

NAZI GERMANY AND FASCIST ITALY: TOTALITARIAN MENACE OR  
MONOLITHIC ILLUSION? AN ANALYSIS OF THE AXIS COALITION

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army  
Command and General Staff College in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE  
Military History

by

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AD BELLUM PACE PARATI

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas  
2004

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MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## Report Documentation Page

*Form Approved*  
*OMB No. 0704-0188*

Public reporting burden for the collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing the collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden, to Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports, 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to a penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number.

1. REPORT DATE <b>17 JUN 2004</b>	2. REPORT TYPE	3. DATES COVERED -			
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE <b>Nazi Germany and fascist Italy: Totalitarian menace or monolithic illusion? An analysis of the Axis Coalition</b>		5a. CONTRACT NUMBER			
		5b. GRANT NUMBER			
		5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER			
6. AUTHOR(S) <b>James Burch</b>		5d. PROJECT NUMBER			
		5e. TASK NUMBER			
		5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER			
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) <b>US Army Command and General Staff College, 1 Reynolds Ave, Fort Leavenworth, KS, 66027-1352</b>		8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER <b>ATZL-SWD-GD</b>			
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)		10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)			
		11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)			
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT <b>Approved for public release; distribution unlimited</b>					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES <b>The original document contains color images.</b>					
14. ABSTRACT <b>Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 irrevocably changed the European geopolitical framework. After 1935, Mussolini would come increasingly under Hitler's influence. Hitler would also begin to free Germany from the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles and Anglo-French encirclement. Using 1935 as a point of departure, this thesis traces the development of the Italo-German coalition, its strategic interests, outlook, commonalities, and areas of contention. The advance of Italo-German interests during from 1935 to the beginning of the Second World War--an era characterized by the Great Depression and appeasement--also created an aura of totalitarian success and collaboration. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Rhineland (1936), Austria (1937), Czechoslovakia (1938), and Albania (1939) lent credence to this perception. This period was also critical to Germany and Italy's efforts in building a coalition. Based on an examination of strategic interests and outlooks, this thesis analyzes Germany and Italy's mutual efforts at developing their partnership. It also examines their strategic decision-making apparatus to determine their ability to effectively implement strategic decisions. Thus, this thesis examines the relationship between the Axis partners, the basis of their coalition based on strategic interests, and the organizational environment in their respective countries to develop and implement strategy.</b>					
15. SUBJECT TERMS					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT <b>1</b>	18. NUMBER OF PAGES <b>154</b>	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT <b>unclassified</b>	b. ABSTRACT <b>unclassified</b>	c. THIS PAGE <b>unclassified</b>			

## ABSTRACT

NAZI GERMANY AND FASCIST ITALY: TOTALITARIAN MENACE OR MONOLITHIC ILLUSION? AN ANALYSIS OF THE AXIS COALITION, by LCDR James A. Burch, 154 pages.

Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935 irrevocably changed the European geopolitical framework. After 1935, Mussolini would come increasingly under Hitler's influence. Hitler would also begin to free Germany from the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles and Anglo-French encirclement. Using 1935 as a point of departure, this thesis traces the development of the Italo-German coalition, its strategic interests, outlook, commonalities, and areas of contention.

The advance of Italo-German interests during from 1935 to the beginning of the Second World War--an era characterized by the Great Depression and appeasement--also created an aura of totalitarian success and collaboration. The Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), Rhineland (1936), Austria (1937), Czechoslovakia (1938), and Albania (1939) lent credence to this perception. This period was also critical to Germany and Italy's efforts in building a coalition. Based on an examination of strategic interests and outlooks, this thesis analyzes Germany and Italy's mutual efforts at developing their partnership. It also examines their strategic decision-making apparatus to determine their ability to effectively implement strategic decisions. Thus, this thesis examines the relationship between the Axis partners, the basis of their coalition based on strategic interests, and the organizational environment in their respective countries to develop and implement strategy.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank God for giving me the strength, patience, and perseverance to follow through with a topic that has always intrigued me. History is never clear-cut and the road to war is never straight. Great Britain and France's appeasement to the totalitarian menace of Germany and Italy in the 1930s always interested me. The menace proved to be more illusionary. I would also like to express my deep appreciation to Dr. Samuel Lewis; Lt Col John Capobianco, U.S. Air Force; and Mr. Jack Hickson for their guidance, suggestions, and professional advice. Our many discussions on this little explored subject were critical to helping me with my research. I would also like to especially thank Mrs. Stephanie Ware for proofreading my multiple drafts and providing invaluable suggestions on organization and content. I also thank my parents, Joseph and Ella Cornelison for their valuable input and editing. This thesis would not have been possible with the many words of encourage from my wife, Maria, and the rest of my family, James, Joshua, Ella and Maria. Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to the memory of the Combined Anglo-American Joint Chiefs of Staff. The success of the Anglo-American coalition during the Second World War would not have been possible without their wisdom, dedication and vision. Their willingness to put aside their petty differences was critical to the successful outcome of the Allies.

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## GLOSSARY

*Abwehr.* Abbreviated German term for the foreign information and counter-intelligence department.

*Alto Adige.* Italian name for the mountainous region located on the Austro-Italian border which also controls the vital Brenner Pass. It was awarded to Italy after the First World War. This region, vital to Italy's northern defenses was also predominantly Germanic who referred to it as *Sud Tirol*.

*Anschluss.* German for "connection." This term referred to the union of Germany and Austria.

*Blitzkrieg.* Literally means "lightning war." This was German concept for using an overwhelming combined arms force to rapidly strike and outmaneuver an opponent. This concept also aimed to create strong psychological and disorganization effects on the enemy.

*Capo di Stato Maggiore.* Italian title for the Chief of the General Staff, a position created in 1925. Marshal Pietro Badoglio held this position from 1925 to 1940.

*Commissione Suprema di Difesa.* Italian title for the Supreme Defense Commission, which consisted of senior civilian and military officials and represented Italy's highest collaborative strategic decision-making body

*Consiglio Nazionale della Ricerche.* Italy's National Research Council, which was chartered to facilitate civil-military research.

*Geheime Staatspolizei.* Germany's state secret police. This organization, also referred to as the *Gestapo*, was chartered to seek out dissidents against the Nazi regime. The *Gestapo* also came under Heinrich Himmler's control in the 1930.

*Guerra di rapido corso.* Italy's maneuver warfare concept of maneuver developed during their involvement in Ethiopia. Similar to the German blitzkrieg, this concept was based on massed motorized units with added firepower supported by air power to outmaneuver the enemy.

*Guerra Parallela.* Literally translated as "parallel war," this term is used to describe Italy's independent actions after their entry into the Second World War on 10 June 1940 until their disastrous second Greek offensive on 9 Mar 1941. While Italian actions were theoretically within a strategic coalition construct, they were in effect unsynchronized with the Germans. Italian setbacks in the war ceased any further independent Italian military actions.



*Lebensraum*. German for “habitat.” Hitler’s quest for *Lebensraum* represented his desire to expand Germany into Eastern Europe, largely at the expense of Poland and the Soviet Union.

*Luftwaffe* The German Air Force that was officially reconstituted in 1935 and led by Field Marshal Herman Göring.

*Politica del peso determinante*. Italy’s strategic “determining” or “decisive weight” outlook. This foreign policy outlook, envisioned by Count Dino Grandi in the 1920s, focused on shifting between two power blocs – Great Britain/France and Germany to secure advantages to Italy. Grandi envisioned his strategy within the context of Italy’s adherence to the League of Nations and the Treaty of Locarno. The Soviet Union, which was largely isolated and did not possess League membership, was not Grandi’s outlook. By the late 1930s, these underlying factors had changed, which made Grandi’s theory largely irrelevant.

*Regia Aeronautica*. The Italian Royal Air Force.

*Regia Marina* The Italian Royal Navy.

*Regio Esercito*. The Italian Royal Army.

*Oberkommando der Heeres (OKH)*. The name for the German Army General Staff regenerated after 1935. It was traditionally the preeminent German strategic planning organization.

*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)*. The German High Command Staff created in the late 1930s and chartered to execute strategic planning. It encompassed army, navy and air force elements. Bitter inter-service infighting and Hitler’s direct control of this organization in 1938 made it largely ineffective.

*Sturm Abteilung (SA)*. German for “storm section.” This organization, also called the Brownshirts or Stormtroopers, was the Nazi Party’s military arm. It played a major role in the Nazi movement during the 1920s and early 1930s. The German military viewed the SA with contempt. To increase his support of the military, Hitler purged the SA in 29 June 1934 shortly after becoming Chancellor.

*Servizio Informazioni Militare (SIM)*. The Italian Army’s intelligence organization. The SIM was highly successful in breaking into foreign embassy safes to secure cryptographic codes and intelligence material.

*Spazio vitale*. Italian term for vital space that usually translated into Italian claims to Nice, Corsica, Tunisia, Dalmatia and Ethiopia.

*Schutz Staffel (SS)*. German for “protection group.” Originally designed to protect senior officials of the Nazi Party, the SS under Heinrich Himmler quickly filled the vacuum after the purging of the Brownshirts. The SS’s influence in German society increased, in effect becoming the ideological arm of the Nazi Party.

*Truppenamt*. German for “troop office.” This organization served as a camouflaged Army General Staff, which had been banned by the Treaty of Versailles. Although at a much reduced capacity, the *Truppenamt* was critical to preserving and developing new tactical doctrines between the World Wars. The *Truppenamt* became a full-fledged General Staff after Hitler’s rise to power.

*Wehrmacht*. The German Armed Forces.

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## CHAPTER 1

### THE EUROPEAN BALANCE OF POWER IN 1935

Firmly united by the inner affinity between their ideologies and the comprehensive solidarity of their interests, the German and Italian nations are resolved in the future also to act side by side with united forces to secure their living space and to maintain peace.<sup>1</sup>

Preamble to the Pact of Steel

On 22 May 1939, the German Reich Minister for Foreign Affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop, and his Italian counterpart, Count Galeazzo Ciano, signed the Pact of Friendship and Alliance, more commonly known as the “Pact of Steel.” The world perceived this, Pact of Steel to be an alliance bent on dominating its neighbors. This totalitarian menace saw its ultimate expression with the signing of the Tripartite Pact in 1940 between Germany, Italy, and Japan--known as the Axis powers.

On the surface, the Axis appeared to be an alliance bent on world conquest. This was the prevalent viewpoint when accounting for German, Italian and Japanese actions in the 1930s.<sup>2</sup> The threat to world stability could be seen as early as 1931, when Japan wrested the province of Manchuria from China. With the triumph of National Socialism in Germany in 1933 and subsequent events in Ethiopia (1935), the Rhineland (1936), Austria (1937), China again (1937), and Czechoslovakia (1938), as well as the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939), the 1930s were truly the decade of conflict.

Despite their successes in the 1930s, the Axis lost the Second World War. One weakness was that Japan’s geographic isolation from its Axis partners presented a disadvantage from the onset. Japanese isolation made collaboration with Germany and Italy more difficult considering the level of communications technology during the period

and the vast distances involved. Additionally, once Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, communications and travel that had existed between Germany and Japan via the Soviet Union ceased. Germany and Italy, however, did not face these difficulties in working together to advance their objectives.

The Italo-German alliance seemingly enjoyed many strategic advantages. Both countries occupied a central position in Europe and enjoyed interior lines of communication when compared to the United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union. Both countries had totalitarian ideologies based on a corporatist model through which the government took an active part in setting resource allocation and production priorities. Their dictators Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini also corresponded frequently and at an early date sought each other as an ally. This study's central argument is that despite having certain advantages, irreconcilable German and Italian strategic interests and their respective strategic decision-making apparatus weakened their ability to collaborate and fight as a coalition. These differences proved to be decisive in their failure to cooperate and act on strategic advantages to win the war.

This thesis will not dwell extensively on Germany and Italy constituted a coalition or alliance. Simply put, a coalition is defined as "an ad hoc arrangement between two or more nations for common action."<sup>3</sup> By its ad hoc nature, a coalition is usually formed outside the confines of a formally structured alliance and therefore tends to be more transitory in nature. Additionally, it is formed in response to a common threat.

Doctrinally, Italy and Germany's relationship can be categorized as an alliance once they signed the Pact of Steel on 22 May 1939. However, the real question regarding Germany and Italy, from the origins of their coalition in 1936 or after their formal alliance in 1939,

is whether they understood what the common threat was as defined by their strategic interests. If not, did their lack of common understanding weaken their ability to collaborate and was it decisive in their failure to win the war?

Many aspects of the Second World War have been studied, particularly regarding coalition warfare. Much has been written on the alliance of the United States, Soviet Union, and Great Britain and their effectiveness as a coalition. It is largely because of their victory in the Second World War that these nations along with France and China constitute the United Nations Security Council. Even today, the “special relationship” between the United States and Great Britain remains an important factor for both countries when dealing with any international issue. One can conclude that an ideal model for a coalition is based on the United States and Great Britain’s success during the Second World War according to much of the analysis written on the subject.<sup>4</sup>

Individual Allied campaigns against Germany, Italy, and Japan have been analyzed extensively; however, the efforts of the Axis coalition at a strategic level still merit some consideration. An in-depth analysis of the Axis coalition as a whole is outside the scope of this study, but German and Italian collaborative efforts merit closer examination. Gaining insight into a coalition’s purpose, strength, and weakness is particularly relevant today as the United States seeks to operate as part of a coalition environment during any military operation. Sometimes a study of failure, such as the relationship between Germany and Italy during the Second World War, can yield greater insight than just focusing on history’s successes.

An examination of Italo-German efforts at conducting coalition warfare raises several questions: were there hindrances that affected the coalition’s unity; did they

attempt to implement mechanisms to achieve unity of effort; and what lessons can be applied for today's coalition-building efforts? Looking at these questions, examining the events that led to the signing of the Pact of Steel, and gaining insight into strategic coalition efforts during the war will place the Italo-German alliance in perspective and perhaps glean some lessons for contemporary coalitions. This thesis will not look at Mussolini's rise to power in 1922 or the events leading to Hitler's seizure of power in 1933. Instead, it will analyze historical German and Italian interests and determine their relationship to the coalition's unity. It will also look into the strategic decision-making apparatus in each country to determine its effect on strategic planning and policy implementation. Before looking at strategic interests and organizational structures, however, this study will use the pivotal year of 1935 as a point of departure in order to set the conditions that affected the Italo-German alliance and to understand the perspectives of the various countries.

The 1930s were collectively a decade of change and uncertainty. The world was in the midst of the Great Depression, which created severe economic hardship and left millions of people unemployed and displaced. Traditional cultural balances and societal norms were uprooted. Of the world's great powers, the United States remained isolationist as did the Soviet Union by virtue of its revolutionary ideology. Great Britain and France sought to preserve their colonial empires and the status quo, but their economies remained in a severe downswing. In Japan, extreme nationalist elements controlled the government, an abrupt departure from the liberal administrations of the 1920s. For Germany and Italy, 1935 would be the turning point to an eventual alliance and war.

In Germany, Hitler continued to accumulate power after January 1933. With the death of President Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler combined the offices of the Reich president and chancellor on 1 August 1934 to create the office of the “Führer of the German Reich and People” or simply “Der Führer.”<sup>5</sup> He vowed to eliminate unemployment and place Germany in its rightful place among nations. He also vowed that all Germans, including those living outside of Germany, would be part of a Greater Reich.

In addition to these pronouncements, Hitler took a series of bold steps aimed at redressing the wrongs imposed by the Treaty of Versailles that ended the First World War. In rapid succession, he announced the formation of the *Luftwaffe* on 5 March 1935, stated that Germany was rearming, reintroduced conscription on 16 March, and on 21 May, signed a secret Reich Defense Law that created a national service army.<sup>6</sup> These were the first public steps Hitler took to show that Germany would no longer abide by the restrictions imposed by Versailles.

Germany’s remilitarization did not go unnoticed. For years Germany had been secretly pushing the boundaries of the Versailles Treaty, but now that Hitler had publicly announced Germany’s rearmament, several governments reacted with concern and protest. Hitler, however, very effectively linked Germany’s rearmament policy to the Franco-Soviet Pact of May 1935--his argument being that an alliance between France and the Soviet Union fundamentally changed the balance of power in Europe and directly threatened Germany.<sup>7</sup> Hitler was able to mollify Britain and the League of Nations on remilitarization by portraying Germany as Europe’s bulwark against Soviet bolshevism.



In June 1935, Hitler had another diplomatic success when he concluded the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. This treaty allowed the German navy to create a force up to 35 percent of the British fleet.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, the treaty also amounted to an official recognition of Germany's right to rearm, and as a result, the right to also ignore international treaties forbidding such rearmament.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, Great Britain did not notify France--its erstwhile ally--thereby greatly alienating France, which was surprised by the agreement.<sup>10</sup> From this point on, France would question Britain's solidarity and intentions.

Although Mussolini, known as *il Duce*, had been in power since 1922, there were also significant changes occurring in Italy. Ethiopia, one of the last non colonized countries in Africa, lay between the Italian possessions of Eritrea and Somalia. For many years, Italy had sought to expand at Ethiopia's expense. As a result of talks in late 1934, Italy and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Laval, reached a private understanding regarding Ethiopia. On 7 January 1935, an agreement was signed between the two countries. In essence, both countries received what they desired most. Italy received French support for its plans in Ethiopia. France received Italian support for continued Austrian independence and maintaining the status quo in the Balkans--both serving as continued counterbalances to Germany.<sup>11</sup> Austrian independence from Germany had been an area of concern, since Hitler's vow for all Germans to be part of a Greater Reich and the murder of the Austrian Chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, by Austrian Nazis in 1934.

Implicit in the Franco-Italian agreement over Ethiopia was the need to gain Britain's approval of the plan.<sup>12</sup> As Britain's primary ally, France would seek to gain

British concurrence. Confident of Britain's concurrence and the Anglo-French need for continued Italian support in maintaining the European status quo, Mussolini began to deploy Italian forces to Eritrea and Somalia with the intent of seizing Ethiopia.

There were two problems with the Franco-Italian agreement. First, the British did not approve. Britain objected to any Italian moves in East Africa that could threaten its imperial interests, specifically its lifeline to India. The possession of two sparsely populated and arid colonies, such as Eritrea and Somalia, was one thing, but the seizure of Ethiopia and consolidation of Italian holdings on the horn of Africa was another. Throughout 1935, Italy and Britain failed to resolve this issue. Italy continued to send reinforcements to its colonies. Britain continued to resist giving any free hand to Italy.<sup>13</sup>

Second, the Ethiopian crisis directly affected the European status quo. Great Britain, France, and Italy were also concerned about Austria's continued independence and German rearmament. At Mussolini's invitation, these countries met in Stresa, Italy, in April 1935 to discuss Germany. For Great Britain, it was critical to maintain Italian support to the anti-German front convening at Stresa.<sup>14</sup> In addition to discussing German rearmament, however, Italy had expected the topic of Ethiopia to be raised at Stresa, but neither Britain nor France discussed Ethiopia for fear of raising a divisive issue that might weaken the common front against Germany.<sup>15</sup> While the Stresa treaty guaranteed Austria's sovereignty and confirmed the need to maintain the European status quo with regard to German rearmament, it left Ethiopia as an outstanding Anglo-Italian issue. Additionally, the signing of the Anglo-German naval agreement in June 1935 had itself also surprised Italy. As with France, Italy remained skeptical of British intentions.<sup>16</sup>

Mussolini's outlook in 1935 consisted of viewing Germany and Britain with suspicion, while having a reliable expectation of French support in Ethiopia.

The conflict between two British policy goals--limiting Italian expansion in Ethiopia and maintaining its support for the Stresa accord--created a strategic impasse between the two countries. Not waiting for British concurrence, Italy attacked Ethiopia on 6 October 1935. Mindful of trying to maintain Italian support for the Stresa accord, the British and French governments attempted to maintain a low profile; however, tremendous public indignation resulted from the invasion. The numerous and vocal protests pressured the British and French governments to support measures in the League of Nations for economic sanctions against Italy.<sup>17</sup> Britain had earlier been Italy's major supplier of coal and oil, which now had to be imported from other sources. Economic sanctions, while lukewarm, resulted in Italy's having to import energy resources from other countries. The only two countries that did not adhere to the economic sanctions were Germany and the Soviet Union.<sup>18</sup>

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia created two strategic opportunities for Hitler, who was quick to seize them. First, Germany now became Italy's chief supplier of coal, the vital energy resource that powered Italian industry.<sup>19</sup> Over time the Italian economy would become increasingly dependent on Germany.<sup>20</sup> Second, although not readily apparent at the time, Italy would start to shift towards German influence.<sup>21</sup> This also created the conditions for Hitler to begin freeing Germany from the encirclement imposed by Versailles.

Italy was still willing to compromise over Ethiopia at the end of 1935, despite the necessity of having to meet its economic requirements via alternate sources and the

confrontations with Britain and France. In December 1935, the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, and the French Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pierre Laval, negotiated a compromise over Ethiopia, known as the Hoare-Laval Plan. Italy was favorably disposed to accept the plan's compromises. The French were also mindful of the Ethiopian issue and its divisive nature between Italy and Britain. France understood that it could not resolve this issue, Germany would be in a better position to retake the Rhineland and disregard the Treaty of Versailles.<sup>22</sup> The British public, however, responded as they did when Italy invaded Ethiopia, creating such an outcry that the government almost fell.<sup>23</sup> There was also a great debate in the French Chamber of Deputies, which eventually resulted in Laval's resignation.<sup>24</sup> As a result, the Hoare-Laval Plan was never implemented. Italy continued with its conquest of Ethiopia, and Hitler achieved the conditions needed to free Germany from encirclement.

A review of the important events in 1935 reveals three points. First, the balance-of-power relationship that had existed in Europe since the end of the First World War was quickly changing. Second, Germany was publicly rearming and breaking free from the conditions imposed upon it by Versailles. Lastly, Italy was no longer tied to Britain and France and was pursuing its own objectives. Understanding the key events that occurred in 1935 is essential to having a proper perspective of the geopolitical situation that faced Italy and Germany. It is also necessary in understanding their strategic interests and the subsequent events that influenced and shaped the Italo-German alliance. From 1935 onwards, Italy and Germany would gradually come together to form the Pact of Steel. It would by no means be a direct path.

Although every coalition is formed for a different purpose and scope, it is formed in response to a common threat. Based on the coalition's scope and purpose, its members must develop a strategy to overcome the threat. This thesis will examine these keys to the Italo-German alliance: the product of their national interests, the manner in which strategic decisions were made in Germany and Italy, the manner in which both countries collaborated on their strategic plans and the mechanisms they developed to achieve coalition unity.

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<sup>1</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 6 (Washington, DC: US Department of State), 561-564. See Document 426.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis: A History of the Relations between Hitler and Mussolini* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 53.

<sup>3</sup>Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: GPO, 5 September 2003), 91.

<sup>4</sup>R. L. DiNardo, "The Dysfunctional Coalition: The Axis Powers and the Eastern Front in World War II," *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (1996): 711.

<sup>5</sup>Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 431.

<sup>6</sup>Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 29.

<sup>7</sup>Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 34; Joachim von Ribbentrop, *The Ribbentrop Memoirs*, trans. Oliver Watson (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), 54. Ribbentrop used the argument of the Franco-Soviet Pact when he presented Germany's case before the Council of the League of Nations. Ribbentrop wrote, "I argued that with the Franco-Russian alliance, which could only be directed against Germany, the conditions which had led to the conclusion of the Locarno Treaty had disappeared and that this treaty had therefore lapsed." The treaty of Locarno signed in 1925 reaffirmed the European status quo and territorial integrity of the European international borders. It also allowed Germany to join the League of Nations.

<sup>8</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: The Gathering Storm* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1948), 138; and Ribbentrop, 43.

<sup>9</sup>Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 85.

<sup>10</sup>Ribbentrop, 42. Ribbentrop mentions the fact that French newspapers were referring to England as, “perfidious Albion,” as a result of the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935.

<sup>11</sup>Brian R. Sullivan, “A Thirst for Glory: Mussolini, the Italian military and the Fascist Regime, 1922-1936” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 331.

<sup>12</sup>Roy MacGregor-Hastie, *The Day of the Lion: The Rise and Fall of Fascist Italy, 1922-1945* (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1963), 223.

<sup>13</sup>Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 193.

<sup>14</sup>MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2000), 140.

<sup>15</sup>Sullivan, 343.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 348.

<sup>17</sup>Rich, 85.

<sup>18</sup>MacGregor-Hastie, 230.

<sup>19</sup>Knox, 141.

<sup>20</sup>Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Prologue to War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 172.

<sup>21</sup>Churchill, 181.

<sup>22</sup>Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, 52.

<sup>23</sup>Churchill, 184.

<sup>24</sup>Robert Whealey, “Mussolini’s Ideological Diplomacy: An Unpublished Document,” *Journal of Military History* 39 (1967): 437. The outcry in Great Britain and France over the Hoare-Laval Plan also had other consequences. Mr. Anthony Eden, a more vigorous and anti appeasement advocate replaced Sir Samuel Hoare as the British Foreign Secretary. Additionally, in France, the elections of 1936 brought the left wing and anti fascist *Front Populaire*, or Popular Front, to power.

## CHAPTER 2

### ITALIAN AND GERMAN STRATEGIC INTERESTS

A foreign policy is never original. Foreign policy is strictly conditioned by factual circumstances in regard to geography, history, and economics.<sup>1</sup>

Benito Mussolini

The noted historian J. R. M. Butler once said: “Grand strategy is concerned both with purely military strategy and politics.”<sup>2</sup> A nation’s political and military outlook, however, is linked to the nation’s strategic interests. Strategic interests are determined by numerous factors, but generally they are influenced by geography, natural resources, economic access, and alliance commitments. This chapter will focus on German and Italian strategic interests and their effects on the alliance by using Butler’s premise--that a nation’s overarching strategy is a combination of its military and political outlook.

The year 1935 was pivotal in European politics. In many ways, the events of that year represented a clear departure from the post First World War geopolitical construct.<sup>3</sup> In 1935, German rearmament and diplomatic maneuvering began to disrupt the European balance of power. Italy’s invasion of Ethiopia increased tensions with Britain and France. Italy and Germany were not yet alliance partners; however, the first seeds of cooperation would be sown in late 1935.

The key to an alliance is the determination of strategic interests--identification of common interests and outlooks to highlight any commonalities and to resolve any contentious issues where interests diverge. A fundamental understanding of national interests provides insight into how Germany and Italy developed the ways and means to

achieve their ends. The product of Italian and German interests will also serve to clarify the foundations that underpinned their alliance.

#### Commonalities: Convergence of Philosophy

Italy as the solitary Fascist State would be like a ship struggling against the adverse tides of all Europe. A Fascist Germany could only be of help. There were no conflicting interests which would militate against such a friendship.<sup>4</sup>

Kurt G. W. Lüdecke

Germany and Italy had three primary common interests in the 1930s, which eventually served as the basis for their alliance. These factors centered largely on the political outlook of their governments. Specifically, both countries perceived themselves as “have not” nations with respect to the other major European powers, were ruled by authoritative dictatorships, and were guided by fascist ideology.

There were two aspects to Germany and Italy’s have not perception. First, Germany and Italy became unified countries in the 1870s--significantly later than their European counterparts--so that both countries missed out on the race for colonies during the 1800s. The colonies they did possess were smaller, with less economic and resettlement potential than those of the British, French or Russian empires. Late unification and lack of colonial possessions would reinforce Germany and Italy’s have not perception. As a result, expansionist outlooks were a consistent undercurrent in both countries. Whether later expressed as *Lebensraum* or *spazio vitale*, living space and influence were aggressively sought by Hitler and Mussolini.

Second, both countries were affected in different ways by the Treaty of Versailles, which ended the First World War. Versailles imposed harsh measures requiring Germany to cede territory in the east to the benefit of a reconstituted Poland and, in the west, to



return Alsace and Lorraine to France. The treaty also limited Germany to an army of 100,000 troops, forbade the development of an air force, and prevented Germany from remilitarizing the Rhineland, which served as a demilitarized security zone for France. More importantly, the Treaty of Versailles was imposed without negotiation. Not only did Germany have to pay a severe financial indemnity, but she also had to assume full culpability for starting the war. From the German perspective, the peace imposed by Versailles was an unjust peace.<sup>5</sup>

For Italy, the effect of Versailles was more complex. Italy appeared as a victor after the First World War. Originally, it had been allied with Germany and Austria-Hungary as part of the Triple Alliance. Austria-Hungary's quick ultimatum to Serbia in 1914, along with Germany's unconditional support had resulted in Italy's withdrawing from the alliance--one that called for consultation prior to the initiation of any aggressive action.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Italy had remained neutral for the first year of the war.

On 23 March 1915, Italy entered the war on the side of the Allies. Italy signed a secret protocol, known as the Pact of London, which promised Italy Trieste, Trentino, Istria, and Dalmatia.<sup>7</sup> At the war's conclusion, however, Italy received only minimal gains. During the Paris Peace Conference, the Italians resented being treated as the "little sister," especially by France, which contested Italy on every international question.<sup>8</sup> Though the Italian delegation walked out of the peace talks, and despite public indignation, Italy could not back up its demands by force, due to the high cost incurred during the war.<sup>9</sup> From the Italian perspective, the victory at Versailles was hollow at best. Gabriele D'Annunzio, a vehement nationalist, best personified Italian discontent with

Versailles' shortfalls. In 1919, he attempted to seize Fiume, a key port in Dalmatia, with two thousand adventurers. This act also led to further disruption and disorder in Italy.<sup>10</sup>

Despite having fought on opposing sides during the First World War, Germany and Italy felt wronged by the Treaty of Versailles. In the decades following the First World War, extremist elements in both countries would point to the injustices of Versailles. These perceptions of injustice would also give rise to revisionist claims in both countries. Hitler and Mussolini would use these claims to further their causes.

Another similarity between Italy and Germany was their dictatorships. Mussolini and Hitler both came to power via questionable methods and antidemocratic violence. They and their followers embodied the revisionist platforms that were made possible by the Versailles Treaty. In 1919, Mussolini helped to create the Fascist Party. Its platform highlighted Italy's sacrifices during the First World War, charged its members to sabotage any neutralist politicians, and "declared its opposition to the imperialism of other peoples to the detriment of Italy."<sup>11</sup> Mussolini capitalized on Italy's discontent with the Treaty of Versailles and on the economic displacement that had resulted from the First World War. His fascists, backed by conservative politicians from northern Italy, took advantage of these conditions and, in 1922, marched on Rome.<sup>12</sup>

In Germany, Hitler's National Socialist, or Nazi, movement rose to power during the Great Depression. After the First World War, Germany suffered the ignominy of defeat and crippling hyperinflation. In the mid-1920s, Germany recovered with significant support from American financial loans via the Dawes Plan, which helped create a viable economy. Germany's high international debt, however, made it extremely susceptible to the effects of the Great Depression. The latter struck Germany hard and

created severe economic conditions--ideal for the rise of Hitler.<sup>13</sup> As Alan Bullock succinctly states: "Hitler offered to millions of Germans a combination of the two things they most wanted to hear: a total rejection of everything that had happened in Germany since the war, plus an equally unconditional promise to restore to a divided nation the lost sense of its own greatness and power."<sup>14</sup> In short, Hitler promised Germany's rightful restoration among nations. Under these conditions, he secured enough votes and was allowed to become Chancellor in 1933.<sup>15</sup>

There were, however, differences between the two dictatorships. Hitler had tighter control of the German government. As *Der Führer*, Hitler was the head of state and government. On 28 February 1933, Germany's elected legislature, the Reichstag passed the "Emergency Decree for the Defense of Nation and State," which basically gave Hitler dictatorial powers.<sup>16</sup> The passage of this law also ended any further Reichstag influence in the German government. In contrast, *Il Duce* served only as the head of the Italian government in his capacity as Prime Minister. King Vittorio Emanuele III remained the head of state. Although at a much reduced capacity, the Italian Senate and the Chamber of Deputies continued in their legislative functions. The differences in government had significant repercussions in their ability to develop and implement strategic decisions. In Germany, Hitler sought to centralize and flatten organizational hierarchy and reporting structures. While his authority was paramount on all issues, there was little room for independent strategic thought. In Italy, Mussolini's authority, while clearly predominant, was not complete. The inherent dualism in the Italian government obscured the lines of authority. In both countries, ambitious subordinates and vested interests also skewed strategic decision making. As a result, the governmental apparatus and strategic planning

was ill suited to decision making. These issues will be discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

This leads to the last area of common Italian and German interests--their ideologies. Unlike the other totalitarian ideology of the period--communism--Italy's Fascist and Germany's Nazi movements allowed for private enterprise, although with extensive government control over production and allocation of resources. Other political parties were banned; and the government strictly controlled the press. Lastly, while both countries were police states run by dictatorships, their driving ideological foundations were largely on the revisionist interpretation of Versailles.

One fundamental element common to Nazi and Fascist ideologies paved the way for collaboration--their extreme anti communist outlook. Writing his memoirs after the Second World War, the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, stated that Hitler thought the Nazi and Fascist philosophies would provide the basis for understanding between Italy and Germany.<sup>17</sup> This mutual hatred of communism found a common expression in two areas: a combined action in Spain against a leftist government actively supported by the Soviet Union and the signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact in 1937.<sup>18</sup>

The Spanish Civil War, which erupted in 1936 shortly after the Ethiopian crisis, served as the basis for both ideologies to converge against the communist threat.<sup>19</sup> Communist encroachment and overt Soviet support to Spain's Republican government led to a military uprising led by General Francisco Franco. Italy and Germany lent active support to Franco. In 1937, the level of support was about 40,000 to 50,000 Italian forces

and approximately 10,000 Germans.<sup>20</sup> Italy and Germany would not tolerate a communist Spain.

Italy's signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact on 6 November 1937 cemented the unity of Fascist and Nazi ideologies. This pact emphasized the ideological union of Germany, Italy and Japan against the spread of communism.<sup>21</sup> It also, however, greatly alarmed Britain, France, and the United States, who all saw this pact as a precursor to the foundation of a military alliance bent on dominating the world.

In summary, Germany and Italy shared a have not perception. Their mutual dissatisfaction with the Treaty of Versailles helped to create the conditions for revisionist platforms. Hitler and Mussolini were able to capitalize on these conditions and mobilize their populations' dissatisfaction with Versailles to seize power. Their dictatorships and ideologies, with some differences, shared an anti-communist outlook and appeared to serve as the basis for future collaboration.

#### German and Italian Political Outlooks: Encirclement versus Balance

During the 1930s, Germany and Italy shared common ground through their disdain of the Treaty of Versailles, their authoritarian governments, and totalitarian philosophies. They did, however, have differences in the way they viewed the European balance-of-power. The German and Italian political outlooks would be integral to their determination of strategic interests.

Germany's geographic position on the central European plain produced two perceptions. First, since Frederick the Great, the Germans viewed themselves as being encircled by competitors. As a result, they saw themselves with limited alternatives tied to the necessity of survivability. Conversely, Germany viewed its competitors as having

multiple alternatives available to them.<sup>22</sup> These views reinforced the German have not perception. In the 1930s, German views on encirclement, especially when imposed by the limitations of Versailles, had not changed, but grown in magnitude.

Second, Germany's position in Central Europe also had an ideological aspect. Hitler viewed the racial purity of the German people as sacrosanct. He believed that foreign influences in Germany, particularly Jewish and Slavic, had a poisoning effect on Germany.<sup>23</sup> These racial doctrines, which took an anthropological view on history, had their origins in the mid-to-late 1800s.<sup>24</sup> Deeply influenced by the concept of racial purity and fixated on Germany's need to expand, Hitler stated: "If land was desired in Europe, it could only be obtained by and large at the expense of Russia, and this meant that the Reich must set itself on the march along the road of the Teutonic Knights of old, to obtain by the German sword sod for the German plow and daily bread for the nation."<sup>25</sup> Eastward expansion also had economic benefits.<sup>26</sup> By establishing German supremacy in the east, the Germans felt that they would be securing the Reich's future as a nation and ensuring its status as a world power.<sup>27</sup> This area was rich in natural resources such a petroleum, chrome and bauxite--all essential to German industry.

Hitler saw the employment of two means to prevent German encirclement--rearmament and the formation of alliances. Concerning rearmament, it was Hitler's opinion that Germany had squandered its position prior to the First World War by not sufficiently strengthening its military, specifically the army.<sup>28</sup> Soon after consolidating power, Hitler sought to remilitarize as a means of addressing German encirclement. This policy had direct consequences. Geoffrey Megargee states it best: "This approach reflected a continental view that equated strategy with operations and did not take proper

account of global power relationships.”<sup>29</sup> Continued German remilitarization could not occur in a vacuum and was bound to upset the European status quo.

The second means Hitler used to prevent further encirclement was to form alliances. He signed a nonaggression treaty with Poland in 1934 and a naval agreement with Britain in 1935. When the opportunity presented itself, Hitler was quick to court Italy away from British and French influence.<sup>30</sup> Italy’s intervention in Ethiopia had also linked the Italian economy closer to Germany. Most importantly perhaps, by allowing Italy to take the lead in Spain, Hitler allowed Britain and France to focus more on Italy and less on German rearmament.<sup>31</sup> Greater focus on Italy by Britain and France also drove Italy closer to Germany.

Lastly, ever present in Hitler’s view on encirclement was the threat from the Soviet Union. He used the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935 as the basis for German remilitarization. Hitler also viewed Soviet support to the Spanish Republic as a Soviet means of increasing communist influence in Western Europe. Ribbentrop attributed the following statement to Hitler in his memoirs: “If Spain really goes communist, France in her present situation will also be bolshevized in due course, and then Germany is finished.”<sup>32</sup>

Germany’s outlook in the 1930s reflected its traditional aim to prevent encirclement. Hitler sought to attain this aim by rearmament and forming alliances. On 11 June 1937, the private understanding between Hitler and Mussolini on common ground and interests became known as the Rome-Berlin Axis.<sup>33</sup> This understanding represented Germany’s first step from encirclement. Hitler would continue to pursue his goals via these means to guide Germany’s actions up to the Second World War.

Conversely, Italy perceived its role in Europe in a completely different manner. The Italians were aware of their relative weakness among the major European powers. Its land frontiers in the north, where the majority of her economic interests were located, were difficult to defend. Italy's extensive coastline also exposed Rome and all the country's major logistical arteries to attack.<sup>34</sup> Lastly, her dependence on importation of natural resources, specifically coal, petroleum and oil, made the Italian economy extremely susceptible to disruption,<sup>35</sup> particularly during a prolonged conflict. As an economic intelligence assessment of Italy stated: "If the United States were to prevent the export of iron, steel products and scrap to Italy--this would be a serious handicap as Italy cannot depend upon European countries and in particular Germany for her full requirements as Germany must supply her needs first."<sup>36</sup>

Since becoming a nation in the 1870s, Italy typically had a defensive strategy.<sup>37</sup> Italy sought to increase its territory gradually and only when the opportunity presented itself. Italy realized it could not pursue an aggressive unilateral policy from a position of strength; rather, it had to seek an understanding or engage as part of an alliance with another major power. This resulted in Italy's maintaining a flexible diplomatic policy until such time when it could lend its weight to one side. The aim of this "determining-weight," or *politica del peso determinante*, strategy was to secure the best deal.<sup>38</sup> Italy's negotiation of the Pact of London with the Allies prior to entering the First World War is a reflection of this behavior.<sup>39</sup>

Mussolini altered this dynamic. While subscribing to Italy's traditional *politica del peso determinante* strategy, he sought to expand his influence quickly and in every direction. He was conscious of Italy's weaknesses and the need to secure raw materials.



He urged all Italians, however, towards “making the Mediterranean our lake, this is with those who live in the Mediterranean and expelling those in the Mediterranean who are parasites.”<sup>40</sup> Simply stated, he sought to increase Italian influence, economic or military, in the Mediterranean. Mussolini pursued an ambitious diplomatic effort as a means of increasing Italian influence.

Mussolini’s activist policy expanded in all directions. To the north, he limited Italy to its traditional outlook--defense along the French border and maintenance of Austrian independence to protect Italy’s northern flank.<sup>41</sup> To the east, Mussolini sought to pursue historical Italian interests in Dalmatia and Albania.<sup>42</sup> He also saw the Balkans as a major source of raw materials. Mussolini actively sought to weaken French influence in the Balkans by weakening its ties with members of the Little Entente, specifically Yugoslavia.<sup>43</sup> To the south, Mussolini looked to expand into Ethiopia and extend Italian influence in North Africa at the expense of France. To the west, Mussolini saw Italy’s involvement in Spain as a means of extending his influence into the Atlantic and even South America.<sup>44</sup>

Mussolini also sought to quickly increase Italian prestige among the great powers. In March 1930, he told Fascist Party Secretary, Augusto Turati: “Between 1936 and 1940 the second European war will inevitably explode. It will be necessary to be strong and ready for that day. Because of its geographic and historical position, if Italy will know how to remain alone, it will be the arbiter of the huge conflict. . . . That day Italy will truly be great.”<sup>45</sup> His comments aligned perfectly with Italy’s *politica del peso determinante*.

To conclude, Germany and Italy viewed the European balance-of-power differently. From Germany's central position and ideological framework, Hitler was predisposed to view Europe from an encirclement perspective. Stemming from this perspective and confident in its tried and true instrument--the military--Germany would typically assess its adversaries through fixed ideological maxims and military principles.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, due to Italy's relative economic weakness and limited means, Mussolini was predisposed to view Europe from a "determining weight" or *politica del peso determinante* perspective. As John Gooch states: "Italy's potential enemies were converted to actual enemies by the process of choice."<sup>47</sup> Such differences between a fixed outlook versus a more pragmatic one would lead to misunderstandings between the two countries.

#### Strategic Interests and Enemies: Foundational Elements

German and Italian strategic interests were closely linked to their respective encirclement and "determining weight" outlooks. Hitler and Mussolini's outlooks on the European balance-of-power during the 1930s would result in the implementation of strategic policies to achieve their strategic interests. Their respective outlooks would fundamentally drive the strategies they envisioned. The actual policies they used to support their strategies represent the means to achieving their ultimate ends.

Hitler saw German strategic interests in three primary areas. One was geographic, the other ideological and the last political. Hitler's geographic interest--expansion into Eastern Europe in pursuit of living space, or *Lebensraum*, was inextricably linked to his ideological aim--maintaining the purity of the German race through an anti-Jewish and anti communist policy. To expand in the east, Hitler had one ideal goal: "For such a

policy there was but one ally in Europe: England.”<sup>48</sup> An understanding with Great Britain would remain Hitler’s primary political aim.

Germany’s encirclement perspective made Hitler predisposed to view expansion into Eastern Europe as a primary strategic interest. This is consistent with Germany’s desire to expand eastward as part of its *Mittleuropa* policy. He saw this area as one for German resettlement and securing vital natural resources for economic growth. German economic expansion into the Balkans would significantly increase in the 1930s. From 1929 to 1937, trade with the Balkans rose from 4 to 12 percent of total German imports.<sup>49</sup> No other import sector showed such a dramatic increase in Germany.

Hitler saw the quest for *Lebensraum* as one of Germany’s primary goals. Writing in the 1920s in *Mein Kampf*, Hitler looked at other countries, specifically the United States, Russia, China, and the British Empire as having the necessary space for their populations to expand. In contrast, he saw Germany as possessing only limited options. In his analysis, Hitler did not see Germany as a colonizing power. Specifically, he stated:

We take up where we broke off six hundred years ago. We stop the endless German movement south and west, and turn our gaze toward the land in the east. At long last we break off the colonial and commercial policy of the pre-War period and shift to the soil policy of the future. If we speak of soil in Europe today, we can primarily have in mind only Russia and her vassal border states.<sup>50</sup>

In terms of ideology, Hitler saw the predominantly Slavic states in the east not only as states to be controlled, but as a direct threat to the survival of the German race. While Hitler took the concept of “racial purity” to the extreme, his beliefs were based on preexisting German views. General Friedrich von Bernhardi spoke on this issue before the First World War:

The Slavs have become a formidable power. Vast regions, which were once under German influence, are now once more under Slavic rule. The present Russian

Baltic provinces were formerly flourishing seats of German culture. The German element in Austria, our ally is gravely menaced by the Slavs. . . . Only faint-hearted measures are taken today to stem this Slavic flood. And yet to check this onrush of Slavism is not merely an obligation inherited from our fathers, but a duty in the interests of self-preservation and European civilization.<sup>51</sup>

With Hitler's rise to power, securing German interests in the east became a permanent and deliberate fixture. Hitler crafted German policy to support one simple task--to seek *Lebensraum* in Eastern Europe. He viewed the outright conquest of the east as the only means of ensuring the Reich's survival and preserving the "race value" of the German people.<sup>52</sup> Additionally, he associated the Jewish conspiracy with communist doctrine aimed at subjugating the world.<sup>53</sup> By seeking *Lebensraum*, Hitler's eastward expansion, ultimately at the Soviet Union's expense, was not only geographical, but also ideological.

Especially during his initial years in power, Hitler had to employ a carefully balanced, yet devious, diplomatic strategy to mask his true aim. He had to portray Germany as the victim wronged by Versailles to achieve diplomatic maneuver. Hitler would quickly act on opportunities to achieve his short-term aims. He would link German rearmament to the Franco-Soviet Pact of 1935, yet would quickly sign a nonaggression pact with Poland in 1934 and declare his respect for Austrian sovereignty in 1936. He would make deals with his adversaries and make announcements that were clearly not his true intentions to maintain the appearance that he supported the European status quo. This diplomatic strategy, while successful, would hamper the German army's ability to effectively prioritize and plan because Hitler rarely revealed his true intent. This would also have serious consequence with his Italian partner.

Hitler's calculated diplomacy during the 1930s was also aimed at carefully courting Germany's relationship with Great Britain. He realized that Britain's primary historical focus was aimed at preventing the consolidation of a hegemonic power in continental Europe.<sup>54</sup> Italy could be useful in preventing encirclement, but securing an understanding with Britain was the key to solidifying German hegemony on the continent. It was in Germany's interest to maintain favorable relations, and to seek an alliance with Great Britain to protect Germany's flank, while in pursuit of eastward expansion. Hitler's early diplomatic policy, as evidenced by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935, was part of an overall aim to get Britain's acquiescence to German expansion in the east and acknowledgement of German hegemony on the continent.<sup>55</sup> Throughout the 1930s and into the Second World War, Germany would continue to pursue this policy goal with Britain.

Hitler's strategic interest lay in its quest for *Lebensraum*. He would pursue a devious, but balanced diplomatic strategy to accomplish Germany's short-term goals. He would also shape Germany's diplomatic efforts with Britain and Italy to prevent encirclement, while acting as a counterbalance to France. Despite Hitler's diplomatic maneuvering in the 1930s, the ideological aspects associated *Lebensraum* would ensure that the pursuit of "living space" remained his long-term goal. Hitler's desire to expand eastward would also fix German war aims, strategy and direction during the Second World War. This policy would have critical consequences to the Italo-German alliance.

Mussolini saw Italy's primary strategic interests in a less fixed manner. They fell into three categories, one was traditional, the other opportunistic and the last political. These interests were the protection of the Italian mainland, specifically along the Alps,

Adriatic, and areas close to Italy; expansion into areas to support Italian deficiencies in natural resources and prestige; and seeking alliances to support Italian aims.

Despite Mussolini's aggressive diplomatic policy of expansion, he could not ignore one vital fact--Italy's relative geostrategic and economic weakness. This fact would result in defending traditional Italian interests, while looking to seize advantages as they presented themselves to support Italian prestige and expansion. Mussolini's ambitions, however, would result in expending too many resources for too many interests--something Italy could ill afford to do.

Unlike Hitler's fixation in expanding eastward, traditional Italian interests were historically focused inward. This was due to the realization of her relative weakness. The majority of Italian industry lay to the north, within the Genoa-Turin-Milan triangle, with Genoa serving as a vital shipping port for Italy, Switzerland, southwestern Germany and Yugoslavia.<sup>56</sup> Additionally, a greater portion of Italian agriculture lay in the Po Valley. Historically, these factors, coupled with the threat from France and Austria-Hungary which occupied the higher slopes in the Alps, made the protection of this region one of vital concern.<sup>57</sup> Part of this concern was rectified after the conclusion of the First World War when Italy assumed control of the vital area known as the *Alto Adige*, or South Tyrol. This gave Italy control of the higher slopes facing Austria and control of the Brenner Pass, which served as a gateway into central Europe.

Associated with this strategy was Italy's policy regarding Austria. It was within Italy's interest to maintain Austrian neutrality, and one favorably disposed towards Italy. The reasons for this policy were twofold. First, it was in Italy's interest to preserve Austria as a buffer state and to prevent a union of Austria and Germany. Italy paid a high

price during the First World War against the combined efforts of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Maintaining friendly relations with Austria would directly support Italy's interest in protecting vital economic and agricultural interests in northern Italy.

Second, Austria possessed natural resources, which were vital to Italian industry, particularly coal. The integration of both economies would bring Austria closer to the Italian sphere of influence. During the 1920s, Italian investment in the Austrian economy increased. Italian capital provided to support large-scale coal mining and lumber in southern Austria.<sup>58</sup> Mussolini would continue to pursue economic integration with Austria as a means of supporting traditional Italian interests. This integration allowed Mussolini to circumvent the League of Nations sanctions and import vital steel and cast iron from Austria during the Ethiopian crisis.<sup>59</sup>

Other traditional Italian interests that directly supported the protection of the Italian mainland lay in the Adriatic and in areas lying next to Italy. The Italians viewed the acquisition of Corsica and Nice as necessary measures to protect their western coast. The majority of Italian shipyards, seaports and transportation arteries were located in this area, facing the French naval fleet in Toulon.<sup>60</sup> Italian interests in the Adriatic, specifically in Dalmatia and Albania, were more historic. It was largely in this area that Italian aspirations fell short at the conclusion of the First World War.

Mussolini capitalized on unfulfilled expectations as a result of the First World War to develop an ambitious expansionist foreign policy. In comparison to Germany, however, it is more difficult to gauge precisely where Italy's primary interests lay. They were not fixed as Germany's interests were in Eastern Europe. Italy's expansionist policies lay in two broad categories, which corresponded to its strategic outlook. First,

Italy would pursue an imperialistic policy of expansion in the Mediterranean and Africa. Second, Italy would seek to solidify economic interests in the Balkans to secure natural resources.

Pursuing interests in the Mediterranean and North Africa were conducive to Italy's geographic situation. In the 1920s, while speaking to a group of Italian military leaders, Mussolini stated: "A nation that has no free access to the sea cannot be considered a free nation; a nation that has no free access to the oceans cannot be considered a great power. Italy must become a great power."<sup>61</sup> Italy's central location in the Mediterranean made it ideally positioned to control a major trade route. Italy sought to expand into Tunisia in particular, but also Malta, Cyprus and the Balearic Islands. This expansion, however, would bring Italy in direct conflict with Great Britain and France.

Italian interests in Ethiopia were discussed in the previous chapter; however, they were also linked to Italian imperialistic policies in the Mediterranean. An Italian territory on the eastern horn of Africa would give Italy the ability to control one of the gateways into the Mediterranean.<sup>62</sup> The acquisition of Ethiopia also represented a direct threat to Britain's imperial interests. Italian aspirations for influence in Spain can be seen in a similar manner. Any Italian efforts in pursuing this imperial strategy were likely to involve hostility and require a significant amount of resources.

Italian efforts in the Balkans were more conducive to supporting a resource poor economy. This policy also required fewer outlays of resources and little military effort. For many of the same reasons in Germany, the Balkans represented an area of economic expansion and a source for raw materials. In 1926, Mussolini pursued economic agreements with Romania to exchange capital and industrial equipment for petroleum.<sup>63</sup>



In that same year, he also concluded favorable trade agreements with Yugoslavia to secure access to resources vital to the Italian economy--namely iron, coal, copper, manganese and chrome.<sup>64</sup> Mussolini continued with this policy into the 1930s. In 1934, he concluded the Rome Protocols with Austria and Hungary to encourage economic integration and serve as a counterbalance to French influence.<sup>65</sup> Mussolini would continue to pursue a Balkans strategy as a means of securing Italy's economic independence.

Italian political interests were not fixed as with Germany. This was a result of Italy's multifaceted strategy and its numerous interests. Whether Italy adopted a traditional or opportunistic strategy, it would come into conflict with numerous adversaries. The adoption of a Mediterranean strategy would bring Italy into conflict with the Western democracies--Great Britain and France. Italian support to Austrian independence, economic exploitation in the Balkans and maintenance of the status quo in Central Europe would bring Italy into conflict with a resurgent Germany. Italy's need for alliances was therefore situational and dependent on which strategy Mussolini pursued at any given moment. The shifting of focus between a Mediterranean versus a Balkans strategy would make Italy a wildcard in the European balance-of-power structure until 1935. Italy's continued focus on Austria and the Balkans would also bring it into contention with Germany and have future consequences to the alliance.

#### Contentious Issues: Clash of Interests

There were three areas that were major sources of contention between Germany and Italy. One was political, the other racial, and the last cultural. Unsatisfactory resolution of these issues would hamper the effectiveness of the Italo-German alliance.

Political contentions centered on Austria and the Balkans. Racial contentions were focused on the ethnic Germans living under Italian rule in the *Alto Adige*. Lastly, the cultural contention between Germany and Italy centered on their inherent mutual dislike of one another.

Germany's eastward drive for *Lebensraum* and Italy's quest for economic independence in the Balkans was bound to create competition and tension between both countries. Both countries were competing for access to the same natural resources that were vital to their economies. Additionally, contention over strategic raw materials, critical to powering a war economy especially during a prolonged conflict, would create dissension among the alliance and result in critical consequences during the early stages of the Second World War.

Hitler's aims at annexing Austria created mistrust in Italy. Italy sought to maintain Austrian independence. When the Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dolfuss was murdered in July 1934, Mussolini placed two divisions stationed at the Brenner Pass on alert and quickly deployed two more to the region.<sup>66</sup> Hitler had clearly acted prematurely. Germany would finally have the right conditions for achieving an Austrian *Anschluss* in 1938 when Italy was decisively engaged in Spain. Despite Mussolini's acquiescence, Germany's annexation of Austria created a deep feeling of mistrust in Italy. For Hitler, he simply saw Austria as a first step into central Europe and regarding Italy, a redirection of their influence to the Mediterranean and away from *Mitteleuropa*.<sup>67</sup> For Italy, it saw Germany's seizure of Austria as a threat to Italian influence in the Balkans.

Another area of contention between Germany and Italy centered on the approximately 200,000 ethnic Germans living under Italian rule in the *Alto Adige*. This

area, gained after much cost during the First World War, was vital to the protection of northern Italy. Hitler freely admitted in *Mein Kampf* that contention over South Tyrol would prevent an understanding between the two countries.<sup>68</sup> He also admitted that it was part of the German fatherland. Italian suspicion over German aims in this area would lead to continued mistrust.<sup>69</sup>

The last area concerns a subjective, yet very powerful, area of contention--their differences in culture. The bottom line--neither Germans nor Italians thought highly of each other. Their differences are rooted in history and molded by geography, both of which are beyond the scope of this study. Thoughts on what Hitler and Mussolini felt about each other and their countries, however, can provide insight to their ability to mold an effective alliance.

Hitler continually professed il Duce to be a brilliant leader with a superb grasp of the Italian nation.<sup>70</sup> He saw Mussolini's ability to marshal the forces of fascism in Italy as a spectacular achievement, starting with his March on Rome to seize the Italian government in 1922.<sup>71</sup> Hitler, however, had other thoughts concerning Italy. Albert Speer, Germany's Minister of Armaments, said the following: "Ever since Hitler had made his unfortunate visit to Italy in June 1934, he distrusted the Italians and Italian policy, though not Mussolini. Now that he saw his doubts reinforced, Hitler recalled an item in Hindenburg's political testament, to the effect that Germany should never again ally herself with Italy."<sup>72</sup> Speer was commenting on Hitler's anxiety in 1935 and whether to throw Germany's weight behind Italy during the Ethiopian crisis. Hitler was concerned whether it would affect his plans for a rapprochement with Britain. Hitler doubted the

validity and strength of Italian commitment, but felt that he would not be able to secure Britain's support under the circumstances of the moment.

Mussolini's views on Hitler were somewhat different. While he admired Hitler's Nazi movement and their rise to power, Mussolini's first impressions of Hitler were less than favorable. According to Marshal Pietro Badoglio, Chief of the Italian General Staff: "Hitler did not make a good impression on Mussolini; he (Hitler) talked without stopping for an hour, repeating different words and all the arguments from *Mein Kampf*, and only allowing Mussolini a few minutes in which to reply."<sup>73</sup> Badoglio further went on to say that Mussolini felt he would have the leading part in any further endeavor with Germany because of his intellectual superiority. In Mussolini's assessment, he felt he would have the upper hand based on intellect, judgment and experience. What Mussolini grossly underestimated was Hitler's determination to pursue his goals, despite any odds. This would repeatedly lead to future misunderstandings.

### Conclusion

Germany and Italy possessed common attributes. Some of these commonalities were strong enough to produce seemingly genuine collaboration, as evidenced in their participation in Spain. During the Spanish Civil War, both countries were united against a common enemy--the Soviet Union, and for a common purpose--to prevent the rise of a communist state in Western Europe. This strength of purpose, however, was limited in time and circumstance.

German and Italian views were extremely divergent when looking at their strategic interests. Despite his diplomatic maneuvering and outright deception, Hitler was fixated on one target--*Lebensraum*. Mussolini's interests were diverse and based on

targets of opportunity--imperialism, economics and prestige. Additionally, their interests were derived from different sources. For Germany, the pursuit *Lebensraum* had ideological overtones. For Italy, imperialistic pursuits and economic security were less personal and more rationalistic in the spirit of Machiavelli. The differences in outlooks, their divergent interests and inherent cultural differences would quickly undermine the foundations on which their alliance would be based.

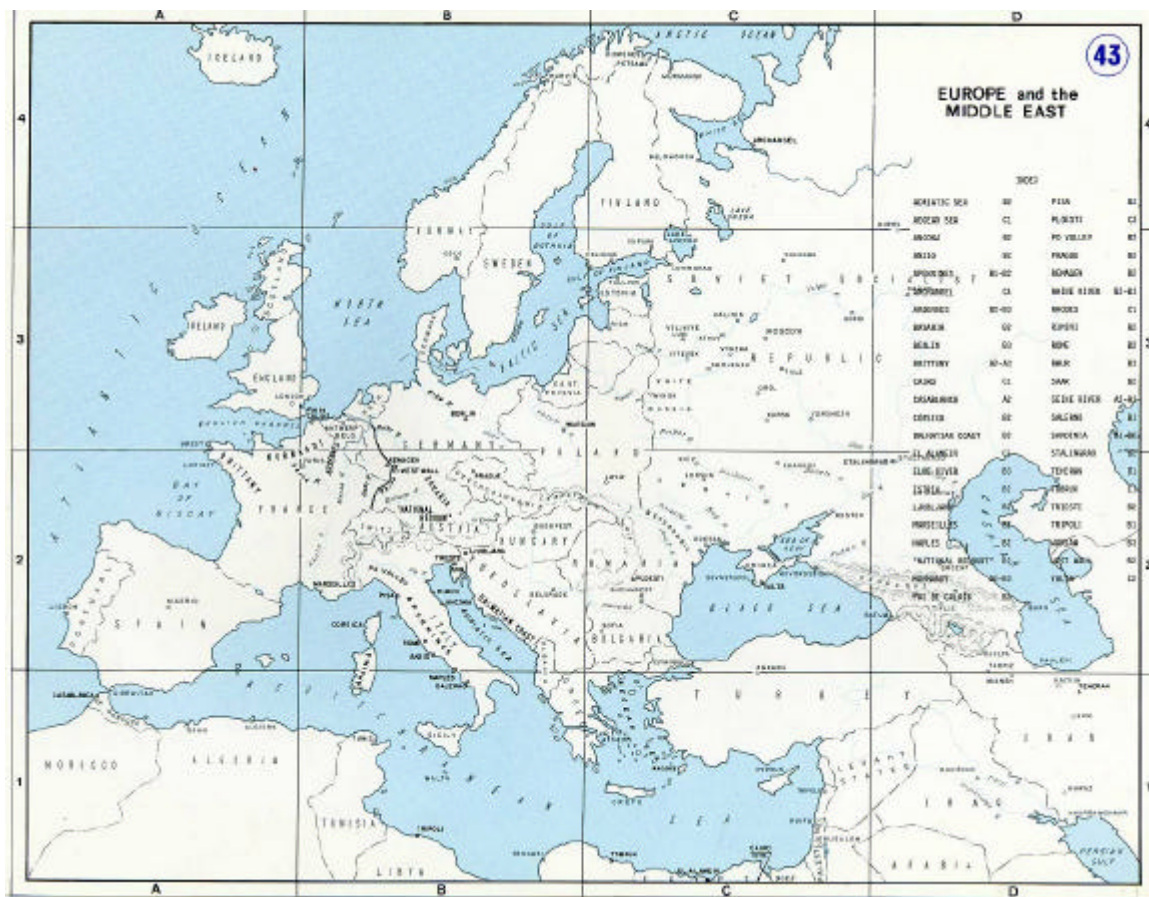


Figure 1. Europe and North Africa in 1935

Source: Atlas of The Second World War: Europe and the Mediterranean, *Europe and the Middle East* (Wayne, NJ: Avery Publishing Group, Inc., 1985), 43.

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<sup>1</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 21 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dal delitto Matteotti all'attentato Zaniboni: 14 giugno 1924-4 novembre 1925*, 164.

<sup>2</sup>J. R. M. Butler, *Grand Strategy: September 1939 to June 1941*, vol. 2 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1957), xv.

<sup>3</sup>Henderson B. Braddick, "The Hoare-Laval Plan: A Study in International Politics," *Review of Politics* (July 1962): 342.

<sup>4</sup>Kurt G.W. Lüdecke, *I Knew Hitler: The Story of a Nazi who escaped the blood purge* (London: Jarrolds Publishers, 1938), 132.

<sup>5</sup>Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1973), xxx.

<sup>6</sup>Brian R. Sullivan, "Strategy of decisive weight," in *The Making of Strategy*, ed., Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 329.

<sup>7</sup>Roy MacGregor-Hastie, *The Day of the Lion: The Rise and Fall of Fascist Italy, 1922-1945* (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1963), 59.

<sup>8</sup>Msg, "Office of Naval Intelligence (ONI) report from Berne, Switzerland, 3 December 1921," attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial 2057-E-86, no subject.

<sup>9</sup>Brian R. Sullivan, "A Thirst for Glory: Mussolini, the Italian military and the Fascist Regime, 1922-1936" (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 91.

<sup>10</sup>Dennis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 37; Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy, 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), 32.

<sup>11</sup>MacGregor-Hastie, 87, quoting the Charter of Fasci (*Fasci di combattimento*). The Fascist charter also adopted the League of Nations clause on the integration of nations. For Italy, this meant the integration of Italians outside of Italy to include those in France, Switzerland, Dalmatia and Fiume.

<sup>12</sup>Mack Smith, 48-54. Since the First World War, Italy had a succession of short-lived governments. In February 1922, Luigi Facta became prime minister. Taking advantage of a depressed economy and nationwide dissatisfaction, Mussolini and his Fascist Party began a series of attacks in various cities. These disturbances continued

throughout the summer and led to a breakdown in basic services throughout the country. Realizing he could not seize power alone, Mussolini began cultivating relationships in the Italian army. After looking at several alternatives, King Vittorio Emanuele asked Mussolini to form a government on October 29, 1922. The “March on Rome” was largely a myth perpetrated by Fascist propaganda.

<sup>13</sup>Joachim von Ribbentrop, *The Ribbentrop Memoirs*, trans. Oliver Watson (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), 19.

<sup>14</sup>Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 223.

<sup>15</sup>Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974), 345-369. The Nazi Party never held a clear majority in the electorate; however, they were the largest party in the Reichstag. Hitler’s first step to seizing power came on 12 September 1932 when he maneuvered a vote of no confidence in against Chancellor Franz von Papen. This led to new elections on 6 November which had unintended consequences--the Nazi’s lost 2 million votes and four Reichstag seats. As a result of the elections, Kurt von Schleicher, became the new Chancellor. Unwilling to serve under Schleicher, Papen met with Hitler on 4 January 1933 and proposed a coalition of German Nationalists and Nazi’s to be headed by Hitler and himself. This led to a series of machinations, which resulted in President Paul von Hindenburg appointing Hitler as Chancellor on 30 January 1933. As with Mussolini’s rise to power, the Nazi’s “Seizure of Power” is a myth perpetrated by Nazi propaganda.

<sup>16</sup>Hans Mommsen, “The Reichstag Fire and Its Political Consequences,” in *Aspects of the Third Reich*, ed. H. W. Koch (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1985), 88; Klaus P. Fischer, *Nazi Germany* (New York: The Continuum Publishing Company, 1995), 270. The “Emergency Decree for the Defense of Nation and State,” suspended civil rights, limited the power of individual German states assigned the central government the supreme authority to restore order. This decree was never rescinded.

<sup>17</sup>Ribbentrop, 27.

<sup>18</sup>Ciano, *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers*, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge, trans. Stuart Hood (London: Odhams Press, Limited, 1948), 142-6. A conversation between *il Duce*, von Ribbentrop and Ciano held on 6 November 1937, the day of Italy’s signing of the Anti-Comintern Pact, highlights their interventionist efforts Spain and the importance of the anti-communist pact; Ribbentrop, 59-60. In his memoirs, Ribbentrop states that Hitler was fearful of having Germany wedged between the Soviets in the east and a communist foothold in Spain on the west.

<sup>19</sup>Gerhard L. Weinberg, *The Foreign Policy of Hitler’s Germany: Starting World War II, 1937-1939* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1980), 4; Ribbentrop, 59-60.

<sup>20</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1936*, vol. 2 (Washington DC: US Department of State, 1954), 575, 583, 601, 623. See telegrams dated 27 November, 29 November, 10 December, and 31 December 1936; Robert H. Whealey, *Hitler and Spain: The Nazi Role in the Spanish Civil War, 1936-1939* (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 1989), 8. German strength centered largely on the Condor Legion which consisted of eight air squadrons with an average strength of 5,600 men. There were also German antiaircraft, antitank, armored units and German volunteers serving in the Spanish Foreign Legion. Whealey puts the total German strength at 4,000 men.

<sup>21</sup>Galeazzo Ciano, *Diary 1937-1943*, trans. Robert L. Miller and V. Umberto Colleti-Perucca (New York: Enigma Books, 2002), 22; Mario Toscano, *The Origins of the Pact of Steel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 72.

<sup>22</sup>Holger H. Herwig, "Imperial Germany," in *Knowing One's Enemies: An Intelligence Assessment before the two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 92.

<sup>23</sup>Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1971), 285-294. Hitler discussed at length on the topic of "racial purity" and how the effects of racial crossing resulted in intellectual regression. His views can essentially be summed when he stated that: "All great cultures of the past perished only because the original creative race died out from blood poisoning," 289. This remained Hitler's fixation and the basis for his anti-Jewish policy.

<sup>24</sup>Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 277. Nolte further states that while Hitler may only have had limited knowledge on previous writings regarding the concept of racial purity. The writings of three men: Count Gobineau, Vacher de Lapouge, and Houston Stewart Chamberlain during the 1800s were critical to creating the atmosphere and concept of "race." The concept of racial purity was a foundational element in Hitler's writings.

<sup>25</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 140.

<sup>26</sup>Ribbentrop, 45.

<sup>27</sup>Herwig, 85.

<sup>28</sup>Adolf Hitler, *Hitler's Secret Book*, trans. Salvator Attanasio (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1961), 154.

<sup>29</sup>Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 13.

<sup>30</sup>*Documents on Nazism, 1919-1945*, ed. Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham (New York: The Viking Press, 1974), 517.

<sup>31</sup>Bullock, 538.



<sup>32</sup>Ribbentrop, 58.

<sup>33</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1944*, Series C, vol.6 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 457-461. See Document 216.

<sup>34</sup>John Gooch, "Italy before 1915: The Quandary of the Vulnerable," in *Knowing One's Enemies: An Intelligence Assessment before the two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 205.

<sup>35</sup>Fortunato Minniti, "Le materie prime nella preparazione bellica dell'Italia (1935-1943)," *Storia Contemporanea* 17 (February 1986): 5. Minniti presents an excellent analysis of Italy's critical dependence on imported raw materials. He also demonstrates Italy's inability to develop a coherent *politica di approvvigionamento*, or strategy of supply. He makes an excellent case that Italy's endemic supply problems were not only a result of raw material shortages, but bureaucratic inefficiency in establishing guidance, priorities and procedures for economic and military mobilization. Italy did not only suffer from raw material shortages, but from organizational inefficiency.

<sup>36</sup>Msg, "Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, December 18, 1936," attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number L-14941, Subj: Present Situation in the Iron and Steel Industry in Italy.

<sup>37</sup>John Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded: Italian Military Thought and Doctrine, 1815-1943," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 9 (June-September 1986): 313. This article provides excellent background on Italian military doctrine, its origins and subsequent development.

<sup>38</sup>Dino Grandi, *Il Mio Paese – Ricordi Autobiografici*, ed. Renzo de Felice (Bologna: Società editrice il Mulino, 1985), 277-281. Italy's "determining weight" or also referred to by scholars as the "decisive weight" strategy was ascribed to Dino Grandi, the Italian Foreign Minister from 1929-1932. Grandi describes in his autobiography the effect of Italy's shifting relationship between France and Germany. In essence, he advocated shifting between two power blocs to secure deals for Italy. Grandi's *politica del peso determinante*, however, was predicated on the geopolitical framework created by the Treaty of Locarno and the collective security afforded by the League of Nations. Mussolini would later undermine the framework on which Italy's strategy was based resulting in severe consequences.

<sup>39</sup>MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 116.

<sup>40</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 18 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dalla Conferenza di Cannes alla marcia su Roma: 14 gennaio 1922-30 ottobre 1922*, 439.

<sup>41</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 9 February 1940,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 17394, Subj: Italy – Comments on Current Events.

<sup>42</sup>Grandi, 309.

<sup>43</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 2 July 1926,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 9745, Subj: Foreign Relationships – Italo-Rumanian Agreement.

<sup>44</sup>Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano’s Hidden Diary*, trans. Andreas Mayor (New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1953), 30.

<sup>45</sup>Sullivan, “Strategy of decisive weight,” 345, quoting Mussolini from Augusto Turati’s *Fuori dell’ombra della mia vita. Dieci anni nel solco del fascismo*, 21.

<sup>46</sup>Herwig, 95.

<sup>47</sup>Gooch, 206.

<sup>48</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 140.

<sup>49</sup>Burton H. Klein, *Germany’s Economic Preparations for War* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1959), 61, quoting figures from, *Weekly Report*, issued by the German Institute for Business Research, 29 July 1939.

<sup>50</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 654.

<sup>51</sup>Friedrich von Bernhardi, *Germany and the Next War*, trans. Allen H. Powles (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1914), 78.

<sup>52</sup>Wilhelm Diest, “The road to ideological war: Germany, 1918-1945,” in *The Making of Strategy*, ed., Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 381.

<sup>53</sup>Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 65.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 618. Ribbentrop, 47.

<sup>55</sup>Ribbentrop, 43. Hitler and Ribbentrop saw the Anglo-German naval agreement of 1935 as the foundation for subsequent cooperation between the two countries. Ribbentrop stated in his memoirs that Hitler was ready to guarantee the naval agreement, the integrity of the countries between Germany and Britain and to help preserve the British Empire. In return, Britain would recognize Germany as the strongest continental Power and grant certain demands for revision in Central Europe.

<sup>56</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 30 January 1941,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 2062-715-5, Subj: Industrial Analysis – Genoa Area.

<sup>57</sup>Sullivan, “Strategy of decisive weight,” 317.

<sup>58</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 8 February 1926,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 9258, Subj: Penetration of Interests into Foreign Countries – Italian Penetration into Austria.

<sup>59</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 18 December 1935,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number L-14941, Subj: Present Situation in the Iron and Steel Industry in Italy.

<sup>60</sup>Sullivan, “Strategy of decisive weight,” 332.

<sup>61</sup>MacGregor Knox, *Common Destiny*, 120, quoting Mussolini from General Arturo Vacca-Maggiolini in Emilio Canevari, *La guerra italiana*, vol. 2, 211.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 121

<sup>63</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 17 June 1926,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 9745, Subj: Foreign Relationships – Italo-Rumanian Agreement.

<sup>64</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 18 March 1926,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 9475, Subj: Penetration of Interests into Foreign Countries – Italian Penetration into Jugoslavia.

<sup>65</sup> György Ránki, “Il patto tripartite di Roma e la politica estera della Germania,” *Studi Storici* 3, no. 2 (1962): 345. Although unstated, the Rome Protocols also served as a counterbalance to Germany. Ránki provides an excellent overview of the conflicting interests between Germany, Italy and France in the Balkans, namely over securing strategic resources and using the Balkan states to serve as counterbalances towards each other; See also *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series C (Washington DC: US Department of State), vol. 1, Documents 14, 27, and 448; vol. 2, Document 320; vol. 3, Documents 118 and 300; and vol. 4, Document 5, 120, and 121 for an excellent insight into German policy regarding its conflicting interests with Italy in the Balkans and Austria prior to 1935.

<sup>66</sup> MacGregor Hastie, 221.

<sup>67</sup> Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis: A History of the relations between Hitler and Mussolini* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 29.

<sup>68</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 628.

<sup>69</sup> Lüdecke, 73. Of note, Hitler sought to understand Mussolini’s feelings on the *Alto Adige* at a very early date--1922. Hitler sent an early Nazi sympathizer, Kurt Lüdecke, to meet with Mussolini. According to Lüdecke they discussed about a wide variety of topics, but when he began to ask about the *Alto Adige*, Lüdecke says Mussolini responded vociferously stating “No discussion about that ever! The *Alto Adige* is Italian and must remain so. But even if it were not, military reasons alone make it imperative not to revert to the impossible old border.”; Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini e Hitler: I rapporti segreti 1922-1933* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1975), 19. As de Felice points out, the significance of the Lüdecke mission was that it occurred before Mussolini’s “March on Rome.” De Felice gives an excellent account of early Italo-German cooperation during the 1920s.

<sup>70</sup> Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Book*, 167.

<sup>71</sup> Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Conversations: 1941-1944*, trans. Norman Cameron and R.H. Stevens (New York: Farrar, Straus & Young, 1953), 8. Hitler thought that Mussolini’s “March on Rome” was one of the great turning points of history. See the entry for 21 July 1941.

<sup>72</sup> Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 85.

<sup>73</sup> Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents*, trans. Muriel Currey (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 2.

## CHAPTER 3

### STRATEGIC DECISION MAKING AND COLLABORATION

Strategic decisions are rarely made and military operations are rarely conducted precisely in the terms worked out by the planning staffs in the national capital. But the planning . . . is the principal instrument by which political leadership arrives at an accommodation between the compulsions of politics and the realities of war, exercises control over military operations and allocates the means necessary to support them.<sup>1</sup>

Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell

The examination of German and Italian strategic interests indicated Hitler and Mussolini's ultimate ends. In a coalition, the convergence of interests should form the basis for common action against a mutual adversary. A coalition with unresolved or divergent interests is bound to weaken the coalition's purpose. While common interests and ends serve as a coalition's foundation, the mere identification and analysis of mutual interests is not enough in determining a coalition's effectiveness. The missing element is the practical means Germany and Italy undertook to support Axis objectives.

Matloff and Snell identify planning as one of the principle means by which politicians arrive at strategic decisions. Planning also serves as the basis for determining the resource allocation necessary to accomplish a nation's objectives. Using this premise as a starting point, this chapter will look at two points: First, the manner in which Hitler and Mussolini arrived at important decisions and second, the examination of the strategic decision-making apparatus in both countries to determine if they supported policy objectives and rational allocation of resources. By focusing on these two points and then looking at the events which led up to the Second World War, we can look at the actual steps Hitler and Mussolini undertook to support their objectives.

### Hitler: Leadership by Chaos

We have the power. Today nobody can offer us any resistance. But now we must educate the German man for this new State. . . . A gigantic project lies ahead.<sup>2</sup>

Adolf Hitler

Despite his spectacular rise to power, Hitler faced significant challenges. His overwhelming desire to free Germany from the restraints of Versailles were but one of his many ambitions. Driven by his racial philosophy, Hitler sought to fundamentally change German society and free it of foreign elements.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, better than any of his political contemporaries, Hitler understood the psychological aspect of the Great Depression and its effect on Germany.<sup>4</sup> After seizing power Hitler's initial efforts were focused on full employment programs and revitalizing the economy. His ambitious programs, whether economic, diplomatic or military, had significant obstacles.

Nowhere were these challenges more apparent than in the military. German remilitarization proceeded at an unprecedented pace.<sup>5</sup> The challenges on undertaking remilitarization after a fifteen-year period of disarmament were unprecedented. Further complicating the issue was the total absence of any preparatory work to support the scale and speed of Hitler's rearmament program.<sup>6</sup> There would be significant organizational challenges associated with an undertaking of this magnitude.

The biggest challenge facing Germany in the 1930s was Hitler himself. Best stated by General Walter Warlimont, who had the opportunity to observe Hitler closely: "Hitler by his nature worked in a disorderly manner and was adverse to anything institutionalized."<sup>7</sup> He viewed the challenges facing Germany in terms of psychology and propaganda.<sup>8</sup> Hitler was masterful at carefully crafting a devious diplomatic and domestic

policy to mask his true intent--*Lebensraum*. He kept his opponents off balance to achieve his short-term aims. By his nature, however, Hitler was more apt to visualize the end result and be less concerned about details. The only area where Hitler had a deep grasp of details was in his architectural ambitions, which appealed to his artistic nature.<sup>9</sup>

Hitler preferred overlapping authority and duplication of effort. Germany's organizational dysfunctionality would grow as his programs grew in scope during the 1930s. On this issue, Hitler stated: "People must be allowed friction with one another; friction produces warmth, and warmth energy."<sup>10</sup> By creating friction and chaos, Hitler ensured a system where no one individual would establish a power base capable of threatening him.<sup>11</sup>

Hitler's leadership style had significant consequences on Germany's ability to meet its goals. First, it was almost impossible for the military to plan effectively, since Hitler was unable to clearly state his long-term objectives and resorted to devious methods to mask his true intent. Second, his "divide and conquer" methods ensured friction among numerous and growing bureaucratic interests.<sup>12</sup> These bureaucracies were led by ambitious men bent on their own aggrandizement.<sup>13</sup> Lastly, while he had a grasp of his opponents' psychological weaknesses, his lack of detailed knowledge in military matters would have dire consequences when he assumed direct control over the military.

#### Organizing for the Next War: Bureaucratic Fiefdoms under Der Führer

Our high command organization in the Second World War is more idiotic than the most capable General Staff officer could invent, if he received the task to create the most senseless wartime high command structure he could.<sup>14</sup>

Count Claus Schenk von Stauffenberg



Prior to the Second World War, Hitler's relationship with the military went through two stages, the initial period after assuming power in 1933 and the second when he took command of the Armed Forces on 4 February 1938.<sup>15</sup> The initial stage introduced the remilitarization of Germany. Hitler worked to create the domestic and international conditions to facilitate German rearmament. During this stage Hitler maintained a laissez faire approach to the actual buildup. The military grew from a force of 115 thousand to a modern peacetime force of 1.1 million men with wartime strength of 4.5 million.<sup>16</sup> While these numbers are impressive, Hitler's lack of clear objectives or time frames resulted in the three services developing their own, uncoordinated plans.<sup>17</sup>

During the initial period, a significant amount of friction grew between the elements within the military. The friction not only resulted from resource competition, but over the question of command. This problem centered on the relationship between the Armed Forces High Command, or *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht (OKW)*, and the rest of the services, rivalries between the services themselves and the influence of nonmilitary elements.

Germany had studied the problems associated with joint commands.<sup>18</sup> Appointed Reich Defense Minister in 1933, General Werner von Blomberg, sought to create a unified command with authority over the services. This command, which would later be known as the OKW, combined the functions of the Reich War Ministry while having Service representation. Blomberg also envisioned this command having authority over economics, propaganda and civil defense. In effect, Blomberg envisioned a Supreme Command directly leading the war effort.<sup>19</sup>

The creation of the OKW presented several problems. Most notably, this ran directly against the independence of the services. Again, Warlimont puts this succinctly:

The Commanders-in-Chief of the Army, the Navy and the Air Force, who had hitherto wielded independent authority in their own spheres, in particular in that of operations, had to renounce a substantial part of their prerogatives in favor of the superior commander now to be interposed between them and the Head of State. A further consequence was that the Commanders-in-Chief of the services found themselves pushed a whole level down in the military hierarchy . . .<sup>20</sup>

Blomberg's initiatives ran counter to the traditional power the navy exercised over purely naval issues and the growing power of the newly independent air force, or *Luftwaffe*. The strongest opponent to the OKW, however, was the army.

As the predominant service, the army and its venerated General Staff, now designated as the *Oberkommando der Heeres (OKH)*, had traditionally exercised strategic decision making in Germany. The Chief of the General Staff, Lieutenant General Ludwig Beck, believed that military strategy should no longer encompass military issues, but also include political, economic and cultural perspectives.<sup>21</sup> The army had also taken the lead in exercising the war effort during the First World War.<sup>22</sup> Focused with transforming the pre-Hitler *Truppenamt* into a regenerated Army General Staff, and faced with the OKW's encroachment into its strategic decision-making role, the army became OKW's fiercest opponent.

Compounding rearmament was the army's strenuous competition from the navy and the *Luftwaffe*.<sup>23</sup> The lack of direction and massive rearmament affected the services in unique ways. For the navy, while the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935 had been a success for Hitler, he did not use this opportunity to define the German Navy's future role. More importantly, this agreement stated that Germany would maintain a navy with limited capability. This agreement and the lack of strategic direction did not lead the

navy to examine the nature of a possible conflict with Great Britain. The lack of clarity, the long lead time associated with naval force construction and competition for limited resources resulted in the German Navy being ill prepared for war in 1939.<sup>24</sup> When the war started, the head of the German Navy, Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, commented on Germany's naval rearmament and readiness by stating "the little that is finished or will be finished in time, can only go down fighting honorably."<sup>25</sup>

The status of the *Luftwaffe*, its relationship with the OKW and the other services regarding strategic decision making and rearmament was totally unique. Field Marshal Hermann Göring was not only the head of the *Luftwaffe*, but second only to Hitler in terms of influence. He also had a powerful position as the "Plenipotentiary of the Four Year Plan."<sup>26</sup> In this capacity, Göring had an almost undisputed voice in resource allocation and could issue orders to the *Wehrmacht*. This made joint integration impossible.<sup>27</sup>

Lack of integration had significant consequences. As head of the newest service, Göring also sought to model the *Luftwaffe* along Nazi lines. He was able to recruit a significant number of highly capable officers from the army.<sup>28</sup> As a result of overlapping responsibilities, economic bottlenecks and Göring's influence, the *Luftwaffe* had difficulty in managing technological development and industrial planning.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, as with the German Navy, the *Luftwaffe* suffered from the strategic vacuum, which led to it being ill prepared against Great Britain in 1939.<sup>30</sup>

## The Waffen SS: Germany's Fourth Service

But it was with Himmler that the SS became the extraordinary body of men, devoted to an idea, loyal unto death. I see in Himmler our Ignatius of Loyola.<sup>31</sup>

Adolf Hitler

One of the first issues Hitler faced when he assumed power in 1933 was to control the unruly elements of the Nazi Party. This eventually led him to purge the *Sturm Abteilung (SA)*, which served as the Nazi Party militia, on 30 June 1934.<sup>32</sup> On 20 July 1934, however, a subsidiary organization known as the *Schutz Staffel (SS)* led by Heinrich Himmler was declared an independent organization by Hitler.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Himmler became the head of the *Geheime Staatspolizei*, or the *Gestapo*. This extended his control over all the state police forces throughout Germany.<sup>34</sup>

The SS's influence grew in the 1930s. The SS became Hitler's ideological arm within the armed forces. Fighting units, created as the *Waffen SS*, existed in parallel to the regular army. While tactically subordinate to the Army, the *Waffen SS* had their own command and control channels and effectively answered to Himmler.<sup>35</sup> Essentially, the SS became an elite force that embodied the principles of the Nazi movement.

As Himmler's power and influence grew, the SS became another competitor for scarce resources in conjunction with the other services. Overlapping responsibilities and alternate command and control mechanisms created further disorganization and inhibited resource allocation. Additionally, by having direct access to Hitler, Himmler as well as Göring could circumvent the formal military chain of command.<sup>36</sup>

### Hitler's Direct Control of the Military

Hitler's relationship with the military entered the second phase in 1937. The critical point occurred on 5 November, when Hitler revealed to a small circle his intention to pursue an aggressive war.<sup>37</sup> The nature of this meeting brought the unified opposition of von Blomberg, the Head of the OKW, and Colonel General Freiherr Werner von Fritsch, the Commander-in-Chief of the Army.<sup>38</sup> They were categorically opposed to operations against Czechoslovakia and stressed the inadequacy of the war supplies and the general state of military preparation.

Hitler waited for the right moment to quell the opposition. The circumstances came about in January 1938 when Hitler, Göring and Himmler forced Blomberg and Fritsch to resign.<sup>39</sup> Hitler took this opportunity to assume the role of "Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht*," while relegating the authority of the newly appointed General Wilhelm Keitel to a role of a coordinator.<sup>40</sup> He also had sixteen generals relieved of their commands while reassigning forty-four generals and numerous staff officers.<sup>41</sup> The end result was Hitler's encroachment into the inner working of the OKW, which in effect became his personal military staff. Additionally, the commanders-in-chief of the services could now interface directly with Hitler, totally circumventing the OKW and the purpose of having a single governmental body to direct strategic decision making.

In conclusion, German rearmament grew at impressive rates, especially when considering that it started in 1935 from scratch. By carefully seeking diplomatic opportunities, Hitler focused on short-term tactical gains, which began shifting the European balance-of-power. His effective use of propaganda, coupled with Germany's public policy of rearmament, created the perception of strength and invincibility.<sup>42</sup>

There were several factors that inhibited effective German strategic decision making and planning. First, the manner in which Hitler arrived at important decisions was by intuition. He was temperamentally not suited to provide the direction necessary for Germany to accomplish its goals. Best described by Joachim Fest: “The style of his rule has rightly been called permanent improvisation.”<sup>43</sup> Hitler knew his ultimate goal-- *Lebensraum*--but he was also aware that he could not publicly announce this as a long-term German aim. This fact, his penchant for secrecy and his preference for quickly seizing opportunities further limited his ability to provide direction to the *Wehrmacht*. It also limited the *Wehrmacht* to operational versus strategic planning.<sup>44</sup>

Second, the strategic decision-making apparatus developed during the 1930s was ill suited to support decision making and ensure a logical allocation of resources. The organization empowered to provide overall direction, the OKW, was circumvented at every opportunity. The OKH’s fight to preserve its historical position, the inter-service rivalries, Göring’s de facto position as the number two man in the Nazi Party and Himmler’s undue influence as the head of the SS would ensure any planning was disjointed and uncoordinated. These factors, along with what Geoffrey Megagee states as, “the general contempt for supporting staff functions,”<sup>45</sup> ensured that issues such as intelligence, logistics and personnel management received scant attention.

Lastly, Hitler destroyed the military’s independence when he assumed direct control in 1938. Hitler viewed the senior military leaders with contempt. Fest highlights this point when he stated: “For some years they (the military) had kept silent, obeyed and served. Now they were manifesting their true pusillanimous nature. They wanted

Germany's greatness, but without taking risks. They wanted rearmament but no war, Nazi order but not Nazi ideology."<sup>46</sup>

Hitler's "permanent improvisation," the chaotic decision-making apparatus and his contempt for the military ensured that erratic strategic guidance was continually out of step with stated policies. From 1938 onward, power in Germany was centered solely on Hitler.<sup>47</sup> He dominated strategic decision making, but did not allow his subordinates to develop strategic policy options. There were no deliberations over the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Hitler made the decisions and there was little discussion on determining the best course of action.<sup>48</sup> The reshuffle of the senior military leadership, the focus of the services on rearmament, the inter-service rivalry and the belief that Der Führer had control of the larger issues resulted in poor strategic planning.<sup>49</sup> In terms of collaborating with Italy, Hitler's temperament and Germany's chaotic strategic decision-making apparatus were ill suited to creating an environment that supported coalition initiatives. It would also ensure that Mussolini was continually one step behind his German partner.

#### Mussolini: Master of Illusion

The "March on Rome" in 1922 brought Mussolini to power with great fanfare; however, his rise to power was not revolutionary. It was also largely a myth.<sup>50</sup> Denis Mack Smith identified Mussolini's greatest quality that played a critical role in his rise to power: "His lack of attachment to principle was an important ingredient to success."<sup>51</sup> Mussolini was a man of contradictions. At various times in his life he was a socialist then a fascist, an anti-war demonstrator then an imperialist, an admirer of Lenin then an anti-communist.<sup>52</sup> His faithlessness led him to change his stance on any number of issues.

This served him well in attaining and keeping power. His lack of attachment, however, was also his greatest weakness in trying to implement policies to support his long-term strategy.

As with any dictator, Mussolini's goal was to remain in power. He faced, however, two major challenges when trying to implement his plans.<sup>53</sup> First, he was able to attain power only with the cooperation of powerful Italian interests. Second, his lack of principle and changing views made it difficult to ascertain which policy he wanted implemented. These two factors seriously hampered Italy's strategic decision-making apparatus.

Mussolini was meticulous in his work. A journalist by background, Mussolini was used to reviewing and editing prose. Mussolini also had a keen sense of political intuition and a flair for propaganda. He easily stepped into the chief executive role, reviewing documents and managing a tight schedule.<sup>54</sup> In their work habits, Mussolini and Hitler were opposites, but the end result was the same. Hitler was disorganized and disliked institutions, but had a clear long-term aim. Mussolini was organized and comfortable with bureaucracies, but his position on an issue depended to whom he was talking.<sup>55</sup> The end result from both was contradictory guidance.

Another similarity between Mussolini and Hitler was their need for overlapping responsibility and duplication. This ensured organizational bureaucracies that kept each in power. Mussolini and his fascists came to power as a result of demonstrating the ability to suppress the left wing opposition in conjunction with the industrialists and landowners. The fascists, however, were also dependent on the conservative elements, namely the king, the army, known in Italy as the *Regio Esercito*, the Roman Catholic



Church and the industrial concerns.<sup>56</sup> During his dictatorship, Mussolini had to compromise with these institutions and although his power grew over time, his control would never be total.

Mussolini's control over the government grew from 1922 to 1940, but was never complete. Authority also came from King Vittorio Emmanuele III, who remained the head of state. Best highlighted by Frederick Deakin: "Throughout the whole system of government ran a basic dualism of authority and activity."<sup>57</sup> The maze of bureaucracy with alternate lines of control limited the degree of Mussolini's totalitarianism.

Mussolini's leadership style, like Hitler's, deeply influenced Italy's ability to attain its goals. First, while meticulous in his work habits, Mussolini was prone to bureaucratic intrigue. He deviously maneuvered and had to balance various interests to accomplish his goals. As a result, Mussolini's policy guidance could be extremely contradictory. Second, he had to compromise with various government institutions. The combination of these factors resulted in contradictory guidance from Mussolini to institutions that he could not control and which maintained their own vested interests. This would have catastrophic consequences in Italy's ability to effectively wage war.

#### Organizing for the Next War: A Compromise of Interests

In Rome there are three of us, myself, the King, and the Pope.<sup>58</sup>

Mussolini

As with Germany, Italy's strategic decision-making apparatus will be judged by using Matloff and Snell's premise that a corollary exists between planning and effective strategic decision making. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini's control over the government grew

incrementally. It stemmed from having to court the vested interests that helped him seize power. While Mussolini's power increased over time, it was never total.

The organization that Mussolini had to carefully manipulate was the *Regio Esercito*. The *Regio Esercito* played a pivotal role in allowing Mussolini's March on Rome. In 1922 Mussolini worked an agreement with the *Regio Esercito*. By helping the Fascists to power, Mussolini would grant the army total autonomy.<sup>59</sup> The preeminent and autonomous role of the *Regio Esercito*, with its monarchical ties, within the Fascist regime would limit Mussolini's ability to control the institution.

Mussolini increased his personal control over the armed forces on 6 February 1927, when he assumed the role as minister of the three branches of service. The implementation of Royal Decree Law number 68 gave Mussolini the legal basis for deciding and planning campaigns.<sup>60</sup> This maneuver also limited the role of the Chief of the Supreme General Staff, or *Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale*. The passage of this law effectively turned the *Stato Maggiore Generale* into Mussolini's personal military staff.<sup>61</sup> When it came to military affairs, however, Mussolini unlike Hitler was not self-assured.<sup>62</sup> Mussolini would continue to rely upon *Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale*, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, to provide him with military advice. Despite his diminished role, this relationship placed Badoglio in a position of influence with Mussolini,

Mussolini's direct control of the services and his dependence on Badoglio had several consequences. First, Mussolini personally focused on military details and the outward form of military affairs. Without genuine self-assuredness, however, it was often not clear what he wanted to accomplish. Most importantly perhaps, Mussolini understood that by having direct control, he could forestall an independent power base by inhibiting

genuine cooperation between the services.<sup>63</sup> Giorgio Rochat concluded: “Mussolini subordinated Italian military policy to the maintenance of his personal position as a leader. . . . The success of il Duce was always sought on a short-term basis, aiming at the momentary crowd pleasing propaganda triumph, and never the real military preparedness of the nation.”<sup>64</sup>

Second, it was impossible for the *Stato Maggiore Generale* to implement genuine cooperation between the services. The *Regio Esercito*'s pre-eminence and its relationship with the monarchy ensured its continued independence from Mussolini. It also gave the *Regio Esercito* a disproportionate vote in planning and resource allocation. Lastly, the association of the Italian Air Force, or *Regia Aeronautica*, with the Fascist Party inhibited genuine cooperation with the other services.

In circumstances similar to the creation of the OKW in Germany, Badoglio assumed the leadership of the new *Stato Maggiore Generale* on 4 May 1925.<sup>65</sup> He also served as the Chief of Staff for the *Regio Esercito*.<sup>66</sup> In theory, the *Stato Maggiore Generale*, was empowered to coordinate the activities of the services. The *Stato Maggiore Generale* also had other functions. It had a stated responsibility to coordinate military-industrial research via the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche*, or National Research Council, to improve weapon's efficiency and designs.<sup>67</sup> The *Stato Maggiore Generale* was also charged with executing the directives of the Supreme Defense Commission, or *Commissione Suprema di Difesa*, and the Committee for the Preparation for National Mobilization to ensure efficiency in resource allocation and armaments.<sup>68</sup>

As with Germany, the individual services refused to part with their traditional prerogatives. Badoglio's role as the *Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale*, while also serving as the Army Chief of Staff, ensured the *Regio Esercito's* predominant role in decision making. Exercising disproportionate power, Badoglio got Mussolini to limit the Supreme Defense Commission's hold over resource allocation, effectively increasing the *Regio Esercito's* share of resources.<sup>69</sup>

Mussolini and the Undersecretary of War, General Ugo Cavallero, effectively cut Badoglio's power on 6 February 1927, when they split the functions of the *Capo di Stato Maggiore Generale* and Army Chief of Staff.<sup>70</sup> He remained the head of the *Stato Maggiore Generale*, but was only allowed a small staff.<sup>71</sup> Additionally, information access from the services came only through Cavallero's office.<sup>72</sup> Under these contradictory conditions, Badoglio remained il Duce's chief military expert until he resigned in 1941.

As with the German Army, the *Regio Esercito* continued to exercise a predominant role despite the imposition of the *Stato Maggiore Generale*. Unlike Hitler, Mussolini never exercised total control. The *Regio Esercito* maintained its monarchical ties to King Vittorio Emanuele III, who was the constitutional head of the armed forces. The *Regio Esercito* also had the historical role in defending the political order.<sup>73</sup> After Mussolini's assumption of power, the *Regio Esercito* assumed control of the Fascist squads, or *squadristi*. The *Regio Esercito* became the ultimate guarantor of the regime, unlike Germany where the SS assumed that function from the German Army.<sup>74</sup>

The Italian Army General Staff exercised the predominant planning functions given the limited role of the *Stato Maggiore Generale*. The *Regio Esercito's* historical

roots and views after the First World War gave it an extremely conservative and defensive outlook.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, unlike the German Army General Staff that valued officer rotations into the field, the Italian General Staff remained an insular group separated from the mainstream army. It prized obedience over initiative and was prone to issuing detailed, vice mission-oriented, orders.<sup>76</sup> There was an inherent mismatch between il Duce's aggressive inclinations and the conservatism of the *Regio Esercito*.<sup>77</sup> This mismatch would have disastrous consequences during the Second World War.

From 1936 to 1938, there was an eclipse in the *Regio Esercito's* conservatism. Combat experiences in Ethiopia and Spain led to General Alberto Pariani's creation of a new doctrine based on rapid movement of motorized infantry supported by air power. This doctrine, or *guerra di rapido corso*, was envisioned for use in North Africa.<sup>78</sup> It supported Mussolini's aggressive outlook and Mediterranean strategy.<sup>79</sup> In a conflict with the Western powers, Pariani envisioned Germany attacking France, while Italy conducted a rapid strike into Egypt to secure the Suez Canal with the aerial bombardment of Malta.<sup>80</sup> At the height of Italo-German cooperation Pariani commented: "The war will be won in the Suez and in Paris."<sup>81</sup> The *Anschluss* in 1938, however, completely reversed this strategy. The *Regio Esercito's* focus, and indeed Mussolini's, quickly reverted to defense and focused on protecting the Alps.<sup>82</sup>

The *Regia Aeronautica's* role within the armed services was similar to the *Luftwaffe*. Mussolini wanted a fascist service within the armed forces.<sup>83</sup> Unlike the defensive orientation of the *Regio Esercito*, Italian airmen led the early employment and innovative use of air power in Libya during 1911 and 1912. The experiences in Libya and the First World War led to Giulio Douhet's work on strategic airpower.<sup>84</sup> Revolutionary

in its scope, Douhet saw airpower as the ideal weapon for Italy. Airpower could circumvent Italy's weakness in raw materials and geography by attacking enemy population and industrial centers. The ensuing attack would spread mass panic and result in a quick victory.<sup>85</sup>

On 28 March 1923, Mussolini designated the *Regia Aeronautica* as the third military service.<sup>86</sup> In November 1926, Mussolini appointed the noted fascist, Italo Balbo as the head of the *Regia Aeronautica*. Balbo's ambition to create a premier service and his close personal ties with Douhet led to a fixation on strategic aerial concepts.<sup>87</sup> The fame of Douhet's work, Balbo's effectiveness and the series of propaganda flights which broke several long distance records between 1927 and 1929 brought the *Regia Aeronautica* to the forefront of Italy's military.<sup>88</sup>

The independence of the *Regia Aeronautica* also brought it in conflict with the army and navy. Cooperation with the *Regio Esercito* was limited by the fixation on strategic airpower concepts. As Brian Sullivan pointed out, "Balbo influenced his service to prepare for a very different vision of future war, with virtually no thought of coordination."<sup>89</sup> Additionally, in 1939, the Italian Navy, or *Regia Marina*, was seriously weakened by the air force's influence when Mussolini cut the funding for aircraft carriers.<sup>90</sup> The lack of an independent naval air arm would seriously hamper Italy's efforts to control its sea lines of communications.<sup>91</sup>

#### Nonmilitary Interests: The Roman Catholic Church and the Industrial Sector

Mussolini had to contend with two other major interests, both of which were outside his direct control, the Roman Catholic Church and the industrial sector. Both

these interests did not exercise direct influence in Italy decision making. Their influence, however, was due to their unique relationship within Italy and the Fascist Party.

Mussolini was not particularly fond of religion. Before coming to power Mussolini was an avowed anti-cleric and had published a pamphlet titled, *God does not exist*.<sup>92</sup> The Roman Catholic Church was also disturbed by fascism's aggressive and violent methods. In a greater context, the Roman Catholic Church had also been at odds with successive Italian governments, since the Church lost its territories around Rome in 1870. In effect, the Church had been at odds with Italy since she became a nation.

Mussolini perceived the impasse between Italy and Church as an opportunity.<sup>93</sup> He realized that the Italian people, who were predominantly Catholic, had deep ties with the Church. An agreement between a Fascist government and the Church would benefit Mussolini for two reasons. First, such an agreement would greatly enhance the prestige and popular support of the Fascist government. Second, an agreement with the Church would in effect give Fascism a stamp of approval. Mussolini and the Vatican were able to reach an agreement, which resulted in the signing of the concordat in February 1929.<sup>94</sup>

Mussolini's relationship with the Roman Catholic Church was, however, a two-edged sword. The Church was increasingly critical of Mussolini in the late 1930s. When Mussolini implemented the anti-Semitic laws in November 1938 over protests from the King and many fascists, Pope Pius XI was quick to denounce the adherence to the "pagan state ideology."<sup>95</sup> Additionally, the Roman Catholic Church was critical of Nazi Germany. In January 1937, Pope Pius XI's had denounced Nazi Germany, equating it with communist Russia in terms of ideology and moral offensiveness.<sup>96</sup> Mussolini's actions directly resulted in the Church's criticism. This led to increased opposition

against the Fascist regime. More importantly, being a predominantly Catholic country, many questioned the validity of having a friendship with Germany.<sup>97</sup>

Italy's industrial sector and the corporate economy was the last area that exerted considerable influence in Italy. Mussolini and his Fascists assumed power in 1922, largely to prevent a left-wing revolution.<sup>98</sup> Under the Fascist concept, the economy would be organized by the producers and workers, but under the direction and control of the state.<sup>99</sup> After attaining power, however, Mussolini reduced the role of the state in the economy.<sup>100</sup> Mussolini protected the interests of Italian industry during the worldwide economic boom from 1923 to 1926. By 1927, however, speculation resulted in the Italian industrial concerns to become increasingly dependent on State support.<sup>101</sup>

Mussolini grew closer to the industrial sector. On 3 April 1926, he enacted a new law that created a corporate economy. It consisted of a Ministry of Corporations, National Council of Corporations and an extensive bureaucracy that controlled numerous industrial and worker organizations.<sup>102</sup> With the Great Depression of 1929, Mussolini enacted protectionist measures to prop up Italian industry and prevent an economic collapse. This also resulted in lower export levels.<sup>103</sup> Severe economic conditions led to the formation of cartels, especially in the steel, mining and armaments sectors. By 1935, 25 percent of Italy's companies controlled 95 percent of the capital.<sup>104</sup>

Mussolini's foreign policy brought his relationship with industry even closer. The Ethiopian conflict and the resulting economic sanctions intensified Italy's drive to achieve self sufficiency, or autarky, in raw materials. Italian cartels benefited from this policy through their close relationship with the state.<sup>105</sup> The result of trying to achieve autarky was lower foreign trade levels and using Italian exchange reserves to support the



Ethiopian and Spanish adventures. Mussolini's autarky policy also had significant political consequences. The economic barriers and the closed currency system not only cut Italy off from the international free trade system, but tied Italy to Germany's barter system of trade.<sup>106</sup>

Lastly, Mussolini's unique relationship with Italian industry had two long-term consequences. First, the corporate bureaucracy that was formed to direct the economy was inefficient and served its own ends.<sup>107</sup> The system that was developed met the needs of Italian industry, but did not provide Italy's military what it needed. Two examples of this problem are best highlighted by Lucio Ceva:

Starting from 1927, the choice of new aircraft was no longer made by the most appropriate scientific body--the air force's own engineers--but by new bodies appointed by the minister on the basis of personal interests. Industry was allowed to practice the huge tolerance (1 percent) on the weight of ordnance which, as a matter of fact, nullified the military power of the navy. This is why, during three years of war in the Mediterranean, no enemy ship was hit by Italian high-caliber shells.<sup>108</sup>

Corporatist's inefficiencies also led to missed opportunities. There was never a structured policy from the *Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche* to promote collaboration between Italian industry and its scientific community. As a result, Italy did not capitalize on Enrico Fermi's preliminary work on nuclear fission in 1934 or the scientific community's advances in radar technology,<sup>109</sup> both of which were critical in the Second World War.<sup>110</sup>

Second, while there were similar corporate inefficiencies in Italy and Germany, the effect of corporatism on Italy was more substantial. The size, capacity and vulnerability of Italian industry, coupled with an inefficient bureaucratic structure, did not support the military.<sup>111</sup> Best summarized by John Gooch: "Italy did not lack the

means to produce an effective military force. . . . It has been suggested that she poured money into the wrong things--sports stadiums, barracks, and splendid parades.”<sup>112</sup>

Mussolini’s set of circumstances, while much different than Hitler’s, resulted with the same effects. Mussolini was able to attain power, but then had to work with the interests that made his rise possible. While better organized and attuned to working within a bureaucratic environment than Hitler, Mussolini resorted to intrigue and maneuver to gradually increase his power. His machinations, coupled with the latent power of the monarchy, lead to a duality of control, especially with the *Regio Esercito*, which was the ultimate guarantor of the system.

By having to increase his power gradually, Mussolini’s effect on Italian institutions was slower and never complete. The *Regio Esercito* maintained its autonomy, which limited Mussolini’s influence. The creation of the *Regia Aeronautica* along Fascist lines created an inherent disconnect within the armed forces. Mussolini’s alienation of the Catholic Church led to increased opposition. His corporate agenda resulted in economic corruption and inefficiency, something that Italy could ill afford.<sup>113</sup>

There were two key factors regarding Italian strategic decision making and planning to support policy. First, Mussolini’s direct involvement by assuming the War, Air and Naval ministries led to inefficiencies. His meddling, the *Regio Esercito*’s inherent conservatism and the weak joint mechanisms resulted in limited cooperation between the services. Second, his commitment to a course of action was transitory. He did not push or gear Italian industry to support the development of an overall Mediterranean strategy. Fear over Germany’s annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia

reaffirmed Italy's defensive stance. Mussolini's vacillation, the role of vested interests, and corruption directly resulted in Italy being ill prepared for a future war.

Table 1. Strategy and Organizational Overview

	Strategy and Policy	Organizational Structure
German	<p>Military – Remilitarization focused on rapid tactical campaigns</p> <p>Economic – Autarky</p> <p>Diplomatic – Short, tactical gains focused on a long-term end – <i>Lebensraum</i></p>	<p>Flat organization – Der Führer sole source of strategic direction</p> <p>Weak collaborative structure – highly compartmentalized</p> <p>Limited strategic military focus – high technical focus</p>
Italian	<p>Military – Traditional conservatives versus a small, but vocal group of innovative theorists</p> <p>Economic – Autarky</p> <p>Diplomatic – Maneuver between two power blocs to gain limited advantages – <i>Politica del peso determinante</i></p>	<p>Dualism – Il Duce provides strategic direction, but monarchy still influential</p> <p>Weak collaborative structure – highly bureaucratized</p> <p>Military strategic focus shifts between defense in the north to offensive minded in support of imperialistic aims</p>

### The Road to War (1936-1939)

The application of force to further or protect national interests requires efficiency on both sides of the dividing line between soldiers and civilians. Political direction must be clear and calculated; the military instrument must be effective; it is for this reason that strategy can appropriately be labeled as a fusionist activity.<sup>114</sup>

John Gooch

The manner in which Hitler and Mussolini arrived at important decisions and the decision-making apparatus that supported them was disjointed and chaotic. While their governments were dissimilar in many ways, the commonalities that existed played a

greater role in producing strategic chaos. Unclear strategic guidance, overlapping levels of responsibility and weak organizational structures were but some of the common factors that plagued Italy and Germany.

Despite these inefficiencies, Italy and Germany presented a seemingly menacing coalition leading up to the Second World War. Their involvement in Spain presented a unified front against the perceived Soviet encroachment in Western Europe. Their anti-bolshevist solidarity found its expression in the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1937. Germany's seizure of Austria and Czechoslovakia, with Italy's acquiescence and Italy's annexation of Albania, lent credence to a totalitarian coalition bent on conquest. The Pact of Steel in 1939 solidified this perception.

The path leading to the Second World War, however, was not direct. The significant geopolitical events that affected the Axis coalition can be grouped into three areas: Spain; German expansion into Austria and Czechoslovakia; and the Polish crisis. The rest of this chapter will focus on these events to ascertain the level of common action and collaboration between the two countries.

### The Spanish Civil War

The overall purpose of Italy and Germany's involvement in the Spanish Civil War was to support a right-wing military uprising led by General Francisco Franco against the Spanish Republic that was heavily influenced by the Soviet Union. In July 1936, General Francisco Franco requested German and Italian assistance to circumvent the Spanish government's blockade and to airlift Spanish troops from Spanish Morocco to Spain. Hitler, over the objections of his foreign minister and senior military advisers, decided to support General Franco.<sup>115</sup> Mussolini, initially hesitant about supporting the rebellion,

changed his stance when he found out that France was intending to support the Spanish Republic.<sup>116</sup>

The initial Italian and German commitment was limited. Italy sent twelve Savoia-S81 bombers<sup>117</sup> and Germany ten JU-52 and six HE-51 fighters.<sup>118</sup> Their support played a critical role in ferrying Franco's forces across the Straits of Gibraltar and supporting his drive towards Madrid. The level of Italian and German commitment increased when Franco's forces were held outside Madrid. Initial collaboration between Italy and Germany occurred on 4 August 1936, when Admiral Wilhelm Canaris, Chief of the *Abwehr*, or German military intelligence, flew to Rome to meet with his counterpart, General Mario Roatta, for the purposes of coordinating support to Franco. In late August 1936, both countries agreed to send an Italo-German military mission to serve at Franco's headquarters.<sup>119</sup>

The Spanish Civil War became increasingly "internationalized" as the fight around Madrid increased. The Spanish Republic received significant amounts of aid from the Soviet Union and volunteers from numerous other countries. Given the level of international support and the ideological nature of the conflict, Mussolini and Hitler recognized that their efforts could not result in failure.<sup>120</sup> During the later part of 1936, Italy and Germany increased the level of military support to Franco.

In December 1936, there was a change in German policy. On 6 December, il Duce called for a conference to discuss an increase in the level of commitment. Admiral Canaris, representing Germany, stated that German air and naval units would continue to support General Franco. Canaris, however, was noncommittal when pressed about ground troops. He stated that Germany was unlikely to commit ground troops due to

rearmament programs and a possible conflict with Great Britain and France.<sup>121</sup> The effective outcome of this meeting was a significantly increased Italian commitment in Spain, while Germany maintained a steady force level with a limited commitment.

Both dictators agreed that the rebellion must not fail. By late 1936, however, Hitler gave Mussolini the lead in Spain. Hitler reaffirmed that Germany's interests were not in the Mediterranean.<sup>122</sup> Additionally, Italy had been nervous about the level and success of Germany's intervention in Spain.<sup>123</sup> The Italian perspective on Germany was reflected in January 1937, when the Italian Foreign Minister, Galeazzo Ciano stated: "If we close the door of Spain to the Russians, only to open it to the Germans, we can kiss our Latin and Mediterranean policy goodbye."<sup>124</sup>

Despite the hidden agendas, the Italo-German intervention in the Spanish Civil War represented a high point in their collaboration. Both countries came together for common action. The high level intermediaries between the two dictators brought some measure of collaboration. There had also been discussion about establishing a combined Italo-German command in Spain although this became unnecessary with the limited commitment of German ground troops. Most importantly during this period, the Rome-Berlin Axis was formed during a meeting held between Ciano and Hitler on 24 October 1936. During this meeting, spheres of influence were delineated and areas for cooperation identified.<sup>125</sup>

The Italo-German intervention in Spain also illustrates a model for their future cooperation. Strategic coordination was promoted only at the highest levels – essentially by Mussolini and Hitler. Both countries had military representation on Franco's staff to facilitate collaborative measures. Despite instances of tactical cooperation, Italian and

German collaborative efforts in terms of strategy, operational design and campaign objectives were extremely limited.<sup>126</sup>

The consequences of the Italian and German involvement in Spain were mixed. Despite the ideological unity and purpose, their motives were diametrically opposed. Mussolini's intervention in Spain grew over time. He sought a quick Italian victory, but once large numbers of Italian forces were committed, he could ill afford to damage his prestige. Mussolini saw Italy's intervention as part of his Mediterranean strategy, while molding the warlike character of the Italian people.<sup>127</sup>

Hitler's intervention in Spain was for a different purpose. While in agreement with Mussolini about the ideological nature of the Spanish Civil War, Hitler was not interested in a quick victory. Hitler's strategy can be best summarized when he stated: "My decision is founded on another train of thought, our only interest in Spain is that Franco should not lose. On the other hand, I am not interested in that he should finish quickly. With the continued conflict in Spain, Europe will be interested in events there and be less concerned with Germany and my objectives."<sup>128</sup> Included in Hitler's assessment was Italy. The increased Italian commitment in Spain and the elusive victory ensured a long-drawn out war. It would also ensure Mussolini's attention would be focused on the Mediterranean and in conflict with Great Britain and France.<sup>129</sup>

#### Collaborated Axis Expansion? Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Albania

While the Spanish Civil War represented a convergence of Italian and German ideology and strategic cooperation, Germany's annexation of Austria in 1938 and Czechoslovakia in 1939 represents a total lack of collaboration. Mussolini's popularity in Italy decreased as a result of the *Anschluss*. His behavior and acquiescence to Germany's

annexation, which clearly affected Italian interests, was also opposed by many of Italy's military, fascist and governmental hierarchy. Among the opposition were King Vittorio Emanuele III and most of the senior military leadership.

Mussolini's behavior can be categorized as the result of two factors. First, his involvement in Spain limited his ability to forestall the German advance into Central Europe, an area of strategic Italian interest. Despite the Rome-Berlin Axis, Austria had remained the area of contention between the two countries.<sup>130</sup> In 1937, Italy's commitment in Spain increased significantly. In March 1937, the Italian military defeat at Guadalajara severely damaged Italian prestige. Describing Mussolini's attitude during this period, Mack Smith stated that "... ideological considerations swamped those of national interests."<sup>131</sup> During 1937, Italy was spending on average approximately 300 million lire monthly to support the Spanish effort.<sup>132</sup> Additionally, Mussolini increased the level of military commitment to include unrestricted submarine warfare. By September 1937, the Italian Navy, or *Regia Marina*, had sunk 200,000 tons of shipping.<sup>133</sup> Such actions also brought British and French enmity. As a result, with each confrontation Italy had with the Western powers, she also became more dependent on Germany for support. Hitler was also keenly aware of this.

Germany has . . . every reason for being gratified if Italy continues to interest herself deeply in the Spanish affair. The role played by the Spanish conflict as regards Italy's relations with France and England could be similar to that of the Abyssinian conflict, bringing out clearly the actual opposing interests of the powers and thus preventing Italy from being drawn into the net of the Western powers and used for their machinations.<sup>134</sup>

Second, Mussolini's visit to Germany in September 1937 greatly influenced his geopolitical outlook.<sup>135</sup> It proved to be a turning point between Italy's relationship with Germany and the Western democracies. Impressed by Germany's military might and



power, Mussolini began to turn increasingly pro-German in his outlook. He maintained that Italy would remain steadfast with Germany.<sup>136</sup> Mussolini also began to discuss whether this was Italy's moment to undertake the "ultimate gamble."<sup>137</sup> Pariani's new *guerra di rapido corso* was also prevalent during this period. Mussolini also took measures to model Italy along German lines. He introduced the *passo romano*, largely modeled after the German army's goose step. Additionally, on 7 November 1937, Italy became a signatory power to the Anti-Comintern Pact of 1936. Although not a military alliance, this pact placed Italy in concert with Germany and Japan.

Mussolini's visit to Germany had other consequences. Hitler took Mussolini's pro-German outlook as an indicator that Germany was free to move into Austria.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, on 7 November 1937, Mussolini told Ribbentrop that: "Italy's interest (in Austria) is no longer as lively as it was some years ago, for one thing because of Italy's imperialist development, which was now concentrating her interest in the Mediterranean and the Colonies."<sup>139</sup> After gaining last minute assurances from Mussolini that Italy would not intervene, German troops entered Austria on 12 March 1938.<sup>140</sup>

What Mussolini failed to realize was that Austria only represented one aspect of German expansion. In 1938, Hitler quickly increased German rhetoric and pressed German territorial claims to Czechoslovakia. Approximately 3.5 million Germans lived in Czechoslovakia in an area called the *Sudetenland*, which bordered Germany and was vital to Czechoslovakian defense. Hitler worked with the *Sudenten* Nazi's while applying pressure on the Czechoslovakian government to create the conditions for Germany's annexation. It also became apparent that Great Britain and France would acquiesce to German demands. In September 1938, the leaders of Germany, Italy, Great Britain and

France met in Munich. Much to Hitler's chagrin, Mussolini saw an opportunity to increase his role as a mediator and worked a compromise solution where the *Sudetenland* would become part of Germany.<sup>141</sup> The Munich agreement also guaranteed the sovereignty of the rest of Czechoslovakia. Hitler broke the Munich agreement when German troops occupied the rest of Czechoslovakia on 15 March 1939. As he failed to do with Austria, Hitler notified Mussolini until the last moment.

Hitler's seizure of Austria and Czechoslovakia extended his power into Central Europe. These acquisitions were also coincident with his consolidation of power over the *Wehrmacht*. German rearmament continued during this period, however, raw material shortages and the uncoordinated planning regarding prioritization between the services resulted in economic disruptions by 1937.<sup>142</sup> Hitler's seizure of Austria and Czechoslovakia secured additional resources to further his rearmament. Czechoslovakia also represented a turning point and Hitler's first mistake. While he achieved his end, Czechoslovakia was a departure from the careful and devious German foreign policy. There was no ambiguity that now Hitler was, as Fest states, the "universal enemy."<sup>143</sup>

Mussolini was critical to Hitler's efforts. Hitler was careful to court Mussolini, especially during the latter's trip to Germany, before moving into Austria. Additionally, Hitler knew that a successful German resolution in Czechoslovakia was only possible if Italy was closely aligned with Germany.<sup>144</sup> Hitler's ability to pull off a peaceful seizure of these two countries over the objections of his military, and with the concurrence of an ally that historically considered Austrian independence a vital interest is remarkable.

For Mussolini, Germany's seizure of Austria and Czechoslovakia, his adoption of anti-Semitic racial policies, and admiration for Germany made him increasingly

unpopular.<sup>145</sup> Mussolini viewed the alternatives, however, with disdain. Great Britain and France's appeasement policy in Munich, their feeble response over Ethiopia and Spain and their inability to counter Hitler's machinations resulted in Mussolini's contempt. His disillusionment with collective security<sup>146</sup> resulted in aggressive actions in Ethiopia and Spain while adopting a pro-German outlook.

Mussolini, however, continued to operate under Italy's *politica del peso determinante* to secure Italy the best possible deal. He sought Germany's support, but continued to make side deals with the Western powers, specifically Great Britain. Italy and Great Britain signed a "Gentleman's Agreement" on 2 January 1937 which recognized the vital interests of both countries in the Mediterranean.<sup>147</sup> On 1 April 1938, the Anglo-Italian Treaty recognized Italy's conquest of Ethiopia, contingent upon Italy's withdrawal from Spain.<sup>148</sup> Mussolini failed to realize, however, that the more duplicitous he became, the less credence the British placed on his word. Mussolini's seizure of Albania in April 1939, largely in response to Germany's seizure of Czechoslovakia and to serve as demonstration of Italy's ability for independent action, would further confirm Britain's suspicions. The end result was that Mussolini's ability to maneuver between the two camps would significantly decrease as Germany's strength and the Western powers changing attitude against appeasement increased.

What both dictators failed to realize was the change of attitude in Great Britain after Czechoslovakia.<sup>149</sup> Conditioned by their responses to Ethiopia, Spain, and Munich, Mussolini assumed Great Britain and France would continue to seek peace at any price. He thought he could continue to seek deals with the Western powers, while being able to control Hitler. Hitler also assumed a continued British and French appeasement policy.

He was aware of Germany's military and economic shortcomings. His concern was on tactical maneuvering, timing and setting the necessary conditions to achieve his immediate aims. Each gain was a stepping stone to enlarging German power and its economic base. In the unlikely event of hostilities, swift German military action would preclude a response from the Western democracies that would then see that any action would be a *fait accompli*. Again, as Fest states, this was Hitler's concept of "strategic blitzkrieg."<sup>150</sup> In essence, Hitler was proceeding via a series of steps towards war while Mussolini was maneuvering Italy to a greater position through limited aggression

#### Attempts at Collaboration

The differences between the Italian and German approaches regarding the events from 1935 to the signing of the Pact of Steel on 22 May 1939 were vast. Mussolini committed Italy to a long conflict in Spain which expended significant resources. Hitler focused on short, carefully orchestrated maneuvers aimed at seizing immediate tactical objectives. Mussolini pursued Italy's traditional balancing between two European power groups. Hitler sought to disrupt the European balance-of-power.

Despite their divergent approaches, Mussolini and Hitler could see that they were ultimately heading towards a conflict with the Western powers. Additionally, despite their collaboration and a formal military alliance when they signed the Pact of Steel, Italy and Germany did not use the period of 1935 to 1939 to jointly prepare for war. Their dictator's individual shortcomings, their country's strategic decision-making weaknesses coupled with the almost total lack of collaboration prior to the initiation of hostilities resulted in mutual distrust, disjointed efforts and several lost opportunities.

Italy and Germany's involvement in Spain represented a high point of collaboration, although their mutual involvement fell short of true collaboration. As seen previously, Hitler and Mussolini both agreed that Franco should not fail, however, their outlooks were totally different. Hitler wanted a protracted conflict while Mussolini was seeking a quick victory. There was limited cooperation at the tactical war fighting levels<sup>151</sup> and a brief discussion on developing a joint command.

Between 1934 and 1939, Italy and Germany also shared intelligence, although for limited and specific purposes. Starting in 1934, there were low-level signals intelligence exchanges between the German and Italian Navies regarding French Naval maneuvers.<sup>152</sup> At a higher level, Admiral Canaris and then Colonel Roatta met to resolve areas of mutual discord and to set boundaries in September 1935. The Italians were upset with Germany harboring ethnic Germans from the *Alto Adige*. Germany was upset at the Italian intelligence, or *Servizio Informazioni Militare's (SIM)*, employment of German Jews as secret agents. Both parties agreed to limit their activities and exchange intelligence information. Germany would pass intelligence to Italy regarding northern Europe and the Soviet Union. Italy would pass intelligence to Germany regarding the Balkans and the Mediterranean.<sup>153</sup> Another example of intelligence sharing to achieve a specific purpose was Ciano's disclosure of captured British embassy documents to Hitler in October 1936.<sup>154</sup> Ciano used these documents to elicit an anti-British outlook when Italy's involvement in Spain was increasing. Intelligence collaboration, however, would continue to be limited in scope.

From 1935 to 1939 there was almost a total absence of military-to-military exchanges and training. During the early stages of German rearmament, Italian pilots

provided training to the *Luftwaffe*. There were instances of German and Italian forces directly cooperating in Spain. This cooperation, however, represented only isolated instances derived from necessity and not true collaboration.

The most glaring example of the limited cooperation was the fact Italy and Germany held only one military conference before the signing of the Pact of Steel.<sup>155</sup> This conference was held on 4 and 5 April 1939, largely at the insistence of General Alberto Pariani, the Italian Undersecretary of State for War and Chief of Staff of the Army.<sup>156</sup> General Wilhelm Keitel, representing Germany, and General Pariani agreed that their respective armed forces were undergoing rearmament and refitting. Additionally, both agreed that hostilities should be avoided until 1943.<sup>157</sup> Of interesting note is General Keitel's memorandum to von Ribbentrop, which explained the position of the *Wehrmacht*. While the memorandum discusses cooperation in the field of intelligence sharing, communications, propaganda and raw materials, it also states there would be: "no local joint warfare under unified command but allocation of tasks and theaters of war for each state, within which areas it will act independently."<sup>158</sup> This Italo-German command arrangement was along the same lines as their experience in the Spanish Civil War. Additionally, there were no discussions on long-range strategic planning. Most importantly, Mussolini's impression of the meeting was that Italy would have four years of peace.<sup>159</sup>

### The Pact of Steel

In 1939 Mussolini understood that a conflict with the Western powers was inevitable. He was still hesitant about having a military alliance with Germany. He acknowledged, however, that Germany had virtually achieved a hegemonic status in

Europe.<sup>160</sup> Regarding the Italo-German relationship, Mussolini also realized that the balance-of-power had shifted towards Germany.<sup>161</sup> After much vacillation, Mussolini sought a closer relationship with Germany based on his interpretation of this power shift and his perception of continued British and French ineptitude.<sup>162</sup>

Mussolini had several expectations from a formal military alliance with Germany. He was convinced that nothing could disrupt Germany's position of strength in Europe and that he could restrain Hitler's aggressive tendencies for at least a period of three years.<sup>163</sup> Mussolini also saw an Italo-German military alliance as a counterbalance to the military pact between Great Britain and France, the rising warlike attitudes in the Western democracies and as deterrence to military preparations in the United States.<sup>164</sup>

Hitler's motivation for seeking a military alliance with Italy was very similar, but for a totally different purpose. He also sought to use an agreement with Italy as a counterbalance against Great Britain and France, however, only in support of achieving his immediate aims against Poland.<sup>165</sup> Securing a military alliance with Italy would be but one of the many steps he would take to isolate Poland. In the spring of 1939, Hitler was already secretly negotiating with the Soviet Union to set those conditions.<sup>166</sup>

Italy and Germany signed the Pact of Steel on 22 May 1939. To synopsise the pact, Article II emphasized the need for mutual consultation. Article III stated that both countries would render mutual support in the event of hostilities. Article IV laid the foundation for establishing military and economic cooperation. Despite these articles, the pact did not serve to join two like-minded powers. Hitler wanted an Italian alliance to support his aggressive actions. Mussolini wanted a German alliance to prevent Hitler's adventurism.

Mussolini hoped that the alliance would serve his purpose, a period of relative peace in order to rearm and curb Hitler's aggressive tendencies through use of the formal requirement for consultation.<sup>167</sup> Conversely, with the Pact of Steel, Hitler had attained his objective. He added another deterrent against the Great Britain and France. Elizabeth Wiskemann highlights the significance of the Pact of Steel: "In point in fact by this treaty Mussolini gave him carte blanche to attack Poland and to plunge into the Second World War."<sup>168</sup>

### Poland

Hitler did not waste time. On 23 May 1939, the day after the signing of the pact, Hitler held a meeting with his senior advisers and military hierarchy. In this meeting, he revealed his intention on attacking Poland. He expressly stated that the issue was not just seeking right to the Polish port of Danzig, which had a high population of ethnic Germans, but to seek *Lebensraum* in the east.<sup>169</sup> Additionally, Hitler did not explain any of Germany's commitments or obligations under the Pact of Steel, which called for mutual consultation with Italy. In fact, Hitler emphatically stated the need for secrecy. General Warlimont, one of the meeting's eyewitnesses, stated: "On 23 May he (Hitler) told his audience nothing of the important military clauses of the treaty. . . . Secrecy is an overriding prerequisite for success. Our objectives must be kept secret from Italy and Japan."<sup>170</sup>

Another important aspect of secrecy related to Hitler's dealing with his own advisers. During the summer of 1939, Hitler was also engaged in seeking an agreement with the Soviet Union. His aim was to effectively set the conditions for isolating Poland, while using the agreement as a further deterrent against the Western powers.<sup>171</sup> Germany



and the Soviet Union announced their Nonaggression Pact on 23 August 1939 in the midst of Germany's mounting pressure against Poland. This Nonaggression Pact was not disclosed to Italy, or even to Germany's senior military hierarchy.

Mussolini began to have second thoughts about committing Italy to a binding military alliance soon after the signing the Pact of Steel. On 30 May 1939, he gave General Ugo Cavallero, a letter personally deliver to Hitler. In Article III of the letter, known as the Cavallero Memorandum, Mussolini restated Italy's reasons why she would not be able to enter an armed conflict prior to 1942.<sup>172</sup> The Cavallero Memorandum emphasized Italy's terms regarding her need for peace which had been stated in the Pact of Steel and in the meetings leading up to the signing of the pact.

Throughout the summer of 1939, Mussolini began to suspect German intentions for Poland. The Italian ambassador in Berlin, Bernardo Attolico, reported from reliable sources that Germany intended to attack Poland.<sup>173</sup> His reports also included the assessment that Germany was discounting the Anglo-French pledge of support to Poland.<sup>174</sup> The Italian Foreign Minister Count Galeazzo Ciano, expressed his doubts on 3 July 1939, when he stated: "The international situation has darkened in these last few days because of the problem of Danzig. . . . The fact is that the Germans haven't said a word on the subject, which cannot be reconciled with the commitments of the pact."<sup>175</sup>

Mussolini now sought to restrain Hitler. He proposed to Hitler the need for an international conference to resolve the Polish crisis and for a meeting between the two dictators at the Brenner Pass. The meeting, which had been scheduled for 4 August was cancelled by Germany. Hitler suspected that Mussolini was attempting another peaceful resolution by having another Munich style conference.

German intentions were made unambiguous when Count Ciano met with the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, in Salzburg, Austria on 10 and 11 August and with Hitler in Berchtesgaden on 12 and 13 August 1939. Ribbentrop presented Germany's case and stated that the Polish issue was now intolerable and that Germany would not stand by while Polish authorities committed atrocities against ethnic Germans in Poland. Hitler told Ciano emphatically that the conflict would remain localized because Great Britain and France were too weak to attack.<sup>176</sup> Neither Hitler nor Ribbentrop disclosed the secret German-Soviet negotiations, which were underway at that time. Hitler also stated that he agreed in principle on the need to avoid a general war against the Western powers for two to three years. He reiterated, however, that the Polish situation would remain isolated and be resolved decisively. As a result, Germany would not need Italy's assistance under the present agreements of the Pact of Steel.

On 25 August 1939, Hitler requested Mussolini's understanding over the Polish situation. Mussolini, who had been vacillating between an anti versus pro-German stance, was influenced by Ciano who recommended that Mussolini use this opportunity to emphatically state Italy's unpreparedness to commit to war due to shortages in critical materiel and resources. Hitler replied that same day and requested a list of Italy's needs. On 26 August, after a meeting with the service chiefs of staff, a long and detailed list was forwarded to Hitler. Referencing the list, Ciano aptly states in his diary "It's enough to kill a bull . . . if a bull could read it."<sup>177</sup>

Hitler's reaction to Mussolini's inability to support Germany left him shaken.<sup>178</sup> He was, however, undeterred and gave the order to attack Poland on 1 September 1939.

The predominant Italian point of view in late August 1939 was best summarized by Mussolini himself:

Hitler and Ribbentrop do not understand anything! What they are doing is an exact repetition of the mistake made by William and his Chancellor in 1914 when they believed that England and France would condone the violation of Belgium. Now Hitler refuses our help unless he asks for it, if things go wrong. The Germans are terrible as enemies and impossible as friends.<sup>179</sup>

#### Conclusion: Styles, Structures, and Outlooks

The examination of Hitler and Mussolini's decision-making style and the strategic decision-making structures in both countries identified several disconnects. First, Hitler and Mussolini had difficulty in clearly delineating their strategic aims. Hitler could not reveal his true intentions until the later part of the 1930s. Mussolini's active mind was spent in pursuing too many aims at once.

Second, the strategic decision-making structures in both countries were not suited to support Matloff and Schnell's premise--that planning is a principal function necessary to support policy decisions. While logically structured according to an organizational chart, Hitler and Mussolini's "divide and conquer" management methods, the ambitious subordinates and powerful bureaucratic interests precluded any genuine cooperation. Maneuvering for power and posturing for influence were the norm.

Lastly, the combination of problems made the Italo-German alliance inherently dysfunctional. Italy and Germany undertook very few practical measures from 1936 to 1939 to improve the level of cooperation between the two countries. Cooperation was limited to discreet instances and only for a limited time and purpose. At a strategic level, cooperation was practically nonexistent and consisted only of high-level meetings

between the dictators and their foreign ministers. The military chiefs met only once and then only for two days.

The inherent environment in a dictatorship created an atmosphere of mistrust and friction. On an organizational level, the strategic decision-making apparatus in both countries reflected these factors. On a coalition level, these factors were multiplied exponentially. Additionally, the fundamental differences in strategic interests and outlooks resulted in a lack of understanding, disjointed efforts and a limited basis for a common strategy. Germany was on the strategic offensive and sought *Lebensraum*. Italy, despite Mussolini's pretensions, was on the strategic defensive after the Spanish Civil War. This resulted in fundamentally different expectations from the Pact of Steel. For Hitler, it was a tactical ploy to isolate Poland and serve as a deterrent to Great Britain and France. For Mussolini, it was a ploy to try and maintain influence over Germany while seeking a period of peace. The fundamental differences, the unraveling of the alliance after Germany's invasion of Poland and Italy's non-belligerency would seriously affect their efforts and create missed opportunities once Italy entered into the Second World War.

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<sup>1</sup>Maurice Matloff and Edwin M. Snell, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1953), ix.

<sup>2</sup>Joachim C. Fest, *Hitler*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1974), 417, quoting Adolf Hitler before a meeting with the SA on July 9, 1933.

<sup>3</sup>Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 316.

<sup>4</sup>Fest, 433.

<sup>5</sup>Wilhelm Diest, “The road to ideological war: Germany, 1918-1945,” in *The Making of Strategy*, ed., Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 373.

<sup>6</sup>*World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 4, *Part III: Command Structure*, Volume I: General Survey, 1-2.

<sup>7</sup>Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters, 1939-1945*, trans. R. H. Barry (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1964), 14.

<sup>8</sup>Fest, 417.

<sup>9</sup>Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 94; Joachim von Ribbentrop, *The Ribbentrop Memoirs*, trans. Oliver Watson (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1954), 29.

<sup>10</sup>Fest, 420, quoting Hitler in conversation with SS leader Walter Schellenberg on duplication of orders.

<sup>11</sup>Norman Rich, *Hitler's War Aims: Ideology, the Nazi State, and the Course of Expansion* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1973), 12.

<sup>12</sup>Ribbentrop, 30.

<sup>13</sup>Rich, 23. Rich provides an excellent description of a typical Nazi leader as “one with driving ambition, tempered by neither conscience nor scruple, with the added qualities of guile and political resourcefulness.”

<sup>14</sup>Ulrich de Maizière, *In der Pflicht. Lebensbericht eines deutschen Soldaten im 20. Jahrhundert* (Hereford: E. S. Mittler & Sohn, 1989), 74; quoted in Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), xiii.

<sup>15</sup>Gerhard Engel, “Adolph Hitler as Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces,” in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 4, Annex 15, 2-3.

<sup>16</sup>Diest, 373.

<sup>17</sup>Megargee, 30.

<sup>18</sup>Roland E. Krause, “The German Navy under Joint Command in World War II,” in *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 73, No. 9 (September 1947): 1029.

<sup>19</sup>Warlimont, 6.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>21</sup>Megargee, 22.

<sup>22</sup>Warlimont, 8.

<sup>23</sup>Diest, 375.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 377; Krause, 1032. Krause also highlights that Hitler assured the navy that that Great Britain would not have to be reckoned with prior to 1944-45. All naval construction programs were aimed with these dates in mind.

<sup>25</sup>Fest, quoting Grand Admiral Erich Raeder, 615. Fest further points out that in 1939, German naval reconstruction efforts had not even attained the strength permissible by the Anglo-German Naval Agreement of 1935.

<sup>26</sup>*World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 4, *Part III: Command Structure*, Volume I: General Survey, 4.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>28</sup>Walter Görnitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967), 276. Görnitz further states that the creation of the “Nazi” Air Force was a direct parallel to Italo Balbo’s creation of the Fascist Air Force in Italy. As a result of ideology, the air forces in both countries claimed leadership over the other services.

<sup>29</sup>Diest, 376.

<sup>30</sup>Herman Göring, “Interrogation of Reich Marshal Herman Göring,” interview by General Carl A. Spaatz and General Hoyt Vandenberg, Document N-9618, 10 May 1945. Commenting on the *Luftwaffe*’s lack of preparation after the war, Göring expressed his dissatisfaction on the JU-88’s performance in the Battle of Britain. He said that the JU-88 was originally a commercial airframe adapted for use against Great Britain; Wilhelm Diest, “The Rearmament of the Reich,” in *Germany and the Second World War*, vol. 1, trans. P. S. Falla, Dean S. McMurry, and Ewald Osers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 497-498. Diest gives an excellent synopsis of the numerous production alterations to the JU-88 and ME-210 beginning in December 1937. In the end, the continual modifications resulted in poor aircraft performance.

<sup>31</sup>Adolf Hitler, *Hitler’s Secret Conversations*, trans. Norman Cameron and R. H. Stevens (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Young, 1953), 178.

<sup>32</sup>Wolfram Wette, “Ideology, Propaganda, and Internal Politics as Preconditions of the War Policy of the Third Reich,” in *Germany and the Second World War*, vol. 1, trans. P. S. Falla, Dean S. McMurry, and Ewald Osers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 144.

<sup>33</sup>Görnitz, 289.

<sup>34</sup>Rich, 34.

<sup>35</sup>*World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 4, *Part III: Command Structure*, Volume I: General Survey, 47.

<sup>36</sup>Ribbentrop, 82. The influence of Himmler and the SS was all pervasive. Ribbentrop also describes how Himmler's influence extended to foreign affairs. Hitler would routinely act on detailed reports provided by Himmler on foreign intelligence from agents at German embassies abroad. Ribbentrop only became aware of these incidents after the fact.

<sup>37</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol 1 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 29. The substance of this meeting, which became known as the Hossbach Memorandum, delineated Hitler's long-term interests – specifically, “to secure and to preserve the racial community (*Volkmasse*) and to enlarge it.” Hitler wanted to enlarge Germany in Eastern Europe. See Document 19 for the entire substance of the meeting.

<sup>38</sup>Warlimont, 10, 13. When discussing Blomberg's replacement, Warlimont records a conversation between Hitler and Blomberg. Blomberg had been evasive with naming his replacement. Hitler asked “What is the name of that general who's been in your office up to now? Blomberg replied “Oh Keitel, there is no question of him; he is nothing but the man who runs my office.” At once, Hitler said “That is exactly the man I'm looking for.”

<sup>39</sup>Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 561. Hitler wanted to oust Blomberg and Fritsch as a result of their opposition to his aims as expressed in the 5 November 1937 meeting. Hitler, with the help of Göring and Himmler, helped to create the circumstances for the removal of Germany's two top ranked generals. Blomberg's newlywed wife was exposed as having been a prostitute. Fritsch was framed as being a homosexual. Both charges were later proven false.

<sup>40</sup>Warlimont, 12.

<sup>41</sup>John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918-1945* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1954), 372-373.

<sup>42</sup>Bullock, 548.

<sup>43</sup>Fest, 430.

<sup>44</sup>Ribbentrop, 29. Referring to Hitler's penchant for secrecy, Ribbentrop described Hitler as “unreasonably suspicious.” He also stated that Hitler was extremely susceptible to the influences of gossip and deception from subordinates; *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 4, *Part III: Command Structure*, Volume III, *Chapter B1a: Strategy and Operations*, 8. Hitler felt that long range planning inherently limited his freedom of action. The end result was ineffective long-range plans.

- <sup>45</sup>Megargee, xi.
- <sup>46</sup>Fest, 541.
- <sup>47</sup>R. J. B. Bosworth, *Mussolini* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 6.
- <sup>48</sup>Michael Geyer, "National Socialist Germany: The Politics of Information," in *Knowing One's Enemies: An Intelligence Assessment before the two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 343.
- <sup>49</sup>Diest, 380.
- <sup>50</sup>Adrian Lyttelton, *The Seizure of Power: Fascism in Italy 1919-1929* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 86.
- <sup>51</sup>Dennis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 1.
- <sup>52</sup>Mack Smith, 1-2.
- <sup>53</sup>Lyttelton, 94.
- <sup>54</sup>Bosworth, 7.
- <sup>55</sup>MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed 1939-1941: Politics and Strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.
- <sup>56</sup>Lucio Ceva, "The Strategy of Fascist Italy: A Premise," in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions 2*, Issue 3 (winter 2001): 47.
- <sup>57</sup>Frederick W. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1962), 32.
- <sup>58</sup>Knox, 9, quoting Mussolini from Himmler Minute dated October 11, 1942.
- <sup>59</sup>Piero Pieri and Giorgio Rochat, *Pietro Badoglio: Maresciallo d'Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 335.
- <sup>60</sup>Ceva, 41.
- <sup>61</sup>Fortunato Minniti, "Il Diario storico del Comando Supremo: Considerazioni e ipotesi sul ruolo del capo di Stato Maggiore Generale nell'estate del 1940," *Storia Contemporanea* 18, no. 1 (February 1987): 174.
- <sup>62</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 17 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dal primo discorso alla Camera alla Conferenza di Cannes: 22 giugno 1921-13 gennaio 1922*, 213.



<sup>63</sup>Knox, 16.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 14, quoting Giorgio Rochat from “Mussolini e le forze armata,” *Il Movimento di Liberazione in Italia*, no. 95 (1969): 12.

<sup>65</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 21 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dall'attentato Zaniboni al discorso dell'Ascensione: 5 novembre 1925-26 maggio 1927*, 341.

<sup>66</sup>Pieri and Rochat, 358.

<sup>67</sup>MacGregor Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies: Royal Armed Forces, Fascist Regime and the War of 1940-1943* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 35.

<sup>68</sup>J. J. T. Sweet, *Iron Arm: The Mechanization of Mussolini's Army, 1920-1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 44. As Sweet points out the *Commissione Suprema di Difesa* did not meet frequently throughout the 1930s. This further hampered the development of strategic options and guidance; Brian R. Sullivan, “A Thirst for Glory: Mussolini, the Italian military and the Fascist Regime, 1922-1936” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1984), 135. The *Commissione Suprema di Difesa* and Committee for the Preparation of National Mobilization consisted of a combination of civilian ministers, agencies, and representation from the Services.

<sup>69</sup>Sullivan, 160.

<sup>70</sup>Pieri and Rochat, 373. Royal Decree Number 68, which was passed on 6 February 1927, effectively reduced Badoglio to the position of a consultant. For further insight regarding Badoglio's role, Rochat devotes a chapter and provides an excellent overview of the situation and the associated bureaucratic machinations. See pages 370 to 380.

<sup>71</sup>Sweet, 55.

<sup>72</sup>Sullivan, 171; Pieri and Rochat, 375.

<sup>73</sup>John Gooch, “Italian Military Competence,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5 (June 1982): 258.

<sup>74</sup>Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, 13.

<sup>75</sup>John Gooch, “Clausewitz Disregarded: Italian Military Thought and Doctrine, 1815-1943,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 9 (June-September 1986): 316; Sweet, 33.

<sup>76</sup>Gooch, “Italian Military Competence,” 252.

<sup>77</sup>MacGregor Knox, "Fascist Italy assesses its enemies 1935-1940," in *Knowing One's Enemies: An Intelligence Assessment before the two World Wars*, ed. Ernest R. May (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 366.

<sup>78</sup>Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded," 318.

<sup>79</sup>Sweet, 134. Regarding Italy's Mediterranean strategy, the *Commissione Suprema di Difesa* had designated Britain and France as the major threat against Libya. Italy's strategy was to hold the French in Tunisia conducting a lightning attack on the British in Egypt.

<sup>80</sup>Giuseppe Bottai, *Diario 1935-1944*, ed. Giordano Bruno Guerri (Milan: RCS Libri S.p.A., 2001), 113. See Bottai's entry for 31 October 1936.

<sup>81</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 58. Ciano summarizes Pariani's comments in his entry for 14 February 1938.

<sup>82</sup>*Ibid.*, 85. See Ciano's entry for 24 April 1938.

<sup>83</sup>Sullivan, 177.

<sup>84</sup>Gooch, "Clausewitz Disregarded," 315.

<sup>85</sup>Guilio Douhet, *Command of the Air*, trans. Dino Ferrari (New York: Coward McCann, Inc., 1942), 79. Douhet envisioned an independent air force as a means to developing a powerful military instrument while taking advantage of Italy's strategic central location in Europe and the Mediterranean. He also saw air power as a means to ensuring Italy's national security, while not having to expend significant amounts of raw materials to develop a strategic capability.

<sup>86</sup>Sullivan, 177.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 182.

<sup>88</sup>Alexander Lopasic, "Italian Performance in the Second World War: Some Considerations," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 5 (June 1982): 271.

<sup>89</sup>Sullivan, 188.

<sup>90</sup>Gooch, "Italian Military Competence," 260. The *Regia Marina's* naval construction program was due for completion in 1944. Seeing its mistake during the early period of the Second World War, Italy attempted to convert two ocean liners, the *Roma* and *Augustus* into aircraft carriers. Their attempts came too late in the war. The *Aquila*, constructed from the *Roma's* hull, lay near completion in Genoa by the time of the armistice in 1943.

<sup>91</sup>Italy experimented early with carrier aviation. In 1923, they conducted tests using an auxiliary carrier, the *Regia Giuseppe Miraglia*. The *Regia Aeronautica* defeated the *Regia Marina's* arguments for an independent naval air arm. Italian naval theorists, however, continued to argue the need for naval air capabilities in the Mediterranean. For an English translation of Italian naval thought, see Giuseppe Fioravanzo, *A History of Naval Tactical Thought*, trans. Arthur W. Holst (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1979)

<sup>92</sup>Dennis Mack Smith, *Mussolini* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), 159.

<sup>93</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 26 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dal Patto a Quattro all'inaugurazione della provincia di Littoria: 8 giugno 1933-18 dicembre 1934*, 399.

<sup>94</sup>Charles F. Delzell, "Pius XII, Italy, and the Outbreak of War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 2 (1967): 137.

<sup>95</sup>Monelli, 173; Knox, *Hitler's Italian Allies*, 15. King Vittorio Emanuele and Pope Pius XI continued to raise serious objections to Mussolini's racial laws.

<sup>96</sup>Bosworth, 348.

<sup>97</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 139. Ciano describes the dissension over the racial laws during a Grand Council of Fascism meeting in his entry on 6 October 1938.

<sup>98</sup>Carl T. Schmidt, *The Corporate State in Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939), 116.

<sup>99</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 28 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dalla proclamazione dell'impero al viaggio in Germania: 10 maggio 1936-30 settembre 1937*, 112-114.

<sup>100</sup>Adrian Lyttelton, 336.

<sup>101</sup>Schmidt, 122.

<sup>102</sup>William G. Welk, *Fascist Economic Policy: An Analysis of Italy's Economic Experiment* (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1938), 54.

<sup>103</sup>Lucio Ceva, *Guerra Mondiale: Strategia e industria bellica – 1939-1945* (Milan: FrancoAngeli Storia, 2000), 24.

<sup>104</sup>Schmidt, 122.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 149; Sweet, 48. The Italian industrial sector wielded enormous influence. Sweet further discusses the unique position of the Fiat Ansaldo consortium and its undue influence in Italian armaments and tank designs.

<sup>106</sup>Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Prologue to War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1940), 174.

<sup>107</sup>Schmidt, 116; Sweet 45.

<sup>108</sup>Ceva, “The Strategy of Fascist Italy,” 50; Fortunato Minniti, “La Politica Industriale del Ministro dell’Aeronautica,” *Storia Contemporanea* (February 1981): 22. Regarding the Italian aircraft industry, Minniti also outlines the lack of any incentives for aircraft programs, transformation or developing new systems of production because any aircraft was certain to be bought by the government. This relationship certainly extended to other areas of Italian industry.

<sup>109</sup>Luigi Carillo Castioni, “I radar industriali italiani. Ricerche, ricordi, considerazioni per una loro storia,” *Storia Contemporanea* 18 (1987): 1225-8, 1241. Italy’s success and failure in developing radar technology is an excellent example of a missed opportunity. Guglielmo Marconi, the inventor of the wireless radio, worked on radar theory as early as 1922. By 1932, he experimented with microwave transmissions and antennas in the Vatican. In 1935, he started working on radar experimentation for the *Regio Esercito*. Another Italian leader in radio wave propagation, Ugo Tiberio, worked on experimental radar prototypes for the *Regia Marina* as early as 1933. By 1940, Italy had developed the essential elements of radar technology – magnetron, cathode ray tubes and power output – and possessed working radar prototypes. The *Regia Marina* viewed radar technology with skepticism. It was only Italy’s disastrous defeat by the British in a night battle at Matapan and an Italian radio intercept of a British transmission that indicated the British might have a radar capability that changed Italy’s skepticism. The Italian government then rushed the radar prototypes into production.

<sup>110</sup>Ceva, *Guerra Mondiale*, 30.

<sup>111</sup>Fortunato Minniti, “Le materie prime nella preparazione bellica dell’Italia (1935-1943),” *Storia Contemporanea* 17 (February 1986): 5. Minniti ascribes the Italian government’s strategic disorientation, lack of policy and disorganization as the primary causes of Italy’s rearmament woes.

<sup>112</sup>Gooch, “Italian Military Competence,” 257.

<sup>113</sup>Ceva, *Guerra Mondiale*, 30

<sup>114</sup>Gooch, “Italian Military Competence,” 258.

<sup>115</sup>Ribbentrop, 59.

<sup>116</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1936*, vol. 2 (Washington DC: US Department of State, 1954), 453. See telegram dated 1 August 1936.

<sup>117</sup>John F. Coverdale, *Italian intervention in the Spanish Civil War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), 20.

<sup>118</sup>Raymond L. Proctor, *Hitler's Luftwaffe in the Spanish Civil War* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1983), 20.

<sup>119</sup>Coverdale, 102.

<sup>120</sup>*Foreign Relations of the United States, 1936*, vol. 2 (Washington DC: US Department of State, 1954), 561. See telegram dated 19 November 1936.

<sup>121</sup>Coverdale, 161.

<sup>122</sup>Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge, trans. Stuart Hood (London: Odhams Press, Limited, 1948), 44.

<sup>123</sup>Coverdale, 120.

<sup>124</sup>Coverdale, 175, quoting Ciano from Roberto Cantalupo, *Fu la Spagna. Ambasciata presso Franco (febbraio-aprile 1938)*, 65.

<sup>125</sup>Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 56. During the October 1936 meeting which served as the genesis for the Rome-Berlin Axis, Hitler reaffirmed Italy's dominance in the Mediterranean, while Germany's interests lay east. More important, however, was the topic that was not discussed--Austria.

<sup>126</sup>Enno von Rintelen, "German-Italian Cooperation," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 14, Part VI, 2. Regarding Italo-German cooperation in Spain, General von Rintelen, who served as Germany's military attaché in Rome, had to request information on Spain from Italy's *Ufficio Spagna* in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was prohibited from talking directly with the Italian military.

<sup>127</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 24. Mussolini thought that continuous armed conflict would stiffen the resilience of the Italian people. In his entry on 13 November 1938, Ciano attests that Mussolini said, "When Spain is over with, I will invent something else, but the character of the Italians must be forged in combat."

<sup>128</sup>Proctor, 77, quoting Warlimont during a personal interview.

<sup>129</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 3 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 157.

<sup>130</sup>Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis: A History of the relations between Hitler and Mussolini* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 32.

<sup>131</sup>Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, 211.

<sup>132</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 1 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 19. See Document 12.

<sup>133</sup>Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed*, 35.

<sup>134</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 3 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 157.

<sup>135</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 11. Although Ciano describes the success of the German trip, he also states that nothing substantially has changed. He also questions if ideology is enough to keep both nations together. He wrote “Will the solidarity of the Regimes not be sufficient to keep two nations whose race, culture, religion and tastes are exact opposites really together? . . . should Germany be considered a goal, or rather a useful place to maneuver?” See his entry for 29 September 1937.

<sup>136</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 28 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dalla proclamazione dell'impero al viaggio in Germania: 10 maggio 1936-30 settembre 1937*, 249-253.

<sup>137</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 15. See entry for 14 October 1937.

<sup>138</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 1 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 1. See Document 1.

<sup>139</sup>Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 146.

<sup>140</sup>Rich, 98-101. Hitler sought the legal means to affect the *Anschluss* by means of having an Austrian plebiscite. When the Austria Chancellor, Kurt von Schuschnigg, undertook measures to ensure an anti-*Anschluss* vote, Hitler maneuvered his resignation and German troops entered Austria peacefully.

<sup>141</sup>Rich, 109-110. Rich also point out that Germany's acquisition of the *Sudetenland* also resulted in acquiring 70 percent of Czechoslovakia's iron and steel output, 80 percent of its textiles, 86 percent of its chemical, 70 percent of its electric power and its entire lignite industry; *Documents on Nazism*, 536. Hitler, when informed of Mussolini acquiescence to the *Anschluss* said to inform Mussolini that, “I will never forget this!”

<sup>142</sup>Diest, 378.

<sup>143</sup>Fest, 573.

<sup>144</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 2 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 238. See Document 132.

<sup>145</sup>Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, 84.

<sup>146</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 28 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dalla proclamazione dell'impero al viaggio in Germania: 10 maggio 1936-30 settembre 1937*, 67.

<sup>147</sup>Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, 75.

<sup>148</sup>*Ibid.*, 189. See Ciano's entry for 8 March 1938 in his conversation with the British ambassador, Lord Perth.

<sup>149</sup>Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, 103.

<sup>150</sup>Fest, 615. Blitzkrieg was not a term used by the Germans, but rather the allies to describe the German military's lethal and rapid effects on the battlefield. In a strategic sense, Fest argues that Hitler's focus was on setting the diplomatic conditions and then using a powerful German military tailored to achieve rapid success on the ground. The combination of these effects would then limit any British and French reactions.

<sup>151</sup>Paul Preston, *Franco* (New York: BasicBooks, 1994), 217, 243. Italian and German cooperation in Spain ranged from totally disconnected operational campaign objectives to close tactical integration. Wolfram von Richtofen of Germany's Condor Legion records two instances in his diary which highlight these points. On 3 February 1937, when highlighting Italian actions in Southern Spain, Richtofen writes "nothing is known about the Italians, their whereabouts and their intentions. Franco knows nothing either." Contrasting the first point, Richtofen also records on 26 April 1937 how Italian aircraft were integrated into the bombing attack at Guernica.

<sup>152</sup>David Alvarez, "Axis Sigint Collaboration: A Limited Partnership," in *Allied and Axis Signals Intelligence in World War II*, ed. David Alvarez (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1999), 5. Alvarez's article highlights the limited nature of Italian and German cooperation in the field of cryptanalysis. This relationship did not improve during the war.

<sup>153</sup>Brian R. Sullivan, "From Little Brother to Senior Partner: Fascist Italian perceptions of the Nazis and of Hitler's Regime, 1930 – 1936," in *Knowing Your Friends: Intelligence Inside Alliances and Coalitions from 1914 to the Cold War*, ed. Martin S. Alexander (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 1998), 103.

<sup>154</sup>Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, 56.

<sup>155</sup>*World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part I: Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration Problems, 2.

<sup>156</sup>Mario Toscano, *The Origins of the Pact of Steel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 78.

<sup>157</sup>Burkhardt Mueller-Hillebrand, "Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part II, Chapter 2, 2.

<sup>158</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 4 (Washington DC: US Department of State), Document 411.

<sup>159</sup>Toscano, 232.

<sup>160</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 202. Ciano pressed Mussolini on 16 March 1939 to keep Italy's diplomatic options flexible by not entering into a formal alliance with Germany.

<sup>161</sup>Benito Mussolini, *Opera Omnia di Benito Mussolini*, ed. Edoardo and Duilio Susmel, vol. 29 (Florence: La Fenice, 1959), *Dal viaggio in Germania all'intervento dell'Italia nella seconda guerra mondiale: 1 ottobre 1937-guigno 1940*, 246-249.

<sup>162</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 203-206. Throughout March 1939, Mussolini vacillated between opposing Germany by joining with the Western powers or entering a formal alliance with Germany. On 21 March 1939, Mussolini justified his actions to seek a German alliance before the Fascist Grand Council. In response, Italo Balbo made the derisive remark that Mussolini, "was shining Germany's boots."

<sup>163</sup>Toscano, 398.

<sup>164</sup>Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, 258.

<sup>165</sup>Toscano, 398.

<sup>166</sup>Bullock, 613.

<sup>167</sup>Toscano, 323, 398.

<sup>168</sup>Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, 146.

<sup>169</sup>Görlitz, 345.

<sup>170</sup>Warlimont, 23, quoting from the minutes recorded by Lieutenant Colonel Schmundt, Hitler's senior military aide in *Chronik*, 109; *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D (Washington DC: US Department of State), vol. 6, 574. See Document 433.

<sup>171</sup>Rich, 125.

<sup>172</sup>Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis*, 149.

<sup>173</sup>Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents*, trans. Muriel Currey (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 5.

<sup>174</sup>Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 39. Great Britain had given a public pledge of support to Poland in March 1939, which in effect stated that she would fight alongside Poland if attacked by Germany. Great Britain also stated that she would seek other allies to join her cause, most notably France.



<sup>175</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 249. Despite his misgivings on Germany's intentions, Ciano did not readily heed the reports of mounting German actions against Poland until early August 1939. See Ciano's entry for 3 July 1939.

<sup>176</sup>Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, 301.

<sup>177</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 265. On 25 August 1939, the German ambassador to Italy, August von Mackensen, suggested to Ciano that a complete list be developed. Ciano indicated that von Mackensen, who was opposed to Germany's involvement in Poland, desired to use any means to prevent his government from going to war.

<sup>178</sup>Franz Halder, *The Halder War Diary: 1939-1942*, ed. Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 35. See Halder's entry for 26 August 1939.

<sup>179</sup>Badoglio, quoting Mussolini, 7.

## CHAPTER 4

### MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

Nothing that is undertaken is to be undertaken without a purpose.<sup>1</sup>

Marcus Aurelius

The spectacular tactical performance that categorized Germany's campaigns early in the war obscures the strategic failure of the Italo-German alliance. The fact that Germany and its erstwhile ally, Italy, came close to achieving success masks their inability to seize and hold the initiative early during the conflict. Germany and Italy's failure to gain the strategic initiative directly resulted from their inability to establish a coalition strategy. Their inability to effectively establish a coalition strategy was due to their differing fundamental interests and dysfunctional strategic decision-making mechanisms in both countries.

There were two strategic opportunities in late 1939. First, the war had yet to turn global. Germany had reached an understanding with the Soviet Union and faced only a resolved Great Britain and France. The United States was still isolationist, German military agreements with Japan were not yet fulfilled and differences over Poland resulted in Italy's non-belligerency. Given these conditions, Germany and Italy had the opportunity to define the scope, and more importantly the purpose of the future conflict. Second, given the tepid British and French reactions over Poland and their defensive outlook, Hitler and Mussolini had the time to resolve their differences and establish the coalition's *raison de etre*. The fact that Hitler and Mussolini did neither is a result of their

failure to control their impulsiveness, their total lack of a rational appreciation for statecraft and their failure to control their country's means for action.

### Nonbelligerency and the Phoney War

The period from the fall of Warsaw, on 27 September 1939, to the beginning of the Germany's attack on Denmark and Norway, on 9 April 1940, was known as the "Phoney War." This period was characterized by its relative inactivity. Britain and France were mobilizing to build up their strength. Their militaries were preparing to seize key terrain in order to withstand the expected German attack. The lessons from the First World War showed that the Germans would expend inordinate casualties and materiel while on the offensive. Great Britain and France's strategy was to withstand the first blow.

Germany and Italy faced different issues. Their differing expectations from the Pact of Steel and Germany's subsequent invasion of Poland created a strategic impasse in their alliance. Mussolini, who expected a period of peace, was now surrounded by conflict. The European geopolitical framework had fundamentally changed as a result of Germany's rapid Polish victory. Hitler had scored a resounding diplomatic success by signing a nonaggression pact with the Soviet Union and the British and French reversed their policy from appeasement to resolve.

Mussolini who had routinely shifted between two power blocs now found himself having to choose sides. While he maintained a close relationship with Hitler and was ideologically in favor of a German alliance, Mussolini still had to reconcile Italy's geostrategic weakness with respect to the Western powers. He also faced the opposition of the king, most of his advisers and the Italian people who were adamantly opposed to a

German rapprochement. Italy's central *politica del peso determinante*, or "determining weight," policy was now at an end. Mussolini could no longer gain spoils from two power blocs that were more or less evenly matched and bent on fighting a war. The result of having to choose sides was extreme vacillation on Mussolini's part. His vacillation lasted during the six months of the Phoney War.

Germany was faced with a totally different set of circumstances. Hitler was genuinely surprised and did not expect Great Britain and France to choose war over Poland. His failure to anticipate their reaction was a mistake with strategic consequences.<sup>2</sup> Hitler now had to reconcile two diametrically opposed objectives: his long-term aim of gaining *Lebensraum* and his desire to avoid a potentially long conflict against the Western powers. Intuitively aware of Germany's economic limitations and his desire not to engage in a prolonged conflict, Hitler and the *Wehrmacht* poured all their energies into the western offensive with the aim of rapidly defeating the British and French armies. Best stated by General Walter Warlimont when referring to the German plan:

It failed to look into the politico-military and strategic future or study possible future developments of the war and so work out the basis even for a post hoc "war plan." This is proved and underlined by the fact that the Mediterranean theater was almost totally neglected and that when the Western campaign was brought to a successful conclusion after barely six weeks, Supreme Headquarters [the OKW] had no plans for and had done no preliminary work on any further operations.<sup>3</sup>

Mussolini's vacillation and Hitler's focus on the upcoming western offensive directly affected the development of an overarching coalition strategy. Despite Hitler's efforts to fix Italy firmly in his camp, and Mussolini's gradual realignment towards Germany, it was clear that both countries continued to have a limited focus. In Germany, there was discussion of using twenty to thirty Italian divisions to attack the Maginot Line,

but there was no consideration to examining larger strategic coalition issues.<sup>4</sup> Despite his vacillation, Mussolini was beginning to lean towards war. Marshal Pietro Badoglio recorded Mussolini's cavalier dismissal of Italy's shortcomings during a Supreme Defense Committee meeting in February 1940: "As frequently happened in similar crises, he (Mussolini) assumed the mantle of a prophet and solemnly announced that everything must be done and possibly done more quickly than was anticipated because we (Italy) must not desert history."<sup>5</sup> During early 1940, Mussolini's focus was on conducting an independent *guerra parallela*, or parallel war. Italian actions would be conducted independently, but in concert with German actions in order to gain Italian objectives in the Mediterranean.<sup>6</sup>

The failure of Germany and Italy to effectively develop an overarching coalition strategy and purpose during the Phoney War is a reflection of their limited strategic mindset. It is noteworthy that there was a total absence of any strategic goals or campaign design to maximize the opportunities of the upcoming offensive given that no one could assume spectacular German success in the West. This can be considered a missed opportunity. Instead, on 18 March 1940, during their first meeting since the Polish invasion, Hitler deliberately falsified Germany's military readiness to show greater strength in order to secure Mussolini's favor.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this meeting and emboldened by the need to meet his destiny, Mussolini began to commit Italy to war. Despite his commitment, Mussolini's guidance to Italy's armed forces was essentially defensive. On 31 March 1940, he outlined the following tasks:

Land frontiers: Defensive in the Western Alps. No initiative. Surveillance. Initiative only in the case, and based on my improbable direction, on a complete French collapse. Against Yugoslavia, at first, careful observation. Offensive only

in the case of an internal collapse. Libya: Defensive against Tunisia and Egypt. Aegean: Defensive. Ethiopia: Offensive to guarantee Eritrea and operations in Gedaref, Kassala and Djibouti. Defensive along the Kenyan front. Air: Support to the Army and Navy, offensive and defensive activity on secondary fronts and against enemy initiatives. Sea: Offensive inside and outside the Mediterranean.<sup>8</sup>

Mussolini only planned offensive ground actions were to protect Eritrea by attacking Djibouti and British Somaliland as well as attacking the Sudan (Kassala and Gedaref).

The *Regia Marina* would conduct offensive operations within and around the Mediterranean to secure lines of communication. Italy's offensive actions were limited and designed to essentially defend Italy and its colonies. Mussolini's idea for a future conflict was still influenced by his experiences in the First World War – a posture designed to withstand the first blow.

One look at the German and Italian battle plans demonstrates their total lack of synchronization. The German plan was offensive, the Italian defensive. More importantly, despite the essential differences in outlook, the plans were not even linked. There were no agreements prior to Italy's entry in the war that they should remain on the strategic defensive in the Mediterranean. In fact, the opposite is true. On 11 March 1940, Mussolini met with the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop. During this meeting, Mussolini stated:

In a certain sense, Italy is enclosed in a prison of which the windows are Corsica, Tunis and Malta, and the walls of which are represented by Gibraltar, Suez and the Dardanelles. Italy is very patient and will remain so until she is ready, just as the boxer in the ring must at certain moments be able to take a great many punches. The duration of that testing period is become shorter and shorter. Italy has made great progress with her own armament and he will shortly allow the Italian people to see with their own eyes what has been achieved in that field.<sup>9</sup>

Mussolini further told von Ribbentrop the rapidly increasing readiness of Italy's armed forces. From the German perspective, there were clear indications that Italy would seize

vital objectives in the Mediterranean. The reality of the situation, however, was that there was no broad purpose for a combined offensive against the Western powers, there was no synchronization of actions to mutually support each other and there was no collaboration to develop an endstate goal should the German offensive be successful.

### Fall of France

We have been defeated . . . we are beaten, we have lost the battle. The front is broken near Sedan; they are pouring through in great numbers with tanks and armored cars.<sup>10</sup>

Paul Reynaud

The German offensive in the West started on 10 May 1940. The German Army swept into the Netherlands and Belgium. The lethality of the attack, the concentration of combined air and armored firepower and the rapid envelopment of Anglo-French forces resulted in Germany achieving all of its operational objectives. The offensive was over in six weeks, culminating with the German Army entering Paris on 14 June 1940. Charles Burdick best described the German offensive: “The blitzkrieg method of combat had destroyed the historical images and theories of war. Through June 1940, the various German arms and services had performed with a perfection normally found only in classroom exercises.”<sup>11</sup>

The extraordinary success of the German offensive had a profound effect on Mussolini, who clearly saw that Italy might miss its share of the spoils.<sup>12</sup> Mussolini’s previous assessment about a war with the Western powers was that it would be prolonged. Germany’s rapid success on the battlefield changed his assessment.<sup>13</sup> On 13 May 1940, he stated: “We have no time to lose. Within a month I shall declare war. I shall attack France and England in the air and on the sea.”<sup>14</sup> On 26 May, when speaking

to Marshals Badoglio and Balbo, Mussolini summarized his assumptions and intent as follows: “I assure you the war will be over in September, and that I need a few thousand dead so as to be able to attend the peace conference as a belligerent.”<sup>15</sup>

Italy declared war on Great Britain and France on 10 June 1940, four days before the German Army entered Paris. Mussolini failed completely in preventing the appearance of Italy arriving too late after all the danger was over.<sup>16</sup> When the French Ambassador to Italy, François Poncet, received Italy’s declaration, he stated: “It is a blow with a dagger to a man who has already fallen.”<sup>17</sup> More importantly, Mussolini was keenly aware that Hitler shared the French ambassador’s assessment. Ciano records Mussolini’s thoughts on the matter when referring to the upcoming French armistice:

The Duce is an extremist. He would like to go so far as the total occupation of French territory and demands the surrender of the French fleet. But he is aware that his opinion has only a consultative value. The war has been won by Hitler without any active military participation on Italy’s part, and it is Hitler who will have the last word.<sup>18</sup>

The extraordinary success of Germany’s campaign in the West and Italy’s entry into the war gave the appearance of a combined totalitarian offensive. In fact, the opposite is true. When notified of Italy’s intent to join the conflict on 5 June 1940, Hitler was hesitant and asked that the Italians delay their entry until 11 June.<sup>19</sup> There was no thought of collaboration beyond the discussion of utilizing units the *Regio Esercito*, or Italian Army, to attack the Maginot Line. More importantly, there were no discussions of strategic level campaigns, aims and intent.<sup>20</sup>

The absences of strategic deliberations were now manifested. For Italy, Mussolini’s entry into the Second World War was based on the assumption that Great Britain would quickly cease hostilities after the Fall of France.<sup>21</sup> For Germany, the



spectacular operational victory over France revealed a much larger strategic weakness: “to effectively attack a foe an army must have the physical means to defeat an enemy force.”<sup>22</sup> The shortcoming of Germany’s rearmament policy in the 1930s was now readily apparent – it lacked the physical means to defeat Great Britain. The lack of synchronization between German and Italian strategic efforts was now glaringly evident. Germany faced the issue of trying to defeat an enemy it could not reach and for which absolutely no combined studies had been performed.<sup>23</sup> Mussolini’s entry into the Second World War to share the spoils limited Italy’s focus. As a result, Italy’s essentially defensive strategy led to a missed opportunity. Italy failed to seize vital objectives in the Mediterranean when the British were at their weakest. Based on Mussolini’s bellicose statements and conversations with von Ribbentrop, the *Wehrmacht* was shocked by the lack of any effort by the Italian military to seize vital objectives in the Mediterranean, specifically Malta, Corsica, and Tunisia.<sup>24</sup>

The lack of collaboration and the inability of the Axis partners to synchronize their plans while defeating France created another strategic impasse. The *Wehrmacht*’s total focus on the main battle in Northern France directly resulted in overlooking the broader aspects of strategy and indeed the war. Italy’s limited offensive actions led to passing up the opportunity to seize objectives in the Mediterranean, an area vital to the British. From a strategic sense, the period between the French Armistice on 22 June 1940 to Germany’s invasion of the Soviet Union on 22 June 1941 was one of marked strategic inactivity. The failure of Germany and Italy to capitalize on their strategic gains during this one-year period would prove catastrophic to their alliance.

### In Search of an Axis Strategy: June 1940 to June 1941

The strategic shortcomings of the Italo-German alliance are best demonstrated during the period between the Fall of France and Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. It was the only time period when Hitler and Mussolini had sufficient breathing space to develop a combined strategic course of action to capitalize on Great Britain's weakness, the Soviet Union's isolation and the neutrality of the United States. The dictators did not make use of their time and squandered any possibility of victory.

Germany's inability to decisively strike at Great Britain led to the search for a strategy. Hitler's senior military advisors now presented to him three options to defeat the British: a "direct" approach categorized by a ground, naval and air assault of the British Isles, and two "indirect" approaches. The first "indirect" option was the use of strategic aerial bombardment coupled with propaganda to terrorize the British population into submission. The last "indirect" approach was an assault on the British Empire – specifically the Mediterranean.<sup>25</sup>

These options were discussed in detail on 31 July 1940 when Hitler met with several of his key advisors. The result of the meeting was to adopt different aspects of all three courses of action.<sup>26</sup> Detailed planning started for a direct assault of the British Isles, codenamed Operation "Sea Lion." The German Navy considered the plan feasible despite its unpreparedness at the war's onset and naval losses sustained during Germany's invasion of Norway. Grand Admiral Erich Raeder stated that naval preparations would be ready by 13 September 1940; however, he asked for a postponement until spring 1941 due to worsening weather conditions better projected German naval capabilities in 1941. Hitler agreed, but stated that the *Luftwaffe* would conduct an aerial offensive, aimed at

achieving air superiority in preparation for the invasion. The navy would be prepared to launch the invasion if it appeared that Great Britain was ready to collapse. If the *Luftwaffe* were less successful, the navy would continue with their preparations during the winter months.<sup>27</sup> There was also the possibility that threat of invasion and the *Luftwaffe's* terror bombings would also crush the British will to resist.

Finally, the last aspect of Germany's British policy was a concerted effort to attack the British periphery in the Mediterranean, specifically at Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. This approach would require Germany to collaborate not only with Italy, but also with Spain and Vichy France.<sup>28</sup> The inability to implement this aspect of German strategic policy represents the significant shortcoming of the Italo-German alliance, and their only chance to capitalize on Britain's strategic weakness during the latter part of 1940.

The implementation of Germany's peripheral British strategy in the Mediterranean suffered from three interrelated issues. First, in order to attack Gibraltar, Germany needed the unequivocal cooperation of Spain. The Germans saw Gibraltar as the key aspect to their Mediterranean strategy. Its capture would allow the Italian Navy, or *Regia Marina*, to operate freely in the Mediterranean with unencumbered access to North Africa.<sup>29</sup> During August of 1940, Hitler actively courted the Spanish dictator, General Francisco Franco, to throw his lot on the side of the Axis. Despite German and Italian support for his cause during the Spanish Civil War, General Franco refused to commit Spain to hostilities. Spain's significant economic shortcomings, its recovery from a brutal civil war and Franco's assessment that the conflict would likely be prolonged

resulted in vague levels of support.<sup>30</sup> Franco also presented a price for his commitment. At the expense of Vichy France, Spain required Morocco.<sup>31</sup>

This led to the second aspect of Germany's problem – Franco's price was too high. Hitler could not afford to antagonize Vichy France. France may have been defeated; however, she still possessed extensive colonial holdings and a first-class navy. During the late 1940s, there might have been a possibility of German and Vichy French collaboration. British attacks on the French Navy in Africa at Mers el Kebir and Dakar had antagonized the French. French airmen volunteered to attack London and Gibraltar.<sup>32</sup> Marshal Henri Pétain, the hero of Verdun during the First World War was the undisputed leader of Vichy France. During this period, his prestige resulted in effectively establishing Vichy French authority over the French colonies. Pétain's prestige was also much greater than General Charles de Gaulle's Free French movement, which was still in its infancy.

Germany could not afford to concede any French territory to Spain. The possibility of the French fleet and Northwest Africa going to de Gaulle and by extension, to the British was too dangerous.<sup>33</sup> Additionally, Marshal Pétain objected to Germany's desire to use Vichy French bases in Oran and Casablanca. Pétain maintained that he would abide by the terms of the armistice, but any German demands outside the scope of the agreements would require a change to their fundamental conditions. Any concessions to Vichy France would not only run contrary to German overtures to Spain, but would be vehemently opposed by Italy.

Lastly, the belated and poorly executed offensive in the French Alps resulted in negligible Italian claims at the armistice table. Mussolini was keenly aware not to press

Italian claims. Hitler had also been careful to limit Italian claims on France, not only because of Italy's poor showing, but to show Great Britain that Germany was not being ungenerous to France. The underlying purpose was to try and get the British to negotiate a peace.<sup>34</sup> As a result, any concessions given to Vichy France in order to support Germany's Mediterranean policy would be at the expense of Italy's claims to Nice, Corsica, Tunisia and French Somaliland and lead to a crisis in the Italo-German alliance.

Germany's "indirect" strategy aimed at attacking the British Empire in the Mediterranean was now in a quagmire. While Hitler was prepared to make some concessions, he faced a triangular problem with no solution in sight. Any concessions to Vichy France would be countered by Italy. Paying Franco's price at the expense of Vichy France would immediately open the door to British and Free French forces. Any attempt to minimize Italy's claims, as Hitler tried when he met with Mussolini at the Brenner Pass on 4 October 1940, only led to increased mistrust.<sup>35</sup>

While Hitler and the *Wehrmacht* faced a period of relative tranquility, Mussolini pursued his own aims. His idea was to pursue a *guerra parallela*, or parallel war. Italy's strategic and material shortcomings now became glaringly apparent. Mussolini proceeded on the assumption that with Germany's preparations for Operation "Sea Lion," the fall of Great Britain was imminent. As a result, Italy invaded Egypt on 13 September 1940 with the aim of seizing the Suez Canal. Despite his reservations, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, Mussolini's chief military advisor, was convinced that the Egyptian campaign would be relatively easy.<sup>36</sup>

Mussolini's total inability to grasp Italy's strategic shortcomings came into play. Marshal Rodolfo Graziani advanced his largely infantry based force of seven divisions

approximately 60 miles into Egypt. Logistical shortages and lack of transport became critical. Graziani stopped at Sidi el Barrani and assumed a defensive position. Mussolini refused Graziani's requests for additional motorized transport, because he was now holding those assets in reserve for an upcoming Yugoslavian offensive.<sup>37</sup>

Mussolini's mistrust of Germany and narrowness of vision proved costly to Italy. Mussolini's reversal of strategy in 1938 from motorization and *guerra di rapido corso* to defense of the Alps as a result of the *Anschluss* now manifested itself. Gross deficiencies in tanks and motorized transport made the Italian Army ill suited to fight a war of maneuver in the Libyan Desert. As a result, Mussolini charged Marshal Badoglio to ask the Germans for approximately 700 captured French tanks, but to refuse any offers of German assistance. According to Badoglio, Mussolini's reasoning was: "If they (the Germans) get a footing in the country, we shall never be rid of them."<sup>38</sup> As a result, even though Italy invaded Egypt in early September 1940, Badoglio refused Germany's offer of a panzer division to assist in the Italian offensive when he met with Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Chief of the OKW on 15 November 1940.<sup>39</sup> The *Regio Esercito* had been in Egypt two months and had advanced only sixty miles.<sup>40</sup>

Germany's inability to resolve the differences between Spain, Vichy France and Italy resulted in its failure to implement an effective "indirect" Mediterranean policy. Additionally, Germany's shortcomings with preparation for Operation "Sea Lion" led to continual postponements. By August of 1940, Operation "Sea Lion" had effectively been postponed until spring 1941.<sup>41</sup> Hitler's inability to deal with these issues and Mussolini's inability at linking means to his strategic aims resulted in their failure to effectively neutralize Great Britain. Their failure was also a missed opportunity. Both dictators

would soon make critical decisions based on changing events. Their decisions were also unilateral, without consultation, and based primarily on their narrow interests. They did not recover from their decisions.

Germany, Italy and Japan signed the Tripartite Pact on 27 September 1940. The totalitarian powers saw this pact as a means to deter the United States from entering a war in Europe and Southeast Asia.<sup>42</sup> It was also a realization on the part of Hitler that his war with Great Britain was not going to be short and that Japanese aims against the British Empire in Southeast Asia could assist in Germany's efforts.<sup>43</sup> The Tripartite Pact had completely the opposite effect. It only served to further alarm the United States.

Despite the inclusion of Japan into a formal military alliance, their attestations of cooperation and development of collaborative technical commissions to facilitate military and economic potential, the Tripartite Pact did little to facilitate and synchronize Italo-German coalition efforts. In fact, towards the latter part of 1940, their mutual lack of communication on larger strategic issues resulted in both countries working at cross-purposes. Hitler continued to view the Soviet Union with suspicion despite the Nazi-Soviet Nonaggression Pact and Germany's strategic orientation towards the West since the conclusion of hostilities in Poland. Hitler kept a close watch on the Soviet Union which had meanwhile conquered Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and the Romanian province of Moldavia. Germany saw the Soviet encroachment into Eastern Europe as a threat to its economic vitality, especially continued access to Romanian oil. Hitler then maneuvered the Romanian government to request German military assistance to ensure Romanian integrity.<sup>44</sup> A German Army and *Luftwaffe* military mission deployed to Romania on 7 October 1940.

Mussolini reacted to the presence of Germany's military mission and effective control of Romania with fury. He stated: "Hitler places me in front of a fait accompli. This time I am going to pay him back in his own coin. He will find out from the papers that I have occupied Greece. In this way the equilibrium will be reestablished."<sup>45</sup> Earlier in mid-1940, Mussolini had approached Germany about seizing Yugoslavia and Greece. Germany had impressed upon Italy the need to keep the Balkans stable to prevent any further Soviet incursions. Consequently, Mussolini viewed Germany's entry into Romania as duplicitous, and as an attempt to increase influence in an area that had been marked for Italy.<sup>46</sup> Italian troops invaded Greece on 28 October 1940 after unsuccessfully trying to induce Bulgaria into attacking the Thrace in northern Greece to draw off troops from the Italian offensive projected from Albania.<sup>47</sup> On that same day, Mussolini met with Hitler in Florence. Hitler had just finished meeting individually with General Franco and Marshal Pétain to try and develop a strategy for Gibraltar. Italy's incursion into Greece now widened the conflict into another theater of operations. It was also an area where Germany had little interest in operating.

Mussolini's action into Greece had greatly irritated Hitler. The Italian offensive quickly became a war of attrition along the mountainous Greco-Albanian border through the remainder of 1940. The strategic situation changed in March 1941 when Great Britain sent forces to reinforce Greece. Hitler clearly saw that German assistance would be required in the Balkans. The overthrow of the pro-Axis government in Yugoslavia and the presence of British troops with air power that could threaten the vital Romanian oil fields gave Hitler the impetus to widen the war in the Balkans. Germany invaded Yugoslavia and Greece on 6 April 1941.<sup>48</sup>



The widening of the war into the Balkans was a result of the Italian and German inability to collaborate and develop a strategy. Their efforts should have been focused on defeating Great Britain and determining the necessary requirements to achieve that aim. Instead, their petty differences and inability for open discussion on proposed spheres of influence and future operations resulted in widening the conflict. It also led to dissipating scarce resources that were vital to support ongoing operations. Mussolini's Greek venture allowed the British to gain a continental foothold and diverted resources away from the Italian offensive in Egypt. His refusal of German assistance further weakened Italy's ability to seize Egypt when the British were at their weakest. The situation changed in December 1940 when the British counterattacked at Sidi el Barrani and routed the Italians. By January 1941, British forces seized the vital port of Tobruk in Eastern Libya. Italy's defeat threatened their position in North Africa. Only then did Mussolini appeal to Hitler for assistance.<sup>49</sup>

It was in the context of trying to implement an "indirect" strategy and bailing out the Italians in Egypt and the Balkans that Hitler made his vital mistake. Unable to defeat Great Britain directly or implement an "indirect" strategy, he justified in his mind that a defeat of the Soviet Union would result in Great Britain's total isolation and acquiescence.<sup>50</sup> In reality, Hitler's decision was a return to his ultimate aim--*Lebensraum*. Hitler justified in his mind that the seizure of vital natural resources and living space for German expansion would result in a position where his power could no longer be threatened. He continued to assume--wrongly--that the British would accept Germany's hegemonic position.<sup>51</sup>

Hitler's thoughts never veered too far away from invading the Soviet Union. The German military was already contemplating operations in the east. General Franz Halder, Chief of the German Army Staff, succinctly summarized these operations in their relationship with Great Britain when he wrote: "Britain probably still needs one more demonstration of our military might before she gives in and leaves us a free hand in the East."<sup>52</sup> Interestingly, Hitler linked an invasion of the Soviet Union to victory over Great Britain during the same meeting on 31 July 1940, when he initiated planning for an "indirect" Mediterranean strategy. Again, Halder later captured Hitler's thoughts: "Russia is the factor on which Britain is relying the most."<sup>53</sup> The invasion of the Soviet Union was scheduled for spring 1941.

Germany's diversion in the Balkans, however, postponed Operation "Barbarossa." The original invasion date of 12 May 1941 was interrupted by the necessity of having to quell an anti-Axis revolt in Yugoslavia and to bail out the Italians in Greece.<sup>54</sup> On 22 June 1941, German forces achieved operational surprise when they invaded the Soviet Union. It was the largest force Germany ever assembled; consisting of approximately 3.2 million men organized into 151 divisions to include 19 Panzer and 15 Motorized, 3,350 tanks, 7,200 artillery pieces and 2,770 aircraft.<sup>55</sup> The scale of Hitler's commitment, the unparalleled focus in terms of personnel and materiel and the racial nature of the invasion made the conflict with the Soviet Union pale in comparison to Germany's experience in Poland.<sup>56</sup> It also ensured that there was no turning back for Hitler. The fixed nature of this massive commitment also extended to his Italian ally. Mussolini immediately offered a Corps of about 62,000 troops to fight alongside the Germans in the Eastern Front.<sup>57</sup> The *Wehrmacht* was irritated by this offer and viewed it

as a burden--a fact not lost by Mussolini.<sup>58</sup> Hitler accepted Mussolini's offer in the interest of maintaining unity. The Italian Corps, which later grew into a force of about 229,000 troops and redesignated as the Italian 8th Army, would fight with the Germans and face annihilation at the Battle of Stalingrad.<sup>59</sup> More importantly, the extent of Italy's commitment and the subsequent loss of personnel and materiel diminished their ability to meet the Anglo-American advance in North Africa and the subsequent invasion of Sicily.

As with Poland and the Western offensive, German forces quickly overwhelmed the Soviet Army and Air Force. Spectacular German victories in the Eastern Front resulted in massive destruction of Soviet forces. The *Wehrmacht* proceeded rapidly to its operational objectives while pushing towards Moscow. Additionally, Mussolini's request for German assistance in North Africa led to the formation of the *Afrika Korps* under General Erwin Rommel. Originally envisioned to remain on the defensive, General Rommel quickly seized the opportunity and drove the British out of Libya. During late 1941, the Italo-German forces in North Africa pushed back the British from Libya and once again threatened to turn the tide in North Africa. The Axis powers seemed to be on the verge of success.

In late 1940, the strategic situation quickly reversed itself. As Wilhelm Diest observed: "The strategic turning point came in December 1941 with the failure of the German attack on Moscow and Hitler's declaration of war on the United States."<sup>60</sup> While not readily apparent at the time, Germany and Italy had little to no freedom of maneuver left. They now faced Great Britain, an enemy they could not decisively defeat; the Soviet Union, an ideological enemy bent on revenge; and the United States, an economic powerhouse they could not hope to match. It also ensured that their limited forces would

continually be dispersed against multiple enemies on multiple fronts.<sup>61</sup> Italo-German operational successes in early 1942 would represent the high mark of the Axis' advance. The Axis' success would prove deceptive. Britain's decisive defeat of Rommel at El Alamein, the Soviet counteroffensive at Stalingrad and Anglo-American landings in Northwest Africa--all occurring in November 1942 would begin to turn the tide of the war in Europe.

Conclusion: Different Interests, Different Outlooks, Different Enemies

I have heard from a source which I believe to be reliable that recently, at one of the Military Schools in Italy, while preparing for a visit by a group of German officials, one of the officer instructors told the Cadets of his company that although they had to make some demonstration of friendliness to the Germans, it was well to bear in mind that they were the true enemy of Italy.<sup>62</sup>

U.S. Military Attaché, Rome, 12 May 1939

The Italian is easily contented; he actually has only three fashionable passions: coffee, cigarettes and women.<sup>63</sup>

Field Marshal Albert Kesselring

Elizabeth Wiskemann best summarizes the illusion of the Italo-German alliance when she said: "It has often been supposed . . . that Abyssinia (Ethiopia), the Rhineland and Spain formed a chain of Nazi-Fascist connivance."<sup>64</sup> These events, together with Austria, Czechoslovakia and Albania certainly lent credence to this perception. The simple fact, however, is quite the opposite. Germany and Italy possessed fundamental differences in strategic interests, outlooks and indeed who the actual enemy was. It was an alliance set by the dictators<sup>65</sup> in order to achieve specific tactical goals and objectives. Despite the ideology and propaganda, it was not based on a sound strategic purpose.

The failure of Hitler and Mussolini to capitalize on their strategic superiority in 1940 is directly attributable to the dysfunctionality of their coalition. Their inability to collaborate and execute combined actions to mutually support each other led to missed opportunities. The seeds of their failure, however, were already planted from the very beginning of their collaboration in 1935. These seeds centered on their irreconcilable interests and their inherent chaotic decision-making structures which were ill suited to support strategic thought and collaboration.

German and Italian interests and outlooks were fundamentally different. Despite the tactical maneuvering in the 1930s, Hitler's strategic objective remained fixed on *Lebensraum*. Mussolini employed a strategy based on a theory of *politica del peso determinante*, inherently designed to shift between two power blocs. His aims were fundamentally limited--seeking gains at a minimum of cost and commitment. Mussolini's failure came from the fact that "taking advantage of the victories of one's allies was not so simple."<sup>66</sup> Hitler's failure was that "military success could solve political problems."<sup>67</sup> No common ideology could overcome these differences.

Their governmental organizations which constituted the strategic decision-making apparatus were flawed. Effective planning is based on sound strategic guidance. In an environment where both dictators practiced a "divide and conquer" method of management, strategic guidance was often ill defined and as a result planning was disjointed. Internal to their militaries, resource allocation and prioritization proved difficult. On a coalition level, this problem was further magnified because there had been very little German and Italian initiative to synchronize their efforts before or even during the Second World War.

In Germany's case, her greater economic and military strength would logically result in her playing the role of a "magnet"--taking the lead on issues where she could enhance the coalition's ability to wage conflict.<sup>68</sup> As R. L. DiNardo points out:

During World War II the United States certainly earned the title "arsenal of democracy." None of the Axis allies possessed the industrial capacity required to fully satisfy the demands for vehicles, weapons, and equipment posed by modern war. Germany, herself, however, also lacked this capability. . . . Germany's failure to become the "arsenal of fascism" created all sorts of problems for the Axis.<sup>69</sup>

Hitler agreed to consolidate and expand armaments production under Albert Speer, his Minister of Armaments, in July 1943.<sup>70</sup> Germany's efforts were too late. In September 1943, the King and the *Regio Esercito* had ousted Mussolini and switched to the Allies.

Italian efforts were no less dismal. Lucio Ceva characterized the North African theater from a supply perspective: "No local resources existed, the logistical problems were enormous. Everything had to be carried to or with the troops: food, water, medicines, clothing, petrol, weapons and ammunition."<sup>71</sup> Given these circumstances, Italy did not militarize her port facilities and labor force to increase supply throughput until May 1943.<sup>72</sup> The Axis had by that time lost all of North Africa to the Allies.

Specifically regarding coalition organizational efforts, Warlimont states:

The Military Commissions set up in January 1942 . . . might have made some pretence of being an allied directing organization on the lines of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, were never allowed to work for which they were designed, at any rate as far as Hitler was concerned. The German members were so selected that they had no detailed knowledge of our plans and they were expressly forbidden to deal with any strategic problems which had to be kept secret from the enemy. As a result the Commissions had no real *raison d'être*.<sup>73</sup>

There was clearly no effort to synchronize efforts within the coalition. Such organizations lacked the means to do their job effectively and existed merely for window dressing.

The miscommunication, deceit, and outright falsification of each others intent which was endemic to the Italo-German relationship existed from the start and continued during the Second World War. Hitler rarely disclosed his intentions to Mussolini and vice versa. Their focus on accomplishing their goals and gaining their interests left little room for collaboration. As the lesser power, Italy's early defeats quickly mortgaged any independent action. Mussolini's *guerra parallela* was at an end by January 1941.

The lack of collaboration was the crux of their failure to synchronize any efforts in 1940 when they had greater strategic opportunities. Mussolini's fear of German involvement in North Africa resulted in turning down Hitler's assistance for Italy's drive to Egypt. Hitler's involvement in Romania precipitated Mussolini's intervention in Greece. Italian failures subsequently led to diverting German assets to the Balkans--delaying the invasion of the Soviet Union by a month. Whether the Axis could have won had German forces been introduced into North Africa earlier and if Operation "Barbarossa" had occurred as planned is debatable. It is clear; however, that it was a significant missed opportunity for the Axis. At a strategic level, their inability to effectively function as coalition partners was decisive to the outcome of the war.

It is perhaps fitting to conclude by stating who the Axis' real enemy was. For Germany, Hitler's fixation on *Lebensraum* made the Soviet Union the clear enemy. For Italy, the situation was more complex. One example, however, best exemplifies Italy's situation. In the 1930s, largely as a result of the *Anschluss*, Italy expended a significant amount of resources building a series of fortifications in the Brenner Pass--a measure clearly against Germany.<sup>74</sup> Significantly, work on these fortifications continued to the end of Italy's participation in the Axis.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. A. S. L. Farquharson (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 18.

<sup>2</sup>Wilhelm Diest, "The Road to Ideological War: Germany, 1918-1945," in *The Making of Strategy*, ed., Williamson Murray, MacGregor Knox, and Alvin Bernstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 385.

<sup>3</sup>Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters 1939-1945*, trans. R. H. Barry (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1964), 53. Warlimont further illustrates the disconnect between the OKW and the services. When discussing the possibilities of a direct attack against Britain, he illustrates the point that in June 1940, OKW had no plans despite the fact that they were aware the army and navy had been studying the problem since November 1939.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, 64; Enno von Rintelen, "German-Italian Cooperation," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 14, Part VI, 15. Referring to the use of Italian troops against the Maginot Line, Rintelen also points out that he never received an answer from the Italian Army on the proposal. The plan to use Italian units was the only attempt at a combined operation.

<sup>5</sup>Pietro Badoglio, *Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents*, trans. Muriel Currey (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 12.

<sup>6</sup>Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 207.

<sup>7</sup>Warlimont, 63; *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part I: Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration, 8.

<sup>8</sup>Piero Pieri and Giorgio Rochat, *Pietro Badoglio: Maresciallo d'Italia* (Milan: Mondadori, 2002), 492.

<sup>9</sup>Galeazzo Ciano, *Ciano's Diplomatic Papers*, ed. Malcolm Muggeridge, trans. Stuart Hood (London: Odhams Press, Limited, 1948), 352. See Ciano's entry for 11 March 1940.

<sup>10</sup>Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War: Their Finest Hour* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1949), 42. The conversation between the French leader, Paul Reynaud, and Churchill took place via telephone on 15 May 1940. When hearing the news about the German breakthrough, Churchill went on to reassure the French Prime Minister "All experience shows that the offensive will come to an end after a while. I remember the 21st of March, 1918. After five or six days they have to halt for supplies, and the opportunity for counterattack is presented." Mussolini was not the statesman to envision the Second World War would be fought like the First.



<sup>11</sup>Charles B. Burdick, *German Military Strategy and Spain in World War II* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1968), 13; Ernst Nolte, *Three Faces of Fascism*, trans. Leila Vennewitz (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1965), 356. Nolte also provided an excellent description of the German offensive when he states “Within six weeks a technically perfect coordination of all arms brought to its knees the great power whose army had only a few years earlier been considered the strongest in the world.”

<sup>12</sup>Badoglio, 14.

<sup>13</sup>Mario Toscano, *The Origins of the Pact of Steel* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1967), 401.

<sup>14</sup>Galeazzo Ciano, *Diary 1937 – 1943*, trans. Robert L. Miller and V. Umberto Colleti-Perucca (New York: Enigma Books, 2002), 351.

<sup>15</sup>Badoglio, 14.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>17</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 362. See Ciano’s entry for 10 June 1940. Poncet further went on to state “The Germans are hard masters. You, too will learn this.”

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 362. See Ciano’s entry for 17 June 1940.

<sup>19</sup>Enno von Rintelen, “German-Italian Cooperation,” in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 14, Part VI, 18.

<sup>20</sup>Franz Halder, *The Halder War Diary: 1939-1942*, ed. Charles Burdick and Hans-Adolf Jacobsen (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1988), 212. Apart from any collaboration with the Italians, the German military’s viewpoint was clear on what Italy’s actual intentions were – to seek French territory prior to the armistice. Halder notes in his diary about the Italian alpine offensive, “The Italians have been stalled by the French fortifications and cannot make any headway. But as they want to present themselves at the armistice negotiations with as large a piece of French territory as they could occupy in a hurry, they have approached us with a scheme to transport Italian battalions behind List’s front, partly by air via Munich, partly directly to the Lyon area, so as to get them to make occupation claims. The whole thing is the cheapest kind of fraud. I have made it plain that I will not have my name connected with that sort of trickery.” See Halder’s entry for 24 June 1940.

<sup>21</sup>Lucio Ceva, “The North African Campaign 1940-1943: A Reconsideration,” in *Decisive Campaigns of the Second World War*, ed. and trans. John Gooch (London: Frank Cass and Co., 1990), 85.

<sup>22</sup>Burdick, 2.

<sup>23</sup>Warlimont, 56.

<sup>24</sup>Enno von Rintelen, "Strategic Command in the German-Italian Coalition," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 5, Annex 21, 3.

<sup>25</sup>Warlimont, 17-18.

<sup>26</sup>Geoffrey P. Megargee, *Inside Hitler's High Command* (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2000), 89.

<sup>27</sup>Halder, 243. See Halder's entry for 31 July 1940.

<sup>28</sup>Burdick, 17-8.

<sup>29</sup>*Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945*, Series D, vol. 10 (Washington DC: US Department of State), 147-155. See Document 129.

<sup>30</sup>Burdick, 79.

<sup>31</sup>Paul Schmidt, *Hitler's Interpreter*, ed. R. H. C. Steed (London: William Heinemann, Ltd, 1951), 109.

<sup>32</sup>Burkhardt Mueller-Hillebrand, "Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, 241.

<sup>33</sup>Burdick, 47.

<sup>34</sup>Elizabeth Wiskemann, *The Rome-Berlin Axis: A History of the relations between Hitler and Mussolini* (London: Oxford University Press, 1949), 217.

<sup>35</sup>Burkhardt Mueller-Hillebrand, "Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, 17.

<sup>36</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 368. See Ciano's entry for 2 July 1940.

<sup>37</sup>Ceva, "The North African Campaign," 85. Ceva also points out Italy's limited investment in Libya's infrastructure despite having occupied the country for thirty years.

<sup>38</sup>Badoglio, 32.

<sup>39</sup>Enno von Rintelen, "Strategic Command in the German-Italian Coalition," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 5, Annex 21, 4. The meeting between the senior Italian and German military leaders was only the second time an event of this type occurred. It was also the only time they met before the German invasion of the Soviet Union; Ciano, *Diplomatic Papers*, 398. Mussolini had also refused Hitler's offer for German assistance on 4 October 1940 when the two dictators met at the Brenner Pass. Ciano's minutes of the meeting provides an excellent synopsis of invasion plan

difficulties for Great Britain, Spanish claims against Vichy France, Italian claims against Vichy France and the Italian offensive in Egypt.

<sup>40</sup>Halder, 269-70. General Wilhelm von Thoma, an armor expert, visited the Italian troops in North Africa in October 1940. He rendered a scathing assessment on Italy's offensive, its strategy, troops, equipment and the topographic conditions for fighting in North Africa. Thoma also stated that the Italians were not favorable to German presence in North Africa. As a result, Hitler was more reluctant to send ground forces to support his Italian ally. Italian reverses in December 1940 changed Hitler's plans.

<sup>41</sup>Burdick, 36.

<sup>42</sup>Burkhardt Mueller-Hillebrand, "Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part I, Chapter 2, 20; Ciano, *Diary*, 383. Von Ribbentrop informed Ciano of the news about the Tripartite Pact several days before the pact was signed. Ciano had deep reservations about the deterrent effect of the pact. Additionally, von Ribbentrop led Ciano to believe that Operation "Sea Lion" was still viable when in fact the Germans had postponed it until spring 1941.

<sup>43</sup>Gerhard L. Weinberg, *A World at Arm: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 182.

<sup>44</sup>Alan Bullock, *Hitler and Stalin: Parallel Lives* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 685. The Romanian King Carol II was forced to abdicate because he refused to allow German troops into the country. General Ion Antonescu, an ardent admirer of the Nazi's, set up a military dictatorship and agreed to adhere to the principles of the Axis Pact.

<sup>45</sup>Ciano, *Diary*, 388. See Ciano's entry for 12 October 1940.

<sup>46</sup>Vittorio Fontanesi, "L'Europa tra la morte e la vita," *Nuova Antologia* 1966, no. 397 (1985): 18-24. Fontanesi illustrates that the key to Mussolini's actions in the Balkans are a result of trying to redress the balance within the Axis alliance. Germany's campaign in the West and peaceful encroachment in the Balkans gave Italy very little room for maneuver. When the Italian offensive in Greece failed, the balance further shifted towards Germany's favor.

<sup>47</sup>Iltcho Dimitrov, "La Bulgarie et l'agression italienne contre la Grèce," *Guerre Mondiales et Conflits Contemporains* 37, no. 146 (1987): 67. Dimitrov gives an excellent background to Italy's diplomatic efforts with Bulgaria and the background influences of Germany, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and Turkey. The Greek Army, not facing a threat from Bulgaria and using terrain and adverse weather to their advantage, quickly bottled up the Italian offensive in Epirus. The Greek counterattack on 8 November 1940 quickly turned Italian efforts into a catastrophe and drove them back into Albania.

<sup>48</sup>Burkhard Mueller-Hillebrand, “Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration,” in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part I, Chapter 2, 21.

<sup>49</sup>Walter Görnitz, *History of the German General Staff, 1657-1945*, trans. Brian Battershaw (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, Publishers, 1967), 391.

<sup>50</sup>Klaus Hildebrand, *The Foreign Policy of the Third Reich* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 104.

<sup>51</sup>Andreas Hillgruber, *Germany and the Two World Wars*, trans. William C. Kirby (Cambridge, MS: Harvard University Press, 1981), 55; Manfred Messerschmidt, “Foreign Policy,” in *Germany and the Second World War*, vol. 1, trans. P.S. Falla, Dean S. McMurry and Ewald Osers (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 583.

<sup>52</sup>Halder, 219. See Halder’s entry for 30 June 1940.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*, 244. See Halder’s entry for 31 July 1940.

<sup>54</sup>Wilhelm Keitel, *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Keitel*, trans. David Irving (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), 137-139.

<sup>55</sup>David M. Glantz, *Barbarossa: Hitler’s invasion of Russia, 1941* (Charleston, SC: Tempus Publishing Inc, 2001), 14. The initial invasion force also included 14 Finnish and 4 Romanian divisions; George E. Blau, *The German Campaign in Russia: Planning and Operations: 1940-1942* (Washington, DC: US Army, Center for Military History, 1988), 88. According to official German reports, by 26 November 1941 the *Wehrmacht* had suffered 743,112 casualties (156,475 killed, 555,685 wounded and 30,952 missing in action). This casualty figure represents approximately 23.5 percent of the total manpower (3.2 million) that Germany deployed to the Eastern front from 22 June to 26 November 1941.

<sup>56</sup>Nolte, 357.

<sup>57</sup>Lucio Ceva, *Guerra Mondiale – Strategia e industria bellica – 1939-1945* (Milan: FrancoAngeli Storia, 2000), 110.

<sup>58</sup>Keitel, 159. Keitel was upset at having to transport the Italian Expeditionary Corps at the expense of critical war supplies; Ciano, *Diary*, 440. Ciano and Mussolini disputed on sending troops to fight against the Soviet Union. Ciano records Mussolini’s reasoning to deploy troops to regain Italy’s prestige. See Ciano’s entry for 30 June 1941.

<sup>59</sup>Ceva, *Guerra Mondiale*, 116.

<sup>60</sup>Diest, 385.

<sup>61</sup>Antonio Saltini, “Gli errori di valutazione dei Capi del Tripartito nel promuovere il secondo conflitto mondiale,” *Rivista Militaire* 22, no. 4 (1966): 557.

<sup>62</sup>Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 12 May 1939,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 17,066, Subj: Comments on Current Events

<sup>63</sup>Albert Kesselring, “Italy as a Military Ally,” in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 14, Part VI, 5.

<sup>64</sup>Elizabeth Wiskemann, 53.

<sup>65</sup>Warlimont, 64 and Badoglio, 7.

<sup>66</sup>Lucio Ceva, “The Strategy of Fascist Italy: A Premise,” in *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 2, no. 3 (winter 2001): 51.

<sup>67</sup>Görlitz, 377.

<sup>68</sup>Burkhart Mueller-Hillebrand, “Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration,” in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part I, Chapter 1, 9.

<sup>69</sup>R. L. DiNardo, “The Dysfunctional Coalition: The Axis Powers and the Eastern Front in World War II,” *Journal of Military History* 60, no. 4 (1996): 718.

<sup>70</sup>Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, trans. Richard and Clara Winston (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1970), 326.

<sup>71</sup>Ceva, “The North African Campaign,” 95.

<sup>72</sup>Ugo Cavallero, *Diario 1940-1943*, ed. Guiseppe Bucciante (Rome: Ciarrapico, 1984), 318-9.

<sup>73</sup>Warlimont, 65.

<sup>74</sup>Herbert L. Matthews, “Nazis press Italy for military tie,” *New York Times*, 1 May 1939, Final Ed., L11; Msg, “Military Attaché: US Embassy Rome to War Department G-2, 9 February 1940,” attaché report in the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) collection of the *Correspondence and Record Cards of the Military Intelligence Division relating to General, Political, Economic and Military Conditions in Italy, 1918-1941*, microfilm identification number M1446, report serial number 17,394, Subj: Italy – Comments on Current Events.

<sup>75</sup>Burkhard Mueller-Hillebrand, "Germany and her Allies in World War II: A Record of Axis Collaboration," in *World War II German Military Studies*, vol. 20, Part II, Chapter 1, 11.

## APPENDIX A

### CHRONOLOGY

- 28 July 1919 The Treaty of Versailles is signed. This treaty officially ends the First World War.
- 23 May 1919 Mussolini charts the *Fasci di Combattimento*. This is the genesis of the Fascist Party.
- 12 September 1919 Gabrielle D'Annunzio leads his group of adventurers and seizes Fiume in Dalmatia.
- 16 October 1919 Hitler joins the German Workers' Party – an extreme right wing group. He quickly rises to a position of leadership.
- 24 February 1920 Hitler changes the name of the German Workers' Party to the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or *Nazi Party*.
- September 1922 Hitler sends his emissary, Kurt Lüdecke, to meet with Mussolini. Lüdecke discusses the Jewish racial problem, Versailles, the ideological unity of Fascism and National Socialism and the question of the *Alto Adige*.
- 28 October 1922 Mussolini and his Fascists “March on Rome” to seize power.
- 30 October 1922 King Vittorio Emanuele III appoints Mussolini as Prime Minister.
- 10 September 1923 Lüdecke meets again with Mussolini and states Hitler's disinterest in the *Alto Adige*.
- 8 November 1923 Hitler attempts to seize power in an abortive putsch. He writes his book, *Mein Kampf*, or My Struggle, while in jail for nine months.
- 28 March 1923 Mussolini forms the *Regia Aeronautica* as an independent Service.
- 3 January 1925 Mussolini, with support from the King and the military imposes a dictatorship.
- 16 October 1925 Germany, Italy Great Britain and France sign the Treaty of Locarno. Germany agrees to a demilitarized Rhineland. The treaty forms the basis of German acceptance into the League of Nations.
- 3 April 1926 Mussolini begins implementing Italy's corporate economy.

- 8 September 1926 Germany admitted into the League of Nations.
- 6 February 1927 Mussolini becomes the Minister for each of the Services.
- 11 February 1929 Mussolini signs the Lateran Pact with the Roman Catholic Church. His government is the first Italian government to receive official recognition from the Church.
- October 1929 The Great Depression begins with the New York stock market crash.
- 30 January 1933 Adolf Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany.
- 28 February 1933 The German Reichstag passes the “Emergency Decree for the Defense of Nation and State,” giving Hitler dictatorial powers.
- 26 January 1934 Germany and Poland sign a Nonaggression Treaty.
- 25 July 1934 Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dolfuss is assassinated by Austrian Nazi’s who attempt an abortive putsch. Mussolini redeploys four Italian divisions to the Brenner Pass to ensure Austrian independence. Europe views Mussolini as a champion for peace.
- 1 August 1934 After the death of President Paul von Hindenburg, Hitler combines the offices of the Reich President and Chancellor to create the office of the “*Führer* of the German Reich and People.”
- 7 January 1935 Mussolini and the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, sign the Rome Agreements with an implicit understanding that France will not oppose Italian interests in Ethiopia.
- 5 March 1935 Hitler announces the formation of the *Luftwaffe* as an independent Service.
- 16 March 1935 Hitler publicly announces German rearmament and reintroduces conscription.
- 11 April 1935 Italian, British and French diplomats meet at Stresa, Italy to discuss German rearmament and continued support to Austrian independence.
- 2 May 1935 France and the Soviet Union sign the Franco-Soviet Pact – a bilateral assistance treaty.
- 21 May 1935 Hitler signs a secret Reich Defense Law to create a national service army.



- 18 June 1935      Great Britain and Germany sign the Anglo-German Naval Agreement. Germany agrees to limit its navy to 35 percent of the British fleet.
- 3 October 1935      Italian forces attack Ethiopia.
- 21 October 1935      Germany withdraws from the League of Nations.
- 9 December 1935      Great Britain and France prepare to accommodate Italian demands in Ethiopia with the Hoare-Laval Plan. The British public's outcry to the plan, however, results in the British government dropping the plan and forces the British Foreign Secretary, Sir Samuel Hoare, to resign on 18 December. Laval resigns in January 1936.
- 7 March 1936      German forces enter and reoccupy the Rhineland.
- July – August 1936      Italian and German forces enter the Spanish Civil War to support General Francisco Franco.
- 4 August 1936      Admiral Wilhelm Canaris and General Mario Roatta meet to discuss mutual efforts in Spain. Both agree to the formation of a combined Italo-German military mission to support Franco.
- 24 October 1936      The Italian Foreign Minister, Count Galeazzo Ciano, meets with Hitler at Berchtesgaden. This meeting is the genesis of the Rome-Berlin Axis.
- 1 November 1936      Mussolini publicly announces the “Axis” between Italy and Germany in a speech in Milan.
- 2 January 1937      Great Britain and Italy sign a “Gentleman’s Agreement” to respect the *status quo* in the Mediterranean.
- 25 September 1937      Mussolini visits Germany for the first time. He becomes convinced of Germany’s might and power.
- 6 November 1937      Italy signs the Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Japan.
- 11 December 1937      Italy withdraws from the League of Nations.
- 4 February 1938      Hitler assumes direct control of the military as “Supreme Commander of the *Wehrmacht*.”
- 12 March 1938      German forces enter and occupy Austria.

- 1 April 1938 Italy and Great Britain sign the Anglo-Italian Treaty. Britain recognizes Italian interests in Ethiopia. Recognition is contingent upon Italian withdrawal from Spain.
- 29 September 1938 Great Britain and France appease German demands for the *Sudetenland* in the Munich Pact. Hitler guarantees the territorial integrity of the rest of Czechoslovakia.
- 15 March 1939 German forces enter and seize the remaining parts of Czechoslovakia, destroying the Munich agreement.
- 1 April 1939 General Franco announces the end of the Spanish Civil War after taking Madrid and forcing the Republican government into exile.
- 4-5 April 1939 Italian Undersecretary of War, General Alberto Pariani and Chief of the OKW, General Wilhelm Keitel meet to discuss military readiness. No strategic plans are exchanged.
- 7 April 1939 Italian forces enter and seize Albania.
- 22 May 1939 Germany and Italy sign a formal military alliance known as the "Pact of Steel." Italy expects no hostilities until 1942-1943.
- 23 May 1939 A day after signing the Pact of Steel, Hitler meets with his senior military leadership and states his intention of attacking Poland.
- 30 May 1939 General Ugo Cavallero meets with Hitler and delivers a memorandum from Mussolini. The memorandum further emphasizes Italy's desire to delay hostilities until 1942.
- 12-13 August 1939 Hitler tells Ciano that Germany intends to invade Poland.
- 23 August 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union sign a Nonaggression Treaty.
- 26 August 1939 Mussolini tells Hitler that Italy cannot fight unless Germany is prepared to provide enormous quantities of raw material and munitions.
- 1 September 1939 German forces invade Poland. Italy declares its *nonbelligeranza*.
- 3 September 1939 Great Britain and France declare war on Germany.
- 27 September 1939 Poland capitulates. Warsaw falls to German forces. A period of relative inactivity, known as the Phoney War begins.

- 18 March 1940 Hitler and Mussolini meet for the first time since the Polish invasion at the Brenner Pass. Hitler continues to induce Mussolini towards war.
- 9 April 1940 Germany attacks Denmark and Norway. The Phoney War ends.
- 10 May 1940 Germany attacks the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg and France.
- 10 June 1940 Italy declares war on Great Britain and France.
- 14 June 1940 German forces enter Paris.
- 22 June 1940 France signs an armistice with Germany.
- 4 July 1940 Italy seizes positions in the British Sudan.
- 3-19 August 1940 Italy invades and seizes British Somaliland.
- 7 September 1940 The Battle of Britain begins.
- 13 September 1940 Italy invades Egypt. The Italian X Army under Marshal Rodolfo Graziani advance to Sidi el Barrani, 60 miles inland and halt on 18 September.
- 27 September 1940 Germany, Italy and Japan sign the Tripartite Pact.
- 4 October 1940 Hitler and Mussolini meet at the Brenner Pass. Hitler offers German forces to assist Italy's drive into Egypt. Mussolini refuses.
- 7 October 1940 German troops enter Romania without notifying Italy.
- 12 October 1940 Germany postpones Operation Sea Lion until spring 1941.
- 28 October 1940 Italy invades Greece without notifying Germany. Hitler and Mussolini meet in Florence the same day.
- 4 November 1940 The Greek Army counterattacks Italian forces and drive them back into Albania. Italy remains on the defensive until January 1941.
- 9 December 1940 Great Britain begins a counteroffensive against Italian forces in Egypt. British forces rout the Italians and drive them back into Libya.
- 18 December 1940 Hitler issues the directive for Operation Barbarossa.

- 19-21 January 1941 Hitler and Mussolini meet at Berchtesgaden. Mussolini finally agrees to German aid in North Africa. Mussolini's *guerra parallela* is now effectively ended.
- 22 January 1941 British forces seize Tobruk, a vital Libyan port and continue to attack Italian forces in retreat.
- 7 February 1941 British offensive into Libya terminates. Remnants of Italian X Army surrender. A total of 130,000 Italians have been taken prisoner during the British campaign. Great Britain is in possession of Eastern Libya.
- 11 February 1941 British forces attack Italian Somaliland.
- 12-14 February 1941 General Erwin Rommel and German Army units arrive in Tripoli, Libya to form the basis of the *Afrika Korps*.
- 7 March 1941 British forces arrive and reinforce Greece.
- 9 March 1941 Italian offensive in Albania designed to penetrate Greek defenses fails.
- 24 March 1941 General Rommel, against the wishes of the German and Italian Army staffs begins an offensive in North Africa.
- 27 March 1941 British forces break through Italian defenses in Eritrea.
- 6 April 1941 Germany invades Yugoslavia and Greece. Addis Ababa, capital of Ethiopia, falls to British forces.
- 10 April 1941 Rommel's *Afrika Korps* lays siege to Tobruk in Eastern Libya.
- 17 April 1941 Yugoslavia capitulates.
- 20 April 1941 Greece capitulates.
- 29 April 1941 British forces are withdrawn from Greece after highly successful German invasion.
- 15-17 June 1941 Rommel defeats British counteroffensive aimed at relieving Tobruk.
- 22 June 1941 Germany attacks the Soviet Union.
- 2 October 1941 German forces begin their final drive towards Moscow.
- 18 November 1941 Great Britain begins second offensive in Libya. British forces drive Rommel's *Africa Korps* back into Western Libya.

- 5 December 1941 Germany abandons its attack on Moscow. Soviet Red Army forces mount a winter counterattack around Moscow
- 7 December 1941 Japan bombed the U.S. fleet in Pearl Harbor.
- 11 December 1941 Germany and Italy declare war on the United States.
- 19 December 1941 Hitler takes personal command of the German Army.
- 21 January 1942 Rommel begins his second offensive and drives the British forces back into Eastern Libya just west of Tobruk.
- 29 April 1942 Hitler and Mussolini along with Count Galeazzo Ciano, Marshal Ugo Cavallero and Field Marshal Walter Keitel meet in Salzburg. All agree that Tobruk should be seized before the invasion of Malta.
- 26 May 1942 Rommel begins his third offensive in Libya.
- 20 June 1942 Tobruk falls to the *Afrika Korps*. Rommel continues his offensive and derails Italo-German plans to invade Malta. The *Afrika Korps* advances into Egypt and halts at El Alamein.
- 28 June 1942 German forces begin their second great offensive in the Eastern Front aimed at seizing vital oil resources in the Caucasus.
- 15-27 July 1942 British forces counterattack the *Afrika Korps* but fail to achieve a breakthrough. Rommel's forces, however, sustain heavy losses.
- 31 August 1942 Rommel attempts to break British defenses at Alam Halfa. *Afrika Korps* offensive fails disastrously.
- September 1942 German forces fail to take Stalingrad or the Caucasus oil fields. The Battle of Stalingrad begins on 13 September.
- 4 November 1942 British forces under General Sir Bernard Law Montgomery break through and destroy the *Afrika Korps* defenses at El Alamein.
- 8 November 1942 Anglo-American forces land in North Africa, seizing French Morocco and Algeria.
- 9 November 1942 Italo-German forces land in Tunisia.
- 19 November 1942 The Soviet Red Army begins its counteroffensive around Stalingrad.
- 23 November 1942 The *Afrika Korps* retreats from Eastern Libya.

- 16 December 1942 The second Soviet counteroffensive around Stalingrad destroys the Italian VIII Army.
- 18 December 1942 Count Ciano and Marshal Cavallero meet with Hitler. An agreement is reached to defend Tunisia.
- 2 January 1943 German forces withdraw from the Caucasus.
- 2 February 1943 German forces surrender at Stalingrad.
- 3 February 1943 The last Italian forces leave Libya.
- 26 March 1943 Italian forces hold against British attacks in southeastern Tunisia, but forced to withdraw when threatened by U.S. forces in the West.
- 7 April 1943 Mussolini and Hitler meet at Klessheim. Hitler insists on continuing the war against the Soviet Union.
- 13 May 1943 Italo-German forces surrender in Tunisia.
- 10 July 1943 Anglo-American forces invade Sicily.
- 12 July 1943 German Kursk offensive in the Soviet Union fails. Germany now on the operational defensive in the Eastern front.
- 25 July 1943 King Vittorio Emmanuele III dismisses Mussolini and has him arrested. The new Prime Minister, Marshal Pietro Badoglio, begins secret negotiations with the Allies to surrender.
- 9 September 1943 Italy surrenders to the Allies. Anglo-American forces invade Italian mainland.
- 12 September 1943 Mussolini is rescued by German paratroopers. Mussolini, with German support, creates the Italian Socialist Republic in northern Italy.
- 13 October 1943 Italy declares war on Germany.
- 6 November 1943 Soviet forces retake Kiev, the capital of the Ukraine.
- 24 December 1943 The Soviet Red Army begins an offensive along the Ukrainian front.
- 27 January 1944 Leningrad is relieved.
- 4 March 1944 The Soviet Red Army begins its Belorussian offensive.
- 4 June 1944 Anglo-American forces enter Rome.

6 June 1944	Anglo-American forces land in Normandy, France.
22 June 1944	The Soviet Union launches its summer offensive.
19 August 1944	The Soviet Union invades Romania and the Balkans.
25 August 1944	Paris is liberated by the Allies.
17 January 1945	Soviet forces seize Warsaw, the capital of Poland.
21 April 1945	The Soviet Red Army reaches Berlin.
28 April 1945	Mussolini is captured and executed by Communist partisans.
30 April 1945	Hitler commits suicide in Berlin.
9 May 1945	Germany surrenders to the Allies.

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