

be postponed until early summer. Had the Germans been able to renew their offensive when the snows melted, starting from the line they had gained during the autumn, their advanced guard would in all probability have appeared south of the Caucasus at the very moment when we were considering how we might oppose their gathering strength in Libya. I have described how in January and February Japanese successes in the Indian Ocean made it necessary to withdraw several divisions from the Middle East, and how I was obliged to instruct the Ninth and Tenth Armies to retire in the event of an enemy advance. Developments in Libya during the months that followed caused the troops allotted to the defence of the Northern Front to be still further reduced.

With the approval of the other Commanders-in-Chief, I decided in March temporarily to reduce the garrison of Cyprus, in order to compensate for our losses and to find troops for Libya. It had been estimated that one infantry division with a proportionate amount of armour and artillery and six additional infantry battalions were required to defend the island. My policy was to keep in the island all the equipment, transport, ammunition and stores required for this garrison, but to reduce the infantry and artillery personnel to about one-third. It was expected that we should have about three weeks warning of attack, and it should be possible with the help of the Royal Navy to bring the garrison quickly to its full strength.

At about this time the 4th Indian Division relieved the 5th Indian Division in the island, and Major-General Tucker finally reorganised its defences. The basic principle of the defence was that the air forces on the island should be kept in full operation. It was not considered possible to prevent the enemy getting a foothold at some point on the coastline, and the main effort of the defence was therefore to be concentrated on protecting the landing grounds in the central plain. For the same reason all important depots and installations were sited inland wherever feasible. As large a proportion of the garrison as possible was to be made mobile so that it might operate against enemy landings. Instructions laying down these principles were issued on the 1st July.*

The reduced strength of the Cyprus garrison caused some uneasiness in London lest the enemy should undertake a combined operation, now that our own naval and air forces in the Eastern Mediterranean were so much reduced. After examining the problem again, the Commanders-in-Chief were able to reassure the Chiefs of Staff, as it was thought that an attempt at invasion was unlikely unless the enemy had the use of landing grounds in Southern Anatolia.

During April the mounting strength of the German and Italian forces in Cyrenaica had compelled me once more to review the policy for the defence of Syria and Iraq, and on the 29th April I issued revised instructions for dealing with an attack through Anatolia.†

By now it had become evident that our original estimate of the forces required to defend

the western frontier of Egypt against an enemy attack in strength would have to be considerably increased. This meant that many of the troops allotted to the defence of the Northern Front would not be available, should need arise, and that, therefore, we must contemplate having to withdraw even further to the south. In Iraq and Persia I hoped to be able to hold the same positions as under our previous plan, but on the left, in order to meet the possibility of having to abandon the Lebanon fortresses, I gave orders for fresh positions to be fortified in Northern Palestine and along the Jordan. It was still my object to keep our bases and ports and the oilfields of southwestern Persia secure, but this seemed to be becoming more and more difficult to achieve, if the expected enemy offensive should take shape.

The question of giving aid to the Turks, in the event of their being attacked by the Axis Powers, had been periodically under review ever since the previous December. At that time the Middle East Defence Committee had advised His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom that, as the existing communications in Turkey were poor and vulnerable, it would be unwise to suggest to the Turks that we should be able to assist them with considerable land forces should they be attacked in the spring of 1942. The Committee recommended instead that we should rather stress the help we might be able to afford them in the air, and also urged that every effort should be made to send the Turks all the small arms, engineering stores, motor vehicles, and raw material for their munition factories that could be spared. The Turks, on their part, though obviously anxious to accept our aid and to see our cause successful, were extremely careful to avoid any overt action which might cause Germany to question their neutrality, and this made it most difficult to make really effective preparations to assist them.

In April, the Commanders-in-Chief recommended to the Chiefs of Staff that Turkey should be included in the sphere of action of the Minister of State in Cairo, in order to enable our relations with her to be co-ordinated by one authority on the spot, particularly in regard to assistance in the event of an Axis attack. This recommendation, however, did not meet with the approval of the Foreign Office in view of the complicated and delicate nature of the relations between Turkey, Great Britain and the Soviet.

In spite of these difficulties we pressed forward steadily with our schemes for assisting Turkey, and a considerable amount of useful preparatory work was done, in the way of improving ports, roads and railways, and aerodromes. We were also able to introduce unostentatiously a large quantity of warlike stores into Anatolia. In all these activities we were greatly aided by the tactful and untiring efforts of Major-General A. Arnold, Military Attaché at Ankara.

On the 19th May I issued instructions governing the action to be taken in the event of enemy attack through the Caucasus*. It was fairly safe to assume that the enemy would be unable to invade Turkey at the same time, and that the Ninth Army could therefore be left with just sufficient troops for guard duties. In

* G.H.Q., M.E.F. Operation Instruction No. 128, 1st July 1942—Appendix 19.

† G.H.Q., M.E.F. Operation Instruction No. 117, 29th April 1942—Appendix 14.

* G.H.Q., M.E.F. Operation Instruction No. 118, 19th May 1942—Appendix 15.