

but it was the opinion of the Intelligence Staff at Allied Force Headquarters that not even the complete loss of the island would bring Italy to sue for terms. Nor was it likely, in the prevailing state of mind in Italy, that the loss of Sardinia in addition would produce that effect. To eliminate Italy from the war we should have to land on the mainland of the peninsula. We should have to do so in any case as soon as the Italians capitulated, whether or not we had made it our main theatre of effort, for we should want to occupy the country as quickly as possible and begin to put its resources to use against the Germans. That being the case, our weakness in available formations rendered it advisable not to split our efforts but to concentrate on one geographical objective.

It was my opinion, therefore, that an invasion of the peninsula was by far the best means of carrying out the first part of the directive and I decided, after considerable study, that it would also offer the best chances of achieving the second object of our strategy, to contain as many German forces as possible. First of all the elimination of Italy, for which an invasion of the peninsula was essential, would of itself, as I have already pointed out, throw a heavy additional strain on Germany. In the summer of 1943 Italy was still performing important garrison duties for the Axis in the Mediterranean theatre; she had seven divisions in Southern France, extending as far west as Marseilles, and no less than thirty-two in the Balkans, together with many non-divisional anti-aircraft and coast defence units in both theatres. If the Germans could no longer count on these forces they would have to replace them at once with German troops: they could not leave south-eastern France ungarrisoned with the Allies loose in the Mediterranean in overwhelming superiority on the sea and in the air; resistance movements in the Balkans would also get completely out of hand unless they took over the areas vacated by the Italians. It was, in fact, not unreasonable to hope that in the Balkans at least, where they far outnumbered the Germans, the Italians might attempt to resist; the resistance was not likely to be prolonged but it would help in diverting German troops. However, apart from these automatic results of Italian capitulation, we should be in a position, by invading the peninsula, to force the Germans to a more damaging diversion of effort than the mere increase in occupational commitments, which could be entrusted to lower category formations, including foreigners and satellites. They would have to put into the field a strong force of good quality troops or see Italy lost by default and the Anglo-American armies appearing on the southern frontier of the Reich. That southern frontier is strong enough by nature, but to abandon Italy, especially the industrial area north of the Apennines, would add a serious loss of war potential to a disastrous loss of prestige. Perhaps even more serious for the Germans would be to allow us to make use of the airfields of Italy from which our strategic Air Forces could develop attacks against hitherto immune targets in Southern and South-eastern Germany, in Hungary and against the vital Ploesti oilfields. For all these reasons I felt sure that the Germans would not stint troops for the defence of Italy and that nowhere else should we be able to draw in and contain so many.

There was, of course, the objection that a campaign in Italy would canalise the whole effort of Great Britain and the United States for 1943 into a comparatively narrow peninsula. The objection, though based on ignorance of our resources and misappreciation of the general strategy of the war, appears superficially sound but omits any consideration of what alternatives were open; as Mr. Churchill said on a later occasion: "We have to fight the Germans somewhere, we can't merely sit and watch the Russians." It would serve no useful purpose to keep the forces available in the Mediterranean in idleness, and plans had already been prepared to make the largest contribution in men and amphibious means which could be transferred in the time available to the Western assault. To say that Italy was a secondary theatre is not a valid objection; it is the nature and function of a holding force to attack secondary objectives while the main force is preparing to attack the main objective. It would be a valid objection, if it could be proved, that the Allies employed unduly large forces in attacking a secondary objective: in fact, as I shall show, our forces in Italy never at any time enjoyed any but the slenderest margin of superiority over the Germans, and usually not even that, and, above all, the invasion of the West was never deprived of any resources in men or materials by the needs of the operations in Italy. The Italian campaign fulfilled its function in the strategic scheme of the war against Germany, and I am convinced that no other possible strategy would have fulfilled that function so well.*

It was clear, therefore, that an invasion of the mainland of Italy was the most advantageous course to pursue in the exploitation of success in Sicily. It was also clear, gazing at the relief map of Southern Italy, that it would be an operation of great difficulty. We must get up that long leg as quickly as possible and preferably start as far north as possible, but the limits were laid down by the availability of air cover. I had had experiences in Burma of fighting against an enemy with control of the air which I was not anxious to repeat, and the loss of "Prince of Wales" and "Repulse" off Malaya was a reminder of what could happen, in those circumstances, even to great warships, let alone convoys of merchant ships and landing craft. The experiences of the United States Navy in operations against comparatively isolated Japanese-held islands in the Pacific under cover of aircraft from large groups of carriers were not applicable to the situation facing me in the Mediterranean, and in any case I was assured by Admiral Cunningham† that there was no chance of getting such a force of carriers. My air cover would have to come from land-based fighters and, taking the Spitfire with 90 gallon long-range tanks as the standard, this gave me a circle of operations of a

* The best alternative available was an invasion of the Balkans. To do this it would first have been necessary, for the sake of air cover, to break into the "outer ring" of islands from Crete to Rhodes, a difficult operation in autumn. Balkan terrain is even worse suited for offensive operations than Italian, and it must be remembered that our amphibious resources were destined to dwindle to the advantage of the Western Theatre. A final argument against this course was that the United States Government was most reluctant to become involved in a Balkan campaign.

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