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SCAEF 12th MEETING

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27 MARCH 1944Supreme HeadquartersALLIED EXPEDITIONARY FORCE

Minutes of Meeting Held in Conference
Room, Widewing, 1430 hours, 27 March 1944.

PRESENT

General Dwight D. Eisenhower

Field Marshal Sir Alan Brooke

Air Chief Marshal Sir ~~Arthur~~ TedderMarshal of the Royal Air Force,
Sir Charles F. A. Portal

Admiral Sir Bertram H. Ramsay

Admiral of the Fleet,
Sir Andrew B. Cunningham

Lt. General W.B. Smith

Lt. General Sir Hastings L. Ismay

SECRETARY

Lt. Commander J. E. Reid

I. U.S. CHIEFS OF STAFF PROPOSALS ON MEDITERRANEAN OPERATIONS (COS(W)1229)

The Committee had before them for consideration a recent signal which had been received from the U.S. Chiefs of Staff (COS (W) 1229), containing proposals relative to future operations in the Mediterranean in support of OVERLORD.

With reference to these proposals General EISENHOWER said that the main question was whether or not it was possible to launch ANVIL on the new target date, July 10th, and at the same time keep up pressure in Italy. He believed the Germans would continue to maintain strong forces in Italy for the purpose of holding Rome. After a brief summary of the contents of the message he said that the U.S. Chiefs of Staff are so concerned in keeping ANVIL alive that they were prepared to withdraw certain landing craft now scheduled for Pacific operations.

Sir Alan BROOKE, after commenting on the proposals said that he was not entirely clear as to the meaning of paragraph 3 (a) of the text, which provided; that after joining the bridgehead with the main line "we should then consolidate this line and maintain pressure to contain the maximum number of German divisions." To maintain pressure you have to attack with sufficient forces, and this, he said, is quite different from consolidation, which means going on the defensive. He felt that from a military point of view there was an inconsistency in consolidating the line and at the same time attempting to maintain pressure.

His principle objection to the proposals related to the conditional assurances, contained in paragraph 4, which he characterized as the "pointing of a pistol". With regard to these assurances he said he was not prepared to accept firm commitments at this time regarding the precise location of a diversionary attack to be made four months hence.

DECLASSIFIED

Authority J.C.S. Memo
Date 1/4/74
By DJH, NARS Date 3/26/74

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DOD Dir. 5200.9, Sept. 27, 1958
NWD by _____ date _____

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Sir Alan BROOKE then drew attention to the point that if our basic strategy, which was to defeat Germany first, had been adhered to, the landing craft required for ANVIL would now be available and they would not be in the Pacific, as was the case. He considered that the failure to adhere strictly to the basic strategy had already resulted in a set-back of approximately six months in the defeat of Germany. Furthermore, he said the lack of sufficient landing craft and other resources in the Mediterranean resulted in our failure to take full advantage of the fall of Italy.

General EISENHOWER replied that he had been pleading for the past two years the transcending importance of whipping Germany first. He considered that in view of the opposing factors General MARSHALL had gone a long way in finally obtaining agreement for allocation of certain Pacific resources for use in the Mediterranean operations. He drew attention to the fact that public opinion in the United States, as regards the Pacific war, had to be reckoned with. He pointed out that only recently certain members of Congress had initiated proposals for an immediate all-out Pacific offensive and allocation of sufficient U.S. resources in support thereof.

Sir Charles PORTAL took the view that we should welcome the offer of additional resources for operations in support of OVERLORD. He did not feel that it was necessary at this time to enter into controversial discussions regarding the proposed strategy to be followed in the employment of these resources. He suggested that in reply to the subject signal, we should point out that between now and July 10th there may arise an opportunity of employing these forces elsewhere to a far greater advantage than now envisioned in the proposed ANVIL operation.

General EISENHOWER emphasised the fact that our main objective is to contain and defeat the greatest possible number of German divisions in the Mediterranean theater. It appeared to him that the main issue centred around the question as to which approach would accomplish this objective - ANVIL, as against an offensive for the capture of Rome. The capture of Rome, in his opinion, was not an unmitigated blessing, though he realized the political implications arising out of continued German occupation. What we are aiming to do is to contain and defeat the greatest possible German forces in the Mediterranean.

Sir Alan BROOKE agreed that our major objective in the Mediterranean was to divert the greatest possible number of German forces from OVERLORD. He thought that an offensive for the capture of Rome was the best method of containing the maximum number of German forces. It was pointed out that our strength in the Mediterranean at the present time, was in the decline, due, among other things, to the necessity of cannibalizing certain divisions. He said that in order to launch an effective ANVIL it would require at least ten divisions and this would result in dividing our forces in the Mediterranean. The consequence of this would be that both forces would have to remain on the defensive.

General EISENHOWER indicated that inasmuch as there was general agreement as to the main objective he did not envision any difficulty in framing a reply which would be acceptable to both the British and U.S. Chiefs of Staff. The main concern of the U.S. Chiefs of Staff, he said, was that they wanted assurances that preparations for a delayed ANVIL would be vigorously pressed with the intention of mounting the operation in support of OVERLORD. He said the Chiefs of Staff were more concerned about preparing for an ANVIL operation and they were not, in his opinion, firm as to the exact geographical point of attack. The point of attack would depend on accepting the most favourable conditions which would accomplish the major objective.

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General SMITH said that he had participated in the Planners' discussion of the subject matter. He pointed out that ANVIL was generally viewed, not as a Second Front, but as an operation in support of OVERLORD. This diversion, he said, would take the pressure off OVERLORD. If we accept the proposed allocation of additional landing craft, it would be possible to launch a two divisional assault with French troops. He estimated that there are sufficient French divisions in the Mediterranean to continue the follow-up until the middle of August, by which time OVERLORD should be firmly established. An American division could be added to lend support. The net result would be that by taking full advantage of utilizing all available French forces for the ANVIL operation, it would be possible to achieve an effective diversionary assistance to OVERLORD and at the same time other forces available for the MEDITERRANEAN could be employed to maintain a strong position in Italy.

Sir Alan BROOKE, referring to paragraph 4 of the text of the subject signal, said that he was not prepared to give firm assurances or accept a commitment at this time for operations to be conducted 4 to 5 months hence. He said that it was not militarily sound to run a war on a lawyer's agreement by making commitments ahead of time, thereby losing the necessary and desired flexibility to meet the ever changing conditions and circumstances.

General EISENHOWER said that it was quite natural that we could not at this time foresee what the conditions would be in the future. With regard to the most advantageous area of launching a diversionary attack in the Mediterranean, it may be possible, he said, that in July the Germans may be deploying large forces in the Rome area, and if that were the case, it might be advisable to direct an amphibious operation toward northern Italy rather than the south coast of France.

General SMITH, in referring to the text of the subject signal, said that what the Chiefs of Staff had in mind when they proposed to consolidate the line in Italy and maintain pressure to contain the maximum number of German divisions was the establishment of a line from which we could not be driven back.

Sir Charles PORTAL, after reading a suggested draft, said that operations for the capture of Rome should be conducted if it proved to be the best possible way to contain the maximum number of German forces.

General EISENHOWER suggested that we ought to present the problem in three steps. First, no operation would be conducted in the Mediterranean which would be contrary to General WILSON's directive to contain the maximum number of German forces. Secondly, there must be sufficient lift in the Mediterranean by July 10th. Thirdly, that in accomplishing the objective the best possible place to strike would be determined at a later date. He explained that in other communications General MARSHALL had expressed the view that "some operation in the nature of ANVIL" should be conducted. He did not consider that General MARSHALL had crystallized the exact geographical location for this operation.

General EISENHOWER said that in any event we must reserve the right to determine the best place to attack at the time. We should make it known to the U. S. Chiefs of Staff that we cannot, at this time, say whether or not in the future an attack on the Toulon area will or will not be the best place to strike.

General SMITH said that what we would like to do is to hold every division now in southern France.

Sir Alan BROOKE said that we ought to at least have 10 divisions to contain the German forces now in southern France. He reiterated his convictions regarding the undesirability of present commitments relative to establishing a precise geographical location for an attack in the future. With regard to this, he pointed out that on other occasions he had subsequently been confronted with previous commitments which entailed considerable argument.

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General SMITH suggested we might reap the fruits of the additional landing craft at the expense of facing arguments in the future.

General EISENHOWER emphasized the fact that there was no question in his mind that a two divisional assault in July would contribute substantially to the success of OVERLORD.

Sir Andrew CUNNINGHAM inquired as to whether or not it would be in harmony with the U.S. Chiefs of Staff's proposals, if the Supreme Commander, at a later date, should recommend that the capture of Rome was the best means of containing the maximum number of German forces. He wondered whether or not that would constitute the breaking of our engagements.

General SMITH said that it was only his guess, but he thought the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff would consider it a breach of commitment if an attack were made south of Pisa. However, on the other hand, if the attack were to the north, it might not be considered as such.

General EISENHOWER believed that a reply could be framed in such a manner as to harmonize the views of the respective Chiefs of Staff. He suggested that we should point out that it would be for the Combined Chiefs of Staff to determine at the time which was the most advantageous area for attack.

Air Chief Marshal TEDDER inquired as to whether or not the Joint Chiefs of Staff, in submitting these proposals, had in mind the opening of a "fresh front".

General SMITH said that in his conversations with General HANDY, he had received the impression that the U.S. Chiefs of Staff had envisioned the operation as a direct assistance to OVERLORD and that they did not consider it as an opening of a new front. It was their view that if ANVIL was not conducted, there would be serious regrets at a later date. General HANDY had expressed the view that it was desirable to employ French divisions now in the Mediterranean.

General SMITH said that if the responsibility of a decision rested in his hands, he would employ, under the command of General GIRAUD, all French divisions, together with possibly one American division. He would provide the necessary landing craft and air support. He considered that such an operation in the Mediterranean, utilizing French forces, would constitute a diversion fully equal to that of ANVIL.

Sir Alan BROOKE said that on the basis of the discussions on the subject matter, it would be possible to prepare a carefully worded answer to the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff's proposals.

General EISENHOWER said that he would communicate with General MARSHALL and explain to him in detail the expression of the views which resulted from this conference. He was confident that an understanding could be reached.

After further discussion, the COMMITTEE took note that:

- (a) The British Chiefs of Staff would prepare a reply to CCS(W) 1229.
- (b) The Supreme Commander would communicate with General MARSHALL and inform him in detail of views expressed during the course of this meeting.

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