

RESTRICTED

AIR HISTORICAL BRANCH

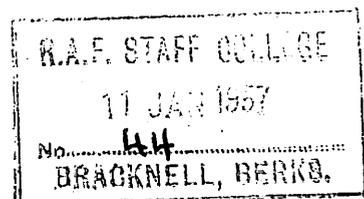
TRANSLATION NO. VII/15.

THE MIDDLE EAST SITUATION IN 1942

- (A) Possible Developments in the Middle East in 1942, dated 16th January, 1942.
- (B) Survey of the British Position in the Middle East, dated 26th June, 1942.

Two Studies prepared by the Foreign Armies (Western) Intelligence Department of the General Staff of the German Army.

TRANSLATED BY:-
AIR MINISTRY, A.H.B.6.
30th DECEMBER, 1946.



RESTRICTED

A. POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST IN 1942
dated 16th January, 1942.

I. General Situation and distribution of forces mid-January, 1942.

Since the beginning of the Russian campaign, British forces in the Middle East have been considerably reinforced. After the serious defeats suffered by the Russians during the summer, the British faced the possibility of a double threat from North Africa and from the Caucasus. A change of attitude in Turkey could aggravate the situation still further. There was also, to a limited extent, the opportunity of sending supplies and even troop reinforcements to Russia via Persia.

Since the beginning of June, the enemy have been busy replacing the losses which they suffered in Greece, Crete, Iraq, Syria and near Sollum. These reinforcements were most probably transported in ships which had in the summer and autumn of 1941 been put at the disposal of the Army. It was presumably, impossible to provide any additional shipping space, the majority of available transport vessels being engaged on shipping supplies to Great Britain.

American deliveries began to arrive in the summer of 1941, consisting mainly of tanks and light armoured vehicles. Two US. commissions, one under General Maxwell and the other under General Wheeler are supervising the distribution of American materials in Cairo, and the organisation of the supplies for Russia in Basra, respectively.

At the beginning of November, General Sir Alan Brooke succeeded General Sir John Dill, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff. According to reliable information, the reason for this change in command was that Sir John Dill disagreed with the policy of making the Middle East the centre of military operations.

Although preparations were still incomplete, an offensive was launched on 13th November, ¹⁹⁴¹ in the Marmarica area; its primary objective was the annihilation of the German-Italian forces in North Africa and subsequently the occupation of the whole of Italian North Africa, thus bringing about a complete change in the military situation in the Mediterranean.

II. Potential Reinforcements in 1942.

The British will most probably continue to reinforce their Middle East forces in 1942. Since June, 1941, reinforcements have been arriving from England at the rate of half a division per month, including Corps and Headquarters personnel and replacements, and we may expect an increase in this rate.

The cut in food rations in England which came into force on 12.1.42, indicates that shipping space hitherto used for importing foodstuffs will from now onwards be used for troop transports. With the increased shortage of shipping space due to the war with Japan, it is however, doubtful whether a force substantially larger than the 24 divisions which were in the Middle East prior to the commencement of the movements to the Far East could be supplied. Certain reports which have fallen into our hands show that for this very reason, the Admiralty, in the autumn of 1941, opposed any further reinforcement of the Middle East.

24 British divisions, inclusive of Corps and Headquarters troops and Air Force personnel, number approximately 500,000 men. Approximately 1 million tons of shipping space must be devoted almost exclusively to supplying these personnel.

/III.

RESTRICTED
SECRET.

III. Air Force.

At the end of December the British air force in the Middle East, (including Malta, Iraq and Persia), comprised approximately 660 bomber and long range reconnaissance aircraft, 650 fighters, 115 short range reconnaissance, and 55 transport aircraft.

These forces are mainly concentrated in Cyrenaica and in Egypt. At the beginning of December approximately 360 bombers, 460 fighters, 65 reconnaissance and 40 transport aircraft were based there.

A certain number of air force units have already been transferred from Iraq and Persia to India or the Far East. It is not yet known whether aircraft have also been transferred from Egypt.

IV. Possible strategical decisions.

No immediate threat to the Middle East, either from Libya or from the Caucasus, exists at present. The British do not, however, enjoy absolute freedom of action. The scale of their reinforcements and supplies is determined by the amount of available shipping space, and the requirements of the Far Eastern theatre of war may delay reinforcements to the Middle East and postpone the re-attainment of late 1941 strength.

The supply factor plays a decisive part in operational strategy in the Middle East. Apart from the garrison troops, certain field units in the Middle East will be permanently engaged on security duties whose importance may increase in the event of a renewed threat to the Middle East, when anti-British elements may be expected to increase their activities in this area.

(a) Libya.

The Allies may decide to continue the offensive with a view to occupying the whole of Italian North-Africa, annihilating the Italo-German forces and establishing contact with the forces in French North Africa.

Should the American Government however decided to summon all available forces for the defence of Singapore, Java, Australia and Burma, the British may be content with the elimination of the threat to Egypt which they have already achieved.

(b) The Turkish-Syrian frontier zone.

The British have been reported to be building field fortifications in the Turkish-Syrian frontier area between the Mediterranean and the Euphrates, particularly at points where the Baghdad railway and the Tigris meet the Turkish frontier.

Turkey's indefinite political attitude is also pinning down considerable British forces in Syria; should she actively support the Axis powers, if only by allowing their troops to cross the country, a far greater number of British forces would be tied up in Syria. Should an attack be launched against the British simultaneously from North Africa, Turkey, and the Caucasus, - admittedly an unlikely contingency in 1942 - they would not be able to put up a sufficiently strong defence on all three fronts.

Taking advantage of the present situation, the British Government will therefore endeavour to win over Turkey to the Allied cause, especially if the Far Eastern situation should necessitate the postponement of the reinforcement of the Middle East.

~~RESTRICTED~~

3.

If on the other hand, Turkey should ever threaten Syria, the British High Command may endeavour to forestall a potential Turkish attack by an advance on the Amanus and Taurus crossings, in order to destroy the Baghdad railway bridges at these points. Such an advance might be combined with a landing in Mersina, in which British troops now based on Cyprus could participate. The British requests for the use of the Aleppo-Mosul railway running along the Turkish frontier, may influence future relations between Britain and Turkey.

(c) Russian supplies from the Middle East.

With the help of American vehicles, limited supplies apparently began to leave for Russia via Tabris at the beginning of November. Rolling stock intended to supplement the unsatisfactory Trans-Iranian railway from Bonder Schapur via Teheran to the Caspian, is beginning to arrive in Basra from Canada, Australia and India. A British Army Transport headquarters has been set up in Teheran under the command of General Rhodes. The Persian ports on the Caspian, whose capacity has so far been very small, are to be constructionally enlarged by the Russian "Iransowtrans".

India has so far only sent isolated deliveries of jute and shalac by the landroute via Meshed to Russia. Afghanistan is apparently not being used as a throughroute. The contents of correspondence between British Government offices, consulates and military authorities in the Middle East and India indicate that the British relations with Soviet Russia are characterised by a feeling of considerable distrust.

With the coming of winter the Russian supply route through Persia will become more difficult, if not completely impassable. Persia herself is already in need of food supplies from Britain. And yet the Persian supply routes will presumably be further consolidated, since Archangel cannot be used in the winter, and the sea route to Wladiwostok has been cut off by the Japanese.

(d) Iraq and Persia.

The most advanced British units in Persia and Iraq are now stationed in Sawarun, Burujird, Kermanschah, Khanaqin and Ruwandiz. They are keeping the mountain passes open on the Persian side, and constructing field fortifications.

All the reports in our hands agree that apart from a military mission which established relations with the Russians, no British troops have been sent to the Caucasus.

The British troops left in Iraq and Persia are not strong enough to combine an advance into the Caucasus with their occupational duties in politically unstable Iraq territory.

The latest developments in the Donetz and Don valleys makes any transfer of British troops there unnecessary. According to reliable information, Marshal Timoshenko, acting as the spokesman of the Russian High Command, declared last October, in spite of the critical military situation then prevailing, that a campaign in the Caucasus could only be launched with the support of the entire strength of the British forces and would require at least 20 divisions. A small token force would be useless.

A strong force of British troops could not enter the Caucasus until an extensive supply system has been built up. As two divisions have recently been dispatched from Iraq to the Far East, practically all the necessary troops for a potential advance into the Caucasus would have to be transferred to the Middle East from other theatres of war. Owing to the vast amount of shipping space tied up in the Far East, it is unlikely that such large scale troop movements could be carried out before the late summer of 1942.

/Should

Should the Middle East be threatened from the Caucasus before that time the British will have to confine themselves to staving off the German advance. In such an eventuality, they might send mobile troops to the Caucasus and while these are holding up the German advance, make the oilfields unusable.

Reports indicate that the British High Command is endeavouring to enlist the help of the Kurds in Western Persia. The anti-British elements among these tribes seem to predominate at the present time; but the Kurds will probably fight any troops crossing their territory regardless of their nationality. According to vague and unconfirmed reports the final defence line in the Middle East will run along the mountain passes from Sawarun via Burujird, Kermanschah and Sulaimaniya to Ruwandiz. This line has the following advantages:-

1. Only a few passes are wide enough for a large military force (Burujird, Kermanschah, Ruwandiz), and these are flanked by mountain peaks of between 2,500 and 4,500 metres and are therefore easily defended.

The defender can concentrate his forces at these few points.

2. Supplies can be brought up by the railway lines running to Dizful, Khanaqin and Kirkuk. The railway line Basra - Baghdad - Kirkuk will permit troop movements behind the front line.

3. The attacking forces coming from the Caucasus will on the other hand have to cross a distance of over 1,000 kms. before even reaching the mountain passes, and build up their supply system in a wild and mountainous country with no railways.

4. The oilfields in Iraq and Southern Persia, which have become considerably more important since Japan occupied the British-Dutch oilfields in East Asia, lie behind this line of defence.

The scale of potential British reinforcements in Iraq and Persia will depend on the capacity of the ports in the Persian Gulf for dealing with supplies, rather than on the actual number of divisions available. At the moment these ports handle approximately 465,000 tons of supplies per month and could therefore supply some 230,000 men. Some 10 divisions could thus be maintained in Iraq and Persia.

V. Conclusion.

The recent developments on the Eastern front and the English successes in Libya will together make it considerably easier for the British to hold their Middle East positions in 1942. England will probably not need to fear a threat from the Caucasus and Turkey nor a renewed attack on Cyrenaica.

Supported by the Mediterranean fleet lying in the African coastal waters and in the Persian Gulf, the British will be in a position to effect a gradual reinforcement of their forces in the Middle East which have been depleted by constant transfers to the Far East, and to keep them supplied. The shortage of shipping space will, however, still impose certain limits. It remains to be seen whether the present scale of American deliveries can be maintained.

Future developments will show what use England will make of her improved situation in 1942. Since we know that Russia is well aware of our position on the Eastern Front, it must be presumed that England will also draw the necessary conclusions regarding the Middle East.

/Theoretically

~~SECRET~~
~~RESTRICTED~~

5.

Theoretically the British forces have control over the internal lines of communication in the Middle East. In practice, this advantage is reduced by the great distances, the poorly developed and unfavourably located railway network and the badly constructed land communications between Egypt and Persia.

The British High Command must consequently still plan the distribution of its forces some time in advance, and it is therefore easier for us to forecast their intentions.

The British will be embarrassed by the danger of partisans and by the security problem in the whole area; transport difficulties to and inside the Middle East will also continue.

The extent of the reinforcements sent from England to the Far East will be the decisive factor. On the whole we may say that all through the war the British forces in the Middle East have always been too weak to make the most of any opportunity. Supply difficulties or new demands in other theatres of war have constantly arisen. The British decision to make the Middle East the centre of operations was for example, immediately followed by Japan's unexpected entry into the war.

Apart from the possibility of an attempt to occupy Tripolitania, or a landing on Crete, or even in Greece, the British will probably content themselves in 1942 with consolidating their present positions in the Middle East. Should the Middle East be threatened in 1942 simultaneously from Libya and the Caucasus, an eventuality which has now become very remote, the British forces would be strong enough to oppose such a threat. They are however, numerically insufficient to launch a campaign against South East Europe so long as Turkey remains hostile.

It should however, not be forgotten that the disruption of German oil supplies from Rumania may well constitute one of the primary aims of the British High Command in 1942.

~~SECRET~~
RESTRICTED

B. SURVEY OF THE BRITISH POSITION IN THE MIDDLE EAST,
dated 26th June, 1942.

1. Present Position.

The British 8th Army has lost the bulk of its tanks and many of its infantry divisions. The remaining forces are at the moment not capable of an attack, but the enemy hopes to be again ready for offensive operations in approximately 4 weeks' time. For a large scale offensive he would, however, require fresh reinforcements and numerous new tanks, which he cannot hope to receive in less than two months.

The decision to reinforce the Middle East forces had obviously been taken before the defeat of the 8th Army was known, because the British regarded them as too weak even before the German-Italian offensive.

The transport of 45,000 men requires a net tonnage of 600,000, a quarter of the entire British transport tonnage. Owing to the present crisis, the reinforcements will presumably be increased.

From a reliable source it is reported that as tank reserves are available, 586 tanks in North Africa, 500 of which were under repair on 20.5, and 320 tanks in Iraq and Iran, a large number of which may be out of date. From previous experience and from our knowledge of the present supply conditions, we may assume that further tanks and other war materials will be brought to the Middle East from Great Britain and America without difficulty. These reinforcements are purely a matter of time.

As in the period from December to April, the pace of troop movements will be slow since the troop ships which reached the Middle East at the end of April are only now gradually returning to Great Britain. Any sending of reinforcements on a larger scale than that hitherto planned would not be practicable before late 1942.

For the time being, the British can afford to concentrate the majority of their Middle East forces along the threatened Western frontier of Egypt, since no threat affecting the entire Mediterranean area, exists as yet from the North. They must however realize that this position can easily alter in the course of the year.

It is reported from a reliable source that apart from the small air force detachment already in Syria, the Allies are not intending to send any other American forces to the Middle East; the British are apparently solely responsible for this theatre of war. It remains to be seen whether they will handle the demands caused by the change in the military situation for long range bombers to be used in operations against the Rumanian oilfields, and short range bombers to support the land troops. The latter could not reach the Middle East before late summer.

We must however reckon with the fact that the enemy's forces in the frontier zone between Libya and Egypt as well as in Syria, Iraq and Iran will by late summer be stronger than they were before Japan's entry into the war.

2. Effects on enemy military operations in Europe.

Should, as has so far been assumed, the enemy actually send larger forces than hitherto planned to the Middle East, the natural consequence will be a shortage of shipping space for a large scale overseas operation such as the 'Second Front'.

An offensive launched from Great Britain against the West coast of France, the Iberian peninsula or the African coasts, all of which require ocean going vessels, could only be carried out by numerically small

/forces.

~~SECRET~~
RESTRICTED

-2-

The Allies may however attempt a landing on the French Channel Coast by means of landing craft, war ships and coastal vessels or a small scale landing in Norway. Alternatively they may endeavour to destroy the German U-boat bases on the French coast. For raids of this type, the Allies have sufficient naval transports.

Distribution same as VII/14.