

East. The principal items have been cattle and sheep (145,000 head in the year), cotton seed (60,000 tons) and beans (6,000 tons).

New Directive.

350. This very satisfactory internal security situation enabled the resources of Middle East Command to be used to the full for the base and training role, subordinate to the demands of the general operations in the Mediterranean theatre, to which the Command had been allotted under me. This role produced excellent results in Tunisia, Sicily and Italy, but it also resulted in the operations in the Aegean being denied the support necessary for success. Despite this setback, the security achieved in Middle East, and the need to place all available resources at the disposal of a unified Mediterranean Command for operations in Italy, and of 21 Army Group for a major planned attack on Western Europe, were such weighty considerations that towards the end of my period in command the role of Middle East was under consideration with a view to diverting from the Command the maximum possible support for these operations.

351. Early in September the Deputy Chief of the Imperial General Staff and the Quarter-master-General visited Cairo and held a number of conferences of which the object was to reduce the resources available in Middle East to the minimum compatible with security, and to make available the maximum contribution for the Mediterranean Command and 21 Army Group; a heavy contribution from Middle East was needed for these purposes.

352. My commitment, as laid down after these conferences in an Aide Memoire of 11th September, was, therefore, to maintain internal security, and to prepare for an unopposed occupation of Crete and Rhodes when the German garrisons should be withdrawn. For this, I was to have under my command at least two armoured divisions, one infantry division, and the equivalent of three further divisions of unbrigaded troops. I was to hold reserves and reinforcements for these six divisions and, in addition, for troops awaiting transfer to Italy, and I was to maintain permanent transit arrangements for New Zealand, Australian, Indian and African troops anywhere in the Mediterranean theatre. The maintenance of British troops in Italy was to be progressively undertaken by bases in Italy as they were developed during the ensuing six to nine months, and Middle East was to maintain its own "garrison", including services for the Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force, to provide Eastern Group Supplies for the Mediterranean theatre, to maintain any forces extra to the six divisions of "garrison" troops which might be in the Middle East, and to continue production for local consumption and to meet the requirements of the other Mediterranean theatres. No provision was made for sending troops to Turkey or to the Aegean.

353. With this new brief, I was to review the organisation of command in the Middle East, to achieve economy in staff and personnel, and was to prepare to transfer to Italy, or elsewhere, the base and line of communication units which would become redundant with the transfer of formations to Italy or with the achievement of more economic organisation.

354. The only serious novelty in this Aide Memoire was the plan to cut Middle East Base and administrative services so that Italy could build up an organisation capable of administering the forces there. This plan caused remonstrance from Admiral Lord Louis Mountbatten, Supreme Commander South-east Asia, when he attended a meeting of the Middle East Defence Committee on 4th October. The argument was advanced that the Middle East Base was a vast and complex organisation which could not be cut without loss of efficiency, and that the retention of the Middle East Base, in its existing form, was an integral necessity for the development of our strategy in South-east Asia.

355. The guidance of the Chiefs of Staff was sought on this clash of principles, and meantime Middle East continued to meet *ad hoc* demands for units in Italy, and lists and plans were prepared for reducing the establishment to the minimum scale to deal with the permanent commitment of maintaining internal security on the basis of six divisions. Pending a further directive from the Chiefs of Staff, a temporary embargo on the release of administrative units was imposed.

356. On 25th October, the Chiefs of Staff directed that my forces should not be reduced below the minimum required for the maintenance of internal security and for the fulfilment of the condition, which was now accepted, that Middle East Base would ultimately be required to support operations in South-east Asia. This decision was clarified on 17th November, when the Chiefs of Staff decided that the primary function of Middle East Base was to support operations in the Mediterranean; units and personnel not required for that commitment must be released. We should eventually be required as a subsidiary base for South-east Asia Command, but this should not be allowed to influence the drafting away of units and personnel for Italy and 21 Army Group, since we should only be involved gradually in the commitment for Asia, and additional troops would be returned as the commitment became heavier. Nevertheless, no base installation or organisation was to be completely closed, but they were to be kept on a care and maintenance basis, and the army base was not to be reduced so as to prejudice present or future requirements of the Royal Navy, Royal Air Force, or Merchant Navy. On the basis of this directive, Middle East continued until the end of my period in command.

357. The operational counterpart of this subordination of Middle East to the Mediterranean Command and Italy came when, on 26th November, 1943, the Chiefs of Staff decided that there should, in future, be a unified command in the Mediterranean. To carry out this policy, the Commander-in-Chief, Allied Forces, North Africa, took over responsibility for operations in the Balkans, the Aegean and Turkey, but I remained directly responsible to the Chiefs of Staff for internal security within Middle East Command.

358. In fact, these directives had no effect on events in Middle East during the remainder of my tenure of command, for the programme for drafting troops to Italy and the United Kingdom had already been drawn up and was