed. Air-operations alone had not brought about the hoped-for air battles. An attempted landing in the north of Norway would come up against great difficulties, while an offensive in Burma designed to reopen communication with China could succeed only if combined with some other action against Japan.

Next day the Combined Chiefs of Staff discussed a paper drafted at a private meeting at which, as Brooke said, complete agreement had been found to exist between the British and American staffs on general strategic policy and on the merits of the 'Bolero' plan as a whole. In his own view the plan was sound, whether or not the Russians held out. If they collapsed and the Germans were enabled to bring back large forces into the West, the presence of American troops in England would ensure the safety of the United Kingdom. We should then have to find an alternative to a major offensive on the Continent in 1943, and an expedition to North Africa might be the solution. The issue in Russia should be decided by September 1942. He could see no merit in a 'sacrifice' operation in 1942 undertaken to relieve Russia. The Germans had some twenty-five divisions in France, and the six divisions which were all that our landing-craft could transport would achieve nothing.

Marshall, who was more optimistic as to what could be accomplished by air-power, resources and ingenuity, insisted that the only sound strategy was to concentrate on the one front where overwhelming superiority was logistically possible and drive through with the 'Bolero' plan. Admiral King was entirely opposed to 'Gymnast' and Admiral Little was sure that the First Sea Lord would agree with him. We had enough trouble in the Atlantic already.<sup>1</sup>

The Combined Chiefs of Staff accordingly agreed on a report setting out the advantages of the 'Bolero' plan and reaffirming their decision that 'Continental operations on a large scale at the earliest possible moment should be the principal offensive effort of the United Nations'. Any other offensive operation in 1942 should only be considered if either it did not materially delay the date of 'Bolero', or contributed directly to the success of 'Bolero', or was forced on us by emergency conditions not now existing. 'Gymnast' should not be undertaken in the present situation.

Brooke noted in his diary that the military men, while agreeing among themselves, 'fully appreciated that we might be up against many difficulties when confronted with the plans that the Prime Minister and President had been brewing up together at Hyde Park.

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<sup>1</sup> It seems that Admiral King's preference for 'Bolero' over 'Gymnast' was due to his wish to transfer the forces earmarked for 'Bolero' to the Pacific as soon as possible (King and Whitehill, *Fleet Admiral King* (1953), pp. 181 ff.). See also Matloff, p. 238.

We fear the worst and are certain that North Africa and North Norway plans for 1942 will loom large in their proposals, whilst we are convinced that they are not possible.<sup>1</sup> He and Marshall would have preferred, if the cross-Channel operation did not take place in 1942, to husband our resources till next year.

Military fears were justified. So far as the Chiefs of Staff were concerned, the 21st was a Day of Dupes: their report was never even formally presented to the Heads of Government, though the Prime Minister was told of the gist of it and was 'very upset'.<sup>2</sup> It ran entirely contrary to a paper he had given the President on the previous day (20th June)<sup>3</sup> granting that preparations must continue for 'Bolero', if possible in 1942, certainly in 1943, but asserting the view of the Cabinet that an operation bound to lead to disaster would do no good to anyone and that there should be no substantial landing in France unless we were going to stay. No responsible military authority had so far been able to make a plan for September 1942 which had any chance of success unless the Germans became utterly demoralized, of which there was no likelihood. Had the American staffs a plan? If a reasonable plan could be found the British would welcome it; but if not, we could not stand idle during the whole of 1942. We ought to prepare within the general structure of 'Bolero' some other operation. 'It is in this setting and on this background that the French North-West Africa operation should be studied.'

Mr. Churchill was playing up skilfully to the President's known feelings, and he was successful. After long and animated discussions at the White House on the 21st, at which Hopkins, Marshall, Brooke and Ismay were present, the decision was taken, in accordance with Mr. Churchill's arguments, which in fact killed 'Sledgehammer' and gave new life to 'Gymnast'. The decision was recorded as follows, after a draft by Ismay had been amended to meet American suggestions:

1. Plans and preparations for the "Bolero" operation in 1943 on as large a scale as possible are to be pushed forward with all speed and energy. It is however essential that the United States and Great Britain should be prepared to act offensively in 1942.

2. Operations in France or the Low Countries in 1942 would, if successful, yield greater political and strategic gains than operations in any other theatre. Plans and preparations for the operations in this theatre are to be pressed forward with all possible speed, energy, and ingenuity. The most resolute efforts must be

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, p. 403.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 406.

<sup>3</sup> Churchill, IV, 342.

made to overcome the obvious dangers and difficulties of the enterprise. If a sound and sensible plan can be contrived we should not hesitate to give effect to it. If, on the other hand, detailed examination shows that, despite all efforts, success is improbable, we must be ready with an alternative.

3. The possibilities of Operation "Gymnast" will be explored carefully and conscientiously, and plans will be completed in all details as soon as possible. Forces to be employed in "Gymnast" would in the main be found from "Bolero" units which have not yet left the United States. The possibility of operations in Norway and the Iberian peninsula in the autumn and winter of 1942 will also be carefully considered by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.

4. Planning of "Bolero" will continue to be centred in London. Planning for "Gymnast" will be centred in Washington.'

The concurrence of Brooke and Marshall is stated by Ismay in the official text.

The wording saved all faces, but Marshall proved right in his conviction that the adoption of 'Gymnast' would kill not only 'Sledgehammer' but also 'Round-up' in 1943. Neither he nor Mr. Stimson, says Sherwood, was set against 'Gymnast' in itself; 'but mounting it and maintaining it would involve the diversion of such a vast amount of shipping as well as naval and air forces and troops to the Mediterranean area that the "Bolero" build-up could not possibly be continued at a sufficient rate through the summer and autumn of 1942 and even through the following winter'.<sup>1</sup> Sir Alan Brooke, for his part, was a strong supporter of the North African expedition at the right time, but he distrusted Mr. Churchill's precipitancy. When Auchinleck had halted Rommel's offensive at Alamein and the Russians were still holding the Germans in the autumn, the venture was justified; but not in the circumstances of June, with the Eighth Army in full retreat and the Germans about to start their summer campaign in South Russia.<sup>2</sup>

On the same day, 21st June, that the decision was taken, came the utterly unexpected news that Tobruk had fallen.<sup>3</sup> Sir Winston Churchill has recorded the staggering shock of the blow and the generous offer by the Americans of all help in their power.<sup>4</sup> As Mr. Stimson puts it,<sup>5</sup> this catastrophe 'shifted the attention of the Washington meeting from grand strategy to immediate repair work'. Marshall

<sup>1</sup> P. 593. For the arguments of the American staff in reply to Churchill's, see Matloff, pp. 240-4.

<sup>2</sup> See Bryant, p. 403.

<sup>3</sup> Accounts differ as to whether the news came in the morning or the afternoon. *Alanbrooke's Diary*, Bryant, p. 407, with circumstantial detail, says the afternoon; Sherman, p. 595, says the morning, and this is implied by Churchill, IV, 343, and Ismay, *Memoirs*, p. 254.

<sup>4</sup> IV, 343-4.

<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, p. 424.

had on the previous day said that an American armoured division was available for the Middle East, but the offer made a few days later and gratefully accepted was one to send 300 Sherman tanks and 100 self-propelled 105-mm. guns. The Americans also made available air reinforcements for the Middle East. These various measures were referred to, somewhat oddly, by Marshall as 'concessions' made to maintain British agreement on the 'Bolero' plan.<sup>1</sup>

Lord Alanbrooke wrote afterwards that the prompt American response on that Sunday 'did a great deal towards laying the foundations of friendship and understanding built up during the war' between the President and Marshall on the one side and the Prime Minister and himself on the other. But it appears that Mr. Churchill 'left behind him a growing sense of alarm that the Second Front was not going to be established in 1942 or in 1943 either'.<sup>2</sup>

It was largely a matter of timing. The British knew that Channel weather precluded landing operations after mid-September. Before that date no operations which the Allies could stage against the French coast in 1942 were likely to be of the slightest use to the Russians in view of the respective forces which the Allies and the Germans could bring into play, the Allied strengths being limited by the numbers both of craft and of troops trained for such a hazardous venture. As for 1943, the British hoped that by the early summer conditions on both sides would combine to make a major offensive practicable but the Americans may well have been disturbed by the wide difference between Mr. Churchill's picture of 'Round-up' and their own. They dreaded a dispersion of effort, whereas the British did not think that a frontal attack was necessarily the last word of strategic wisdom.

The Prime Minister's party were back by the 27th and he and the C.I.G.S. reported to the Cabinet. Feeling in England was bitter over the loss of Tobruk, and the Prime Minister was called upon to meet a vote of no confidence in the House; those who went into the lobby against him were more numerous than in January, but he again, as we have seen, secured an enormous majority.

In the next week British official opinion hardened against 'Sledgehammer'. The Chiefs of Staff on 30th June discussed the practical aspects both of this operation and of 'Round-up'. The Commander-in-Chief had presented an appreciation and outline plan of the initial stages of the latter, but their study convinced them that unless German morale had softened in the spring owing to another failure against Russia 'Round-up' would not be a feasible operation of war. The C.I.G.S. said that he regarded this as one of the possible operations for 1943, but others should be studied along with it, such as the

<sup>1</sup> Matloff, p. 255.

<sup>2</sup> Bryant, p. 406; Sherwood, p. 597.



capture of the Brest salient and a landing on the west coast of France. The Committee agreed, and agreed also that the target date for 'Round-up' should remain 1st May. Further consideration of 'Sledgehammer' had led the Commanders-in-Chief to the conclusions that not only could it not succeed unless there had been 'a crack in German morale to the extent of reducing their resistance to that put up by the German forces after August 1918', but that the mere mounting of 'Sledgehammer' must delay the launching of 'Round-up' for several months. On purely military grounds, the Chiefs of Staff agreed, it would be a mistake to mount the operation, but on the other hand 'we were definitely committed both to the Americans and to the Russians to prepare for offensive operations in 1942'. They decided to refer the problem to the Cabinet, and a memorandum of 2nd July stated the position.

On the evening of 6th July it was agreed by the Prime Minister and Chiefs of Staff, meeting in staff conference, that 'Sledgehammer' offered no hope of success and would merely ruin all prospects of 'Round-up' in 1943. The Cabinet next day decided that, although the conditions which would make 'Sledgehammer' a sound and sensible enterprise were very unlikely to occur, planning should go on and preparations be made but not to such an extent as would prejudice 'Round-up'. The Americans should in the meantime be encouraged to proceed with 'Gymnast', which was known to interest the President and which the improvement of the position in Egypt again rendered attractive. The Prime Minister also, despite the profound misgivings of the Chiefs of Staff, obtained a conditional approval of an operation in Northern Norway if a sound scheme could be devised; it was agreed to ask General McNaughton to prepare such a scheme, to be carried out largely by Canadian troops.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill informed the President of these conclusions: 'No responsible British general, admiral or air marshal is prepared to recommend "Sledgehammer" as a practicable operation in 1942'. He was sure that 'Gymnast' was by far the best chance for affording relief to the Russian front in 1942. 'This has all along been in harmony with your ideas.' 'It is, in fact, your commanding idea.'<sup>2</sup> The Cabinet decided further that Stalin was to be told that we were 'greatly interested' in the possibility of operations jointly arranged with Soviet forces in the Petsamo region and were in favour of staff discussions. Thus, in his telegram of 17th July breaking to him the painful news that in view of the disaster which had overtaken P.Q. 17 the Arctic convoys must be suspended, Mr. Churchill could only offer the possibility of combined operations in Northern Norway in the

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<sup>1</sup> See below, p. 650.

<sup>2</sup> Printed in Churchill, IV, 391.

autumn and of air reinforcements on Russia's southern flank when Rommel had been disposed of. Stalin replied on the 23rd that 'in view of the situation on the Soviet-German front' his government 'cannot tolerate the second front in Europe being postponed till 1943'.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill in his telegram to the President had claimed that 'Gymnast' was 'the true Second Front' of 1942, and he decided to take heroic measures to convince Stalin also that this was the case.

The British revival of 'Gymnast' with the virtual abandonment of 'Sledgehammer' provoked acute controversy with the Americans. Brooke knew well how strongly their Chiefs of Staff disliked the idea of 'Gymnast' in 1942; he realized that it must to some extent affect our ability to carry out 'Round-up' in the following year.<sup>2</sup> Dill gathered from Marshall's first reaction that the result of pressing 'Gymnast' on the United States authorities would be 'to drive them into saying that they are finished in the West and will go all out in the Pacific'. Such a decision, Dill added, would be immensely popular with the United States Navy, Australia, New Zealand and China; Marshall had throughout fought a hard fight for 'Bolero' against strong opposition. A later message from the Joint Services Mission added that the British were suspected by many of 'going cold on "Bolero" and putting up suggestions for "side-shows" to conceal the fact'.

Dill's forebodings were justified. American writers have described the disgust and indignation felt in Washington at what appeared to be British inconstancy or worse. Marshall's objections to 'Gymnast' were as strong as ever, and since it was impossible to carry out a cross-Channel operation 'without full aggressive British support' he proposed to his colleagues that if this were not forthcoming the United States should turn to the Pacific for decisive action against Japan. Admiral King of course agreed: he held that it would be impossible to fulfil naval commitments in other theatres and at the same time provide the necessary shipping and escorts for 'Gymnast'. Accordingly the two officers addressed a memorandum to the President recommending that if the British would not 'go through with full "Bolero" plans the United States should assume a defensive attitude against Germany, except for air operations, and use all available means in the Pacific'. The President, however, was not to be moved from the accepted policy of dealing with Germany first.

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<sup>1</sup> *Soviet Correspondence*, I, 56.

<sup>2</sup> According to L. J. Meyer (*Command Decisions*, p. 183) 'Marshall and King stubbornly continued to object to dropping "Sledgehammer" from the books, not because they wanted it but because they clearly recognized that the fate of "Round-up" was also at stake in the British Government's attitude toward the emergency operation.'

This did not mean that he accepted the British ideas, and after discussion with Hopkins, Marshall and King on the 15th he decided that these three should fly to London at once and find a settlement. They were to investigate carefully the possibility of executing 'Sledgehammer'. This might be the turning-point, the crucial decision which would save Russia this year and which should take effect whether or not Russian collapse became imminent. In the latter case it would become not only advisable but imperative. Only if 'Sledgehammer' were 'finally and definitely out of the picture' were they to determine another arena for United States troops in 1942; somewhere in the current year they *must* fight against the Germans. He hoped for total agreement within a week of the mission's arrival.<sup>1</sup>

The President's emissaries arrived in London on 18th July, evading Mr. Churchill's wish to see them first at Chequers, and got to work with the American commanders in England—Eisenhower, Clark, Spaatz and Stark—all of whom except Stark were strongly in favour of 'Sledgehammer'.<sup>2</sup> The British had been briefed as to the American staffs' objections to 'Gymnast' by a signal of the 14th from Dill to the Prime Minister. It would draw naval forces, particularly carriers, from the Pacific where they were urgently needed; the new line of sea-communications could not be maintained without difficulty; Casablanca and Algerian ports were for different reasons unsatisfactory for landings; and 'Gymnast' would grow into such a large commitment as to rule out 'Round-up' in 1943. Marshall, said Dill, still favoured operations in Europe, but was 'convinced that there had been no real drive behind the European project. Meetings are held, discussions take place and time slips by. . . . May I suggest with all respect that you must convince your visitors that you are determined to beat the Germans, that you will strike them on the continent of Europe at the earliest possible moment even on a limited scale and that anything which detracts from this main effort will receive no support from you at all? Marshall believes that your first love is "Gymnast" just as his is "Bolero" and that with the smallest provocation you will always revert to your old love. . . .

'Two more thoughts. War Cabinet's ruling . . . of 2nd July seems open to question.<sup>3</sup> What does success mean? If landing ultimately fails tactically but causes diversion from Russia front will it have succeeded? Remember Greece.

'Lastly, Marshall has this moment sent me Robertson's *Soldiers and*

<sup>1</sup> See Matloff, pp. 266-78; Sherwood, pp. 597, 603-06; Stimson and Bundy, pp. 424-5; King and Whitehill, p. 189. Stimson states that the memorandum of the two Chiefs of Staff was not seriously meant.

<sup>2</sup> See Hopkins (Sherwood, p. 609); but Eisenhower had been of opinion on 17th July that 'Sledgehammer' had less than a fair chance of success. (*Command Decisions*, p. 185).

<sup>3</sup> It was on 7th July that the Cabinet discussed the staff paper of 2nd July. See p. 630 above.

*Statesmen* with Chapter II of Volume I marked. King has been reading this too.<sup>1</sup>

The opening paragraphs of the chapter referred to, headed 'The Dardanelles Expedition', insist on the importance of concentration of effort on the 'decisive front' and the dangers of changing the theatre once selected.

'A change of plan which entails the transfer of the main effort from one theatre to another may, however attractive in appearance, be attended with great risks, and usually it can only be justified by exceptional circumstances. . . . The soldier has no choice but to resist all tendencies of this kind, unless they are well founded, remembering that dispersion of force is only admissible when, in one form or another, it subserves the main plan of campaign.'<sup>2</sup>

The chapter goes on to criticize Mr. Churchill's activities in the planning of the Dardanelles expedition, as he must have been well aware. But his reply to Dill neatly parried the reference to Robertson: 'I am glad our friends are coming,' he cabled. 'Soldiers and statesmen here are in complete agreement.'

Dill reported in a later signal that he understood that the President did not favour full-scale operations in the Pacific as an alternative to 'Bolero'; but this did not mean that there might not be a great increase in the American forces allotted to that area.

Meeting at Chequers on the night of the 18th, the Prime Minister and the British Chiefs of Staff agreed that 'Sledgehammer' was not a feasible operation, but if Marshall could produce a plan which held out any prospect of success we would give it sympathetic consideration and be prepared to carry it out. Plans and preparations for 'Round-up' must go ahead at full speed. If 'Gymnast' were adopted as the only practicable operation in 1942, landings would be required in Algeria, and here a British contingent might play a part.

A series of conferences, formal and informal, between the Americans and British were held on 20th, 21st and 22nd July. The Americans now put forward a proposal that 'Sledgehammer' should be regarded as the opening phase of 'Round-up', with the purpose of not only remaining on the Continent but building up our strength and expanding our foothold there; the immediate tactical objectives should be Cherbourg and the Channel Islands. The British maintained their opposition, Brooke and Portal explaining how unlikely it was that the small force, say six divisions, which might hope to land in the Cherbourg area could maintain itself, still less break more ground, against the numbers which the Germans could bring against

<sup>1</sup> The greater part of this signal is printed in Churchill, IV, 396, but not the last two paragraphs.

<sup>2</sup> See *Soldiers and Statesmen, 1914-1918*, by F.-M. Sir William Robertson (1926), 174-5.

it. On the 21st powerful support for an operation in North Africa came from Sir Andrew Cunningham, who had replaced Admiral Little as chief British naval representative in Washington. He thought it essential to seize Algiers and if possible Bizerta, and believed that Admiral King, though inflexibly opposed to a landing at Casablanca, might favour an operation embracing the Mediterranean coast. At a 'combined staff conference' on the following day, the 22nd, at which both sides restated their conclusions, the Prime Minister declared himself an ardent believer in 'Round-up'; in fact one of his reasons for disliking 'Sledgehammer' was that it would 'eat up the seed-corn' for the larger operation. The essential pre-requisites of a successful 'Round-up' were, first, that the operation should be on a sufficiently big scale, and secondly that there should be a certain degree of German demoralization. General Marshall admitted that 'Sledgehammer' was 'not at all the operation that one would deliberately choose, if choice had been possible'; he personally had 'come to the conclusion that for various reasons it could not be launched before October, which increased the hazards as to weather and as to [the] appearance of German air forces from the Russian front. However, there was no choice in the matter. Time was tragically against us. Without 'Sledgehammer' we were faced with a defensive attitude in the European theatre. . . .'

Later that afternoon the Cabinet decided unanimously that they could not approve of 'Sledgehammer' being carried out in 1942 but favoured 'Gymnast'. The Americans were so informed, and the President, learning that no agreement could be reached on 'Sledgehammer', or rather—to avoid an expression of Allied disunity—that 'Sledgehammer' had been agreed to be impracticable, instructed his representatives to work out some other plan that would bring United States land-forces into the field against the Germans in 1942, giving first priority to an offensive in North Africa. On the 23rd he cabled the Prime Minister accepting the fact that the Western front in 1942 was off, and stating that he was influencing his Chiefs of Staff in the direction of an attack in North Africa.<sup>1</sup>

Discussions were resumed in London on 24th July at a formal meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, at which a memorandum was submitted by the Americans. Marshall explained that the United States Chiefs of Staff held that no unavoidable reduction in preparations for 'Round-up' should be considered as long as there remained any possibility of its successful execution before 1st July,

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<sup>1</sup> Matloff, p. 278; Sherwood, p. 610; *Alanbrooke's Diary*, Bryant, p. 426; L. J. Meyer in *Command Decisions*, pp. 183-6.

1943. After that date the odds were definitely against 'Round-up' for the remainder of the year [1943] unless the German army showed 'unmistakable signs of rapid deterioration'. If 'Round-up' had to be given up, 'Gymnast' seemed the best alternative. But they considered that a commitment to 'Gymnast' implied the definite acceptance of a defensive encircling line of action for the Continental European theatre, except as to air and blockade operations against Germany. In the meantime, 'for purposes of deception and to be ready for any emergency or a favourable opportunity', all preparations for 'Sledgehammer' should continue in so far as they did not interfere with training for 'Round-up'. If by 15th September, 1942, the situation on the Russian front indicated such a collapse or weakening of Russian resistance as to make it appear that 'Round-up' could not be carried out successfully, then 'Gymnast' should be launched as soon as possible and not later than 1st December.<sup>1</sup>

Sir Charles Portal questioned whether 'Gymnast' could be correctly described as a purely defensive operation; it would in fact open up a second front and might commit Germany to the occupation of Italy and Spain. She might even be so weakened as to allow the Allies to undertake 'Round-up' in 1943. The Americans, however, insisted that once 'Gymnast' was undertaken 'Round-up' in its original form was ruled out. The First Sea Lord thought that this might be so, but the C.I.G.S. declared that the British Chiefs of Staff were determined to go ahead with preparations for an invasion of the Continent on a large scale.

The American proposals, as approved in slightly amended form by the British Chiefs of Staff, were submitted by them to the Cabinet that afternoon.<sup>2</sup> It was explained that the landings on the Atlantic coast of Africa would be wholly American, whereas those within the Mediterranean would be carried out by British troops but, for political reasons, 'under a United States veneer'. 'Torch', as the whole operation was now to be called, necessarily involved a diversion of forces from 'Round-up', which Marshall had conceived as an attack on the Continent by all available forces; but we should always have to maintain strong forces at home and in due time they would re-enter Europe. The plan would also mean a diversion of some United States air forces from the United Kingdom, but plenty would remain for bombing Germany or for operations against the Continent in 1943.

The proposals were criticized in the Cabinet as not clearly defining whether 'Torch' or 'Round-up' would be carried out, since the

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<sup>1</sup> 'To General Marshall, as to General Eisenhower, the choice of "Gymnast" meant acceptance of a probable Russian defeat, which in turn would prevent Allied invasion of Western Europe'; G. A. Harrison, *Cross-Channel Attack* (Washington, 1951), p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> The document is printed in Appendix V.

decision was to depend on forthcoming events in Russia, and the wording implied that 'Torch' would not take place if the Russian front held. Ministers were assured, however, that both the British and the United States Chiefs of Staff believed that it was unlikely that 'Round-up' would be carried out in 1943, and that unless this expectation was falsified by events later in the present year 'Torch' held the field. The British Chiefs of Staff pleaded that no further alterations in the agreed document should be asked for from the Americans, who had gone so far to meet us, and the Cabinet authorized the Chiefs of Staff to subscribe it.

The point raised in the Cabinet was none the less an important one, and, though the question of principle had now been settled, room still remained for division of opinion as to when the final decision to adopt 'Torch' should be taken. The President however cabled to Hopkins at once that plans for a landing in North Africa not later than 30th October should go ahead.<sup>1</sup>

At a meeting of the Combined Chiefs of Staff on 25th June it was agreed that a Supreme Commander should be appointed, who should be responsible for both the cross-Channel and the African operations so long as both were in contemplation. The Supreme Commander should be an American. A combined planning team, working in London, should produce an outline plan for 'Torch', and General Eisenhower was selected for the command.

On the 27th Mr. Churchill sent the President a happy telegram, paying tribute to Hopkins' helpfulness.

'We must establish a second front this year and attack at the earliest moment. As I see it this second front consists of a main body holding the enemy pinned opposite "Sledgehammer" and a wide flanking movement called "Torch".'

The President was equally pleased at the result; he felt that 'the past week represented a turning-point in the whole war'.<sup>2</sup>

The President and the Prime Minister having agreed that 'Torch' should be launched, and as early as possible, it took only a few days for the Combined Chiefs of Staff to accept the fact. The directive of 24th July contained, however, a more fundamental ambiguity. What was implied by the definite acceptance of 'a defensive encircling line of action for the Continental European theatre' and by a 're-adjustment of present U.S. commitments to "Bolero" for the purpose of furthering offensive operations in the Pacific'? Did the policy thus defined amount to a revision of the grand strategy agreed on at Washington in January 1942? Did it supersede it? A clear divergence of view between the American and British Chiefs of Staff appeared

<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 404; Matloff, p. 282; Sherwood, p. 612.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 404, 405.

over the drafting of a 'strategic hypothesis for April 1944' to form the basis on which production planning might proceed. Dill warned London that not only the U.S. Naval Staff, who naturally took the July Directive as authorizing 'extra emphasis' on the Pacific theatre, but also the Army maintained that this document was 'a reversal of our previous grand strategy'. The British Chiefs of Staff had protested against such a 'heresy', but in the course of a visit to England he assured them that their American colleagues were undoubtedly leaning more and more to the Pacific and that at some time a 'showdown' would probably be needed. Fortunately the divergence raised no immediate practical difficulties; 'everyone,' Dill said, 'was agreed on Operation "Torch" and the President was quite clear that our first and main enemy was Germany.'<sup>1</sup>

Writing after the war, Eisenhower generously admitted his conviction 'that those who held the "Sledgehammer" operation to be unwise at the moment were correct'. He was convinced too 'that out of the north-west African operation flowed benefits to the Allied Nations that were felt all through the war and materially helped to achieve the great victory when the invasion actually took place in 1944'.<sup>2</sup> It is plain that the possibility of no 'Round-up' in 1943 was now deliberately accepted. Dill cabled on 1st August that in the American mind the acceptance of 'Torch' excluded it. But the Prime Minister insisted that 'on no account should we agree that "Round-up" is destroyed by "Torch"'. His views are clearly set out in a minute for the Chiefs of Staff of 23rd July in which, after stating the need to re-emphasize 'our intention to form a second front at the earliest possible moment' and referring to the reinforcement of the Middle East, he continues:

'It is of the utmost importance to carry out "Gymnast", with variants, at the earliest possible. It seems very dangerous to delay beyond October. We should concert the whole plan with the United States authorities, offering them all the escorts and assistance in our power but pressing continually for speed.

'Meanwhile, "Bolero" should move steadily forward. It would seem necessary to replace with United States divisions in November the seven British divisions which will have sailed to the East. Over and above this, the full "Bolero" programme should be pursued, subject only to any impingement caused by "Gymnast", etc. This impingement would fall for operational purposes in September and October and, for reinforcement of "Gymnast", during November and December, by which time the American forces required for "Gymnast" should have landed. Thereafter, unless we decide to move into Europe, only drafts and stores would

<sup>1</sup> This matter will be more fully treated in Vol. IV by Michael Howard (forthcoming); see also G. A. Harrison, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> *Crusade in Europe* (1948), p. 79.



be required. It should not be admitted that "Gymnast", though it impinges temporarily on "Bolero", is at the expense of "Round-up".

'If, however, we move from "Gymnast" northward into Europe, a new situation must be surveyed. The flank attack may become the main attack, and the main attack a holding operation in the early stages. Our second front will, in fact, comprise both the Atlantic and Mediterranean coasts of Europe, and we can push either right-handed, left-handed, or both-handed as our resources and circumstances permit.

'For all these purposes we should strengthen "Bolero" and "Gymnast" with the largest transportations of United States troops that are possible. Meanwhile, we shall pin down the largest numbers possible of enemy troops opposite "Bolero". It is not wise to try now to look too far ahead. If, however, by June 1943 we have fifteen United States divisions and fifteen British ready to strike from Britain, and ten United States divisions, say, and four British available on which to draw for offensive action northward from the "Gymnast" area, we shall be well placed. . . .'

Such a conception of a second front was far removed from the Russian, and there was urgent need of coming to an understanding with Stalin.<sup>1</sup>

What might have been the fate of 'Sledgehammer' was illustrated by the raid on Dieppe carried out on 19th August by Canadian troops and commandos, supported by the Navy and the Royal Air Force.<sup>2</sup> This operation was the most ambitious of a series of raids planned in accordance with the policy laid down by Mr. Churchill in 1940 of continually harrying and bewildering the Germans by descending on their coastline at one point after another; how effective a well-planned raid with a limited object could be had been demonstrated by the attack on St. Nazaire in March.<sup>3</sup>

The idea of an assault on Dieppe was conceived early in April at Combined Operations Headquarters; Home Forces joined in the planning. On 13th May the outline plan produced after long study was approved by the Chiefs of Staff. It provided for a frontal attack on the town and port of Dieppe supported by landings on the flanks. It was eventually decided not to include an air bombardment of the town or the use of air-borne troops but a number of the new Churchill tanks were to be landed. Force Commanders were designated and

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<sup>1</sup> The Cabinet at the meeting on 24th July had before them Stalin's angry message of 23rd July; see Chap. xxv, p. 589.

<sup>2</sup> For a full account Vol. I of the Official Canadian History, *Six Years of War*, by C. P. Stacey (Ottawa, 1955). See also Roskill, Vol. II, Chap. x, Churchill, IV, 457-9.

<sup>3</sup> See above, Chap. xxi, p. 516.

proceeded to work out detailed plans; the bulk of the land-force was to be supplied by the Canadian troops who had long been chafing in England at their role of defending the island without an opportunity of getting at the Germans.

The operation had been planned to take place at the end of June, during a spell when moon and tide conditions would be favourable; it was postponed, first as the result of an unsuccessful exercise and then because of the weather, until on 7th July it was abandoned and the troops dispersed. The Prime Minister, however, was eager that some operation should be launched and the C.I.G.S. stressed its necessity as a preliminary to an invasion; accordingly it was soon decided to remount the project under the new code-name of 'Jubilee'. Exceptional measures would have to be taken to maintain secrecy in view of the large numbers who had been aware of the previous plan. On 27th July the Chiefs of Staff approved a new directive to the Chief of Combined Operations, who was to be generally responsible for launching the operation. The Force Commanders now appointed were Captain J. Hughes-Hallett, R.N., Major-General J. H. Roberts, commanding 2nd Canadian Division, and Air Marshal T. L. Leigh-Mallory.

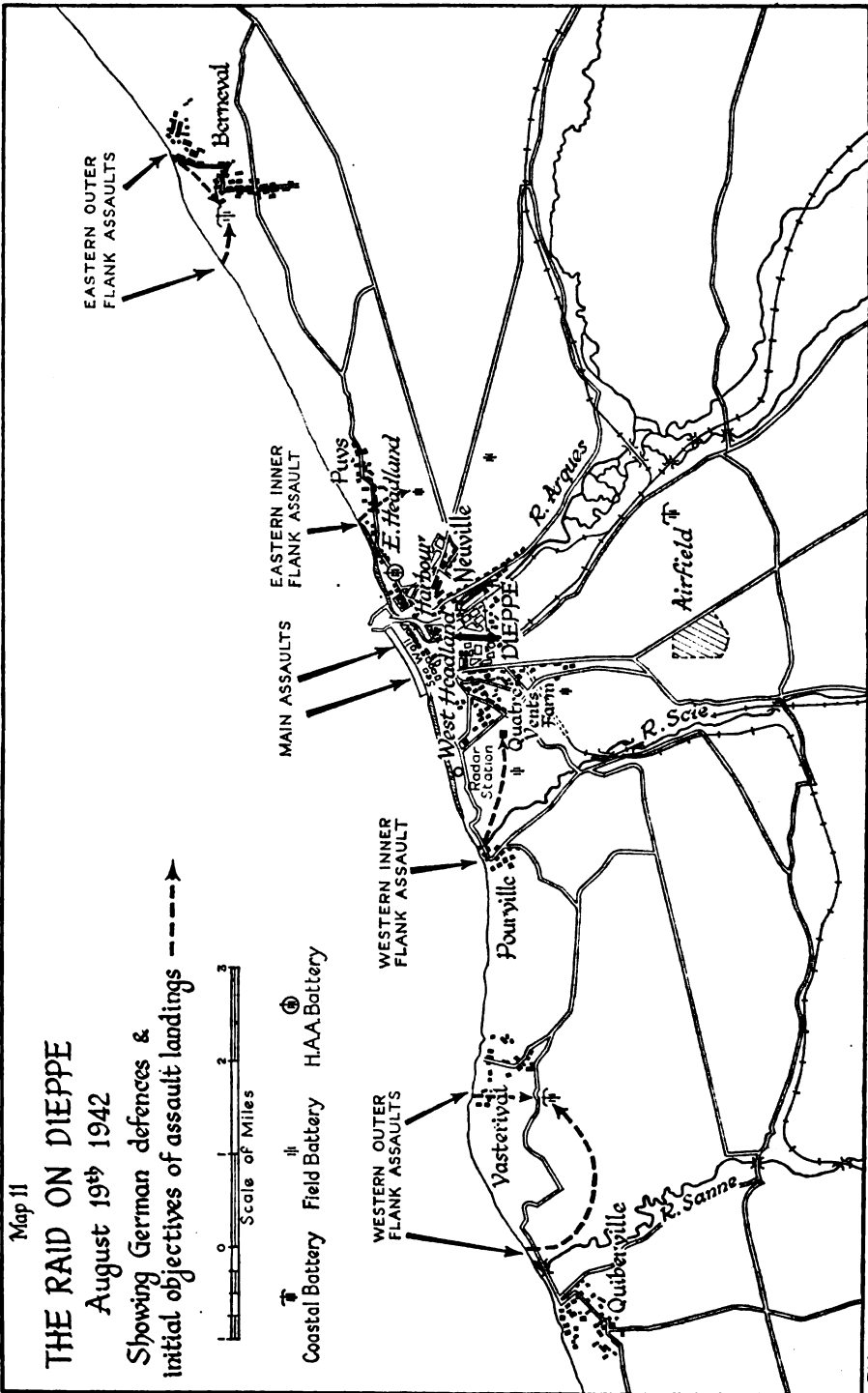
The objectives mentioned in the original plan had been to destroy enemy defences in the vicinity of Dieppe, to destroy the installations of the aerodrome, the radar stations, power stations, dock facilities, etc., and to remove the invasion barges in the harbour; but the real purpose was to test the German coast defences and discover what resistance would have to be met in the endeavour to seize a port. It was hoped also to inflict heavy wastage on the German Air Force and thereby give some relief to the Russians.

The garrison of Dieppe, one regiment of 302nd Infantry Division besides artillery, was stronger than had been estimated when plans were discussed at the end of April. It afterwards transpired that, although the raid itself came as a surprise, the enemy had been warned to be prepared for attacks at any time during the summer and especially at certain alert periods suitable for a landing; one of these ended on 19th August, the day of the raid, and the division had been brought up to full strength by drafts, though these were only half-trained.<sup>1</sup>

The attacking force consisted of two brigades of 2nd Canadian Division, a Canadian Army Tank regiment, four commandos, and some 50 United States Rangers—about 6,100 troops in all, of whom nearly 5,000 were Canadians. The naval force included 8 destroyers,

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<sup>1</sup> It is clear from Rundstedt's Battle Report of 3rd September, 1942, that he had no precise foreknowledge of the assault, while the *Abwehr* headquarters in Paris reported on 14th September that there had been no indication that Dieppe in particular was our objective. For Hitler's forebodings see pp. 642-5 below.



24 tank landing-craft, 41 coastal craft, and some 150 infantry landing-craft, a total of 237 ships. Of the 67 squadrons under Royal Air Force control, manned by men of many nations, 60 were fighters, mostly Spitfires.<sup>1</sup>

The plan was to land on eight beaches, two on the seafront of the town itself, one each at or near Puys and Pourville on the flanks near by, and two each on the outer flanks in the neighbourhood of Berneval and of Quiberville, where there were coastal batteries. The flank assaults were to go in half an hour before those on the town.<sup>2</sup>

In the event only the assault on the cliff on the outer western flank was completely successful; after capturing and destroying the battery of 5.9 guns the commando returned with comparatively small loss. The party on the outer eastern flank, whose landing was largely frustrated by the fortuitous encounter with a German coastal convoy, failed to capture their battery but contrived to silence it while the raid lasted. On the central beaches, however, the infantry and as many of the tanks as could be landed met with much stiffer resistance than had been expected and despite extreme gallantry under withering fire had failed to make any significant progress when withdrawal was ordered at the pre-arranged time, six hours after the landings. Casualties were deplorably heavy, both in killed and wounded and by the capture of parties whom it was impossible to bring off.<sup>3</sup> Both in the assault and in the withdrawal the service rendered by the Navy was beyond praise, and the troops spoke of the air co-operation as 'faultless'. Air casualties also were heavy—106 aircraft, of which 88 were fighters—and, contrary to belief at the time, much heavier than those inflicted on the enemy. The raid had proved, however, 'that the German Air Force could be provoked into throwing all its available resources into the air by a coastal raid on the scale of "Jubilee"'. The enemy's losses, except in aircraft, were slight and arguments whether or not the raid was justified in the circumstances are nicely balanced.

Mr. Churchill had decided that the operation was to be regarded as 'a reconnaissance in force' and undoubtedly it secured valuable information which could not have been obtained without fighting. Besides information it provided important lessons for the future, of which the official report listed first 'the need for overwhelming fire support, including close support during the initial stages of the attack'. Next it placed 'the necessity for the formation of permanent naval assault forces with a coherence comparable to that of any other first

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<sup>1</sup> Seven U.S. squadrons took part.

<sup>2</sup> See map on p. 640.

<sup>3</sup> Of the Canadians 68 per cent, and of the commandos nearly 20 per cent became casualties, but over 2,000 of the missing were taken prisoner. The Navy had 523 casualties and lost a destroyer and 33 landing-craft.

line fighting formations. Army formations intended for amphibious assaults must without question be trained in close co-operation with such naval assault forces.' Among other points singled out were the need to plan a raid so as to be independent, as far as possible, of weather conditions and the need to carry out the assault on a wide front so as to allow of flexibility in the army plan and its execution. Unless it was possible to provide overwhelming close support, assaults should be planned to develop round the flanks of a strongly defended locality rather than frontally against it. The minimum force required for success should be allotted to the assault and the maximum retained as a reserve to exploit a success. A further important lesson learnt, though not mentioned in the official report, was that an assault on a strongly defended port could not succeed without such destruction of the port itself as greatly to reduce its usefulness, when captured, in the early days of an invasion. This pointed to the need of constructing and bringing over from England an artificial harbour.

The German division engaged at Dieppe reported afterwards that the strength of the attacking air and naval forces were not nearly sufficient to keep the defenders down during the landings and to destroy their signal communications. The German Fifteenth Army ascribed the large number of Allied prisoners and casualties to lack of artillery support, underestimation of the strength of the defences, the effect of the German defensive weapons, and the damage done to the craft provided for re-embarkation.<sup>1</sup>

These lessons proved their value when the time came in June 1944. In the meantime all sections of the attacking force had given evidence of their fighting quality, and not least the commandos, whose separate organization the Prime Minister was determined to maintain and develop with the utmost energy. As for the Canadians, it was a hard fortune which gave them their first taste of battle in conditions involving such cruel losses without the possibility of success.<sup>2</sup>

The Dieppe raid was not repeated; but the Germans could not be sure that it would not be—perhaps in much greater strength—and the possibility increased the nervousness from which Hitler had long suffered with regard to the northern and western coasts of his empire. The British Chiefs of Staff were correct in their belief that the German army in the West was amply sufficient to drive into the sea any force that the Allies might succeed in landing in the summer of

<sup>1</sup> Stacey, *op. cit.*, pp. 391–2.

<sup>2</sup> For comments on the planning of the expedition and a discussion on the lessons learnt see Stacey, Chap. XII.

1942, without withdrawing a single division from the eastern front, but they could not reckon on the Fuehrer's intuitions.

In a directive of 23rd March 1942, Hitler announced that '*in the near future the European coasts will be exposed very seriously to the danger of enemy landings*'. Even attempts at landing with limited objects 'would interfere materially with our own plans' since they would 'tie down strong forces of the Army and Air Force, thus preventing us from employing them at decisive points'. The British, he said, had at their disposal 'numerous armoured landing-craft suitable for carrying tanks and heavy weapons' and landing them on the open coast.<sup>1</sup> But while careful instructions were given for the tactical measures to be taken it is clear that the defenders in the West were expected to do their best with such forces as were already stationed there. German military intelligence did not consider it very likely that any major landing operations would be attempted. 'In spite of increasing Russian pressure on the British to establish a second front', ran a report of 30th March, 'enemy intelligence available to the *Wehrmacht* gives no indication of *an intended major landing operation* in Europe in the near future'. A later report of 5th May admitted that sufficient Allied forces were available for creating a 'second front' in Norway, France or elsewhere, but thought it doubtful whether, in view of the large amount of tonnage committed to the transport of troops to the East, there was enough shipping space over for an operation overseas in the West.<sup>2</sup> Raeder had pointed out on 11th April that the St. Nazaire raid showed British determination and ability 'to attack our extensive coastline more frequently and on a larger scale'; but it was difficult to say whether the enemy was ready for ambitious operations aimed at establishing new land fronts, as against more limited landings, and he thought the former unlikely at the present time, though sooner or later 'we must expect that the enemy will have the necessary forces for large-scale operations'.<sup>3</sup>

The Dieppe raid confirmed Hitler in his conviction of the need to prepare against an invasion. He had already on 2nd August given orders for the construction of a new system of coast defences 'after the pattern of the West Wall', and on the 25th, a week after the raid, he charged Commander-in-Chief, West, to have *15,000 fortifications of a permanent nature* built during the winter months.<sup>4</sup> Thus it is probable that the Germans' success in repelling the Dieppe raid influenced their strategy, which proved fatal in 1944, of attempting to hold an attempt at invasion on the beaches instead of relying on a mobile reserve.

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<sup>1</sup> *F.D. 40*. The words in italic were underlined in the original.

<sup>2</sup> *Fremde Heere West, O.K.H. Chefsachen*, A.L. 1341c, 1455a (original underlining).

<sup>3</sup> Naval High Command directive on coastal defences. *F.D.* pp. 21, 22.

<sup>4</sup> See Stacey, pp. 351-2, 405-6. The words in italic were underlined in the original document.

But although Hitler might feel greater anxiety about the West than his military advisers, all the evidence suggests that the effective measures which he took to prepare it against attack held only a secondary place in his strategic thinking. His basic aim in 1942, as set out in his directive of 5th April, was 'to wipe out the entire defence potential remaining to the Soviets and to cut them off as far as possible from their most important sources of supply'. All available forces of Germany and her allies would be brought up for this purpose. 'At the same time, however, the occupied territories in western and northern Europe, *particularly the coasts*, must remain adequately protected under all circumstances.'<sup>1</sup>

The West served two purposes: it was an area to which tired and depleted formations were sent from Russia for rest and reorganization and in which new or reconstituted divisions were being formed before moving eastwards; at the same time, since the West was a region exposed to attack, all forces stationed there, whatever their condition, served as a protective shield, whether their primary function was coast defence or the maintenance of internal security. Attention was naturally directed to the West by the St. Nazaire raid, and the high command took in hand the improvement of the Channel and Atlantic coast defences, but it was not until the late spring and early summer of 1942 that any substantial reinforcements arrived in the West. In fact it was not until May that the Fuehrer was so seriously concerned with the danger on that front as to order the transfer thither of a single first-class regiment.<sup>2</sup>

Two months later, on 9th July, when the main German offensive in the Ukraine had begun, Hitler at length issued an order for the strengthening of defence measures in the West:

'Our rapid and great victories may place before Great Britain the alternatives of either staging a large-scale invasion with the object of opening a second front, or seeing Russia eliminated as a political and military factor. It is therefore highly probable that enemy landings will shortly take place in the area of the Commanding General Armed Forces, West.'

The indications, he said, were agents' and other intelligence reports, the heavy concentration of ferrying vessels along the English south coast and the holding back of the Royal Air Force in the last few days. The areas regarded as particularly threatened were, in the first place, the Channel coast, the area between Dieppe and Le Havre, and Normandy.<sup>3</sup> He evidently regarded the matter as urgent, for two S.S. divisions were to be transferred to the West at once, one

<sup>1</sup> *F.D. 41*: original underlining set in italic.

<sup>2</sup> *Mot. Regt. Hermann Goering*.

<sup>3</sup> He also mentioned the South Netherlands and Brittany, as being the areas next in danger.

of them before the completion of reorganization and before it was fully mobile. All S.S. units in the West were to be combined under a new S.S. Motorized Command. Two bomber groups were also to be transferred to France from the eastern reserves of the German Air Force and drastic measures were to be taken to prevent sabotage. Daily progress reports would be made to the Fuehrer, and in the event of an enemy landing he would himself proceed to the West and assume charge of operations.<sup>1</sup> But these proposals were not carried out in their entirety, and in order to form a true picture of the importance attached to the West at this time by the high command it is necessary to consider the German Order of Battle as a whole.

According to the monthly *O.K.H.* formation tables,<sup>2</sup> there were in January 1942 in the West (France, Belgium and the Netherlands) 33 German divisions, of which two were armoured, as against 163 divisions (19 armoured), including five divisions in Finland, in the East. In September there were 35 divisions in the West, including 3½ armoured and 1½ motorized, as against 182 (20 armoured), including seven in Finland, in the East. In Scandinavia there were in January eight infantry divisions; in April–May this total rose to 11 infantry divisions and one weak armoured division. The number of infantry divisions in the West never rose above 31 (in January); in June it dropped to 24. With the exception of one *Luftwaffe* division, none of the infantry divisions were of notably high quality. The most significant reinforcements were the arrival of one S.S. motorized division and one motorized brigade in July, and from May onwards an increase in armour of one division and an armoured regiment, later expanded to brigade strength.

Thus only 1½ motorized divisions instead of the two mentioned in Hitler's directive of 9th July were actually sent. Moreover his suggestion on the day of the Dieppe raid that another S.S. motorized division should be transferred from Russia was not followed up, since the Commander-in-Chief in the West assured him that 'he hoped to be able to deal by the evening with the English who had landed'.

In fact, during the period under review, only 10½ divisions, including three armoured, were moved to the western theatre from the eastern, whereas 25, including three armoured, were moved to the East from the West. Taking into account movements to and from all fronts, viz. Scandinavia and the Balkans, and new formations, 'the final overall picture which emerges is that the East gained 26 divisions and the West lost 5½, all of them to the Russian theatre. The only true gain which the West can show at the expense of the East

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<sup>1</sup> *F.D.* pp. 34–36. For the order to build an 'Atlantic Wall' see above p. 643.

<sup>2</sup> *Schematische Kriegsgliederung*—A.L. 755.



was one S.S. motorized division (*Das Reich*) and one S.S. motorized brigade (*Adolf Hitler*),<sup>1</sup>

In the air there were no important transfers between Russian and other theatres in the months April–July. The numbers of operational aircraft in the whole German Air Force increased by 23 per cent, but, while numbers in the West increased in this proportion, on the eastern front the increase was 39 per cent. Nevertheless the Germans felt bound to retain in the West a very large proportion of their air forces which would have been of immense value in the East.<sup>2</sup> The number of serviceable single-engine fighters and night fighters (577) in the West on 20th July was much greater than that of serviceable single-engine and twin-engine and ground-attack fighters (428) at that date in the East. On the other hand far the greater number of bombers was in the East. After the cessation of the intensive attack on Malta in May some units were transferred to Russia from the Mediterranean theatre, reducing the *Luftwaffe* strength in the latter theatre by about 12 per cent.

From the figures given above it appears that, at any rate until August, the Allies did not succeed in diverting any significant part of the enemy's armed strength engaged on the Eastern front. What diversions, if any, might have been caused by more and larger landings, how far Hitler's fears might have prevailed over rational calculations, must be a matter of guesswork. Mr. Churchill could, however, point out to Molotov in May that we had confronting us eleven Axis divisions, of which three were German, in Libya; the equivalent of eight German divisions in Norway; and 25 German divisions in France and the Low Countries<sup>3</sup>—a total of 44 divisions, of which some at least might otherwise have been deployed against Russia.

## A Note on 'Jupiter'

Our failure in Norway in April 1940 had not killed the Prime Minister's interest in that country as offering opportunities for offensive action. In October 1941 he had been attracted by the idea of capturing Trondheim.<sup>4</sup> He had tried to commend the project first to the Chiefs of Staff, then to Sir Alan Brooke, at that time Commander-in-Chief, Home Forces, whom he instructed to propose a plan after consultation with his naval and air colleagues and a number of Ministers, and finally to Lieut.-General A. G. L. McNaugh-

<sup>1</sup> I owe these facts and figures to Mr. B. Melland and Mr. Lickfold of the Enemy Documents Section.

<sup>2</sup> See Webster and Frankland, I, 490 and Chap. xxii above.

<sup>3</sup> This was an underestimate.

<sup>4</sup> See Chap. viii above, pp. 204-6.

ton, commanding the Canadian forces in England. None of them responded: the impossibility of providing the necessary air support seemed conclusive.<sup>1</sup> In the spring of 1942, Mr. Churchill's thoughts turned to still higher latitudes and 'Jupiter' was the outcome.

'Jupiter' is defined in his book as the code-name for operations in Northern Norway. He also speaks of it as meaning 'the liberation of Northern Norway'. It was more narrowly defined as an operation to safeguard the passage of convoys to Russia. It was the Prime Minister's 'own constructive plan', for which he says that he 'always hankered', and for six weeks in the summer of 1942 it occupied much of the time and energy of the Chiefs of Staff and the Planners.<sup>2</sup>

Sir Winston tells us that he had 'Jupiter' in mind as early as April for execution in the autumn, but thought it inexpedient to mention it in discussion with Mr. Hopkins and General Marshall that month. He appears to have first put forward the idea for the consideration of the Chiefs of Staff on 27th May as an alternative to 'Sledgehammer'. The operation should be undertaken in the late summer when the nights were longer, with the object of securing the airfields from which the enemy air forces were harassing our Russian convoys. He suggested that a force of one or two divisions, together with the necessary anti-aircraft units for the protection of the airfields when captured, should be embarked and sailed as if it were a convoy proceeding to Archangel. The force could then turn south at an appropriate point and land near the airfields in Northern Norway. As soon as these had been captured and the anti-aircraft guns installed, bombers could fly in from northern Scotland, and fighters from Murmansk or from a carrier or from both. A second convoy could bring a supporting force and these ships could remain in the narrow fiords under cover of their own anti-aircraft guns and of an abundant smoke-screen until they had all been unloaded. This operation might well be the prelude to the rolling-up of the German forces in Norway.

Sir Dudley Pound at once pointed out that the naval commitment of launching and maintaining this force in Northern Norway would probably absorb the whole of our escort forces in the Western Approaches, and Sir Charles Portal suggested that the Russians might well consider that the shipping required could be more profitably employed in taking munitions and supplies to Archangel. Mr. Churchill, however, told the President that he had instructed the staff to study such an operation, which, seemed to him 'necessary to ensure supplies to Russia next year', and he produced for the Chiefs of Staff a minute, which he has printed in his book, sketching the enterprise as he conceived it.<sup>3</sup> It would consist of two waves, first the fight-

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, 258-62; Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 166-70.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 748, 289, 312.

<sup>3</sup> IV, 312-13 where the minute (of 1st June) is, however, wrongly dated.

ing expedition and a week later the supplies. Supplies would be taken for three or four months, since the expedition must be self-contained. The troops would be based on the ships which had carried them, and in the winter the great bulk of them would live in these ships.

The Chiefs of Staff discussed the matter further with the Prime Minister on 8th June. They had had before them a draft appreciation by the Joint Planners which in no way lessened their distaste for the scheme. It appeared that there were not two, as the Prime Minister had thought, but ten airfields which would have to be occupied. Sir Dudley Pound said the shipping requirements were so great as to make it unlikely that we should be able to continue the convoys to Russia. In any case, said the Chief of the Air Staff, during the winter months owing to weather our convoys were subject to only a small and intermittent scale of air-attack and the proposed operation would not contribute much to their safety. Sir Alan Brooke thought that we should now have to occupy or at least deny to the enemy the whole coast from Petsamo to Narvik and that much larger forces would be required; a less ambitious operation, however, in the Petsamo-Kirkenes area in conjunction with the Russians was worth considering. But the Prime Minister was not dissuaded; since it was now unlikely that 'Sledgehammer' would come off it was all the more important that 'Jupiter' should be carefully studied, and he emphasized its merits at the Cabinet meeting on 11th June. He proceeded to set out his views in a further vigorous minute, which also he has printed.<sup>1</sup> In the north of Norway, he claimed, we could certainly bring superior forces to bear at the point of attack and in the whole area invaded, which we could not do in France; moreover, if successful we should get a permanent footing on the Continent of constant value to the passage of our convoys and 'capable of almost indefinite exploitation southwards. In fact, we could begin to roll the map of Hitler's Europe down from the top'. In spite of our experience in Norway in 1940 he challenged the opinion, which had 'come to be accepted by us as an axiom', 'that it is impossible to land anywhere against opposition, including air opposition, however limited, without superior air strength. . . . It is a question whether it is better to land without fighter cover at a point where the enemy are very weak in armour and troops, or with fighter cover at a point where the enemy are very strong in armour and ground troops. It is a question of emphasis and proportion. . . . A military attack is not ruled out simply because a fifth of the soldiers may be shot on the way, provided the others get there and do the job.'

The Chiefs of Staff considered this minute on the 15th along with

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<sup>1</sup> IV. 313-16.

the revised appreciation from the Planners, who summed up strongly against 'Jupiter'. They argued that as a 'second front' it could have no great military value since it offered no immediate threat to any objective vital to the Germans, and that owing to poor communications between north and south Norway any project for 'unrolling the Nazi map of Europe from the top' had little chance of success. All the same the Prime Minister directed at a staff conference held that evening, just before he and the C.I.G.S. started for Washington, that plans should be made for 'Jupiter'.

At Washington 'Jupiter' found no favour with the Combined Chiefs of Staff except that they regarded it as preferable to 'Gymnast': it would be accompanied by hazards justified only by compelling reasons. But the Prime Minister's advocacy with the President secured the inclusion among the decisions reached at the White House on 21st June of a sentence to the effect that the possibility of operations in Norway in the autumn and winter of 1942 would be carefully considered by the Combined Chiefs as well as those of 'Gymnast', supposing operations in France or the Low Countries were found impracticable.<sup>1</sup>

This was as much recognition as 'Jupiter' ever received from Allied strategy. It was not mentioned in the decisive memorandum of 24th July.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless Mr. Churchill remained faithful to his constructive plan. The staff had been kept at work on it and produced elaborate reports. In a minute of 5th July the Prime Minister, now convinced that 'Sledgehammer' must be abandoned, insisted that 'Jupiter', or some form of 'Jupiter', in concert with the Russians would, as well as 'Gymnast', seem to be of great urgency from every point of view, military and political. 'Our whole power to help Russia in any effectual manner this year depends upon our driving the enemy aircraft from the northern airfields of Norway.' At a staff conference on the evening of the 6th it was agreed that further consideration should be given to 'Jupiter' among other offensive projects for 1942, in spite of the Chiefs of Staff's renewed and reasoned objections, which they confirmed in a note to the Prime Minister next morning. 'In accordance with your instructions,' they said, 'we have for some time past been trying to make plans for seizing and holding the northern tip of Norway, but so far we have failed to find any satisfactory solution.' The Cabinet that afternoon, having heard the views of the three Chiefs of Staff, agreed that in view of the unlikelihood of 'Sledgehammer' being undertaken the Americans should be encouraged to proceed with 'Gymnast' and that we ourselves should undertake 'Jupiter' if by any means a sound and sensible plan could be devised.

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<sup>1</sup> Operations in the Iberian peninsula were also to be studied, but this led to nothing.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix V.

So 'Jupiter' was given a further and final lease of life. General McNaughton was again called in and asked to examine the project afresh.<sup>1</sup> After a month's study he produced a long report, concluding that it would be necessary to seize three areas in Norway by simultaneous attack, for which five divisions, four battleships, an aircraft-carrier and fifteen cruisers would be required; the operation would be a most hazardous one, the chances against suitable weather conditions being about six to one, and might result in a frightful military disaster. Moreover, even should we succeed in capturing the northern airfields, it would still be open to the Germans to deprive Russia of supplies from her Arctic ports by launching an offensive on the Finnish front to cut the railways from those ports. The Prime Minister, who did not see this report till 15th September, nevertheless wished General McNaughton to go to Moscow and discuss the plan with Stalin. The Canadian government, however, saw various objections to this suggestion and it was not pressed.

This was the death of 'Jupiter' as a serious possibility, but the Prime Minister continued at intervals to demand reports, and as late as February 1944 he remarked that 'we ought, of course, to have liberated the country in the campaign of 1943'.

'Jupiter' is perhaps the most striking instance of how in the face of the strongest military opinion from his professional advisers Mr. Churchill would persist in pressing on them a scheme which they held to be radically unsound. It illustrates too the reverse fact that if his advisers stubbornly resisted this pressure he would not overrule them on a purely military question.

But if 'Jupiter' deserved rejection as a genuine operation, it had great merit as a cover plan, and the Prime Minister saw it in this light as subserving 'Torch'. Hitler, moreover, was all too ready to be deceived. As we now know, he had for some time been obsessed with the notion that the British intended to land in the far north.<sup>2</sup> On 14th March, 1942, remarking that enemy landings on the Arctic coast must be expected, with the probable objective of the Finnish nickel mines so vital to Germany, he ordered intensified U-boat and aircraft activity in the Arctic. In order to strengthen the forces there it would be necessary to reduce operations in other areas, in particular in reconnaissance in the Atlantic. The Army in Lapland must have sufficient troops to meet a large-scale attack against the coast. On 29th August we find Hitler agreeing with Raeder's wish to keep the fleet in Norwegian waters, partly in order to attack convoys but also because of 'the constant threat of an enemy invasion'.

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 394; Bryant, p. 420.

<sup>2</sup> See above, p. 643.

## CHAPTER XXVIII ·

### CAIRO AND MOSCOW

**T**HE TWO Western Allies having at length agreed on their strategy for 1942, it remained to explain and justify it to the Russians.

No answer had been returned to Stalin's angry message of 23rd July, but in view of Russian disappointment at our failure to open a second front, as expressed by Maisky to Eden and reported by our Ambassador in Moscow, something clearly had to be done. On the 28th the Ambassador suggested that the Prime Minister himself should come to Moscow. Mr. Churchill accordingly on the 30th offered to meet M. Stalin at any convenient place, informing him at the same time that we were taking preliminary steps to run a large convoy to Archangel in the first week of September. Stalin replied immediately with an invitation to come to Moscow 'for joint consideration of urgent matters'.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister also informed M. Stalin that he was starting forthwith for Cairo, where he had 'serious business'. He had wished to do so as early as 3rd July but had yielded to dissuasion. Then the visit of Hopkins, Marshall and King had intervened, but now he was convinced that it was 'urgently necessary' that he should go out and settle the decisive questions on the spot. Auchinleck was told to expect him on 3rd August; he had asked General Smuts and General Wavell to join him in Cairo, and the C.I.G.S. would arrive the same day. Brooke had for the last fortnight been planning to visit the various commands in the Mediterranean, the Middle East and India on his own account and in his own time, and the change of plan was disconcerting.<sup>2</sup>

The Prime Minister's descent on Egypt was due to doubts about the high command in the Middle East 'fed continually by the reports' he had 'received from many quarters'. His doubts had been confirmed by a signal of 31st July from the Commander-in-Chief saying that an opportunity for the resumption of the offensive was unlikely to arise before the middle of September and that his policy would therefore be temporarily defensive. Both the Prime Minister and the C.I.G.S. were agreed that the commands of the Middle East and of Eighth Army, which Auchinleck had held jointly since 25th June, must be separated, and it was with a successor to him at the Army, not at

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<sup>1</sup> See Chap. xxv, above, p. 589; *Soviet Correspondence*, I, 58-59.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 408; Bryant, pp. 419, 433.

Middle East Headquarters, that they were at first concerned. On the night after their arrival on 3rd August Mr. Churchill argued in favour of General Gott, commanding 13th Corps, who had had long experience of fighting in the Desert and was generally admired and trusted; when the C.I.G.S. objected that Gott was a tired man, the Prime Minister suggested that Brooke should take the command himself.<sup>1</sup>

Next day, the 4th, Brooke found that Auchinleck agreed with him both that Gott was not so suitable for the command of Eighth Army as Lieutenant-General B. L. Montgomery, then holding South-Eastern Command at home, and that a new Chief of Staff was needed in Cairo.<sup>2</sup>

On the 5th the Prime Minister and the C.I.G.S. both visited troops and Army and Air headquarters in the forward area, and Mr. Churchill made up his mind, as the result of talks at the front and in Cairo, that in order to give fresh impetus to the campaign a change at the top was required. The C.I.G.S. seems to have come to the same conclusion, as had General Smuts. Next morning Mr. Churchill told Brooke that he had decided to split the Middle East Command, forming a new headquarters to face the danger from the north, and offered Brooke himself the command in Egypt, with Montgomery under him at Eighth Army. Lord Alanbrooke has told how sorely he was tempted to accept, but he felt that his duty lay in London, where he had now learnt how to work with the Prime Minister. If Brooke was not to be in supreme command, Mr. Churchill insisted on Gott at Eighth Army; Brooke had been confirmed in his opinion that Gott was a tired man when he talked with him on the 5th, but did not care to press his preference for Montgomery.<sup>3</sup> Accordingly on the evening of the 6th the Prime Minister sent the following signal to his Deputy at home.

'1. As a result of such inquiry as I have made here, and after prolonged consultations with Field-Marshal Smuts and C.I.G.S. and Minister of State, I have come to the conclusion that a drastic and immediate change is needed in the High Command.

2. I therefore propose that the Middle East Command shall be reorganized into two separate Commands, namely:

- (a) "Near East Command", comprising Egypt, Palestine and Syria, with its centre in Cairo, and
- (b) "Middle East Command", comprising Persia and Iraq, with its centre in Basra or Baghdad.

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, p. 439; this offer of command of Eighth Army is not mentioned by Churchill, who, as Bryant notes, has confused the dates.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 440.

<sup>3</sup> See Churchill, IV, 413, 415; Bryant, pp. 441-7.

The Eighth and Ninth Armies fall within the first and the Tenth Army in the second of these commands.<sup>1</sup>

3. General Auchinleck to be offered the post of C-in-C the new Middle East Command. The title remains the same, but its scope is reduced. It may, however, become more important later. It also preserves General Auchinleck's association with India. It must be remembered that General Wavell's appointment as C-in-C India was for the duration of the war, and that the India Office have always desired that Auchinleck should return there if possible. I know of nothing that should prevent the eventual realization of this plan, though of course no promise can be made in respect of events which are unforeseeable.

4. General Alexander to be Commander-in-Chief the Near East.

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6. General Gott to command the Eighth Army under Alexander.

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12. The above constitute the major simultaneous changes which the gravity and urgency of the situation here require. I shall be grateful to my War Cabinet colleagues if they will approve them. Smuts and C.I.G.S. wish me to say they are in full agreement that amid many difficulties and alternatives this is the right course to pursue. The Minister of State is also in full agreement. I have no doubt the changes will impart a new and vigorous impulse to the Army and restore confidence in the Command, which I regret does not exist at the present time. Here I must emphasize the need of a new start and vehement action to animate the whole of this vast but baffled and somewhat unhinged organization. The War Cabinet will not fail to realize that a victory over Rommel in August or September may have a decisive effect upon the attitude of the French in North Africa when "Torch" begins.'

The War Cabinet on the 7th agreed 'as to the need for drastic and immediate changes in the High Command' and warmly approved of the selection of Alexander. They would have preferred, however, that he should retain the undivided Middle East Command, and in this the Chiefs of Staff present, as well as the Service Ministers and the representatives of Australia and New Zealand, concurred. In any case they were doubtful as to the wisdom of appointing Auchinleck to the proposed eastern command.

Mr. Churchill, replying, defended the proposed distribution of responsibilities on its merits. He doubted if the disasters in the Western Desert would have occurred if Auchinleck had not been 'distracted by

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Churchill had intended that the boundary between the two Commands should be the Canal but had been persuaded by Brooke that this would be administratively unsound. (Bryant, p. 444.)



the divergent considerations of a too widely extended front'. He himself, General Smuts and the C.I.G.S. were all convinced that the division now proposed was 'sound on geographical, strategic and administrative grounds'. Nor had he any hesitation in recommending Auchinleck for the new command.

'At the head of an army with a single and direct purpose he commands my entire confidence. If he had taken command of the Eighth Army when I urged him to I believe we should have won the Gazala battle, and many people here think the same. He has shown high-minded qualities of character and resolution. . . . There is no officer here or in India who has better credentials. Only the need of making an abrupt and decisive change in the command against Rommel and giving the army the sense of a new start has induced me to propose the redistribution of commands. . . .'

He added that there would be no difficulty in continuing Air Marshal Tedder's Air Command over the whole of the existing Middle East Area.<sup>1</sup>

Though not entirely convinced, the Cabinet, meeting late that night, agreed to waive their objections, stipulating only that in order to avoid confusion the geographically incorrect title of 'Middle East' should be retained for Alexander's Command.

The proposed arrangements were upset, however, first by the death of General Gott, killed in his aircraft by German fighters, and, secondly, by Auchinleck's refusal to accept the diminished command offered him; in his opinion there was a case for putting the area under either India or Middle East, but none for setting up an independent command. The Prime Minister now agreed that the Eighth Army should be taken over by Montgomery, and General Maitland Wilson, commanding Ninth Army in Syria, was appointed to the new command in Persia and Iraq (P.A.I.C.)<sup>2</sup>

It was mentioned in a previous chapter that on 9th July the Middle East Defence Committee had consulted London as to the strategy to be adopted should Russian resistance break in the north.<sup>3</sup> A reply to their inquiry was at length produced in a Chiefs of Staff Report of 29th July.

The Report accepted the possibility that the Russian southern front might break in 1942, in which case, if we had taken no steps to deal with such a situation, there was little to prevent the enemy from advancing through Persia to the South Persian oilfields. The Oil Control Board had advised that the loss of Abadan and Bahrein

<sup>1</sup> Part of this signal is printed in Churchill, IV, 417-18.

<sup>2</sup> Churchill, IV, 418-19; Bryant, 449-51; Connell, 704-14, where use is made of Sir Ian Jacob's Diary. In June 1943 Auchinleck was reappointed C-in-C, India.

<sup>3</sup> See pp. 613-4 above.

'would be calamitous inasmuch as it would enforce a drastic reduction in our total war capacity and probably the abandonment of some of our present fields of action'. It would be unwise to count on Auchinleck being able to transfer land forces from Egypt to Iraq and Persia during the autumn, but 'reasonable security on the Persian front' might be attained in the course of the autumn and winter if the 51st and 56th British Divisions (from home) and the 5th, perhaps followed by the 2nd (both from India) and an American armoured division, could arrive in time. The requisite air forces should also be available if the American reinforcements arrived according to plan and if intensive operations in the Western Desert were not prolonged indefinitely. The Chiefs of Staff's conclusions were that the capture of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania would be the best contribution to Middle East security, but that if the worst occurred, if the Russian front broke and adequate forces could not be sent, it would be right to hold on to the Abadan area even at the risk of losing Egypt, since the main purpose of our whole Middle East effort was to defend the sources of oil and its transport by sea. If we lost Persia and Iraq, our position in Egypt would ultimately become untenable for military as well as economic reasons, but if we were forced to abandon Egypt it would not necessarily mean the loss of Abadan.

This paper was discussed both by the Cabinet at home in the absence of the Prime Minister and C.I.G.S. and at a meeting in Cairo at which Mr. Churchill explained to General Smuts, Mr. Casey and General Wavell, as well as the three Commanders-in-Chief, the arrangements come to with the Americans.

The Cabinet in the circumstances did little more than take note of the Report. The discussion in Cairo on the afternoon of 4th August followed on a conference of the three Commanders-in-Chief, all of whom agreed with Brooke that the importance of Abadan, as compared with Egypt, was paramount.<sup>1</sup> The C.I.G.S. stated this opinion to the main conference. It was difficult, he said, to estimate the extent of the Russians' resistance north of the Caucasus. Their strategy might be to concentrate their forces from Stalingrad northward and let the Caucasus go. 'In such a case German light forces might penetrate to Northern Persia in October or November. They would not be in great strength, so that if we could arrange for a modicum of defence we might hold them until the winter, during which we could build up our strength for the spring campaign. . . . The Chiefs of Staff felt that whatever else happened it was essential to hold Abadan. . . .'

The Prime Minister was ready to take the risk. He thought that 'the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus Mountains and a neutral Turkey

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<sup>1</sup> Bryant, p. 440.

would together form a good shield for our northern flank provided that the Russians would hold the Caucasus chain and provided that we could support them with the air forces which would prevent German domination of the air over the Caspian'. A scheme for moving twenty squadrons to that front had been worked out, but he was not prepared to divert anything from Egypt until a decision had been reached in the Western Desert. The battle there was of supreme importance to the whole war, and he felt it would be wrong to withdraw forces which could take part in it, in order to prepare what could only be a weak defence in the north. Summing up the position, the Prime Minister said that he intended to find out while in Moscow what forces the Russians had disposed for the defence of the Caucasus and thus to estimate the extent of the danger which might arise on that flank this year. On his return the whole situation could be reviewed in the light of the information which he had obtained and the final decisions as to our policy could be reached. In the meanwhile nothing should be done which would in any way detract from our effort in the Western Desert.

General Alexander arrived on the 9th to command the Middle East as redefined, and took as his Chief of the General Staff Major-General R. L. McCreery, till recently Auchinleck's adviser on armoured fighting. The new Commander-in-Chief received from the Prime Minister next day a directive which left no doubt as to what was expected of him :

'1. Your prime and main duty will be to take or destroy at the earliest opportunity the German-Italian Army commanded by Field-Marshal Rommel, together with all its supplies and establishments in Egypt and Libya.

2. You will discharge or cause to be discharged such other duties as pertain to your Command, without prejudice to the task described in paragraph 1, which must be considered paramount in His Majesty's interests.'<sup>1</sup>

On the following night, the 11th August, the Prime Minister and his party, which included Wavell and Tedder as well as the C.I.G.S. and Sir Alexander Cadogan of the Foreign Office, left for Moscow.

Just at this time a further effort was made to relieve the plight of Malta. The two ships which, out of seventeen, had arrived in June had met immediate needs, but the island was still on painfully short commons.<sup>2</sup> Experience now forbade the sailing of a convoy from the east, but a more powerful escorting force than ever before was assembled at Gibraltar to protect the 14 merchant vessels which

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 424.

<sup>2</sup> See p. 605 above.

passed the Rock eastwards on 10th August; it included two battle-ships and three carriers, while a fourth carrier, the *Furious*, sailed independently to fly-in 38 Spitfires to strengthen the island defences. The decision whether the heavy ships and aircraft-carriers should accompany the convoy beyond Cape Bon into the narrow waters near Malta was so important that it had been referred to the Cabinet; they had decided in accordance with the Admiralty's advice that they should *not*. As it happened the Italian surface fleet made no attempt to attack the convoy after our heavy ships had turned back. Nevertheless the convoy came under prolonged attack from aircraft, submarines and motor-torpedo-boats and both the escorting force and the merchant vessels sustained losses. Only five of the latter reached Malta, with 32,000 tons of supplies besides 15,000 tons of oil. The Navy lost the carrier *Eagle* and the cruisers *Manchester* and *Cairo*, while another carrier and two other cruisers were damaged. This, as it turned out, was the last convoy which had to be sailed to Malta under such desperate conditions, and the island held out.<sup>1</sup>

The Prime Minister was now embarked on the more important half of his mission. His visit to Egypt had been most useful. His authority with the Cabinet had made it possible to effect desirable changes with the least possible delay and the exchange of views with Wavell and Smuts in person had been valuable. But his presence, though stimulating, and ensuring prompt action, was not essential. The C.I.G.S. was quite competent to perceive and recommend the necessary changes in command; it is clear that he would have chosen Montgomery for the Eighth Army and highly probable that he would have asked for Alexander as Commander-in-Chief, Middle East.<sup>2</sup> But to deal with the suspicious and angry Russians was a different matter, for which all Mr. Churchill's authority and statesmanship were required. He had indeed, as he saw it in prospect, 'a somewhat raw job' before him. The President recognized the rawness and willingly sanctioned Mr. Averell Harriman's offer to accompany the Prime Minister and give him America's moral support.

The primary purpose of the mission was to propound to the Russians the Anglo-American strategic plans for 1942 and to secure their acquiescence if hardly their approval; at any rate to avoid a public outburst of recrimination and a rift in the alliance. Mr. Churchill's secondary purpose was to obtain information of Russian plans and prospects in the Caucasus as a basis for concerted action.

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<sup>1</sup> For the 'Pedestal' convoy see Playfair, III, 316 ff. and Roskill, II, 301 ff. The battle-ships engaged were *Nelson* and *Rodney*; the three carriers were *Victorious*, *Indomitable* and *Eagle*. The concentration of this force had been made possible by the suspension of the Arctic convoys and by the improved situation in the Indian Ocean.

<sup>2</sup> See Bryant, pp. 442, 446.

The incidents of the journey via Tehran and of the four-days stay in Moscow have been graphically described by Sir Winston himself and by Lord Alanbrooke; Sir Ian Jacob also kept a full diary. There were two formal meetings in the Kremlin on the 12th and 13th August at which the Prime Minister and Mr. Harriman met Stalin and Molotov. Besides these Mr. Churchill had a short talk with Molotov at noon on the 13th, and the military members of the party met Marshals Voroshilov and Shaposhnikov twice on the 15th. The Prime Minister had also a long informal session with Stalin during most of that night before leaving at dawn on the 16th for Cairo; Sir Alexander Cadogan and M. Molotov attended for part of this meeting.

At the first meeting, besides the Prime Minister, only the Ambassador, Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, and an interpreter were present on the British side, the rest of the party having been delayed for a day at Tehran by engine trouble in their *Liberator*.<sup>1</sup> The conference opened in an atmosphere of gloom. The Germans were advancing in two great drives towards Stalingrad and the Caucasus, and it was only gradually that Russian resistance hardened. On the 8th the Russians had evacuated and destroyed the Maikop oilfield, and the enemy occupied it a day or two later. Stalin admitted that the news was not good.

In accordance with his considered 'plan of campaign' the Prime Minister began by telling the worst. He explained the practical reasons which had forced us to abandon the idea of opening a second front in north-west Europe in 1942. We had in view, however, 'a very great operation' in 1943, for which a million American troops were due to assemble in the United Kingdom in the spring of that year, making an expeditionary force of twenty-seven divisions, to which the British would add twenty-one; nearly half this force would be armoured. To this disappointing announcement Stalin reacted strongly. There was not a single German division in France, he said, of any value. Why should not the Allies capture the Channel Islands? Why should they not make a demonstration in the Pas de Calais and a landing at Cherbourg? Were they really unable even to land six divisions? The Prime Minister, who had explained the difficulties of an assault landing on a fortified tidal coast and our lack of the necessary landing-craft, answered that we could land six divisions, but the landing of them would be more harmful than helpful. We knew that there were in France twenty-five German divisions, nine of which were of the first line.<sup>2</sup> 'He could assure M. Stalin that, if by throwing in 150,000 to 200,000 men we could render him aid by drawing away from the Russian front appreciable German forces,

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<sup>1</sup> The record of the meeting was presumably kept by the Ambassador.

<sup>2</sup> German records show that these figures were in fact an understatement of the total number but possibly an overstatement of their quality.

we would not shrink from this course on the grounds of loss. But if it drew no men away and spoiled the prospects for 1943, it would be a great error.' Stalin, who is said to have looked deeply depressed, said that if his Allies could not make a landing in France this year he could not insist upon it, but he did not accept Mr. Churchill's arguments.

The Prime Minister then proceeded to disclose and enlarge upon the more positive aspects of the Western strategy. He held out, somewhat imaginatively, 'a general picture of next year's big operation', which proposed to 'hold the enemy at this point or that and at the same time attack elsewhere, for instance in the Loire, the Gironde or the Scheldt'. He was more successful in securing Stalin's enthusiasm for our bombing programme. After he had announced our intentions of shattering German cities, one after another, with four-ton bombs, the atmosphere, according to the record, 'became progressively more cordial'. At length Mr. Churchill, who had started 'to bring him southward by steps',<sup>1</sup> unfolded to Stalin the 'Torch' plan, for which the President had fixed 30th October as the latest date. He 'described the military advantages of freeing the Mediterranean whence still another front could be opened' and, drawing a crocodile, explained how 'it was our intention to attack the soft belly of the crocodile as we attacked his hard snout'. Mr. Harriman said that 'in spite of the fact that the President had serious preoccupations in the Pacific his eyes were turned upon the European theatre of war as of primary concern. He would support it to the limit of the resources at his disposal'.

Stalin, who was hesitant as to the political implications of the plan, which he thought might lead to war with Spain and Vichy France, nevertheless approved it and delighted Mr. Churchill by the quickness with which he perceived four of its outstanding advantages: it would take the enemy in the rear, it would make the Germans and French fight each other, it would put Italy out of action, and it would keep the Spaniards neutral. The Prime Minister and Mr. Harriman pointed out the further immense advantages of clearing the enemy out of the Mediterranean and shortening the present long haul round the Cape.

Reporting next day to the Cabinet and to the President, Mr. Churchill expressed his satisfaction at the cordial ending of the meeting and his expectation that he would be able to establish 'a solid and sincere relationship' with Stalin. 'He knows the worst and we parted in an atmosphere of great goodwill.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, IV, 432.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Harriman reported home that 'the Prime Minister was at his best and could not have handled the discussion with greater brilliance'. *Foreign Relations of the U.S. 1942*, III, 620.

It was therefore an unpleasant surprise when next evening Stalin presented an *aide-mémoire* amounting to a bleak rejection of all Mr. Churchill's arguments.

'As is well known,' it ran, 'the organization of a second front in Europe in 1942 was pre-decided during the sojourn of Molotov in London, and it found expression in the agreed Anglo-Soviet communiqué published on the 12th June last. . . . It will be easily understood that the Soviet Command built their plan of summer and autumn operations calculating on the creation of a second front in Europe in 1942. . . . It appears to me and my colleagues that the most favourable conditions exist in 1942 for the creation of a second front in Europe, inasmuch as almost all the forces of the German army, and the best forces to boot, have been withdrawn to the Eastern front, leaving in Europe an inconsiderable amount of forces and these of inferior quality. It is unknown whether the year of 1943 will offer conditions for the creation of a second front as favourable as 1942. We are of the opinion, therefore, that it is particularly in 1942 that the creation of a second front in Europe is possible and should be effected. I was, however, unfortunately unsuccessful in convincing Mr. Prime Minister of Great Britain hereof, while Mr. Harriman, the representative of the President of the United States, fully supported Mr. Prime Minister in the negotiations held in Moscow.'

Mr. Churchill next day, in an answering *aide-mémoire*, restated the Anglo-American position — 'The best second front in 1942, and the only large-scale operation possible from the Atlantic, is "Torch" — and refuted Stalin's allegation.

'No promise has been broken by Great Britain or the United States. I point to paragraph five of my *aide-mémoire* given to M. Molotov on the 10th June, 1942, which distinctly says: "We can, therefore, give no promise". . . . We cannot admit that the conversations with M. Molotov about the second front, safeguarded as they were by reservations both oral and written, formed any ground for altering the strategic plans of the Russian High Command.'

Mr. Harriman associated himself with this reply.

In the meantime, to return to the meeting in the Kremlin on the night of 13/14th August, at which Sir Alexander Cadogan, General Wavell, General Brooke and Air Chief Marshal Tedder were now present, Mr. Churchill made it clear that the British and American governments had no intention of altering their decision. 'It would be no help to Russia if the United Nations were now to do something that would simply lead to disaster involving them in profitless loss.' Stalin then declared that the Soviet government were not directly concerned with 'Torch'; the British and American governments, he said, seemed to consider the Russian front of only second-

dary importance. He also asserted that the Soviets had obtained little from the Western Allies in the way of supplies; 'promises which were made ought to be carried out'. He would not agree that the shortfall had been caused by enemy action; he suggested that owing to an underestimate of the importance of the Russian front the Allies only sent such equipment as they could spare.

Mr. Churchill denied that the Russian front was held to be of only secondary importance; he admitted that 'Torch' would affect the convoy position, but he reminded Stalin that it was at our own ports that we had undertaken to deliver the supplies for Russia, and there were a hundred ships waiting full of cargo. He showed remarkable self-restraint under the Russian taunts, but after a time, when Stalin suggested that our reluctance to invade the Continent was due to the army being frightened of the Germans, he replied with passion. He was disappointed to find no 'ring of comradeship' in the discussions. His outburst appears to have been salutary, and the conversation soon turned to less inflammatory topics—new weapons, the Caucasus, the output of aircraft.

The visitors were puzzled by Stalin's change of attitude. Sir Alan Brooke's opinion was that he was taking the measure of the Prime Minister and was favourably impressed by his toughness. Mr. Churchill thought his performance might have been intended for the record, to gratify his fellow Commissars. Others saw in it a regular Soviet technique, of which we had experience before. If it did not beat down opposition, it would at any rate serve to emphasize disapproval.

The C.I.G.S. at the staff meetings on the 15th found the Russian marshals equally unable or unwilling to understand why their Allies were not prepared to invade France at once. Voroshilov admitted his incapacity to discuss such details as shipping and landing-craft, but none the less claimed that a second front was not only necessary, but possible. The C.I.G.S. had further to point out that experience had shown that in narrow waters the advent of air-power had undermined supremacy at sea, while Sir Arthur Tedder explained that it was an overstatement to say that we had air supremacy over Northern France; to cover a great combined operation air superiority must be continuous. When questioned about the opening of a second front in 1943, General Brooke said that no definite date could be given; it would be as early as it was possible to make it.

With regard to the defence of the Caucasus region little definite information could be obtained, either from Stalin by Mr. Churchill or from the Russian marshals, but general confidence was expressed that the front would hold until the winter; the central route through the mountains would become impassable in October. The C.I.G.S., however, who had studied the country between the mountains and



the Caspian on the 13th from his low-flying aircraft, had seen little sign of prepared defences, and he was further sceptical as to whether as many as 25 Russian divisions were available in the area, as Stalin and Voroshilov had stated.<sup>1</sup>

The Russians welcomed the Prime Minister's tentative proposal to send air reinforcements for the defence of the region, but, since their numbers and the date of their dispatch depended on the result of operations in North Africa, seemed doubtful of the need to make immediate preparations in the area north of Tehran, as we wished. Thus, so far as this side of the object of the mission was concerned, little was accomplished.

Whatever may have been the reason for the Soviet Premier's truculence on the night of the 13th, at a banquet on the following evening he treated Mr. Churchill with signal respect, and after a final prolonged impromptu talk in Stalin's private flat on the night of the 15th they parted, in the Prime Minister's words, 'on most cordial and friendly terms'. In the earlier, more formal part of this interview Stalin went out of his way to say that the personal exchange of views was of the utmost importance; the fact that personal contact had been established meant that the ground had been prepared for future agreement. He now admitted that the indirect effect on Russia of success in North-West Africa would be very great. The Prime Minister told him that of course what we wanted to do was to put this new army into France and Italy; that would mean a frontal and a flank attack. Differences between Germany and Vichy might compel the Germans to occupy the south coast of France, as well as Sicily and Italy, but they could not remove their troops and aircraft from the Channel coast. In order to cause them anxiety about an attack across the Channel we proposed, weather permitting, to make a serious raid, a reconnaissance in force, that month.<sup>2</sup> Stalin then gave some information as to Russian dispositions in the Caucasus, after which he expressed his desire to meet the Prime Minister and President Roosevelt together. In the later course of the evening he stated Russia's urgent need for lorries and for aluminium and argued for the use of the northern supply route. Mr. Churchill naturally welcomed his proposal for an operation against Northern Norway and is reported to have agreed that Britain would provide two divisions for a joint expedition in that region in November. The meeting ended at 2.30 a.m.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Brooke suspected the figure of 25 divisions to be 'a gross exaggeration'. However, on 19th August the German Army Group A estimated that there were 20 Russian reserve divisions in the Caucasus uncommitted (*The German Campaign in Russia, etc.*, p. 162).

<sup>2</sup> The Dieppe operation, described in Chap. xxvii.

<sup>3</sup> The interpreter (Major A. H. Birse) present on this occasion declared that his account of the conversations should not be considered as more than rough notes. See Churchill, IV, 445 ff.

The Prime Minister reported to the Cabinet and to the President that on the whole he was definitely encouraged by his visit to Moscow. He was sure that the disappointing news he brought could not have been imparted except by himself personally without leading to really serious drifting apart. The Russians knew the worst and, having made their protest, were now entirely friendly, and this in spite of the fact that this was their most anxious and agonizing time.

But was it the fact that the Russians now knew the worst? By every statement, short of an absolute promise, Stalin had been given to understand that his Western Allies would launch 'a very great operation in 1943'. 'It was important . . . not to expose the people of France, by a withdrawal [after a landing in 1942] to the vengeance of Hitler and to waste them when they would be needed in the big operation in 1943.' 'Next year's big operation' would consist of holding the enemy on this point or that and at the same time attacking 'elsewhere, for instance in the Loire, the Gironde or the Scheldt.' That is no doubt what Mr. Churchill hoped would happen, but was he justified in speaking to Stalin so confidently? The Cabinet had been informed on 24th July that 'both the British and the United States Chiefs of Staff believed that it was unlikely that "Round-up" would be carried out in 1943'. Mr. Churchill indeed continued to persuade himself that the invasion could be launched in the latter part of 1943 and he argued with the Chiefs of Staff against its postponement.<sup>1</sup> He has since admitted that he was too optimistic, but his conscience was clear that he 'did not deceive or mislead Stalin'.<sup>2</sup>

The party returned to Cairo on 17th August and the Prime Minister and C.I.G.S. were back in England on the 24th. Although 'Torch' had now been accepted in principle by the three major Allies, important decisions as to time and place had yet to be made.

Speaking in the House of Commons on 27th January, 1942, Mr. Churchill confessed that he was feeling the weight of the war even more than in 'the tremendous summer days of 1940'. On 5th March he opened his heart to the President in words that he has published:

'When I reflect how I have longed and prayed for the entry of the United States into the war, I find it difficult to realize how gravely our British affairs have deteriorated by what has happened since the 7th December. We have suffered the greatest disaster in our history at Singapore, and other misfortunes will come thick and fast upon us. Your great power will only become effective gradually because of the vast distances and the shortage of ships. All can be retrieved in 1943 and 1944 but meanwhile there are

<sup>1</sup> See minutes of 24th July (above, p. 636) and of 18th November, 1942, printed in Churchill, IV, 582-3.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 591.

very hard forfeits to pay. The whole of the Levant-Caspian front now depends entirely on the success of the Russian armies. The attack which the Germans will deliver upon Russia in the spring will, I fear, be most formidable. The danger to Malta grows constantly, and large reinforcements are reaching Rommel in Tripoli *en route* for Cyrenaica.<sup>1</sup>

The misfortunes had come and the forfeits were still being paid. In each of the months of July and August more than 600,000 tons of shipping were sunk by the enemy; in each month nearly 100 ships were lost in the North Atlantic alone.<sup>2</sup> In August Rommel still stood within sixty miles of Alexandria and the Germans were still advancing in the Caucasus. In India, following on the failure of the Cripps mission, the Congress had again proclaimed civil disobedience or rather 'a mass struggle on non-violent lines'; Gandhi had been arrested and political riots had broken out in several provinces. The Japanese had not renewed their offensive in the Indian Ocean, but they were yet to attempt an invasion of India by land.

Nevertheless the general prospect had greatly improved. Our supply line in the Atlantic had not been cut. The Japanese navy was no longer supreme in the Pacific. The Russians, so far from collapsing, were maintaining an obstinate resistance and the American output of armies, ships, aircraft and all kind of munitions was rapidly mounting. The accession of these two mighty partners, east and west, assured us victory in the end. But the very fact of our being linked with powerful allies brought certain disadvantages; it diminished our freedom of action and in some ways made the direction of affairs more difficult.

Since he became Prime Minister on the day of the German invasion of the west Mr. Churchill had built up at home an effective system of war administration centred on the military side in the Minister of Defence and Chiefs of Staff Committee—an arrangement unlike anything in the past but entirely within the framework of the constitution. The military machine worked not without friction but without deadlocks or resignations. In Mr. Churchill's absence Mr. Attlee was an efficient chairman; Sir John Anderson, the Lord President, rendered invaluable service in co-ordinating and supervising the activities of government on the civil side, while Mr. Ernest Bevin, Minister of Labour and National Service, retained the confidence of the trade union world and proved a tower of strength in council. The organizations presided over by Lord Leathers and Lord Woolton showed extreme skill in administering our lessening supplies of shipping and food. The War Cabinet and its numerous

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<sup>1</sup> *House of Commons Debates*, Vol. 377, column 618; Churchill, IV, 169-72.

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix VIII.

committees were well served by the secretariat under Sir Edward Bridges. Some critics might grumble in Parliament and the Press, in clubs and at home, that the Prime Minister was taking too much upon him, but his popularity and prestige remained enormous. By his dauntless leadership at the time of greatest danger, by the confidence and vigour of his inspiring eloquence and by the personal touches which delighted the common people he had acquired a firm hold on the country's trust and affection; it was not seriously shaken by the recent disasters.

In dealing with the Dominions, especially those in the South Pacific, his touch was not so sure. While recognizing that in matters concerning them their governments must have the last word, he was too apt to assume that they would fall in with the decisions which he and his colleagues in London were making, as he firmly believed, for the common good of the Empire. Cases have been mentioned in this volume in which Mr. Churchill was painfully surprised by a Dominion veto. But these disagreements, though they affected military plans at the time, were not on matters of supreme importance. Where grand strategy was concerned, the inequality of the respective resources of the United Kingdom and any of the Dominions was such that, apart from the force of precedent and tradition, the latter were bound to accept, though not uncritically, the decisions of London. The protests of the Australian and New Zealand prime ministers in December and January did not alter the fact that their countries must acquiesce in the policy of the stronger power, whether that power was based in London or at Washington.

Within the Commonwealth, generally speaking, Mr. Churchill could call the tune. Relations with the United States were obviously on a different plane. It had indeed always been a cardinal point of his policy to avoid any action or pronouncement which might make it more difficult for America to enter the war. Even before he became prime minister he seized the opportunity offered him by Mr. Roosevelt to correspond with him informally and he always kept the President apprised of our intentions and our motives. Still, so long as the United States was, even if only nominally, neutral, the British government were uncommitted and not bound to seek American approval. Now it was different. As allies and joint leaders of the United Nations it was essential that the two countries should pursue a common policy and each must be prepared to compromise. Common ideals, common traditions, common language, made their co-operation easier than has been the case in previous wartime alliances, but among their common traditions is a full measure of national pride and self-confidence. Moreover, as the balance of power inclined more and more to the American side with the expansion of American industry and armed forces, the task of British negotiators became

more difficult. For a man of Mr. Churchill's temperament, strong-willed to the point of obstinacy, it required remarkable self-control and delicacy to press the British point of view without faltering and yet without offence, while realizing that in the last resort the American view might have to prevail. In his handling of the President he showed great tact; we have seen how at a critical moment he referred to the 'Gymnast' plan as Mr. Roosevelt's own 'commanding idea'; but any suspicion of sycophancy or hypocrisy was refuted by the fact that he felt a real admiration for this 'very great man, who was also a warm-hearted friend . . . of the high causes which we served'.<sup>1</sup> Only in matters touching the internal affairs of the British Empire did he presume to warn the President off. He was of course immensely helped by Mr. Roosevelt's readiness in extreme cases, as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief, to overrule his own military advisers in the interest of Allied unity. We were fortunate also in possessing such admirable representatives in Washington as Lord Halifax and Sir John Dill and in having to deal with such loyal American friends as Winant, Hopkins and Marshall. None the less Mr. Churchill's skill in handling the problems set by the circumstances of the American alliance is not the least of the grounds on which his country owes him gratitude. His success, in so far as he succeeded, was due to the statesmanship which recognized the essential community of interest of the two partners and in great affairs knew what was really important. Tough as he could be in negotiation he realised the limits of the attainable and moreover he felt a native liking and respect for American traditions.

Mr. Churchill tried, as we have seen, to establish with the Soviet Premier relations similar to those which he enjoyed with the American President, and he believed for a moment that he had done so. Events were soon to show that this was not the case: it was not in Stalin's nature to make allowances for another's difficulties or feelings, to trust him or to attribute to him any but selfish motives. Nevertheless at this first meeting in Moscow Mr. Churchill, while yielding nothing to Stalin's taunts and bullying, did succeed in creating with the man some kind of human connexion, rooted in mutual respect for the other's courage and firmness. At least a sufficient understanding was built up to provide some degree of concert in dealing the tremendous blows against the common enemy which will be described in the next volume.

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<sup>1</sup> Churchill, II, 22.

# Appendices

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## APPENDIX I

### Washington War Conference; American and British Strategy; Memorandum by the United States and British Chiefs of Staff.

#### *I—Grand Strategy*

1. At the A-B<sup>1</sup> Staff conversations in February 1941 it was agreed that Germany was the predominant member of the Axis Powers, and, consequently, the Atlantic and European area was considered to be the decisive theatre.
2. Much has happened since February last, but, notwithstanding the entry of Japan into the War, our view remains that Germany is still the prime enemy and her defeat is the key to victory. Once Germany is defeated, the collapse of Italy and the defeat of Japan must follow.
3. In our considered opinion, therefore, it should be a cardinal principle of A-B strategy that only the minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres should be diverted from operations against Germany.

#### *II—Essential Features of Our Strategy*

4. The essential features of the above grand strategy are as follows. Each will be examined in greater detail later in this paper:
  - (a) The realization of the victory programme of armaments, which first and foremost requires the security of the main areas of war industry.
  - (b) The maintenance of essential communications.
  - (c) Closing and tightening the ring round Germany.
  - (d) Wearing down and undermining German resistance by air bombardment, blockade, subversive activities and propaganda.
  - (e) The continuous development of offensive action against Germany.
  - (f) Maintaining only such positions in the Eastern theatre as will safeguard vital interests (see paragraph 18) and deny to Japan access to raw materials vital to her continuous war effort while we are concentrating on the defeat of Germany.

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<sup>1</sup> For brevity the abbreviation A-B is used to denote American-British.



*III—Steps to be taken in 1942 to put into effect the above General Policy*

5. In so far as these are likely to be attacked, the main areas of war industry are situated in:

- (a) The United Kingdom.
- (b) Continental United States, particularly the West Coast.
- (c) Russia.

6. *The United Kingdom*—To safeguard the United Kingdom it will be necessary to maintain at all times the minimum forces required to defeat invasion.

7. *The United States*—The main centres of production on or near the West Coast of the United States must be protected from Japanese sea-borne attack. This will be facilitated by holding Hawaii and Alaska. We consider that a Japanese invasion of the United States on a large scale is highly improbable, whether Hawaii or Alaska is held or not.

8. The probable scale of attack and the general nature of the forces required for the defence of the United States are matters for the United States Chiefs of Staff to assess.

9. *Russia*—It will be essential to afford the Russians assistance to enable them to maintain their hold on Leningrad, Moscow and the oilfields of the Caucasus, and to continue their war effort.

*Maintenance of Communications*

10. The main sea-routes which must be secured are:

- (a) From United States to the United Kingdom.
- (b) From United States and the United Kingdom to North Russia.
- (c) The various routes from the United Kingdom and United States to Freetown, South America and the Cape.
- (d) The routes in the Indian Ocean to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf, to India and Burma, to the East Indies and to Australasia.
- (e) The route through the Panama Canal, and United States coastal traffic.
- (f) The Pacific routes from the United States and the Panama Canal to Alaska, Hawaii, Australia and the Far East.

In addition to the above routes, we shall do everything possible to open up and secure the Mediterranean route.

11. The main air-routes which must be secured are:

- (a) From the United States to South America, Ascension, Freetown, Takoradi and Cairo.
- (b) From the United Kingdom to Gibraltar, Malta and Cairo.
- (c) From Cairo to Karachi, Calcutta, China, Malaya, Philippines, Australasia.
- (d) From the United States to Australia via Hawaii, Christmas Island, Canton, Palmyra, Samoa, Fiji, New Caledonia.
- (e) The routes from Australia to the Philippines and Malaya via the Netherlands East Indies.

- (f) From the United States to the United Kingdom via Newfoundland, Canada, Greenland and Iceland.
  - (g) From the United States to the United Kingdom via the Azores.
  - (h) From the United States to Vladivostok via Alaska.
12. The security of these routes involves :
- (a) Well-balanced A-B naval and air dispositions.
  - (b) Holding and capturing essential sea and air bases.

*Closing and Tightening the Ring Around Germany*

13. This ring may be defined as a line running roughly as follows: Archangel-Black Sea-Anatolia-the Northern Seaboard of the Mediterranean-the Western Seaboard of Europe.

The main object will be to strengthen this ring, and close the gaps in it, by sustaining the Russian front, by arming and supporting Turkey, by increasing our strength in the Middle East, and by gaining possession of the whole North African coast.

14. If this ring can be closed, the blockade of Germany and Italy will be complete, and German eruptions, e.g. towards the Persian Gulf, or to the Atlantic seaboard of Africa, will be prevented. Furthermore, the seizing of the North African coast may open the Mediterranean to convoys, thus enormously shortening the route to the Middle East and saving considerable tonnage now employed in the long haul around the Cape.

*The Undermining and Wearing Down of German Resistance*

15. In 1942 the main methods of wearing down Germany's resistance will be :

- (a) Ever-increasing air bombardment by British and American Forces.
- (b) Assistance to Russia's offensive by all available means.
- (c) The blockade.
- (d) The maintenance of the spirit of revolt in the occupied countries, and the organization of subversive movements.

*Development of Land Offensives on the Continent.*

16. It does not seem likely that in 1942 any large-scale land offensive against Germany except on the Russian front will be possible. We must, however, be ready to take advantage of any opening that may result from the wearing down process referred to in paragraph 15 to conduct limited land offensives.

17. In 1943 the way may be clear for a return to the Continent, across the Mediterranean, from Turkey into the Balkans, or by landings in Western Europe. Such operations must be the prelude to the final assault on Germany itself, and the scope of the victory programme should be such as to provide means by which they can be carried out.

*The Safeguarding of Vital Interests in the Eastern Theatre.*

18. The security of Australia, New Zealand and India must be maintained and the Chinese war effort supported. Secondly, points of vantage from which an offensive against Japan can eventually be developed must be secured. Our immediate object must therefore be to hold :

- (a) Hawaii and Alaska.
- (b) Singapore, the East Indies Barrier and the Philippines.
- (c) Rangoon and the route to China.
- (d) The Maritime Provinces of Siberia.

The minimum forces required to hold the above will have to be a matter of mutual discussion.

## APPENDIX II

14th January, 1942

Washington War Conference;

Post-Arcadia Collaboration;

Memorandum by Combined Chiefs of Staff

1. In order to provide for the continuance of the necessary machinery to effect collaboration between the United Nations after the departure from Washington of the British Chiefs of Staff, the Combined Chiefs of Staff (formerly designated as 'Joint Chiefs of Staff') propose the broad principles and basic organization herein outlined.
2. To avoid confusion we suggest that hereafter the word 'Joint' be applied to Inter-Service collaboration of one nation and the word 'Combined' to collaboration between two or more of the United Nations.
3. Definitions:
  - (a) The term 'Combined Chiefs of Staff' is defined as the British Chiefs of Staff (or, in their absence from Washington, their duly accredited representatives) and the United States opposite numbers of the British Chiefs of Staff.
  - (b) The term 'Combined Staff Planners' is defined as the body of officers duly appointed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to make such studies, draft such plans, and perform such other work as may from time to time be placed on the 'Combined Chiefs of Staff Agenda' by that body, and duly delegated by them to the Combined Staff Planners.
  - (c) The 'Combined Secretariat' is defined as the body of officers duly appointed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff to maintain necessary records, prepare and distribute essential papers, and perform such other work as is delegated to them by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.
4. Personnel:
  - (a) The Heads of the Joint Staff Mission, Admiral Sir Charles Little, General Sir Colville Wemyss and Air Marshal A. T. Harris, will represent the British Chiefs of Staff in Washington.
  - (b) The Joint Staff Planners will be:
    - (i) For the British (for the time being):  
Captain C. E. Lambe, R.N.  
Lieutenant-Colonel G. F. Bourne, British Army  
Group Captain S. C. Strafford, R.A.F.
    - (ii) For the United States, the principal members are:  
Rear-Admiral T. K. Turner, United States Navy  
Brigadier-General L. T. Gerow, United States Army  
Captain R. E. Davison, United States Navy  
Colonel E. L. Naiden, United States Army.

- (c) Combined Secretariat.  
The British members of the Combined Secretariat will be headed by Brigadier Dykes. The United States members will be headed by Commander L. R. McDowell, United States Navy.
5. The Combined Chiefs of Staff shall develop and submit Recommendations as follows :
    - (a) for the A.B.D.A. area, specifically as set forth in the Directive, Annex 2 to U.S. ABC-4/5, British WW6, dated the 5th January, 1942 ;
    - (b) for other areas in which the United Nations may decide to act in concert, along the same lines as in (a) above, modified as necessary to meet the particular circumstances.
  6. The Combined Chiefs of Staff shall :
    - (a) determine and recommend the broad programme of requirements based on a strategic policy ;
    - (b) submit general directives as to the policy governing the distribution of available weapons of war ;
    - (c) settle the broad issues of priority of overseas movements.
  7. The question of production and dissemination of complete Military Intelligence to serve the Combined Chiefs of Staff and Combined Staff Planners has been referred to the latter body for a report. Here, also, it is contemplated that existing machinery will be largely continued.
  8. It is planned that the Combined Chiefs of Staff will meet weekly, or more often if necessary ; an agenda will be circulated before each meeting.

## APPENDIX III

### General Marshall's Plan; Operations in Western Europe

1. Western Europe is favored as the theater in which to stage the first major offensive by the United States and Great Britain. By every applicable basis of comparison, it is definitely superior to any other. In point of time required to produce effective results, its selection will save many months. Through France passes our shortest route to the heart of Germany. In no other area can we attain the overwhelming air superiority vital to successful land attack; while here and here only can the bulk of the British air and ground forces be employed. In this area the United States can concentrate and maintain a larger force than it can in any other. A British-American attack through Western Europe provides the only feasible method for employing the bulk of the combat power of the United States, the United Kingdom and Russia in a concerted effort against a single enemy.

Another, and most significant consideration is the unique opportunity to establish an active sector on this front this summer, through steadily increasing air-operations and by raids or forays all along the coasts. This initial phase will be of some help to Russia and of immediate satisfaction to the public; but what is more important it will make experienced veterans of the air and ground units, and it will offset the tendency toward deterioration in morale which threaten the latter due to prolonged inactivity.

Finally, successful attack through Western Europe will afford the maximum possible support to Russia, whose continued participation in the war is essential to the defeat of Germany.

2. Decision as to the main effort must be made now. This is true even if the invasion cannot be launched during this year. A major attack must be preceded by a long period of intensive preparation. Basic decision is necessary so that all production, special construction, training, troop movements and allocations can be co-ordinated to a single end. Until this process of co-ordinated and intensified effort is initiated, it is difficult to calculate even the approximate date at which a major offensive can be undertaken. Decision now will stop continued dispersion of means.

The element of time is of the utmost importance. Physical limitations both as to the time and strength of the attack are the shortage of shipping and landing-craft. But we must begin a sustained offensive before Russia can be defeated and before Vichy France, Spain, Sweden, Portugal and Turkey are drawn into the ranks of the enemy.

3. Our proposal, more fully outlined later, provides for an attack, by combined forces of approximately 5800 combat airplanes and 48 divisions, against Western Europe as soon as the necessary means can be accumulated in England—estimated at 1 April, 1943, provided decision is made *now* and men, material and shipping are conserved for this purpose.

(Included preparations for an 'emergency' offensive by fall of 1942 will be explained later.)

The plan contemplates three main phases.

- (a) Preparation, involving:
  - (1) Immediate co-ordination of procurement priorities, allocations of material and movements of troops and equipment.
  - (2) Establishment of preliminary active front this coming summer—for training, demonstration, deception and destruction.
  - (3) Development of preparations for possible launching of an 'emergency' offensive this coming fall.
- (b) Cross-channel movement and seizure of beachheads between Le Havre and Boulogne.
- (c) Consolidation and expansion of beachheads and beginning of general advance.

4. A special significance of the preparatory phase is that it presents opportunity for the intensive and specialized training of troops, without which the plan could have meager prospects of success. This special training, beginning with fundamentals of technique in loading and unloading of boats, must advance progressively through logical steps until it comprises constant raiding by small task-forces at selected points along the entire accessible coastline held by the enemy.

The beneficial results to be derived from continuous raiding fall into two main categories. On the one hand there will be obtained a variety of useful information, applying to details of geography, hostile dispositions, tactics and intentions. Some measure of deception as to time and the place of the final attack should result. The continuation of such raids over a long period may lead the enemy to believe that no all-out offensive is to be attempted or, conversely and equally valuable, may induce him to withhold from the Russian front air and ground units because of constant fear that the raids may develop at any moment into a major attack. In this latter event the raiding process would, on a limited scale, serve the same purpose as the opening of a new front on the continent itself.

But by far the greatest benefits to be anticipated from constant raiding will be the resultant increase in the battle efficiency of the participating troops. After troops have completed normal phases of training and manoeuvre, it is essential that, to avoid deterioration, they begin gradual entry into actual battle, preferably under conditions that, so far as possible, will guarantee the small success that raids seek, while minimizing losses in personnel and material. These successes can be assured by careful preparation for each venture, somewhat in the pattern of the trench raid of the First World War. The characteristics of each action will be a sudden concentration of overwhelming air superiority supported by gun-fire where practicable, with speed, surprise and precision in execution. For air forces, technical methods will be different, but the purposes and principles the same. In this way, troops will acquire that morale and self-confidence that only participation in battle can impart. They will perfect technique, methods, and co-ordination not only as among individuals, but also as between commanders, staffs and units. Communications between land,

air and sea forces will be developed to a high level of efficiency. Equipment will be tested under combat conditions. Troops will be kept on their toes, mentally alert, and, by these means, gain that feeling of moral ascendancy over the opponent that always characterizes a victory-imbued army. Successfully conducted, these raids will permit our troops to enter upon the final venture with an ability to meet, on equal terms, the battle-trained veterans of the German Army.

Losses in landing-craft, though small in each individual raid, will be considerable in accumulated total. Production plans must foresee and provide for this inescapable requirement, and insure that equipment so lost will not be reflected in a diminished scale of attack when the final offensive is undertaken.

5. An advantage of this plan is that, during the preparatory period, it provides means to act promptly under either of the following eventualities:

- (a) If the imminence of Russian collapse requires desperate action, a sacrifice attack could be made immediately.
- (b) If German forces are almost completely absorbed on the Russian front, or a deterioration of the German military power is evident, a prompt movement to the Continent could be undertaken.

## OUTLINE PLAN FOR INVASION OF WESTERN EUROPE

### 6. *Assumptions*

- (a) That so far as the United States is concerned the line, Alaska-Hawaii-Samoa-Australia will be held and Pacific garrisons increased from present approximate strength of 175,000 to an approximate strength of 300,000.
- (b) That present U.S. commitments in troops and ships will be executed. These include dispatch of the 41st and one additional division to Australia, one division to New Zealand, the loan of sufficient shipping to the British to move 40,000 troops to the Middle East, and the building up of a small air force in China-India. Providing the British furnish the necessary planes from aircraft now allotted to them, two groups pursuit, one group medium bombardment and two groups light bombardment have been promised for the Middle East as the additional U.S. commitment to theaters other than Western Europe. Transfer of these air units will have a corresponding effect in diminishing the early U.S. air-effort in Europe.
- (c) That Russia is still effective in the war to the extent that the bulk of the German forces are required on the Russian front.
- (d) That Axis forces in Western Europe remain at approximately their present strength.



7. *Combat Strength Required*

From an examination of the present hostile situation, it is estimated that combat power and readiness as follows is necessary for a successful attack :

- (a) Adequate air superiority over the enemy, involving the use by the allies of a minimum of 3,000 fighters and 2,850 combat planes other than fighters (Combined British and U.S.).
- (b) Sufficient landing-craft to land in the first wave the major combat elements of an infantry and armored force of at least six divisions. At the beginning of the actual invasion, U.S. land forces in England or *en route* should approximate 30 divisions. Total U.S. strength in England at that time will approximate 1,000,000 men.
- (c) An ability to land on the western coast of Europe behind the leading wave, a weekly increment initially of at least 100,000 troops, and, after the invasion forces have landed, a continuous flow of reinforcements from the United States at the maximum rate that shipping will permit.
- (d) Sufficient naval support to assure freedom from interference by hostile surface and sub-surface craft.

8. *Execution*

- (a) The plan provides for the movement to the British Isles of U.S. air and ground forces comprising approximately one million men to participate with the British in an invasion of France between Le Havre and Boulogne. Logistic factors fix the earliest possible date for an attack on this scale at about 1st April, 1943. Bottlenecks, as to time, will be shipping and landing-craft, which will not be available in sufficient quantities by the time that air-craft, ground equipment and ammunition can be supplied.
- (b) As previously explained the operation is planned in three phases with actual combat beginning in the preparatory phase.

Immediately after approval of the basic plan, all production and allocation plans must be reviewed and co-ordinated to this objective to meet obvious shortages, particularly in shipping and landing craft.

U.S. air and ground units must begin moving to the United Kingdom by every available ship.

Plans for execution of an 'emergency' operation are to go forward constantly, based always upon the maximum force that could be transported across the channel at any given moment.

- (c) The second and third phases are the cross-channel movement and beginning of the general advance. The invasion itself will consist of the seizure of beachheads between Le Havre and Boulogne. The main landing is to be made on a six-division front. Parachute and airborne troops will be employed in addition to combat aviation in assisting the ground forces to establish beach-head and to prevent rapid movement of German reinforce-

ments towards the coast. As soon as a beachhead is established, strong armored forces are to be rushed in to break the German resistance along the coast and seize the line of the Oise-St. Quentin. A movement towards Antwerp will then follow to widen the salient and permit the movement of additional forces across the channel between Boulogne and Antwerp. Short range aircraft will be based on land fields as quickly as they are captured.

9. U.S. and British forces as follows should be in Great Britain or *en route* when the land attack begins:

<i>U.S. Forces</i>	<i>British Forces</i>
Will be available, as modified by any airplanes sent to Middle East	Numbers of British aircraft shown are minimum requirements. Information is not at hand as to how many the British can make available.
1,450 Fighter planes.	1,550 Fighter planes.
1,800 Combat planes other than fighters.	1,000 Combat planes other than fighters.
400 Transport planes.	200 Transport planes.
18 Infantry Divisions.	The British must provide at least the following ground troops:
6 Armored Divisions.	15 Infantry Divisions.
5 Motorized Divisions.	3 Armoured Divisions.
1 Airborne Division.	1 Parachute Brigade.
11 Parachute Bns.	3 AA Gps.
30 AA Regts.	

10. The success of the operation will depend upon the availability of adequate naval forces for its support.

#### 11. *General Comments*

- (a) An attack in Western Europe will have a protective effect on the remainder of the Atlantic area. The garrisons in the Atlantic should not require material reinforcements. This does not apply to the Pacific, to India, and to the Middle East, consequently our protective measures in those regions must be adequate.
- (b) U.S. troops will be equipped and trained in time for the operation.
- (c) American shipping available for movement overseas of the U.S. troops will transport only about 40 per cent of the number involved by 1st April, 1943, leaving some 600,000 men to be transported by shipping from British and other sources. If this movement must depend entirely on available U.S. shipping, the date of initiating the invasion of France must be postponed until late summer 1943, by which time U.S. shipping can effect the overseas movement of the entire force.
- (d) The shipping situation is under continuous study. However, it is

believed that when the movement of reinforcements to the Middle and Far East now projected for 1942 has been effected, and the situation in those areas stabilized, sufficient U.S. and British passenger transports can be made available for the movement of U.S. troops to England to meet the requirements of this plan. Additional cargo vessels will have to be diverted after 1st January, 1943, to support this operation.

- (e) Landing-craft necessary for the operation are not available at present in sufficient quantities for the cross-channel movement. Some 7,000 landing-craft are essential for the crossing. More should be on hand to cover losses. Only through intensification of the construction program, immediately after agreement in principle to this plan has been reached, can a sufficient number be obtained.
- (f) It is mandatory that we continue to send to Russia sufficient material aid to keep that nation actively in the war.
- (g) Development and construction of airfields, bases, cantonments, etc., in the British Isles in preparation for invasion of Western Europe in 1943 must be substantially completed in 1942.

#### 12. *Modified Plan*

This limited operation would be justified only in case:

(1) The situation on the Russian front becomes desperate, i.e. the success of German arms becomes so complete as to threaten the imminent collapse of Russian resistance unless the pressure is relieved by an attack from the west by British and American troops. In this case the attack should be considered as a sacrifice in the common good.

(2) The German situation in Western Europe becomes critically weakened

Because of the emergency basis on which a modified plan would be undertaken, it is impossible to predict the time for its execution. It is likewise impossible to fix the minimum scale, as to troop numbers, on which the movement might have to be initiated. It must be clear that the maximum forces that can be transported across the channel must be employed and that local air superiority must be assured.

The following represents the scale of possible American participation, on the basis of shipping now in sight, for an invasion of France in September-October, 1942:

- (a) *U.S. troops* that can be made available in England by 15 Sept. (Figures include all troops of the Magnet Force.)

##### *Air Forces :*

400 Fighters.  
300 Combat other than fighters.  
200 Transport.

*Ground Forces :*

- 2½ Infantry Divisions and 1 Armored  
Division, *or*  
1½ Infantry Divisions and 2 Armored  
Divisions, *or*  
1½ Infantry Divisions, 1 Armored  
Division, 4 Parachute Bns, and  
10 Anti-aircraft Regiments.

- (b) Inclusive of the above, a total of 6 Infantry, 3 Armored, and 2 Motorized Divisions, 4 Parachute Battalions, and 10 Anti-aircraft Regiments will be equipped and trained in the U.S. in time to participate in this operation. If necessary shipping can be found, all the American ground forces just enumerated can be available for duty in England by early fall.

Since a large amount of troop-lift shipping becomes available late in the summer, the build-up of strength would be much more rapid after September.

- (c) *British Troops*

*Air Forces.* Execution of the 'emergency' plan would throw an additional burden upon the British, particularly their air forces, which, with the American help indicated, would have to gain and maintain air superiority over the area involved in the limited-scale attack. The minimum considered desirable, exclusive of U.S. air forces, is 2,600 fighters, 2,400 other combat types, and all available transport aircraft. However, due to the unforeseen circumstances that may demand a limited attack, even smaller air forces may be able to gain and maintain the necessary air superiority.

*Ground Forces.* Owing to the scarcity of landing-craft this fall, large land forces could not participate. Unless production programs are immediately intensified, it appears probable that we cannot plan on sustaining more than about five divisions, half British and half United States.

## APPENDIX IV

(a)

### *Aide Mémoire handed to M. Molotov on 10th June, 1942*

After a most thorough and comprehensive examination of all possible steps which we could take to draw the weight off Russia, we have reached the following conclusions :

- (i) In accordance with our agreement, we will, to the best of our ability, continue to send supplies of aircraft, tanks and other war equipment to Russia by the hazardous Northern route and by the Persian route.
- (ii) In the air we are already containing in the various theatres of war about one half of the German fighter strength and one third of their bomber strength. With a view to forcing the Germans to make further withdrawals from their air-strength in the East, we shall continue our bombing of German towns and industry, and also our day bomber and fighter offensive over Occupied France.
- (iii) We have despatched, and will continue to despatch, considerable reinforcements to Libya, where we have confronting us 11 Axis divisions, including two German Armoured Divisions and one German Motorized Division. We intend to keep the enemy fighting hard in this theatre. Malta has for the last four months contained considerable German air forces in Sicily. At one time they had over 400 first-line aircraft pounding the Island. We have sent, and will continue to send, large fighter reinforcements to keep the air battle going there.
- (iv) We shall continue our policy of raids against selected points on the Continent. These raids will increase in size and scope as the summer goes on. By this means we are preventing the Germans from transferring any of their 33 Divisions in Western Europe to their Eastern front, and keeping them constantly on the alert, never knowing at what point the next attack may come.
- (v) We are making preparations for a landing on the Continent in August or September, 1942. As already explained, the main limiting factor to the size of the landing force is the availability of special landing-craft. Clearly, however, it would not further the Russian cause or that of the Allies as a whole if, for the sake of action at any price, we embarked on some operation which ended in disaster and gave the enemy an opportunity for glorification at our discomfiture. It is impossible to say in advance whether the situation will be such as to make this operation feasible when the time comes. We can therefore give no promise

in the matter, but, provided that it appears sound and sensible, we shall not hesitate to put our plans into effect.

- (vi) We are prepared, if the idea appeals to the Russian Government, to send a force of 4 fighter and 2 fighter-bomber squadrons to Murmansk, with a view to releasing Russian air forces for operations on other parts of the Russian front. The British squadrons could arrive about the end of July. Does this project appeal to our friends?
- (vii) Is the Russian Government still attaching any importance to a combined Russian-British operation in the Petsamo area, such as has been previously suggested? If so, we should be pleased to start conversations with the Russian Staff on this subject.
- (viii) Finally, and most important of all, we are concentrating our maximum effort on the organization and preparation of a large-scale invasion of the Continent of Europe by British and American forces in 1943. We are setting no limit to the scope and objectives of this campaign, which will be carried out in the first instance by over a million men, British and American, with air forces of appropriate strength.

(b)

Extract from Mr. Eden's Statement in House of Commons on 11th June, 1942 (*H. of C. Deb.*, Vol. 380, cols. 1352-3), on the Treaty of Alliance between Great Britain and Soviet Russia:

. . . Our conversations with Mr. Molotov were not, of course, confined to Treaty matters, important as those were. The war in all its aspects was reviewed, and I will now give the House a quotation from the communiqué which is being issued today:

'Full understanding was reached between the two parties with regard to urgent tasks of creating a second front in Europe in 1942. Discussions also took place on the question of further improving the supplies of aeroplanes, tanks and other war material to be sent from Great Britain to the Soviet Union. Both sides were gratified to note the identity of their views on all the above questions.'

## APPENDIX V

24th July, 1942

### Combined Chiefs of Staff

#### Operations in 1942-3;

#### Memorandum by the Combined Chiefs of Staff

It having been decided that 'SLEDGEHAMMER' is not to be undertaken as a scheduled operation, we propose the following general plans for 1942-3:

(a) That no avoidable reduction in preparations for 'ROUND-UP' should be favourably considered so long as there remains any reasonable possibility of its successful execution before July 1943.

(1) That Allied air-strength continue to be built up in U.K. to provide for a constantly increasing intensity of air-attack on Germany.

(2) That, for purposes of deception and to be ready for any emergency or a favourable opportunity, all preparations for 'SLEDGEHAMMER' continue to be pressed except as to concentration of landing-craft or other details that seriously interfere with training for 'ROUND-UP', and that a task force commander be appointed with authority to organize the force, direct the training and maintain a contingent plan for execution. This Commander should be either the officer designated for supreme command of the final invasion of North-west Europe or one of his subordinate commanders acting as his deputy. The troops and supporting units, so far as possible, to be immediately placed under his control.

(b) That, if the British Chiefs of Staff propose to ship an armoured division to the Middle East, a United States reinforced armoured division (about 19,000 men) be substituted therefor, moving in British shipping.

(c) That, if the situation on the Russian front by 15th September indicates such a collapse or weakening of Russian resistance as to make 'ROUND-UP' appear impracticable of successful execution, the decision should be taken to launch a combined operation against the North and North West coast of Africa at the earliest possible date before December 1942.

(1) That the combined plans for this African operation should immediately be developed and that the latest date be determined after which the necessary shipping, naval forces and troop units can be assembled in time to permit the initial landing operations before the limiting date—1st December, 1942.

(2) That the U.S. commitment for the African operation will require British assistance in aircraft-carriers, covering forces and escort vessels. Land and air forces for North Africa would be predominantly

British and land and air forces for North-West Africa would be predominantly American.

(3) That a task force Commander for the entire African operation should be appointed forthwith.

(4) That it be understood that a commitment to this operation renders 'ROUND-UP' in all probability impracticable of successful execution in 1943 and therefore that we have definitely accepted a defensive encircling line of action for the Continental European theatre, except as to air operations and blockade; but that the organization, planning, and training, for eventual entry in the Continent should continue so that this operation can be staged should a marked deterioration in German military strength become apparent, and the resources of the United Nations, available after meeting other commitments, so permit.

(d) That it be understood that heavy and medium bomber units in the United Kingdom are available for transfer to the African theatre as required.

(e) That over and above the U.S. forces required from 'BOLERO' for operations in North and North-West Africa, the following re-adjustment of present U.S. commitments to 'BOLERO' will be made for the purpose of furthering offensive operations in the Pacific:

(1) Withdrawal of the following air forces:

- 3 groups heavy bombers
- 2 groups medium bombers
- 2 groups light bombers
- 2 groups lighter planes
- 2 groups observation planes
- 4 groups transport planes.

(2) Probable shipping to move one infantry or Marine division from U.S. West Coast to South West Pacific.

(f) That the security of the British Isles is a first charge upon the military resources of both the U.K. and the U.S.



## APPENDIX VI

### Abbreviations and Code-names

#### *Abbreviations*

A.B.D.A.	.	American, British, Dutch, Australian Command in Far East.
A.O.C.	.	Air Officer Commanding
C.A.S.	.	Chief of the Air Staff
C.C.O.	.	Chief of Combined Operations
C.C.S.	.	Combined Chiefs of Staff (Anglo-American)
C.G.S.	.	Chief of the General Staff
C.I.D.	.	Committee of Imperial Defence
C.I.G.S.	.	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
C.N.S.	.	Chief of the Naval Staff
C.O.S.	.	Chiefs of Staff Committee
C-in-C	.	Commander-in-Chief
G.O.C.	.	General Officer Commanding
J.I.C.	.	Joint Intelligence Committee
J.P.S.	.	Joint Planning Staff
O.K.W.	.	<i>Ober Kommando der Wehrmacht</i> (Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces)

#### *Code-names*

Achse	.	German Action in Libya
Acrobat	.	Proposed British advance into Tripolitania
Arcadia	.	First Washington Conference, December 1941
Barbarossa	.	German plan for invasion of Russia
Battleaxe	.	British offensive in Western Desert, June 1941
Bolero	.	Build-up of U.S. forces in the United Kingdom
Bonus	.	Original cover-name for Madagascar operation
Crusader	.	British operations in Western Desert, November 1941 (also the name of a cruiser tank)
Felix	.	} German plan for seizure of Gibraltar through Spain
Felix-Heinrich	.	
Gymnast	.	British occupation of French North Africa (see also 'Super-Gymnast')
Harpoon	.	Convoy from U.K. to Malta, June 1942
Herkules	.	Axis plan to capture Malta
Imperator	.	Proposed major raid on Channel coast
Jubilee	.	Dieppe Raid, August 1942
Jupiter	.	Proposed operation in Northern Norway
Lustre	.	Aid to Greece
Marita	.	Axis invasion of Greece, 1941
Matador	.	Plan for British move into the Kra Isthmus
Operation 25	.	Axis move into Yugoslavia, 1941

Pedestal .	Malta Convoy, August 1942
Pilgrim .	Projected capture of the Canary Islands (also used to describe all projected operations against the Atlantic Islands)
PQ & QP.	Convoys to and from North Russia
Puma .	Projected expedition to the Canary Islands
Round-up .	Large-scale cross-Channel invasion
Rutter .	Original name for Dieppe operation
Sea Lion .	} German plan for invasion of the United Kingdom, 1940
Seelowe	
Sledgehammer	Proposed cross-Channel attack in 1942
Sonnenblueme	German action in Libya
Springboard	Proposed capture of Madeira
Super-Gymnast	Anglo-American occupation of French North Africa
Thruster .	Projected expedition against Azores
Torch .	Later name for a landing in N.W. Africa
Vigorous .	Convoy from Alexandria to Malta, June 1942
WS .	Convoys from U.K. to Middle East

## APPENDIX VII

### List of the Holders of Certain Appointments

*Members of the War Cabinet are in italics*

(a) **MINISTERS**

Prime Minister and Minister of Defence . . . . .	<i>Mr. Churchill</i>
Lord President of the Council . . . . .	<i>Sir J. Anderson</i>
Lord Privy Seal . . . . .	<i>Mr. Attlee</i> (until 19.2.42) <i>Sir S. Cripps</i> (from 19.2.42, also became Leader of the House of Commons from this date)
Chancellor of the Exchequer . . . . .	<i>Sir K. Wood</i> (Ceased to be Member of War Cabinet 19.2.42)
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs . . . . .	<i>Mr. Eden</i>
Secretary of State for Home Affairs and Minister for Home Security	<i>Mr. H. Morrison</i>
Secretary of State for Dominions . . . . .	<i>Viscount Cranborne</i> (until 19.2.42) <i>Mr. Attlee</i> (from 19.2.42, also became Deputy Prime Minister from this date)
Secretary of State for Colonies (and Leader of the House of Lords) . . . . .	<i>Lord Moyne</i> (until 22.2.42) <i>Viscount Cranborne</i> (from 22.2.42)
Secretary of State for India and Burma . . . . .	<i>Mr. L. S. Amery</i>
First Lord of the Admiralty . . . . .	<i>Mr. A. V. Alexander</i>
Secretary of State for War . . . . .	<i>Capt. H. D. R. Margeson</i> (until 22.2.42) <i>Sir James Grigg</i> (from 22.2.42)
Secretary of State for Air . . . . .	<i>Sir A. Sinclair</i>
Minister of Aircraft Production . . . . .	<i>Lt.-Col. J. T. C. Moore-Brabazon</i> (until 22.2.42) <i>Col. J. Llewellyn</i> (from 22.2.42)

Minister of Supply . . . .	Sir Andrew Duncan (until 29.6.41) <i>Lord Beaverbrook</i> (until 4.2.42) Sir Andrew Duncan (from 4.2.42)
Minister of Production . . . .	<i>Lord Beaverbrook</i> (War Production 4.2.42-19.2.42) Mr. Oliver Lyttelton (from 19.2.42)
Minister of War Transport . . . .	Lord Leathers
President of the Board of Trade . . . .	Mr. Oliver Lyttelton (until 29.6.41) Sir Andrew Duncan (29.6.41-4.2.42) Colonel J. Llewellyn (4.2.42-22.2.42) Dr. Hugh Dalton (from 22.2.42)
Minister of Economic Warfare . . . .	Dr. Hugh Dalton (until 22.2.42) Lord Selborne (from 22.2.42)
Minister of Food . . . . .	Lord Woolton
Minister of Labour and National Service . . . . .	<i>Mr. Ernest Bevin</i>
Minister without Portfolio . . . . .	<i>Mr. Arthur Greenwood</i> (until 19.2.42) Sir William Jowitt (from 19.2.42)
Minister of State . . . . .	<i>Lord Beaverbrook</i> (1.5.41-29.6.41)
Minister of State (Middle East) . . . . .	<i>Mr. Oliver Lyttelton</i> (1.7.41-19.2.42) <i>Mr. R. G. Casey</i> (from 18.3.42)

## (B) CHIEFS OF STAFF

Chief of Naval Staff (First Sea Lord) . . . . .	Admiral Sir Dudley Pound (Chairman until 9.3.42)
Chief of the Imperial General Staff	General Sir Jolin Dill (until 25.12.41) General Sir Alan Brooke (from 25.12.41) (Chairman from 9.3.42)
Chief of the Air Staff . . . . .	Air Chief Marshal Sir Charles Portal

**(C) BRITISH JOINT STAFF MISSION, WASHINGTON**

Field Marshal Sir John Dill  
Admiral Sir C. Little  
(until 25.6.42)  
Admiral Sir A. B. Cunningham  
(from 2.7.42)  
Lt.-General Sir Colville Wemyss  
(until 17.3.42)  
Major General R. H. Dewing  
(24.3.42-26.5.42)  
Lt.-General G. N. Macready  
(from 16.6.42)  
Air Marshal Sir A. T. Harris  
(until 3.2.42)  
Air Marshal D. C. S. Evill  
(from 10.2.42)

**(D) JOINT PLANNING STAFF**

Capt. C. S. Daniel, R.N.  
(until 17.7.41)  
Capt. E. G. H. Bellars, R.N.  
(22.7.41-4.3.42)  
Capt. C. E. Lambe, R.N.  
(from 7.3.42)  
Brigadier V. Dykes  
(until 12.12.41)  
Brigadier C. M. Stewart  
(from 16.12.42)  
Air Commodore W. F. Dickson  
(until 23.3.42)  
Air Commodore W. Elliot  
(from 25.3.42)

**(E) JOINT INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE**

V. Cavendish-Bentinck  
(F.O. representative)  
Rear-Admiral J. H. Godfrey  
Major-General F. H. N. Davidson  
Air Vice Marshal C. E. H. Midhurst  
Colonel C. S. Vickers  
(M. E. W. representative)

## APPENDIX VIII

(from S. W. Roskill, *The War at Sea*, Vols. I and II)

1941

**Table I. British, Allied and Neutral Merchant Ship Losses from Enemy Action, and Causes**  
(Tonnage—Number of Ships)  
January—December 1941

Month	Submarines	Aircraft	Mine	Warship Raider	Merchant Raider	E-boat	Unknown and other causes	Total
January	126,782 (21)	78,597 (20)	17,107 (10)	18,738 (3)	78,484 (20)	—	532 (2)	320,240 (76)
February	196,783 (39)	89,305 (27)	16,507 (10)	79,086 (17)	7,031 (1)	2,979 (3)	11,702 (5)	403,393 (102)
March	243,020 (41)	113,314 (41)	23,585 (19)	89,838 (17)	28,707 (4)	20,361 (9)	10,881 (8)	529,706 (139)
April	249,375 (43)	323,454 (116)	24,888 (6)	—	43,640 (6)	4,299 (3)	42,245 (21)	687,901 (195)
May	325,492 (56)	146,302 (65)	23,194 (9)	—	15,002 (3)	—	1,952 (4)	511,402 (139)
June	310,143 (61)	61,414 (25)	15,326 (10)	—	17,759 (4)	—	27,383 (9)	432,025 (109)
July	94,209 (22)	9,275 (11)	8,583 (7)	—	5,792 (1)	—	3,116 (2)	120,975 (43)
August	80,310 (23)	23,862 (9)	1,400 (3)	—	21,378 (3)	3,519 (2)	230 (1)	130,699 (41)
September	202,850 (53)	40,812 (12)	14,948 (9)	7,500 (1)	8,734 (2)	6,676 (3)	4,452 (4)	285,942 (84)
October	156,554 (32)	35,222 (10)	19,737 (4)	—	—	3,305 (2)	3,471 (3)	218,289 (51)
November	62,196 (13)	23,015 (10)	1,714 (5)	—	—	17,715 (7)	—	104,640 (35)
December	124,070 (26)	72,850 (25)	63,853 (19)	6,661 (2)	—	—	316,272 (213)	583,706 (285)
<b>Total:</b>	<b>2,171,754 (432)</b>	<b>1,017,422 (371)</b>	<b>230,842 (111)</b>	<b>201,823 (40)</b>	<b>226,527 (44)</b>	<b>58,854 (29)</b>	<b>421,336 (272)</b>	<b>4,328,558 (1,229)</b>

Table II. British, Allied and Neutral Ship Losses according to theatres  
(Tonnage - Number of ships)

1941

Month	North Atlantic	United Kingdom	South Atlantic	Mediterranean	Indian Ocean	Pacific	Total
January	214,382 (42)	36,975 (15)	58,585 (17)	—	10,298 (2)	—	320,240 (76)
February	317,378 (69)	51,381 (26)	—	8,343 (2)	26,291 (5)	—	403,393 (102)
March	364,689 (63)	152,362 (73)	—	11,868 (2)	—	287 (1)	592,706 (139)
April	260,451 (45)	99,931 (40)	21,807 (3)	292,518 (105)	14,094 (2)	—	687,901 (195)
May	324,550 (58)	100,655 (99)	11,339 (2)	70,835 (19)	3,663 (1)	—	511,042 (139)
June	318,740 (68)	86,381 (34)	10,134 (2)	9,145 (3)	7,625 (2)	—	432,025 (109)
July	97,813 (23)	15,265 (18)	—	7,897 (2)	—	—	120,975 (43)
August	83,661 (25)	19,791 (11)	—	5,869 (2)	—	21,378 (3)	130,699 (41)
September	184,546 (51)	54,779 (13)	15,526 (2)	15,951 (4)	10,347 (3)	4,793 (1)	285,942 (84)
October	154,593 (32)	35,996 (12)	5,297 (1)	22,403 (6)	—	—	218,289 (51)
November	50,215 (10)	30,332 (20)	4,953 (1)	19,140 (4)	—	—	104,640 (35)
December	50,682 (10)	56,845 (19)	6,275 (1)	37,394 (9)	837 (5)	431,673 (241)	589,706 (285)
Total:	2,421,700 (496)	740,292 (350)	133,916 (29)	501,363 (158)	73,155 (20)	458,131 (246)	4,328,558 (1,299)

Table III. British, Allied and Neutral Merchant Ship Losses from Enemy Action, and Causes  
January - December 1942

Month	Submarines	Aircraft	Mine	Warship Raider	Merchant Raider	E-boat	Unknown and Other causes	Total
January	327,357 (62)	57,086 (15)	10,079 (11)	3,275 (1)	—	—	22,110 (17)	419,907 (106)
February	476,451 (85)	133,746 (28)	7,242 (2)	—	—	—	62,193 (39)	679,692 (154)
March	537,980 (95)	55,706 (15)	16,862 (5)	16,072 (8)	8,591 (2)	951 (1)	198,002 (147)	834,164 (273)
April	431,664 (74)	82,924 (17)	15,002 (9)	100,001 (20)	31,187 (5)	—	1,679 (7)	674,457 (132)
May	607,247 (125)	59,014 (14)	18,795 (6)	—	19,363 (3)	—	631 (3)	705,050 (151)
June	700,235 (144)	54,769 (11)	19,936 (8)	—	48,474 (7)	—	10,782 (3)	834,196 (173)
July	476,065 (96)	74,313 (18)	8,905 (2)	—	42,166 (6)	12,192 (5)	4,472 (1)	618,113 (128)
August	544,410 (108)	60,532 (6)	—	—	12,946 (2)	37,570 (4)	5,675 (3)	661,133 (123)
September	485,413 (98)	57,526 (12)	—	3,188 (1)	21,200 (3)	—	—	567,327 (114)
October	619,417 (94)	5,683 (1)	5,157 (3)	—	—	7,576 (3)	—	637,833 (101)
November	729,160 (119)	53,868 (6)	992 (1)	7,925 (1)	5,882 (1)	5,371 (4)	4,556 (2)	807,754 (134)
December	330,816 (60)	4,156 (2)	1,618 (4)	—	4,816 (1)	7,496 (6)	—	348,902 (73)
Date not known	—	697 (1)	—	—	—	—	1,532 (1)	2,229 (2)
Total:	6,266,215 (1,160)	700,020 (146)	104,588 (51)	130,461 (31)	194,625 (30)	71,156 (23)	323,632 (223)	7,790,697 (1664)



Table IV. British, Allied and Neutral Merchant Shipping Losses from Enemy Action,  
according to Theatres 1942

(Tonnage: Ships)

Month	North Atlantic	United Kingdom	South Atlantic	Mediterranean	Indian Ocean	Pacific	Total
January	276,795 (48)	19,341 (14)	—	6,655 (1)	46,062 (13)	71,054 (30)	419,997 (106)
February	429,891 (73)	11,098 (5)	—	19,245 (4)	38,151 (18)	181,247 (54)	679,632 (154)
March	534,064 (95)	15,147 (8)	13,125 (3)	19,516 (4)	68,539 (65)	183,773 (98)	834,164 (273)
April	391,044 (66)	54,589 (14)	48,177 (8)	12,804 (6)	153,930 (31)	13,913 (7)	674,457 (132)
May	576,350 (120)	59,396 (14)	9,081 (2)	21,215 (6)	22,049 (4)	16,959 (5)	705,050 (151)
June	623,545 (124)	2,655 (5)	26,287 (4)	59,971 (16)	90,322 (18)	31,416 (6)	834,196 (173)
July	486,965 (98)	22,557 (9)	23,972 (3)	5,885 (3)	47,012 (9)	31,722 (6)	618,113 (128)
August	508,426 (96)	—	35,494 (10)	110,423 (13)	5,237 (1)	1,553 (3)	661,133 (123)
September	473,585 (95)	1,892 (1)	57,797 (7)	813 (4)	30,052 (6)	3,188 (1)	567,327 (114)
October	399,715 (62)	12,733 (6)	148,142 (20)	—	63,552 (11)	13,691 (2)	637,893 (101)
November	508,707 (83)	6,363 (5)	58,662 (10)	102,951 (13)	131,071 (23)	—	807,754 (134)
December	262,135 (46)	9,114 (10)	43,496 (8)	5,649 (3)	28,508 (6)	—	348,902 (73)
Date not known	—	—	—	—	—	2,229 (2)	2,229 (2)
Total:	5,471,222 (1006)	214,885 (91)	464,233 (75)	365,127 (73)	724,485 (205)	550,745 (214)	7,790,697 (1664)

## APPENDIX IX

### Chronological Table

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>2. Hitler and Mussolini meet at Brenner Pass.</p> <p>11. U.S. Note to Portugal about position of Azores and Cape Verde Islands, if Portugal were attacked.</p> <p>12. Meeting of Allied Governments in London.</p> <p>14. Freezing of German and Italian assets in United States.</p> <p>20. Prime Minister of New Zealand in London for discussions.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>1. German air-raid on Manchester</p> <p>7. (and subsequent nights) Air-attack on <i>Prinz Eugen</i> in Brest harbour</p> <p>11. Beginning of air-attack for twenty nights on Ruhr, Rhineland and north German ports.</p> <p>14. Daily fighter-sweeps over Channel and northern France, lasting throughout the month.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>1. Imperial forces withdraw from Crete. Air Vice-Marshal Tedder appointed A.O.C.-in-C., Middle East</p> <p>3. British forces occupy Mosul.</p> <p>4. Egyptian Cabinet resigns. New Iraqi Cabinet announced.</p> <p>8. Imperial and Free French forces enter Syria.</p> <p>11. Assab, last Italian port in East Africa, occupied</p> <p>15. Sidon and Kiswe occupied. Operation 'Battleaxe' begins.</p> <p>18. Turkey signs Treaty of Friendship and non-Aggression with Germany.</p> <p>21. Free French occupy Damascus.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>13. Tass Agency issues official denial of tension between Germany and U.S.S.R.</p> <p>22. Germany attacks U.S.S.R.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>7. Heavy Japanese air-raids on Chungking</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>25. House of Commons in secret session on Battle of the Atlantic</p> <p>29. Cabinet changes in U.K.</p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>12. Anglo-Soviet Agreement signed in Moscow.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>25. Sweden allows transit of one German division, from Norway to Finland.</p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>1. Daylight bomber and fighter offensive over Northern France, continuing till 24th July</p> <p>2. Night-attacks on targets in West Germany throughout the month.</p> <p>7. U.S. garrison arrives in Iceland.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>1. General Sir C. Auchinleck appointed C.-in-C., Middle East. Mr. Oliver Lyttelton appointed Minister of State in Middle East.</p> <p>2. General Sir R. Haining appointed Intendant-General, Middle East.</p> <p>3. British forces capture Debra Tabor, Abyssinia.</p> <p>6. Air-attack on Palermo.</p> <p>12. Syrian armistice terms signed at Acre.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p>24. H.M.G. to send military and economic missions to Moscow. Germany occupies Brest-Litovsk, Vilna and Kaunas.</p> <p>30. Germany occupies Lwow.</p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>1. Germans enter Riga.</p> <p>5. Germans reach Dnieper line.</p> <p>6. Russian counter-attack on Latvian frontier and in White Russia.</p> <p>8. Soviet Military Mission arrives in London.</p> <p>11. Russian front divided into three commands: Voroshilov in North, Timoshenko in Centre, and Budyonny in South.</p>	<p><b>1941 June</b></p> <p><b>July</b></p> <p>1. General Sir A. Wavell appointed C.-in-C. India.</p> <p>2. China breaks off relations with Axis Powers.</p> <p>10. Telegram from German F.O. to Japan, urging Japanese attack on Russia.</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941</b> <b>July</b> 16. General Weygand appointed Governor-General of Algeria. 17. Mr. Harry Hopkins, President Roosevelt's representative, arrives in London. 18. Agreement signed in London between U.S.S.R. and Czechoslovak government-in-exile. 19. Further Government changes in U.K. 21. President Roosevelt asks Congress to recognize 'National emergency'.</p> <p>23. Air-attacks on <i>Scharnhorst</i> and <i>Gneisenau</i> at Brest and La Pallice, repeated.</p> <p>27. German air-attack on London.</p> <p>29. Mr. Churchill reviews war production in House of Commons, refusing demand for new ministry. 30. Agreement signed in London between U.S.S.R. and Polish government in exile. Mr. Hopkins in Moscow.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>July</b></p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>July</b></p> <p>25. Convoy arrives in Malta after two-day battle.</p> <p>26. Italian E-boat raid on Valetta harbour.</p> <p>28. Air-attack on Sicily.</p> <p>31. New Egyptian Cabinet formed.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>July</b> 16. Intense fighting reported round Smolensk.</p> <p>21. Russians evacuate Bessarabia. First German air-raid on Moscow.</p> <p>30. Fleet Air Arm, acting with Russians, attacks Petsamo and Kirkenes.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>July</b> 16. Japanese Cabinet resigns.</p> <p>18. New Japanese Cabinet, excluding M. Matsuoka.</p> <p>19. Mr. Duff Cooper on mission to Far East.</p> <p>23. Vichy admits Japanese demand for bases in Indo-China.</p> <p>25. Japanese assets in U.K. and Dominions to be frozen: simultaneous action in U.S. 26. New U.S. Army command in Far East.</p> <p>29. Japanese bomb U.S. gunboat <i>Tunila</i> at Chungking.</p>
<p><b>August</b> 1. U.K. break off diplomatic relations with Finland.</p>	<p><b>August</b> 1. Daylight air-offensive over northern France, etc., continued.</p>	<p><b>August</b></p>	<p><b>August</b></p>	<p><b>August</b></p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 August</b> 2. Exchange of Notes between U.S. and U.S.S.R. on aid to Russia.</p> <p>5. Mr. Eden warns Japan that threat to Siam would be of immediate concern to H.M.G.</p> <p>12. Admiral Darlan appointed Vichy Minister of Defence.</p> <p>14. Atlantic Meeting between President Roosevelt and Mr. Churchill.</p> <p>16. Anglo-Soviet economic agreement signed in Moscow.</p> <p>20. Prime Minister of Canada arrives in England. Mr. Fadden replaces Mr. Menzies as Prime Minister of Australia.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b> 2. Night attacks on West Germany throughout the month.</p> <p>7. Air-attacks on targets in the Ruhr, repeated throughout the month.</p> <p>12. Daylight air-attack on Cologne.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>3. Italian cruiser and two supply-ships sunk in Mediterranean.</p> <p>6. Mr. Eden warns Persian Government against German infiltration.</p> <p>10. British and Russian Notes to Turkey, promising aid if attacked.</p> <p>16. British and Russian Notes to Persia about German infiltration. Air-attack on Syracuse.</p> <p>19. Part of Tobruk garrison relieved.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>6. General Anders appointed C.in.C. of Polish Army in Russia.</p> <p>11. German advance in Ukraine approaches Nikolaiev.</p> <p>14. Russians announce evacuation of Smolensk.</p> <p>18. Budyonny withdraws -across Dnieper; Nikolaiev evacuated. 19. Von Leeb intensifies attack on Leningrad.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>5. Reinforcements announced at Singapore: further contingents on 15th and 3rd Sept.</p> <p>8. Japanese air-attack on Chungking lasting six days.</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>25. Mussolini visits Hitler on Eastern Front.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>25. British and Russian troops enter Persia.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>21. Russians evacuate Gomel. Finnish forces capture Kexholm.</p> <p>24. Russian counter-attacks in Gomel area.</p> <p>25. Russians evacuate Novgorod.</p> <p>28. Russians evacuate Dnepropetrovsk.</p>	<p><b>1941 August</b></p> <p>26. Japanese Ambassador in Moscow protests against shipment of U.S. goods through Vladivostok: protest rejected.</p> <p>28. Letter from Japanese Prime Minister, Prince Konoye, to President Roosevelt proposing personal meeting.</p>
<p><b>September</b></p> <p>4. U.S. destroyer <i>Greer</i> attacked by U-boat off Iceland. Lend-lease extended to Poland.</p>	<p><b>September</b></p> <p>1. German air-raid on Newcastle, repeated 30th Sept. Night-attacks on targets in West Germany throughout the month.</p> <p>2. Daylight air-offensive over northern France continues throughout the month. Daylight air-attack on Bremen.</p>	<p><b>September</b></p> <p>29. Hostilities cease in Persia.</p> <p>30. New Yugoslav Government formed under General Nedić.</p> <p>4. Enemy air-raids on Malta, repeated on three nights.</p> <p>7. Air-attack on Palermo, repeated.</p>	<p><b>September</b></p> <p>1. Russian counter-attacks in Gomel sector.</p> <p>29. Germans capture Tallinn.</p> <p>30. Russians withdraw from Karelian Isthmus.</p> <p>3. Marshal Voroshilov in command at Leningrad.</p>	<p><b>September</b></p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 September</b></p> <p>11. President Roosevelt announces that German or Italian warships entering waters under U.S. protection will be attacked.</p> <p>18. Roosevelt asks Congress for additional \$5,985 million for Lend-Lease supplies.</p> <p>23. General de Gaulle forms Free French National Committee.</p> <p>24. Second Allied Conference in London adheres to Atlantic Charter.</p>	<p><b>1941 September</b></p> <p>8. Announcement of Allied raid on Spitzbergen.</p> <p>9. Action by Royal Navy off Murmansk, repeated 14th Sept.</p> <p>10. State of emergency proclaimed in Oslo.</p>	<p><b>1941 September</b></p> <p>9. Persian Government breaks off relations with Axis Powers.</p> <p>10. Air-attacks on Turin and Genoa, repeated.</p> <p>11. Enemy convoy in Mediterranean dispersed by air-attack.</p> <p>16. Shah of Persia abdicates; succeeded by Crown Prince. British and Russian forces move on Teheran. Air-raid on Cairo.</p> <p>26. General Wavell confers in Baghdad with General Auchinleck and subsequently in Persia with General Novikov. Surrender of Italian garrison at Wolcheft in Abyssinia.</p>	<p><b>1941 September</b></p> <p>8. Russians announce recapture of Elnya, south-east of Smolensk.</p> <p>12. Russians evacuate Chernigov north-east of Kiev. First snowfall on Eastern Front.</p> <p>14. Russians announce evacuation of Kremenchug.</p> <p>19. Germans occupy Kiev.</p> <p>23. Russian counter-attacks towards Glukhov.</p> <p>25. German attack on Crimea opens.</p>	<p><b>1941 September</b></p> <p>9. Mr. Duff Cooper arrives in Singapore.</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941</b> <b>September</b> 28. Allied Supply Conference in Moscow.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>September</b></p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>September</b> 28. Free French proclaim independence of Syria.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>September</b></p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>September</b></p>
<p><b>October</b></p> <p>6. Mr. Curtin succeeds Mr. Fadden as Prime Minister of Australia.</p> <p>9. President Roosevelt urges partial repeal of Neutrality Act.</p> <p>10. U Saw, Prime Minister of Burma, arrives in London.</p>	<p><b>October</b></p> <p>1. Daylight air-offensive over northern France continues throughout the month. Night-attacks on targets in West and South Germany throughout month. 2. German air-raids on Newcastle and Dover, repeated.</p>	<p><b>October</b></p> <p>2. Creation of two Army Commands: 8th Army (Western Desert); 9th Army (Syria and Palestine.) 4. Air-attacks on Benghazi and Sicily, repeated on subsequent night. 5. Air-attack on Tripoli, repeated. 6. Air-attack on the Piraeus, repeated.</p> <p>9. Turco-German trade-agreement signed in Ankara. New Iraqi Cabinet formed. 10. Italian convoy dispersed by air-attack.</p>	<p><b>October</b></p> <p>2. Hitler's Order of Day to troops facing Moscow: 'last great decisive battle of this year'.</p> <p>6. German launch renewed offensive against Moscow.</p> <p>8. Russians announce evacuation of Orel.</p> <p>12. Russians evacuate Bryansk. 13. Russians evacuate Vyasma. 14. Russians evacuate Mariupol on the Sea of Azov. 16. Russians evacuate Odessa.</p> <p>19. State of Siege proclaimed in Moscow.</p>	<p><b>October</b></p> <p>16. Japanese Cabinet resigns. 18. New Japanese Cabinet: General Tojo replaces Prince Konoye as Prime Minister.</p>



GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 October</b></p> <p>20. Seat of Soviet Government transferred to Kuibychev.</p> <p>29. Sir Earle Page arrives in London as special emissary of Australian Cabinet.</p>	<p><b>1941 October</b></p>	<p><b>1941 October</b></p> <p>22. Renewed operation in Gondar, Abyssinia.</p> <p>31. Air-attack on Palermo.</p>	<p><b>1941 October</b></p> <p>20. Germans capture Stalino.</p> <p>22. New German offensive in Tula area.</p> <p>24. Russian front reorganized into two commands: North under General Zhukov; south under Marshal Timoshenko. Germans capture Kharkov.</p> <p>27. Russian counter-attacks in Moscow sector.</p> <p>29. Germans break through Perekop Isthmus and advance into Crimea.</p>	<p><b>1941 October</b></p>
<p><b>November</b></p> <p>10. Mr. Churchill at Mansion house: if Japan attack U.S., Britain will be at war within the hour.</p> <p>13. U.S. Neutrality Act revised.</p>	<p><b>November</b></p> <p>1. German air-raid on Merseyside; further scattered raids throughout month. Daylight air-offensive over northern France continues on fifteen days of the month. Further night-attacks on targets in West Germany.</p>	<p><b>November</b></p> <p>9. Royal Navy destroys Italian convoy south of Taranto.</p> <p>14. H.M.S. <i>Ark Royal</i> sunk while escorting Malta convoy</p>	<p><b>November</b></p> <p>1. Germans capture Simferopol in Crimea.</p> <p>3. Germans capture Kursk.</p> <p>9. Germans capture Yalta, south-east of Sevastopol.</p> <p>10. Germans capture Tikhvin on Leningrad front.</p> <p>14. Russian counter-attacks on Moscow front.</p>	<p><b>November</b></p> <p>15. Canadian reinforcements arrive in Hong Kong.</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941</b> <b>November</b></p> <p>17. President Roosevelt asks Congress for additional \$1749 million for Army and Navy. 18. Sir Alan Brooke appointed C.I.G.S. as from 25th Dec.; succeeded by General Paget as C-in-C., Home Forces.</p> <p>20. General Weygand retired as Governor-General of Algeria. 21. Lend-Lease extended to Iceland and (24th Nov.) Free French.</p> <p>26. U.S. Note to Japan asking explanation of troop movements in Indo-China. Free French proclaim independence of Lebanon. 27. War-warning sent to U.S. Naval commands in Pacific.</p> <p><b>December</b> 1. Marshal Petain meets Goering in occupied zone.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>November</b></p> <p>22. H.M.S. <i>Devonshire</i> sinks German raider in S. Atlantic.</p> <p><b>December</b> 1. Air-attack on Kristiansund.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>November</b></p> <p>17. Commando raid on German G.H.Q. in Libya. 18. 'Crusader' offensive opens.</p> <p>20. Heavy tank-battles in Sidi Rezegh area.</p> <p>23. New Zealand forces occupy Bardia. 25. H.M.S. <i>Barham</i> sunk off Sollum.</p> <p>26. Major-General Ritchie replaces General Cunningham in command of 8th Army.</p> <p>27. Surrender of Italian garrison in Gondar, Abyssinia.</p> <p><b>December</b></p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>November</b></p> <p>16. Germans capture Kerch. 17. Rosenberg appointed Reich Minister for occupied Eastern Territories. 19. Germans renew general offensive on Eastern Front. 22. Germans enter Rostov. 25. Renewed German attacks in Moscow sector. 28. Russians recapture Rostov.</p> <p><b>December</b> 1. Russian counter-attack at Tula.</p>	<p><b>1941</b> <b>November</b></p> <p>16. Extraordinary session of Diet opens in Tokyo. 18. Lt-General Sir H. Pownall appointed C-in-C., Far East. 19. H.M.A.S. <i>Sydney</i> sunk by German raider off Australia. 25. U.S. Navy Department orders merchant ships in Pacific to be convoyed. 27. H.M.A.S. <i>Parramatta</i> sunk off Australian coast.</p> <p><b>December</b> 1. Rear-Admiral Sir T. Phillips appointed C-in-C., Eastern Fleet. State of Emergency declared in Malaya.</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>2. New National Service Act, including conscription of women.</p> <p>6. President Roosevelt sends personal plea for peace to Japanese Emperor.</p> <p>8. U.K. and U.S. declare war on Japan. Other Allied nations follow suit.</p> <p>11. Italy and Germany declare war on U.S.</p> <p>16. Mr. Eden in Moscow.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>2. Daylight air-offensive over northern France continues throughout most of the month. Night-attacks on targets in West Germany throughout the month.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>2. Air-attacks on Libyan supply-bases (Tripoli, Benghazi, etc.), repeated throughout month.</p> <p>4. General Sir H. Maitland Wilson appointed to command 9th Army.</p> <p>7. Rommel begins withdrawal to Gazala line.</p> <p>8. 8th Army reoccupies Sidi Rezegh; Tobruk relieved.</p> <p>12. Italian cruisers <i>Giussano</i> and <i>Barbiano</i> sunk.</p> <p>15. H.M.S. <i>Galatea</i> sunk off Libya. H.M. Submarine <i>Tetrarch</i> lost in Mediterranean.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>2. Germans in retreat towards Mariupol.</p> <p>8. Russians recapture Tikhvin. Berlin announces cessation of major operations for the winter.</p> <p>9. Russians recapture Elets, south of Tula.</p> <p>10. General Russian offensive on Eastern Front.</p> <p>12. Special Russian communique on German failure before Moscow.</p> <p>15. Russians recapture Kalinin.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>7. Japanese attack U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. Japanese landings in Siam and N. E. Malaya. Air-raid on Singapore.</p> <p>8. Japanese air-attacks on Guam, Midway and Wake Islands and targets in Philippines. Attack on Hong Kong begins. Siam ceases resistance and allows passage of Japanese troops.</p> <p>9. Japanese land at Luzon in northern Philippines.</p> <p>10. Japanese capture Kota Bharu aerodrome. H.M.S. <i>Prince of Wales</i> and <i>Repulse</i> sunk by air-attack off Malaya.</p> <p>15. British forces at Hong Kong withdraw from mainland.</p>

GENERAL	WEST	MIDDLE EAST	EASTERN FRONT	FAR EAST
<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>19. Hitler takes personal command of German Army.</p> <p>22. Washington Conference opens.</p> <p>24. Free French forces occupy St. Pierre and Miquelon.</p> <p>26. Mr. Churchill addresses U.S. Congress.</p> <p>30. Mr. Churchill addresses Canadian Parliament. Indian Congress vote in favour of supporting war: Gandhi resigns.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>17. H.M.S. <i>Dunedin</i> sunk in Atlantic.</p> <p>18. Daylight air-attacks on <i>Scharnhorst</i> and <i>Gneisenau</i> in Brest harbour.</p> <p>26. British raid on Lofoten Island.</p> <p>27. Raid on German-occupied islands of Vaagso and Maaloy, off Norwegian coast.</p> <p>30. Daylight air-attack on Brest.</p> <p>31. H.M.S. <i>Belmont</i> sunk in N.W. approaches.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>17. Rommel withdraws from Gazala.</p> <p>19. H.M.S. <i>Valiant</i> and <i>Queen Elizabeth</i> damaged in Alexandria harbour.</p> <p>23. Barce and Benina recaptured.</p> <p>24. Benghazi recaptured.</p> <p>27. Enemy air-raid on Malta, repeated.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>20. Russians recapture Volokolamsk.</p> <p>29. Russian landing in Crimea.</p> <p>30. Russians recapture Kaluga.</p>	<p><b>1941 December</b></p> <p>17. Japanese land in N. Borneo.</p> <p>18. Portuguese Timor occupied by Dutch and Imperial forces.</p> <p>19. In Malaya British forces evacuate Kedah. Japanese land on Hong Kong Island. Mr. Duff Cooper appointed Minister of State in Far East.</p> <p>22. Major Japanese attack on Philippines. General Wavell confers with Chiang Kai-shek at Chungking.</p> <p>24. Japanese capture Wake Island.</p> <p>25. Hong Kong surrenders. Japanese land in Sarawak.</p> <p>29. In Malaya British troops withdraw from Ipoh. Further air-raids on Singapore.</p> <p>31. Japanese capture Kuantan. Martial law in Singapore.</p>

GENERAL	ATLANTIC, ARCTIC AND AIR	E. EUROPE, MEDITER- RANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST	FAR EAST AND INDIAN OCEAN
<p><b>1942</b> <b>January</b></p> <p>1. United Nations declaration Directives to Commanders. 3. Formation of A.B.D.A. Command</p> <p>17. P.M. returns to England.</p> <p>26. U.S. troops in N. Ireland. 27-29. House of Commons debate on Vote of Confidence.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>January</b></p> <p>15-16. <i>Tirpitz</i> moves to Norway.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>January</b></p> <p>12. Iraq and Persia transferred to M.E. command.</p> <p>21. Rommel counter-attacks in Western Desert.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>January</b></p> <p>3. Wavell receives A.B.D.A. directive. 7. Slim river action. 10. Japanese invade N.E.I. 11. Japanese enter Kuala Lumpur.</p> <p>15. Wavell assumes command of A.B.D.A.</p> <p>20. Japanese invade Burma.</p> <p>23. Japanese take Rabaul.</p> <p>31. British withdraw to Singapore Island.</p>
<p><b>February</b></p> <p>10. 1st meeting of Pacific War Council in London.</p> <p>14. Area bombing directive to R.A.F.</p> <p>17. P.W.C. agree not to reinforce Java.</p>	<p><b>February</b></p> <p>11, 12. <i>Gneisenau</i> and <i>Scharnhorst</i> escape up-Channel.</p>	<p><b>February</b></p> <p>4. Change of government in Egypt. 7. W. front stabilized at Gazala.</p> <p>20. (approx) Russian counter-offensive halted.</p>	<p><b>February</b></p> <p>15. Fall of Singapore. Fall of Palembang.</p> <p>19. Japanese air raid on Darwin.</p>

GENERAL	ATLANTIC, ARCTIC AND AIR	E. EUROPE, MEDITER- RANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST	FAR EAST AND INDIAN OCEAN
<p><b>1942</b> <b>February</b></p> <p>22. Air-Marshals Harris at Bomber Command.</p> <p>24. Reconstruction of U.K. Govt.</p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>4-5. P.M. appeals to President for shipping.</p> <p>10. President suggests redivision of strategic areas.</p> <p>26. Defence Committee accept 15th May as earliest date for Ritchie to attack in W. Desert.</p> <p>29. P.M. appeals to President for heavy bombers.</p> <p><b>April</b></p> <p>1. 1st meeting of Pacific War Council in Washington.</p> <p>4. Division of command areas approved.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>February</b></p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>6-13. Sortie by <i>Tirpitz</i>.</p> <p>27-28. St. Nazaire raid.</p> <p>28. Air-raid on Lübeck. Over 534,000 tons of shipping sunk in Atlantic in March.</p> <p><b>April</b></p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>February</b></p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>11. Malta included in M.E. Command.</p> <p>20-22. Cripps and Nye in Cairo.</p> <p>22. 2nd battle of Sirte.</p> <p><b>April</b></p> <p>3. Admiral Cunningham leaves Mediterranean.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>February</b></p> <p>23. Sittang river disaster.</p> <p>25. Dissolution of A.B.D.A. Wavell, C.-in-C., India.</p> <p>27. Naval Battle of Java Sea.</p> <p>28. Japanese land in Java.</p> <p><b>March</b></p> <p>5. Layton, C.-in-C., Ceylon.</p> <p>8. Japanese enter Rangoon. Allied forces in N.E.I. surrender. Japanese land in New Guinea.</p> <p>17. MacArthur, C.-in-C., S.W. Pacific.</p> <p>22. Cripps Mission arrives in India (until 12th April)</p> <p>24. General Alexander meets Chiang Kai-shek.</p> <p>27. Admiral Somerville, C.-in-C., Far Eastern Fleet.</p> <p><b>April</b></p>

GENERAL	ATLANTIC, ARCTIC AND AIR	E. EUROPE, MEDITER- RANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST	FAR EAST AND INDIAN OCEAN
<p><b>1942</b> <b>April</b></p> <p>8. Marshall and Hopkins arrive in London.</p> <p>14. Laval in power at Vichy.</p> <p>23. Secret session o House of Commons.</p> <p>30. Dictators confer at Salzburg/Berchtesgaden.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>April</b></p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>April</b></p> <p>7. Field-Marshal Lord Gort succeeds General Dobbie as Governor of Malta.</p> <p>Malta under concentrated air-attack during April.</p>	<p><b>1942</b> <b>April</b></p> <p>5. Japanese naval raid on Colombo.</p> <p>9. Japanese naval raid on Trincomalee.</p> <p>16. Eastern Fleet to withdraw to Kilindini.</p> <p>18. Doolittle air-raid on Tokyo.</p> <p>29. Allies evacuate Mandalay. Japanese occupy Lashio on Burma road.</p>
<p><b>May</b></p> <p>20. Singleton Report on bombing. Molotov arrives in London.</p> <p>26. Anglo-Russian treaty signed.</p> <p>29. Molotov in U.S.</p>	<p><b>May</b></p> <p>2. H.M.S. <i>Edinburgh</i> sunk.</p> <p>21. Convoy P.Q. 16 sails.</p> <p>30. R.A.F. 1,000 raid on Cologne.</p>	<p><b>May</b></p> <p>6. Auchinleck proposes to postpone offensive until 15th June.</p> <p>8. Germans attack in Crimea.</p> <p>26. Rommel attacks at Gazala.</p>	<p><b>May</b></p> <p>3. Japanese occupy Tulagi.</p> <p>5-7. Capture of Diego Suarez.</p> <p>6. Fall of Corregidor.</p> <p>7-8. Battle of Coral Sea.</p> <p>20. Allied withdrawal from Burma completed.</p>
<p><b>June</b></p> <p>1. President Roosevelt's statement to Molotov <i>re</i> 2nd Front.</p>	<p><b>June</b></p>	<p><b>June</b></p>	<p><b>June</b></p>

GENERAL	ATLANTIC, ARCTIC AND AIR	E. EUROPE, MEDITER- RANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST	FAR EAST AND INDIAN OCEAN
<p><b>1942 June</b></p> <p>10. P.M. gives <i>aide memoire</i> to Molotov. 11. Eden's statement in House of Commons <i>re</i> Russian treaty, etc.</p> <p>17. P.M. leaves for Washington. 19-20. P.M. at Hyde Park. 21. Decision on Allied strategy.</p>	<p><b>1942 June</b></p> <p>27. Convoy P.Q. 17 sails.</p> <p>Over 623,000 tons of shipping sunk in N. Atlantic in June.</p>	<p><b>1942 June</b></p> <p>12-13. Defeat of British armour at Knights-bridge. 14-15. 'Harpoon' convoy reaches Malta.</p> <p>21. Fall of Tobruk.</p> <p>25. Auckinleck takes over command of 8th Army.</p> <p>28. Main German offensive in S. Russia launched. 30. 8th Army stand at Alamein.</p>	<p><b>1942 June</b></p> <p>4-7. Battle of Midway.</p>
<p><b>July</b></p> <p>1-2. Debate in both Houses of Parliament.</p> <p>17. P.M. explains situation to Stalin by signal. 18. Marshall, King and Hopkins arrive in London.</p> <p>24. C.C.S. agree on strategy for 1942/3. 30. President Roosevelt decides for 'Torch'.</p>	<p><b>July</b></p>	<p><b>July</b></p> <p>1-3. Rommel held at Alamein. 1. Fall of Sevastopol.</p> <p>23. Fall of Rostov.</p> <p>31. Stalemate at Alamein.</p>	<p><b>July</b></p>
<p><b>August</b></p> <p>7. War Cabinet approve changes in M.E. Command.</p>	<p><b>August</b></p>	<p><b>August</b></p> <p>3. P.M. and C.I.G.S. arrive Cairo. 7, 8. Changes in M.E. Command: P.A.I.C. formed. 8. Russians evacuate Maikop. 11-13. 'Pedestal' convoy to Malta.</p>	<p><b>August</b></p> <p>7, 8. U.S. landings in Solomons.</p>



## APPENDIX IX

GENERAL	ATLANTIC, ARCTIC AND AIR	E. EUROPE, MEDITER- RANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST	FAR EAST AND INDIAN OCEAN
<p><b>1942 August</b></p> <p>24. P.M.'s party back in England.</p>	<p><b>1942 August</b></p> <p>19. Raid on Dieppe.</p>	<p><b>1942 August</b></p> <p>12. P.M. arrives Moscow via Tehran. 16. P.M. leaves Moscow for Cairo.</p>	<p><b>1942 August</b></p> <p>23. Tananarive occupied.</p>

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(Note: References to Part II are in italics)

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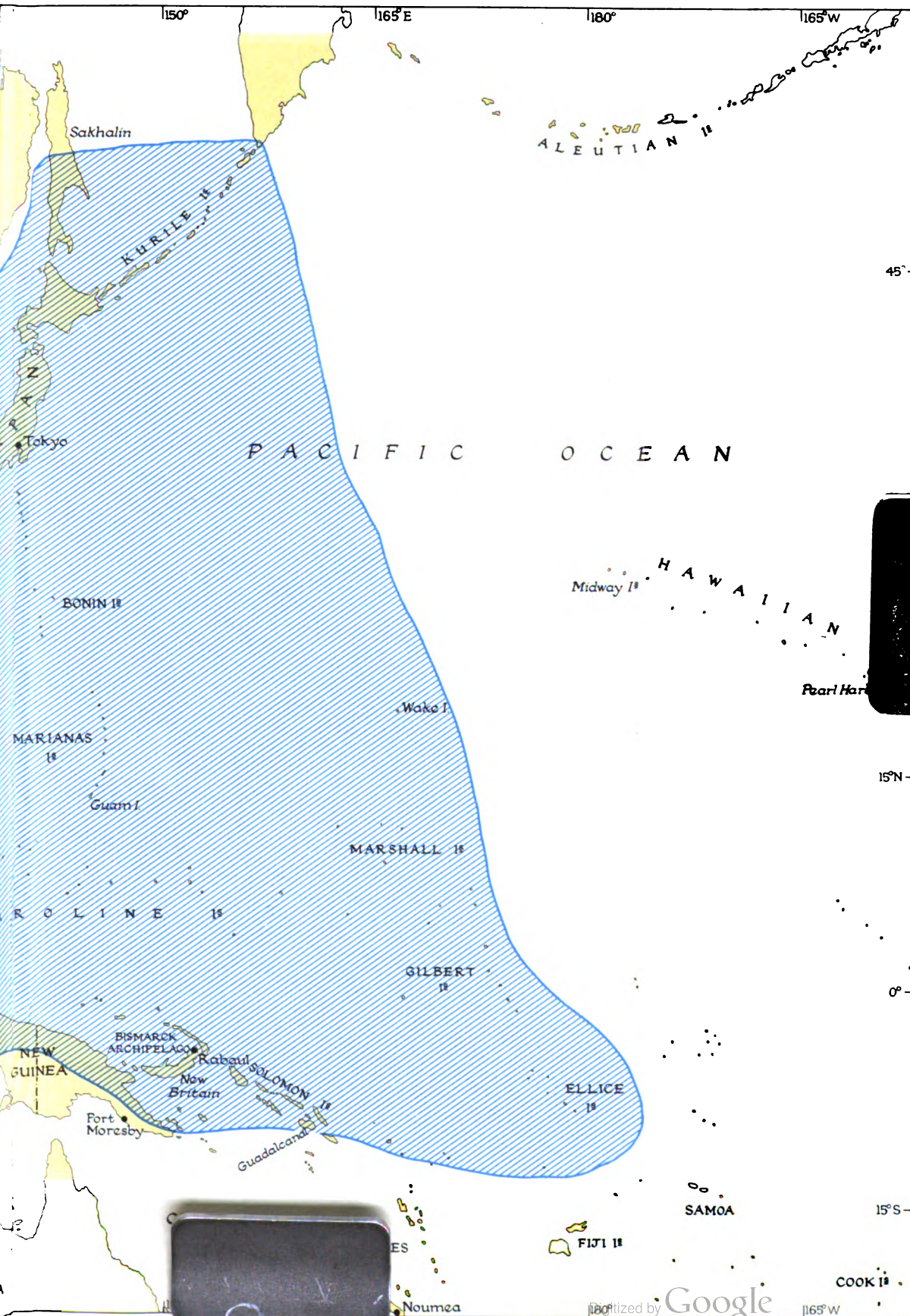
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