

# British Strategy in a Certain Eventuality

Chiefs of Staffs' Committee Memorandum

Introduction by Sebastian Cox

The “Certain Eventuality” somewhat coyly referred to in the title of this paper was the defeat of France and her conclusion of a separate peace with Germany. This did not, in fact, occur until the French Government accepted the German Armistice terms on 22 June 1940. The report had been discussed at the British Cabinet meeting nearly a month earlier on 27 May 1940.

The paper accurately predicted that Italy would enter the War against the UK; in fact Mussolini declared War on 10 June in the hope that he could materially benefit from the defeat inflicted on France by the forces of his Axis partner. As the paper pointed out this made the British strategic position in the Mediterranean and Middle East immensely more complicated, as French control of the Western Mediterranean ceased, and Italy’s position was thus strengthened *vis-à-vis* both the British base on Malta and Britain’s control of Egypt and the Suez Canal, placing both under threat. The Mediterranean and the North African littoral were henceforward to become the centre of a large part of the British war effort for the next three years. This change in the Mediterranean balance in turn complicated the situation in the Far East with regard to Japan. That much of the British position in Malaya now depended on the United States as no fleet could now be despatched eastwards in the event of Japanese aggression was correctly identified. However, it erroneously assumed that Spain and Portugal would fall under Axis control and that this would probably result in the loss of Gibraltar. In fact, fascist Spain under Generalissimo Franco though sympathetic to the Axis, sought carefully to balance this sympathy with continued neutrality. Portugal maintained a staunchly neutral stance throughout. The authors’ assumption that the USA would prove broadly sympathetic to the UK proved essentially correct, although prior to Pearl Harbour President Roosevelt had to move carefully in the face of strong isolationist sentiment in the country and the US Congress.

The paper rightly concluded that the essential immediate strategic issue facing the UK in the event of a French collapse was the maintenance of the economic life and morale of the nation in the face of imminent air attack and possibly invasion. The crux of all three issues was rightly identified as air defence and Fighter Command's ability "to reduce the scale of attack to reasonable bounds". The first priority in air defence was therefore to be fighter aircraft and aero-engine factories and the ports. The paper, in concert with all the air intelligence estimates of the time, grossly overestimated the strength of the *Luftwaffe* at 5,500 frontline aircraft with more than 7,000 in reserve. As indicated in the extracts elsewhere in this edition of APR the actual strength deployed by the *Luftwaffe* during the Battle of Britain was approximately 2,800 frontline aircraft.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, the paper also pointed out that offensive air power would also prove important and that the nation's bomber force should not be expended "on operations that are not of first importance". It is worthwhile noting in this regard that, when eventually employed against German invasion shipping assembled in the Channel ports on the Continent from late August 1940, Bomber Command attacks sank some 10-12 per cent of the invasion barges.

It is interesting to note that the paper considered the capacity of naval forces alone to defeat any invasion attempt "is dependent on the extent to which our Naval forces can operate in the face of heavy air attack on both ships and bases...". This was a lesson which had only recently been brought home very forcibly to Royal Navy ships off Norway and which was being repeated in the waters off Dunkirk even as the paper was being considered by the Cabinet.

The longer term prospects for defeating Germany were also considered but here its conclusions were more uneven. It noted some of the underlying weaknesses of the German economic position but exaggerated many of them, especially in the short term. The prediction that Germany would have difficulty replacing military equipment by mid-1941 has to be regarded with some incredulity given that the authors did not predict the German campaign in Russia. At almost precisely the moment they were postulating future German equipment difficulties, the *Wehrmacht* instigated a massive military effort against the Soviet Union which initially met with considerable success. Germany's long term oil position was indeed an Achilles' heel but in the short term her position was unaltered because her expenditures of oil in conquering Western Europe in 1940 were almost exactly balanced by the stockpiles she captured from the occupied nations, which included sufficient aviation fuel in France and Holland to sustain her entire air effort through the forthcoming Battle of Britain.<sup>2</sup> The paper was accurate in its forecast that attacks on the German oil and transportation industries would eventually hasten her defeat, but wildly optimistic both in its assessment of the damage inflicted on these target systems already – which was almost negligible – and the date by which serious damage would help bring about collapse. In fact German oil production increased year on year until the Allied combined bomber offensive began to mount concerted and effective attacks on oil targets in 1944.<sup>3</sup>

Similarly the prediction of widespread food shortage in Western Europe did not come about until very late in the War, partly because of overestimation of the problem and partly because of an understandable failure to anticipate the invasion of the Soviet Union and to appreciate how brutally the Germans would behave in the occupied areas of Eastern Europe. The high hopes of stimulating significant subversive guerrilla activity in Occupied Europe also proved largely illusory in the early years of the occupation.

One surprising aspect of the paper is its failure to consider the part that offensive land power would play in the eventual defeat of the Axis powers. It is only considered in respect of its ability to defend the UK and other strategic areas in the Middle and Far East. However, to be charitable it is as well to bear in mind that at the time it was being written the Dunkirk operation was just getting under way and was expected to succeed in evacuating only some 45,000 British and French troops and not the 330,000 who were eventually brought back to the UK.

Overall, and allowing for some notable omissions and inaccuracies, the paper accurately predicted much of the future course of the War, including the UK's ability to survive concerted air attack, the efficacy in the long term (much longer than predicted) of blockade and offensive air action against economic targets, along with the hostility of Italy and Japan as well as the support of the USA. It did not predict the German assault on the Soviet Union, or the crucial part played by the land forces of the Grand Alliance in concert with the Combined Air Offensive and blockade in the final German defeat.

## **Notes**

<sup>1</sup> See the relevant figures in the extract from the Rise and Fall of the German Air Force.

<sup>2</sup> Chiefs of Staff Committee, "Oil as a Factor in the German War Economy", March 1946, p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, table p.24.

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Printed for the War Cabinet. May 1940.

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**W.P. (40) 168.**

(Also C.O.S. (40) 390.)

May 25, 1940.

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WAR CABINET.

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BRITISH STRATEGY IN A CERTAIN EVENTUALITY.

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REPORT BY THE CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE.

THE object of this paper is to investigate the means whereby we could continue to fight single-handed if French resistance were to collapse completely, involving the loss of a substantial proportion of the British Expeditionary Force and the French Government were to make terms with Germany. The assumptions we have made are contained in Appendix A of the Annex. Of these the two most important are that:

- (i) United States of America is willing to give us full economic and financial support, *without which we do not think we could continue the war with any chance of success.*
  - (ii) Italy has intervened against us.
2. In particular we have asked ourselves two questions:
- (a) Could the United Kingdom hold out until assistance from the Empire and America made itself felt? and
  - (b) Could we ultimately bring sufficient economic pressure to bear on Germany to ensure her defeat?

We summarise our conclusions and recommendations below. As regards the latter *there are a large number of measures which we consider should be carried out at once irrespective of whether a French collapse is or is not likely.*

We attach our detailed appreciation as an Annex.

## CONCLUSIONS.

3. There are three ways in which Germany might break down the resistance of the United Kingdom – unrestricted air attack aimed at breaking public morale, starvation of the country by attack on shipping and ports, and occupation by invasion.

### *Air Factor.*

4. The vital fact is that our ability to avoid defeat will depend on three factors:

- (a) Whether the morale of our people will withstand the strain of air bombardment;
- (b) Whether it will be possible to import the absolute essential minimum of commodities necessary to sustain life and to keep our war industries in action;
- (c) Our capacity to resist invasion.

All of these depend primarily on whether our fighter defences will be able to reduce the scale of attack to reasonable bounds. This will necessarily mean the replacement of casualties in personnel and aircraft on a substantial scale. Our capacity to resist invasion may, however, depend also to a great extent on the maintenance of an effective air striking force.

These factors cannot be assessed with certainty, and it is impossible to say whether or not the United Kingdom could hold out in all circumstances. We think there are good grounds for the belief that the British people will endure the greatest strain, if they realise – as they are beginning to do – that the existence of the Empire is at stake. We must concentrate our energies primarily on the production of fighter aircraft and crews, and the defence of those factories essential to fighter production should have priority. At the same time it is clear that we cannot afford to neglect our bomber force or to expend it on operations that are not of first importance.

### *Civil Defence.*

5. As long as the present quasi-peacetime organisation continues, it is unlikely that this country can hold out. The present Home Security Organisation was constituted to deal with air attack only by aircraft operating from bases in Germany; it is not sufficient to grapple with the problems which would arise as a result of a combination of heavy air attack from bases on a semi-circle from Trondheim to Brest, invasion, and internal attack by the "Fifth Column".

### *Land Forces.*

6. Germany has ample forces to invade and occupy this country. Should the enemy succeed in establishing a force, with its vehicles, firmly ashore – the Army in the United Kingdom, which is very short of equipment, has not got the offensive power to drive it out.

### *Naval Forces.*

7. Our first naval task is to secure the United Kingdom and its seaborne supplies against naval attack. We have sufficient Naval forces to deal with those that the enemy can bring

against us in Home Waters, and we can provide naval security for our seaborne supplies. Our ability to defeat at sea a seaborne attack on this country is dependent on the extent to which our Naval forces can operate in the face of heavy air attack on both ships and bases, and it is of the greatest importance to strengthen our systems of intelligence and reconnaissance to ensure early and accurate warning of enemy intentions is obtained.

*Seaborne Supplies.*

8. We have adequate shipping to meet our requirements, but again the provision of air security is the main problem. We may have to abandon our ports on the South and East Coasts for trade purposes, and our ability to carry on the war will then depend on West Coast ports entirely. These, therefore, must be adequately defended. All unimportant imports must be eliminated. If we can maintain 60 per cent of our present imports we can obtain enough food for the population and raw materials to continue essential armament production.

*Overseas.*

9. On a long-term view, Germany, in concert with Italy, will strive to overthrow our position in Egypt and the Middle East.

10. The immediate effect of a French collapse would be the loss of naval control in the Western Mediterranean. Italy would be able to concentrate all her strength against Malta, Gibraltar and Egypt. Malta could probably withstand one serious assault. We could continue to use Gibraltar as a naval base until Spain became hostile. Even then Gibraltar should hold out for 60 days.

11. To contain the Italian Fleet and secure Egypt a capital ship fleet should be based on Alexandria. In due course a heavy scale of attack could be mounted on Egypt from Libya, and we might have to withdraw the Fleet through the Suez Canal to Aden and block the Canal. Preparations to do this should be undertaken as soon as the contingency considered in this paper arises.

12. The retention of Singapore is very important for economic control, particularly of rubber and tin. To counter Japanese action in the Far East, a fleet, adequately supported by air forces, is necessary at Singapore. It is most improbable that we could send any naval forces there, and reliance would have to be placed upon the United States to safeguard our interests.

13. We should endeavour to maintain our position in all our overseas possessions.

*Ability to defeat Germany.*

14. Germany might still be defeated by economic pressure, by a combination of air attack on economic objectives in Germany and on German morale and the creation of widespread revolt in her conquered territories.

15. We are advised in the following sense by the Ministry of Economic Warfare. We cannot emphasise too strongly the importance of the substantial accuracy of this forecast, since upon the economic factor depends our only hope of bringing about the downfall of Germany.
16. In spite of immediate economic gains obtained from her conquests, Germany will still be very short of food, natural fibres, tin, rubber, nickel and cobalt. Above all, even with Roumanian supplies, she will still have insufficient oil.
17. Given full Pan-American co-operation, we should be able to control all deficiency commodities at source. There will be no neutrals except Japan and Russia.
18. The effect of a continued denial of overseas supplies to Germany will be:
  - (a) By the winter of 1940-41, widespread shortage of food in many European industrial areas, including parts of Germany.
  - (b) By the winter of 1940-41, shortage of oil will force Germany to weaken her military control in Europe.
  - (c) By the middle of 1941, Germany will have difficulty in replacing military equipments. A large part of the industrial plant of Europe will stand still, throwing upon the German administration an immense unemployment problem to handle.
19. Air attacks on Germany's oil centres will be an important contribution to the enemy's defeat and to the reduction of the intensity of his air offensive.

The pressure we could exert by air action will be extremely limited for some time owing to the effects of the enemy's attacks and the need to conserve our striking power to deal with the contingency of invasion.

20. The territories occupied by Germany are likely to prove a fruitful ground for sowing the seeds of revolt, particularly when economic conditions deteriorate.
21. Finally, we emphasise once more that these conclusions as to our ability to bring the war to a successful conclusion depend entirely upon full Pan-American economic and financial co-operation.
22. In view of our terms of reference and the speculative nature of the problem, we have not considered whether the Empire can continue the war if the United Kingdom were defeated.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS.

23. The following recommendations were drafted before the Bill conferring on the government complete power of control over persons and property for the prosecution of the

war was passed. We have not had the opportunity of studying the details of this Bill, so some of our recommendations are no doubt covered by its provisions.

We recommend that the following measures should be carried out NOW, irrespective of events in France. These measures are confined to those which we consider necessary for the security of this country against attack during the critical period that may arise in the next few months:

- (i) We should do our utmost to persuade the United States of America to provide aircraft, particularly fighters, as soon as possible and in large numbers, including those from stocks now held by the United States Army and Navy.
- (ii) Measures should be taken to ensure the strictest economy in A.A. ammunition expenditures.
- (iii) The most ruthless action should be taken to eliminate any chances of "Fifth Column" activities. Internment of all enemy aliens and all members of subversive organisations, which latter should be proscribed.
- (iv) Alien refugees are a most dangerous sort of subversive activity. We recommend that the number of refugees admitted to this country should be cut to the minimum and that those admitted should be kept under the closest surveillance.
- (v) In order to ensure the necessary co-operation between the Civil and Military Authorities, operational control of all Civil Defence Forces, including county and borough police, &c., should be vested in the Ministry of Home Security and exercised through Regional Commissioners.
- (vi) Any evacuation which the Government intends to carry out in emergency should be carried out now. We recommend that a modification of the scheme for reception areas, in view of the dangers of invasion, should be carried out.
- (vii) Immediate steps to be taken to obtain destroyers and M.T.Bs from the United States of America.
- (viii) Every possible measure should be directed to obtaining the active support of Eire, particularly with a view to the immediate use of Berehaven.
- (ix) Our intelligence system to be strengthened with a view to getting early warning of German preparations for invasion of this country.
- (x) Dispersal of stocks of raw materials to free our West Coast ports to deal with the heavy increase in imports should now be made.
- (xi) So far as is practicable distribution of food reserves throughout the country with a view to meeting the disorganisation of transport which may occur.
- (xii) Bunkering facilities and other arrangements necessary to deal with a heavy volume of merchant shipping in West Coast and Irish ports should be organised.
- (xiii) All unimportant and luxury imports to be cut out.



(xiv) Finally we consider that the time has come to inform the public of the true dangers that confront us and to educate them on what they are required to do and what NOT to do, if the country is invaded.

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ANNEX.

BRITISH STRATEGY IN A CERTAIN EVENTUALITY.

APPRECIATION.

*Object.*

The object of this paper is to investigate the means whereby we could continue to fight single-handed if French resistance were to collapse completely involving the loss of a substantial proportion of the British Expeditionary Force, and the French Government were to make terms with Germany.

2. We have based our investigation on certain assumptions which we have set out in Appendix A. Of these, we would draw particular attention to the assumption that we could count on the full economic and financial support of the United States of America, without which we do not consider we could continue the war with any chance of success. Briefly, the general strategic situation which would arise under these assumptions is as follows:

*Strategical and Political Situation.*

3. From the first few weeks of a French collapse the United Kingdom and its sea approaches will be exposed at short range to the concentrated attack of the whole of the German Naval and Air forces operating from bases extending from Norway to the North-West of France. The threat of invasion will be ever present. Italy will be in the war, and the Mediterranean – except for the Eastern end and possibly, to a limited extent, the North African coast – will be closed to us.

4. As time goes on – over a period of some months – our enemies will be able to extend their economic and military control to Spain, Portugal and North Africa in the West and to the Balkans, except Turkey, in the East. This will somewhat improve their economic situation, will provide additional bases for attack on British trade in the Atlantic, and enable a heavy scale of attack to be prepared in Libya against Egypt. On the other hand, we have assumed that we can count on the full economic and financial support of the United States, possibly extending to active participation. Japan we see as purely opportunist – prepared to exploit the situation but with a watchful eye on the United States of America. Russia, through fear of Germany's growing determination, may come to an understanding with Sweden and Turkey.

*Probable enemy action.*

5. The defeat of France will not free Germany from the risks of economic strangulation and air attack. The main objective in German policy must therefore be the rapid elimination of resistance in the United Kingdom.

6. There are three broad methods by which Germany might achieve this end:

- (a) Unrestricted air attack aimed at breaking down public morale.
- (b) Starvation of this country by attack on shipping and ports.
- (c) Occupation of the United Kingdom by invasion.

In all of these the primary factor would be full-scale use of air forces.

7. On a longer term view, in concert with Italy, German strategy will strive ultimately to overthrow our position in Egypt and the Middle East and to open a trade route through the Red Sea.

#### I – OUR ABILITY TO WITHSTAND ATTACK.

*Attack on the United Kingdom and its approaches.*

8. To withstand German attack on the United Kingdom and its approaches we must be able to defeat invasion, to maintain a large proportion of our seaborne supplies, to keep factories working and to sustain the morale of the people of this country.

*Air Forces.*

9. The crux of the whole problem is the air defence of this country. The following are the main factors affecting the enemy scale of attack: The Germans will be free to concentrate the whole of their air force against this country. Its numerical strength at the present time is shown in Appendix B. The area which this force could cover in the situation assumed is as follows: The long-range bomber force could operate over the entire British Isles and the approaches to all West coast ports, including Irish and Scottish ports. The dive-bomber force and long-range fighters could reach an area in southern and central England extending as far as a line drawn between Cardiff and Grimsby, while the short-range fighters could reach South-East England.

10. The Germans will thus be able to concentrate a very heavy weight of long and short-range bomber attack over a large area of this country, including our vital areas in the Midlands and over all probable areas for enemy landings on our coast. The fact that they would be able to escort this force with fighters creates a threat, the seriousness of which cannot be overstressed, since it will involve a very much higher wastage rate in fighters than we have previously estimated. Should they succeed in obtaining a high degree of air superiority, they could deal comparatively unhindered, except by A.A. gunfire, with any objectives they might select. This would enormously increase our difficulties in maintaining the normal life of the country and in meeting invasion.

11. We have, on the other hand, the following factors in our favour: A proportion of the German air force will be operating from aerodromes far removed from their main organisation and supplies and in unfriendly country. The German casualties have been extremely high and will continue, though perhaps at not quite such a high rate. Although the enemy is still able to replace aircraft from reserves and production, the replacement of his most highly trained

crews will seriously affect the efficiency of his Air Force. There is no doubt that the morale of the flying personnel also has suffered, and that it will deteriorate further, so long as our fighter defences remain effective. It is therefore open to doubt whether attacks will be pressed home whole-heartedly, particularly by day, and whether the enemy air force is capable of sustaining a large-scale offensive so long as such opposition exists.

12. The capacity of the German Air Force to reduce the effectiveness of our air defence depends to a considerable extent upon his ability to destroy our aerodromes, aircraft on the ground and our aircraft industry. We have a well-dispersed system of aerodromes and satellite landing grounds. The enemy will certainly have to employ large forces with determination before he begins to inflict serious losses to our first-line strength by attack on aerodromes. During this time his own losses from fighter and A.A. gunfire will be heavy, but protection of aerodromes will absorb a proportion of our fighter strength which would be available for the defence of other vital areas. In our aircraft industry the dangerous weakness is the concentration of the whole of our engine production for the fighter force in two factories. Under a sustained rate of attack it is extremely doubtful if we could expect to receive more than a fraction of our present production figure. Our first-line strength may, therefore, diminish rapidly both because of a high rate of wastage and a low rate of replacement. It will accordingly be of extreme importance to do everything to obtain quantities of aircraft from America and to keep open our sea routes across the Atlantic.

13. Ability to protect both our aerodromes and aircraft industry depends to an over-whelming extent upon the maintenance of a force of fighter aircraft. Its completely dominating position in an Air Defence organisation has been clearly shown during the last few weeks. Including naval forces and fleet bases our fighter organisation has immense areas to cover. Ability to concentrate at decisive places would be of the greatest value in economising fighters, and any steps that can be taken to reduce the vital areas to be defended should be adopted.

14. The second factor in Air Defence is the gun. There are at present of the approved numbers for A.D.G.B. only 44 per cent of heavy and 18 per cent of light equipments available. These meagre resources must also clearly be concentrated in the most vital areas only, and the maximum number extricated from France. It is equally important to economise ammunition and to ensure that plans and preparations are made to modify tactical dispositions to meet successive stages of the enemy's attack.

15. We cannot resist invasion by fighter aircraft alone. An air striking force is necessary not only to meet the sea-borne expedition, but also to bring direct pressure to bear upon Germany by attacking objectives in that country.

16. The fighter and bomber forces, which we have available in this country at the present date, are shown in Appendix C. The strength of this force will no doubt be further reduced before the situation under consideration arises.

It will be noted that our reserves have reached dangerously low totals and that we are therefore vitally dependent on a continued flow of production. The aircraft for operational units due to reach us from the United States of America and Canada are given in Appendix D. The present orders are totally inadequate to replace wastage if our own production ceases. Further orders for fighters now under consideration should be given a very high order of priority, and we should persuade the United States Government to release aircraft from their first line strengths.

*Civil Defence.*

17. There can be no doubt that, in the circumstances we are considering, the morale of the country will be subjected to a heavier strain than ever before. Not only will the physical damage and demoralisation of continued and heavy bombing attacks sap the nation's courage but these attacks will be directed at important objectives with a view not only to destroying the objective but driving away labour. Furthermore, propaganda and "Fifth Column" activities will play a dangerous part in demoralising the country.

18. As long as the present quasi-peacetime organisation continues there is no guarantee that this country could hold out. The present Home Security Organisation was constituted to deal with air attack only and the volume of such attack was estimated on the basis that the enemy aircraft would be operating from Germany. It does not take into account the new problems arising from a combination of heavy air attack, invasion and "Fifth Column" activities such as has been experienced by the countries already subjected to attack by Germany, and to which we are now liable. An attack of this character may now be regarded as probably based on the channel ports.

We believe that, with proper organisation, this country could hold out, but if we are to survive total war, it is essential to organise the country as a fortress on totalitarian lines.

We are satisfied that the country is ready to accept whole-heartedly any steps that may be considered necessary provided that clear direction is given. At the same time immediate steps must be taken to bring home to the nation the gravity of the problem and the need for individual self-sacrifice in the interests of the Empire.

19. To this end we consider that the following steps, inter alia, should be taken to implement this recommendation.

- (a) That the operational control of all civil defence forces, including County and Borough Police, should no longer be exercised by local authorities but should be vested in the Ministry of Home Security and exercised through the Regional Commissioners.
- (b) That all enemy aliens and persons known to be members of subversive organisations should be incarcerated.
- (c) That no evacuation or movement of refugees should be allowed, in order not to

hamper essential movements. The evacuation problem is thus restricted to one of local "panic" conditions. (It should be noted that the corollary of this is that any evacuation considered necessary should have been carried out before the emergency arises).

*Land Forces.*

20. Germany would have ample troops (70 divisions or more) for the invasion of this country, even after providing for the occupation of conquered territory, including France, and for limited operations in South-East Europe.

The troops available in this country during the next two or three months will be:

Trained, equipped and mobilised .....	3½ divisions
Partly trained, mainly equipped except for artillery .....	3 divisions
.....	2 motor divisions
Relatively untrained, little equipment .....	5 divisions

and two armoured divisions, of which the equivalent of about two brigades could be mobilised.

In addition, there are 57 Home Defence Battalions employed on the defence of vulnerable points and many men in holding units, training centres, &c. It is unlikely that more than a small portion of the British Expeditionary Force could be extricated from France. Most of its equipment and ammunition is likely to be lost. On the other hand, additional Dominion Forces, which are not fully trained or equipped, are en route to the United Kingdom.

21. The major weakness of our Home Defence Forces is lack of equipment, artillery and ammunition. Should the Germans succeed in establishing a force with its vehicles in this country, our army forces have not got the offensive power to drive it out. The maintenance of the lines of communication of such a force would, however, be a difficult problem for the enemy.

*Naval Forces.*

22. The first and vital task of our naval forces is to ensure the security of the United Kingdom and its essential supplies against seaborne attack. All other naval commitments are secondary to this; and, if our naval forces at home become depleted through loss or damage, we must at all costs maintain their strength by drawing on outlying stations.

23. It is also important to retain our position in the Eastern Mediterranean, and for this a capital ship force to contain the Italian Fleet will be essential. After providing for this, it will still be possible to match the German Fleet in Home Waters and to provide for ocean convoy escorts. In this we may be helped by any French Naval forces that may not have capitulated.

24. Whatever the strength of our Naval forces in Home Waters, our ability to exercise command of the North Sea and Channel will depend on our ability to operate surface forces

within close range of enemy air bases. Whether we shall be able to maintain effective naval forces in bases on the East and South Coasts in the face of a very heavy scale of air attack is uncertain; if we cannot do so, the chance of intercepting enemy forces before they reach our shores will clearly be less. Finally, whether we shall be able to operate surface forces in strength in the southern part of the North Sea and the Channel at all is also uncertain. At the best, we may be able to continue using our present bases and to operate surface forces in adequate strength off our South and East Coasts without prohibitive loss or damage; at the worst, we may have to face the fact that we cannot do so. All that we can say at the moment is that it would be imprudent to count upon being able to do so.

25. With Germany in possession of ports in Norway, Holland, Belgium and France our Naval dispositions must be planned to meet the threat of seaborne invasion on either the East or South Coasts of the United Kingdom. In such an operation Germany would probably employ the whole of her Naval forces (see Appendix E) and we must therefore base a capital ship Fleet to intercept German heavy forces. Rosyth is the most suitable base in the North Sea for this purpose, but air attack may make it untenable, in which circumstances, Scapa is the next best base.

26. The problem in the Channel is more difficult, as with enemy naval forces operating from French ports, the cover provided by a Fleet in the north is not adequate, and capital ships might have to be based on West Coast or Irish ports. The use of Berehaven as an operational base would be of the greatest importance for this and for our light forces, which will be covering the approaches to the West Coast ports. In this connection, we point out that it will be even more important to prevent Germany from making use of naval or air refuelling bases in Eire, and we consider that the strongest representations should be made to the Government of Eire in this respect.

27. We cannot stress too strongly the importance of strengthening our intelligence systems and reconnaissance patrols to get the earliest possible warning of the preparation of invasion.

28. Our ability to control the North Sea and Channel depends on the number of light forces that we can dispose in these waters and operate there in the face of air attack. We are short of destroyers, and it is essential that every effort should be made to obtain reinforcements from Canada and the United States. Withdrawal from Narvik would make additional destroyers available.

29. Minelaying operations in the Straits of Dover to prevent movement of shipping southward to French ports and the laying of a south-coast barrage should be planned, and minelaying off enemy ports intensified.

30. Apart from defensive methods, operations to destroy enemy shipping concentrations in port must be undertaken, if opportunity offers, to strike directly at the enemy's ability to carry a seaborne expedition.

*Seaborne Supplies.*

31. We have adequate shipping resources at present to meet our requirements, although we must assume that enemy naval attacks, both on our trade and Naval forces, in Home Waters and overseas, will be intensified.

32. The provision of air security is, however, the real problem in Home Waters. If the enemy launches a full-scale offensive against the United Kingdom, a very heavy scale of air attack will be developed on our ports on the south and east coasts, and we may have to abandon them altogether for trade purposes.

33. Plans have already been prepared to divert all shipping to West Coast ports and, provided we can maintain approximately 60 per cent of our present imports, we believe that we should be able to obtain enough food to support the population and sufficient raw materials to continue our essential armament production, although at a reduced rate. We again draw attention to the importance of reducing now the unimportant imports (such as bananas and children's toys), so that the maximum import of important raw materials may be available to increase our stocks of these essentials. Moreover, even if our imports were reduced to a mere trickle, we should still be able to tide over a critical period of a few weeks by drawing on our reserve stocks, which have been accumulated to meet a crisis of this nature. To increase our ability to hold out in a critical period, we should now put into operation plans for drastic rationing and distribution of stocks. Nevertheless, our ability to carry on the war is absolutely dependent upon the eventual maintenance of supplies through the West Coast ports, and we would point out that this will raise major problems of labour transference. Moreover, the West Coast ports themselves will be subjected to air attack, although possibly on a lesser scale to that on the East and South Coasts.

*The influence of the Air Factor in our ability to withstand Attack.*

34. The vital fact is that our ability to avoid defeat will depend on three factors:

- (a) Whether the morale of our people will withstand the strain of air bombardment;
- (b) Whether it will be possible to import the absolute essential minimum of commodities necessary to sustain life and to keep our war industries in action;
- (c) Our capacity to resist invasion.

All of these depend primarily on whether our fighter defences will be able to reduce the scale of attack to reasonable bounds. This will necessarily mean the replacement of casualties in personnel and aircraft on a substantial scale. Our capacity to resist invasion may, however, depend also to a great extent on the maintenance of an effective air striking force.

These factors cannot be assessed with certainty and it is impossible to say whether or not the United Kingdom could hold out in all circumstances. We think there are good grounds for the belief that the British people will endure the greatest strain, if they realise – as they are beginning to do – that the existence of the Empire is at stake. We must concentrate our



energies primarily on the production of fighter aircraft and crews, and the defence of these factories essential to fighter production should have priority. At the same time it is clear that we cannot afford to neglect our bomber force or to expend it on operations that are not of first importance.

ENEMY ACTION AGAINST OUR OVERSEAS POSSESSIONS AND INTERESTS.

*Naval Forces.*

35. The immediate effect of a French collapse on the Mediterranean and Middle East situation would be the loss of naval control in the Western Mediterranean. This would leave Italy free to concentrate the whole of her strength against Malta, Gibraltar, Egypt and our interests in the Near East.

36. Malta has six months' food reserve for the population and garrison, but A.A. guns and ammunition are short, and the island is not likely to withstand more than one serious seaborne assault, nor could it be used as a Naval base.

37. Gibraltar, provided it was not attacked by gas, could hold out for 60 days against a hostile Spain, and it is even probable that supplies could be made available to extend this period. It would be possible to continue using Gibraltar as a naval base until Spain became hostile.

38. It would be impossible, with the forces at our disposal, to control sea communications in the Western as well as in the Eastern Mediterranean. We should, however, retain light forces in the Atlantic approaches with a view to intercepting raiders, coastwise shipping and blockade runners. In the event of Gibraltar becoming unusable, we might occupy Casablanca, failing which the nearest bases are Dakar and Freetown, both of which are too far away to be of much value. It would be important to prevent enemy forces using the Azores, Canary Islands and Cape Verde Islands as bases, and, should we be unable to use Casablanca, we might require to base naval forces on these islands ourselves.

39. The only naval bases left in the Mediterranean would be Alexandria and Haifa in the Eastern basin, and so important is it to hold our position in Egypt in order to maintain economic pressure that we consider a capital ship fleet should be based on Alexandria.

40. We estimate that sufficient force could be made available to contain the Italian fleet and still leave us sufficient Naval units for operations at Home and elsewhere. Supply by the Red Sea route would be subject to attack from Italian East Africa, and the Fleet itself would operate continuously within range of enemy bomber forces. In spite of this, we believe it should be retained there as long as possible for the security of Egypt and as a stabilizing influence on Turkey and the countries of the Middle East. Furthermore, it would, by its presence, contain a large proportion of Italian Naval forces from making sorties into the Western Mediterranean and Atlantic.

*Land and Air Forces.*

41. In the early stages the situation in Egypt would not be greatly altered from that already envisaged in the event of war with Italy. Our land forces are strong enough to meet Italian attack in that area and equipment and ammunition reserves are sufficient for 90 days at full wastage rates. There is, however, a serious shortage of aircraft and anti-aircraft guns and the air defence problem is a serious one even in the scale of attack at present envisaged. The problem of further maintenance would be acute with a closed Mediterranean and hazardous Red Sea. The scale of attack in the Red Sea would, however, gradually diminish, as the enemy would find difficulty in maintaining his air effort in Abyssinia.

42. After a period of some months the Germans and Italians would no doubt gain military and economic control of the whole of the Balkans, except Turkey, or Spain and of French North Africa. The scale of attacks mounted from Libya would be greatly increased and in the meantime the internal security problem in the Middle East would have grown. Eventually, after a period of months, a heavy attack supported by considerable air forces could be launched from Libya, in which case it is doubtful whether we can maintain our position in Egypt. If we could not, it will be necessary to withdraw the fleet to Aden and block the Canal. Preparations for this should be put in hand as soon as the contingency considered in this paper materialises. Unless previous to this it were possible to increase the scale of air defence in Egypt, it is doubtful whether the garrison could hold out.

43. The situation in Iraq depends chiefly on the maintenance of internal security in that country. No immediate deterioration might follow the French collapse. After some months, however, our position up country might become untenable, in which case it would be necessary to withdraw to a position at Habbaniya to protect Basra and the Anglo-Iranian Oilfields. A division could be provided from India for this purpose.

44. There will be no direct military threat to India, but we could not rely on being able to withdraw any British troops from India.

*The Far East.*

45. A threat to our interests in the Far East can only arise in the event of a hostile Japan. With America actively on our side Japan would be unlikely to make a direct attack on British territory; though she would no doubt exploit any opportunity that offered. The retention of Singapore is extremely important from the point of view of our economic control – particularly of rubber and tin.

46. To counter Japanese action in the Far East, a fleet, adequately supported by Air Forces, is necessary at Singapore. What forces we can send can only be judged in the light of the situation at the time. It is most improbable that we can send any naval forces to the Far East. Therefore we must rely on the United States of America to safeguard our interests in the Far East.

47. Australia should be asked to consider a reinforcement of the garrison in Singapore.

*Other Overseas Garrisons.*

48. We should endeavour to maintain our position in all our overseas possessions. In view of the necessity for concentration of all British resources at vital points, it is for consideration whether responsibilities for isolated garrisons might not be taken over by the Dominions, e.g. Canada might be asked to take over the defence of the West Indies and of Iceland.

II – ABILITY TO DEFEAT GERMANY.

49. The defeat of Germany might be achieved by a combination of economic pressure, air attack on economic objectives in Germany and on German morale and the creation of widespread revolt in the conquered territories.

*Economic Pressure.*

50. The following general conclusions which we have reached on this wide economic problem have been arrived at after consultation with a representative of the Ministry of Economic Warfare.

51. German control of the resources of Western Europe and a part of Northern Africa will secure for her a number of immediate economic assets. Nevertheless Germany and the area under her control will still depend on outside sources for certain essential commodities, particularly natural fibres for clothing and footwear, rubber, tin, nickel and cobalt. Moreover the occupied territories of Western Europe will aggravate the food shortage which is already a serious problem in the Reich; and the whole oil output of Roumania, Poland and Germany together with such supplies as are likely to be available from Russia will not suffice to maintain German and Italian stocks, which would have to be drawn on from the outset.

52. With genuine and extensive pan-American co-operation and with the Dutch, Belgian and French Empires at our disposal, we shall be in a strong position to control all deficiency commodities at source, except for Japan and Russia and a few isolated territories, there will be no neutrals. It will no longer be practicable by normal contraband control methods involving visit and search.

Our ability to apply economic pressure of this nature will depend primarily upon American co-operation. On this assumption, and provided that we can maintain control over the Allied Overseas Empires and naval control of the wider oceans and focal points leading to the blockaded area, the trickle of supplies reaching Germany by blockade running will be negligible.

53. The effect of the denial of overseas supplies to Germany will manifest itself in the following ways: Firstly, food shortage. Dependent upon the yield of the harvests in 1940,

which are expected to be low, German-controlled Europe will be somewhat short of bread-stuffs. There will also be a widespread scarcity of essential fats and fruits. Life will be sustained for a period by the heavy slaughtering of immature animals. This will be necessary because, after the end of the grazing season, there will be a dearth of feeding-stuffs. It will probably be only a matter of months before hoarding by the peasant population creates a really acute shortage of food in the industrial areas, including parts of Germany herself.

54. Secondly, Germany's war potential itself must be expected to decline through deficiency in oil. The whole of her own and of Italian stocks of petrol plus the whole output of Roumania and small supplies from Russia will nearly suffice to provide the lubricants and petrol needed to maintain orderly administration and the minimum industrial activity in the Continent as a whole. As soon as the initial stocks are exhausted, and if synthetic plants can be destroyed, the German garrisons would be largely immobilised and her striking power cumulatively decreased.

55. A third effect will be on the quality of Germany's war equipment. It is impossible to estimate the amount of war material that the German fighting forces will have to consume under the conditions postulated. But it is certain that deprived of all imports of certain essential non-ferrous metals, alloys, rubber and cotton and wool, Germany will not be able to maintain a high rate of replacement, and the quality of her war equipment, including aeroplanes, must be expected to decline. Even with practically no consumption of war equipment a large part of the industrial plant of Europe will stand still, throwing upon the German administration an immense unemployment problem to handle.

56. With regard to the time factor, effective denial of these supplies is, we are advised, likely to produce widespread starvation in many of the industrial areas, including parts of Germany, before the winter of 1940 (assuming an early French collapse). By the same date the depletion of oil stocks will force Germany to weaken her military control in Europe or to immobilise her armed forces. By the middle of 1941, Germany will find it hard to replace her military equipments. This process of exhaustion would be somewhat hastened by destruction of Germany's synthetic oil plants and of Roumanian wells, by blockage of the Danube and the diversion of Russian oil supplies.

*Air attack on economic objectives in Germany.*

57. Economic factors have shown that the primary objective for our air attack should be the enemy's oil resources and focal points in his transport system. We have already made progress in the systematic elimination of the key objectives (the effect of which have not been allowed for in the estimate of supplies above) and if we can maintain these attacks, even on a light scale, an important contribution will be made towards the enemy's defeat. Moreover, shortage of lubricating oils and petrol may have a very important effect on the intensity of the air offensive against this country in the ensuing months.

58. The pressure we could exert by air action would, for some time, be extremely limited, owing to the effects of the enemy's offensive and the need for conserving a proportion of our striking power to deal with the contingency of invasion. We could not expect to do more than maintain a very limited scale of attack until we could obtain additional resources from the Dominions and from the United States. In the course of time we could hope to bring a heavier scale of attack on Germany by developing the United Kingdom as an advanced base for the operation of large long-range bombers flown from production centres across the Atlantic.

*Subversive Action.*

59. The only other method of bringing about the downfall of Germany is by stimulating the seeds of revolt within the conquered territories. The occupied countries are likely to prove a fruitful ground for these operations, particularly when economic conditions begin to deteriorate.

In the circumstances envisaged, we regard this form of activity as of the very highest importance. A special organisation will be required and plans to put these operations into effect should be prepared, and all the necessary preparations and training should be proceeded with as a matter of urgency.

*Political aspects of economic pressure.*

60. The political and moral issues involved in imposing on the mass of Europe the severe effects of economic pressure may present serious difficulties. It will be necessary to realise, however, that it is only by this pressure that we can ensure the defeat of Germany, and that by holding out we shall remain as a nucleus on which the rebuilding of European civilisation may be attempted.

If, on the other hand, we do not persevere, the economic collapse of Europe and the United Kingdom under a corrupt Nazi administration would only be postponed for a short while, and we should have no chance of contributing to Europe's reconstruction.

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APPENDIX A.

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*Assumptions as to the Political Background.*

1. THE precise political situation cannot be foretold, but we consider the most likely assumptions that we can make are:
    - (a) Italy will be hostile.
    - (b) All French European and North African territory will be accessible to enemy forces in course of time, and will be treated as hostile territory. French armed forces in Europe and North Africa will cease to fight. Parts of the fleet and certain land and air forces in outlying parts of the French Empire will continue to assist in the war.
    - (c) Spain, Portugal and all the Balkan States (excluding Turkey), together with their resources, will eventually fall under German or Italian military and economic domination.
    - (d) Our prestige in the Middle East generally will suffer a great set-back, which is likely to involve us in serious internal security problems in Egypt, Palestine and Iraq. The extent of our trouble will be largely conditioned by the attitude of Turkey, who may not remain as an active Ally in the circumstances envisaged.
    - (e) Japan will exploit the situation to her advantage in the Far East, though whether she would go to the length of a direct attack on British territory will depend on the attitude of the United States.
  
  2. On the other hand, we assume that:
    - (a) The whole Empire, with the possible exception of Eire, would increase their efforts in support of the United Kingdom. The attitude of India might, however, be doubtful and would be largely influenced by the situation in the Middle East and the extent of our difficulties at home.
    - (b) We could count on the full economic and financial support of the United States of America, possibly extending to active participation on our side. This example is likely to be followed by the remainder of the American States. The degree to which American forces might assist us would depend on the extent to which America became involved with Japan.
    - (c) Russia will be really frightened of the increasing might of Germany. She will try to improve her position vis-à-vis Germany if she can do so without becoming involved in a major Military commitment. To this end she might come to an understanding with Turkey and Sweden.
-

APPENDIX B.

Statement of German Aircraft Position.

—	10.5.40.		Lost over period 10.5.40 - 24.5.40	Produced by period.	Balance.	Reserves at 24.5.40.
	1 <sup>st</sup> Line	Reserve.				
L.R. Bombers }						
Bomber Recce }.....	2,600	3,300				
Dive Bombers.....	500	1,200	1,000	500	-500	7,000
Fighters .....	1,500	2,500	100 slightly damaged			less 100 slightly damaged
Army Co-operation....	400	200				
Coastal.....	350	300				
	<u>5,350</u>	<u>7,500</u>				
<i>Bomber Transport.</i>						
Ju. 52.....	500	300	} 400	25	-375	- 75
Ju. 86.....	100	...	}			
	<u>600</u>	<u>300</u>				

- NOTE – 1. B.A.F.F., French and Dutch reports of German aircraft losses have not given details of types. It is therefore not possible to state the losses of the individual categories.
2. Reserve trained crews are estimated at 100 per cent of 1st line crews.

## APPENDIX C 1.

Strength of the Home Based Air Force on May 17, 1940, excluding all  
Aircraft based in France.

Types.	<i>Operational Strength, including –</i>  All 1st line aircraft in operational squadrons serviceable within 7 days.	<i>Reserve of Operational Aircraft immediately available, including –</i>  (i) Serviceable reserve aircraft in squadrons. (ii) Aircraft in operational training units and non-operational squadrons. (iii) Serviceable aircraft stored.	<i>Reserve of Operational Aircraft not immediately available, including –</i>  (i) Aircraft repairable in units. (ii) Stored aircraft short of equipment. (iii) Aircraft of service types in Training and Reserve Commands, some percentage of which may be fully equipped.
<i>Heavy Bombers</i> .....	316 (including Reserve Squadrons which can operate if necessary).	148	445
<i>Medium Bombers –</i> Blenheim .....	84	98	264
Battle .....	...	103	753
<i>Fighters –</i>			
Hurricane, Spitfire, and Defiant .....	491	134	528
Blenheim .....	145	63	157
Gladiator .....	8	27	50
<i>Army Cooperation</i>	...	134	200
<i>Coastal –</i>			
General Reconnaissance and Torpedo Bomber Land-planes .....	184	221	820 (inc 643 Ansons)
Flying-boats .....	33	13	20

- (a) Above return does not include aircraft crashed beyond the capacity of units to repair or aircraft without engines.
- (b) Total operational strength differs from past statements in that it takes account of serviceability.
- (c) Losses since May 16 amount to 114.



APPENDIX C 2.

*British Air Forces, not included in Table of Home-Based Units, which have been or are Employed in France.*

*A.A.S.F. in France on May 22.*

Battle .....	52
Hurricane .....	38
Blenheim – Returned to United Kingdom .....	number unknown

*Air Component returned to United Kingdom.*

Blenheims .....	number unknown
Hurricane .....	45 } Reported
Gladiator .....	15 }
Lysander .....	number unknown

*Detachment from Fighter Command returned to United Kingdom on May 21.*

Hurricane .....	possibly 30 - 40
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*Total of above.*

Blenheim .....	unknown
Battle .....	52
Hurricane .....	120 approximately
Gladiator .....	15
Lysander .....	unknown

*Norway.*

Hurricane – returning .....	18
Gladiator .....	16

*May 23, 1940.*

## APPENDIX D.

*Forecast of Home (and Dominions) Production of Aircraft, May-October 1940.*

About 90 per cent of these aircraft will be delivered to Air Storage Units to await certain items of equipment. Some of the May production is probably included in the Reserves shown in Appendix C.

NOTE: It has recently been decided to concentrate on the production of existing models at the expense of the long-term production of new types. This may make some alteration in the figures given.

	May	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Totals
<b>Bombers.</b>							
1. Blenheim .....	145	145	145	108	145	145	853
2. Hampden .....	28	19	16	17	18	20	118
3. Hereford .....	20	20	15	...	...	...	55
4. Whitley .....	26	27	28	21	30	30	161
5. Albemarle .....	...	1	2	6	20	20	41
6. Wellington .....	47	51	51	50	79	79	348
7. Manchester .....	2	3	5	7	10	15	42
8. Stirling .....	3	4	7	7	15	21	57
9. Halifax .....	1	3	4	6	6	6	26
<b>Bombers produced for Training.</b>							
10. Battle .....	30	20	10	...	...	...	60
11. Battle (target towing) .....	60	60	60	45	60	60	345
<b>Fighters.</b>							
12. Defiant .....	38	40	48	40	60	60	286
13. Hurricane .....	130	140	150	120	170	180	890
14. Tornado .....	...	...	...	...	...	6	6
15. Spitfire .....	75	86	95	88	111	125	580
16. Beaufighter .....	12	18	24	24	35	40	153
17. Whirlwind .....	6	8	12	10	16	16	68
<b>Reconnaissance.</b>							
18. Anson .....	80	80	80	60	80	80	460
19. Beaufort .....	30	35	40	30	40	40	215
20. Botha .....	41	48	46	46	59	59	299
21. Sunderland .....	...	1	2	2	3	4	12
<b>Army Co-operation.</b>							
22. Lysander	64	72	80	87	94	100	497
<b>Training.</b>							
23. Training types .....	304	340	434	382	482	438	2,380
24. Service types produced..... for training. See 10 and 11	...	...	...	...	...	...	...

*Approximate Forecast of Deliveries from United States, May-October 1940.*

25. Hudson (General Reconnaissance).....	120
26. Brewster (Fighter).....	30
27. Harvard (Trainer).....	190

APPENDIX E.

*Comparison of Naval Forces.*

	<i>Great Britain.</i>	<i>Germany.</i>	<i>Italy.</i>
Capital ships.....	13 (plus 1 in September)	2 (plus 1 during summer)	2 (plus 4 more possibly In June)
Aircraft carriers .....	6 (plus 1 in May)	1	...
Armoured ships.....	...	2	...
8 in. cruisers.....	14	2 (plus 1 in autumn)	7
6 in. cruisers.....	24 (plus 5 during summer)	4	12
Old cruisers.....	15	...	4
A.A. cruisers .....	6	...	...
Destroyers .....	170 (plus 14 during summer)	9 to 15	67
Torpedo boats.....	...	...	55
Submarines .....	67 (plus 6 during summer)	45 to 50 (plus 25 to 30 in summer)	155
M.T.B.s.....	18 (plus 12 approximately during summer)	30 to 40	100

*Notes.*

- (a) Ships undergoing long refits or damage repairs and not likely to be available within the next three months not included.
- (b) Japanese forces not shown, as we should hope that any Japanese threat would be countered by the American fleet.
- (c) Our own position would be correspondingly improved if American destroyers become available by purchase.

MOST SECRET.

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Attention is directed to the particularly secret nature of the attached paper. It is requested that particular care is taken for its security and that it may be returned to the War Cabinet Offices as soon as it is no longer required.

(Signed) E.E. BRIDGES.

Richmond Terrace, S.W.1.,  
26<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 1940.

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