

basis. It is considered that these dispositions are commensurate with our occupation and preparations at Giarabub and, unless the enemy intends to attack either Tobruk or eastwards from his forward area, are quite possibly those which he will adopt in the future. A note is appended on the effect on the plan of other possible action on the part of the enemy.*

(ii) The relative strengths in tanks will be about 6:4 in our favour.

(iii) The relative air strengths may be about 3:2 in the enemy's favour. This figure, however, takes into account the Italian aircraft.

(iv) It is understood that the enemy supply situation cannot be interfered with to a much greater degree than at present. It is known that continuous dumping is going on in the area between Tobruk and Sollum. It is estimated under these conditions that the enemy in the forward area will be in a position to carry on land operations for a period of three months and air operations for at least one month by 1st November.

4. It should be our endeavour to bring the enemy armoured forces to battle under conditions where we can concentrate against them a numerical superiority in tanks. Our armoured division will not have this superiority if faced with both the enemy armoured divisions, and one of our armoured brigades is weaker than one enemy armoured division. In order, therefore, to produce a superiority of tanks against the enemy, as long as the enemy divisions are within inter-supporting distance of each other, a similar condition must apply to our armoured division and our remaining armoured brigade.

5. If the enemy do not withdraw from present positions, an attack on Bengasi as visualised in Plan 'A' is not advocated, for the following reasons:—

(i) The capture of Bengasi would not necessarily cause the enemy to capitulate in view of his supply situation in Eastern Cyrenaica.

(ii) It would divert a portion of our armoured forces from the main object, which is the destruction of the enemy armoured forces, to the rapid accomplishment of which all armoured forces should be directed. It might, moreover, expose a portion of our armoured forces to be attacked by the enemy in greater strength. (See para. 4).

(iii) A controlling factor is the enemy air threat from set bases in the north directed to the flank of a force competing with administrative and operational difficulties. The potential of this threatening force far exceeds our available strength, and its present numbers may be increased at will so long as the enemy possesses the coastal aerodromes which are in direct contact with Greece and Crete.

The second factor is the dissipation of force involved. The bombing threat would necessitate despatching a strong fighter force with the column and this would result in fighter weakness in the Bardia area.

Thirdly, the arrival of the column within reach of the coastal area south of Bengasi would find our weakened air forces opposed by a strong enemy operating from established

bases. This would imply further strengthening of the southern fighter force at the expense of the northern, and even then there is doubt that it would be in sufficient strength for the task.

(iv) The maintenance of any forces sent to Bengasi over the period (which might last for some time) during which the main tank battle was being staged, would be extremely difficult and very costly in transport.

(v) There is a possibility of moves in the area south of Bengasi being delayed by rain, with consequent dislocation of any plan decided upon. This also affects the enemy, though to a less extent, due to his administrative situation being easier than ours.

6. Our initial plan, therefore, goes no further than the relief of Tobruk, and destroying the armoured forces in Cyrenaica. Subsequent plans for the capture of Bengasi must depend on the success which has attended the above. If, unhappily, any enemy armoured formations escape, the detail of future plans to be adopted will depend on their dispositions and action. If all enemy armour is brought to battle, the conquest of the rest of Cyrenaica should not be difficult or slow. (See para. 13).

7. The following, then, are the essentials of a plan to be adopted if the enemy remain in the forward areas:—

(i) The enemy armoured forces are the target.

(ii) They must be hemmed in and not allowed to escape.

(iii) The relief of Tobruk must be incidental to the plan.

Re. (i) the enemy will seek to avoid meeting superior armoured forces, but we should be in a position to force him to do so (see para. 8). The destruction of his dumps, particularly petrol, must be an essential part of any plan adopted, as by this means he can be rendered impotent.

Re. (ii) the enemy lines of withdrawal must be through his dumping areas, except for such forces as he can supply by air. (Information as to the position of dumps, and extent he can carry out air supply, is of vital importance. Intensive air war against dumps is going on now to full extent of resources.) Lines of withdrawal to Tengeder, Mechili and Derna will, therefore, be those to which attention must be paid.

(ii) and (iii) taken together indicate the necessity of an operation by our forces west of Tobruk, to take place simultaneously with any operation in the frontier area, or between it and Tobruk.

8. The enemy armoured forces are in two different localities and, although within inter-supporting distance, an armoured threat to both Tobruk and the Bardia—Sollum area at the same time should place him in a quandary, and might give us the opportunity of interposing ourselves between his two armoured divisions and defeating each in detail.

The relief of Tobruk would mean much more to him than the loss of Bardia—Sollum. If, therefore, a serious threat develops towards Tobruk, it is probable that he would attempt to concentrate his armoured forces against that threat. It will therefore be necessary for us to be strong in armoured units for any attack carried out in the Tobruk area.

* Not attached.