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G.O.S. (51) 322

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31ST MAY, 1951

CHIEFS OF STAFF COMMITTEE

DEFENCE OF EUROPE IN THE SHORT TERM

Note by Secretary

At their Meeting<sup>f</sup> on 21st May, 1951, the Chiefs of Staff approved the attached Report<sup>o</sup> on the Defence of Europe in the Short Term as a basis for planning. A copy of the Report has accordingly been forwarded to the B.J.S.M. Washington for the use of the United Kingdom Planners in discussion with the U.S. Planners.

(Signed) R. N. BEMBANK

MINISTRY OF DEFENCE, S.W.1.

31ST MAY, 1951

<sup>f</sup> Confidential Annex to G.O.S.(51)83rd Mtg., Minute 5  
<sup>o</sup> Annex

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DEFENCE OF EUROPE IN THE SHORT TERM

Appendix A - Review of Possible Bridgeheads

Appendix B - Map of Bridgehead Area (To be detached from J.P.(51)33 (Final))

INTRODUCTIONPeriod Under Review

1. Our examination of the defence of Europe in the Short Term is related to the period July, 1951 to July, 1952. ]

Outbreak of War

2. It has been appreciated<sup>+</sup> that war may break out either as a result of deliberate aggression by Russia, or it may be precipitated by western reactions to some Russian move. In the former case, which is considered unlikely to arise in 1951, Russia would mobilise and deploy her armed forces. It is estimated that this would take a minimum of two months and that it could not be carried out without some indication reaching the Western Powers. Warning of such preparations could be expected between 7 and 30 days before their completion. Scenario  
+  
Warning

3. In the second case Russia might undertake certain campaigns with the forces at present deployed, without first having completed mobilisation. In these circumstances, little or no warning could be expected.

Russian Intentions

4. The Russians must rightly regard the United Kingdom, as a considerable potential danger to themselves; not only as an advanced base for the Anglo/U.S. forces, but as the centre of European leadership and resistance to Communism. Russian operations in Western Europe, excluding Italy and possibly Scandinavia would therefore have as their ultimate object the occupation of the United Kingdom. As a preliminary, Russia would aim to mount an air offensive against the U.K. to destroy the allied forces in the field, and to overrun Western Europe.

Present Plans for the Defence of Western Europe

5. The general concept of operations for the defence of Western Europe in the Short Term, as envisaged in the Western European Regional Short Term Plan<sup>x</sup>, is based on the obstacle of the Rhine prolonged by the IJssel, in conjunction with other European Regional Plans. Sketch

6. The aim for the centre is to concentrate the forces of Western Europe for the defence of the Rhine, covered by delaying action further East. Bases in the United Kingdom would be used in launching a strategic air offensive against Russia.

Effectiveness of Present Plans

7. Western Union Appreciation. It is clear from the appreciation<sup>y</sup> tabled at the meeting of the Western Union Chiefs of Staff on the 20th June, 1950, that the success of ]

+ J.I.C.(50)101  
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the Rhine strategy envisaged above was considered impracticable taking into account the forces available during 1950. A successful Rhine strategy is still impracticable in 1951 and the first half of 1952 because, despite increases, the forces are still inadequate. We summarise below the relative strengths of the Russian forces and N.A.T.O. forces under SHAPE as planned for the period under review.

8. Comparison of Land Forces

(a) Unpromeditated Attack. Russia could start hostilities in Western Europe without warning, with an initial force of about 24 line divisions which are at present located in East Germany and Poland, and could rapidly build up this force to about 75 to 90 divisions. To meet a surprise attack, N.A.T.O. forces planned to be available in the Western European theatre, are likely to amount to:-

(i) Mid 1951 - - - Approx. 14-15 divisions.

(ii) Mid 1952 - - - Approx. 21-22 divisions.

The subsequent build-up would be slow and to a figure well below that of the Russians.

(b) Deliberate Attack. In the case of a deliberate build-up prior to the outbreak of war, the Russians could launch a campaign in Western Europe with an initial force of 50 - 60 divisions, increasing as before to some 75 - 90 divisions. Assuming that between 7 and 30 days' warning is received, allied forces planned to be available to meet this attack are likely to be of the following order:-

(i) Mid 1951 - - - Approx. 17-22 divisions.

(ii) Mid-1952 - - - Approx. 32-37 divisions.

The further build-up would be slow and to a figure well below that of the Russians.

9. Comparison of Air Strengths

(a) Russia has considerably greater strength in tactical air forces than the combined tactical air forces of N.A.T.O. The Russian leaders could make available by redeployment approximately 4,400 aircraft, with about 1,300 in reserve, to support the land campaign against Western Europe and to take part in the initial air attack against the United Kingdom.

(b) The N.A.T.O. tactical air forces in Western Europe are difficult to assess accurately since they are made up of National estimates which may not in fact be realised. They might amount to a minimum of 1,200 by mid-1952, though this figure would be larger if the American contribution is increased. This figure does not include Fighter Command in the United Kingdom. Though the Russian long range

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air force is superior in total numbers to the strategic air forces of N.A.T.O., N.A.T.O. has much greater strength in medium bombers and possesses a small number of the only heavy bombers in the world. The scale of strategic air attack that could now be mounted by N.A.T.O. against Russia is therefore much greater than that country could mount in retaliation from its present bases. Russian air defence by day is technically a good deal inferior to that of the N.A.T.O. countries, but, owing to the length of time that an attacking aircraft would have to spend over hostile territory, it might in practice be of comparable effectiveness. By night there is apparently no air defence except for A.A. guns which will be used largely for barrage fire in defence of vulnerable points.

(10) Comparison of Naval Forces. The naval surface forces of N.A.T.O. are so much stronger than those of Russia that the latter will not be able, for many years at least, to dispute by surface forces the control of the major sea communications. The Russian submarine fleet, however, is strong in comparison with the anti-submarine forces of N.A.T.O. and Russian mine-laying potential is high in comparison with the minesweeping resources available to N.A.T.O.

(11) Deduction. The North Atlantic Treaty Countries will clearly have insufficient forces to prevent Western Europe, excluding the United Kingdom, from being overrun.

Political Implications of a Rhine Strategy

12. Although, the successful adoption of a Rhine strategy in Western Europe in the short term is militarily impracticable, because of the overall shortages of forces, we must recognise that a Rhine strategy will have to be attempted for political reasons. It is clear that any plan for the defence of Western Europe, that is not based primarily on a Rhine strategy, would contribute nothing to the security of most N.A.T.O. countries and might therefore bring about the collapse of that organisation.

Requirement for a Bridgehead Strategy

(13) In view of the fact that a Rhine strategy is unlikely to be successful in the period under review, there are clear advantages to be gained from holding a bridgehead or bridgeheads in order to retain a foothold for the subsequent counter-offensive and, if possible, to contribute to the defence of the United Kingdom base.

14. Quite apart from purely strategic considerations, a bridgehead in Europe is of great importance to keep hope alive and the spirit of resistance strong.

The Aim of the Paper

(15) The aim of this paper is to determine whether a bridgehead or bridgeheads, can be held in Europe in conjunction with a Rhine strategy during the period July, 1951 to July, 1952.

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30. In addition to holding the southern bridgehead it will be necessary to ensure that Spain is denied to the enemy in order to safeguard sea lines-of-communication to Italy.

SUMMARY OF CONCLUSIONS

31. We conclude that--

(a) Unless the use of the atomic weapon, tactically or strategically, should so influence the course of events markedly to our advantage, that we can, in fact, hold the Russians on the Rhine, the retention of a bridgehead in Europe is most important for the following reasons:-

- (i) It would provide the means for eventual counter-offensive.
- (ii) It would aid, in some measure, the defence of the United Kingdom.
- (iii) It would strengthen European morale, keeping hope alive and the will to resist strong.

The only possible bridgehead is the Italo-Austrian bridgehead.

(b) As, in the short term, the success of the Rhine strategy is in doubt, plans should be prepared in addition for:-

- (i) the successful and prolonged defence of the Italo/Austrian bridgehead, subject to the following considerations -
  - (A) The defence of this bridgehead is of no direct assistance to the security of the United Kingdom base, but will contribute to the security of Allied sea communications.
  - (B) Its successful defence will require the making good an initial deficiency of approximately 3 divisions and nearly 500 aircraft. This could be done by improving the Italian potential by using carrier aircraft, and by direct reinforcement. In view of the possible increase in the Russian air threat, allied air reinforcements of the 500 aircraft to meet the initial deficiency are likely to be an early requirement.
  - (C) It is essential that the Allies should retain control of the Straits of Gibraltar.
- (ii) The denial of Spain to the enemy. Spain would not fulfil the general requirements of a bridgehead except that it would contribute to the security, both in the Atlantic and in the Mediterranean of Allied sea communications. In particular the Mediterranean line of communication through the Straits of Gibraltar is essential to our Middle East strategy in the first six months of the war and is also essential to the successful defence of the Italo-Austrian bridgehead for so long as such defence is conducted. Spanish Forces are not adequate to stem a Russian attack across the Spanish frontier and steps should be taken to increase their effectiveness.
- (iii) Evacuation bridgeheads in the Antwerp area for forces withdrawing from the northern sector of the Rhine and along the proposed United States lines of communication for forces withdrawing from the southern sector of the Rhine.