

HAMILTON, WEDNESDAY, SEPT. 18, 1940

Egypt and the Axis

Ribbentrop, Nazi Foreign Minister, is paying a hurried visit to Rome, and the greatest importance is attached to the trip. He is expected to discuss with Mussolini, in particular, the problems affecting the Mediterranean, and the extent of German assistance in the task of clearing Mare Nostrum of the British fleet, sweeping the land forces out of Egypt and securing control of the Suez canal. Linked with these discussions is the position of Spain; speculation is rife as to the possibility of that country definitely throwing in her lot with the axis partners, in an attempt to seize Gibraltar and seal up the western entrance to the Mediterranean. What precisely will be the nature of the conversations in Rome is not, of course, known to the outside world. All comments, however confidently expressed, are nothing but guesswork, but it is safe to assume that questions of vital significance to the British land and sea forces in the affected areas will be taken under consideration.

In the meantime the Italians push rapidly on in their invasion of Egyptian territory. The occupation of Sidi Barrani by Marshal Graziani's troops is an impressive feat, in view of the difficulties encountered in reaching that point. His armies have been continually harassed on the march and are still being subjected to terrific punishment, but they have now gained much-needed water supplies and are at the beginning of an asphalt road leading to the Suez canal, which should be invaluable for the battalions of tanks which the Italians are employing in these operations. Alexandria, where the British Mediterranean fleet is concentrated, is about 200 miles away from Sidi Barrani, and if Graziani intends to push his advance in that direction he will find his

troubles are only beginning. So far there has been no real battle between the opposing sides; apparently, British strategy has so arranged matters that the site of the major engagement can be chosen at will. A stranglehold is being maintained on Italian supply routes and a formidable British force is in the vicinity awaiting the signal to strike.

It may well be that the Nazis, foiled in their effort to subdue the British Isles, are turning their attention to the possibilities of better success in the Mediterranean. Britain is conserving her strength for the major struggle, if and when it comes. A decisive defeat for Italy in the Mediterranean would have a tremendous effect on the morale of the Italian people, and Hitler cannot afford to sit idly by under any such menace to his partner. Moreover, there are the Irak oil fields, which have always loomed so largely in Nazi calculations. Some observers envisage a colossal plan whereby the Fuehrer and the Duce will act in concert in a supreme effort to sever the British "life-line" connecting the Motherland with her eastern possessions.

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