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Tripolitania

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TRIPOLITANIA

In the May-June *Journal* Mr. Evans-Pritchard gives an excellent résumé of the recent history, present condition, and possible future of Cyrenaica, the eastern half of the former Italian colony of Libya. May I, from the experience of a year's service in "Arab Affairs" in Tripolitania, complete the picture with some account of the western half?

The recent history of Tripolitania is much the same as that of Cyrenaica: cession by Turkey in 1912; a period when the Italians did little more than occupy the coastal towns; reconquest of the country under the stimulus of Fascism, but carried out with less brutality than in Cyrenaica; the wide extension of colonization with Italians from the mother country and two half-hearted attempts at land settlement for the Arabs.

In the recent war the Allies received less assistance from the Arabs (with whom I include the Berbers) of Tripolitania than from those of Cyrenaica, partly because the Italian hold on the country was stronger, and partly because the Eighth Army swept through the whole country in less than four months. There were however a number of cases in which the Arabs, at great risk to themselves, aided Allied troops. Since 1943 the territory has been governed by a British Military Administration, similar to, though separate from, that in Cyrenaica.

The future is more difficult than in Cyrenaica for the following reasons: Cyrenaica is now empty of Italians but in Tripolitania there are forty thousand of them; the country is poorer in natural resources yet the Italian over-development and the presence of many thousands of foreigners lead inevitably to higher Government expenditure; the unifying influence of the Sanusiya order is absent and there is no native leader who could fill a position similar to that of as-Sayyid Idris in Cyrenaica as the focus of an Arab administration.

The alternatives for Tripolitania appear to be a return to Italy or a mandate under the United Nations Organization. In January 1942 Mr. Eden announced in the House of Commons that "His Majesty's Government is determined that, at the end of the war, the Sanusi in Cyrenaica will in no circumstances again fall under Italian domination." This promise could be kept by moving the Sanusi to Greenland, but it is probably as near as diplomacy can get to saying that Cyrenaica will not be returned to Italy, and is certainly interpreted thus in the Middle East. But no such declaration has been made about Tripolitania and the Arabs there are apprehensive. They would, I think, resist the return of the Italian Government with such force as they could command, and of course there would be repercussions throughout the Middle East.

For though they would admit the indirect material benefits of the lavish Italian expenditure on roads, hospitals, electric and water supplies, etc., they would point to the concomitant evils—expropriation of land for demographic

colonization; a horde of corrupt and inefficient officials; and the lack of any real advancement for the Arabs in the professions, in business, in the administration of their country or in learning. Before the British occupation there were in Tripolitania no Arab doctors, lawyers, engineers, or magistrates; in trade the Italians and Jews predominated, and in the administration the Arabs held only very minor posts. Arab children would leave school with neither a good education in their own language or in Italian. The Italians intended that the Arabs should be hewers of wood and drawers of water and provide a market for the output of Italian industry, and the Arabs realized that the Italians were achieving their intention. The contrast with what might have been achieved was pointed by the presence in the occupying army of the British-trained Sudan Defence Force with its excellent conduct and smart appearance. Among the S.D.F. Sudanese officers were many with the rank of Bimbashi (Major), but the heir of the leading Berber family of Tripolitania had been a (conscript) corporal in the Italian army. And yet as one Arab notable said of the Sudanese: "You know, my grandfather used to buy those fellows in the market in Misurata!"

Mr. Evans-Pritchard suggests that Cyrenaica would accept a separation of that country from Tripolitania. This would be much less acceptable to the Tripolitanians, partly for economic reasons as Cyrenaica has more to offer Tripolitania than vice versa, and partly because separation from Cyrenaica might deprive Tripolitania of some of the advantages which might be expected to follow Mr. Eden's declaration. Mr. Evans-Pritchard also envisages the Italian-made frontier between the two territories being moved westwards to include Sirtica (the country south of the Gulf of Sirte).

Whoever gets Tripolitania at the Peace settlement there will probably be a good deal of frontier rectification. The French from Chad conquered and now occupy the Fezzan up to about lat. 28° N. They may be unwilling to give it up, and there are some good reasons for joining the Fezzan to French Equatorial Africa. The French have also occupied Gadames, formerly in Libya but belonging naturally to southern Tunisia.

If a frontier has to be drawn between Cyrenaica and Tripolitania the best line would appear to run from the north-eastern corner of Tibesti, west of Tazerbo, up the east side of the Harug el Asuad, between Zella and Marada to reach the sea in about long. 19° E. The argument for including Sirtica in Cyrenaica is that there are adherents of the Sanusiya in that area, but if Hon., and therefore Zella which is administered from it, are left to Tripolitania there would be a deep re-entrant of the latter's territory into Cyrenaica. Moreover Sirte is only 150 miles from Misurata, the headquarters of the eastern province of Tripolitania, but 250 from Agedabia, the nearest administrative centre in Cyrenaica. If Tripolitania is separated from Cyrenaica under a United Nations Organization mandate there should be no difficulty in making the necessary trans-frontier grazing arrangements for the Sanusiya in Sirtica. If it is returned to Italy adequate precautions will have to be taken against the victimization of the Sanusiya both in Sirtica and at the two or three other places in Tripolitania where groups of them are found.

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10 December 1945