

Imminence of a German Invasion of Great Britain - Report by the Joint Intelligence Committee

Introduction by Sebastian Cox

This paper, prepared by the Joint Intelligence Committee [JIC] on 4 July, was the first attempt by the JIC to assess German intentions following the fall of France. The JIC had utterly failed to predict the German invasion of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, partly because “underestimating Germany’s capacities, it had been too much disposed to discount evidence.”¹ It had also been hampered because structural weaknesses in the intelligence organisation meant that intelligence was not properly co-ordinated and assessed on a joint as opposed to individual Service basis. Determined to avoid these mistakes it moved to set up an *ad hoc* sub-committee, the Combined Intelligence Committee, in late May with officers from all three Services charged to look at all intelligence relating to a possible invasion of the UK. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, the CIC and to a lesser extent the JIC itself now leaned in the opposite direction and began to overestimate German capabilities.

This assessment refers to “evidence that Germany is making preparation for raids in force, or for invasion of the British Isles” and assumes that “these preparations are well advanced”. In fact Germany had done no proper detailed planning for an invasion of the UK and indeed Hitler had only instructed the *Wehrmacht* to prepare such plans on 2 July, just two days before the JIC assessment was written. Later Directives laid down the earliest date for mounting Operation *Sea Lion* (the German codeword for the invasion plan) as early September. The JIC, however, postulated that Germany could mount a full-scale invasion as early as mid-July and that large scale raids, by all three arms of the *Wehrmacht*, could be expected “at any moment”.

The JIC was now guilty of vastly overestimating Germany military capability, most especially in the short-term, and of reading too much into the available evidence. This evidence, such as it

was, is contained in the Appendix to the report. The grading of the reports, as indicated, was by reliability of the source, graded A to E, and the likelihood of its being correct, graded 1-5. Most of the references to A.1 reports refer to the *Luftwaffe* and were derived either from low-grade sigint or decrypts of high-grade German Enigma traffic. These, being first-hand evidence from German military sources, were considered reliable on both counts. They still, however, required interpretation. Thus, the supposition that an invasion would not come before mid-July resulted from an Enigma decrypt [item 7] stating that German air units would have completed refitting by mid-July. It also revealed the German plans for a triumphal parade in Paris, though quite why this was thought to be of relevance to the threat of invasion remains a mystery [item 17].² The move of German Ju87 Stuka dive-bomber units into position in France and Belgium had also come from decrypts [item 14].

Intelligence reports emanating from agents are generally graded B2. The SIS had by this time established a rudimentary agent system in Norway³ and this was clearly the source of some of the reports on Norwegian fishing vessels and German troop movements [items 1 and 3] alongside Enigma and photo-reconnaissance [items 4 and 5].

In point of fact, of course, nearly all the most reliable intelligence from decrypts pointed, not directly to imminent invasion, but rather to the German preparations for their air assault on the UK to gain air superiority as a preparatory phase before Operation *Sea Lion* could be mounted.

Notes

¹ F H Hinsley, E E Thomas, C F G Ransom, R C Knight, *British Intelligence in the Second World War* (HMSO, London, 1979), Volume 1, p.168.

² *Ibid*, p.174.

³ *Ibid*, p.173

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WAR CABINET.

IMMINENCE OF A GERMAN INVASION OF GREAT BRITAIN.

Report by the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee.

In accordance with the instruction of the Prime Minister we have had under urgent consideration the question of the imminence of a German invasion of Great Britain.

2. On 1st July we considered, in Paper No. J.I.C.(40)144 what was likely to be "Germany's next move" now that France has collapsed. Our view was that there is at present little direct evidence to indicate what this next move is likely to be, and Germany's military superiority is such as to enable her to move in any direction she pleases with little or no warning. Since that date we have had little further conclusive evidence.
3. Assuming however that Germany's next move will take the form of an invasion, we have examined all the evidence available as to the likelihood and imminence of such an invasion. This evidence is attached in Appendix "A".
4. We are satisfied from this evidence that Germany is making preparation for raids in force, or for invasion of the British Isles. In view of the fact that these preparations are well advanced Germany may well move at any time at a date most suitable to her. The evidence available however, suggests that Germany's full strength will not be developed until 15th July.
5. We must point out however, that some of the evidence contained in Appendix "A" is capable of more than one interpretation. Furthermore, the question of Germany's immediate action is much confused by the flood of tendentious reports and propaganda which are being deliberately put about.

CONCLUSIONS.

6. We consider that large-scale raids, on the British Isles involving all three arms, may take place at any moment. A full-scale invasion is unlikely to take place before the middle of July. This matter is under our daily review.

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4TH JULY, 1940.

APPENDIX A.

THE IMMINENCE OF A GERMAN INVASION.
AVAILABLE EVIDENCE.

<u>Evidence.</u>	<u>Source.</u>	<u>Reliability.</u>
<u>NORWAY.</u>		
1. There are reports of an increase in the numbers of troops in Norway; the increase is said to include some parachute troops.	Secret Report.	B. 2
2. The merchant shipping is considered to be enough for the transport of 2 divisions.	Known fact.	–
3. There are some 800 fishing cutters available in Norway and easily hidden in innumerable fjords, while reports of the requisitioning and arming of Norwegian craft of all types continues to be received.	Norwegian and secret sources.	B. 2
4. There are 250-300 bomber aircraft based in Norway.	Secret Report.	A. 1
5. On 29th June there remained one 8" cruiser and one unidentified warship (not a battle-cruiser) at Trondheim.	Reconnais- sance.	Fact.
<u>GERMANY, THE BALTIC PORTS AND DENMARK.</u>		
6. Recent reinforcement of troops in DENMARK.	Secret sources.	B. 4
7. The majority of the units of the German air force will not have completed their refitting before 15th July.	Secret sources.	A. 1
8. Troop-carrying aircraft were recently withdrawn from training schools to first line units.	Secret sources	A. 1
9. Aerial photographs on 30th June indicated that special rafts had been built at Keil that were being loaded on to small vessels, possibly of trawler type. Exact nature and intended use of the raft still unknown.	Reconnais- sance	Fact.

<u>Evidence.</u>	<u>Source.</u>	<u>Reliability.</u>
10. Reports indicate the transport of motor boats from Italy and Austria to Germany.	Secret sources.	B. 2
11. It is reported that large scale landing exercises have recently been practiced at Memel in the Baltic.	Neutral master. Stockholm	B. 3
<u>NETHERLANDS AND FRENCH COAST.</u>		
12. Reports have been received of increase of German infantry in Holland and of the move of two parachute regiments and air units from Austria and from Berlin area to Belgium.	Secret sources.	B. 2
13. Special assault detachments are being formed from reconnaissance units which did well on the Western front.	Secret sources.	B. 3
14. The German air force in this area is in process of being reorganised and regrouped and this process is nearing completion. Dive bombers are being concentrated in Belgium and N.E. France.	Secret sources.	A. 1
15. A standing fighter patrol over the Calais area indicates some activity to be concealed.	Known fact.	–
16. Barge traffic is abnormal in amount and in routes. This may represent the provision of supplies for the armies of occupation or for an invasion.	Air reconnaissance.	–
<u>GENERAL.</u>		
17. Information from a most reliable source is to the effect that the Germans will hold a parade of their armed forces in PARIS some time after 10th July.	Secret sources.	A. 1

Note: A – E indicates reliability of source.

1 – 5 indicates probability of report.

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