

# WHAT NORTH AFRICA MEANS TO US

**I**N no other area that I can think of can we use to better advantage our superiority in the air and on the sea; nowhere else can we make better use of political warfare, that new arm that will play such an important part in the war now that we are beginning to have victories to our credit. Our allies in South Eastern Europe wouldn't have been half so encouraged if we had been able to land a large army in France. For between that army and Germany there would still have been Hitler's Siegfried line of fortifications, and also the Maginot converted to deal with attack from the west instead of from the east.

The Italians don't want to fight: that's quite certain. It's very doubtful if they ever wanted to fight on the German side. But it wouldn't be easy for them to break away from Germany now; their choice isn't between war and peace, but between being bombed by the British and being bombed by the Germans. And their factories are in the north. So are their power stations to generate their electricity upon which their railways and so much else depends. At the present time, the little coal they burn has to be sent to them from Germany. Before they could decide to come over to our side in the war they would need the assurance of at least as much coal from Great Britain. That, in turn, would involve a lot of shipping, and although the re-opening of the Mediterranean would make more shipping available for us, and give us a better chance of dealing with the submarine menace in the Western Atlantic, I suppose the problem of the U-boat is still the gravest that we have to face.

It might be argued that we should gain a very great deal if the Italians did go out of the war. Our forces would be back again on European soil, but the Alps and the Dolomites that form Italy's northern frontier are one of the finest lines of natural defence in the world. Besides, Hitler's been adding to those defences in a big way—an action which would seem to express a certain lack of confidence in his Italian ally. Therefore, we might argue that we should gain very little except that from northern Italy a new area would be brought within easy range of our bombers. It would, of course, be an important new area, for Munich is only about 150 miles away, Vienna and Nuremberg just over 200, and Budapest less than 300.

## If We Gained the Adriatic

But there is a great deal more to it than that. It's what lies to the east of Italy rather than to the north that most attracts one's interest. There you've got the Adriatic Sea running up well towards the heart of Europe, and sufficiently near for ships on it to be given fighter protection from either shore. On the east coast of the Adriatic are the Albanians, who have been under Italian domination since 1926, and the Greeks and Yugoslavs, who have proved themselves to be among our tougher allies. If the United Nations could gain control of the Adriatic, they could pour supplies and munitions into the Balkan countries. And at present, nearly all the Axis troops stationed in those Balkans

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are Italians; there are believed to be some 30 Italian divisions there. If Italy were out of the war, the Germans would in some way have to find further divisions to replace them. This would require at least as many divisions and probably more, because the Yugoslavs and Greeks would obviously put up an even stronger resistance to oppression if our own forces were so near at hand and were able to give them the weapons that they so urgently need.

It would, therefore, seem to be absolutely essential for Hitler to prevent these things from happening. Probably he didn't need much of Mussolini's help at the time of the collapse of France. Mussolini climbed on to the band-wagon then—now Hitler aren't let him go. To us in London it looks as though he will have to strengthen his forces in Italy however much he will have to weaken those in Russia in order to do so, and it is encouraging to remember that this winter the front that Hitler will have to defend in Russia is about 1200 miles longer than it was last year.

But he still hasn't reached the oil fields that were to be one of the principal reasons for his attack on Russia.

## Reactions in Russia

There's one other feature that ought to be mentioned. From all we hear in London, the co-operation between American and British troops in the North African campaign has been remarkably good, and the welcome given to this campaign by the Russians has been quite unexpectedly cordial. Stalin wasn't at all enthusiastic when he learned that we were to open up the second front probably in Africa, and one can well understand his impatience when one thinks of the strain his army must have gone through in the defence of Stalingrad. But now that the North African campaign has gone so well—or to be on the safe side, let me say has started so well—Stalin has done everything possible both to express his satisfaction and to let every Russian know he has done so. When I was on the Russian front a little over a year ago, I was distressed to find

that the pilots of the Russian Air Force were frankly incredulous when I told them that I'd come out in a convoy which had brought a wing of the British Air Force to their assistance. As for the fact that for a whole year the British Commonwealth had borne the burden of the German attack almost alone, there were very few Russians indeed who seemed to realise that fact, and certainly nothing was printed to help them to do so. But this week there have been special broadcasts and all sorts of other steps to make the soldiers in the Soviet Army realise that they are not alone.

## Tactics and Strategy

Tactically very few German troops have been involved against us. That should stop us from becoming swollen-headed. Also, we oughtn't to forget the distances in Africa. The Axis base of Tripoli is nearly 800 miles from our army advancing from Egypt. So even if there were no more resistance, weeks would probably be needed before North Africa is ours. But strategically, this one victory might easily prove to be decisive, because it should enable us to take full advantage of our superior air and sea power, and compel Hitler to spread his large army very thinly indeed along the northern coast of the Mediterranean.

## Political Warfare

Finally, the fact that the shores of so many nations are washed by the waters of that sea should give us an unparalleled opportunity for political warfare. By words as well as by deeds we could encourage so many of the occupied countries of Europe when the time comes to revolt, to wreck trains, to lessen the confidence in victory of the peoples who twice in one generation have been led to believe in the beastly doctrine of war as an instrument of national policy.

## SIMPLE STORIES

HIGHER-PURCHASE

**T**HE house was condemned by the authorities as unsuitable for human habitation, but the man and the woman and their five children were still in it because, the woman said, "They've got to find us another place." In the yard there were two lines with three garments hanging to dry in the smoky air, a rickety privy with a canary in a cage hanging on the wall, and a tap which dripped into a leaking bucket. The woman came to the door with a baby in her arms and a yearling crawling behind her. She showed me the house. There was an electric light in the kitchen, and I could see what the range and the floor were like. I did not see into one room, and three children slept in the other. There was another room opposite the kitchen.

"This is the wash-house," the woman said. There were no tubs or benches in it and no tap. There was only one thing in it, a chromium and cream shining thing—a new electric washing-machine.

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