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## THE CAUCASUS OIL REGION IN BRITAIN'S MILITARY – POLITICAL PLANS, 1940–1942

During the Second World War, the Caucasus region possessed not only vital energy resources but also significant geostrategic importance for both the Allies and Germany. The aim of this research is to examine the objectives, content, and military-political context of the military plans developed by Britain between 1940 and 1942, either independently or in cooperation with France and the United States. The research is based on the analysis of books and scholarly articles in multiple languages, as well as the study of historiographical approaches to draw conclusions. The scientific novelty of this research lies in the systematic analysis of previously insufficiently studied British contingency plans designed to prevent the bombardment of or enemy occupation of the Caucasus oil region, with particular attention to the «Velvet» operation within the context of Britain–US–USSR cooperation. The findings demonstrate that Britain regarded the Caucasus oil region as a critical factor during the war for both energy security and imperial defense, and that the implementation or cancellation of these plans depended directly on diplomatic interactions with the USSR and the shifting military and political balance following the Battle of Stalingrad.

**Keywords:** Britain, Germany, USSR, World War II, Caucasus, oil, «Pike», «Velvet».

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### 1940–1942 жылдары Британияның әскери-саяси жоспарларында Кавказ мұнай өнірі

Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс кезінде Кавказ аймағы тек маңызды энергетикалық ресурстарға ғана емес, сонымен қатар одактастар мен Германия үшін стратегиялық тұрғыдан аса маңызды аймак болып саналды. Осы зерттеудің негізгі мақсаты – 1940–1942 жылдары Ұлыбритания таралынан Франция мен АҚШ-пен бірлесіп немесе тәуелсіз түрде өзірленген әскери жоспарлардың мақсаттары, мазмұны және әскери-саяси контекстін жан-жақты зерттеу болып табылады. Зерттеу әдістемесі әртүрлі тілдердегі тарихи кітаптар мен ғылыми мақалаларды мүқият талдауға, сондай-ақ, тарихнамалық көзқарастарды зерделеуге негізделген. Ғылыми жаңалығы Кавказ мұнай аймағын бомбалаудан немесе жаудың бақылауына өтуінен қорғауға бағытталған, бұрын жеткілікті түрде жүйелі зерттелмеген Ұлыбританияның төтенше жоспарларын, атап айтқанда «Velvet» операциясын Ұлыбритания–АҚШ–ССР ынтымақтастыры контекстінде жан-жақты талдауда көрініс табуында жатыр. Зерттеу нәтижелері көрсеткендегі, Ұлыбритания Кавказ мұнай аймағын соғыс кезінде энергетикалық қауіпсіздік пен империялық қорғаныс үшін шешуші фактор деп санадан, ал осы жоспарлардың жүзеге асырылуы немесе тоқтатылуы тікелей ССР–пен дипломатиялық қарым-қатынастарға, сондай-ақ, Стalingrad шайқасынан кейінгі өзгерген әскери-саяси тәп-тендікке байланысты болған.

**Түйін сөздер:** Британия, Германия, КСРО, Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс, Кавказ, мұнай, «Пайк», «Велвет».

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### Нефтяной регион Кавказа в военно-политических планах Великобритании, 1940–1942 гг.

Во время Второй мировой войны Кавказский регион обладал не только жизненно важными энергетическими ресурсами, но и значительным геостратегическим значением для союзников и Германии. Цель данного исследования – изучить цели, содержание и военно-политический контекст военных планов, разработанных Великобританией в 1940–1942 годах, как самостоятельно,

так и в сотрудничестве с Францией и США. Исследование основано на анализе книг и научных статей на различных языках, а также на изучении историографических подходов для получения выводов. Научная новизна исследования заключается в систематическом анализе ранее недостаточно изученных британских чрезвычайных планов, направленных на предотвращение бомбардировок или захвата Кавказского нефтяного региона противником, с особым вниманием к операции «Velvet» в контексте сотрудничества Великобритании, США и СССР. Результаты показывают, что Великобритания считала нефтяной регион Кавказа критическим фактором во время войны как для энергетической безопасности, так и для имперской обороны, а реализация или отмена этих планов напрямую зависела от дипломатических отношений с СССР и изменившегося военно-политического баланса после Сталинградской битвы.

**Ключевые слова:** Великобритания, Германия, СССР, Вторая мировая война, Кавказ, нефть, «Пайк», «Велвет».

## Introduction

In the initial phase of the Second World War, the rapprochement in political and economic relations between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany, coupled with the “Winter War” against Finland, was perceived as one of the primary catalysts for the pronounced deterioration in Anglo-Soviet relations. In response, the United Kingdom and France pursued measures aimed at undermining Soviet capabilities, with the strategic objective of maintaining the USSR in a position of neutrality throughout the conflict. Given the Soviet Union’s provision of raw materials most notably petroleum to Germany, the Western Allies, from November 1939 onward, began to consider the bombardment of the oil industry in the Caucasus region as an integral component of their economic warfare strategy. Between late 1939 and March 1940, the British and French Chiefs of Staff produced a series of politico-military reports addressing the feasibility and implications of such an operation.

## Materials and methods

During the Second World War, Britain’s interest in the destruction of the Soviet Union’s oil fields located in the Caucasus region is regarded as one of the less-explored topics in historiography. In the preparation of this article, a variety of sources (books and academic articles) have been utilized.

The most comprehensive work written on this subject to date is considered to be Patrick Osborn’s *Operation Pike: Britain Versus the Soviet Union 1939-1941* (2000). The studies of Millman (1994), Lucas (1964-1965), Champonnois (2018), Kahle (1973), Sultanov (2016), and other researchers are considered significant sources for a more comprehensive understanding of this topic.

For the purpose of achieving a clearer understanding of the issue, the historical-critical method

has been employed; to present the events that took place between 1940 and 1942 in a sequential manner, the chronological method has been applied; and to analyze qualitative factors such as military strategy and geopolitical interests, the qualitative method has been utilized.

## Results and discussion

The military-political strategy of Great Britain toward the Caucasus in 1940–1942 remains one of the least explored subjects in both Western and Soviet historiography. The first British-French plans for an attack on the Caucasian oil facilities are discussed in detail in P. Osborne’s “Operation Pike: Britain Versus the Soviet Union 1939–1941”. Osborne focuses on the diplomatic and military considerations developed during the “Phoney War,” as well as the operational framework of these plans, using extensive archival material.

Another important interpretation of this period is found in B. Millman’s “Towards War with Russia”. Millman examines Britain’s attempts to cooperate with Turkey, its view of Turkey as a potential transit route for sabotage operations against the Caucasian oil infrastructure, and Britain’s broader security policy in the Black Sea–Middle East region. However, his analysis concentrates mainly on the winter–summer period of 1940.

The British-French air-strike proposals of the same period are explored in greater detail in the study of the French researcher S. Champonnois, who examines the bombing plans targeting the Soviet oil industry in the Caucasus. Champonnois systematically analyzes the political motives, military-strategic debates, and intelligence assessments of France and Britain in this context. Nonetheless, he pays relatively little attention to the broader regional-strategic position of the Caucasus.

The later stage of the war, from 1942 onwards, has been examined mainly by the Russian historian

N. Prigodich. Prigodich analyzes the preparations for Operation Velvet, the institutional inconsistencies, and the logistical and coordination problems that ultimately prevented its implementation, drawing extensively on archival materials. He concludes that the operation was never carried out because it did not correspond to the actual capabilities of the Allies. The first comprehensive analysis of the Velvet Project in Western historiography is provided by R.C. Lucas. In "The Velvet Project: Hope and Frustration", Lucas outlines the initial concept of the operation and the political and practical obstacles that led to its gradual collapse. However, both Lucas's and Prigodich's studies focus primarily on the internal dynamics of Allied decision-making institutions and therefore offer limited insight into the role of the Caucasus within the broader strategic context.

During the early stages of the conflict, disagreements among the Allied powers considerably postponed the execution of a decisive strike against Germany. In particular, the French military and political circles regarded the opening of a second front in Eastern Europe as essential to divert Germany from the Western Front and to prevent its access to key strategic resources in a prolonged war. The French General Staff concluded that if military operations between Germany and the Allies did not begin specifically in the Eastern European region, France itself would become Germany's primary target. On the other hand, Britain approached the idea of opening a second front in Eastern Europe with caution because this region was within the political and strategic interests of both Italy and the Soviet Union. Military activity by France and Britain in this area could provoke strong opposition from those states. As a result, the issue of establishing a second front in Eastern Europe lost its urgency after the Soviet Union's military intervention in Finland in November 1939. From that point on, the main focus shifted to involving neutral countries such as Norway and Sweden on the side of the Allies, providing military support to Finland through these countries, and restricting Germany's access to strategic resources, especially iron ore deposits. Within this framework, the British War Cabinet developed a plan called "a small-scale operation," which aimed to prevent the shipment of iron ore from the Norwegian port of Narvik to Germany. France proposed a broader plan known as "a large-scale operation," which involved Allied forces taking control of the iron ore mines located in Sweden. French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier believed that if Sweden's mineral resources fell into Germany's hands, the war could be pro-

longed by another two years. The implementation of either plan would have meant a clear violation of the neutrality of Norway and Sweden by the Allies. Despite various military and political proposals and promises of military assistance from the Allies, the governments of Norway and Sweden refused to cooperate due to increasing pressure from Germany. (Catherwood, 2003: p.104-105)

From the onset of the Second World War, one of the priority concerns for the British military and political leadership was ensuring the security of Turkey. This strategy was based on Turkey's strategic geographical position, which provided Britain with vital access to key regions. The potential military threats posed by the Soviet Union from the east and Germany from the Balkans constituted a serious danger to British imperial interests in the Near East. For this reason, Britain began to develop military and political plans aimed at the phased deployment of ground and air forces within Turkish territory to safeguard security and protect its existing interests in the Near East.

From January 1940 onward, the French Chiefs of Staff, similarly to their British counterparts, began formulating military and political plans concerning a possible intervention in the Soviet Union's oil industry. Within this framework, under the directive of French Prime Minister Edouard Daladier, a memorandum was prepared on January 19, 1940, by General M. Gamelin and Admiral F. Darlan. The plan outlined three main options to weaken the Soviet Union: conducting naval operations against German merchant vessels in the Black Sea by the British and French Navies; organizing joint air raids on the oil production centers in the Caucasus; and supporting potential uprisings among the region's Muslim population against the Soviet regime. (Kahle, 1973: p.11) In addition to the memorandum, a special report entitled "Note on Russian Oil – Baku" compiled detailed information on the cities of Grozny, Batumi, and Baku, with the primary focus directed towards Baku. Expert assessments recommended that any bombardment should employ a combination of high-explosive and incendiary munitions to maximize its destructive effect. (Champonnois, 2018: p.37-38)

Following detailed assessments, the Third Directorate of the French General Staff for National Defense prepared a new document on 22 February evaluating the risks and opportunities associated with the possible courses of action. The plan to block the transportation of oil in the Black Sea was contingent upon Turkey's consent. Direct interven-

tion against cities in the Caucasus was deemed risky due to the challenging terrain, whereas the destruction of facilities in Batumi, Poti, and Kareli, located in Georgia, appeared more feasible given their proximity to the border. A ground assault on Baku was considered possible only through Iranian territory, although the prospects for success were assessed as higher in the case of an air attack. For this purpose, it was planned to deploy air bases in Turkey, Iran, Iraq, and Syria. The targets for destruction included the oil facilities in and around Baku, as well as the railway lines and ports. Due to the lack of modern bomber aircraft in the French arsenal, it was envisaged that these would be supplied by Britain. The possibility of inciting uprisings among the Muslim population of the region was also considered; however, the brutal suppression of earlier revolts led to a more cautious approach toward this option. (Gamelein, 1940: pp. 188–192)

On 19 January 1940, the principal topic of discussion at the meeting of the Anglo-French Coordinating Committee in London was the potential military intervention of Germany and the Soviet Union in the Balkans and the Near East. The French side proposed the deployment of part of the Allied forces to the city of Salonika in order to ensure the security of the Balkan region. (Osborn, 2003: p.64) However, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, Edmund Ironside, opposed this initiative, arguing that, in the event of a Soviet attack on Iran, Britain's foremost priority, in terms of imperial interests, would be the defense of the Anglo-Iranian oil fields and the port of Basra. At the same time, plans were made to launch air strikes against the oil production centers in the Caucasus from air bases located in Iraq and Turkey. The operation was to involve four British "Blenheim" squadrons and one "Wellesley" squadron, as well as twenty-four French "Farman" aircraft and sixty-five "Glenn Martin" aircraft based in Syria. Codenamed "Pike," the plan aimed to prevent any potential Soviet advance towards the Near East. (Millman, 1994: p.273; Sultanov, 2011: p.133)

On 31 January 1940, the British military attaché in Tehran, Reader Bullard, met with Iran's Minister of War, Colonel A. Nakhjavan. During the meeting, the minister provided detailed information on the state of the Iranian Air Force and requested British support for the acquisition of additional aircraft to enhance the country's security. He also indicated that, within the framework of potential Allied plans to strike the Soviet Union's oil facilities in Baku, Iran would be willing to provide military assistance and cooperate in the preparation of operations

against the USSR. Bullard, however, noted that for such operations, fighter aircraft would be more essential than bombers, and emphasized that the proposal could not be advanced without the Shah's knowledge. In discussions within the British War Cabinet, it was observed that the French were particularly interested in the destruction of the oil fields and infrastructure in Baku, as such an action would cripple Soviet industry. As a result, the Chiefs of Staff Committee was tasked with conducting a detailed assessment of Soviet oil supplies and Iran's proposals. The British Foreign Office, however, regarded the use of Iranian air bases as a risky measure that could lead to political repercussions after the war, and instead considered the bases in Iraq to be a more secure option. (Sultanov, 2011: p.134)

On 12 March 1940, the British War Cabinet discussed the report prepared by the Chiefs of Staff on 8 March regarding possible military operations against the Soviet Union and their potential outcomes. During the deliberations, the Chief of the Air Staff stated that any potential Soviet air strikes against Britain would most likely be launched via Afghanistan and India. The report noted that India's air defense system was poorly organized and stressed that Afghanistan, facing the threat of Soviet occupation, required additional support. As the most effective means of delivering a strategic blow to the USSR, the option of attacking oil installations in the Caucasus region was considered. However, the region's geographical position, long distances, reinforced air defense systems, and lack of operational experience in such missions rendered the execution of this plan highly challenging. According to Air Staff calculations, the sustained deployment of three Blenheim squadrons for a period of six weeks to three months could completely disable the region's oil production infrastructure. Repairing this damage would require between nine months and two years. The report also acknowledged that civilian casualties during such an operation would be unavoidable. Furthermore, it was stated that the Middle East did not have a sufficient number of squadrons to carry out the operation. The maximum range of a fully loaded Blenheim aircraft was 750 miles. The nearest suitable airfields for an attack on Baku were located in Tehran, Tabriz, and Kars; for Grozny in Kars, Erzurum, Erzincan, and Tabriz; and for Batumi in Kars, Erzurum, and Erzincan. It was noted that attacks on Baku from the British bases in Mosul and Habbaniya would be impossible for Blenheim aircraft and could only be conducted to a limited extent using long-range Wellesley aircraft, of which only

one squadron was available. Consequently, the success of the operational plan was directly contingent upon cooperation from Iran or Turkey. The British Foreign Secretary, Lord Halifax, argued that neither Iran nor Turkey would be inclined to engage in such cooperation unless there was a direct threat from the USSR. For this reason, under conditions where the likelihood of direct military confrontation with the Soviet Union was deemed low, it was recommended that the decision to dispatch bomber aircraft to the Middle East should be postponed. (Millman, 1994: p.273-274)

On 13 March 1940, Finland's signing of a peace treaty with the Soviet Union prompted revisions to Allied strategic plans. In this context, the French Chief of the General Staff, General Maurice Gamelin, prepared a memorandum outlining the measures deemed necessary against Germany. Gamelin emphasized the need to intensify the economic blockade in order to weaken Germany's position, while also conducting certain military operations in parallel. The primary focus was on the threat posed by Germany to the security of the Netherlands and Belgium. In order to prevent Sweden from supplying Germany with iron ore and to ensure that Norway abandoned its neutral stance on this matter, it was deemed necessary to apply increased diplomatic and economic pressure on these countries. Should they fail to comply with Allied demands, restrictions on their maritime trade were envisaged. At the same time, preparations were to be made for the deployment of Allied forces to Scandinavia. Blocking Romania's oil exports to Germany was considered unfeasible. For this reason, the necessity of military action against the USSR was underlined, with the aim of depriving Germany of Soviet oil supplies sourced from the Caucasus region. The plan envisaged the destruction, through aerial bombardment, of oil facilities in Baku and Batumi, which was expected to deliver a serious blow to Germany's military fuel supply. The operation required nine bomber squadrons, of which four were to be provided by France and the remainder by the Royal Air Force. Preparations for air bases in Algeria were underway, and the possibility of establishing new bases in eastern Turkey was also being explored. The French Air Force Command stated that the operation could be executed within 14 days to one month, involving two heavy and two medium bomber groups. The air raids were to be supported by French and British submarines disrupting maritime communications in the Black Sea. For Allied passage through the Straits, both the official and unofficial consent of

Turkey would be required. Ground operations were to be carried out by the Turkish army, supported by forces stationed in the Levant, with the additional aim promoted by Britain of involving Iran in the operation. (Gamelin, 1940: p.205-209)

Despite the interest shown by the French political and military leadership in accelerating the Caucasus operation, Marshal Carl Gustav Mannerheim's acceptance of the Soviet Union's armistice terms gradually led to a decline in the prominence of the Finland issue and the likelihood of confrontation with the USSR in British public opinion. Consequently, diplomatic efforts began to be undertaken with the aim of avoiding potential military conflict with the Soviet Union and easing relations. Reports were prepared by the British Foreign Office to be presented to the War Cabinet concerning the restoration of trade negotiations with the USSR. The documents noted that the primary political motivation of the Soviet leadership to improve relations with Britain was linked to the threat of air strikes against Baku and the risk to the Murmansk region should the Allies consolidate their position in Narvik. In addition, the importation of timber and other household goods from the USSR was considered potentially beneficial. However, within the framework of the Trade Agreement, it appeared unlikely that the re-export of Soviet domestic products and imported goods to Germany could be prevented. Nevertheless, the Trade Council and the Ministry of Economic Affairs deemed it feasible to achieve a limited barter agreement, proposing that selected goods be allowed to be imported into the USSR in exchange for pre-purchasing rights to certain commodities. It was also emphasized that anti-smuggling controls over Russian imports should remain in place until the trade agreement was formally concluded. (Woodward, 1970, pp. 109–110)

Germany's rapidly expanding occupations across Europe had placed the Allies in a serious strategic deadlock. As a result, the British government officially informed French officials that the implementation of the plan had been postponed indefinitely. After the occupation of France, on June 19, 1940, among the documents seized by German forces at the railway station in La Charité, France, were plans and meeting protocols prepared by the Allied High Command concerning operations against Germany and the Soviet Union. Germany utilized these materials to publish certain documents in the German press with the aim of sowing discord both among the Allies and with countries that remained neutral during the war. (Kahle, 1973: p.1) On the same day,

Adolf Hitler addressed the Reichstag, emphasizing the authenticity of the documents and noting that they bore the handwritten annotations of Gamelin, Daladier, and Weygand. He declared that these documents exposed the Allies' policy of escalating the war. In his speech, Hitler accused the Allies of planning to sacrifice Finland, turn Norway and Sweden into battlefields, and violate Turkey's neutrality in preparation for attacks on Batumi and Baku. (Domarus,1997: p.2045)

Following Winston Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister, the British government revised its long-standing anti-communist policy to some extent and began exploring opportunities for cooperation with the Soviet Union aimed at countering Nazi expansionism in Europe. Within this framework, a direct appeal was made to Joseph Stalin through the new British ambassador, Stafford Cripps, proposing the establishment of bilateral collaboration. By October 1940, a relative thaw in relations between the parties was observed, with Soviet representatives raising the prospect of reciprocal visits by air forces. Nevertheless, by the end of the year, political tensions had escalated once again, a situation that persisted until April 1941. During this period, both states maintained a policy of mutual distrust, refusing to grant each other's military attaches access to their strategic facilities. (Smith, 1996: p. 55-57)

Following his visit to Ankara in March 1941, Stafford Cripps noted that the outbreak of war between Germany and the Soviet Union in the near future was inevitable. According to Cripps, Adolf Hitler's primary objective was to prevent Britain from gaining strength during the war, and to achieve this, the immediate commencement of military operations against the USSR by Germany was deemed necessary. In the report Cripps submitted to the Foreign Office on March 24, it was indicated that Germany was expected to launch attacks on the Soviet Union along three main directions. The report stated that under the so-called "blitzkrieg plan," Germany aimed to occupy the entire territory up to the Ural Mountains. Cripps had obtained this information through Wilhelm Assarsson, the Swedish diplomatic representative in Moscow, considered a reliable source. (Whaley, 1974: p.50-51) Cripps believed that the intelligence should be conveyed to Moscow indirectly through the Soviet ambassador, Ivan Maisky. He argued that this approach might facilitate the Soviet Union's engagement in the war against Germany. (Gorodetsky, 1986: p.979) However, senior officials within the Foreign Office and the War Cabinet feared that any warning directed at

the Soviet Union regarding Germany could be perceived by Moscow as provocation, potentially resulting in closer Soviet-German relations.(Hinsley, 1979: p.449-450) In contrast, Winston Churchill asserted that the intelligence gathered from the decryption of Enigma codes belonging to the German Air Force provided clear evidence of Germany's preparations to attack the Soviet Union. German troops had received orders to advance from the Balkans toward Krakow with three armored divisions. However, following the coup d'état in Belgrade, the movement of these forces was redirected. Nonetheless, Churchill maintained that Hitler might initiate military operations against the Soviet Union as early as May 1941. (Gorodetsky,1986: p.982)

In June 1941, the British Royal Air Force, in coordinated efforts with military contingents stationed in Iraq, initiated a reassessment of the "Pike" plan. As part of the planned operation, bombing exercises involving aviation units deployed in Mosul were scheduled to take place. Additionally, several fighter-bomber squadrons were deployed to the region. Despite British forces being engaged in armed clashes with Vichy French units in Syria during the same period, preparations for the operation continued without interruption and progressed rapidly. Concurrently, the United Kingdom's Armed Forces General Staff issued directives for the immediate deployment of a military delegation to Moscow in the event of a German attack on the Soviet Union. Designated as "Mission 30," this delegation, composed of senior officers from the navy and air force, aimed to support the Soviet Union's sustained resistance in the armed conflict against Germany. (Osborn,2000: p.228)

The British War Cabinet assigned a special operational directive to military forces stationed in the Middle East under the designation "Mission No.16" (G(R)16). The primary objective of this operation was to secure the deployment of British forces in strategically significant positions within Iranian territory. According to archival documents, the plan was devised as a preemptive measure against potential strategic developments. In the event that German military operations against the Soviet Union expanded into the Caucasus region, posing the risk of the area's rich oil fields falling under Nazi control, the plan envisaged rendering these resources unusable for enemy purposes. Accordingly, "Mission No. 16" entailed the deliberate destruction of oil infrastructure. The execution of "Mission No. 16" was to be maintained under the strictest secrecy. One of the main reasons for this requirement was the

absence of formal Soviet approval for the operation. British envoy Stafford Cripps had raised this matter twice in previous discussions with Joseph Stalin. However, the Soviet side expressed no support for such an undertaking, stating that any decision on its implementation would rest solely with the Soviet leadership. The British government, in turn, offered specific concessions aimed at safeguarding Soviet economic interests should the operation be carried out. In exchange for the destruction of strategically important oil fields in the Caucasus, the United Kingdom pledged to supply the USSR with petroleum products during the war and for an additional two years after its conclusion. Moreover, the construction of new facilities for the restoration of the destroyed oil infrastructure was also envisaged. (Соцков,2011: p.236-237) These proposals reflected both Britain's intention to prevent the strengthening of Germany in the Caucasus region and the desire to maintain strategic cooperative relations with the Soviet Union. Consequently, "Mission No.16" can be regarded not only as a military-strategic initiative but also as a complex plan encompassing diplomatic and economic dimensions.

The occupation of Dnepropetrovsk by German forces facilitated the opening of strategic routes to the Don basin and the Caucasus region. In response, the War Cabinet unanimously decided that Prime Minister Winston Churchill should renew his appeal to the Soviet leader Joseph Stalin. The main content of this appeal was a call for the expedited and systematic destruction of oil fields under Soviet control. Churchill argued that the destruction of oil infrastructure could inflict significant damage on the agricultural sector, potentially leading to a severe crisis in the Soviet economy. However, if the Soviets failed to destroy these facilities in a timely manner, Great Britain would be compelled to undertake these measures independently to prevent their capture by German forces. Had the operation planned by Britain been successfully executed, it could have played a critical role in preventing Germany's advance toward the Persian Gulf and India. Such an advancement was largely contingent on German forces gaining control over Baku's oil reserves. Two primary scenarios were considered for the operation's implementation: the first involved the occupation of the Caucasus by German forces following the redeployment of Soviet troops to other fronts; the second entailed the region falling under German control as a result of a potential ceasefire agreement with Moscow. The updated air operation plan identified sixteen potential bombing targets in the Cau-

casus. According to the priority list, Baku's White City and Black City refining zones were designated as the principal strategic targets. Additionally, the oil refining complexes in Batumi and the storage infrastructures owned by the "Soyuzneft" company were included among the high-priority targets. The plan stipulated that following the destruction of the initial six targets, the authority to decide on striking the remaining ten targets would be delegated to Air Force Commander John D'Albiac, based in Iraq. (Osborn,2000: p.233-234) The Air Force was prepared to launch air strikes against the Caucasus oil industry within a short time frame, even under suboptimal conditions.

In order to counteract Germany's advances on the Eastern Front, a new military-strategic plan was developed by Great Britain and the United States. Under the code name "Velvet," this plan envisaged the deployment of Anglo-American air forces to the Soviet front lines. Similar to British military circles, the question of sending air forces to the Caucasus region was also a significant topic on the agenda in the United States. Within this context, President Franklin Roosevelt had already, by May, issued directives to the U.S. Army Air Forces to prepare possible operational plans involving the use of Soviet military bases. Consequently, from June 1942 onward, the leadership of the U.S. War Department initiated negotiations with Soviet officials. Initially, the United States considered expanding its military presence in China while simultaneously exploring the use of Soviet air bases for conducting air raids against the Ploieshti oil fields in Romania. However, the implementation of these planned operations was complicated by delays in responses from Soviet representatives to the requests made by the American delegation. A delegation led by Winston Churchill traveled to Moscow to convey information to Stalin regarding the postponement of the opening of a second front in Europe and the temporary suspension of military aid intended for Northern Russia. Simultaneously, a proposal was put forward to deploy British and American air forces in the Caucasus region to support the USSR. The decision to delay the opening of the second front, as well as to halt aid shipments via the Northern route, was met with dissatisfaction by Stalin. (Lucas,1964-1965:p.145-146) During the meeting, Winston Churchill emphasized that preventing the German advance from the southern front was of strategic importance both for Great Britain and the Soviet Union. According to Churchill, failure to halt this progression could enable Germany to gain access to the Persian Gulf, se-

riously jeopardize Britain's positions in the Middle East, and create favorable conditions for joint military operations between Germany and Japan directed towards India. However, the deployment of air squadrons could only be realized after the hostilities in Egypt subsided. Joseph Stalin did not object to this decision, fully aware that Britain's military needs at that time were a priority. Stalin stated that, provided a detailed plan was formulated and mutual agreement reached, he would welcome such military assistance. He also assured that regardless of whether the aircraft were fighters or bombers, he would ensure the provision of all necessary conditions for their effective use and guarantee their involvement in combat operations. (Feis,1967: p.77-78)

One of Stalin's primary concerns was the indefinite postponement of military aid shipments to the Soviet Union by the Western Allies. Winston Churchill justified this situation by noting that convoys traveling along the northern route were subject to attacks launched from German military airbases located in Norwegian territory. Despite the air and naval escort support provided from March 1942 onward, the convoys suffered heavy losses. Consequently, the movement of the northern convoys had to be temporarily suspended. Nevertheless, the British government was exploring the possibility of rerouting a portion of these supplies via an alternative southern route at that time. An initial plan for the establishment of a joint British-American air force had been developed by the American delegation. According to this plan, the United States would be responsible for deploying a heavy bomber group based in the Middle East, alongside forming an air transport contingent of at least fifty aircraft to be dispatched from the U.S. Under the current plan, as soon as military conditions in the Western Desert permitted, aircraft and personnel were to be relocated from Egypt and subsequently concentrated in the Baku-Batum region approximately two months later. President Franklin Roosevelt expressed satisfaction with the plan and emphasized his commitment to aligning it with other military operations. However, General George Marshall, Chief of the U.S. General Staff, and General Henry Arnold, Commander of the U.S. Army Air Forces, voiced serious reservations regarding the allocation of resources and the potential effectiveness of the initiative. (Feis,1967: p.79)

General George Marshall emphasized that there was no compelling evidence to demonstrate that deploying existing American air forces to the Caucasus region would have a more decisive impact on

the overall success of strategic efforts compared to utilizing these forces on other fronts or holding them in reserve for future military operations. He argued that the deployment of American air units to the Caucasus posed significant logistical challenges and resource constraints. Considering the possibility that these forces could be employed more effectively elsewhere, Marshall concluded that it was inadvisable to prioritize the "Velvet" project as a strategic imperative. (Lucas,1964-1965: p.149-150)

In October 1942, the Air Force headquarters of both the United Kingdom and the United States commenced preparations for the "Velvet" operation. According to the U.S. plan, a group of heavy bombers and transport aircraft stationed in the Middle East was to remain on standby for immediate deployment to the Soviet Union. By early November, agreements were reached regarding the operational command and supervision by Soviet authorities. Amid the deteriorating situation in the Caucasus, Stalin welcomed the news of the operation's finalization and expressed readiness to receive the military delegations. Consequently, by November 8, 1942, all obstacles were removed, the deployment plan of the air forces was approved, and the Soviet side declared its full preparedness to accept them. The operation envisioned the delivery of necessary ammunition, food supplies, and other equipment via the Tehran railway. However, as the railway was already utilized for transporting cargo to the USSR under previous agreements, potential logistical delays were anticipated. (Пригодич,2018: p. 574-575)

Despite multiple meetings held between the parties regarding the implementation of the "Velvet" operation, the Soviet Union ultimately declined to participate. Several substantive reasons underpinned the Soviet leadership's decision. The most significant factor was that counteroffensive operations around Stalingrad were progressing successfully, which consequently alleviated the Soviet army's urgent need for additional air support. Another crucial reason was of a political nature: the strengthening of Western Allies' military presence in the Caucasus region was perceived by Soviet leadership as potentially leading to undesirable postwar consequences. Furthermore, such a development risked undermining public confidence in the invincibility of the Soviet Union.

## Conclusion

The course of historical events indicates that, although political relations between Britain and the

Soviet Union were relatively tense in the early years of the Second World War, no military confrontation occurred. While plans for aerial attacks against the Soviet Union were independently developed within the British and French War Cabinets, certain critical aspects were overlooked. Within the British War Cabinet, there was no consensus regarding the execution of a military operation in the Caucasus region. The primary concern was that implementing such a plan might lead to the formation of a firm alliance between Germany and the Soviet Union during the war.

Moreover, a counter-offensive operation could potentially have been carried out by either country against the Allies, which, in turn, could have placed the Allies in a precarious position on the European front. Another weakness in the planning process was the absence of information in reports prepared by the Chiefs of Staff concerning whether the meteorological conditions in the Caucasus were favorable for military operations. Furthermore, the failure to assess the Soviet Union's defensive capabilities against aerial attacks and the potential damage that Soviet military aviation could inflict during the operation increased the risks associated with the plan. Additionally, the reluctance of Turkey, the principal transit country for the operation to cooperate posed

further challenges for its implementation. Taking all these factors into account, the British government concluded that carrying out a military operation against the oil facilities in the Caucasus would not only be met with domestic public disapproval but could also result in politically undesirable consequences.

The defeat of Germany at Stalingrad, accompanied by severe losses and a subsequent retreat, significantly strengthened the Soviet Union's position on the Eastern Front. Consequently, The Soviet Union's need for additional air forces on the Eastern Front had considerably diminished. Moreover, by this time, the lack of prompt operational decision-making by the Allies regarding the execution of the operation had become one of the key factors contributing to the failure of Operation Velvet. Another factor underlying this failure was of a political nature. The deployment of British and American air forces in the Caucasus could have led to serious repercussions after the war, as such a move risked undermining the Soviet Union's influence in the newly emerging postwar political arena.

Thus, none of the military and political plans devised by the British High Command between 1940 and 1942 were ever implemented.

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