

If war hits the near East, these oil fields, pipe lines and ports may figure in far bigger news than that made on the western front, or even in Finland.

There are two guesses why the Allies have massed nearly a million men here:

First—that Great Britain and France are convinced Europe's two wars will merge, making Russia a military ally of Germany. So they are preparing to strike a paralyzing blow against the Soviet from the South.

Second, and perhaps nearer the truth—they know that the near East and the Balkans were important World war battlefields; they don't know what's likely to happen this time, but they mean to be prepared.

If the near East does become a

battlefield, the arrows indicate the general directions the offensives may take. Note that two big prizes would be at stake: control of the Dardanelles, which is the gateway to Turkey, Russia and Rumania, and the back door to Germany; and the oil wells of the near East.

Capture of the Baku fields would deprive Russia of her biggest oil source and cut off Germany's hope of getting Russian oil to keep her military machine going. Similarly, a successful Russian drive against the fields in Iran and Iraq would seriously injure the Allies, though they could still get oil from the Americas.

To understand the importance of the near eastern and Rumanian oil fields, consider this:

In 1938, Germany got 24 per cent of her oil imports from the

United States, and 44 per cent from Venezuela. The allied blockade cuts her off from these sources, so she must depend heavily on Rumania and Russia, which together gave her only 12 per cent.

In the same year, England got 30 per cent of her imports from the fields shown here, most of it from Iran and Iraq, and France 44 per cent.

So war in the Near East and the Balkans would make these small countries natural objectives for armies determined to keep the other fellow from oil.

Remember what happened last time?

1. Rumania came in on the side of the Allies and was quickly conquered. This time she has an allied guarantee of aid against aggression, but is under strong pressure from Germany for more oil.

Most of her oil industry is owned by British, French and Americans.

2. Russia drove down through Iran (Persia), halfway to the Persian gulf. She was fighting on the side of the Allies then.

3. The Allies failed to take the Dardanelles, defeating Turkey only by backdoor drives through the Holy Land. Nowadays Turkey has a mutual aid treaty with Britain and France, would fight alongside them if she thought the Dardanelles menaced by Germany or Russia. Allied loans of 274 million dollars and France's gift of Alexandretta undoubtedly have had something to do with the change.

India's domination has long been reported near Afghanistan, which offers two gateways to the rich empire. But Russia has more

immediate concerns nearer home—and besides, the British are supposed to have those two gateways tightly plugged.

Most of the troops in the near East probably are concentrated near the cities classed as military headquarters. The arrival of 30,000 Australians and New Zealanders at Suez puts the likely allied total at more than three-quarters of a million. That's in addition to the Turks, who have an army of 200,000 and can put a million more in the field, and the Egyptians. The size of Russia's southern forces is a mystery, but it must run into the hundreds of thousands. And there are 2 million armed men in the Balkans.

Such figures are reason enough the military experts are keeping an eye to the east.