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Note on Libyan Offensive—II.

20th April 1942.

1. *Object.*—The permanent and overriding object is to secure Egypt from attack.

2. *Considerations and deductions.*—The best way to secure Egypt from attack from the west is to remove enemy from Libya.

Deduction.—This entails destruction of his armed forces.

3. If enemy can withdraw before us, keeping his forces, and particularly his armoured forces, in being, he becomes stronger as he gets nearer Tripoli, while we become weaker the farther we get from railhead.

Deduction.—Enemy armed forces must be decisively defeated in Cyrenaica and not allowed to withdraw into Tripolitania.

4. Enemy has consolidated his positions in area Derna—Tmimi—Temrad—Mechili.

Deduction.—Frontal attack on these positions, even with our present superiority in infantry, likely to be lengthy and costly, and to place our forces in an unfavourable strategic position should we have to stop our offensive before we have got a decision because of threat to our Northern Front.

5. Key to enemy present positions is Mechili, which cannot be safely attacked from east or south until enemy armoured forces have been neutralised or destroyed.

Deduction.—We must have sufficient armoured forces to give reasonable chance in early stages of our offensive of hitting enemy armour so hard as to prevent it interfering further with our advance.

6. We are unlikely to have such superiority in armour as to be certain of decisively beating the enemy's armoured forces on ground chosen by him.

Deduction.—We must, therefore, induce the enemy armour to attack us on ground favourable to us.

7. To induce the enemy to attack us we must threaten something so valuable to him as to make him move to guard it.

The enemy is most sensitive in his supply system. Vulnerable points in this system are Barce, Bengasi, Agedabia, and El Agheila. Barce, an important road junction, is difficult of access from the south and to attack it would entail a wide turning movement within striking distance of the enemy reserves in the Gebel Akhdar, and out of supporting range of our fighters from their present forward bases. Interception at Agedabia of the enemy's supply route by the coast road from Tripoli would hamper him a lot, but might not make him move if he could still count on using Bengasi. The same applies to El Agheila; but this operation is not possible because of supply difficulties.

A threat to Bengasi directly affects the enemy's ability to remain in Eastern Cyrenaica beyond the limited period during which he is able to live on such reserves of supplies as he may have been able to build up. It is therefore the most likely operation to make him move to attack us on ground of our own choosing.

Deduction.—Our threat should be made against Bengasi, and must be sufficiently permanent to prevent the enemy being able to rely on living on his reserves of supplies until it is past.

8. The object being to induce the enemy armour to attack our armour, we must be ready to meet him with the strongest possible armoured force, in conditions most favourable to us.

Deductions.—All our available fast medium tanks must be included in the striking force, and be strongly supported by infantry and artillery holding mined and entrenched positions, which will act as pivots of manoeuvre and bases of supply for them.

9. The ground on which we wish the enemy to attack must be chosen to give us the greatest possible advantage over him. It should be so far from his probable starting points as to force him to refuel at least once before he attacks, and to make it hard for him to supply his troops. It should not be so far, however, as to make it too difficult for the enemy to move against us.

It should give good going over which our tanks can pass freely and quickly to the counter-attack. If this condition can be combined with areas of broken ground in which our infantry can form strong defensive areas, so much the better.

Deduction.—The area round Ben Gania appears to be suitable for our striking force, which would then be close enough (120 miles) to Bengasi to threaten it. This area is just about the limit of enemy tank radius of action from his probable starting point near Mechili, so that he must refuel before giving battle.

The going is reasonably good, and there are stretches of broken ground which should make good defensive areas for the infantry.

10. To establish an armoured force near Ben Gania strong infantry forces are necessary to form pivots for the armoured force itself, and to establish strongpoints protecting its lines of communication to Tobruk.

Deduction.—At least two infantry divisions, which must be fully mobile, will probably be needed for this purpose.

11. To mislead the enemy and to prevent him interfering with the initial seizure and consolidation of ground necessary to give the armoured force security and mobility, a strong force must be available to demonstrate against the enemy positions north of Mechili with the object of pinning him to them.

Deduction.—At least one infantry division with heavy tanks is needed for this.

12. To prevent an enemy break-through with armoured forces to Tobruk to upset the supply of our striking force and other forward troops, the Gazala—Tobruk—El Adem defensive system must still be held.

Deduction.—An infantry division and a brigade group will probably be needed for this, and also to guard against possible airborne or seaborne raids against our forward bases in the same area.

13. Our present aerodromes and landing grounds are too far back to enable full air support to be given to forces operating in the Ben Gania area and west of it. Without such support, the operations cannot hope to succeed against the strong enemy opposition which must be expected.

Deduction.—New forward landing grounds in the general area Bir Hacheim—Meduar Hsan—Ben Gania will be needed. These will require protection by a motor brigade group, or an infantry brigade group, or both.