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THE QUESTION AS TO THE MILITARY-POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA.

[Zur Militär-politischen Lage im Mittelmeer.]

(Translated from the Russian by Lieut.-Colonel W. E. GOWAN,
Bengal Infantry.)

UNDER this heading there appeared in the September (1890) number of the "Military Journal," published in Vienna, and entitled "Streffleur's Österreichische Militärische Zeitschrift," a paper by an anonymous author, which, in view of the question with which it deals, relating to the military strength of Italy in the Mediterranean Sea, and especially of the power of England and France in that Sea, is not devoid of interest.

"It is indisputable," says the author, "that England, thanks to the superiority of her fighting and mercantile fleet, occupies, both in the Mediterranean and in all other seas, the prior place." Her power in these waters acquires a special importance in consequence of her possession of such important positions as Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, and Port Said, for these points secure England's communication with the East Indies, a territory which more or less insures the vitality of the metropolis. Gibraltar, on account of its position, commands the entrance into the Mediterranean Sea, and this point could, in case of need, prevent any other Power from entering this sea. This inaccessible rocky fortress at the same time defends a very important and convenient anchorage for ships; but in a strategical and commercial respect the group of Maltese islands which lie 1,050 miles further to the east is more important. Situated as is this group of islands in the centre of three countries of the world, and between Gibraltar and Cyprus, it serves for England as a central position in the Mediterranean Sea, whence she can command the communication between the stations which we have named. The Maltese group of islands is strongly fortified, and is moreover adaptable for use as a vast point of supply. The chief town of the Maltese Group—La Valetta, with its forts bristling from rocks, presents a very serious source of strength. Moreover, its well defended and extensive naval and mercantile harbours serve the British war and mercantile fleets as their principal anchorages in the Mediterranean Sea. Cyprus and Port Said, on the other hand, have as yet only an importance with respect to the Suez Canal; but Cyprus, on account of its geographical position, could, in the future, become possessed of an important significance in case of any changes concerning the hold of the Bosphorus by the Sublime Porte. In such a case the fortified island of Cyprus would command the Asia

Minor littoral and the communications between the Black and Red Seas. On account of the influence of political parties, and likewise of her own interests, the relations of England towards the other two central Powers are completely independent. As regards Italy, in the event of a war between her and France, it would be difficult to say whether she could count on the support of England. Even, however, were England to be thoroughly neutral, and yet continue the transport of coal to the stations of the Italian war fleet, this attitude would have a great importance for Italy, since she would find the supply of coal from within her own territory to be quite impossible, whilst to import the same from Germany would not only be difficult, but such a source of supply would be extremely dear. The possibility of the display of indirect co-operation on the part of England towards Italy is based on the circumstance that the interests of either Power are in no way in opposition. As regards, however, the development of the Italian fleet, this is as yet so far from attaining that point of vantage as to make England fear for her supremacy on the sea, even if Italy were in alliance with some other second-rate naval Power. On the other hand, in her relations with France, England has had for several years past occasion to look distrustfully, in her knowledge of the unusually rapid development of the French war fleet. In view, then, of the possibility of a war between France and Italy, apart from purely mercantile-political considerations, the realization of a project such as the piercing of a canal between the Northern and Baltic Seas, or the continuation of the Languedoc Canal from the Bay of Biscay to the Gulf of Lyons, and of the rendering of this passage suitable for the largest vessels, would secure a rapid concentration of the French Atlantic and Mediterranean fleets, whatever attitude England might adopt in the event of a war between Italy and France.

The interests of France in the Mediterranean Sea consist in the securing uninterrupted communication between Corsica, Algiers, Tunis, Tenquin, and her other Colonial possessions. France must also be anxious to defend the littoral of the first named provinces from the descent of an enemy's fleet. At present she possesses the following war fleet:—27 iron-clads, 38 cruisers, and 105 torpedo-boats. Of this number of vessels about 30 are useless. The majority too, at present, belong to the French Atlantic fleet, but of late, France has entered upon the increase of her Mediterranean flotilla, and she is now building 10 iron-clads and 12 cruisers, which will be ready at different periods. In respect of number of ships, the French fleet is not as yet greatly superior to the Italian, and in fighting qualities some of the French vessels are inferior, for in the French fleet there still is a considerable number of wooden ships. Moreover, a large number of French ships have neither the same speed, nor the same heavy armament as the Italian vessels have. In addition to this, France, as compared with Italy, occupies a less favourable position, for her fleet is in two seas which are at a considerable distance from each other, and any concentration of French vessels, in either the Atlantic or the Mediterranean, could at any moment be prevented by England. Added to this, France must maintain a large number of ships in other seas in

order to safeguard her colonial possessions, whilst Italy need only keep up in the Red Sea and in the Mozambique Channel a few cruisers.

As long as the Triple Alliance and the League of Peace last, and until the strict neutrality of England in the event of a great European war can be secured, so long will France be unable to so increase her Mediterranean fleet, at the expense of her Atlantic squadron, as to have a preponderance over the united Austro-Italian fleets, for it must be borne in mind that Austria already possesses 8 iron-clads, 13 cruisers, and 78 torpedo boats.

"It is very doubtful," says the author, "that England would preserve a neutrality with respect to France, for an increase of French influence in the Mediterranean Sea and the weakening of the Italian fleet, to the benefit of France, would be as little to the advantage of the interests of England as would be the increase of the importance of Russia in the Black Sea or in the Bosphorus." The author even supposes that in case of a general war, any especially rapid armament of dismantled French war vessels could not be reckoned upon, and he bases this opinion on the not thoroughly hopeful condition of the French Naval Department, about which frequent declarations were made during the past year's session of the French Chambers. On the basis of experiments, carried out at Cherbourg, it may be asserted that, in the face of the most favourable conditions, the mobilization of a complete French fleet would require at least ten days.

Prior to the year 1877, Italy designed her fleet chiefly for coast defences, and it is only during the present year that she has begun to turn her attention to a more active rôle for her war fleet, as she has become convinced that such a long coast line as she possesses would be only open to the attack of war ships at certain points within a prescribed area, and that her coast line can be more successfully defended by a powerful fleet, which would be able to cope, at sea, with whatever naval Power might be named. It should, moreover, be opportunely mentioned that even the strongest coast defences are not always in a condition to secure from bombardment, towns and large trading marts along an extended sea board, for their heavy guns cause but little harm to war ships steaming past them at full speed, even when within range of their most powerful projectiles. In consequence of this circumstance, the Italian Naval Department has decided to substitute for their ships of original design, swifter vessels, completely armoured, and equipped with powerful artillery. As representatives of the new type of Italian war ships we may mention the following, which, in power, exceed the ships of all other European fleets: viz., the "Duilio," "Dandolo," "Italia," "Lepanto"; and the four following now under construction: "Andrea Doria," "Francesco-Morosini," "Rudgiero-di-Lauria," and "Ré Umberto."

Year by year the reciprocal relations of Italy and France have become more and more strained. The extension of French influence over Tunis, and the damage thereby caused to the national *amour-propre* of the Italians, have been the cause for the appearance of very serious antipathy between the two nations, the result of which has been the adhesion of Italy to the Austro-German alliance. Thus,

in view of the possibility of a very near rupture with France, it is fully manifest why Italy has of late years been very seriously occupied with increasing and improving her land and sea armed forces, and with fortifying her land frontiers as well as certain of her most important sea coast points.

In drawing up any plan for the defence of Italy it would be indispensable to have in view, that simultaneously with a French invasion of Northern Italy, a French fleet would make its appearance off the Italian coast line.

Only a few places on the Italian coast line present obstacles to a hostile landing, viz., the Ligurian littoral of Northern Italy, and the Calabrian littoral of Southern Italy; within these areas the character of the coast line, the sparsity of population, and the absence of roads altogether preclude the practicability of landing. Throughout the rest of the Italian sea board, coast defences and a fleet should secure the country from a hostile landing, which, if successful, would seriously interfere with the mobilization of the Italian land forces and the entrainment of their troops, and might even threaten the lines of communication of any Italian army which had already taken the field. In an article which was published in 1888 under the title, "Europe and the position of England," and which was ascribed to the pen of Sir Charles Dilke, the friend of Gambetta, it was asserted that the French would, in all probability, use their utmost endeavours to defeat and cripple the Italian fleet, and would then land at several points in Central Italy with the object of sending flying columns inland to operate against the Italian lines of communication. As points especially adapted for such landing, the writer indicated Genoa, Palermo, Brindisi, Ancona, Livorno, and Naples, but with such an opinion of a man who reveals his partiality for France we cannot agree, and we will endeavour to show in our further exposition of the question, why we cannot do so.

The mobilization and concentration of an army in Upper Italy would meet with great difficulties, not only because of the very intersected nature of the country, but because of the fact that the territorial system of filling up the ranks exists, in the strict sense of the word, only on the Island of Sardinia and in the case of the Alpine Bersaglieri. As regards all other arms, the reserves and depôts are scattered throughout all the provinces of the kingdom, since the rule has been made that no single fighting unit (the battalion) can receive its complement of men from more than two or three neighbouring provinces. As regards the railway system of the country, that is well developed only in Northern Italy, where there are three large double lines which are connected with each other by numerous cross lines. On the other hand, in Central and Lower Italy, there are very few railways, and double lines do not exist at all.

Of the three lines of railway which run down the length of Italy, two belong to the category of coast lines since they are laid within a short distance of the sea shore, and so, in case of war, might be easily threatened. Indeed, their uninterrupted use could only be counted on in the event of the Italian littoral being secured from a hostile

descent. The third or central railway is a mountain line and only fit for the passage of small trains, so that it is of scarcely any importance connected with the transport of troops. But the past year's debates in the Italian Parliament indicate that in a very short time, commencement will be made in the way of extending the Italian railway system, and of increasing its rolling stock, and of building new stations, railway bridges, and viaducts, for which purpose a sum of 86,000,000 lire has been voted. Of late, too, several changes have been made in the dislocation of the Italian Army. Thus, of 12 Army Corps, the first five have been distributed over provinces with headquarters at Turin, Alexandria, Milan, Piacenza, and Verona; the headquarters of three others are at Bologna, Florence, and Ancona; and the headquarters of the last four are at Rome, Bari, Naples, and the Island of Sicily. The Island of Sardinia has its own defensive organization, of which we will speak further on.

In accordance with an official notification of the Italian War Minister, made by him in Parliament, the concentration of a large portion of the Italian Army in the Valley of the Po can be completed in three weeks. The author of the article before us supposes that this force will consist of the first five Italian Army Corps and also of a portion of the reserve division of territorial militia.

In reviewing the plan for the mobilization of the French Army, according to which the mobilization of each unit must be accomplished in five days, the movement of the troops and of their impedimenta begun on the eighth day, and the starting off of the last unit in every Army Corps finished on the seventh day of mobilization, it would appear that both the mobilization and the concentration of the Italian Army in the Valley of the Po would take place under very disadvantageous conditions, especially when we consider that the *rayons* of the dislocation of the Army Corps of Southern and Central France, and of their territorial establishments are at no very considerable distance from the Italian frontier. Likewise, it is necessary to bear in mind that the periods prescribed for the mobilization of the French Army could be adhered to by the French, since they have at their command a vast railway network with numerous parallel lines, of which the principal carry four lines of rails and are well supplied with rolling stock, a fact which cannot but simplify the passage of troops along several lines at the same time. And yet, in reality, all these favourable conditions on the side of the French, and the deductions based thereon are considerably changed, not in favour of the French, when we take into consideration that in order to concentrate a French Army in the line of Chambéry-Grenoble in order that it may reach the Valley of the Po, it would have to accomplish in ordinary marching order from 66 to 102 miles, and that, too, along roads leading across the mountains of the Lesser Saint Bernard, Mont Cenis, Genevre, De Larche, and Col-di-Tende. On all the routes taken by the French they would have to deal with Italian frontier troops, whom they must overthrow in order to gain possession of the forts on the Lesser Saint Bernard and Mont Cenis, and also of the

masked works in the valleys of the rivers Dora Battea, Dora Riperi, and Stura. Even supposing, then, that the French Army began its advance on the eighth or ninth day of mobilization, the author does not think that it would succeed in concentrating in the Valley of the Po before the twenty-first or twenty-second day of mobilization, and all this time it would have opposed to it the entire Italian Army. From this the author concludes that the position of the Italians on land is altogether not so bad as it would seem to be at the first glance. He even doubts whether columns advancing in succession through the Alpine valleys would succeed in concentrating in the Valley of the Po at all. In order to secure those points on the Ligurian littoral, which are the most exposed to the operations of an enemy, the following necessary measures have been adopted. At Lido new shore batteries have been constructed, and the old works have been renewed. For the protection of the town and port of Genoa, even against bombardment, works have been in progress for many years past. Spezzia, which has been constructed into a fortified point, and which is the principal station for the Italian fleet, is now considered impregnable. On the Island of Elba the ports Ferraio and Longone have been fortified. Gaeta and Capua are also strongly defended, and Naples has been left to the protection of the Italian fleet, as local conditions are not favourable to the construction of forts at this place. Works are now in progress for the defence of the Straits of Messina, but those for the fortifying of Tarenta, a very important naval station, have not yet been commenced. The strong fortress of Ancona makes it a second-rate military point, but owing to its small roadstead being shallow, ships could not be brought thoroughly under its shore batteries. Venice, after Maddalena, is the largest naval station in Italy, and is strongly fortified. In order to thoroughly co-operate with the coast defences, a fleet of torpedo vessels has been distributed throughout the entire Italian littoral, the greater number of these vessels being kept at Genoa, Spezzia, Naples, Porto-Vecchio, and Venice. According to present information the Italian fleet in 1897 will comprise 282 war and 76 battle ships (iron-clads and cruisers), of which 16 will be of the first class, 20 of the second, and 40 of the third class, and there will be 190 torpedo vessels as well. According to present returns the Italian fleet now consists of 180 battle ships, of which only 35 (iron-clads and cruisers) are in commission, and 73 torpedo vessels. Seven of the battle ships are of the first class, 8 of the second class, and 9 are of the third class. Forty torpedo boats are either under construction or are only partially armed.

As a base for a fleet designed for the defence of the Tarenta sea and of the western coast line which is most exposed to a hostile fleet, there is the harbour of Maddalena, in the island of that name, which lies at a short distance from the north-east end of the Island of Sicily. The port of Maddalena is by nature very well adapted as an anchorage for ships, and its fortification has been very actively carried on since 1865. This harbour covers an area of about five square miles, and has a hard bottom and a depth of water thoroughly sufficient for ships of war. It is shut in on the east by the Island of

Caprera, and on the south by the Island of San Stefano, and it lies only a few kilometres to the north of the Straits of Bonifaccio. It is separated from the Island of Sardinia by two channels with a breadth of 3 miles and a depth of 50 metres.

The isolated position of the Island of Sardinia has been the reason for entrusting its defence to a special body of militia, comprising all arms of the service, of the strength of about one division. Should an enemy appear off the island, the militia would be concentrated on the north shore, and to the south of the harbour of Maddalena, on the elevated plateau of Gabara, with the object of occupying and holding this position.

"Thus," says the author, "in regarding closely the question as to how far the Italian coast line can be said to be exposed to danger from the operations of the French fleet, of course, under the conditions of the present grouping of the European Powers, it follows that the opinion above quoted as enunciated by Sir Charles Dilke, must be recognized as groundless."

In the event of war between France and Italy in alliance with Germany, France would have to employ her active and territorial troops to the last man, on the one side to occupy the vast frontier fortresses and numerous screened works along her eastern frontier, and on the other to meet the hostile armies of operation with sufficient organized forces. In support of what he has already said, the author asserts that France, besides having to provide a sufficient garrison for Paris and its numerous fortified exterior works, would have to occupy on her eastern boundary at least 12 frontier fortresses. The forts around Paris cover an area of 29 square miles, and the circumference of the 12 frontier fortresses referred to equals from 21 to 36 miles. The forts around Lyons and Paris would require garrisons amounting to 180,000 men. And as France could not abandon Algiers, Tunis, Corsica, Tonquin, and her other colonial possessions, she would have left to place against Germany from 11 to 12 army corps, and against Italy from 5 to 6 army corps, so that she would have more need of her fleet and territorial army for other purposes, than for such a risky enterprise as in operations against the coast line of Italy. Even supposing, then, that France, in view of the complete neutrality of England, were able to increase her Atlantic fleet at the expense of flotillas in other seas, "even then," says the author, "she could not concentrate in the Mediterranean Sea more than half of her entire fleet, and this would give her about 15 or 16 iron-clads, and from 18 to 19 cruisers, or in all from 33 to 35 vessels and 50 torpedo vessels, against which Italy could, without the help of Austria, array as many as 35 war ships and more than 70 torpedo boats."