



The  
**HINGE**  
OF FATE

Winston  
Churchill

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# The Hinge of Fate

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Winston S. Churchill

The Hinge of Fate

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# Moral of the Work

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*In War: Resolution*

*In Defeat: Defiance*

*In Victory: Magnanimity*

*In Peace: Good will*

## Acknowledgments

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I MUST AGAIN ACKNOWLEDGE the assistance of those who helped me with the previous volume, namely, Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Pownall, Commodore G. R. G. Allen, Colonel F. V. Deakin, and Sir Edward Marsh, Mr. Denis Kelly, and Mr. C. C. Wood. I have also to thank the very large number of others who have kindly read these pages and commented upon them.

Lord Ismay has continued to give me his aid, as have my other friends.

I record my obligation to His Majesty's Government for permission to reproduce the text of certain official documents of which the Crown Copyright is legally vested in the Controller of His Majesty's Stationery Office. At the request of His Majesty's Government, on security grounds, I have paraphrased some of the telegrams published in this volume. These changes have not altered in any way the sense or substance of the telegrams.

I wish to acknowledge my debt to Captain Samuel Eliot Morison, U.S.N.R., whose books on naval operations give a clear presentation of the actions of the United States Fleet.

I am indebted to the Roosevelt Trust for the use they have permitted of the President's telegrams quoted here, and also to others who have allowed their private letters to be published.

## Preface

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IN *The Gathering Storm*, *Their Finest Hour*, and *The Grand Alliance* I have described as I saw them the events leading to the Second World War, the conquest of Europe by Nazi Germany, the unflinching resistance of Britain alone until the German attack on Russia and the Japanese assault brought the Soviet Union and the United States to our side. In Washington, at the turn of the year, President Roosevelt and I, supported by our Chief Military and Naval Advisers, proclaimed *The Grand Alliance*, and prescribed the main strategy for the future conduct of the war. We had now to face the onslaught of Japan. Such was the scene when on January 1, 1942, I landed at Plymouth; and here the tale of this volume begins. Again it is told from the standpoint of the British Prime Minister, with special responsibility, as Minister of Defence for military affairs. Again I rely upon the series of my directives, telegrams, and minutes which owe their importance and interest to the moment in which they were written, and which I could not write in better words now. These original documents were dictated by me as events broke upon us. As they are my own composition, written at the time, it is by them that I prefer to be judged. It would be easier to produce a series of afterthoughts when the answers to all the riddles were known, but I must leave this to the historians who will in due course be able to pronounce their considered judgments. I have called this volume *The Hinge of Fate* because in it

we turn from almost uninterrupted disaster to almost unbroken success. For the first six months of this story all went ill; for the last six months everything went well. And this agreeable change continued to the end of the struggle.

WINSTON S. CHURCHILL

Chartwell,  
Westerham,  
Kent

January 1, 1951

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## Theme of the Volume

How the power of the  
Grand Alliance  
became preponderant

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# The Hinge of Fate

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Book I

The Onslaught of Japan

Book II

Africa Redeemed



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**BOOK I**

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**THE ONSLAUGHT OF JAPAN**

## AUSTRALASIAN ANXIETIES

*The New Shape of the War—Assurance of Final Victory—Anglo-American Nakedness in the Pacific—Potential Impact of Japan upon Australia and New Zealand—My Correspondence with Mr. Curtin—His Appeal to the President—Mr. Bowden's Reports of the Peril of Singapore—Mr. Curtin's Article in the "Melbourne Herald"—I Accept Full Responsibility for the Distribution of Our Resources—My Reply to Mr. Curtin of January 3—And of January 14—Safe Arrival of the First Convoy at Singapore—Explanations to New Zealand, January 17—Mr. Curtin's Cable of January 18, and My Answer—A General Survey—The Australian Case—The Pacific War Councils in London and Washington Begin to Function.*

**T**HIS new year, 1942, of the Second World War opened upon us in an entirely different shape for Britain. We were no longer alone. At our side stood two mighty Allies. Russia and the United States, though for different reasons, were irrevocably engaged to fight to the death in the closest concert with the British Empire. This combination made final victory certain unless it broke in pieces under the strain, or unless some entirely new instrument of war appeared in German hands. There was indeed a new instrument of war for which both sides were avidly groping. As it turned out, it was into our already stronger hands that the secret of the atomic bomb was destined to fall. A fearful and bloody struggle lay before us and we could not foresee its course, but the end was sure.

The Grand Alliance had now to face the onslaught of Japan. This had been long prepared and fell upon the British and American fronts—if such they could be called—with cruel severity. At no moment could it be conceived that Japan would overcome the United States, but heavy forfeits had to be paid by them, in the Philippines and other islands, in the Pacific Ocean, and by the British and the hapless Dutch in South-East Asia. Russia, in mortal grapple with the main German Army, suffered only from the Japanese assault by the diversion of Anglo-American energies and supplies which would have aided her. Britain and the United States had a long period of torturing defeats before them which could not affect the final issue but were hard for their peoples to endure. Britain was naked because our strength was absorbed elsewhere, and the Americans because they had scarcely begun to gather their almost limitless resources. To us in the British Isles it seemed that everything was growing worse, although on reflection we knew that the war was won.

\* \* \* \* \*

In spite of the heavy new burdens which fell upon us there was no addition to our danger at home. Australia and New Zealand, on the other hand, felt suddenly plunged into the forefront of the battle. They saw themselves exposed to the possibility of direct invasion. No longer did the war mean sending aid across the oceans to the Mother Country in her distress and peril. The new foe could strike straight at Australian homes. The enormous coastlines of their continent could never be defended. All their great cities were on the seaboard. The only four well-trained divisions of volunteers, the New Zealand Division, and all their be-

officers, were far away across the oceans. The naval command of the Pacific had passed in flash and for an indefinite period to Japan. Australasian air-power hardly existed. Can we wonder that deep alarm swept Australia or that the thoughts of their Cabinet were centred upon their own affairs?

It will always be deemed remarkable that in this deadly crisis, when, as it seemed to them and their professional advisers, destruction was at the very throat of the Australian Commonwealth, they did not all join together in a common effort. But such was their party phlegm and rigidity that local politics ruled unshaken. The Labour Government, with a majority of two, monopolised the whole executive power, and conscription even for home defence was banned. These partisan decisions did less than justice to the spirit of the Australian nation, and made more difficult our task in providing, so far as possible, for the security while observing a true sense of proportion in world strategy.

The sombre pages of this volume must open with my correspondence with the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Curtin. Our discussions about the relief of the Australian troops at Tobruk had not been agreeable. Later in the war, in easier times, when he came over to England and we all got to know him well, there was general respect and liking for the eminent and striking Australian personality, and I personally formed with him a friendship which, alas, was cut short by his untimely death. At this moment however, when pressures from all sides were so fierce, I was too conscious of the depth and number of the differences in outlook that divided us, and I regret any traces of impatience which my telegrams may bear.

While in Washington I received a series of messages from Mr. Curtin and Dr. Ewing, Australian Minister for External Affairs, through their representative in Washington, Mr. Casey. Mr. Curtin also sent the following telegram to the President:

26 Dec 4

At this time of great crisis I desire to address you both while you are conferring for the purpose of advancing our common cause.

2. I have already addressed a communication to Mr. Churchill on the question of Russia which I regard as of great importance in relation to the war with Japan, and which I hope will receive the consideration of you both during the conference.

3. I refer now to a matter of more pressing importance.

4. From all reports it is very evident that in North Malaya the Japanese have assumed control of air and sea. The small British army there includes one Australian division, and we have sent three air squadrons to Malaya and two to the Netherlands East Indies. The army must be provided with air support, otherwise there will be a repetition of Greece and Crete and Singapore will be grievously threatened.

5. The fall of Singapore would mean the isolation of the Philippines, the fall of the Netherlands East Indies, and an attempt to smother all other bases. This would also sever communications between the Indian and Pacific Oceans in this region.

6. The setback would be as serious to United States interests as to our own.

7. Reinforcements earmarked by the United Kingdom for dispatch to Malaya seem to us to be utterly inadequate, especially in relation to aircraft, and more particularly fighting



aircraft.... Small reinforcements are of little avail. In truth, the amount of resistance to the Japanese in Malaya will depend directly on the amount of resistance provided by the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States.

8. Our men have fought and will fight valiantly. But they must be adequately supported. We have three divisions in the Middle East. Our airmen are fighting in Britain and the Middle East and are training in Canada. We have sent great quantities of supplies to Britain, to the Middle East, and to India. Our resources here are very limited indeed.

9. It is in your power to meet the situation. Should the Government of the United States desire, we would gladly accept an American commander in the Pacific area. The President has said that Australia will be a base of increasing importance, but, in order that it shall remain a base, Singapore must be reinforced.

10. In spite of our great difficulties, we are sending further reinforcements to Malaya.

11. I would be glad if this matter could be regarded as of the greatest urgency.

The reports which Dr. Evatt received from Mr. Bowden, the Commonwealth Commissioner in Singapore, were also transmitted to me. They were grave and proved true.

26 Dec 41

Reports read to-day indicate air situation deteriorating daily. Eight British fighters lost yesterday against three or four Japanese.

Kuala Lumpur and Port Swettenham are now our advance landing-grounds for air reconnaissance, but difficult even to carry out air reconnaissance in face of Japanese superiority in machines. Greater part of our fighters now withdrawn to Singapore for defence of island and base. Nevertheless, Air Officer Commanding stated that to provide effective fighter escort for naval convoys approaching with sorely needed reinforcements, men and material, he would have to leave Singapore unguarded.

And further:

I feel I must emphasise that deterioration of war position in Malayan defence is assuming [the aspect of a] landslide collapse of whole defence system. Expected arrival of modern fighter planes in boxes requiring weeks of assembly under danger of destruction by bombing cannot save the position. The renewal of military reinforcements expected will be absorbed in relief of tired front-line troops and will create little difference. British defence policy now concentrates greater part of fighter and anti-aircraft defence of Malaya on Singapore Island to protect naval base, starving forward troops of such defence, including the Australian Imperial Force.

Present measures for reinforcement of Malayan defences can from the practical viewpoint be little more than gestures. In my belief, only thing that might save Singapore would be the immediate dispatch from the Middle East by air of powerful reinforcements, large numbers of the latest fighter aircraft, with ample operationally trained personnel. Reinforcements should be not in brigades but in divisions, and to be of use they must arrive urgently. Anything that is not powerful, modern, and immediate is futile. As things stand at present, the fall of Singapore is to my mind only matter of weeks. If Singapore and A.I.F. in Malaya are to be saved there must be very radical and effective action immediately.

Doubt whether visit of an Australian Minister can now have any effect, as the plain fact that without immediate air reinforcement Singapore must fall. Need for decision and action matter of hours, not days.

Dr. Evatt added that in his judgment Bowden's summary set out the position correctly. "it cannot be met in the way he suggests the worst can be expected."

\* \* \* \* \*

On December 27 Mr. Curtin wrote a signed article in the *Melbourne Herald* which was flaunted round the world by our enemies. Among other things he said:

We refuse to accept the dictum that the Pacific struggle must be treated as a subordinate segment of the general conflict. By that it is not meant that any one of the other theatres of war is of less importance than the Pacific, but that Australia asks for a concerted plan evoking the greatest strength at the Democracies' disposal, determined upon hurling Japan back.

The Australian Government therefore regards the Pacific struggle as primarily one in which the United States and Australia must have the fullest say in the direction of the Democracies' fighting plan.

Without any inhibitions of any kind, I make it quite clear that Australia looks to America free of any pang as to our traditional links with the United Kingdom.

We know the problems that the United Kingdom faces. We know the constant threat of invasion. We know the dangers of dispersal of strength. But we know too that Australia can go, and Britain can still hold on.

We are therefore determined that Australia shall not go, and we shall exert all our energies towards the shaping of a plan, with the United States as its keystone, which will give to our country some confidence of being able to hold out until the tide of battle swings against the enemy.

Summed up, Australian external policy will be shaped towards obtaining Russian aid, and working out, with the United States, as the major factor, a plan of Pacific strategy, along with British, Chinese, and Dutch forces.

This produced the worst impression both in high American circles and in Canada. I was sure that these outpourings of anxiety, however understandable, did not represent Australian feeling. Mr. W. M. Hughes, Australian Prime Minister in the First World War and leader of the Federal United Australia Party (the famous "Billy Hughes"), immediately said that it would be "suicidal and a false and dangerous policy for Australia to regard Britain's support as being less important than that of other great associated countries." There was a keen controversy in Australia. I cabled from Washington to Mr. Attlee: "I hope there will be no pandering to this, while at the same time we do all in human power to come to their aid...." I weighed painfully in my mind the idea of making a broadcast direct to the Australian people. At the same time I fully accepted the responsibility which fell on me. "I hope you will endeavour to let all issues stand over until I return, so that I may face any opposition myself.... If the Malay peninsula has been starved for the sake of Libya and Russia, no one

more responsible than I, and I would do exactly the same again. Should any questions be asked in Parliament I should be glad if it could be stated that I particularly desire to answer them myself on my return.”

I replied at once to Mr. Curtin on the military position:

*Prime Minister to Mr. Curtin*

3 Jan 42

General Wavell's command area is limited to the fighting zone where active operations are now proceeding. Henceforward it does not include Australia; New Zealand, and communications between the United States and Australia, or indeed any other ocean communications. This does not of course mean that these vital regions and communications are to be left without protection so far as our resources admit. In our view, the American Navy should assume the responsibility for the communications, including the islands right up to the Australian or New Zealand coast. This is what we are pressing for. Admiral King has only just been given full powers over the whole of the American Navy, and he has not yet accepted our views. Obviously, if I cannot persuade the Americans to take over we shall have to fill the gap as best we can, but I still hope our views will be accepted, in which case of course any vessels we or you have in that area will come under United States direction while operating there. There never has been any intention to make the main Allied concentration in the newly defined South-West Pacific theatre, and I do not know where you got this from....

Night and day I am labouring here to make the best arrangements possible in your interests and for your safety, having regard to the other theatres and the other dangers which have to be met from our limited resources. It is only a little while ago that you were most strongly urging the highest state of equipment for the Australian Army in the Middle East. The battle there is still not finished, though the prospects are good. It would have been folly to spoil Auchinleck's battle by diverting aircraft, tanks, etc., to the Malay peninsula at a time when there was no certainty that Japan would enter the war. The ease-up of the Caucasian danger through the Russian victories and the Auchinleck successes have made possible the considerable reinforcements, at the temporary expense of the Middle East, of which you have been advised, and which are also justified because Malaya has now become a war theatre....

Continuous interchanges took place between me and Mr. Curtin.

*Prime Minister of Australia to Prime Minister*

11 Jan 42

It is naturally disturbing to learn that the Japanese have been able to overrun so easily the whole of Malaya except Johore, and that the Commander-in-Chief considers that certain risks have to be accepted even now in carrying on his plan for the defence of this limited area.

It is observed that the 8th Australian Division is to be given the task of fighting the decisive battle. The Government has no doubt that it will acquit itself in accordance with the highest traditions of the Australian Imperial Force. However, I urge on you that nothing be left undone to reinforce Malaya to the greatest degree possible in accordance with my earlier representations and your intentions. I am particularly concerned in regard to air strength, as repetition of the Greece and Crete campaigns would evoke a violent public reaction, and such a happening should be placed outside the bounds of possibility.

You will be aware of our agreement to the dispatch of the 6th and 7th Australian Divisions together with corps troops and maintenance and base organisations, from the Middle East to the Netherlands East Indies.

I continued to reassure the Australian Government and explain more fully our motives for the policy of the united command of the South-East Asia theatre. On the eve of my departure from Washington I summed up our position.

*Prime Minister to Prime Minister of Australia*

14 Jan 42

I do not see how any one could expect Malaya to be defended once the Japanese obtained the command of the sea and while we are fighting for our lives against Germany and Italy. The only vital point is Singapore Fortress and its essential hinterland. Personally, my anxiety has been lest in fighting rearguard actions down the peninsula to gain time we should dissipate the force required for the prolonged defence of Singapore. Out of the equivalent of four divisions available for that purpose, one has been lost and another mauled to gain a month or six weeks' time. Some may think it would have been better to have come back quicker with less loss.

2. It is clearly our duty to give all support to decisions of the Supreme Commander. We cannot judge from our distant post whether it is better to fight on the north-western side of the peninsula at some risk to Mersing, or whether all troops should now withdraw into the island fortress. Personally, I believe Wavell is right, and that view is supported by the Chief of Staff. I feel sure that you will agree to most of this.

3. I have great confidence that your troops will acquit themselves in the highest fashion in the impending battles. Everything is being done to reinforce Singapore and the hinterland. Two convoys bearing the 4th Indian Brigade Group and its transports have got through, and a very critical convoy containing the leading brigade of the British 18th Division is timed to arrive on the 13th. I am naturally anxious about these 4,500 men going through the Straits of Sunda in a single ship. I hope however they will arrive in time to take their stand with the Australian brothers. I send you the full details of what we have on the move towards this important battlefield, with the dates of arrival. There is justification in this for Wavell's hope that a counter-stroke will be possible in the latter part of February.

4. You are aware, no doubt, that I have proposed your withdrawal of two Australian divisions from Palestine to the new theatre of so much direct interest to Australia. The only limiting factor on their movement will be the shipping. We shall have to do our best to replace them from home.

5. I do not accept any censure about Crete and Greece. We are doing our utmost in the Mother Country to meet living perils and onslaughts. We have sunk all party differences and have imposed universal compulsory service, not only upon men, but women. We have suffered the agonising loss of two of our finest ships which we sent to sustain the Far Eastern War. We are organising from reduced forces the utmost further naval aid. In the Battle of Libya British and Empire losses to January 7 are reported at 1,200 officers and 16,000 men. Out of the comparatively small force it is possible to maintain forward in the desert. A heavy battle around Agheila seems to be impending. We have successfully disengaged Tobruk, after previously relieving all your men who so gallantly held it for so long. I hope therefore you

will be considerate in the judgment which you pass upon those to whom Australian lives and fortunes are so dear....

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Here at least was good news:

*Prime Minister to Mr. Curtin*

14 Jan 42

The vital convoy, including the American transport *Mount Vernon*, carrying five Hurricanes, one anti-tank regiment, fifty guns; one heavy anti-aircraft regiment, fifty guns; one light anti-aircraft regiment, fifty guns; and the 54th British Infantry Brigade Group, totaling about 9,000, reached Singapore safely and punctually yesterday.

Mr. Fraser also expressed his anxieties, and I replied:

*Prime Minister to Prime Minister of New Zealand*

17 Jan 42

I welcome, as always, the frank expression of your views, with which, in the main, I am in much sympathy, and the well-balanced reasoning with which you have presented them to me.

2. The Government and people of New Zealand have always adopted a helpful and realistic attitude to this war, which, beginning in the narrow confines of Europe, has gradually spread over almost the entire world and is now at the doorstep of New Zealand.

3. If you have thought us unmindful of your necessities in the past, although indeed we have never been so, I can assure you that the vast distance in miles which separates London from Wellington will not cause us to be unmindful of you or leave you comfortless in your hour of peril.

4. You will, I am sure, forgive me if in the time at my disposal I do not take up each of your points in detail. From the telegram which you have now received since sending your telegram to me you will know of the army and air reinforcements which we and America are sending to you. The establishment of a new Anzac naval area will, I hope, also be agreeable to you.

Moreover, the United States contemplate the dispatch at an early date of considerable land and air forces to the Far East area.

5. Nevertheless, you would not expect me to make promises of support which cannot be fulfilled, or of the early redress of a situation in the Far East which must take time to rectify, as rectified it will be.

6. I sense your [reproach at our] having been misled by a too complacent expression of military opinion in the past on probable dangers in the Pacific area in general and to New Zealand in particular. But who could have foretold the serious opening setback which the United States Fleet suffered on December 7, with all that this and subsequent losses of our two fine ships entail?

The events of this war have been consistently unpredictable, and not all to our disadvantage. I am not sure that the German General Staff have always forecast events with

unerring accuracy. For example, the Battle of Britain, the Battle of the Atlantic, and the Russian resistance must have shaken Hitler's faith in careful calculation of military appreciations.

\* \* \* \* \*

In due course Mr. Curtin replied to my telegram of the 14th.

*Prime Minister of Australia to Prime Minister*

18 Jan 42

I do not understand how you can read into my telegram any expression of opinion that we expected the whole of Malaya to be defended without superiority of sea-power.

2. On the contrary, if you refer to the Australian Government's cable of December 1, 1941 on the report of the first Singapore Conference you will read the following, which unfortunately has proved rather too true a forecast:

"The general conclusion reached by the delegation was that in the absence of a main fleet in the Far East the forces and equipment at present available in this area for the defence of Malaya are totally inadequate to meet a major attack by Japan."

3. The United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff laid down the strengths of:

(i) Land forces considered necessary for the defence of Malaya.

(ii) The total quantity of equipment to be provided for the forces in (i)

(iii) The air forces required "to give a fair degree of security" to Malaya.

4. We have contributed what we could in land and air forces and material to this region and consistently pressed for the strengthening of the defences, but there have been suggestions of complacency with the position which have not been justified by the speed of progress of the Japanese. That is why I said in my telegram [of December 5] these events were disturbing....

6. As far back as 1937 the Commonwealth Government received assurances that it was the aim of the United Kingdom Government to make Singapore impregnable. When the defence of Singapore was under survey by the Committee of Imperial Defence in 1933 the [Australian] High Commissioner pointed out the grave effects that would flow from the loss of Singapore or the denial of its use to the main fleet. He stated that in the last resort the whole internal defence system of Australia was based on the integrity of Singapore and the presence of a capital fleet there. He added that, if this was not a reasonable possibility, Australia, in balancing a doubtful naval security against invasion, would have to provide for greater land and air forces as a deterrent against such risk. I repeat these earlier facts to make quite clear the conception of the Empire and local defence in which we have been brought to believe. It has also influenced our decision on cooperation in other theatres from the relatively small resources we possess in relation to our commitments in a Pacific war.

7. My observations on Crete and Greece imply no censure on you, nor am I passing judgment on anyone, but there is no denying the fact that air support was not on the scale promised.... I have stated this position frankly to the Australian people because I believe it is better that they should know the facts than assume that all is well and later be disillusioned.

by the truth.

8. No one has a greater admiration for the magnificent efforts of the people of the United Kingdom than their kinsfolk in Australia. Nevertheless, we make no apologies for our efforts or even for what you argue we are not doing. The various parts of the Empire, as you know, are differently situated, possess various resources, and have their own peculiar problems....

It was my duty to make the fullest allowance for the alarm which racked the Commonwealth Government and the dangers which beset them. I could not however forbear a reference to the strong support which Australian political parties, particularly the Labor Party, had given before the war both to the neglect of our defences and to the policy of appeasement. As this telegram sums up the position I felt myself entitled to take, it should be printed here.

*Prime Minister to Mr. Curtin*

19 Jan 42

I thank you for your frank expression of views. I have no responsibility for the neglect of our defences and policy of appeasement which preceded the outbreak of the war. I had been for eleven years out of office, and had given ceaseless warnings for six years before the war began. On the other hand, I accept the fullest responsibility for the main priorities and general distribution of our resources since I became Prime Minister in May 1940. The eastward flow of reinforcements and aircraft from this Island has been maintained from that date forward to the utmost limit of our shipping capacity and other means of moving aircraft and tanks. I deemed the Middle East a more urgent theatre than the new-christened A.B.D. area. We had also to keep our promises to Russia of munitions deliveries. No one could tell what Japan would do, but I was sure that if she attacked us and you the United States would enter the war and that the safety of Australia and ultimate victory would be assured.

2. It must be remembered that only three months ago we faced in the Middle East, where the Australian Imperial Force lay, the threat of a double attack by Rommel from the west and the overrunning of the Caucasus, Persia, Syria, and Iraq from the north. In such a plight as the teachings of war show that everything should be concentrated on destroying one of the attacking forces. I thought it best to make a job of Rommel while forming with the rest of our resources the best Levant-Caspian front possible. This latter was largely beyond our resources. Since then two-thirds of Rommel's army has been destroyed, and Cyrenaica cleared, but only by a very narrow margin. In fact, it hung in the balance at the moment when Auchinleck superseded Cunningham.

3. Although I cannot promise total destruction of Rommel, we have at least gained a very substantial success, which has already rid us of one serious danger and liberated important forces. At the same time the tremendous, unexpected resistance of Russia has given considerable breathing-space, and it may be more, on the Levant-Caspian front. Thus we are able to move the 17th Indian Division and soon several other Indian infantry divisions previously assigned to the Levant-Caspian front, together with the 18th British and the 7th and 8th Australian Divisions, with substantial aircraft and some armoured forces, from the Middle East to the Far Eastern theatre. This we are doing with all speed. You may judge how melancholy our position would have been if we had been beaten by Rommel, and if the

Caucasus, the Baku oil-wells, and Persia had been overrun by the enemy. I am sure it would have been wrong to send forces needed to beat Rommel to reinforce the Malay peninsula while Japan was still at peace. To try to be safe everywhere is to be strong nowhere.

4. We have to be thankful, first, for the Russian victories, secondly, for our good success against Rommel, and, thirdly, that the United States was attacked by Japan at the same time as ourselves. The blame for the frightful risks we have had to run, and shall have to run, rests with all those who, in or out of office, failed to discern the Nazi menace and to crush it while it was weak.

5. No one could foresee the series of major naval disasters which befell us and the United States around the turn of the year 1941–42. In an hour the American naval superiority in the Pacific was for the time being swept away. In another hour the *Prince of Wales* and *Republique* were sunk. Thus the Japanese gained the temporary command of Pacific waters, and no doubt we have further grievous punishment to face in the Far East. In this new crisis affecting you I should have approved the sending of the three fast Mediterranean battleships to form a fleet with the four “R.s” and the *Warspite*, just repaired, a new fleet in the Indian Ocean, to move to your protection as might be most helpful.

6. I have already told you of the *Barham* being sunk. I must now inform you that the *Queen Elizabeth* and *Valiant* have both sustained underwater damage from a “human torpedo”, which put them out of action, one for three and the other for six months. As the enemy do not yet know about these three last-mentioned ships, you will see that we have no need to enlighten them, and I must ask you to keep this last deadly secret to yourself alone.

7. However, these evil conditions will pass. By May the United States will have a superior fleet at Hawaii. We have encouraged them to take their two new battleships out of the Atlantic if they need them, thus taking more burden upon ourselves. We are sending two, and possibly three, out of our four modern aircraft-carriers to the Indian Ocean. *Warspite* will soon be there, and thereafter *Valiant*. Thus the balance of sea-power in the Indian and Pacific Oceans will, in the absence of further misfortunes, turn decisively in our favour, and our Japanese overseas operations will be deprived of their present assurance. Meanwhile we are trying to make up by air-power in the Mediterranean for our lack of a battle fleet, and the impending arrival of *Anson* [our latest battleship] and complete working up of *Duke of York* enable us to face large reductions in American strength in the Atlantic for the sake of the Pacific.

8. We must not be dismayed or get into recrimination, but remain united in true comradeship. Do not doubt my loyalty to Australia and New Zealand. I cannot offer any guarantees for the future, and I am sure great ordeals lie before us, but I feel hopeful as never before that we shall emerge safely, and also gloriously, from the dark valley.

The following answer was received:

*Prime Minister of Australia to Prime Minister*

22 Jan 42

I appreciate your full reply and reciprocate your sentiments on the unity of our efforts.

2. Just as you foresaw events in Europe, so we feel that we saw the trend of the Pacific



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