

Western Desert. Since I have held this command this has always been the case, and, I have several times emphasised it, and given as my considered opinion that it is not a practical proposition to attempt offensive operations in the Western Desert and at the same time carry out major defensive operations in Persia or Iraq. I see no reason whatever to change this opinion now. Apart from the shortage of transport, it is not possible to provide the fighting troops required for the defence of Persia without so weakening the Eighth Army as to make it doubtful whether it could carry out a successful offensive.

7. I fully realise the desirability, even the necessity of driving the enemy further west and so lessening the imminence of the threat to our bases in Egypt, and no one could be more desirous of assuming the offensive in the Western Desert than I. But I am deeply impressed with the general weakness of our position in the Middle East, so strongly emphasised by the Russian collapse north of the Caucasus, and by the immense risks we are running in exposing the head of the Persian Gulf to enemy attack. We cannot be strong everywhere, and I feel that we must husband our resources, such as they are, and try to preserve what is essential to us, hoping that before long the tide may turn and enable us to take the offensive in earnest. I feel myself that only the annihilation of the enemy in the Western Desert is likely materially to affect the course of events in Northern Persia. It is impossible, in my opinion, to set an arbitrary limit to the duration of offensive operations in the Western Desert once these have been embarked upon, nor is it possible to control the enemy's reactions to such operations.

The length of time taken, and the amount of transport required, to transfer troops from Egypt to Iraq and Persia is not always sufficiently taken into account by those who plan operations in this theatre from a distance, but it is a very important factor.

I consider that, by attempting to carry out an offensive in the Western Desert simultaneously with a defensive campaign in Persia with our present resources, we will run a grave risk of failing in both and of being defeated in detail. This is my considered opinion and, though I hope it may prove to be wrong, I feel bound to give it for what it is worth.

8. I have studied the report of the Committee on the implications of setting up an independent command in Iraq—Persia and I consider it makes the best of a bad case. Its conclusions and recommendations make it very obvious that the working of the scheme in practice must depend on compromise in practically every sphere of activity to an excessive degree. It is also clear that the Commander-in-Chief in Iraq—Persia will have to depend on the machinery at the disposal of his colleague in Cairo to an extent which cannot fail to place him in a subordinate position to the latter and so bring about again the situation which I understand the scheme is expressly designed to avoid.

I do not myself think that the scheme is workable in practice, and I feel that there is a grave risk of its breaking down under the stress of active operations. I do not therefore feel able to accept the responsibility of this new Command, and I have informed the Minister of State accordingly.

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