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The Evolution of British Intelligence Assessment,

1940-41

by

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the influence of intelligence assessment on British strategy and operations in the Second World War, during 1940 -1941. Britain was at its most vulnerable during this period and the ability to forecast enemy intentions would be invaluable to British strategic decision-makers. British intelligence assessment was reorganised several times in this period. However, the secondary literature has failed to ask whether these reforms actually helped decision-makers formulate Britain's strategy for survival. The history of British wartime intelligence is generally approving of the Joint Intelligence Committee and its associated organs dedicated to assessment, first the Axis Planning Staff and then the Joint Intelligence Staff. Conversely, their predecessor, the Future Operations (Enemy) Staff, is associated with the twin failures of British arms in Greece and Libya in 1941. Analysis of the accuracy of the forecasts of these bodies in 1940-41 suggest that the very conditions which motivated the British to attempt to forecast enemy strategy also crippled the accuracy of their forecasts. While evolutionary changes of British intelligence assessment would be important for future needs, the impact of strategic forecasting on British strategy in 1941 was marginal.

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List of Acronyms, Abbreviations and Codenames

ACAS(I)	Assistant Chief of the Air Staff (Intelligence)
AI	Air Intelligence
APS	Axis Planning Section
ATB	Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War
BARBAROSSA	German invasion of USSR
BASEBALL	British occupation of Cape Verdes Islands
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CIC	Combined Intelligence Committee
CoS	Chiefs of Staff
DDMI	Deputy Director of Military Intelligence
DDNI	Deputy Director of Naval Intelligence
DMI	Director of Military Intelligence
DNI	Director of Naval Intelligence
FCI	Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries Sub-Committee
FELIX	German attack on Gibraltar
FO(E)S	Future Operations (Enemy) Section
GAF	German Air Force (<i>Luftwaffe</i>)
HUMINT	Human intelligence gathering
IIC	Industrial Intelligence Centre
IS(O)	Intelligence Staff (Operations)
ISIC	Inter-Service Intelligence Committee
ISSB	Inter-Service Security Board
ISTD	Inter-Service Topographical Department
JIS	Joint Intelligence Staff
JIC	Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (of the CoS)
LUSTRE	British expedition to Greece
MARITA	German invasion of Greece
MCC	Military Coordination Committee
MEW	Ministry of Economic Warfare
MI	Military Intelligence
NID	Naval Intelligence Division

List of Acronyms, Abbreviations and Codenames (cont.)

OKH	<i>Oberkommando des Heeres</i> (Army High Command)
OKM	<i>Oberkommando der Kriegsmarine</i> (Naval High Command)
OKW	<i>Oberkommando des Wehrmacht</i> (High Command of the German Armed Forces)
PUMA	British occupation of Grand Canary Island
PR	Photographic reconnaissance
PILGRIM	British occupation of the Canary Islands
RAF	Royal Air Force
RN	Royal Navy
SIC	Scientific Intelligence Centre
SIS	Secret or Special Intelligence Service (or MI6)
SIGINT	Signals intelligence gathering
Skl	<i>Seekriegsleitung</i> (German Naval War Staff)
SOE	Special Operations Executive
SONNENBLUME	(Sunflower) German intervention in Libya
SRC	Situation Reporting Centre
THRUSTER	Occupation of one of the Azores
TIGER	reinforcement of British forces in Egypt
TORCH	Anglo-American invasion of North Africa

Chapter One: Introduction

Part I: Historiography

Throughout the history of conflict, opponents have sought to anticipate enemy action. Until the 20th century, intelligence gathering relied on human agents (HUMINT) and the volume of information gathered was relatively low. Moreover, individuals could make reasonably accurate assessments without need for elaborate bureaucratic processes. Analysis, research and assessment could be effectively accomplished by the same person, and the need to separate intelligence gatherers and decision-makers was thus minimal. However, modern machine communications allowed greater volumes of information to be transmitted - and intercepted - at greater speed. No individual could hope to discern all of the meaning from this mass of information; thus, bureaucratic organisations evolved systems for transforming information into useable intelligence.

The system centring on the British Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was the first bureaucratic organisation dedicated to managing and assessing inter-service intelligence. Its role has been more praised than studied. As noted by Ralph Bennett, a veteran of the British intelligence effort and respected scholar, historians have yet to answer important questions about these bodies and their role in British strategy:

Was the JIC as much of a help to the Chiefs of Staff as it ought to have been? ...Would some different arrangement have cleared the way for speedier decision-making?¹

This dissertation seeks to address these issues by focussing on the JIC's initial

¹ Ralph Bennett, "World War II Intelligence: The Last Ten Years' Work Reviewed." from Intelligence Investigations: How Ultra Changed History. (London: Cass, 1996), p. 60.

attempts to assess enemy capabilities and intentions in the Second World War. In the first half of 1941, the Chiefs of Staff (CoS) formed and reformed several bodies for strategic assessment. First was the Future Operations (Enemy) Staff (FOES), who masqueraded as the German General Staff and reported directly to the CoS. After the failure of the FOES experiment, assessment was reorganised into the Axis Planning Staff (APS). They subsequently became known as the Joint Intelligence Staff (JIS) and were absorbed by the JIC - this arrangement would last until the end of the war. The impact of the shifts in structure and methodology on the accuracy and the results of British assessment have yet to be examined.

Concurrent to the organisational upheavals in British intelligence assessment, Hitler enjoyed his period of greatest strategic freedom. From the fall of France in June, 1940 to the invasion of the Soviet Union in June, 1941, Germany faced no active opposition on the continent and had the capability to strike in any direction. The British feared that Hitler would choose to concentrate his superior forces against the Mediterranean, which was their second most important war-fighting position, after the United Kingdom itself.² In theory, under these circumstances intelligence could act as an important force multiplier: accurate assessment of enemy intentions would help British decision-makers to deploy their limited forces against real threats, while preventing diversions to false alarms. This paper seeks to determine whether British intelligence did in fact act as a force multiplier on the strategic plane; whether the assessments of FOES and APS were accurate and what influence they had

² Michael Howard, The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War, (New York: Praeger, 1968), p. 9.

on British strategy in the Mediterranean in the spring of 1941, if any.

Assessment is a necessary part of the process which transforms data into useful intelligence. While the organization of the mechanisms of assessment may vary according to experience and priorities, the goal is functionally the same. Conceptually, the various parts of intelligence form a continuum from the source of information to the decision of the leader - assessment is the final stage in production before consumption. E.E. Thomas defines assessment as:

...accepting...evaluated and analysed intelligence from wherever...it is produced and developing the synthesis required in a form useable by top decision-takers.³

In theory, assessment should be a communal and an open process in order to preserve intellectual honesty in an objective search for the truth. When any one set of interests, whether an individual or a department, controls the assessment process, then intelligence is at the mercy of the subjective whims and biases. The motive to seek a monopoly on information is power. Advisors trying to influence decision-making use intelligence to improve the value of their advice. They may wish to retain exclusive control over sources of secret intelligence to maintain this advantage.⁴ Conversely, a leader can demand to see "raw" intelligence direct from the source in order to retain exclusive control of the decision-making process, as Churchill did in 1940.

Meanwhile, modern communications and intelligence gathering systems led to a

³ E.E. Thomas, "The Evolution of the JIC System up to and during World War II" from C. Andrew and J. Noakes, ed.s Intelligence and International Relations, (Exeter: Exeter University, 1987), p. 220.

⁴ generally, John R. Ferris, "'Indulged In All Too Little'?: Vansittart, Intelligence and Appeasement." Diplomacy and Statecraft, 6, 1 (1995), pp. 122-175.

multiplication of sources and the exponential growth in the volume of data. The sheer mass of data to be processed soon exceeded the capabilities of individuals, thus requiring bureaucratic intelligence organisations. These organisations evolved differentiated functions in the intelligence hierarchy. At the beginning of the process are the specialists who gather and interpret information. At the end are the consumers who take intelligence into account in their decision-making process. And in the middle are the assessors who must collate relevant individual facts from multiple sources into a meaningful whole.

In the theory of the intelligence cycle, the "middle management" of the information hierarchy obey orders from those above (leaders/consumers) and direct those below (gatherers/producers). Assessing bodies must account for the biases and character of superiors when presenting intelligence. For intelligence to be effective, consumers must trust the people and organisation that provide the product. Presentation can affect the influence of intelligence as much as its accuracy.

Assessment has received little attention from histories of intelligence, in part because its influence on events is not easy to understand. Far more appealing are Machiavellian stratagems and covert acts of derring-do. Certainly, the first works on intelligence during the Second World War were "sensationalistic, inaccurate and influential."⁵ Highly speculative and ultimately unscholarly tales of Allied deception operations have subsequently attracted much academic criticism.⁶ Despite the best efforts of the official historians of British

⁵ John Ferris, "Ralph Bennett and the Study of Ultra," Intelligence and National Security, 6, 2 (1991), p. 473.

⁶ Anthony Cave Brown, Bodyguard of Lies, (New York: Harper & Row, 1975), pp. 32-44. Frederick W. Winterbotham, The Ultra Secret J.C. Masterman, The Double-Cross System

(continued...)

intelligence, the "Coventry myth" - that Churchill knowingly sacrificed the city to the Luftwaffe to protect Ultra - continues to persist in military folklore.⁷ The "hints of amoral stratagems" about Churchill and intelligence have a certain romantic appeal which continues to capture the popular imagination.⁸

More modest and accurate are the personal histories of the veterans of the Allied signals intelligence (SIGINT) community. The memoirs and biographies of those who participated in the Allied campaign against enemy communications have been invaluable in recording when SIGINT was effective and when it was not.⁹ However, due to compartmentalised security, few experienced more than the intercepts they labouriously worked to decipher and translate. Thus, they do not directly contribute to our consideration of British strategic assessment.

The material relating to the experience of the veterans of assessment is even more limited. The biography of Stewart Menzies, head of the Secret Intelligence Service (SIS), for example, barely mentions the JIC. However, biographers and memoirs have preserved the invaluable experiences of a few key members of the JIC and the JIS. Based on the personal papers and recollections of their subjects, these books add personality to the deliberations of

(...continued)

in the War of 1939-1945, (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972), and E.E. Montagu, The Man Who Never Was (Peter Davies: 1975).

⁷ F.H. Hinsley, E.E. Thomas, C.F.G. Ransom, and R.C. Knight, British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations, (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1979), 1:317-18, 528-548.

⁸ Brown, *Ibid.*, p. 821.

⁹ Gordon Welchman, The Hut Six Story: The Breaking of the Enigma Codes, (New York: McGraw, 1982), F.H. Hinsley and Alan Stripp, ed.s, Codebreakers: The inside Story of Bletchley Park, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); David Kahn, The Codebreakers, (New York: MacMillan, 1967).

an otherwise faceless committee in a war overrun by committees.

The unpublished ADM files of Admiral John Godfrey, Director of Naval Intelligence (DNI) from 1939-42, have spawned at least two books. Donald McLachlan depends heavily on these files for Room 39: Naval Intelligence in Action, 1939-45, one of the most read books on naval intelligence.¹⁰ The late Patrick Beesly based his biography of Godfrey on the ADM files and his unpublished memoirs.¹¹ Both relate naval views uncritically, producing partisan perspective - for example, a marked tendency to blame the War Office for the problems in British assessment. Beesly and McLachlan correctly credit Godfrey with a key role in the development of important bodies in the British intelligence organisation; however, they overestimate his influence on the evolution of the assessment system. They document the transition from FOES to APS without appreciating that this change in structure also constituted a rejection of methodologies advocated by Godfrey.

Patrick Howarth's Intelligence Chief Extraordinary is a vital secondary source of JIC deliberations. As widely respected as Godfrey and far better liked was William Cavendish-Bentinck, the Foreign Office representative and chairman of the JIC for the duration of the war. Noted for his diplomatic handling of committee meetings, Cavendish-Bentinck also laid much of the blame for the dysfunction of British assessment at the feet of the Army.¹²

Cavendish-Bentinck's biography is one of the best surveys of JIC work. Howarth, himself a veteran of the SOE, cleverly integrates the JIC's reports into Cavendish-Bentinck's

¹⁰ Donald McLachlan, Room 39: Naval Intelligence in Action, 1939-45, (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968).

¹¹ Patrick Beesly, Very Special Admiral, (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1980).

¹² Patrick Howarth, Intelligence Chief Extraordinary: The Life of the Ninth Duke of Portland, (London: Bodley Head, 1986).

story, despite the fact that they were still officially classified when the book was published in 1986. Some of the JIC reports were reproduced in the records of the Chiefs of Staff, which were not classified. Unfortunately, Howarth does little more than list the JIC's major conclusions, without critically analysing their influence on Allied strategic decisions. Furthermore, this as well as all the other JIC biographies are not properly footnoted, which grievously impairs their academic value, though Howarth does distinguish between quotations from Cavendish-Bentinck's personal recollections and written sources.

The War Office has been surprisingly lax in defending its record of wartime intelligence. Much maligned by his colleagues, Major-General Francis Davidson, was Director of Military Intelligence (DMI) from late 1940 to 1943. In Secret Service, Christopher Andrew grants only a page to his leading role in the reform of British assessment in the spring of 1941, though it is a page more than most.¹³ Cavendish-Bentinck describes Davidson as a "very mediocre officer...with a permanent desire to make our reports fit in with the views of CIGS."¹⁴ One of his own subordinates, Noel Annan, compared him unfavourably to Kenneth Strong.¹⁵

Strong was the head of the German section of the War Office until early 1942, but is better known as Eisenhower's intelligence officer in the European campaign. He has several trenchant criticisms of British assessment, especially of FOES, but his observations

¹³ Christopher Andrew, Her Majesty's Secret Service: The Making of British Intelligence Community, (New York: Viking/Penguin, 1985), p. 675.

¹⁴ Howarth, *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁵ Noel Annan, Changing Enemies: The Defeat and Regeneration of Germany, (London: Harper Collins, 1995), 65.

are disappointingly superficial.¹⁶ Oddly, Cavendish-Bentinck describes Strong as a valuable member of the JIS, which Strong does not mention in either of his memoirs.¹⁷

Noel Annan worked with both Strong and Davidson, but after the war sided with the critics in his evaluation of the War Office participation in joint intelligence. A member of the German section of Military Intelligence (MI14) and then the JIS, Annan relies on Howarth and British Intelligence to describe assessment before he joined the JIS in 1943. However, his account contains some unique anecdotes and impressions of the daily workings of the JIS, some of which validate the complaints of his colleagues from other services. He also makes a frank judgement on the work of British assessment: "...our greatest, and yet most comprehensible, failure was to get inside Hitler's mind and think like him."¹⁸

The few secondary sources dealing with the JIC have been equally lacking in academic rigour. As expected, the official history of British wartime intelligence gives a detailed description of the evolution of the organisation of assessment. However, it does little more. Despite full access to documents, the official history merely "cites several JIC predictions approvingly without attempting a general verdict."¹⁹ Its account of the motivations for and the ramifications of the change from FOES to APS is incomplete at best. At worst, its estimate of the influence of the JIC system on British strategy and operations in the first part of 1941 is demonstrably erroneous.

¹⁶ Kenneth Strong, Intelligence at the Top: The Recollections of an Intelligence Officer, (London: Cassel, 1968), and Men of Intelligence (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1971); Strong's section was originally designated MI3(b), and later MI14 on 15 May, 1940. British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:162n.

¹⁷ Howarth, *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁸ Annan, *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁹ Ralph Bennett, Behind the Battle, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1994), p. xviii.

One of the co-authors of British Intelligence passed an all-too general verdict on the JIC in 1985. In his lecture "The Evolution of the JIC System," E.E. Thomas felt that the JIC system embodied "the principle of the search for truth through the medium of the seminar," concluding that "...there are worse ways of constructing a window on the world."²⁰ Though his general observations on the work of British assessment are a useful introduction to the form and function of the JIC, his references are few and his documentation is based on secondary sources, which is to be expected for an oral presentation.

Most of the commentary on British wartime intelligence have passed over the JIC system with cursory statements of general approval; some are more critical, but no more incisive or scholarly. Angelo Codevilla was harshly critical of the performance of the British JIC in wartime. He blamed committee "group-think" for the failure to anticipate the invasion of Norway, the implications of Blitzkrieg doctrine, the capabilities of certain enemy weapons systems and the invasion of the USSR, among others:

Because it could not overcome its members' prejudices, the JIC did not sufficiently reduce the ambiguity of the evidence available but issued bad guesses on land questions.²¹

In contrast to E.E. Thomas's "search for truth", he accuses the JIC of sacrificing truth in a search for consensus. His criticisms have merit, though Codevilla's supporting arguments are wanting. At the time of his presentation, only Volume I of British Intelligence had been published.

²⁰ E.E. Thomas, *Ibid.*, p. 232-233.

²¹ Angelo Codevilla, "Comparative Historical Experience of Doctrine and Organization," from Intelligence Requirements for the 1980's, Number Two: Analysis and Estimates. Roy Godson, ed. (Washington: National Strategy Information Center, Inc., 1980), pp. 23-24.

R. V. Jones' comments about the JIC lend some weight to these criticisms. Jones is noted for his involvement in the assessment of science and technology during and after the war. Furthermore, he spent a year serving on the postwar JIC. In 1954, Jones opined that:

...too much time and effort was dissipated in the JIC machine. I did my best to make it work despite memories of the comparative ineffectuality of the JIC in war.²²

Part of Jones's impatience with the JIC may lie in his specialized interests. Evidence of an opponent's technical capability is empirically observable. Highly specialised topics like scientific intelligence require expertise and are not amenable to assessment by committee. The process of assessment of enemy strategic intentions is necessarily more interpretive and impressionistic.

To attempt a more thorough analysis of the evolution of British strategic assessment requires an estimate of the accuracy and influence of its forecasts. Attempts to measure the accuracy of the JIC system have been hampered by the long wait for the declassification of British documents and the translation of German primary and secondary sources. The papers of FOES, APS and the JIC are the backbone of this work, plus the minutes of the latter's meetings. Also invaluable are the meetings and papers of the CoS. Comments on the products and organisation of assessment are rare but revealing.

Understanding Germany's strategy in the Second World War is complicated by the chaotic command structure and the lack of direct evidence of Hitler's objectives. The memoirs and apologias of Hitler's advisors and field commanders contain little but

²² R. V. Jones, Reflections on Intelligence, (London: Heinemann, 1989), p. 156.

impressions and wishful second-guessing of German strategy.²³ Walter Warliamont's work - more of an analysis based mostly on second-hand experiences than a memoir - is an influential and valuable work which describes the inner workings of Germany's Supreme Command, the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW).²⁴ Franz Halder's war diary stands alone as the most complete record of the Army, or *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH) view of German strategy, though the English translation is flawed.²⁵ Hitler's consultations with OKW and his naval chief are the most direct documentation of his decision-making process.²⁶ The Führer's conferences with Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, CiC of the Navy, reveal the details of the alternative Mediterranean strategy persistently advocated by the *Kriegsmarine*.²⁷

Just such a campaign against the British Empire was the greatest fear of British strategists in 1941, and what might have been has captured the imagination of historians for over five decades later. Initial works focussed on Germany's actual strategy and policy

²³ Galeazzo Ciano, Ciano's Diary, 1937-1938, (London, 1952). Keitel, Wilhelm. Keitel, Trans. David Irving, In the Service of the Reich, (New York: Stein and Day, 1979); Albert Kesselring, Kesselring: A Soldier's Record, (Westport: Greenwood, 1970); Erich von. Manstein, Trans. Anthony G. Powell. Lost Victories (Munich: Bernard & Graefe Verlag, 1982); Erich Raeder, Trans. Henry W. Drexel. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder: My Life, (Annapolis: U.S. Navel Institute, 1960); Rommel, Erwin. B.H. Liddell Hart, ed. The Rommel Papers, (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1953).

²⁴ Walter Warliamont, Trans. R.H. Barry. Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-45, (New York: Praeger, 1966).

²⁵ Franz Halder, Trans. Kriegstagebuch. The Halder Diaries: The Private War Diaries of Colonel General Franz Halder. (Dunn Loring: T.N. Dupuy Associates, 1976).

²⁶ Helmuth Greiner. "OKW War Diary Draft Entries, Dec. 40-Mar. 41." World War II German Military Studies, Vol. 9, (London: Garland, 1979) - henceforth GMS.

²⁷ Führer Conferences on Naval Affairs, 1939-1945. (London: Greenhill, 1990).

towards the Mediterranean states, Spain, Vichy France and Italy.²⁸ However, in order to evaluate whether the fears expressed by British assessment were justified, we must first attempt to understand Hitler's strategic calculations. In the inevitable debate as to whether Hitler followed a strategy of opportunism or a fixed plan, D.C. Watt contends that it was a synthesis of both:

...his decisions, both in content and timing, were a response to the actions of others and the effects he anticipated these actions would have on his freedom to pursue his long term aims.²⁹

Building on the work of Andreas Hillgruber, Gerhard Schreiber reinterprets Hitler's Mediterranean policies of 1941 within his long-term strategic "programme."³⁰ Schreiber, along with other German authors whose works have previously not been available in English, is also responsible for the authoritative account of strategies, potential and actual, in the third volume of Germany's official history of the war. They make a powerful argument for their exhaustive exploration of rationale for studying Hitler's abortive plans and intentions:

²⁸ Walter Ansel, Hitler and the Middle Sea (Durham: Duke University Press, 1972); Charles B. Burdick, Germany's Military Strategy and Spain in World War II. (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1968); Donald S. Derweiler, "Spain and the Axis During World War II." Review of Politics, 33, 1, (1971): 36-53; Denis Smyth, "Franco and World War Two." History Today, 35, (November, 1985): 10-15.

²⁹ D.C. Watt, "Hitler's Visit to Rome and the May Weekend Crisis: A Study in Hitler's Response to External Stimuli." Journal of Contemporary History, 9, 1, (1974): 23-32; contrary: H.W. Koch, "Hitler's 'Programme' and the Genesis of Operation 'Barbarossa.'" The Historical Journal, 26, 4, (1983): 891-920.

³⁰ Andreas Hillgruber, "England's Place in Hitler's Plans for World Domination." Journal of Contemporary History, 9, 1, (1974): 5-22; Gerhard Schreiber, "The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy in 1940. 'Programme' and Military Planning." from The German Military in the Age of Total War. ed. Wilhelm Deist. (Dover: Berg, 1985).

...even the most unrealistic planning is, in itself, also real, and that ideas if given half a chance of realisation, seldom remain mere ideas. In other words, they reveal the dimension of volition, i.e. what moves history forward, and usually influence it more powerfully than that which has manifestly taken place.³¹

This rationale also explains the need for British assessment to study the ephemeral realm of German intentions. Historical research into that realm still continues: Norman Goda introduces important modifications to the conventional interpretation of Hitler's intentions towards Gibraltar.³²

Particular assessments must be placed in the context of the strategic decision-making process before any judgement about whether a particular assessment was helpful, harmful or simply irrelevant. That process is well documented, though establishing what a leader knew and when he knew it is not without pitfalls. The accounts of the British decision-makers are complicated by the fact that most were published before the existence of Ultra could be publicly acknowledged. Even their private memoirs are guarded - the diaries of Generals Ismay and Alanbrooke reveal little beyond what has already been published. Churchill's Premier files reveals a great interest in intelligence but few direct references to the JIC itself. Nevertheless, Churchill's memoirs and the official histories are a useful general record of British strategy and policy.³³ John Kennedy, the Director of Military Operations,

³¹ Gerhard Schreiber, Bend Stegemann and Detlef Vogel. Trans. Dean S. McMurray. Germany and the Second World War: The Mediterranean, South-east Europe, and North Africa. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3:301.

³² Norman J.W. Goda, "The Riddle of the Rock: A Reassessment of German Motives for the Capture of Gibraltar in the Second World War." Journal of Contemporary History, 28, 2, (1993): 297-314; and "Hitler's Demand for Casablanca in 1940: Incident or Policy?" International History Review, 16, 3, (1994): 491-510.

³³ Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War. 6 vols. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, (continued...))

provides invaluable critical insight into the planning of British operations.³⁴ There is no lack of secondary sources on this subject, of which only a few specialised contributions are relevant to our considerations.³⁵

Before considering the question of the influence of intelligence on strategy, we should define the spacial and temporal parameters of terms like "strategy." At the local or tactical level of decision making, combatants count on the quality of their weapons and preparation to use them for personal survival. Action is typically resolved in hours or days. Campaigns take place on the operational level of military action, taking from days to months for resolution. Strategy, sometimes called "grand" or "national" strategy, determines the allocation and use of resources in different campaigns. Operations determine how those resources are deployed and managed to gain tactical advantage.³⁶

Controversies in the historiography of operational intelligence hold important methodological clues for this consideration of strategy. As Ralph Bennett noted, the early works on Ultra were critically flawed by the assumption "that intelligence is the main, if not

(...continued)

1948-53); J.R.M. Butler, Grand Strategy, vol. 2, September 1939-June 1941. (London: HMSO, 1957), I.S.O. Playfair, F.C. Flynn, C.J.C. Molony and S.E. Toomer, The Mediterranean and the Middle East, vol. 2. (London: HMSO, 1956); British Intelligence. *Ibid.*; Llewellyn Woodward, British Foreign Policy in the Second World War, 2 vols (London: HMSO, 1970-1).

³⁴ John Kennedy, Bernard Fergusson, ed. The Business of War: The War Narrative of Major-General Sir John Kennedy. (London: Hutchinson, 1957).

³⁵ Ralph Bennett, Ultra and Mediterranean Strategy. (New York: William Morrow, 1989); John Connell, Wavell: Scholar and Soldier, (London: Collins, 1964); Harold E. Raugh, Wavell in the Middle East, 1939-1941: a Study in Generalship, (London: Brassey's, 1993); Denis Smyth, Diplomacy and Strategy of Survival: British Policy and Franco's Spain, 1940-41, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

³⁶ see John Gooch's introduction to Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War, (London: Frank Cass, 1990), pp. 1-9.

the sole, determinant of military action."³⁷ Beginning in the late-1980s, scholars of intelligence questioned the influence of intelligence in operations, and as a result moderated and defined the revisionist effect of the revelations of intelligence on the historiography of the war.

The question of influence is answered by isolating relationships of cause and effect. Controversy over the importance of different causes is often rooted in imprecise terminology.³⁸ Causes may be ranked in four categories: sufficient, necessary, contributory and irrelevant.³⁹ For the purposes of the history of intelligence, the first and last are less troublesome than the others. As with all history, irrelevant factors abound and are discarded once identified with basic research. Sufficient cause rarely exists as a "single all-revealing item." The historian's task is to determine the least number of necessary causes which collectively form sufficiency.⁴⁰ Intelligence alone was not sufficient to win the war, but it contributed to the effectiveness of Allied operations - without intelligence, Allied operations might have cost more in blood and/or treasure.⁴¹

Recent studies of the evolution of Western assessment processes have the benefit of

³⁷ Bennett, "Intelligence and Strategy in World War II," *Ibid.*, p. 130.

³⁸ Klaus-Jurgen Muller, "A German Perspective on Allied Deception Operations in the Second World War," Michael Handel, ed., Strategic and Operational Deception in the Second World War, (London: Frank Cass, 1987), pp. 301-326. Michael Handel, "Introduction: Strategic and Operational Deception in Historical Perspective," *Ibid.*, pp. 1-91. Klaus-Jurgen Muller, letter to the editors, Intelligence and National Security, 3, 4 (1988), p. 173. Michael Handel, "Methodological Mischief: A Reply to Professor Muller," (1989); John Ferris, "The Intelligence-Deception Complex: An Anatomy." Intelligence and National Security, 4, (October 1989): 719-734.

³⁹ Ferris, "The Intelligence-Deception Complex," *Ibid.*, p. 727 and *passim*.

⁴⁰ Bennett, Behind the Battle, *Ibid.*, p. 727.

⁴¹ Ferris, "Ralph Bennett and the Study of Ultra," *Ibid.*, p. 474-75.

more complete secondary documentation.⁴² The trauma of Pearl Harbour and the growth of Soviet nuclear capabilities - real or imagined - powerfully concentrated American attention on how the organisational structure of assessment can prevent intelligence failure. American writers have led in the field on policies and theories of assessment. They are divided between the didactic versus the "no-fault" schools of thought.⁴³ Broadly speaking, the former believes in the perfectability of intelligence through the application of the proper methodologies of assessment and organisational structure.⁴⁴ The latter asserts that no single method or structure is foolproof, and that sometimes not even accurate intelligence can prevent failure.⁴⁵ Though based mostly on the postwar intelligence organizations, their research presents a useful framework for critical analysis of the JIC system.

According to Herman, the American CIA and the British JIC organise assessment following collegial and the central models, respectively. In the central model, the central assessing body uses the data and analyses of the intelligence producers, but independently forms its own assessment. The collegial or community-based model recognises departmental

⁴² Michael Herman, "Assessment Machinery: British and American Models," Intelligence and National Security 10, 4 (1995); Philip H. Davies, "Organizational Politics and the Development of Britain's Intelligence Producer/Consumer Interface," *Ibid.*, pp. 113-132. Neither, however, addresses the wartime record of FOES or APS.

⁴³ Ferris, "Coming in from the Cold War: The Historiography of American Intelligence, 1945-1900," Diplomatic History, 19, 1 (1995), p. 94.

⁴⁴ Sherman Kent, Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy, (Hamden: Archon, 1965); Ray S. Cline, Secrets, Spies, and Scholars: Blueprint of the Essential CIA, (Washington: Acropolis, 1976); Roger Hilsman, Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions, (Glencoe: Free Press, 1956).

⁴⁵ Richard K. Betts, "Policymakers and Intelligence Analysts: Love, Hate or Indifference?" Intelligence and National Security 3, (January, 1988): 184-89; Michael Handel, "Intelligence and Military Operations," in Intelligence and Military Operations, ed. Michael Handel, (London: Cass, 1990); Roberta Wholstetter, Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision, (Stanford: Univ. Press, 1962).

autonomy: the intelligence community forms assessments based on consensus.⁴⁶ In Phillip Davies's analysis of "The British Producer/Consumer Interface," the constitutional centralisation of governmental power determines the development of a decentralized intelligence system. The small central government of the U.K., the Prime Minister and the Cabinet system form the hub of the power structure, from which "...the various departments of state which consume intelligence radiate like the spokes of a wheel, pulling the agencies in a range of completely different directions."⁴⁷ Though collegial systems may have central aspects (and vice versa), the hallmark of the British model is the autonomy and independence of the organisations within that community. The implication for intelligence is that a tradition of departmental independence naturally leads to competitiveness over any means of influencing those in power, like intelligence assessment:

With individual departments highly autonomous in their formulation of policy, and their power highly centralised in the Cabinet, ministers and civil servants have traditionally held a proprietary attitude towards analysis and decision-making....⁴⁸

Such a community would naturally be hostile to any form of central assessment beyond their control.

However, contrary to the assumptions of the current and past literature about assessment, the wartime experience of the British JIC strategic assessment system does not fall so easily into the decentralised collegial model. Administratively independent from the rest of the intelligence bureaucracy, FOES was devoted to producing long-term strategic

⁴⁶ Herman, *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁷ Davies, *Ibid.*, pp. 113-132.

⁴⁸ Davies, *Ibid.*, p. 114.

appreciations for its sole consumer, the CoS. While the rest of the JIC system was organised on a collegial model, FOES constituted an experiment in central assessment.

As we have seen, secondary and official scholarship has superficially recognised the structural changes in the spring of 1941, but the evolution of British organs of assessment is too often a footnote or a simple succession of acronyms. The result is a distorted perception of influence of intelligence on British strategy. The FOES experiment is inaccurately assumed to have been abolished because of the twin defeats of British forces in Greece and Libya, without critical examination of its actual successes and failures. Historians have similarly overlooked the APS, simply accepting that it was more effective than FOES because the system did not change for the remainder of the war. They have not questioned to what extent the reforms of 1941 actually improved forecasts. A closer examination of the real reasons for reform and the APS's assessments of the threat to Libya and Spain reveals significant inaccuracies and omissions in the historical evaluation of the JIC system. Understanding assessment in the spring of 1941 is important to defining the causal role of intelligence in decision-making, specifically in relation to British strategy during the war and generally to intelligence as a practice.

Part II: Interwar to 1939.

The history of British intelligence during the interwar period has been overshadowed by the Second World War. In hindsight, both the budgetary and organisational difficulties of interwar British intelligence have been exaggerated. In fact, the organs of intelligence gathering continued and flourished after the Great War. However, the quality of collection

exceeded that of assessment. The various governmental departments and ministries were content to assess intelligence without the benefit of interdepartmental consultation or specialised assessment bodies. This system worked well for the requirements of peacetime.

However, in the 1930s requirements changed with the rising threat of Germany, leading to the reorganisation of British intelligence. New bodies dedicated to interdepartmental research and collection of specialised sources of intelligence proliferated, laying the groundwork for cooperation on other issues. As war loomed, the services and the Foreign Office committed themselves to cooperation on intelligence matters. This formed the core of the JIC and the JIC system.

It is tempting to blame the initial failures of the war on the disorganisation and/or under funding of intelligence. According to D.C. Watt and Wesley Wark, among others, British pre-war intelligence suffered from duplication and conflict trying to assess German military capability and intentions.⁴⁹ However, neither the finances nor the findings of British intelligence were really so dire. Despite the economic crisis and fiscal austerity of the period, the size and budget of British intelligence matched that of the other great powers.⁵⁰ Though much work remains to be done on the period, recent scholarship suggests that the fighting services had a sound estimate of German capabilities and battle doctrine before the outbreak

⁴⁹ D.C. Watt, "British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War in Europe," from Knowing Ones' Enemies: Intelligence Assessment Before the Two World Wars, Ernest R. May, ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), pp. 237-270; Wesley K. Wark, The Ultimate Enemy: British Intelligence and Nazi Germany, 1933-1939, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

⁵⁰ Ferris, "'Indulged in All Too Little?' ...", *Ibid.*, p. 127.

of war.⁵¹ That this understanding did not translate into battlefield effectiveness in war was the result of a multitude of faults, but not of intelligence.

After the Great War, the War Office and Air ministry subordinated intelligence to the operational planning branches of the services; the Admiralty did much the same, in practice if not organisationally. Planners tended to make their own assessments. As a result, service intelligence tended to work in isolation from both superiors and other services.⁵²

Thus, while intelligence gathering by dedicated organisations and military attaches thrived, the intelligence assessment branches of the services languished in obscurity. Career officers of ability preferred active service to the "professional backwater" of intelligence.⁵³ According to Cavendish-Bentinck, this affected the quality of War Office intelligence:

...the reason for the mediocrity of the directors of military intelligence was that officers who went into intelligence were not regarded as likely to command troops and rise to top rank.⁵⁴

For the most part, this system sufficed for the needs of peacetime. However, with the approach of war the need for collection and research dedicated to technical issues grew. Mutual interest not entirely within the jurisdiction of any one department motivated interdepartmental cooperation, beginning with economic intelligence. The specialized nature of economic matters required diligent research which was impossible at higher levels, hence

⁵¹ Chris Bell, British Ideas of Sea Power, 1919-1941, (University of Calgary, 1998), pp. 28-9; J.P. Harris, "British Military Intelligence and the Rise of German Mechanized Forces, 1929-40," Intelligence and National Security, 6, 2 (1991), *passim*; Joseph Maiolo, "'I Believe the Hun is Cheating' British Admiralty Technical Intelligence and the German Navy, 1936-39," Intelligence and National Security, 11, 1 (1996): 32-58.

⁵² British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:9.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1:10.

⁵⁴ Howarth, *Ibid.*, p. 116.

a new body in the middle of the intelligence hierarchy was needed.

Created in 1930, the Industrial Intelligence Centre (IIC) was originally formed to perform research for two committees concerned with economic warfare - the Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War (ATB) - and foreign industrial mobilization - the Industrial Intelligence in Foreign Countries Sub-Committee (FCI). By 1934 the IIC's mandate expanded "to assist in the collection, interpretation and distribution of industrial intelligence" for the services and the ATB Committee.⁵⁵ In late 1937, the IIC gained the exclusive right to analyse and circulate such intelligence. The IIC became the sole conduit for the assessment of economic information, thus replacing four separate voices with one.

Though it was the first example of interdepartmental cooperation, the IIC only shed light on the industrial potential of German military power.⁵⁶ In response to the increasing menace of Nazi Germany, the Services became more interested in the state of their intelligence departments and in inter-service cooperation on issues other than the industrial, at least in principle. Both the Air Ministry and the War Office raised the top positions in intelligence to the level of Deputy Director. After some six months of desultory discussion, they created Britain's first experiment in joint consultation: the Inter-Service Intelligence Committee (ISIC).

⁵⁵ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:31.

⁵⁶ The simple existence of IIC could not materially improve the quality of industrial intelligence that Britain was receiving, which was in most cases poor. British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:33. In fact, Wesley Wark argues that the IIC view of German mobilization was distorted by exaggeration, which in turn distorted British foreign policy. Wark, "British Intelligence Assessments of Nazi Germany," from The Missing Dimension: Governments and Intelligence Communities in the Twentieth Century, Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds. (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 98.

Composed of only the senior members of the three service intelligence branches, lacking a budget, a secretariat and even a regular schedule, ISIC left no records and in six months was renamed the Joint Intelligence Sub-Committee (JIC). As a sub-committee of the COS, the JIC had the same membership as the ISIC and could also draw on the IIC for expertise. The JIC was to assist the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) prepare papers which required intelligence from more than one service. In theory, the JIC would derive a coherent assessment from the products of Britain's diverse intelligence community.

While these adjustments improved intelligence sharing, they did little to further strategic assessment. The JIC produced no long term appreciations which had any impact on British strategic thinking in peacetime, despite inheriting the ISIC's responsibility to draft "Joint appreciations on possible enemy operations from the Intelligence point of view."⁵⁷ Without a written charter to direct its activities, the JIC had neither the authority nor the initiative to produce papers spontaneously.⁵⁸ With few operations to plan in peacetime, the JIC was better organised but had little to write about which was important to British decision-makers. They managed one pre-war appreciation of note, a study of air-power in combat in Spain and China. The Air Ministry obstructed its drafting and dismissed its conclusions on the basis of insufficient and unreliable evidence, a view which was not entirely unjustified.⁵⁹

Few long term appreciations were possible without reference to politics, especially though not exclusively in peace. The JIC could not credibly appreciate foreign intentions

⁵⁷ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:35-36.

⁵⁸ Denis-Capel Dunn to Admiral Godfrey, letter, 13 Aug. 42. ADM 223/465.

⁵⁹ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:37-8.

without representation from the Foreign Office. However, the Foreign Office treated intelligence quite differently from the fighting services. Whereas intelligence was an adjunct to the prime duty of the services - combat - collecting and assessing information was indivisible from diplomatic activity. Thus intelligence was traditionally not the responsibility of a separate administrative entity within the department. In essence, senior Foreign Office officials performed all three roles of executive, adviser and assessor of diplomatic and political intelligence.⁶⁰

The Foreign Office jealously controlled the dissemination of political information in order to maintain its prerogative over advising on foreign policy. The Foreign Office had participated in the ATB but for the most part scorned interdepartmental cooperation. It had sent a representative to sit at a JIC meeting for the first time in November, 1938, but its attention thereafter was described as "spasmodic."⁶¹ Even after the organisation of specialist agencies like the SIS, the Foreign Office continued to collect and assess their own intelligence, both overt and covert.

The epitome of the Foreign Office's long tradition of direct involvement in the arcane world of espionage (HUMINT) was Robert Vansittart. As Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office from 1930 to 1938, then Chief Diplomatic Advisor until 1941, Vansittart held positions of potential influence and took great interest in secret intelligence, both official and unofficial. One of the latter was a privately funded network of German contacts run by businessman and amateur spymaster Malcolm Christie. Vansittart used the products of his

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1:5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 1:42.

"private detective agency" in a manner contrary to the theoretical principles of modern bureaucratic intelligence organisation. According to Herman, the organisation of assessment must "...promote *objective analysis*, with the discipline of scrutiny and argument to eliminate departmental biases."⁶² Vansittart's analysis and circulation of secretly obtained intelligence was anything but objective:

He circulated some reports as ammunition against opponents, he withheld others which might be used against himself, he used references to secret sources and to back appeals to his own unique authority.⁶³

Rather than making an assessment based on all available information, Vansittart selectively used intelligence to support his Germanophobic assessments and policy recommendations.

Comprehending the mental processes of Hitler, the key Nazi decision-maker, was fraught with difficulty. In peace, the fine lines between propaganda, bluff and actual intentions often have no material manifestation. German strategy was ultimately decided by Hitler, and his decisions often defied prediction by British conventional strategic wisdom. Ironically, the theoretical flaws in Vansittart's private intelligence system did not prevent accurate results in practise. His *idée fixe* of a threatening and aggressive Germany, while contrary to an academically sound "search for truth," produced an accurate assessment of German intentions:

Precisely because Vansittart focussed on will rather than material, he understood Hitler's thought and German policy better than his contemporaries....⁶⁴

However, understanding was not sufficient for successful forecasting. Hitler's

⁶² Herman, *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁶³ Ferris, "'Indulged All Too Little?'...", *Ibid.*, p. 128-9.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 138.

opportunistic improvisations limited the ability of British intelligence to predict his actions. The plans for the occupation of the Rhineland were issued five days before operations began, and the whole process took only three weeks from Hitler's initial decision to completion. Neither signals intercepts nor human sources could have provided the British any warning.⁶⁵

Understanding a foe's psychology does not in and of itself determine the influence of an assessment. Though basically correct about Germany's power and leadership, Vansittart assessment ultimately failed to influence events because of the circumstances of British power and leadership. He did influence British thinking, but British weakness dictated that a policy of confrontation was no less risky than a policy of appeasement.

Furthermore, Vansittart's preconceptions also made him less critical of supportive intelligence, and thus more susceptible to deception and false reports on those lines. Several were eventually traced to a "notorious rumour-producing agency" run by the Germans in Berne, but not before they had caused no little embarrassment for some credulous officials and HMG. Vansittart announced German submarines were concentrating off British harbours, at the same time the British embassy in Berlin reported the Germans were planning to bomb the Home Fleet in port.⁶⁶

At the beginning of 1939, concern for the collation and distribution of intelligence reports led the War Office and the SIS to suggest Foreign Office membership on a permanent interdepartmental body dedicated to this task. The incidents mentioned proved the need to determine the genuine threats among the multitude of false reports and rumours, leading to

⁶⁵ Watt, "British Intelligence and the Coming of the Second World War..." *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

⁶⁶ Godfrey to Charles Morgan, letter, 28 Aug. 42. ADM 223/465.

the creation of the Situation Reporting Centre (SRC) in April.⁶⁷ The modern doctrines of combined arms warfare required a spectrum of knowledge broader than any one service or ministry. A report like the last item above could theoretically demand the expertise of the Navy, the RAF, the SIS and the Foreign Office in order to assess the probable threat to the Fleet. Daily circulated summaries of all authentic intelligence from the SRC would replace the haphazard reports of ambassadors and private detective agencies. In theory, the government would be able to react to sudden events "on the most reliable and carefully coordinated information."⁶⁸ The cooperative short-term reports of the SRC set the precedent for the joint assessment of the JIC system.

The creation of the SRC is also notable as marking the end of the Foreign Office's long standing reluctance to cooperate and coordinate on intelligence matters. In January, 1939, the DDML, later joined by the DNI, agitated for a Foreign Office representative to chair the JIC. When the SRC was formed, its members recommended that the Foreign Office take the chair. As these bodies would be most concerned with military issues, their members felt that a civilian head would facilitate more objective discussion.⁶⁹

Initially, this concept met with resistance from superiors in the services and the Foreign Office. The latter, lacking an intelligence branch of its own, initially balked at appointing a man of equivalent rank to the service Directors of Intelligence without giving

⁶⁷ David Dilks, "Flashes of Intelligence: The Foreign Office, The SIS and Security Before the Second World War," from *The Missing Dimension Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

⁶⁸ Capel-Dunn to Godfrey, letter, 13 Aug. 42. ADM 233/465.

⁶⁹ *British Intelligence, Ibid.*, 1:41-42.

him equivalent responsibilities.⁷⁰ The services objected to civilian control over a military committee. Eventually, however, the suspicion of other services proved greater than the distrust of civilian supervision: Cavendish-Bentinck speculated that "the War Office supported this idea in order to ensure that the chairman should not be a sailor."⁷¹ The Foreign Office member had chaired the SRC informally, a practice formalised in the JIC shortly after it absorbed the membership and the responsibilities of the SRC on July 28.

As British intelligence mobilised for war, the JIC acquired the responsibility of administrating and directing the operations of the multitude of new inter-service bodies. Its new mandate was "the efficient working of the Intelligence organisation of the country as a whole."⁷² The very idea of British intelligence as a whole rather than as isolated demesnes of rival departments was a conceptual breakthrough. In view of the fierce independence of the departments, getting them to admit common cause on intelligence was the main accomplishment of the peacetime reorganisation of British intelligence.

With Foreign Office membership and the new power to co-opt experts from any body as necessary, the JIC now had access to all the information collected and interpreted by the British intelligence community.⁷³ However, this did not immediately lead to the ability to produce useful strategic assessments. Although the British had finally assembled the machinery of assessment on the eve of war, they would require more than organisation to make it function effectively. Of all the shortages that afflicted Britain's march to war, time

⁷⁰ *British Intelligence, Ibid.*, 1:43.

⁷¹ Howarth, *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷² Capel-Dunn to Godfrey, letter, 13 Aug. 42. ADM 233/465.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

to learn would be the scarcest commodity of all.

Part III: October, 1939 - December, 1940.

After the outbreak of hostilities, intelligence failure had immediate and deadly consequences. The litany of surprises caught the Chamberlain government: the German-Soviet non-aggression pact, the invasion of Denmark and Norway, and the swift defeat of France. Only the second of these can be blamed on British intelligence, but on the whole, its assessment of German actions was slow and uninfluential. Despite the organisational adjustments of the JIC structure in peacetime, innumerable technical and conceptual difficulties conspired to muffle the JIC's voice on important issues in war. Disaster in Norway revealed the deficiencies of not only British intelligence analysis, but of the whole strategic decision-making process. A new government brought sweeping procedural reforms which gave the JIC system the potential to produce accurate and influential strategic appreciations. However, this promise went unfulfilled for several years because the JIC system was unable to resolve the conflict between the demands of assessment and administration.

Deficiencies in Britain's intelligence analysis crippled its ability to anticipate and counter Germany's invasions of Denmark and Norway. Numerous indications of invasion were either discounted or mishandled before German forces landed on April 9. One of the first reports transmitted by the Admiralty to the CiC Home Fleet accurately described the German plan to land at Narvik and Jutland, but was accompanied by the unfortunate rider, "...all these reports are of doubtful value and may well be only a further move in the war of

nerves."⁷⁴ While a valid concern, these doubts did not help the operational commander to decide what, if any, action to take.

To be fair, the many reports of German attacks from foreign-based diplomats and attaches had for the most part proved inaccurate, leading to a sceptical complacency among intelligence authorities.⁷⁵ Furthermore, the British did not credit German daring and ability to strike as far north as Narvik.⁷⁶ At first Narvik was thought to be a typographical error for Larvik, a difference of over 900 miles. Aerial photography showed the concentration of shipping at Kiel, and might have been convincing as corroborating evidence of German intentions. However, the first set of photos were obtained on April 7 - the analysts had no way of knowing whether this was a normal state of affairs or not. As German ports were covered on a fortnightly basis, the invasion was well away before PR returned.⁷⁷

As a result, the British suffered surprise at the operational and strategic level. Information gathering provided regular and accurate information of enemy activity in the Norway campaign. But despite the best efforts of the DNI and his staff, the RN was unable to identify and interpret this information correctly. The photographs of the German fleet at Kiel lacked context, and thus meaning. Change cannot be perceived without some idea of the status quo - for the first years of the war the British were learning the hard way the patterns of normal German behaviour.

⁷⁴ Admiralty Intelligence Department to Admiral Forbes, 7 Apr. 40, quoted from Martin Gilbert, The Churchill War Papers: At The Admiralty, vol. 2, (London: Heinemann, 1993), p. 977.

⁷⁵ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 149.

⁷⁶ Churchill War Papers, *Ibid.*, p. 977n.

⁷⁷ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 136.

The JIC was not directly responsible for warning operational commands. However, according to its original mandate and that of the SRC, JIC *was* responsible for warning the CoS of imminent threats. But the same problems which afflicted intelligence gathering - lack of reliable information, lack of context for analysis, lack of experience in general - affected the JIC as well.

Furthermore, despite changes in organisation, prewar habits persisted. The fact that the Directors of Intelligence were not all present at a JIC meeting until February, 1940 was indicative of the lack of commitment to joint intelligence. Cavendish-Bentinck blamed the Directors for not encouraging the JIC to write papers on its own initiative.⁷⁸

Cavendish-Bentinck's criticism of parochial attitudes in the services - from which he admits the Foreign Office was not exempt - must be tempered by the fact that, unlike the Directors, he was not responsible for running an intelligence department. The comparative neglect of the JIC may be explained by the need to manage the massive expansion of existing and new intelligence organs. For example, during Godfrey's tenure as DNI, the NID grew from barely fifty men and women to over 1000 personnel.⁷⁹ Little positive action was possible except to relearn as quickly as possible the intricacies of analysis and reporting; failures like those at Norway were inevitable.

Despite being charged with "the assessment and coordination of intelligence" in its 1939 mandate, consumer demand for the JIC's opinion of strategic developments remained low. The physical proximity of the JIC to the main decision-makers reflected the status of

⁷⁸ Howarth, *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷⁹ Andrew, Secret Service, *Ibid.*, p. 636.

assessment in the British war bureaucracy. At the outbreak of war, the JPS were immediately relocated to offices next to the COS, while the JIC remained distant from both. The CoS and the JPS preferred to assess new information and developments themselves. At least in the early stages of the war, the JIC certainly could not claim much greater experience or expertise with handling intelligence. Conversely, producers were emboldened to write more and more reports, and to mix inference with fact. Neither producers or consumers saw joint assessment as necessary or desirable.

The organisation of the Chamberlain administration itself limited the influence of the JIC. Despite its centralized power structure, redundant and inefficient consultation procedures dissipated that power. The Chiefs first met individually with their Ministers, and then with each other to decide particular issues. These decisions were then the subject of "a copious flow of polite conversation" at the Military Coordination Committee (MCC), which produced a further report for the consideration of the Defence Committee of the War Cabinet - where "all had to be explained and re-explained."⁸⁰ The result was a great deal of talking and writing, at the expense of timely and decisive action.

The JIC's relationship with the War Cabinet also hampered its ability to influence Britain's decision-making. Churchill described the Chamberlain War Cabinet as a "friendly, but unfocused circle."⁸¹ In the absence of focussed authority, reports and opinions proliferated, often in contradiction of each other. Debate and reportage fed off each other - JIC weekly and daily intelligence summaries competed for attention with the COS weekly

⁸⁰ Winston Churchill, The Second World War. vol. 1, The Gathering Storm, (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1948), pp. 587-588.

⁸¹ Churchill, vol. 1. *Ibid.*, p. 589.

resume (which included the individual reports of each service), monthly reports from the MEW, reports from the Foreign Office at irregular intervals, and two daily reports from the Cabinet War Room.³² The JIC was just one voice among many, and not one which carried much weight.

The brutal impetus of war demanded a more robust decision-making process. Winston Churchill streamlined the organisational hierarchy by eliminating the MCC and reducing the War Cabinet from eight to five members. As his own Minister of Defence with undefined powers, Churchill monopolised ultimate authority over British strategy. He and the CoS worked together directly as the only members of the new Defence Committee. The Defence Committee commanded British forces and strategy; technically the War Cabinet was the superior authority, but its meetings in effect became more information-sharing than substantive decision-making.³³

The rationalising imperative trickled down through the information hierarchy. On May 17, the CoS empowered the JIC to take the initiative in considering intelligence from any quarter in regards to any international development, "at any hour of the day or night, as a matter of urgency." The subject of these papers was twofold: the JIC was to consider items of information of particular note and enemy intentions. However, not only was the JIC to report evidence but also to present the range of conclusions which might be drawn from them. The members of the JIC were "in the closest touch with the intelligence situation" and thus by extension the logical focal point of inter-service assessment. The circulation of JIC

³² British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:97.

³³ Tuvia Ben-Moshe, Churchill: Strategy and History, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1992), p. 125.

papers was restricted to the Minister of Defence, the War Cabinet and the CoS. By recognising the importance of a single assessing body, Churchill's reforms offered an escape from the vicious circle, in which the JIC said nothing because it was not asked and was not asked because it had nothing to say.⁸⁴

On May 24, the MEW, the SIS and MI5 joined the JIC: no further changes would affect the membership or the mandate of the JIC proper for the rest of the war. However, changes to the JIC system did not produce immediate results - in the short term they actually retarded the production of useful strategic assessments. The directive of May 17 emphasized that the JIC make its deliberations as quickly as possible. A short definition of good intelligence is "timely truth, well told."⁸⁵ Delivering intelligence quickly and persuasively provides the consumer time and confidence for decision and action. The timeliness of the JIC's reports in 1940 was unimpressive.

After the fall of France, the British had no doubt that Hitler would turn the German war machine on them next.⁸⁶ The reforms of May, 1940 showed little result in the improvement of joint intelligence appreciations. The few strategic papers the JIC produced had next to no influence on British strategy. In Strong's opinion, the JIC's conclusion that invasion was no longer a threat by October was one of the three most important forecasts of the war.⁸⁷ However, on Aug. 10 Churchill had already risked reinforcing the Middle East

⁸⁴ CoS(40)360, reproduced in *British Intelligence, Ibid.*, 1:513-514.

⁸⁵ T.L. Cabbage, "German Misapprehensions Regarding Overlord: Understanding Failure in the Estimative Process," *Strategic and Operational Deception in the Second World War*, Michael Handel, ed. (London: Cass, 1987), p. 166n.

⁸⁶ *British Intelligence, Ibid.*, 1:165.

⁸⁷ Strong, *Men of Intelligence, Ibid.*, p. 118.

with half of Britain's tanks.⁸⁸ This was by no means a casual decision; any forces so dispatched were effectively out of action while in transit, for 40 to 120 days.⁸⁹

The PM's perception of the German threat to invade determined British strategy in 1940, and the JIC had precious little influence on it. In July, Churchill confided in private conversation that he did not consider invasion likely, but that the threat was a useful motivator for the British war effort.⁹⁰ From late August to mid-September, however, he withheld further reinforcements out of concern for a possible invasion in October.⁹¹ Especially interesting was his refusal to allow the redeployment of Home Fleet destroyers to convoy escort duty on October 15, stating that it was premature to discount invasion - five days after the JIC had issued its definitive statement.⁹² In light of the rising number of shipping losses which the U-boats inflicted in September, the fact that the destroyers were not released until October 31 would seem to indicate that the JIC had little to do with influencing Churchill's threat perceptions.

However, the fact that the JIC failed to affect Churchill was not indicative of his disregard for intelligence, but for joint assessment. As Christopher Andrews and others have shown, Churchill concerned himself with intelligence throughout his career.⁹³ By necessity,

⁸⁸ Winston S. Churchill, The Second World War, vol 2, Their Finest Hour, (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1949), p. 428.

⁸⁹ Churchill War Papers, *Ibid.*, 2:601.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2:495, 510-511.

⁹¹ Churchill to Ismay, 13 Oct. 40, 17 Sept. 40, *Ibid.*, 2:830-1, 936-938.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 2:950-951.

⁹³ H.F. Hinsley, "Churchill and the Use of Special Intelligence," from Churchill, eds R. Blake and R. Louis, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 407-426; Christopher Andrew, "Churchill and Intelligence," Leaders and Intelligence, ed. M. Handel, (London: Cass, 1989), pp. 181-193; Andrew, Secret Service, *Ibid.*, pp. 627-677.

effective leadership often must act in the absence of complete intelligence: Churchill's decision to send scarce forces to the Mediterranean while the prospect of invasion was so uncertain was an act of boldness and determination.

Indeed, it is rare that anyone with the will and ego to rise to power completely trusts another's judgement. In the Second World War, Churchill's primary interest was operational intelligence, brought on in part by the apparent incompetence of British generalship. Though he had no training in assessment, he was a consumer of voracious appetite. In August, the inadequacy of the JIC's appreciations caused Churchill to inveigh against reports being "sifted and digested" into "a form of collective wisdom" by British Intelligence; henceforth he would receive raw intelligence as selected by his personal assistant.⁹⁴

Churchill often attempted to use these unprocessed reports to influence his military advisors and field commanders.⁹⁵ The CoS and British generals in the field eventually learned to insulate themselves against Churchill's intelligence-inspired "prodding" by keeping well informed.⁹⁶ Regardless of personal ability, no single man could fully understand the significance of any one piece of information removed from the vast interrelated patchwork of elements from the past and present. But in 1940, even this was better than the moribund JIC system.

There were a number of reasons for the JIC's slowness, but the time-consuming demands of administration was chief among them. The need to tend to the care and growth of the numerous new acronyms seeded by Churchill's reforms in May had occupied the

⁹⁴ *Churchill War Papers, Ibid.*, 2:621.

⁹⁵ Andrew, "Churchill and Special Intelligence," *Ibid.*, p. 409-414.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

attentions of the JIC at the expense of its strategic function. In addition to the demands of their individual departments, the Directors found that caring for the efficiency of the "intelligence organisation of the country as a whole" a time consuming task. With a staff of "a major and a typist," the JIC was barely adequate to address joint concerns on administrative policy.⁹⁷ Cooperation also tended to wane during disputes over limited resources. The ongoing squabble over photo-reconnaissance (PR), involving the Air Ministry and the Admiralty, found expression in JIC meetings and memos, but ultimately could only be resolved at the highest levels.⁹⁸

As administrators the JIC oversaw many facets of the British intelligence establishment, like the production and distribution of intelligence summaries and communications security.⁹⁹ It supervised the creation of new bodies intended either to make good deficiencies in existing capabilities or reduce duplication effort. In that respect, the JIC was extremely active as a conduit for interdepartmental consultation concerning the development of such bodies as the Inter-service Security Board (ISSB), the Inter-service Topographical Department (ISTD) and the Scientific Intelligence Centre (SIC).

Important as this work was, the JIC could not hope to be influential until it could produce evaluations in a timely manner. "Bill" Williams, Montgomery's chief of intelligence, wrote of the tension between the search for truth and the need to produce useful intelligence:

⁹⁷ Howarth. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁹⁸ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:278-283.

⁹⁹ JIC(40)60, May 15. CAB 81/96; JIC(41)418, Dec. 22. CAB 81/99; JIC(40)113. CAB 81/97; JIC(40)429, Dec. 26. CAB 81/99.

Perfect Intelligence in war must...be out of date and therefore cease to be perfect.... We deal not with the true but with the likely. Speed is therefore the essence of the matter.¹⁰⁰

Even as information is received, enemy action and/or friendly reaction conspire to change the situation and render the information obsolete. Therein lies the advantage of the attacker - the potential to initiate change before the defender can react effectively. In order to provide useful intelligence, the JIC had to appreciate enemy intentions in time for British action.

In theory, the May reforms gave the JIC the tools to draft useful appreciations. The strengthened secretariat allowed the JIC to produce greater quantities of reports on possible enemy actions and estimates of future capabilities. However, the quality and subject matter of the JIC's appreciations left something to be desired:

...these appreciations were of a routine character and made no unique contribution. They were...merely speculations of the kind which the Planners and the central bodies could make for themselves....¹⁰¹

The overriding need to rebuild the mechanisms for gathering and reporting intelligence limited the attention that the JIC itself could devote to strategic assessment. Thus, at the end of 1940 the CoS created the Future Operations (Enemy) Section (FOES) to fill this need, initiating yet another round of trial and error in the organisation of British intelligence.

¹⁰⁰ John Ferris and Michael Handel, "Clausewitz, Intelligence, Uncertainty and the Art of Command in Military Operations." Intelligence and National Security, 10, (January 1995), p. 41-42.

¹⁰¹ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:294.

Chapter Two: Future Operations (Enemy) Section

Part I: December 1940 to March 1941

As an independent body with the specific role of studying and predicting enemy intentions, FOES was a bold innovation in the British intelligence organisation. Furthermore, it emerged at a period when the enemy had the unmistakable capability to act on several different options. Although thwarted over the skies of England in 1940, Germany still held the strategic initiative so long as the bulk of its land forces were uncommitted. An accurate forecast of enemy intentions might enable Britain to deploy its meagre resources more effectively. With that in mind, on Dec. 6, 1940 FOES was assigned "to prepare a brief strategical appreciation from the enemy point of view." For the next year, neither its recommendations nor British strategy were to see much success.

The most important decision in British strategy in the ensuing months, the intervention in Greece, was an almost unmitigated military disaster. Aside from the loss of men and material in Greece and Crete, the diversion of British forces also weakened the defence on the Western flank in the desert, allowing Rommel the opportunity for an early offensive. Though FOES hinted at such an outcome, it had no influence on the decision to divert forces to Greece. FOES's lack of influence was in part due to the nature of the decision to intervene in the Balkans and the structure of FOES itself. FOES was not to blame for the defeat as it was almost totally irrelevant to the decision-making process.

Post-war commentary has been correspondingly dismissive. Most often, FOES is simply mentioned as the precursor to the supposedly more effective APS, and later the JIS. In Kenneth Strong's brief and peremptory evaluation, FOES:

...did their best but after two or three wrong guesses they were quietly disbanded...and sent to more profitable work.¹⁰²

These views are not entirely accurate. A re-evaluation of FOES's "guesses" reveals that its assessments of enemy intentions often contained some truth. Furthermore, the change in intelligence organisation began long before events conclusively proved or disproved FOES's results. Nevertheless, the change from FOES to APS was not merely administrative: it also represented a shift in forecasting methodology. Led by the naval representative, FOES used psychological techniques to forecast enemy strategic thinking, almost to the exclusion of operational considerations.

Dissatisfaction with the inability of the JIC system to produce useful strategic assessments culminated in November, 1940. The JPS suggested the formation of a joint committee dedicated to study German intentions "from the enemy's point of view." It would have access to only that information known to the enemy. They originally conceived of it as independent from the JIC, to which the JIC strenuously objected. Eventually, the JIC and JPS settled on a compromise: FOES would serve the requests of both, but the JIC would see to its administration and reserve the right to comment on reports for the JPS. The Chiefs of Staff rejected this arrangement and subordinated FOES to themselves instead.¹⁰³

Superficially, FOES resembled all the innumerable committees which Britain used to coordinate its intelligence service. Like the JIC, FOES was composed of representatives from the three services, the Foreign Office and the MEW, and drew upon their ministries for the raw information and technical expertise needed to form assessments. However, even

¹⁰² Strong, *Intelligence at the Top*, *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁰³ *British Intelligence*, *Ibid.*, 1:296-7.

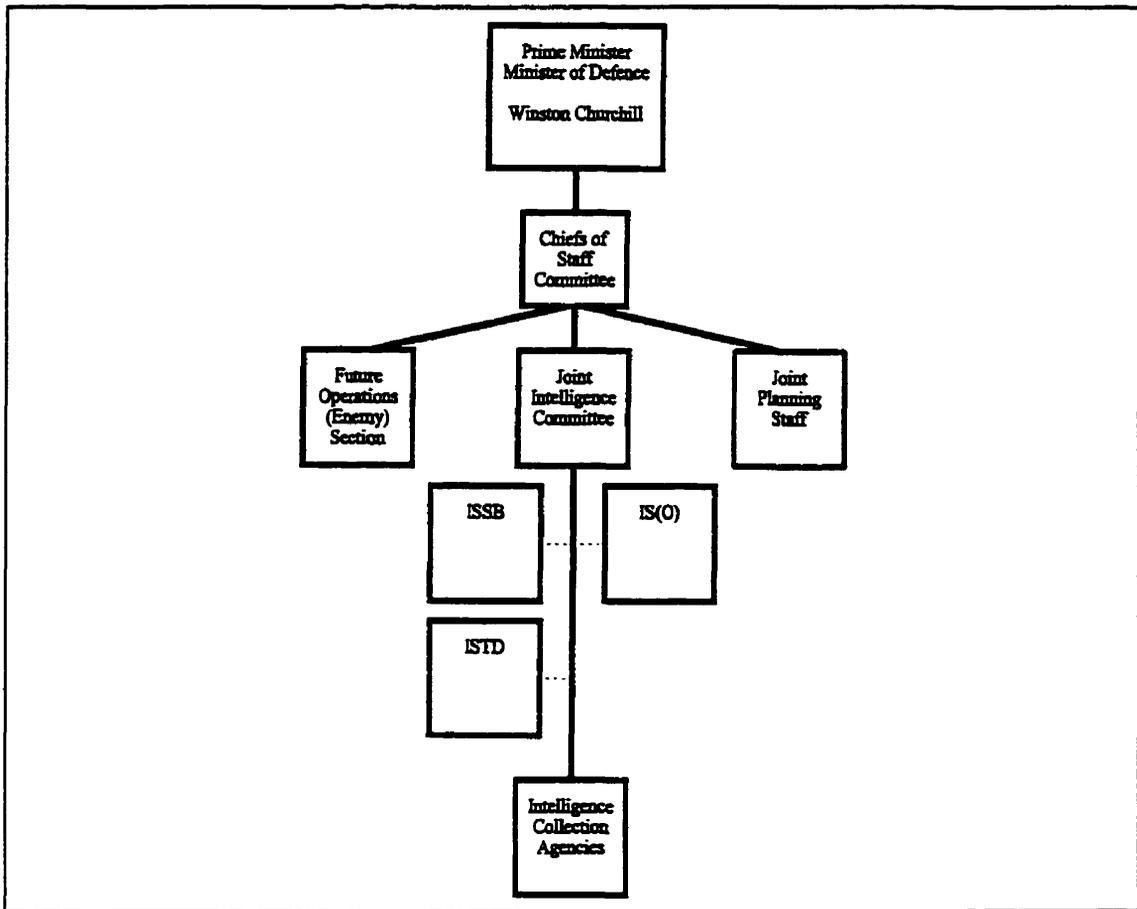


Figure 1: The JIC System, January - March, 1941

though most members of FOES were junior to those in the JIC, it reported directly to the Chiefs of Staff. FOES therefore existed in parallel to the JIC in the intelligence hierarchies of the British military bureaucracy. [see Figure 1, above]

The development of the JIC system followed the traditional collegial system of community cooperation. However, FOES was an experiment in central intelligence, where the individual members could use departmental resources - in theory, at least - without owing

allegiance or accountability for their views to any department.¹⁰⁴ That very independence would prove to be the seed of its demise. Although the section was hardly prolific enough to provoke much controversy with its appreciations, the established hierarchies could not tolerate this competitor. FOES produced seven finished papers over its four month lifespan, of which just four were relevant to the study of enemy strategic intentions.¹⁰⁵

All of FOES's strategic appreciations surveyed potential German actions in all potential theatres of operations, rather than focussing on any one in particular, such as the Balkans. In retrospect, this is somewhat surprising, since the Greco-Italian conflict was escalating and a major British expedition was planned for Greece. Apparently FOES was neither asked nor had the initiative to devote special attention to the impending German involvement in Greece. Thus, from the outset FOES did not focus on the major areas where Britain and Germany would soon clash. While FOES accurately predicted that the outcome of any conflict in the Balkans would inevitably be German victory, well before the British expeditionary force landed in Greece, this forecast had no affect on British strategy.

This first attempt to appreciate the strategic situation from the German point of view was a mass of equivocation which outlined all of Germany's military options without indicating which were most likely. On January 14, the CoS enjoined FOES to try to get further under Germany's skin; in their opinion, "if regarded as a captured enemy document, [this paper] told us little that we did not know already." They asked that FOES for a more

¹⁰⁴ Herman, *Ibid.*, p. 13-33.

¹⁰⁵ Other papers addressed such topics as: GAF bombing policy FOES(41)3; possible new GAF tactics, FOES(41)4; and a final summary of the accuracy of FOES predictions in FOES(41)6. CAB 81/64.

detailed examination, and especially to apply "original thought" to future German moves in the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁶

Eight days later, FOES produced a slightly more detailed and definite recommendation in regards to Greece. Germany should occupy Bulgaria immediately as a prelude to concentrating forces on the Greco-Bulgarian border. If Britain intervened with significant force, Germany would require passage through Yugoslavia for more troops of its own.¹⁰⁷ FOES also included an estimation of the forces required to mount the operation and the timetable for it, which will be considered presently.

Nearly a month later, FOES was even more daring in a consideration entitled "Future Operations Against Britain." The overall German objective was to divert Imperial forces and shipping away from the defence of Britain. As Greece was a "trap" into which the British were unlikely to send their forces to be annihilated, Germany should mount operations against the British in the Eastern Mediterranean, "to create the maximum diversion and strain upon British shipping."¹⁰⁸ Perhaps emboldened by the knowledge that they were about to be abolished, FOES reiterated their opinion of the British intervention on March 19, even as imperial troops were taking up positions - this force, predicted FOES, would be overrun beginning April 1 and cleared from the Balkan Peninsula by the end of the month or the middle of the next.¹⁰⁹

From the British perspective, this estimate proved to be depressingly accurate, as the

¹⁰⁶ CoS(41)23rd Mtg, Jan. 14. CAB 79/8.

¹⁰⁷ FOES(41)1, 22 Jan. CAB 81/64.

¹⁰⁸ FOES(41)2, 18 Feb. CAB 81/64.

¹⁰⁹ FOES(41)5, 19 Mar. CAB 81/64.

remnants of the British force were evacuated in the last days of April. If anything, FOES underestimated the speed of German operations, though not by much. In January and February FOES had predicted that German operations would start Apr. 1, or even earlier, depending on the favorability of ice conditions on the Danube.¹¹⁰ This assessment was strikingly accurate. According to the OKH plans drawn up in December, the operation would commence after the snow melted in the beginning of March.¹¹¹ However, OKH underestimated the time necessary to secure Bulgaria from land and air attack while maintaining secrecy, which pushed the start date back to Apr. 1. The unexpected need to improvise an attack on Yugoslavia further delayed Operation MARITA until Apr. 6.

FOES's estimates of German forces were initially more accurate than subsequent events might indicate. According to FOES(41)1 the initial concentration against Greece would be ten divisions.¹¹² And indeed, under OKH's plan, the first and second echelons which were to concentrate in Bulgaria by the middle of March totalled eleven and a half divisions and one regiment.¹¹³ This was FOES's only attempt to combine hard numbers about enemy capabilities with an appreciation of enemy strategic intentions, and it was roughly accurate. Although lacking some of the detail of later estimates, it was a foretaste of the kind of staff work which would become the backbone of Allied strategic assessment.

If British decision-makers misunderstood the potential correlation of forces in Greece in any way, then it lay in an over optimistic assessment of the will and ability of the Balkan

¹¹⁰ FOES(41)1(revise), 22 Jan. and FOES(41)2, 18 Feb. CAB 81/64.

¹¹¹ Helmuth Greiner, "The Balkans, 1941." *GMS* (London: Garland, 1979), 7:4.

¹¹² FOES(41)1, 22 Jan. CAB 81/64.

¹¹³ "The Balkans, 1941," *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:26.

nations to fight - an issue which FOES neither had the mandate nor was asked to address. After the war, Churchill's greatest complaint was not that the scale of the German attack was greater than expected, but that Greek forces were far fewer than had been originally promised.¹¹⁴

Indeed, misunderstanding and confusion marked the British decision-making process leading to the fateful commitment. Generally, scholars conclude that the final, irrevocable promise of military support was not made in London, but by Britain's representatives in the field, Eden and Dill.¹¹⁵ However, Churchill's expectations and wishful thinking motivated their mission to the Balkans. After the war, he wrote:

I take full responsibility for the eventual decision...because I am sure I could have stopped it all if I had been convinced. It is so much easier to stop than to do.¹¹⁶

The DMO, John Kennedy, had strongly opposed Operation LUSTRE on the grounds that the British simply did not have the forces to hold a Balkan front.¹¹⁷ Whether a clear statement from FOES - or an assessment body more effective than FOES - could have added anything more convincing than Kennedy's arguments is doubtful. At any rate, FOES had no influence on the decision.

A significant failing of FOES was its consistent inability to predict how British

¹¹⁴ Winston Churchill, Grand Alliance, vol. 3, The Second World War (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), p. 220.

¹¹⁵ see Martin van Creveld, "Prelude to Disaster: The British Decision to Aid Greece, 1940-41." Journal of Contemporary History, 9, 3, (1974): 65-92; Sheila Lawlor, "Greece, March 1941: the Politics of British Military Intervention." Historical Journal, 24, 4, (1982): 933-946; Monty Woodhouse, "The Aliakmon Line: An Anglo-Greek Misunderstanding in 1941." Balkan Studies, 26, 1, (1985): 159-193.

¹¹⁶ Churchill, vol. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 90.

¹¹⁷ Kennedy, *Ibid.*, p. 82-3.

strategy would influence German intentions. While FOES was essentially correct to describe German intervention in Greece as a security measure, it did not consistently identify the threat which affected Hitler most. Hitler identified Rumanian oilfields as "a matter of life and death for the Axis," fearing that enemy bombers from Russia or the Mediterranean could turn them to "smoking desolation."¹¹⁸ Even the expert advice of his military advisors did not reassure Hitler. On Feb. 14, the Luftwaffe ruled out RAF daylight bomber raids, as their airstrips were beyond the range of fighter escort.¹¹⁹ Hitler halted preparations for MARITA for 17 days to deploy additional anti-aircraft batteries and fire fighting units to the Rumania oilfields.¹²⁰ Hitler feared air attack on Rumanian oil so much that the mere threat effectively delayed operation MARITA almost as long as the British defence of Greece.¹²¹

FOES knew of these considerations, but never correlated them properly. Initially, FOES identified Germany's vital interest in protecting Rumanian oil, but watered down its consideration with the caveat that German offensive operations would disrupt the flow of commodities, especially oil, from the region.¹²² In its next report, FOES emphasized the need to invade Greece to gain control of Black Sea shipping; the potential threat to Rumanian oil was from the Dodecanese islands.¹²³

FOES's first consideration of the Greek situation managed to hit one elemental strategic truth, buried in caveats and equivocal prose. In stating that Germany could not let

¹¹⁸ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:105.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

¹²¹ "The Balkans, 1941." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:15.

¹²² FOES(40)1(revise), 8 Jan. CAB 81/64.

¹²³ FOES(41)1 22 Jan. CAB 81/64.

Britain establish itself in strength on the mainland, FOES implied that German strategy was interlinked with British strategy.¹²⁴ For some time to come, however, it would have no clue as to the significance of this truth.

While the Directive for Operation MARITA originated on 12 Nov., 1940, British actions exerted considerable influence over German operations and strategy. The original objectives of MARITA were limited to advances on Salonika and Athens; the Luftwaffe would neutralise the British airbases. On Dec. 5, 1940, Hitler saw no need for MARITA at all if the Greeks asked the British to leave.¹²⁵ But Hitler's determination to secure the Balkans by military force increased as the date for BARBAROSSA grew closer.

The objectives for MARITA also expanded with the British presence. On Mar. 17, 1941, the deployment of British reinforcements prompted the extension of German objectives to the southern tip of the Peloponnesus.¹²⁶ Despite desperate peace feelers from the Greeks, Hitler refused to accept any compromise except complete occupation.¹²⁷ The revised MARITA required twelve more divisions than the original plan: as a result, the bulk of 12th Army and its HQ staff would also be unavailable for the attack on Russia, forcing changes in the operational plan of BARBAROSSA.

With the benefit of hindsight, the strategic relationships between active fronts might

¹²⁴ FOES(40)1(revise), 8 Jan. CAB 81/64.

¹²⁵ Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, 5 Dec. 1940, (not in English translation), qf. Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:457.

¹²⁶ On March 4, OKW proposed retaining the divisions assigned to protecting the Bulgarian-Turkish border in Rumania, as Turkey appeared docile and the divisions would be required for BARBAROSSA; on March 10, OKW received verified reports that British troops had been arriving in Greece since March 7. "The Balkans, 1941." GMS, 7:26.

¹²⁷ Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, 18 Mar., 1940 (not in English translation), qf. Germany in the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:472.

seem obvious. However, this was more difficult to perceive at the time. At the end of July, 1940, Hitler announced that Germany's strategic objective was to be the "destruction of the life force of the USSR."¹²⁸ Though the German High Command would plan a multitude of operations against a variety of enemies, only "the crusade against Bolshevism" held Hitler's attention.¹²⁹ All other operations would compete against the schedule and force requirements of BARBAROSSA. In its short existence FOES had no inkling of BARBAROSSA, which would badly skew its assessments and those of its successors.

FOES had a better understanding of German intentions in Libya, at least initially. While the loss of Cyrenica in 1941 would seem to indicate a failure of strategic prediction, FOES's line of thinking was not unreasonable. According to a post-war analysis by Field Marshall Albert Kesselring, Commander in Chief of German forces in the Mediterranean, Hitler never fully appreciated the importance of the North African theatre. Kesselring described Hitler's conduct of the Mediterranean war as a series of reactive and makeshift countermeasures, divorced from the over-all context of strategy.¹³⁰ The inherent volatility of Germany policy would cripple the accuracy of FOES strategic appreciations.

Kesselring's post-war analysis was correct: Hitler's Mediterranean strategy in 1941 was improvised and reactive. However, as a field commander, Kesselring was not aware that Hitler had acted on an strategy against the British Mediterranean position in 1940. After the

¹²⁸ Germany and the Second World War *Ibid.*, 3:248.

¹²⁹ Brend Wegner, "The Road to Defeat: The German Campaigns in Russia 1941-43." from John Gooch, ed. Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War, (London: Cass, 1990), p. 108.

¹³⁰ Albert Kesselring, "Kesselring's View of the African War, Part I." GMS, (London: Garland, 1979), 14:17-18.

fall of France, Hitler's army, navy and foreign affairs advisors had pressed for an offensive against the British Mediterranean position. Geography dictated that Germany needed allies if it wanted to pursue an indirect strategy against the British Empire. Thus, in late-October, Hitler embarked upon a diplomatic offensive in an effort to forge a global coalition "from Yokohama to Spain."¹³¹ Though Japan proved amenable to the Tripartite Pact, closer partners were less forthcoming.

German diplomacy would determine the success of such a coalition. In order to realise the "Kontinentalblock" envisioned by Ribbentrop, Hitler wanted Spain to give up its designs on French Morocco, and France to agree to German and Italian territorial demands in Europe and Africa.¹³² He realised that building an alliance from these conflicting territorial interests and ambitions would require "a gigantic fraud."¹³³ However, when Franco and Petain refused to be taken in, Hitler was unwilling and/or unable to make real concessions to his potential partners in the Mediterranean. Rebuffed diplomatically, Hitler discarded this grand scheme and returned to planning isolated military operations to secure his southern flank.

In its first strategic appreciation of Jan. 8, FOES had stated, rather ambiguously, that one of Germany's chief objectives was to prevent an Italian collapse with the least effort. Unambiguously, FOES ruled out the idea of sending significant forces to Libya because

¹³¹ Schreiber, "The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy..." *Ibid.*, p. 257; Germany and the Second World War *Ibid.*, 3:187; generally, 180-246.

¹³² Germany in the Second World War *Ibid.*, 3:190.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 187, 577.

"there is now little prospect of successful offensive action."¹³⁴ The next day Hitler decided to dispatch a small, armoured equipped "blocking unit" to assist in the defence of Tripolitania until the hot season halted major operations.¹³⁵

Previously, respect for Italy's sphere of influence had restrained Germany's interest in Libya. In contrast to the combined Anglo-American strategy later in the war, in 1940 the Axis operated on the principle of a "parallel" war strategy against Britain, which simply meant that Italy and Germany each pursued their own interests with a minimal cooperation.¹³⁶ The British offensive at the end of the year forced Italy to ask for German assistance, which was "unwillingly given and unwillingly accepted."¹³⁷ For Mussolini, the German presence in Africa spelled the end of Italian colonial ambitions; for Hitler, it was an unwelcome diversion from BARBAROSSA.

On Jan. 8, FOES discounted the possibility of German intervention in Libya because of the poor prospects for offensive action. FOES was right about the importance of offensive operations to German strategy, but they seriously underestimated the effect of British actions on German strategy. Hitler's commitment to the Libyan operation waxed and waned according to the prospects of success. On Jan. 22, FOES concluded that even in the worst case, Germany would not need to send forces to defend Tripoli until autumn.¹³⁸ Events soon overtook this analysis: British forces had captured Tobruk the day before, leading the German army to advise that passive defence would no longer be adequate to save Cyrenica.

¹³⁴ JIC(40)1(revise), 8 Jan. CAB 81/64.

¹³⁵ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:81.

¹³⁶ *Germany in the Second World War Ibid.*, 3:184-5.

¹³⁷ Warliamont, *Ibid.*, p. 126.

¹³⁸ FOES(41)1, 22 Jan. CAB 81/64.

An "aggressive defence on a large scale" was required, which would require the commitment of a larger force.¹³⁹ German generals in liaison with the Italians estimated that the minimum force required - a full panzer division - could not be transported in time. The Wehrmacht CiC in Berlin supported this estimate, asserting that German forces would only serve a useful purpose if they could take the offensive.¹⁴⁰ The logistics of this commitment posed Hitler with a dilemma: he could either send an inadequate force before summer, or wait for a full counter-offensive in the autumn.

The beginning of February marked a period of doubt and uncertainty in German Mediterranean strategy. At the beginning of January, Hitler had been relatively sanguine about the prospect of a British victory in North Africa. On Feb. 1, Hitler ordered a halt to the transport of the blocking force until the Italian position in Italy could be explained in detail. Questioning the Italian estimates of the impassability of the Sirte Desert and the size of British forces, Hitler demanded further reconnaissance of the area.¹⁴¹

By Feb. 4, the British were only a few days away from Benghazi, and Operation SONNENBLUME expanded yet again to five light divisions reinforced with armour and a corps level HQ, possibly to be followed by another panzer division.¹⁴² Hitler balked at the thought that such a large force might sit idle on the defensive if the Italians lost their nerve. Deciding to go for broke, on Feb. 6 he determined to cancel SONNENBLUME immediately

¹³⁹ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:110.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 127-128.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

unless the Italians agreed to an active front on the Cyrenican border.¹⁴³ The next day, the Chief of the Wehrmacht Operations Staff argued for the continuation of Mediterranean operations even without Italian support.¹⁴⁴

A week after the first German troops had disembarked in Tripoli, FOES still favoured a passive defence there, assuming that the British did not manage to take the port in a pre-emptive "lightning stroke."¹⁴⁵ A month later, FOES ruled out the latter possibility due to "Wavell's hesitation." They predicted:

...minor offensive operations against the depleted garrison of Cyrenica. *In any case a serious offensive cannot be carried through until...later in the year, by which time it is hoped that the need for serious operations...will have passed.*¹⁴⁶

FOES supposed that German forces in Libya would spend the summer in desert training, which was contrary to Hitler's ambitions. Rommel's reconquest of Cyrenica was impressively fast, although ultimately indecisive as he failed to retake Tobruk. This derailed British strategy in the Mediterranean. By compelling the British to attend to their hitherto secure western flank, significant forces were diverted away from operations intended to support the expedition to Greece. In Churchill's perception, the crisis in the desert robbed Britain of the "sullen dangers and glittering prizes" of Balkans.¹⁴⁷

However, Churchill certainly exaggerated the possibility of any "glittering prizes" to be found in the Balkans. After the war, he stated his intention was

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 153-4.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁴⁵ FOES(41)2, 18 Feb. CAB 81/64.

¹⁴⁶ *My italics.* FOES(41)5, 19 Mar. CAB 81/64.

¹⁴⁷ Churchill, vol. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 344.

...to form a Balkan front. I wanted Yugoslavia, and I hoped for Turkey. That, with Greece, would have given us fifty divisions. A nut for the Germans to crack.¹⁴⁸

Even if the Balkan nations had acted as Churchill and Eden wished, that "nut" was unlikely to withstand Germany's cracker, as the latter had more troops and shorter supply lines.¹⁴⁹ FOES consistently maintained that British forces sent to Greece would face annihilation under any circumstances, calling the Balkans a "trap."¹⁵⁰ Indeed, Hitler was certainly intent on removing the British from the Balkans, declaring, "We will drive England out of Greece with 20 divisions, but [are] willing to use 180 divisions if need be."¹⁵¹

Thus, Rommel's precipitate action actually reduced potential British losses in Greece. According to Rommel, von Paulus blamed his premature advance for causing a British withdrawal from Greece, thus ruining the High Command's plans.¹⁵² Though most of the British expedition escaped, they lost significant numbers of men and most of their equipment; more losses might have decisively weakened British ability to defend Egypt.

However, there was no evidence that such an intention influenced German strategy prior to Rommel's unexpected offensive, in either the latter's instructions or his superior's records. Paulus likely exaggerated OKW's foresight in his attempt to assert his authority over Rommel. German strategy vis-a-vis Britain tended to be largely reactive from mid-1940 to mid-1941, and any appreciation of the relationship between actual operations in the

¹⁴⁸ Churchill to Lord Boothby, conversation, q.f. John Connell, *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹⁴⁹ Crevelde, "Prelude to Disaster..." *Ibid.*, p. 65-92; Kennedy, *Ibid.*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁰ FOES(41)2, 18 Feb. CAB 81/64.

¹⁵¹ Halder, 3 Dec. 40, *Ibid.*, p. 718.

¹⁵² In his defense, Rommel notes that German forces were consistently unable to pin down retreating British forces and destroy them. Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 119, 119n.

Mediterranean was ex post facto, when perceived at all.

Despite failing to predict the seriousness of Rommel's offensive, FOES's last analysis contained a great deal of truth. It accurately described the German forces in Libya as incomplete, intended to carry out an "active defence" rather than a major offensive. This matched Hitler's original concept of a "panzer blocking unit." The operational nature of the theatre made the classification of forces as defensive or offensive a moot point. As the British defeat of the Italians had just shown, effective desert operations required mobility, and blurred the line between defence and offense.

In addition to correctly assessing the strategic purpose behind the German presence in Africa, FOES also hinted at operational possibilities. FOES believed that the transfer of the best equipped and most experienced British troops to Greece gave Germany an opportunity. Unfortunately, it did not predict the outcome - its mandate was to assess enemy strategic intentions, not detailed operational probabilities.

The FOES estimate accurately described the conservative strategic objectives of the German High Command in the Libyan theatre, a policy of low risk and minimal commitment for the support of the Italian war effort. Strategically, Operation SONNENBLUME was defensive in nature: losing Libya would lower Italian morale and free an estimated dozen British divisions to cause trouble elsewhere.¹⁵³ Yet, as in Greece, British activity constantly influenced German operational perceptions, with strategic consequences. In response to Britain's counter-offensive Hitler committed a minimal force to bolster the Italian defence. However, Wavell's unexpectedly rapid progress through Cyrenica led the

¹⁵³ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:138.

High Command to believe that this force would be inadequate, but a larger force would not arrive in time. Furthermore, Hitler refused to let a large force lie idle in the African sun when he needed all his resources for BARBAROSSA. Fortunately for the Germans, the diversion of British forces to Greece alleviated the threat. Nevertheless, the requirements of BARBAROSSA dictated a conservative strategy elsewhere, which was subsequently overthrown by unexpected insubordination from Rommel.

FOES had hinted at possibilities, but had neither the responsibility nor the imagination to predict the outcome of the clash in the Western desert. In hindsight FOES was a fair judge of German strategic intentions; but its record of prediction was dismal because of operational factors beyond its purview and its inability to judge the dynamic relationship between British actions and German reactions. Furthermore, the fact that German capabilities so outweighed Britain's, both qualitatively and quantitatively, magnified even the slightest misjudgment of intentions into disaster on the battlefield.

Part II: Reform and Reorganisation

Despite the discrepancy between forecasts and actual events, the push to reform British assessment did not originate with dissatisfied decision-makers. On the contrary, with the exception of the first report, the CoS generally had little complaint or interest in the work produced. Most of the papers considered at CoS meetings were simply "noted," though a few were criticised for lack of original thought.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ As described above, CoS threw out FOES(40)1 for being too obvious. FOES(41)3, 26 Feb. "Bombing Policy," failed to impress Portal with its originality. CoS(41)78th mtg., 1 (continued...)

The conditions which ended FOES had existed for some time, and they concerned other agencies as well. The nature of enemy intentions and capabilities interested the Joint Planning Staff, as they shaped the possibilities of British actions. Under the original proposal of the JIC and JPS on Nov. 26, 1940, the JIC would take administrative responsibility for the new section, and forward queries and reports to and from the JPS as required. However, when the CoS constituted FOES as an independent body reporting directly to itself, both the JIC and JPS were denied control over how it assessed enemy intentions.

The movement against FOES originated from the senior producers, in the intelligence hierarchy - the JIC. Despite his colleagues' low opinion of his ability, it was the DMI who led the impetus for reform.¹⁵⁵ Beginning with a letter to his colleagues on the JIC, Davidson called attention to the difficulties created by the independence of FOES from JIC jurisdiction. With the support of his colleagues, the DMI presented the case for the JIC to absorb FOES. Despite the many reforms instituted since the outbreak of war, Davidson wrote, joint assessment still functioned only intermittently. While the various agencies of the British war machine shared information and opinions through the JIC, consultation more often than not occurred on an informal basis. On its own initiative, the JIC had formed an ad hoc committee to study German intentions, but its members had other regular duties. Meeting only twice a week, they had the time neither to appreciate global strategy fully, nor to produce written

(...continued)

Mar. However, a mention of possible "new tactics" in FOES(41)2, 18 Feb., generated a more detailed study at Portal's request. CoS(41)79th mtg., 3 Mar. The resulting FOES(41)4, 5 Mar., "Air Appreciation," was sufficiently interesting to be brought to the attention of the Chief of Air Staff. CoS(41)90th mtg, CAB 79/8.

¹⁵⁵ Howarth, *Ibid.*, p. 165; Annan, *Ibid.*, p. 29.

reports. Both tasks would require full-time attention if they were to be done properly. According to Davidson, many JIC papers were still being written on the initiative of individual departments, which risked duplication of effort.¹⁵⁶

With the support of his fellow Directors of Intelligence, the DMI argued that FOES was redundant and could potentially cause contradiction and confusion. The DNI thought that FOES was isolated and out of touch with the considered views of the various Departments.¹⁵⁷ Godfrey believed that junior officers were best suited to understanding the enemy because of the breadth of their current knowledge and open-mindedness, but they also should be subject to the rule of their seniors. The current system, allowed for two potential sources of appreciations, FOES and the JIC. As the DMI conceived it, each Department would continue to study their assigned aspect of the enemy independently as before, but only reports produced through the JIC should carry the authority of their consensus.¹⁵⁸

The primary motive for the reorganisation of British assessment was a conflict not over methods or results but procedure. As an independent body, FOES threatened the authority of its ranking superiors who commanded the Service intelligence departments. Though their letters contained some suggestions for producing better results, the prime motive in their desire to restructure strategic assessment was the prospect of redundant, or worse, conflicting, appreciations - that is, contrary to their own. Secondary sources mention the Directors of the JIC being embarrassed before the Chiefs by dissenting counsel from their

¹⁵⁶ JIC(41)58, Feb. 6. CAB 81/100; CoS(41)93rd Mtg., 11 Mar. CAB 79/9.

¹⁵⁷ DNI to DMI and ACAS(T), memo, 3 Feb., 41, ADM 223/465.

¹⁵⁸ JIC(41)58, 6 Feb. ADM 81/100.

juniors, though neither they nor any official source mention particular issues.¹⁵⁹ While such disputes may have been too minor to register in government records or veterans' memories, the mere potential for conflict may have been enough to provoke the JIC to initiate reform. As an assessing body responsible only to the CoS, FOES threatened the authority of the JIC. In order to overcome this threat, the Directors of Intelligence sought to bring assessment back under their control.

The restructuring of assessment also produced important procedural changes in British intelligence. On April 22, the CoS decided to maintain a closer relationship with the JIC and to keep abreast of intelligence developments by meeting with it on a weekly basis. Previously, the CoS had rarely met the JIC as a body.¹⁶⁰ These Tuesday meetings with the Chiefs also became a convenient means of dealing with JIC business as well, since all of the Directors had to be present anyway.¹⁶¹ Formalising committee procedure improved communication not only with their superiors but between the Directors as well.

The elimination of FOES immediately improved the presentation of appreciation papers. Led by the naval representative, Troubridge, FOES had enthusiastically role-played the German general staff, which affected the presentation of their written reports. According to Beesly, the attempt to simulate captured enemy documents resulted in an affected and

¹⁵⁹ The official history cites ADM 223/107 and JIC(44)345, both written well after the dissolution of FOES. A letter from Denis Capel-Dunn to Godfrey in regards to JIC(44)345 is reproduced in ADM 223/465; the documents in neither ADM 223/107 nor ADM 223/465 cite specific disagreements between the JIC and FOES. Capel-Dunn does mention that early consultations with JPS sometimes resulted in JIS views being disowned by superiors. The problem was solved by having the Director of Plans and the Deputy Directors of Intelligence meet regularly.

¹⁶⁰ CoS(41) 143 mtg, 22 Apr. from British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:298.

¹⁶¹ Dennis Capel-Dunn to Charles Morgan, letter, 4 Mar. 44. ADM 223/465.

verbose writing style liable to provoke "derisive laughter" - hardly the desired reaction to an effective presentation.¹⁶² This effort weakened the effectiveness of FOES forecasts and obfuscated their conclusions. Attached to the last FOES appreciation is a defensive plea for tolerance of "the mixture of bombast and ponderosity with which the text is liberally interlarded."¹⁶³ When FOES was abolished, so was that obtuse convention. British strategic assessments soon became more concise and readable.

Undoubtedly, many of the instructions for FOES to "get under the skin" of the enemy originated from Admiral Godfrey. His strong interest in the assessment of enemy intentions is evidenced by his role in creating the informal section within NID under Bellairs and his vocal opinions on the proper form and function of FOES and APS. His desire to develop the less quantitative aspects of strategic appreciation led to initiatives which entered folklore. An oft repeated anecdote of British wartime intelligence is the mystic or water diviner, who got on the government payroll by claiming to predict German intentions.¹⁶⁴ In late September, 1940, Godfrey consulted an astrologer, whose extensive findings he forwarded to his chief, along with a proposal to form a team of "sincere astrologers" for strategic forecasting. Noting Hitler's reported interest in the subject, the Admiral argued for a relative understanding:

The significance of Hitler's astrological researches is not therefore whether or not we believe in them or if they represent the truth, but that Hitler believes in them, and to a certain extent bases his acts on the opinions and predictions of his astrological experts.¹⁶⁵

Risible as it might have seemed to portray astrology as "an exact science", the DNI's effort

¹⁶² McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁶³ FOES(41)5, 19 Mar. Cab 81/101.

¹⁶⁴ Strong, *Intelligence at the Top*, *Ibid.*, p. 69; Beesley, *Very Special Admiral*, *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹⁶⁵ Godfrey to Pound, memo, 30 Sept. 40, ADM 223/84.

indicated both the need and the difficulty of understanding German thinking - specifically, Hitler's thinking. Godfrey's superiors were less than impressed. Not unnaturally, the First Sea Lord wished to "work on something more solid."¹⁶⁶ Despite Strong's objections, the astrologer received funding and "a comfortable flat in a fashionable London district."¹⁶⁷ The astrologer's work benefited only himself.

Although astrology was a failure and roleplaying a poor presentational technique, the DNI continued to champion the effort to understand enemy thinking. He had fully supported Troubridge in attempting to model the thinking of the German General Staff, and unlike the other directors of service intelligence had screened naval intelligence passed to FOES, so as to preserve the intellectual purity of the thought experiment. The DNI held - correctly - that Hitler and his ideology was the key to the inner workings of German strategic thought, though he never found a reliable means to predict it. He proposed that the new body should be composed of officers from the German sections of each department. By virtue of their relatively junior rank and their area of specialisation, they were more likely than their seniors to have

...insight into the Nationalist Socialist way of thinking (as opposed to the traditional German make-up) which can only be gained by the type of young mind which is not scornful of, or impatient with, the ideology which Hitler has been at such pains to create...¹⁶⁸

Godfrey also suggested that the new body should scrutinize JIC appreciations "from the enemy angle" for consistency with Nazi ideology and Hitler's politico-military style, adding

¹⁶⁶ Pound to Godfrey, written comment on 1 Oct., 40, ADM 223/84.

¹⁶⁷ Strong, *Intelligence at the Top*, *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹⁶⁸ DNI to First Sea Lord, letter, 11 Mar. 41, ADM 223/465.

a paragraph to that effect on every paper as a stamp of approval.¹⁶⁹

In letters briefing Pound about replacing FOES, the DNI favoured the maintenance of barriers between assessment and planning.¹⁷⁰ This would ensure that assessments were produced only on the basis of what the enemy knew, or probably knew, of British intentions. However, preserving the intellectual purity of assessment would also rule out close collaboration with the planning staffs - the subject of their requests would naturally reveal British interests and information not known to the enemy. Yet, isolation from British planners would deny assessors key information which would affect their work and the subject of it.

Some of the DNI's suggestions greatly influenced the structure of the APS. The DNI felt that Troubridge had spent too much time simply collecting information from various departmental experts rather than "sitting and thinking" about enemy intentions,¹⁷¹ while the high rank of the Army representative had hampered equitable discussion.¹⁷² In line with these suggestions the members of the APS were all of equal rank or seniority. As with FOES, they would be composed of representatives from the services, the Foreign Office and the MEW; however, they would also be assisted by a junior team of lower rank.¹⁷³

The DNI's suggestions on the methods of assessment proved less influential. As with

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ "The Development of IS(O)," ADM 223/465.

¹⁷² As a Brigadier-General the Army spokesman outranked his Navy and Air Force colleagues, a Captain and a Air Commodore respectively, by two grades. Godfrey to Pound, letter, 11 Mar. 41. ADM 223/465.

¹⁷³ The senior and junior teams were of "GSO1" and "GSO2" rank, respectively.

FOES, the APS terms of reference instructed them to "get under the enemy's skin."¹⁷⁴ However, their access to information was not screened; rather, they were simply warned not to be biased by information unavailable to the enemy. The need to preserve intellectual purity was obviously, and rightly, deemed less important than servicing the Planners' requests. The relationship between the assessment and planning staffs would continue to produce contention - mostly instigated by the naval representatives of the JIC and the CoS - but the structure of the new body was a clear rejection of Godfrey's methods of assessing enemy strategic intentions.

Furthermore, Godfrey's recommendation for an ideological addendum never appeared on an officially circulated JIC paper. Acting as the JIC's drafting committee, it is doubtful whether the JIS edited JIC reports with an eye to Nazi ideology. Certainly no APS or JIC report ever overtly referred to Hitler's "political-military style." If there was any formal study of Hitler's psychology or his ideological aims, it went unrecorded. An understanding of Hitler's grand strategy remained elusive even after the war.

As constituted, the APS rejected the methods of understanding the enemy advocated by Godfrey. According to Beesley, the average intelligence officer was as sceptical of trying to "think like the enemy" as he was about astrology.¹⁷⁵ Indeed, the results failed to win over an exceptional intelligence officer. Kenneth Strong, head of the War Office German section from the beginning of the war to Feb., 1941, doubted their methods and dismissed their results. Although his knowledge and analysis of FOES' work was superficial, Strong doubted

¹⁷⁴ JIC(41)112, 22 Mar. CAB 81/101.

¹⁷⁵ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 255.

the possibility and the utility of fathoming the internal processes by which others form intentions:

...it is extremely difficult for anyone to think like his opponents, and the natural reaction must be to attribute to the enemy one's own experience and one's own conceptual framework. In any case the opponent's actions depend more often than not on political and social attitudes which do not lend themselves to analysis of this kind.¹⁷⁶

Strong's critique must be qualified. He himself relied on consideration of enemy thinking to forecast the likelihood of invasion in 1940. His assessment initially rested on his own understanding of the German mentality - Strong found the threat unconvincing because a cross-Channel invasion "seemed foreign to their thinking and training."¹⁷⁷ However, he re-evaluated his conclusions when confronted with evidence. Strong found photos of barges in Channel ports more compelling than his experience of German military culture. Despite the Admiralty's reservations, Strong believed the barges evidence of German capability, which when allied with his pessimistic evaluation of British defensive capabilities constituted a serious threat of invasion. Ultimately, he valued the proof of German capabilities more than his own assessment of German intentions.

It was hardly surprising that Strong little trusted FOES's understanding when he doubted his own. Critical of their methods and sceptical about their qualifications, he believed that those trying to mimic Nazi psychology had no direct experience with German culture, language, and doctrine.¹⁷⁸ As they lacked his experience, their understanding of German military thinking was academic and their assessments must be inferior to his.

¹⁷⁶ Strong, Intelligence at the Top, *Ibid.*, p. 57.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

This sense of superiority was unjustified with regards to FOES. Troubridge had served as the naval attache in Berlin, while the military representative, Major-General Macksey, had the experience of fighting the Germans in Norway.¹⁷⁹ This criticism might be more fairly levelled at the assessment team in the succeeding body, the JIS. The service members of the junior team of the JIS, which was responsible for long term assessment, were not even professional military men - in civilian life they were a history don, an advertising agent and a barrister.¹⁸⁰ However, this inexperience did not invalidate JIS assessments. Unlike FOES, the JIS did not exclusively rely on an understanding of German thinking in order to draw their conclusions.

Nevertheless, British intelligence did not unanimously condemn the method. Despite organizational reforms and departmental skepticism, the end of FOES did not end roleplaying as a method of assessment. On Nov. 10, 1941, the CoS formed an ad hoc inter-service committee dubbed "the German Syndicate" to draft an invasion plan based on their probable order of battle.¹⁸¹ Although Strong dismissed their conclusions as "fairly obvious," it is equally obvious that not everyone doubted the value of roleplay. Long after Strong left, MI14 gave the DDMI and the JIS a report on German strategy from the point of view of an OKW staff officer.

While concise - limiting the ersatz Nazi ornamentation to a single "Heil Hitler!" - the report ultimately failed to forecast German strategy more accurately than most of FOES's prognostications. Playing the role of an aide of "General STITSCHINTEIN," MI14 outlined

¹⁷⁹ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 254.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 257.

¹⁸¹ CoS(41)380 mtg., 7 Nov. Cab 79/15.

German contingency plans for the abandonment of the offensive in southern Russia in favour of a general withdrawal to a shorter line of defence. A defensive strategy would conserve Germany's declining reserves of oil and manpower, and allow time to prepare for a renewed offensive in spring.¹⁸² Erich von Manstein had, in fact, suggested such a strategy to the Führer, to no avail: Hitler insisted on holding to his territorial gains at all costs.¹⁸³ Neither FOES' methods nor their flaws were unique within British intelligence.

Fundamentally, the British could not understand Germany's intentions because they did not understand Hitler's relationship with his military advisors. British assessors assumed roles as OKW staff officers - i.e. FOES signed their papers as Keitel, the OKW Chief of Staff. They assumed that the OKW functioned much as the British CoS Committee. In fact, they functioned in completely different ways. Whereas the British CoS structure gave the Prime Minister considered inter-service recommendations, the OKW functioned only to serve Hitler's will.

According to Wilhelm Deist, from the rise of the Nazi party to the outbreak of war, the leaders of the *Wehrmacht* leaders "neither generated nor sought strategic ideas."¹⁸⁴ In 1938, Hitler assumed the position of Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht*, ensuring that he alone determined Germany's strategy. The OKW became a drafting committee for his orders, rather than a general staff able to study, work, and think independently.¹⁸⁵ As a result,

¹⁸² WO 208/4307, Nov. 26, 1942.

¹⁸³ Erich von Manstein, *Lost Victories*, *Ibid.*, p. 291.

¹⁸⁴ Wilhelm Deist, "The Road to Ideological War: Germany, 1918-1945." from *The Making of Strategy: Rulers, States, and War*, ed.s Williamson Murray, M. Knox and A. Bernstein. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1994), pp. 371-380, *passim*.

¹⁸⁵ Warliamont, *Ibid.*, p. 32.

anyone who sought to influence Germany's strategy during the war bypassed OKW and approached Hitler directly. This included service chiefs - e.g. Goering and Raeder - and field commanders - e.g. Rommel, Manstein. Lacking a representative with strong character or personal connections with the Führer, the OKH had little influence on Hitler's strategic formulations.¹⁸⁶

The British had no way to appreciate who really directed Germany's strategy. Before the war, attaches like Kenneth Strong could observe details like German methods, equipment, doctrine, and order of battle to develop an understanding of Germany's military capabilities, but the inner workings of the German High Command were a mystery. Of the restructuring of OKW in 1938: "...we read of all these changes in the newspaper but we knew little of the detailed manoeuvres and motives behind them."¹⁸⁷ Beyond this, British commanders respected the German generals and instinctively assumed that Hitler must do the same. Strong believed that Keitel was "a typical and important representative of German military thought." Warliamont later described Keitel and Jodl as ciphers who identified completely with Hitler, possessing no will of their own.¹⁸⁸ Hitler was the prime mover of German strategy, and thus Hitler's political, economic, ideological and racial ideas determined Germany's strategic objectives; military considerations were only one part of his considerations. The British failed to understand Hitler's intentions, and thus failed to understand Germany's intentions; ironically, however, they understood quite well the people they were trying to assess - the German generals .

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 59-61.

¹⁸⁷ Strong, *Intelligence at the Top*, *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁸ Warliamont, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

In 1944, a review of the development of the assessment organisation dismissed FOES as a failed experiment.¹⁸⁹ This judgement was perhaps harsh from a historical perspective, but in terms of wartime requirements, entirely justified. British forecasters mimicked certain currents in German military thinking fairly accurately, but this could only be appreciated after the war with access to enemy documents, as German military thinking often diverged substantially from German strategy. This tendency grew more pronounced as the war progressed.

Although it understood German strategic intentions, FOES could not forecast German actions. Structured as a central assessing body free from departmental control, this very freedom isolated FOES from vital human and informational resources. Restricted access to operational data gathered by the departments and the JPS, and insufficient personnel to harvest it, limited FOES's ability to study enemy capabilities. Understanding alone could not produce useful forecasts. Although it hinted at the flaws in British strategy, hints of the truth could not prevent disaster in Greece and Libya. The rejection of the DNT's suggestions with regard to the new assessing body thus represented the British intelligence community's rejection of a subjective and intangible understanding of the enemy in favour of "something more solid."

The independence of FOES thus hindered its work and caused its demise - this stemmed directly from the Chiefs of Staff, who formed FOES as an independent body against the wishes of the JIS and the JPS. At the latter's urging, British assessment underwent yet another transformation in the spring of 1941, even as yet another wave of German attacks

¹⁸⁹ Capel-Dunn to Morgan, letter, 4 Mar. 44, ADM 223/465.

threatened to flood the Mediterranean.

Table 1: Intelligence Failure and FO(E)S

		<u>Greece</u>	<u>Libya, March-April</u>
German			
Intentions	-	secure southern flank; Operation MARITA	secure Libya; Operation SONNENBLUME
Capabilities	-	great	limited
British			
intelligence	-	good estimate of German capability, and British weakness	good estimate of German capability, poor estimate of British weakness
assessment	-	Balkans is a "trap" for British forces	possible limited German offensive
action	-	wishful thinking and poor timing prevent influence on British strategy; operation continues	with Greek commitment, Wavell has no forces to spare for Cyrenica; Rommel violates orders
result	-	British evacuate Greece	British lose Cyrenica

Chapter Three: The Axis Planning Section - Libya.

Part I - March 22 to April 10.

At the instigation of the Directors of intelligence, on Mar. 22 the CoS disbanded FOES and created the Axis Planning Section (APS):

The object of the APS is to place under the [JIC] a body of selected and trained officers with full experience of the tactical and strategical methods and of the political and economic implications of modern warfare, combined with expert knowledge of drafting papers.¹⁹⁰

The history of the APS is if anything even more obscure than its predecessor. In many memoirs it is little more than yet another jumble of letters in the plethora of wartime acronyms. Beesley recalls "APES" as the "Advanced Enemy Planning Section"; McLachlan interprets "APES" as the "Advanced Planning (Enemy) Section"; in a postwar review of the development of the JIC and JIS machinery, Admiral Godfrey refers to JIS as the lineal descendant of FOES, omitting any mention of the APS.¹⁹¹ McLachlan erroneously states that the JIS succeeded the APS in 1942.¹⁹²

However, the importance of the APS to British assessment was disproportionate to its brief existence. The APS produced its first paper five days after receiving its terms of reference on Mar. 22, and in the vague terminology of British Intelligence "evolved" into the Joint Intelligence Staff (JIS) by May 9.¹⁹³ As this suggests, the transition from APS to JIS

¹⁹⁰ JIC(41)112, 22 Mar. CAB81/101.

¹⁹¹ J.H. Godfrey, 2 May 47. ADM 223/465.

¹⁹² McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 256. McLachlan replicates a typographical error in ADM 223/465.

¹⁹³ The inconsistent nomenclature suggests that the switch was not formal. APS terms of reference: JIC(41)112, Mar. 22. CAB 81/101; "evolved" British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 2:3; first reference to "JIS", JIC(41)170(supplement), 23 Apr. CAB 81/102. A memo dated July 17, 1941 refers to the APS, though in the context of being embodied into the JIC, not as a
(continued...)

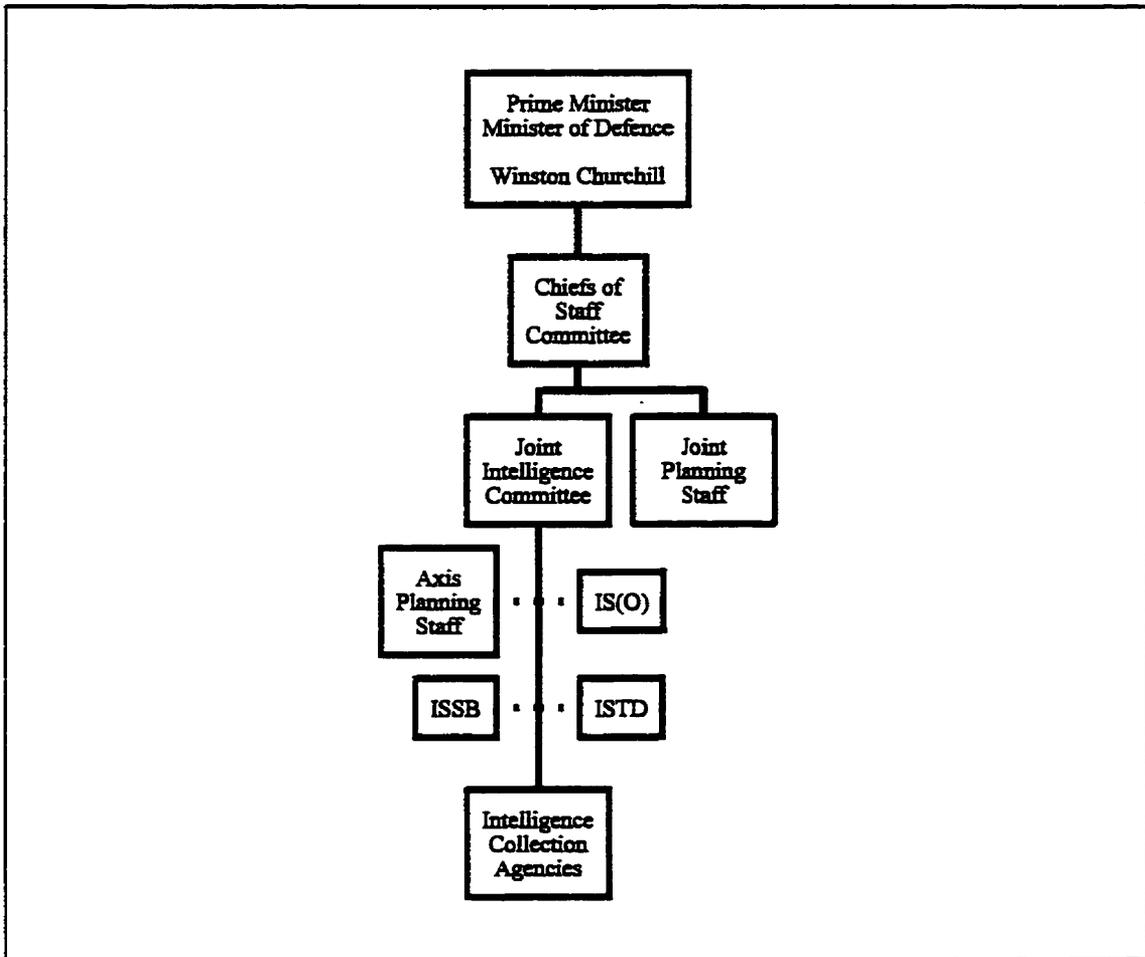


Figure 2: The JIC System, April 1941 to 1945

was more administrative than substantive. The Chiefs would wax nostalgic and seek the reinstatement of FOES in July, but the new system passed this test substantially unchanged, though its reporting procedures were streamlined. Essentially the APS was the same assessing body which would serve British intelligence for the rest of the war. Moreover, as the JIS became a part of the JIC and thus produced no official documents of its own, the APS

(...continued)
separate entity. CAB 121/230.

papers constitute an important record of how British intelligence conducted assessment for the rest of the war.

Because it was responsible to the JIC and the JPS, the new system improved the quantity and quality of assessment. In one month the APS produced more papers than FOES had in three. Of those papers Air Vice Marshall Medhurst, the RAF representative on the JIC, distinguished between two types, factual and long-term.¹⁹⁴ The latter were similar to the strategic surveys of FOES. Many of the former concerned "factors limiting German strategic flexibility" in answer to questions asked by the JPS.¹⁹⁵ FOES studied enemy intentions, accurately portraying some aspects of German thinking, but was unable to do detailed operational studies. The reformed assessment staff retained the abilities - and deficiencies - of FOES's understanding of enemy thinking, but also had the manpower and the mandate to investigate German capabilities. Their terms of reference reflected this dual focus:

Although the Axis Planning Section will be mainly concerned with drafting papers dealing with the immediate future, they will always bear in mind enemy intentions in the more distant future. They should, therefore, be in a position to produce both long-term and short-term appreciations on Axis strategy.¹⁹⁶

Making the assessment staff responsible for operational and strategic studies did not settle the debate over which should have priority. These terms of reference, however, gave operations the upper hand, which it exercised for the rest of the war, despite nostalgic impulses from certain quarters.

Some initial missteps hampered the integration of the study of capabilities and

¹⁹⁴ JIC(41)Mtg., 9 May. CAB 81/88.

¹⁹⁵ APS(41)9, Apr. 28. CAB 81/136.

¹⁹⁶ JIC(41)122, 22 Mar. CAB81/101,

intentions. Unlike the FOES, the APS had the ability to study both enemy intentions and capabilities, and to present their conclusions in a timely and straightforward manner. However, the accuracy of the APS's forecasts suffered when German capabilities were not defined by objective military factors but rather by subjective political intentions. The APS endangered British strategy through a serious misreading of German strategic intentions and one false alarm. Or it would have, had those assessments had any influence. Fortunately, in these cases they did not. The official history of wartime intelligence exaggerated the influence of the APS on British strategy and operations in the desert front. As had happened with FOES, inefficient procedures would render some of the APS's forecasts irrelevant to British strategy, regardless of their accuracy.

The implementation of the APS was the final major change in Britain's wartime assessment machine, although the fine-tuning of reporting procedures would continue until the middle of 1941. The APS was subject to a more formal structure in drafting and submitting reports than FOES had been. Any of the committees and sub-committees of the CoS, the JPS or the JIC could request papers through the JIC. The APS was encouraged to exercise its creativity, but initiating the drafting process required the prior approval of the JIC. Each member brought a brief prepared in consultation with his ministry, discussed and criticised all points in detail, referring back to intelligence divisions if necessary. The JPS were also consulted if the subject concerned them. In a collaborative effort, "Immense trouble was taken over the drafting of each sentence..." of the report. This first draft was sent

to the ministries for comments, and the final one sent to the Directors for approval.¹⁹⁷

Despite changes in methodology, procedure and organisation, the first forecasts were like those of the old system - not the least because the same personnel were producing them from the same data. The APS's first pronouncement on strategic affairs was fundamentally accurate, though like many FOES reports, not an unqualified success. The JIC assigned them a task much more limited than the all-encompassing grand strategic surveys of their predecessors. The APS were to consider whether the German mechanised column and long range bombers reported to be operating in the Murzuk area were the advance guard of a major new threat to British facilities in West Africa and the vital aerial reinforcement to the Middle East through Takoradi.¹⁹⁸ If so, Britain would have to invest scarce military resources in a completely new theatre of operations. While this paper was dominated by operational concerns, it was an important step towards the integration of the study of capabilities and intentions in strategic assessment.

Despite its distance from the theatre of operations, the APS accurately divined the truth behind vaguely misleading evidence. In order to operate in the difficult West African terrain, any such campaign would require a major strategic commitment, which the reported force scarcely qualified. Furthermore, the scant evidence available was unreliable, possibly exaggerating the size of the German forces. Information on German activity was equivocal, that on the harshness of the vast African expanse was not; given this balance of certainty and uncertainty, the APS ruled out the improbable and speculated on the possible. They felt that

¹⁹⁷ Charles Drake, "The Joint Intelligence Committee at work, 1941 to 1945 and Joint Intelligence Staff," ADM 223/465.

¹⁹⁸ JIC(41)121, CAB 81/101.

the possibility of a substantial Axis attack was faint at best, though it did recommend vigilance against small raids. Lacking more detailed evidence, the APS speculated that the reported units were most likely sent either to reinforce the Italians defending Murzuk, or to reconnoitre and acclimatize to the desert.¹⁹⁹

The OKW war diary reveals that the British assessment of German capabilities and intentions was accurate. As per their orders, the German field commanders insisted that Axis forces be deployed eastward in an active defence. The Italians objected, fearing a British attack on the southern flank, because of reports of a large Anglo-French force concentrating near Murzuk. The Germans dispatched a reconnaissance group on a round trip of 2 000 km taking a month, both to scout the area and familiarise themselves with the desert. This force was subsequently observed as the "mechanised column" in British reports. The three reconnaissance aircraft assigned to the group were undoubtedly the "long-range bombers" in the JIC report.²⁰⁰ What the Germans learned via physical reconnaissance over thousands of kilometres and weeks of travel, the APS deduced from research - that the infrastructure necessary to support major operations without extensive preparation simply did not exist in Western Africa.

The only missing element in the APS appreciation was the catalyst for these events. The reconnaissance group found that the Italian reports were wildly exaggerated - their garrisons had been panicked by minor British and Gaulist raids. Allied actions had caused Italian fears, which produced a German reaction, which in turn provoked British fears.

¹⁹⁹ APS(41)2, Apr. 1. CAB 81/136.

²⁰⁰ "Africa, 1941." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:30-36.

British and German strategy thus acted on each other in an ever-changing dynamic.

Nothing indicates that the APS even knew of British raids in the area. Their report mentioned several possible reasons for a German presence in the area, but none positively defined it as a reaction to British actions. There are two explanations for this oversight - either the liaison between the operational authorities and the intelligence community failed, or the APS simply failed to connect the raids to the reports of the reconnaissance group. There is no positive evidence as to whether the fault was one of form or function, but the most likely cause was a problem in the organisational relationship between assessment and operations.

The cause of this lapse is less important than its nature. The APS determined the operational mission and capabilities of German forces but not German motives. The APS also neglected the same factors as FOES had when it speculated on the motives behind Germany's future Balkan strategy - the influence of British actions. However, in the overall threat assessment, the British understanding of the enemy was immaterial. Objective factors which limited German capability rendered their intentions irrelevant. British forecasting was at its most accurate and certain when the assessing staff could show operational capabilities were a limiting factor.

Though the APS had ably eliminated the possibility of a German threat, the CoS's deeply imbedded preconceived notions proved harder to dispel. The importance and apparent vulnerability of the Takoradi air route made the CoS sensitive to the slightest rumour of German activity in southern Libya. APS(41)2 quoted two previous JIC studies of the area

with the same negative assessment of the threat.²⁰¹ Less than a fortnight after the APS pronouncement, the Chief of the Air Staff again sounded the alarm regarding a report of a "small German mechanised force" moving south from Tripoli.²⁰² The matter was considered not serious enough to warrant a new paper by the APS. This would not be the last time that fears of British vulnerability would challenge reasoned intelligence assessments of German capabilities. Though the APS assessment could not permanently lay their superior's fears to rest, it helped prevent the CAS's insecurity from wasting scant British military resources.

Nevertheless, in the spring of 1941 British military resources were stretched thin between the demands of three far-flung fronts. Between mopping up operations in Italian East Africa, mounting an expedition to Greece and defending Cyrenica, Wavell had no strategic reserve. In its last report, FOES had pointed out that the depletion of British forces would invite German attack, but had not the time nor the resources to do an operational study. This task thus fell to other agencies before and after the storm broke in the desert.

Until the British retreated from Mersa Brega on Apr. 1, no had one known with certainty the actual balance of forces in the desert. By March, however, anxiety was building in Cairo over the state of the Cyrenica garrison. Wavell's intelligence officer, John Shearer, wrote an appreciation from the point of view of the enemy commander on Mar. 5:

Subject to administrative preparations... the German Armoured Corps, after a few weeks' training and experience in desert warfare conditions, and unless the British substantially reinforce their present forces in Libya, could successfully [reoccupy] Cyrenica.²⁰³

²⁰¹ JIC(40)161, CAB 81/97 and JIC(41)7, CAB 81/100.

²⁰² JIC(41)151, 15 May. CAB 81/101.

²⁰³ Connell, *Ibid.*, p. 385.

Even if Wavell had accepted this prescient report, there was little he could have done, lacking mobile reserves. In a note regarding the "Defence of Cyrenica" composed Mar. 6, Wavell conceded that the desert flank required reinforcement, but maintained that the Germans would not attack before May. He expressed confidence in an active, elastic defence of Cyrenica. Ten days later, Wavell was much less confident. When visiting the field, the CiC-ME found faulty dispositions, poor state of repair and uninspired leadership. Especially worrisome was the state of the most important British mobile unit, the 2nd Armoured Division - of fifty-two tanks, half were under repair and the rest were running intermittently. He left with a fatalistic attitude:

I came back anxious and depressed from this visit, but there was nothing much I could do about it. The movement to Greece was in full swing and I had nothing left in the bag. But I had forebodings and my confidence in Neame was shaken.²⁰⁴

Against these fears was the knowledge that Berlin had no intention of mounting an offensive. From radio intercepts the British knew that Rommel had orders not to advance beyond El Agheila before the arrival of the 15th Panzer Division, which would not be before mid-May at the earliest.²⁰⁵ Wavell accordingly left Neame with new dispositions and instructions for a "fighting and strictly limited withdrawal in face of a cautious and equally limited advance."²⁰⁶ To the surprise of both sides, however, Rommel was anything but cautious and limited.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 385-6.

²⁰⁵ Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:674, 676.

²⁰⁶ Connell, *Ibid.*, p. 387.

The German high command attempted to remind the impetuous general of his orders, little knowing that they were already too late. Several days removed from the rapidly changing conditions at the front, OKW repeated the order on Apr. 3, but this time allowed him some discretion under strict criteria. They reinforced the prohibition against advancing further than El Agheila, unless "it can be determined beyond any doubt that the enemy is withdrawing most of his mobile units from Cyrenica."²⁰⁷ As indicated above, the most experienced and best equipped of the British troops had in fact been withdrawn from Africa and sent to Greece. Lack of working transport and fuel severely limited the mobility of their replacements to a degree which Wavell failed to appreciate even after his visit in mid-March.²⁰⁸ When Rommel attacked, neither Neame nor his tanks proved capable of executing a tactical withdrawal; the latter broke down at a rate of one every ten miles of movement.²⁰⁹ British actions had thus inadvertently created the conditions which the German high command felt an advance could succeed.

However, if Rommel had had any conclusive evidence of decisive British weakness in Libya, he did not care to share it with his superiors. He was entirely responsible for the decision to pursue as British forces recoiled before his advance.²¹⁰ His superiors did not share his confidence. The OKW felt that "the means at his disposal could hardly be regarded as adequate for such an operation." Despite his earlier insistence on offensive action, the

²⁰⁷ Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:676.

²⁰⁸ Playfair, The Mediterranean and the Middle East, vol. 2, *Ibid.*, pp. 1-5.

²⁰⁹ Raugh, Wavell in the Middle East, *Ibid.*, p. 193.

²¹⁰ In his own words, from the very start of his mission, Rommel "...had no intention of allowing good opportunities to slip by unused." Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 111. He decided to exceed his orders on Apr. 1, after occupying Mersa Brega, when the Luftwaffe and reconnaissance patrols reported that the British were falling back. *Ibid.*, p. 109.

Führer's own assessment of the balance of forces in Libya urged caution. Unfortunately for the British, Hitler uncharacteristically resisted the temptation to meddle in operations, and allowed Rommel free rein in the desert.²¹¹

As noted earlier, FOES had accurately assessed the intent behind the deployment of German forces to Libya, but could not foresee Rommel's insubordination. His offensive began in earnest with the attack on Mersa Brega on Mar. 31. By Apr. 4 he had taken Benghazi. British intelligence assessed these developments on multiple tracks. Two papers were presented to the JIC on Apr. 5. One, JIC(41)137(draft), examined in detail "Probable Axis Intentions in the Present Operations from Tripolitania," while the other, APS(41)3, considered general "German Strategy in 1941." These appreciations defined Whitehall's assessment of the strategic and operational threat of a German advance in the desert.

On Apr. 4, the junior JIC had determined to produce an appreciation "as a matter of urgency."²¹² Meeting at 11 am the next day, it quickly drafted and circulated a report which examined the capabilities and limitations of Axis forces in Libya in detail. They based their report on their knowledge of the demanding desert environment and decrypts of *Luftwaffe* signals. They concluded that Rommel's rapid advance had outrun the limits of the logistical and air support network needed to sustain a major offensive into Egypt, and that "an immediate advance on Egypt was not part of the initial Axis plan."²¹³ The water supply would be especially critical in the heat of the desert. The assessment concluded, however, that while this would limit the scale of the attack, the degree of British resistance would

²¹¹ "Africa, 1941." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:34-35.

²¹² JIC(41)136, 4 Apr. CAB 81/101.

²¹³ JIC(41)137(draft), 5 Apr. CAB81/101.

determine whether Rommel gained a foothold in Egypt or was held to the border.

The junior JIC's study was fundamental to the assessments produced in London, but not in the desert. Intelligence officers in Cairo and commanders in the field made similar assessments concurrently. British Intelligence holds that the junior JIC's estimate was crucial in allowing Churchill to persuade Wavell to turn and fight at a time when the latter was contemplating further retreat eastward, albeit at the expense of reinforcing the doomed Greek expedition.²¹⁴ Other sources show that this evaluation is overstated. The assessments of the JIC and APS actually coincided with several others operating independently but in parallel, most notably those of Wavell, Shearer and senior staff officers in the field.

Direct, personal observation of local conditions determined local British reactions to this crisis, more than committee assessments produced thousands of miles away. On Apr. 6, Wavell declared his intention to hold the Tobruk fortress and the frontier around Sollum: against these breaks the Axis would advance no farther.²¹⁵ Personally visiting the port itself on Apr. 8, Wavell found Tobruk's defensive perimeter run down and too long for the troops available. Past experience when the British easily took the port from the Italians was also disquieting. Despite these uncertainties, however, the local commanders assured their superior that they could hold out.²¹⁶ Wavell decided that Tobruk's supply stockpiles and support infrastructure were too important to give up without a fight. At any rate, the 9th Australian Division did not have enough transport to outrun the advancing Germans.²¹⁷ He

²¹⁴ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:393-399.

²¹⁵ Connell, *Ibid.*, p. 402.

²¹⁶ Raugh, *Ibid.*, pp. 196-7; David Hunt, A Don At War, (London: Cass, 1990), p. 69.

²¹⁷ Connell, *Ibid.*, pp. 404, 409.

thus ordered tank reinforcements brought up and preparations made for a siege.

Though APS(41)3 was submitted on Apr. 5, the JIC did not forward it to the Chiefs until Apr. 10. The JIC noted that events were developing as forecast and were confident that they would continue to do so. They felt that the CoS should read a summary of the main conclusions, if not the whole paper. In regards to the immediate threat to Egypt, the incipient summer weather would limit German operations, barring British weakness.²¹⁸

While the APS assessment obviously had no impact on the decision to hold at Tobruk and the frontier, they placed developments in the desert within a wider strategic context for the CoS. The APS studied the objective factors limiting German capability in order to forecast their probable strategic objectives and operational activity.

The result was important not so much for predicting Rommel's future actions but for placing them in relation to other operations - specifically, the Balkans campaign - helping the CoS to derive the implications for the overall strategic situation in the Mediterranean. Their conclusions would redeem past appreciations and foreshadow future possibilities.

Judging from their comments, the APS began drafting their paper before news of the initial successes of the German advance had reached London. It noted that the withdrawal of many British troops and the arrival of German armour was an opportunity for the enemy; even a limited advance to capture Benghazi or Tobruk would bring Egypt into bombing range. The Germans might open a new front to complement an offensive against Egypt, but such operations were inconsistent with the goal of immediate victory:

A further advance might be staged in co-operation with an advance through

²¹⁸ JIC(41)144, 10 Apr. CAB 81/101.

Syria; but with the hot weather approaching, this could hardly be looked upon as a short-term policy, such as is needed in 1941.²¹⁹

The CoS could thus count on environmental factors to shape and limit possible German actions. The APS predicted that the enemy would devote its energies to developing its logistical and support network so as to mount a decisive offensive later, while continuing to exploit any sign of British weakness:

Their aim would be to tie to Libya British forces that might be used in the Balkans, or to take advantage of any weakness created by their removal.²²⁰

As we have seen, neither Hitler nor Rommel explicitly linked strategy in Libya with the conflict in the Balkans, but whatever German intentions, it had that effect, given the limited military resources available to Britain.

This appreciation proved accurate, and in fact was simply an elaboration of a previous strategic assessment. FOES had described the German presence in Libya as defensive. In the same manner that they had studied the difficulties of operations near Murzuk, the APS concluded that a serious threat to Egypt could emerge only after a major commitment of German resources to build up an adequate logistical base. In describing the offensive as opportunistic, the APS credited the loss of Cyrenica to the weakness of the British defence, rather than to a planned German offensive, which incidentally, was accurate. In effect, the APS reaffirmed the original FOES appreciation of the strategic balance of power in the desert as sound, but added operational considerations to support their case.

This assessment was borne out by subsequent events. Indeed, the British came to

²¹⁹ APS(41)3, Apr. 5. CAB 81/136.

²²⁰ APS(41)3, Apr. 5. CAB 81/136.

understand the situation before the German high command did. German sources reveal great confusion and indecisiveness in Berlin at the time. The German high command, confronted with unplanned success in the desert had to choose whether to reinforce Rommel immediately, at the expense of other planned operations, or to reinforce him later and risk squandering the fruits of his success.

Opinion was divided. The OKW war diary reveals Hitler's indecision at the end of March, balanced between the opportunity presented by Rommel's unexpected victory and his fear that German forces were overextended and vulnerable.²²¹ His generals were similarly divided between counsels of opportunism and caution. Halder's diary reveals strong differences within the Wehrmacht. Rommel demanded reinforcements and air support for an immediate advance on the Suez, which Goering approved. Brauchitsch was much more enthusiastic about the Libyan campaign than Halder, whose view of the precipitous advance was jaundiced. While the Chief of Staff complained about Rommel's "preposterous demands", his superior was "casting about" for any means of supporting him.²²²

Looking back, Rommel wrote that his superiors had missed the "really great opportunity" of a North African strategy in 1941.²²³ He claimed that with more motorised troops and secure supply, he could have destroyed the British army defending Suez and driven all the way to Iraq and Iran. From this Middle East position, Germany could then strike at the Soviet Union's vital Caucasian oilfields. As Rommel put it,

Anyone who fights the whole world must think in continents. It mattered

²²¹ "Africa, 1941." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:34.

²²² Halder, 11 Apr. 41, *Ibid.*, p. 868.

²²³ Rommel. *Ibid.*, p. 511.

nothing how many million square miles of territory lay behind the thin barrier which the Eight Army had set up in the Libyan desert. What mattered was to break through that line...²²⁴

This strategy was similar to the one outlined by Raeder on Sept. 26, 1940. Raeder urged Hitler to capture Suez and Gibraltar as an alternative to BARBAROSSA. With Egypt, Germany could advance via Syria to Turkey, thus threatening the Soviet Union from the south:

The Russian problem will then appear in a different light. Fundamentally, Russia is afraid of Germany. It is doubtful that whether an advance from the north will be necessary.²²⁵

The Führer expressed general agreement to Raeder's proposals, adding that Russia should be encouraged to advance to the south.²²⁶

Had Germany immediately begun the necessary preparations in 1940, Rommel might have had his reinforcements in 1941. However, Hitler's commitment to any sort of Mediterranean strategy at that time was superficial at best. The German High Command discussed armed intervention in North Africa throughout the summer of 1940, without making any firm decision.²²⁷ On Nov. 3, Hitler declared he had "written off the Libyan affair," because the Italians had proved incapable of sustaining an offensive.²²⁸ Hitler did go so far as to meet with Molotov on Nov. 12 and 13, 1940, but by that time there was no need for an alliance. Unable to find a willing or able ally among the Mediterranean states, Hitler

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 514-5.

²²⁵ Führer Conferences, 26 Sept., 40, *Ibid.*, p. 141; Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:221.

²²⁶ Führer Conferences, *Ibid.*, p. 142.

²²⁷ Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:217. Halder, Jul. 30, Aug. 23, 26, Sept. 14, 8 Oct., 15 Oct., *Ibid.*, pp. 529-622, *passim*.

²²⁸ Germany in the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:228; Halder, 3 Nov., 40, *Ibid.*, p. 672.

lost interest in acting against Britain before BARBAROSSA by the end of October.²²⁹ Germany's involvement in Libya was thus purely defensive in strategic intent.

Ultimately, the will to divert forces to Rommel in 1941 was less important than the ability to do so. He and his supporters were ignoring the special difficulties of operating in the desert. Additional German forces could not land in time to matter, before the summer heat rendered operations impossible. Even if they could, the Axis did not have the supplies or the logistics network required to maintain them. To build such a network took time, time which Hitler had squandered in the strategic indecision of 1940. Halder's assessment of the possibility of further offensive action mirrored APS opinion: "This operation can be staged only as a raid. To hold Suez, we have neither the troops nor the supply facilities."²³⁰

Ultimately, the man whose opinion mattered most in Germany came to the same conclusion, ten days after the APS. On Apr. 15 the Führer ordered Rommel to limit offensive action to raids until his second panzer division arrived, and told him that no more forces could be spared. That day a report reached OKH which vindicated Halder. Rommel had ground to a halt on the frontier, awkwardly caught between British forces defending Tobruk and counter attacking from Egypt. Exhausted, out of supply and taking heavy casualties, Rommel admitted that his forces were insufficient to "take full advantage of the unique opportunities afforded by the overall situation," just as Halder and British intelligence had predicted.²³¹

²²⁹ Schreiber, "The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy..." *Ibid.*, p. 257, 260; Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:197.

²³⁰ Halder, 14 Apr. 41, *Ibid.*, p. 873.

²³¹ Halder, 15 Apr. 41, *Ibid.*, p. 875.

Part II: April 10 to May 5.

However, the members of the JIC and the APS had no time to rest on their laurels as British forces detected German reinforcements. Near the end of the month, Middle East Command reported elements of the 15th Panzer Division at the battlefield. Cairo believed that the rest of this unit would shortly complete their disembarkation at Tripoli and reach the front some time in May.²³² Rommel would then have a force of three to four armoured and mobile divisions.²³³ The British had to determine how this change would affect the enemy's operational capabilities and intentions. Despite their initial successes in determining conditions in the Western Desert, the APS's subsequent estimates of Rommel's capabilities would show the problems of assessment at a distance.

According to the British official history of intelligence, an APS assessment of the threat to Egypt shaped a highly risky operation to reinforce the Middle East Command. On Apr. 18, Wavell reported that his tank strength was perilously low, and expressed little hope of recouping his losses to Rommel or Greece: his opponent, on the other hand, could soon look forward to reinforcements of up to 400 armoured vehicles.²³⁴ In a draft telegram to the military mission in the United States, the CoS outlined their strategic priorities, stating that the U.K. and Malaya were both more important than the Middle East, and both were still

²³² British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:395-6.

²³³ APS(41)10, 29 Apr. CAB 81/136.

²³⁴ Wavell's estimate was based on both British weakness and an out-dated TOE for German armoured divisions. The irregular TOE of Axis formations distorted British attempts to estimate Rommel's tank strength until late September, leading the British to overestimate by 100% the strength of every German unit and formation. John Ferris, "The Usual Source': Signals Intelligence and Planning for the 'Crusader' Offensive, 1941." Intelligence and National Security, forthcoming (1999), p. 10; Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 153fn.

short of their minimum defence requirements.²³⁵ In the spring of 1941, however, the U.K. and Malaya would continue to go wanting: despite the general shortage, the British managed to collect some 280 tanks, some from new production, other by stripping some Home Forces units. On May 6, a convoy under heavy escort passed Gibraltar into the Mediterranean gauntlet. With a great deal of good fortune, on May 12 Operation TIGER safely unloaded its tanks and Hurricane fighters with minimal losses. British Intelligence contended that a JIC paper convinced the CoS that Operation TIGER was necessary.²³⁶ Closer examination shows that the paper was actually an APS appreciation - and that its influence was overstated.

The APS estimated the enemy's capabilities and intentions in Libya and the Middle East in two papers. The first, submitted to the JIC on Apr. 29, was a commentary on the CiC ME's appreciation of enemy capabilities, which will be examined in detail below. The second, submitted May 1, placed these capabilities in the context of overall "German Intentions in the Middle East." The APS continued to assume that the enemy's policy was to defeat the U.K. in 1941, through naval blockade, air attack and finally direct invasion. The aim of further operations against Egypt would be to force the British to maintain large forces far from their industrial base, thereby diverting shipping and naval resources from the battle of the Atlantic. Another Axis offensive before the summer heat would immediately increase this pressure, though with logistic difficulties and stronger British forces, the rate of advance would be slower than in Libya.²³⁷

Allowing for the fact that all units were under strength and the Italians rarely matched

²³⁵ CoS(41)150th Mtg., 28 May. CAB 79/11.

²³⁶ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:396.

²³⁷ APS(41)11(draft), May 1. CAB 81/136.

German combat efficiency, the APS estimate of the scale of Rommel's mobile force was roughly correct.²³⁸ However, the timing of the threat to Egypt would also depend on the German supply situation. Logistics was of prime importance in the desert, because in addition to the supplies necessary for operations, the combatants had to bring along the basics of human survival, like food and water. As Martin van Creveld observed, "neither [side]...had the slightest hope of finding anything useful but camel dung."²³⁹ The APS believed that German capability at the front depended on supply, which in turn depended on port capacity and the *Luftwaffe's* ability to prevent RAF interference.²⁴⁰

Two interdependent issues are of interest in determining the accuracy of APS calculations: the amount of supplies which the Axis could unload in North Africa, and the amount which their troops needed for sustained operations. The accuracy of British estimates can be measured against actual requirements and capabilities as outlined in Martin van Creveld's study of logistics in war and The Rommel Papers. The APS assessment of May 1 assumed that Axis controlled ports in North Africa could unload a total of no more than 5 000 tons/day.²⁴¹ They also considered Axis logistics when asked by the JPS to comment on two telegrams containing the estimates of the CiC-ME. The APS concluded that with the ports in Cyrenica alone, the Axis could land 1 000 tons/day, enough to support four

²³⁸ Mobile formations available to Rommel consisted of the 5th Light (later renamed 21st Panzer), the 15th Panzer, the Ariete and Trieste Italian armoured divisions. Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 153.

²³⁹ Martin van Creveld, Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton, (Cambridge: Univ. Press, 1977), p. 182.

²⁴⁰ APS(41)10, 29 Apr. CAB81/136.

²⁴¹ APS(41)11(draft), May 1. CAB 81/136.

divisions.²⁴² According to van Creveld, the theoretical capacities of the major ports in North Africa under optimal conditions were as follows:

Tripoli : 1 500 tons/day
 Benghazi: 2 700 tons/day
 Tobruk : 1 500 tons/day.²⁴³

Since Tobruk was still in British possession, the APS's estimate of the maximum Axis port capacity was not far from reality.

A multitude of limiting factors, however, reduced this maximum capacity. In The Rommel Papers, the "Desert Fox" blamed his superiors and his Italian allies for inadequate logistical support. With little sympathy and understanding of the latter's difficulties, Rommel complained that the Italians supply convoys were still unloading at Tripoli, rather than the much closer Benghazi.²⁴⁴ In fact, in the beginning of May, the port of Benghazi was still physically blocked and was also subject to attack by the RAF. Therefore the supplies unloaded rarely reached even 33% of the theoretical maximum, about 700 to 800 tons/day.²⁴⁵ Van Creveld suggests that, on the basis of future experience, the capture of Tobruk in the spring of 1941 would not have increased unloading capacity. In 1942 the Italians barely managed to land 600 tons/day at Tobruk, at heavy cost: closer to the front also meant closer to British airfields.²⁴⁶

The RAF and the lack of coastal shipping severely limited the utility of the Cyrenican port facilities. Nevertheless, had Tobruk fallen, even these reduced capacities would have

²⁴² APS(41)10, 29 Apr., subsequently submitted as JIC(41)191, 3 May. CAB 81/102.

²⁴³ Creveld, Supplying War, *Ibid.*, pp. 184-187.

²⁴⁴ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 143.

²⁴⁵ Creveld, Supplying War, *Ibid.*, p. 187, 187 fn32.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

exceeded the APS's estimate of the supply needed by Rommel's four division strike force. Benghazi and Tobruk, even under difficult conditions, had a demonstrated capacity of 1 300 to 1 400 tons/day, well over the APS calculation of a minimum requirement for 1 000 tons/day.

The APS failed to appreciate that the key factor determining enemy capabilities was not port capacity. Rommel's outspoken criticism of Italian naval efforts also tended to obscure the real bottleneck in the Axis supply system, a failing which van Creveld identified. From February to May of 1941, the Italians actually landed tonnages in excess of the requirements for all Axis air, sea and ground forces in North.²⁴⁷ However, these supplies were stalled in Tripoli: getting them from the ports to the front proved to be the chronic problem with the Axis war effort in North Africa. Despite having proportionally ten times more motor transport than that allocated to divisions assigned to BARBAROSSA, Rommel's logistics system was unequal to the vast distances and rough conditions of the desert campaign.²⁴⁸ The denial of Benghazi by blockage and bombing was less important for reducing cargo-handling capacity than it was for increasing the distance from the ports to the front. Experience in 1942 suggests that unfettered use of Benghazi would have substantially alleviated the transport problem in April/May of 1941. Landing a greater proportion of supplies closer to the front reduced transit time and mechanical strain, increasing the rate of supplies actually reaching the front lines. It was a severe strain to truck just the minimum daily requirement - 1 500 tons of supplies - over 1 500 kilometres from Tripoli to Tobruk,

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 185. Despite this lavish allocation, in 1942 Rommel estimated that 85% of his transport consisted of captured British vehicles. Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 245.

much less stockpile for a major offensive.²⁴⁹

While aware of this problem, at this stage British intelligence had no evidence of Axis difficulty moving supplies from the ports to the front. In mid-April, a growing number of intercepted GAF signals revealed that the *Luftwaffe* was suffering fuel shortages, but did not contain information on Rommel's supply difficulties.²⁵⁰ British cryptologists were unable to read Army Enigma at all until the fall, and then only sporadically.²⁵¹ British tactical intelligence was equally unedifying.²⁵² Hence, the state of Axis lines of communication between the unloading docks and the front was a matter of supposition. As the Junior JIC noted in their appreciation at the beginning of April: Information as to the amount of transport in Tripolitania is scanty. A shortage would prove a serious limiting factor in maintenance of supplies.²⁵³

In late April, information from Cairo was not only still scant, but equivocal. According to POW interrogations, not all of the 15th Armoured Division's supply transport had disembarked; on the other hand, there were "signs" that the Axis were able to use Benghazi and smaller ports in Cyrenica.²⁵⁴ Unknown to the Middle East Command and the APS, Benghazi was actually still blocked and would remain so till early May;²⁵⁵ Derna was limited to receiving ammunition which could be transported by submarines, while the minor ports

²⁴⁹ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁵⁰ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 2:395.

²⁵¹ Ralph Bennett, "Army Ultra in the Mediterranean Theater: Darkness and Light." from Intelligence Investigations: How Ultra Changed History. (London: Cass, 1993), p. 35.

²⁵² British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:393.

²⁵³ JIC(41)137, 5 Apr. CAB 81/101.

²⁵⁴ Churchill, vol. 3. *Ibid.*, p. 250.

²⁵⁵ Crevelde, Supplying War, *Ibid.*, p. 187 fn 32.

at Buerat and Sirte were useless.²⁵⁶ Without this knowledge, the British had to consider Rommel a potential threat to Egypt: supposition about supplies was a thin shield against fear of an enemy who had acted unexpectedly once before. Wavell thus accelerated his timetable for a German attack from July to mid-June. The APS was even more pessimistic.

In addition to studying the objective factors defining enemy capability, the APS considered his behaviour. Though the APS acknowledged that the enemy probably had "great difficulties" with water and fuel, they believed that he would again try for a quick and decisive thrust and that the British lack of mobile forces would compensate for Axis difficulties. The APS assumed that the enemy knew of British weakness from his "many sources" in Egypt and would take "great risks" to exploit it.²⁵⁷ They repeatedly cited recent behaviour as evidence of the enemy's willingness to take risks:

...particularly after the experience of Cyrenica, we must assume that the German will move with the very minimum of impedimenta and he may well hope to continue his advance during May.²⁵⁸

Clearly, Rommel's initial attack in April had led the APS to question their assumptions about enemy thinking, particularly about the minimum necessary supply for an offensive. Unfortunately, their efforts to improve the situation were hampered by error and uncertainty. Wavell believed that supply difficulties would prevent an attack by Rommel's mobile forces until mid-June - with the qualification that the Germans might again act unexpectedly.²⁵⁹ The APS believed this view optimistic, commenting that conventional

²⁵⁶ Playfair, *Ibid.*, 2:157.

²⁵⁷ APS(41)10, Apr. 29. CAB 81/136.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:396.

British military thinking had a "general tendency to overestimate the enemy's daily requirements."²⁶⁰ This was true but unavoidable. According to Ferris:

The assessment of logistics involved schematic analyses of hard intelligence about enemy strength, supply requirements and capacity, combined with crude guesses.²⁶¹

APS tried to add experience from past behaviour, but they underestimated German requirements. Rommel stated that he needed 1 500 tons/day, including water and rations, to sustain "normal activity" for his seven German and Italian divisions.²⁶² Offensive action would have had greater requirements. According to van Creveld, a single motorised division organised like the original 5th Light Division required 350 tons/day.²⁶³ Meanwhile, British intelligence consistently overestimated the strength of German tanks in Africa by up to 400%, even when they correctly assessed the number of formations. This naturally distorted any attempt to estimate German logistical needs.

Future events also illustrated important factors besides the tonnages of supplies landed in North Africa. From February to May, 1942, supplies unloaded in Africa averaged 60 000 tons/month.²⁶⁴ Rommel had ten divisions to supply in 1942, but still managed to retake Cyrenica and push on to Alam Halfa with supplies captured at Tobruk. This scale of supply - 200 tons/day/division - was theoretically even less than the APS estimate that the Axis would need 250 tons/day/division for an offensive in 1941. A bald comparison, however, would be misleading: other factors affected the actual movement of supplies to the

²⁶⁰ APS(41)11, 29 Apr. CAB 81/136.

²⁶¹ Ferris, "'The Usual Source'...", *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁶² Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁶³ Creveld, *Supplying War*, *Ibid.*, p. 185.

²⁶⁴ Creveld, *Supplying War*, *Ibid.*, p. 193-4.

front lines, and the enemy's need for them. In 1942, the Axis could use Benghazi, which in 1941 was blocked long enough to preclude a May offensive. In 1942 Axis forces also had the benefit of four months of relative inactivity to build stockpiles, whereas in 1941 they had advanced over 700 km against opposition, and then spent most of April in hard fighting at Tobruk.

Thus, while the APS's basic calculations were roughly accurate, the context significantly modified actual German capabilities and intentions. Though the APS tried to take the wastage from recent activity into account, this was hard to quantify. The APS thus erred on the side of caution, overcompensating for earlier displays of German operational improvisation in Norway, Greece and Cyrenica. Unaware of the limits to German capabilities and all too aware of British weaknesses, the APS forecast an Axis attack in May, which exaggerated German operational aggressiveness. Before the setback at Tobruk, at his most optimistic Rommel hoped to launch an offensive in the summer.²⁶⁵ Until British intelligence intercepted von Paulus' assessment of Rommel's capabilities on May 4, as will be described below, the assessment staff believed that Rommel would attack much sooner than he could.

In April, however, Rommel was not ready to take the defensive, and expended most of his time and energy attacking Tobruk. This was the rock upon which both his plans and the APS forecast foundered. Wavell's decision to hold on to the fortress was controversial in the War Office. John Kennedy, the DMO and the Army representative on the JPS, believed that "Holding Tobruk would be like letting go the anchor of a battleship in the midst

²⁶⁵ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 118.

of a naval battle."²⁶⁶ Yet the issue of Tobruk was conspicuously absent from APS deliberations. Of course, the APS could not predict the fate of the fortress, which was subject to local, tactical factors beyond their purview and observation. But it was well within their mandate to comment on how the different potential outcomes of the current battle might affect the campaign as a whole. The APS inexplicably failed to do so.

As we have seen, lack of information made British estimates of the recent expenditures and the rate of resupply of Axis forces speculative. However, the importance of Tobruk to Rommel's supply problem should have been evident just by studying objective factors of topography and logistics. As stated previously, van Creveld has suggested that taking the port probably would not have solved Rommel's supply problem.²⁶⁷ However, he failed to consider a significant point - Tobruk also blocked the all important coastal road leading to the frontier. According to Rommel, the detour around the south (the "Axis bypass") through open desert wore down vehicles and delayed supply columns at least a day, often more.²⁶⁸ Opening this road would have allowed Rommel to maintain forces deployed to the east much more easily. Tobruk itself also contained significant stockpiles of British supplies, which in 1942 sustained Rommel's push to Alam Halfa.²⁶⁹ Had Wavell abandoned its stores, British munitions probably would have been little use to the Germans, but it would have saved scarce manpower and materials, especially ammunition, that was expended in multiple attempts to remove this roadblock. At the very least, capturing Tobruk would have

²⁶⁶ Kennedy, *Ibid.*, p. 90, 140-1.

²⁶⁷ Creveld, *Supplying War*, *Ibid.*, p. 187.

²⁶⁸ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 138.

²⁶⁹ Creveld, *Supplying War*, *Ibid.*, p. 196-7.

simplified Rommel's logistics. Whether he then would have had the capability to advance on Egypt in 1941 is a matter of speculation.

Whatever might have been, Rommel's troops and his superiors reached the limit of their capabilities and intentions, respectively, at Tobruk. Regardless of his achievements, Rommel's superiors had no intention of allowing further insubordination. On Apr. 27, General von Paulus arrived at Rommel's HQ, to "head off this soldier gone mad," as Halder colourfully put it.²⁷⁰ After reviewing Rommel's plans and dispositions, he authorised one more attempt to take the fortress. On the eve of the attack, von Paulus assured OKW that even if Tobruk fell and the British withdrew, Axis forces would regroup and resupply. In reply, the OKW repeated their injunction not to allow Rommel to advance without orders under any circumstances.²⁷¹

In hindsight, the APS appraisal of Rommel's willingness to take risks with his supply was justified, but reality sided with OKH and von Paulus. Before the final attack on Tobruk, Rommel claimed that his supply situation was more than adequate.²⁷² After fighting, this final assault made deep inroads on the British defensive perimeter, but at the cost of severe casualties. The day after the APS submitted their report, Rommel finally conceded that he did not have the strength to mount the large-scale operation necessary to take Tobruk.²⁷³ When the besieged Australians' subsequently counter-attacked, Paulus discovered that

²⁷⁰ Halder, 23 Apr., *Ibid.*, p. 885.

²⁷¹ Halder, Apr. 30, May 1, *Ibid.*, pp. 896-7.

²⁷² Germany in the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:691-2.

²⁷³ Rommel, *Ibid.*, pp. 132-33.

German units were suffering from critical shortages, especially of ammunition.²⁷⁴ The rebuff at Tobruk objectively proved both Rommel and the APS wrong.

Unable to clear his flank, Rommel's operational planning for May was quite different from the APS forecast. Without Tobruk, Rommel had no power to threaten Egypt. On May 4 Paulus forbade further offensive action larger than local attacks and ordered Rommel to assume a defensive posture. Before he left, von Paulus emphasized that Rommel's most important objective was to hold Cyrenica, regardless of the awkward tactical situation. He would have to beseige the obdurate fortress while holding the frontier against growing British strength.²⁷⁵

British understanding of German risk-taking was hampered by the inconstancy of German strategic intentions. Halder cast von Paulus as "a guardian of our ideas, which have the blessing of the Fuehrer."²⁷⁶ Events showed that this blessing was often fickle and indecisive in the tug of war between Rommel and the General Staff. As we have seen, the initial commitment to Libya was conservative and defensive, despite Hitler's distaste for defensive operations. Rommel's bold nature and Hitler's well-known tendency to measure success in terms of territorial gain let the former act beyond the scope of that commitment. Indeed, though he knew nothing of and cared less about the effect on British shipping, Rommel hoped to continue his advance in the summer of 1941, envisioning a campaign directed against Egypt and the Middle East.²⁷⁷ Though his capabilities surprised the British,

²⁷⁴ Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:691-2.

²⁷⁵ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 135.

²⁷⁶ Halder, 4 May 41, *Ibid.*, p. 901.

²⁷⁷ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 118, esp. pp. 514-5.

Rommel's intentions fit their assumption that Germany's primary strategic objective was to defeat Britain.

Ignorant of German plans beyond the Libyan theatre, both Rommel and the British assumed that Hitler had more than sufficient force available for such a campaign. The APS estimate for the scale of an offensive in May assumed that the Germans could not reinforce Rommel with more than two divisions per month, unaware that the German High Command had no intention of doing so.²⁷⁸ In late May, Rommel demanded support from German air and naval units for the siege of Tobruk.²⁷⁹ He received nothing more than a promotion. When Hitler changed his mind in October, the air corps and submarines transferred to the Mediterranean went at the expense of ongoing campaigns in Russia and the Atlantic.²⁸⁰ The redeployment of submarines substantially, if temporarily, reduced the pressure on British shipping,²⁸¹ which, ironically, completely contradicted APS assumptions regarding German strategic objective for operations in the Mediterranean. Despite apparent German strength, the competing requirements of his ambitious commitments limited Hitler's strategic flexibility in 1941, in a way which neither Rommel nor the APS appreciated.

These limits were crucial to the German decision-making process in 1941. To the APS, for Germany to risk four divisions in an offensive with partial logistical preparation appeared reasonable, given the threat this would pose for important Imperial interests. However, to the German command the risk of defeat outweighed the opportunities of

²⁷⁸ APS(41)10, Apr. 29. CAB 81/136.

²⁷⁹ Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²⁸⁰ Fuehrer Conferences, Aug.26, Sept. 17, *Ibid.*, p. 229, 235.

²⁸¹ Fuehrer Conferences, 25 July and 13 Nov. 41, *Ibid.*, p. 224, 240; Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:714.

success. Loss of the forces in the North African sideshow would divert even more resources from Hitler's strategic priorities. These priorities dictated a conservative, defensive operational strategy in North Africa aimed at preserving Axis forces, rather than indulging in risk. Neither Paulus nor the OKH questioned the operational need to capture Tobruk, just the poor tactics Rommel employed in his attacks, leading to high casualties which jeopardised the overall mission.²⁸² The contributors to the German official history concluded that Rommel's insubordination ran counter to such duly considered military strategy, relying more on Hitler's whim than a sound assessment of interests versus resources:

Hitler's favour enabled Rommel to satisfy his personal ambitions and give the North African theatre an importance which neither Hitler nor the Wehrmacht and army high commands had originally intended it to have.²⁸³

Strategically, the April offensive was an anomaly which was not to be repeated in May. Hence, the opportunistic and risk-taking nature of Rommel's actions in early April were not useful indications of German strategic intentions in the future. Experience was misleading - though Rommel's boldness in violating orders and military common sense won Cyrenica, it was a wasting asset. Rommel's precipitate advance exhausted his troops and stretched his supply lines to the breaking point, while tasking his superiors' tolerance for further risks. Paulus was sent to prevent any further anomalies and bring Axis operations into harmony with overall German strategy. British intelligence could not appreciate this until

²⁸² Rommel blamed inadequate training and the nature of positional warfare for his high casualties; Rommel, *Ibid.*, p. 133; his subordinates and the German official history blamed Rommel for throwing tired, outnumbered troops at the fortress piecemeal, without giving them a chance to acclimatise or reconnoitre their avenues of advance. Germany in the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:681-684, 693.

²⁸³ Germany and the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:752.

they intercepted his assessment of local conditions on May 4.

Although the APS ultimately underestimated German logistic requirements and overestimated German operational boldness, their misassessment of the situation in the desert had little influence on actual British operations. From the Apr. 20 to the beginning of May, there was some confusion as to how soon 15th Panzer would pose a serious threat. As late as Apr. 28, the CoS believed that the German advance forces had outrun their communications, and to remain locally active against Tobruk or Mersa Matruh would need air supply. They cited Wavell's estimate that an enemy offensive with three mobile divisions could only threaten Egypt from July onwards. This timing depended on the ports at Benghazi and Derna; if the enemy could exploit ports more successfully, the attack could come "considerably earlier."²⁸⁴ On Apr. 29, the APS submitted their forecast of a possible attack in May; this paper was circulated by the JIC under their name on May 3.²⁸⁵ According to British Intelligence, this paper persuaded the CoS to risk sending the TIGER reinforcements.²⁸⁶

In fact, it is highly unlikely that this paper, or the APS's strategic survey, APS(41)11 of 1 May, circulated as JIC(41)188 of 5 May, played any part in the decision to send the TIGER convoy. The decision was made long before the papers were circulated. Furthermore, the decision to undertake TIGER originated with the Prime Minister, in part against the wishes of the CoS. He actually decided to mount the convoy immediately in response to

²⁸⁴ CoS(41)150th Mtg., 28 May. CAB 79/11.

²⁸⁵ APS(41)10, 29 Apr. CAB 81/136; JIC(41)191, 1 May.

²⁸⁶ British Intelligence, *Ibid.*, 1:396.

Wavell's pessimistic estimate of relative tank strength of Apr. 20.²⁸⁷ After two days of prolonged discussions, Churchill won the support of the Navy and the Air Force. CIGS, CiC Home Forces, and the DMO were all loathe to reduce the tanks strength of the U.K., but Churchill overrode their objections.²⁸⁸ On Apr. 22, he communicated the fruits of this victory to Wavell.²⁸⁹ Had the issue still been under debate, Churchill hardly could have specified the number and types of tanks to be sent.

It is equally unlikely that the APS's views contributed to Churchill's effort to "persuade" his advisors. The APS's strategic appreciation that was circulated before Wavell's alarm mentioned the possibility of an opportunistic attack without giving a specific timetable.²⁹⁰ They specified an offensive in May only well after the decision to send reinforcements was made. The APS assessments at the end of the month may have marginally contributed to British perception of imminent danger, and thus affirmed Churchill's decision after the fact. But in and of itself, Wavell's estimate painted a sufficiently vivid picture of British weakness to provoke the PM to act.

The accuracy and the influence of APS appreciation concerning Libya were thus deeply flawed. APS appreciations were most accurate when they were able to divine the factors limiting enemy capability, as in the case of Murzuk and, belatedly, Rommel's first offensive. Through the study of factors affecting operations, especially of logistics in the Libyan theatre, the APS could determine probable strategic intentions.

²⁸⁷ Churchill, vol. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 245-46.

²⁸⁸ Kennedy, *Ibid.*, pp. 99-100, 105.

²⁸⁹ Churchill, vol. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 245-9.

²⁹⁰ APS(41)3, 5 Apr. CAB81/136.

However, despite initial successes, the APS forecast an offensive just at the moment that the enemy decided such was impossible. The APS's overemphasis of port capacity and downplaying of Rommel's internal lines of communication were somewhat mitigated by the fact that the bold but logistically-challenged German commander was himself just as ignorant. They did not know for certain about the state of German transport, but should have lent more weight to their suspicions. But Rommel's unorthodox behaviour created uncertainty about British concepts of German supply requirements. In this uncertainty lay the possibility of a threat to Egypt.

The APS's greatest omission was in overlooking the tactical and operational importance of Tobruk, which should have been evident from a map. This error probably occurred because the APS were overly influenced by the shortage of British armour. The APS assumed that the enemy would exploit this weakness, when in fact the transition from mobile to positional warfare actually spelled the end of German operations. The fortifications of Tobruk maximized British infantry and artillery strength, while its location objectively limited Rommel's capabilities against Egypt.²⁹¹

From this combination of uncertainty and blindness, the APS tried to forecast Rommel's actions based on their understanding of German strategic intentions - as FOES had done. Both FOES and OKH had appreciated the strategic limits to Rommel's capability, but his insubordination, with Hitler's connivance, proved embarrassing to their forecast of immediate events. Operationally, Rommel's offensive had been unexpected, but it was consistent with British assumptions about German strategic priorities - the defeat of Britain

²⁹¹ Germany in the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:693.

in 1941. The APS posited a worst case scenario in reaction to the recent surprise and British weakness. Though this was arguably congruent to Rommel's aggressive-mindedness, he could no longer single-handedly dictate Axis strategy in North Africa after the arrival of von Paulus. When the German high command reasserted their control and their strategy at the end of April, the APS's understanding of German actions was nullified.

Ultimately, the APS's degree of understanding was irrelevant. Unlike FOES, the APS had the manpower and the mandate to influence British decision-making but its finished drafts circulated too slowly to influence British operations, as in the decision to hold Tobruk, or British strategy, like the decision to reinforce Wavell at the expense of Home Forces. In the latter case, even if it had come out sooner, the forecast of a May offensive would only have reinforced Churchill's decision; TIGER would not have reached Alexandria any faster than it did. As it was, the Prime Minister made his decision based on operational intelligence without the benefit of a strategic appreciation by the APS. However, not all of the APS's forecasts in the spring of 1941 would be so impotent.

Part III: APS Procedure

Regardless of the quality and the quantity of the APS's assessments, the general sluggishness of the process was hampering the production of timely and influential intelligence. One of the DNI's chief complaints against FOES was its "ponderosity" [*sic*]; speed again became an issue in the production of reports during the spring of 1941.²⁹² On Apr. 23, the ACAS(I) circulated a memo with suggestions and concerns about procedure,

²⁹² DNI to Pound, letter, 11 Mar. 41. ADM 223/465.

provoked by the heavy volume of requests for reports on recent German activity, especially from the Joint Planners.²⁹³ Two distinct issues determined the productivity of the assessment staff: firstly, the speed of deliberations and priorities in drafting reports; secondly, the delay in circulating finished papers.

Of the two problems, the first was simpler to fix. The initial elaborate procedure for the submission of papers had reflected the fear that conflicting opinions might reach intelligence consumers, eroding the authority of the JIC and the Service intelligence branches. Oversight of APS papers by both the ministries and the individual Directors of Intelligence was cumbersome and redundant. The JIC typically circulated reports of a technical nature and/or specific to one service on the same day as they were received, but often delayed papers on German strategy by as much as four days.²⁹⁴ This delay served little purpose, as the JIC circulated these appreciations without significant changes to their conclusions.

Procedural reform was relatively uncontroversial. The ACAS(T) proposed that the JIC consider papers together, in person, with the authors present if necessary.²⁹⁵ The former became regular practice, which sped up the editing process considerably; however, the latter did not, much to the frustration of those authors. The most time consuming step in the process proved to be quibbling with the various departments about conclusions already

²⁹³ One concerned giving the junior JIC a clear directive on what could be included in the daily "Intelligence Situation Report" and the other that the Directors meet occasionally to consider trends or present a warning in regards to new information to the CoS. JIC(41)170, 23 Apr. CAB 81/102.

²⁹⁴ APS(41)10, of 29 Apr., circulated 1 May; APS(41)11, of 1 May, circulated 5 May. APS(41)5, 15 Apr. "Future Strategy of Japan" was circulated the same day, as JIC(41)155.

²⁹⁵ JIC(41)170, 23 Apr. CAB 81/102.

forged through interservice debate and compromise. Troubridge therefore suggested that circulating the papers to the ministries was unnecessary, with drafts going direct to the JIC.²⁹⁶ This spared a round of fruitless debate and made the JIC solely responsible for ensuring that appreciations were consistent with departmental views. The JIS followed this procedure unchanged, although not entirely without complaint.

The APS's work priorities were a more contentious issue. Despite fundamentally accurate conclusions at the beginning of April, the APS exhibited a certain lack of responsiveness to events. Two days after the event, the APS report submitted on Apr. 5 considered the implications of the fall of Benghazi only speculatively; in comparison, the Junior JIC prepared a report on it in one day.²⁹⁷ A further indication of teething troubles was that the estimates of the timing and scale of attack for the options described in "German Strategy in 1941" were submitted separately, almost two weeks later.²⁹⁸ The ACAS(T) questioned whether the APS was satisfying the demands of its clients at both operational and strategic levels, or perhaps shirking its responsibility to the JPS and other sub-agencies. In mid-April, the burden of their *ad hoc* requests for appreciations had fallen on the country sections of the intelligence directorates.²⁹⁹

The APS may have caused some of the difficulties out of its desire to retain the independent status of FOES without the liabilities. On Apr. 24, the JIC asked the APS to write a short report on all work done to date, prefaced by their perception of their duties and

²⁹⁶ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 256.

²⁹⁷ JIC(41)137, 5 Apr. CAB 81/101; APS(41)3, 5 Apr. CAB 81/136, also JIC(41)144, 10 Apr. CAB 81/101.

²⁹⁸ APS(41)3, 5 Apr., APS(41)6 17 Apr. CAB 81/136.

²⁹⁹ JIC(41)170, 23 Apr. CAB 81/102.

responsibilities.³⁰⁰ The APS produced its report four days later. They attempted to dodge responsibility for *ad hoc* work like that demanded by APS(41)2 [see above], because the Junior JIC had more immediate access to the information on the "isolated problems" which inspired these requests. Furthermore, although mandated to represent the views of their ministries, the APS felt that they should have some leeway in the creativity and length of their considerations:

...we should express the views resulting from our own argument rather than act purely as a drafting committee. For this reason we have, in long-term papers, subordinated speed of production to thoroughness of examination.³⁰¹

Referring to the continuing debate over whether assessment should work sealed away from the operations staff as FOES had supposedly been, the APS advocated developing closer relations with the Planners. Nevertheless, an undeniable ambivalence towards the work required by the JPS persisted in the assessment staff. Charles Drake recalled that the JIS "felt that they could produce their best work without being worried and asked for help by the Strategic Planners."³⁰² The assessing staff wished to retain the luxury of time and independent thought granted to FOES, without the problematic mechanisms of intellectual purity and roleplaying. As it was, they saw in the APS the "germ of a useful permanent-interservice body" for strategic assessment.³⁰³

However, a leisurely "thoroughness of examination" was inimicable to producing timely and useful estimates. Though the assessment staff might prefer to consider matters of

³⁰⁰ JIC(41)11th Mtg., 24 Apr. CAB 81/88.

³⁰¹ APS(41)9, 28 Apr. CAB 81/136.

³⁰² Drake, *Ibid.* ADM 223/465.

³⁰³ APS(41)9, 28 Apr. CAB 81/136.

grand strategy exclusively and independently, FOES's experience showed that enemy intentions and capabilities could not be assessed separately without risking duplication of effort and/or conflicting results. Thus, on May 9, the JIC unanimously agreed that the functions of the Junior JIC and the APS overlapped. As suggested by DMI Davidson, the JIC amalgamated the two bodies, rather than abolish the APS. The APS would retain its name and accommodation in War Cabinet Offices, while each member would have an office in their respective ministry to keep in touch with the Intelligence branches. Rather than receiving their assignments from the JIC, the staff would be responsible for drafting all JIC papers.³⁰⁴

Though they were to retain their name, in practice APS "fell into disuse" and they became known as the "Joint Intelligence Staff."³⁰⁵ The JIS retained the same structure as the APS, with a senior and a junior team. The division of labour between the two teams indicated the new priorities of British assessment:

...the [senior] team usually worked with the more important papers and left the [junior] team to undertake the longer term forecasts...and any required re-assessments of strengths and enemy dispositions from...previous papers.³⁰⁶

As noted previously, the junior team was mostly composed of civilians with wartime commissions.³⁰⁷ The JIC had apparently decided that strategic surveys were less important than factual reports. However, this did not mean the end of strategic forecasting. Whereas the APS had focused on enemy intentions in the tradition of FOES, the JIS would devote

³⁰⁴ JIC(41) mtg, 9 May. CAB 81/88.

³⁰⁵ British Intelligence *Ibid.*, 1:298.

³⁰⁶ Drake, *Ibid.* ADM 223/465.

³⁰⁷ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 257; Annan, *Ibid.*, p. 65.

more attention to the limits of enemy capabilities. Though some might still favour strategic assessment untouched by operational concerns, determining the limits to what the Germans could do was crucial to strategic assessment.

Chapter Four: Spain, January 8 to April 23

By virtue of geography, the Iberian Peninsula and its associated territories figured more prominently in British and German strategic considerations than their military, political or economical value alone merited. Barely visible on the maps of grand strategy, the island-fortress of "The Rock" had a strategic significance out of proportion to its size in 1940-42. Important not only as a stepping stone for north-south convoy routes through the Atlantic, Gibraltar was also the staging point for the projection of Allied sea power into the Western and Central Mediterranean.³⁰⁸ Though the Luftwaffe could make transit of the Sicilian Narrows extremely costly, air power alone was unable to completely cut off British naval traffic through the Central Mediterranean, as Operation TIGER proved. Hitler himself felt that Sicilian-based air power was a "poor substitute" for the possession of Gibraltar.³⁰⁹ In and of itself, the loss of Gibraltar would hinder British operations in the Atlantic and the

³⁰⁸ Although most British reinforcements and supplies to the Mediterranean theatre were either flown through Takoradi or shipped the long way around the Cape of Good Hope, at times the ability to sail the shorter route through the Western Mediterranean proved decisive. The British air and naval base at Malta stood astraddle the Axis shipping lanes in the central Mediterranean, and hampered Rommel's reinforcements and supplies en route. While the Axis air forces did neutralise the island for periods of time, the British repeatedly fought supply convoys through to Malta from the west, despite heavy losses. Ultimately, Gibraltar was also the staging point for the first combined Anglo-American offensive, Operation TORCH. Playfair, The Mediterranean and the Middle East, vol. 2, *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁰⁹ "OKW War Diary..." GMS, *Ibid.*, 9:104.

Mediterranean; whoever held Gibraltar also held the key to North West Africa.

Ultimately, the fate of Gibraltar depended on British relations with Franco's Spain. As Churchill put it, "Spain has much to give and even more to give away."³¹⁰ The period from mid-1940 through 1941 was the most fraught in Anglo-Spanish relations during the Second World War. Britain's enemies were ideologically aligned with the victors of the recent civil war, and had helped them win it. Approximately 80 000 Germans were in Spain, of which any proportion could be spies or soldiers in disguise.³¹¹ With the fall of France, even more might pour across the French border, with or without Spanish permission.

Against these motives for casting in with the Axis was balanced a shattered economy dependant on the good will of the Royal Navy for basic survival. By carefully fostering Spanish economic dependency, the British made neutrality Spain's best policy. According to Denis Smyth, these measures were actually initiated to preserve the British blockade of Germany, rather than to control Spain; however, in practice this strategy served both purposes equally well.³¹² While Hitler promised Spain a subsidiary role in his march to world domination, the British could deliver just enough food and fuel to keep the Spanish people from starving to death - or not, if they so chose. Should this economic policy fail, or the Germans enter by force, the British also prepared military contingency plans. In the summer 1940, the British designated forces to occupy Spanish and Portuguese-held islands in the

³¹⁰ Churchill, vol. 2, *Ibid.*, p. 518.

³¹¹ J.R. Thrackrah, "The Gibraltar Question and Its Effect On Anglo-Spanish Relations, 1936-1945." *Iberian Studies*, 5, 1, (1976), p. 11.

³¹² Smyth, *Survival*, *Ibid.*, pp. 40-41, 60-65.

Atlantic to replace Gibraltar in the convoy system.³¹³ So long as Spain balanced between Germany's guns and Britain's butter, the fate of Gibraltar was uncertain and insecure. This ambiguity suited British policy, so long as the status quo was not threatened. However, a number of alarms almost provoked the British to initiate their contingency plans, and also to seek the help of others with greater means. These are among the major "might have beens" of the Second World War.³¹⁴

According to the official history of British intelligence, the first such alarm occurred in mid-December of 1940. Churchill believed that the Germans would retaliate for British victories over Italy by occupying Spain, with or without its permission. The Prime Minister wished to pre-empt the enemy and move on the Atlantic islands. However, the Chiefs of Staff all too aware of their limited resources and the effect of such an action would have on Spanish policy, persuaded him to defer this action until there was more positive evidence of German intentions.³¹⁵ Pre-empting the German threat might have been tactically attractive, but was neither operationally vital nor strategically desirable: the relatively minor military advantage would have been more than offset by the potentially negative reaction of neutral governments on both sides of the Atlantic.

Patience was rewarded - indications from Madrid soon convinced Whitehall that Madrid was increasingly unlikely to grant permission for German operations on Spanish territory. Continued Spanish political resistance and German military inaction lessened

³¹³ *Grand Strategy* vol. 2. *Ibid.*, p. 432.

³¹⁴ see Lucio Ceva, "The North African Campaign 1940-43: A Reconsideration," from John Gooch, ed. *Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War*, (London: Frank Cass, 1990), p. 89.

³¹⁵ *British Intelligence*, *Ibid.*, 1:256-7.

anxiety at Whitehall, at least for a while. Information of the former came from the resident Naval Attache and Ambassador in Madrid. Churchill believed that the Germans were unlikely to use force to gain entry, at least until April:

All these matters are highly speculative.... But the fact that Hitler has not acted...when conditions... were more favourable to him, makes it on the whole a reasonable working assumption that any German adventure in Spain will at least wait for the spring.³¹⁶

Indeed, fear of another "German adventure" would alarm the British in the spring of 1941, yet the majority of secondary sources have ignored the alarm and/or its source. Grand Strategy states nothing more than that a crisis at the end of April, 1941 led to the organisation of a new expedition codenamed Operation PUMA; this, and the previously planned expeditions were placed on 48-hour alert.³¹⁷ In his work on British policy towards Spain in 1940-41, Smyth reveals that the alarm originated from the CoS, after discussion with the JIC, but he misses the influence of the APS on the latter. Both British Intelligence and Churchill's memoirs ignore the alarm, though it led the PM to initiate an unprecedented diplomatic approach.

One might conclude that this APS assessment did not much influence British strategy. In fact, it provoked as much action as British resources could allow. The APS's statement was unprecedented in the history of British assessment for its clarity, certainty and influence, but it is characteristic in its lack of accuracy. The APS forecast on Apr. 5 was categorical:

³¹⁶ PM to CoS, minute, 7 Jan. 41. CAB 121/144.

³¹⁷ Operation PUMA (later PILGRIM) was to capture the Grand Canary Island as a substitute base for Gibraltar; Operation THRUSTER was directed against an island in the Azores; Operation BASEBALL was targeted at the Cape Verde Islands. Grand Strategy, vol. 2, *Ibid.*, p. 433.

German victory in the Balkans was "inevitable," and an attack on Gibraltar through Spain would come "immediately thereafter."³¹⁸

Here, as in many issues, the roots of the APS forecasts lay in the work of FOES. In its first survey of grand strategy from the German perspective, FOES outlined the costs and benefits of inducing Spanish collaboration. Beginning from the assumption that the enemy's ultimate objective was the defeat of Britain, FOES conceived a wide-ranging operation aimed at escalating the attack on British shipping:

To increase the pressure of the blockade, we must be ready at the first favourable moment to occupy Spain and Portugal and even some of their Atlantic islands. We might follow this by the occupation of the Tangier, Ceuta, Tetuan regions. Pressure on Spain must be maintained in the hope of inducing Franco to modify his present attitude.³¹⁹

By controlling ports and airbases on the northern and western coasts of the peninsula, the Germans could range farther west into the Atlantic from bases beyond the reach of British forces. German forces could also dominate the Straits of Gibraltar with artillery fire, or assault the Rock directly. In either case, the base would be neutralised, effectively closing the western Mediterranean to British naval influence. Subsequent German expansion into North and West Africa would also threaten crucial British air and sea supply routes to the Middle East.³²⁰

Such a campaign would also entail significant long term liabilities. In this first appreciation FOES failed to consider Spanish resolve to resist such moves, and the effectiveness of such resistance. Its tacit assumption was that the Spanish government would

³¹⁸ APS(41)3, 5 Apr. CAB 81/136.

³¹⁹ FOES(40)1(revise), 8 Jan. CAB 84/64.

³²⁰ FOES(40)1, 8 Jan. CAB 81/64.

be compliant or passive. FOES thus ruled out the possibility of an organised resistance movement, though it allowed that sabotage might further weaken the inferior Spanish infrastructure. The chief deterrent to German action was deemed to be Spain's critical economic situation, which FOES characterised as "desperate." Spain depended on food imported on the sufferance of British naval supremacy. Unless intervention was immediately decisive, the Germans would either have to make up the deficit from their own limited reserves or let the Spanish starve. Neither alternative was strategically desirable, but FOES still felt that the cost was worth the threat to Britain. In their words, "...the economic problem involved must be a deterrent. It is not a bar."³²¹

In hindsight, FOES's roleplaying allowed it to penetrate actual German preparations to that point. Its conclusive recommendation was that Germany should be ready to occupy the Iberian peninsula "at the first favourable moment," while maintaining diplomatic pressure on Franco.³²² This described German military activity to that date quite accurately. German planning for involvement in Spain began on August 14, 1940, when it had become clear that the British were willing to continue fighting without the French.³²³ On Nov. 12 OKW issued Directive 18, which defined the objectives for the operation, designated FELIX. Seventeen days later, all the preliminary preparations that could be carried out covertly were completed.³²⁴ The next step was to acquire Spanish permission to move the assault forces to their jumping off positions.

³²¹ FOES(40)1, 8 Jan. CAB 81/64.

³²² FOES(40)1, 8 Jan. CAB 81/64.

³²³ "Operation *Felix*." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:1.

³²⁴ This included training of a special independent Abwehr sabotage unit. Burdick, *Germany's Military Strategy, Ibid.*, p. 94-95.

FOES's estimate of German determination to gain passage through Spain was also fairly accurate, albeit with an appreciable time lag. Their paper of Jan. 8 accurately reflected German intentions several months earlier. Anticipating Franco's exorbitant economic and territorial demands, Hitler had privately declared that he was willing to promise the Spanish anything in order to gain passage, although honouring that promise was another matter entirely.³²⁵ Indeed, the value of Nazi promises notwithstanding, Franco himself questioned whether the vast quantities of food and fuel that he insisted the Spanish people needed to survive could be distributed across Spain's chaotic infrastructure.³²⁶ Canaris, acting as go-between for Hitler and Franco, told Halder that "the transportation problem defies solution" - Gibraltar could be taken, but at the cost of losing the Atlantic islands and letting the population starve.³²⁷ The OKW considered Spanish demands excessive and proposed much lower requirements more tolerable to Axis supplies and the Spanish transportation net.³²⁸ Typically, these logistical studies did not consider the political component to Franco's demands - there is no indication that they were ever proposed diplomatically.

On Dec. 3, OKW notified Hitler that only if the order was given immediately could the attack on Gibraltar commence in February as originally intended, so that the troops involved could be free for reassignment by May.³²⁹ However, the progress of the political preparations for FELIX lagged far behind the military. Despite months of negotiations and promises, on Dec. 10 word reached OKW that Franco adamantly refused to enter the war

³²⁵ Halder, 14 Sept. 40, *Ibid.*, p. 595.

³²⁶ "OKW War Diary," Dec. 8. *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:40.

³²⁷ Halder, 8 Dec. 40, *Ibid.*, p. 727.

³²⁸ *Germany and the Second World War, Ibid.*, 3:150.

³²⁹ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:15, 19.

unless Britain was on the verge of collapse; Hitler's reaction was to halt further preparations, though reconnaissance was to continue.³³⁰

Until February, 1941, British intelligence based their assessment of the threat to Gibraltar on the indicator of whether or not Spain would accede to German demands. Assessments of this issue depended heavily on information provided by pro-British sources close to the Franco regime. Through its embassy in Madrid the Foreign Office had a steady stream of intelligence on the latest Spanish reaction to German diplomatic pressure.³³¹ The British felt that they could rely on this source of timely diplomatic intelligence as an indication of enemy strategy so long as the Axis wanted Spanish cooperation. If the Germans were determined to gain entry against Spain's will, diplomatic intelligence on Spanish intentions would become irrelevant.

On Jan. 23, FOES repeated its original considerations, though with the significant addition that the moral effect of Italian defeats in Libya and an Anglo-American-Spanish wheat agreement had stiffened Spanish political resolve. FOES believed that actual operations were unlikely for the moment, but that Gibraltar would continue to be a German strategic objective.³³² In fact, the British grossly exaggerated the impact of their victories over Italy. Canaris reported that Franco was actually most concerned about the absence of a German operation against the UK proper; his overriding objective in these talks was to avoid any long term military involvement at all costs.³³³

³³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9:44.

³³¹ *British Intelligence, Ibid.*, p. 1:256.

³³² FOES(40)2, Jan. 23. CAB 81/64.

³³³ Warliamont, *Ibid.*, p. 127.

However, while Hitler was remarkably sanguine about his Axis partner's crisis in Libya, he became increasingly pessimistic about assessment of the political conditions for FELIX. On Jan. 9, the day after FOES circulated its first strategic appreciation, Operation FELIX was officially "abandoned" for the first time. Hitler felt that

...even the loss of North Africa would do no more in a military sense than restore the situation as it was before 25 June 1940, and even at that the overall German position would unlikely be [*sic*] less favourable than on 1 September 1939.³³⁴

He directed that negotiations continue, though the prospects of success were "scarcely promising."³³⁵ Despite a pledge of a million tons of grain, Franco had refused to commit himself until Britain was at the point of collapse.³³⁶

Hitler's last throw at a chance to take Gibraltar was to turn to his junior partner and fellow Fascist. In a hastily arranged meeting on January 19-20, he asked Mussolini to go to Madrid to win Franco over. Reluctant to assist German penetration into an area perceived as an Italian sphere of interest, but unable to refuse a direct request from Hitler, the Italian dictator agreed.³³⁷ FELIX was temporarily reprieved: Hitler ordered the preparations to be maintained in case his ally succeeded where German diplomacy had failed. On the same day, he approved Operation SONNENBLUME, indicating that whatever its original objectives, FELIX had become merely another possible means of propping up the Italians in their theatre of war.³³⁸

³³⁴ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:86.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*

³³⁶ *Führer Conferences, Ibid.*, p. 171.

³³⁷ Burdick, *Germany's Military Strategy, Ibid.*, p. 116-117.

³³⁸ "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:98.

However, unlike SONNENBLUME, FELIX did not expand as the British advanced westward - rather the opposite. Contrary to the expectations of FOES and its successors, Hitler proved unwilling to wait indefinitely for Spanish cooperation. When Mussolini failed to produce results, Operation FELIX was definitively cancelled on Jan. 28. On Feb. 7 OKW noted that the forces originally allocated to FELIX were available for reassignment.³³⁹ Meanwhile, in Libya, German policy was to provide only the minimum support deemed necessary to prevent total Italian collapse. The political and economic prerequisites demanded by Franco far exceeded such a minimum. By 1941 Hitler's primary concern was with German strategic objectives; a combined Axis strategy was distinctly secondary. Libya was a theatre secondary to German interests and the initial force requirements for SONNENBLUME were small.

However, the requirements for FELIX were substantial. Operations to assault the heavily fortified Rock and to close the Straits would require an especially large concentration of heavy artillery, units which were also needed in the planned invasion of the Soviet Union. Should FELIX commence after January, the forces committed would not be available in time for BARBAROSSA. Not even the apparent opportunities of Rommel's unexpected success several months later would shake loose reinforcements for the Mediterranean at the expense of BARBAROSSA.³⁴⁰

³³⁹ *Ibid.*, 9:116.

³⁴⁰ Planning for operations against Gibraltar continued at OKH, despite the collapse of diplomatic negotiations. Once the success of BARBAROSSA was guaranteed, an ambitious plan codenamed FELIX-HEINRICH would send a sizable force back across the length of Europe. The required artillery would have comprised twenty-nine of the 111 artillery battalions assigned to the invasion of Soviet Russia. Burdick, Germany's Military Strategy,

(continued...)

It was at this point that British assessment diverged from actual German intentions. Had their view of Hitler's aims been accurate, their estimate of his likely actions in Spain would probably have been accurate. As yet unaware of Hitler's determination to attack the Soviet Union, FOES continued to assume that Britain would remain the focus of Axis attentions. So long as they believed that the Germans eschewed forceful entry into Spain, British assessment could rely on Spanish acquiescence as a significant indicator. However, once Spanish policy became unambiguous, the dominant issue was German intentions. The British had no source of intelligence on German intervention; their assessment was therefore based on the less certain ground of supposition. By the end of January, 1941, both sides appreciated that Spain was resistant to Axis wiles, but whereas this simply led Hitler to turn elsewhere, the British assumed that he would try to achieve his objective by force.

Both sides pondered the option of unauthorised German entry into Spain, though the British spent considerably more time on it. FOES never stated that invasion was imminent, but it did assert that this was inevitable. On Feb. 18. they suggested that unless Franco yielded soon,

...sterner measures must be tried - a coup d'etat or assassination first, or, if these fail, the occupation of Spain by force.³⁴¹

Though none suggested a *coup d'etat*, some of Hitler's military advisors thought Gibraltar worth the price of a hostile Spain. After a month of fruitless negotiation, OKH began to anticipate such a contingency - the reconnaissance mission was ordered to proceed discreetly

(...continued)

Ibid., p. 123.

³⁴¹ FOES(41)2, Feb. 18. CAB 81/64.

with the possibility of hostile entry in mind.³⁴² However, Halder did not try to advise his Führer as to whether the military advantages outweighed the political and economic liabilities of FELIX: good German soldiers, even of the highest rank, were to leave matters of state to the political leadership. Privately, however, Halder confided to his diary that Spain would be "...an ally who will cost us dearly."³⁴³

However, planning for the contingency of forced entry was not allowed to proceed any farther. German official records are as coy as British records in naming advocates of the road not taken. What was recorded in the OKW war diary was Hitler's respect for the sovereignty of a fellow Fascist:

From the very start, Hitler refused to carry out Operation FELIX without the permission of Spain, or against its will, as had been proposed from another quarter.³⁴⁴

He would remain steadfast in his scruples. In 1943, Mussolini suggested that German armour sweep through Spain to attack the Anglo-American landings in North Africa from the rear; he received no response.³⁴⁵ Of course, by then Hitler had little armour to spare.

One can infer that some of these proposals must have originated from the *Kriegsmarine*. Raeder and his naval operations staff repeatedly championed the case for FELIX:

As on several previous occasions, [Raeder] emphasized that the capture of Gibraltar would have an important bearing on the situation in the entire

³⁴² Halder, 7 Oct. 40, *Ibid.*, p. 611.

³⁴³ Halder, *Ibid.*, p. 564.

³⁴⁴ "Operation *Felix*." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:19.

³⁴⁵ Mussolini to Hitler, letter, 8 Mar., 43, qf. Burdick, *Germany's Military Strategy, Ibid.*, p. 182.

Mediterranean area.³⁴⁶

In fact, their ambitions ranged far wider than the Mediterranean. Despite their enthusiasm, however, official German documents record no discussion of operations without Spanish cooperation.

According to Halder, Hitler was less loath to discuss such options with his chief of staff.³⁴⁷ Apparently, the Führer believed that forced entry would have "extreme consequences," especially in Africa. Disaffection and resistance in Spanish Morocco could spread to French colonies currently still loyal to Vichy. He concluded by outlining a contingency plan for the occupation of Vichy in response to any significant developments in North Africa. So concerned was Hitler that he ordered the assigned forces to be on a ten day alert period; these troops were also not to be taken from MARITA, but to be dedicated only to Operation ATTLA, as it was called. From these clues, clearly Hitler had not simply rejected the possibility of forcible entry into Spain though discussions of the matter went unrecorded for the sake of posterity.³⁴⁸

On Mar. 19, in its next - and final - strategic appreciation, FOES attempted to anticipate events in Spain following the impending Balkan conflict. Written with typical FOES circumlocution, their analysis again favoured authorised entry. The deciding factor would be the prestige value of total German victory in Greece by the late April or mid-May:

³⁴⁶ "Operation *Felix*." *GMS, Ibid.*, 7:12.

³⁴⁷ Halder, *Ibid.*, 8 Dec. 40, p. 727-28.

³⁴⁸ Halder, 8 Dec., 40, *Ibid.*, p. 727-8; Burdick, *Germany's Military Strategy, Ibid.*, p. 104n.

In spite of the recent partial success of English and American economic bribes, this successful demonstration of German military might can hardly fail to tip the political balance in Spain sufficiently far in our favour to enable Suner to force the final move.³⁴⁹

The possibility of entry by force was only mentioned in the context that should authorised entry cause internal strife in Spain, that would suffice as a pretext to occupy the whole country.

A fortnight later, APS circulated their survey of "German Strategy in 1941." By then the Germans had already reached the Egyptian frontier, overrun Croatia and come into contact with British troops in Greece. Despite these developments, the JIC felt the paper was worthy of attention because impending German victories would have serious consequences across the breadth of the Mediterranean:

The course of events in 1941 may well depend on the stand which it is possible to make in Greece, since on this is likely to depend the future attitude of Turkey and Spain.³⁵⁰

With this statement the JIC linked British military operations in Greece to the wider strategic context of the whole Mediterranean. This was not an objective, physical link, but an estimate of the importance of the intangible moral effect that the resolution of the Greek campaign would have on the neutral governments on the flanks of the Mediterranean. However, British forces in the Mediterranean were fully committed - nothing more could be done for the Balkans.

Even as Operation LUSTRE raced towards final defeat, the APS predicted imminent battle on another front. With a certitude rare to typically equivocal intelligence reports, the

³⁴⁹ FOES(41)5, 19 Mar. CAB 81/64.

³⁵⁰ JIC(41)144, 10 Apr. CAB 81/101.

APS claimed that the Germans would move on to Spain after the Balkan campaign - no matter what the outcome. They predicted that the prestige value of a victory would bend the Iberian Peninsula to German will. The APS, unlike their predecessors, also considered the unlikely possibility of a German defeat in the Balkans, but they believed that this might provoke

....[a] move South-West...to recover prestige and to break the British blockade, especially if their own counter-blockade does not show signs of being successful.³⁵¹

Neither side had any doubt as to the outcome should Germany move against Gibraltar. The Wehrmacht expected Operation FELIX to last four weeks, from the moment German forces entered Spain to the capture of Gibraltar.³⁵² The APS estimated that once German forces crossed the border, they could begin arriving in Southern Spain within twelve days; the whole assault force might arrive ten days later. Although the APS did not speculate how long the fortress could hold out, they stated that hostile fire from Spanish artillery already in place would make use of the base and transit of the straits dangerous for British shipping.³⁵³

The German officers who reconnoitred the area were less impressed with the firepower of their potential ally. They described the Spanish artillery as "pitiful - too few and worn out," lacking sufficient spare parts and ammunition for more than a few days of

³⁵¹ APS(41)1, Apr. 5. CAB 81/136.

³⁵² "OKW War Diary..." *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:14.

³⁵³ APS(41)8, Apr. 23. CAB 81/136.

fighting.³⁵⁴ Their guns also lacked sufficient optical equipment.³⁵⁵ The difference between British and German assessments of Spanish artillery can be reconciled by their radically different objectives. The Germans intended to capture the heavily fortified "Rock," which would have required a far greater volume of shellfire than that needed to interdict naval traffic.³⁵⁶ At the very start of German planning, Hitler adamantly insisted on occupation. He rejected the suggestion that the fortress be neutralised via air attack, and demanded total occupation with no more justification than that he would entertain no "half-measures."³⁵⁷ Without objective evidence of Hitler's arbitrary decision, the APS believed that the neutralisation scenario was the minimum possible threat to Gibraltar: the least of Hitler's "half-measures" would still cause the British great inconvenience.

Irrespective of the true status of Spanish guns, both sides also understood that British military responses were limited. German strategists believed that the British would move against Spanish and Portuguese-held islands as soon as German forces crossed the border, while British naval supremacy would severely limit German capacity to interfere. FOES anticipated that the Germans would anticipate just such a reaction:

...the advantages [to] a penetration into Spain or Portugal might be offset by British occupation of some of the Atlantic islands. If Iceland is any clue, the British are certain to go for those islands as soon as we cross the Spanish frontier.³⁵⁸

³⁵⁴ Germany in the Second World War, *Ibid.*, 3:145.

³⁵⁵ Burdick, Germany's Military Strategy, *Ibid.*, p. 78.

³⁵⁶ Operation FELIX envisioned 210 heavy and medium guns firing more than 8500 tons of ammunition. Prior to the assault, several medium batteries were to be transferred to the Spanish for coastal defence the west of Gibraltar. "OKW War Diary..." *Ibid.*, 9:20-21, 27.

³⁵⁷ Burdick, Germany's Military Strategy, *Ibid.*, p. 38.

³⁵⁸ FOES(40)1(revise), 9 Jan. CAB 81/64.

The possibility for German interference in British shipping operations and contingency plans thus led to more a specific query from the JPS with regard to German intentions and capabilities.

As with the Libyan theatre, the APS defined the limits of German capability and intentions in the Atlantic. On Apr. 15, an ad hoc paper outlined the prerequisites and methods for a German attempt to occupy the Cape Verde Islands. British and Portuguese actions would be the key deterring factor. The Portuguese were reinforcing the defences on the Azores and would probably soon do the same with their other island possessions. The Germans would need French-controlled Dakar to sustained the occupation of the Cape Verdes, but then, with the former under their sway, they would have no need for the latter. The chief argument against an independent operation was that the British would occupy the strategically more important Azores in response to any violation of Portuguese neutrality.³⁵⁹ The APS thus concluded the Germans would only attack the Cape Verdes in concert with plans to take Portugal and the Azores as well.³⁶⁰

The CiC of the *Kriegsmarine* had in fact reached the same conclusions several months earlier. In mid-November Hitler had been enthusiastic about taking the Cape Verdes. However, his naval chief advised him that the islands would be difficult to hold and were not important enough to merit the effort, while such an operation was liable to induce a British and American reaction against other Portuguese colonies and/or Portugal itself.³⁶¹ Yet again,

³⁵⁹ Glyn A. Stone, "The Official British Attitude to the Anglo-Portuguese Alliance, 1910-1945." *Journal of Contemporary History*, 10, 4, (1975), p. 740.

³⁶⁰ APS(41)4, Apr. 15. CAB 81/136.

³⁶¹ *Führer Conferences*, *Ibid.*, p. 147, 153.

the APS proved its ability to rule out strategically isolated enemy operations.

The APS continued to study the strategic impact of German access to Spanish ports on the battle for the Atlantic. They believed that German forces could occupy the northern and western coasts of Spain fourteen days after entry.³⁶² The possible effect on British shipping was illustrated by the German covert resupply of U-boats in violation of Spanish neutrality. Operation MORO extended the range of German submarines to the northern coast of Brazil in the summer of 1940, surprising the British and forcing them to expand their defensive operations.³⁶³ Operation MORO was necessarily limited by the need for secrecy. Open use of Spanish ports would have allowed far greater numbers of U-boats to attack Allied shipping farther into the mid- and South Atlantic.

The APS elaborated upon possible British counter-moves to preserve the strategic balance of power in the Atlantic. Submarine bases in northern Spain would be beyond the reach of British destroyers, but the British could nullify some of this advantage by occupying the Azores and other Portuguese-held islands:

The importance...of controlling these islands cannot be exaggerated. If adequate fuel supplies could be established there, British convoys from Gibraltar could be routed out of range of German air reconnaissance. Destroyer escort could be provided over a much wider range and aircraft could operate against submarines from landing grounds in the islands.³⁶⁴

With the direct route to Alexandria closed, the Mid-Atlantic would have become the battleground for the lifeline of the British Middle East position. Whether their respective

³⁶² APS(41)6, Apr. 17. CAB 81/136.

³⁶³ Charles Burdick, "'Moro': the Resupply of German Submarines in Spain, 1939-1942," Central European History 3, 3, (1970), pp. 283-284.

³⁶⁴ APS(41)8, Apr. 23. CAB 81/136.

bases would have given the British or the Germans a decisive advantage is a matter of speculation.

None the less, for several months this issue was significant to the British and German strategy. Halder quoted Hitler as saying on Oct. 15: "Collaboration with Spain is of interest to us because of Gibraltar; we don't want anything else..."³⁶⁵ In fact, Hitler and his naval advisors wanted much more from Spain than Gibraltar, though not necessarily for the same strategic objectives. The APS enumerated a number of the other advantages that the Germans would derive from Gibraltar:

The occupation of the ports of North West and West Africa, and the islands lying off the coast, would progressively strengthen Germany's position.³⁶⁶

The *Seekriegsleitung* (SkI) strongly advocated this strategy throughout the 1940-1941 period. Positioned in North-West Africa, Germany air and naval bases would extend the attack on British shipping, while German troops defended Africa from the threat of Allied incursions and/or the further defection of Vichy colonies. Those troops could also advance south against Central Africa and dislocate the British supply system by occupying Freetown.³⁶⁷

The *SkI* believed that these operations would ultimately force the British out of the Mediterranean entirely. Naval strategists also coveted the Atlantic islands as bases, but Raeder simply did not have the means to secure them, not in 1940, or any other time.³⁶⁸ According to Holger Herwig, Germany never had the means to realise its strategic aims: the

³⁶⁵ Halder, 15 Oct. 40, *Ibid.*, p. 623.

³⁶⁶ APS(41)3. Apr. 5. CAB 81/136.

³⁶⁷ Schreiber, "The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy..." *Ibid.*, p. 256.

³⁶⁸ Holger Herwig, "The Failure of German Sea Power, 1914-1945: Mahan, Tirpitz and Raeder Reconsidered," International Historical Review. 10, 1. (1988), p. 100.

Kriegsmarine aspired to colonial world power status, but its strategy for attaining it was fundamentally bankrupt.³⁶⁹ Germany was hard pressed to exploit the newly conquered bases in France and Norway:

...three problems...militated against optimum exploitation of this enhanced geographical position: inferior fleet, insufficient submarine force, and enemy air superiority combined with ineffective air cover.³⁷⁰

The 'Z' Plan was to have made up for the *Kriegsmarine's* numerical inferiority with a massive fleet designed to assert Germany's world power status from India to Greenland; however, such ambitions which were dubious at best in peacetime were, by 1940, "sheer delusion."³⁷¹ Ultimately, the *Kriegsmarine's* only realistic strategy was "to die with honour."³⁷²

However, the navy could not keep Hitler's attention focussed on the necessary first step in their programme, the conquest of the British Mediterranean position, because he favoured expansion in the Atlantic primarily in order to deal with the United States. Norman Goda argues that Hitler was interested in Gibraltar solely as a route to North West Africa, in order to begin developing the infrastructure of North West Africa for a "defensive forefield" against future American attacks.³⁷³ Hitler believed that Britain was already beaten, even if the British refused to acknowledge it. When Franco had offered Spanish participation in the war soon after the fall of France, Hitler was distinctly uninterested:

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 69-105.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

³⁷² Even the honour of the *Kriegsmarine* is questionable: *Ibid.*, pp. 102-3.

³⁷³ Goda, "The Riddle of the Rock..." *Ibid.*, pp. 297-314, *passim*.

In June 1940 a high-priced alliance with a destitute country for the conquest of a distant naval base in a war that seemed all but won struck the Germans as superfluous.³⁷⁴

In the wake of the British attack on the French fleet at Mers el-Kebir in July, Hitler demanded bases in Casablanca. Goda argues that Germany could neither use nor needed such bases in the war against Britain; the only possible opponent was the U.S. This display of German territorial ambition in Africa had a negative effect on relations with Spain, Vichy and Italy.³⁷⁵ Later, the "Destroyers-for-Bases Deal" in early September provoked Hitler into ordering plans for seizing bases in the Azores, Cape Verdes, Dakar and Casablanca. In mid-November, Hitler expressed an interest in the Azores as an airbase for long range strategic bombing against the United States.³⁷⁶

Raeder tried to turn his attention to the Mediterranean, to no avail.³⁷⁷ Hitler stubbornly clung to his dreams of attacking a country he was not at war with, using planes that did not yet exist. He expected the British to attack the Azores as soon as German forces crossed the Franco-Spanish border: he ordered an investigation of the feasibility of preemptively occupying the islands, despite Raeder's doubts.³⁷⁸ Raeder informed the Führer that the Azores might be taken with great risk, but probably could not be held. Supplying the garrison would have been a dubious endeavour requiring all of the *Kriegsmarine's* resources; such a diversion from the blockade would have been strategically self-defeating. In order to put an end to such thinking, Raeder ultimately pressed for, and received, a strategic

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

³⁷⁵ Goda, "Hitler's Demand for Casablanca..." *Ibid.*, pp. 501, 506.

³⁷⁶ Goda, "Riddle of the Rock," *Ibid.*, p. 302.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

³⁷⁸ Führer Conferences, *Ibid.*, p. 152.

commitment to maintain offensive action against British supply lines.³⁷⁹

Nevertheless, the APS's fears about German intentions for the use of Spanish ports was well-founded. In December, Hitler was entertaining ideas of using Spanish ports as bases for commerce-raiding battleships and submarines.³⁸⁰ He wanted to occupy Spanish islands and coastal ports, and had some capability to do so, however limited; thus the APS could not reasonably discount their use as bases for offensive action, regardless of the original intent. Operationally, Hitler's defensive *glacis* against the United States would have served just as well as a base for attacks on British sea communications. Fortunately for the British, Hitler proved unwilling to make the sacrifices necessary to take Gibraltar: his own programme, determined in mid-1940, limited his strategic freedom in the West.

In fact, German simply lacked the ability to implement any of these intentions, and its weakness at sea was fundamental to Spain's willingness to cooperate. Furthermore, Hitler's long range plans for a "defensive *glacis*" to defend North West Africa were incompatible with Spain's colonial interests. As a prerequisite to an alliance against Britain, Spain demanded a long term strategic commitment to expand and defend their offshore territories. Franco and many in the ruling party were *africanistas*, to whom Spanish claims on Gibraltar, Morocco and Oran were deeply important, personally and nationally.³⁸¹ In a meeting with Suner in late November, Hitler revealed his intention to deploy two divisions to Africa, and his demands to own - rather than simply lease - bases in Spanish territory were unacceptable and insulting. Alarmed by the prospect that a German military presence in

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 14 Nov. 14, 40, p. 153; 22 May, 41, pp. 198-99.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

³⁸¹ Halder, *Ibid.*, p. 623; *africanistas*: Smyth, *Survival*, *Ibid.*, p. 45.

North West Africa would thwart their imperial ambitions, the Spanish adopted an uncooperative and hostile attitude towards German agents and defence arrangements in their colonial territories.³⁸²

Germany's inability to guarantee the security of Iberian colonial possessions also figured prominently in Franco's rejection of an alliance in December. The *Caudillo* asserted that limited provisions would seal the fate of the Canaries and the Portuguese islands.³⁸³ The Germans had no viable response against British naval superiority. While not all of the Atlantic islands were necessary for German military operations, their security was politically necessary for Spanish cooperation. Ultimately, all the Germans could do was to advise the Portuguese to reinforce their own defences and deny the Royal Navy port privileges.³⁸⁴

Ignorant of these considerations, however, the British continued to believe that German operations against the Iberian peninsula were imminent. When British forces finally decided to evacuate the Greek mainland on Apr. 21, the APS's prophesy of the imminent danger to Spain demanded British action. At the beginning of the month, the JIC had experienced an embarrassing difference of opinion, but by Apr. 22 they were united in fear. The DMI asserted that the Germans would not attack Russia, but would enter Spain before June 1, whereas Cavendish-Bentinck believed the opposite. To prevent further quarrels in front of their superiors, the JIC agreed to confer immediately before their regular Tuesday meetings with the Chiefs of Staff.³⁸⁵ On Apr. 22, Davidson reported to the Chiefs that "an

³⁸² Goda, "Riddle of the Rock," *Ibid.*, p. 307.

³⁸³ "OKW War Diary..." 8 Dec. 40, *GMS, Ibid.*, 9:40.

³⁸⁴ 17 Dec. 40, *Ibid.*, 9:64.

³⁸⁵ Smyth, *Survival, Ibid.*, p. 222 fn 25.

early German advance south-westwards seemed almost a certainty" with the attack on Gibraltar developing "within the next month or so." In contrast to the previous meeting, Cavendish-Bentinck concurred with the DMT's timing, though he noted that there were no signs of extensive troop movements towards the Spanish border.³⁸⁶ Nevertheless, the next day, the APS repeated its warning in even more categorical terms than at the beginning of the month:

...effective opposition by Spain and Portugal to German pressure is improbable, and Spain is likely to join the Tripartite Agreement shortly. This is admittedly the gloomiest possible view. Nevertheless... this possibility must be frankly faced.³⁸⁷

The APS report assumed that German influence in the Iberian peninsula would rise because of the imminent defeat of British forces in Greece. Though most of the population and the military favoured neutrality, the Spanish government was unlikely to remain so unless British fortunes improved or Spain was promised "effective military assistance...in case of need."

This worst case scenario was completely wrong: the APS had underestimated Spanish political resistance and overestimated German will. Nevertheless, they exercised a measurable influence over British strategy. APS predictions fed Churchill's long-standing desire for the Atlantic possessions of Spain and Portugal. In the summer of 1940, Churchill speculated that the early occupation of the Azores might forestall German invasion of Spain. His rather tenuous rationale was that with British possession of an alternate refuelling base for convoys, Gibraltar would be a less desirable target.³⁸⁸ Fortunately nothing came of the

³⁸⁶ CoS(41)143, 22 Apr. CAB 79/11.

³⁸⁷ APS(41)8, 23 Apr. CAB 81/136.

³⁸⁸ Churchill to Halifax, 24 July 40, Churchill War Papers vol. 2, *Ibid.*, p. 566-7.

Prime Minister's misplaced enthusiasm for preventative measures.³⁸⁹ According to McLachlan, an aggressive desire to secure the Canaries existed at the highest levels, and cooler heads prevailed with help from local observers. The Naval Attache in Madrid played a key role in convincing Pound that "...it would be criminal folly to strike such a blow at national pride and unite opinion behind the influences hostile to us."³⁹⁰

Churchill remained keen to preempt any opportunistic ventures by the Germans, though studies predicted British naval supremacy would thwart any attempt to hold the islands. The decline of British military fortunes in 1941 intensified this inclination. At the end of 1940, the CoS had told Churchill that they could not spare the forces to take the islands. Five months later, British commitments were even greater with a new front in Greece, while British military resources were not. The British could ill-afford to expend effort in false alarms.

Yet in the spring of 1941 they believed that the danger was real. On Apr. 23, 1941, Churchill placed an expedition targeted at Portuguese possessions on 48 hour notice. Disturbingly, the CoS discovered that the organisation of troops and transports was lacking, and gave immediate priority to their planned deployment. The JPS recommended that the preparation of an additional operation against the Spanish Grand Canary Island, which was approved the next day under the code name PUMA.³⁹¹

However, Churchill's limited military options did not prevent other strategic activity. In the summer of 1940, the British considered hinting to the Spanish government that it

³⁸⁹ *British Intelligence Ibid.*, 1:256.

³⁹⁰ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 196.

³⁹¹ Smyth, *Survival, Ibid.*, pp. 223-4.

might cede Gibraltar. Churchill believed that such a promise to discuss ownership after the war might ultimately do more harm than good: "[the] Spaniards know that, if we win, discussion would not be fruitful; and if we lose, they would not be necessary."³⁹² Whether such an offer was actually made is unclear, though historians concur that Spanish decisions were unlikely to have been much influenced by such empty promises.³⁹³

In fact, the judicious application of economic pressure on Spain was Britain's primary insurance against Spanish hostility. The United States was an important ally in this policy. Before the crisis in the spring of 1941, Churchill twice discussed the Spanish situation with neutral powers, with mixed success. On Nov. 23, 1940, in a personal and secret telegram to Roosevelt he stated that the German occupation of Spain would lead to hostile air and naval units operating from Casablanca and Dakar - uncomfortably close to the American definition of the Western Hemisphere, as Churchill well knew. As the Peninsula was close to starvation, the Prime Minister suggested that an American offer of monthly food shipments might decisively influence Spain to remain neutral.³⁹⁴ The result was the Anglo-American-Spanish wheat agreement, which both FOES and Hitler believed measurably influenced Franco to keep out of the war at the end of 1940.³⁹⁵

As Smyth notes, a domestic policy dispute delayed the actual delivery of American

³⁹² PM to Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, from Churchill, vol. 2, *Ibid.*, p. 640.

³⁹³ Smyth, *Survival*, *Ibid.*, p. 42-43. Post-war Anglo-Spanish tensions over Gibraltar caused certain official records to be withdrawn from the public record in 1972. see *Ibid.*, p. 44 fn 111; Thrackrah, *Ibid.*, p. 12 fn27.

³⁹⁴ Warren F. Kimball, ed. *Alliance Forged*, vol. 2, *Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence*, (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1984), p. 86-7.

³⁹⁵ FOES(40)2, Jan. 23. CAB 81/64; Churchill, vol. 3, *Ibid.*, p. 12.

food shipments until after the crisis had passed.³⁹⁶ Nevertheless, Churchill would continue to seek help in dealing with Spain. The Prime Minister also used diplomacy to pursue military cooperation with neutral powers, in times of opportunity and times of danger. Churchill made an ambitious and speculative attempt to exploit British victories over Italy in Africa at the end of 1940. On the last day of the year, Churchill suggested to Petain that this would be an opportune moment for Vichy to join Britain in a new alliance to defend French North Africa.³⁹⁷ He believed that even if the Straits of Gibraltar were lost, with access to French ports and air bases in Africa "the whole situation in the Mediterranean would be completely [*sic*] be revolutionized" in Britain's favour. Unsurprisingly, this Churchillian suggestion met stony silence from the French.³⁹⁸

He was more circumspect in approaching another prospective ally. Economic bribery was one thing for the American government to consider, military operations were another. During the early months of 1941, American involvement in the war was a delicate flower, and Churchill was wary of demanding too much too quickly. His telegrams kept the President abreast of the difficult struggle with German surface raiders and submarines, while carefully avoiding any direct request for assistance. However, what is interesting about the personal and most secret telegram of Mar. 23 is what was not sent. The original draft contained a paragraph outlining Churchill's fears that the Cape de Verde Islands had been infiltrated by the Germans, who were covertly staging U-boats there. The threat to the African trade route was great enough to provoke a British occupation "at any time"; though

³⁹⁶ Smyth, *Survival*, *Ibid.*, pp. 123-132.

³⁹⁷ Churchill, vol. 2, *Ibid.*, p. 623-4.

³⁹⁸ Churchill to CoS, minute, 7 Jan. 41. CAB 121/144.

such action would undoubtedly cause a negative reaction in both Spain and Portugal, he felt Spanish hostility was possible regardless of British actions.³⁹⁹ The message transmitted omitted all mention of the Cape de Verdes; clearly, Churchill wished to raise the issue but felt it too soon to demand American support for operations directed against neutral states.

At that moment, Churchill's instincts were correct. Roosevelt scrupulously ignored the Prime Minister's emphasis on the strain on British shipping. However, dramatic changes in American posture were at hand. Since late January, British and American staff officers had been engaged in secret negotiations over joint strategy should the United States enter the war. The resulting ABC-1 agreement outlined a combined "Germany-first" strategy for war against both Germany and Japan. After extensive consultation with his advisors, Roosevelt extended the Western Hemisphere security zone to West longitude 25 degrees on Apr. 10. Within this expanded patrol area, American air and naval forces were committed to coordinating reconnaissance operations with British convoys - in effect, to escort British shipping in all but name, although without official sanction to fire at "aggressor" forces.⁴⁰⁰

This change in American naval policy gave Churchill leeway to act on a long thwarted intention. Though the President was committed to current operations and future strategy, he was not prepared to be completely open about these arrangements, so as not to force an early confrontation with isolationist elements in American politics. Nevertheless, the new security zone represented a major leap towards active American participation in the war. Churchill tried to exploit the diplomatic opportunity to involve the Americans in

³⁹⁹ Kimball, Warren F. ed. Churchill and Roosevelt: The Complete Correspondence: Alliance Emerging, vol. 1, (Princeton: Univ. Press, 1984), p. 151-2.

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

securing the islands. As in December, he wished to take the initiative, rather than wait for German moves. His advisors had ruled out the possibility of giving Spain "effective military assistance" from British resources; however, he hoped to stretch the new American willingness to assist into a public, if still neutral, display of force. On Apr. 24, Churchill sent President Roosevelt a confidential telegram outlining the precarious situation in the Iberian Peninsula. Spain and Portugal might "at any time" collapse to German pressure or attack. Repeating the scenario described by the APS, he told the President that Gibraltar could then be quickly neutralised and the straits closed by German gunners manning the Spanish guns already in place.⁴⁰¹ Militarily, little could be done to prevent this eventuality, but Churchill worried that British inability and/or German interference might disrupt what contingency plans were available:

...these operations will take will take eight days from the signal being given, and...the Germans may ...have forestalling plans... With our other naval burdens we have not the forces to maintain a continuous watch.⁴⁰²

He therefore asked Roosevelt to send a naval squadron "for a friendly cruise in these regions," a commitment which might deter the Germans and inspire confidence in neutral capitals, while also performing useful reconnaissance for the British. On Apr. 29 he emphasized that the Spanish situation was "most critical" As he had done in November, Churchill linked the threat to Spain to American national interests. With Gibraltar. German influence would expand throughout North West Africa. Churchill predicted that once the *Luftwaffe* established bases in Morocco, "it will not long before Dakar becomes a German

⁴⁰¹ APS(41)8, Apr. 23. CAB 81/136.

⁴⁰² Churchill and Roosevelt, *Ibid.*, 1:173.

U-boat base."⁴⁰³

The APS thus influenced British strategy at the diplomatic level. Their urgent warning motivated Churchill to make a request of the Americans; the new diplomatic climate provided the opportunity. Roosevelt proved to be amenable to such operations, though he was wary of impinging on Iberian sovereignty and neutrality. On May 1 he reported that the suggestion of a "friendly visit" had evinced "strong protests" from Portugal, while discussions with Spain were equally unpromising. The newly redefined American patrol area would remain limited to the west of the Azores and the Cape Verdes; aircraft would take care not to overfly the islands themselves, despite the British desire for information on possible German infiltration. As Churchill had known, Roosevelt was sensitive to any encroachment on the American sphere of influence, even by a potential ally. The President warned Churchill against invading the Azores unless it could be justified as purely defensive. Despite Churchill's fears about German intentions and British capabilities, Roosevelt asserted that "most of the Azores are in [the] Western Hemisphere under my longitudinal map reading."⁴⁰⁴

This warning provoked Churchill's anger, who insisted that the British would strike if they felt it was necessary, regardless of American scruples.⁴⁰⁵ However, after this brief spat, the Allies-to-be coordinated their planning even more closely. Churchill's appeal motivated Roosevelt to consider more substantial means of supporting the British. In mid-May, Secretary of State Cordell Hull had to persuade the President limit expansion of the

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

⁴⁰⁵ Smyth, *Survival*, *Ibid.*, pp. 224-225.

Monroe doctrine to a scale that would not provoke the Axis or American isolationists.⁴⁰⁶ On May 22, Roosevelt ordered planning for an American occupation of the Azores in a month's time; he prepared the American public for such a move. In a radio address on 27 May, the President spoke of pre-emptive measures against a "probable enemy," and mentioned Azores & Cape Verdes by name.⁴⁰⁷

Although this speech incited Portuguese protests, Roosevelt was undeterred. Two days later, he suggested to the British that Anglo-American plans to secure the Atlantic islands be coordinated. The British had interpreted certain developments in Spanish politics at the beginning of May to mean that Franco would continue to maintain Spanish neutrality, and in mid-May Churchill had actually decided against pre-emptive action.⁴⁰⁸ Nevertheless, this did not reduce the potential threat from the Germans. Churchill thus greeted the President's offer with enthusiasm, repeating the thesis that Hitler might obtain air bases obtain in Spain or Africa to neutralise Gibraltar "at any time now." He welcomed Roosevelt's offer of the participation of American troops in operations against the Atlantic islands. Control of the islands could be turned over to the Americans "as a matter of mutual war convenience."⁴⁰⁹ He also suggested that the US State Department would be of assistance in diplomatic efforts to ensure control over the Azores in case of German invasion.⁴¹⁰ British

⁴⁰⁶ This would have encompassed all of West Africa north of equator, including the Atlantic islands. Smyth speculates that currents of expansionism in American domestic politics also probably contributed to this scheme. *Ibid.*, p. 225, fn 42.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 226-7.

⁴⁰⁹ Churchill and Roosevelt *Ibid.*, 1:200-1.

⁴¹⁰ This strategic partnership would eventually pay off in October of 1943, when the Portuguese government allowed Allied air and naval forces to use bases there, significantly
(continued...)

fears were thus assuaged in the spring of 1941, albeit temporarily.

The APS had produced a timely and influential strategic appreciation; unfortunately, it was wrong. Despite their improved ability to study German operational capabilities, British assessment continued to have difficulty forecasting German intentions. Though records of the German High Command's discussions of strategy justified the APS's fears, they seriously overestimated Hitler's willingness to violate Spanish neutrality.

The effect of this mistake might have been costly but for the limits to British resources and American cooperation. APS assessments did influence the Prime Minister's decision to consider military options - he put PUMA on 48 hour standby - but he also chose to act diplomatically. Despite his desire for pre-emptive military measures, Churchill knew that the burgeoning strategic relationship with the United States was far more valuable. The APS warned of a immediate operational threat, which Churchill presented as a threat to common Anglo-American interests: this was the foundation of alliance strategy.

(...continued)

improving the protection of Atlantic convoys. Winston Churchill, Closing the Ring. vol. 5, The Second World War, (London: Houghton Mifflin, 1951), p. 165.

Table 2: Intelligence Failure and APS

	<u>Libya, April</u>	<u>Spain, April</u>
German Intentions	- Rommel wants reinforcements; High Command will not divert from BARBAROSSA	Hitler wants Gibraltar, Atlantic isles; Franco refuses; Hitler unwilling to use force
Capabilities	- limited; reinforcements cannot arrive in time to affect local situation	limited economic to win over Franco; capable of taking Spain and Gibraltar, but not Atlantic isles
British intelligence	- flawed estimate of German tank strength and logistical difficulties	good estimate of German military capability, British naval strength
assessment	- miss significance of Tobruk; APS forecasts early German offensive	APS predicts German invasion of Spain
action	- PM decides to send TIGER convoy before assessment circulated	PM puts PUMA on alert; approaches USA re: military cooperation in Atlantic
result	- British take the offensive in Western Desert for rest of 1941	closer Anglo-American relations

Chapter Five: Conclusion

On May 15, one acronym "fell into disuse," replaced by another acronym: the JIS was simply the APS by another name. It served British decision-makers until the end of the war without any further changes. Its later experience suggests the significance of the organisation of British assessment. In March, 1942, the JIC considered increasing the manpower of the JIS in light of its increasing workload; however, the real stumbling block was that the senior members of the JIS team felt responsible for the work of the junior team. Their review of the latter's work was slowing the circulation of finished drafts. They recorded the wish that minor papers pass direct from junior team to the Directors and let it rest: the senior team would come to trust the junior over time.⁴¹¹

Time to earn trust from consumers was the most important element in the success of the JIS - even more important than its structure. According to theories of intelligence organisation, the weakness of collegial assessment systems is that they can become agencies in their own right if they become too large, and thus subject to bureaucratic and political forces which distract from the search for truth. The ideal assessment system should attempt to embody the strengths of both systems, which Herman believes that the JIS system did, working as an

...central, elite group, drawing on the basic analysis of the community but free to make high-quality assessment, free of departmental allegiances or the need to build community support.⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ JIC(42)11th Mtg., 31 Mar. CAB81/90.

⁴¹² Herman, *Ibid.*, p. 24.

A more complete survey of JIS's wartime experience shows that the JIS was far from meeting such an ideal. Intelligence was subject to bureaucratic and political pressures. The JIS found the oversight by the JIC frustrating, because this reduced their own role. In theory, they were supposed to be present, but in practice the Directors were too busy to entertain detailed arguments. Furthermore,

...they resented having their views shot down by the JIS officers...They therefore preferred to meet alone, amend the carefully worded draft...and get away quickly. This often caused dismay amongst the JIS who saw their clear and firm deduction sometimes watered down until it became a woolly compromise paper...⁴¹³

Lt. Cmdr. Fletcher Cooke, transferred to the junior JIS in early 1943, complained that open access to JIS minutes and papers encouraged the Secretary of the War Cabinet and officers in the Ministries of Defence to meddle in their deliberations. This transparency rendered it "impossible at one time to hold private meetings without our views being thwarted either on paper or minutes, or by the Secretary to a higher authority."⁴¹⁴ In Noel Annan's experience, he was to represent the War Office at JIS meetings, not search for truth. If his colleagues would not accept War Office views, he would try to influence the majority to accept as many of his points as possible, so that the DMI would sign off on the final draft; sometimes he might change his superiors' minds.⁴¹⁵ The JIS system was designed not to encourage individual creativity, but to ensure that JIS members faithfully championed ministry views.

The DNI, a central figure in the creation of this system, tried in vain to introduce some key modifications. Godfrey was a strong advocate of centralised intelligence systems:

⁴¹³ According to Drake, his superior, the DNI never did this. Drake, *Ibid.* ADM 223/465.

⁴¹⁴ Cooke to Godfrey, letter, 15 Jan. 46, ADM 223/465.

⁴¹⁵ Annan, *Ibid.*, p. 129.

during his mission to the United States in mid-1941, he suggested that American intelligence be organised as a central agency.⁴¹⁶ FOES, as a free, elite central group with no allegiances except to the CoS, was a potential competitor to the JIC. Thus he could not support the continued existence of FOES, despite his support for its methods. However, unlike his War Office and RAF colleagues, he tried to preserve FOES's methodologies in the new body. What Troubridge and the assessing staff needed was time to think, which was impossible if the JIS was preoccupied with requests from the JPS.

The naval representatives on the JIC thus fought a losing battle to keep assessment separate from operational planning. Nor were they entirely isolated - some of their superiors held similar views. On July 17, the CoS considered undoing all the changes since March. They were more generous than post-war historians when they opined that FOES's forecasts, though flawed, were "On the whole...borne out by events."⁴¹⁷ With the APS now incorporated into the JIC, the CoS felt the absence of these forecasts. The CoS went so far as to suggest that either FOES be restored or the APS abolished - seemingly an uncompromising vote of non-confidence in the new system.

Leading the attack, Pound felt that the APS devoted too much time to mundane matters, at the expense of studying enemy intentions. Cavendish-Bentinck explained that the Chiefs were indeed receiving strategic forecasts imbedded in JIC and JPS reports.⁴¹⁸ The DMI later circulated a letter outlining Cavendish-Bentinck's point in detail, summarising the

⁴¹⁶ Bradley F. Smith, "Admiral Godfrey's Mission to America, June/July 1941." Intelligence and National Security, 1, 3, (September 1986), p. 443. Smith argues that Godfrey's recommendations did not greatly influence the evolution of the CIA.

⁴¹⁷ Hollis to Shoosmith, memo, 17 July 41, CAB 121/230.

⁴¹⁸ CoS(41)251th mtg, 18 July, CAB 121/230.

APS/JIS forecasts to date.⁴¹⁹ Portal declared that although he had originally supported forming FOES as a separate body, he now enthusiastically endorsed the new organisation over the old:

The present system ensured that appreciations of enemy intentions were based on all the available evidence and not, as previously, on a combination of intelligent guesswork and a knowledge of our own weakness and the German ability to exploit it.⁴²⁰

Ultimately, the CoS left well enough alone, satisfied with the JIC's reassurances that the Joint Intelligence Staff (JIS) would not be distracted from its first priority, enemy strategy and intentions.

Direct evidence of Godfrey's views on this issue are suspiciously absent from his papers in the ADM files and his biography. When the DMI raised the idea of putting the JIS and JPS in adjoining rooms in mid-1942, Godfrey's deputy objected that closer relations with the JPS might compromise the JIS's ability to "appreciate for the enemy."⁴²¹ It is difficult to imagine that the DDNI and the First Sea Lord acted contrary to Godfrey's wishes, but it does seem the DNI subsequently changed his mind about collaboration between assessment and planning. Denis Capel-Dunn, the JIC's Secretary, counted the DNI as his "strongest supporter" in the effort to bring the staffs together in adjacent rooms in the Cabinet War Offices.⁴²²

The integration of assessment and planning was inevitable. The assessors needed data

⁴¹⁹ Davidson to CIGS, 19 July 41. CAB 81/103.

⁴²⁰ CoS(41)251th mtg, 18 July. CAB 121/230.

⁴²¹ JIC(42)35th Mtg. 28 July 42. CAB 81/90.

⁴²² Denis Capel-Dunn to Charles Morgan, letter, 4 Mar. 44. ADM 223/465; on moving the JIS: JIC(42)35th mtg, 28 Jul. CAB 81/90; JIC(42)41st(0)mtg, 27 Aug. CAB 81/90.

from the planners to construct a dynamic model of Britain and Germany's strategies reacting to each other. The artificial barrier between FOES and British plans limited its ability to make timely and detailed forecasts of German reactions to British strategy. Furthermore, as Davies points out, fulfilling the JPS's needs was the *raison d'être* of the JIC system in the first place: "The lever which allowed the CID to create the JIC was the need to coordinate and pool required for joint Service operations."⁴²³

Godfrey had a good motive in preserving that barrier, however. The DNI believed that Hitler and his racial-ideological goals were the keys to German strategy, but his colleagues rejected all his methods of attaining a psychological understanding of the Führer. The objectives of his concept of assessment differed from that which won out in the bureaucratic struggles of 1941. The DNI wanted Troubridge to have more time for "sitting and thinking" - that is, about enemy intentions or Hitler's mind.⁴²⁴

Based on his experience with operational intelligence, Ralph Bennett critiques this "academic" approach to intelligence as portrayed in accounts of naval intelligence. In Room 39, Donald McLachlan praises the role of civilians in intelligence analysis and assessment: he claims that the skills and qualities of academic and professional work were of great value to the painstaking research requirements of intelligence, what he called "the common standards of exact scholarship."⁴²⁵ Bennett adds some heavy qualifications to this view. While academia and managerial work allows for lengthy equivocation on unclear evidence,

⁴²³ Davies, *Ibid.*, p. 123.

⁴²⁴ "The Development of IS(O)," ADM 223/465.

⁴²⁵ McLachlan, *Ibid.*, p. 344.

in military intelligence lives depend on minutes and hours.⁴²⁶ While strategy involves longer periods, the need to determine the enemy threat quickly is no less important. Hence, the DMI was less inclined to give the assessing staff the time Godfrey wanted for "sitting and thinking." The APS was to draft estimates of Germany's capabilities quickly and efficiently, at the expense of lengthy deliberations about Germany's intentions.

When capability determined Germany's strategy, the APS did this very well - i.e. in disposing of the threat to Murzouk. The transition from the FOES to the APS significantly improved the effectiveness of certain aspects of British intelligence in the spring of 1941. Though still imperfect, the APS drafted and circulated its considerations much more quickly than FOES could. Its appreciations could thus influence the strategic decision-making process in a timely manner.

According to Richard K. Betts, a former CIA consultant, the need for accuracy and influence in intelligence are often at variance.⁴²⁷ In his experience, the presentation of intelligence can be balanced and fair, including all caveats and uncertainties, or decisive and influential, containing only the essential conclusions without distraction. The presentation of FOES's appreciations suffered from an excess of detail and second-guesses which often obscured important points, like the importance of Rumanian oil to Germany.

Unfortunately, procedural and organisational changes did not markedly improve Britain's assessment of Hitler's strategic intentions. Though the FOES and the APS understood German military thinking very well, they underestimated the importance of Hitler

⁴²⁶ Bennett, "Intelligence and Strategy: Some Observations," from idem, Intelligence Investigations, *Ibid.*, p. 100.

⁴²⁷ Betts, "Policy-Makers and Intelligence..." *Ibid.*

and his intentions to Germany's strategy. Noel Annan stated rhetorically, "Surely the duty of an intelligence staff is to assume that the enemy will act with the utmost strategic wisdom."⁴²⁸ Yet Hitler's strategic wisdom was far removed from British strategic wisdom - or even German strategic wisdom. When asked about Hitler's intentions, Halder said: "There was hardly any person who was able to penetrate the mind of this enigmatic man."⁴²⁹ What restrained Hitler from invading Spain was not incapacity, but subjective political, economical and ideological factors which could not be separated from his military strategy. These racial and ideological ideals permeated even the manner in which Germany fought.⁴³⁰ The British had difficulty accepting the influence of non-military factors. Fletcher Cooke, a junior member of JIS, said that Hitler "...would have done better if he had followed our advice...."⁴³¹

The only evidence of any attempt to formally study Hitler's psychology, goals, ideology or programme is Godfrey's abortive astrology project. However, post-war historical controversy over Hitler's actual intentions casts doubts on the usefulness of Godfrey's suggestions. Even with full access to Germany's war records, historians have had difficulty determining whether Hitler's strategy was "programmic" or opportunistic. Hitler was flexible in his tactical approach and timing of his policies, within the context of his unshakable long term goals.⁴³²

⁴²⁸ Annan, *Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁴²⁹ Franz Halder, interview. "Decisions Affecting the Campaign in Russia, 1941-1942," *GMS, Ibid.*, 15:8.

⁴³⁰ Jurgen Forster, "New Wine in Old Wineskins? The Wehrmacht and the War of *Weltanschauungen*." from *The German Military in the Age of Total War*, ed. Wilhelm Deist. (Dover: Berg, 1985), pp. 304-322.

⁴³¹ Fletcher Cooke to John Godfrey, undated letter, ADM 223/465.

⁴³² Schreiber, "The Mediterranean in Hitler's Strategy," *Ibid.*, p. 248.

This flexibility frustrated British attempts to predict German strategy. When the APS could not find the objective operational factors limiting Hitler's capabilities, they forecast German strategy no better than FOES did. Though the APS's prediction of an attack on Spain proved influential, it was wrong; fortunately, Churchill found the false alarm a useful catalyst for strategic diplomacy. The membership and the quality of the information remained consistent between the FOES and the APS, while their understanding of Hitler was equally poor. Only their organisation differed - thus, in 1941 the organisation of British assessment had little to do with the quality of their appreciations of enemy strategic intentions, and of their usefulness to British decision-makers.

The secondary literature has underestimated the accuracy of FOES and overestimated the APS's influence, thus leading to an erroneous historical assessment of contribution of intelligence assessment to British strategy. FOES was largely irrelevant to the process which led to the twin disasters in Greece and Libya. Despite the improvements in organisation and reporting procedures, the APS was only marginally more relevant to British strategy in areas of active operations. Churchill made up his mind to dispatch the TIGER convoy based on his own assessment of the threat and British strategic priorities, without the help of the APS. The APS contributed the catalyst for the alarm over Spain in late April, but British leaders' - specifically Churchill's - preconceptions were equally important. In 1941, British perception of their own weaknesses had more influence over strategy than forecasts of enemy intentions.

The reforms of 1941 were part of a necessary learning process, but in accordance to with the "no fault" school of thought, circumstances dictated the limits of the accuracy and influence of British forecasts no matter how assessment was organised. While greater

experience and more efficient reporting methods measurably improved the delivery and presentation of forecasts, no new structural form or analytical method could improve the accuracy of the contents so long as Hitler's will was the most important determining factor in German strategy. The cases presented suggest that, under such conditions, the utility of strategic forecasting as a force multiplier on the strategic defensive was a difficult proposition at best.

However, war would expand to a truly global conflict in which individual intentions would be less relevant to the outcome of events. The successes of FOES and APS in defining the limits of German military capability in Greece and North Africa foreshadowed a time when a different context would maximize the JIC system's strengths and minimize their weaknesses. Although harshly critical of the early performance of the JIC system, Anthony Codevilla allows that the JIC functioned better by mid-1943, because of

...the luxuries peculiar to nations on the offensive: fewer vital subjects, more high quality information about them, and the supreme luxury of not needing to worry too much about what the enemy would do.⁴³³

Though the last item might be more properly termed "complacency," as the Ardennes offensive of 1944 proved, Codevilla is correct. After the invasion of the Soviet Union, the requirements of Hitler's strategy would increase beyond Germany's limited military and economic resources. Hitler's idiosyncratic intentions would become less important than the limits of his capabilities in determining Germany's actions. While relatively ineffectual in the years of Britain's maximum peril, the JIC system would serve the Allies well on the offensive.

⁴³³ Codevilla, *Ibid.*, p. 23.

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