

and West a final line of defence had been selected by General Sir E. P. Quinan and prepared by troops of Tenth Army.

6. North Persia is a mountainous country, with few localities where airfields can be developed rapidly. Between the open country about Kasvin-Teheran-Hamadan on the South, and the River Araxes on the North, the only areas offering reasonable facilities for airfields lie in the valley between Ardebil and Tabriz and about Lenkoran on the Caspian coast.

Possession of this area was extremely important. As long as I could hold it, the Royal Air Force would be able to provide fighter cover for troops in action against the enemy and for bombers attacking his communications; if I lost it these advantages would be transferred to the enemy, and the Royal Air Force, forced on to the defensive, would have to disperse its efforts to provide fighter protection for the vulnerable oil installations, ports and communications.

I had reluctantly to come to the conclusion that the forces I could maintain north of this important area were not strong enough to fight a successful battle if the Germans attacked in strength. I determined, however, to hold it as long as I could, and it was therefore my intention to send forward to the River Araxes whatever mobile forces I could maintain, to delay any German advance for as long as possible.

7. By the end of September, 1942, I had had sufficient opportunity to consider the situation and to discuss it with General Sir E. P. Quinan, Commander Tenth Army, who had been studying the problem for some time and had been able to visit North Persia and see something of the country. By this time the likelihood of a winter campaign in North Persia was receding, the earliest date by which it was estimated the Germans could reach the River Araxes having already been put back to 15th November.

I had at this time only one Indian Motor Brigade and two Infantry Divisions fit to undertake operations and could not have maintained more than this force in North Persia without substantial administrative reinforcements, which even if they were available from the Middle East, could not reach Persia for some weeks.

At this time the troops in Persia and Iraq Command were located mainly in the Persian Highlands about Hamadan and Kermanshah, where the winter climate is very severe. It was desirable to move them for the winter to milder areas and this move could not be long delayed. It was my intention to bring all the troops back to the railways for the winter, in order to reduce the strain on the transport available and afford it opportunity for refitting before the Spring. I intended also to cut down to the minimum the force in Persia, whose maintenance requirements had to be moved up the Persian line of communications in diminution of the flow of aid to Russia.

My first proposal was to locate two divisions, which force I could expect to maintain in North Persia if operations took place during the winter, in the area of Kasvin; but as this was in the Russia zone the concurrence of the Russian Government had first to be obtained. As the time was not considered expedient for an approach in this sense to the

Russian Government, I had to modify my plan; this involved little or no risk, as the sustained Russian defence at Stalingrad and in the North Caucasus continued to postpone the date by which German intervention in North Persia might be expected. I therefore reduced the force in Persia to one division and one motor brigade, located in the British zone at Qum and Andimishk respectively; the remainder of the troops being brought back to winter training locations on the Iraq railway.

8. By November, 1942, the course of the campaign in Russia and the opening of the Allied offensive in North Africa had rendered a German threat to North Persia during the winter almost impossible; the earliest date for possible operations was estimated to be 15th April, 1943, five or six divisions being considered the maximum force the Germans were likely to deploy on or south of the River Araxes.

The troops in Persia and Iraq had meanwhile completed their moves to winter locations, and arrivals from other theatres had increased the strength available. I had now at my disposal two British divisions and one British Armoured brigade; three Indian divisions (two with three Infantry brigades each and one with two); one Indian Armoured division (with some light tanks and trucks in place of medium tanks); and one Polish division reasonably prepared for operations. The remainder of the Polish Army was in process of organization, equipment and training, and for some months to come could not be counted on for operations. The flow of equipment into the Command was increasing and some improvement had been effected in the transport position.

To achieve a balanced fighting force for possible operations in the Spring of 1943, I formed the British and Indian Infantry divisions into two Corps (3rd and 21st Indian) each of one British and one Indian division. Both Corps, together with 31 Indian Armoured Division and 10 Indian Motor Brigade, were placed under command of Tenth Army for operations in North Persia. I intended to retain direct command of the Polish Corps and to hold the remaining Indian Infantry division (of two Infantry brigades) in general reserve, and with this in view incorporated with it as an integral part 7th British Armoured Brigade.

My general plan to meet a German offensive in the Spring remained substantially as before, though I now had at my disposal a force more nearly adequate to its task.

I was still not in a position to maintain sufficient forces far enough forward to make sure of stopping the enemy before he reached the Northern group of airfields about Ardebil and Tabriz; my intention remained, therefore, to secure these areas for as long as possible and subsequently to defeat the enemy South and South West of Mianeh if he should succeed in advancing so far.

The defence of Northern Iraq against an attack from Lake Urmia I proposed to entrust to the Polish Army in the East, assisted by troops of the Iraqi Army. (My outline plan was submitted to the War Office on 17th November, 1942.)

One aspect in the situation which gave cause for some anxiety was the time required to get the forces in position and ready to meet the German thrust if it should come.