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## STRATEGY: Axis on Second Front

Hitler obviously cannot let Mussolini lose in Albania and Libya. The former campaign, planned as a pushover, was to have been only the warm-up for a much larger Axis drive into the Near East conducted in the usual Hitler manner: politics backed by power. The thrust into Egypt, even if not successful in capturing Suez, was at least to occupy Britain's full strength in the Near East while other Axis victories were won northeast of Suez. Now both shows had not only flopped but threatened to cost the Axis dear in power and prestige. Reports began flowing about Germans rushing to the rescue, and the Nazi official newspaper, *Völkischer Beobachter*, announced: "The British are in error if they think that the Germans do not know their place, which has always been by the side of their brothers in arms. Their place is alongside Italy. . . ."

Apart from invading Britain at once and winning the war with one supreme smash, which it was doubtful Hitler felt strong enough to do, three other ways of helping Italy suggested themselves: 1) a drive from the west coast of France, down across submissive Spain, at Gibraltar; 2) sending troops from Hitler's pool of 1,000,000 men in Austria (see map) to put some spine into the Italian armies now afield; 3) sending troops from the smaller pool in Rumania, to attack Greece from the rear across Bulgaria.

With Bulgaria, Turkey and Russia not acquiescent, No. 3 was a difficult plan. No. 1 would be a large, tough mouthful. No. 2 seemed likeliest, if it could be executed in such a way as not to injure Italian morale.

Last week's reports (none confirmed) placed 30,000 Germans already in Libya or bound there; 50,000 waiting in Italy; a full division aboard ships in Trieste. All that Italy admitted was that big Junkers transports, flown and serviced by Nazis, were ferrying about 3,000 Italian troops per day across the Adriatic.

Strategists read into Admiral Sir Andrew Cunningham's dramatic appearance with his fleet in the Adriatic last week a gesture of warning and defiance to the Germans: let them not dare to try smuggling troopships down behind the islands along the Yugoslav coast. The R. A. F. bombed an oil refinery near Venice, aimed at a bridge near Fiume, and repeatedly smashed at Mannheim, a rail junction through which German munitions bound for Italy would pass.

A lot of passenger trains on Italian lines were canceled last week, presumably to make way for war transport of Hitler's forces. But for Hitler, going to Italy's aid was no picnic. If he did, he might find himself fighting a war on two fronts—the disadvantage which he has been most eager to avoid.

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