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Printed for the War Cabinet. March 1940

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Copy No. 21

W.P. (40) 91

(Also Paper No. C.O.S. (40) 252)

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WAR CABINET

Military Implications of Hostilities with Russia in 1940

Report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee

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WAR CABINET.

Chiefs of Staff Committee.

MILITARY IMPLICATIONS OF HOSTILITIES WITH RUSSIA IN 1940.

REPORT.

WE desire to lay before the War Cabinet an appreciation of the principal military factors which are of importance when considering the effect of Allied hostilities with Russia in 1940, in relation to our main object in this war, *the defeat of Germany*. The paragraphs dealing with the economic aspects of this problem have been prepared in conjunction with representatives of the Ministry of Economic Warfare, who have agreed their text. The political aspects of the problem were discussed with the Foreign Office in the early stages of the preparation of this report, but this is not necessarily to say that the Foreign Office subscribe to the views herein expressed.

I.—GENERAL FACTORS.

German-Soviet Economic Collaboration.

2. The present trend of German policy towards Russia is to develop German-Soviet economic collaboration to the utmost extent that the Soviet will allow. Russian reactions to this policy are open to doubt, but it seems that they are determined to drive as hard a bargain as they can with the Germans. It is safe to assume that, owing to ultimately conflicting interests, Russia will not wish Germany to emerge from the war in great military and economic strength.

3. The extent of German-Soviet economic collaboration is subject to the following important considerations :—

- (a) The inefficiency of the Russian economic and transportation systems imposes a limit upon the supplies which Germany can receive from Russia.
- (b) Russian production is just sufficient to meet the requirements of Russian internal economy as at present planned. If the Russians were prepared to revert to a less ambitious programme, some increase in supply to Germany would be possible, but up to the present Germany has succeeded in obtaining only a fraction of what she hoped to get. It is unlikely that supply can be increased in 1940.
- (c) Any increase, however, would be dependent upon a reorganisation of Soviet transportation and industry and on a cessation of Soviet military activity. This could be achieved to a material extent with German assistance, but not in 1940.
- (d) If the Germans are allowed to undertake this reorganisation they would never be certain that the Soviet would permit them to reap the benefit.

The general deduction is that Soviet assistance to Germany in the economic sphere is likely to be on a small scale in 1940.

Extent of German-Soviet Military Collaboration.

4. Germany and the Soviet have for the moment common interests in achieving the disruption of the British Empire. It is possible, however, that Germany may be reluctant to see the Russians involved in large-scale hostilities with the Allies for fear of being deprived of Russian supplies which might otherwise be forthcoming. On the other hand, important parts of the British Empire and other Allied interests can be attacked from Russia, and once hostilities commenced the Germans would doubtless encourage the Russians to force dispersion of effort upon the Allies.

5. Should Allied-Soviet hostilities commence, therefore, we must expect Germany to be ready to provide such military aid as the Soviet may be willing to accept. Initially, such assistance could take the form of military missions, which might effect some improvement in the direction of Soviet military operations, and the provision of German air force units to operate from Soviet bases. At a later stage Germany might send detachments or even complete formations to operate with Russian forces.

Weak points in the U.S.S.R. System.

6. The weak points in the Russian system may be summarised as follows :—

Transportation.

- (a) Russian railways work to capacity. Any unusual strain, such as that created by military operations, is apt to cause dislocation over wide-spread areas. Moreover, although Russia's natural resources make her virtually immune to external economic pressure, the interruption of her seaborne trade, particularly in the Black Sea, would add to her internal transportation difficulties. Baku is a focal point of Russian communications southwards to Iran and eastwards to India.

Industry.

- (b) The relative geographical location of Russian natural resources and Russian industry throw a great strain on transportation. Industrial areas are not easily accessible to air attack, but they are vulnerable through the transportation system, and to some extent because of their dependence on oil.

Oil.

- (c) Reliance on the Caucasian oil supply is a fundamental weakness in Russian economy. The military forces rely upon it, Russian agriculture is mechanised and there are insufficient horses to make reversion to horse traction practicable. 80 per cent. of Russia's oil production and 90 per cent. of her refining capacity is centred in the Caucasus. A large scale interruption of the supply of oil from this area would therefore have a far-reaching effect upon Soviet economy. We are advised that it would in time paralyse Russian military effort and disorganise Russian national life. Russia would be forced into competition in other markets, probably at an early date, and this might well bring her into conflict with German interests in Roumania.

Internal Situation.

- (d) The control exercised on an apathetic people by the existing ruthless régime is capable of suppressing popular risings. There are signs, however, that popular discontent in Russia is spreading, particularly in Transcaucasia.

Soviet Military Potential.

7. The commitment in Finland must, for material reasons alone, limit Russia's ability to conduct major operations elsewhere. Any extension of this commitment, combined with large-scale operations in other theatres (necessitating further mobilisation), would impose a tremendous strain upon

Russia's transportation system, industry and reserve stocks. Even after the campaign is finished she could only contemplate such operations with reluctance. If, in addition, the Soviet oil supply were substantially reduced, a general breakdown of the Russian military, industrial and agricultural systems might ensue.

8. It is probable, nevertheless, that the local land and air forces in other theatres are sufficiently self-contained to be able to initiate simultaneous operations of a limited nature, although there is no doubt that Russia would soon exhaust herself in the effort to maintain them on her distant frontiers.

II.—THE METHODS BY WHICH RUSSIA COULD STRIKE AT ALLIED INTERESTS.

9. We now proceed to set out in general terms, first, the methods by which Russia could strike at Allied interests, and, secondly, the methods by which the Allies could strike at Russia. This arrangement has been adopted for convenience of presentation, but it does not mean for a moment that we should leave the initiative to the Soviet. On the contrary, once hostilities break out, we should make every effort to assume the offensive wherever the opportunity presented itself.

10. We examine the nature and extent of the military operations Russia might undertake against Allied interests, in the following areas :—

Northern Europe.
Near and Middle East.
India and Afghanistan.
Far East.

The extent to which such Russian operations could be successful, however, would, of course, be dependent upon the pressure we ourselves were able to bring to bear upon Russia, having regard to the weak points in her system discussed in paragraph 6 above.

11. It is possible that a greater danger might result from the dissemination of subversive propaganda and the stirring up of disorder and rebellion wherever opportunity offered. We have drawn attention to this in a previous paper,* and again invite attention to the need for the most active counter-measures.

NORTHERN EUROPE.

12. Russian hostility would mean a large increase in the total submarine strength of our enemies, although the Russian submarines are likely to be less efficient than the German. In consequence, we should have to expect an intensification of the submarine menace in home waters, and heavier losses of shipping. The basis of enemy naval operations would be broadened, and the availability of the ice-free port of Murmansk would facilitate the activities of raiders, and, since Murmansk is a fully-equipped submarine base, the effect of our Northern mine barrage would be reduced. If Russia succeeds in defeating Finland, she may press on through Norway to the Atlantic seaboard in order to obtain a western base. In so doing, she would cut off our supplies of Swedish iron ore. The loss of these would be serious, and substitutes could only be obtained at the cost of delay and of increased shipping requirements and prices. The countering of the increased threat at sea, however, should be within the capacity of the Allied naval strength.

NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST.

General.

13. It would appear to be contrary to Russia's interests to take any action which might disturb Turkish or Iranian neutrality and thus expose her vulnerable areas in the Caucasus to Allied attack. It is therefore unlikely that

* Paper No. C.O.S. (39) 69.

Russia will start operations against Turkey or Iran, and she may well hesitate to pursue a more forward policy in the Balkans. If hostilities broke out between us and Russia, however, and if Turkey or Iran became involved, Russia might then undertake certain limited operations.

14. We could not exclude the possibility of Russian submarines penetrating into the Mediterranean, although their passage through the Bosphorus and Dardanelles would be hazardous, particularly if Turkey were on our side and adequate anti-submarine defences were established in the Straits. The equipment for these defences, however, will not be ready before the middle of 1940. If Russian submarines should succeed in entering the Mediterranean, they could develop a serious threat to our sea communications and we should have to despatch anti-submarine forces from home waters.

15. In the Balkans limited Russian operations might be aimed at gaining control of the Roumanian oil supplies, either in collaboration or in competition with the Germans. Against Turkey they might be designed to gain depth in front of the Batum defences, and in Iran their object might be to gain depth in front of the Baku defences and to facilitate air operations against the Anglo-Iranian oilfields, the Iraqi oilfields and other objectives in Iraq.

16. The spread of the war to the Balkans would, in our opinion, be to our disadvantage, but this is not a situation which is likely to result from a Russian attempt to strike at the Allies, and it is, therefore, outside the scope of this paper. With regard to the Caucasus, we do not think the Russian forces are in any state to undertake operations against the Turkish army in position. The question of Iran and Iraq is examined in more detail below.

IRAN AND IRAQ.

Land Operations.

17. The possibility of a Russian land offensive directed on the Anglo-Iranian oilfields is remote, both because of Turkey's position on the flank of any such advance, and because of the heavy strain that would be imposed on Russia's resources. Russia might, however, overrun the northern districts of Iran which lie between the Turkish border and the Caspian sea, and in fact her old sphere of influence. This invasion would no doubt be accompanied by attempts to stir up the Kurds on the Iraqi-Iranian frontier and so cause trouble in the Iraqi oilfields. We do not think it probable that the Russians could penetrate more deeply into Iran, in view of the paucity of communications which could in any event be subjected to Allied air attack. A Russian air bombardment of Teheran and other centres of population in Iran might, however, result in the disintegration of the central authority and throw Iran into a state of turmoil.

Air Operations.

18. Russia has a small number of long-range bombers which could reach the Anglo-Iranian oilfields and chief towns in Iraq from aerodromes in the Caucasus. Sporadic attacks on a light scale could be made, and these might inflict serious material damage at Abadan if this area were to remain devoid of air defences. The effect of bombing on the Iraqi population might well result in internal disorders which the Iraq Army would be incapable of controlling. In this event, our land communications connecting Palestine with the Persian Gulf would be seriously interrupted. It is possible that modern German bombers, or even complete German squadrons, might be operated in conjunction with Russian air forces and appreciably increase the efficacy of attacks, but this is not likely in the early stages of the war.

Allied Defence Measures.

19. On land a force of three brigades is the minimum necessary to provide for the internal security of the Anglo-Iranian oilfields and Basra, which might become the scenes of serious disorder resulting from Russian air action and tribal risings. Of these three brigades one is available in India now. The remainder have been offered by the Government of India on condition that the troops are replaced by the raising of new units, a process which may take five months

to complete. It is, nevertheless, possible that in the event of emergency the Government of India might be able to spare the balance of the three brigades even though the new units had not been completed. To counter sporadic air attacks on Abadan by bombers based on Caucasian aerodromes, some fighter aircraft and anti-aircraft defences would be necessary to act as a deterrent. The necessary aircraft could only be found from those at present earmarked for the defence of Egypt or Turkey. No anti-aircraft units are available for this purpose in India or the Middle East.

20. If Iran were reduced to a state of chaos, there would be repercussions in Iraq, and we might require in Iraq and the Anglo-Iranian oilfields a total of three divisions with the requisite air support. These land forces could not be found from our resources in India and the Middle East until late in 1940, and then could only be employed if sufficient progress had been made in the provision of maintenance requirements. The possibility of providing the requisite forces earlier than this date is dependent upon whether they can be provided, and prepared in time, by the Government of India, and is under urgent examination. There would, moreover, be no anti-aircraft units available in the Middle East or India to accompany these forces, and the provision of aircraft would be a matter of considerable difficulty.

INDIA AND AFGHANISTAN.

General.

21. Once hostilities between the Allies and Russia had begun, it is unlikely that the Soviet Government would lose any time in taking action against India and Afghanistan. It would clearly be in the Russian and the German interest to create in India and on her frontiers the maximum diversion of Allied strength. Russia may therefore be expected to make the fullest use of the land and air forces that she can dispose in the Central Asian Military District. She would also make full use of agents to stir up revolutionary activity within India.

Soviet Land Threat.

22. With the forces normally located in this area Russia could rapidly occupy those provinces of Afghanistan which lie to the north of the Hindu Kush. Her object would be to bring about the fall of the Kabul Government and generally disturb the remainder of Afghanistan and the whole of the North-West Frontier of India. A land advance on India could be undertaken by Russia only as a long-term project, if at all, and it would, in any event, be beyond the capacity of the forces now stationed in the Central Asian military district.

Soviet Air Threat.

23. The small force of Soviet bombers at present located in the Central Asian Military District could reach objectives in any part of Afghanistan and certain important centres in the north-west of India, such as Peshawar. A few long-range bombers exist elsewhere in Russia, and could be moved into the district, thus bringing Indian centres of population as far as Lahore and Quetta within range of attack; but Russia would require some months in which to concentrate a formidable bomber force against India, and her ability to do so would depend upon the extent of her air force commitments in other areas and upon the effects of Allied counter-measures, particularly against the Caucasian oil supply.

24. Russian air attacks on Afghanistan would probably be directed against Kabul as a primary objective in order to drive out the Afghan Government and so lead to the disintegration of all forces of law and order. Air attacks on India might cause considerable damage in the crowded cities of the north-west. Their principal result, however, would be to create acute internal security problems for us, particularly in the frontier districts where serious tribal disorders might result.

British Support to Afghanistan.

25. If Russia were to take action on the lines described above, it is almost certain that the Afghan Government would appeal to us for assistance both on land and in the air.

26. The forces at the disposal of the Government of India are not designed to meet the commitment of operations in aid of the Afghan Government, nor does any plan for such operations exist; nevertheless, it would be important to assist the Afghan Government and to enlist the sympathy of the Afghan tribes and the tribes in British territory. We recommend that the Government of India should be invited to examine, as a matter of urgency, the question of giving help to the Government of Afghanistan, and to consider the provision of some forces for despatch into Afghanistan. It should be realised that no fighter aircraft or anti-aircraft units would be available in India.

27. It must be recognised that, if we could not provide any direct assistance to Afghanistan, either on land or in the air, it would have most unfortunate results on our relations with the Afghan Government and most undesirable repercussions on our prestige in the Moslem world in general. The fact remains, however, that, unless the Indian Government can find forces for despatch to Afghanistan, there would be nothing in the first instance that we could do in direct support of that country. It would be, therefore, of more importance that we should take action against Russia's vulnerable areas elsewhere at the earliest possible moment.

Air Defence of India.

28. Air defence resources in India at present consist of one anti-aircraft battery, and two bomber squadrons are being supplied with fighter conversion sets. Air attack would create an outcry in India for fighter protection and for anti-aircraft guns, and in the circumstances it might be politically impossible to leave India without any fighter protection at all. We might therefore be compelled to strengthen India's fighter defence sufficiently at least to act as a deterrent to Russian air attacks. The fighter squadrons in Egypt are already earmarked for the defence of Turkey and Iraq so that, even if the attitude of Italy justified relaxation of defence measures, the release of these squadrons might only be possible at the expense of one or the other of these Allies. Substantial reinforcement from the fighter and anti-aircraft resources of Great Britain and France would clearly be undesirable.

Land Defence of India.

29. Apart from the lack of fighter and anti-aircraft defences, India should be able to deal with tribal unrest and internal security with the resources now at her disposal. The strain on her industrial capacity, however, might be heavy and result in her inability to act as a potential source of reinforcement for other theatres of war.

FAR EAST.

30. Hostilities with Russia would not result in any serious disturbance of the strategic equilibrium in the Far East. The small Russian surface naval forces based on Vladivostok cannot be regarded as any menace to our sea communications. The submarine force, however, which includes some large submarines, represents a more serious potential threat and some anti-submarine reinforcements to our China Fleet would be desirable, but it would not be easy to spare these from home waters. Although the China Coast is within range of submarines working from Vladivostok, the trade in that area is not vital to us and it may be necessary to accept some risks. To inflict any real damage on our seaborne trade in the Far East, Russian submarines would have to operate in the Singapore area. This is almost at their extreme range from Vladivostok, which would make it very difficult for them to sustain the attack. Furthermore, it is doubtful whether the standard of Russian submarine training is equal to such long distance patrols.

It is possible that German surface raiders might make use of Vladivostok as an occasional base for repairs and rest. Although Vladivostok is some 3,000 miles from any important focal areas of British trade, this use of it would avoid passage through the dangerous North Sea area.

31. There is nothing the Russians can do on land or in the air directly to embarrass us in the Far East. The fact that we were at war with Russia might, however, cause Japan to pursue a more forward policy in the Far East, to the detriment of Allied interests. The extent to which Japanese action might cause us embarrassment would depend upon the attitude of the United States. On the other hand, Japan might attempt to exploit the situation by compromising with us in order to improve her position *vis-à-vis* Russia. Our diplomatic action should be directed to bring about this latter course.

III.—METHODS BY WHICH THE ALLIES COULD STRIKE AT RUSSIA.

32. We now turn to consider the ways in which the Allies could bring pressure to bear upon Russia under the following headings:—

Northern Europe.

Near and Middle East.

Far East.

NORTHERN EUROPE.

Naval Action.

33. Our existing dispositions for exercising contraband control against Germany in northern waters would enable us to interrupt Russian seaborne trade outside the Baltic, including the limited trade which passes through Russia's northern ports.

34. Petsamo, Murmansk and Archangel would all provide suitable targets for carrier-borne air attack and for offensive mining and submarine action. Similarly Narvik, if the Russians should reach that port, would be exposed to attack from the sea and might be harried incessantly. Naval raids designed to destroy shipping and port facilities might well prove practicable on any of the above harbours, although the consequences to Russia would not be serious.

Land and Air Action.

35. Allied intervention through Scandinavia might provide us with air bases from which we could reach Russian territory. It would, however, be unsafe to assume that we could attack important objectives such as those at Leningrad, since we should be committed to intensive operations with Germany. For this reason we could not count on striking a direct blow at Russia in this area, but if the Soviet decided to extend her advance beyond Finland to the Norwegian coast at Narvik, Allied support in the Scandinavian countries would greatly increase the strain on Russia in her attempt to carry out the project. Intervention in this area would also hasten the defeat of Germany if we could occupy the orefields at Galivare, but it would be unsound to hold forces available for this purpose once it becomes clear that we should be unable to reach Galivare before the Gulf of Bothnia is ice-free.

NEAR AND MIDDLE EAST.

Naval Operations.

36. The attitude of Italy would greatly influence our ability to conduct naval operations in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea against Russian seaborne trade and naval forces.

37. In the first instance, we should exercise contraband control over Russian seaborne trade passing through the *Ægean*. This would include the important inter-coastal traffic between the Black Sea and the Far East, and our control would be greatly facilitated by Turkish co-operation with the consequent closing of the Bosphorus and Dardanelles.

38. Later, assuming Turkish co-operation and that we had been able to concentrate the necessary naval and air forces, we could operate against Russian forces and sea communications in the Black Sea. Interruption of the

Black Sea trade would adversely affect Russian industry and throw extra strain on the railways. The Allied naval forces would need to include heavy ships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines and perhaps an aircraft carrier, and we might be hard put to it to spare these forces, and particularly the smaller ships, from other services. Before we could operate naval forces in the Black Sea the provision of a secure base would be essential, and this is under active consideration with the Turks.

39. The whole Black Sea is within range of Soviet shore-based air forces, and this fact would impose an initial restriction on our naval operations until the measure of this threat had been obtained by experience.

General Conditions governing Attack on Russian Oil Supplies in the Caucasus.

40. The Soviet dependence on the Caucasian oilfields has already been emphasised. Subject to the factors stressed below there are three possible methods of interrupting or destroying these supplies. Firstly, by air attack; secondly, by naval action in the Black Sea and, lastly, by Turkish land operations from Eastern Anatolia.

41. All three of the above methods are governed by the fact that we cannot reach any of the Russian vulnerable points in the Black Sea or Caucasus unless we obtain the co-operation of Turkey or Iran, or infringe their territorial rights. The question whether these countries can be induced to depart from their neutral position is a political one.

42. On the assumption, however, that circumstances do enable us to secure Turkish or Iranian co-operation against Russia or to infringe their territorial rights, the following are the military factors affecting Allied action against Caucasian oil supplies.

Air attack.

43. The most vulnerable oil objectives in the Caucasus are the groups of refineries at Baku, Grozni and Batum, of which the first is by far the most important. We are advised that a refinery, once effectively destroyed, could not be repaired under nine months at least. The Russians are well aware of the vulnerability of their oil installations in the Caucasus, which are defended by large numbers of fighters and anti-aircraft weapons, though the efficacy of these defences, being Russian, is no doubt not so formidable as their numbers would suggest. There must however remain, in the absence of any experience of sustained air action against this scale of defence, some element of doubt whether the requisite wholesale destruction of all the refineries could be carried out.

44. A plan for the attack of these installations is now being worked out by the Air Staff in the Middle East, and is also under examination in the Air Ministry. It is at present estimated that the destruction of the principal refineries might be achieved by sustained operations over a period of several weeks by a force of not less than three bomber squadrons. In the event of hostilities with Russia, it would be desirable to undertake these operations as soon as circumstances permit, since delay would give the Russians an opportunity of improving their defences, possibly even by the addition of German fighters.

45. The plan involves operations at long range over difficult and mountainous country. The only squadrons now in the Middle East with the necessary range are three squadrons of Wellesleys. These are not suited for action by day against the scale of defence to be anticipated, though some of them might be used to supplement at night the activities of squadrons working by day. The operations must, therefore, in the main be undertaken by Mark IV Blenheims, for which we can provide the tropical equipment required to enable them to operate in this part of the world. Three squadrons of this type would, therefore, have to be provided in the Middle East, complete with the necessary reserves to enable them to replace wastage.

46. It is essential that the implications of such a course of action should be clearly understood. Whether the Mark IV Blenheims are used to re-equip Mark I Blenheim squadrons now in the Middle East, or to reinforce the Middle East Command, the fact remains that the necessary aircraft and equipment can only be found from home resources. If the aircraft of three complete squadrons

with the necessary reserves were drawn from the United Kingdom, the result, taken in conjunction with certain operations now under preparation, would be that practically all the home-based medium bombers now available to support the British Air Forces in France in the event of a German offensive through the Low Countries, or for any of our major air plans, would be otherwise employed.

Moreover, recent demands on our resources of skilled personnel and equipment have already set back, by several weeks at least, the progress of other important developments, such as the completion of the four long-range fighter squadrons for trade protection, the formation of new fighter squadrons to meet new commitments such as the defence of Scapa, the expansion of the bomber force and the re-equipment of existing squadrons with the most modern types. The fact must be faced that the despatch of three more squadrons to the Middle East will inevitably retard these important Home Defence developments still further. Nevertheless, if these disadvantages were accepted, three squadrons of Mark IV Blenheims could be provided from the metropolitan force, and—if the necessary preparations were put in hand at once—should be ready to operate from bases in Northern Iraq or Syria by the end of April. This period of preparation could be reduced in the coming months. Any addition to the number of squadrons detailed for the operations, though it would be desirable in relation to the Caucasus plan, would accentuate the disadvantages described above, and could not be effected without further considerable delay.

Some land forces might be required for the protection of aerodromes if we were to operate from Northern Iraq, and this question is now under examination by the Commanders-in-Chief in the Middle East. Until late in 1940, such forces would have to be found either from the three Brigades earmarked for Basra and the Anglo-Iranian oilfields or from other troops in the Middle East. If it proved possible to operate only from aerodromes in Syria or Eastern Anatolia, the French or Turks would presumably provide the necessary protection.

47. The importance of early and effective operations against the oil installations in the Caucasus in the event of war with Russia might well be so great as to justify the inevitable risks involved elsewhere. We have, however, thought it right to set out the consequential effects in some detail, so that a decision may be arrived at with full knowledge of the implications.

48. There is, of course, the possibility that Iran might be engaged as an ally on our side. In this event we should presumably be able to make use of Teheran as an advanced aerodrome. By this means it should be possible, subject to certain technical difficulties which are now being examined, to reach Batum and Baku with the existing Mark I Blenheim squadrons in the Middle East. The advantages of this would be obvious. It is, however, impossible to plan on this basis, since we cannot be certain what the attitude of Iran will be when the time comes.

49. The French have a project for attacking the Caucasus from bases in Syria with long-range bombers drawn from Tunisia. We have not the details of this plan, but the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief in the Middle East has been instructed to obtain them, and to ensure the necessary co-ordination with our plans.

50. We should point out that the bombing of the oil installations in the Caucasus would certainly involve considerable loss of civilian life. Our existing rules governing air bombardment would, therefore, have to be modified. It is clear, however, that Russia's action in Finland has given ample justification for these operations. The reaction of Germany, which cannot be predicted, must not be lost sight of, since the necessary diversion of forces to the Caucasus would reduce our capacity to strike at Germany.

Naval Action.

51. Naval action in the Black Sea could strike at Russian oil supplies by interrupting the distribution by sea from the ports of Batum and Tuapse, which represents some 5,000,000 tons per annum. The Caspian route and the railway from Baku are believed to be incapable of standing any appreciable increase of oil traffic. Consequently, congestion would be likely to occur in the Baku area and the transportation system generally would be severely strained. Moreover, control in the Black Sea would stop the export of Russian petroleum to Germany.

52. Carrier raids into the Black Sea to attack the refineries, oil stocks and port facilities at Batum and Tuapse would provide a useful supplement to the main air attacks on the Caucasus area, and might impose a temporary dispersion on the Russian defences. Surprise would be desirable, to reduce the risk to the carrier from shore-based bombers, and to the comparatively slow F.A.A. aircraft from the Russian fighters.

It would be necessary to assess, in the light of circumstances at the time, whether the risks of such carrier operations were justified. It is only by sustained air operations in the Caucasus area that decisive results can be obtained and a carrier could not remain for prolonged periods inside the Black Sea. Furthermore, 90 per cent. of the oil refineries are in the Baku area, which is beyond the range of F.A.A. aircraft operating from the Black Sea.

Land Attack.

53. The Turks are reported to be taking an active interest in Trans-Caucasia, where there are many inhabitants of Turkish origin. If they were at war with Russia, they might undertake operations on land against Batum, especially if the anti-Soviet elements in Armenia and Georgia were to co-operate with them by rebellion and sabotage.

FAR EAST.

Action against Russia in the Far East.

54. It would not be practicable to undertake operations against Russian naval forces based at Vladivostok, other than by submarine patrols, until the attitude of Japan had been clarified, and until some considerable liquidation of our commitments in European waters had released adequate naval forces. Our naval action in this area would be mainly directed to exercising contraband control for the purpose of cutting off seaborne supplies to Eastern Siberia, and thus adding a further strain to the already over-burdened transportation system. This would also prevent goods reaching Germany via Vladivostok and the Trans-Siberian railway. Lack of suitably placed bases would render the effective exercise of this control difficult.

IV.—SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS.

55. We summarise our appreciation in the following terms:—

General Factors.

- (i) German policy is directed at securing the maximum economic assistance from Russia that the latter will permit. If we became involved in war with Russia we should be indirectly striking at Germany by ensuring that the extent of this assistance is not increased (paragraph 2).
- (ii) On the other hand, the extent of this assistance is at present limited by the weakness of the Russian transportation and industrial systems, and is likely to be on a small scale in 1940 (paragraph 6).
- (iii) Russia is unlikely to risk open hostilities with a major Power. But if we force them upon her she could undertake limited operations in more than one area, and it would be to the interest both of Germany and of Russia to impose dispersion of effort upon the Allies. Germany might give Russia active assistance in this respect (paragraphs 4, 5 and 7).
- (iv) The greatest weakness in the Russian economic system is her dependence upon the oil supplies derived from the Caucasus. We are advised that the interruption of these supplies would in time paralyse the Russian military machine and disorganise Russian national life (paragraph 6).

Methods by which Russia could Strike at Allied Interests.

General.

- (v) One of the greatest dangers would be Russian subversive propaganda. This calls for active counter-measures (paragraph 11).

Northern Europe.

- (vi) The Russian threat in this area would be purely maritime and could be met, but the loss of our supplies of Swedish iron ore, should the Russians reach the Atlantic seaboard, would be serious (paragraph 12).

Near and Middle East.

- (vii) Russian submarines might attempt the passage of the Straits to attack our communications in the Mediterranean. Counter-measures would be much facilitated by Turkish co-operation, without which the threat might possibly become serious (paragraph 14).
- (viii) It would be contrary to Russian interests to initiate action which would disturb the neutrality of Turkey or Iran. But if war broke out between Great Britain and Russia, and Turkey or Iran became involved, Russia might undertake limited land operations in northern Iran and air operations against objectives in Iraq and Iran. The spread of the war to the Balkans is not likely to result from a Russian attempt to strike at the Allies, and has therefore not been considered in this paper (paragraphs 13 and 16).
- (ix) As soon as hostilities broke out we would have to provide for the security of the Anglo-Iranian oilfields and Basra. Three brigades, some anti-aircraft artillery, and fighter aircraft would be necessary for this. Of these, only the three brigades could definitely be made available early in 1940 (paragraph 19).
- (x) The Russians might overrun the northern fringe of Iran, perhaps as far as Tabriz. In addition the whole of Iran might be thrown into a state of chaos by air bombardment. This would no doubt have repercussions in Iraq where also considerable disorder might result from air bombardment. To deal with this situation and to maintain our communications through Iraq much larger forces would be necessary. So far as can be foreseen at present these larger land forces should be available in the Middle East and India late in 1940, although their employment would depend upon the progress made in the provision of maintenance requirements. The possibility of providing the requisite forces earlier than this date is under urgent examination with the Government of India. The provision of adequate air forces and anti-aircraft units would, however, be a matter of great difficulty (paragraphs 17-20).

India and Afghanistan.

- (xi) Soviet land and air action in this area is to be expected as soon as war breaks out (paragraph 21).
- (xii) With the land forces normally located in the Central Asian Military district, Russia could rapidly occupy the Northern Provinces of Afghanistan. A further land advance on India could be undertaken by Russia only as a long-term project, if at all (paragraph 22).
- (xiii) With the air forces now located in the Central Military district, Russia could bombard objectives in any part of Afghanistan and some military centres in the North-West Frontier of India. By reinforcing the above air force with a few long-range bombers, Russia could attack Indian cities as far as Lahore and Quetta (paragraph 23).
- (xiv) These attacks, if successful, would create grave disorders amongst the tribes of Afghanistan and the North-West Provinces of India; might cause considerable damage in the crowded cities of the North-West of India; and would certainly result in acute internal security problems (paragraph 24).

- (xv) Afghanistan would undoubtedly call for assistance on land and in the air. There would be no possibility of providing air assistance; but the Indian Government might be able to assist Afghanistan by despatching small land forces to Afghanistan. We recommend that the Government of India be invited to examine as a matter of urgency the problem of giving aid to the Afghan Government, including the provision of some land forces for Afghanistan. Our inability to give effective aid to Afghanistan would have unfortunate but unavoidable repercussions on our relations with the Afghan Government and on our prestige in the Moslem world, to offset which it would be important to strike against Russian vulnerable points elsewhere at the earliest possible moment (paragraphs 25-27).
- (xvi) The demand by India for reinforcement by fighter aircraft, and by anti-aircraft artillery would be difficult to resist. Even if the Italian attitude justified their release, the fighter squadrons in the Middle East are already earmarked for the defence of Turkey and Iraq. Substantial reinforcement from the fighter or anti-aircraft resources of Great Britain and France would clearly be undesirable (paragraph 28).
- (xvii) India might cease to be a potential source of supply of reinforcements for other theatres of war, but she should be able to maintain her position unaided except in respect of anti-aircraft defences (paragraph 29).

Far East.

- (xviii) A limited submarine threat must be anticipated against trade which, however, is not vital. German surface raiders might make use of Vladivostok as a base, thus avoiding passage through the dangerous North Sea area. Japan might adopt a more forward policy to the detriment of Allied interests, or might compromise with the Allies in order to improve her position *vis-à-vis* Russia.

Methods by which the Allies could Strike at Russia.

Northern Europe.

- (xix) Russia's seaborne trade would be interrupted and her northern bases could be subjected to seaward attack (paragraphs 33-34).
- (xx) On land and in the air we could not strike directly at Russia, but if we gained access to Scandinavia we might defeat any Russian attempt to reach Narvik and thereby impose an added strain upon the Russian military effort. Moreover, successful operations in this area, if carried out before the Gulf of Bothnia is ice free, would secure Galivare (paragraph 35).

Near and Middle East.

- (xxi) It is in this area alone that the Allies could strike at Russia effectively; namely, by attacking her oil supplies in the Caucasus. It is, however, impossible to carry out this attack unless we first obtain Turkish or Iranian co-operation or infringe their territorial rights (paragraph 41).
- (xxii) Provided the problem of Turkish or Iranian neutrality could be overcome, the best method of attack would be by air.
- (xxiii) The objectives for air attack comprise the groups of refineries at Baku, Grozni and Batum. The destruction of these might be achieved by sustained operations over several weeks, by at least three bomber squadrons (paragraph 43).

- (xxiv) The area is heavily defended against air attack. There must therefore remain an element of doubt as to our ability to achieve the wholesale destruction of all refineries. It would be most important to undertake the operations at the earliest possible moment so as not to give the Russians time to improve the defences still further, possibly with German help (paragraphs 43-44).
- (xxv) The only British squadrons now in the Middle East which could reach the Caucasus are not suitable for day operations against the Russian defence and could not alone achieve effective results. Such results could only be achieved by Mark IV Blenheims, which would have to come from the United Kingdom (paragraph 45).
- (xxvi) The transfer of three squadrons of Mark IV Blenheims from home to the Middle East could be effected by the end of April if preparations were put in hand now and if the following implications were accepted :—
 - (a) The air striking force for our major air plans or for the attack on a German invasion through the Low Countries would be correspondingly reduced.
 - (b) Important developments such as the provision of fighter squadrons for Scapa, expansion of the bomber force, trade defence squadrons, and re-equipment generally, already delayed by preparations for a certain operation, would be further retarded (paragraphs 45-46).
- (xxvii) Air attack of the Caucasus area could not be carried out without casualties to civilians. Our existing rules governing air bombardment would have to be modified (paragraph 50).
- (xxviii) There is a possibility that we might be able to operate the bomber squadrons now in the Middle East from Teheran, but since we cannot rely on Iranian co-operation, plans cannot be framed on this basis (paragraph 48).
- (xxix) The French have a project for attacking the Caucasus with long-range bombers operating from Syria. This is now under discussion (paragraph 49).
- (xxx) If we could obtain access to the Black Sea, naval action against the Russian sea communications could interrupt the distribution of a considerable proportion of the oil from Batum and thereby add to the congestion in the Baku area and on the railways. Carrier raids into the Black Sea against Batum and Tuapse might prove practicable, but it would not be possible to attack the vital Baku area by this means (paragraphs 51-52).
- (xxxi) If the Turks were at war with Russia, they might undertake operations on land against Batum, possibly in conjunction with a rising of the Armenian and Georgian tribes (paragraph 53).
- (xxxii) Apart from operations in the Black Sea, naval action in this area would be confined to contraband control over Russian sea-borne trade through the Ægean (paragraphs 38-39).

Far East.

- (xxxiii) Action would be limited to submarine patrols and to cutting off supplies through Vladivostok as effectively as possible (paragraph 54).

Broad Conclusions.

56. The broad conclusions to be drawn from the above appreciation are as follows :—

- (i) The risk of initiating war with Russia would be acceptable only if it led to a result which might cause the early defeat of Germany. Capture of the Galivare orefields would be a case in point.
- (ii) As a result of our present examination we consider that there is no action which we could take against Russia which would bring about the early defeat of Germany.

- (iii) Our examination has, however, indicated that, assuming the co-operation of Turkey, successful attack on the Caucasian oilfields might in time result in the economic and the military collapse of Russia, which in turn would deprive Germany of any hope of supplies from that source.
- (iv) At sea, war with Russia would result in material increase in the naval strength of our enemies, particularly in submarine forces. The increased threat to Allied sea communications and the necessity for some redistribution of our naval force would add to our difficulties, but it should be within the Allied naval capacity to overcome them.
- (v) On land and in the air, we should be exposed in war with Russia to serious threats in India, Iraq and the Anglo-Iranian oilfields, with inadequate means of meeting them. During 1940 we cannot be sure that our military strength will be sufficient to meet even the contingencies which may arise in war with Germany alone. Moreover, in all operations which may be considered, account has to be taken of the attitude of Italy. Consequently :—
- (a) Land forces on an adequate scale to counter Russian threats in the Middle East cannot be found until late in 1940, except at the expense of the British Expeditionary Force in France or by accepting risks *vis-à-vis* Italy.
 - (b) Anti-aircraft units which would be necessary for the defence of the Anglo-Iranian oilfields and which would be demanded by India cannot be provided during 1940 except at the expense of Home Defence.
 - (c) Fighter aircraft for the defence of India and Abadan would not be available unless the attitude of Italy justified their withdrawal from Egypt and they had not been committed to the defence of Turkey or Northern Iraq.

On the other hand it must be remembered that Russia has to maintain forces widespread through the length and breadth of the vast territories of the U.S.S.R.

- (vi) It is essential that we should be in a position to attack the oilfields at the earliest possible moment after the outbreak of hostilities. If we cannot do so, or if our attacks are not successful, the threats to our interests may continue indefinitely. If we are to have a reasonable chance of attacking the oilfields effectively with British forces, it will be necessary to transfer three long-range Blenheim squadrons from Home to the Middle East. The full implications of this move are set out in paragraph 46 above.
- (vii) Without Turkish or Iranian co-operation, we cannot attack the Caucasian oilfields at all except by infringing territorial rights.

(Signed)

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March 8, 1940.



