

MEMORANDUM OF INFORMATION

ON

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND THE WORLD CRISIS

NOTE

Our space this month has been taxed to the utmost, for the latest developments in Europe have increased the number of problems which directly affect the English-speaking world, and consequently are of interest to all responsible citizens. The unfolding crisis has proved one thing at least, namely, that when, during highly critical times, the public is poorly informed upon great affairs, calamities inevitably follow. We hope, therefore, as time goes on to play a small part in helping to acquaint more people in Britain, throughout the Commonwealth, and in the United States, with intelligence about developments in Europe and elsewhere. Moreover, in the future it will be necessary to give a great deal of attention to military, political, and economic affairs within the Commonwealth.

This issue contains a rather full story of the collapse of France. We include a large number of extracts from confidential reports and letters which have never before been published. There will be more to add later. In many cases we have had to omit names for the sake of future Anglo-French relations. Nevertheless, the extracts will, we hope, be found of interest. All the reports from which they are taken were hastily written or dictated over the telephone, and consequently they are not masterpieces of literature. We have made no corrections.

We think the story of France published in this issue represents an accurate historic record of certain aspects of a tragic crisis, and, so far as we know, it is the first moderately full one which has appeared. We hope it may receive the widest notice, since, in our view, it is most important for the salient facts to become known.

We hope, therefore, that at a time when most people are eagerly searching for accurate information, our readers will do their utmost to bring these Memoranda to the attention of their friends, so that they may not miss any chapter of contemporary history, as we see it and record it here.

KENNETH de COURCY,
Editor.

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IMPERIAL POLICY GROUP
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and

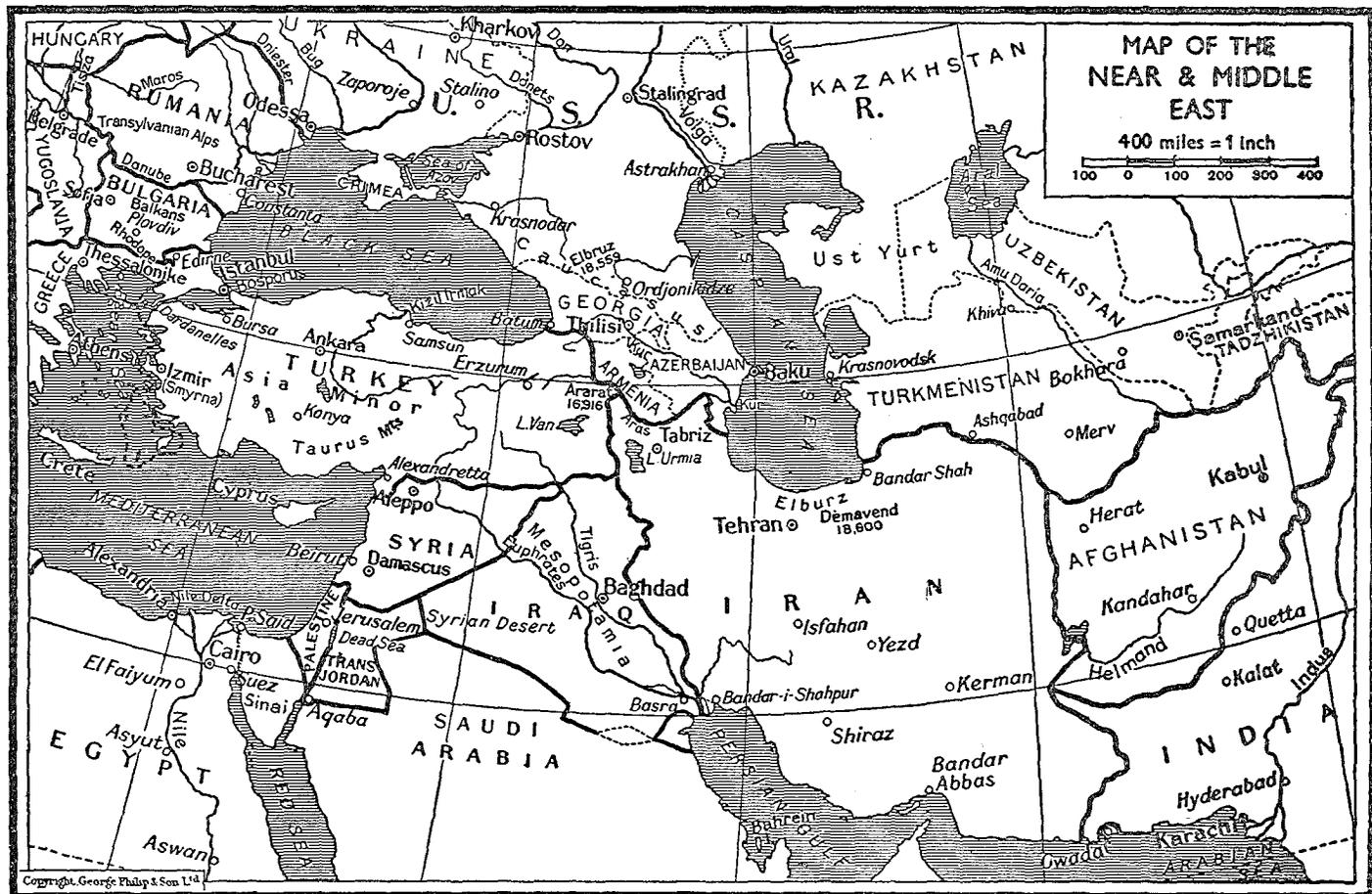
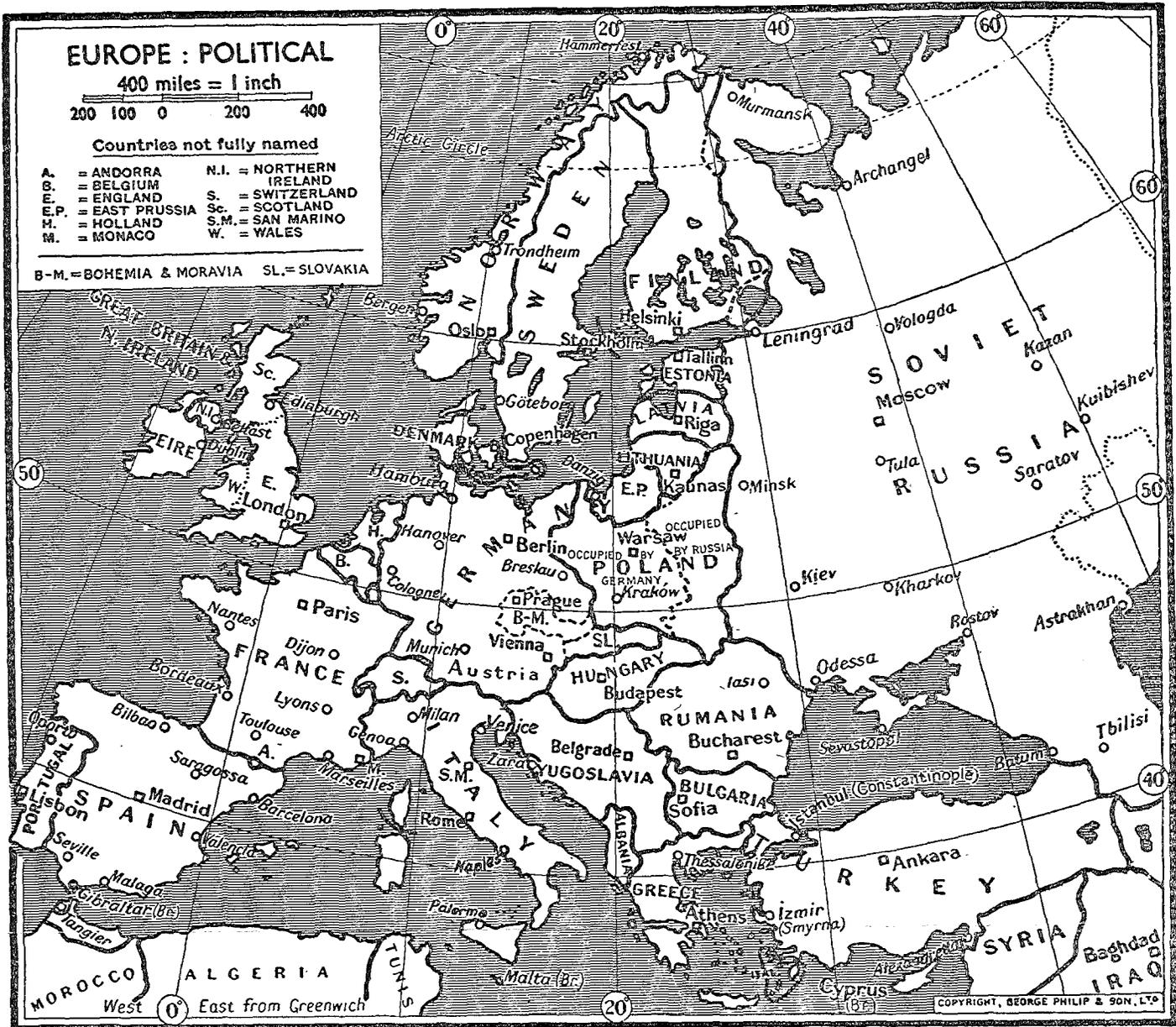
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A REVIEW OF THE CRISIS

THE CAPITULATION OF EUROPE

The gradual breakdown in Europe in the face of German aggression was consummated by the capitulation of France—a terrible event which came as a profound shock to a great majority throughout the English-speaking world. Last month we discussed certain aspects of a situation which were leading to that collapse, and in another part of this memorandum we go deeper into the story. First, however, must come a general review of the unfolding crisis through which Europe has passed and of the grave position which now confronts us.

The World shocked by French action.

Future historians will deplore the fact that the persistent warnings which highly trained experts sounded over a period of years were not taken into fuller account, though it cannot be argued that they were unnoted. In 1935 the responsible officials prepared for, and circulated to the Cabinet, a memorandum setting out the military preparations of Germany, and the aggressive tendencies of her policy. In the same year a small delegation representing this Group visited Mr. Baldwin at 10, Downing Street, and during the course of an hour's discussion on the foreign situation it became clear that his view was that Germany was on the way to becoming the most powerful military force in Europe. Neither was the Cabinet ignorant of Germany's preparations, nor was the Prime Minister unconscious of the implications.

The Cabinet warned of German preparations.

In January, 1936, two observers representing this Committee were instructed to tour Europe in order to make an independent review of a situation which appeared menacing. They visited Brussels, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, and Paris, and had conversations with the Permanent Head of the Belgian Foreign Office, also Herr von Ribbentrop, Dr. Benes, Dr. von Schuschnigg, as well as others, mostly politicians, statesmen and soldiers, including, incidentally, Colonel (now General) de Gaulle. On their return they drafted a report in which was the following general note of warning:—

A Mission of inquiry.

“ . . . Our lengthy exchange of views with Herr von Ribbentrop was not of a reassuring character. A spirit of self-sufficiency and determination is marked. . . . In our view the military preparations of Germany constitute a grave menace to the peace of Europe, and eventually to British Imperial interests. . . . The young people of Germany are being persuaded that they are surrounded by a ring of hostile nations, and a case is being built up to justify, for the benefit of German public opinion, the re-militarisation of the Rhine zone. . . . In our view, Germany is an armed camp and every political organisation has a potential military value and is being developed for military purposes. . . . ”

A Warning from 1936.

The Committee decided that the report contained so many extremely grave facts that it should be circulated to a number of responsible persons in Parliament and the country, especially to some of those who were persistently opposing rearmament, despite the ever-growing dangers. The conclusions of the report were only a reiteration of the view of nearly every British Ambassador and Minister in Europe. Yet, we were asked by a parliamentary representative of Mr. Baldwin's Government to suppress it on the ground that it obviously contained the views of British officials and of some foreign statesmen. We were confronted with the choice of disregarding the request, in which case every door to future activity might be shut, and joining in the general conspiracy of silence which was to prove so disastrous. We took our own course.

The Report unpopular.

Every effort which the Committee's resources permitted was made. A number of meetings were organised for Members of Parliament to hear lectures by competent authorities on the state of our armaments and the situation in Europe. Meetings were also arranged for the private information of the leading clergy and laity of the Churches. Speakers addressed a long series of Rotary Club meetings. The collaboration of Headmasters of many leading public and secondary schools made lectures possible in educational establishments in many parts of the country. In addition to these activities, the Committee organised the distribution of articles for, and letters to the Press, both at home, and in many parts of the British Empire.

An Independent campaign.

Unhappily, however, there was lack of co-operation between those who recognised the growing dangers in Europe. There were two schools of thought. We took the view that so weak and divided were the Eastern and Central states of Europe and so uncertain the temper of France, that the wisest course lay in far-reaching British re-armament in preparation for a long rather than a short-term foreign policy. A very much more powerful school of thought recruited from all parties, however, believed (and until recently were convinced) that Germany was potentially encircled by a ring of Powers capable of resisting her encroachments if only they were supported and encouraged by Great Britain.

Two Schools of thought.

This view was strongly held by most advocates of the Polish and Roumanian Guarantees. None of the ominous events connected with the failure of the Disarmament Conference, the breakdown of the League, the collapse of Austria and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia, proved adequate warning of the fundamental weaknesses and disunity which existed in Europe, not only between nations but within them. It was indeed internal disunion of the Powers which constituted the main strength of the aggressive Nations.

Polish and Roumanian Guarantees

Of all those who share responsibility for the calamities which have fallen upon us, the most guilty are those who at first declined to support any re-armament, and subsequently only agreed to a limited extension of the fighting forces, providing the Government undertook widespread foreign commitments far in excess of our military resources. They argued that the collective strength of the non-aggressive States would provide all the necessary force. The almost endless bickering to

Conditional rearmament.

which this led not only hampered re-armament, but greatly disturbed the conduct of our foreign policy. This whole subject, however, is one of too great importance to be dealt with in a paragraph. At the proper time we mean to prepare and publish a short work of reference upon it. The British public is quite determined not to allow the guilty to cover up their misdeeds by a series of bellicose speeches delivered now. Before these speeches can be taken into favourable account, they must answer for their earlier declarations, which neither we—nor we suspect, future historians—will dismiss with an easy tolerance.

The
Wishful
View.

After the outbreak of war there were those who believed that Italian non-belligerency represented a break in the Axis, that in some mysterious way Russia would prove a secret ally of the Western Powers, and that Germany, betrayed by her partners and surrounded by an iron ring, would capitulate, starve to death, or launch some reckless military adventure offering no prospect of success or reward. Those who held this view did not believe that Poland would be swept away within three weeks, without France being able to raise a helping hand. Nor was it thought that Russia and Germany would achieve the domination of Scandinavia without the Northern States even attempting some form of collective resistance. The suggestion that the Balkans might be terrorised into complete submission, with the evident acquiescence of Russia, and the help of Italy, was scouted as extreme pessimism. That France would capitulate, and Turkey remain neutral in the event of Italy joining the war, were possibilities absolutely excluded from their calculations.

Grave
Reports
from the
Continent.

Reports were constantly reaching us which led us to conclusions so different from the popular ones, that we were confronted with a heavy and thankless task. On the one hand it was undesirable to paint a picture of Europe so black as to discourage the public, yet on the other to dissemble the facts would, we felt, be unpatriotic. By a series of mischances Britain's future generally was becoming ever more closely linked with the strength and fate of certain countries in Europe which we knew to be dying. Yet at that time to suggest that Poland would fall was unpopular, while to talk of France's weakness was regarded as utter defeatism. Moreover, to discuss such possibilities was, in the view of many, to argue a final disaster for the Empire, for in the public mind the fate of Great Britain had become indissolubly linked with that of Europe. In fact, important though our interests on the Continent of Europe undoubtedly were, and grave though the catastrophe which has occurred, it was and is a gross mistake to associate too closely the fate of the Commonwealth with that of Europe.

A
Persistent
Confidence.

To find ourselves at war with the most powerful military nations in the world at a time when the rest of Europe is in dissolution is, of course, not only unpleasant, but dangerous. That for some time things may look very grave, we have no doubt, but that in the fullness of time we shall achieve success we are confident. Moreover, we hope it will be noted that we came to this conclusion a long time ago, despite our fears for the capitulation of Europe. We never believed that we should reach our final goal without going through many vicissitudes, including the breakdown of many Allies. Whatever phases we may yet have to go through, and whatever difficulties we are destined to face, our conviction will remain unshaken. It was formed upon the assumption that these things would happen and we are not now to be found amongst those who incline towards undue depression.

GERMANY'S POLICY AND SUCCESSES

Germany's
Objectives
Recalled.

The most striking points which stood out from all reports about Germany's policy were that she was striking out for three main preliminary objectives :—

1. To sweep away all potential military interference in Eastern Europe before the Western Powers could intervene.
2. To gain domination of an area from the Arctic to the Bosphorus and from the Rhine to Vladivostock.
3. To immobilise France and Turkey before dealing with Great Britain.

The Great
Questions.

The great questions were, first, whether she would apply direct or indirect aggression against Poland; secondly, how far the imposition of German pressure upon Scandinavia and the Balkans would involve military complications with the great Powers; thirdly, how long Hitler would content himself with a passive military policy in Western Europe; fourthly, whether, having immobilised France and Turkey, he planned for a pause before going further; and fifthly, which of the two most vital parts of the British Empire he would strike at first—the British Isles or the Middle East?

The
Decision
over
Poland.

His decision last summer not to waste any more time and to apply direct aggression against Poland was taken the moment it became clear beyond all reasonable doubt that France would not, and could not, go beyond a declaration of war, and that Britain could not take the initiative in the air. He calculated both these factors correctly.

Hitler
Recognises
Importance
of Flanks.

He believed he could safeguard his flanks without risking the success of his whole strategy, and he knew that if he did not do so he would face a very dangerous situation. Consequently he took all measures to prevent the Allies from gaining any foothold which might redress the balance of influence in Scandinavia and the Balkans.

The Months
of Stale-
mate in
W. Europe.

Most interesting of all the experiments which Hitler undertook was his passive policy in Western Europe, which was the subject of very frequent discussion in these Memoranda during the first months of the war. That policy puzzled and misled many. Hitler never had the slightest intention of risking a long war in the West. He never meant the historic battlefields to become more than the site of a great garrison, so long as to strike in the West involved the slightest risk of prolonged hostilities. He was out for the breakdown of France and a separate peace. Although he was within measurable distance of achieving this without a campaign at all, nevertheless, true

to form, he finally chose the more extreme course. But not until his reports assured him that success could be achieved within a few weeks.

Germany's eight months of inactivity in Western Europe was partly responsible for the inducement of complacency between September and May. It was argued that Germany had not expected a Franco-British declaration of war, and that it came as a blow, creating a dilemma from which there was no escape. Germany's failure to take the offensive in the West was regarded by the French Government and by many in London as a sign of weakness, when indeed it was a sign of great intelligence.

Some of
the Con-
sequences.

The two final questions have yet to be resolved by events. It is sufficient to recall past reports on the great importance which Germany attaches to striking at one objective at a time, and the two principles which no enemy of Great Britain can disregard. First, that even though this Island die, the Empire lives, and secondly, that no amount of military success in Western Europe can be regarded as complete so long as the Central Arch of British Imperial defence spanning the Middle East remains intact.

Events yet
to come.

The situation created by Europe's capitulation raises many problems of great complexity. There is now no part of the Continent where Italo-German influence is not paramount. This will remain so until the Empire's defensive strength is demonstrated anew, or we show our capacity to inflict a major reverse upon Germany in the offensive sense. The establishment of the first point would have the result of increasing British prestige, but would not lead to the achievement of any positive influence outside those relating to British Imperial interests. It would, however, have a great effect in that respect. The achievement of the second objective would bring the fullest realisation of the former advantage, together with a renewed influence upon the foreign and military policy of neutral Powers. Any increase in British influence will be measurable solely in terms of our military strength and successes. In present circumstances no amount of unassisted propoganda will make the slightest difference to the policy of any single European neutral.

New
Problems
arise from
Europe's
Capitu-
lation.

Since the rapid extension of German military influence, the position of Russia has become a subject of renewed speculation. Naturally, M. Stalin is afraid of Germany. That is one of the reasons why he sought an alliance with her. He prefers this solution to an alliance with the Western Powers and he has stuck to his opinion. It must never be forgotten that for some considerable time before political Germany became responsive, Russia was manoeuvring for a rapprochement. From the very first, Germany has been the dominant partner. No one is more conscious of the weakness of his country than M. Stalin, even though sometimes this is grossly exaggerated by observers who are not fond of the Soviet. Russia would have little chance against Germany if that country, free from commitments in the West, decided to strike eastwards. M. Stalin's policy has, therefore, been to foster good relations with Germany, and to grasp such local advantages as he could during the European upheaval. In payment he has been obliged to use his fullest influence on behalf of Germany in Turkey, to put his foreign organisations at the disposal of Herr Hitler, to permit the entry of German industrial, military and other missions, and to acquiesce in German domination of all Europe. He has also been obliged to annoy Great Britain whenever possible, especially in Persia.

Russo-
German
Relations.

The concentrations in the Black Sea and Caucasus to which we referred some weeks ago indicated that renewed pressure upon Turkey was imminent, but also that we must keep our eyes upon Bessarabia, where a move may well be made at any time. If and when it does come, it will be taken as a sign of disagreement between Moscow and Berlin; in fact, it will be nothing of the sort. The Roumanian Government has been recently reconstituted on a more pro-German basis in the hope that by this means the pressure of Revisionist neighbours can be bought off. Although no doubt Germany will welcome the change in Roumania's attitude, that unfortunate country will find it receives no help whatever against the Revisionists, all of whom are beholden to, and working with, the Reich.

Russia's
Military
Movements.

Behind this political understanding, so largely inspired by fear, there has, however, been a curious, subtle, and perhaps half accidental community of thought about imponderables, and this has led to the dangerous though "discrete alliance" between the three dictators. Its existence has been denied by many. The facts show, however, that whatever the theories held in some quarters, these three men are between them achieving a number of successes, so far without clashing, and at the expense of the civilised world. The fact that Germany has risen above her partners as the paramount Power may one day cost both M. Stalin and Signor Mussolini most dearly, but things having gone as far as they have, Hitler's partners cannot desert him. They may occasionally indulge in a certain amount of intrigue with the object of bettering their positions with their master, but they would find it difficult, indeed impossible, to escape from the toils in which they are now enmeshed. If the Alliance ever breaks up, it will be on Germany's initiative.

The
Discrete
Triple
Alliance.

The British Empire is therefore faced with a situation in which Italy and Germany have issued a direct challenge, with Russia acquiescing, while all Europe lies prostrate. Our first task is to establish the defence of each part of the British Empire so that none is dependent upon another for assistance in the first phase of hostilities, except that which sea power can provide. Once this has been achieved we shall be able to afford a more leisurely survey of the general situation. Consideration of Imperial war aims for example. Only after having established our defences and then deciding upon our objectives can we plan our foreign military policy.

The Great
Challenge
to Imperial
Britain.

While we are engaged upon the discharge of our immediate Imperial responsibilities, very serious developments are certain to take place upon the Continent which will create an extremely complex issue. We may find by the time we have solved our own immediate problems that our Germanic

The Fate
of Europe
in the
Toils.