

- Support Group (two Battalions).  
3rd R.H.A. (Anti-tank regiment), and  
4th R.H.A.
- (b) 4th Indian Division—comprising:  
Two Regiments of Artillery.  
Two mixed Infantry Brigades (5th and  
11th).
- (c) Part of New Zealand Division—com-  
prising:  
One Cavalry Regiment (less one  
squadron).  
One Field Regiment New Zealand Artil-  
lery.  
Three Infantry Battalions.  
One Machine Gun Battalion (incomplete  
in training and equipment).
- (d) Fourteen British Infantry Battalions.  
7th Medium Regiment R.A.  
31st Field Regiment R.A.  
Total about 36,000.
- Sudan (with 1,000 miles of frontier with  
Italian East Africa).  
Three British Battalions and  
Sudan Defence Force.  
Total about 9,000.
- Kenya (with over 700 miles of frontier with  
Italian East Africa).  
Two East African Brigades.  
Two Light Batteries.  
Total about 8,500.
- (Two Brigades from West Africa had been  
ordered to Kenya and arrived during July.)  
British Somaliland.  
H.Q. and five Companies Somaliland  
Camel Corps.  
One King's African Rifles Battalion.  
Total about 1,475.
- Palestine, Aden Protectorate and Cyprus  
were also liable to attack. Their garrisons  
were:
- Palestine.  
1st Cavalry Division (incomplete in train-  
ing and equipment).  
Two British Cavalry Regiments.  
One Brigade of three British Infantry Bat-  
talions.  
Two British Battalions.  
6th Australian Division—comprising:  
Two Brigades.  
Two Artillery Regiments.  
Divisional Recce Unit (incomplete in  
training and equipment).  
Total about 27,500.
- Aden.  
Two Indian Battalions.  
Total about 2,500.
- Cyprus.  
One British Battalion.  
Total about 800.
15. Very little equipment had been sent to  
the Middle East and no single unit or formation  
was fully equipped. There was a dangerous  
lack of A.A. guns, A.Tk. guns and other  
artillery.
16. The enemy also had a very considerable  
numerical advantage in the air. This was  
countered by the superior technical qualities of  
our machines and by the higher training and  
morale of the pilots of the R.A.F. and  
S.A.A.F., who quickly established an ascend-  
ancy over the Italians which they have main-  
tained ever since.
17. The shortest route by which the Middle  
East could be reinforced, through the Mediter-  
ranean, now became too precarious; over 7,000  
badly needed reinforcements which were ready

for despatch in May, and of whom some were  
actually waiting at Marseilles, were held up and  
did not reach the Middle East till the end of  
August. It was even uncertain whether the  
long sea route via the Cape might not also  
be rendered unsafe by the action of the enemy  
air forces and naval forces in Italian East Africa  
operating in the narrow waters of the Red Sea.  
Alternative routes via Basra, Baghdad, Haifa  
and via Mombasa and the Nile Valley were  
reconnoitred. Up to date, however, convoys  
have used the Red Sea route without loss,  
in spite of enemy attacks.

18. The position on the Western Frontier of  
Egypt was that our foremost defended positions  
were at Mersa Matruh, over 200 miles west of  
Alexandria and about 120 miles from the  
Egyptian frontier with Libya. There was a  
railway and road as far as Matruh and a good  
metalled road from Matruh to Sidi Barrani,  
about 50 miles from the frontier. Between  
Sidi Barrani and the frontier there was no  
good road. The small harbour of Sollum on  
the frontier offered no facilities for the supply  
of a force and had no water supply. It was  
therefore impossible to maintain any large num-  
ber of troops on the frontier, even had they  
been available, and our policy had always  
been to allow the enemy to advance on our  
defences at Matruh before meeting him in any  
force.

It was decided, however, to place a small  
covering force on the frontier; and I ordered  
that this force should, as soon as possible after  
the outbreak of war, attack the Italian frontier  
posts.

19. In the Sudan it was obviously impos-  
sible, with the very small force available, to  
cover the long and vulnerable frontier, but I  
directed that small mobile forces should occupy  
the principal places on the frontier until attacked  
by superior forces. Although these small forces  
could obviously not resist any attack which the  
greatly superior Italian forces could make, I  
considered it desirable that they should fight  
a delaying action against the enemy rather than  
abandon the frontier posts without any fighting  
at all, as had been the previous policy.

The small mobile forces of the Sudan Defence  
Force made several most successful raids on the  
Italian frontier posts in the earlier days of the  
war, and when finally attacked at Kassala on  
4th July and at Gallabat on 6th July by greatly  
superior Italian forces fought successful delay-  
ing actions and inflicted heavy loss on the  
enemy, who did not follow up his success in  
spite of the great disparity in numbers.

20. In Kenya a similar policy of holding the  
frontier posts for as long as possible was fol-  
lowed. The principal engagement took place  
at Moyale, where a company of the King's  
African Rifles held the small fort on the British  
side of the frontier for several weeks against  
an Italian force which amounted to about a  
brigade. It was not until a second Italian  
brigade was brought up that it was decided to  
withdraw the Company, which was successfully  
done on 15th July, although the enemy had by  
this time practically surrounded the post.

21. Enemy propaganda exaggerated these  
small successes, obtained by sheer force of num-  
bers, so loudly that they succeeded in causing  
them to be accepted in some quarters as British  
defeats.

22. Such preparations as possible had been  
made with a view to assisting the patriot leaders