



HISTORY **IN**  
DISPUTE

Volume 5

World War II

# HISTORY<sup>IN</sup> DISPUTE

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# HISTORY <sup>IN</sup>DISPUTE

Volume **5**

World War II

*Edited by* **Dennis Showalter**

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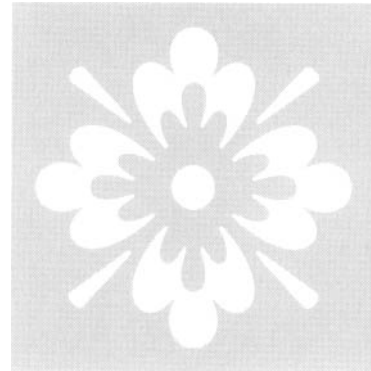
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No, the Nuremberg Trials were the victor's justice, complete with  
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No, although resistance and partisan movements did help boost national pride and distract enemy troops, they were not decisive in bringing about the defeat of Nazi Germany. *(William H. Kautt)* . . . . 246

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Yes, Franklin D. Roosevelt was an astute and effective war leader, who picked excellent military subordinates, prepared the United States for war, and helped orchestrate an effective grand strategy and maintained close ties to Britain. *(William J. Astore)*. . . 250

No, Franklin D. Roosevelt was not a great war leader because he too easily followed the British lead, favored the Navy over the Army, and let his personal feelings interfere with policy, especially with regard to General Douglas MacArthur. *(John Wheatley)* . . . . . 252

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No, unconditional surrender was not a wise policy, especially in relation to the defeat of Japan, but Harry S Truman's desire to follow Franklin D. Roosevelt's course, the availability of the atomic bomb, and the need to placate American feelings forced Truman to seek total defeat of the enemy. *(Gian P. Gentile)* . . . . . 274

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# ABOUT THE SERIES



*History in Dispute* is an ongoing series designed to present, in an informative and lively pro-con format, different perspectives on major historical events drawn from all time periods and from all parts of the globe. The series was developed in response to requests from librarians and educators for a history-reference source that will help students hone essential critical-thinking skills while serving as a valuable research tool for class assignments.

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# PREFACE



U.S. participation made what had begun as an essentially European conflict into an unquestionable second world war. The adjustments of the Soviet Union to war were more geographic than social—the country had been on what amounted to a war footing since the introduction of the first Five Year Plan in 1928. Of the liberal democracies, Great Britain was the most efficient in mobilizing its limited resources, to the point of conscripting women for war work and eventually integrating them into home-defense anti-aircraft batteries. Germany was slower to achieve full mobilization—in good part because Adolf Hitler believed that in World War I the home front had collapsed from privation while the army was still fighting on. Not until after Stalingrad (1943) did Germany begin to tighten its belt and add women in significant numbers to its labor force. Even then the Reich’s civilians continued to live well on the plunder of Europe. American soldiers entering the Reich in 1945 consistently remarked on how well nourished the inhabitants appeared compared to the French or Belgians. As for the United States, its large population, efficient economic system, and remoteness from the fighting enabled national mobilization with overlapping loopholes—so many that major-league baseball was able to continue fielding teams throughout the war. The country was even able to indulge its racist elements by virtually ignoring the military potential of 10 percent of its citizens. Draftees or volunteers, most African Americans spent the war as uniformed laborers. Despite the large numbers engaged in direct support of the war effort—in factories, and in uniform—American women’s contributions as well were largely gender conventional, involving keeping home fires burning and home cooking on the table.

Even before the entry of the United States into the war, Britain had been striking back at Germany the only way possible—by air. Prewar expectations about the effect of strategic bombardment, however, proved wildly optimistic. A

Royal Air Force (RAF) unable to survive by day was also unable to find, much less strike, specific targets by night. The result was a de facto shift of emphasis to area bombardment—a shift hardly noticed in 1941 and during most of 1942 because of the small numbers and the short range of the aircraft available. The Americans were more robust in their approach, calling for a land invasion of the Continent in 1943—perhaps as early as 1942, should Soviet collapse become imminent. British prime minister Winston Churchill and his military chiefs considered both ideas folly and convinced U.S. president Franklin D. Roosevelt that Allied ground resources would be better employed initially in an invasion of North Africa.

Mounted in November 1942, the North African campaign, Operation Torch, highlighted the tactical and operational weaknesses of the American and British armies, while proving significantly successful on strategic and policy levels. The North African campaign forced the Axis off the Continent with a loss of more than 150,000 prisoners and ended Italy’s commitment to the war. It also established the framework for successful cooperation among senior British and U.S. commanders in no way compatible, either personally or professionally. The unity owed much to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, whose mastery of coalition war made him one of the great captains of the twentieth century.

Victories in North Africa, however, were irrelevant—at least for negotiating purposes—to Joseph Stalin, who demanded a “second front now” in northeast Europe to relieve pressure on a Soviet Union strained to the limit against a still-formidable *Wehrmacht* (German Army). An Anglo-American proclamation of “unconditional surrender” in January 1943 did not placate the Soviet dictator. Neither did the Western Allies’ decision that African success was best followed up directly by invading Sicily, then Italy. This “Mediterranean strategy” also disturbed U.S. Army leaders still committed to a cross-Channel

invasion in 1943 and naval commanders arguing for the deployment of American resources to the Pacific theater if the cross-Channel invasion remained impossible in the near future. It made sense, however, to President Roosevelt, who was committed to maintaining an equal partnership with a steadily weakening Britain—and to British policymakers who realized that for their country, a cross-Channel invasion was a one-time event.

Operational implementation of the “Mediterranean variant” has ever since been grist for critics’ mills. Sicily was overrun easily enough in the summer of 1943. Yet, the plans for invading the Italian peninsula itself took too little account of the terrain and paid even less attention to the Germans. The Italian surrender in September, exploited only halfheartedly by the Allies, enabled the Germans to convert Italy to a killing ground. An increasingly multicultural Allied force fought its way up the peninsula mile by mile against a defense whose conduct remains a tribute to Wehrmacht skill at arms. The single effort to open up the campaign, the amphibious landing at Anzio in January 1944, was quickly contained, becoming just another static front in a theater where advances were achieved at a single price: soldiers’ lives. Not until June did Rome finally fall—and the Normandy landings promptly overshadowed its capture.

Allied initiatives and successes in the Mediterranean nevertheless influenced Hitler and the Wehrmacht as well. In the aftermath of Stalingrad, the Germans had succeeded in reestablishing their lines in south Russia, even throwing the Russians out of the key city of Kharkov, captured in February 1943. That counterpunch generated plans for a larger attack against the salient around the city of Kursk. Far from being just a large-scale local counterattack, Operation Citadel was regarded as a response to Allied gains in the West and as a means of reestablishing the operational superiority lost at Stalingrad. The Red Army viewed Kursk as an integral part of its own offensive plans, an opportunity to wear down German mobile forces on Russian terms. The result was one of history’s biggest tank battles (5–12 July 1943). At its end the panzers had been stopped, then forced into a retreat that ended only in the streets of Berlin. The Russians followed their victory by unleashing their own offensive—a series of operationally sophisticated, well-coordinated attacks that by late autumn had recaptured Smolensk and Kiev, forced the Germans back across the Dnieper River, and set the stage for the massive assaults of 1944.

Meanwhile Britain and the United States had won a decisive victory in one sector and were expanding operations in another. The Battle of the Atlantic had gone into high gear in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor. German U-boats took

advantage of American inexperience to launch a devastating offensive against shipping along the Atlantic coast and in the Caribbean. The Royal Navy stretched to the breaking point and a Royal Canadian Navy, so new that its ships were named for inland towns such as Moose Jaw and Kamloops, were ill-prepared for transatlantic escort missions. For a year it seemed that a *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) might indeed sink merchantmen faster than the Allies—or better said, the Americans—could build them. By the end of 1942, however, U.S. yards were launching ships on a daily basis. All three navies were learning the techniques of antisubmarine warfare. As German admiral Karl Doenitz deployed every boat he could muster, the battle for control of the North Atlantic culminated in May 1943, with Allied escorts and aircraft inflicting losses so high that Doenitz “temporarily” withdrew his boats to safer sectors. They would never return in force.

As the war at sea intensified, so too did the battle over Germany. The RAF, whose strength and effectiveness were steadily increasing, was joined in 1942 by growing numbers of American heavy bombers, committed by doctrine and design to daylight precision bombing. Such raids proved difficult to implement in a theater where cloud cover was often as high as 90 percent. Daylight raids proved costly in the face of a *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) that, indifferent to defensive operations before the war, showed a steep learning curve. They were no less costly than British night operations. Both air forces take pride in never having abandoned a raid, despite losses as high as 60 of 230 U.S. bombers sent against Schweinfurt on 14 October 1943, and 95 of the 800 RAF aircraft that attacked Nuremberg on the night of 30–31 March 1944. The scale and the scope of those raids steadily increased. As early as 1942 the British were able to send a thousand planes against a single target in a single night—but only in western Germany. That same year the first fire raids began, incinerating cities the size of Hamburg. In 1943 the “Combined Bomber Offensive” took on Berlin: the Americans by day and the British by night. But the Reich survived, with its morale and its production capacities having proved unexpectedly resistant to the best that the world’s greatest industrial powers could throw at them.

In the Far East, the United States and Japan spent the first months of 1943 dueling at arm’s length for possession of Guadalcanal and control of the southwest Pacific. Final honors went to the Americans, who brought the techniques and mentality of industrial war to bear in swamps and jungles, against an enemy so committed to moral force that Japanese light machine guns had bayonet attachments. At the same time the

U.S. Navy began a drive across the coral atolls of the central Pacific, intending to draw the Japanese Navy into an all-out battle, and establishing bases for a final attack against the home islands. Here again the United States brought a paradigm shift to war—this time by its increasing capacity to keep entire fleets at sea by refueling and resupplying the ships on the spot, rather than withdrawing them to land bases. American aircraft carriers became the dominant surface warship; American submarines savaged Japanese merchant shipping.

By the end of 1943 the question of Japan's fate was not "if" but "how". General Douglas MacArthur, commanding in the South Pacific, was convinced the best way to Japan's heart lay through the Philippines. In early 1944 he began successful combined-arms operations along the New Guinea coast. The Navy, disliking MacArthur and convinced a pincers attack was a waste of resources, simultaneously struck for the Mariana Islands. Whatever its strategic shortcomings, the operational advantages of this one-two punch were demonstrated when the Japanese main fleet, fearing to be caught in the combined attack, sortied against the Marianas invasion force. The result was officially called the Battle of the Philippine Sea (19–20 June 1944); to participants it was the "Great Marianas Turkey Shoot." For the second time in the war, Japan's carrier aviation was annihilated, its surviving flattops returning home with empty flight decks. In the context of that victory it made common sense to follow it up as quickly as possible, by attacking the closest major objective. Navy and army agreed; in October 1944 U.S. troops landed on Leyte Island in the Philippines. MacArthur—and the Americans—had returned.

In 1944 in the West, British and Americans concentrated on crippling the German fighter force. The P-51 Mustang, the war's best piston-engine fighter, enabled daylight raids to penetrate anywhere in the Reich—and decimated its Luftwaffe opponents. Electronics and the "wooden wonder," De Havilland's Mosquito night fighter and intruder, played significant roles in increasing British successes after dark. As D-Day approached, both air forces were diverted from bombing cities and factories to strike oil production facilities and railway networks. By September, Luftwaffe fuel supplies were so low that fighter pilots were being sent to squadrons with no more than a few hours' cockpit time—cold meat for their Allied opponents, who were undeterred by the small-scale introduction of German jet fighters exponentially superior to any piston-engine craft. The bombers ranged virtually unchallenged across a shrinking Reich. By the end of the year, the Combined Bomber

Offensive (CBO) had for practical purposes run out of targets—military targets, at least.

On land, the Red Army initiated a sequence of offensives that broke the siege of Leningrad, isolated the Crimean Peninsula, and drove across the Bug and Dniester Rivers into Romanian territory. Hitler responded by replacing most of the generals—about all that could be done given the steep and increasing decline in German resources relative to the Soviet Union which had risen like a phoenix from the disasters of 1941–1942. As he had done consistently since 1941, Hitler ordered a policy—it cannot be called a strategy—of no retreat. Implemented along a front of 1,400 miles, it was a recipe for catastrophe. On 22 June, no fewer than four Soviet army groups launched Operation Bagration against an overstretched German defensive system in central Russia. Army Group Center disappeared in a typhoon of fire and steel—it took a quarter-century to reconstruct the fate of individual divisions from survivors and returned prisoners of war (POWs). To the north, Russian forces pushed the Germans back into the Baltic states, then swung left to trap an entire army group in the Courland Pocket on the Baltic Sea. On 7 August, elements of the 1<sup>st</sup> Ukrainian Front reached the Vistula River. The underground Polish Home Army reacted by staging a revolt in Warsaw. The savage suppression of the uprising by German forces was uninterrupted by Soviet commanders who claimed their advance units were too overstretched to make a further effort. The Red Army did, however, have enough vital energy remaining to mount a drive into Romania, beginning on 20 August, that drove that country to capitulate and left two German armies isolated in the land of their erstwhile ally. Some of the men made it back to their own lines. Most were lost, along with their irreplaceable equipment, as the Russians slashed into Hungary and occupied Belgrade—the latter with some help from a Yugoslav partisan movement that had fought internal rivals almost as much as the Germans over the past few years.

Often overshadowed in Western accounts by the D-Day campaign, Soviet Russia's achievement in the second half of 1944 is arguably the greatest operational victory of World War II. The Red Army had retained the virtues of a mass that had a quality of its own and a fighting spirit enhanced when necessary by the secret police. It had added sophisticated combined-arms tactics, weapons systems second to none in the world, and commanders, from captains to generals, who had learned their trade at the front against an unforgiving, highly skilled enemy. Soviet intelligence left the Germans deceived or blinded. Soviet partisans provided a rear-area threat to Germans already facing all they could handle to



their front. Rear-echelon services, with the aid of thousands of Lend-Lease U.S. trucks and jeeps, kept forward units supplied and mobile. Engaged on its own terms, the German army had been outfought as well as overwhelmed.

The Allied landing in Normandy on 6 June 1944 epitomized an Anglo-American war effort that from the beginning sought to maximize material at the expense of human resources. The half-dozen divisions that crossed the beaches were supported and sustained by the factories and laboratories of the world's greatest industrial nations. Yet, in the final analysis it was fighting power at the sharp end that secured and expanded the beachheads against a German defense as determined as it was skillful.

The same held true for the subsequent breakout and the drive across France in the summer and fall of 1944. In the old newsreels it seems a triumph of mobile warfare. In fact, the percentage of British casualties in the Northwest European campaign was comparable to that for the Western Front in 1914–1918. American losses were no less heavy. In contrast to the earlier conflict, divisions were seldom removed from the line. Instead replacements were funneled forward—and there were fewer and fewer of them as the campaign progressed. British manpower was exhausted after five years of total war, to the point where it was necessary to break up fighting formations to keep others in the field. The U.S. decision to create only a necessary minimum of ground formations—the “ninety-division gamble”—frayed at the edges as combat-arms casualties exponentially exceeded expectations.

Seen in that context the debate over “broad-front” versus “single-thrust” strategies becomes something of a red herring. The Allied armies were not configured for a massive hammer blow. A broad-front strategy also reflected the logistical problems inherent in sustaining a high-tech mobile campaign through small and damaged ports. The failure of Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, commanding the northern army group, to clear the Scheldt Estuary promptly in the fall of 1944 rendered the harbor of Antwerp temporarily useless. Not supply shortages, however, but increasingly effective German resistance brought the Allied advance to a halt at Arnhem, Holland, in the Huertgen Forest and all along the frontier of Germany, fighting with a hangman's noose around its neck.

The Ardennes offensive of December 1944 was Hitler's last desperate gamble for a military victory sufficiently impressive to encourage a negotiated peace. Its stated objective of Antwerp was widely recognized as unattainable. The practical goal of the attack was to do as much damage as possible to the U.S. Army and Anglo-American relations. The first goal was frustrated by a

stubborn local defense and a spectacular counter-attack mounted by General George S. Patton's 3rd Army. He became infuriated when Montgomery boasted of having “seen off” the Germans despite a minimal involvement of British forces in the sector.

The incident with Montgomery indicates the relative ease with which the Allies finished off a German opponent that had shot its bolt in the Ardennes. By that time both the British and U.S. armies had a solid sense of what they could do well. Their citizen-soldiers were a match for any, and their commanders had achieved high levels of skill. The Rhine River, far from proving the formidable obstacle initially expected, was crossed in a half-dozen places, by methods ranging from elaborate set-piece battles, to the inspired seizure of an undestroyed bridge, to paddling across in rubber boats. The rest of the war was a mopping-up operation against fierce but episodic resistance, while trying to avert military and political clashes with a Red Army advancing from the other direction.

The final Soviet offensive against the Third Reich began in January 1945. Its focal point was the northern sector: East Prussia, Pomerania, and Silesia. Sheer numbers overwhelmed the Germans. By 31 January, the Red Army was on the Oder River, its progress marked by a wave of pillage, murder, and rape that sought to repay four years of German atrocities in a few weeks—and came close to succeeding. In the south, Budapest held out until 12 February, thanks in part to a final counterattack by some of the panzer troops who survived the Ardennes. With its fall the Soviets fought their way into Austria, reaching Vienna on 13 April. The desperate German defense of that city was overshadowed by the struggle for Berlin. The final attack began on 16 April. By 25 April the city was encircled, the Red Army fighting its way toward the center. On 30 April, the hammer and sickle went up over the Reichstag building. Hitler committed suicide the same day. On 8 May an unconditional German surrender brought an end to Hitler's war.

In the Pacific theater, Japan responded to the invasion of Leyte by dispatching the remainder of its fleet on what amounted to a suicide mission against American forces superior in quality, command, and deployment. On 15 December, U.S. troops landed on Luzon, and subsequently moved south into the Visayas and Mindanao. Japan, however, remained unconquered. Direct raids on the home islands, mounted from bases in the Marianas by the new B-29 Superfortresses, had no visible effect. The submarine campaign by now was attacking fishing boats in the absence of larger targets. Yet, the Japanese high command remained intransigent—a

fact demonstrated consistently in the diplomatic radio traffic wide open to U.S. interception.

Invasion seemed an increasingly inevitable option. Its probable costs were highlighted by the landings on Iwo Jima in February 1945 and on Okinawa six weeks later. On both islands Japanese resistance was as skillful as it was ferocious. In March a new wave of air attacks, based on low-altitude firebombing, devastated Japanese cities, inflicting casualties dwarfing any experienced by Germany. As American planning developed for the invasion of Kyushu in the autumn of 1945, Japan prepared to inflict such losses that the United States and its allies would consider negotiating a settlement on what amounted to Japanese terms. The dropping of the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima on 6 August was the first step in a necessary attitude adjustment. Nevertheless it took a second bomb three days later, coupled with a simultaneous Soviet invasion of Manchuria, to convince the Emperor and his advisers to capitulate.

Japan's signing of the surrender terms on 2 September concluded the fighting. The Axis had been not merely defeated but crushed: its soldiers dead or in POW camps; its cities devastated; its territory under occupation; and its citizens at the mercy of their conquerors. Para-

doxically, the completeness of the Allied victory facilitated the postwar collapse of the grand coalition. Stalin had from the beginning suspected the good will of Britain and the United States—to a point where on several occasions between 1941 and 1944 he considered opening peace negotiations with Hitler. As the war neared its end, the Soviet ruler was concerned both for strengthening the geopolitical position of the Soviet state and creating a springboard for world revolution. Churchill hoped to preserve as much of the British Empire as possible. Roosevelt's vision of a postwar world rendered prosperous by free trade and regulated by a United Nations underwritten by a consortium of great powers was generous, but so broad-gauged that it overlooked the reservations of America's coalition partners. Face-to-face conferences such as Teheran in 1943 and Yalta in 1945 produced agreement, if not consensus, on specific subjects such as Russia's entry into the war against Japan, or the frontiers and government of postwar Poland. They could not, however, bridge the fundamental gaps in understanding and interest that led to World War III—known familiarly but misleadingly as the Cold War, and treated by other volumes in this series.

—DENNIS SHOWALTER, COLORADO COLLEGE

# CHRONOLOGY



## 1943

- 14–27 JANUARY: Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt confer with the Joint Chiefs of Staff at Casablanca and demand unconditional surrender by the Axis powers. (See **The Allies**, **Anglo-American Disputes**, **Anglo-American Relations**, and **Unconditional Surrender**)
- 22 JANUARY: American and Australian forces overrun the last pockets of Japanese troops in New Guinea.
- 23 JANUARY: The British Eighth Army takes Tripoli. (See **Allied Strategy**, **Anglo-American Disputes**, and **Italy**)
- 31 JANUARY: On the outskirts of Stalingrad, the Germans under General Friedrich Paulus capitulate. Joseph Stalin announces the capture of more than 45,000 prisoners, including thirteen generals, and the deaths of 146,700 Germans. The remaining German troops in the area, including eight more generals, surrender on 2 February. (See **Hitler's Army** and **Operation Barbarossa**)
- 9 FEBRUARY: The last Japanese forces retreat from Guadalcanal.
- 20 FEBRUARY: At Kasserine Pass in Tunisia, Allied troops are forced to retreat by Erwin Rommel's *Afrika Korps* (Africa Corps). On 25 February, Allied troops retake the pass.
- 2–4 MARCH: The Japanese are defeated by the United States in the battle of the Bismarck Sea, losing a convoy of twenty-two ships and more than fifty aircraft.
- 20 APRIL: The Nazis massacre Jews in the Warsaw ghetto. (See **Holocaust: Mass Murder** and **Holocaust: The System**)
- MAY: The U.S. Supreme Court hears arguments in the *Hirabayashi v. U.S.* civil-rights trial. (See **Japanese Internment**)
- 7–9 MAY: After the Allies take Tunis and Bizerte, the German forces in Tunisia surrender unconditionally. (See **Unconditional Surrender**)
- 13 MAY: Axis powers surrender in North Africa. (See **The Axis**)
- 24 MAY: German *Unterseeboote* (U-boats) are withdrawn from the North Atlantic, conceding Allied victory. (See **Battle of the Atlantic** and **Submarines**)
- 3 JUNE: French generals Charles de Gaulle and Henri Giraud form the French Committee of National Liberation (CFLN) to coordinate the French war effort. (See **Resistance Movements**)
- JULY: President Roosevelt signs a bill establishing the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) as an official part of the U.S. Army's Women's Army Corps (WAC). (See **Women's Role**)
- 5 JULY: One of the largest tank battles in history begins at Kursk in the Soviet Union. After a week of fighting, the Germans are forced to call off their offensive.
- 10 JULY: The Allies invade Sicily, overcoming the last remaining forces on the island at Messina on 17 August.
- 19 JULY: Allied forces bomb Rome for the first time. (See **Allied Strategy**)
- 25 JULY: The Fascist Grand Council passes a vote of no confidence in Italian dictator Benito Mussolini and he is arrested. King Victor Emmanuel III asks Marshal Pietro Badoglio to form a new government. (See **The Axis** and **Italy**)
- 1 AUGUST: The Japanese grant independence to Burma, which declares war on the United States and Great Britain. (See **Emperor Hirohito** and **Imperial Systems**)
- 14–24 AUGUST: Allied representatives meet in Quebec to plan a war strategy. (See **Allied Strategy** and **The Allies**)
- 23 AUGUST: Soviet troops retake Kharkov. (See **Operation Barbarossa**)
- 3 SEPTEMBER: The Allies invade Italy.
- 8 SEPTEMBER: Eisenhower announces the unconditional surrender of Italy to the Allies. Stalin permits the reopening of many Soviet churches. (See **Anglo-American Dis-**

**putes, The Balkans, Italy, and Unconditional Surrender)**

- 9 SEPTEMBER: Allied troops land near Salerno, Italy.
- 10 SEPTEMBER: Germany announces the occupation of Rome and northern Italy. (*See The Axis*)
- 12 SEPTEMBER: German commandos led by Captain Otto Skorzeny rescue Mussolini from house arrest in San Grasso and take him to northern Italy, where he forms a new Fascist government. (*See Italy*)
- 30 SEPTEMBER: The Allies occupy Naples. (*See Allied Strategy*)
- OCTOBER: The United Nations War Crimes Commission is created. (*See Nuremberg and The Tokyo Trials*)
- 13 OCTOBER: The Italian government led by Badoglio declares war on Germany. (*See The Axis*)
- 19–30 OCTOBER: The Allies confer in Moscow and agree that Germany will be stripped of all territory acquired since 1938. (*See The Allies and Roosevelt*)
- 1 NOVEMBER: American forces land at Bougainville in the Solomon Islands.
- 6 NOVEMBER: The Russians retake Kiev.
- 19 NOVEMBER: Sir Oswald Mosley, a British Fascist leader imprisoned since May 1940 as a security risk, is released on grounds of failing health.
- 22–26 NOVEMBER: Churchill, Roosevelt, and Chinese Nationalist leader Chiang Kai-shek meet at Cairo to plan a postwar Asian policy. (*See Nationalist China and Roosevelt*)
- 28 NOVEMBER–1 DECEMBER: Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt meet in Teheran to discuss war strategy and plan the structure of the postwar world. (*See The Allies, Anglo-American Relations, and Roosevelt*)
- 2 DECEMBER: U.S. mustard gas supplies begin leaking after a German air attack on Bari, Sicily. More than one thousand people die from the poison. (*See Chemical Warfare*)
- 1944**
- 22 JANUARY: Allied troops land at Anzio, Italy, in an attempt to outflank German defense positions in central Italy. (*See Allied Strategy and Anglo-American Disputes*)
- 27 JANUARY: The German siege of Leningrad ends. (*See Hitler's Army*)
- 4 MARCH: American bombers conduct the first daylight air raid on Berlin. (*See Air Power, Bomber Offensive, and Bombing of Civilians*)
- 4 JUNE: Allied forces enter Rome.
- 6 JUNE: D-Day. Allied forces establish beachheads in Normandy, France, and begin the liberation of western Europe. The operation, code-named "Overlord," involves more than 3,400 ships, 3,100 bombers, 5,000 fighters, and 3 million troops. (*See Airborne Forces, Allied Strategy, Anglo-American Disputes, and U.S. Combat Effectiveness*)
- 13 JUNE: The Germans begin attacking Britain with their V-1 rockets, launching more than seven thousand against England by 24 August. (*See Bombing of Civilians*)
- 15 JUNE: American long-range Superfortress aircraft begin bombing operations against the Japanese home islands. (*See Air Power, Bomber Offensive, and Bombing of Civilians*)
- 1 JULY: The Allies confer in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, hoping to establish a stable postwar economic system. (*See The Allies and Roosevelt*)
- 3 JULY: The Soviets announce their recapture of Minsk.
- 18 JULY: Hideki Tojo resigns as Japanese prime minister. (*See Emperor Hirohito and Imperial Systems*)
- 20 JULY: An assassination attempt on Adolf Hitler fails at his East Prussian headquarters. Some of the conspirators, including Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg, chief of staff of the Home Army, are executed during the night.
- 1 AUGUST: While Soviet forces battle only twelve miles outside the city limits, members of the Polish Home Army in Warsaw begin an uprising against the German garrison. The resistance is brutally suppressed. (*See Resistance Movements*)
- 12 AUGUST: Allied troops liberate Paris.
- 15 AUGUST: The Allies invade southern France. (*See Allied Strategy, Anglo-American Disputes, and Operation Dragoon*)
- 4 SEPTEMBER: Allied troops liberate Brussels.
- 8 SEPTEMBER: The Germans begin V-2 rocket attacks on England. (*See Bombing of Civilians*)
- 12 SEPTEMBER: Romania signs an armistice with the Allies.
- 17 SEPTEMBER: In one of the largest airborne operations in military history, the First Allied Airborne Army lands in Holland. (*See Airborne Forces*)
- 29 SEPTEMBER: The Soviet Union invades Yugoslavia. (*See The Balkans*)
- 9–20 OCTOBER: Churchill and Stalin confer in Moscow.
- 20 OCTOBER: American forces led by General Douglas MacArthur land in the Philippines. (*See The Generals*)
- 23–26 OCTOBER: During the Battle of Leyte Gulf, the largest naval battle of World War II, American forces destroy the remainder of the Japanese fleet.

16 DECEMBER: German general Karl von Rundstedt launches an unsuccessful German offensive in the Ardennes. This “Battle of the Bulge” is the last major German military offensive of World War II. (*See Allied Strategy, The Generals, and Hitler’s Army*)

## 1945

18 JANUARY: The Soviets announce the liberation of Warsaw.

20 JANUARY: The provisional Hungarian government of General Bela Miklos signs an agreement of unconditional surrender to the Allies. (*See Unconditional Surrender*)

22 JANUARY: British troops retake Monywa, in Burma, reopening the land route to China.

26 JANUARY: Soviet troops reach the Prussian coast at Elbing, severing East Prussia from the rest of Germany.

27 JANUARY: The Red Army liberates Auschwitz. (*See Auschwitz*)

29 JANUARY: Soviet troops cross the 1939 border between Poland and Germany, entering the province of Pomerania in northeastern Germany. By 2 February they control most of East Prussia.

31 JANUARY: Soviet troops cross the Oder River, coming within fifty miles of Berlin.

4–11 FEBRUARY: Roosevelt, Churchill, Stalin, and other Allied leaders confer at Yalta, in the Crimea, on issues of postwar international organization. They agree to divide Germany into separate Allied occupation zones. (*See Yalta*)

13 FEBRUARY: The Soviets capture Budapest after a fifty-day siege.

14 FEBRUARY: The Allies firebomb Dresden. (*See Bombing of Civilians*)

19 FEBRUARY: U.S. Marines land at Iwo Jima, 750 miles south of Tokyo. The island falls to the Americans on 17 March, at a cost of four thousand American and twenty thousand Japanese lives. (*See U.S. Marines*)

21 FEBRUARY: The Inter-American Conference convenes in Mexico City to discuss economic issues such as conversion to a peacetime economy.

24 FEBRUARY: U.S. troops drive the last Japanese forces from Manila, Philippines.

6 MARCH: U.S. troops capture Cologne.

7 MARCH: The American First Army crosses the Rhine at Remagen.

9 MARCH: American Superfortress bombers drop more than 2,300 tons of incendiary bombs on Tokyo. (*See Air Power, Bomber Offensive, and Bombing of Civilians*)

30 MARCH: The Soviets capture Danzig.

1 APRIL: American forces invade Okinawa, 360 miles south of Tokyo.

9–13 APRIL: The Red Army enters Vienna.

12 APRIL: President Roosevelt dies at Warm Springs, Georgia. He is succeeded by Vice President Harry S Truman. American troops liberate Buchenwald concentration camp. (*See Roosevelt, Holocaust: Mass Murder, and Nazi Rise to Power*)

21 APRIL: Soviet troops reach the outskirts of Berlin.

25 APRIL: Advancing armies of the United States and the Soviet Union meet at Torgau, on the Elbe River in Germany. The United Nations conference opens in San Francisco. The delegates complete the U.N. charter on 26 June.

28 APRIL: In Como, Italy, Mussolini is executed by Italian partisans. (*See Italy*)

29 APRIL: The U.S. Seventh Army enters Munich and liberates the concentration camp at Dachau. German troops in Italy surrender to the Allies. (*See Holocaust: Mass Murder*)

30 APRIL: Hitler commits suicide at his bunker in Berlin.

2 MAY: The Germans surrender Berlin to the Soviets.

8 MAY: V-E Day. German military authorities formally surrender to the Allies, ending World War II in Europe.

22 MAY: Yonabaru, the key Japanese position on Okinawa, is taken by American forces. The Japanese surrender the island on 21 June, at a cost of thirteen thousand American and one hundred thousand Japanese lives.

5 JULY: The United States completes the reoccupation of the Philippines, at a cost of nearly twelve thousand men.

16 JULY: The United States successfully detonates the first atomic bomb at Alamogordo Air Force Base in New Mexico. (*See Atomic Bomb*)

17–26 JULY: Truman, Stalin, Churchill, and other Allied representatives meet in Potsdam, a suburb of Berlin, and issue the Potsdam Declaration, demanding the unconditional surrender of Japan. (*See Unconditional Surrender*)

26 JULY: Elections in Britain result in a Labour Party landslide; Clement Atlee succeeds Churchill as prime minister.

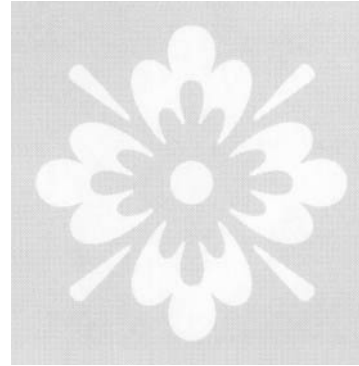
6 AUGUST: The U.S. Superfortress bomber Enola Gay drops an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Hiroshima, killing more than fifty thousand people and leveling four square miles of the city. (*See Atomic Bomb and Bombing of Civilians*)

8 AUGUST: The Soviet Union declares war on Japan and attacks Japanese forces in Manchuria the next day.

- 9 AUGUST: The United States detonates an atomic bomb on the Japanese city of Nagasaki, killing more than forty thousand people and destroying one-third of the city. (*See Atomic Bomb*)
- 10 AUGUST: The Japanese Supreme Council votes to accept the surrender terms of the Potsdam Declaration. (*See Unconditional Surrender*)
- 14 AUGUST: The Soviet government concludes a treaty with the Chinese Nationalist government of Chiang Kai-shek. (*See Nationalist China*)
- 15 AUGUST: V-J Day. The Allies accept the unconditional surrender of the Japanese. (*See Unconditional Surrender*)
- 28 AUGUST: U.S. troops land on the home islands of Japan to supervise the disarmament of the Japanese military.
- 2 SEPTEMBER: The All-India Congress Committee, led by Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru, convenes. It rejects British proposals for national autonomy and calls for the removal of British influence in India. Ho Chi Minh declares Vietnamese independence. (*See Ho Chi Minh*)
- 20 NOVEMBER: In Nuremberg, the trials of top Nazi leaders for crimes against humanity begin. (*See Nuremberg*)
- 27 DECEMBER: Allied foreign ministers, meeting in Moscow, call for the establishment of a provisional democratic government in Korea. Soviet forces occupy Korea north of the thirty-eighth parallel while U.S. troops occupy the southern portion of the country.

# AIRPOWER

## Was Allied airpower decisive in World War II?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, although airpower did not win the war, its broad effectiveness made it a decisive factor in the outcome of World War II.

**Viewpoint:** No, airpower was an important adjunct to the Allied war effort, but it was not decisive in defeating the Axis powers.

Evaluations of the role of air power in World War II tend to be shaped by excessive prewar expectations and initial wartime achievements. Strategic bombardment was widely touted by air theorists and generals as a sovereign remedy for avoiding the costly attrition experienced during World War I (1914–1918). In 1939 and 1940 the successful *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) interdiction and intimidation seemed to confirm the mastery of the airplane on the battlefield. For the first six months of the Pacific war, Japanese aircraft—both land and carrier based—cleared the way for relatively small forces that achieved impressive successes at generally low costs.

Even in large numbers, however, aircraft alone could not provide either the firepower or the accuracy to shape a campaign in the face of opposition. Over Britain in 1940, Malta in 1941, and Germany in 1943, it became increasingly apparent that a joint defense combining fighters, anti-aircraft guns, and electronics could check, if not mate, aerial offensives. In strategic contexts air power achieved its greatest success as an attritional weapon, eroding production and distribution capacities, absorbing resources that otherwise would have been available for positive purposes. Operationally, its effect was greatest in joint contexts: cooperating with surface forces in the Battle of the Atlantic; isolating South Pacific strong points for destruction one at a time; extending the range of naval engagements; adding shock and firepower to ground campaigns. By 1945 it was clear that control of the air was vital to successful war-making. It was also apparent that air power was among the keys to victory—until, that is, Hiroshima clouded the skies.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, although airpower did not win the war, its broad effectiveness made it a decisive factor in the outcome of World War II.**

To grasp the importance of air power to the Allied cause, try to envision landing on the beaches of Normandy (6 June 1944) in the face of German air superiority, conducting

countless naval gunnery duels against well-trained Japanese surface forces all across the Pacific, stopping well-supplied and fully fueled German armies counterattacking in northwest Europe, persuading the Japanese to surrender without dropping the atomic bomb or burning down their cities, protecting convoys in the Atlantic against prowling submarine wolf packs without air cover, or fighting on the ground in any theater without extensive close air support. No matter what one's defi-

nition of “decisive” is, it cannot be denied that the results of World War II would have been different without the dominance of Allied air forces.

Prewar air power advocates argued that wars could be won with strategic bombing alone, and though the Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) did not live up to those high hopes, it delivered significant blows to the German war economy. Once the campaign against oil began in earnest in mid 1944, it quickly affected enemy air and ground operations. The *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) struggled to mount an effective defense and train new pilots with only a trickle of new aviation fuel being delivered, and counterattacks in the Ardennes and against the Russians ground to a halt from the oil shortage. Widespread attacks on European transportation systems not only limited German ability to move reinforcements, but also almost completely cut off movement of critical coal supplies by early 1945. The CBO prevented a German industrial base that was slow to mobilize from producing much more than it did, and the Royal Air Force (RAF) area bombing of cities caused worker apathy that also reduced productivity. The Allied air campaign cut German steel production and blocked its expansion, delayed the launch of V weapons (rockets) for three or four months so that they began being used well after ground forces were established in France, and limited the construction of new *Unterseeboote* (U-boats) that in greater numbers could have challenged Allied command of the sea. Despite Nazi efforts to disperse and protect their industry, bombing destroyed an estimated 20 percent of all German war production during 1944 and 1945. Strategic attacks also had a significant impact on Italy, as the July 1943 bombing of the marshaling yards in Rome was a key factor in the downfall of Benito Mussolini and the eventual Italian surrender.

The indirect effects of the CBO were just as important, if not more so. One to two million Germans were diverted from other sectors of the war effort to conduct air defense of the Reich and repair bomb damage. In 1944 German anti-aircraft defenses absorbed about a third of artillery and optics production, one-fifth of all heavy-artillery ammunition, and more than half of all electronics. Thousands of artillery pieces that could have been destroying Allied tanks were instead shooting at bombers over German cities. Nazi soldiers in the field got less and less air support as the war went on, as more and more of their aircraft were withdrawn from the battlefield to defend the home front. In 1940 Germany only devoted 17 percent of its aircraft production to single-engine fighters, but by 1944 that figure had more than quadrupled to

76 percent. Those defensive efforts failed, and the costs were enormous in planes and pilots. The most important achievement of the CBO was the destruction of the *Luftwaffe*, assuring Allied air superiority for the invasion of France and the ensuing drive across northwest Europe.

Air power on D-Day protected the vast invasion convoys, allowed only one strafing attack on the beaches, delayed the movement of reinforcements, and played havoc with German defenders across France. Carpet bombing by four-engine bombers was crucial to the breakout from the beachhead in Operation Cobra (25–28 July 1944), and General George S. Patton used the XIX Tactical Air Command to defend his open flank during the Third Army’s dash across France. The enemy had to make use of night and bad weather to avoid omnipresent fighter-bombers, and when the weather cleared during the Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944–16 January 1945), swarming Allied aircraft doomed the last-gasp German counteroffensive. Tactical air forces in the European theater of operations destroyed more than five thousand enemy tanks and seventy thousand motor vehicles. In the east, also, air armies of *Shturmoviks* and other Russian planes provided important support as the Red Army headed for Berlin.

Besides affecting the construction of new U-boats in German factories, air power was essential in the effort to destroy them at sea. No Allied strategy in Europe could work until the wolf packs were defeated. Ship losses approaching eight million tons in 1942 endangered the tenuous logistical support provided by merchant convoys bound for Britain and Russia. By January 1943 the Royal Navy had only two months of oil left. Air power, however, quickly reversed the fortunes of the European sea war. Small escort carriers that began arriving in adequate numbers in the spring of 1943 provided moving protection for convoys. Once B-24 Liberators with extra fuel tanks plugged the last holes in land-based air cover, the Battle of the Atlantic quickly reached a climax. By May 1943 more U-boats were being sunk than merchant ships. Unable to escape seemingly continual patrols by Allied aerial hunters, the wolf packs withdrew from the Atlantic sea-lanes at the end of the month and were never a major threat again.

Air power was even more important in winning battles in the Pacific. Aircraft carriers revolutionized naval warfare, and American industrial might and military skill overwhelmed Japanese efforts to compete in the air war at sea. Air superiority negated the excellence of Japan’s surface fleet. There is no more fitting symbol of the Pacific war than the image of the mighty Japanese battleship *Yamato* succumbing



to a swarm of dive-bombers and torpedo bombers (7 April 1945).

Command of the air also made island-hopping and bypassing enemy garrisons possible. Without air power that could reach out from their islands, the isolated forces posed no threat and could be ignored and bypassed without the need for bloody assaults. General Douglas MacArthur's "triphibious warfare" along New Guinea to the Philippines used his land-based air forces to facilitate operations that baffled the Japanese and saved Allied lives. In the amphibious landings across the Pacific, aircraft from carriers and island airbases provided indispensable fire support.

Air power also performed essential functions on the Asian mainland. The exploits of the Flying Tigers bolstered morale in China and at home when the war seemed to be going badly. Dangerous supply flights over the "Hump" from India helped keep China in the war at a critical time. General Sir William Slim's masterful retaking of Burma was only possible because of his innovative use of aerial supply that enabled his columns to move in ways and into areas unforeseen by his opponents.

Perhaps air power's most important contribution to winning the Pacific war was the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) assault on the Japanese home islands. The Doolittle Raid on 18 April 1942 had important psychological impacts in the United States and Japan, but it was the operations of the 20th Air Force that really brought the reality of war to the Japanese leaders and populace. Curtis E. LeMay's incendiary campaign began in March 1945 and eventually burned out approximately 180 square miles of some 66 cities. Hundreds of thousands of the inhabitants died, and more than eight million fled their urban homes for the countryside, creating severe refugee problems for the government and labor shortages for industry. The air campaign combined with the submarine blockade to bring the Japanese economy to a virtual standstill. B-29s also assisted naval operations with a five-month mining effort that sank more than 9 percent of all merchant tonnage lost during the war. The incessant fire raids caused apathy and hopelessness in the populace and convinced many leaders that surrender was necessary to avoid total annihilation from the air. This impression was reinforced by the two atomic bombs dropped by B-29s on Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945). Though debate rages on regarding the most important factor in Japan's surrender, there can be no doubt that the B-29 raids and atomic bombs were key components in the series of shocks that eventually ended the Pacific war.

Axis leaders themselves testified to the magnitude of air power's contribution to their defeat. Colonel General Alfred Jodl, Adolf Hitler's chief of operations, stated that air superiority decided the war. Field Marshal Wilhelm Keitel, Hitler's chief of staff, gave Allied air forces the majority of the credit for victory on the Western Front. Even most German generals in Italy agreed that air power was chiefly responsible for their defeat. Admiral Karl Dönitz realized as early as 1943 how much Allied aircraft were harrying his U-boats and stated after the war that this was the decisive factor that won the Battle of the Atlantic. Japanese ground and naval leaders repeated many of the same assertions about Allied air power in the Pacific, and Prince Konoe Fumimaro and Premier Suzuki Kantarō claimed that the massive destruction of LeMay's B-29 raids made them determined to seek peace to end the war.

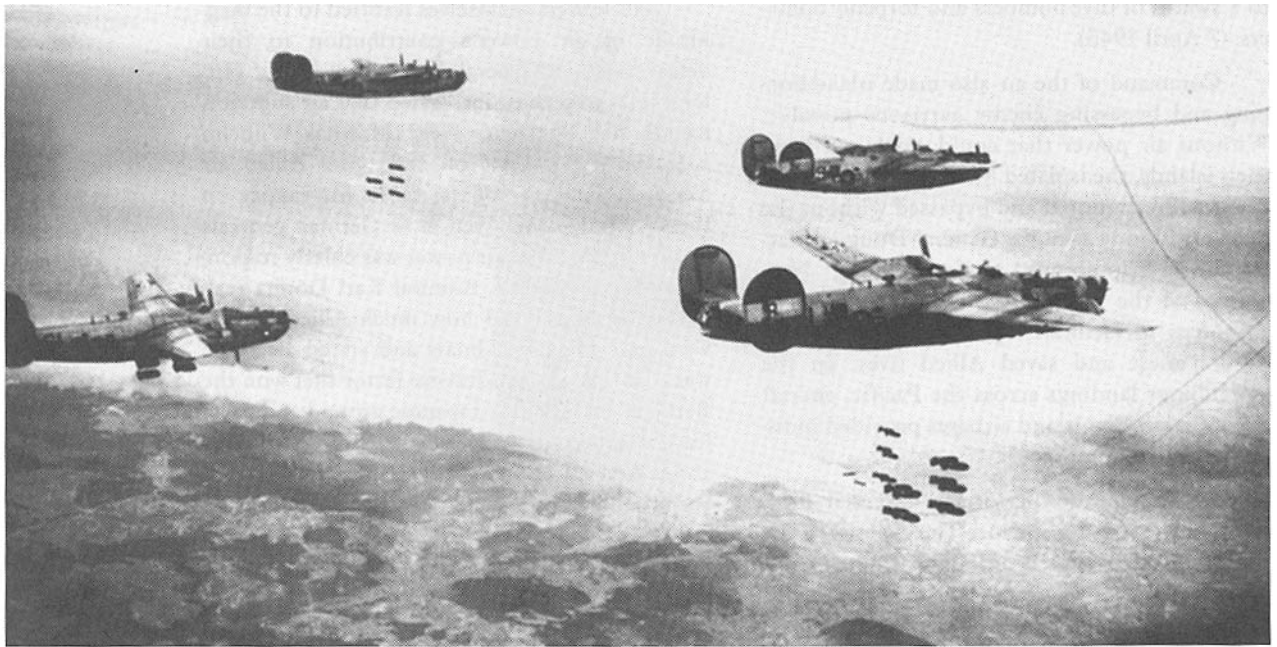
While World War II did not provide the evidence to support the claims of zealots that air power could win wars on its own, there is no single factor that was more important in the eventual Allied victory. The war would have been much longer and bloodier without Allied aerial dominance, and had the Axis maintained their initial air supremacy, the whole outcome would have been much different.

—CONRAD C. CRANE, U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, airpower was an important adjunct to the Allied war effort, but it was not decisive in defeating the Axis powers.**

Following World War I, American air theorist General William "Billy" Mitchell determined that aerial warfare, properly applied, could end the dreaded stalemates such as were experienced on the ground in France in World War I (1914–1918). Mitchell believed that strategic bombardment—or striking at vital industrial centers, food, medical and military supplies, and lines of communication behind enemy lines—would prove decisive in any future war and destroy the enemy army's ability to resist. Mitchell's Italian counterpart, Giulio Douhet, had a far grander vision of future aerial wars. He envisioned massive concentrations of large bombers delivering a first and final destructive blow to civilian population centers. Douhet reasoned that the fear of further destruction would be decisive in coercing enemy governments to surrender. In the end, he hoped



**American B-24s dropping bombs on German targets**

*(U.S. Air Force)*

that fear of such an aerial holocaust would become an effective deterrent to future war. The advent of World War II confirmed that Douhet and Mitchell had been mistaken. The war in the skies became a bloody struggle of attrition, and the firebombing of large populated areas never extracted a decisive psychological blow. Nonetheless, Allied heavy bombers did exact a great toll on vital industrial and communications centers, establishing an essential constituent to the termination of hostilities.

Douhet had set an unattainable artificial standard by which the decisiveness of air power was to be measured. Budgetary concerns, partisan politics, and inter-service rivalry bridled both British and American strategic air doctrine. America's first strategic bomber, the B-17, did not enter service until 1936 and only then as a long-range coastal-defense weapon intended to bomb invading surface fleets. The Royal Air Force (RAF) did not procure its first strategic bomber until the late 1930s. Despite constraints placed on the development of strategic-air doctrine at the time, the procurement of the B-17 enabled American air planners to test a new theory of high-altitude precision bombing that would become prevalent in World War II.

Germany, like its western counterparts, had been greatly influenced by the writings of Douhet. At the outbreak of war, in 1939, the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) had thirty bomber groups, nine dive-bomber groups, and only thirteen fighter groups in its air arsenal. Most of Germany's bombers, such as the twin-engine He-111s or Do-17s, were medium-range bombardment aircraft. Yet, Germany's strategic operations were less successful than its roles in close air support (supporting ground forces) and air

superiority (seizing command of the skies). The *Luftwaffe* destroyed several cities, such as Warsaw, from the air, but without purpose. The outcome of the German invasion of Poland had already been assured. Its greatest triumphs came as an integral part of the *Blitzkrieg* (lightning war) operations early in the war, and its airborne and glider assaults against Allied fortifications and airfields in western Europe. The later Battle of Britain (July–September 1940)—indicative of the German high command's love affair with Douhet—proved indecisive and costly. More than three thousand German aircraft were lost in the attempt to crush British resistance by air. Late in the war, the Anglo-American Combined Bomber Offensive (CBO) forced the Germans to switch almost exclusively to fighter-interceptor aircraft. Thus after the Battle of Britain, the *Luftwaffe* never had another opportunity to employ its strategic forces; instead, they had to concentrate on protecting Germany from Allied bombers.

The Japanese, like the Americans, had an air arm for both their army and navy. Yet, because their national interests centered on Manchuria, which was just developing industrially and did not have any viable strategic targets, Japanese military aviation developed its fighter force at the expense of heavy bombers. Even though the Japanese had long-range maritime seaplanes, carrier-based bombers executed the majority of necessary strategic operations, as in the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941).

When the *Luftwaffe* pounded Poland (September 1939) at the outbreak of hostilities, the RAF determined at first to employ only its heavy bombers against naval targets. Also, if the bombs had any chance of hitting the coastline, they did not drop their payloads at all. These daylight

attacks, however, became exceedingly expensive in men and matériel. In its first several raids, only half of the RAF's heavy bombers returned. Such immense losses caused British Bomber Command to opt for nighttime air raids. At first, British leaders, such as Air Commodore Arthur Coningham, believed that a nighttime air attack against vital industries, like synthetic oil production, could be made with a fair amount of precision. Overconfidence, however, in the ability of the RAF to destroy several targets at once, lack of adequate fighter escort, and a loss of scruples concerning the fate of German civilians after the Luftwaffe began terror bombing London, conspired against British efforts to contain the destructiveness of concentrated strategic air power. Thus the British decided upon a strategy of mass area bombing under the cover of darkness—the same strategy Douhet recommended twenty years earlier—that led to the infamous firebombings of Hamburg (24 July 1943), Dresden (13–14 February 1945), and Berlin (November 1943–March 1944).

Following the passage of the Lend Lease Act (11 March 1941), the RAF quickly placed an order for America's heralded heavy bomber, the B-17. The Air Corps sent the B-17C to the RAF as trainers while Boeing finished production of the more combat-ready B-17E. The British, however, rushed the B-17Cs into battle immediately, with negative results. Between the end of July and beginning of September the RAF had lost eight of its twenty B-17s. The British bomber crews called them "Flying Targets"; German fighter pilots called them "Flying Coffins." The Americans correctly attributed the high losses among British B-17 crews to misapplication of American precision-bombing doctrine, mechanical malfunctions caused by bad weather over the target areas, and stiff German resistance. This early episode exposed recurrent problems that both the RAF and the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) endured throughout much of the war that limited the effectiveness of strategic bombardment until fall 1944—doctrinal rigidity, poor weather, and German air superiority.

American strategic air power had few opportunities to prove its worth before fall 1944. In 1942, even though he believed his heavy bomber crews were his shock troops in the war against Hitler, Air Chief of Staff Henry H. "Hap" Arnold understood that the USAAF needed far more than B-17s and B-24s to win the two-front war. On 17 August 1942 his shock troops went into action for the first time over Rouen, France. In the attack twelve B-17s hit the Sotteville marshaling yards with minor damage to the bomber force. Despite the initial success, most of America's heavy bombers in Europe had been diverted from daylight precision strikes to bombing sub-

marine hangars—in an effort to turn the tide in the Atlantic—and supporting surface operations for the invasion of North Africa (November–December 1942).

Across the globe, strategic bombers were of even lesser importance in the opening stages of the Pacific war. Prewar declarations that the heavy bomber could defend American island possessions from invading naval fleets appeared flawed. High-altitude bombing strikes against Japanese naval vessels produced little effect. Although carrier-based naval air power decisively defended Midway (3–5 June 1942), USAAF B-17s and B-26s used high-altitude bombing strikes against surface vessels but recorded no hits. With a dearth of strategic targets, America's heavy bombers had been anything but effectual in the opening stages of the Pacific war; only close air support, air superiority, and aerial interdiction (battlefield bombing operations) had been fruitful.

Following the campaign in North Africa, Major General Ira C. Eaker proposed the CBO that, according to Bernard C. Nalty in an essay in *Winged Shield, Winged Sword: A History of the United States Air Force* (1997), called for the Anglo-American destruction of Germany's "military, industrial and economic system, and the undermining of the morale of the German people to a point where their capacity for armed resistance is fatally weakened." The objective had been deliberately vague to allow for both nighttime area and daylight precision attacks and to integrate both British and American strategic operations.

During the offensive, Mitchell's theories—originally designed to end the stalemates of World War I—led to a war of attrition in the skies. American strategic-air doctrine called for self-defending heavy bombers to penetrate deep into enemy territory, destroy their targets, and return without excessive losses, while creating deeper attrition among German interceptor aircraft. Inflated kill-ratio reports only reinforced this doctrinal rigidity. During the five "Maximum Effort" raids in October 1943, airmen claimed 984 kills with less than 10 percent accredited to Allied fighter escorts. The actual number of downed German interceptors, however, had been 284. USAAF command, therefore, had been encouraged by false reports to believe that their raids had been more successful than they actually were.

High attrition among American bombers also hindered the Eighth Air Force, based in England, from capitalizing on their few early successes. During these raids, the Americans hit the Schweinfurt ball-bearing plants with 291 heavy bombers. The aircraft caused a 67 percent decrease in crucial ball-bearing production, but



## THE ATTACK ON COVENTRY

*On 15 November 1940 the Germans made a devastating air raid against the manufacturing city of Coventry, England. A German correspondent reported on the attack, a portion of which is included below.*

The night was in full moon as we came to the ready room. We had an idea that our job this time was something special. The group commander began by giving us in the beginning in brief but precise words all necessary navigational and technical weather details. This attack, he says, must be an extraordinary success for our air force. Painfully accurate flying by our own pilots and careful bombing are of the greatest importance on this mission.

Our "Caesar," heavily loaded with bombs, is the first plane of its group to get away. It takes course for England. We all know that a long, difficult flight is before us. Fortunately, the storms that had bothered us in the last few nights had disappeared. Through clear skies, some clouds, and light haze we fly toward the English coast. In this favorable weather, cities, rivers, and canals are good signposts.

We are greeted by flak on the coast. Searchlights poke excitedly through the darkness. But we hold true to our course. Our first test through the enemy flak is soon behind us. From a fair distance we recognize the London area. Other planes must have already made their visits there. There are clouds of smoke over the city and we can see the flash of exploding bombs on the ground. From a great height we can see the curve of the Thames. A cupola of lights rises up to meet us, and the first shells burst near us. But we hold our bombs—they are destined for another target that evening.

It has become very quiet in the plane. In the enclosed stall and in the canopy men study the maps by the dull lights of their little pocket flashlights. We are surrounded by deep dark night. When the Midlands come into view, the

game begins anew with the searchlights and the antiaircraft guns.

A cry of surprise. Far to the north of us there is a tremendous fire. Is that Coventry already? That is our target—the great fire before us must be the work of our comrades who had flown in before us. Over the burning city many trace-bombers hang in their parachutes for minutes.

The picture is becoming clearer. German bombs must have caused tremendous damage in these hours before midnight. Conversation in the plane stops. We go to the attack. Calmly the commander gives the pilot his flight instructions: "A little more to the right, just a bit more. So, now we are just right."

We come closer and closer. The terrible picture comes into focus. Thick smoke hovers over the city far out into the country. We can clearly see the flames crackling. An especially large burst of flame near countless others shows that a great industrial area must have been heavily hit.

We remain over the target. Flak is shot desperately at us. Around us the lightning of exploding shells.

We look directly into the destruction and see the great craters of fire and the greater part of the industrial city in flames. At this moment we release our bombs. A shudder goes through the plane. Down below there is a brilliant flash in a new explosion. We are the first plane in our group of German fighter planes; others were there before us. Others will follow until the dawn of a new day, which will reveal the extent of the attack on Coventry.

*Source: Louis L. Snyder, ed., Masterpieces of War Reporting: The Great Moments of World War II (New York: Messner, 1962), pp. 94–96.*

with the cost of sixty B-17s in one raid and 148 during the five-day campaign; there would be no return. Albert Speer, in charge of Germany's war production, had been amazed that the Americans did not follow up. He claimed that the crippled ball-bearing industry could have been dealt a decisive blow had the Eighth Air Force returned. Experiencing high loss of men and matériel, the USAAF stopped the strategic-air offensive to train new replacement crews and

wait for long-range fighter escorts to reduce the attrition rate.

The United States Strategic Bombing Survey (USSBS), an official postwar study of bombing effectiveness, claimed that mass strategic operations in good weather, such as those accomplished during Big Week (20–25 February 1944), produced their expected results, mainly that American strategic-air forces completely destroyed enemy industrial facilities. Nonethe-

less, gaps in reliable intelligence and enemy unpredictability continued to nullify the effectiveness of strategic bombardment. At times, Allied crews reported that they had destroyed 100 percent of their target areas. Even if these claims were true, large stockpiles or alternative sources of supply negated this destruction. In these instances strategic bombardment had produced the expected result, but it had been aimed at the wrong targets.

From December 1943 to June 1944 Allied strategic-bombing effectiveness was diffused by the pressing need to strike German V-1 and V-2 rocket facilities. After Big Week, as Speer increased his fighter production and separated his ball-bearing plants into small, hard-to-bomb facilities, Allied command ordered General Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, to hit tactical targets in western France in preparation for the invasion of Normandy. Spaatz still believed that his strategic air force could win the war without an amphibious assault—if the right vital industry could be destroyed. The USAAF had missed its chance with Speer's ball-bearing plant, but Spaatz now targeted Germany's oil industry. Until the Allies had successfully gained a foothold in Normandy, however, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower redirected America's heavy bombers toward battlefield operation in France.

Not until the end of the war did the Allies' full strategic air power concentrate against the targets that, almost four years before they had alleged, would prove decisive in ending the conflict. By this time, the Allies were slowly winning the aerial war of attrition. The arrival of the long-range fighter escorts, such as the P-47 and P-51 with external drop tanks, allowed the USAAF to finally achieve air superiority over German interceptors. Although aircraft production increased dramatically during this time—a tribute to the German war industry—the Luftwaffe had few trained pilots because of heightened attrition in the skies. Moreover, the strategic successes against oil refineries and reserves, such as the harrowing raids against the Romanian oil fields in Ploesti (April–May 1944), had severely limited the amount of gasoline available to train new pilots. The Germans could either amass a large interceptor force made up of ill-trained pilots or a small air force of highly trained pilots. They mistakenly chose the former. Thus, the Germans could produce high numbers of interceptors in spite of Allied strategic attacks, but they did not have the resources to fly them.

In the Pacific theater, strategic-bombing operations produced mixed results. Although a group of B-24s made some successful bombings of Japanese oil refineries in Borneo, the majority of strategic operations came over Japanese-con-

trolled China and the Japanese homeland. A China-based B-29 offensive against Manchuria and Japan had long been Arnold's desire. Thus, Arnold, who feared control of his bombers by theater commanders Douglas MacArthur, Chester W. Nimitz, and Joseph W. Stilwell, received executive authority from the Joint Chiefs to control the B-29s from Washington, D.C.

Yet, XX Bomber Command, headed in the field by Kenneth Wolfe, had an inauspicious beginning. The Japanese army mounted an offensive to overtake the B-29 airfields as soon as they were completed. On 15 June 1944, XX Bomber Command hit the steel mills in Manchuria, but because of a lack of adequate supplies and spare parts they could not deliver the decisive blows for which Arnold had hoped. Curtis E. LeMay replaced Wolfe as head of XX Bomber Command and continued the daylight precision attacks with little improvement in results. Subsequently, Arnold dissolved XX Bomber Command.

From Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas Islands, XXI Bomber Command under Haywood S. Hansell attacked the Japanese homeland with equally little success. Precision bombing proved ineffective because of an unsolvable jet-stream problem that affected the speed, bomb dispersal, and engines of the planes. Hansell's answer to the problem was increased training to improve accuracy. The Joint Chiefs relieved Hansell in favor of LeMay, who ultimately decided to employ low-level incendiary raids against Japanese industrial centers.

Firebombing had been favored by the Joint Chiefs because of the ineffectiveness of precision attacks. Unlike Germany, Japanese industries had been located near large residential areas where many Japanese homes had been constructed out of a wood-bamboo-plaster composite. Furthermore, within the residential areas a cottage industry thrived. Thus LeMay and the Joint Chiefs determined to destroy the integrated urban matrix with incendiary bombs as a necessary evil to hitting the vital industries. Although the fire raids burned out the urban matrix as expected, the destruction had been greater than previously envisioned. Nonetheless, the Japanese emperor and Cabinet decided to surrender only after the Americans dropped the atomic bombs, not the incendiaries.

American aviators originally embraced strategic bombardment because of its independent nature. They believed that the decisiveness of strategic air power would legitimize their air force institutionally, and perhaps provide a permanent and independent role in American national defense. Friction (the unexpected or uncontrollable elements of war), however, conspired against these prewar aims.

Even though strategic bombardment did not win the war, it was extremely effective in reaching its objectives. After revealing that German oil consumption exceeded production by May 1944, the USSBS stated, "Allied air power was decisive in the war in Western Europe . . . its victory was complete." The USSBS also asserted that Japan would have surrendered without the atomic bomb or the proposed invasion probably by 1 November 1945, but at least by 31 December. They argued that bombing Japanese rail lines could have fatally severed urban areas from their necessary food supplies in a matter of weeks. Thus, USSBS argued that had surface operations ceased in Europe by winter 1945 and in the Pacific by spring 1945, Allied air power would have forced an Axis surrender alone. Such bold statements about the decisive nature of air power, however, have been scrutinized by later scholarship. Yet, the USSBS statement exhibited the effectiveness of strategic bombardment if Allies selected the proper targets.

Air power was by no means decisive in the war. The Douhet-like battle plan never dominated the skies, nor did Mitchell's dream of eliminating the stalemated wars of attrition through decisive air strikes materialize. Instead, the battle in the sky became a bloody war of attrition. Furthermore, the Douhet-inspired hope that concentrated aerial bombardment over densely populated areas would create a massive psychological effect and coerce an early surrender was a forlorn one. Only the dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945) could have been perceived as a decisive psychological blow—but surrender came only after four years of continual fighting. Thus, the atomic bomb was not decisive either.

Allied strategic air power, however, clearly proved its worth in battle. Once the air forces seized air superiority by bombing aircraft industries, oil reserves and refineries, airfields and hangars, command and control centers, and combating enemy aircraft in the skies, they could finally exact its potent effect. Air superiority, however, could not have been won before introduction of long-range fighter aircraft. Thus, the heavy bomber had great military import, but pre-war doctrinal rigidity, poor weather, intelligence and targeting, and initial German air superiority hindered its immediate potency and precluded its decisiveness.

The word "decisive," in this historical debate, has come to mean: "won the war alone." Even though strategic bombardment, when given good weather, long-range escort, and proper targets, was highly effective and contributed greatly to achieving victory in World War II, it was not decisive. Victory in both theaters

was the result of an arduous joint effort from all Allied service branches. The Allies could not have won without their air forces, but they did not win solely because of them either.

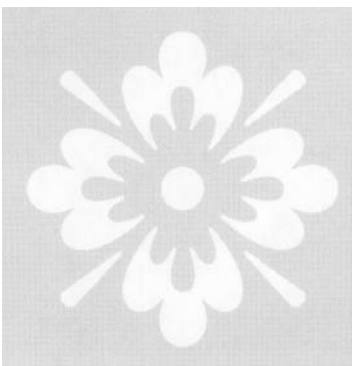
—MICHAEL PERRY MAY, KANSAS  
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# AIRBORNE FORCES



## Did the airborne forces of World War II require resources that could have been better applied elsewhere?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, airborne units, although useful adjuncts to military force, required huge human and matériel allocations that did not result in significant victories.

**Viewpoint:** No, the airborne infantry was an innovation that, when put to the test during World War II, contributed significantly to operational success in the Mediterranean, European, and Pacific theaters.

Airborne forces were first organized during the 1930s, but were regarded as a curiosity until 1940, when German paratroopers and glider units played key roles in seizing bridgeheads and strong points in Norway and the Low Countries. The conquest of Crete in 1941 seemed to suggest the potential of airborne forces in large-scale operations as well—despite casualties so high that the Germans abandoned for practical purposes the idea of airborne war.

Britain and the United States began raising their own parachute and glider units in 1940. From the beginning, tension existed between the advocates of using airborne forces in small-scale operations, and the optimists, supporting division-sized airborne formations as part of a “quick fix,” going over the enemy rather than through him. Eventually the high-end option triumphed. In the process, airborne forces developed a mystique that endures to the present. Merely jumping from an aircraft was regarded as a major test of the “right stuff,” to say nothing of engaging in combat immediately afterward. Airborne forces depended on volunteers—at least in the parachuter elements—and those volunteers tended to regard themselves as exponentially superior to everyone else. In many ways they were superior—young, tough, and motivated. The Germans took advantage of the paratroop mystique long after abandoning any thought of large-scale airborne assaults, and their parachute divisions were legitimately regarded among the best troops in the *Wehrmacht* (German Army).

The problem lay in employing these elite forces. Large-scale drops in the Mediterranean had at best mixed results. Three Allied divisions jumped into France on D-Day (6 June 1944), but it is debatable whether their successes could not have been replicated by smaller forces, focused on disruption and deception. The next attempt to use airborne forces strategically, at Arnhem (17 September 1944), showed the vulnerability of these lightly equipped troops to even moderately effective ground forces. The jump across the Rhine in 1945 was a tactical operation, predicated on the early relief of the airborne by ground forces. Airborne divisions fought hard and well in sustained ground roles—the British 6th in Normandy, the U.S. 82nd and 101st in the Ardennes. If ground shock troops were desirable, though, did it not make sense to give them appropriate scales of heavy weapons? Might not a few regiments of airborne troops, as opposed to entire divisions, have improved



the quality of “ordinary” divisions in both the U.S. and British armies by leaving them more of their best men? What about the transport aircraft dedicated to carrying paratroopers instead of supplies, in what was essentially a war of logistics? Perhaps the horse cavalry of World War I and the paratroopers of World War II had more in common than high boots.



### Viewpoint:

**Yes, airborne units, although useful adjuncts to military force, required huge human and matériel allocations that did not result in significant victories.**

It is somewhat ironic that the United States, possibly one of the most egalitarian forces in twentieth-century military history, should create an elite force of the size and scope of the airborne divisions and corps used during World War II. The arguments against airborne forces generally focus upon two issues: the criteria for selection and allocation of resources. The first is one of the quality of airborne forces versus that of the rest of the army. The second is that the army focused a disproportionate amount of matériel and attention on these forces. Both rest on the assumption that, while the airborne units accomplished the missions assigned to them, the periodic and short-term nature of their use meant that they tied up assets in men and matériel that might better have been employed elsewhere.

When the Germans demonstrated that specialized airborne forces could be used in unique ways in an offensive operation, U.S. strategists sat up and took notice. Forming an American airborne force became a “requirement,” and the fact quickly assumed an importance at Fort Benning, Georgia, far out of proportion to the actual utility of the airborne forces themselves. The U.S. Army solicited volunteers for this “special and hazardous assignment,” and soon airborne platoons, companies, battalions, and eventually entire regiments were floating slowly to the earth under silk canopies as they tested and created new doctrine for the employment of this specialized tool of war.

Eventually, advocates of this new force managed to get official army assignment policies changed to reflect their insistence that the airborne concept required better and more intelligent soldiers. While the infantry as a branch overall received a low percentage of soldiers that scored in the highest percentiles on the Army Classification Tests, the airborne received a quota comparable to that of the Army Air Corps. In other words, the airborne received the cream of the crop. Airborne soldiers were also

authorized to wear distinctive insignia and paraphernalia designed to boost their morale and build esprit de corps. Items such as the small qualifications badges, known as airborne wings, and the distinctive high-topped all-leather “jump boots” (nominally permitted because it was believed that the additional support of the high-topped boots would prevent ankle injuries during jumps) set the paratroopers apart almost as much as their attitudes. On top of these incentives, the new paratrooper received an additional \$50 per month in “airborne pay” if he was enlisted, \$100 if an officer. The attractions of the airborne were tough to resist.

By 1944 there were roughly fifty thousand men assigned to various airborne and airborne-support units. At the same time several thousand more were being trained as replacements. The United States organized six full airborne divisions (three in Europe, two in the Pacific, and one in the United States) and enough additional combat units to create a seventh “Provisional Airborne Division.” Arguably, this concentration of quality represented enough leadership potential to man the cadres of roughly ten to fifteen additional American infantry divisions. The saying at the time was that any private first class (PFC) in the airborne could be a squad leader anywhere else. A more accurate assessment might be that most airborne privates could have been officers, with the right training. The result of these personnel policies hit hard on the rest of the army.

In combat, the quality of leaders, first and foremost, determines the capability of the unit and its effectiveness in combat. Effective units lose fewer lives. It is not often the technology of weapons, or amount of logistics support, that wins fights. These things win wars, but not battles or skirmishes. Given anything even approaching parity in quality and quantity of technology and logistics, the deciding factor comes down to leadership. In 1944, as the U.S. Army slugged its way across the Pacific and Europe simultaneously, it suffered most from a lack of quality leaders among its non commissioned officers (NCOs) and at the junior officer level, which cost lives. The original cohorts of company-grade officers (lieutenants and captains) in units on the front lines were by this time either dead, wounded, or promoted to vacancies created by combat. There was a critical shortage of replacement soldiers in all grades, especially for the infantry. In this environment it was almost criminal to concentrate so



## AIR ASSAULT ON EBEN-EMAEL

*In 1940, Eben-Emael was probably the most fortified single stronghold in the world. Located on a plain of some two hundred acres along the Albert Canal, this Belgian fortress had more than thirty artillery pieces, twenty heavy machine guns, and a garrison of 1,200 men. In its casements were armories, hospitals, and magazines full of rations and munitions. In short, Eben-Emael was built to withstand a siege for an indefinite period of time. Below is the account of a war reporter who witnessed the German assault on the fort.*

During the early hours of May 10 parachute troops under command of Captain Koch and First Lieutenant Witzig, in an incredibly bold action, landed on the superstructure of Eben-Emael. At the same time a commando unit under First Lieutenant Mikosch attacked at Maastricht over the Meuse, fought up as far as Canne, in order to cross the Albert Canal, the last obstacle before Eben-Emael, and then, by storming the fortress from the land side, join up with the paratroopers.

Before Mikosch's commandos reached Canne, they found that the Belgians had blown up the bridge over the Albert Canal. Simultaneously, from the fort of Eben-Emael came a wild artillery fire designed to frustrate the crossing of the Albert Canal. In spite of it the commando unit fought on through the defensive nests of the tenaciously battling Belgians, through street barricades, and around mine fields, against ever increasing enemy fire.

In the early afternoon the spearhead of the ground troops reached the area of Canne. Over there, beyond the enemy positions, they could see their paratrooper comrades. The two groups of German troops were in radio communication. Between them were the aforementioned Belgian machine-gun emplacements, the bunkers and outer works of the fortifications. The Belgian fire did not lessen. The enemy sent up star shells in the darkness, while the searchlights of the fort were riveted on the Albert Canal. It was necessary despite the heavy fire and the meter-high steel walls that the Canal be crossed in the darkness.

The leader of the commando unit gave his orders. One after another the shock troops laden with battle packs went down the scaling ladders into the boats and in drill order rowed to

the other shore and there climbed up ladders placed on the steep walls there.

Thus, during the night not only companies but also their ammunition and supplies were brought over the canal despite the rough terrain and unbroken enemy fire. Suddenly, another obstacle emerges over there in the vicinity of the village of Eben-Emael. The only entrance into the armored works is through flooded sluice locks. Sergeant Major Portsteffen with a selected group of storm troopers risks it over the flooded areas in rubber boats. In the face of a scorching enemy fire and with some casualties he makes it to the other side and begins to move on to the 20-meter high platform on which the paratroopers await him.

Just before 6 o'clock in the morning, almost exactly 24 hours after the landing of the paratroopers on the armored platform, the junction with the commandos is made. Now the storm troopers move against the defensive works. Position after position is blown up. Again and again the detonations of disintegrating bunkers and gun emplacements thunder through the morning.

The well-aimed fire of German guns rattles from both sides of the Albert Canal. The defensive fire becomes weaker and weaker. Shortly after 12 o'clock the fire from the fortress ceases altogether.

On May 11 at 12:30 p.m. the white flag goes up to announce the sending of a flag of truce officer and the surrender of the fortifications. About a hundred dead and wounded of the enemy lie among the ruins of the armored works. A thousand men are taken prisoner.

Thus it was that a relatively weak German paratroop unit, inferior in numbers and weapons, a small body of death-defying men, hurtled from the air into the midst of iron and fire, and through their boldness and cold-bloodedness captured this strong bastion of the Belgian defensive girdle. . . .

*Source: Lois L. Snyder, ed., Masterpieces of War Reporting: The Great Moments of World War II (New York: Messner, 1962), pp. 45-48.*

much leadership potential in an elite force that spent much of the year in reserve.

The 82nd Airborne Division, the "All American" division, was typical of U.S. airborne units in their experiences during 1944. On the night of 5-6 June the division arrived

by parachute and glider behind the beaches in Normandy. While their actions at the unit and individual level were certainly heroic, one cannot ignore the fact that they suffered immense casualties before they ever fired a shot in anger. Paratroopers broke their legs,

drowned in flooded fields, were caught by the Germans even as they came down in their parachutes, and were lost or separated from their units—all contributing to the chaos. Even two days after the landings, on 8 June 1944, only 2,100 of the men who hit the ground with the 82nd were accounted for and fighting with the division.

Following the linkup of paratroopers with soldiers who landed on the beaches, the division went into strategic reserve. Replenishing manpower and training for the next operation, it did not see combat again until 17 September 1944, when it participated in the unsuccessful Operation Market Garden. In this assault the men of the “All American” 82nd Division were lucky, or at least luckier than some of their Allied airborne peers, in that their objective was close enough that the attacking ground-bound force could fight through and link up with them. Not all airborne units dropped in this mission were so fortunate. The British 1st Airborne Division lost a total of nearly seven thousand men killed, wounded, or missing. Overall, in this massive operation, which saw roughly thirty-five thousand men arrive by air, more than thirteen thousand were out of action before the mission was deemed a failure and abandoned. Still, this did not persuade the end of the use of airborne troops.

Following Market Garden, the 82nd and its sister division the 101st went into strategic reserve again as they replaced their losses. Both divisions saw combat again only during the Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944–16 January 1945), during which they were trucked more than one hundred miles from their staging bases and ordered to defend Allied lines as normal infantry against the German counterattack. After the Allies pushed back the threat of German penetration, the division went into reserve again and did not come out until after the surrender of Germany. In all, the division spent approximately seventy-five days in combat, when comparable infantry divisions were engaged two hundred or more days.

A prudent commander always maintains a reserve, but the purpose is to have a powerful force available in the event of an emergency or opportunity. The airborne, despite its status as elite, was not “powerful.” Without tanks, heavy artillery, or sufficient transportation assets to even move their men, let alone the logistics requirements of an American combat division, the airborne divisions actually represented a net drain on assets. In their heroic defense of the encircled village of Bastogne during the Battle of the Bulge, the 101st Airborne Division derived much of its initial logistics support from armored units also trapped in the town. In fact,

the division would not even have been there had not headquarters sent enough trucks to carry it all at once to the front. For all their heroics, it still appears that the histories of the airborne are somewhat misleading. At a minimum it is generally “forgotten” that there were other units in Bastogne. Underequipped troops, no matter how motivated, rarely fare well against tanks. Tanks and heavy artillery helped stop the majority of German armored assaults on the town. The facts suggest that had the airborne been there alone the result would have been more akin to the experience of the 7th Cavalry at the Battle of the Little Bighorn (25 June 1876) and not the successful defense that it ultimately was.

It should come as no surprise that units consisting entirely of volunteers for especially hazardous duty should gather about themselves something of an elitist attitude. Controlling an entire unit of such men requires the utmost personal confidence and physical ability, because a leader must demonstrate not only mastery of his profession but that he is among the best soldiers in the unit as well. Competition becomes the norm in such an environment at every level, from the ranks of private through colonel. When officers brought up from within these units first interact with the rest of the army, there is a natural tendency to continue this hypercompetitive nature. Accordingly, the inclination and nature of those leaders contribute toward their burnishing of the reputation and claimed abilities of their units, almost without regard for the relative capabilities of other units.

During World War II, airborne soldiers who actually survived their drops performed admirably. There is no doubting the individual heroism and undaunted courage of the vast majority of these select men. As a whole, however, the idea of an elite force that takes such a massive bite out of the collective pool of potential quality at such a high material cost, is one that should not have occurred. That it did was the result of the confluence of two factors. First, there was the general, though unstated sentiment, that if the Germans had airborne forces, then the Allies must have them. Secondly, and perhaps more tellingly, the leaders of these new types of units were, to a man, extremely self-confident and generally outspoken. The effect of the force of their personality can never be accurately measured, but to discount their collective effect would be intellectually dishonest. A few men believed with the fervor of religious converts in the efficacy of the new airborne concept. They persuaded or cajoled the rest of the army to go along, and go along it did. The end result was that “regular” infantry units suffered in combat from a lack of leaders of the intelligence that they might have had otherwise and because they

were kept in the front lines longer, while airborne troops rested and trained in the rear. All in all, the allocation of resources to these units was disproportionate to their actual contributions to the war effort.

—ROBERT L. BATEMAN III, U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT



**Viewpoint:  
No, the airborne infantry was an innovation that, when put to the test during World War II, contributed significantly to operational success in the Mediterranean, European, and Pacific theaters.**

The first use of parachutes by military forces occurred during World War I. Observation balloon crews, subjected to strafing attacks by hostile fighter planes, used parachutes as a means of escaping a fiery death. Though many lives were saved in this manner, only the Germans took the next logical step and supplied their pilots with parachutes. On the Allied side, Colonel William “Billy” Mitchell, chief of all American Expeditionary Force (AEF) air units, requested that his aviators also be supplied with parachutes, but the war ended before this could come to fruition. The forward-thinking Mitchell made one other suggestion as well. In October 1918, approximately one month before the end of hostilities, Mitchell wrote a memorandum to General John J. Pershing, commander of the AEF, suggesting that the deadlock of the trenches could be broken if an infantry division was dropped by parachute behind enemy lines in order to seize key terrain and disrupt enemy command, control, and logistical facilities. Mitchell was convinced that, faced with an assault to their front and hostile forces in their rear, German troops would break. As with his first idea, the war ended before Mitchell’s airborne division could be organized.

During the interwar years, the Soviets were the first to test the efficacy of Mitchell’s ideas about airborne infantry. Prior to Joseph Stalin’s great purges of the late 1930s, Russian military innovators were experimenting with several ways to modernize the Red Army. As early as 1929, the great Soviet military thinker Mikhail N. Tukhachevsky, at that time commander of the Leningrad Military District, conducted trial exercises aimed at developing operational and strategic air-landing units. The next year, the Soviets employed small parachute infantry detachments during large military exercises. By 1932 the Sovi-

ets had developed their first airborne brigade, and beginning in 1933 all their annual military exercises involved the use of airborne troops.

Though the Russians led the field with their airborne experiments, other countries were not far behind. The French were the next to take seriously the development of airborne units. In 1935 the French Army established a jump school at Avignon and within eighteen months had organized and equipped two airborne groups. In 1938 the Italian Army established its first jump school in Tripoli, Libya, and a year later established a second school at Tarquinia, Italy. Even the U.S. Army began considering the creation of airborne forces as early as May 1939, though peacetime defense budgets allowed little more than contemplation of the idea. A revived German military establishment under Adolf Hitler, however, made the greatest strides toward putting into operation the techniques, tactics, and procedures of airborne forces.

During the interwar years, the German military conducted extensive experimentation with an eye toward finding some means for regaining tactical mobility on the battlefield and thereby avoiding the bloody trench warfare that had cost Germany so dearly in World War I. From this study a variety of new weapons, tactics, and techniques emerged, not least of which was the concept of fast-paced, combined-arms warfare. With the accession of Hitler to power and his subsequent repudiation of the Versailles prohibitions, the pace of German military development accelerated dramatically. The *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force), headed by Hermann Göring, began an expansion program designed to complement the combined-arms warfare concept being developed by the army. In January 1936 Göring ordered the organization of a battalion of paratroopers that could conduct deep raids in support of army operations, and less than a year later the Hermann Göring Parachute Battalion was participating in annual maneuvers. So impressive were the results that by July 1938 the Germans had formed the 7th Flieger Division, commanded by Major General Kurt Student (German airborne units were a part of the *Luftwaffe*, unlike their army counterparts elsewhere).

In the April 1940 invasion of Denmark and Norway, the Germans dropped paratroopers for the first time in combat, with stunning results. On the initial day of the invasion one battalion of paratroopers seized four widely separated strategic objectives with clockwork efficiency. A subsequent drop in Norway five days later was not as successful because of high winds and poor visibility, but the Germans were well pleased with their new weapon.

So pleased were the Germans that they planned a more extensive use of airborne troops

for the invasion of the West. Having convinced Hitler that a mere repetition of the Schlieffen Plan for the upcoming invasion would not bring decisive results, General Erich von Manstein, chief of staff of Army Group A, forwarded an alternate plan calling for a main attack through the heavily wooded Ardennes. Key to his plan's success was the swift seizure of strategic choke points so that German panzers and their supporting infantry would not be held up, as had happened at Liège in 1914. To do this, the 7th Fliieger Division and 22nd Air Landing Division were allocated several targets in Belgium and Holland. The most important was the Belgian fortress of Eben Emael, regarded by many as impregnable. On 10 May 1940 seventy-eight German paratroopers conducted a glider-borne assault and within an hour destroyed its main armaments, then fought an additional twenty-seven hours until relieved. At the end of this action, the fortress had been completely destroyed, and the Belgian garrison of approximately eight hundred men had surrendered. Meanwhile, other German paratroopers and air-landed infantry had been inserted deep behind enemy lines, seizing airfields and bridges as well as causing confusion in the rear. Not all of the missions in Holland met with the same degree of success experienced at Eben Emael, yet the moral effect of the paratroopers was incredible, and German after-action reviews credited this effect as fundamental to the collapse of Dutch resistance.

The Germans used paratroopers again in Greece with mixed results but stunned the world in May 1941 when their airborne and supporting infantry seized the island of Crete from a mixed force of Allied defenders. An ironic outcome of this operation was the curtailment of German airborne operations, as Hitler thought the casualties suffered by his paratroopers prohibitive, while it spurred the creation of airborne units in both Britain and the United States. By war's end there were two British airborne divisions, six American airborne divisions, and many separate units of brigade size and smaller. Allied airborne operations were conducted in both the Pacific and Europe, including North Africa, Sicily, Italy, France, Holland, Germany, New Guinea, and the Philippines. Meanwhile, after recovering from the initial debacle of the 1941 German offensive into Russia, the Soviets continued to organize and employ airborne units. They were initially used during the Soviet counteroffensive outside Moscow. By 1943, Soviet airborne units were being employed in an offensive role in conjunction with ground units pursuing the invaders back into Germany.

Even before the end of the war there arose debate in Anglo-American circles about the bene-

fits accrued by such elite units, a debate that continues in the present day. Those opposed to the idea claim that such units have limited utility in modern warfare and denigrate the quality of the rest of the force by having first claim on the best soldiers. Those in the airborne camp counter that such units give armies an added capability, are effective combat multipliers (if used correctly), and enhance the prospects of operational success. What has confused the issue is the proliferation of special units in both the British and American armies during World War II, and the argument then expands beyond the question of airborne forces to include the efficacy of Ranger and Raider battalions, the Special Air Service, the Special Boat Service, the Long Range Desert Group, Commandos, Chindits, Marauders, and a unique anomaly, the First Special Service Force. Each of these units was organized in response to a specific threat or situation, and each then had problems justifying its existence when the threat waned or situation changed. This was not the case with airborne forces.

Though British, American, and German commanders were divided on their views about the efficacy of airborne operations, they all, without exception, had nothing but praise for the fighting abilities of paratroopers. Though essentially grounded after Crete, German paratroopers were used on every front and fought brilliantly. Likewise, Anglo-American commanders, faced with a dearth of competent infantry, kept their paratroopers in the line long after they should have been withdrawn for refitting. Ironically, the paratroopers' tactical competence undermined their use in the role for which they were originally organized, for commanders were chary of pulling these tough fighters out of the line in order to prepare them for an airborne operation that might not occur. This reason was often the case during the 1944 campaign in France when the Allies planned airborne operations only to have the drop zones overrun by fast-moving armored forces. General Omar N. Bradley, 12th Army Group commander, was also reluctant to release the needed transport aircraft, as he felt they were better employed ferrying gasoline to his armored spearheads.

Despite the lukewarm reception of the airborne concept in some circles, several successful airborne operations occurred in World War II. During the 1943 invasion of Sicily, elements of the U.S. 82nd Airborne Division, used as a blocking force behind the invasion beaches, stopped an Axis armored counterattack in its tracks. Meanwhile, a British airborne brigade seized an important bridge near Syracuse and held it long enough for ground forces to move up and secure it permanently. During the Normandy invasion, the U.S.



**U.S. gliders and paratroopers near Nijmegen, Holland, during Operation Market Garden in September 1944**

*(Associated Press)*

AIRBORNE FORCES

82nd and 101st Airborne Divisions and the British 6th Airborne Division again dropped behind the invasion beaches and seized key terrain and disrupted enemy command, control, and communications. Though the drops were scattered, especially in the American sector, the paratroopers held the German counterattacking forces at bay long enough for the British, Canadian, and American amphibious forces to get established ashore. In the Pacific, General Douglas MacArthur employed airborne forces during his drive along the New Guinea coast (January 1943), during the liberation of Manila (February 1945), and, most spectacularly, in a coup de main at Los Baños prison camp (23 February 1945) that succeeded in liberating more than two thousand Allied prisoners of war.

More than anything else, successful airborne operations of World War II hinged on

the fact that once inserted, the paratroopers were not forced to fight on their own for an extended period of time. Because of the limitations of transport aircraft, airborne units are not as robust as regular infantry units. They do not have heavy artillery and armor to augment their combat power, nor do they have logistical elements that can quickly bring up needed supplies. They are most effective when employed as shock troops, relying on speed and surprise to overcome their enemy. If the enemy, however, is allowed to regain the initiative and mass armor, infantry, and artillery against the lightly armed paratroopers, the odds of success swiftly diminish. This is what happened during the largest airborne operation in history, Operation Market Garden (17–26 September 1944).

The plan for Market Garden, conceived by 21st Army Group commander Field Mar-

shal Bernard Law Montgomery, was to lay an “airborne carpet” over which the armored forces of British XXX Corps would race. The U.S. 101st and 82nd and British 1st Airborne divisions would drop near the Dutch cities of Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem, respectively, seizing key bridges in each area. The bridge at Arnhem, over the lower Rhine, would catapult XXX Corps into the Ruhr, the industrial heart of Germany. Because of the distances involved, unexpected German resistance, and the prohibitive Dutch terrain that limited the ground forces to a single road, XXX Corps was unable to fight through to the British paratroopers at Arnhem, and the 1st Airborne Division was decimated. Dropped ninety miles behind German lines, 1st Airborne was left too long on its own, and two German SS Panzer Divisions were able to recover from the initial surprise and mount an effective counterattack.

Market Garden is often cited as an example by those in the anti-airborne camp of everything that is wrong with the airborne concept. They argue that in September 1944, when the operation occurred, there were several elite airborne divisions in England that were burning holes in the pockets of the Allied high command. So much precious manpower had been put into organizing these units it was a shame that they were not being used. Seeing these resources lying fallow, Allied commanders dreamed up Market Garden in order to get these units in the war. Finally, when employed they not only failed to accomplish their overall mission, but the casualties sustained also served to further drain Allied forces of quality fighting men.

Such an argument misses the point. Market Garden failed because the plan was flawed and intelligence was ignored (the British had been informed of the SS Panzer Divisions in the area). Additionally, airborne divisions in England could have been employed in any number of ways if there truly was a desire simply to get them in the war. They had, in the past, been employed as regular infantry and would be again before the end of the war. Finally, as Montgomery insists, the operation was not wholly unsuccessful. Both the American divisions successfully seized their objectives, and XXX Corps did make an advance into Holland. The 1st Airborne had simply been called upon to accomplish a mission that was beyond its capabilities, just as it is beyond the capability of armored units to fight in a city without supporting infantry or dismounted infantry to conduct high-speed maneuver warfare in the desert.

World War II demonstrates that when used within their capabilities, airborne forces are highly effective combat multipliers. They arrive at the cutting edge of battle with paralyzing swiftness and can put more troops on the ground in a shorter period of time than any other type unit. On D-Day (6 June 1944), between midnight and two o'clock in the morning, twenty-four thousand British and American paratroopers were deposited in the German rear areas. The quiet of Normandy was suddenly punctured by highly motivated soldiers who cut communication lines, seized key terrain, ambushed vehicular columns, and caused general mayhem. No other force in the world was capable of such action.

—G. A. LOFARO, U.S. MILITARY  
ACADEMY, WEST POINT

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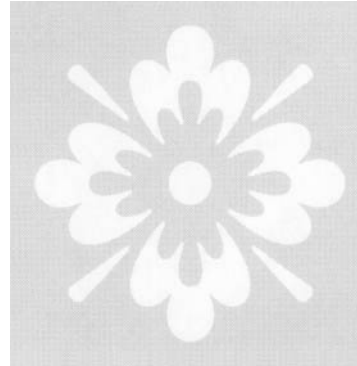
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# ALLIED STRATEGY

## Did Dwight D. Eisenhower's broad-front strategy in northwest Europe offer better possibilities for rapidly defeating Germany than Bernard Law Montgomery's single-thrust approach?



**Viewpoint:** Eisenhower's broad-front approach was the least risky and quickest way of defeating the German army because it forced a war of attrition.

**Viewpoint:** Montgomery's single-thrust approach offered the best possibility of defeating the Germans, but this strategy was undercut by his personality, the failure of Operation Market Garden, and the slow advances of British ground forces.

The debate over the best and quickest way to complete the defeat of Nazi Germany began in the aftermath of the Allied breakout from the Normandy beachhead (June 1944). Allied planners projected two possible routes to Germany. One ran through Belgium into the Ruhr valley. The other led through Verdun and Metz to the central Rhine valley. The original expectation was that operations would be conducted along the lines of a one-two punch, with opportunities exploited as they emerged. For American general Dwight D. Eisenhower, this approach maximized Allied advantages of mobility and flexibility. For British field marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, this plan represented a culpable failure to concentrate Allied forces for a single killing thrust. Instead, he advocated making the main effort along the northern route, putting as much U.S. strength as necessary under his command to accomplish that mission. In part this option was a recognition of the rapid erosion of Britain's resources. It reflected as well Montgomery's belief that Eisenhower had no grasp of strategy.

From Eisenhower's perspective, however, a narrow-front campaign played to German strengths, particularly their demonstrated ability to concentrate against and blunt single-thrust offensives even on the scales mounted by the Soviet Red Army. Neither Montgomery nor the British Army, moreover, were at their best in the kind of fast-paced, hard-driving offensive demanded by the narrow-front option. Even if somehow the British could execute at the tactical level, supplying an offensive of the scale Montgomery projected would overstrain the road net in the armies' rear. Finally, apart from the political problems inherent in putting large numbers of Americans more or less permanently under British command, experience showed that the English-speaking allies worked best in separate compartments.

Eisenhower stuck to his broad-front strategy even after the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes (December 1944–January 1945) demonstrated the risks it entailed being strong nowhere. In principle, Eisenhower recognized the advantages of a northern concentration. He understood as well the value of keeping an enemy off balance and the possibility of exploit-

ing local opportunities. More clearly than Montgomery, more clearly indeed than most of his subordinates of either nationality, Eisenhower realized that the days of spectacular, decisive mechanized drives were over—at least in the context of the broken, built-up terrain of northwest Europe and the grimly determined German defense. “Three yards and a cloud of dust” may not receive high marks from armchair strategists, but it decided the European campaign.



**Viewpoint:  
Eisenhower's broad-front approach  
was the least risky and quickest  
way of defeating the German army  
because it forced a war of attrition.**

Strategy entails devising methods of using available or developed resources to bring about a desired objective. Several criteria are customarily used to judge the efficacy of a strategy: the clarity of the objective, the adequacy of the resources to achieve the objective, and whether the methods chosen represent the optimal use of the resources at hand. Strategic disputes usually arise over the perceptions of what is optimal. To help focus examination of this criterion, analysts usually attempt to assess the relative opportunities and risks of competing methods in order to determine which strategy offers the greatest opportunity for success with the fewest risks of failure.

In the case under examination, the objective was crystal clear. On 12 February 1944 the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS), the controlling military organization for the Anglo-American alliance, designated General Dwight D. Eisenhower as Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force (AEF), and directed him to “enter the continent of Europe, and in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.” Nor was there any dispute between Eisenhower and his subordinate Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery concerning what the available resources were. They were the land and air forces under Eisenhower’s command and, significantly, the logistical matériel required to sustain the operations of these forces. At the time of the Normandy invasion in June 1944, the ground formations consisted of a single army group commanded by Montgomery, which comprised two field armies, one British and one American. The air formations included the strategic air forces, under Eisenhower’s temporary command, and British and American tactical air forces. By the end of the war in May 1945, the land forces had expanded significantly to three army groups comprised of eight field armies (five American, one British, one Canadian, and one French). The strategic air forces were no longer under Eisen-

hower’s command, but tactical air forces had expanded commensurately with the ground formations. In light of Germany’s declining military capability and the inexorable pressure of a Soviet advance from the east, these forces were adequate to defeat the German armed forces.

There was, however, a temporary logistical shortage that affected strategic considerations. In the autumn of 1944, before the vital port of Antwerp had been captured and the port of Marseilles had become fully operational, Allied ground forces had advanced farther than the theater support infrastructure was capable of sustaining them. This progress was the result of many factors, but chief among them was Eisenhower’s decision not to take an “operational pause” when his forces reached the Seine River but to continue to pursue the retreating German forces into Belgium, Holland, and eastern France. This strategy entailed a certain amount of risk, but Eisenhower judged it to be preferable to allowing the Germans to reestablish an effective defense west of the German border. It did, however, raise the issue of what the logistical priorities would be after the capture of Antwerp and the establishment of an effective supply line from southern France. Precisely at this juncture Montgomery began to remonstrate with Eisenhower for a single thrust from Holland, through the German Ruhr River industrial complex, and on to Berlin, rather than Eisenhower’s concept of a broader advance, from Holland through the Ruhr but also from Belgium and eastern France into central and southern Germany. Montgomery’s strongly worded request was accompanied by a demand that his 21st Army Group receive all available logistical support and that advances elsewhere along the northwest European front be brought to a halt.

In order to assess the merits of the two concepts, it is necessary to do two things. One must briefly examine how the campaign in Europe actually played out and then assess the relative opportunities and risks of the two concepts. It is important to note that Eisenhower’s command was an international coalition made up of several nations. As such, he could never completely separate military and political considerations. For example, in August 1944 he directed that the 2nd French Division under General Jacques LeClerc be allowed to participate in the liberation of Paris. Such political reality has caused many analysts to conclude that Eisenhower’s

decision to reject Montgomery's strategy was based primarily on the fact that the Americans were providing the great preponderance of fighting forces to the war in northwest Europe. According to this line of thinking, Eisenhower knew that the American people would not countenance a single drive into Germany led by a British general when most of the soldiers in the theater were Americans. Thus, he was influenced primarily by considerations of coalition politics to reject Montgomery's strategy. This explanation cannot be entirely ruled out, but Eisenhower's decision to adhere to his concept of a broad advance across western Europe and into Germany was based on sound military considerations as well.

In early September 1944 Montgomery proposed to Eisenhower a daring plan to seize a bridge over the Rhine River near the Dutch-German border at Arnhem, Holland. The plan called for three airborne divisions to capture a series of bridges along the Eindhoven-Nijmegen-Arnhem line and a British corps to attack along the same line to consolidate these holdings. Although Eisenhower had rejected the notion of a single thrust toward Berlin, he saw a great deal to commend Montgomery's plan despite the significant risks it entailed. Its chief attraction was that by projecting forces across the Rhine in the autumn, it might prevent the Germans from establishing an effective winter defense along their western frontier. The operation, code-named Market Garden, was launched on 17 September. Although two American airborne divisions seized the intermediate bridges at Eindhoven and Nijmegen, and the British airborne division temporarily captured the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem, the Germans counterattacked with a vengeance. Stiff German resistance kept the British corps making the ground attack from reaching its beleaguered comrades. The remnants of the British airborne division were therefore ordered to withdraw after suffering heavy casualties, and the vital Rhine objective was not held.

After the failure of Market Garden, Montgomery's forces eventually captured Antwerp and cleared the approaches to it through the Schelde estuary. The opening of the Antwerp port, coupled with the movement of General Jacob L. Devers's Sixth Army Group into eastern France, where it linked up with General Omar N. Bradley's Twelfth Army Group, and the consequent opening of a supply line from Marseilles to the southern Allied forces, provided the logistical wherewithal for Eisenhower to put into effect his broad-front advance. This concept called for Montgomery to press toward the Ruhr, Bradley to push toward central Germany on two axes north and south of the



Ardennes Forest, and Devers to attack toward southern Germany.

On 16 December, however, the Allies received a rude awakening. For out of the Ardennes Forest the Germans unleashed a powerful offensive with more than twenty divisions, splitting Bradley's army group in half, threatening to cross the Meuse River, and potentially putting at risk the critical port of Antwerp itself. Although all the Allied commanders were taken completely by surprise, they were eventually able to stabilize the situation. Taking advantage of heroic stands by small groups of soldiers at isolated road junctions, Eisenhower shifted reserves from both north and south to contain, blunt, and eventually eliminate the noticeable penetration of his lines that earned the campaign the sobriquet "The Battle of the Bulge." One of his more controversial decisions during the difficult six weeks between mid December 1944 and the end of January 1945, when the Germans were finally driven back to their starting point, was to give Montgomery temporary command of Bradley's northern two armies. Although castigated by many American commanders for assuaging

**Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery and Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower**

*(U.S. Army)*

Montgomery's ego, Eisenhower made the decision based on the sound operational logic that Bradley's headquarters was too far removed from these armies to control their participation in the battle. After the elimination of the Bulge, the German reserves were spent. Eisenhower's forces advanced on multiple axes to the Rhine River, crossed the Rhine in March, and by early May linked up with the Soviet army at the Elbe River. On 7 May, General Alfred Jodl, chief of the German High Command, signed the instrument of surrender at Reims, France, and Eisenhower cabled the CCS that his mission had been accomplished.

The key questions in assessing the efficacy of Montgomery's versus Eisenhower's approaches to the war in Europe are the extent to which the former's plan had a realistic chance of success and whether the risks it entailed were worth the potential gains. The chief factor in Montgomery's favor is the military principle of concentration of force. According to this concept, a commander should not fritter away his resources but should focus them toward the attainment of a decisive objective. In Montgomery's mind, if he had been given all available logistical support in the autumn of 1944, he could have driven on Berlin, defeated whatever German forces were in his way, and seized the capital, thus bringing the war to a successful, early conclusion. Eisenhower saw things differently. He estimated that even if all his support was given to Montgomery, it would not allow the field marshal to reach Berlin. Eisenhower also recognized that there is a flip side to the principle of concentration: if you concentrate, so can your enemy. Montgomery's plans would allow the Germans to focus their reserves on a single target. On the other hand, if the Allies advanced on several axes, each army would be able to support the other, and the Germans, who were also engaged heavily by the Soviets from the east, would not have sufficient forces to deal with all the simultaneous threats. Fundamentally, possessing the stronger force vis-à-vis the Germans, Eisenhower was simply unwilling to put all his eggs in one basket.

History suggests strongly that Eisenhower was correct. The Germans, as they had proven earlier in the war in France, North Africa, and Russia and pointedly during Market Garden and the Battle of the Bulge, were masters of operational maneuver. It simply made no sense to give them another opportunity to demonstrate this virtuosity, particularly if a setback would seriously jeopardize the Allied war effort. Here one can make a useful comparison to the American Civil War (1861–1865). As long as Union commanders attempted to engage Robert E. Lee in campaigns of maneuver, they lost. Only when Ulysses S. Grant assumed control of the Union

armies did the North begin to win consistently. Grant understood clearly that the way to beat Lee was to use the Union's superior resources to engage the Confederate armies on several axes simultaneously, thus depriving them of the opportunity to maneuver their forces. It was not necessarily an elegant strategy, but it was devastatingly effective. Eisenhower, whether consciously or unconsciously, applied the same practical logic against the Germans with similar results. It would have been foolhardy of him to do otherwise, and Eisenhower was no fool.

—HAROLD R. WINTON,  
MONTGOMERY, ALABAMA



**Viewpoint:**  
**Montgomery's single-thrust approach offered the best possibility of defeating the Germans, but this strategy was undercut by his personality, the failure of Operation Market Garden, and the slow advances of British ground forces.**

In late August 1944, following the successful breakout from the Normandy beachhead, Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery forcefully presented to General Dwight D. Eisenhower his solution for defeating the German field armies in the most expeditious way possible. It was not the first time he had lobbied, with the support of other senior British officers, for a British "front seat, center" position in the final act of the Hitler play. As Allan R. Millett has suggested in an essay about the American armed forces in his *Military Effectiveness* (1988), co-edited with Williamson Murray, American interests "coincided with Soviet interest in dominating postwar eastern Europe" but were not consistent with the restoration of prewar British imperial influence in Europe. By late spring 1945, as the Allied juggernaut closed on the Rhine River, Montgomery had accepted his assigned role of supporting actor, but not gracefully. To more than one friend the new field marshal wrote that after Eisenhower had assumed field command of all Allied ground forces on 1 September, the campaign lacked coherence and promised to be a protracted, indecisive advance into Germany. The Battle of the Bulge that burst on the Allied lines in mid December gave Montgomery a chance again to show his field-command skills on the north side of the German penetration. Those arrangements were temporary, however, and Eisenhower's command die

had been cast. Montgomery continued to command only the left flank of the advancing Allied wave. Russell F. Weigley certainly is correct in noting in *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944–1945* (1981) that if the positions of the British-Canadians and Americans had been reversed from Normandy to the Rhine, the American armies at the beginning of April would have crossed faster and been closer to Berlin. That circumstance would certainly have influenced Eisenhower's operational decisions.

One question that still nags historians is whether the war in Europe might have ended sooner as the result of a bold stroke by the 21st Army Group across the German plain north of the Ruhr aimed at Berlin. Prominent German generals interviewed by Sir Basil Liddell Hart after the war stated as much. Eisenhower conceptually supported the idea of a strong main attack in the north as early as August 1944, but his support was always couched in vague language that provided room for change. "Might-have-beens" are difficult to sort out because alternative outcomes must be assessed from circumstantial evidence that existed at the time the critical decisions were taken. Similarly, judgments about what could have been done are not the same as those about what should have been done. The political and grand-strategic framework of the endgame to defeat the Axis powers in Europe defined the boundaries of what was operationally and logistically feasible.

Put aside for the moment the issue of mopping up German forces to the west of the Rhine, a requirement that Eisenhower believed to be essential to continued, successful operations. Once the Rhine River had been reached, two obvious operational choices were to advance from west to east all along the front, meeting the advancing Russian forces in zone, or to weight the advance with powerful, mobile forces in a narrower zone, with weaker secondary attacks along the front to tie down potential German reinforcements. Although Eisenhower was not opposed to a weighted main attack, and even considered as late as the early months of 1945 allowing Montgomery's 21st Army Group to make the main effort with about thirty-six divisions, he came to the conclusion that based on performances to date Bradley, not Montgomery, should make that effort with its locus aimed at Leipzig, not Berlin. Montgomery, like George B. McClellan during the American Civil War (1861–1865), had developed a case of the slows during the Caen fighting and his proclivity for deliberate, set-piece operations, with the exception of Operation Market Garden, resurfaced as his army group drove to and across the Rhine.

As Forrest C. Pogue reported in *The Supreme Command* (1954), the British Chiefs of Staff, in their request of 10 January 1945 to the Combined Chiefs of Staff in Washington, insisted that "there would not be sufficient strength for two main attacks" and called for a review from Eisenhower by the end of January. Eisenhower replied with the same arguments he had given to Montgomery in November and December 1944. The British generals still feared, with some justification, that if George S. Patton's Third Army were allowed to make the secondary attack south of the Ruhr, the pressure on resources and Patton's famous energy would quickly "develop into a larger drive" that would detract from the main effort in the north. Moreover, the initial success of the German counteroffensive in the Ardennes "showed the danger of the broad front policy."

Following the Battle of the Bulge, Eisenhower turned a bit more conservative in his view that he must close his forces "up to the Rhine along the entire front before attempting to force a crossing." It appeared from Allied operational estimates that there was likely to be a parity in forces between the Germans and western Allies when the spring campaign opened. This situation made the Russians, closing from the east, the wild card and reinforced Eisenhower's conservative estimates. In order to retain flexibility he believed he had to eliminate German forces west of the Rhine, then close up deliberately.

The roots of the operational choices were in the cross-Channel invasion itself. Montgomery, not Bradley, was the ground forces commander for that operation. Once ashore at Normandy, Eisenhower faced the immediate problems of building up the logistical and fighting strength of the Allied Expeditionary Force and then breaking out of the beachheads, hopefully trapping large numbers of German defenders. With the war nearly five years long at that point, hope, if not expectations, ran strongly to defeating the Axis powers in Europe by maintaining the momentum generated with the Normandy invasion. First, the beachheads had to be expanded so that logistical buildup had enough space. The decision not to take Cherbourg early in the campaign put pressure on the invasion beaches to accomplish those logistical requirements. Again the weather intervened and the British and Canadian units encountered stiffening resistance in and around Caen. The Allied juggernaut, however, was irresistible given the imbalance of forces between the contending armies in northern France. The breakout at St. Lô near the end of July 1944 restored momentum to the campaign and presented the opportunity to clear Brittany and the Cotentin Peninsula. As Allied forces surged forward out of the expanded beachheads into the French countryside, the Germans



## OPERATION MARKET GARDEN

*On 17 September 1944 Operation Market Garden, the brainchild of Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, was launched. (The assault was later chronicled by Cornelius Ryan in his 1974 book A Bridge Too Far.) Three airborne divisions were dropped behind enemy lines in the Netherlands near Eindhoven, Nijmegen, and Arnhem. Their objective was to seize a series of bridges for a thrust across the Rhine into Germany by XXX Corps of the British 2nd Army. While the bridge at Nijmegen was taken, British and Polish paratroopers faced a strong German counterattack at Arnhem and were eventually overwhelmed. Thomas Pitt, of the Third Battalion, 504th Parachute Regiment, recalled the American effort to cross the Waal River at Nijmegen Bridge.*

We got into the damn boats and thought at first it looked like rain in the water. Then we realized it was lead coming from the Krauts on the other side. And away we went. I'll tell you we were paddling like mad to get across. Quite a few of the boats were overturned; guys in a lot of them were killed in getting across the thing.

When we got over to the other bank of the water I don't know how many boats we had lost in the river. It was a hell of a wide river. We got out of the boats. The two guys that were with us, (the two engineers) had to go back to the other side to get some more people. They had a hell of a time getting them back. By then the Krauts weren't too worried about them. They were more worried about us. We were coming across another beach-like area (200 to 800 yards wide) before the final dike. They were dug in some on the beach and then back in the dike. We were running by them practically and they were just shooting. The only thing to do was to head for the dike because there wasn't a Goddamned bit of cover anywhere else or anything. So we finally got about half way back to the dike and this kid who is peeling off this wire and he says "I ran out of wire should I set the phone up here?" I said "hell with it kid just take it easy now and get to the dike. We will talk to them some other day."

So we finally got over to the dike. The Krauts on the other side. The dike must have been maybe ten yards or so wide at the top and they were on the backside. We spent a little time tossing grenades from one side or the other that was fun and games. They were there with their potato mashers and we had fragmentation grenades. So my job was to hold this left flank so as we moved down towards the bridge the Krauts wouldn't turn and come behind us. So we proceeded to hold it (the dike). The Krauts tried to come across (the dike) a couple times and we discouraged them enough with what lead we gave them. They stayed there. It got a little later on and the first battalion guys came across. We had cleaned out what was on the beach. By then it started getting dark. It was getting late in

the day. They (1st Battalion) came over and said they would take the left flank. . . .

We went on along the dike-like thing, which really was under the bridge and along the other side. In the dark they didn't bother us. By the time we got to the other side, I guess they didn't see us or could care less. I think they had their own problems. We got down it must have been another third of a mile or so and came up where the Highway Bridge was across the river. By the time we got there Cook, who was the Battalion Commander was there. And then the first British tanks came roaring across the bridge. They cleaned it out there. Most of H Company (my old company) and G Company and what not came a little shortly afterwards. I don't know how many of them. Then came a couple of jeeps and what not and there was (General) Gavin, the Division Commander and his radio man. They came over in the jeep and came in this house we had taken over like the command post that was right by the edge of the bridge. They had come in there to get the information and how we were and how the situation was and things like that. We had begun to take some probes out to see what was out in front of us there as from Arnhem. By then, it was dark practically and there came a British staff car along and out got the British commander. He was, I guess, the corps commander. I'm not sure who he was. But one of the wheels and he came on in with his folks with him and what not. (Col.) Tucker was there and (General) Gavin was there and (Major) Cook was there, myself (Lieutenant Pitt) and one of the communications officers. We were sort of in the back ground when you get wheels like that around.

Gavin said "We will put some men up on the tanks and in front of the tanks and lets head for Arnhem." I think it was 20 some miles or so it wasn't far, you know. This British commander said "We don't move our tanks at night." Gavin said "You don't move them at night? Well if we wait till day light then they (the Germans) will move some stuff in." The Brit said "Well we can't move tanks at night." Gavin said something to him, he said "If they were my men in Arnhem we would move tanks at night. We would move anything at night to get there." This guy said "We are not. We will move them in the morning."

*Source: "The Waal Crossing," The Drop Zone Virtual Museum.*

reacted with stiff and determined fighting for every foot of ground given up. At Argentan and Falaise, the so-called Falaise gap, the German Seventh Army avoided complete destruction but lost irreplaceable combat troops and equipment as it streamed back to the Seine River crossings that were not interdicted effectively by Allied air power. The Allied pursuit to the West Wall (Siegfried Line) was again slowed by the German defenses at their western borders, but also by differences in strategic choices and the influence of the strong personalities of senior commanders.

Eisenhower and Montgomery both viewed the military objective of the European campaign to be the defeat of the German field armies, but they did not agree on the way to accomplish it. A slowdown in the pace of the advance or a stalling along the front with mounting casualties and little ground gained were possibilities that distressed both senior commanders. Prime Minister Winston Churchill, on the other hand, from April 1945 forward increasingly weighed the possibilities of denying to Russians the political spoils that would fall to its advancing armies, namely Berlin and Prague, and possibly Vienna. Eisenhower steadfastly responded by pointing out that if Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt wanted to change his mission and substitute the race to the two European capitals, he would comply and attempt to do so. In the interim, however, the objective remained as specified in his instructions from the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) to “enter the continent of Europe, and, in conjunction with the other United Nations, undertake operations aimed at the heart of Germany and the destruction of her armed forces.” Eisenhower, in his role as Supreme Allied Commander, understood his mission to be the military defeat of Germany in the least possible time and at the least cost in lives.

As Pogue pointed out in *George C. Marshall: Organizer of Victory, 1943–1945* (1973), Joseph Stalin was suspicious about the intentions of the western Allies, sensing that they wanted a separate truce with the Germans in the west while the Red Army was closing in from the east, effectively leaving them to face the full force of Nazi last-ditch defenses. The Soviet armies, however, had to pause fifty miles short of Berlin to regroup and resupply. Part of this disagreement stemmed from differences of view between the British and Americans as to the role of their Soviet ally in the final drive on Germany. Eisenhower, and certainly Roosevelt up to the time of his death, were more sanguine about their Soviet partners than were the British. The Soviets certainly saw the end of the war and the new order to arise from it in political terms. Military action would, in their view, facilitate the political outcome.

After the war Eisenhower published his memoirs, *Crusade in Europe* (1948). Montgomery, upset by Eisenhower’s version of events, began to explain his operational logic with several books. Each had the same theme. If only Eisenhower and George C. Marshall had appreciated the opportunity that existed in late August 1944, it could have been exploited by appointing the field marshal as senior ground forces commander and adopting his plan to strike across the north German plain to Berlin and end the war sooner with fewer casualties. In his *Memoirs* (1958) Montgomery asserted that “the German army was nearly finished” at that point and what was needed were “quick decisions, and above all a plan.” He had cautioned against frittering away the advantages already won by hard fighting. Ten years later, in *A History of Warfare* (1968) he stated that the AEF was poised to “push home the advantage we had gained,” but the Americans chose to “advance simultaneously, on a broad front.” He supported that conclusion by noting that the Allied “administration” had become “stretched” to the point that the advancing armies could not all be supported logistically at the same time. Moreover, the broad-front approach would preclude getting “decisive results quickly,” and the Germans would be given time to regroup. The unpalatable part of that recipe for Eisenhower was that Montgomery was to be the key instrument of the successful strategy.

There are two distinct aspects to the choice between advancing from the Rhine River eastward on a broad front or with a heavily weighted main attack in the north. The first, political and personality considerations, has been presented. The second, feasibility in terms of time, the military aspects of geography, forces available, and logistics, is harder to assess but is more important. A coherent agreed-upon operations plan is the smaller part of success; the larger part is forceful, persistent execution. Even if Montgomery’s plan for the final advance into Germany was inferior to Eisenhower’s concept, it still held the possibility of success if properly supported and vigorously executed. The objective for each partner in the western Allied coalition was speedy defeat of the German field forces. Montgomery’s concept contained risks, but so did a methodical advance all along the front. A successful, early rupture in the continuity of the German defenses in the west promised at least the creation of circumstances whereby the Germans might sue for cessation of fighting, even on “unconditional” terms. If Montgomery’s execution of Operation Market Garden (17 to 26 September 1944) had succeeded in capturing the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem, Holland, a path into Germany would have been opened and Eisenhower might have been tempted to throw

the weight of the attack behind the 21st Army Group. Of course, that did not happen and time became an enemy, along with terrain and weather.

The wild card remained Stalin and the Red Army. In the end, it was quite impossible to separate political from military ends and actions. If it were possible to separate Montgomery from the idea of the northern thrust, the operational option could be evaluated more readily. Certainly rapid seizure of the initiative in August 1944 would have kept German field armies falling back on their heels. On one critical point, Montgomery was right: the war did extend to mid 1945, with significant casualties, but he lost a bet with his staff that the war would go on for most of that year. The Achilles heel was always logistics. For Eisenhower to give Montgomery his way would have required extraordinary confidence in a man who continually rebuked his superior with an air of superiority and occasionally fell short of what he promised. Montgomery really was his own worst spokesman in advancing this alternative.

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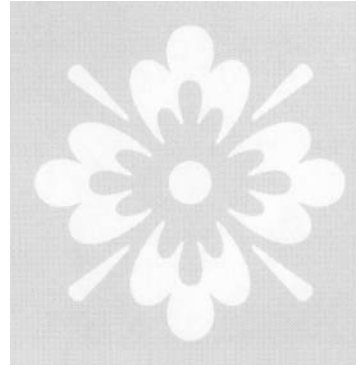
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# THE ALLIES

## Was the postwar collapse of the Allies' coalition inevitable?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, the grand coalition of the Allied powers was doomed to collapse after World War II because it was built only on the common interest of defeating the Axis; mutual mistrust and postwar self-interest caused the Cold War.

**Viewpoint:** No, the collapse of the grand coalition was not foreordained; it was caused by the United States breaking from its pattern of traditional isolationism after the war and the Soviet policy of territorial expansion, among other factors.

The Soviet-American-British coalition against the Axis was based on a negative consensus: the perceived necessity to destroy implacable common enemies. The geography that separated them also imposed different ways of war. Russia could not avoid fighting massive land battles; Britain and the United States spent a good deal of time determining how to get at their enemies. A good amount of effort was required to reconcile the Allies' circumstances.

Personalities played a significant role in the process. Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin related well to each other. Each knew who he was and how he understood the vital issues of his state and system. The three powers also collaborated institutionally with a minimum of understandable friction—whenever the issues at stake involved defeating the Axis.

When wider questions were raised, personalities could do no more than paper over differences. The ideology that legitimized the Soviet Union, with its eschatological vision of Communist triumph, made long-term cooperation with capitalist states impossible for any but instrumental reasons. Russia, moreover, saw itself as a permanent outsider in any relationship with the English-speaking democracies. Churchill's concepts of a postwar world looked backward to an era of empires and balances of power. Britain was so weakened by its wartime efforts that its place in the alliance increasingly depended on finesse rather than power. Roosevelt's concept of a peace structured by the United Nations and maintained by regional hegemonies may have been the most realistic political conceptualization of a postwar order. The free-trade and human-rights principles accompanying it, however, generated much suspicion—not all of it behind the emerging Iron Curtain—that when all was said and done, America would own the half of the cow that gave the milk. The Cold War was not inevitable, but the structural tensions among the partners in the Grand Alliance meant that avoiding it would have required insight, cleverness, and luck—a combination that in international relations can never be counted upon.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the grand coalition of the Allied powers was doomed to collapse after World War II because it was built only on the common interest of defeating the Axis; mutual mistrust and postwar self-interest caused the Cold War.**

Alliances and coalitions among nations are based on two crucial foundations: trust and common interest. If either is lacking, it requires an extreme amount of the other to create and sustain an alliance. The Grand Alliance—to use Winston Churchill’s term for the coalition of Great Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States against Nazi Germany—was based almost entirely on common interest, as there was little trust between the United States and Great Britain on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other. As an alliance based on common interest, rather than on trust, it collapsed after the achievement of their common aim, the defeat of Adolf Hitler’s Germany.

During the course of World War II, the United States and Great Britain developed a close working relationship that was, however, not without strains. The two countries differed on several matters of strategy, such as British support for the deployment of troops to North Africa and the Mediterranean, as opposed to American plans for a cross-Channel invasion in 1942, or 1943 at the latest. Even after troops were ashore in France in 1944, differences abounded. British field marshal Bernard Law Montgomery favored a narrow thrust to cut through German defenses and bring the war to a quick conclusion, but he was overruled by American General Dwight D. Eisenhower, who favored attacking along a broad front.

As the war drew to a close, further issues arose between the two powers. The United States had long been suspicious of British imperial designs. Franklin D. Roosevelt personally believed the British colonies should be granted independence, in a manner similar to the American plan to grant independence to the Philippines following the war. On the other side of the Atlantic, Winston Churchill insisted he had not become His Majesty’s prime minister to oversee the dissolution of the British Empire.

Despite these differences between the two Atlantic allies, they remained relatively close, as compared to the gaps in trust and understanding between the British-American coalition and the Soviets. The two sides had little reason to trust each other, and many reasons for suspicion. Founded on the ruins of Imperial Russia, the

Soviet Union had much in common with its predecessor, such as geography, population, and certain ambitions for expansion. The Marxist ideology of the Bolsheviks—the small party of revolutionaries led by Vladimir Ilyich Lenin who seized power in 1917—made the Soviet Union a fundamentally different state from Imperial Russia. The Bolsheviks believed a worldwide revolution of workers would soon follow their capture of Russia. It did not, leaving the Bolsheviks in a situation for which their theory did not prepare them: leading a lone socialist state in a capitalist-dominated world. Many Soviet leaders, including Joseph Stalin, who rose to almost absolute power in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, believed that ensuring the safety of their country as the bastion of socialism was more important than promoting a worldwide revolution of workers. Nevertheless, Soviet propaganda and agitation worried capitalist countries such as the United States and Great Britain. Especially troubling were the activities of the Comintern, or Communist International, an organization of Communist parties in several countries, directed and funded by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union’s avowed goal of the destruction of capitalism, and the steps taken toward that goal, however hesitant, were a major source of concern to Americans and British and a high barrier to trust.

Soviet internal actions led to further distrust in the West. In the 1930s Stalin consolidated his leadership with a series of purges. He sent hundreds of thousands to their deaths, either by ordering their immediate execution or sending them to work camps, known as gulags, to die under horrific conditions. In addition to those deliberately eliminated by Stalin, he allowed millions of peasants, mainly Ukrainians, to starve to death while he exported grain to earn hard currency to fund his plans to industrialize the Soviet Union. The leaders of Great Britain and the United States did not know the full details of Stalin’s rule, but they developed a fairly clear picture from the stories of those who fled it.

Soviet foreign-policy activities further damaged its credibility, at least in British and American eyes. In August of 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany signed the Ribbentrop-Molotov Non-Aggression Pact. This pact between dictators convinced many in the West that the Soviet Union was no better than their newfound Nazi ally. The Red Army invaded Poland in the next month, dividing the hapless country with Hitler, and confirming these suspicions. If any doubt remained, it was removed when the Soviet Union launched an unprovoked attack on Finland, known as the Winter War of 1939–1940. The Finns fought bravely and expertly, but they



were overwhelmed by Soviet numbers and forced to cede border territories. This attack resulted in the expulsion of the Soviet Union from the League of Nations. Indeed, the British were so incensed with Soviet behavior that they considered sending aid to the Finns, despite the threat they faced from Germany.

The Soviet Union had perhaps even stronger reasons to be suspicious of Great Britain and the United States. Marxist ideology taught eternal hostility between the interests of workers and capitalists. As long as the Soviet Union represented the workers, and the capitalists controlled Great Britain and the United States, there could be no permanent accommodation. While Lenin's and Stalin's modifications to Marxist doctrine allowed for periods of peace, and even cooperation, with capitalist countries, their destruction through revolution was both the final goal of the Soviet Union and, to Marxist ideology, the inevitable outcome of history.

Beyond ideology, the Soviet Union had substantial reasons not to trust the British or Americans. Following the Bolshevik seizure of power, several of Russia's former allies in World War I, including Great Britain and the United States,

sent troops to prevent the new government from giving or selling stockpiled war matériel to Germany. This mission quickly expanded to include support for the counterrevolutionary opponents of the Bolsheviks, the Whites, in hopes of keeping Russia in the war. After World War I ended, foreign troops continued to aid the Whites in hopes of eliminating the communists and bringing political democracy to Russia. During the intervention, British and American troops engaged in combat with Russian troops on Russian soil, with casualties on both sides. The Soviet Union never forgot that the United States and Great Britain tried to strangle the revolution in its earliest and most vulnerable days.

Further causes for distrust soon emerged. When Hitler began his rise to power, he appealed both to Germans' fears of a communist takeover and to their contempt for the perceived weaknesses of the liberal democratic West. Stalin saw a common interest with Great Britain and France in resisting German expansionism, but the two western nations rejected Stalin's overtures for alliance, distrusting the Soviet dictator as much as the German. When they followed this rejection with a policy of appeasing German

**American and Soviet troops meet at the Elbe River near Torgau, Germany, on 15 April 1945.**

*(Associated Press)*

demands, Stalin decided to find his own way to deal with the threat of Hitler, a decision that led to the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact. Stalin tried to channel Hitler's aggression away from himself and toward those who had rejected his friendship. Stalin's diplomacy does not seem so cold-hearted when one recalls that many in the West, including future American president Harry S Truman, were hoping, loudly and publicly, that Germany and the Soviet Union would tear each other to shreds, leaving the Western democracies out of the battle of dictators.

Following the fall of Poland in 1939, the Soviet Union remained aloof, and even provided Germany with vital war matériel, until Hitler's surprise attack in 1941 brought the war to the Soviet heartland. Great Britain, though hard-pressed after standing alone against Germany since the fall of France in 1940, immediately extended aid, and the United States extended Lend Lease supplies to the new foe of Hitler's Germany. The United States, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union had finally found a common national interest strong enough to overcome the long-standing lack of trust. As Churchill reportedly said, if Hitler invaded Hell, he would at least make a favorable reference to the devil in the House of Commons.

Even the experience of fighting a common foe, however, built little trust between the two sides. Britons and Americans traveling to Moscow on official business felt isolated and spied upon—which they were. Each side neglected to share significant intelligence and kept operational plans clouded. Efforts by the United States to arrange for bomber bases in the Soviet Union, which would have exposed all of Hitler's empire to attack from the air, resulted only in small shuttle-bombing experiments. Even these were discontinued, in part because of operational difficulties, but also in part to Soviet obstructionism.

The greatest blow to what could have developed into trust between the members of the Grand Alliance was the fate of the Warsaw uprising. As the Red Army approached Warsaw in the summer of 1944, the Polish underground staged an uprising, hoping to liberate the city before the Soviets arrived. Poland had long been a source of contention between the Western allies and the Soviet Union, with each side recognizing different, and mutually hostile, governments-in-exile. As the Germans in the city began to crack down on the brave but underequipped Poles, the Red Army halted its offensive. The Western allies called on the Soviets to advance and relieve the Poles, but Stalin, claiming the army had outrun its supply lines, ordered it to halt. Western leaders believed that Stalin simply wanted to let the Germans exterminate that portion of the Polish

population most likely to resist Stalin's own plans for Poland's future. At roughly the same time, evidence emerged in the Katyn Forest that the Soviets had massacred Polish prisoners it had captured in 1939, though at the time, public blame went to the Germans. This atrocity, combined with the Soviet refusal to allow British and American transport planes to land in Soviet-controlled territory after dropping supplies to the beleaguered Poles, effectively preventing such flights, reinforced Western suspicions regarding Stalin's plans. While there was little chance that the Grand Alliance would collapse before Hitler was utterly defeated, the already dim prospects for postwar cooperation grew even dimmer in the smoke over rubble-choked Warsaw.

In April 1945, Hitler committed suicide—killing himself, the Nazi regime, and the Grand Alliance, although the alliance took longer to die than the dictator or his regime. With no great enemy to unite them, the lack of trust that had haunted the Grand Alliance since its founding returned to the forefront. The national interests of the three parties quickly intersected in conflicting and dangerous ways.

Eastern European countries occupied by the Soviet Union were, according to agreements made during the war, to have freely elected governments friendly to the Soviet Union. "Free" but "friendly" governments were contradictions in terms, however, as any government that could not choose hostility to another nation was clearly not free. The Allies even began to argue over the word "democratic," with the United States and Great Britain interpreting it to mean political democracy based on their models, and the Soviet Union interpreting it to mean social democracy based on its own model.

It soon became clear that Stalin was determined to control Europe as far west as possible. When an American diplomat congratulated him on his forces reaching Berlin, Stalin replied that those of Tsar Alexander I had reached Paris. Stalin wanted a buffer zone behind which the Soviet Union, devastated by Hitler's invasion, could recover. This territory would provide defense-in-depth for a country that had faced repeated invasions from the west, not only by Hitler but also by the Teutonic Knights, the Swedes of Charles XII, the French of Napoleon, and the Germans of Kaiser Wilhelm II. This buffer zone would also keep the United States, the world's only atomic power, at bay, perhaps even until frantic Soviet efforts at espionage and research produced their own atomic weapon.

The British were hostile to Soviet expansionism, but they were also old hands at power politics and the balance of power, and were willing to grant the Soviet Union a sphere of influence in Europe, its extent subject to negotiation.

Great Britain, however, was now clearly the junior partner of the Grand Alliance. It was still a great power, but the United States and Soviet Union were becoming something the world had never before seen—superpowers. Where they were going, Britain could not follow: its homeland had been spared invasion but had been shattered by aerial attack; its economy was in tatters, with only support from the United States preventing collapse; and its population had suffered heavily. By the closing phase of the war, there were no more young men to recruit or conscript. To replace casualties in the British Army on the Continent, the British had to cull troops from support services and the Royal Air Force. Abroad, nationalist movements shook the empire, dividing British attention between the perceived Soviet menace and the effort to hold the empire together. While the Americans admired Britain's resistance to Hitler and its experience in world diplomacy, Britain could not set the policy for the western pair.

The United States had fought a long, hard war for a set of principles, not for territorial gain. American diplomats were unwilling on principle to concede the Soviet Union's right to retain control of the territory the Red Army had occupied, thus forcing the populations of these nations to trade one foreign dictator for another. Such an outcome to the great crusade could not be endorsed, even if the might of the Soviet Union made it too costly to prevent.

Thus, the Soviet Union's interests and those of the United States were in direct conflict. While the Americans and British disagreed on specific points, their hostility to Soviet expansion was mutual, and they remained closely allied. Soviet postwar moves in Europe, and the U.S. sole possession of the most powerful weapon yet created, added to the long list of reasons not to trust the other side. Without trust, and without a common enemy, the Grand Alliance collapsed.

While it can be argued that the leaders of the Grand Alliance should have reached an accommodation that would have prevented the Cold War, the reality is that there was little incentive for them to do so. The compelling reason for putting aside their distrust lay dead in a Berlin bunker, and the process of bringing him down had done little to engender loyalty. Looking back upon their legacy of mistrust, and forward to the actions their opposite numbers were taking in pursuit of contradictory national interests, the two sides grimly hunkered down to prepare for the next war.

—GRANT WELLER, U.S. AIR FORCE  
ACADEMY, COLORADO



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the collapse of the grand coalition was not foreordained; it was caused by the United States breaking from its pattern of traditional isolationism after the war and the Soviet policy of territorial expansion, among other factors.**

There was nothing inevitable about the collapse of the Grand Coalition following the end of World War II. On the contrary, that breakdown resulted from two primary events that observers with a long memory would have regarded as unlikely. First, it was essential that the United States abandon its two-decades-old policy of peacetime isolationism in favor of active engagement in Europe and the world. Second, it required Joseph Stalin to abandon his two-decades-old isolationism in favor of an expansionist policy that was a break with his previous track record. These factors were interrelated, of course, and reflected changes that had occurred in both states, as well as in the other nations of Europe, during World War II. In no sense, however, can these outcomes be regarded as inevitable.

American involvement in World War I violated more than a century's worth of tradition of remaining aloof from European affairs. Although America had been far from "isolationist" during the nineteenth century, it had steadfastly avoided involving itself in the complicated and dangerous politics of the European continent. The American continents, and then the Pacific region, were the theaters for American foreign adventures. The old world was regarded with distrust, suspicion, and a certain amount of fear. For a brief period Woodrow Wilson (and German strategic ineptness) broke this tradition and dragged America forthrightly into the center of European politics, but the experience of war restored the tradition with a vengeance. Throughout the interwar period (1919–1939), not only did America turn a blind eye toward Europe, but it also largely ignored dangerous events in the Pacific that would previously have held its attention. The 1920s and 1930s were the period of truest isolationism in American policy—that seemed only to intensify as the storm clouds gathered over Europe.

It was by no means foreordained that America would remain committed to a policy of active involvement in the old world after World War II had passed. With the German threat destroyed once and for all, and the Soviets so clearly weakened that large-scale aggression beyond the bounds of the territories they already occupied



## THE ALLIES IN ACTION

*Although united in a war against the Axis, the soldiers who fought for the Allied nations shared many misunderstandings about each other. The following incident was reported in the memoirs of an American soldier who fought in Europe.*

The story concerns one of our better-liked, high-ranking officers who recently paid a visit to a neighboring unit, thereby meeting several Americans lately released from German prison camps. Freed by the Russians, these ex-prisoners had had the opportunity to see our allies in action. According to their report, the Russians are *really* rough, tough, and nasty, and the famed 1st Division, by comparison, as gently mannered as Girl Guides on a summer outing. The Russians loot, then burn every German house that falls into their hands, and say simply, "So it was done to us!"

Concerning women, the Russians are reputedly a shade more delicate in their approach than were the Germans in Russia two years ago. The Russians *do* ask first, "*Komme sie hier und schlaffen!*" Sometimes they even say, "*Willst du?*" Freedom of choice remains, you see. Of course, if a flat "*Nein!*" is the answer, the Russian has the last word . . . and a pistol slug puts the final unanswerable period to further reluctant bargaining.

That's the story, now for the denouement! Our officer, listening to these accounts of Russian vigor, reflected upon the soft way *we* handled civilians, and the comparison made him angry and self-conscious. Riding back to his own headquarters, he considered further, and his anger mounted. Passing a German farmhouse, he suddenly ordered his driver to pull up, and puffed with firm resolution, the officer jumped from the jeep. Studying the farmhouse for a moment, he tilted his helmet and strode up the path. (Incidentally, he stands five feet three and weighs a generous 115 pounds.) He pounded roughly on the door, and when it swung open, he pushed past the cowering frau and walked in. Then, fixing the woman with a stern eye, he stomped his foot, stretched an imperious hand, and said firmly, "Twelve eggs!"

**Source:** Raymond Gantter, *Roll Me Over: An Infantryman's World War II* (New York: Ivy Books, 1987), pp. 350–351.

was unlikely, it was not at all inconceivable that once more a pacifistic and war-weary populace and Congress might turn away from an internationalist president. The atomic monopoly, moreover, could have served as a powerful argument for an American invincibility that could underwrite complete isolationism. In fact, America's break with its isolationist tradition represented a remarkably determined effort to shoulder the load of global leadership that is unusual in the history of any state, let alone this one.

That America did not turn to isolationism had a great deal to do with the personalities of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Harry S. Truman,

both of whom were determined to avoid a return to a policy they regarded as dangerous and anachronistic. It is not certain that, even with their will to break with Stalin, a will that Truman manifested much more clearly than Roosevelt ever did, they could have convinced the country at large to support a vigorous involvement in the world. As the Soviet Union gained territory after the war, however, astute observers began to realize that a crisis was brewing. When the Soviets reneged on the agreements they had made at Yalta (4–11 February 1945) and elsewhere to allow free elections in the territories occupied by their armies, American opinion began to tilt more and more toward confrontation. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, the process was complete. In short, it was the aggressive expansionism of the Soviet Union more than anything else that combined with Roosevelt's internationalism to break America's previous isolationist pattern.

Stalin's aggressive expansionism after 1945, however, was no more inevitable than America's newfound internationalism. The fight over the role of the Soviet Union in the international arena had been waged without quarter in the early 1920s between Leon Trotsky and his adherents, who pressed for a true communist internationalism, and Stalin and his allies, who argued that the Soviet Union, birthplace of communism, must first be made secure and strong. Stalin, of course, triumphed in that debate, as in all others, adopting as his foreign-policy slogan the need to perfect "socialism in one country." Throughout the 1920s and 1930s the Soviets resolutely turned away from large-scale or dangerous adventures in the world, confining their prosecution of the war against capitalism to the support of communist parties and agents in the Western powers.

All that time, Stalin strove resolutely to develop the modern industrial base Russia would need to fight the West on equal terms—a process that was far from complete in 1939. That fact led to the ultimate reversal of Soviet foreign policy with the signing of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact in that year—a reversal that staved off the inevitable clash with Germany for a bare two years. These years had been important for Stalin, but not sufficient: in 1941 Russia was still woefully ill-equipped to face the modern German army, and in the end, it was, of course, Hitler and not Stalin who broke the Soviet Union out of its isolationism.

The Soviets' situation in 1945 was not such as to encourage foreign adventures either. During the war the Germans had occupied territory that had been home to 40 percent of the Soviet population and a staggering percentage of its industry. The Soviets had survived the war through

Allied largesse in the form of the Lend Lease program, and by evacuating both population and industry to the safe distance of the Ural Mountains region and Central Asia. Neither of those regions was well enough served by a transportation or energy infrastructure to become true industrial powerhouses in short order, while the traditional areas that had generated Soviet military power had been gutted, bombed, and destroyed. A conflict between the Soviet Union and the Western powers in 1945, even on the conventional level, then, offered little prospect of lasting success to the Soviets, despite their remarkable achievements against the Germans. Of course, any conflict as well was certain not to remain conventional, for the Americans, and they alone, had atomic weapons and had already demonstrated the will to use them.

Just as Soviet aggressiveness helped to keep the Americans engaged in the world, so had Western passivity helped convince Stalin that he might with safety pursue a much more aggressive policy than his resources would suggest. As Soviet armies swept through Eastern Europe, they rapidly rearranged the political order in the occupied lands in accord with Stalin's wishes. So far from protesting, Roosevelt deliberately avoided taking any action to interfere with these activities. When Churchill pressed him to place Allied troops in the Balkans in 1944, forestalling complete Soviet domination of the area, Roosevelt demurred, refusing to take such actions except in consultation with the Soviet dictator. The matter was dropped.

By the end of the war, Soviet armies were in occupation of all the Eastern European countries, and the Americans had made no demur or complaint about the Red Army's treatment of its occupied territories. Nor did Truman lodge serious protests as Stalin methodically violated the terms of the Yalta agreement following the conclusion of the war. In other words, by its continuous inaction in the face of steady but low-level Soviet aggression, the United States signaled to Stalin that he could safely expand the Soviet Union's power. As he became convinced that it was safe to do so, Stalin also realized the desirability of such expansion. Eastern Europe could be made to support the Soviet recovery and help strengthen the Soviet Union for the fight to come. Stalin would not have

embarked on such an adventure, however, if he had not been convinced in advance that the United States would remain passive as he did so.

It is ironic, therefore, that the policies pursued by the Soviet Union and United States, although mutually antagonistic, were also mutually supporting. Without Soviet aggressiveness, American continued involvement in the world was unlikely. Without clear American passivity, Soviet aggressiveness in the immediate postwar years was almost unthinkable. Both states unwittingly conspired, therefore, to bring about the collapse of the Grand Coalition, something that was not foreordained.

—FREDERICK W. KAGAN, U.S. MILITARY  
ACADEMY, WEST POINT

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# ANGLO-AMERICAN DISPUTES



## Was the Anglo-American dispute over strategic priorities in the European theater significant?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the Allies genuinely differed on war plans, as Britain was determined to preserve its global status while attacking German-held territory along the periphery, while the United States desired a more direct and speedy resolution of the European conflict.

**Viewpoint:** No, despite minor disputes over priorities in the European theater, the Allies agreed on overall strategy and generally implemented the plans made early in the war, while the major differences concerned timing and level of preparation for the cross-Channel assault.

In the historiography of World War II, it seems at times that the United States and Britain spent as much energy quarreling with each other as in fighting the Germans. The confrontation as usually outlined pits a declining empire, cunning or careful depending on perspective, against an emerging superpower, forceful or unsophisticated—again, depending on perspective. To the Americans, the shortest distance between two points was a straight line and the best way to drive a nail was with the largest possible hammer. From the beginning of the Atlantic Alliance the United States sought a full-scale invasion of northeastern Europe, and from there a killing thrust at the heart of the Third Reich. The British, on the other hand, had neither the resources nor the confidence to pursue such a strategy. Instead, Churchill and his generals favored the “indirect approach”: defeating Germany’s allies, probing for weak spots of an overextended imperium, and inflicting a death of a thousand cuts—slower, perhaps, but also surer and less costly.

In contrast to this abstract model, controversies between the Allies involved timing more than principle. While Winston Churchill might have preferred to see Germany collapse without the risks and costs of a cross-Channel attack, in practice he understood that such an assault would be necessary and was determined that it have every chance for success—which in practice usually put him on the side of postponement. As for the Americans, they quickly learned that the Reich was not to be brought low with a blast of trumpets and that it was neither good strategy nor good policy to suspend the war in the west while preparing an irresistible cross-Channel blow.

Assignment did as much as nationality to shape the reactions of commanders in the field: U.S. senior officers in the Mediterranean tended to support pursuing operations in that theater, while there was no stauncher supporter of Operation Overlord than Bernard Law Montgomery—at least once he was appointed its tactical commander. In short, Anglo-American differences in approach are best considered in perspective.





**Viewpoint:  
Yes, the Allies genuinely differed on war plans, as Britain was determined to preserve its global status while attacking German-held territory along the periphery, while the United States desired a more direct and speedy resolution of the European conflict.**

During the years between World Wars I and II, it would have been hard to find two major powers more unlike in their attitudes toward the world than England and the United States. Great Britain possessed an immense global empire that it was determined to keep hold of, and therefore it was involved in nearly all the disputes of the world. Preparations for supporting England's interests and defending its subjects in virtually every potential theater were considered, and occasionally pressed, by the British military—and sometimes even supported by its politicians. The United States, to the contrary, had little or no interest in the world beyond its borders, believed that it had no vital concerns to defend around the world, and made virtually no preparations to deal with any contingencies that might arise. For England, World War I had been a horrific struggle in which a generation of its young men were virtually wiped out in a series of pointless battles. For America, that war had been short and largely glorious—most of all, by 1939 it was largely forgotten. Lastly, England was situated but a few miles away from continental Europe. If it came to disaster, England's focus had to be on a European threat. With more than three thousand miles of ocean separating America from any potential foe, the Americans were able to choose which enemies to attack and in what order. All of these differences came to the forefront in the process of formulating Allied grand strategy during World War II.

England was the major Allied power during the first two years of the war. From the German invasion of Poland (1 September 1939) to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), English strategies dominated. After the fall of France (22 June 1940), Great Britain stood virtually alone against the Axis powers. There was little hope at that time that the war would be short or that England would be able by herself to strike any decisive blow against Germany. It was no surprise, therefore, that English strategy, before the American entry into the war, focused on isolating Germany and eroding its power with attacks around the periphery. After all, an attack by England alone against Germany in 1941 was unthinkable.

Pearl Harbor changed all that, but not necessarily to England's immediate advantage. It had effectively written off East Asia as a security commitment during the interwar period—but the English had been counting on America to fill their critical role there. They found during World War II that this decision had unfortunate consequences. Despite Adolf Hitler's foolish declaration of war on the United States, the fact remained that Japan, not Germany, had attacked American soil and threatened it directly. Although President Franklin D. Roosevelt and his military advisers speedily decided to concentrate on defeating Germany first, they could not ignore the threat Japan posed to that strategy. As long as the war dragged on, pressure would mount both among the American people, anxious to avenge themselves for the Japanese attack, and from the U.S. Navy and its supporters, eager for the theater controlled by that service to receive priority, to place Europe on a back burner. At the least, as long as resources designated for Europe were not actually being used, it was hard to resist the temptation to send them to the active fighting fronts in the Pacific.

When the Americans considered how best to implement the "Germany first" strategy, therefore, they naturally sought a plan that would defeat Germany as rapidly as possible. The British policy of attacking along the European periphery obviously did not offer hope of a rapid victory. Surprisingly, the British were at first quite willing to abandon that strategy in support of a program aimed at launching an invasion of western Europe as soon as possible. The difficulty was that resources available in 1942 simply did not make such an option practicable.

The problem was, however, that with the German invasion of Russia (22 June 1941) in full swing, Roosevelt had promised Joseph Stalin that the Western Allies would alleviate some of the burden by opening a second front in 1942. The American need to use forces earmarked for Europe, moreover, before Pacific demands overrode the "Germany first" strategy, similarly argued for finding some European theater in which to engage, even if it was not the desired one. As a result, the Americans consented to the employment of their forces in Operation Torch, the invasion of North Africa (8 November 1942). Subsequently, as necessary matériel for the invasion of France continued to be unobtainable, they also agreed to the invasion of Sicily (Operation Husky, 10 July 1943), and the subsequent attack on Italy (3 September 1943).

The purpose of these operations, for the English and Americans alike, was to divert German forces away from Russia and France in



**American troops landing  
at Utah Beach, Normandy,  
6 June 1944**

*(Associated Press)*

order to pave the way for the major effort, the invasion of France, dubbed Operation Overlord. Into 1943, therefore, there was no significant disagreement between England and the United States concerning strategic priorities in the European theater. The trouble arose only after Sicily had been quickly conquered, southern Italy invaded, and Benito Mussolini thrown out and replaced by a pro-Allied government (25 July 1943). At that point, strategic discord broke out once again.

Following Italy's switching sides, Winston Churchill began to imagine that southern Europe could be the decisive theater and that an invasion of France would not be necessary, at least not until it was only a mopping-up operation. Churchill hoped to move north through Italy toward Vienna, perhaps making landings either in southern France or the Balkans to distract the Germans still further. He spoke of his plan as striking at the "soft underbelly" and offered it as an alternative to what

he imagined would be horrific and bloody battles in northeastern France—a theater all too familiar to the English as the site of the World War I battles of Passchendaele (November 1917) and the Somme (1 July–13 November 1916; 21 March–5 April 1918). Churchill also hoped to support Greece, inveigle Turkey into the conflict, and open up another front in the Balkans. It may well be that he hoped to repeat the experience of World War I when German armies, apparently undefeated on the Western Front, nevertheless were forced to surrender by the collapse of their southern flank.

If Churchill had had his way, Overlord would have been considerably postponed. He consistently argued for strengthening or at least not weakening the Allied forces in Italy and for expanding Allied operations in that theater. Such an expansion, indeed, even maintaining their forces at high levels, could only come at the expense of Overlord. Churchill believed that the safer and less bloody road to

victory lay through the southern theater, and he desired to postpone what he saw as the riskier and bloodier attack on France—at least long enough to give his plan a chance.

It is not inconceivable that Churchill could have carried the day. A considerable part of American opposition had to do with their distrust of England's "colonial" mentality and an unwillingness to become involved in English attempts to maintain their influence and empire. Those criticisms were largely irrational—Churchill's plans had little to do with English imperialism and much more to do with a differing view of military strategy. The divergence also arose because for Churchill, time was not of the essence, whereas rapid victory in Europe was essential to the Americans.

Churchill's plans were not entirely without merit. The Allies had, in fact, fought through terrain as bad or worse than anything they would encounter in northern Italy and Austria, and if it had taken them a long time to do it, they had also perfected the art of fighting in such terrain. The mountains greatly reduced the utility of German armor, thus negating one of the greatest assets of the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) and rendering the prospect of successful German counterattacks, such as the one staged in the Ardennes in 1944, extremely unlikely. The Allied thrust would take the form of a dagger pointing at Germany's heart and could not have failed to attract considerable German reserves and reinforcements. It would serve, in other words, the main purpose of the Normandy invasion at considerably less risk and possibly less cost.

If the Americans had not been so unwilling even to contemplate the plan, both because of their distrust of England and the impatience forced upon them by circumstances, they might well have found merit in Churchill's arguments. It is hard to know what the outcome of such a decision would have been, but certainly the further course of the war would have been dramatically different.

These inter-Allied disputes were not trivial—they were epochal, with vast potential consequences for the course of the war. What is more, they reflected the different perspectives and tensions that reigned in Washington, D.C. and London and underlined the difficulties of effective coalition planning even among such similarly constituted states as the United States and Great Britain. At root, England was a dying empire while the United States was an emerging global power. The Anglo-American dispute over strategic priorities was fundamental and important indeed.

—FREDERICK W. KAGAN, U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT



### Viewpoint:

**No, despite minor disputes over priorities in the European theater, the Allies agreed on overall strategy and generally implemented the plans made early in the war, while the major differences concerned timing and level of preparation for the cross-Channel assault.**

In the early 1950s Hanson Baldwin, in describing major errors made by the British and Americans during World War II, suggested that the two Allies had differing opinions about how the Germans should be defeated. In addition, each believed that its strategy was the only correct one. While the Americans favored a direct approach, the British wanted to wear the Germans down, in areas such as the Mediterranean, before launching an amphibious assault on northwest Europe, if one proved necessary. Those who have entered the debate generally tend to suggest one or the other strategy was the correct plan. Although they emphasize the gulf between the two sides, what Baldwin and many other historians gloss over is the fact that not all British or American chiefs of staff agreed with their leader's plans for winning the war. They also fail to recognize that both Allies agreed that the Germans would have to be attacked from the west.

Much American scholarship written since Baldwin first raised the issue has been colored by his perspective, which suggested that the Americans developed a strategy that was more aggressive than, and hostile to, the approach envisioned by the British. The Americans favored an early landing in northwest France, followed by a thrust into the center of Germany, as the way to foster a quick end to the war. The British, on the other hand, according to Baldwin, advocated a series of campaigns in the Mediterranean along the periphery of *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe). The goals of these offensives were to divert German forces from western Europe and the Eastern Front, as well as cause heavy losses of German troops, equipment, fuel, and supplies. Baldwin did, however, concede one way in which the two strategies concurred. Both agreed that strategic bombing against the German homeland and occupied Europe would be a major part of their plan.

Historian Michael Howard presented the British interpretation of the two strategies in *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (1968). The British scheme, which Winston Churchill played a major role in developing, was "subtle, far-sighted and politically motivated."



## STRATEGIC DECISIONS

American and British strategists during World War II often disagreed over exact planning and timing of combined efforts. At the Arcadia Conference (22 December 1941 – 14 January 1942) the Allies established a framework for cooperation and an overall strategy, as exhibited in a portion of a memo from this meeting.

### WASHINGTON WAR CONFERENCE

#### AMERICAN-BRITISH STRATEGY MEMORANDUM BY THE BRITISH CHIEFS OF STAFF REVISED BY U.S. CHIEFS OF STAFF

##### I. GRAND STRATEGY

1. At the A-B Staff conversations in February, 1941, it was agreed that Germany was the predominant member of the Axis Powers, and consequently the Atlantic and European area was considered to be the decisive theatre.

2. Much has happened since February last, but notwithstanding the entry of Japan into the War, our view remains that Germany is still the prime enemy and her defeat is the key to victory—Once Germany is defeated, the collapse of Italy and the defeat of Japan must follow.

3. In our considered opinion, therefore, it should be a cardinal principle of A-B strategy that only the minimum of force necessary for the safeguarding of vital interests in other theatres should be diverted from operations against Germany:

##### II. ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF OUR STRATEGY

4. The essential features of the above grand strategy are as follows: Each will be examined in greater detail later in this paper.

a. The realization of the victory programme of armaments, which first and foremost requires the security of the main areas of war industry.

b. The maintenance of essential communications.

c. Closing and tightening the ring round Germany.

d. Wearing down and undermining German resistance by air bombardment, blockade, subversive activities, and propaganda.

e. The continuous development of offensive action against Germany.

f. Maintaining only such positions in the Eastern theatre as will safeguard vital interests and deny to Japan access to raw materials vital to her continuous war effort while we are concentrating on the defeat of Germany.

*Source:* Franklin D. Roosevelt Library and Digital Archives, safe file, box 1.

American “short-sightedness and doctrinaire stupidity” prevented the Allies from winning the war “with a minimum of bloodshed” and hindered them from being in a better position with regard to the Soviet Union than they were when hostilities ended. While their strategy appeared to be developed in a piecemeal fashion, British military leaders simply adjusted to changing situations, doing what they could with available resources. British historians frequently concur with Howard’s assessment. Contrary to accusations made by Americans, the British did not think that the Mediterranean and southern Europe should be the location of the main Allied offensive, but it could perhaps “enhance the prospects of winning the peace.”

The debate continues to emphasize the differences between the American and British positions. Historians provide endless examples to demonstrate that the conflict supposedly interfered with the development of a permanent grand strategy, but they ignore the fundamental similarities between the two sides. While divergent philosophies and attitudes led to different approaches to defeating Germany, both the Americans and British agreed that the fight would have to be taken to Germany; however, they disagreed about when that would be possible.

During and after the war, American military leaders and historians have accused the British, because they supported offensives in the Mediterranean in 1942 and 1943, of being unwilling to launch the cross-Channel invasion. This accusation lies at the heart of the Mediterranean versus northwest Europe debate. Between June 1940 and the end of 1941, the British had to fight the Germans where they could do so from a position of strength. Consequently, they implemented operations in Egypt and North Africa. While at times they appeared to be more interested in peripheral operations, the British, before the end of 1941, had constructed a plan, Roundup, for a small-scale invasion of northern France. The design, which did not resemble the 1944 Normandy invasion plan, was never taken seriously or formally introduced into the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS) discussions.

The British frequently reminded their Allied colleagues that the Arcadia agreement reached in January 1942 acknowledged the inevitability of operations on the continent. They did not oppose that accord, but the British believed that the use of “indirect” methods—blockade, bombing, subversive activities, and preparatory operations—would not prevent a large-scale amphibious landing in France when the time was right. “When the time was right” was the operative phrase. The British realized that an invasion of northern France was essential to the defeat of Germany. Drawing on past experiences, they knew, according to Chester Wilmot in *The Struggle for Europe* (1952), “that would-be invaders must first exploit the

great mobility which sea-power (and now air-power) gave them, in order to keep the enemy dispersed and to counter his natural advantage of being able to move on interior lines. This was the reason for their eagerness to extract the greatest advantage from the Mediterranean before venturing upon OVERLORD.”

The desire to engage the enemy in battle quickly did not mean that it was possible. Because of the Americans’ level of preparedness in January 1942, Allied military leaders, both British and American, eventually admitted that the cross-Channel invasion was not feasible that year. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, however, wanted American forces committed to battle against the Germans before the end of the year. When the British gave signs of opposing a second front in 1942, General George C. Marshall advised the president to threaten to abandon Europe and concentrate all U.S. resources in the Pacific. Against the advice of Marshall and others, Roosevelt accepted Churchill’s proposal to mount an offensive against French North Africa, which then made necessary the postponement of the cross-Channel assault until September 1943.

In 1943, as the North African campaign was nearing completion, the Allies evaluated what their next move would be. The possibility of launching Roundup, the cross-Channel invasion, was thoroughly discussed. The main obstacles were insufficient buildup of forces in England, which would prevent the implementation of a large-scale operation, and the lack of shipping and landing craft necessary to transport the invasion force to the continent. The British, especially Churchill, were quick to point out the advantages of continuing operations in the Mediterranean. The momentum from the African campaign could be transferred to Sicily and result in further victory. Supply and shipping needs were less than those of the cross-Channel assault. When Marshall and his colleagues expressed opposition, the British asked what else could be done in 1943. If neither operation—Roundup or Husky (Sicily)—was mounted, what would the Allied forces do? Could they afford to remain idle for a year? The Americans finally agreed to the British plan, which then meant further postponement of the cross-Channel invasion.

Some of the strategy debate suggests that one ally, generally Britain, was much more cautious than the other. This charge can be directed toward both the British and Americans, but at different times and places. In the fall of 1941, the Americans, who favored a direct attack against the Germans at the earliest possible opportunity, challenged the British to agree to a date for the amphibious assault. In the face of American impatience, the British urged caution. While the Americans placed great faith in an offensive with a fixed date, the British preferred to be more cautious and

flexible, which allowed them to adjust to any given situation. In November 1943, when discussing the future of the Mediterranean campaign, however, the British advocated a bold, opportunistic strategy, while the Americans advised caution. The Americans did not want to get tied down in the Mediterranean. They feared that too much involvement would adversely affect the Allies’ ability to launch Roundup in 1944.

Because the British supported offensives in the Mediterranean in 1943, the Americans claimed that they were overturning the agreed upon strategy—direct attack against the Germans. The British consistently denied the charge. They agreed that the main attack must come in the west, but hesitated to fix a firm date for the invasion. Part of British reluctance came from memories of western Europe during World War I—Passchendaele, (November 1917), Ypres (July–October 1917), and the Somme (1 July – 13 November 1916; 21 March – 5 April 1918). Part came from more recent events—the forced evacuation at Dunkirk (27 May – 4 June 1940) and the failed assault at Dieppe (19 August 1942). General Marshall and Admiral Ernest J. King, neither of whom had any experience with planning and implementing an amphibious assault, believed that the British exaggerated the difficulties and dangers of such an operation.

When encouraging postponement of the cross-Channel invasion, the British did not propose abandonment but rather increased preparation. They emphasized the need for more shipping and landing craft but failed to recognize that part of the problem was the failure to agree upon a definite date for the assault. While the Americans advocated amassing a large invasion force, they did not initially plan enough shipping or landing craft to implement the operation, a problem that they thought would not have arisen had the date been set. Neither the Americans nor British seemed to understand the other’s approach to developing a general strategy or planning and implementing an offensive. By 1943 the British had already reached their peak mobilization, while the Americans were still far from theirs, a point that their ally appeared to forget at times.

Participants in the strategy debate also suggest that Roosevelt was a skilled, but naive, diplomat and that Churchill had taken advantage of him. Roosevelt would not have agreed to the North African campaign (Torch) otherwise, particularly since Marshall and others advised against American participation. The evidence does not support that conclusion. While Roosevelt did not always apprise the joint chief of his position, he invariably had an opinion. He was determined that American troops participate in the war in Europe in 1942. If the only way that they could do that was to take part in Torch, then so be it. Just because Roosevelt agreed

with Churchill did not mean that the prime minister had manipulated him.

Another aspect of the debate concerns the reasons why Churchill and the British supported operations in the Mediterranean in 1942 and 1943. In addition to the obvious—British setbacks in Africa, insufficient resources to mount the cross-Channel assault, and the belief in peripheral, rather than direct, attacks—historians argue that the British had a political motive. They were more interested in winning the peace than in winning the war. In other words, the British wanted to dictate postwar conditions in certain parts of the world, especially in the Balkans. They also desired to prevent Soviet control of postwar Europe. While there is some merit to the argument that postwar, not wartime, concerns dictated British strategy, it was not the overriding factor. In addition, whether it was vocalized or not, all participants in the war had postwar concerns, issues, or regions that they wanted to control. For example, the Americans objected to any offensive that might be designed to guarantee British retention of its colonies. Political issues naturally played a part in the development of strategy, but other factors were also involved.

In December 1941, when the United States entered the war, Britain had been fighting against Germany for two years. Because of their experiences, the British, according to Gordon A. Harrison in *Cross-Channel Attack* (1951), “tended to focus on the difficulties of assault, and the tactical and logistical problems involved, while the Americans, some 3,000 miles away, found it easier to start with the large view of the strategic problem.” Consequently, the Americans “were enabled to give a freer reign to their imagination and to arrive at bolder offensive concepts.” While there was much heated discussion over strategy between the British and Americans, the plan that they constructed early on was carried out for the most part. They reexamined each step, however, before implementing it. The process just indicated their different opinions regarding the best way to defeat Germany and emphasized their inability, at times, to understand each other’s perspective. The defeat of Germany, though, provided a common ground for the strategy developed by the Allies. The dispute over priorities did not significantly affect the development of an Allied strategy that both Americans and British agreed must include a cross-Channel assault and a direct attack against the Germans from the west. They were determined to make it work, and they did.

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 LOYOLA UNIVERSITY

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# ANGLO-AMERICAN RELATIONS

## Was there a mutual trust between the Americans and British during World War II?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the Americans and British had an amicable partnership during World War II as they planned and executed strategy together.

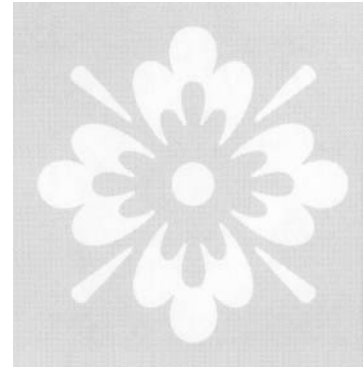
**Viewpoint:** No, the relationship between the Americans and British during World War II was characterized by self-interest although they shared a common desire to defeat the Axis.

The question of whether a “special relationship” existed between Great Britain and the United States during World War II was an issue of policy as well as historiography. Certainly, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin’s normally high levels of suspicion were constantly exacerbated by his conviction that his ostensible partners in the Grand Alliance were discussing and deciding the future of the world behind his back in a language he could not understand. Concern that America was being coerced or duped into pulling Britain’s imperial chestnuts out of the fire was expressed from Washington, D.C., to the headquarters of the Twelfth Army Group and the U.S. Third Army. That Britain was sacrificing what remained of her strength in an increasingly unbalanced coalition with the United States that understood nothing of how the world actually ran was a concern of politicians as different—or perhaps as similar—as Anthony Eden and Clement Atlee.

To a degree, the concept of a special relationship was driven by personalities. Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt genuinely liked each other. Churchill’s bulldog courage was rendered even more appealing to Americans by his repeated insistence, with rhetorical flourishes long vanished from American public life, that Britain and the United States shared a language, a history, a culture, and a purpose. Roosevelt, the quintessential American liberal, epitomized the confidence, power, and ultimate good will of the New World coming to the rescue of the Old.

The special relationship was also nurtured, in its early years, by the asymmetric synergy of their respective contributions. Britain had the bases, recent experience, and finesse. The United States had the industrial potential, raw materials, and imagination. In the bomber offensive against Germany, the two powers divided the responsibility along lines already developed, Britain striking by night and the United States by day. Until the Normandy invasion on 6 June 1944, Britain had more ground troops engaged against the Axis than the United States did. It also had a record of defeats that gave American military leaders confidence in asserting their own positions.

Even more basic to the special relationship, Britain and the United States faced two implacable enemies that they could not meet on equal terms if fighting alone. Britain was overstretched from the beginning of the war. The United States did not hit its full stride in production or effectiveness until 1945. Circumstances fostered cooperation on levels ranging from grand strategy to tongue-biting. Eisenhower’s alleged relief of a staff officer for calling a colleague not a son-of-a-bitch, but a British son-of-a-bitch, epitomized what



began as more or less a shotgun marriage, but evolved into a stable partnership, surviving World War II, shaping the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, and still enduring at the end of the century.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the Americans and British had an amicable partnership during World War II as they planned and executed strategy together.**

During World War II the Americans and British built a special relationship that was different than any partnership they had with any other allies. The British and the Americans talked, worked, and fought together in ways that stood apart from the remainder of the alliance. They formed the Combined Chiefs of Staff and shared theater commands. Soldiers and politicians developed personal relationships across the Atlantic that were not duplicated with other foreign nationals. The two nations as well would share the greatest secret of the war—the atomic bomb.

One administrative body that demonstrated this special relationship was the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Members of this body consisted of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff and the British Chiefs of Staff Committee. The Combined Chiefs of Staff met together to discuss the status of war planning being done on both sides of the Atlantic. They discussed current and future operations and in many cases were the body that approved finalized operations. The group met once a week in Washington, D.C., as well as during high-level Anglo-American conferences. The British Chiefs of Staff, however, could not possibly fulfill their responsibilities in London and meet with the Americans on a weekly basis in the United States. So each British Chief of Staff sent to America a trusted deputy in the form of the Joint Staff Mission who took their places at weekly meetings. This regular gathering helped to bring American and British versions of the war into better alignment and allowed each side to have a say, even if one side dominated the agenda at times, in the progress of the war. Neither side developed a similar relationship with the Soviets or any another ally. It was never seen as plausible to include other nations. Outsiders did not receive a large voice in Anglo-American planning.

Another element that helped to build the Anglo-American special relationship was the fact that American and British soldiers, sailors, and airmen fought and spilled blood next to each other. In North Africa, Italy, France, and in the China-Burma-India theaters the Anglo-Americans combined their military resources. Typi-

cally, a commander of one nation would be named the supreme allied commander of a theater. He would have assigned to him deputies from the other nation. One example of this practice was the Allied command structure for the European theater after 1944. American general Dwight D. Eisenhower was appointed to head the Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF), which was responsible for Allied efforts in western Europe. Assigned to assist him were several British commanders. British air marshal Sir Arthur William Tedder served as Eisenhower's second in command. Admiral Sir Bertram Ramsay served Eisenhower as the head of his naval forces, while Air Marshal Sir Trafford Leigh-Mallory commanded Eisenhower's air forces. From 6 June to 31 July 1944, British general Bernard Law Montgomery was assigned to command the Anglo-American ground forces in Europe as Eisenhower's deputy. SHAEF was supported by a group of competent staff officers under American general Walter Bedell Smith. Many of the most trusted members of the staff included British officers, such as Eisenhower's head of intelligence General Kenneth Strong. This pattern was in place, in various forms, wherever American and British soldiers coexisted. Eisenhower had earlier led a command similar to SHAEF during the North Africa campaign in 1942–1943. British commanders also led Anglo-American forces with American deputies. Admiral Lord Louis Alexander Mountbatten took over the Southeast Asia Command in October 1943 with American General Albert Coady Wedemeyer as his Deputy Chief of Staff. While the Anglo-Americans fought next to each other, the Soviets, on the other hand, fought heading toward the American and British efforts in both Europe and Asia. They were never integrated into the Anglo-American command structure, as there simply was no need for them to cooperate at the same level as the Americans and British.

Personal relationships between British and American citizens were another aspect of the Anglo-American special relationship. The best example was the friendship between American general George C. Marshall, the Army Chief of Staff, and British field marshal Sir John Greer Dill. Dill had served as the head of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee and head of the British Army as the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. He fell out of favor with British prime minister Winston Churchill, however, who used Dill's sixtieth birthday on 25 December 1941 as an excuse to retire the field marshal. There was



*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

not time to prepare Dill's replacement and close friend, General Sir Alan Francis Brooke, to represent the British at the Arcadia conference in Washington, D.C. So Dill attended though his official duties were over. While at the conference, he lobbied to stay in the United States as Britain's chief representative to the Combined Chiefs of Staff. With the help of Marshall and Brooke, Churchill was persuaded to let Dill stay on and work in Washington.

Marshall and Dill built a close relationship while Dill worked in America's capital. The two men kept few secrets from each other. Marshall let Dill know how the Americans thought, which Dill then reported to Brooke. Dill showed Marshall all the correspondence that he received from London, including staff studies and memorandums for Dill's eyes only, as well as correspondence between Churchill and President Franklin D. Roosevelt. This open relationship allowed the British and Americans to work closer together. It was especially helpful that Dill was close to both Brooke and Marshall, who were not always on friendly terms. Dill could explain to each man what the other was truly thinking and smooth over bumps in the Anglo-American relationship. Dill's role in the war effort was considered so important that the Americans requested that he be buried at Arlington National Cemetery after he died in 1944.

Other relationships such as the one between Marshall and Dill existed among the Anglo-Ameri-

cans. One short-lived relationship was between Wedemeyer, while he was the chief army planner in 1942 and 1943, and British brigadier Vivian Dykes, who agreed to share all information that came into their hands from their respective nations. The relationship ended prematurely, however, when Dykes was killed in a plane crash following the Casablanca conference of January 1943. These open and friendly personal relationships were not duplicated with the other allies. The idea of the Anglo-Americans casually sharing sensitive material with Soviet officials is somewhat incredible.

The ultimate Anglo-American relationship was between Roosevelt and Churchill. Soon after the war began, Roosevelt commenced a comprehensive correspondence with Churchill and looked to support the British, but not enter the war. He turned America into the arsenal of democracy and made efforts to indirectly support the Royal Navy in the Atlantic. After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the German declaration of war against the United States, Churchill rushed to Washington, D.C., to meet with the president. They were determined to beat back the Axis powers together. At times the men were the best of friends fighting the good fight against their opponents; at other times they were the most bitter of enemies. The two statesmen disagreed about the future of the post-war world. Churchill looked to limit the influence of the Soviet Union, while Roosevelt

wished to make it into a great power after the war that could help to preserve peace. In the end they focused on beating the Axis powers, not squabbling over the postwar picture. The future was not an obstacle for their coming together to win the war. The two men also shared correspondence with Soviet premier Joseph Stalin; both, at times, courted the premier as they tried to get him to sway the other leader on various issues. Neither Roosevelt nor Churchill, however, ever had a personal relationship with Stalin such as they had with each other.

Some could define the Anglo-American partnership of personal relationships and discussion as mutual manipulation. Each side worked together in order to get their policies and goals adopted. The word *manipulation*, however, insinuates a more negative relationship than really existed. It would be better to define the Anglo-American relationship as cooperative competition. Both sides competed: the Americans were constantly showing the British how their plans were superior, while the British did the same. Yet, they competed in a cooperative manner—both had the goal of defeating the Axis in the quickest and least bloody way possible. On that issue they were united. So they attempted to find the best way to achieve victory. They never let the competition keep them from their major task—winning the war. Together, they weeded through opposing plans and decided on mutual strategies to defeat their opponents. The Soviets were left out of this process. Stalin made requests to the Anglo-Americans, such as his desire for a second front in western Europe, but the Anglo-Americans evaluated Soviet wishes in the context of their own mutual planning. The Soviets were never part of the free interchange of ideas that defined the closeness of the Anglo-American relationship.

One final example of the Anglo-American relationship was the Manhattan Project, the building of the atomic bomb. A British study originally inspired the Americans to put their efforts into building the device. It described to the Americans the first plan for building a bomb out of ten kilograms of uranium. Later, while the Americans were furiously constructing the bomb, British scientists such as Rudolph Pierls worked beside them at the Los Alamos laboratory. The project, known by the code name Tube Alloys, was strictly an Anglo-American affair. The Soviets were told as little as possible about the bomb and its effects.

There were disagreements, as there are in any relationship. The American Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest Joseph King, often feared that the British would attempt to find ways to lessen the importance of the U.S. Navy's drive in the Pacific and relocate resources to the

Mediterranean. King also feared, however, that the U.S. Army would try to lessen the importance of operations in the Pacific in favor of those in Europe. It is also true that Montgomery was at times publicly vocal about his distaste for Eisenhower, under whose command he served. Yet, American general George C. Patton was also openly against the actions of Eisenhower at times. Cracks in the special relationship were personal and were never allowed to develop to the point where they could fracture the alliance. The same could not be said for the Soviets. After Allied victory was assured, Churchill openly expressed to the Americans his desire for Anglo-American soldiers to conquer portions of eastern Europe, as a way to counter the influence of their Soviet ally in that area. This action would have been a clear attack on the Soviet Union's postwar designs and could have severed the alliance before the Axis powers were defeated.

Many motivations helped to propagate the idea of the special relationship during and after the war. A simple reason was language and tradition. Both groups spoke English, which made it easier for them to identify with each other, and label non-English speakers such as the Soviets as "others." Another rationalization is history. Churchill himself said that the American Revolution was never completed. The former English colonies that became the United States were bound by tradition and economics to Great Britain. It was only natural that they would come together as one people in their mutual hour of need.

There was a close Anglo-American relationship during World War II. The Americans and British cooperated and shared resources together at unprecedented levels in order to defeat their enemies. Though they worked with other nations, such as the Soviet Union, to defeat the Axis powers, they never integrated with the other allies to the extent that they did with each other.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the relationship between the Americans and British during World War II was characterized by self-interest although they shared a common desire to defeat the Axis.**

In 1942 Prime Minister Winston Churchill declared that he had not been elected first minis-

ter to oversee the dissolution of the British Empire. This statement was symbolic of the tensions and disagreements between the British and the Americans during World War II. The relationship between the British and Americans during the war was born of national self-interest, not some special relationship based on a common heritage or kinship. Both sides had their own agenda when it came to which strategy was the best to win the war and how to shape the post-war world. These conflicting agendas resulted in disagreements in several areas, including strategy and colonial empires. Only the common desire to defeat Nazi Germany kept the two powers sufficiently united during the war to bring about an Allied victory. Such a desire enabled the two to form a successful coalition but did not constitute a "special relationship."

The fact that the two sides, Great Britain and the United States, needed each other to survive and win the war did not result in total agreement on all important issues, especially the strategy to defeat Nazi Germany. Through 1943 the British held the upper hand in the area of strategy due to experience and the balance of military power. As long as the United States was the junior military partner in terms of numbers and experience, the British members of the Combined Chiefs of Staff were able to shape Allied strategy in Great Britain's favor. The debate over strategy has been characterized as a choice between a direct or an indirect approach to defeating Germany. The American desire to launch a cross-Channel invasion of France as early as possible was the direct approach while the British emphasis on a Mediterranean strategy constituted the indirect approach. The British interest in the Mediterranean extended beyond mere fears of a premature invasion of France, as control of the Mediterranean Sea and a secure Egypt and Suez Canal were crucial to maintaining the British Empire in India and the Far East. Preserving the overseas colonial empires of European powers was not a high priority for President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the Americans who were interested in promoting free trade and self-rule around the world.

As long as the United States was the junior military partner and dependent upon British naval and air support to conduct offensive operations, there was little the U. S. Chiefs of Staff could do to force the issue. Moreover, Roosevelt emphasized cooperation with the British in the name of defeating Germany and desired to get American troops into action as soon as possible. The result of British dominance of the Combined Chiefs of Staff in 1941-1942 was the implementation of a Mediterranean strategy rather than the cross-Channel invasion favored by the senior American military leaders. Novem-



## THE ATLANTIC CHARTER, 14 AUGUST 1941

The President of the United States of America and the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, representing His Majesty's Government in the United Kingdom, being met together, deem it right to make known certain common principles in the national policies of their respective countries on which they base their hopes for a better future for the world.

First, their countries seek no aggrandizement, territorial or other;

Second, they desire to see no territorial changes that do not accord with the freely expressed wishes of the peoples concerned;

Third, they respect the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live; and they wish to see sovereign rights and self government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them;

Fourth, they will endeavor, with due respect for their existing obligations, to further the enjoyment by all States, great or small, victor or vanquished, of access, on equal terms, to the trade and to the raw materials of the world which are needed for their economic prosperity;

Fifth, they desire to bring about the fullest collaboration between all nations in the economic field with the object of securing, for all, improved labor standards, economic advancement and social security;

Sixth, after the final destruction of the Nazi tyranny, they hope to see established a peace which will afford to all nations the means of dwelling in safety within their own boundaries, and which will afford assurance that all the men in all lands may live out their lives in freedom from fear and want;

Seventh, such a peace should enable all men to traverse the high seas and oceans without hindrance;

Eighth, they believe that all of the nations of the world, for realistic as well as spiritual reasons must come to the abandonment of the use of force. Since no future peace can be maintained if land, sea or air armaments continue to be employed by nations which threaten, or may threaten, aggression outside of their frontiers, they believe, pending the establishment of a wider and permanent system of general security, that the disarmament of such nations is essential. They will likewise aid and encourage all other practicable measure which will lighten for peace-loving peoples the crushing burden of armaments.

Franklin D. Roosevelt

Winston S. Churchill

*Source: Hyperwar: A Hypertext History of World War II, Historical Text Archive Web Page.*

ber 1942 marked the invasion of Northwest Africa and the beginning of a major Allied commitment to the Mediterranean theater for the remainder of the war. The January 1943 Casablanca Conference, code-named "Symbol," once again highlighted the differences between the two powers. The cross-Channel invasion was put off until 1944 at the earliest, and Churchill's Mediterranean strategy moved forward with the invasion of Sicily in July. An additional Casablanca decision included the pronouncement of a priority effort to win the Battle of the Atlantic and the beginning of a combined bomber offensive against Germany. The continued emphasis on the Mediterranean theater pleased Churchill, but Roosevelt's announcement of the policy of unconditional surrender troubled him. Churchill viewed the insistence on unconditional surrender as an unnecessary hurdle on his path to shape the postwar world. Such a pronouncement ultimately limited Germany's options and conceivably extended the war. In September 1943 Italy surrendered, a development that appeared to vindicate Churchill's Mediterranean strategy. German forces occupied Italy and the war there became a slow, grinding fight up the peninsula, which only ended when Germany surrendered in May 1945. In the end the United States was unable to disengage from the Mediterranean theater and devote all its resources to liberating France and driving into Germany.

The British interest in the Mediterranean and secure links to its Far Eastern empire highlighted strategic differences between the two in the war with Japan. While both wanted to see a Japanese surrender, Churchill and the British were primarily interested in recovering their imperial possessions. They wanted Burma, Malaya, Hong Kong, and Singapore liberated and restored to British control. President Roosevelt and the Americans were not interested in fighting to restore Great Britain's colonies. As a result Roosevelt looked to China, under the leadership of General Chiang Kai-shek, for its main ally in the Pacific. American strategy thus centered on opening the Burma Road to China, and the twin drives across the Pacific toward the Philippines and Japan, not the liberation of Southeast Asia that would come with the defeat of Japan. British interest in major operations to liberate its former colonies went unsatisfied for lack of resources as the Americans insisted there were more important operations to conduct.

By the time of the Teheran Conference in November 1943, American industrial might was finally making itself felt, and the United States became the senior military partner. At that point the Americans insisted upon a cross-Channel invasion in the spring of 1944. Despite repeated arguments, Churchill's proposal for operations

in the Aegean Sea and the Balkans and his adamant opposition to an invasion of southern France were overcome by the Americans, often-times with Joseph Stalin's support. The American objective was the defeat of Germany as rapidly as possible. The British objective was the defeat of Germany in such a way as to benefit Britain the most in postwar Europe. The immediate objective for the Americans, and by default the British, became the cross-Channel invasion.

In the end, war weariness, a dependence on American economic aid, limited military resources, and the might of the United States and the Soviet Union all combined to make the British the junior partner in the alliance. Such a position did not end the British efforts to shape the postwar world in such a way as to benefit the British empire, it only made such efforts for the most part unsuccessful late in World War II.

As victory over Germany approached, Churchill began arguing against Allied strategy with an eye toward the postwar world. As the Soviet forces marched into Eastern Europe, differences in American and British strategy intensified. Churchill argued that a Balkan strategy instead of the invasion of southern France would have kept the Red Army further east. Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower's decision to halt the Anglo-American advance at the Elbe River was severely criticized by Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff. Churchill wanted to see the Western Allies liberate Berlin instead of the Soviets. As long as the Soviets were allies, American army chief of staff George C. Marshall and Eisenhower did not care who liberated what as long as the end result was a speedy defeat of Germany. Besides, the occupation zones had already been established at Yalta in February 1945. Churchill's concern for the balance of power in postwar Europe was of little concern to General Eisenhower in the spring of 1945. Unfortunately for Churchill, Great Britain had little power remaining to influence the alliance by the end of the war.

The grand alliance, the wartime relationship between Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, ended when Nazi Germany ended. Roosevelt died in April 1945 and was replaced by Vice President Harry S. Truman; Churchill was voted out of office and his government replaced by the Labour Party in July 1945; and Stalin solidified his control over Eastern Europe as the Cold War began. The coalition between the British and the Americans lasted as long as the need for it existed. The national interests that drove both powers continued to influence the relationship. Although the British emerged victorious in their struggle with Nazi Germany, it cost them their status as a major world power. The relationship between the

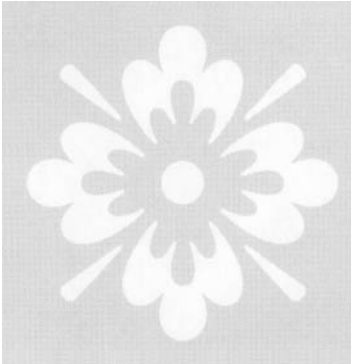
United States and Great Britain in World War II was nothing more than a successful coalition against the Axis powers.

—STEVE WADDELL, U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY, WEST POINT

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# ATOMIC BOMB



## Was the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki justified?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the U.S. atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified because the Japanese were determined to defend their homeland to the last man in order to raise the human cost for Allied victory and induce a negotiated peace.

**Viewpoint:** No, although the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was justified and morally defensible, the attack on Nagasaki was, in its haste, a morally indefensible result of bureaucratic ineptitude.

The atomic bombing of Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945) is most commonly presented in American templates. The Japanese become reactive instead of proactive: "If the United States had done so and so, then Japan would—or would not—have done thus and such." In fact, Japan held the central position. In the summer of 1945 its leaders were convinced that making a final stand in the home islands offered solid possibilities for raising the costs of an invasion beyond American capacities to stomach, and thereby opening a door to negotiations on Japanese terms. That postulate informed Japanese planning for the rest of World War II. No simple dilution of unconditional surrender by the United States would produce a positive reaction. As for the often-cited efforts to use Russia as a mediator, Japan sought, at most, Russian aid in obtaining peace on terms that were never made plain. Nowhere in the diplomatic exchanges were there indications of either an offer to surrender or a discussion of possible surrender terms. Instead, the correspondence bristled with determination to fight to the end, at whatever cost.

U.S. cryptanalysts were able to read these exchanges. They were also aware that the Japanese were concentrating in the very sectors of Kyushu that U.S. planners had chosen for beachheads should an invasion become necessary. The search for an alternative became correspondingly imperative. Electronic intelligence demonstrated beyond dispute that conventional aerial bombing, escalated to area raids inflicting unprecedented devastation and casualties, was doing nothing to change the minds of Japanese leaders prior to Hiroshima. Nor did advocates of some form of longer-term blockade/bombardment make a confident case before the nuclear fact. Not American culture but Japanese decisions, in short, reduced the chances of not using the bomb to zero—a decision that was the best of a set of bad choices.



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, the U.S. atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki were justified because the Japanese were determined to defend their homeland to the last man in order to raise the human cost for Allied victory and induce a negotiated peace.**

On 15 August 1945 Japanese soldiers, sailors, and civilians listened to the voice of a man on the radio they had revered as a god but rarely heard. Emperor Hirohito, the sovereign of Imperial Japan, announced the unconditional surrender of the Japanese Empire to the Allied Powers. This unprecedented act ended eight years of bloodshed endured by his people. Despite months of diplomatic maneuvering, the imperial decision to surrender unconditionally had only been made in the last twenty-four hours and was the direct result of the American atomic bombings of Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945).

The end, however, had been in sight since the U.S. 2nd and 4th Marine Divisions assaulted Saipan (15 June 1944), breaching what Japanese Imperial General Headquarters (Imperial GHQ) considered their Absolute Zone of National Defense. Following this American landing, Tōjō Hideki resigned and Koiso Kuniaki replaced him as prime minister of Japan. Koiso, like Tōjō before him, was unable to stop the American advance toward his homeland and left office just eight months after accepting the job. Following the resignation of Koiso, the *jushin* (a council of former government officials) selected Suzuki Kantaro as prime minister with the hope that he could consolidate Army and Navy support for a negotiated peace with the United States.

On 8 April 1945, a day after Suzuki formed his cabinet, the Supreme Council for the Direction of War, with Suzuki at its head, approved an operational plan to defeat the Americans on the shores of Japan. The *Ketsu-Go* (Decisive) plan took shape throughout the spring and summer of 1945. Many Japanese officials believed that the Allied victory in Europe (8 May 1945) had created a special moral situation in the United States. The American public, having tasted victory, would press their government for an early return of servicemen and rapid victory in the Pacific. The Japanese determined that a decisive blow at the landing point would cause a decrease in morale and lead to an acceptance of a peace favorable to Japan. The Suzuki Cabinet approved the plan in the presence of

Hirohito and called for a “fight to the bitter end.” As the hawks planned, Hirohito remained silent.

Morale had also been an important consideration for the American high command. Downfall, the code name for the American invasion of Japan, had been divided into two operations. Operation Olympic would begin on 1 November 1945, and Operation Coronet would follow on 1 March 1946. Olympic alone would dwarf the Allied landing on Normandy (6 June 1944). Olympic called for a simultaneous landing of ten American divisions in southern Kyushu with three more divisions held in reserve in the immediate area. Furthermore, a maritime line of supply reaching all the way to the Marianas Islands and Philippines would have supported these assault forces. In Europe, just five Allied divisions landed on Normandy and had to cross only the one-hundred-mile-wide English Channel. Moreover, the Japanese were far more prepared to receive the American invaders than the Germans had been.

The Japanese suspected the U.S. invasion would come in southern Kyushu. Furthermore, the Japanese Army had correctly determined the exact beaches selected by the American planners as the only possible landing areas on the island. Again, Imperial GHQ planned to destroy the American forces on the beaches. Exactly how many Japanese soldiers would have faced the Americans on Kyushu cannot be ascertained. Most reports have claimed that a minimum of 280,000 combat troops would have faced the 380,000 American invaders. With the Japanese resolved to confront the American forces in an all-or-nothing effort, Imperial GHQ would have also probably committed most of its 900,000-strong army in northern Kyushu to the fray. Such a massive operation, had it been necessary, would have prolonged the war for another nine to twelve months and cost several hundred thousand lives among American and Japanese soldiers and civilians. The atomic bomb, although not ending the Pacific war, forced the Japanese to give up before such a nightmare became a reality.

President Harry S Truman regarded the atomic bomb as a “military weapon and never had any doubt that it should [have been] used.” This statement, questioned by many scholars, was wholly consistent with the military and scientific understanding of the atomic weapon at the time. By spring of 1945 a committee convened to select the target for the soon-to-be-completed weapon. Up until that time several reports measured the predicted effect of the uranium and plutonium bombs in tons of TNT. At the time a single B-29 could drop about eight to nine tons of explosives; thus, these estimates com-

“Image not available for copyright reasons”

pared the use of one atomic weapon to that of five hundred B-29s in a conventional raid. In the spring J. Robert Oppenheimer, head of the Manhattan Project, which created the atomic device, imparted nothing to alter this view except that radiation would linger in the area. When asked to elaborate on the subject, he said nothing (or at least nothing else has been recorded). The recommendation was made that Kyoto, Hiroshima, and Niigata would be the best targets. Kyoto's status as a cultural center, however, precluded it from further consideration.

Truman presciently declared that Hiroshima was a military target, as if to save himself from expected criticisms. Nonetheless, as Richard B. Frank has noted in *Downfall: The End of the Imperial Japanese Empire* (1999), Truman only demonstrated his lack of knowledge regarding the atomic bomb. Oppenheimer believed that it had great psychological applications. Through correct targeting it could cause such destruction as to politically coerce the Japanese government into accepting an unconditional surrender just to save itself from further destruction.

In Japan, the Lord Keeper of the Privy Seal, Kido Koichi, convinced Hirohito to consider a negotiated peace. Kido proposed that three main conditions would be attached to it. Essentially the Japanese wanted to retain the sovereignty of the Imperial line, execute their own disarmament

after the war, and keep foreign soldiers from occupying their homeland. In July, Fumimaro and Sato Naotake traveled to Moscow to urge the Soviets to mediate a peace between the United States and Japan. Although they offered the Soviets everything from trade agreements to military alliances, they did not know that Joseph Stalin had already agreed to enter the war in February 1945. Their pleas fell upon deaf ears.

At 2:45 A.M., 6 August 1945, Colonel Paul W. Tibbets piloted the *Enola Gay* of the 509th Composite Group at Tinian toward destiny. The uranium bomb, code-named “Little Boy,” detonated at 8:16 A.M. over the courtyard of the Shima Hospital in Hiroshima. Across the world, Truman received notification of the successful bombing after returning from a conference in Potsdam, Germany, where he had approved its use and issued the Potsdam Declaration calling for the unconditional surrender of Japan. A second message read in part, “Visible effects greater than in any test.” On the ground in Hiroshima, the Japanese people were experiencing the incomparable magnitude of the atomic blast. A postwar calculation discerned the bomb's explosive capacity as equivalent to 12,500 tons of TNT and acknowledged that the epicenter reached 5,400 degrees Fahrenheit.

On 9 August 1945, Suzuki commenced a meeting of his Supreme Council. In the meeting, Suzuki, Foreign Minister Togo Shigenori, and Navy Minister Yonai Mitsumasa wanted to accept the Potsdam Declaration, only with the provision that the Imperial line remain intact. War Minister Anami Korechika, Army Chief Umeza Yoshijiro, and Navy Chief Toyoda Soemu, however, wanted to pursue the decisive battle strategy until the Americans accepted Kido's previously proposed conditions. Suzuki called for the emperor to break the tie among the Big Six. Robert J. C. Butow argued in *Japan's Decision to Surrender* (1954) that the emperor merely stated his opinion when he sided with Togo's one-condition plan. Nevertheless, he specifically questioned the logic of further planning for the decisive defense of the homeland. Also, he “concluded that continuing the war would only mean destruction for the nation.”

The atomic bombs gave Japanese peace advocates something that they did not have before—a tangible reason for wanting peace. The Japanese military system had been based on their own spiritual strength vis-à-vis that of the enemy. It was on this premise that Imperial GHQ prepared to meet the American invaders on the beaches of Kyushu with the full expectation that they could repel a first wave of attacks. The atomic bomb, however, posed a different problem. It was a technological device. Urging surrender because the Japanese could not compete



technologically with a nation that could have a hundred atomic bombs (as Anami erroneously believed) would allow some saving of face and preservation of the Japanese notion of spiritual superiority.

In December 1945 Suzuki noted that the Supreme Council had continued to prepare for the decisive confrontation with the United States until they dropped the atomic bomb. According to Suzuki, the Cabinet reasoned that the Americans, regardless of incendiary attacks, would still have had to invade Japan to win the war. Thus the Japanese Army and Navy continued preparing for their joint defense of the homeland. Yet, he added that with the advent of the atomic bomb, the Americans no longer needed to invade to win the peace. Suzuki directly related the Japanese decision to surrender with the dropping of the atomic bomb.

During the Imperial conference on 9 August the council was notified of the second bomb attack on Nagasaki and the Soviet invasion of Manchuria. The latter was unfortunate, especially considering Sato and Konoe's hopeful peace missions to Moscow, but not unexpected. The Japanese Army had been planning for such a contingency since the announcement in May that the Soviet Union would not renew their non-aggression pact with the Japanese in 1946. Even though Tōjō suspected the Soviets might invade, he had no proof. Moreover, some government officials, as revealed in a postwar document translated by the U.S. Army, believed that the United States did want the Soviets to intervene because if that were to happen they would have to give up a sphere of influence during the subsequent occupation.

This situation was clearly not the case; nor did the Truman administration decide to drop the atomic bomb in order to gain political advantages over the Soviets in any future U.S.-Soviet conflict. Both Army Chief of Staff George C. Marshall and Air Chief Henry H. "Hap" Arnold wanted the Soviets in the war against Japan for different reasons. Marshall believed that the war was over and only the cost of ending the conflict remained. Intervention by the Soviet Union would help defray some of those closing costs. Arnold still hoped that the U.S. Army Air Force could win the war before the invasion would be necessary. He planned on using Siberian airfields to place a larger part of his air fleet within range of the homeland. Although Michael S. Sherry, in *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (1987), added that Secretary of State James F. Byrnes had been tempted by the notion of employing nuclear diplomacy against the Soviets, he correctly acknowledged that Truman did not know enough about the sit-

uation to have made the decision based on that assumption.

Clearly, the blame lay with the Japanese government for the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Some have argued that had the United States been willing to accept a conditional peace based on the proposal by the Lord Keeper in June, much of this unnecessary bloodshed could have been avoided. The United States, however, received few official indications that the Japanese government was serious about ending the war. The Americans had been attacked and brought into a war that they did not begin; therefore, it was not their place to begin peace negotiations either. Furthermore, after such bloodshed, sacrifices, and hardship in the Pacific war, the four conditions Kido proposed were appropriately not considered as serious peace overtures. All the Japanese had to do to end the war in June was really all they did to end it in August—accept the unconditional surrender. Because they did not, the Americans continued the war.

Moreover, the Pacific war had not been diplomatically or militarily limited. Each nation strove to maximize its peculiar national advantages over the other. As the Japanese believed that their soldiers were spiritually superior to the Americans, they wanted to face them man-to-man in a decisive battle to the finish—or at least until they attained a favorable peace. If they perished, their deaths would honor their families past and present. The employment of the atomic bomb was the culmination of a U.S. attempt to end the Pacific war as quickly as possible by all military means available.

The employment of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and the second bomb on Nagasaki has been justified by both American and Japanese accounts. If the emperor had desired peace all along, why did he not speak up during the conference in June that called for a "fight to the bitter end?" Hirohito had to wait for the appropriate moment to intervene and command the Army and Navy to surrender. Any decision to do so earlier, before an exhibition of the futility of resistance, would have resulted in a far greater military uprising than that of 14–15 August. The first bomb had not convinced Hirohito to accept the Potsdam Declaration. "Little Boy" provoked Hirohito to let go of the three-condition plan in favor of the one-condition proposal. The second atomic bomb, and the fear that the Americans would drop more in the coming days, proved crucial in Hirohito's decision to break the tie in the Suzuki Cabinet, spare his country further destruction, and accept the Potsdam Declaration without condition.

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STATE UNIVERSITY



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, although the atomic bombing of Hiroshima was justified and morally defensible, the attack on Nagasaki was, in its haste, a morally indefensible result of bureaucratic ineptitude.**

In 1994 the Smithsonian Air and Space Museum became embroiled in intense controversy. The director, Martin Harwit, assembled an ambitious exhibit to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the fateful mission of the *Enola Gay* against Hiroshima (6 August 1945). The exhibit incorporated U.S. and Japanese perspectives, as well as charred objects from Hiroshima that survived the attack. After a highly charged and politically contentious debate, veterans' organizations and a Republican-controlled Congress combined to quash the exhibit, forcing Harwit to resign. They contended that it sympathized too much with Japanese suffering and not enough with the sacrifices of American servicemen. They also wanted the exhibit to argue that the A-bombs had decisively ended the war. In the much-simplified exhibit presented by the Smithsonian in 1995, an innocuous and seemingly incontrovertible statement explained that "the use of the [atomic] bomb led to the immediate surrender of Japan and made unnecessary the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands." The new exhibit no longer challenged Americans to reexamine received beliefs. Instead, it reassured them that the United States had acted justly and morally in attacking Hiroshima and Nagasaki (9 August 1945).

In contrast to this simplistic storyline, however, historians have raised complex and contentious issues in reviewing events surrounding the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Indeed, by 1950 prominent military officers such as General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Admiral William D. Leahy had already expressed serious reservations about the necessity and morality of these attacks. In examining these complex questions, historians have attempted to evaluate President Harry S. Truman's decision based upon what he and his advisers knew or believed to be true in 1945. One must recall that they acted without benefit of retrospect—they knew nothing of the Cold War or the nuclear-arms race and little of the long-term effects of atomic radiation.

Having celebrated Germany's unconditional surrender in May 1945, war-weary American leaders turned their attention to Japan and sought the quickest way to force a fanatical and seemingly implacable enemy to surrender, while

minimizing American casualties in the process. With this goal uppermost in his mind, Truman made a just and morally defensible decision to use the atomic bomb against Hiroshima. The attack on Nagasaki, in contrast, was unduly hasty and driven largely by military expediency and bureaucratic momentum.

Well before 1945, Allied strategic-bombing doctrine had come to promote the legitimacy of mass raids against civilians to weaken the enemy's morale and will to resist. Inhibitions against killing Japanese were even weaker than those against Germans, according to John W. Dower in *War Without Mercy: Race and Power in the Pacific War* (1986), because of "species distancing," a deliberate propaganda campaign waged in the United States to dehumanize the Japanese. Seemingly confirming to Americans that Japanese soldiers were somehow both less-than-human beasts and superhuman fanatics was their brutal torture and execution of Allied prisoners of war and their often suicidal resistance in defending Saipan, Iwo Jima, and Okinawa, where they fought virtually to the last man. Tactics adopted by Japanese *kamikaze* (divine wind) pilots were equally disturbing, as these pilots willingly sacrificed themselves in attempts to crash their planes into U.S. naval ships (at Okinawa kamikazes succeeded in sinking twenty-eight ships and damaging a further 176). Even more shocking to U.S. soldiers was the behavior of Japanese civilians on Saipan who, rather than surrendering, murdered their children before committing suicide by jumping off cliffs.

With such shockingly powerful evidence of Japanese devotion to *bushido* (the warrior code of honor) and the emperor, U.S. officials concluded that equally powerful attacks would be needed to convince Japan to surrender. A major element of this effort was massive firebombing raids against major Japanese cities. On 9 March 1945, 334 B-29 bombers armed only with incendiaries attacked Tokyo at low levels. In the ensuing fires at least eighty-three thousand Japanese died, with another forty thousand wounded and one million made homeless. Millions more lost their homes as U.S. firebombing raids continued. By July the fire raids had gutted more than 40 percent of sixty-six urban centers in Japan. Despite this devastation, the Japanese in July still had two million soldiers and 10,500 aircraft ready to defend the home islands, with 5,000 aircraft dedicated to kamikazes. Japanese soldiers' and civilians' wills to resist appeared very much intact.

How, then, to weaken Japan's will to resist quickly and efficiently without exposing U.S. servicemen to unnecessary risks? Atomic weap-

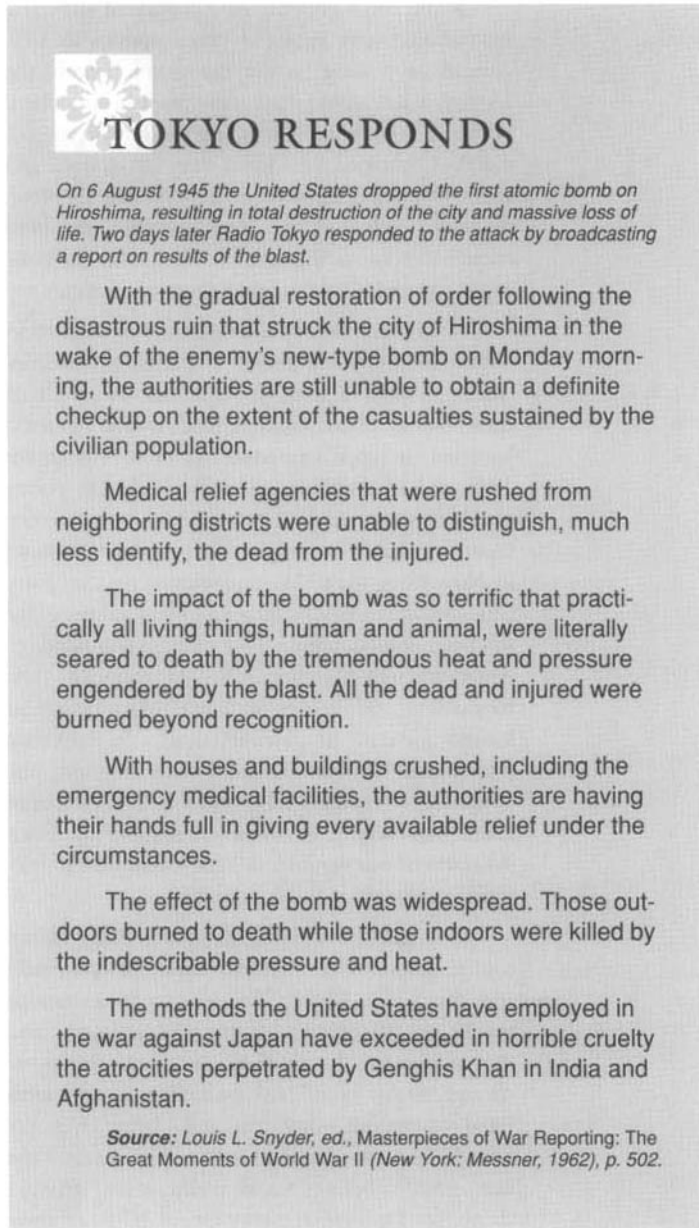
ons seemed to hold the answer. Compared to the bloody invasions of Iwo Jima or Okinawa, bombing raids hit Japan directly and resulted in far fewer American casualties. To Truman and his advisers, atomic bombs simply offered a more efficient and intimidating way to continue work that was already in progress. Given the remarkable resiliency evinced by the Japanese people, it seemed to Truman and Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson that only a tremendous shock would convince the Japanese to surrender. The shock of the atomic bomb, Truman hoped, might prove powerful enough to shatter Japanese resistance, thereby ending the war quickly and saving American lives. With no demurrals from his leading military or political advisers, Truman gave the order to attack.

In using the atomic bomb, Truman had expressed the goal of attacking a purely military target. Since no large military targets remained in August 1945, however, it proved impossible to meet this ethical goal while simultaneously striking a shattering blow to Japan's will to resist. Attacking Hiroshima seemed at least partially to fulfill both criteria. A center for shipbuilding and armaments manufacturing, Hiroshima in August 1945 served as a military headquarters for the Second Army, with barracks for forty-three thousand soldiers. It was also a major center for communications, whose destruction would be recognized almost immediately by Japanese authorities in Tokyo.

Two days after the *Enola Gay* dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, the Soviet Union entered the war against Japan. The next day the second atomic bomb devastated Nagasaki. Within five days the Japanese surrendered and the wisdom of Truman's decision seemed unassailably vindicated.

Nevertheless, before the nuclear attacks U.S. officials had discussed other alternatives. One option was to demonstrate, in an isolated location, the power of the atomic bomb to the Japanese. Stimson dismissed this strategy, however, because the bomb might possibly fail to detonate when dropped from an aircraft (the successful Trinity test in July had taken place in a tower above ground). Possible physical defects in the bomb itself might also prevent detonation. Any failure could conceivably strengthen the already considerable resolve of Japanese leaders, as well as forfeit the element of surprise. Yet, more importantly, U.S. officials thought a demonstration would not end the war as quickly as actual combat use of the bomb.

Another option discussed was a moderation of the demand for unconditional surrender. Specifically, the United States might release a statement expressing respect for the emperor's position without having to recognize his semidi-



**TOKYO RESPONDS**

*On 6 August 1945 the United States dropped the first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, resulting in total destruction of the city and massive loss of life. Two days later Radio Tokyo responded to the attack by broadcasting a report on results of the blast.*

With the gradual restoration of order following the disastrous ruin that struck the city of Hiroshima in the wake of the enemy's new-type bomb on Monday morning, the authorities are still unable to obtain a definite checkup on the extent of the casualties sustained by the civilian population.

Medical relief agencies that were rushed from neighboring districts were unable to distinguish, much less identify, the dead from the injured.

The impact of the bomb was so terrific that practically all living things, human and animal, were literally seared to death by the tremendous heat and pressure engendered by the blast. All the dead and injured were burned beyond recognition.

With houses and buildings crushed, including the emergency medical facilities, the authorities are having their hands full in giving every available relief under the circumstances.

The effect of the bomb was widespread. Those outdoors burned to death while those indoors were killed by the indescribable pressure and heat.

The methods the United States have employed in the war against Japan have exceeded in horrible cruelty the atrocities perpetrated by Genghis Khan in India and Afghanistan.

*Source: Louis L. Snyder, ed., Masterpieces of War Reporting: The Great Moments of World War II (New York: Messner, 1962), p. 502.*

vine status in Japanese culture. Tentative Japanese peace feelers had indicated that the emperor's position was the major sticking point preventing Japan's surrender.

Yet, Truman arguably had little freedom of action in this area. The policy of unconditional surrender was a powerful legacy of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. Truman, who had been president only since 12 April 1945, arguably lacked the political or psychological freedom to overturn an important tenet of FDR's legacy, even if he had wanted to. Moreover, Secretary of State James F. Byrnes lobbied hard to keep the terms of surrender unconditional. Apparently fearing that any moderation in terms might be interpreted by hardline elements in Japan as a sign of weakness, rather than as respect or sensitivity to Japanese cultural beliefs, Truman stuck by previous demands for unconditional surrender.

Some commentators have suggested that Truman should have explored other options as well. Instead of rushing to use the atomic bomb, the United States could have continued conventional bombing raids while blockading the Japanese home islands. Combined with Soviet entry into the war and some form of guarantee of keeping the emperor, bombing raids and the blockade may have been enough to persuade the Japanese that further resistance posed intolerable risks to Japan's future existence.

Such a combination of events has been thoroughly examined by Barton J. Bernstein. He concludes, in a 1995 issue of *Diplomatic History*, that these events would likely, although not certainly, have led to Japan's surrender prior to November 1945 and an Allied invasion. As Bernstein points out, however, in conjectural history there are no certainties. An invasion might still have been required in November, with U.S. casualties of perhaps forty thousand in the first month. Even if an invasion had not been needed, hundreds or perhaps thousands of Americans may have been killed or wounded while blockading and bombing Japan. Many Japanese looked forward to glorious deaths in ramming planes into American bombers or in mounting suicide attacks in midget submarines against American ships. Meanwhile, an unknown number of Allied prisoners of war would also have succumbed to starvation or disease as the war dragged on.

This scenario is problematic for a different reason: it ignores U.S. concerns about Joseph Stalin and the Soviet Union. The longer Soviet troops fought against Japanese forces in Manchuria, and the higher the losses they sustained, the more strongly Stalin would have insisted on greater territorial concessions from Japan and a larger say in the future of postwar Japan and East Asia. Ending the war quickly, before Stalin could make stronger claims on Japanese territory or establish a firmer foothold in East Asia, was an important goal for Truman and his advisers.

A few historians have expanded upon this goal to suggest that the United States decided to drop the atomic bomb primarily to impress and intimidate the Soviets, hoping thereby to wring foreign policy concessions from Stalin after the war. Truman and his advisers recognized that the atomic bomb would impress and perhaps intimidate the Soviets, thereby making them more amenable to postwar Allied persuasion. Yet, postwar "atomic diplomacy" was decidedly secondary in importance to the main goal of impressing and intimidating the Japanese to persuade them to surrender.

Historians have also questioned how Truman could have justified a decision against using the atomic bomb, especially since the United States had spent three years and \$2 billion developing it. With all his leading advisers agreeing that the atomic bomb offered an excellent chance at ending the war without the need for costly invasions, Truman had

little to do except nod his approval. Given the fire-bombing raids and brutal fighting that had preceded this final order, the Hiroshima attack was essentially a continuation of policy by superior technical means: an attack that might finally persuade a fanatical foe that surrender was more desirable than obliteration.

Did Nagasaki also need to be attacked in order to persuade the Japanese to surrender? In his detailed analysis of events surrounding Japan's decision to surrender, Bernstein has concluded that the attack on Nagasaki "was almost definitely unnecessary." The timing of this attack—three days after Hiroshima—was driven not by political or strategic concerns but by weather. Because an extended period of unfavorable weather was predicted, crews rushed to drop the second bomb before conditions forced them to stand down indefinitely. On the day of the attack Nagasaki was actually the secondary target; clouds had obscured the primary objective (Kokura).

The rationale for this attack appears to have been to use two atomic bombs in rapid succession to fool the Japanese into thinking the United States had a large stockpile (in actuality, the Americans had only one more atomic device that could have been ready by September). The three-day gap between Hiroshima and Nagasaki, however, failed to give the Japanese sufficient time to absorb the implications of a radically new weapon of unprecedented destructiveness about which the Japanese knew little.

Nagasaki represents a victory for bureaucratic inertia. To the U.S. military, Nagasaki was "business as usual," another bombing mission to be flown to devastate yet another Japanese city. Clearly, U.S. officials had underestimated Hiroshima's impact while failing to reexamine the wisdom of the military's standing order to use both bombs as soon as they could be made ready. Small wonder that Telford Taylor, the chief prosecutor at Nuremberg, grouped the attack on Nagasaki with Dresden as "war crimes, tolerable in retrospect only because their malignancy pales in comparison to Dachau, Auschwitz and Treblinka," in *Nuremberg and Vietnam: An American Tragedy* (1970).

Leaving aside the unjustified and morally indefensible attack on Nagasaki, clearly the bombing of Hiroshima, together with Soviet attacks in Manchuria, shocked the Japanese sufficiently into surrendering, which the emperor expressed memorably and meaningfully as "enduring the unendurable and suffering what is insufferable." Even these twin shocks proved insufficiently persuasive to prevent fanatical Army officers from attempting a coup on 14 August to prevent broadcast of the emperor's message of surrender. The coup attempt collapsed when senior officers refused to join the patriotic extremists who still fervently desired to fall in battle for their country.

The quickness of Japan's surrender seemed to confirm the efficacy of the atomic bomb attacks. As

suggested previously, however, Nagasaki followed too closely on the heels of Hiroshima to influence Japan's offer of surrender on 10 August. Moreover, some historians have suggested that Soviet entry into the war on 8 August, and not Hiroshima, constituted the decisive shock. Here evidence remains inconclusive, perhaps forever so. It is possible, perhaps even likely, that Hiroshima demonstrated conclusively to Japan's leaders that their military was entirely and hopelessly outclassed. The bitter pill of surrender thus became endurable for all but the most fervid diehards as the Japanese military came to conclude there was little dishonor in surrendering when further resistance had been rendered inglorious and utterly futile by the quantum leap in destructiveness demonstrated by the atomic bomb.

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# AUSCHWITZ

## Should the Allies have bombed the railroad facilities and crematoriums at Auschwitz and other death camps?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the Allies should have bombed the death camps and more aggressively opposed the Holocaust in order to save lives and send a message of condemnation to the Nazis.

**Viewpoint:** No, Allied bombing raids on the death camps would have been difficult without inflicting heavy losses on the inmates and would have slowed the war effort by diverting airplanes needed for military targets.

The failure of the Allies to bomb the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp is one of the central issues of the Holocaust. Such attacks, however impossible as they were in the early years of World War II, certainly seemed feasible by mid 1944. In particular, U.S. heavy bombers based in Italy regularly struck targets in the same region. Two areas of analysis shape current discussion. One addresses technicalities: could in fact heavy bombers have hit targets within the camps, as opposed to making area attacks that would have caused heavy casualties among the inmates? Did the Allies possess adequate intelligence to plan a raid, or series of raids, in which the potential for success was balanced by the losses inflicted by German air defenses? More fundamentally, what would have defined success: a mass breakout, destruction of camp infrastructure, or disruption of camp routines? Or were lives to be risked and lost making what amounted to a “feel-good” gesture?

The other level of interpretation addresses the question of will. How wide was the knowledge and how deep the understanding of what was being done at Auschwitz? Is the moral and cultural centrality of that particular site a post-war construction, that contemporaries cannot be expected to have shared? Was the effort and risk of bombing regarded as too great on a basis of rational calculation, or was it that the Jews were so marginalized and powerless that their fate simply did not register with Allied decision makers?

Somewhat outside the main framework of this discussion, but no less significant for that, is a strain of analysis that focuses on the Nazis. Given their determination to fight to the finish and their commitment to destroying as many Jews as possible, the specific targeting of Auschwitz, or the railroads leading to it was unlikely to have had significant effect. The only consequent action that would save even a remnant of Europe’s Jews was to end the war—and as quickly as possible.

Yet, when all is said and done, the fact remains that sometimes gestures—symbolic actions—have an importance that transcends their immediate consequences. A policy statement on the mass murder of Jews, made with even a few tons of bombs on Auschwitz, would have been difficult for both victims and executioners to misunderstand. The absence of such a statement speaks for itself.



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, the Allies should have bombed  
the death camps and more  
aggressively opposed the  
Holocaust in order to save lives and  
send a message of condemnation to  
the Nazis.**

By the summer of 1943 many in the Allied high command were aware of the Final Solution, the German operation to eliminate Jews from Europe. Eyewitnesses to activities in the concentration camps, several of them carrying film, had managed to reach the safety of Allied lines. Jewish organizations based out of Palestine and London had accumulated significant evidence and passed it on to British and American intelligence operatives. As Russia went on the offensive, German POWs and civilians who had lived under the oppressive Nazi yoke corroborated reports of death-camp operations. By the autumn of 1944, Soviet forces overran several death-camp and massacre sites, such as Babi Yar, and opened them to the world for inspection. Intelligence operatives inside occupied Europe filed alarming reports of mass deportations and railroad cattle cars loaded with the condemned, which received the highest shipping priorities. Polish freedom fighters hiding in Warsaw reported the liquidation of the Warsaw Ghetto, after the valiant but vain uprising of Jews in that tormented city during April and May of 1944, and provided, as well, the names of infamous death camps: Treblinka, Auschwitz, and Buchenwald. Even the Catholic Church, which failed to launch any type of active, vigorous response to the Holocaust, secretly passed reports through its network of priests and nuns that not just concentration camps, but camps specifically designed for extermination, were in operation.

The only postwar defense that has any shred of credibility regarding the total lack of response by the Allies to this atrocity is that they were not fully aware of the horrifying extent of the operation. Even that defense is hollow, especially for the highest levels of command in the English government. One British official even stated that Adolf Hitler was actually doing the world a favor by ridding Europe of Jews, a comment that in and of itself is evidence enough of just how much was known. His punishment was exile to a remote foreign posting.

The question of exactly “who knew what and when did they know it?” still needs extensive study. It is impossible to conceive that the U. S. president or British prime minister were not fully briefed about the Holocaust by early 1944. If information was indeed reaching Allied lines and top elected

officials were not aware of it, then where did it stop and why?

Throughout the war, but particularly in 1944–1945, when the Holocaust neared its ghastly conclusion, repeated appeals were made by a variety of groups to launch some sort of “special” operation. Several plans were put forward, originating from special-operations units, Zionist groups, and representatives of resistance movements. The most radical was a suggestion to drop weapons and personnel directly into a camp with the intent of triggering a rebellion. The gesture would have been suicidal for those involved on the ground, but it might have at least afforded the opportunity for the condemned to go down fighting. It was rejected out of hand by British Bomber Command with the statement that no air crew would ever be sent on a one-way mission, or transport personnel on such a mission.

Less-radical proposals included the strafing and bombing of camp perimeters to take down the barbed-wire fences and guard posts, combined with weapons drops and destruction of rail lines leading to the camps. Again Bomber Command refused all such operations on the grounds that such a gesture was futile and would divert precious equipment from the far more important objective of destroying the German capacity to wage war, claiming that ending the war sooner promised to save more of those condemned.

The Churchill government refused to directly support such operations, as did the Roosevelt administration. The only direct efforts in relation to prisoners held in German-occupied territory was the airdropping of supplies on Allied prisoner-of-war camps in the final days of the war. A couple of specialized missions were initiated but were extremely limited in scope, the most famous being a strike launched against a Gestapo headquarters in France where prisoners from the Resistance faced torture and execution. Not one mission, not one bomb, not one volunteer commando, however, was dropped on a German death camp.

Such a glaring refusal to directly attack the German death camps begs for an answer. The claim of ignorance is false: postwar analysis of data indicates a clear knowledge by the last year and a half of the war that something sinister was taking place in relationship to the Jews inside occupied Europe. Nearly all of Europe, as far east as the old Soviet frontier, had been meticulously photographed from the air. The vast Auschwitz compound, with its twin sites of industrial complexes and the nearby death camp, were repeatedly photographed and analyzed.

The argument that precious war assets could not be diverted to an attack on death-camp railroads might in some small way be valid, especially during the brutal period of struggle for air supremacy over Germany in late 1943 through the spring



## HAVING THE KNOWLEDGE

On 8 August 1942, Dr. Gerhart Riegner, the World Jewish Congress representative in Bern, Switzerland, sent a secret telegram to the U.S. State Department and Rabbi Stephen S. Wise of New York. Wise was a leader of the Jewish community in America as well as a friend of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. The Riegner cable asserted that:

There has been and is being considered in Hitler's headquarters a plan to exterminate all Jews from Germany and German controlled areas in Europe after they have been concentrated in the east. The number involved is said to be between three and a half and four millions and the object to permanently settle the Jewish question in Europe.

The U.S. State Department, however, delayed giving this message to Wise because it was considered to have unsubstantiated information. In fact, the government actively attempted to stop any similar future messages originating from private sources. In a communique dated 10 February 1943, Undersecretary of State Sumner Wells informed American consulates in neutral countries of the new official policy:

In the future we would suggest that you do not accept reports submitted to you to be transmitted to private persons in the United States unless such action is advisable because of extraordinary circumstances. Such private messages circumvent neutral countries' censorship and it is felt that by sending them we risk the possibility that steps would necessarily be taken by the neutral countries to curtail or forbid our means of communication for confidential official matter.

*Source: Michael Berenbaum, The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), pp. 161–162.*

of 1944. An argument can even be made that the demands of supporting Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944, required full commitment of all air assets up to the middle of the summer of 1944. After air superiority had clearly been won, however, and long-range fighter protection ranged clear into Poland, it was increasingly evident that the nature of the war had changed. An effort could have been made against the camps. It was no longer a desperate defensive struggle for survival. Even the most secret of dreaded fears—that the Nazis were on the verge of deploying an atomic weapon—was realized to be hollow by the end of 1944. This overarching concern, known only to the highest circles, that every day was crucial and nothing could divert the Allies from the effort to beat the Axis to the bomb no longer held. The war at this point was simply a matter of driving a stake through the heart of Nazism while saving as many lives as possible.

Air strikes on the rail lines to the death camps, as well as against the fences and guard boxes, and even dropping weapons into the compounds would have served several purposes. First and foremost, it would have afforded a chance, no matter how slim, for some inmates to survive and fight back. The argument that these actions would have triggered a blood purge belies the fact that in the final weeks of the war *Schutzstaffeln* (SS) criminals murdered hundreds of thousands in a final orgy of killing in order to “cover their tracks,” and even more perversely, to fulfill their mission to “de-Jew” Europe, even as the Reich went down to defeat. Bombing would have seriously disrupted the precision machine-like manufacturing of death—a mere two or three days interruption of crucial railway networks to the death camps would have meant possible salvation for thousands. Perhaps most important, it would have served clear notice to the Nazi hierarchy that the Allies were fully aware of their crimes and would take whatever steps necessary to stop them.

Another disturbing mystery was the complete lack of clear communication to the Nazis that the Allies knew of their crimes. This lack of open outrage and direct challenge was seen by some within the Nazi high command as a tacit message of concurrence with their Final Solution. Given the powerful system of propaganda available to the Allies, such as the legendary BBC broadcasts that tens of millions listened to, the silence on this front is deafening. A nightly reading of a list of death camps and a description of what was being done there could have had a shattering effect. The naming of towns adjoining the camps, informing citizens of what was being done nearby, would have destroyed their defense that they knew nothing, in spite of the stench, smoke, and rain of human ashes.

A direct challenge to the German people should have been offered, clearly informing them what their government was doing, rather than allowing them to hide behind the veil of silence. The Nazi regime was, in fact, sensitive to public opinion. When word leaked out about the first Final Solution, the liquidation of the mentally and physically handicapped within their own country, some courageous individuals protested and the government was forced to stop, though it resumed the program later with greater secrecy. The far wider outrage of mass exterminations across Europe, if publicly revealed, surely would have drawn a response.

Would such messages have made a difference to the victims sent to the camps? Yes, because the entire German system was built on a cynical cultivation of hope, right down to the packing of luggage and sending of postcards to perpetuate the myth that victims were simply being sent to live in other areas. The horror had to be kept hidden until that final second when the showerheads proved false,



*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

the airtight doors locked, and the gas pellets fell. This subterfuge was maintained so that the victims never had a chance to resist, for they outnumbered each of their murderers by the hundreds. One might argue that the victims were powerless and prior knowledge would have been needlessly cruel. Rather, had they known their fate, some might have chosen to flee or fight back rather than to go quietly to the grave or ovens.

Could the Holocaust have continued if all Europe, Gentile and Jew, knew that this was not relocation, but genocide? One of the truly great fears of the Schutzstaffeln (SS) was that word would indeed leak out and that every Jew, and possibly even some of their Gentile neighbors, rather than following a false hope would meet their enemy instead with a knife or gun.

A one-day diversion of several bomber groups might have saved many doomed lives in the German death camps. Air strikes on the fences and parachute bundles laden with weapons of vengeance might have seemed like a message of salvation to the condemned. To the murderers it would have sent a message of damnation, an acknowledgment that the secret was out and even if they survived that day they would know that the Allies were coming for them. A week of radio broadcasts about the Holocaust might have done more to set

Europe ablaze than all the years of coded messages to the few thousand resistance fighters in France. Many who died in the camps must have wondered if the world had forgotten them. The question still lingers.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, Allied bombing raids on the death camps would have been difficult without inflicting heavy losses on the inmates and would have slowed the war effort by diverting airplanes needed for military targets.**

The question of Allied indifference to the Holocaust during World War II has increasingly come down to the subject of launching air raids against the concentration camps. It is generally recognized that ground operations, even on the level of commando raids, were for practical pur-

poses impossible against facilities located deep in the political/geographic heart of the Third Reich. It requires, moreover, little technical knowledge to see that at the height of the extermination campaign, in 1942–1943, the British and Americans had no aircraft with the range and survivability to hit targets deep in Poland and return to any existing bases. Shuttle bombing too was impossible when the front line of the Russo-German War was on the Volga River.

What about 1944 and 1945, when the Allies had airfields in Italy, when the Combined Bomber Offensive was running out of strategic targets, when the P-51 Mustang could escort heavy bombers the length and breadth of the Reich? The work camps of Auschwitz-Birkenau in particular were running at full capacity. The Reich's railway lines still scheduled trainloads of Jews from the west and south—in particular from Hungary, which only fell under full Nazi control in 1944. The abortive Warsaw Rising of the Polish Home Army in 1944 was supported by air strikes. Surely a few planes might have been spared for an alternate target that cost no fewer lives in the same period. U.S. heavy bombers flew strikes against chemical plants only a few miles away from Auschwitz. Could not one or two of those missions have been redirected? Arguments that such attacks might have cost thousands of prisoners' lives are answered—often by camp survivors—that the dying would have blessed the names of the men striking at their murderers. At the end of the day, the field seems mastered by the argument, expressed in many variations, that “it should have been tried.”

Looking at the other side of the question, however, three elements stand out in support of an Allied decision that considered in isolation seems callous at best, anti-Semitic at worst. The first is on the technical/institutional level: how best could such missions have been undertaken? A favorite scenario involves using Royal Air Force (RAF) Mosquitoes in the low-level role. These planes demolished Gestapo headquarters in Oslo and Copenhagen. They blew in the walls of the Amiens prison. Could they not replicate those performances in Poland? The best answer involves complex analyses of ranges to the targets, and the nature of the objectives themselves, and indicates that the Mosquito was no super-weapon able to destroy gas chambers mostly constructed below ground. What about U.S. medium and heavy bombers? Even if their accuracy was not as great as claimed, surely they could hit something the size of the Auschwitz murder facilities. In an excellently reasoned essay in *War in History* (1999), Rondall Rice, a serving officer of the U.S. Air Force, makes a strong case that a daylight raid conducted by a single group of heavy bombers in the late summer of 1944

stood a good chance of destroying the Birkenau killing facilities—without either a hecatomb of camp inmates or heavy losses to the bombers.

That last point is important. The U.S. Army Air Force prided itself on never turning back from a mission, but it took as much pride in not risking or sacrificing its air crews unnecessarily. “Sideshows,” missions not perceived as having a direct positive effect on the war's outcome, were seldom approved, particularly in the war's later years. It is irrelevant that an attack on Auschwitz might well have produced more than enough volunteers—by no means all of them Jewish—to crew twice the number of aircraft needed. Rice makes the point that an operation such as attacking Auschwitz was “outside the box” of thought and doctrine in the U.S. Strategic Air Forces. It was within their capacities—but not to the extent that it would be considered routine. It would require superior orders, that is, high-level military and/or political intervention.

Such intervention was not forthcoming—not least because even as late as 1944, if the outcome of the war in Europe may have been certain, the path to victory was not. Allied air forces did not achieve clear superiority over the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) until the summer of 1944—and the timing is much clearer in hindsight than it appeared to the generals ordering the missions. Allied air power, moreover, was engaged in campaigns against German transportation networks, oil refineries, and flying-bomb sites. The latter were significant for their impact on the morale of a war-weary Britain—and even more so for their implied threat of worse to follow. It is clear in hindsight that Nazi boasts of “wonder weapons” were hollow. In the fall of 1944, few in responsible leadership positions were willing to take such a gamble.

It is worth noting as well that the “transportation campaign” remained subject well after D-Day to harsh criticism for generating small results at a high price in collateral damage to France and Belgium. That the generals would have directed any significant number of strikes against secondary lines leading from Budapest to nowhere more important than southern Poland is correspondingly unlikely. That their superiors would have made it an order is even less plausible.

This line of reasoning leads to a third governing factor. The argument that the best way to save Jewish lives was to end the war has been held up to ridicule through statistics. Since well before V-E Day the vast majority of Jews under Nazi control were dead, the case is considered moot. Yet, at the same time it is increasingly clear that nothing short of final, annihilating defeat could have deterred either the direct perpetrators of the Final Solution or their ideologically

driven masters. The kinds of damage even a successful raid, such as those postulated by Rice, could inflict were well within the capacity and will of those German officials on the spot to repair—and to keep repairing if the bombers returned. Given the fact, recently highlighted by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen in *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (1996), that thousands of Jews died during the war's final weeks in random marches across a shrinking Reich as the camps closed down, was the risk of even a few days' prolongation of the war a worthwhile exchange for a symbolic gesture?

Since 1945 analysis, myth, and plain second-guessing increasingly overshadow the experiences of World War II. In evaluating the Allied failure to strike Hitler's concentration camps from the air once that became technically—and theoretically—feasible, it must be remembered that modern war is not a postmodern experience. It is not a sequence of constructions—and it offers few second chances.

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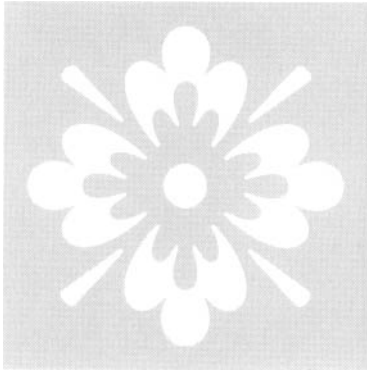
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# THE AXIS



## Did the Axis powers cooperate effectively during World War II?

**Viewpoint:** The failure of the Axis powers to coordinate their war efforts critically impeded their conduct of the war.

**Viewpoint:** It was logistically beyond the capabilities of the Axis powers to cooperate in more than a limited fashion, and it was perhaps a better strategy for them to fight “parallel wars.”

From an Axis perspective, World War II was a global conflict waged in compartments. Before the outbreak of hostilities Italy, Japan, and Germany did nothing to coordinate their policies or strategies. Italy remained neutral until the last stages of the German conquest of France, then pursued its own interests in the Mediterranean. Germany for its part persisted in treating Italy as a client—ignoring, trivializing, or overriding Italy’s concerns until behavior generated reality and Italy ceased to be an independent factor. Japan played the role of “jackal state” in its decision to expand its Chinese war into an Asian conflict in the aftermath of French collapse and British defeat in Europe in June 1940. Neither Germany nor Japan seriously pursued the possibility of cooperating in a drive into the Indian Ocean in mid 1942, at a time when neither the United States, Great Britain, nor the U.S.S.R. were well placed to challenge such an initiative. Nor did Japan respond to German proposals for a coordinated submarine campaign in 1942.

Arguably the deepest division within the Axis powers, however, involved the U.S.S.R. In the aftermath of its defeat by Mongolian and Soviet troops at Nomonhan in 1939, Japan did everything possible to maintain a neutral relationship with the Soviet Union, while at the same time Germany was engaged in a death grapple with that state. The United States shipped increasing amounts of war matériel past the Japanese navy into Siberian ports—by way of Russian merchantmen. Japanese efforts to broker a peace that would enable Germany to turn its full effort against Britain and the United States got nowhere in a Reich unwilling—and increasingly unable—to release the bear so casually seized by the ears in 1941. Cooperation may have been overrated in a conflict on the scale of World War II. Coordination is another story—especially given the collective material inferiority and mutual geographic isolation of the major Axis powers. To fight alone was not merely to court defeat, but to ensure it.



### Viewpoint:

## The failure of the Axis powers to coordinate their war efforts critically impeded their conduct of the war.

World War II has often been written about as a coalition war, but only from the Allied side. Little has been written about cooperation among the Axis powers. Yet, one must consider how many countries were actively involved in or associated with the Axis: three major powers—namely Germany, Italy, and Japan (the original signatories of the Tripartite Pact); three minor powers—Romania, Hungary, and Finland; and several associated powers, which would include Spain, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Croatia, and perhaps Vichy France. Of these ten countries the first six were heavily involved in combat operations. Most of the others contributed only small forces.

The most obvious question was whether or not the Axis powers, particularly Germany and Japan, could have cooperated better? The answer is both yes and no. It must be remembered that there was cooperation between Germany and Japan. Although limited by both distances involved and the relative lack of shipping, not to mention Allied control of the seas, economic intercourse was carried on between the two countries. The Japanese, for example, were able to send enough raw rubber to keep Germany's synthetic rubber program going throughout the war. For its part, Germany sent some technical experts to Japan as well as other aid, such as plans for jet aircraft.

As far as direct military operations, the only place where such cooperation could have taken place was against Russia. A Japanese attack along the Mongolian border would certainly have tied up several Soviet Siberian divisions that proved so crucial to the successful winter offensive against the Germans in December 1941. The Germans, however, did not consider such assistance important. Some German strategists went so far as to argue that any Japanese intervention in the summer of 1941 would amount to little more than "corpse stripping." In addition, from the Japanese point of view, there was no real strategic objective for them. Oddly enough, the Germans only began to press the Japanese for an offensive against the Soviets in late 1943, a call that was rebuffed.

Once Japan was committed to war against Britain and the United States, the best they could do was to wage a parallel war alongside Germany. On occasion some indirect help was furnished. Japanese advances in December 1941, for example, diverted enough British forces from the Mediterranean to aid Erwin Rommel's suc-

cessful counterattack in North Africa in January 1942 that regained most of the territory lost in the battles of November and early December 1941.

The two places where the Axis powers did cooperate to varying degrees were in the Mediterranean and on the Eastern front. Although the war was conducted rather differently in each theater, some general observations common to both can be made. The most notable was the lack of any kind of organization that could be considered equivalent to the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff. Nor did the Axis leaders ever have a meeting analogous to the summits of the "Big Three" at Teheran and Yalta. Rather, Adolf Hitler generally conducted coalition war as he conducted foreign policy and high-level military talks on a bilateral basis.

Another interesting commonality is the notion of "parallel war." The term, actually used by the Italians, held that Italy would fight, but not in concert, the same enemies as Germany. Instead, by fighting a parallel war, Italy would gain its own objectives. This goal was what the Axis powers did in effect achieve, although some were better able to pursue this course than others. Perhaps the most successful in this endeavor was Finland. Field Marshal Carl Mannerheim was able to bring Finland into Operation Barbarossa on his own terms and was able to fend off German attempts to obtain greater Finnish participation in 1942. He was also able to effectively extricate Finland from the war with a reasonable degree of success.

Benito Mussolini's attempt to accomplish similar feats had failed by the beginning of 1941 with the disastrous defeats in North Africa and the ill-conceived invasion of Greece, undertaken largely at the urging of his foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano. On the Eastern Front, the failure of the Axis powers to effectively coordinate their efforts was the result of several reasons. First, one must acknowledge that Germany was faced with a problem that the Allies did not have to deal with, namely that two of its allies, Romania and Hungary, would really have preferred to fight each other instead of the Russians. That open warfare did not break out between them was due to Hitler's strenuous diplomatic efforts, aided at times by Mussolini. This animosity clearly influenced how Romanian and Hungarian units were used on the Eastern Front, in the sense that they could not be placed in close proximity to each other.

The biggest failure of the Axis on the Eastern Front was in the inability of the Germans to connect the true strategic interests of their allies with the willingness of their soldiers to fight. The classic example of this problem was the Romanian Army. In 1941 the Romanians, fight-

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ing to regain the territory lost to the Russians in 1940, suffered heavy casualties but generally fought well. With the fall of Odessa on 16 October 1941, however, most Romanian soldiers were convinced that Romania’s active participation in the war was over. This was realized by many Germans as well, including Hitler himself.

The plan for the German 1942 summer campaign in the south, however, called for substantial Romanian participation. The Romanian forces would have to assume covering positions along long stretches of the Don River. Although the Germans were well aware of the material and moral deficiencies of the Romanian Army, which had not yet recovered from the 1941 campaign, the Germans pressed ahead with the operation. Not surprisingly, as the Romanian units trudged ever eastward, their morale sank. Most Romanian soldiers had little understanding as to why they were freezing in their positions on the Don in November of 1942. Although most German liaison officer reports for 1941 noted good morale among Romanian units, such comments are absent from the 1942 reports. What was true for the Romanians went double for the Hungarians and the Italians.

Finally, one must include the Holocaust, in general, and German occupation policies in Russia, in particular, as playing a part in this situation as well. To be sure, Romanian units in Russia committed their share of anti-Semitic

atrocities, with the Odessa massacre being the most infamous incident of this type. Hungarian and Italian troops were another matter. They generally found German behavior in Russia to be barbaric and utterly incomprehensible. In fact, in the Balkans, Italian and Hungarian authorities went so far as to actively attempt to thwart the Germans in the execution of their extermination policies against Jews.

Axis cooperation in the Mediterranean proceeded initially from a different premise than on the Eastern Front. The Germans, initially at least, regarded the Mediterranean as an Italian theater of war. No real attempt was made, however, to coordinate strategy or planning in the Mediterranean. Instead, overall matters were often decided by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel, at times in consultation with Field Marshal Albert Kesselring and his Italian counterpart, with varying degrees of input from Mussolini and Hitler. At the lower levels, agreements were often reached between individual services.

These arrangements generally worked decently enough, although it must be noted that some services were better than others at coalition warfare. The German Navy, for example, seemed a bit more willing than the other services to share technology with the Italians, particularly sonar equipment for anti-submarine warfare. In North Africa, Rommel was able to take advantage of the occasional lulls in the campaign to

give Italian units training and to develop a German-Italian military dictionary to aid the liaison officers and interpreters in their duties. Overall, however, relations were often marked by considerable distrust, especially at the higher levels. Matters were not helped by Mussolini's incredibly foolish decision to deploy the majority of Italy's forces in Russia, instead of North Africa, where Italy's real strategic interests lay. Men and equipment that could have made a difference in North Africa were swallowed up in the snowy wastes of Russia.

In looking at the conduct of the war by the Axis, it is clear that operations were impeded by a failure to coordinate their efforts. The notion of "parallel war" proved to be intellectually and strategically bankrupt. In the case of Germany and Japan, it might have been feasible if the United States possessed only one half the productive capacity it actually had. As it turned out, the American economy was capable of turning out enough weapons and equipment to meet the needs of both the European and Pacific theaters, shortages of some kinds of equipment, such as landing craft, notwithstanding.

In the case of Germany and Italy, failure to coordinate their plans was particularly critical during the interval between the fall of France (1940) and the invasion of the Soviet Union (1941). Italy pursued its parallel war, even though the German High Command was well aware of the weaknesses of the Italian economy and armed forces. Although there were discussions in Germany as early as August 1940 about sending German armored units to North Africa to support the Italian advance against Egypt, nothing was done because of German indecision, starting with Hitler himself, and Italian suspicion, especially on the part of Mussolini's leading military advisors. Although Mussolini eventually overruled his generals and accepted the German offer, this was not done until 1940, and before that time no kind of planning had been done to facilitate the deployment of German units. By that time it was too late. The British offensive in December 1940 ended any chance of the Axis powers being able to take the Suez Canal while the British defenses were still relatively weak. The occupation of Egypt and the canal by Axis forces would certainly have greatly impeded Allied operations, and provided the best possible protection for Germany's most vulnerable ally.

In conclusion, it would be a gross overstatement to argue that better coordination of military plans by the Axis powers would have altered the outcome of World War II, especially after December 1941. Their failure to do so, however, certainly facilitated the efforts of the Allies to defeat the Axis.

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## PARTNERS

*Although Germany and Japan fought World War II in separate hemispheres, there was some discussion early in the conflict of possible direct cooperation. On 5 March 1941 the Wehrmacht (German Army) High Command issued a directive, a portion of which appears below.*

1) The aim of the cooperation initiated by the Tripartite Pact must be to bring Japan into active operations in the Far East as soon as possible. This will tie down strong English forces and the focal point of the interests of the United States of America will be diverted to the Pacific.

In view of the still undeveloped military preparedness of her foes, Japan's prospects of success will be better, the sooner the intervention occurs. The *Barbarossa* Operation creates especially favorable political and military conditions for this.

2) For the preparation of the cooperation it is necessary to strengthen Japanese military power by every means.

To that end, the commanders in chief of the branches of the Wehrmacht will extensively and liberally comply with Japanese requests for the communication of German war and battle experience, and for aid in the field of war economy and of a technical nature. Reciprocity is desirable, but must not impede the negotiations. This naturally concerns in the main such Japanese requests as could have application in military operations within a short time. . . .

The following principles apply hereto:

a) The quick defeat of England is to be designated as the common aim in the conduct of the war, thereby keeping the U.S.A. out of the war. Otherwise Germany has neither the political, nor military, nor economic interests in the Far East which give occasion to reservations respecting Japanese intentions.

b) The great successes which Germany has achieved in the war against merchant shipping make it appear peculiarly appropriate that strong Japanese forces be directed to the same purpose. In addition, every possibility of assistance in Germany's war against merchant shipping is to be exploited.

c) The situation of the [Tripartite] Pact Powers with respect to raw materials requires that Japan take over those territories which it needs to continue the war, especially if the United States intervenes. Rubber deliveries must take place even after Japan's entry into the war, since they are vital to Germany.

d) The seizure of Singapore, England's key position in the Far East, would signify a decisive success for the combined warfare of the three Powers.

*Source: "Directive No. 24," in The United States and World War II Military and Diplomatic Documents, edited by A. Russell Buchanan (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 30–32.*



**Viewpoint:**  
**It was logistically beyond the capabilities of the Axis powers to cooperate in more than a limited fashion, and it was perhaps a better strategy for them to fight “parallel wars.”**

Among the most common assertions in the historiography of World War II is that the Axis powers cooperated so poorly that it facilitated their eventual defeat. On the Russian Front, Germany ignored the interests of its ostensible allies and paid no attention to their military capacities. The German-Italian relationship, arm’s length in its best days, degenerated by 1941 into a “brutal friendship” that in practice reduced Italy to client status. Japan and Germany did not even coordinate their declarations of war and ignored the real possibilities of operational cooperation in the Indian Ocean.

The weight of evidence that each Axis state fought its own war is buttressed by the argument that ideologically, fascism by its nature obviated the possibility of cooperation on even the instrumental levels achieved by the Grand Alliance. Fascist governments, for example, were short-sighted and unable to compromise even with their purported friends. In that sense the failure to coordinate war efforts was paradigmatic of fascism’s wider inability to achieve long-term positive results in an international context.

Examined at closer range, this observation becomes less simple. In several ways the Axis powers did cooperate consistently. Germany, Japan, and Italy made effective use of blockade runners throughout the war. Japan and Italy exchanged information on signals intelligence. At the operational level, the Romanian Army contributed significantly to the Russian campaign in 1941–1942. Italian-German coordination in Erwin Rommel’s North African campaign reflected solid mutual understanding of what the respective forces on the spot could and could not do. At the higher levels of strategy and policy, however, each of the three major Axis powers indeed fought their own war, largely because they had no choice in the matter. Both physical and strategic geography pulled them in different directions. Germany’s attention was eastward, into Russia. Adolf Hitler’s launching of war in 1939 came as a surprise to an unprepared Italy that had just been assured of several years of peace. Hitler’s decision in turn was conditioned by the window of opportunity created by the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (1939)—an opportunity that could not be counted upon

to reoccur. Italy for its part saw in the summer of 1940 a chance to establish a Mediterranean empire and sphere of influence at the low cost no fascist power could resist.

In both cases the consequence was overstretch. Germany was unable either to drive Britain from the war or destroy the U.S.S.R. Italy could not even win local victories against inferior numbers in Greece and the Western Desert. In both cases as well, the overstretch was unexpected, as German and Italian military planners were confident in their respective capacities to secure their objectives. Neither system, however, enjoyed redundancy at any level. The Germans had neither the men nor weapons to spare to change the Mediterranean balance. All they could do was provide high-tech quick fixes: enough *Stukas* (dive bombers) and panzers to hold the ring until the Italians found their feet. Italy for its part dispatched the cream of its army to the Russian Front, where its positive qualities were irrelevant and it was destroyed attempting missions beyond its capacities.

The resulting bitterness on both sides so poisoned relations by 1943 that it is reasonable to suggest that Italy and Germany may have suffered not from too little cooperation, but too much—of the wrong kind. The Italian army and air force in particular had limited opportunity to develop a learning curve, while their German counterparts first appeared to show them how war should be fought and then disappeared to more-threatened theaters. The Germans captured Crete (20–31 May 1941) but suffered such heavy losses that they balked at providing forces for an invasion of Malta—which the Italians considered the logical next step but were unwilling to risk without the aid that was rapidly becoming an addictive drug.

Instead of cooperation, mutual recrimination became the order of the day, with the Germans dismissing their allies as inept and the Italians accusing theirs of arrogance. Both charges arose from frustration. Italian air wings and ground divisions could not fight like the Germans; the Germans could spare neither the matériel nor time to begin altering that situation. Fighting in compartments could hardly have produced worse results.

Admittedly there were risks in leaving the Italians primarily to their own devices. Given the force structures and military effectiveness of their British opponents, however, those risks were acceptable. At least they were no greater than the rest of the chances taken by the European Axis. Britain by itself could not defeat Italy in the Mediterranean from 1940 to 1942, although it could inflict defeats—which is not quite the same thing. Even under the unfavorable conditions for progress that actually existed,



the Italian army and air force by late 1942 were far better fighting forces than they had been in 1940. Their fleet too was learning from experience, despite the high tuition it paid to a Royal Navy that gave its own best combat performance in the Mediterranean. Perhaps in this particular case, the only thing worse for the Italians than fighting without allies was fighting with one.

A similar situation was obtained in the Far East. Immediate direct cooperation between the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) and Japan's armed forces offered no operational or strategic prospects whatever. In December 1941 Siberia presented no strategically decisive objectives. Even the fall of Vladivostok was unlikely to have any effect on Soviet policy while the Germans were at the gates of Moscow. The divisions transferred to the Russo-German front had been dispatched well before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941). Nor was Siberia left defenseless; the "Siberian Rifles," who appear as if by magic in so many German accounts of the winter fighting, were mostly from elsewhere in Russia, as divisions were newly organized or replenished after initial casualties. Even if the "strike north" faction in the Japanese government had been able to carry the day, a Japanese army that had been steadily demodernizing as a result of its engagement in China could not expect to plunge into the Siberian forests and go where it willed. A second Nomonhan (the defeat of Japanese troops by Mongolian and Soviet soldiers in 1939) was a more likely possibility than any triumphal march along the Trans-Siberian Railway in either direction.

A more promising window of opportunity for cooperation appeared in early 1942. Some counterfactual scenarios go so far as to describe the wasting of a golden grand-strategic opportunity, with a reinforced *Afrika Korps* (Africa Corps) driving through the Middle East to meet Admiral Nagumo Chuichi's carriers at the Persian Gulf. In fact, however, Japan possessed the deployable strength to do no more than mount raids into the Indian Ocean. The 1st Air Fleet was simultaneously Japan's main striking force and principal strategic reserve. Committing it at the far end of a newly conquered empire as the United States massed its strength at the other

was the kind of gamble from which even Japanese planners shrank. Nor was a Germany so weakened by Operation Barbarossa (June 1941)—that the next year it could mount an offensive only in one sector of the Russian Front, rather than three—likely to consider reducing its forces at the immediately critical point further for the sake of a strike toward Baghdad.

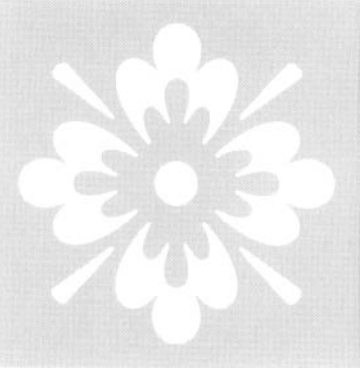
In short, the major Axis states may have fought and lost the war in compartments. The outcome, however, was no more promising had they sought cooperation that was unattainable in some respects, unpromising in others.

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## THE BALKANS



### **Did a refusal to invade the Balkans in mid 1944 represent a missed opportunity for the Western Allies to end the war sooner and gain control of Eastern Europe?**

**Viewpoint:** If British prime minister Winston Churchill had prevailed in his Balkan strategy the Western Allies would have wasted valuable resources and alienated the Soviet Union.

**Viewpoint:** An invasion of the Balkans by the Western Allies would not have prevented Soviet domination of the area after World War II.

**Viewpoint:** If the Western Allies had invaded the Balkans, the war would have ended sooner and much of Eastern Europe would not have fallen under Soviet domination.

The concept of invading the Balkans—specifically northwestern Yugoslavia—was seriously considered by British strategic thinkers in the summer and early fall of 1944. The operation was projected with the dual objectives of bypassing the strong German defenses in Italy and preempting Soviet penetration of southeastern Europe. Aware of the American military's vehement objections to any involvement in the Balkans, Winston Churchill nevertheless pushed the idea as an alternative to the invasion of southern France, which he regarded as typical American overkill. Unable to carry his point, Churchill abandoned it with reluctance and referred to it repeatedly as the Cold War deepened.

Did the Balkans represent a missed opportunity? To begin at the operational level, the amount of shipping required for a major invasion at the far end of Anglo-American supply lines was unavailable in the context of other ongoing commitments. The terrain behind the projected landing zones was singularly unsuitable for the operations of mechanized-vehicle and firepower-intensive forces. In that context it must be noted that the pool of infantry replacements in the Mediterranean was almost empty by the end of 1944. The British in particular were disbanding or reducing the strengths of their rifle battalions. The French divisions that performed so well in Italy would not be available for Yugoslavia while France was being liberated. Machines, therefore, were replacing men. The long columns of tanks that blocked the roads of eastern Italy on the way to the Gothic Line would have fared no better in Yugoslavia. Nor were Josip Broz Tito's partisans likely to abandon their Soviet connection and throw in their lot enthusiastically with the Western allies. By pinning substantial forces in a dead-end theater instead of making them available for southern France, a Balkan invasion might well have prolonged the war in the west and correspondingly enhanced Soviet control in postwar Eastern Europe.



**Viewpoint:**  
**If British prime minister Winston Churchill had prevailed in his Balkan strategy the Western Allies would have wasted valuable resources and alienated the Soviet Union.**

Perhaps it started with the attacks on the Gallipoli peninsula in 1915–1916. As First Sea Lord of the Admiralty in 1915, Winston Churchill was instrumental in pushing for a British front in the Mediterranean with the dream of taking Constantinople from the Ottoman Turks and thus opening a supply route to Russia. It was a disastrous failure, resulting in the disgrace and dismissal of Churchill, and haunting him for the rest of his life as a “might have been.” Some scholars believe it also fixated in his mind a belief in the “soft underbelly of Europe.” In fact a second British front was opened in the Balkans in the last year of World War I, a campaign out of Greece that ended with no significant results. The soft underbelly, even then, proved to be a difficult and costly campaign that had little direct bearing on the final outcome of the war.

In 1941 the British Empire suffered a severe setback when the Nazis, in a lightning campaign, swept through Yugoslavia, into Greece, and in a daring airborne assault seized Crete, thus putting the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) within two hours flying time of the Suez Canal. It was a front the Germans failed to exploit, though there were abortive attempts, primarily through use of Vichy forces, to expand into Lebanon, Syria, and Iraq. Nonetheless, the Prime Minister’s attention was again fixed to this region.

The classic debate between Churchill and the American high command in 1942 as to the primary axis of advance into Fortress Europe is well known. Churchill, already predisposed to activities in the eastern Mediterranean, was also a proponent of the “indirect school,” believing that a direct assault straight into northern Europe would be far too costly. In contrast he maintained that the southern flank was the “soft underbelly.” Allied landing operations could be launched at any number of points in Greece and Yugoslavia to secure bases for ground assaults, and for air attacks on key strategic resources, especially the crucial Axis oil fields at Ploesti, Romania. Ultimately, a major ground assault could drive clear through the Balkans and into Hungary and Germany.

There was, as well, a crucial postwar political concern on Churchill’s part. After the grim crises of 1941 and the summer of 1942 had passed on the Eastern Front, it was obvious that the Soviet

juggernaut would eventually roll forward, perhaps all the way to Berlin and beyond. The question was, once Joseph Stalin had armies in eastern and central Europe, could he ever be persuaded to leave? History clearly shows the answer to that question. The great “what if,” however, is could it have been avoided by following Churchill’s plan?

Churchill voiced his concern about Russian domination in the east throughout 1942–1943 when the great debate was on as to when, where, and how the Western Allies would finally strike back at the Germans. Churchill’s dream was to create a final victory with Western Allied forces meeting their Soviet allies on the border of Russia, rather than on the Elbe or the Rhine. Eisenhower, supported by Franklin D. Roosevelt and George C. Marshall, saw northern France as the key. Eisenhower’s participation in North Africa was a reluctant one and he believed that the campaign was engineered by Churchill to lure American support into the Mediterranean, where once enmeshed could not be withdrawn. Eisenhower’s opinion on this course of action finally changed with the realization that North Africa had to be fought as an American operation, if for no other reason than to serve as a training and testing ground for the harder campaigns to come. His prophecy about American involvement in the Mediterranean, however, came to pass with the bitter campaign in Italy.

After recapturing North Africa, Churchill pushed aggressively for operations not only against Sicily, but also into the Balkans. He was vetoed by the American high command, as well as by some of his own field officers. Operation Overlord would take place in 1944 in Normandy, not Greece or Yugoslavia. It is fortunate for the Allied cause that Churchill’s dream of a Balkan front never came to pass, both for military and political reasons.

The military reasons against a Balkan front can easily be demonstrated by the operations in Italy. The surrender of Italy to the Allies, which took place within days of the Salerno landing (8 September 1943), is a story of political blundering and lost opportunities. When Italy threw in the towel and switched sides, a brief window opened. Aggressive action could have resulted in an occupation of most of the peninsula. Instead, Allied forces moved forward cautiously, and little anticipated the speed with which German forces swept into Italy, occupied it, and then established a deadly system of defensive works.

Anzio is another demonstration of this indecision. By the end of the first day of the landing (22 January 1944) the road to Rome was open. The Allied high command hesitated, and again the Germans demonstrated remarkable flexibility and audacity, ringing the landing

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forces in, and creating a deadlock. Italy clearly showed German superiority to react quickly to a crisis, both military and political, and even more importantly their ability at defensive warfare in mountainous terrain, especially during the winter.

Would the Balkans have been any different? It is doubtful. Advances through Greece, or even landings across the Adriatic into Yugoslavia, might have created beachheads but little else. Repeatedly in Italy numerically inferior German forces bottlenecked Allied forces, even when the Allies had all but total air superiority. Avenues of advance through Yugoslavia were narrow, and would have proven to be logistical nightmares given the primitive road and limited rail systems available, which were even less adequate than those in Italy. A campaign in this theater would also have been at the end of a difficult logistical tail, requiring an additional two thousand miles of sea transport as compared to northern France.

Yet another argument against the Balkan front was that the Normandy campaign and the dash across France took place under a massive air umbrella based out of England. The Allies had five years to build up the complex infrastructure

of air bases in England in preparation for the offensive into France. There would have been no such infrastructure to support a major campaign in the Balkans. Allied air support into Yugoslavia and Greece would have been forced to operate out of Italy, where the ground for major air bases was limited, and with a significant “commute” time to the front as well. Logistically, Allied air operations in this region would have been forced to haul supplies thousands of miles further as well, when compared to the hop that American bombers and transport planes were making across the North Atlantic to bases in England by the spring of 1944.

In response, the Germans could have easily based significant air assets in Hungary and Romania, placing them close to their centers of logistical support. Their transport grid up to the Yugoslavian front was fairly intact, and at the extreme limit of interdiction from air units based out of England. Such a campaign would also have played to the German strength of being able to quickly shift “fire brigade” units from one front to another as needed. Units could have quickly moved from Russia and into the Balkans to meet the threat, without fear of the massive strategic bombing fleets based in England that seriously damaged the French rail system in the summer of 1944. Militarily, a campaign in the Balkans would have undoubtedly ended in a deadlock, costing hundreds of thousands of Allied casualties for little, if any, gain.

The other primary argument against the Balkans campaign is political. Churchill’s anxiety of what the Russians might do in eastern Europe was well founded. He, far more than any other Allied leader, clearly saw the threat to the post-war world. The question is, could it have been stopped? It is doubtful, at least from the perspective of a Balkans front. Throughout the war one of the great anxieties for the West was the fear that Stalin might seek a separate peace with the Nazis. Secret talks were carried on in neutral countries between German and Soviet diplomats, with both sides extending feelers at various points as fortunes shifted on the battlefield.

If Churchill had prevailed and a Balkans front had been opened in 1943 or early 1944, without a doubt Stalin would have correctly interpreted it as a blocking move to keep him out of a postwar settlement in central Europe. There might have been one of several responses.

The 1944 Russian summer offensive was a broad-based attack, advancing all along the entire fifteen-hundred-mile-wide front. Significant assets were committed by Stalin for the drive into Romania, which switched sides in August. Soviet forces in the south then pushed into Hungary and crossed through Yugoslavia. In response to an Allied Balkans front, Stalin might

well have committed even more assets into this region to seal off the Allied advance, or he might have committed nothing at all, placing instead all his strength into a punch straight into the heart of Germany, leaving his southern front static once it reached Odessa. Indeed, after the collapse of German Army Group Center in July 1944 the road all the way to Berlin was in fact open, and with more assets on this front Stalin's armies might have been across the Oder before winter, while British and American forces still wallowed in the mountains of Yugoslavia.

Another response, though difficult to conceive, might nevertheless have happened, if in his paranoid state, Stalin had been sufficiently disturbed by a Yugoslavian campaign. He might have walked out of the alliance. After the collapse of Army Group Center, the German presence on Soviet soil was finished. It is conceivable that given sufficient provocation Stalin would have then presented the argument to his own people that the integrity and honor of the Motherland had been restored. Some additional territorial demands, such as the Baltic States and a bigger chunk out of Poland would have been negotiated for, and Germany might have grabbed for a separate peace. It should be recalled that Adolf Hitler, by this stage of the war, was indeed dreaming of a replay of the Seven Years' War (1756–1763), when Russia left the coalition against Prussia, thereby saving Frederick the Great from total defeat. It is not conceivable then that Churchill's grand plan for keeping Stalin out of the Balkans might instead have resulted in a collapse of the coalition, thus allowing Germany to turn its full might against the Western Allied forces mired down in yet another Balkans' trap.

The Balkans proved to be a trap for Germany during World War II. In many ways the financial and military commitment by the Soviet Union to holding the region for forty-five years after the war ultimately proved to be their undoing as well. Fortunately, at least in the long term view of things, Churchill's dream did not become a trap for the West as well.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**An invasion of the Balkans by the Western Allies would not have prevented Soviet domination of the area after World War II.**

Winston Churchill's interest in the "soft underbelly" of Europe did not begin with a comprehensive design, but became an ever-changing

search for options and opportunities. By the time World War II was over, few of the options had been exploited and none proved decisive in defeating Germany. Soviet indifference and American reluctance to support Churchill's interest in that region made it a source of British frustration and "what ifs" throughout and after the war. In the end, Allied efforts proved more useful elsewhere, in both military and political terms.

Few could match Churchill's knowledge in the eastern Mediterranean. He had traveled widely in the region and during World War I had promoted the unfortunate Gallipoli campaign (1915–1916) in which British Commonwealth troops tried unsuccessfully to gain control of the Dardanelles straits between Europe and Turkey. After the war, as Colonial Secretary, he played a crucial role in dividing up the Middle East and developing the Mandate System, with Britain taking the Mandates for Palestine and Iraq as France took those for Lebanon and Syria. Many European leaders had hoped that the United States would take a Mandate in the region, perhaps for Turkey. The United States, however, sent a strong signal after World War I that it had little interest in the eastern Mediterranean, a view that would continue into World War II, much to Churchill's disappointment.

Prior to World War II, Britain had developed a military and political base in Egypt to protect the Suez Canal and the flow of resources from Asia and the Pacific. Egypt soon became a base from which sea, air, and land operations could be conducted throughout the Mediterranean against overextended Italian and German forces. Churchill also focused on Turkey and Greece early in the war, leading him to consider actions in the Balkans.

After Italy invaded Albania in 1939, Britain developed a favorable relationship with Turkey through diplomacy and limited military aid. The Turkish attitude toward Britain and the Allies was positive during the war, but not so positive for it to enter the war. The real threat from Albania, however, was to Greece, and Benito Mussolini used it as a base to invade Greece in October 1940. The Greek Army repulsed the Italian attack, but Adolf Hitler feared the unfortunate Italian incursion would become an excuse for Britain to project forces into Greece. Hitler coerced Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria to join the Axis and promptly moved German forces into the Balkans. Britain responded by sending fifty thousand troops into Greece in March 1941. Hitler took them on, invading Yugoslavia in the process, and by the end of April had driven them from Greece.

As the British forces fell back on Crete and North Africa, Hitler sent *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) squadrons into Vichy-controlled Syria. Churchill had General Archibald P. Wavell advance forces from Palestine and Egypt and take Lebanon and Syria later in 1941. The lines were drawn with the Axis controlling the Balkans, British forces securing the adjacent Middle East, with Turkey between them, the only neutral state. Beaten on the ground, the British continued to fight the Germans with the Royal Navy and air power and by supporting resistance movements in the Balkans.

The Axis powers divided Yugoslavia. Germany annexed Slovenia and gave Macedonia to Bulgaria. The Italians controlled most of Croatia and the Balkan coast and developed a proxy fascist government in the *Ustase* (Insurgents) Croatian movement, which terrorized the other ethnic groups. German forces occupied the rest of the country. Resistance movements quickly sprang up in response. A large movement emerged from those loyal to the Yugoslav King Peter II under General Dragoljub Mihailovic, who led a Serb-dominated group often called Chetniks. Under Josip Broz Tito, a more diverse group developed composed of Croats, Serbs, and Bosnians with a communist agenda. The two groups spent more time fighting each other than fighting the Germans and Italians. Churchill tried to persuade them to work together and sent aid and military advisers to both groups; an effort later assisted by the American Office of Strategic Services (OSS).

Allied advisers formed an identification with their respective resistance movements in Yugoslavia and sent conflicting reports to the British headquarters in Cairo and London. It took Churchill and the Allies some time to get the story straight on which resistance movement was making the greater progress fighting the Germans and Italians. Each movement exaggerated its fighting strength to justify more aid from the Allies. In the end, the Allies chose to provide more support to Tito, but he was leery of the Allies and reluctant to allow them a role in Yugoslavia beyond giving aid.

When America entered the war and agreed to a "Europe First" strategy, its military leaders wanted to mass forces in Britain and have the main effort directed at Germany proper through an invasion of France. Churchill and British military officers persuaded them to wait and focus their efforts first on North Africa, then Sicily, and finally Italy proper to clear the Mediterranean and take Italy out of the war. When the buildup began earnestly in Britain for Operation Overlord, the invasion of Normandy, and Operation Anvil, the supporting attack in southern France, American leaders saw the Italian cam-

paign as a secondary effort to fix the German forces there. That contrasted with the British view, which saw the Italian campaign as one that could be projected much further into southern Europe.

When Italy surrendered to the Allies in the fall of 1943, the British tried to occupy the islands they had taken in the Aegean Sea with small formations to secure airfields for the projection of Allied air power into the Balkans, which might coax Turkey into the war. When the Germans reacted aggressively and captured or repelled the British forces, Churchill asked Dwight D. Eisenhower, then commander of all forces in the Mediterranean, to provide the amphibious forces to recover them. Eisenhower refused, determined not to disperse Allied forces when the main effort was to be made in France.

At the Teheran Conference in December 1943, the Allies agreed to execute Overlord as the main effort in northern France, with Anvil as a large supporting effort in southern France, both to be executed in May–June 1944. Churchill did not object, but wanted to maintain a significant effort in Italy. He wanted to bring Turkey into the war and urged Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt to support him. Stalin did not think Turkey would join the Allies and, furthermore did not seem to care either way. When Roosevelt and Churchill talked to Turkey's president Ismet İnönü, they found the Turks concerned about German forces in the Balkans. In particular the Turks feared an air attack on Istanbul, "which would burn like matchwood." İnönü did not have the air defenses to protect Istanbul or other parts of Turkey from the *Luftwaffe* and did not believe the Allies could spare them.

When the Allied campaign in Italy bogged in the mountainous terrain, Churchill promoted the amphibious assault at Anzio (22 January 1944). Scarce landing craft limited the assault to two divisions, however, and the Germans contained the Allied forces at Anzio. Sustaining the Allied beachhead tied up precious landing craft from January to May, and prevented the execution of Anvil concurrent with Overlord. Churchill and most of the British leaders wanted to cancel Anvil and use the forces programmed for it to advance the Italian campaign. American leaders demanded that the main effort be made in France and wanted Anvil executed in August.

Churchill developed an argument for an amphibious landing at Trieste at the top of the Adriatic Sea, combined with an Allied push through northern Italy to Istria and across the Ljubljana Gap, to take Vienna. Eisenhower was unimpressed with the proposal and referred to it as that "Gap whose name I can't even pronounce." He and General George C. Marshall objected to anything that competed with Anvil.

Churchill went to Roosevelt, who proved harder to persuade than earlier in the war. He insisted on Anvil as a necessary operation to secure ports and get French forces into France, and then took issue with the alternative. "I cannot agree to the employment of United States troops against Istria and into the Balkans, nor can I see the French agreeing to such use of French troops . . . for purely political reasons over here, I should never survive even a slight setback in 'Overlord' if it were known that fairly large land forces had been diverted to the Balkans."

The British knew that "the very word Balkan was anathema to the Americans." Churchill argued that an advance through northern Italy to the Ljubljana Gap was not an advance into the Balkans but into Austria, with Vienna as the objective. His argument was misleading as the Ljubljana Gap was in Slovenia, part of Yugoslavia and the Balkans. He also expected such an advance to be supported by Tito's forces in Yugoslavia. At that time the British held the two key commands in the Mediterranean, with General Henry Maitland "Jumbo" Wilson as Allied theater commander and General Harold R. L. G. Alexander as his ground force commander in Italy. Eisenhower exercised influence as the senior commander for Overlord, the main effort.

Churchill encouraged Wilson and Alexander to develop plans for an operation through the Ljubljana Gap. Such an operation would integrate the ten divisions designated for Anvil, hopefully giving Wilson and Alexander enough forces to make it a success. During late June until the first weeks of August 1944, it boiled down to Anvil or the Ljubljana Gap, with virtually all American leaders supporting the former and all British leaders, particularly Churchill, supporting the latter.

In June, Marshall visited Wilson and convinced him that Anvil would provide essential ports to sustain Overlord and that the French wanted desperately to participate in the liberation of France and would strongly object to the cancellation of Anvil. Wilson stated that Marshall's arguments "convinced me that . . . our case . . . wouldn't stand up." Wilson also decided he lacked the logistics capability to sustain properly any forces he could push across the Ljubljana Gap. Both Theater Commanders, Eisenhower and Wilson, finally agreed on Anvil over the Ljubljana Gap, but arguments continued after the war as a result of the Soviets overrunning Eastern Europe. Churchill and many of the British leaders complained of opportunities lost as a result of American intransigence.

What would have happened had the Allies canceled Anvil and used the forces to enhance the Italian Campaign? Arguably, Overlord



## CHURCHILL ON THE BALKANS

*During the latter stages of World War II, the Soviet Union was poised to dominate the Balkans. Worried that the area might turn communist, Winston Churchill composed a letter on 11 October 1944 to Joseph Stalin, detailing his thoughts on postwar government of the region. A portion of this note, which was never sent, is reproduced below.*

Our broad principle should be to let every country have the form of government which its people desire. We certainly do not wish to force on any Balkan State monarchic or republican institutions. We have however established certain relations of faithfulness with the Kings of Greece and Yugoslavia. They have sought our shelter from the Nazi foe, and we think that when normal tranquility is re-established and the enemy has been driven out the peoples of these countries should have a free and fair chance of choosing. It might even be that Commissioners of the three Great Powers should be stationed there at the time of the elections so as to see that the people have a genuine free choice. There are good precedents for this.

However, besides the institutional question there exists in all these countries the ideological issue between totalitarian forms of government and those we call free enterprise controlled by universal suffrage. We are very glad that you have declared yourselves against trying to change by force or by Communist propaganda the established systems in various Balkan countries. Let them work out their own fortunes during the years that lie ahead. . . . In principle I feel that Great Britain and Russia should feel easy about the internal government of these countries, and not worry about them or interfere with them once conditions of tranquility have been restored after this terrible blood-bath which they, and indeed, we, have all been through. . . . Hitler has tried to exploit the fear of an aggressive, proselytising Communism which exists throughout Western Europe, and he is being decisively beaten to the ground. But, as you know well, this fear exists in every country, because, whatever the merits of our different systems, no country wishes to go through the bloody revolution which will certainly be necessary in nearly every case before so drastic a change could be made in the life, habits, and outlook of their society. We feel we were right in interpreting your dissolution of the Comintern as a decision by the Soviet Government not to interfere in the political internal affairs of other countries.

*Source: Winston Churchill, Triumph and Tragedy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), pp. 232–233.*

would have succeeded without Anvil, but at a much slower rate with ten fewer divisions and constrained logistics passing through limited ports through 1944. If the German Ardennes Offensive, aimed at interdicting the large port in Antwerp in December of that year, had been more successful it would have seriously slowed Eisenhower's operations. That in turn might have meant meeting the Russians further west, leaving them controlling much more of Germany by the end of the war. By December 1944, however, Eisenhower had the ten divisions provided through Anvil fully engaged, which forced the Germans to man a defensive line from Switzerland to the sea. At that time the largest port sustaining the Allies was Marseilles in southern France.

A case is difficult to make that an advance into Austria would have offered much in exchange for slower movement through France. General Alan Brooke, the British Army Chief of Staff, noted quietly that the Allied forces in Italy could not have begun serious movement through northern Italy until the fall of 1944, which would have meant fighting across the Austrian Alps in the winter. One of Marshall's planners noted that, "the Austrians held off the Italians for 4 years in World War I." The German Army that had prolonged the Allied campaign through mountainous Italy would probably have been just as determined fighting over the Alps. They would also have been falling back on their lines of communications as the Allied lines became longer. Once through the Ljubljana Gap the Western Allies would have been stretched thin along a tenuous mountain defile and aligned with much larger Soviet formations closing from the East.

Assuming the Allied forces in Italy were successful advancing on to Vienna and able to work smoothly alongside the Soviets in the region—a questionable event—the results might have been more disappointing than Churchill and others have suggested. It is doubtful that the meager British-led forces entering Austria from the south would have caused a diversion of German forces from Eisenhower's main effort. Vienna is over three hundred miles from Berlin, and Soviet forces were passing from east to west well to the north. As it turned out the British 8th Army advanced from Italy across the Alps late in the war and occupied southern Austria. The Soviets beat them to Vienna and took the rest of Austria, but several years after the war they were coerced through diplomacy to give it up and it became a democratic state.

If the advance through the Ljubljana Gap had succeeded in late 1944, as Churchill suggested, it is unlikely events would have worked out much differently in the Balkans. Without

British or American assistance, the Soviets had overrun most of the Balkans and Yugoslavia during the fall of 1944. Greece, while threatened with a communist movement, survived to become a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Tito coerced the Soviets out of Yugoslavia and ruled it relatively peacefully through most of the Cold War. If British forces had played a role in liberating Yugoslavia, which Churchill claimed he did not intend, it is probable that Tito would have coerced them out as well to achieve the same political end. Reflection on the turmoil in the Tito-less former Yugoslavia in the 1990s does not make it attractive to think what British or American forces might have had to endure if they had occupied Yugoslavia at the end of the war.

British strategy emphasized the indirect approach during the war, useful early when Germany was stronger but overextended and vulnerable on the periphery. The Americans entered the war focused on the principle of concentration and attacking the German center of gravity, where it could be defeated quickly, rather than attacking where it was vulnerable but would have to be defeated slowly and in detail. There is nothing the Allies could have done to slow the Soviet Army rolling across Eastern Europe in 1944–1945, except to shift its direction somewhat. While a successful advance across the Ljubljana Gap or even directly into the Balkans might have accomplished that, such a move would have left more of northern Europe in Soviet control—a much less attractive alternative.

—GORDON W. RUDD, USMC SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED WARFIGHTING



**Viewpoint:**  
**If the Western Allies had invaded the Balkans, the war would have ended sooner and much of Eastern Europe would not have fallen under Soviet domination.**

The Cold War arose from many causes, but Communist domination of what became the European satellite state played a major role in the origins and intensity of the East-West struggle. Had the Western Allies liberated East European territory in 1944–1945, different factors would have influenced postwar history. Perhaps international tensions would have been as severe or worse, if Joseph Stalin had felt threatened by that Western presence. If the Soviets had occupied less European territory in 1944–1945, however, Harry S Truman might have assumed more



accommodating postwar positions toward Moscow. The worst of the Cold War might have been avoided. In either case, a commanding position in Eastern Europe could have greatly benefited the Americans and British from the Yalta Conference (1945) until the end of the Soviet Union. Furthermore, a strategy for a British-American campaign in East Europe was practical. Nor would it have precluded a cross-Channel invasion. However, to successfully create such a front would have required daring, ingenuity, good intelligence, and great foresight from Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.

If history proved Churchill correct about a Balkan second front, it was a case of good ends pursued for bad reasons. Churchill did not seek Western-dominated territory in Eastern Europe. From 1942 to 1944, he did not foresee the Cold War, however much he distorted the truth afterwards. Instead, Churchill wished to avoid a second front in France. He feared this strategy would lead to battles such as he had witnessed in World War I, and those bloody engagements had drained British strength. In fact, British dead in northwest Europe in 1944–1945 numbered 30,280; Canadian fatalities were 10,740. While Britain lost its world power following World War II, the reasons were far more complex and deep-rooted than its casualties in the two world wars. Of course, this transformation was far from clear in 1942–1943.

The period between the Allied landings in northwest Africa (1942) and the Casablanca Conference (1943) would have been crucial for establishing a different second-front strategy. In late 1942, envoys of the Italian monarchy, military figures, and members of the Fascist regime had approached the British, seeking negotiations. For political reasons and from personal conviction, Roosevelt would not have bargained with Fascists. Moreover, an Italian exit from the war and neutrality would not have been practical. Roosevelt and Churchill could have allowed Italy to switch sides, following Benito Mussolini's overthrow, and approved prior planning with the Italians. Such would have been aimed at combined operations for an unopposed Allied landing and denial to the Germans of as much of Italy as possible. While the announcement of the unconditional surrender formula would have still been imperative, it might have been modified. The demand could have been applied to Germany and Japan alone. Surrender under terms could have been offered to the minor Axis powers, to include Italy, all defined as "captive nations." This policy could have been described as encouraging defections from the Axis, thus saving many Allied lives.

The essential prerequisite for a Balkan second front would have been Italian cooperation

before a landing on the mainland. Only by acquiring an advantageous position in Italy and several hundred thousand more combat troops could the Allies later initiate operations in south-east Europe. In turn, the Italian leaders required a large landing west of Rome to save themselves, their capital and its garrison of six divisions—their army's best—from capture by the Germans. They also wanted one airborne division dropped on airfields near the city. Finally, the Italian government and military had to get incentives to take the risks changing sides necessitated, more than the "co-belligerent" status actually granted them in 1943. Rather, it required a formal political-military alliance and a better postwar position in the Mediterranean than that actually granted the Italians. For Churchill to have gotten his preferred second front would have cost the British their expectations of postwar Mediterranean hegemony. From a later vantage point, that seems a good bargain, but it would not have appeared so in London during the war. This situation would have required flexibility and foresight, as mentioned above.

For enough Italian troops to join the Allies, drive the Germans from as much of Italy as possible, and limit the Allied troops later committed to an Italian campaign, a landing on Sardinia should have been made in June–July 1943. Capture of Sardinian airfields, the Italian military's change of sides, and effective resistance to the Germans, would have allowed a landing in August under air cover west of Rome. (The round trip in air miles between the military airfields in northeast Sardinia and Furbara and Cevetaria airbases near Rome is 330 miles; the distance from Sicilian air bases to the Salerno landing beaches of September 1943 and back is 350 miles.)

Capture of Rome would have forced withdrawal of German forces from the south. Since all roads in western Italy led to Rome, the German forces would have had to retreat up the east coast, while the Allies raced across the Rome-Pescara Highway. Some German divisions might have been destroyed by air attacks or even captured. When autumn rains slowed further advance, Italy probably would have divided by a line from Pisa to Pesaro, roughly where the Germans held the historical Gothic Line. Additional efforts should have brought the Allies to the northern edge of the Apennines by December 1943, roughly where they actually arrived a year later.

The Germans would have captured most of the Italian forces in northern Italy, southern France, and the Balkans. However, from Tuscany and Romagna south, the fourteen regular and fourteen coastal Italian divisions there, as well as hundreds of thousands of support and service

troops, could have joined the Allied ranks. In addition, some of the three Italian divisions in the Aegean and the one on the Ionian islands, Crete, and Corsica could have been evacuated by Italian and Allied naval forces. Several Italian divisions in the north guarded naval bases. Historically, they allowed 6 battleships; 9 light cruisers; 32 destroyers, destroyer escorts, and torpedo boats; and 18 corvettes to escape capture in September 1943. However, the Germans sank the new Italian battleship *Roma* in an air attack and seized many light craft. Better Italian-Allied cooperation could have helped more warships to escape the Germans. Aircraft from Sardinia might have saved *Roma*. Either way, Italian ships would have been useful in a southeastern Europe campaign.

Italian ground forces would have proved more valuable. Italian divisions were small and poorly equipped. Normal full-strength Italian infantry divisions contained 11,300 to 12,600 men. By mid 1943, however, most were several thousand short. Coastal divisions were far weaker, with 3,200 to 4,800 men. By mid 1943, most regular divisions had few motor vehicles and some none, save staff cars and motorcycles. Coastal divisions moved on foot. Nonetheless, retrained and reequipped, fifteen to eighteen regular and ten to twelve coastal Italian divisions could have been transformed into ten to twelve infantry divisions of the size and strength of contemporary American (14,250) and British (18,350) formations by late 1943 or early 1944. The Italian military-age manpower pool south of the Apennines would have sufficed to sustain such a force, even with heavy casualties.

Could the Allies have provided equipment for five or six Italian corps? The British did form six Italian light divisions in 1944. By then, the United States had done the same for five Chinese light divisions, a force that proved of little value. The resources could have been used to arm six to eight full-strength Italian divisions. Allied 15th Army Group wastage in Italy from September 1943 to August 1944, saved in the scenario above, would have offered enough for another four to six Italian divisions. Most of these units should have been used in Italy, but an Italian *Alpini* (Alpine) corps would have proved invaluable in the Balkan mountains. More important, the net effect of rearming the Italians would have freed eight to ten Allied divisions for operations in southeastern Europe. To these, another seven could have been added from those historically detached from the 15th Army Group for the 1944 landings in southern France. Having gained a commanding position in Italy a year sooner than actually occurred, the Allies could have spared these units for Balkan service. This would have meant cancellation

of Operation Anvil/Dragoon, a decision demanding sacrifice from Roosevelt and Dwight D. Eisenhower, as this counterfactual scenario would have asked of Churchill.

Other forces for a Balkan second front would have been three African American units: the 2nd Cavalry, 93rd Infantry, and 98th Infantry Divisions. These combat formations were disbanded in early 1944 or never employed because of racial bias. Their inclusion in the Allied Balkan army group would have brought the force to some twenty to twenty-two divisions: two Italian, nine to ten American, and nine to ten British, Commonwealth, Indian, and Polish. While well-provided with motor transport and supported by motorized artillery, this force would have been an all-infantry division. However, a 1944 British infantry division contained thirty-one armored cars. In practice, a battalion of seventy tanks and thirteen half-tracks was attached to each U.S. infantry division. Thus, the army group would have possessed armored vehicles equivalent to four 1944 panzer divisions.

Politics would have required a British commander. Two of talent were available: Sir Alan Francis Brooke (chief of the Imperial General Staff) and Sir Claude John Eyre Auchinleck (commander in chief in India). Brooke had been promised command of Allied forces in the Normandy invasion, then disappointed when Churchill realized an American must be appointed. Churchill also wanted Brooke in London. Perhaps Auchinleck offered a better choice. Churchill knew his worth was wasted in India. Montgomery had done much to maliciously destroy Auchinleck's reputation and that calumny was designed to ensure himself command of Overlord ground forces. Sending Auchinleck to the Balkans might have proved politically and militarily wise.

Despite Churchill's assertion, Europe has no soft underbelly. No attack through the Ljubljana Gap in northwest Yugoslavia or from landings in Istria, Dalmatia, or Greece could have penetrated far into Central Europe or the Balkans. Extremely rugged terrain and lack of communications would have rendered any major advances from there impossible. In addition, Stalin's closest ally in Europe, Josip Broz Tito, would probably have done all in his power to hinder a northward movement of divisions from Western capitalist states. The only feasible entry into the Balkans in early 1944 would have been from Turkish Thrace. While the Balkan Mountains run east to west across most of Bulgaria, a fifty-mile coastal plain extends from the Black Sea near Burgas to those mountains' foothills. The next barrier is the Danube, some 120 miles north. Across that river lies the Wallachian Plain. The Carpathians rise precipitously beyond

Bucharest and Ploesti to the northwest, the marshes of the Danube's tributaries spread past the plain to the northeast. Yet, such considerations leap ahead of political events necessary for creation of an Allied Balkan front. Turkey would have had to join the United Nations in November–December 1943.

Historically, Churchill sought to draw Turkey into the war in talks near Adana in January 1943. The Turks demanded 2,300 tanks and 2,600 guns for their tough but badly equipped forty-six-division army, as well as fifty Royal Air Force (RAF) squadrons to protect their wooden cities from air attack. Their final precondition was destruction of Axis forces on the Aegean Islands, both to remove that threat and open Izmir, the only port able to receive the necessary matériel and troops, with rail connections sufficient to bear such traffic northward. Since the Americans agreed to these conditions only if met from British resources, the project stalled. British attempts to seize the Dodecanese Islands in the fall of 1943, to gain access to Izmir, ended in disaster. Turkey only entered the war in February 1945. However, Italian and British warships could have cleared the Aegean in late 1943, under air cover from Turkish bases. Rather than asking for major Turkish participation in the campaign, the Allies could have offered Lend Lease, United Nations membership, security guarantees against the Soviets and an Allied army group to make sure the Red Army never came close to Istanbul. The Turks could have released at least half their one million peasant soldiers, to increase food production and reduce their ruinous inflation.

Turkish forces could have defended Thrace until Allied forces assembled behind them. Meanwhile, Allied naval forces could have entered the Black Sea to threaten the sea coasts of Bulgaria and Romania, sweep for mines and allow Lend Lease shipments access to Novorossiisk, Rostov, and Sevastopol. In February–March 1944, the Allied Balkan army group could have begun its offensive into Bulgaria and to seize the Greek port of Salonika. By the time the Allied forces in Normandy broke out into central France in late July, the Allied Balkan armies could have captured Sofia, Bucharest, Ploesti, and reached the Iron Gates and the Transylvanian Alps. The Bulgarian and Romanian governments would have joined the Allies as they actually did in 1944 for six months, adding their forces to the common war effort. (They suffered 202,000 casualties fighting the Germans in 1944–1945.) The Germans would have evacuated Greece, allowing the British to land in Piraeus in the summer, rather than in the fall as they did in reality. After the 2nd, 3rd, and 4th Ukrainian fronts crossed the Danube and Prut

rivers, then wheeled right, their left flank would have met the Allied right in Transylvania in the fall of 1944.

Reequipping and retraining even 500,000 Turkish soldiers would have been pointless. The war would have ended first, but reforming six to eight Turkish divisions would have proved useful. When ready in the summer–fall of 1944, some could have been assigned to Italy—joining many Muslim troops already there—the rest deployed to the north Balkans. Turks sent to Italy could have helped form the force to invade the Po Valley, advance along the Mediterranean, and capture Marseilles in August. Eisenhower's armies would have gotten the large French port they needed and most of the U.S. Fifth Army as reinforcements, more than compensating for Anvil/Dragoon. One or two Turkish corps could have joined the Balkan army group in the autumn of 1944. Employing Turks in the south, given Christian sentiments, would have been foolish. Nevertheless, Turkish divisions could have helped the Allied army group further north.

By January 1945, the Allies could have crossed into Hungary and captured Budapest, while the Red Army would have begun the liberation of Slovakia. By the time the Yalta Conference convened, the Allies could have been advancing on Vienna and Brno, with Prague their next objective. The Soviets would have been ranged along the Oder. Or, given these counterfactual circumstances, the war might have ended by February, with the Red Army in Berlin, while the west and east Allied army groups joined along the line at Hamburg-Magdeburg-Dresden. The postwar Soviet border would have remained thus drawn at Yalta. Poland, eastern Germany, and Slovakia would have fallen under Soviet occupation. The Yugoslavs and possibly the Albanians would have suffered much the same fate they did after World War II, but Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Austria, and what would have been the Czech Republic, would have joined the West. Four years after that, all could have become members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). More American, British, Commonwealth, Polish, and Italian soldiers would have died than actually did in 1944–1945, possibly by several tens of thousands. Furthermore, the shipping needed to place such a force in Turkey and maintain it thereafter would have caused Douglas MacArthur's Philippine invasion of 1944 to be postponed or the smaller Formosa operation proposed by Admiral Chester Nimitz to be substituted.

Would this alternative to the record have been worth the price? The answer depends on whom would have been asked: those who would have paid

or those who would have benefited. Other answers would spring from evaluating the wisdom of the Western leaders who would have gained such different opportunities in 1945. In any case, the military endeavor proposed above was possible.

—BRIAN R. SULLIVAN, VIENNA, VIRGINIA

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# BATTLE OF THE ATLANTIC

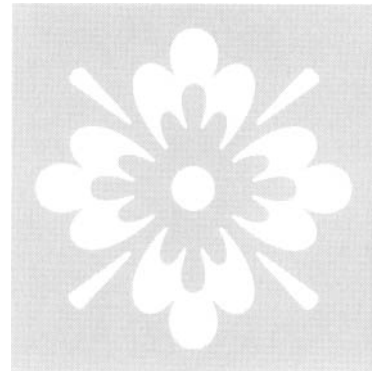
## Has the significance of the Battle of the Atlantic been exaggerated?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the Allies were able to replace lost shipping rapidly and develop new antisubmarine technologies.

**Viewpoint:** No, the Battle of the Atlantic was decisive because its outcome determined not only the survival of Britain but also the ability of the Allies to conclude the war in Europe successfully.

The Battle of the Atlantic (1939–1945) is commonly described as a decisive race between the ability of Admiral Karl Dönitz's submarine wolf packs to sink merchant tonnage and the Allies' ability to build new ships and successfully devise antisubmarine tactics. Yet, the basic German *Unterseeboot* (U-boat), the Type VII, was increasingly obsolescent, while Adolf Hitler's policies and interservice rivalries kept its numbers low. "Special intelligence," (the Ultra codebreaking,) made possible regular reading of the communications of the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy). The undersea campaign was nevertheless for two years a focal point of British, U.S., and Canadian naval efforts. If no convoy ever turned back under attack, the losses suffered were nonetheless evidence that successful escort demanded purpose-built ships, experienced crews, and more aircraft than the masters of strategic bombardment were initially willing to make available.

On the other side of the ledger a significant body of evidence points to a certain exaggeration, by both sides, of the significance of the U-boat campaign. In strategic contexts, Dönitz sought to do too many things with too few boats, consistently transferring them from sector to sector and theater to theater. German commitment to operational attrition led to a neglect of the possibilities offered by concentrating on strategically critical choke points. Nor did the Germans seek to improve boats that had at best limited capacity for upgrading. Technological quick fixes such as the snorkel seem more deadly in retrospect than they were effective in practice. The successes U-boats achieved depended less on their own capabilities than on windows of opportunity opened by Allied shortcomings whose eventual remedying was beyond German control.





**Viewpoint:  
Yes, the Allies were able to replace  
lost shipping rapidly and develop  
new antisubmarine technologies.**

The Battle of the Atlantic (1939–1945), along with the Battle of Britain (July–September 1940) and the Battle for North Africa (June 1940 – May 1943), have become part of the “matter of Britain”—or at least modern Britain. They form a triptych of a heroic last stand in the defense of civilization by an empire stripped of its external resources and reduced to its own spirit, courage, and ingenuity. The crews of merchant ships who sailed in the face of German *Unterseeboots* (U-boats), the “boffins” of Bletchley House and elsewhere who broke codes and designed strategies, the officers and men of the Royal Navy who kept sea-lanes open whatever the cost—they became heroes who turned the tide of World War II at its most critical point. Had the Battle of the Atlantic gone to Admiral Karl Dönitz and his submarine wolf packs, D-Day (6 June 1944) could have been postponed for years, the Grand Alliance might have collapsed in the absence of a second front, and Britain, faced with starvation, may well have sought terms.

It is a picture sufficiently inspiring, and frightening, to have been spared for practical purposes the revisionism that increasingly permeates the study of World War II. Yet, should the Battle of the Atlantic be so privileged? Was in fact the prospect of Allied defeat as great as the myth insists? Several factors suggest the legitimacy of modifying conventional wisdom on the subject. First is the numerical and technological weakness of the U-boat arm. At its peak strength fewer than a hundred boats could be deployed in the Atlantic at any one time—a number constantly reduced by calls for U-boats in other theaters. The subs themselves were obsolescent, with limited endurance and relatively few torpedoes. They were controlled from land through a communications system that was comprehensively compromised by Allied intelligence. The strategy for their use emphasized tonnage sunk, as opposed to concentrating on surge operations against maritime choke points, to maximize the advantages of limited numbers. Nor did Dönitz significantly revise either his strategy or operational concepts in light of changing circumstances. His aphoristic belief that a U-boat had no more reason to fear an airplane than a mole had to be frightened of a crow may have been credible in 1940, when even Avro Anson’s were few and far between. In the days of Leigh-Light Wellingtons and

VLR Liberators, the mantra had a distinctly hollow ring. Dönitz was similarly arrogant in his refusal to consider the possibility that German codes had been compromised. After three years of war, such an assumption was a denial of common sense that cost too many of the U-boat arm’s best crews and captains. Nor was Dönitz particularly interested in technical innovation. The *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) ended the war still depending on the Type VIIIs and Type IXs of 1940. The vaunted, much-feared snorkel was a technical stepchild, far less effective operationally than its postwar reputation indicates. The U-boats, in short, were an obliging enemy. In too many crucial ways they made precisely the mistakes the Allies would have wished.

To a significant degree as well, the U-boat successes reflected Allied shortcomings. Overreliance on asdic (sonar), too few escorts, poor tactics, lack of long-range aircraft—these and similar shortcomings had in common that their correction lay entirely within Allied control. The Royal Canadian Navy’s fighting power was improved with training and experience. The U.S. Navy modified its initial emphasis on offensive patrolling in favor of convoys for coastal as well as transatlantic shipping. Aircraft were reassigned from other missions. New escorts were built and manned. Germany could do nothing about any of these developments. Indeed, the attritional nature of the campaign Dönitz waged facilitated Allied adaptation by eschewing the possibility of an overwhelming blow, an undersea blitz whose shock effect would have inhibited prompt, effective response. In effect the *Kriegsmarine* conducted an antisubmarine warfare school for its enemies, giving them time to improve and adjust to every change in the course of operations.

Third comes the feasibility of the U-boats’ objective: cutting Britain’s sea trade and communications by sinking ships. As early as the spring of 1941 Britain was adjusting import requirements and shipping patterns, while the United States was beginning its undeclared war with the *Kriegsmarine*. Preparations for Operation Barbarossa (the German invasion of Russia) had reduced the resources available for U-boat construction and for developing a comprehensive air/sea antishipping campaign, as opposed to relying on a single dimension and primary weapons system. During 1941 Britain lost only about 2.1 million tons of shipping to U-boats. Reducing imports and rationalizing working patterns in ports still dominated by prewar trades-union rules generated an equivalent saving of about 3 million shipping tons. Another 1.2 million tons of new ship construc-



## CONVOY HX 84

As the thirty-eight merchant vessels of Convoy HX 84 steamed through the Atlantic on the evening of 5 November 1940, they were attacked by the German pocket battleship Admiral Scheer. While the convoy attempted to escape, its sole escort, the aged cruiser *Jervis Bay*, sailed into battle with the more powerful German warship. Fogarty Fegen, captain of the *Jervis Bay*, was awarded the Victoria Cross posthumously for his heroic action.

LONDON, November 12—Sinking and afire from stem to stern but with her guns blazing to the last, the 14,164-ton armed British merchant cruiser *Jervis Bay* fought a German warship at dusk last Tuesday. . . .

Twenty-nine of the freighters escaped and twenty-four reached a British port today. The fate of the nine others is uncertain. All may have been sent to the bottom after the destruction of the *Jervis Bay*. . . .

The German high command said the entire convoy had been destroyed, but the *Jervis Bay*, fighting as gallantly as the armed merchant cruiser *Fawalpindi* had done against the *Deutschland* last winter, sacrificed herself to allow nearly three-fourths of the vessels to escape in the gathering gloom.

Details of the action were told by some of the men, who, aboard the freighters in convoy, watched the *Jervis Bay* steaming out from the line to meet the powerful raider. In peace time the *Jervis Bay* sailed between England and Australia carrying freight and the poorest classes of immigrants.

British and foreign vessels in the convoy, eyewitnesses recounted, followed one another across the calm sea. It had been a perfect day. Just as darkness was gathering the silence was shattered by a distant explosion. Then came the scream of a shell

from below the horizon. It fell a few yards from a ship.

The shell was followed by another. Soon the silhouette of a warship emerged and the firing grew more intense. Immediately the order to scatter was given and, as the ships obeyed, the raider began to concentrate on the *Rangitiki*, the largest vessel in the convoy.

The raider stood off about seven or eight miles as she poured shell after shell in the direction of the *Rangitiki*. Suddenly, when it seemed that the merchantman could no longer escape the devastating fire, the *Jervis Bay* steamed straight out in front of her, turned slightly and raced toward the attacking ship.

The crew of the *Jervis Bay* must have known that she stood little chance against the raider's superior armament, but they manned their guns and blazed away furiously, drawing away fire from the *Rangitiki*.

As the convoy ships disappeared one by one into the safety of the night, the *Jervis Bay* fought grimly on. The battle did not last long. The *Jervis Bay*, battered from stem to stern, began to burn. Soon she was blazing. Still her last remaining gun could be heard barking defiantly between the thunderous explosions of the raider's heavy guns.

Full details on what happened then are not available. The Admiralty said that nearly two hours after the beginning of the engagement an explosion was seen aboard the *Jervis Bay*. . . .

Source: New York Herald Tribune, 13 November 1940.

tion was launched during the year, with 7 million tons on order in U.S. shipyards.

Despite some spectacular tactical successes, U-boat operations in 1941 fell far short of mounting anything resembling a decisive threat to Britain's Atlantic trade. Adolf Hitler's declaration of war on the United States in December 1941 opened a new operational sector. In the first eight months of 1942, more than three million tons of shipping were lost in U.S. waters—including many tankers, whose absence restricted Allied opera-

tions. By year's end, however, almost two-thirds of the tanker tonnage had been replaced. Alternate routing of oil shipments, plus moderate rationing, made up for most of the specific U.S. deficits. American shipyards alone in 1943 launched more than two million tons of tankers—part of a general pattern of literally building ships faster than they could be sunk by the increasingly obsolescent methods of the Kriegsmarine.

If there was a crisis in the Battle of the Atlantic during 1943, it was specifically Brit-

ish. By late 1942 the escorts seemed well on their way to dominating the U-boats in the middle and eastern Atlantic. North African operations of 1942–1943, however, strained both Britain’s shipping resources and raw-material reserves. Withdrawing escort ships for Operation Torch meant that transatlantic convoys had relatively less protection. Finally, most of the new ship construction was American or Canadian, but most of the vessels sunk were British.

Seen in hindsight, the epic convoy battles of that period were no more than a tactical problem, quickly overcome by material and technical means, more escorts and aircraft, improved radar and electronics, and the rebreaking of a temporarily lost U-boat cipher. The ratio of U-boats lost to tonnage sunk grew so quickly that Dönitz withdrew his hard-hammered boats in May 1943. From his perspective at least, the Battle of the Atlantic was over.

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#### Viewpoint:

**No, the Battle of the Atlantic was decisive because its outcome determined not only the survival of Britain but also the ability of the Allies to conclude the war in Europe successfully.**

The Battle of the Atlantic (1939–1945) is the name given to the bitter, highly complex, and long, drawn-out struggle between Axis (principally German) and Allied navies for control of the Atlantic sea-lanes. The *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) tried to prevent the passage of supplies across the ocean while the Allies, principally the British Royal Navy, Royal Canadian Navy, and later the U.S. Navy, fought to keep the supply lines open. Britain, an island nation, depended for survival on the flow of goods in thousands of Allied and neutral cargo ships. German victory depended on their *Unterseeboots* (U-boats) sinking more cargo ships than could be replaced. The significance of this *guerre de course* (war against trade) is demonstrated by the tenacity and the resources with which it was fought on each side. It was, indeed, the longest running battle of World War II. Beginning with the outbreak of war on 1 September 1939, the battle lasted five years and eight months, ending only with Germany’s surrender on 8 May 1945.

The consequences of failure for both sides were so severe because there was more at stake

than just Britain’s survival. In many ways the outcome of World War II in Europe hinged on the naval campaign in the Atlantic. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941 and then declared war on the United States that December, Britain assumed a larger strategic role. The island became a base of support for supply shipments to Russia and for Allied operations in North Africa and the Mediterranean, a platform for the strategic bombing campaign against the continent, and, finally, a staging area for the invasion of France. U-boats continued to threaten these operations to the end.

Clay Blair’s recent two-volume revisionist work, *Hitler’s U-Boat War* (1996, 1998), misguidedly minimizes the decisive significance of the Battle of the Atlantic by suggesting that the outcome was never really in doubt and that Germany never came close to winning with its inferior vessels, weapons, and productive capacity. Blair holds that U-boat successes have been greatly exaggerated, German technology was flawed, and the famed prowess of German submariners has been overrated. He even discounts wartime improvements in German submarine technology, challenging the prevailing view that had the war on the continent dragged on a little longer, new U-boat types could have posed a significant threat in 1945.

With undue emphasis on self-defeating German weaknesses, Blair portrays the Nazi effort as inevitably doomed by America’s axiomatic productive capacity. At best, in this view, the U-boat campaign merely delayed the arrival of goods and supplies to the Allies by forcing them to adopt the time-consuming expedient of gathering merchant ships into convoys sailing at the speed of the slowest vessel in the group. At the mere threat of sinkings, Blair argues, the Allies expended vast resources on warships for convoy protection, as well as on other antisubmarine countermeasures. In reality, according to Blair, 99 percent of all ships in convoys reached their destinations. Statistics derived from average losses covering the entire war, however, do not reflect the severity of the situation at any particular moment. Most merchant ship losses occurred before 1943, most U-boat losses after that. A different picture of merchant ship arrivals emerges from those waiting anxiously on the dock before spring 1943.

Blair’s use of hindsight statistics masks the ferocious struggle in the Atlantic. Both sides were acutely aware that they began the battle with forces inadequate to the task. As the war progressed, each sought to overcome deficiencies, but the rapid pace of advances on one side were swiftly met by countermeasures on the other, the advantage swinging back and forth with the outcome much in doubt until signifi-



*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

cant Allied successes in April and May 1943. Not until then did American productivity begin to have a real effect, and yet U-boats remained a threat, a force to guard against even in British home waters. The snorkel-equipped U-boats of the last year of the war were only suppressed by vast air and naval resources. The battle was one of tactics, strategy, and technology, in which all the weapons of a modern industrial war were gradually brought to bear, and success was not guaranteed to either side.

Germany attacked Atlantic shipping with warships, other surface raiders, aircraft, and mines. By far the most important and effective weapon, however, was the U-boat, operating for the entire war under the direction of Admiral Karl Dönitz, head of the U-boat force and (after January 1943) commander in chief of the Kriegsmarine. In 1939 Dönitz had only fifty-seven operational U-boats at his command, instead of the three hundred he believed necessary to defeat Britain. Not until war broke out was U-boat construction accelerated. At that point twenty-nine new submarines a month were authorized, twenty-five more than before. The Type VIIC U-boats formed the backbone of Dönitz's fleet,

eventually accounting for some 700 of the nearly 1,170 U-boats built. At 750 tons and 220 feet in length, they carried 14 torpedoes and had deck and anti-aircraft guns. They were powered by diesel-electric engines that gave a maximum surface speed of seventeen knots, faster than most Allied convoy escorts in the early years of the war. These U-boats could crash dive in thirty seconds, reach depths of 300 feet or more, and move underwater at a top speed of eight knots when powered by electric motors. The Type VIIC had a range of 6,500 miles but could only stay at sea for a little more than a month without refueling. The problem of limited range was addressed by efforts to refuel and resupply at sea, at first from surface vessels and later from specially designed supply submarines.

In spite of their general reliability and sturdy construction, Dönitz's U-boats had weaknesses. Like all other submarines of the time, they were little changed from those of World War I. Not true submarines, they were rather submersible ocean-going torpedo boats, with a limited capacity to remain submerged and with underwater movement handicapped by slow speed. Every time it surfaced to recharge its bat-

teries the U-boat became vulnerable to detection, especially from increasing Allied air patrols. Faulty magnetic detonators on German torpedoes, and trouble with depth settings, reduced the U-boats' effectiveness until these problems were finally solved in 1942. In general, Germany trailed Allied developments in electronic equipment. On one hand, while U-boats had excellent hydrophones for passive underwater listening, they were not equipped with sonar and they never received an adequate search radar. On the other hand, they kept up the pressure on advances in Allied radar with ever-better search receivers and reflective paints to absorb sonar waves. While the Allies made better use of their scientific resources than the Germans, at the time those resources were stretched to the limit in the effort to keep one step ahead of Nazi science.

Additional weaknesses were inflicted on Dönitz's U-boat campaign from higher authority. Afraid of bringing neutral America into the war by unrestricted submarine warfare, as had happened in 1917, Adolf Hitler at first imposed such stringent rules of engagement that the U-boats' usefulness as commerce raiders was hampered. On several occasions, too, he interfered in Dönitz's operations directly, reducing effectiveness in the Atlantic by diverting many U-boats to Norway, Gibraltar, and the Mediterranean. Finally, in the competition for scarce resources—especially armor plate—the navy usually lagged behind both the army and air force. Hitler's lack of interest in the maritime war, and his consequent failure to provide adequate resources to the navy, accounted for many of its deficiencies.

Dönitz sought to overcome all of these weaknesses with bold new tactics, and in this he had a major advantage over the Allies. Between the wars he had actively prepared for a new submarine war by creating a doctrine for his U-boats, refining it in extensive trials, and training his small force in its use. Realizing that lone U-boats could not succeed against convoys protected by escorts, Dönitz planned to deploy them in groups known as wolf packs. By maintaining direct radio contact with each submarine, Dönitz could spread them across the ocean sealanes in long patrol lines, reducing the problem of finding targets. Once a U-boat spotted a convoy and informed headquarters, Dönitz radioed all other U-boats within range to converge for mass attacks. Night surface attacks by a coordinated group of U-boats was the essence of wolf-pack operations, and they were eventually highly successful in overwhelming escorts and sinking merchant ships.

With ill-advised confidence, Britain relied almost exclusively on improved asdic (sonar) and

convoying to defeat any new U-boat threat. The failure to invest in escorts to protect the convoys, and other vessels suited to antisubmarine warfare, was a costly mistake only slowly reversed by an intensive building program. Lack of numbers also assured the initial failure of poorly conceived tactics. Weak and unpracticed hunter-killer groups were sent out in costly and usually futile attempts to locate and sink U-boats. Even if contact was made, the British depth-charge, the principal antisubmarine weapon, was little improved since the last war and had only a small lethal radius. Reluctance to allocate sufficient air power to antisubmarine patrols further hampered the British effort. As a result of these weaknesses, after only a year and a half of war, and even before Dönitz had the U-boats launch massed attacks, his campaign had succeeded in cutting goods reaching Britain from the 1939 import requirement of fifty-five million tons to an annualized rate of only twenty-eight million tons. In addition to cargoes lost between 1939 and late 1941, Dönitz's subs were sinking ships at twice the rate of new construction and it was not at all clear that Britain could hold out much longer.

When Hitler unexpectedly followed Japan's lead, declaring war on the United States on 11 December 1941, the U.S. Navy faced many of the same weaknesses that had hampered the British, yet they were slow to apply the lessons of convoying and appreciate the futility of weak hunter-killer groups. Lack of preparedness was further exacerbated by the demands of a two-ocean war. Dönitz took immediate advantage of the American confusion by launching a highly successful attack on cargo ships sailing independently and unescorted along the American Atlantic, Gulf, and Caribbean coasts. Between December 1941 and August 1942, U-boats sank about six hundred Allied ships—approximately three million tons—coming close to Dönitz's goal of seven hundred thousand tons a month, before convoying made these operations too costly. At this point even the U.S. Navy's chief antisubmarine warfare expert believed the Battle of the Atlantic was being lost. In late 1942 and early 1943, returning to attack convoys in the North Atlantic, Dönitz's wolf packs secured more victories. In the first three months of 1943, with 240 U-boats operational, 208 merchant ships were sunk, causing a shipping shortage so severe it affected the conduct of the war and jeopardized plans for an invasion of Western Europe in 1944.

The U-boats had reached their high point, however, and in April 1943 the weight of Allied forces proved irresistible. When Allied leaders met at Casablanca in January, they had identified victory in the Atlantic as their top priority. By then they fully realized the wider significance of

the campaign and fully mobilized all antisubmarine warfare measures. Defeat of the U-boats took convoying, more and better convoy escorts, escort aircraft carriers and land-based aircraft to provide coverage across the entire Atlantic, effective tactics for support and hunter-killer groups, new weapons, and the eventual flood of new American construction. It also took an ever improving range of electronic devices for the location of U-boats, such as sonar, radar, and direction finders. Dönitz's reliance on radio communication laid his U-boats open to detection by information—known as Ultra—derived from codebreaking. Ultra frequently enabled the Allies to divert convoys out of the path of German patrol lines and later to direct hunter-killer groups onto U-boat targets. Too much focus on the accomplishments of Allied Ultra, however, has overshadowed the good use the Germans also made of radio intelligence. They, too, broke naval codes, and the same radio messages warning Allied convoys to divert their course alerted the U-boats to their location. The complexity of the Battle of the Atlantic suggests, contrary to the view of Blair, that it was not easily won.

The numbers prove it was not. Approximately 73 percent of the 860 U-boats that went on at least one patrol were sunk. Of the nearly 41,000 Germans engaged in these operations, 27,378 were killed. Among the victorious Allies the losses were even heavier: the total of ships of all types lost to U-boats was about three thousand, or fourteen million tons. It is impossible to know how many people died in the campaign, though the British merchant navy lost 30,248 men and the Royal Navy lost 73,642, mostly in the Atlantic. The Royal Canadian Navy lost 1,965 men. The U.S. Navy lost somewhat under 2,000 men in the Atlantic, and the U.S. merchant marine suffered 6,833 dead. Each of the Allied air forces also lost planes and men in the Atlantic: British losses numbered in the thousands.

This high price was paid because the Battle of the Atlantic was a necessary victory for the Allies; without it their final victory in Europe would have been in doubt. As British wartime prime minister Winston Churchill noted, “The Battle of the Atlantic was the dominating factor all through the war. Never for one moment

could we forget that everything happening elsewhere, on land, at sea, or in the air, depended ultimately on its outcome.”

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# BOMBER OFFENSIVE

## Was the Allied bombing of enemy cities such as Dresden, Hamburg, and Tokyo necessary?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, Allied incendiary attacks against large urban centers were necessary to destroy valuable industrial and communications centers.

**Viewpoint:** No, the Allied aerial onslaught against enemy cities was not only ineffective, it also provoked a counterproductive moral backlash—predicted by critics at the time—that has tainted the Western use of airpower ever since.

The distinguishing characteristic of the air campaign waged by the Western Allies during World War II was the massive bombing of urban centers. The approach grew out of a desire to avoid the attritional stalemate of World War I (1914–1918), combined with a faith in the power of technology to bring cut-price victory by directly attacking an enemy's economy and morale. That concept was, however, originally defined in terms of the ability of large formations of aircraft to penetrate enemy airspaces in daylight and accurately strike particular targets. In that respect there was little to choose between the peacetime doctrines of the Royal Air Force (RAF) and U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF).

Experience demonstrated almost immediately the near impossibility of mounting unescorted daylight raids against a coordinated antiaircraft and fighter-plane defense informed by radar. The British shift to night area bombardment required near-religious faith in the power of indiscriminate blasting to cripple the economy and break the morale of a highly developed, strongly nationalist state with a totalitarian government. The USAAF, while never abandoning the principle of precision bombing, found itself engaging in city-busting because its preferred alternative was feasible only episodically in the face of German flak and fighters.

The apparent resilience of the German economy and morale led to a steady reduction of the common denominator of the Combined Bomber Offensive. City destruction, if it did not quite become an end in itself, was a means to other ends. It showed up on photographs, could be described in news stories, and justified bomber losses to the crews. Above all, urban destruction became something the air forces knew how to do. By the time Japan came within range, it was sufficiently part of the USAAF's repertoire that it became the first option when poor weather and the technical problems of the B-29s limited the results of precision attacks.



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, Allied incendiary attacks  
against large urban centers were  
necessary to destroy valuable  
industrial and communications  
centers.**

Gulio Douhet, in *Command of the Air* (1942), envisioned large concentrations of bombers flying deep into enemy territory under the cover of darkness and delivering a conflagration so great that the will of the people to resist would have been disintegrated in the flames. Douhet believed that bombing civilian population centers would prove a quick and decisive way to end war. Yet, questions arose concerning the morality of targeting civilians to achieve a military objective. Likewise, many have criticized the Douhet-like mass-area bombings of Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo that caused horrendous loss of civilian life. In these three air raids Allied air forces targeted the cities correctly as military and industrial centers. Although they chose to use incendiary bombs that would create massive collateral damage as necessary to attain their military objectives, they did not anticipate the catastrophic firestorms that ensued.

By 1943 the Anglo-American bombing operations had produced little effect. Exorbitant British aircrew losses provoked the Royal Air Force (RAF) to switch from daytime attacks to nighttime operations, which called for a greater aggregate of bombers carrying more explosives to achieve the same results as in daytime. Thus nighttime air raids produced more collateral damage—because of the obvious decrease in precision targeting—than those flown during the day. The U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) had become rigidly indoctrinated with the idea that only daylight precision bombardment could prove decisive in war. Foremost in such a strategy was the selection of individual targets whose destruction would hinder the ability of the enemy to continue the fight. The collective results of destroying hundreds of industries; food, medical, and military supplies; lines of communication; and raw materials would force the enemy to sue for peace. Lessening collateral damage was not an overriding concern with American air planners, even though daylight precision bombing exacted a high cost on American bomber crews and caused less loss of civilian life than the nighttime raids of the RAF. The effectiveness of this air strategy, however, had been hindered by bad weather, German air superiority over Europe, and the more pressing need to support Allied ground operations in North Africa.

A new directive known as Pointblank, coming after the North Africa campaign, called for the joint destruction of the German ability to continue

the war. Although the order stated that achieving air superiority and destroying vital industrial centers were the primary objectives, the directive was sufficiently vague to allow for mass-area, as well as precision, attacks.

Throughout the war Hamburg had significant military importance. It had produced the superbattleship *Bismarck* and about two hundred *Unterseeboote* (U-boats) by mid 1943. It also had several important industrial facilities in Germany's second most populated urban area. The RAF, under Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris, had bombed Hamburg before, but little came of the ninety-eight previous raids. Life in Hamburg continued as usual. On 27 May 1943 British Bomber Command issued an order that called for the total destruction of Hamburg. They reasoned that the ruin not only would greatly reduce German war-fighting capability, but also the psychological effect of mass-area bombing would prove that further resistance was futile.

The Battle of Hamburg began on the night of 24 July 1943. A total of 791 RAF bombers, mostly four-engine types, made use of a new military technology intended to disrupt German antiaircraft and nighttime interception capabilities. Known as *Window*, this new technology dispersed small pieces of metallic foil throughout the skies to confuse German radar systems. The diversion was a success. Only twelve bombers were lost and a third of the entire force dropped their payloads not far from the target area, the city center. Fires from the incendiary explosives used in the attack were still raging when 252 American B-17s returned during the daylight hours of 25–26 July to precision bomb the submarine barracks and aircraft manufacturing facilities. The American flyers had little success with their precision bombings because clouds of smoke covered the targets. The Americans learned that they could not follow an RAF area bombing with precision attacks—a lesson they had forgotten by the Dresden raid in February 1945.

The RAF followed the American bombing runs with a devastating raid on the night of 27 July. Incendiaries from the 787 bombers hit in a peculiarly concentrated formation about two miles east of the town center. A firestorm erupted. Winds gusted up to 150 miles per hour and razed approximately thirteen square miles of Hamburg. Many of the 42,000 killed in the firestorm died from carbon monoxide asphyxiation and crumbling buildings while hiding in underground shelters. After the firestorm, RAF bombers returned on 29 July and 2 August with more than 700 bombers each to finish the job. Hamburg had been mostly evacuated by 29 July, however, and heavy winds scattered the bombs dropped on 2 August, greatly reducing their aggregate effect. Total loss of life reached 45,000 in the battle, only 1 percent resulting from American precision raids. After receiving news of the raid, Berlin city officials

*"Image not available for copyright reasons"*

prepared anxiously for the same thing to happen to their city, and several high-ranking German officials, including *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) commander Hermann Göring, were stunned at the loss of civilian life. Yet, Bomber Command had targeted Hamburg primarily for military and industrial purposes. Secondarily, they had hoped that the destruction of a major urban area might contribute to a reduced desire to continue the fight; however, Allied intelligence noticed no marked psychological despair.

During the meeting between Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin at Yalta in early February 1945, Stalin asked for Anglo-American bombings of German lines of communication and points of embarkation for the Eastern Front. The bombing of Dresden on 13–15 February 1945 was the direct result of that request. Nonetheless, most scholars have blamed Churchill as the primary instigator of the Dresden raid. Churchill had become enamored with the idea of area bombing of cities as a means of diplomacy and a quicker way to end the war. He asked Harris and Bomber Command to begin preparation for a raid on Dresden that would destroy its centers of communication and

create a major psychological blow against the German people.

American air planners had come out decidedly against attacks such as those to be carried on Dresden. Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) had been preparing a plan known as *Clarion* that called for the aerial destruction of German transportation, especially those in towns and cities. Also, SHAEF had declared that such an operation could only have favorable psychological effects collateral to the bombing objective. U.S. air chief Henry H. "Hap" Arnold and his field commanders were greatly concerned about the morality of hitting civilian centers and the reputation they would have for becoming a nation that "terror bombed" during the war. Although Arnold allowed the bombing of cities to pinpoint specific communication or industrial centers, according to Conrad C. Crane in *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (1993), he did not believe "the promiscuous bombing of German cities for the purpose of causing civilian confusion" was acceptable. Most high-ranking American air commanders, including Arnold and his air commander in Europe, Carl A. Spaatz, believed the best way to attack German transportation was through strategic attacks on Germany's oil refineries and reserves. Notwithstanding, contrary to some earlier scholarship, Dresden possessed industrial targets worth hitting and had become a vital transportation center for the Eastern Front.

On 13 February 1945 the RAF hit Dresden's city center with 772 four-engine bombers, followed by the Americans, who hit the marshalling yards with 527 four-engine types. Both raids delivered a total of about 3,900 tons of high explosives and incendiaries. Yet, when the American bombers reached their target over Dresden, the area had been clouded over by thick smoke from another unexpected firestorm that engulfed the city center. Thick smoke covered most of the Americans' target site; the bombs were scattered and stoked the fires the British bombs had set earlier. Soviet reports, during the height of the propaganda-rich Cold War, placed Dresden's death toll at 135,000. Post-Cold War estimates, bound to be far more accurate, range the death toll between 25,000 and 35,000. Furthermore, Dresden has received much more publicity and historical debate than perhaps has been warranted. U.S. newspapers printed stories after the raid that the USAAF had begun terror bombings to crush the will of the German people. Nothing could have been further from the truth. While Bomber Command was guilty of seeking a psychological solution—it was probably easier for them to rationalize given that they had endured the London "blitz" in 1940–1941—USAAF commanders were against hitting any population

center unless it had valuable industrial targets, and then only with precision tactics. The Soviets seized an opportunity, however, to exploit an accidental conflagration to the best of their political abilities in the years following World War II.

After the raid on Dresden, Arnold correctly blamed Bomber Command for the firestorm that ensued. He could not do the same, however, when a greater firestorm burned Tokyo. The idea for incendiary attacks against Japan began before the war. As Japanese-American relations broke down in the months preceding World War II, Roosevelt, a hearty advocate of strategic airpower, sided with Arnold that the best way to deter Japanese aggression in the Pacific was to base American B-17s on the Philippine Islands as a constant deterrent threat of firebombings against the Japanese homeland. A major portion of Japanese cities had been constructed from a wood-bamboo-plaster composite and even their major industrial facilities had been surrounded by wooden residential structures. Furthermore, much of Japan's war-fighting ability came from these areas in the form of cottage industry. Unlike Germany, where industrial centers were set apart from civilian population centers, in Japan the civilian and military apparatus was closely integrated. Thus incendiary raids against the Japanese became a credible, yet unsuccessful, deterrent to Japanese aggression.

After trials against mock Japanese villages in southern California and western Utah, incendiary raids became the strategy of choice in taking the war to the Japanese homeland. The Joint Chiefs, who retained full command over the B-29s based in the Pacific, grew tired of the heavy losses the Twentieth Air Force had suffered in precision raids, with few tangible successes, over Manchuria and Japan. The B-29s experienced an odd jet stream at high altitudes that ruined engines, increased air speed, and scattered bombs away from primary target areas. After the failure of Twentieth Air Force commander Curtis E. LeMay's bombers to destroy the Masashima Aircraft Factory on 4 March 1945, despite all efforts to better train his aircrews, he changed his basic air strategy from precision attacks to mass incendiary bombings. He knew that industries concealed within the urban matrix would become engulfed with flames as the city burned. Yet, this was not a decision he made lightly.

On the night of 9 March 1945, LeMay's new plan for destroying Japanese industry went into action. Bomber Command launched 334 B-29s loaded with a total of two thousand tons of incendiary bombs. The three wings flew between 4,900 and 9,200 feet when they released their bombs over Tokyo. Immediately a fire-

storm erupted. Aircrews reported that the glow of the flames could still be seen 150 miles away from Tokyo. The Shitamachi district—the densely populated downtown suburb that had been the target—was mostly destroyed. Sixteen square miles had been flattened, one million left homeless, and more than 83,000 killed and 40,000 wounded. No other single air assault was more costly in loss of life and material—not even the atomic bombings of Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945).

The results of these raids were horrendous and unfortunate. However, none were intended. All of these cities contained legitimate military targets throughout the war. Moreover, the decision to use incendiaries arose from the need not only to make the mission more survivable, but also to create the necessary destruction to attain prescribed military objectives. Certainly, hope prevailed that massive destruction could have created an equally large psychological blow that could have ended the war sooner. Trying to achieve peace through military means, however, even against densely populated industrial centers such as Hamburg, Dresden, and Tokyo, was never any more immoral than the war itself. The immorality of war mainly rests on those who begin the conflict, not those forced to end it.

—MICHAEL PERRY MAY, KANSAS  
STATE UNIVERSITY



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the Allied aerial onslaught against enemy cities was not only ineffective, it also provoked a counterproductive moral backlash—predicted by critics at the time—that has tainted the Western use of airpower ever since.**

Texts used in 1934 at the American Air Corps Tactical School (ACTS) acknowledged that cities were vulnerable targets that were hard to defend from aerial bombardment, but noted that world opinion was strongly opposed to such use of airpower. The next year lesson plans added that direct attacks on the civil population were also inefficient, especially when compared to the air campaign envisioned by the precision doctrine being developed at ACTS. By 1939, texts stated bluntly, as cited in Conrad C. Crane's *Bombs, Cities, and Civilians: American Airpower Strategy in World War II* (1993), that a "Direct attack of the civilian populace . . . is rejected as an air objective due to humanitarian considerations." The bombing of cities in the early years



## RAID ON WILHELMSHAVEN

*On 26 February 1943 correspondent Walter Cronkite accompanied airmen on a raid against Wilhelmshaven, Germany. Below is a portion of his report.*

American Flying Fortresses have just come back from an assignment to hell—a hell 26,000 feet above the earth, a hell of burning tracer bullets and bursting gunfire, of crippled Fortresses and burning German fighter planes, of parachuting men and others not so lucky. . . .

We fought off Hitler's fighters and dodged his guns. The Fortress I rode in came out without damage, but we had the element of luck on our side.

Other formations caught the blast of fighter blows and we watched Fortresses and Liberators plucked out of the formations around us.

We gave the ship repair yards and other installations at the great German submarine and naval base of the North Sea a most severe pasting. As we swept beyond the target and back over the North Sea from which we came we saw great pillars of smoke over the target area. . . .

Actually, the impressions of a first bombing mission are a hodge-podge of disconnected scenes like a poorly edited home movie—bombs falling past you from the formation above, a crippled bomber with smoke pouring from one motor limping along thousands of feet below, a tiny speck in the sky that grows closer and finally becomes an

enemy fighter, a Focke-Wulf peeling off above you somewhere and plummeting down, shooting its way through the formation, your bombardier pushing a button as calmly as if he were turning on a hall light, to send our bombs on their way.

Our bombardier was First Lieutenant Albert W. Diefenbach, 26, of Washington, D.C. His job began at that thrilling moment when the bomb bay doors swing open on the lead ship on down the line to us.

That signaled that we were beginning our bomb run. Then we swept over Wilhelmshaven. There were broken clouds but through them there appeared a toy village below which was really a major seaport and I thought:

"Down there right now people are scurrying for shelters—which means interrupting work on vital submarines and ships and dock yards."

Lieutenant Diefenbach's left hand went out to the switch panel alongside him and almost imperceptibly he touched a button and said calmly over the communications system:

"Bombs away."

That was it. Our mission was accomplished—our bombs were on their way to Hitler.

*Source: The New York Times, 27 February 1943.*

of World War II reinforced the ACTS position. West Point lesson plans on raids on cities in the Sino-Japanese War (1937–1945) and Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) emphasized that although bombing destroyed much property and took many lives, its frightfulness gained little military advantage and seemed to stiffen resistance instead. The results of the German Blitz on London (The Battle of Britain, July–September 1940) only reinforced such observations and strengthened American resolve to avoid such tactics. Wartime U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) studies also emphasized that in a police state such as Nazi Germany, civilian attitudes and morale were too controlled to be vulnerable or a useful target.

By the end of the war, however, the Allied bombing of cities was commonplace. Though

the British conducted the longest campaign to "dehouse" workers in German cities, the USAAF participated with the Royal Air Force (RAF) in deadly attacks on Hamburg, Berlin, and Dresden, and even conducted its own comparable campaign against Japan. Nevertheless, the end of the war did not invalidate those earlier evaluations of the worth of aerial bombardment of civilian populations. It remained an inefficient and ineffective practice, and the backlash of international condemnation of its immorality has had important repercussions.

The British adopted their strategy aimed at destroying the morale of the civilian population, and especially industrial workers, by indiscriminate attacks on German cities in early 1942, not because that was perceived as the ideal target or approach.



With the limitations of night operations and available technology, that was the only realistic option available, especially with the domestic clamor to take some action against the enemy and to justify the massive expenditures on Bomber Command. The RAF worked diligently to perfect its bombing techniques, and with the use of radar and radio beacons managed to achieve respectable accuracy in poor-visibility conditions. It also demonstrated the potential to perform daylight precision bombing like the Americans, but General Sir Arthur "Bomber" Harris would never allow any major portion of his command to be diverted in such a way. Once the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) was virtually destroyed, and the RAF had perfected its bombing technology and tactics, there was no compelling reason not to shift to more precise daylight attacks that Germans such as Albert Speer knew were far more effective in degrading the Nazi ability to wage war. Instead, Harris continued to commit his resources to area raids that only assisted peripherally in the degradation of key-target systems. After the Hamburg firestorm (24 July 1943), Speer told Adolf Hitler that six more similar attacks would completely halt armaments production. That did not occur, however, and instead Germany had time to adjust and disperse industrial operations to lessen their future vulnerability and further reduce the effectiveness of area bombing. Though there is some evidence that the destruction wreaked on cities increased worker apathy, they stayed on the job, and the actual impact of the campaign is hard to measure, although there is plenty of data on the effect of USAAF precision attacks. If Bomber Command had seriously joined the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in their assault on oil and transportation targets beginning in mid 1944, the impact of those attacks on the German military and economy would have been accelerated, and the war might have ended earlier.

When the Americans in 1945, however, were faced with a similar situation as the RAF in 1942, with an expensive air force showing poor bombing results trying to hit specific objectives, they also resorted to mass night attacks on cities. The USAAF had invested almost \$4 billion in the B-29 program, but by 1945 there had been little useful return on that expenditure. Deficiencies in training and defects in hastily fielded technology contributed to the failure of precision bombing against Japan, but the main problem was weather. A combination of overcast skies and jetstream winds made high-altitude daylight accuracy impossible. Fearing that he would lose control of the heavy bombers to theater commanders, and therefore his chance to really show the war-winning capabilities of airpower, USAAF Commanding General Henry H. "Hap" Arnold decided to switch commanders of the main B-29 effort from the Mariana Islands. He replaced Haywood Hansell, one of the developers of precision bombing doctrine, with

Curtis E. LeMay, the USAAF's premier problem solver. LeMay replaced staff officers, upgraded training, refined maintenance procedures, and built new facilities, but nothing could change Japanese weather. He also knew that he could be relieved, too, if he did not get results. The flammability of Japanese cities was common knowledge, and LeMay decided to exploit that vulnerability with low-level incendiary attacks conducted at night to negate Japanese defenses. Obviously that would also degrade bombing accuracy, but districts selected to be burned out included key industrial targets that would be destroyed by spreading fires. Arnold and LeMay considered the operations a spectacular success, eventually incinerating about 180 square miles of some sixty-six Japanese cities. Though the targeting focus remained on military and industrial facilities, LeMay also took advantage of the "destruction bonus" of his tactics with a psychological warfare campaign. Leaflets were dropped on urban areas giving vague warnings of future attacks and advising citizens to move to the countryside. The terror generated by the fire raids and these warnings eventually drove more than eight million people to flee their homes. The first incendiary attack on Tokyo on the night of 9 March 1945 probably killed more than one hundred thousand civilians, and many times that number died in subsequent raids.

Despite the widespread destruction of the incendiary campaign, its worth is questionable. The Japanese economy was really strangled by the blockade, and war industries destroyed in urban areas were already failing because of a lack of raw materials. Though the B-29s contributed to the series of shocks that produced the Japanese surrender, they did not break enemy morale and perhaps could have been more effectively used. Better target intelligence, the use of escort fighters from Iwo Jima, and suppression of enemy air defenses might have allowed a return to daylight raids at a lower altitude away from winds. One study of the U.S. Strategic Bombing Survey concluded that strategic bombing would have been more profitable if directed at Japanese transportation, and Hansell argued after the war that electric power was the most vulnerable and efficient target system. He acknowledged that such a campaign might have taken more time, but that approach would have avoided the troubling moral questions raised by the fire raids. LeMay's resort to mass urban-area incendiary attacks made the decision to use atomic bombs much easier, since for key leaders such as George C. Marshall and Henry L. Stimson there could be nothing worse than the nightly conflagrations ignited by the Twentieth Air Force.

Although there was no widespread outcry in Allied countries during the war about the bombing of enemy cities, many were troubled by it. Many recent arguments emphasizing the immorality of

urban-area attacks were also evident in the 1940s in theological and pacifist journals. They were not the only elements of society against using such tactics. Though not willing to aid enemy propaganda by openly disagreeing with an ally, American airmen in Europe believed that the future moral backlash against bombing cities would negate any benefits from the unnecessary attacks. Planners complained that German morale was not susceptible to such an approach and “baby-killing” operations were not in keeping with American ideals. After Dwight D. Eisenhower ordered it to participate in Operation Thunderclap, the Eighth Air Force bombed the center of Berlin and hit marshaling yards as part of the Dresden raids (13–14 February 1945), but commander James H. “Jimmy” Doolittle resisted to the last minute. Even Ira C. Eaker, who had been enthusiastic about the results of the Hamburg firestorm in 1943, had changed his mind by 1945 to argue that “we should never allow the history of this war to convict us of throwing the strategic bomber at the man in the street.” When Carl A. Spaatz, commander of the U.S. Strategic Air Forces in Europe, was reassigned to oversee Pacific strategic air operations in July 1945, he received briefings from the Strategic Bombing Survey that RAF area bombing had little impact on German workers and may have actually unified them to work harder. Based on evaluation of that experience, Spaatz’s top priorities were to attack Japanese railways, aircraft production, and ammunition supplies, and he was appalled by LeMay’s devastating assault on cities. It was too late, however, to alter the course of the air war in the Pacific, which reached its climax against Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945).

Spaatz once tried to persuade Arnold to avoid joining British urban-area raids because “the RAF want very much to have the U.S. Air Forces tarred with the morale bombing aftermath which we feel will be terrific.” Such concerns were borne out after the war. Dresden is the best example of how attacks on cities, however well-justified at the time, could be counterproductive in the long run. The city did contain viable targets, and the Allies had grounds to believe they were responding to Russian requests to degrade German transportation in the region. The massive and indiscriminate two-day area raid, however, did surprisingly limited damage to key targets while German authorities on the scene estimated a civilian death toll of about thirty-five thousand. Reactions against the disproportionate application of force from the British public and in American command centers contributed directly to the cessation of strategic bombing in Europe, and Cold War distortions of the facts of the raid that vastly inflated casualty figures also helped

secure Dresden’s place as one of the most recognizable symbols of the evils of Western airpower.

At best, the bombing of cities was wasteful—at worst, it was counterproductive. Because of perceived time pressures, neither the British in 1942 nor the Americans in 1945 were willing to let expensive air forces stand idle while planners looked for the most efficient use for airpower. As Eaker and Spaatz feared, the legacy of the campaign against German and Japanese cities has been images of destruction that sometimes obscure more serious Axis transgressions, and have been resurrected in conflicts in Korea, Vietnam, and even Kosovo, by the international press, opposing leaders, and even among U.S. decision makers.

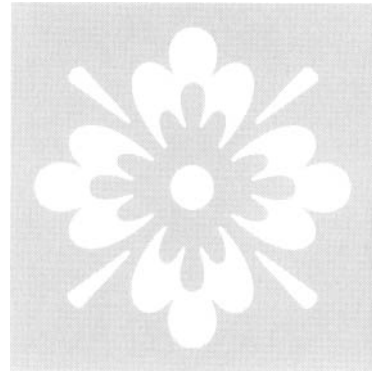
—CONRAD C. CRANE, U.S. MILITARY  
ACADEMY, WEST POINT

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# BOMBING OF CIVILIANS

## Was Allied and Axis utilization of strategic bombing in World War II based essentially on pragmatic considerations?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, while moral factors played a certain role in policy formation and target selection, the tendency on both sides was to extend the scope of bombing operations even at the cost of increasing civilian casualties and collateral destruction.

**Viewpoint:** No, the final incendiary and atomic attacks on Japan were an exception to an otherwise general effort to impose some restraints, however limited they may have been, on aerial bombardment.

The sense that the bombing of civilians during World War II was carried on without significant restraint by both sides requires evaluation on three levels. The first is the extent to which the air forces as institutions accepted the concept of unrestricted aerial warfare. The U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF), the Royal Air Force (RAF), and the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force), the principal participants, on the whole targeted civilians instrumentally rather than as ends in themselves. Even the RAF Bomber Command's selection of targets for their vulnerability to incendiary attack was predicated on making life unsustainable—"destabilizing and dehousing" the population as opposed to destroying it.

The argument that this was a distinction without a difference gains credibility the later in the war it is applied. By 1944 what happened to civilians was a matter of indifference to the hard-pressed bomber crews and their senior officers. At policy levels indifference reflected abstraction: focus was on tonnage dropped and missions flown. It also reflected ignorance—particularly in the United States, whose leaders had no experience of the effect of air raids. It also reflected the fact that British and American leaders were concerned with their own countries and peoples. The extent to which German civilians suffered was part of the price for keeping Adolf Hitler in power.

In the Far East, desperation was added to the mix. Racist desire to annihilate the Japanese "other" played no significant role outside the overheated imaginations of some postwar revisionists. What did influence the targeting of civilians was a growing sense that there was no feasible way to bring the war to a timely end, and without a bloodbath, in the face of unbending Japanese intransigence. Strategic bombardment was a way of showing the Japanese that they were helpless under the U.S. flail. Burn, starve, or surrender: the choice was theirs.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, while moral factors played a certain role in policy formation and target selection, the tendency on both sides was to extend the scope of bombing operations even at the cost of increasing civilian casualties and collateral destruction.**

In 1915, when German Zeppelin airships carried out the first long-range aerial-bombing raid against an enemy city, people were shocked, both in London, where the bombs fell, and around the world. A new element had been added to warfare. Civilians had been killed without warning in the streets of their own capital far from any battle zone. Much of the population was panicked and the cabinet met to consider the crisis. The initial shock soon wore off, however, and the British and French started to develop their own long-range bomber force. By 1917–1918 the Allies were regularly bombing Germany's western cities, and in 1917 Germany replaced its highly vulnerable airships with a fleet of more effective Gotha bombers for a renewed campaign against London.

The bombing campaigns of World War I produced more of a psychological reaction than a physical effect. Aircraft were small, slow, short-ranged, and had limited bomb loads. Bombers were vulnerable to enemy fighters by day and were scarcely able to be navigated at night. Technology imposed severe limits. The Germans had to call off their bombing campaign against Britain in 1918 because of heavy aircraft losses—not from combat but from the high accident rate of the overloaded biplane bombers. Casualties and actual damage from bombing were slight. A reported 1,393 Britons and 797 Germans died from aerial bombing. Still, the perception about the role of civilians in warfare had changed. World War I was the first modern mechanized total war: conflict was no longer seen as being only between opposing soldiers, but involved whole societies. The armies, navies, and air forces at the front were completely dependent upon huge industrial infrastructures. One could fairly ask who contributed more to the national war effort: the skilled workman producing machine guns and aircraft engines or the cannon-fodder infantryman in the trenches? For the first time the civilian war worker and his arms factory could be attacked and destroyed by aircraft. Rather than eliminate the big guns on the front lines by costly

frontal attack, nations could contemplate destroying the entire cannon factory hundreds of miles away, as well as the skilled workers that produced them.

By the end of World War I nations that had lost millions of men in battle contemplated desperate solutions to force their enemies out of the war. By late 1918 the British had produced a heavy bomber capable of attacking Berlin, and RAF officers considered dropping poison-gas bombs on the German capital to compel a surrender. The German Air Service developed new lightweight incendiary bombs with which they planned to set London ablaze. Indeed, an early form of deterrence set in as each side held back its approval for such bombing campaigns in consideration that their opponent was capable of inflicting severe retaliation. In any case, by 1918 the prewar moral barriers against attacking civilians in wartime had been dropped by all the major powers.

In the interwar period, two issues affected the views of military and political leaders of the major powers concerning policies on bombing civilians in wartime. The first was the rapid technological development of the airplane. In 1918 strategic bombing was barely feasible with the underpowered, fragile biplane of the era. Fifteen years later the rapid developments in aircraft technology made strategic bombing a realistic policy. Powerful and reliable engines became available; radio technology made bad weather and night flying commonplace; and all-metal aircraft with retractable landing gear entered production. By the early 1930s all the powers were designing or building fast, powerful, well-armed medium and heavy bombers capable of carrying bomb loads of several tons over long distances. Every major country had to take the issue of strategic bombing seriously.

The second major issue to dominate interwar thinking on air power was the memory of the carnage of World War I. Germany, France, Britain, Russia, and Italy had lost more than ten million men in the four years of stalemated trench warfare that characterized most of that war. A whole generation had been decimated. Political and military leaders looked for a way—any way—to avoid a repeat of similar casualties in any future war. Theorists such as Italian general Giulio Douhet provided a way out of the dilemma. In 1922 Douhet argued that a future war could be quickly and victoriously ended by massive aerial bombardment of enemy cities at the start of the conflict. He argued that no city could be effectively defended against aerial attack and that a fleet of bombers using high-explosives, gas, and incendiary bombs could attack the enemy's cit-

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

ies, inflict heavy civilian casualties, and quickly create a societal breakdown. In short order, the population would rise up, depose their government, and demand peace. While the concept appears brutal and barbaric, it was actually offered as a more humanitarian means of waging war. Instead of millions of men dying at the front in the course of a long war, tens of thousands of civilians would die and the war would be over in weeks. While such a concept appears shocking, many British, American, French, German, and Russian military leaders and thinkers who had experienced World War I viewed it as a far better strategy than repeating the carnage of 1914–1918. Douhet was not the only air-power theorist in this vein; there were many individuals in the Western nations who enthusiastically endorsed his position.

In the late 1930s, as the major powers built fleets of bombers capable of conducting large-scale bombing raids, air-force and other military leaders drew back from the idea of openly targeting civilians. One reason was that any nation that made civilians a primary target would be condemned as clearly violating international law. The other was fear of retaliation. The *Luftwaffe's* (German Air Force's) 1935 operational doctrine said that an air force should avoid targeting civilian morale partly because it violated international law, partly because it was not likely to be effective, and mainly because bombing enemy cities would

invite retaliation in kind. Other air forces also reconsidered Douhet's concepts and imagined the response if they attacked enemy civilians.

Western air forces, however, reserved the right to bomb facilities vital to an enemy's war effort. Arms factories, transportation infrastructure, and ports were considered legitimate military targets—even though bombing an arms factory or port would necessarily entail killing civilian workers and inflicting heavy collateral damage upon surrounding urban areas. Since World War I, war workers were not considered to be fully civilian. Some nonmilitary deaths were tolerable under international law as long as the primary intent of a bombing attack was not to terrorize civilians. The U.S. Army Air Corps created a strategic-bombing doctrine that emphasized paralyzing an enemy's industrial infrastructure by carefully targeting a few vital industries and facilities. Such an approach promised to cripple enemy production while keeping civilian casualties low. The Royal Air Force (RAF) had developed a doctrine in the 1920s and early 1930s that emphasized breaking enemy morale by bombing its cities. Nevertheless, by the late 1930s, British bombing doctrine generally paralleled the American approach in targeting specifically military industries and bases.

All of the combatant powers in World War II, save Japan, went to war with official policies of trying to limit civilian casualties in

strategic-bombing campaigns. When Japan attacked China in 1937, it had no inhibitions whatsoever about bombing undefended cities and inflicting massive civilian casualties in order to break Chinese morale. In contrast, when Germany invaded Poland, Adolf Hitler promised that the Luftwaffe would avoid bombing civilian targets and would follow international law. Through most of the campaign the Luftwaffe stuck to tactical military targets. In late September 1939, however, the Germans ruthlessly bombed Warsaw with high-explosive and incendiary bombs. Civilian casualties were heavy. Yet, the Germans claimed that bombing Warsaw was not “terror bombing,” but a legitimate act of war insofar as Warsaw was, at the time, a city under siege by ground forces.

From September 1939 until September 1940 both the Germans and the Allies avoided bombing population centers. Air attacks were strictly limited to purely military targets such as airfields and naval bases. Nevertheless, during the Battle of Britain the Luftwaffe attacked urban targets in Britain and launched heavy raids against London that invited British retaliation. At this point of the war the Germans could still legitimately claim that their attacks on British cities were aimed at factories and industrial areas important to the war effort and were not designed primarily to kill civilians. The notorious German bombing raid on Coventry on the night of 14 November 1940 severely damaged twenty-one factories supporting the British war effort. The deaths of five hundred civilians, however, gave the world the impression that Germany was targeting civilian morale and pushed the British leadership to see that German cities received the same treatment. The RAF began bombing German cities by night, but the lack of a heavy bomber (with a large bomb load) and the RAF’s inability to find the target in 1940–1941 meant that German cities suffered little in the early part of the war. Still, the cycle of city bombing and retaliation had begun and continued to escalate. In 1942, in retaliation for bombing German cities, Hitler ordered the Luftwaffe to attack the British civilian population. While previous attacks had been against industrial centers such as London, Portsmouth, and Liverpool, now the Germans attacked cities, such as Canterbury and Bath, that had no military value in an attempt to demoralize British civilians. As the Luftwaffe’s bomber force declined, the Germans carried on attacks against the British people with the V-1 and V-2 rockets, called “vengeance weapons,” which were useful for area bombardment but useless for hitting military targets.

In 1940–1941 the British were on the defensive in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic and faced having to rebuild the army that had been humiliated in France. For the foreseeable future the only way that the British could carry the offensive to Germany was by strategic bombing. At this point the British gave Bomber Command the top priority for personnel and resources. During the war Britain put a larger share of its total resources into its air force, particularly its bombers, than any other combatant. It takes years to develop the factories and heavy aircraft, as well as the large number of highly trained personnel, necessary for a strategic-bombing force. Once committed, resources cannot be easily shifted. By 1942–1943 the RAF’s dilemma was bomber accuracy and survivability. To keep casualties down in the face of Luftwaffe fighters and radar, British bombers flew by night. Night bombing was inaccurate, however, and so the only means of hitting industrial targets was to bomb large urban areas. Thus, German civilians became Bomber Command’s primary target.

Bureaucratic inertia also played a big role in the Allied air offensive against Germany. Once strategy and target lists were established, and aircrews trained in the new tactics, changing policy became difficult, if not impossible. The British perfected the technique of fire-bombing cities with the raid on Hamburg in July 1943, an attack that caused the Germans considerable military damage as well as thirty thousand dead. Late in the war, however, when the Luftwaffe had been forced from the skies and the RAF had the ability to hit military targets with a high degree of precision, the tactics of city busting were maintained. In February 1945 Dresden’s only significant military target was its rail yard—a target that could have been easily destroyed by a single daylight raid with low civilian losses. Yet, the RAF fire-bombed the city in a massive raid and killed twenty-five thousand civilians in a form of attack that had simply become habit.

In Europe the Americans refrained from indiscriminate city bombing and stayed with the policy of precision daylight attacks. This tactic served the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) well. German oil refineries in particular were wrecked by an effective American campaign that served to deprive the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) of vehicle and aircraft fuel. U.S. strategic bombers played an important role in defeating Germany without excessive civilian losses. Their participation in the Pacific theater was another story. When the United States started the bombing campaign against Japan in 1944, American air commanders found that the techniques of precision,



## FIREBOMBING OF JAPANESE CITIES

*During World War II, American air forces targeted Japanese civilian populations with massive incendiary raids, one of which destroyed Tokyo, killing more than one hundred thousand Japanese and leaving another million homeless. In the following passage, a former prisoner of war held by the Japanese describes the firebombing of Osaka.*

On the night of March 13, 1945, Osaka was bombed. Our camp was barely one city block inland. The first firebombs hit about two blocks inland and continued away from us for four or five miles. The raid lasted much of the night. (Military records reveal that 301 B-29s hit Osaka.)

In the morning, a vast area—later determined to be 25 square miles—was a smoldering desert. The firebombs would not have been effective against many of the “hardened” buildings at the waterfront, but they devastated the inland cottage industry. The bombs also reduced to rubble the homes of the population that supported Osaka’s war effort. On the night of March 17, Kobe was hit. (This time the raid was carried out by 306 B-29s.) Kobe was now a mirror image of Osaka.

Our food situation now became critical. The soup was always thin and frequently there was none. The rice ration was reduced to about two-thirds of a bowl morning and evening. I was beginning to feel weak and it became hard to concentrate. On occasion,

my chest felt overfull. Visible heartbeats again appeared, sporadically, over much of my chest.

We were made part of a frantic effort to salvage material from damaged warehouses, where we were always on the lookout for food but rarely successful. Roof damage had allowed water to attack the contents of many structures. Mostly, we salvaged commercially valuable items such as bales and bolts of cloth. Some warehouses were heavy with the odor of mildew or mold.

What we assumed to be Japanese industrial officials were appearing at the work site more and more often. Surprisingly few Japanese were in the area. Groups of younger-appearing women came into the area several times to work, but their efforts seemed poorly coordinated.

During the Osaka bombing in March, we all expected the camp to be hit momentarily. When it did not happen, it was for a while believed that our people knew where we were and had avoided hitting us. By this line of thinking, we attributed an accuracy to our Air Corps’s night bombing that its daylight bombing never achieved.

*Robert E. Haney, Caged Dragons: An American P.O.W. in W.W.II Japan (Ann Arbor, Mich.: Sabre Press, 1991), pp. 131–132.*

high-altitude bombing delivered poor accuracy against the Japanese factories because of the high winds of the jet stream. As U.S. forces advanced inexorably toward Japan, American bombers were doing little to damage the Japanese war effort. The USAAF Pacific bomber commander, General Haywood S. Hansell Jr., was relieved and replaced with General Curtis LeMay, who had a reputation as a practical “can do” commander. LeMay came up with the simple and practical tactic of wrecking Japan’s industry by simply burning its cities to the ground in massive incendiary raids. These raids were more devastating than anything the RAF had done in Europe. The Tokyo raid of 9 March 1945 leveled sixteen square miles of the city, killed approximately one hundred thousand people and rendered one million homeless. It was the most destructive air attack in history.

There was little moral outcry in American ranks as city after city received the Tokyo treatment. By the end of July 1945 almost every major city in Japan had been obliterated and approximately 210,000 people had been killed. The atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945 killed an additional 120,000 people and finally forced the Japanese government to sue for peace. The bombing of Japan is the one instance in which Douhet’s theory seems to have worked.

Some authors, notably Michael S. Sherry in *The Rise of American Air Power: The Creation of Armageddon* (1987), argue that the motivation for bombing Japanese cities was largely based upon American racism against the Japanese. While Americans indeed passionately hated the Japanese, partly a result of racism, as well as a response to the treacherous Pearl Harbor attack and mass murder of American prisoners on

Bataan, these reasons are not sufficient to explain the ruthlessness of the bombing campaign against Japan. As U.S. forces approached the Japanese home islands, resistance became fanatical and U.S. casualties increased. The Okinawa campaign of April–June 1945 was one of the bloodiest of the war for the Americans. Kamikaze attacks killed thousands of sailors and sank or damaged dozens of ships. The invasion of Japan was imminent, and American leaders expected hundreds of thousands of U.S. casualties; thousands were dying daily in the war against Japan. President Harry S. Truman and U.S. military leaders saw little alternative to trying to defeat Japan by bombing rather than initiating a bloody invasion. In this particular case, a policy of obliterating cities and bombing civilians overcame deeply held moral positions.

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#### Viewpoint:

**No, the final incendiary and atomic attacks on Japan were an exception to an otherwise general effort to impose some restraints, however limited they may have been, on aerial bombardment.**

When World War II began, there were no ratified international legal restrictions on the use of aerial bombardment against civilians. As one of the U.S. Army Air Force's (USAAF) commanding generals Henry Harley "Hap" Arnold's staff officers explained, "Law cannot limit what physics makes possible." Instead, airmen had to rely on "reason and humane instincts" to moderate the "bestial instincts" that could be unleashed by air power.

This was not true for all powers. While Adolf Hitler initially forbade attacks on London, his eventual resort to the "Blitz," as well as hurling V-1 and V-2 rockets indiscriminately at England and Antwerp, showed a willingness to go as far as physics would allow. Likewise, the Japanese assaulted Chinese cities and launched balloon bombs against the United States and were restrained only by their limited technology from doing more.

Allied nations did generally accept some voluntary limitations on their air power. This was not solely because of ethical superiority. There were political, economic, and public-relations reasons to avoid attacks on cities that might cause controversial civilian casualties, waste resources, or harm the image of air power and

Allied righteousness. Even the British, who aimed to "dehouse" German workers with nightly assaults on their residential areas, were reluctant to risk causing casualties in occupied zones of Europe. Americans seeking to bomb key targets in France and Belgium were frustrated by their ally's concerns about the political backlash of killing civilians there, even inadvertently. While the British were willing to bomb any German anywhere, only the Americans were willing to bomb any workers in any factory or service assisting the Axis.

Even the USAAF leaders who developed the concept of "precision bombing" by formations of B-17s and B-24s knew that reality was far different from the images of bombs dropping down smokestacks, as depicted on propaganda posters. Still, an impartial observer must conclude that in general most American airmen did the best they could to win the war with consistent application of a doctrine that favored military and industrial targeting over indiscriminate bombing of civilians. Bombing accuracy improved throughout the war and was consistently exceeding prewar expectations by 1945. Aircrews and leaders were convinced of the effectiveness and appropriateness of pinpoint tactics and missions focused on specific objectives and were quick to express dissatisfaction with any perceived deviations from proven and accepted methods and operations. This was especially true in Europe. An examination of actual operations such as Clarion, Thunderclap, and Aphrodite reveals that American air commanders consciously tried to avoid terror bombing, even when superiors such as Dwight D. Eisenhower were encouraging it. Some officers, such as James C. "Jimmy" Doolittle and Carl "Toocy" Spaatz, had genuine moral concerns about such bombing. Others, such as Ira Eaker, were apparently more concerned with domestic public opinion against such tactics or believed they were ineffective or inefficient. Civilian morale, especially in a controlled police state such as Nazi Germany, was not perceived as a viable target.

By 1945, however, the USAAF in Europe did accept more risks for noncombatants. The change resulted primarily from an increasing resort to transportation targets, as higher-priority industrial objectives were destroyed. Such operations assisted ground advances by restricting the movement of reinforcements and supplies, putting extra burdens on a transport system already strained by the destruction of oil-related targets, and facilitating widespread attacks that used the increased air assets present in the theater. Precision doctrine recognized the validity of transportation targets as a means to weaken the enemy's economy, but attacks on



marshaling yards in cities were bound to increase the number of noncombatant casualties from errant bombs. Large transportation objectives could also be discerned by radar, which was used for nonvisual bombing through overcast—a technique that allowed American bombers to increase their missions significantly during German winter weather—but that also contributed to an acceptance of less accurate bombing results. USAAF airmen and leaders preferred to bomb when they could see the target and be more effective, but radar-assisted attacks through the clouds kept the pressure on a beleaguered German air force and economy. The USAAF devotion to daylight precision hampered their development of nonvisual bombing techniques so that the British, accustomed to night raids, were able to achieve better accuracy in such conditions.

Even the Americans could not resist pursuing the possibility of an aerial “deathblow” against German civilians in 1945, but the conduct of operations Thunderclap and Clarion reveal much about the persistence of beliefs in precision doctrine and air-power restraint. Spaatz strongly resisted the former, a British plan for a massive assault on Berlin, warning Arnold, “There is no doubt in my mind that the RAF want very much to have the US Air Forces tarred with the morale bombing aftermath which we feel will be terrific.” Only after being ordered by Eisenhower to participate did Spaatz reluctantly develop plans for the mission. Even then, his subordinates resisted until the eve of the operation in early February; Doolittle thought Thunderclap violated American doctrine and principles, and argued that his Eighth Air Force bomber crews were not trained for it. Spaatz developed his own plan, Clarion, to collapse civilian morale by widespread attacks on military or economic targets in towns throughout Germany, but that was also unacceptable to his subordinates, who thought it was a “baby-killing plan” that would make the USAAF look like barbarians and tarnish its image. Accordingly Spaatz modified his operation to concentrate on the German transportation system in late February and later canceled a repeat performance in early March.

The restraints on American bombing in Europe are even more apparent when compared to the devastating air operations against Japan, but there were limits on Allied air power in the Pacific theater as well. General Douglas MacArthur had probably the most restrictive bombing policies of any theater commander. When punitive bombing was carried out to insure the safety of coast watchers on isolated islands, only one or two bombs were used and only with MacArthur’s approval. He continued stringent control of aerial bombardment when he returned to

the Philippines, requiring that attacks on any targets near or within inhabited areas be cleared through his headquarters. He believed the Filipinos would not be able to understand a liberation that was accompanied by indiscriminate destruction of their homes, and that “the use of air on a part of a city occupied by a friendly and allied population is unthinkable.” He maintained his high standards even if they hindered his subordinates. He refused General Walter Krueger’s request to bomb stubborn resistance in the Intramuros district during the retaking of Manila, even though air support would have hastened the conclusion of the operation. He also respected the laws of war in raids on Japanese targets. When authorities on Rabaul complained that an air raid had destroyed a hospital there, MacArthur ordered a full investigation. A detailed report with maps was furnished to the Japanese government through the Spanish Embassy, revealing that American planes were attacking an anti-aircraft position sited right next to the hospital.

MacArthur’s staff considered the Twentieth Air Force’s incendiary attacks on Japanese cities “one of the most ruthless and barbaric killings of non-combatants in all history,” but even General Curtis LeMay was not devoid of all humanitarian impulses. Despite objections of airmen who thought warnings of impending raids endangered their welfare, leaflets were dropped on Japanese cities advising citizens to flee future B-29 attacks. The operational descriptions were vague though they were an effective psychological-warfare ploy that helped motivate millions to leave for the countryside; but LeMay sincerely believed that the warnings would convince the Japanese, as well as Americans troubled by the bombing of civilians, that USAAF policy aimed to destroy the war-making industrial capacity of Japan and not the people.

When LeMay took command of the main strategic-bombing effort against Japan, carried out from the Mariana Islands in January 1945, he did not immediately begin the fire raids. He first spent a month exhausting all his options to get precision daylight bombing to work. The pursuit of accurate bombing remained a primary goal for the USAAF throughout World War II, influencing American tactics and technology during that conflict and setting precedents for later wars where the U. S. Air Force (USAF) has demonstrated remarkable advances in precision methods and munitions. The intent, if not always the effect, of American air attacks was consistently to achieve the most precise and effective bombardment possible. Wartime improvements in bombing accuracy demonstrate that such a goal was realistic, not a wishful fantasy to be quickly abandoned in favor of military expedi-

ency. Changing conditions influencing combat effectiveness in the European and Pacific theaters did lead to USAAF acceptance of greater risks for enemy civilians by 1945, but that does not mean all restrictions on “bestial instincts” were abandoned. In Europe, at least, the operational record shows that the avoidance of non-combatant casualties in accordance with precision doctrine remained a component of American bombing.

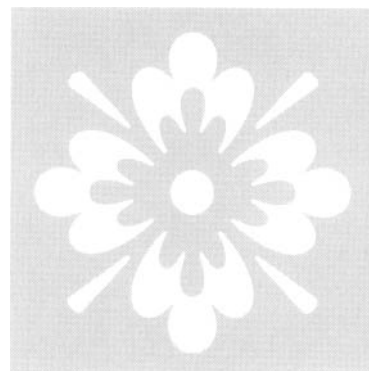
—CONRAD C. CRANE, UNITED STATES  
MILITARY ACADEMY

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# CHEMICAL WARFARE

## Why were chemical weapons not used in World War II?



**Viewpoint:** International norms and military doctrine were the primary reasons why chemical weapons were not used in World War II.

**Viewpoint:** Fear of retaliation prevented the European powers from using chemical weapons, while the United States shunned their use on moral grounds.

Chemical warfare had played an important enough role in World War I that there was widespread expectation of its use in World War II. Certainly, Germany's army and its chemists had no qualms about adding poison gas to the Third Reich's arsenal. When war began, however, many of the latest chemical warfare agents were not available in deliverable form. The early successes of conventional-war making, combined with an increasing shortage of raw material, led Germany to deemphasize gas warfare even apart from the fear of Allied retaliation that significantly influenced at least the armed forces.

Japan too was unprepared for large-scale chemical warfare when it launched its attacks of December 1941. Like Germany, it feared retaliation—to the point of reducing even the limited use of poison gas in China that it had initiated in 1937. Also like Germany, Japan achieved initial victories without needing to resort to chemical warfare.

For France and Britain, standing as they did on the defensive, chemical warfare was a credible option—at least in theory. Neither power was prepared to deliver chemical attacks before the 1940 German offensive rendered the issue moot. Britain considered its use against an invasion, and Winston Churchill seemed willing to consider that option. Certainly he labored to develop Britain's chemical-warfare capability long after Operation Sea Lion, the planned German invasion of England, had been abandoned. The United States followed a similar approach, developing a significant chemical capacity, but primarily regarding it as a retaliatory weapon whose use was linked to Axis behavior.

Chemical warfare was something with which neither statesmen nor armed forces were ever comfortable. By 1944, for example, Anglo-American chemical capabilities were sufficient to mount massive attacks on Germany. The issue was evaluated; the option was rejected—partly because of the unpredictability of chemical weapons, but also because of the question of whether public opinion would support chemical attacks on German cities.

Matters were somewhat different in the Pacific, where increasingly effective Japanese defenses encouraged consideration of the tactical use of chemical warfare. Discussions had not gone beyond the theoretical stage, however, before the atomic bomb made the question moot.



**Viewpoint:  
International norms and military doctrine were the primary reasons why chemical weapons were not used in World War II.**

One of the more interesting anomalies in the history of warfare was the virtual absence of chemical warfare during World War II. While chemical means were used by the Nazis against defenseless victims of the Holocaust and by Japanese soldiers against the Chinese, the major combatants did not employ them against each other despite having large stockpiles. This circumstance has seldom been addressed by historians. Scholars usually debate what actually occurred, not what failed to happen. The absence of the use of chemical weapons, however, is interesting because it represents a rare example of combatants in a clash for survival not using a readily available weapon. It is also noteworthy as a precedent for the types of limits that might be desirable in any future conflict involving the possibility of nuclear, biological, and chemical warfare.

Myths and half-truths are common responses to the question of chemical nonuse. The central myth is that chemical weapons were not used because they had no military utility. World War I, so this argument goes, showed the futility of gas warfare. This explanation has little empirical support. While chemical warfare certainly had its limitations, the belligerents in World War I were increasing their use of gas at the end of that conflict, not reducing it because of ineffectiveness. During the interwar period, British experts such as Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart and General John Frederick Charles Fuller promoted the utility of gas. Various national militaries also widely recognized its significant military use. British officials in the summer of 1939, for example, concluded that “with added and improved weapons chemical troops will be used in a future war more than they were in the last.” Based on December 1939 tests, the British determined that “we have at our disposal a potential weapon of great value.” German, Soviet, and American analysts reached similar conclusions. Chemical warfare was not a silver bullet; like most other weapons its usefulness depended on how and when it was employed.

What is surprising is that when situations seemed to offer advantage in the use of chemical weapons in World War II, states passed on the option. The Soviet Union, even while pursuing a “scorched earth” strategy to fend off the German invasion in 1941, did not use gas even though it might have significantly slowed the Nazi *Blitz-*

*krieg* (lightning war). Britain rejected the use of chemical weapons against Germany in 1944, yet its strategy to break German civilian morale may have been enhanced without the fear of comparable retaliation. Prime Minister Winston Churchill supported such a plan and called for a cold calculation of their effectiveness. Germany did not use its chemical weapons supply against the pivotal, and vulnerable, D-Day invasion of Normandy (6 June 1944). American general Omar N. Bradley, one of the key planners, was “vastly relieved” when D-Day ended without chemical weapons being used, “for even a light sprinkling of persistent gas on Omaha Beach could have cost us our footing there.” Finally, the United States rejected use of chemical weapons against the Japanese in 1945, even when significant casualties were expected in the planned invasion of the Japanese home islands, the atomic bomb was not yet built, and the leadership had intelligence that Japan had employed gas against the Chinese. How does one account for these puzzling cases of restraint?

Perhaps states were deterred from introducing chemical warfare because they feared even greater retaliation in kind. This explanation is particularly resilient because it is not a myth. It is, however, only a half-truth. It is true because the ability of each side to retaliate against the other is likely a necessary condition of mutual restraint in any form of effective warfare when the survival of combatants is at stake. Germany, as it had in World War I, would surely have employed gas had the Allies not possessed chemical weapons. Likewise, Churchill’s interest in chemical weapons might not have been deflected had Germany not been able to respond. Furthermore, deterrent threats were made. These threats were implicit in the no-first-use norm that developed; if one side used chemical weapons, the other would respond. Churchill, in the midst of the conflict, made an extended deterrent threat to warn the Germans from using gas against the Russians. In 1942 President Franklin D. Roosevelt, after learning of the use of gas in China, threatened the Japanese with retaliation.

Deterrence, however, is not the whole story. Both Britain and the United States failed to retaliate, despite their threats, against the Japanese for their actions in China. More importantly, there were a variety of situations in World War II where stigmatized weapons were used even when the users thought they would get the worst of the exchange (for example, Britain and its initiation of strategic bombing), thus defying deterrence logic.

Two types of factors appear central to the nonuse of chemical warfare. The first involves international norms—the collective understanding and rules among states regarding the proper



**Mannequins with chemical protective gear in a German window display, March 1939**

*(Bundesarchiv, Koblenz, courtesy Library of Congress; from "Die Sirene," March 1940, published by Deutscher Verlag, Berlin, courtesy George A. Petersen)*

rules of engagement. While prohibitions against the use of poison agents had existed for centuries, constraints on chemical use were violated egregiously in World War I, although all states denied responsibility for the escalation. Yet, statesmen returned to chemical warfare restraints in the interwar peace. Limitations on the use or manufacture of gas were discussed at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919, the Washington Arms Conference of 1921–1922, and, most conclusively, the 1925 Geneva Conference. This last meeting produced the simple and precise Geneva Protocol: signatory nations would not use chemical warfare first if the other side was a signatory and also showed restraint. These formal rules reflected a broader informal consensus that chemical warfare was a separate and heinous form of conflict. In September 1939, at the outbreak of World War II, the combatants reaffirmed their intention not to use gas first.

Although the rules against chemical warfare are certainly not the whole story of chemical non-use in World War II, they did play a critical, usu-

ally ignored role. The most fundamental effect of the antichemical warfare norm was to define chemicals as tools demanding special consideration for restraint. Countries did not eliminate these weapons from their inventories, nor ferret out heinous forms of combat from their war plans. The reason that chemical warfare, like some forms of submarine warfare and strategic bombing, was even considered as a candidate for restraint was because it was stigmatized by extant norms. This stigmatization was not simply an aversive reaction to the technological inhumanity of a particular form of combat. States hardly blinked over the use of equally inhumane forms of warfare, such as the use of devastating high explosive artillery shells or flamethrowers. What set chemical weapons apart was not some objective measure of inhumanity, but instead, recognized norms that dictated boundaries of acceptable use.

Other tactics, specifically submarine attacks and strategic bombing, were also limited by norms and restrictions that were sometimes even more developed and widely accepted than the pro-

hibitions against chemical warfare. They were nevertheless eventually used in World War II. One also needs to consider the “culture”—the ideas, habits, and traditions—of the various military organizations in order to understand the reluctance to exploit chemicals. While virtually all were subject to civilian control and the orders of national political leaders, military organizations played a pivotal role in deciding what types of force would be employed, largely because of their special expertise. In light of the complexity and scale of modern warfare in the mid twentieth century and the long lead times needed to prepare, political leaders, even ones knowledgeable about military matters—such as Churchill and Adolf Hitler—frequently relied on the advice of their military professionals. This situation was especially true in the heat of war when time pressures and imminent needs limited the ability of leaders to alter strategic concepts, weapons production, and modes of warfare developed over several years.

This expert authority and influence mattered because military organizations developed biases about the use of force that affected how states fought. Military planners during peacetime, often uncertain about future needs, tended to develop a dominant mind-set or “way of war” that set priorities and allocated resources. This culture allowed a course of action that advocated or ignored specific means of warfare. While those means considered compatible with the dominant philosophy were developed and advocated by the military, others were deemed unsuitable and were not integrated into war plans.

What one sees in World War II is that nations tended to use those modes of warfare compatible with their military cultures and neglect those (assuming the other side did not use them) that did not fit the dominant mind-set. Thus, the bomber-oriented, morale-targeting British violated the ban on strategic bombing, whereas Germany’s anticcommerce-focused submarine force shattered the restrictions on submarine warfare. What is interesting about chemical warfare is that the main combatants had organized cultures that were biased against the use of chemical weapons that collectively provided the fundamental pillar of restraint.

The forces that shaped restraint are illustrated by the German decision not to use gas, even though their chemical warfare industry, supplies, and training were superior to that of their enemies. The *Wehrmacht* (German Army) could have used chemical weapons in certain situations—most importantly the D-Day invasion—for considerable strategic advantage. Surprisingly, a preference for first use of chemical warfare did not emerge even as Allied troops crossed into Germany, threatening the survival of the Third Reich, and causing Hitler to press for escalation. German military

beliefs, however, centered on a faith in fast, decisive maneuver and encirclement to achieve victory. Chemical warfare was considered best suited for defense, a concept that did not fit easily with the military’s way of thinking. This view led Germany to a lack of appreciation of its relative strengths in this area, a tendency to overestimate the chemical warfare potential of enemies, a neglect of preparations, and an overall hesitancy to turn to such a weapon. A preference for restraint was the result.

The absence of chemical warfare in World War II is a fascinating, important, and potentially optimism-generating event because it suggests that not all means of warfare need be used, even in an “all out” conflict. This restraint can best be explained by three central factors. First, the ability of the opposing sides to retaliate in the event of chemical use likely played a role. Countries may not have been stopped had they believed they could achieve credible military gains with a weapon the enemy did not have. Second, because of the existence of international norms that stigmatized chemical weapons as inhumane and deviant, states bothered to pause and actually consider nonuse. The third and most decisive reason was that chemical weapons did not fit the war-fighting cultures of the major combatants and they were neglected. Even when leaders such as Churchill and Hitler energetically pushed for their use, the biases of military organizations prevailed because of their structural power. Either direct expert advice objected to its use, preparations were inadequate, or the enemy (usually wrongly) was believed to be superior—a judgment typically shared by cultural mind-set, not objective conditions. Thus states were “deterred” from using chemical weapons, not because the strategy situation was such that they would be relatively harmed by doing so, but because the dominant war-fighting mentality only saw the costs and not the benefits of chemical use. In chemical warfare, as militaries thought, so states fought.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**Fear of retaliation prevented the European powers from using chemical weapons, while the United States shunned their use on moral grounds.**

The question of why chemical weapons were not used overlooks a loathsome occurrence of chemical warfare in World War II. Germany killed millions of European Jews with Zyklon B,

because this lethal gas was easy to produce and it spared German men, arms, and bullets for the front. This unparalleled murder program was a form of chemical warfare, insofar as the destruction of European Jewry constituted a central war aim of the Nazi leadership. The outcome of Germany's war against Great Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union was strongly affected by Germany's labor and transportation resources, yet the German leadership did not hesitate to prejudice these resources by giving highest priority to the destruction of Europe's Jews. There were also other, far more modest instances, of chemical warfare. Italy killed Ethiopians with chemical weapons in a prologue to World War II, and Japan used chemical weapons in its long war against the Chinese. Nonetheless, it is remarkable that Germany, Italy, and Japan, on the one hand, and Great Britain, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union, on the other, never used chemical warfare against each other, despite the widespread use of poison gas in World War I. This abstinence requires explanation, for these belligerent nations possessed chemical weapons. Moreover, they did not hesitate to use other weapons of equivocal morality, as Dresden and Nagasaki remind us, not to mention the wanton massacres of Soviet and Chinese civilians.

The Germans initiated the use of chemical warfare in 1915 with chlorine. The idea was to create a gap in the Western Front and thereby overcome the operational stalemate of trench warfare. During World War I, the German army did not achieve any strategic successes with its gas attacks, but it did gain some local tactical victories. Soon the other belligerents countered with gas against the German armies; however, chemical warfare never decided the issue, because poison gas was difficult to deliver and both sides developed adequate defensive measures. The war remained largely one of attrition, in which the belligerent nations pitted not only their armies against each other, but also the sum of their economic, industrial, agricultural, human, cultural, and political resources.

The social, economic, and political change wrought by this four-year struggle was devastating, as a series of European revolutions made all too clear. Worse, another European war was likely. Military planners in the interwar period were confronted with two possible scenarios for future war. First, they could improve weapons and tactics in order to regain mobility and the possibility of a speedy victory, thereby heading off the specter of extreme social, economic, and political dislocation. Second, they could prepare for a war even more "total" than World War I had been: that is, they could prepare to directly attack the civilian populations and



## A PRESIDENTIAL WARNING

*Although poison chemicals were used little in combat situations during World War II, the threat of their use was always present. In 1943 President Franklin D. Roosevelt issued a warning to the Germans on the possible employment of gas.*

From time to time since the present war began there have been reports that one or more of the Axis powers were seriously contemplating the use of poisonous or noxious gases or other inhumane devices of warfare.

I have been loathe to believe that any nation, even our present enemies, could or would be willing to loose upon mankind such terrible and inhuman weapons. However, evidence that the Axis powers are making significant preparations indicative of such an intention is being reported with increasing frequency from a variety of sources.

Use of such weapons has been outlawed by the general opinion of civilized mankind. This country has not used them, and I hope we never will be compelled to use them. I state categorically that we shall under no circumstances resort to the use of such weapons unless they are first used by our enemies.

As President of the United States and as Commander in Chief of the American armed forces, I want to make clear beyond all doubt to any of our enemies contemplating a resort to such desperate and barbarous methods that acts of this nature committed against any one of the United Nations will be regarded as having been committed against the United States itself and will be treated accordingly. We promise to any perpetrators of such crimes full and swift retaliation in kind, and I feel obliged now to warn the Axis armies and the Axis peoples, in Europe and Asia, that the terrible consequences of any use of these inhumane weapons on their part will be brought down swiftly and surely on their own heads. Any use of gas by any Axis power, therefore, will immediately be followed by the fullest possible retaliation upon munitions centers, seaports and other military objectives throughout the whole extent of the territory of such Axis country.

*Source: "Roosevelt Warns Axis on Gas Warfare," Current History, 4 (August 1943): 405.*

industrial bases of their enemies on a massive scale. Chemical warfare appeared efficacious for both purposes.

The experience of poison gas in World War I had been bad enough, however, for the great powers to agree to forsake the use of chemical (and biological) weapons in the Geneva Protocol of 1925, which France ratified in 1926, Italy and the Soviet Union in 1928, Germany in 1929, and Great Britain in 1930. (Japan did not ratify this

treaty until 1970, and the United States Senate took another five years to do so.) Despite this protocol, none of its signatories trusted the others to abstain from chemical weaponry. Military discourse assumed that the enemy would use chemical weapons as a matter of course. Western military custom and law had long permitted armed forces to take measures normally considered beyond the pale, should "military necessity" call for them. Hence all the great powers continued secretly to develop chemical weapons, albeit (at least ostensibly) not for first use against each other, a restriction that did not apply outside the European periphery. British Brigadier General Charles H. Foulkes wanted to use gas in the Afghan War of 1919, but the India Office killed this proposal because of expected political fallout in India. British soldiers got their chance in the Russian Civil War (1918–1920), where they made a few gas attacks. Far more serious were the Italians' attacks on Ethiopian soldiers and civilians in 1935, when airplanes spread mustard gas with sprayers, which led all European powers to step up their chemical weapons program. Finally, the Japanese used gas and chemical smoke sticks against the Chinese.

The Japanese, however, never used chemical weapons against the Chinese on a mass scale, and some 80 percent of what they used only caused tears or sneezing. By the end of 1941, 1,948 dead and some 26,600 wounded could be attributed to Japanese chemical weapons, as opposed to some two million Chinese casualties overall. For one thing, the Japanese appear to have lagged in their development of lethal agents, delivery systems, specialist personnel, and doctrine. More significantly, the Chinese used space to their advantage, leaving the Japanese to deal with a front some three thousand kilometers long by 1943. Most chemical attacks had limited local significance or an experimental character. With inadequate chemical stockpiles, a chemical attack on the United States' armed forces would have been foolish indeed, because the United States possessed huge quantities of chemical weapons and the ability to deliver them. The Japanese understood this threat. Franklin D. Roosevelt had deliberately warned them in 1942 not to initiate chemical attacks against the United States and not to continue the use of chemical weapons in China, lest the United States retaliate with its own chemical agents.

The dimensions of the U.S. chemical-weapons program were enormous. The government spent \$2 million on chemical armaments in 1940, \$60 million in 1941, and \$1 billion in 1942. Personnel employed to develop these armaments increased from two thousand to six thousand to twenty thousand people during these three years. Although this chemical-weap-

ons capacity included the production of smoke bombs and shells, the ability of the United States to deliver gas also grew enormously. The American arsenal started the war with 1,500 aerial spray tanks and ended with 113,000. Roosevelt favored such a massive buildup in order to be prepared for a Japanese attack; however, he was against the first use of such weapons, which he considered morally reprehensible. In fact, Roosevelt's moral rejection of chemical warfare restrained not only his own senior officers, but also Winston Churchill, who seriously contemplated using gas against German soldiers and civilians. The United States was the only major belligerent power to refrain from chemical warfare for openly moral reasons. Yet, this country was never threatened in the existential way that other nations were; that is, the first use of chemical weapons never seemed "necessary" to the United States for its survival. Moreover, it is fair to ask what Harry S Truman might have done had the United States not had the atomic bomb, which shortened the Pacific war dramatically. The point is this: Roosevelt used a moral argument because he could afford to, but he did not think the country could afford such a moral stance should Germany or Japan initiate a chemical attack against its armed forces. Just how ready the United States was to fight a chemical war is demonstrated by the fact that it transported chemical weapons to the theaters of war, in case their use should become "necessary." For example, the United States sent some one hundred tons of mustard gas to Bari, a port in Sicily, at the end of November 1943. On 2 December this gas leaked following a German air attack. The toxic effects became deadlier still because of the total secrecy surrounding the shipment and the resultant ignorance of the real danger the sailors and townspeople faced. More than one thousand people died.

France and Britain also developed and produced chemical armaments on a significant, albeit smaller, scale. The lightning speed of the *Wehrmacht's* (German Army's) campaign against France in 1940 initially prevented the use of gas from becoming a real possibility for any of the belligerents. After Britain stood alone in western Europe, however, Churchill began pushing to use these weapons, despite an agreement with Germany not to do so and despite the objections of his advisors, who feared German retribution. Britain initially did not possess enough gas to head off an expected German invasion, a problem Churchill took seriously enough to demand weekly production reports. Even after the Battle of Britain (July–September 1940), Churchill continued to press his military to consider options for the use of chemical warfare, especially when Germany began launching the V-1 and V-2 rockets at London, and again when he worried about



the speed of the Allies' penetration of France. As late as July 1944, he demanded proposals for how to spray gas on Germany, including German civilians. His planners also considered using anthrax. Fortunately, the war ended less than a year later.

Why did Germany's villainous leadership not initiate chemical warfare, especially when it was faced with defeat and unconditional surrender? Unknown to the Allies, Germany had developed the world's first nerve agents—Tabun, Sarin, and Somar—which were far deadlier than the Allies' phosgene and mustard gas. Adolf Hitler did not use these weapons at the beginning of the war because he did not need to and perhaps because of an aversion to chemical weapons caused by his own experience in the trenches of World War I, when he himself had been subjected to a gas attack. In 1943, however, Hitler considered using his nerve agents. He asked the industrialist and chemical-agent expert Otto Ambros about the enemy's chemical-weapons potential. Fortunately, Ambros incorrectly assumed that the Allies also possessed a nerve gas capability, because basic knowledge about these chemicals had been developed some forty years earlier. This false information—reinforced by clear Allied air superiority and a lack of gas masks for Germany's civilian population—led Hitler to avoid using nerve gas against the Allies.

Finally, the Soviet Union's chemical-armaments program and policy deserve more attention than they have received in the historiography. This gap in knowledge will improve now that the Soviet archives are open, but it seems safe to believe a Soviet officer, who after the war testified that Joseph Stalin had not used chemical weapons because he had feared German retribution; chemical weapons had only been intended for retaliation against German first use. In any case, the Soviet Union had known about Germany's chemical-weapons program before 1933, so Stalin had reason to be cautious. Moreover, no one would accuse this Soviet leader of having allowed moral scruples to interfere with his application of violence.

All of the great belligerent powers of World War II refrained from using chemical warfare against each other for prudential reasons. Only the United States used moral arguments, which it could better afford to consider, but which should not obscure its massive buildup of and readiness to use chemical weapons throughout the war. The U.S. failure to ratify the Geneva Protocol until thirty years after

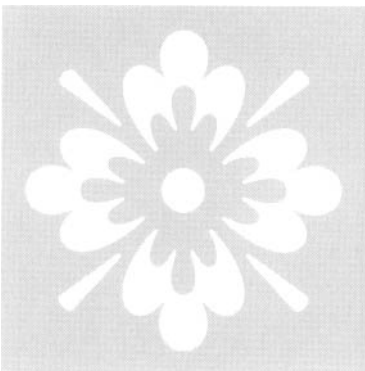
the war reflected this "pragmatic" approach to chemical armaments.

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# EMPEROR HIROHITO



## Was Emperor Hirohito of Japan responsible for fostering his nation's aggression in World War II?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, Hirohito was an advocate of Japanese aggression in the Pacific, despite the limited role he played in day-to-day political and military decisions.

**Viewpoint:** No, Hirohito had little influence on the Japanese decision to go to war and on the conduct of military affairs because constitutional and political constraints limited his role as emperor.

While wartime propaganda pilloried Japanese emperor Hirohito as a war criminal on a level with Adolf Hitler and Benito Mussolini, the United States was careful not to target him in air raids. This reflected the belief of America's Japanese experts that Hirohito would be a useful, perhaps indeed an essential, instrument for the postwar reconstruction of Japan. After 1945 Japan's former leaders, military and civilian, accepted the same paradigm. In order to preserve the monarchy, Hirohito was described as being essentially outside the process of policy formation and implementation, intervening only at the last minute to save his country and people from nuclear destruction.

This mutually convenient myth sidesteps the fact that all decisions were made in the emperor's name. Hirohito was present at crucial meetings and was kept informed of events. If not particularly imaginative or insightful, he was intelligent. If his education was conventional and restricted, it was not entirely separated from his future function as emperor. Determined to maintain the authority of the throne, Hirohito had refused any compromise with the military rebellion of January 1936. Within a few days it collapsed, and its leaders were executed. That was not the behavior of a figurehead. Hirohito was skeptical in 1941 as the military leaders pressed for war with the United States. His subsequent assent reflected the unanimous opinion of Japan's principal military and civilian leaders. It was, however, a positive affirmation. Hirohito was less concerned with peace as an abstract concept, as suggested by his famous haiku on the subject, than with Japan's status as a great power—and war was an acceptable means to that end.

Until 1945 Hirohito continued to be a positive force in Japan's belligerent policies. Even the fire raids of late summer did not change his mind—that required two atomic bombs.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, Hirohito was an advocate of Japanese aggression in the Pacific, despite the limited role he played in day-to-day political and military decisions.**

The role played by Emperor Hirohito in Japan's decisions for war, and the way it was conducted, is generally understood in terms of his 1946 comment that had he tried to prevent the attack on the Western powers, chances were that the militarists would have staged a coup d'état, killed his aides, and reduced him to a symbolic figurehead. It is not necessary to question his sincerity to put the statement in the context of the free pass Hirohito received in 1945. The emperor's moral responsibility for the outbreak and conduct of Japan's aggression was nevertheless unique among his fellow chief executives. Neither Adolf Hitler nor Joseph Stalin, to say nothing of Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill, claimed the right to rule by virtue of divine descent. Nor did the mass of their people accept that claim as a working postulate. This is not intended to imply that Japan's generals and cabinet officers took literally on an everyday basis the notion that a higher power personified in the emperor directly approved their decisions and behavior. One may, however, speak of a psychological subtext that strongly diminished an already limited capacity for self-reflection at the highest levels of Japan's government.

Even mortals are expected to face responsibility for deeds done in their names and not repudiated. However, U.S. occupation authorities, especially Douglas MacArthur, argued that it would be impossible either to govern or change Japan without the presence of the emperor. For most of the Pacific War, Hirohito was exempted from the kinds of personal attacks routinely made on Hitler and Mussolini—a process facilitated by the collective, impersonal loathing that was America's dominant wartime emotion toward the Japanese. The ironic result was a strong convergence of postwar objectives between Japan's current occupiers and its former officials. These men too, albeit for essentially different reasons, sought to keep the emperor outside the issues of war guilt and war crimes—to the point that in some cases they accepted surrogate roles that led all the way to the gallows.

The emperor thus was confirmed by both enemies and supporters as having been above the fray of policymaking. In fact, Japan was a

constitutional monarchy, however distorted that constitution had been by the events of the 1930s. Hirohito, insofar as he possessed a sense of his political role, viewed it through the prism of his British counterparts. That meant in principle that his personal position meant no more one way or the other than Queen Elizabeth II's during the Falklands crisis (1982), and Hirohito frequently expressed his concern for the risks of imperial dictatorship.

He was not alone in that concern. Though regularly present at meetings of the cabinet and war council, he did not participate. This reticence was not merely a personal quirk. Hirohito's father had been mentally incompetent and as a consequence played no role in deliberations—a pattern that became a precedent, one encouraged by the negative consequences of another hereditary monarch's insistence on living up to his constitutional position. It required no leap of imagination in Tokyo to perceive the advantages had Germany's officials been able to muzzle William II (1859–1941).

Western constitutionalism, however, was only one aspect of the emperor's role as a war leader. While not especially reflective, Hirohito took his divine role as seriously as his political one—not necessarily in a literal sense, but in accepting himself as the heir to a sacred monarchy that was asserted in the national foundation myth to be of divine origin. In that context Hirohito was inherently and essentially more than a figurehead or follower. His presence—and his silence—lent support to whatever was going on. One does not expect deities to comment on details of policy and strategy. Their literal presence, as opposed to iconographic or symbolic representation, nevertheless would for most mortals be considered a sign of approbation.

The emperor, moreover, involved himself in the war effort more systematically than by composing occasional haikus with ambiguous meanings. Hirohito was a nationalist, as committed as most of his advisers to enhancing Japan's power and to developing a sphere of influence commensurate with an Asian mission he never seriously questioned—even after 1945, when, it has been argued, Japan simply shifted its emphasis from military to economic force in pursuing world-power status. Hirohito was also a marine biologist of international standing. As a scientist he was correspondingly aware of the limits of willpower. He repeatedly questioned the relationship between Japan's actual and potential resources and the ambitious policies of the expansionists. Hirohito had visited Britain in 1921

while still crown prince. He was aware of the industrial potential of the United States. He regarded cooperation with the English-speaking powers as preferable to confrontation—a principle inspiring suspicion of the militarists’ claims for the potential advantages of war with China. He made his preference for a diplomatic solution to the 1941 U.S. oil embargo sufficiently plain to alarm the military. Yet, in each of these cases, Hirohito lived up to his concepts of how a constitutional monarch and an emperor of Japan should behave. From the China Incident (Marco Polo Bridge Incident, 7 July 1937) to Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), Hirohito affirmed what he had initially criticized, moving his country and people further along the path to total war.

Nor did the emperor ever express regret for his behavior. What he did do was change his mind. Hirohito kept himself well informed of the war’s details—especially in the Pacific. His initial gratification at Japan’s string of victories gave way in 1942 to a belief that Japan should pursue negotiations rather than risk being caught in a war of attrition it had no chance of winning. By 1944 Hirohito’s conviction that the war must be ended for the sake of the empire was common knowledge at senior policy levels. Yet, paradoxically, two decades of increasingly heated rhetoric asserting the sacredness of the imperial person had created a gap between the office and the individual holding it. To paraphrase Jean-Jacques Rousseau, the imperial will and the will of the emperor were not the same thing. Hirohito himself recognized the “divinity card” could only be played once, and in the absence of credible alternatives. Only after months of undeniable disasters, culminating in the possibility of nuclear devastation, was the emperor able to assert the moral authority that in principle accompanied his status as a direct descendant of the gods. Even then die-hard elements in the armed forces sought to mount a coup against him.

Hirohito was neither a behind-the-scenes manipulator of aggression nor a reluctant belligerent. He was emperor of Japan and perceived his task as serving the empire and its people—nothing else. From 1937 to 1945 he behaved as a proactive pragmatist, responding less to his conscience than to his sense of events. In the process he demonstrated a level of detachment that comes close to removing him entirely from the dialectic structure that is the essence of this project. It was the kind of detachment, indeed, more frequently associated with deities than statesmen.

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**Viewpoint:  
No, Hirohito had little influence on the Japanese decision to go to war and on the conduct of military affairs because constitutional and political constraints limited his role as emperor.**

On 6 January 1989 the Showa Emperor of Japan (better known to Americans by his given name Hirohito) died, ending an eventful and controversial reign of sixty-three years that witnessed his country’s rise from a feudal backwater to a major power and its drift toward militarism and war in the 1930s, devastating defeat in World War II, and subsequent rebirth as an economic superpower. Immediately after his death, historians in Japan, Europe, and the United States began to examine Hirohito’s legacy, focusing in particular on his role in the decision for war in 1941 and in the conduct of the war. One school of thought, which might be called the “revisionist” interpretation, argues that the nature of the political system of prewar Japan dictated that the emperor’s approval was required for such major decisions, and thus not only were Hirohito and his officials well informed about the aggressive goals of the military, but they also actively participated in the planning of aggression. This revisionist interpretation, however, fails to take into account the historical role of Japan’s emperors, the limits of imperial power under Japan’s prewar constitution, Hirohito’s education and personality, and the true nature of political decision making in Japan.

When Hirohito ascended to the Chrysanthemum Throne in 1926, he was the latest in a line of imperial succession that, according to Shinto mythology, dates back to 2600 B.C. with the accession of the first emperor Jimmu, a descendant of the sun goddess Amaterasu. However, Japan’s emperors could not translate claims of divine origin into absolute political power, and thus they traditionally acted as figureheads. Real political power was in the hands of samurai warlords, the shoguns.

This situation seemed to change in 1868, after a group of young samurai rebels overthrew the Tokugawa Shogunate (1603–1867) in the name of Hirohito’s grandfather, the Emperor Meiji. This event was called the Meiji Restoration because the rebels theoretically restored the emperor to his “rightful” place as absolute ruler. The emperor, however, had no more power to make decisions than his predecessors. Instead, the former rebels formed an oligarchic government, with the emperor merely sanctioning decisions made by the oligarchs. This relationship was formalized in the Constitution of 1889,



## THE EMPEROR SPEAKS

The following passage is taken from Emperor Hirohito's statement concerning the Allied surrender terms for Japan following the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

To Our good and loyal subjects:

After pondering deeply the general trends of the world and the actual conditions obtaining in Our Empire today, We have decided to effect a settlement of the present situation by resorting to an extraordinary measure.

We have ordered Our Government to communicate to the Governments of the United States, Great Britain, China and the Soviet Union that Our Empire accepts the provisions of their Joint Declaration.

To strive for the common prosperity and happiness of all nations as well as the security and well-being of Our subjects is the solemn obligation which has been handed down by Our Imperial Ancestors, and which We lay close to heart. Indeed, We declared war on America and Britain out of Our sincere desire to ensure Japan's self preservation and the stabilization of East Asia, it being far from Our thought either to infringe upon the sovereignty of other nations or to embark upon territorial aggrandizement. But now the war has lasted for nearly four years. Despite the best that has been done by everyone—the gallant fighting of military and naval forces, the diligence and assiduity of Our servants of the State and the devoted service of Our one hundred million people, the war situation has developed not necessarily to Japan's advantage, while the general trends of the world have all turned against her interest. More-

over, the enemy has begun to employ a new and most cruel bomb, the power of which to do damage is indeed incalculable, taking the toll of many innocent lives. Should We continue to fight, it would not only result in an ultimate collapse and obliteration of the Japanese nation, but also it would lead to the total extinction of human civilization. Such being the case, how are We to save the millions of Our subjects; or to atone Ourselves before the hallowed spirits of Our Imperial Ancestors? This is the reason why We have ordered the acceptance of the provisions of the Joint Declaration of the Powers. . . .

Having been able to safeguard and maintain the structure of the Imperial State, We are always with ye, Our good and loyal subjects, relying upon your sincerity and integrity. Beware most strictly of any outbursts of emotion which may engender needless complications, or any fraternal contention and strife which may create confusion, lead ye astray and cause ye to lose the confidence of the world. Let the entire nation continue as one family from generation to generation, ever firm in its faith of the imperishableness of its divine land, and mindful of its heavy burden of responsibilities, and the long road before it. Unite your total strength to be devoted to the construction for the future. Cultivate the ways of rectitude; foster nobility of spirit; and work with resolution so as ye may enhance the innate glory of the Imperial State and keep pace with the progress of the world.

Source: *Oriental Economist*, 12 (July–August 1945), p. 254.

which on one hand proclaimed that the emperor was the absolute ruler but on the other hand constrained the emperor from exercising absolute power by requiring that all imperial decrees, rescripts, and ordinances include the countersignature of an appropriate government minister.

Both Meiji and Hirohito's father, Emperor Taisho (who reigned from 1912 to 1926), were content to function as constitutional monarchs within this system, which relied on consensus decision making among government officials. Hirohito would have been content to follow in the footsteps of his predecessors in this regard,

but by the early years of his reign this consensus-based system began to break down. As the Meiji-era oligarchs aged and died, political parties in the Diet began to assert themselves, replacing consensus with partisanship. By the early 1930s radical young army officers, disillusioned with the political system, began plotting its overthrow.

According to his political biographer, Stephen S. Large, in *Emperor Hirohito and Showa Japan: A Political Biography* (1992), Hirohito was personally appalled by army radicalism in the early 1930s, despite the fact that many of the

*"Image not available for copyright reasons"*

young officers were carrying out their mutinous activities in the name of a "Showa Restoration" to "save" the emperor from a corrupt government. When an army mutiny broke out in Tokyo in 1936, threatening to topple the government, Hirohito acted as decisively as possible within the constraints of his position to quell it and save the political system. Yet, he was unable and unwilling to prevent Japan's drift toward military control, despite his personal objections, for several reasons. First, Hirohito's education, and a state visit to England in 1921, had instilled in him an abiding sense of the constraints on his position as a constitutional monarch. He viewed his role as identical to that of his revered grandfather: namely, to sanction decisions made by the government. Second, Hirohito's personality reinforced his disinclination to become involved in political matters. Essentially a timid and pedantic man, he was unable to act on his personal convictions, and constitutional scruples provided him with a justification for failing to act to restrain the military. Third, Hirohito's own court advisers often deceived him about political and diplomatic developments and in turn neglected to inform the government and military of his personal convictions and wishes.

They feared that if his objections to military adventurism became public, the army might try to stage a coup and replace him with a more war-like member of the imperial family.

Following the outbreak of war with China in 1937 and the establishment of a fully militarized "national defense state" in Japan, a political consensus of sorts reemerged in the form of a totalitarian government dominated by the military. By this time the window of opportunity for Hirohito to intervene meaningfully in political decision making had closed, and, like his subjects, he was forced to watch helplessly as the increasing recklessness of the militarists plunged the nation deeper into the quagmire of war with China, thus antagonizing the Western powers, especially the United States. The Japanese occupation of French Indochina in the summer of 1940 prompted an American embargo of oil and metals in 1941, leaving Japan's armed forces with a limited reserve and the conviction that if the Americans did not lift the embargo, raw materials would have to be seized from Southeast Asia. Although this step would mean war with the United States and Great Britain, both civilian and military leaders reached a consensus by the fall of 1941 that Japan had no choice but to fight. Like his ministers, Hirohito understood the appalling risks of war against an enemy with overwhelmingly superior material resources, but in keeping with his abiding sense of duty as a constitutional monarch, he gave his sanction to a decision made by the government. Thus, Hirohito duly issued the declaration of war on the United States, although he had played no part in making the decision to launch that war.

During World War II, Hirohito received regular briefings on the military situation, and, like his ministers, he realized that, with the fall of Saipan in July 1944, Japan's situation had become desperate. Nevertheless, when his advisers raised the possibility of deposing Prime Minister Hideki Tojo for the failure, Hirohito adamantly refused to consider the matter, not out of support for Tojo's hardline militarism but rather because of his desire to remain aloof from all political decisions. Instead, the task of deposing Tojo was left to the prime minister's political adversaries.

Hirohito, who had so studiously refrained from involvement in political matters even as the nation was plunged into a foolhardy war, only chose to intervene directly in decision making when the time came to end the conflict. By August 1945 Japan was devastated and defeat was looming. Nevertheless, the government was hopelessly deadlocked on an exit strategy. One faction, mostly civilian, favored accepting surrender terms provided that the Allies would agree to retain the imperial throne. The other faction, led by the military, favored a last-ditch defense of the home

islands, which would be, in effect, national suicide. Hirohito, at the request of the prime minister, broke the deadlock by ordering acceptance of the Allies' surrender terms even if that meant the end of the imperial line. Following that, at noon on 15 August 1945, Hirohito's shocked subjects heard his voice for the first time as he announced his decision over the radio.

Any responsibility Hirohito bears for Japan's deadly plunge into conflict in the Pacific in 1941 is indirect, arising from his failure to act decisively against the rise of militarism in the 1930s. Constitutional and political constraints, and his own strict sense of adherence to the Japanese concept of the constitutional monarchy, made Hirohito an inactive participant in the decision to go to war. Although he sanctioned that decision, he felt that his position dictated no other course of action. Thus, like the millions of his subjects who fought, suffered, and died in his name, Hirohito remained largely passive as Japan lurched down the road to disaster.

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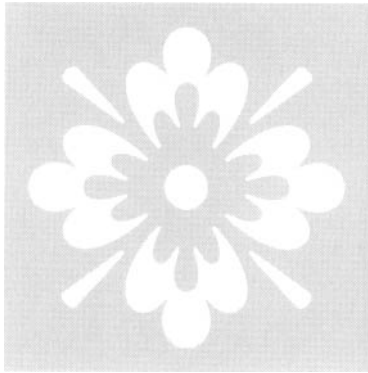
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## EUROPEAN RESPONSE



### Did the Western powers take appropriate action to stop the rise of Adolf Hitler?

**Viewpoint:** The European states had their own internal problems and showed a willful blindness to the rise of Adolf Hitler.

**Viewpoint:** Diplomatic options were inadequate to block Hitler's bold initiatives that led to the outbreak of the war.

The failure of European states to resist Adolf Hitler's aggression, particularly during his early and vulnerable years in power, initially reflected Germany's existence as a sovereign state. However unpleasant, indeed menacing, Europe might find the Nazi regime, there was no question that it was a legal government—one, moreover, with a strong popular base by any measurable standards. A second crucial factor was Hitler's careful calibration of his challenges to a "Versailles system" that even treaty supporters conceded was in need of modification. The question, for example, of whether it was worth going to war for the Rhineland—"To prevent a man from occupying his own back garden," in one commonly used metaphor—by no means had an obvious answer. That was particularly true given the economic and political strictures against military spending everywhere in a Europe scarred by memories of World War I (1914–1918) and traumatized by the Great Depression.

Anticommunism, the belief that Nazi Germany was a bulwark against Soviet expansion and subversion, did less to shape Europe's approach than a conviction that Germany was, when all was said and done, an essential part of Europe. To declare it rogue or outcast was to set the seal on the entropy generated by World War I. It was to reject all the fence-mending essayed since 1918 and plunge the Continent into a virtual Hobbesian state of all against all. With that prospect on the horizon, European diplomats and pundits did everything possible to make Nazism respectable and keep Hitler at the conference table—long after clearer eyes saw the impossibility of integrating either the man or his movement into a civilized world order.



**Viewpoint:**  
**The European states had their own internal problems and showed a willful blindness to the rise of Adolf Hitler.**

The European democracies showed utter and willful blindness to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the imminent threat that he posed to stability

and peace in Europe in the 1930s. They failed to intervene repeatedly despite early and consistent signs of his duplicity, only egging him on from one defiant act to the next until it was too late and a second war in Europe became inevitable.

The new German Republic founded after World War I (1914–1918) was destroyed by the onset of the Great Depression in the 1930s. Depression conditions radicalized politics. With six major and several



minor parties, no single party could gain a majority, and coalitions were so divided in the *Reichstag* (German Parliament) that parliamentary procedures became impossible. From 1930 the government functioned by presidential emergency decree. The chief beneficiary of this turmoil was Hitler's National Socialist Party, which appeared to offer radical solutions to economic problems while upholding patriotic values.

In the elections of 1930 the National Socialists secured 107 seats in the Reichstag, up from twelve, making them the largest party next to the Socialists. In March 1932, Hitler actually stood against Paul von Hindenburg for the presidency of the Weimar Republic. Hindenburg failed to win a clear majority, but was reelected in a runoff ballot in April with more than 19 million votes. Hitler, however, had polled a stunning 11.3 million and 13.4 million votes in the two ballots. This showing was followed by a collapse of his fortunes in the November 1932 national elections, in which the National Socialists actually lost votes. Nevertheless, just over 50 percent of the members of the new Reichstag actually opposed the Weimar Constitution. On 30 January 1933, Hindenburg was finally convinced by several generals and Nationalist politicians to appoint Hitler as chancellor, assured by them that he could be "controlled." Hitler nevertheless immediately ordered a new national election for 5 March. Despite *Sturmtruppen* (storm troopers) terrorizing the voters, the National Socialists only polled 44.5 percent of the vote, but with the Nationalists they controlled 52.5 percent of the seats in the Reichstag. By suppressing the Communists and deceiving the Catholic Center Party, Hitler secured the two-thirds vote needed to pass his Enabling Act (23 March) granting him power to rule by decree.

In the next fifteen months Hitler consolidated his power. He assumed the presidency after Hindenburg died on 2 August 1934, though Hitler never used the title. His efforts culminated with the *Nacht der langen Messer* (Night of the Long Knives), the bloody purge of Ernst Röhm and the "Brown Shirts" on the weekend of 30 June 1934 after Röhm and others demanded a "second revolution" to secure the National Socialist's supposed socialist ideals. Most Germans who supported Hitler during his rise to power did so out of desperation with the chaotic political and economic situation. Few had a clear picture of what he planned to do. After his coercion of the Reichstag, Hitler lost no time in establishing a totalitarian state, decreeing for example the Nuremberg Laws (15 September 1935), which deprived Jews of civil rights. These laws were soon supplemented by other measures designed to rid Germany of Jews.

Internationally, in October 1934, Hitler took Germany out of the League of Nations when it failed to grant Germany "equality of military rights." Not long after, Hitler secured full control of the expanding German armed forces. Meanwhile, relations between the Soviet Union and Germany cooled, and the Soviet Union now became the object of German anticommunist rhetoric. On 25 November 1936 Japan joined Germany in the Anti-Comintern Pact. When Italy also joined on 6 November 1937, the countries effectively ringed the Soviet Union. Many right-wing European leaders, fearful of the communists, hoped Hitler and his allies would destroy the "Red menace."

On the whole, 1936 was a good year for Hitler. He had gained allies, as well as pleased Germans, when he remilitarized the Rhineland while Europe stood by, and thus discovered the weakness of the democratic states and the League. He garnered international prestige after successfully staging the Olympic games in Berlin. The Spanish Civil War also successfully distracted potential opponents' attention from 1936 to 1939. He went on to secure *Anschluss* (Union) with Austria in March 1938 and the destruction of Czechoslovakia by March 1939, all without effective interference from other European powers. What was Europe doing while this occurred?

In the immediate aftermath of World War I the League of Nations was established to provide an umbrella organization for collective security in Europe, and in general globally. The United States, the world's strongest democracy, chose to play a limited role in international affairs and refused to join the League. Great Britain refocused its attention on its empire and commonwealth, leaving to a much-weakened France the leadership role in postwar Europe. The mutual distrust of member-states, coupled with their fear of losing sovereignty, hurt the League's ability to keep the peace. Despite some successes, such as resolving a dispute between Sweden and Finland, the League was helpless in the face of defiant states—as Italy, Japan, and increasingly Germany, proved to be in the 1930s. Gradually reduced to little more than a talking shop, the League sponsored several well-intentioned but ultimately ineffectual agreements such as the Kellogg-Briand Pact (27 August 1928). U.S. secretary of state Frank B. Kellogg, and his French counterpart, Aristide Briand, sponsored the agreement. Ultimately signed by sixty-two nations, the pact outlawed war as an instrument of national policy, but the omission of any enforcement provisions neutered it.

With the United States essentially uninterested and Britain distracted, France spent much of the 1920s trying to achieve absolute security by keeping Germany weak. It sought to impose

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harsh financial reparations on the Germans, and with the Belgians occupied the Ruhr region in 1923 to enforce its will. This act only served to harden the German desire for revenge and divided the former allies at a crucial point. The Treaty of Locarno (1 December 1925) among Germany, Great Britain, France, and Italy only skimmed over their differences. In it they agreed to guarantee the existing frontiers along the Rhine with a demilitarized zone fifty kilometers deep along its east bank and pledged not to attack one another. In return Germany received, and accepted, an invitation to join the League of Nations, a highly symbolic act indicating its return to the international fold. Locarno, however, left unresolved the controversial issues of eastern Europe.

France emerged from World War I shaken by its losses. It suffered more than the other democracies, both in lives lost as a proportion of the population and direct property damage. More than 20 percent of young Frenchmen died in the war. Twenty years later the nation had still not recovered. France experienced political stalemate and social stagnation. The economic impact of the war exacerbated these conditions. Exhausted, France lacked both vitality and a sense of national purpose despite gain-

ing its revenge for the Franco-German War (1870–1871). Working from such a dispirited domestic base, France attempted to oversee international affairs on the Continent. Overall, excepting the counterproductive occupation of the Ruhr, the French carried on fairly well in the 1920s. In the 1930s, however, France retreated behind the newly constructed Maginot Line, a supposedly impenetrable line of fortresses on its western frontier with Germany.

The Great Depression struck France later, but harder, than other countries. French politicians and economists were no better than those of other democracies in dealing with the economic downturn. France managed to maintain a false prosperity for a while because of its large gold holdings, but by the early 1930s it too suffered rising unemployment and budget deficits. Ministry after ministry took power, then collapsed within months. French citizens became impatient with their government, especially when the press exposed corruption in high places, such as during the Stavisky affair. In December 1933 it was discovered that a confidence artist, Serge Alexandre Stavisky, had issued a huge quantity of worthless bonds from the municipal pawnshop at Bayonne. A month later he was found dead, an apparent suicide, in a chalet in the French Alps, with a Paris police inspector outside his door. Rightist groups such as the *Action Française* (French Action) charged that he had been killed by the police to conceal high-level government protection of fraudulent activities. Government refusal to authorize an investigation only lent credence to the charge. Outrage led to riots by rightists and antirepublican groups outside the Chamber of Deputies on 6 February 1934 in which 6 civilians were killed, as well as 170 civilians and 412 police wounded. The riot brought down the government of Edouard Daladier, who had only assumed power in January, but the republic survived. Gaston Doumergue, former president of France, was asked to form a coalition government. The National Union, a rightist coalition, endured strikes and avoided civil war for the next two years. Doumergue’s proposals to strengthen executive powers met with strong leftist opposition and his government fell on 8 November 1934. Pierre-Etienne Flandin succeeded Doumergue, but was soon succeeded by Pierre Laval in June 1935. Laval attempted to deal with the continuing economic crisis, for which pains he was attacked by the Left. Public indignation forced withdrawal of Laval’s plan, with the British, to halt the Italian invasion of Ethiopia by partitioning it and surrendering the larger share to Italy, and his government fell. Albert Sarraut’s ministry then suppressed several rightist parties, including *Action Française*. In the elections of April and May 1936, however, the Socialists gained forty-nine, and the Commu-

nists sixty-two, new seats. The leftist Popular Front took power after Daladier proved instrumental in bringing the middle-of-the-road Radical Party into a coalition with the Socialists and Communists.

The Popular Front, led by Léon Blum, soon set about to bring socialist reforms to France's struggling economy. Blum's government tried to reduce the power of the traditional ruling elite over national finances, while working with the Communists to block growing fascist influences. Cooperation with the Communists caused serious problems since the party was Moscow dominated. Many French voters refused to support the Popular Front, fearing that it might commit France to fight Germany for the Soviet Union's benefit. Internationally, the Popular Front tried to support the League of Nations, while also appeasing Germany. It was heavily distracted by the Spanish Civil War on its southern border, fearing a spillover of that conflict into France. In such an atmosphere of social, economic, and international turmoil, Blum was unable to govern successfully for long. Despite introducing laws for a forty-hour workweek, higher wages, collective bargaining, and paid vacations, the government was embarrassed by sit-down strikes involving some three hundred thousand workers. After only a year in office, Blum resigned because of the unfavorable trade balance, huge public debt, and unbalanced budget. France swung back to the right and the new government ended the forty-hour week and put down the strikes. In many ways the two governments, National Union and Popular Front, mirrored the widening class divisions in France. Workers felt no allegiance to a wealthy ruling clique, just as business owners and financiers were horrified at the prospect of communism, and openly admired Hitler's fascism. Riven thus internally, France was rendered all but impotent internationally. While the French quarreled and France's economic strength declined, Germany outstripped France in the manufacture of armaments.

France increasingly had lost faith in the Covenant of the League of Nations as a guarantee of its survival. Instead, it depended more and more on its diplomats to construct a wall of allies along Germany's eastern frontier that would simultaneously surround the Germans and isolate the Soviet Union. While Germany was weak and dependent on American loans, France could stand as the strongest diplomatic power on the Continent. Yet, even in the 1920s, France lacked the strength to serve as the leader of Europe. When Germany and Italy began to flex their muscles in the 1930s, France—even with Britain's help—faced fascist aggression from a position of weakness.

Austria fared no better than Germany economically. Being nearly as dependent upon American loans, its finances collapsed with the Depression. The failure of Austria's largest bank in 1931 plunged the nation into economic crisis. In May 1932, Engelbert Dollfuss, a Catholic conservative, became chancellor of Austria. He aimed to maintain Austrian independence from Germany with Fascist Italy's help. In March 1933 he suspended parliamentary government. Between 12 and 16 February 1934 he crushed a Socialist uprising, the so-called Civil War, and established a dictatorship in April. Austrian National Socialists assassinated Dollfuss on 25 July 1934 during an abortive coup, before his new regime was fully functioning. The coup collapsed when Benito Mussolini dispatched troops to the Austrian border as a warning to Hitler not to interfere. Dollfuss was succeeded by Kurt von Schuschnigg, who was unable to stop the growth of Germany's influence in Austria. Summoned to Berlin by Hitler, Schuschnigg was browbeaten into resigning on 12 March 1938 and the Anschluss of Austria and Germany was proclaimed.

Why did the European nations not act sooner against Hitler? He had given them clear and repeated signals, if not to his ultimate intentions, then at least to the type of regime he had installed in Germany. How could the Europeans reconcile either the Night of the Long Knives, or the Nuremberg Laws? Did the western Europeans really contemplate living with such a man? They had of course already seen and were used to rule by decree under Hindenburg, and of course there were dictators aplenty, short-lived or otherwise, throughout Europe. Germany was, however, not Austria, Poland, or Hungary. Despite the Depression, Germany was still Europe's single most industrialized state. Incredibly, there were actually European politicians who excused the murders of Röhm and the others on the grounds that once Hitler felt "secure" he would be more reasonable.

Why was no countervailing action taken when Hitler began to rearm Germany? The British under Neville Chamberlain acted, but in a way consistent with their responses throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and in line with their views about appeasement. The Anglo-German naval accord of 1935 was a diplomatic solution, restricting Germany to build a fleet up to 35 percent of Britain's, and to have parity with Britain in submarines. Chamberlain reasoned the Germans were bound to build a fleet anyway, but were unlikely to actually fulfill their quotas. So why not strike a bargain and remove a point of contention? Even if they built to their limit, they did not violate Britain's own "two fleet" policy, since Japan's fleet was reckoned equal to 64 percent of Britain's under the Washington (1920–1921) and

London (1930) naval treaties. Thus, the Royal Navy would be equal to the two, and with France as an expected ally in any confrontation, would overmatch them. How anyone could live through the submarine menace of 1917, when Britain was within six weeks of starvation, and permit the Germans any submarines is a real mystery.

Even if one excuses the European response to the initial political and diplomatic moves by Hitler, all essentially internal, how does one excuse their inaction when Hitler abrogated both the Versailles and Locarno treaties by entering the Rhineland in 1936? The move, typical of much of Hitler's actions in the mid 1930s, was completely symbolic. The Germans could not possibly have resisted any British and French military response. The democracies, however, sat back and did nothing, except for France, which uselessly mobilized 150,000 troops behind the Maginot Line. Hitler later confessed that if the French had advanced into the Rhineland in response, the Germans would have had to withdraw, as they were incapable of mounting any real resistance. The feeble reaction only encouraged Hitler. Armed defiance, or a short if bloody riposte, would probably not only have repulsed the Germans, but might have led at that early date to Hitler's political downfall. Even action in response to the Anschluss might not have been too late, although by then the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) was considerably stronger and real fighting might have ensued. Given the sorry state of mobilization, as admitted afterward by many German officers, the *Wehrmacht*'s strength at that time was more numerical than qualitative. It was a far cry from the forces that unleashed *Blitzkrieg* (Lightning War) in 1940 against France and Belgium.

One can make excuses for the democracies, distracted as they were by political and social problems associated both with the end of World War I and the Great Depression. For example, Hitler had only been in power a year when the fallout from the Stavisky affair shook France to its foundations, and nearly simultaneously Dollfuss crushed the Austrian Civil War. The Night of the Long Knives occurred a bare four months later. The Nuremberg Laws went into force as the Laval government wrestled with Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia. While the democracies had a great deal on their plates, their failure to focus on an obvious totalitarian, unfettered by any democratic checks, at the helm of the state they accused of starting World War I should have set alarm bells ringing in every capital. Indeed, half a world away a contemporary military writer, Fujita Issimarou, observed, as recorded by Stephen Howarth in *The Fighting Ships of the Rising Sun: The Drama of the Imperial Japanese Navy, 1895–1945* (1983):

The world today contains two tinderboxes, one on the Pacific and the other around the European developments since the rise of Hitler to power. These two centres are interlocked. If the tempest breaks out in one place, it can easily extend to the other and assume a global character.

The failure of the European democracies to look beyond their own immediate problems to the horizon, as Issimarou had, can only suggest that they turned a blind eye to the threat Hitler posed. Their reward for this folly was the very war they thought they could avoid, and for France, four years of brutal occupation by the old enemy.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**Diplomatic options were inadequate to block Hitler's bold initiatives that led to the outbreak of the war.**

"Each one hopes," Winston Churchill said, "that if he feeds the crocodile enough the crocodile will eat him last." This quotation is often taken to refer to the attitude taken by western European powers to the aggressive initiatives taken by Adolf Hitler during the 1930s. In fact, Churchill was referring to the neutral stance of Norway and Sweden during the Russian campaign against Finland in 1940, after Britain had gone to war with Germany. To apply this Churchillian phrase to the policies of the Western powers before the outbreak of World War II, implying as it does their willful blindness to Hitler's intentions, would also misstate the case. The truth of this observation is quickly grasped, if one turns the statement around. The choice of not feeding a predatory crocodile can lead to two possible courses of action: one can either pen or shoot the beast. When applied to international relations, the first alternative entails the building of alliances to contain Germany. The second involves swift and determined preparations for war and the pressing of hostilities at the earliest and most convenient moment. This set of options has its own analogy to August 1914, when a combination of alliances and events propelled the European powers into World War I. This observation points up the fact that the tools available to statesmen to settle disputes, ameliorate grievances, and confront dangers need to be more various than the narrow pathway of alliances and armaments.

The principal method by which the European powers sought to keep the peace was collective security, theoretically positing a community of interest among the major powers to maintain an existing settlement or seek its revision through negotiation and the redress of grievances, as well as a willingness to unite to bring preponderant force against an aggressor and thereby provide a credible deterrent. Unlike the balance of power, the system dominating pre-1914 international relations, collective security eschews rival alliances in favor of a framework within which states can define their common interests, settle disputes, and rally against aggressive actors. A system of collective security makes some fundamental demands on its participants. For instance, what constitutes aggression and, in a dispute, who is the aggressor? Anyone reflecting on the diplomacy of the Cold War will recognize that the containment of the Soviet Union by the western powers did not prevent the Soviet government from crushing dissident movements in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia (1968), as well as condemning thousands of its own citizens to life in its Gulag. If the members of this system are committed to the support of a particular settlement, what parts of that settlement are open to renegotiation and what parts are nonnegotiable? These questions became increasingly important and difficult as the western allies faced the coming of Hitler to power in 1933.

During the 1920s Europe's collective security was a work in progress. European leaders had explored a variety of ways to preserve peace, settle disputes, and check aggression. Through the League of Nations the Draft Treaty of Mutual Assistance (1923) and the Geneva Protocol (1924) attempted to set the terms by which aggression could be defined and appropriate action called for. Outside the League of Nations, only the Treaty of Locarno (1 December 1925), guaranteeing Germany's western borders, and the Dawes Plan (1924), stabilizing the payment of German war debts, promised the settlement of outstanding grievances by means of negotiation. At the same time, French diplomacy was active in eastern Europe, forging alliances with Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Romania, encouraging these states to ally with one another. By the end of the decade it appeared that a combination of methods, negotiated settlements, and alliance diplomacy would secure the peace.

This background helps to explain why the statesmen who faced Hitler in 1933 applied similar measures. Their early readings of his intentions encouraged them to do so. Before 1934 it appeared that Hitler could be checked by President Paul von Hindenburg or the German army. Thus Hitler's moves of 1933—the cancellation of war-debt payments, the decision to begin rearma-



## NEGOTIATIONS

*In late March 1935 Adolf Hitler met with a British delegation led by Foreign Secretary Sir John Simon. The meeting triggered much diplomatic maneuvering as both Hitler and Simon tried to gain certain concessions. In the case of Germany, there was a desire to regain its colonial possessions as well as to establish a bilateral agreement with Britain at the expense of France. As for Britain, it wished to have Germany rejoin the League of Nations.*

The Chancellor then showed his British visitors a diagram indicating the comparative sizes of the European metropolitan countries and their colonies, together with other possessions having economic potentialities. He demonstrated that Germany with her 68 million inhabitants in an area of 460,000 square kilometres, that is to say, with a population density of 137 inhabitants to the square kilometre, had by herself insufficient economic living space [*Wirtschaftsraum*]. It would not do to try to find a solution, only to have it again denounced shortly afterwards, but in the interests of a true peace a solution must be sought which would be permanently acceptable; Britain would thus have pledged herself to Germany and Germany would abide absolutely by her Treaty obligations. He was not asking for the impossible, but for what, in his view, constituted the necessary and reasonable minimum. He recalled that Germany also had made great renunciations. Britain had no interest in making Germany a pariah among the nations, but in bringing her into Britain's own sphere of interest. No one could tell how history might develop. But a time would come when the European nations would have to stand together, and when it would be specially important for Germany and Britain to be standing together. No one in Germany, and least of all the National Socialists, felt any hatred or enmity towards Britain. Nor had they any such feelings towards France, but in view of French complexes it was infinitely more difficult to get on better terms with France. Germany was aware that she could never defend any possible colonial possessions of hers single-handed. But it might also happen that Britain would require outside help to defend her possessions. Should it be possible to find a solution, this might lead not only to cooperation in Europe but to special relations of friendship between England and Germany.

Simon expressed his pleasure at the frank statements made by both sides. He wished to make two observations: The first was that the Chancellor had so expressed his thoughts that they seemed to require closer relations between Britain and Germany than between Britain and France. Britain wanted to be on good terms with Germany, but must not allow this to prejudice her friendship with France. They did not wish to substitute one friend for another. They did not wish to have special engagements with anyone; Britain was an entirely uncommitted member of the Society of Nations. It would not be "fair" were he to allow the impression to be created that Britain was being disloyal to one friend while seeking another. His second point concerned the colonial question. This would be carefully studied. . . .

*Source: Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, Documents on Nazism, 1919–1945 (London: Cape, 1974), pp. 514–515.*

ment, and Germany's exit from the League of Nations—were taken, particularly by the British, as justified revisions of the Versailles Treaty (1919) rather than as potential threats against Germany's neighbors. From 1934 to 1936 there was a good chance that alliance diplomacy could keep Hitler at the negotiating table. In the spring of 1933, Italian dictator Benito Mussolini proposed a Four Power Pact, designed to bring Italy, France, Germany and Britain into an alliance to settle European affairs among themselves. Mussolini also opposed Germany's expansion into Austria. This opposition led to an agreement with France (1935). In April of that year the British joined in these talks and, at the Italian town of Stresa, discussed their general interests in preserving the territorial settlements of Versailles and Locarno. It also appeared that an alliance framework to contain Germany was expanding. In 1934 Soviet Russia, alarmed that Hitler meant to destroy communism throughout Europe, joined the League of Nations and showed willingness to cooperate in the preservation of the eastern European settlement. These developments left Hitler's Germany isolated in Europe. From the perspective of 1935 there was good reason to believe that any German threat to European stability could be easily contained.

It is also true that the European powers were not idle on the military side. During the 1930s the French prepared an army of more than eighty divisions and a powerful navy. The British had a small land force, able to commit two divisions to the Continent, and a strong navy upon which the island depended for its survival. Aircraft production was more problematic. The French gave little attention to aircraft and lagged badly throughout the period. The British began a building program with emphasis on the bomber, an offensive weapon aligned with a strategy of deterrence. By 1937 the British turned their building program toward fighter production, a strategy emphasizing survival of the first blast of war. This emphasis on defense was also in line with French strategic thinking. The great symbol of French strategy was the Maginot Line, a series of fortified areas stretching along the Franco-German border from Switzerland to Belgium. Like the British theory of survival, the Maginot Line was intended to buy time against an offensive from Germany, allowing the army to organize its own countermeasures. Whatever flaws this armament program may have had, it was sufficient to convince German army commanders that their forces were inferior to those of the western powers.

The only person these measures did not deter was Hitler. By 1935 he had consolidated his hold on political power. In June of that year he signed a unilateral treaty with Britain on naval forces. This agreement demonstrated the willing-

ness of British statesmen to put aside collaboration with the French. Soon thereafter Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia (2 October 1935) revealed further divisions between the western powers. The British, fearing an Italian threat to their influence in Egypt, wanted strong measures against Mussolini. The French preferred to court Mussolini as an ally against Germany and so by the end of the year persuaded the British (the Hoare-Laval agreement) to grant major concessions to Mussolini. The resulting furor in both countries against this agreement forced its cancellation, a move that alienated Mussolini from the western powers. In 1936 he moved to settle disagreements over Austria with Hitler. By the end of 1935, before Hitler had made a single challenge to the territorial settlement of Versailles, the frailty of relations between Britain and France was apparent.

This frailty was less a matter of blindness to an apparent threat than the result of the assertion of the traditions, according to which each state determines and pursues its own interests, of the European state system. By the end of 1935 it was clear that British interests were naval and imperial, security for its Mediterranean interests being paramount. The French, on the other hand, wished to preserve the territorial settlement of Germany's western and eastern borders. Whereas the French sought alliances to support the territorial settlement, the British considered Continental issues to be subjects suitable for negotiation, itself a tradition of British diplomacy. These factors made western diplomacy vulnerable to the swift and decisive initiatives Hitler thrust against it during 1936.

By focusing attention on the weakness of Hitler's potential opponents it is easy to underestimate the importance of the Führer's bold activism. Not only did he pose as a man of action, the fast pace of his actions against well-chosen objectives forced his potential opponents to make decisions that they were ill prepared to consider. This fact was revealed with startling clarity in March of 1936 when Hitler sent troops into the demilitarized German Rhineland. The French demanded that the British honor their guarantee of Germany's western border (Locarno) and provide troops. British prime minister Stanley Baldwin, realizing that he lacked both the troops and political support to provide them, refused. For the rest of the year Hitler settled affairs with Mussolini (the Anti-Comintern Pacts, with Japan in 1936, and Italy in 1937), sent forces into Spain to aid the fascist rebels, and set about weaving a diplomatic web around Austria, his next objective.

The Western powers never recovered from Hitler's Rhineland venture. The British continued to rearm but also pursued the course of negotiation and diplomatic redress of grievances, now turning into the policy of appeasement. The

French dug more deeply into the strategy of the Maginot Line and made diplomatic efforts to shore up support on Germany's eastern flank by treaties with the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. Without Britain and Italy, however, these were unpromising efforts. Collective security had gone, a victim of divergent national interests and an emphasis on diplomacy over deterrence.

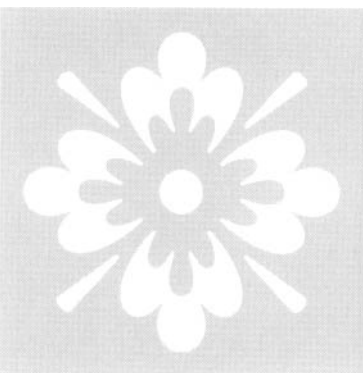
By choosing to move into the Rhineland, historically part of Germany, Hitler posed for the western powers a problem no system of collective security has been able to resolve, the legitimacy and desirability of intervention to reverse actions taken within a sovereign country's own borders. He also posed a similarly unanswered problem concerning the use of deterrent force. Suppose the French had chosen to march into Germany. What would they accomplish? Would they continue their occupation, and its expenses, for an extended period? Would they try to depose Hitler, a constitutionally elected ruler? At what point does deterrence turn into aggression? It is clear that British opinion was ready to give Hitler the benefit of the doubt on these points and the French were similarly unwilling to act. Instead of force, the western powers pursued the course of negotiation. That Hitler was able to attack this strategy and seize the initiative from the western powers is less an indictment of the blindness of the west than it is a recognition of the ability of a determined opportunist, Hitler himself.

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# THE GENERALS



## Did German generals on the whole outperform their American and British counterparts?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, German generals were clearly superior to their American and British adversaries, and it was only Adolf Hitler's meddling in operational details and overwhelming Allied superiority that compensated for the lackluster performance of senior Allied commanders.

**Viewpoint:** No, while German and American generals were roughly equivalent in the field, senior American generals were superior in developing broad strategies.

Comparing the performances of U.S. and British senior generals with their German opponents in World War II is complicated by the fact that Britain and the United States were fighting a true global war, whose widely varied theaters made significantly different demands on generalship. The demands on William Slim, in command of a multiethnic army at the low end of British logistical priorities, facing an enemy more remarkable for determination than finesse, were far different from those confronting Sir Bernard Law Montgomery in northwest Europe. The United States made a few successful transfers from the Pacific to European theaters, namely J. Lawton Collins and Alexander M. Patch. These, however, were exceptions proving a general rule of specialization—a rule that diminished the pool of senior officers available against the Germans.

A second factor influencing the development of senior Allied generals was the prewar structure of the British and American armies. Both were small, professional forces. Both had significant constabulary functions paralleling their preparations for *grande guerre* (grand war), were part of policy systems determined to avoid by any means necessary the waging of a long war on the continent of Europe, and competed on equal terms with other services for funding and attention.

German generals by contrast were products of a military culture that gave the army unquestioned priority and of a strategic culture that understood Germany would wage only one kind of war: an all-out continental conflict. Their operational experience was homogeneous. The differences among Russia, Italy, and northern France, as well as between the Red Army and its western Allies, were matters of detail. Principles tested in one theater could be applied in others. Generals could be transferred to take situational advantage of specific skills.

Considered in the abstract, then, Allied generals might be expected to be flexible and adaptable, not likely to suffer from arrogance, and with a medium-to-high learning curve. Their shortcomings would be at the operational levels of war. The Germans, on the other hand, would be at their best as battle captains, able to make the most of opportunities and exploit opponents' mistakes. Whether they would be able to extend themselves to meet the requirements of war-making in three elements and three dimensions was more problematic—especially as resources available to them declined.





**Viewpoint:  
Yes, German generals were clearly superior to their American and British adversaries, and it was only Adolf Hitler's meddling in operational details and overwhelming Allied superiority that compensated for the lackluster performance of senior Allied commanders.**

Generalship, the art of commanding large bodies of soldiers successfully in combat, is a complex activity that defies easy description. The noted Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz said that the successful high commander required a rare blend of intellectual and psychological qualities, nicely balanced and raised to a high pitch. Among the particular attributes included in Clausewitz's mix were the ability to see through the fog of war to determine enemy capabilities and intentions; the knack of figuring out which tactical, operational, or strategic plan will work best in a given situation; courage to make decisions; resolution to see them through to completion; and wisdom to know when to adjust if necessary. Although Clausewitz's penetrating analysis offers a good place to start, it is not sufficient for assessing generalship in World War II. Four decades into the twentieth century, superior commanders also needed a clear sense of how new technological developments, particularly tanks and airplanes used in close cooperation with each other, affected the pace and dynamics of modern war. A brief survey of the campaign history of World War II indicates that German generals, rather than their British and American adversaries, excelled in the art of war.

The domination of German generals over the British began with the invasion of France in May 1940. The British, along with their French allies, were expecting the main attack to come through Belgium into northeastern France, along the World War I route the German army had taken in August 1914 in accordance with the famous Schlieffen Plan. This, in fact, had been the original German idea for World War II as well, but a daring and brilliant German general named Erich von Manstein regarded this plan as strategically indecisive and convinced Adolf Hitler and the high command to adopt instead a much more audacious concept. Manstein's idea was to launch a major, but secondary, attack into Belgium and Holland to draw the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and French mobile forces to the north. Meanwhile, a large concentration

of armored units would move through the supposedly impenetrable Ardennes Forest, cross the Meuse River at Sedan, and then race to the English Channel, cutting off the BEF and French mobile forces from the rest of the French army.

Manstein's bold conception played out on the ground almost exactly as it was drawn on the map. The Germans invaded Belgium and Holland; the British and French took the bait and German armored formations moved successfully through the Ardennes. Then, in a textbook river crossing and exploitation, General Heinz W. Guderian's XIX Panzer Corps, strongly supported by dive-bombing Stukas of the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force), forced its way across the Meuse and boldly dashed to the Channel, covering 150 miles in just seven days. The British and French high commands reacted in stunned disbelief: counterattacks were indecisive and ineffective. The only saving grace for the British was that their commander, John S. S. P. Vereker, Viscount Gort, acting on accurate intercepts of German radio messages, gave the order for evacuation in time to save the majority of the BEF's soldiers, though none of its heavy equipment, in a heroic rescue from Dunkirk (27 May–4 June 1940) to the safety of the British isles. As Churchill ruefully admitted to the House of Commons several days later, "Wars are not won by evacuations." The two principal protagonists of this stunning victory were Manstein, who had the brilliance to conceive it and the moral courage to fight for its acceptance, and Guderian, the tactical innovator who designed the original German armored division and as a corps commander decisively demonstrated that he could lead large armored forces in battle. Another German general, however, who commanded the 7th Armored Division with dazzling audacity, was soon to become famous in his own right. His name was Erwin Rommel.

Rommel became the principal British nemesis in a series of offensive operations in North Africa in which he showed a degree of tactical brilliance in the handling of mobile forces and a relentless, driving spirit that set the standard against which almost all World War II combat commanders would subsequently be measured. Rommel arrived in Tripoli on 12 February 1941 with the lead elements of a single light division. By the end of March, the rest of the division had arrived, but Rommel appeared to the British to be in no shape to mount an offensive. General Archibald P. Wavell, the commander in chief of British forces in the Middle East, a sound, but conventional, soldier, knew from intercepts of German radio messages that the second division of Rommel's *Afrika Korps* would not arrive until May and judged that Rommel would need at

*"Image not available for copyright reasons"*

least two months to establish a proper logistical base. Wavell's estimate probably would have been correct for anyone else, but it did not take into account the audacity of Rommel's mind and spirit. Attacking with his single division, with a few Italian formations in support, Rommel arrived at Al-Agheila on 24 March. By the end of May, he had driven the British Army completely out of Libya, a distance of nearly five hundred miles.

The British hurriedly rushed reinforcements to the theater to protect their base in Egypt and in late 1941 mounted a concerted offensive that pushed Rommel back to Al-Agheila. A subsequent offensive by Rommel in May 1942 reached a stalemate just west of Tobruk. Rommel resolved to break the stalemate by outflanking the British position. This maneuver failed, and Rommel's supply lines were attacked by the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the British 7th Armored Division. Any other commander probably would have withdrawn, but in a remarkable display of tactical resourcefulness and daring, Rommel pulled his armored formations into a defensive perimeter in the center of his lines and held his ground. The British 8th Army commander, General Neil Ritchie, launched a series of piecemeal attacks against this position, all of which were successfully repulsed by Rommel's

devastating use of tanks, infantry, and antitank guns. When the British reserves were depleted, Rommel again took the offensive, this time pushing Ritchie's forces deeply into Egypt, just sixty miles from Alexandria. With significant matériel support from the Americans and Rommel retired from the theater because of illness, the new British 8th Army commander, General Bernard Law Montgomery, mounted a massive attack against the German-Italian position in November 1942. Rommel was summarily pulled out of his convalescence and returned to North Africa, where he managed to elude Montgomery's grasp and withdraw in the face of superior force all the way to Tunisia. Here, for good measure, he inflicted a stinging defeat on the Americans at the Battle of Kasserine Pass (14–25 February 1942) before Hitler ordered him back to Germany.

Rommel's tactical brilliance in the handling of armored formations was matched by the operational skill of his German superior, Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, whose intelligence was evident in the fact that during World War I he had been appointed to the General Staff without the formal schooling this normally entailed. Transferred to the Air Ministry in 1933, he commanded the 2nd *Luftflotte* (Air Fleet) during the invasion of France and the Battle of Britain

(July–September 1940). In December 1941 Hitler selected him to take command of the Mediterranean theater of operations. As the only airman of any of the major World War II belligerents to command both ground and air formations, Kesselring demonstrated strategic sense, operational savvy, and the ability to play a weak hand with skill and determination. Soon after his arrival in Rome in December 1941, Kesselring determined that capture of the tiny island of Malta, which served the British as an unsinkable aircraft carrier, was absolutely necessary to provide security for the sea lanes across the Mediterranean that kept Axis forces in North Africa supplied with vital matériel. Hitler, however, refused to give Kesselring the airborne forces required to capture Malta. As a result, Rommel's forces were never properly sustained.

After the Allied victory in North Africa, Kesselring correctly divined that Sicily would be their next target and that its defense was untenable. He therefore ordered the local commander to organize an aggressive delaying action and personally supervised the buildup of formidable air defenses at the Straits of Messina. Weak leadership on the part of the Allied army group commander, General Harold R. Alexander; Montgomery's innate caution; and Kesselring's skillful planning allowed the evacuation of roughly seventy thousand Axis troops and all their equipment to the Italian mainland, where they were subsequently used to great effect. Hitler appeared to favor a quick withdrawal to the north of Italy, but Kesselring convinced him that it was not only strategically desirable to defend the south to keep American bombers as far as away as possible from Germany, but it was operationally feasible as well. Hitler supported Kesselring's concept but typically refused to give him the forces he needed to make the plan fully effective. Nevertheless, Kesselring excelled. He came within an ace of driving the American 5th Army under General Mark W. Clark into the sea at Salerno. He kept two Allied armies at bay in the mountains south of Rome for eight months. He bottled up the American VI Corps at Anzio for two months. The Americans and British finally used overwhelming superiority on the ground and in the air to dislodge his defense. Clark, rather than cutting the German 10th Army off in its withdrawal from the Gustav line, elected to beat the British to Rome and marched virtually unopposed into the Italian capital. Deftly exploiting this breakdown in Allied unity, Kesselring moved his forces into the mountains north of Rome and organized another elastic defense that kept the Americans and British involved in a long, frustrating, torturous advance up the Italian peninsula. Having survived being shot down five times while touring the front in his own airplane, Kesselring was seriously

injured in an automobile accident in the autumn of 1944 and placed on convalescent leave. He returned to service briefly in the spring of 1945 in a last-ditch effort to defend Germany, but his last major battle was over.

During the campaign in northwest Europe, American and British generalship improved somewhat, but it was still marked by hesitation and indecisiveness at critical times, while the German command in Europe was significantly hindered by Hitler's meddling in operational and tactical detail. Rommel, appointed by the Führer to command the army group on the Western Front, wanted to place all the armored divisions in close proximity to the beaches. Hitler temporized. He gave Rommel only three of the available six divisions, placing the remaining three under the nominal command of Field Marshal Karl Gerd von Rundstedt, the theater commander, and reserving to himself the authority to order their employment when the Allied invasion came. As a result of Hitler's indecision, the Americans and British were able to establish their lodgment before large-scale armored attacks could drive them into the English Channel. Their actions ashore, however, were not tactically sound. Montgomery repeatedly launched aborted attacks to seize the French coastal city of Caen, which he had originally predicted would be captured in the first few days of the assault. General Omar N. Bradley, commanding the American portion of the landing, got bogged down in a series of hedgerows, skillfully defended by the *Wehrmacht* (German Army). When General George S. Patton's 3rd Army finally broke through the German positions at Avranches (12 August 1944), Hitler ordered the local commander to launch the German 7th Army in a suicidal counterattack. This presented the Allies with a magnificent opportunity to annihilate an entire German army by encircling it at Falaise. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Allied theater commander, however, failed to grasp the opportunity, and neither Montgomery nor Bradley was bold enough to attempt it on his own initiative. This indecisiveness allowed the Germans to extract critical corps and division staffs, around which they established an effective defense of Germany's western frontier.

Shortly thereafter, Hitler began planning a massive thrust designed to split the American and British forces, recapture the port of Antwerp, stabilize the western front, and bring about a negotiated peace with Britain and America that would allow him then to turn his attention to the Russians, who were remorselessly advancing from the east. It was a pipe dream. Rundstedt argued instead for a more modest offensive that would chew up several Allied divisions and leave Germany with sufficient strength

to conduct a fighting withdrawal to the Rhine River. Hitler would have none of it. As a result, when the offensive was launched on 16 December 1944, it achieved tactical and operational surprise, but not strategic results. Eisenhower diverted forces from both the north and south to contain it. By the end of January 1945, the Americans, with some assistance from Montgomery, had eliminated the bulge in their lines, and the German army, as Rundstedt had predicted, had no reserves left with which to defend the fatherland. Just more than three months later, the war was over.

Thus, the British and Americans, with a good deal of help from the Russians, ultimately triumphed over Germany in World War II. There are many reasons this was so. One reason, however, was not because the Allies had better generals. Men such as Manstein, Guderian, Rommel, and Kesselring were clearly superior in the conduct of modern war to the likes of Eisenhower, Montgomery, Bradley, and Clark.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, while German and American  
generals were roughly  
equivalent in the field, senior  
American generals were superior in  
developing broad strategies.**

The excellent is the enemy of the good. This aphorism encapsulates the conventional wisdom about military leadership before and during World War II, where Dwight D. Eisenhower and his lieutenants get credit for being morally good, while the Germans are held to have been militarily excellent. Like much conventional wisdom, this assessment is wrong, resting as it does on an implicit and fundamentally flawed comparison between glittering German victories against France in 1940 and the Soviet Union in 1941 and necessarily less breathtaking American achievements against a tough and experienced *Wehrmacht* (German Army). Erich von Manstein and Heinz W. Guderian may or may not have been military geniuses on the order of Napoleon Bonaparte, but they never faced the Americans. Those who did emerged with little to garnish their military reputations. This should not have surprised anyone; Americans, personified by George C. Marshall and Lesley J. McNair, saw the shape of war to come and constructed a mili-

tary instrument suited to winning that war, while German preparations conducted by Werner F. von Fritsch, Ludwig Beck, and Franz Halder bordered on dilettantism. Marshall's minions employed these forces in support of credible and evolving strategy to win the world war, while the *Ober-Kommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW, German General Staff) never seemed to have any clear idea of how they were going to fight it. As a military commander, Eisenhower's broad-front strategy, rather than being a dull and unimaginative frontal assault, presented Karl Gerd von Rundstedt with an unanswerable challenge that he chose not to meet. For all their faults, Omar N. Bradley and his commanders come off better than their enemies. Douglas MacArthur described his vision in 1932, when he assumed his duties as army chief of staff:

It was plain to see that modern war would be a war of massive striking power, a war of lightning movement, a war of many machines, yet a war with its cutting edge in the hands of but a few skilled operators. . . . It was easy for the professional mind to foresee the armored task force of bombing planes, tanks, and supporting motorized columns reviving mobile war.

As MacArthur's syntax indicates, this was a collective vision, shared by all American military leaders and not imposed from above. While this vision sprung in part from natural predilection, General John J. Pershing had proposed the triangular division for mobile campaigns in North America. Historian Louis Morton demonstrates that a realistic evaluation of the threat informed this vision. Malin Craig, MacArthur's successor as chief of staff, and Stanley Embick, head of the War Plans Division, adjusted American war plans to cope with evolving threats from Japan and Germany. Officers such as Walter Krueger and Albert C. Wedemeyer attended the German *Kriegsakademie* (Military Academy) and kept their fellows informed about developments in German doctrine. For all the attention focused on William "Billy" Mitchell's unfortunate grandstanding and its predictable result, MacArthur promoted the existence of the Army Air Corps as an autonomous branch during his tenure as Chief of Staff. While the Marine Corps might justly claim the honors of originating amphibious doctrine, Army Chief of Staff Marshall directed its wholesale adoption in early 1941. Chief of Army Ground Forces McNair, in 1943, completed the evolution of the triangular division, begun with Pershing, which was symbolic of the transformation of the U.S. Army into the most mobile combatant of all World War II belligerents. Though Russell F. Weigley, in *Eisenhower's Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944–1945* (1981), criticized the triangular division as

lacking in power compared to the earlier square divisions, it packed more punch than any of its Allied or Axis counterparts.

The German general staff, in contrast, anticipated little of what was to come, insisting on fighting a limited war long after it was clear that the coming conflict would exceed World War I in scale and ferocity. To be sure, the evolution of tactical and operational doctrine under Hans von Seeckt was quite impressive. Faced with a rapacious Poland to the east and an eternally hostile France to the west and limited by the Treaty of Versailles (1919) to a standing army of one hundred thousand, von Seeckt espoused a vision of highly mobile offensive campaigns, using a central position to defeat opponents in sequence. Guderian's memoirs, *Erinnerungen eines Soldaten* (1950), make this clear, as he graduated from staff officer in the Motor Transport division to proponent of armored warfare. Tanks, for instance, were to weigh no more than twenty-seven tons, the limit of German bridges; trucks were little modified from civilian use and suitable chiefly for operations in highly developed countries. Indeed, the oft-criticized logistical austerity of the Wehrmacht makes sense when one considers that its force structure was designed to support a defensive conducted on or near German soil, allowing the army to exploit existing infrastructure. The preceding argument is not meant as an apologia for the Wehrmacht, but rather to point out that when Hitler made it quite clear that Germany's wars were going to be aggressive and expansionist, Fritsch, Beck, Halder, Walther Brauchitsch, as well as most German generals, did absolutely nothing to alter their military instrument. They saw the shape of war to come, because they timidly organized an abortive coup to avert it, but after Hitler's rantings about "the spirit of Zossen" petrified Halder into abandoning this project, the Great General Staff addressed this fundamental change in the military environment by simply hoping that the Führer would be proven correct. In contrast to well-developed American war doctrine, the Germans had no credible plans for the invasion of France, Britain, or the Soviet Union. Bluntly put, the Germans had no one of Marshall's vision and perspective to advise Hitler; when the latter took over the higher direction of the war, he occupied a vacuum.

Nor was this an entirely contingent circumstance. Later, the German generals would dismiss Friedrich Paulus as a "party hack" and Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Jodl as "bootlickers," but all three were in their time well-regarded products of the General Staff system. Paulus rose through the ranks on his own merits, even as his superiors recognized that he lacked the gift for command; Keitel rose as Brauchitsch's protégé.

Though the officer corps regarded Keitel as something of a drone, the fact that they in effect ceded the position as chief of the General Staff demonstrates the low priority it accorded unified direction of the war effort. These three serve as mere symbols of a promotion system in which mediocrity thrived to such a degree that when Manstein relieved Graf von Sponeck from corps command for precipitous flight, the affair reverberated throughout the Wehrmacht.

Excellence in the American army, by contrast, was no accident. There, agonizingly slow promotion—in lockstep, by seniority—provided peers and superiors alike the opportunity to learn each other's capabilities and limitations. Marshall's "little black book" was typical. In spite of stagnation in promotion, officers were aware that they were competing for high command in war. Not only Marshall but also George S. Patton identified Eisenhower as suited for high command, while Eisenhower in turn urged Troy Middleton to stay in the army for that reason. This competition, symbolized by selection for the Command and General Staff College or the Army War College, motivated officers to stand out, to demonstrate brilliance. When war did come, Marshall and his subordinates ensured that the U.S. Army had the best senior leadership available, relieving commanders who did not measure up with shocking ruthlessness, and promoting those who did without regard to convention. Unlike the German Army, patronage disappeared as soon as the illusion of brilliance did. Thus Lloyd R. Fredendall, even though one of Marshall's handpicked men, disappeared quickly, while Raymond McClain, a National Guardsman from outside the fraternity of regular officers, rose quickly to corps command.

The contrast of Marshall with Halder, whose position as chief of staff of the army came closest to Marshall's, illustrates clearly the American superiority in the field of strategy. Admittedly, much of this excellence had to do with Franklin D. Roosevelt's preeminence as a global strategist, but Hitler's failings were exacerbated by his short-sighted staff. Halder had no plans for the war against France. The plan for Operation Barbarossa (the invasion of Russia) shows how German strategy frequently acted at cross purposes. When Hitler rejected Halder's long-term plan for defeating the U.S.S.R., he dealt with that setback by assuming that the Germans would defeat the Soviet Union in the opening battles. This confusion resulted in the back and forth switching of the 4th Panzer Army, preventing the Germans from both reaching Moscow, Halder's objective, and seizing the Ukraine, Hitler's choice. After Barbarossa collapsed in the fall, Halder frantically regenerated his concept of a drive upon Moscow. As Earl Ziemke demon-



## THE SLAPPING INCIDENT

*One of the most publicized events to come out of World War II occurred when the flamboyant and fiery American general George S. Patton Jr. struck an enlisted man. While such an incident would have gone unnoticed in the Soviet, German, or Japanese armies, it was considered an outrage in U.S. military circles. The American public was aghast that a general could act so callously toward one of its citizen soldiers. Although he valued Patton's abilities as a leader, Supreme Allied Commander Dwight D. Eisenhower reprimanded the general and had him publicly apologize to the soldier in question.*

ALLIED HEADQUARTERS, ALGIERS, Nov. 23 (AP)—It was disclosed officially today that Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr. had apologized to all officers and men of the Seventh Army for striking a soldier during the Sicilian campaign. . . .

The story is a strange one—the story of a General, whose excellence is admitted by all, who in the heat of battle lost his temper and later admitted he was wrong and made amends.

The incident consisted of this, according to eyewitnesses:

Gen. Patton slapped a shell-shocked soldier in a hospital tent because he thought that the soldier was shirking his duty. The incident occurred early in August when the Sicilian campaign was in one of its most critical periods.

Patton visited the evacuation hospital and went among the wounded, trying to cheer them. He patted some on the back, sympathizing with them. He then came upon a 24-year old soldier sitting on a cot with his head buried in his hands, weeping.

"What's the matter with you?" Patton asked, according to persons who were in the hospital at the time.

The soldier mumbled a reply that was inaudible to the General. Patton repeated the question.

"It's my nerves, I guess I can't stand shelling," the soldier was quoted as replying.

Patton thereon burst into a rage. Employing much profanity, he called the soldier a "coward," "yellow belly," and numerous other epithets according to those present. He ordered the soldier back to the front.

The scene attracted several persons including the commanding officer of the hos-

pital, the doctor who had admitted the soldier and a nurse.

In a fit of fury in which he expressed sympathy for the men really wounded but made it plain that he did not believe that the soldier before him was in that class, the General struck the youth in the rear of the head with the back of his hand.

A nurse intent on protecting the patient made a dive toward Patton but was pulled back by a doctor. The commander of the hospital then intervened.

Patton then went before other patients, still in high temper, expressing his views. He returned to the shell-shocked soldier and berated him again. The soldier appeared dazed as the incident progressed but offered to return to the front and tried to rise from his cot.

Patton left the hospital without further investigation of the case.

The facts concerning the soldier were later ascertained: He was a regular Army man who had enlisted before the war from his home town in the South. He had fought throughout the Tunisian and Sicilian campaigns and his record was excellent. He had been diagnosed as a medical case the week previous, but had refused to leave the front and continued on through the strain of battle. He finally was ordered to the hospital by his unit doctor. . . .

This incident reflected the character of Patton—a general who drives both himself and his men to the very limit in battles, who is highly emotional at times and is given to outbursts when under strain. But he is regarded by many officers as the best field general in the American Army.

While many soldiers under Patton's command may not have much affection for him, they all respect him as a great general and have confidence in him as a commander. Patton himself doesn't care whether they like him or not—he regards his job as winning battles.

*Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, 23 November 1943.*

strates, this concept was based more on Halder's willingness to gamble and fear of the future than any realistic appreciation of success.

On the surface Eisenhower's persistence in the broad-front strategy resembles the compromise plan for Operation Barbarossa. This concept, so distasteful to advocates of maneuver warfare with their penchant for large arrows on maps, nonetheless created a strategic asymmetry against which the Germans could do nothing. Outnumbered on every front, the Germans could only hold one sector by creating opportunity in another. As the Ardennes offensive (Battle of the Bulge, 16 December 1944–16 January 1945) shows, the Germans could concentrate forces only with great difficulty and by fatally weakening other sectors, incurring disproportionate losses from overbearing American airpower in the process. In effect, by deciding on a broad-front strategy, Eisenhower stretched the Germans past their breaking point. Nor was the alternative, the so-called knifelike thrust, viable. As historian and grandson David Eisenhower points out in *Eisenhower at War, 1943–1945* (1986), Bernard Law Montgomery's apparently daring plan to topple Germany in the fall of 1944 rested on the erroneous assumption that Germany was really finished; Montgomery's own experiences in Operation Market Garden (17–25 September 1944) plainly demonstrate the latent folly of this assumption. Apparently, neither Rundstedt nor any other German general could imagine how the Allies might be defeated. This dearth of strategic imagination left it to the amateurism of Hitler to conceive—and the uninformed efforts of the OKW to plan—*Wacht am Rhein* (Watch on the Rhine), better known as the Battle of the Bulge. Rundstedt's and Walter Model's persistent advocacy and de facto adoption of the small solution to Germany's colossal strategic dilemma, when only Antwerp would suffice, illustrates the strategic blindness of Eisenhower's opponents. Hailed as a diplomat and a political general, Eisenhower in fact mastered his opponents as a military strategist.

Though Bradley, America's foremost operational commander, had flashes of brilliance, they were marred by periods of overcaution and, as at the Bulge, paralysis. Even with his flaws, however, he still outperformed a succession of opponents: Erwin Rommel, Hans von Kluge, and Model. Soviet marshal Georgy K. Zhukov could not have managed a better example of the operational art than the Operation Cobra breakthrough (25–28 July 1944) and its subsequent exploitation at St. Lô. Bringing massive American airpower to bear at the decisive point, exploiting the brilliance of VII Corps under Collins, Bradley created the penetration, activated

Patton's 3rd Army, and then ruthlessly exploited to the Seine. If his caution exacerbated the German opportunity for escape from the Falaise pocket created by Montgomery's pathological slowness, the fact that such an opportunity existed at all can be credited entirely to the 12th Army Group. While he was creating and exploiting this opportunity, his opposite number, Kluge, was battering away futilely at Mortain, which actually made a bad German position worse. Though the Führer had ordered this counterattack over Kluge's protest, the latter really had nothing better to propose, save the tiresome request for reinforcements. As for the bulge, though the German thrust did momentarily unhinge Bradley, he made the right decision with respect to Patton's attack. The same cannot be said for his opponent, Model, who rigidly adhered to the 6th Panzer Army as the main effort, even after it was clear that any success would come behind Hasso von Manteuffel's 5th Panzer Army. One commander seized the operational opportunity presented to him; the other failed to even discern it.

In terms of army commanders, Germans and Americans seem to run about even. For every strength there was a weakness; for every Patton, there was a Courtney H. Hodges. Yet, even Hodges deserves better than he has received. He did, after all, actually command the execution of the Operation Cobra penetration, and if the offensive in the Hürtgen Forest (November–December 1944) turned out to be an egregious mistake, there was clearly no alternative at the time. Compared with Paul Hausser, his opposite number in Normandy, he seems positively brilliant. While Hodges's 1st Army was covering the left shoulder of the pursuit across France, Hausser was busy losing the German 7th Army. Nor can this disaster be laid entirely at Hitler's feet; Hausser abandoned Avranches, perhaps the most vital point during the whole campaign, without a fight, against Kluge's express orders. As for Manteuffel, he was the only subordinate commander to earn Model's respect, but even he was guilty of a flagrant error. It was Manteuffel's mistake that contributed in no small part to the American retention of Bastogne, leaving it covered with only a regiment. Rundstedt would later say that this oversight was the critical failing in the entire operation. Little need be said about Patton's excellence, except to note that William H. Simpson, the 9th Army commander, was even better. While it might be going too far to say that the Americans were significantly better than their German opponents, it would be equally problematic to state the opposite.

Hodges, Simpson, and Patton, taken collectively, were certainly no worse than their Ger-

man adversaries, and probably better. As one climbs the chain of command, the superiority of American leadership becomes even more obvious: Bradley outshined Model and Kluge, and Eisenhower emerged as the preeminent theater commander of the war. Unlike their opponents, however, every American effort contributed to eventual Allied victory. This performance validates the American preoccupation with strategy, something in which the Germans were notably deficient. Unlike German generals, willing to seek the small solution for no clear end, the Americans made the efforts of their soldiers count. In the end, the excellent were not the enemy of the good; they were the good.

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WEST POINT

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# HITLER AND THE UNITED STATES

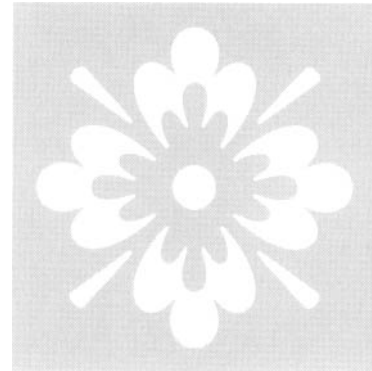
## Was it wise for Adolf Hitler to declare war on the United States after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, Adolf Hitler's declaration of war on the United States was the correct decision in the context of his worldview and war aims.

**Viewpoint:** No, Adolf Hitler's decision to wage war against the United States was based on a poor assessment of American economic and military might.

Adolf Hitler's decision to declare war on the United States four days after it was attacked at Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941) was the most puzzling of his twelve-year rule. The chain of events it set in motion made Germany's defeat certain. Yet, what if Hitler had refrained from taking that step? It is at least questionable whether President Franklin D. Roosevelt would have immediately ventured to urge declaring war on Germany when, for the first time since September 1939, American national purpose was focused on one common goal: the annihilation of Japan. Instead, Roosevelt was more likely to bide his time and work behind the scenes to bring congressional leaders to support a war on two fronts across two oceans.

Part of that process would have involved continuing and extending support of Britain—particularly since it, by grace of Japan, would now be America's ally in the Far East. An easy step would be to push convoy protection eastward, perhaps even to British ports, and publicize the clashes likely to result from the reactions of the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy). Hitler almost certainly would have begun hostilities eventually, with or without formal declarations. Had he acted, however, on his often-expressed belief that the United States was not a dangerous foe—had he stayed his hand even for six or eight months—the U.S. buildup in Britain would have been correspondingly delayed. There would have been no Operation Torch (November–December 1942), nor occupation of French North Africa. The combined bomber offensive would have taken longer to get off the ground. The Battle of the Atlantic would have begun against an Anglo-American coalition in its preliminary stages of cooperation. The U.S.S.R., with only Britain's limited forces to create diversions in the west, would have had so little hope of a second front in any near future that Joseph Stalin might even have considered negotiation a possible option. Were these conditions for an eventual German victory? Perhaps not, but it might have been a longer, bloodier road to Berlin.





**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, Adolf Hitler's declaration of war on the United States was the correct decision in the context of his worldview and war aims.**

On 11 December 1941 Adolf Hitler declared war on the United States. In retrospect this action made little sense, for it brought the world's largest economy and military potential to bear against Germany, which was already bogged down in a vast military undertaking against the Soviet Union. How could Hitler have been so foolish? On the other hand, if he was indeed foolish, why have so many writers attributed an almost demonic genius to him? Rationality is a category of often limited efficacy for understanding human actions. One should never assume that individuals in different cultures and times share the same values and think in the same "rational" terms. Instead of damning the stupidity and infamy of Hitler's declaration of war on the United States, with the benefit of hindsight, one should examine his decision from his point of view. Hitler's declaration of war made sense, if one achieves the following feats of historical imagination: one must proceed from the assumptions of Hitler's despicable racist worldview, accept his false understanding of U.S. military potential, and recall that Germany and Japan appeared to be winning their wars prior to the battles at Stalingrad (Summer 1942–2 February 1943), Midway (3–6 June 1942), and Guadalcanal (August 1942–February 1943).

During the Weimar period (1919–1933), Hitler's foreign-policy aims differed fundamentally from those of most Germans who hated the Versailles Treaty (1919). He agreed that this treaty enslaved Germany and needed to be overcome, but he maintained that mere border corrections made little sense. As he demanded in a foreign-policy speech in 1928, as translated by Gerhard L. Weinberg in *Hitlers zweites Buch: Ein Dokument aus dem Jahr 1928* (1961), "No drop of blood for goals that are not in the German people's interest. . . . Our goals are to gain liberty and land. We do not want any border corrections. 10 or 20 kilometers will not improve the future of our nation. That can never be the aim of a healthy foreign policy." German soldiers should only be sacrificed for truly worthwhile goals.

Hitler described his far-reaching foreign-policy aims in 1924 in *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle) and again in 1928 in his untitled "Second Book," which was not published during his life-

time. These books did not set out a fixed course for his future actions, but they did show the general direction he would take Germany, should he come to power. Hitler believed that a grand vision was prerequisite to great accomplishments. Not in his time, but in the next generation or more, Germany's racial destiny was to rule the world. His job was to set Germany well on its violent course toward this goal; his vision was nourished by a distinct view of world history, which for him consisted of a struggle among nations for survival and predominance, as well as a strong anti-Jewish component. This struggle was about trade and manufacturing on one level, but more important was each nation's ability to feed itself with its own agricultural resources. In order to achieve self-sufficiency, nations had to fight wars. Armed conflict was a fundamental reality of international relations. According to Hitler, "The final outcome of the struggle for the world market will lie with force and not with the economy itself. . . . The sword must stand before the plow and an army before the economy."

Hitler described in his second book the worldwide hegemonic threat that he believed the United States posed: "The only state that will be able to defy North America in the future is the one that knows how . . . racially to enhance the value of its national qualities and governmentally to bring them into the form best suited to this purpose. . . . It is again the task of the National Socialist movement to strengthen and prepare its fatherland for this task to the utmost." These statements do not explain why Hitler declared war on the United States, but they signal his potential willingness to do so.

His writings in the 1920s were not a mere episode, but the formal expressions of a coherent worldview to which he remained true. He mentioned his worldwide ambitions in speeches to *Wehrmacht* (German Army) officers several times in 1939—before invading Poland (1 September 1939) but after having accomplished liberation from the armaments restrictions mandated by Versailles, the remilitarization of the Rhine, and the *Anschluss* (Union) of Austria and a large chunk of Czechoslovakia in 1938. Hitler did not discuss a precise plan but spoke in global terms, justifying his megalomaniacal vision with the German people's superior racial value, numerical strength, and proven ability to fight. After the campaign against Poland, he reiterated his vision in a speech in the Reich chancellery in November 1939: "A racial struggle has erupted [to decide] who should rule in Europe and therefore in the world." Germany would win, of course, because the German soldier was inherently superior to all others: "One can accomplish anything with the German soldier."

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

Hitler's vision was more than mere raving. The *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) had far-reaching plans for the whole Atlantic, although its ideas were never realized because its shipbuilding programs always had to make way for the growing material needs of the army. Striking the United States by air appeared to hold more promise. Jochen Thies, in *Architekt der Welt Herrschaft. Die "Endziele" Hitlers* (1976), shows that in 1937 Willy Messerschmitt revealed to Hitler

and Hermann Göring a full-sized model of a four-engine airplane of which the range would be transcontinental. In 1940 the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) placed an order for the development of six versions of the Me 264, which were supposed to be able to carry heavy loads of bombs to the eastern seaboard of the United States and do reconnaissance work as far as the west coast. In November 1940, when Hitler's successes had seduced him into believing everything was possi-

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## GERMANY DECLARES WAR

On 11 December 1941 the German minister for foreign affairs, Joachim von Ribbentrop, released the following note to the American embassy.

The Government of the United States having violated in the most flagrant manner and in ever increasing measure all rules of neutrality in favor of the adversaries of Germany and having continually been guilty of the most severe provocations toward Germany since the outbreak of the European war, provoked by the British declaration of war against Germany on September 3, 1939, has finally resorted to open military acts of aggression.

On September 11, 1941, the President of the United States publicly declared that he ordered the American Navy and Air Force to shoot on sight at any German war vessel. In his speech of October 27, 1941, he once more expressly affirmed that this order was in force. Acting under this order, vessels of the American Navy, since early September 1941, have systematically attacked German naval forces. Thus, American destroyers, as for instance the *Greer*, the *Kearney* and the *Reuben James*, have opened fire on German submarines according to plan.

Furthermore, the naval forces of the United States, under order of their Government and contrary to international law have treated and seized German merchant vessels on the high seas as enemy ships.

The German Government therefore establishes the following facts:

Although Germany on her own part has strictly adhered to the rules of international law in her relations with the United States during every period of the present war, the Government of the United States from initial violations of neutrality has finally proceeded to open acts of war against Germany. The Government of the United States has thereby virtually created a state of war.

The German Government, consequently, discontinues diplomatic relations with the United States of America and declares that under these circumstances brought about by President Roosevelt Germany too, as from today, considers herself as being in a state of war with the United States of America.

*Source: U.S. State Department, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1941, volume 1 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1958), pp. 588–589.*

ble, the Führer stated that, should the United States enter the war, he would send bombers against it from the Azores in order to force it to defend its own airspace instead of coming to Britain's aid. This defensive strategy had some merit from a purely theoretical point of view; however, Germany's economic, industrial, military, and governmental capacity was more lim-

ited than Hitler's imagination. The Me 264 never came on line, despite repeated efforts throughout the war.

Viewed from the end of the twentieth century, these military preparations and Germany's declaration of war against the United States appear bizarre. The U.S. superpower role, however, had not yet emerged. Germany had experienced the ability of the Americans to field, equip, and feed a substantial army in 1917–1918, but Hitler and many millions of other Germans did not acknowledge the U.S. military contribution to the Allied victory. Following the infamous stab-in-the-back legend, Hitler believed that Germany had never been defeated militarily. Rather, internal enemies had turned on the German Army and undermined its achievements, for which so much German blood had flowed.

Why did Hitler choose 11 December 1941 to declare war on the United States? Weinberg's explanation is the most convincing one. Proceeding from Hitler's worldview, his overestimation of Germany, and underestimation of the United States, and also taking into account German armaments policy, Weinberg places Hitler's decision into the global context in which the German chancellor thought. Hitler wanted to avoid war with the United States in 1939 and 1940, so he kept his navy on a tight enough leash to ensure that its actions against shipping in the Atlantic would not give the United States cause to enter the war. Germany would first defeat the Soviet Union; then it would build a blue-water navy big enough to take on the United States. But the war against the Soviet Union could not be ended in 1941; Britain was still in the conflict, and the United States was supplying both these countries. One way to deal with Britain, Hitler thought, would be to encourage Japan to move south against vulnerable British possessions. Such a move would also keep the United States occupied in the Pacific. Japan wanted to take advantage of British weakness but needed German support against the United States, which Hitler gladly promised since he thought the United States could do little more than continue to send goods to Britain and the Soviet Union. Germany could make up for its insufficient naval power with the Japanese navy. Japan never revealed its precise plans to Germany, but Hitler welcomed its surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941). He immediately ordered his navy to sink all ships it encountered from the United States or from countries who declared their solidarity with it. Hitler took a few more days to officially declare war because he was on the Eastern Front. He had to return to Berlin, and the *Reichstag* (German parliament) and public opinion had to be prepared.

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about Hitler's declaration of war, as Weinberg points out, was that it received near unanimous support among Germany's military and political leadership, which had not been the case with his other military undertakings. This support did not mean that Germany's entire leadership shared Hitler's worldwide ambitions, but it did believe that Hitler's declaration of war on the United States was the correct, indeed the "rational," thing to do at the time. This decision was not initiated on an insane or suicidal whim. It was clearly thought out. That the premises upon which it was based were false did not make it any less "wise" in the eyes of Hitler and the rest of Germany's military and political leadership.

—MARK R. STONEMAN, GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY



**Viewpoint:  
No, Adolf Hitler's decision to wage war against the United States was based on a poor assessment of American economic and military might.**

Hindsight makes the question of Adolf Hitler's declaration of war against the United States seem absurd. Conventional wisdom asserts that Germany's war was definitively lost when the Führer deliberately engaged the United States in a coalition already holding the Third Reich in a stalemate. What were the possible advantages, from both a tactical and strategic standpoint, as well as the immediate and long-term goals of such a move? Can Hitler even be considered a "rational actor," or as Sebastian Haffner suggests, was this a conscious first step toward *Götterdämmerung* (Twilight of the Gods)?

From Hitler's perspective, in December 1941 the war was going reasonably well. General Erwin Rommel was poised just west of Tobruk, reorganizing for his drive to the Suez. The Battle of Britain (July–September 1940) had switched from the air to an underwater war of attrition, whose ratios seemed in Germany's favor. France was out of the war except for an unimportant army-in-exile consisting mainly of quibbling factions. Scandinavia was either safely occupied, neutral, or allied in fighting against the Russians. The Balkans presented problems only for Italy's Benito Mussolini. Only in Russia did shadows accompany light, and even there prospects seemed anything but desperate.

The drive into Russia in June 1944 had initially produced tremendous gains of territory

and enemy armies destroyed. October, however, brought the *rasputitsa* (season of impassable roads). Autumn rains turned eastern Russia into a tank-swallowing quagmire. November snows and subzero weather froze the mud, but slowed the struggling *Wehrmacht* (German Army) to a ragged halt just short of the gates of Moscow. Marshal Georgy K. Zhukov began his counter-offensive on 5 December, two days before the Day of Infamy on the other side of the world. Conditions on the battlefield were so confused that the German General Staff was unsure of the extent and depth of the Russian attack. For the moment optimism prevailed—always the best attitude to hold when presenting Hitler with any news.

The Japanese strike at Pearl Harbor caught Hitler completely off guard, as it did everyone else. He quickly looked to see what political and military advantage he could make from it. The United States had been waging a de facto war against Germany for at least two years, providing both war matériel and supplies to keep Britain alive during the Blitz. With the Lend-Lease arrangement Britain added fifty destroyers to her fleet, to be returned later with no deductible for torpedo damage. For the last six months the U.S. Navy had been providing escort service for all convoys as far as Greenland, losing two destroyers in the process. In addition the United States was sharing its intelligence data with Britain—no small matter to a *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) ignorant of British successes in breaking its codes.

In their May 1941 meeting off the coast of Newfoundland, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt made a pact that when the United States entered the war, and both knew it was only a matter of time, the conflict in Europe would take precedence over any war in the Pacific. At that time, however, American sentiment was wholly against getting involved in the European war. The "America First" movement, vigorously led by national heroes such as Charles Lindbergh and national hatemongers such as Father Charles Coughlin, made it political suicide for Roosevelt to do more. For the next step to war he needed a spectacular cause célèbre. Japan gave it to him—but Hitler helped.

The United States and its new allies declared war against Japan on 8 December 1941. The following Friday, 11 December, Germany and the United States declared war on each other. Hitler believed it was a safe decision. He had nothing immediate to fear militarily from the United States. This decision was made at the height of the U-boat rampage in the North Atlantic, with the sinking of 350,000–750,000 tons a month. This number

leaped in the next three months to 1.7 million tons after they were freed to roam the central and south Atlantic. The German Admiralty had been lobbying for this freedom of movement for some time, promising to close the Atlantic to Allied shipping. Now the time seemed right. With Germany's war going well on all fronts and the Americans preoccupied in the Pacific, Hitler and the Kriegsmarine felt they could put a lock on the Atlantic and strangle Britain, leaving the Reich free to concentrate on Russia. He never dreamed America could be any near-term threat to invade Europe or fight a two-front war.

Hitler had been wooing the Japanese for years to join him in the fight against Russia. Japan had its own agenda to the south. Besides, after the clash with the Russians at the Battle of Khalkin Gol in 1938, the Japanese army's High Command wanted nothing more to do with the mechanized and steel-tipped weapons of the Soviets. Nevertheless, in Hitler's reasoning, he had much to gain and nothing to lose diplomatically by aligning himself with Japan. It was always possible Japan would oblige him by at least making a feint toward Russia, which would oblige Joseph Stalin to keep a sizable army in the East. In fact, Russia and Japan had signed a non-aggression pact in 1938, which both sides adhered to until August 1945. Stalin knew Japan was primarily interested in South Asia, so he had already transferred a sizable portion of his eastern army, unbeknownst to Hitler, to the Moscow theater.

In short, Hitler believed that he had nothing to fear from declaring war on an ill-prepared and geographically distant United States. His navy would now control the whole of the Atlantic, as they then controlled the North Atlantic, keeping any potential American force from reaching Europe. At the most a few expeditionary divisions might supplement the British army, which he considered a spent force anyway. At best, by presenting a solid front with the Japanese, the Allies might hesitate in any counterattack, giving him time to finish Russia and consolidate the Reich.

Of course he overlooked a few things. The United States as yet had a numerically insignificant standing army, but they had an almost unlimited manpower pool, and, more important, the existing army was solidly professional, especially in its officer corps. Continuing budget cuts throughout the 1920s and 1930s had winnowed out all but the most dedicated. Those

left, men such as George C. Marshall, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Omar N. Bradley, George S. Patton, and Douglas MacArthur, were, by good chance, uniquely talented to wage a modern war. On a lower level the noncoms were equally proficient in making civilians into soldiers. Hitler equally misjudged the ability of American industry to stop turning out Fords on Monday and start rolling off tanks on Tuesday. During the course of the war America produced 86,000 tanks, 297,000 aircraft, 8,800 naval vessels, 193,000 pieces of artillery and 2.5 million trucks, not to mention munitions of all types.

The attack on Pearl Harbor caused the immediate collapse of the "America First" Campaign and discredited its leaders, many of whom long bore the label of traitor. By declaring war in support of Japan, Hitler shared equally in the firestorm of public hatred, scorching away all arguments for not getting involved in European affairs. Thus Roosevelt had full political license to fulfill his commitment to Churchill that the European conflict take precedence. Declaring war on the United States also appealed to Hitler's vanity and his warped vision of a world in flame. Yet, he traded short-term military and diplomatic advantages, which were largely illusionary, to poke a stick at an already aroused tiger.

—JOHN WHEATLEY, BROOKLYN  
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# HITLER'S ARMY

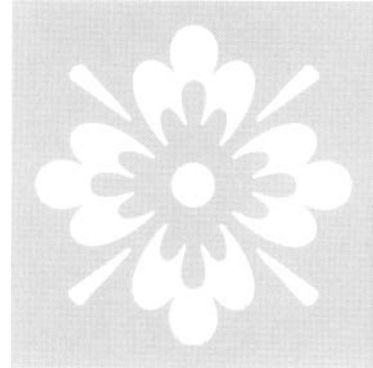
## Did the Wehrmacht reflect Adolf Hitler's ideology?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the organization, training, and indoctrination of the Wehrmacht made it into Hitler's army.

**Viewpoint:** No, unlike the officer class, the majority of the rank and file of the Wehrmacht was not committed ideologically to Hitler.

If veterans of the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) have possessed a common story, it is of *nur-Soldatentum*: patriots doing their duty as honorably as possible, for the most part standing clear of contamination by a criminal regime. Two major challenges to this position dominate current scholarship. One insists that a synergy between frontline conditions of modern war and national Socialist ideology produced a German army in Adolf Hitler's image. In contrast to 1914, there was little enthusiasm for war in 1939. The euphoria created by the unexpected victories of 1940 quickly dissipated after the launching of Operation Barbarossa (22 June 1941). The invasion of Russia was the kind of high-risk operation requiring faith in the Führer. Faith and will became ever more important as the German army demodernized, no longer able to maintain its high-tech facade in the face of its material losses. Comradeship and cohesion disappeared as well, destroyed by the constant high casualties. At the same time Nazi ideology and German racism combined to brutalize the war on the Russian Front and the men who fought it.

A second perspective recognizes the strong ideological dimension German soldiers brought to their war—especially by comparison to their Soviet, British, and American counterparts. Building on a legacy of World War I, the *Landser* (foot soldier or infantryman) saw himself as in the forefront of creating a new German community. The frontline experience of comradeship and sacrifice would grow into the national people's community promised by the Nazis. In this sense their hardships had an other than existential meaning. German soldiers also took conscious pride in their skills and capacities. They saw themselves as better soldiers, and therefore better men, than their opponents. This self-image in turn played into a nationalism, exacerbated by Nazi ideology and propaganda, that objectified everyone outside the German community—allies as well as enemies. In those contexts, the Wehrmacht did not fight Hitler's war—it fought Germany's war.





**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the organization, training, and indoctrination of the Wehrmacht made it into Hitler's army.**

An army, any army, inevitably reflects the society from which it came and of which it remains a part, a statement with which Adolf Hitler certainly agreed. From the beginning of his rule he sought to immerse the young, the fabric of any future Nazi army, in ceaseless ideological indoctrination through a myriad of organizations. In National Socialist Germany, therefore, ideology functioned long before battle to shape and foster a sense of national community in young Germans. Historians of the *Wehrmacht* (German Army), however, have proved remarkably resistant to this seemingly elementary observation.

Even before the end of World War II, analysts sought the reason for the remarkable cohesion, tenacity, and resilience of the Wehrmacht outside Nazism itself. Some sought to detach the Wehrmacht from the Nazi regime by arguing that it had maintained itself as a separate institution, so that the explanation for its efficacy lay in German military tradition. Others pointed to technical factors such as training, organization, or leadership. Still others noted a complex mixture of factors, among them comradeship, fear, good leadership, and faith in Hitler. Shortly after the end of the war, Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, in their classic study of the combat motivation of the German soldier, "Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht" (1948), disparaged the notion of ideology as a motivational factor, asserting that the effectiveness of the German Army had little to do with the National Socialist political convictions of its members. Primary group formation and comradeship, both of which provided for the basic psychological needs of the *Landser* (foot soldier or infantryman), they concluded, served as the key motivational factor in the determined resistance of the German soldier. Evidence pointing to the importance of ideology, prior political indoctrination, or faith in Hitler as a leader who had promoted the economic and social well-being of the German people went largely unnoticed.

This almost exclusive emphasis on the relevance of the primary group for German combat behavior remained largely unchallenged for three decades. However, in the 1978 article "Effectiveness and Cohesion of the German Ground Forces in World War II," Victor Madej returned to the issue of motivation. He rejected the central role of the primary group, arguing instead

that German cohesion in combat stemmed from the military skill and efficiency created by an outstanding organization. To Madej, superior performance issued not from cohesion, but cohesion instead resulted from exceptional organization, training, and military skill. Martin van Creveld seemed to settle the debate in *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939-1945* (1982). He in effect combined the Shils-Janowitz thesis with that of Madej in claiming that the Wehrmacht deliberately created well-integrated primary groups, but these tight-knit units only endured because they satisfied the social and psychological needs of the individual soldiers. Just a year after the appearance of van Creveld's work, however, Elliot P. Chodoff wrote "Ideology and Primary Groups." Although agreeing on the significance of both organization and primary group formation, Chodoff nevertheless recognized the importance of ideology in precombat motivation, while also noting that ideology and the primary group need not be exclusive as motivational factors. To Chodoff, ideology established the precombat framework for behavior, but once in action ideology gave way to primary group loyalty as a motivating factor.

Recently, Omer Bartov took the debate a step further by suggesting that ideology played a decisive role in determining motivation even during combat. As Bartov demonstrated in several works, the *Landser*, perhaps to a surprising degree, carried preordained ideological beliefs with him into the war, especially into Russia. Of incessant Nazi propaganda and ideological indoctrination in the schools, as well as in institutions such as the Hitler Youth and the labor service, the practical result was a body of men whose remarkable cohesion in the face of the tribulations of war was a result of the binding force of these ideological beliefs. Bartov emphasized that the brutality of the fighting quickly severed these carefully nurtured primary groups, so that the only explanation for the amazing resilience of the *Landser* lay in his ideological motivation. In his stress on ideology, however, Bartov focused exclusively on factors of negative integration such as racism, anti-Semitism, and a brutal disregard for the occupied peoples.

Certainly the incessant stream of propaganda served to produce in the minds of many soldiers a legitimacy for the Nazi regime that encouraged willing obedience. And the flow of racist and anti-Semitic ideological indoctrination undeniably reinforced a general sense of racial superiority on the part of many *Landser*s. However, this negative integration, so thoroughly documented by Bartov, by itself could not induce the amazing tenacity under conditions of extreme disintegration demonstrated by the aver-





age German soldier. The extraordinary resilience of the German soldier also demanded the celebration of a positive ideal, a point that Josef Goebbels's propagandists well understood. Their emphasis, after the war had turned against Germany, that the Landser fought for German culture and European civilization, indeed for the existence of everything they knew and cherished, resonated among many frontline soldiers.

Many Landsers, in fact, demonstrated an acute sense of defending an ideal, that new society, evidently under construction in the 1930s, that would redeem Germany socially, economically, and nationally after the failures of World War I. The notion of *Volksgemeinschaft* (national community), the idea of a harmonious society which would eliminate class conflict and integrate the individual into the life of the commu-

nity, holds the key to unlocking the attraction National Socialism asserted for many Landsers. As an organizing principle, *Volksgemeinschaft* represented an attempt to balance individual achievement and group solidarity, and as an agent of social integration within the Third Reich contributed greatly to Nazi success in creating a sense that a new society was in the offing. The Nazi insistence that the individual best served the *Volksgemeinschaft* by developing his potential encouraged both cooperation and competition, while cohesion came from the belief that those above had earned their positions in direct competition. The promise of open doors to advancement, of living an ordinary life in an extraordinary fashion through service to an ideal community that was both inclusive and integrated, proved a heady brew. Among the young,

**Fourteen-year-old Wehrmacht soldiers captured by the Allies near Bestadt, Germany, 1945**

*(Associated Press)*

especially, the belief in this national community represented a rallying point, an idea which supplied the vital principle around which a new German society was to be organized.

This dynamism and passionate energy that the Nazis tapped, the motivational power of *Volksgemeinschaft*, stemmed not least from the fact that millions of Germans thought that such a unity had already been achieved once, only to be lost. The outbreak of World War I had initially illustrated the intoxicating power of the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*. With the *Burgfrieden* of 1914, Germany seemed to have overcome class division and internal disunity, as people from every segment of society came together in a profound wave of national enthusiasm. This promise of unity, of participating fully in the life of the nation for the first time, dazzled many Germans, especially as it created a powerful sense of purpose and shared destiny. The trenches of the Great War thus proved a breeding ground for a new idea, that the front experience had forged a community of men in which all social and material distinctions disappeared.

The memory of this unity and the reality of the mobilization of millions of average Germans, both men and women, for the war effort ensured that the spirit of 1914, when a new society beckoned, would remain a potent political force in Germany. The contrast with the Weimar period, with its political fragmentation, economic conflict, interest group squabbling, and national humiliation, proved especially disheartening. What once had been tangible—the great accomplishment of the war—now appeared lost. A mood of crisis was palpable. The postwar years kindled in Germans a restlessness, a desire for a restored sense of community to replace the lost unity of 1914. The secret of Nazi popularity lay in understanding this desire, of reviving the passions of 1914, of promising not only to restore national pride but to revive the spirit of popular mobilization and promote social reform as well.

National Socialism, as an organizing idea, owed its existence to the war, to the model of “trench socialism” Hitler held so dear. The Nazis promised a new beginning, a national community that would restore the lost feeling of camaraderie. In this respect, Nazism was idealistic, a call to the national spirit, a promise of salvation and national renewal on many levels. Purpose, belonging, and meaning would thus be restored to a life based on values. Hitler proposed to transform the German *Volk* (people) into a group of comrades, equal in status if not in function, under the strong leadership of the new man just back from the front. It marked a plunge into the future, but the promise of deliverance was beguiling. Just as importantly, this national socialist

idea resonated all the more powerfully in that it appealed to many who believed it had already been realized in the trenches of World War I. After all, as the popular saying went, a bullet did not ask whether one was high- or low-born, if one was rich or poor, or what religion or social group one belonged to.

Even before 1933 the Wehrmacht had been intrigued by the notion of *Volksgemeinschaft*, seeing in it a way to promote a more cohesive and effective military force. Any future war was bound to be a total war that required the complete mobilization of German society, so Wehrmacht leaders pursued the *Volksgemeinschaft* idea as a means to create an effective national unity. Both Hitler and the army leaders thus shared a vision in which the revered *Frontgemeinschaft* (frontline community) of World War I would be transformed into a permanent state of affairs. Nor was this mere rhetoric. The new National Socialist military worked assiduously to promote the idea of careers open to talent, to deemphasize the externals of rank, and to promote a sense of shared community between officers and men. The German military under the Nazis for the first time became an organization open to talent regardless of social origin. Hitler himself welcomed and championed this process. In a speech in September 1942 he specifically pointed to the new promotion policy of the Wehrmacht as an example of the emerging National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft*, where the sole criteria for advancement were leadership and achievement. This accomplishment, to Hitler, appeared to be the most revolutionary one of National Socialism: the destruction of the old bourgeois world of class and social snobbery and the emergence of a *Volksgemeinschaft* established on the basis of talent, opportunity, and merit.

The twin pillars of this new *Volksgemeinschaft* would be the army and the party. “We must educate a new type of man,” Hitler proclaimed at the Nuremberg Party Rally in September 1935, and he left no doubt upon whom this task fell, proclaiming at Reichenberg in December 1938:

These young people learn nothing else but to think as Germans and to act as Germans; these young boys . . . move from the *Jungvolk* to the Hitler Youth and there we keep them for another four years. And then we are even less prepared to give them back into the hands of those who create our class and status barriers. . . . And if they . . . have still not become real National Socialists, then they go into the Labor Service and are polished there for six or seven months. . . . And if . . . there are still remnants of class consciousness or pride in status, then the Wehrmacht will take over for a further treatment.

By 1939, when membership became compulsory, fully 82 percent of German boys and girls between the ages of ten and eighteen belonged to the Hitler Youth or one of its affiliates. Indeed, the Nazi leadership recognized early on that these adolescents represented a source of dynamic energy and passionate enthusiasm that could produce ideologically committed soldiers and leaders who would keep the movement strong and vital.

The Nazi stress on comradeship, achievement, and action produced a restless dynamic that drew many fervent followers into the circle of belief. The attempt to bring together Germans from differing backgrounds on a basis of equality made a deep impression, particularly the self-proclaimed goal of integrating workers into the life of the nation. Ending the ruinous class struggle and the realization of the principle of common good before individual good appeared revolutionary in comparison to the self-interest and destructive individualism that had gone before. The Labor Service and the Hitler Youth reinforced specific values important to the Nazis, notions such as camaraderie, sacrifice, loyalty, duty, endurance, courage, and obedience; and perhaps as well a certain contempt for those outside the bonds of community. The “socialist” aspect of National Socialism could and did have a significant impact on Germans, especially of the younger generation. The allure of Nazism, then, lay in creating the belief that one was in service to an ideal community that promoted both social commitment and integration.

Despite the coercive nature of this *Volksgemeinschaft*, to many Landsers the Nazis accomplished enough in the 1930s, in terms of restoration of employment, the extension of social benefits, and the promotion of equality of opportunity and social mobility, to sustain their belief that Hitler was sincere about establishing a classless, integrative society. In the 1948 article “Attitudes of German Prisoners of War: A Study of the Dynamics of National-Socialistic Followership,” H. L. Ansbacher discovered that many average soldiers voiced positive opinions regarding Nazi accomplishments, highlighting such things as the provision of economic security and social welfare, the elimination of class distinctions and the creation of communal feelings, concern for every *Volksgenosse* (national comrade), and expanded educational opportunity for poor children. Especially prevalent was the belief that the common man and the workers had benefited most from Nazi measures, so that Hitler appeared to many to be a man of the people. Indeed, a great many prisoners of war (POWs) from working-class backgrounds claimed that the Nazi regime had achieved a number of key socialist goals. So pervasive was the sentiment that all

Germans had benefited from the Nazi revolution that half of Ansbacher’s sample of prisoners could find nothing at all wrong with National Socialism. Some, in fact, concluded that Hitler’s only mistake was that Germany lost the war. Hitler’s popularity among German POWs consistently remained above the 60 percent mark, signs of disaffection appearing only in March 1945. Consistent to the end, Hitler asserted in one of his last messages to the German people that he would not cease working for the creation of a classless *Volksgemeinschaft* that offered opportunity regardless of birth and rank. As Ansbacher himself noted, “It was exactly the striving for these goals which represented the essence of the appeal National Socialism had for its followers.”

Those who argue an exclusive focus on primary group formation and comradeship as the explanation for German combat motivation and effectiveness thus have missed the essential connection in the Nazi mind between the *Volksgemeinschaft* and camaraderie. Far from being mutually exclusive, the two appeared to Nazis and the Wehrmacht leadership as complementary, with comradeship giving shape to and bolstering the idea of *Volksgemeinschaft*. Indeed, camaraderie was seen as the affirmation of community, with ideology and experience reinforcing each other on the front lines to create the reality of *Volksgemeinschaft*. As doctrine and common sense seemed to converge, above all in those younger soldiers shaped by the Nazi system, an extraordinary expectation of cohesion resulted. Certainly the recruitment and training policies of the Wehrmacht encouraged primary group formation and loyalty. Still, the amazing performance of the German Army in the latter half of the war, when time and again they cobbled together units from broken formations, units that proved remarkably cohesive and displayed astonishing levels of morale and fighting power, cannot be explained on the basis of primary group loyalty alone. This accomplishment depended on Landsers who believed in the idea and reality of *Volksgemeinschaft*. Hitler had aimed at nothing less than the creation of a new man, social system, and order, and in the harsh atmosphere of combat a National Socialist *Volksgemeinschaft* had assumed a certain reality.

The hard fact is that the ordinary Landser fought courageously and with great determination in the service of a deplorable regime engaged in unprecedented atrocities. To the end of the war, Hitler retained an amazing popularity with German soldiers, who were among his staunchest supporters. As late as November 1944 almost two-thirds of German prisoners of war in American hands professed support for the Führer, while a mid-December



## A TIME TO REFLECT

Siegfried Knappe, a German infantryman captured by the Red Army, was ensconced in a Soviet labor camp until 1949. During his internment he had plenty of time to reflect upon his participation in the bloodiest war in history.

It was only now beginning to dawn on me that our treatment of other nations had been arrogant, that the only justification we had felt necessary was our own. . . . I had unquestioningly accepted the brutal philosophy that might makes right; the arrogance of our national behavior had not even occurred to me at the time. . . . What had begun, at least in our minds, as an effort to correct the injustices of the Treaty of Versailles had escalated far beyond anything that any of us could have imagined. In retrospect, I realized that I, and countless others like me, had helped Hitler start and fight a world war of conquest that had left tens of millions of people dead and destroyed our own country. I wondered now whether I would ever have questioned these things if we had won the war. I had to conclude that it was unlikely. This was a lesson taught by defeat, not by victory.

**Source:** Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995), pp. 224–225.

report indicated a firm belief that Germany would still win the war. More than is generally accepted, the rank and file German soldier embraced the Nazi vision of a Volksgemeinschaft of social reform and integration. There were no mutinies by the common soldiers in the Wehrmacht, while the attempted assassination of Hitler by a conspiracy of officers was generally regarded by the men at the front as a traitorous action done by an unrepresentative aristocratic clique. In a real sense, the Landser had become “Nazified.” Acknowledging the importance of the indoctrination process that had led from the Hitler Youth to the Labor Service to the Army, the head of the *Oberkommando des Wehrmachts* (Armed Forces High Command), General Wilhelm Keitel, assured Hitler in early 1944 that little opposition to political instruction existed in the ranks, since the men had already undergone a thorough education in Nazism. In a cruel paradox, these men, often brimming with idealism to create a new and better Germany, in truth became the all-too-successful instruments of Hitler’s will.

—STEPHEN G. FRITZ, EAST TENNESSEE  
STATE UNIVERSITY



### Viewpoint:

**No, unlike the officer class, the majority of the rank and file of the Wehrmacht was not committed ideologically to Hitler.**

Although Omer Bartov’s argument in *Hitler’s Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (1991) about the ideological nature of the German Army was correct, it was certainly overstated. While the modifications of Bartov’s argument by Stephen G. Fritz in *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (1995) were much needed, his work by and large covers only the Eastern Front. Nonetheless, it would be a useless exercise to attempt to resurrect the notion that German soldiers were, to use Paul Hausser’s term about the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), “soldiers like any other.” Time, careful research, and good scholarship have combined to effectively demolish such a notion. Rather, it might be worth looking at how far Adolf Hitler was able to make it his army, which parts of it were his, which were not, and when it was accomplished.

To some degree, the process by which the armed forces became steadily more ideological was determined by time. Like all totalitarian movements, Nazism was very much youth oriented. Ultimately, Hitler wanted to fashion a German youth who would be fully indoctrinated into Nazi ideology, and who would be able to destroy at command any and all enemies of the German Reich. He wanted education and party organizations to mold young German men into cold-blooded, heartless killers, completely removed from the corrosive taint of Judeo-Christian ethics. These would be the young men who would compose the rank and file of the *Wehrmacht* (German Army), if Hitler completely got his way.

Given this assumption, one could argue that the German armed forces became more ideological, but only later in the war. Starting in 1941–1942, the German armed forces began drafting young men who were fully indoctrinated by the Nazi educational system, and the full range of Nazi Party youth organizations, by the time they entered military service.

This argument, however, should not be carried too far. For all the efforts by the Nazis to mold youth to fit the Nazi ideal, they never entirely succeeded. Although the Hitler Youth did prove an effective conduit for the provision of manpower to the SS, in 1945 a great many of these men preferred surrender to the ideologically correct choice of fighting to the death. This situation was certainly applicable to all services.

Even in the realm of ideology commanders were careful about the type of material their troops read. In the SS *Totenkopf* Division, for example, the type of reading material given to the men consisted mainly of excerpts from such Nazi “classics” as Alfred Rosenberg’s *The Myth of the Twentieth Century* (1930). In the *Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler*, however, reading material ran to books such as Ernst Junger’s *Storm of Steel* (1929).

Finally, as far as rank and file, one can raise the following points about the German armed forces, especially late in the war. First, even for an army spiritually fired by ideology, drastic steps had to be taken to hold the men to duty. The number of death sentences imposed by military courts martial ran into the thousands, more than 90 percent of which were carried out. Also, it is interesting to note that for all the times Hitler ordered men who were surrounded to fight to the last bullet, there were many Germans who were willing to take the option of surrendering instead. Also in 1945, when ordered by Admiral Karl Dönitz to lay down their arms, all three services readily complied. For all the talk of Nazi “diehards,” it is worth noting how few diehards there actually were.

At the higher echelons of the military, the story is again a complex one. There were those brave souls who took an active part in the attempt to kill Hitler, and paid with their lives for the failure of that endeavor. These people, however, were certainly a minority. Of the vast majority, one can classify them into three overlapping categories: those truly committed to the ideological goals of Nazism, those who were personally devoted to Hitler at one point in time or another, and those who were corrupted by Hitler (this category would include many from the first two).

The level of ideological commitment on the part of some general officers to Nazism should not be all that surprising. *Völkisch* (folkish) thought, the intellectual progenitor of Nazism, was much in vogue among the Imperial German General Staff and army officers during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Alfred von Schlieffen, for example, tended to see the world through the dark prism of Social Darwinism. His successor, Helmuth von Moltke, was even more pronounced in his views on this subject, as was Wilhelm II, who was as convinced of the existence of a “Slavic peril” as he was of a “Yellow peril.” Such thinking extended to generals as radically different in personality as Erich Ludendorff and August von Mackensen.

Thus, it should not be surprising that many German generals were ardent Nazis. The most notable of these was Walter von Reichenau, who owed his rapid rise to his ardent Nazism. Others

included Walter Warlimont and Ferdinand Schörner. All Nazi ideology did here was to provide an intellectual bridge from the *Völkisch* past to the Nazi future.

The second category are the “Hitlerites.” These were people who, although not Nazis, were loyal to Hitler on a personal basis. The best example of this group was almost certainly Walter Model, who was not a Nazi, but whose military talents and personal loyalty to Hitler eventually earned him the nickname “the Führer’s Fireman.” Although this kind of loyalty could be powerful, it was not lasting. Many generals who were personally loyal to Hitler fell away from him for a variety of reasons. The quintessential examples of this type of officer were Erwin Rommel and Wilhelm Keitel. A dashing young panzer commander early on in the war, Rommel’s personal loyalty later turned into bitter opposition, although his part in the plot to kill Hitler was more a matter of conjecture than fact. Keitel could not be classified as a Nazi, but his personal devotion to Hitler was such that it earned him the contempt of his peers, who called him *Lakeitel*, a pun on the German word for lackey.

Finally, there were those generals, including many in the first two categories, who were corrupted by Hitler. Being in impecunious circumstances was fairly common among German officers, even extending back to the days of Frederick the Great’s Prussian Army. The elder Moltke, for example, is reputed to have written mildly racy short stories to supplement his income as an officer. He only became wealthy after the creation of the German Empire, when he was the recipient of several large cash donations from Wilhelm I and the Reichstag.

Hitler gave monetary rewards as well, but with baser motives in mind. He was able to use the straightened financial circumstances of many general officers to his own ends. Walter von Brauchitsch, for example, was trapped in a bad marriage. He wanted to divorce his wife so he could marry someone else, but lacked the requisite cash to make the divorce final. Hitler took care of that financial burden and thus secured Brauchitsch’s loyalty. Brauchitsch proved to be a pliable commander in chief of the German Army until his retirement in December 1941 from a combination of Hitler’s disfavor and poor health.

Hitler also used the dispensing of rank in the same way. After the French campaign he set a record. On 12 July 1940, Hitler created more field marshals than had been created in all previous German history, going back to Frederick the Great. This liberal dispensing of rank secured for Hitler the loyalty of those promoted in two ways. First, those who were promoted, aside

from getting a large raise in salary, owed their positions to Hitler who, like his imperial predecessors, was the only one who could create field marshals. The second was that a field marshal had the right of immediate access to Hitler. This situation made Hitler the indispensable man when it came to settling disputes between them.

In conclusion, the Wehrmacht was not truly Hitler's army. The manner in which the officers and men, not to mention the generals, became a part of it, and how far they were willing to "work towards the Führer," however, is a much more complicated story. It is one that defies simple classification.

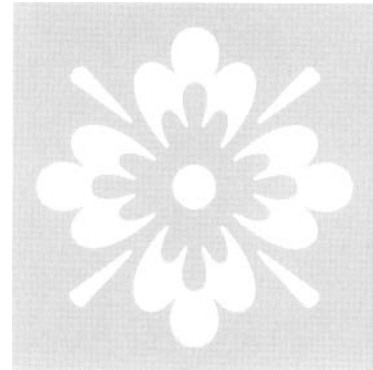
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# HO CHI MINH

## Should the United States have attempted to establish a favorable relationship with Ho Chi Minh and the Viet Minh in 1945?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, the United States missed an opportunity to establish a favorable relationship with Ho Chi Minh, because he was a nationalist unlikely to fall easily under the sway of the Soviets; moreover, Vietnamese independence was a stated goal of the Atlantic Charter.

**Viewpoint:** No, there was little chance of the United States establishing a favorable relationship with an independent postwar Vietnam because Ho Chi Minh was a communist and the Americans needed French support in the Cold War.

The exact balance between communism and nationalism in the ideology of Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh continues to defy analysis. In 1942 the question meant little to the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which supported his clandestine return from exile in China to organize resistance against the Japanese occupation of his homeland. Ho made himself as useful and pleasant as possible to American intelligence officers who were hostile to imperialism in principle and professionally antagonistic to their French and British counterparts. He quoted the Declaration of Independence and assisted downed airmen. The OSS provided his fledgling insurgency with arms and made vague suggestions of postwar support for some sort of Vietnamese autonomy.

The return of the French to Indochina had at least the tentative support of a Truman administration increasingly concerned with the stability of an exhausted western Europe. Ho's unilateral declaration of independence in September 1945—celebrated in one case by a Vietnamese band playing "The Star-Spangled Banner"—reflected his belief that the United States might nevertheless be convinced to throw its influence behind a self-governing Vietnam. He made several direct appeals to Harry S Truman but received no answer. The United States needed French support in Europe, however, and saw no need to become involved in a backwater on the other side of the world. American diplomats urged the French to negotiate with the Vietnamese in good faith. American spokesmen defended the principle of self government. In World War II, Ho fought on the side of the Americans; twenty years later he fought another war, this time against his former allies.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the United States missed an opportunity to establish a favorable relationship with Ho Chi Minh, because he was a nationalist unlikely to fall easily under the sway of the Soviets; moreover, Vietnamese independence was a stated goal of the Atlantic Charter.**

While the end of World War II settled many political questions, it also raised new ones, not the least of which was the future of Indochina. The Vietnamese, tired of more than one hundred years of French imperialism and the recent occupation by the Japanese in 1941, established an armed-front organization called the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (League for the Independence of Vietnam or Viet Minh). Led by the Indochinese Communist Party and Ho Chi Minh, the Viet Minh not only fought the Japanese but also assisted the United States in locating downed Army Air Force pilots and providing intelligence in the region, thus earning the respect of Office of Strategic Services (OSS) agents. Despite the Viet Minh's communist ideology, the United States should have taken the opportunity to foster favorable relations in the fall of 1945. President Franklin D. Roosevelt's animosity toward colonialism, the power vacuum resulting from the Japanese surrender, and Ho's nationalistic fervor all made it possible for the United States to accept this viable alternative to the reestablishment of French dominance in postwar Indochina.

American feelings toward colonialism clearly appeared in the text of the Atlantic Charter (14 August 1941). Among other issues, the charter, signed by both Roosevelt and British prime minister Winston Churchill, made plain that a goal of the Allied powers was to allow all people the opportunity to determine their own systems of government. It recognized "the right of all people to choose the form of government under which they will live and to see sovereign rights and self-government restored to those who have been forcibly deprived of them." While it did not specify Indochina, even before the United States had entered the war it had made known its intent for the postwar world.

Opposed to colonialism in principle, Roosevelt's beliefs became even firmer—and anti-French—after Vichy France allowed Imperial Japan to occupy air bases in Indochina in 1940. Since Vichy's mutual-defense treaty constituted "collaboration" with an aggressive Japan, the president felt that the French had forfeited any rights to that part of the world. He also was not

surprised that the Japanese takeover had occurred with ease, given the French treatment of the Vietnamese: "The Japanese control that colony now; why was it a cinch for the Japanese to conquer that land? The native Indo-Chinese have been so flagrantly downtrodden that they thought to themselves: anything must be better than to live under French colonial rule!" Although the United States was not in a position to liberate Indochina in 1942 and 1943, Roosevelt actively worked to block a French return.

In the absence of Allied assistance, the Viet Minh took up the task of ridding their country of the Imperial Japanese Army. Although ultimately desiring freedom from French rule, the Viet Minh focused first on expelling the Japanese. From 1941 to 1943 they attempted to gain support in the countryside, but they were largely unsuccessful because of the effectiveness of French (and not Japanese) patrols. Still administering the region, the French maintained their presence in the urban and rural areas and struggled to squash the perceived Viet Minh threat to their authority.

The greatest threat to the French, however, came not from the Viet Minh but from the Japanese. By early 1945 the Japanese saw clearly the tide of the war turning against the Axis powers and the increased presence of Free French troops operating in Indochina. To protect their southern holdings, the Japanese staged a coup d'état on 9 March 1945, effectively removing all French authorities from power. Although Emperor Bao Dai, ruler of the Annam region of Vietnam, became head of state and formed a government, his regime was a puppet of the Japanese.

In the absence of effective French control following the coup, the Viet Minh gained mass support throughout Vietnam. Governmental committees sprang up throughout the country in anticipation of the Japanese defeat. When the Japanese agreed to peace in August 1945, only the Viet Minh was in a position to govern the country. After pushing aside Bao Dai's government in a coup known as the August Revolution (18–20 August 1945), Ho set about the task of gaining control of the country. The deposed emperor, recognizing Ho's strength, handed over the Vietnamese seal of state, the traditional symbol of authority, and called for "all parties and groups, all classes as well as the Royal Family to strengthen and support unreservedly the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam in order to consolidate our national independence." By late August the Viet Minh gained control of Hanoi, Saigon, Hue, and other major urban areas. In an orderly assumption of control, the front regularly accepted the surrender of Japanese units. Viet Minh influence extended to even the post



offices, which issued stamps with Ho's likeness. The Viet Minh, and not the French or Japanese, governed Vietnam.

On 2 September 1945, as the world focused on the surrender of the Japanese at Tokyo Bay, Ho declared Vietnamese independence. Drawing heavily from the American Declaration of Independence, he announced the formation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Visibly present at the ceremony was a member of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), Major Archimedes L. A. Patti. Holding the Viet Minh in the highest regard, Patti believed that Ho's government provided a promising alternative to French administration. The Viet Minh were in control of the country; they had popular support; and they had expressed on many occasions their desire for a close relationship with the United States.

Yet, there were troubling issues with recognizing Ho's government. First and foremost, although the Viet Minh governed the country, the French were still present in some strength. Free French soldiers had parachuted into the region in 1944 and 1945, and now that the war was over, those French who were imprisoned were now at liberty. Legionnaires, colonial officials, and French citizens living in Indochina all wished to return to business as usual, which certainly did not include a Vietnam governed by the "natives."

Another problem was that American anticolonial views for the postwar world were not as strong as they had been. Harry S Truman was president of the United States after April 1945. Truman did not share Roosevelt's dislike for the French, nor did he espouse as firmly his predecessor's anticolonialism. Even Roosevelt himself had backed away from his stance in late 1944, in deference to Churchill's concern for Britain's colonies. No longer was it clear to the U.S. State Department that the president's vision for the region precluded the French from returning to Indochina.

There was also the matter of the Imperial Japanese Army. Despite the Viet Minh's willingness to accept their surrender, the Vietnamese had no way to repatriate Japanese soldiers to their homeland. This meant that larger powers that possessed the capability to oversee repatriation efforts would have to play a role in postwar Vietnam. Because the United States did not wish to involve itself on mainland Asia, this role fell to Great Britain and China, two countries not known for their sympathy toward the Vietnamese.

Ho's allegiances were also potential stumbling blocks to American recognition of the Viet Minh government. Ho was a known member of the Comintern and had spent time in the Soviet

*"Image not available for copyright reasons"*

Union. He was one of the founding members of the French Communist and Indochinese Communist Parties, and his armed Viet Minh units mirrored Mao Tse-tung's Red Army. His prior experiences certainly did not resemble those of a typical patriot of the American Revolution.

None of these challenges were insurmountable. Since great power intervention was required to repatriate the Japanese soldiers, it could also act as a peacekeeping force to ensure Viet Minh safety and French compliance. A popular, representative government in that part of the world was in American interests, particularly given the natural resources at stake. Supporting Ho, who had expressed his desire to align with the United States many times, clearly fell within the intent of the Atlantic Charter, the document that guided the entire Allied war effort.

While a communist, Ho was first and foremost a nationalist. Of those OSS officers working with him, almost all commented on his patriotic fervor, one going so far as to say that Ho "was at least ninety percent patriot." Ho anticipated receiving support from both the



United States and the Soviet Union, and did not express a desire to be a Soviet satellite. Given the Vietnamese desire to be free of the Japanese and French, there is little indication that they would openly accept Soviet direction. Having attained his dream of an independent Vietnamese state, Ho would have had no reason to seek sole support from the Comintern or the Soviets. Further, the United States and the Soviet Union were still allies in the fall of 1945; in this period before the Cold War, Truman faced little danger from domestic political opponents over allowing Ho's government to seek aid equally from both countries.

The United States therefore missed a valuable opportunity in 1945 by failing to recognize Ho's coalition as the legitimate government of Vietnam. Roosevelt's vision for Indochina was in keeping with the Atlantic Charter and clearly precluded French return to that part of the world. Despite the presence of French colonial officials and soldiers in Vietnam, the Japanese coup in March 1945 effectively removed them from power, allowing the Viet Minh to establish itself in August and September with little or no resistance. Even Bao Dai, the reigning monarch, had abdicated, passed the seal of state to Ho, and called for all Vietnamese to support the new government. An acknowledged communist, Ho was a fervent nationalist and a long way from the Kremlin's influence. While American recognition of a Viet Minh regime would not have ensured stability for the region, it most certainly would have changed the events of the next fifty years.

—DAVID M. TOCZEK, U.S. MILITARY  
ACADEMY, WEST POINT



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, there was little chance of the United States establishing a favorable relationship with an independent postwar Vietnam because Ho Chi Minh was a communist and the Americans needed French support in the Cold War.**

On 2 September 1945 Ho Chi Minh (“He Who Enlightens”) declared independence for Vietnam by stating: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.” Standing next to Ho were American Office of Strategic Services

(OSS) officers who had been fighting alongside him since 1944—organizing, training, and equipping the Viet Minh forces and, in some cases, leading them in combat. Immediately thereafter, Ho officially requested assistance from the United States, specifically asking for agricultural specialists and teachers. The United States never replied to that request.

In retrospect, it would appear that the United States missed a golden opportunity to have a positive relationship with Ho and the Viet Minh, but this is total hindsight, as any type of alliance at that time was impossible because Ho was a communist, the United States needed French support, and Harry S Truman was concerned about the spread of communism.

Born Nguyen That Thanh in 1890, Ho grew up in a highly educated, nationalist household. He was raised with the idea of Indochinese independence and would end his life in the struggle for that dream as he saw it. Many people question whether Ho was a “true communist” or really just a nationalist using the tools of revolution and resistance available to him. Ho may not have been a “real communist,” but after he attended the Versailles Peace Conference in 1919 (to lobby for Indochinese independence), he became a founding member of the French Communist Party in December 1920; he returned to French Indochina and founded the Indochinese Communist Party (ICP) in 1930 and trained with Mao Tse-tung in China in the early 1930s. This history clearly indicates that he was part of the system regardless of his feelings about it.

Võ Nguyên Giáp, Ho's primary assistant and military commander of the Viet Minh, was a “dyed-in-the-wool” communist. Born in 1912, Võ had a similar background to Ho—his family was nationalistic and highly educated. In fact, Võ was one of an extremely small minority of Indochinese who were allowed to attend school. He not only graduated from high school (only 17,000 graduates in all of Indochina in thirty years), but he also graduated from the University of Hiphong (only 1,100 graduates in thirty years) with a degree in law. Because of his extremist views, Võ was not allowed to practice law, so he taught history until joining the ICP.

After the French capitulation to the Axis in 1940 and the ensuing Japanese occupation of French Indochina, Ho and Võ returned to Viet Nam (from China) and formed the Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh Hoi (League for the Independence of Vietnam or Viet Minh). While the Viet Minh were an amalgamation of anti-French and nationalist groups from throughout Vietnam, the leadership was primarily communist. After the defeat of the Japanese, the Viet Minh proved to be absolutely ruthless in pursuing its internal enemies, while



## A POSTWAR WORLD

*As World War II came to a close in Southeast Asia, Ho Chi Minh sought assurances from the United States that it would follow the Atlantic Charter and allow the autonomy of Indochina. In the following telegram from China, dated 12 August 1945, Ambassador Patrick Hurley apprised the U.S. State Department of the situation in Indochina and French desires to reassert control of its former colony.*

Prior to his Foreign Office call the French Chargé visited General Wedemeyer in the latter's capacity as the Generalissimo's Chief of Staff, to request participation in reoccupation of French Indochina by the aforesaid French Forces and their transportation to French Indochina by airplane. Wedemeyer has since received General Allessandri, commanding French general in this theater. General Wedemeyer said he would be happy to help in any way possible but referred to the transportation difficulties. He authorized one French plane to operate between Kunming-Mengtze area and Hanoi, transporting key French personnel, and agreed to consult with the Generalissimo concerning other collaboration requested. Latter has since authorized French Yunnan troops to proceed overland from Mengtze or via Laokay to Hanoi.

Discussing his call at the Chinese Foreign Office, the Chargé stated to Briggs that he had told Dr. Wu that it would have a "very bad effect" and might "gravely prejudice" Sino-French relations should these French troops not be permitted to proceed to Indochina. He also predicted "serious trouble" should Chinese troops enter Indochina. He likewise brought up the question of French prisoners of war, of whom there are an esti-

mated 10,000 to 12,000 in the hands of the Japanese; it was explained to him that under the proposed surrender terms the Japanese would be responsible for their safe transportation to places designated by the Allied military command. . . .

It is obvious from the foregoing that France is urgently desirous of complete reestablishment of her authority in Indochina at the earliest possible moment, and views with disfavor having any Chinese troops enter Indochina.

No provision exists in the Potsdam Declaration that the surrender of the Japanese in Indochina be made to anyone other than the Generalissimo as Supreme Commander of the China Theater, or to his designated representative. The French desire to save face by accepting Japanese surrender themselves. Neither General Wedemeyer nor the Embassy has any authority to change the Potsdam Declaration or the surrender terms drafted pursuant thereto. Nevertheless, unless you direct me to the contrary, I am considering suggesting to the Generalissimo that an arrangement be made directly between the Chinese and French Governments whereby French representatives will participate in receiving surrender of Japanese Forces in French Indochina.

*Source: U.S. State Department, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1945, volume 7 (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1969), pp. 498-499.*

after the French defeat in 1954, they conducted pogroms in North Vietnam—killing upward of one hundred thousand nationalists and Catholic Vietnamese. Regardless of whether the leadership of Viet Nam was communist at the end of World War II, there were other factors in the U.S. decision not to support Ho.

The United States needed France in a European postwar coalition against the U.S.S.R. because there were immediate problems with Joseph Stalin. The Soviets moved into China and Japan at the end of the war and were continually belligerent in their dealings with the West—frictions necessitating the creation of the eastern and western sectors in occupied Berlin.

The ensuing Cold War initiated new conflict in the form of the Berlin Airlift in 1947, the communist victory in China and the Soviets testing a nuclear weapon in 1949. In 1950 communist-dominated North Korea invaded the south and the Soviets created the Warsaw Pact in response to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). All of these incidents caused great concern in the West about the spread of communism. The West interpreted all of these incidents as proof of communism's goal of world domination.

During World War II, President Franklin D. Roosevelt made statements about not allowing colonial powers to return to their former colonies, but he was not focused on the spread of communism toward the end of his life. His

performance in dealing with the Soviets demonstrates this. His successor, Truman, had more to worry about—he was more concerned with the spread of communism than promises made by his predecessor. His decision to use the atomic bomb in August 1945 not only ended the war but also served as a warning to the Soviets. These actions, and the later policies of Truman’s administration, clearly indicate that with this fear and hatred of communism, Truman was unable to “work” with communists. For these reasons, and because France wanted Indochina back for its “honor,” it was infeasible for the United States to support Vietnamese independence.

Did the United States trade Vietnamese independence and self-determination for the sake of French support during the Cold War? Yes, and in the long run, this arrangement may have been a poor bargain. To argue that there was a possibility of having a good relationship with Ho is impossible, however, considering the political and strategic realities of postwar America.

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# HOLOCAUST: MASS MURDER

## Was the Holocaust a specifically German atrocity?

**Viewpoint:** Atrocities on a massive scale during World War II were perpetrated by several warring nations as a matter of state policy.

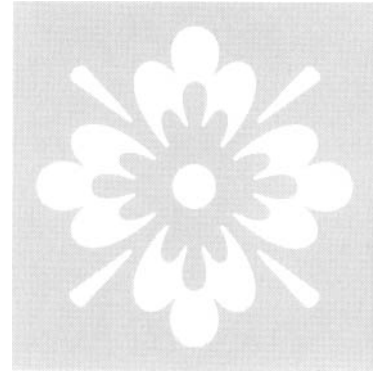
**Viewpoint:** There was something particularly and specifically German about the Holocaust and other mass killings of World War II. Based on the authoritarian and exclusionary traditions of the Nazi Regime, such atrocities could only have happened in Germany.

The massive loss of lives during World War II reflected less the direct effects of combat than its secondary consequences: famine, disease, privation, and not least outright murder. In Europe it began in Poland in 1939, as Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany collaborated to annihilate race and class enemies. In 1940, when Russia occupied the Baltic states, the executions and deportations were on such a scale that many survivors subsequently welcomed the Germans as liberators—and then took up arms to seek revenge against their former persecutors.

Mass murder had established itself even earlier in Asia, where a Japanese army, incapable of conciliating its conquests in China, as early as 1937 sought to establish rule by terror. Far from being consequences of poor discipline, pillage and rape became near doctrine. Japanese treated prisoners of war instrumentally, regarding their mass murder as operationally legitimate under a broad spectrum of conditions. This mind-set spread to civilians as well. Anywhere from fifty thousand to three hundred-thousand people died during the Nanking Massacre of 1937. The 1944 “Ichi-Go Offensive” had as its watchword the “three alls:” kill all, burn all, destroy all. Other infamous acts included the forced recruitment of “comfort women,” the murderous medical experiments carried out by Unit 731, and the deliberate large-scale supplying of narcotics to the Chinese civil population.

Following the German invasion of June 1941, the Soviets deported millions of nonethnic Russians whose loyalty was suspected by Joseph Stalin and his henchmen. Soviet military authorities also shot several divisions’ worth of their own men, while the government regarded those unfortunate enough to be captured as traitors and sent most of them to the gulags after 1945. The Germans, for their part, shot and starved millions of Russian prisoners of war, were directly and indirectly responsible for the deaths of millions more, and initiated an ethnic war in the Balkans of which the consequences are still being felt in that region. Above all else stands the Jewish Holocaust: the systematic obliteration of six million people, accompanied by a plan for eventually doubling the figure.

Yet, is the Holocaust enough to single out Nazi Germany in an era when collective death became a way of life? The entries for this chapter address the question from a general perspective and a German one.





**Viewpoint:  
Atrocities on a massive scale during  
World War II were perpetrated by  
several warring nations as a matter  
of state policy.**

In the spring of 1915 a German submarine, lurking off the coast of Ireland, sent a spread of torpedoes into an ocean liner that had entered the “blockade zone” established by the Imperial Navy. The victim was flying the flag of a belligerent nation, had been warned prior to its sailing that it was defined as a legitimate target, and in fact was a “legitimate” target by twentieth-century standards since it was carrying war munitions. The sinking of the *Lusitania* forever shifted American public opinion against Germany, would eventually prove to be a significant contributing factor to America’s eventual entry into World War I, and was the stuff of endless propaganda posters, photos, and even the first motion picture propaganda cartoon. It is still considered by many to be a war crime.

Thirty years later, almost to the day, a Red Cross ship, loaded with more than six thousand wounded German soldiers and civilian refugees, departed from the Courland Pocket, a German position on the Baltic Coast cut off by the encircling Red Army. A Soviet submarine was waiting. In spite of the fact that the *Wilhelm Gustloff* was clearly flying Red Cross flags, its decks crammed with refugees packed shoulder to shoulder, the Soviet sub fired without warning. It was the single greatest maritime disaster in history. More than six thousand died, five times as many as were lost on the *Lusitania* or *Titanic*. Practically no one noticed the incident. Perhaps only one person in a thousand even know the name of the ship that, as it went down, dumped its passengers into the freezing Baltic. The world had grown used to such things. Wholesale murder, on both sides, was now part of twentieth-century warfare, and such actions were officially sanctioned by the top commands of both sides.

There is a well-known process, an ever-downward spiral of morality and standards, that inevitably happens in war. Several factors create this process of increasing brutality that eventually leads to an acceptance of horrors unimagined at the start of any conflict. The first factor is a process of time. The longer a conflict continues, the more hardened both sides become to the brutality of war. A good example is the American Civil War (1861–1865). Throughout the first year of the conflict Union commanders issued strict orders recognizing the property rights of Southerners, even the return of runaway slaves. Four years later,

when General William Tecumseh Sherman’s troops departed from Columbia, South Carolina, what they left behind looked like Berlin or Tokyo in 1945. Prisoners of war released from Andersonville, Georgia, and Camp Douglas, Chicago, in 1865 could have easily been mistaken for survivors of the Bataan Death March (1942).

The second factor is one of accident. Both sides in an armed conflict might initially agree to certain standards, either through formal treaty or informal custom. The accidents of war, however, quickly blur these standards and eventually create a counterresponse. The classic example happened with the German bombing of England during the Battle of Britain. Air Marshal Hermann Göring had laid out key strategic goals and rules of engagement prior to the start of the campaign, and the random bombardment of civilian targets was off limits.

The story is well known how a German bomber force, lost in the unpredictable weather typical of England, accidentally unloaded their bombs on a civilian section of London. British prime minister Winston Churchill, seizing on the event, launched a counterstrike on Berlin the following night. An enraged Hitler, supported by a humiliated Göring, who had boasted that a bomb would never fall on the capital of the Reich, countered with a series of terror raids on London. It eventually destroyed more than a quarter of the city and perhaps lost Germany the war because of the diversion of forces from crucial military targets. It opened, as well, the acceptance by both sides of indiscriminate night bombing of civilian targets.

A third factor in the downward spiral of brutality in war emerges when the potent elements of ideology and race are added to the brew. World War II was a war of ideology and race. In Europe, fascism and the Aryan racial doctrine were pitted against democracy and communism; on the Eastern Front an additional factor was that it was a war of Aryans against Slavs.

Ground combat on the western front was fought with at least a certain adherence to “the rules.” Both sides shared a common culture, religion, and acknowledgment that they were of the same racial group. In general, prisoners were treated fairly well if they survived the first few minutes of capture, and efforts were made to avoid civilian casualties and the destruction of culturally significant landmarks. Not to say that there were not abuses, but such actions were not part of an official doctrine except in certain limited situations such as the Malmédy Massacre, in which one hundred captured U.S. soldiers were killed by German soldiers (December 1944); the bombing of Monte Cassino (May 1944); or the executions of Cana-

dian troops by members of the Hitler Youth Division in Normandy (June 1944).

On the Eastern Front, however, brutality was the norm and officially sanctioned by both sides. From the very start of the campaign into Russia, *Wehrmacht* (German Army) troops were informed that, due to the “unique demands” of the campaign, the standards of acceptable behavior were to be put aside—thus the infamous “Commissar Order,” calling for the immediate execution of captured commissars. Jews were to be marked for “special treatment,” and “elimination” of prisoners and captured enemy wounded would not be questioned. Special Operations Units, the infamous *Schutzstaffeln* (SS) Death Squads, were attached to the armies, with the full knowledge of front commanders. It is impossible to imagine that a single German soldier serving in Russia was not aware of the extent of the brutality going on both on the battle line and in the occupied zones to the rear. The German military command knew as well that official government policy called for the systematic stripping of food out of the occupied zones with the intent of triggering a genocidal reduction in population through starvation and disease.

Such knowledge quickly hardened the Wehrmacht to a standard of behavior unimaginable prior to the start of the conflict. Evidence of this is clear with German units transferred from Russia to stem the Allied advance in 1944. Troops had to be briefed that they were now fighting a “different” enemy, but the briefings often did not take. When Allied units discovered they were facing German units that were Russian-front veterans, the word generally went out not to expect mercy if taken prisoner. It created as well a reaction among Western Allied troops who, when facing SS units, tended to shoot first and ask questions later if the enemy indicated that they wanted to surrender.

The official Soviet policy regarding a racial war is not as well known but was equally brutal. Though the Soviet high command would try to deny the policy of allowing troops to brutalize the enemy, since it did run contrary to Marxist principles about the universal brotherhood of the proletariat, Soviet propaganda aimed at their troops advancing into Germany in 1945 called for an orgy of murder and rape. “Remember your raped mothers, wives and daughters,” ran the official party line, “humiliate and humble the women of Germany.”

The machine gunning of refugee columns, the mass rape of women of all ages, and the systematic slaughtering of entire communities, especially by rear echelon troops, was an official part of the Soviet war effort. The brutality reached such a frenzy that front-line officers finally dared



## GHETTO HUMOR

*Life in the Warsaw ghetto during World War II was grim. The following story that comes out of that time and place illustrates the sardonic as well as defiant humor of the Jewish inhabitants.*

A police officer comes into a Jewish home and wants to confiscate the possessions. The woman cries, pleading that she is a widow and has a child to support. The officer agrees not to take the things, on one condition—that she guess which of his eyes is the artificial one.

“The left one,” the woman guesses.

“How did you know?”

“Because that one has the human look.”

*Source: Michael Berenbaum, The World Must Know: The History of the Holocaust as Told in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (Boston: Little, Brown, 1993), p. 90.*

to protest to the Kremlin, claiming that the honor of the Red Army would forever be sullied and that their troops had gone completely out of control. This policy did much to harden postwar feelings in Eastern Europe, and the hatred created still lingers in the generation that survived the onslaught of Soviet troops.

The issue of race in war was played out with equal brutality in the Pacific war. The Japanese Empire billed itself as the liberator of Asia from white European imperialism. They replaced it with a racial system of their own that was infinitely more brutal. The Rape of Nanking (1937) was officially sanctioned by the Japanese high command. It was a clear signal to all Japanese troops that Chinese civilians were to be treated as nothing more than targets for bayonet practice. In addition, tens of thousands of Korean women were forced into a horrifying system of army-run brothels, which even nearly sixty years later the Japanese government refuses to recognize and apologize for.

On the combat fronts of the Pacific the clash of race and differing cultures was fought out with a brutality perhaps equaling that of the Russian Front. Prisoners were rarely taken by either side, and when large units did surrender, such as the Allied forces at Singapore and Bataan, they were subjected to unspeakable cruelties, including beheading and being buried alive. The war on this front was one that was fought to the death by both sides.

It is ironic to note that America, which claimed it went to battle in World War I over the

issue of freedom of the seas and to combat the scourge of unrestricted submarine warfare, officially adopted unrestricted submarine warfare in the Pacific within hours after the strike on Pearl Harbor. When a fleet of Japanese transports was caught near Guadalcanal and sunk by American aircraft, thousands of Japanese soldiers who had survived were systematically machine-gunned in the water, the ocean turning red from the carnage. It was justified as a military necessity. Perhaps it was; but such an action, if it had occurred off the coast of Florida, England, or Italy to U.S. troops, would have drawn howls of protest and be remembered in America to this day. In the Pacific, however, the total elimination of the enemy was policy, and it was the norm.

There is a final factor that plays into the acceptance of brutality in war, and that is one of physical distance from the dead and dying. If an American soldier, using a flamethrower, had deliberately torched a German mother holding her child, he would have been arrested. Hundreds of thousands of German mothers and children died under Allied carpet bombing of cities, but this was an action that was death from an acceptable distance, which became official policy and thus was accepted. In the name of breaking the German war industry and morale, civilians became legitimate targets. In hindsight it is apparent that saturation bombing of cities contributed little to the war other than the general increase of misery. Hundreds of thousands were incinerated at Hamburg, Berlin, and the ultimate expression of incendiary madness, at Dresden (13–14 February 1945).

The same was true in the Pacific, where there was even less moral compunction about the use of firebombing, with the new cocktail of napalm added in. Upward of a quarter of a million died in one night in Tokyo (9–10 March 1945), and the campaign was climaxed finally by the mass incinerations, ignited by official policy, over Hiroshima (6 August 1945) and Nagasaki (9 August 1945).

War is a downwardly spiraling process of brutality. How could the bombing of Dresden, the Commissar Order, or the Japanese army brothels be defined as anything other than official policy? When official policy, which in other times would be defined as murder and genocide, is accepted by either or both sides in war, the grassroots enthusiasm for murder, the individual acts of cruelty by troops or groups of civilians who are “out of control,” becomes a mere sideshow, except for those who are the victims. Genocide was official policy on both sides in World War II; there is no other explanation possible for the

more than forty million civilians who died in the most brutal conflict in human history.

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#### Viewpoint:

**There was something particularly and specifically German about the Holocaust and other mass killings of World War II. Based on the authoritarian and exclusionary traditions of the Nazi Regime, such atrocities could only have happened in Germany.**

The Holocaust is in many respects the paradoxical event of the twentieth century. The paradoxical nature of German involvement in the events of the destruction of the European Jews and other racial “undesirables” is often expressed in the rhetorical question, “How could the land of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Immanuel Kant, Johann Sebastian Bach, and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart produce an Adolf Hitler, a Josef Goebbels, and a Heinrich Himmler?” From an historical perspective, the fundamental question arising out of the genocidal actions of the Third Reich remains, “Why Germany?” The answer to this question lies not only in the twelve years of the National Socialist dictatorship but also in the roots of German political, military, cultural, and economic traditions of the nineteenth century. The answer can also be found in the development of a specific current of German intellectual thought tied to the emergence of an ultranationalistic and malevolent anti-Semitic *volkish* (folkish) ideology in the late nineteenth century. To be sure, anti-Semitism was not a uniquely German phenomenon. The “Dreyfus Affair” (1894–1899), in which a French Alsatian Jew serving on the General Staff was falsely accused of espionage and imprisoned, fractured the French political landscape in a bitter battle between the political forces of the Right and the Left. Additionally, the forced confinement of Russian Jews and the periodic but vicious Polish pogroms against the Jews in the 1920s demonstrated the presence of anti-Semitism throughout Europe. Still, these discriminatory measures and acts of persecution remained largely episodic and never escalated to the level of genocide. In the end, the seedbed of biological racism and annihilation was prepared upon German soil and firmly implanted in both the





**The execution of a Soviet Jew by an SS soldier in 1942**

(Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.)

structural and intellectual traditions of the Second German Empire (1871–1918).

In the period between the proclamation of the Second Empire and the end of World War II, German history followed a course highlighted by a singularly abnormal evolution of political, social, economic, and military institutions with respect to its Western European neighbors. Some observers of German history have identified the roots of German particularism as early as the mid nineteenth century. Indeed, British historian A. J. P. Taylor focused on the failure of the revolutionary

movements throughout the various German lands in 1848 to achieve enduring social and political reforms as a turning point that “failed to turn.” The exact origins of a German *Sonderweg* (special path) are certainly debatable; however, the role of the “Iron Chancellor,” Otto von Bismarck, in setting the nascent German nation upon the road to an authoritarian state tradition is without question. In point of fact, as chancellor of Prussia (and later unified Germany) Bismarck initiated many of the authoritarian and exclusionary policies that would eventually guide the German nation

on an aberrant trajectory that found its ultimate expression in the crimes committed during the National Socialist dictatorship.

In order to understand the emergence of an extremist right-wing and genocidal government within Germany after 1933, it is first necessary to look back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and examine the role of various antidemocratic forces within the German polity. Several theories have been advanced as to why Germany developed differently than her European neighbors; they have included explanations based on geopolitics, Prussian militarism, and the German ideology. However, the concept of a German *Sonderweg* found its ultimate expression in the writings of a group of German historians at the University of Bielefeld who characterized the failure of German democracy as a function of a reactionary alliance between the preindustrial elites of “rye and iron,” an alliance of shared interests between traditional agrarian elites and industrialists. The German historian Hans-Ulrich Wehler highlighted the role of an antidemocratic landed aristocracy that exercised control over the three main pillars of the state—the ministerial bureaucracy, the army, and the diplomatic service. Through their control over these institutions, the traditional agrarian and industrial elites strangled any attempts at popular democratic reform from below and prevented Germany from embarking upon the democratic course of her western neighbors. Furthermore, the economic modernization of the German lands had proven to be an anomalous process in which economic modernization did not engender a reciprocal social and political modernization as had occurred in France, England, and the United States. The authoritarian structures and the inequality of Prussia’s procedural traditions (such as the three-class voting system based on tax status that favored large landowners at the expense of the majority of citizens) present in the Second Empire acted as overwhelming obstacles preventing the development of democratic and representative institutions.

Although one must be careful in drawing a straight-line trajectory between Bismarck and Hitler, it is clear that many of the policies pursued by Germany’s first chancellor laid the foundation for the authoritarian and exclusionary practices of the National Socialist dictatorship. For example, Bismarck’s pursuit of *Sammlungspolitik* (the politics of gathering specific group interests together) resulted in a policy of “negative integration” that produced a state characterized not by its ostensible inclusivity but rather by its marginalization and the exclusion of putative *Reichsfeinde* (literally enemies of the state). This policy found its practical expression in the discriminatory measures aimed at the Catholic

Church and its members in the *Kulturkampf* (culture clash) during the 1870s and 1880s. A further example involved Bismarck’s leading role in the passing of the anti-Socialist laws (1878–1890) designed to forestall the rise in political power of the German Social Democratic Party and its working-class constituency. The anti-Socialist laws restricted the right of workers to organize, prohibited publication of socialist newspapers, and resulted in the imprisonment and/or exile of many leaders of the socialist movement—measures similar to those that would be employed later by Adolf Hitler during the National Socialist “seizure of power.”

Not only political leaders but military leaders as well advocated the practice of exclusionary and extremist measures during the Second Empire. In the final war of German unification against France (1870–1871), not only did Chief of the General Staff Helmuth von Moltke reject the concept of civilian control over the military; he also went so far as to frame the war against the French as “a war of extermination.” The ability of the German military to run roughshod over domestic political opposition continued into the years before World War I. The Zabern Affair in October 1913 demonstrated the epitome of military arrogance and parliamentary impotence in the Second Empire. In the Alsatian village of Zabern (Saverne), a German lieutenant grossly overreacted to a domestic disturbance by usurping civilian control of the local government through a decree of martial law. The crisis pitted the elected *Reichstag* (Parliament) versus reactionary forces within the army. In the end, Kaiser William II supported the illegal actions of the military despite opposition from some of his own civilian advisers and a vote of censure from the Parliament. The Zabern Affair highlighted the dysfunctional relationship between the Kaiser, the military, and the Parliament—Germany wore the facade of a limited constitutional democracy, but behind this mask, authoritarianism and military prerogatives reigned supreme.

The tradition of authoritarian governance and the special status of the military certainly shaped the unique trajectory of German history, but it was the insidious intellectual influence of an exclusionary ultranationalistic volkish ideology that paved the long road from Berlin to Auschwitz. For the proponents of volkish thought, Germans were not Germans simply by birth within definable borders or through the shared use of a common language; rather “real Germanness” resulted only through a shared bloodline (*jus sanguinis*). Within Germany by the end of the nineteenth century, the Jew had been widely characterized as the foreign “other” within influential sections of the German intellectual community. The writings of the historian

Heinrich von Treitschke identified the Jews as “dangerous,” “alien,” and “cosmopolitan” elements within German society. Treitschke’s oft-quoted description of the Jews as “Germany’s misfortune” placed Jews into the role of an unwelcome and foreign element within the German culture. The journalist Wilhelm Marr, the originator of the term anti-Semitism, argued that the process of Jewish assimilation and intermarriage had caused the corruption of the German corporate body. He exhorted the German people to unleash their wrath to combat this perceived victory of the Jews over the *Volk* (the German people).

Marr’s conflation of German nationalism, the Volk, and the “Jewish Question” set the stage for a radicalization of racial theory in the late nineteenth century. The emergence of racial theorists such as the German Eugen Dühring and the extreme Germanophile Houston Stewart Chamberlain heralded the advent of a new philosophy of racial science. These racials argued in favor of immutable physical and genetic characteristics such as blood and skull length as determinants of cultural identity. They, in turn, believed that relative values could be assigned to specific cultures thereby allowing for their rank ordering. The bastardization of Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection provided the final ingredient to the poisonous stew of racist philosophy within Germany at the turn of the century. Chamberlain used the theory of social Darwinism to present a worldview that separated groups into culture creators and culture destroyers. He contended that the Teutonic or Aryan culture creators were locked in a life-and-death struggle against the culture destroyers whom he identified as the Jewish race. In this way Chamberlain bound chauvinistic nationalism with the Darwinian principle of survival of the fittest. In turn this linkage of chauvinistic nationalism and anti-Semitic rhetoric shaped the tone of right-wing German nationalist parables in the period after the Great War.

The origins and course of World War I arose as a result of the aggressive and expansionist goals of German military and political leaders. The German leadership launched a war of conquest and annexation designed to achieve German political and economic control over a greater *Mitteleuropa* (the heart of Europe). These plans were formulated in the “September Program 1914” (a program involving vast annexations throughout Europe as Germany’s goal in the war) and partially realized with the draconian peace of Brest-Litovsk (March 1918), a peace in which Russia was forced to cede approximately 1.3 million square miles and 62 million of its population to German control.

By 1918 the facade of parliamentary control was completely stripped away with the emergence of a military autocracy under the control of General Erich Ludendorff and the Army Supreme Command. The actions of the Supreme Command again demonstrated the fragility of political and personal freedoms within the German state; however, even these measures could not prevent a German defeat. The loss of World War I proved a severe psychological shock to the majority of the German population. The wildly exaggerated optimism of German propaganda and the fact that German troops were still occupying Allied territory led to a widespread feeling of suspended disbelief, if not incredulity, as Germans learned of the Kaiser’s abdication and the signing of the armistice in November 1918. Still, the proclamation of a new Republic under the control of the Social Democratic government of Friedrich Ebert offered Germany and her citizens one final opportunity to throw off the authoritarian traditions and exclusionary practices of the past. Like in 1848, Germany in 1918 had reached a fork in the road; one path led to democratization and a place among the family of nations, and the other path followed the continued course of German singularity and authoritarian rule.

The Weimar Republic (1918–1933) was not perhaps “crippled at birth,” but it suffered from a number of congenital defects. Germany’s first democracy faced many problems, including structural weaknesses in the Weimar constitution, the deleterious role of antidemocratic elites, the influence of ultranationalistic ideology, the radicalization of mass politics, and the financial crises of 1923 and 1929. Ultimately, the Weimar experiment failed due to a combination of social, political, and economic factors. In the political arena, Weimar witnessed a trend toward an electoral polity correctly described as a “democracy with no democrats.” One of the first fatal compromises made by the Social Democratic government involved cutting a deal with the officer corps, thus allowing a reactionary military elite to defend their antidemocratic prerogatives from within the government. The antidemocratic leanings of the *Reichswehr* (German Military) were never more clearly demonstrated than during the refusal of the army leadership to take action against a right-wing coup attempt in March 1920 (Kapp Putsch). The government survived the attempted coup, but the incident again demonstrated the disdain among the traditional elites for the Republic.

The National Socialist electoral breakthrough in 1930 (the Nazis became the second largest faction in the parliament) along with the dramatic success of July 1932 reflected a willingness of a large section of the German population

to revert to a past authoritarian and exclusionary tradition in the face of the worldwide economic hardships caused by the aftereffects of the Great Depression in 1929. It is often argued that at no time did the National Socialists receive a majority of the German vote. Although technically correct, one should not overlook the fact that almost 13.8 million Germans (37 percent of all voters) cast their ballot for an ultranationalist and demonstrably anti-Semitic party in July 1932. It is also argued that the November elections of 1932 in which the National Socialists lost 2 million voters demonstrated the rejection of extreme Nazi actions. However, this argument ignores the fact that 11.7 million voters remained committed to the National Socialists despite these excesses and the Party's anti-Semitic platform.

American historian Thomas Childers conducted an empirical analysis of Weimar voting patterns that conclusively established the appeal of the Nazi Party throughout a broad cross section of German society. The German electorate turned in significant numbers toward the Nazis for several reasons. Certainly, the charisma of the Führer, Adolf Hitler, played an important role. Likewise, Hitler's rejection of the restrictions imposed by the Treaty of Versailles (1919) and his open renunciation of the "war guilt" clause (a clause in the treaty that forced Germany to accept full responsibility for starting the war) were acts that resonated within many social groups and classes. In addition, Hitler's promise to restore order had an intrinsic appeal to groups that desired the return of stability in the wake of the economic slump and political violence of the late 1920s. Likewise, the military elites were in essential agreement with Hitler's plans for rearmament and expansion. They may have expressed misgivings over tactics, methods, and timing, but they certainly saw Hitler and his party as a real if not somewhat prickly gift. In addition, wealthy industrialists may not have provided the funding for Hitler's rise to power, but they certainly recognized the benefits that might be gained with a chancellor who could control the demands of the labor unions. Each of these groups had their own particular reasons for supporting Hitler and his party, and although some may not have shared completely his anti-Semitic views, the exclusionary measures adopted by the Nazis against the Jews were not enough to generate widespread opposition to the regime. The willingness of many Germans to accept Hitler's tirades against the Jews reflected the latent appeal of anti-Semitism across a broad spectrum of society. Indeed, Hitler's philosophy simply echoed the themes of late-nineteenth-century Volkish thought by emphasizing nationalism and the concept of a unique German cultural

community based on the singular quality of shared blood. In the end, Hitler was only continuing a policy established by Bismarck, except the new Reichsfeinde were not Catholics or Socialists but rather Jews. However, annihilation and not discrimination constituted the objective of National Socialist racial policy.

The exclusion of the Jews from German society proved to be the first step in a process that led to the loss of their civil and political rights, the expropriation of their property, and ultimately their murder. Without doubt, Hitler and his henchmen constructed the roads leading to Treblinka, Belzec, and Auschwitz, and they are responsible for the subsequent annihilation of 11 million persons, including Jews, *Sinti* and *Roma* (Gypsies), Poles, homosexuals, and Slavs. Still, the gas chambers constructed to kill Jews at Auschwitz or those used to kill handicapped Germans within the borders of the Third Reich could not have been built without the foundation laid by an historical tradition of authoritarian rule and exclusionary practices. The Third Reich ultimately traced its origins, when not its genocidal impulse, to the antidemocratic practices of the Second Empire.

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# HOLOCAUST: THE SYSTEM

## Was the Holocaust different from other cases of genocide?

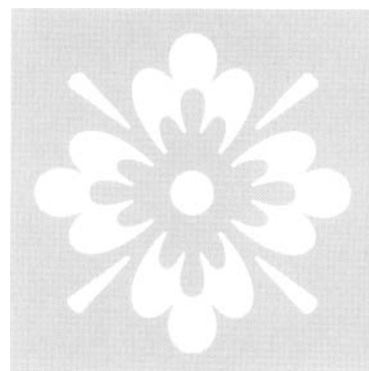
**Viewpoint:** Yes, when compared to other cases of genocide only the Holocaust combined the planned, total annihilation of an entire community on the basis of the quasi-apocalyptic, quasi-religious principles that were the core of National Socialism.

**Viewpoint:** No, the Holocaust was not unlike other attempts at racial genocide; in the past century more than 120 million people have been annihilated under similar circumstances.

The Holocaust occurred at a particular time and place, with specific, identifiable perpetrators and victims. Additionally, those victims were identified objectively, in scientific terms. They were defined in an intellectual, abstract context: their persecution was not in any significant way a product of past grievances or present direct fears. Extermination was the stated and understood goal of the process. The scope of the Holocaust was universal and included every Jew in the world. The Holocaust's implementation was pragmatic, not metaphorical. The Holocaust had no counterpart in an anti-Semitic context to the Marxist concept of the withering away of the state. Jews were supposed to die, and the Nazis were supposed to oversee their deaths. According to the Nazis, every day that Jews remained alive was one day too many; every Jew that remained alive was one Jew too many.

In the process of dying, Jews were dehumanized and tormented, not only in the traditional sense of these concepts but with the most modern methods and techniques. System, perhaps more than cruelty, characterizes the Holocaust. While many of the perpetrators at the sharp end enjoyed their work, the "master attitude," the mentality sought for all levels, was detachment—not the indifference that comes with exposure, but a conscious awareness of being above events, controlling them for a higher purpose.

Specific features of the Holocaust are similar to processes of mass murder, past and future. None, however, combine all of them as the Nazis did. In that context the Holocaust is morally unique because it confronts a secular, skeptical age with the idea of evil—evil as something other than an aberration caused by social, psychological, or economic factors adjustable by the exercise of reason or power. Other horrors, even other genocides, can be put into stories that make human sense. As distilled wickedness, the Holocaust is specifically Jewish, definably Western, and ultimately human.





**Viewpoint:  
Yes, when compared to other cases of genocide only the Holocaust combined the planned, total annihilation of an entire community on the basis of the quasi-apocalyptic, quasi-religious principles that were the core of National Socialism.**

Confronting the Nazi mass murder of European Jews during World War II is a daunting task. How is it possible—if at all—to come to terms with the millions of victims of industrialized killing in death factories that was organized by the political leadership of a modern nation-state in the heart of Europe? One response taken by survivors and many scholars alike is to consider this event, which came to be known as the Holocaust, as “unique” or even “uniquely unique” in Jewish and world history. Their argument is that by comparing the Holocaust to other acts of mass-human destruction one questions the Holocaust’s singularity and trivializes it. Many scholars, therefore, consider the Holocaust to be both incomprehensible and incomparable.

Another set of responses that has gained in significance since the mid 1980s, nonetheless, contextualizes the Holocaust in the development of modern society and as a result of the modern spirit of science. Testifying to the pathology of modernization, the Holocaust cannot be seen as unique, but rather exemplary of the lethal dangers of the twentieth century. Other historians have presented specific comparisons to challenge the position of the Holocaust’s uniqueness. Ernst Nolte, a prominent conservative historian, suggests that the Stalinist “Gulag Archipelago” was “more original” than Auschwitz. Moreover, he argues that Adolf Hitler started the Holocaust in fear of an “Asiatic deed” in the form of a Bolshevik invasion of Germany.

As the veiled hints and insinuations in the arguments of Nolte and other German historians during the “historians’ controversy” demonstrate, the use of vague language increasingly blurs the often politicized interpretations of the Holocaust. It is therefore important to clarify the meaning of key terms. First, the term “Holocaust” refers to the systematic annihilation of the European Jews by the Nazis during World War II. Many scholars have widened its meaning in order to include other acts of mass-human destruction—for example, the slaughter of *Sinti* and *Roma* (Gypsies) in the early 1940s, or of the

Armenians by the Turks beginning in 1915. While there are similarities in individual elements, the Holocaust still remains strikingly different, which justifies the use of a distinct term.

Second, in contrast to Steven T. Katz’s narrow definition of “genocide” in *The Holocaust in Historical Context* (1994) in as the “actualized intent . . . to physically destroy an *entire* [ethnic, ‘racial,’ religious, or national] group,” in this article genocide is defined more broadly, so that it encompasses several mass killings that have occurred in modern times. Closer to Raphael Lemkin’s definition, first coined in the 1930s, genocide will refer to a form of one-sided, entire or partial destruction of such a group that is organized by a state or comparable authority. These destructive acts include—but are not limited to—the murder of the group’s elites, eradication of its religious and cultural life, and onslaught on its biological reproduction. While partially based on Yehuda Bauer’s definition in a 1984 article in *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, which, in contrast, construes the “Holocaust” as a category of its own, this conceptualization encompasses the Holocaust as a kind of archetype for genocides.

Finally, the concept of “uniqueness” itself poses problems because of its many meanings and epistemological challenges. For the purpose of this essay, uniqueness will not be considered in primarily theological terms, nor will it be used to measure greater or smaller evils. This article will not engage the philosophical question of whether “the unique” exists. It is a truism that any historical event can be seen as unique in the shared memory of a particular group whose members it affected. The claim for historical uniqueness will rest on an understanding that, on an empirical-comparative basis, several of the Holocaust’s key components are genuinely singular in modern history. This evaluation is especially the case for its geographic scope, elements of the killing process, and the ideology and intentions of its perpetrators.

A total of about six million Jews died during the Holocaust. While this horrendous figure turns the Holocaust into an unparalleled event in the history of the Jewish people, it cannot serve by itself as the basis for a claim of historical uniqueness. The Bolsheviks’ genocidal policies against the ethnic minorities of the Tartars and Volga Germans during World War II, as well as the “terror famine” in the Ukraine of the early 1930s, led to the death of more than 14.5 million people. Without entering the debate over the allegedly genocidal character of the government-produced famine, the sheer immensity of the number of its victims causes one to question claims of uniqueness of the Holocaust based on the death toll.

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

Rather than the number of its victims, the geographic scope of the Holocaust constitutes one of the components that marks its uniqueness. The Nazis extended their genocidal policies against the Jews over all of Europe that came under their control during the war. Moreover, the protocol of the so-called Wannsee Conference of 20 January 1942 indicates that leading Nazis also envisioned the murder of those European Jews who were outside their sphere of influence. The conference, which served to secure the participation of the German ministerial bureaucracies in the Holocaust, listed, among others, the Jews of England that Hitler’s armies never attempted to conquer and those of neutral Switzerland. In the end, the Nazis succeeded in murdering two-thirds of all European Jews. In contrast, other modern genocides did not approach the geographic scope of the Holocaust. During the genocide of the Armenians in World War I, for example, Turkish authorities limited the persecutions of their victims to the Ottoman Empire. They did not try to kill Armenian refugees in neighboring countries such as Czarist Russia. Likewise, the Bolshevik deportations of the Tartars and Volga Germans were events that took place exclusively in the Soviet Union.

By the late twentieth century, Auschwitz had become a term often used symbolically for the Holocaust and its experience. The name evokes images of industrial killing in gas chambers, piles of corpses, and heaps of victims’ belongings neatly separated for future use. These images refer to a second component that testifies to the Holocaust’s historical uniqueness, that of distinct destruction practices in extermination camps. Not all victims of the Holocaust, of course, died in these camps. In the early stages of the genocide, four *Einsatzgruppen* (Special Task Forces) of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office) alone shot more than 535,000 Jews in the Soviet Union. Yet, by mid 1942, the Nazis had developed an efficient killing process, which combined deportations, concentration camps, and gas chambers. The genocidal killings of millions assumed a factory-like form, which also differentiates the Holocaust from other genocides. In late July 1942 the personnel of Treblinka, for instance, murdered daily thousands of deported Jews hours after their arrival in the killing center’s gas chambers. While the Bolsheviks used such techniques as deportations by train as a means in their onslaught on ethnic minorities, they did not systematically murder them in death facto-

ries. Also, even though thousands of Sinti and Roma died in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the installations were not specifically set up and expanded to murder them. Instead, they were part of the planning of the Jewish Holocaust.

A third element that sets the Holocaust apart from other modern genocides is the structure and key role of the Nazi leadership's racial ideology. While the Nazi *Weltanschauung* (world-view) did not assume the form of a coherent structure, its conception of an enemy was more stringently defined. In Nazi ideology, the Jews assumed a place below the lesser races of the Slavic peoples, whom the Nazis only deemed worthy of a life in slavery. The Nazis viewed the Jews, however, as posing a continuous lethal threat, trying to weaken and defeat the German-Aryan master race by polluting its blood and setting Western capitalism and Eastern Bolshevism against Nazi Germany. In an ideological schemata that projected a world evolving around an eternal racial struggle, the "solution to the Jewish Question" was their *Entfernung* (removal)—in whatever way imagined. In the course of World War II, this "removal" took the final form of the physical destruction of the Jews. Nazi racial anti-Semitism was not the only factor in the complex processes that led to the actual genocidal killings. Yet, without it, the Holocaust would not have taken place. Nazi ideology attributed a role to "the Jew" that it did not assign to any other group. Their physical destruction was not a means to an end, but rather one of the Nazi regime's central *raison d'être*.

The foregoing argument does not imply that other modern genocides were not also ideology-driven. However, the ideologies at stake were structurally different and often fulfilled other purposes. The genocidal killings of many Sinti and Roma by the Nazis certainly fed on ideological constructions. Yet, in Nazi ideology, the gypsy did not pose a fundamental threat as did the Jew. In the Stalinist Soviet Union the official interpretation of Marxist-Leninism lent itself to defining the relatively wealthy peasant elite of the kulaks as "class enemies." This ideology, however, did not necessitate the physical destruction of "class enemies." Unlike with race in Nazi thought, the destruction of a class could have taken place without murdering their members.

The fourth element differentiating the Holocaust from other twentieth-century genocides, evolves around the crucial question of the perpetrators' intentions. The Holocaust represents the only incident in which the leadership of a modern nation-state intended and implemented a genocidal program to annihi-

late every member of a specific people it had defined. Every Jew was to be killed. Even if, as the latest studies on the topic correctly emphasize, the genocide of the Sinti and Roma resembled the Holocaust in many respects, the Nazis did not intend to murder all people defined as "gypsies." Likewise, the Turkish regime presided over the gruesome killing of large numbers of Armenian women and children. It also sought to murder the Armenians of major cities such as Smyrna, where many of the targeted population ultimately managed to survive. Nonetheless, the Turkish leadership did not intend to systematically eliminate every Armenian in the Middle East.

Given the partially attempted concealment of the Nazi regime's genocidal practices and the verbal nature of much of the decision-making process, not many documents have survived that testify to the Nazi leaders' intentions. One such document is the text of a speech given by Heinrich Himmler, the Holocaust's key architect and head of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS), to the Party leadership in Poznan on 6 October 1943:

*"Wie ist es mit den Frauen und Kindern?—Ich habe mich entschlossen, auch hier eine ganz klare Lösung zu finden. Ich hielt mich nämlich nicht für berechtigt, die Männer auszurotten—sprich also, umzubringen oder umbringen zu lassen. Es mußte der schwere Entschluß gefaßt werden, dieses Volk von der Erde verschwinden zu lassen . . . Es ist durchgeführt worden . . ." (What about the women and children?—I have decided to find a clear solution here, too. I did not consider myself entitled to exterminate the men—that is to kill or have killed. The difficult decision had to be made to let this people disappear from the earth . . . It has been done . . .)*

By this time more than half of the Holocaust's victims were already dead, and the killing operations were still in full swing. Even with Hitler's armies rapidly retreating on the western and eastern fronts, the regime continued to allocate significant resources to the destruction of the European Jews. As late as July 1944, for instance, the Wehrmacht (German Army) forced 1,700 Jews of all ages and sexes on the island of Rhodes onto ships that brought them to the last trains leaving Greece for Auschwitz. Ultimately, the Nazis could not complete the total destruction of the European Jews. However, even if more than three million European Jews escaped death at the hand of Hitler's executioners, the Nazis had targeted every single one of them. At the end of the twentieth century, no other regime had intended or achieved mass-human destruction on a similar scale.

The Holocaust cannot be seen as totally removed from other modern genocides. Several of its elements were similar to, among other groups, the mass murder of the Armenians and



the Sinti and Roma. The Turkish authorities involved in the killing of the Armenian minority did employ the empire's bureaucratic apparatus and also forced their victims on death marches. Like the Jews, the Sinti and Roma were subjected to Nazi classification schemes, which designated them as "pure," "half," and "quarter gypsy." Moreover, the Nazis set up a temporary gypsy camp in Auschwitz-Birkenau and killed thousands in the gas chambers.

The Holocaust, however, retains its historical uniqueness because of a set of distinct characteristics. They form the basis of the cultural, academic, and political mechanisms that turned it into an event that has changed the ways people think about the twentieth century. In the face of its geographic scope, the elements in the practices of destruction, as well as the ideology and intentions of its perpetrators, the Holocaust was genuinely singular in modern history. Since the study of genocides is an inherently political project that works toward their prevention, it is crucial to remain aware of differences in past and present acts of mass destruction. To do so represents one step in efforts to devise effective political mechanisms for a future without genocides.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the Holocaust was not unlike other attempts at racial genocide; in the past century more than 120 million people have been annihilated under similar circumstances.**

The Holocaust is, in many respects, the paradigmatic event of the twentieth century because of its profound influence on the landscape of post-World War II literary, philosophical, and historical writing. The Holocaust has thrown a ubiquitous and threatening shadow across the whole of twentieth-century history, and more specifically, the entire course of modern German history. Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer, in a 1996 *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* article, remarked that "The Holocaust has become a cultural code for the deadly combination of ideology with the technology, modernism, bureaucracy, and expertise to implement evil." Attempts to decrypt the meanings of this cultural cipher draw the writer into a vortex of competing narratives in which the selection of terms, whether "Holocaust," "Shoah," or "genocide," alone threaten to lead to charges of relativism,

preferred victimization, or insensitivity. The language selected, events included (or omitted), and the author's personal background are oftentimes as loaded with implications as the specific interpretations and conclusions reached by the historian. In short, the contemporary philosopher, theologian, writer, and historian faces a formidable challenge in presenting the reality of genocide.

Likewise the question of "uniqueness" has emerged as a highly contentious issue involving a wide range of participants, including professional academics, partisan institutions, and individuals seeking to promote specific political, cultural, and even racist agendas. For an event or occurrence to be unique, it must essentially be without like or equal. Historical events or occurrences can be judged to be singular or comparable in several respects. On the one hand, a theologian might focus on ethics and morality to define moral singularity, while a social scientist might examine bureaucratic structures and organizational procedures to identify political singularity. On the other hand, an historian might concentrate on the motivations of the actors and the series of actual events (cause) that led to a specific result or results (effect). Regardless of the benchmark used, most historians agree that, like an individual's fingerprint, every historical event is unique in its own right, as no two situations, regardless of similarities, are ever exactly the same. It is precisely for this reason that in contemporary historiography, one will seldom find the term the "lessons" of history without the accompanying quotation marks. Still, history is in many respects the art of drawing conclusions by using analogies and comparisons. Comparability does not, however, ipso facto equate to relativism.

Without a doubt, the destruction of six million European Jews is one of the most horrendous crimes of the twentieth century. It is made no less terrible by recognizing the suffering and persecution experienced by Poles, Russians, *Sinti* and *Roma* (Gypsies), and other groups of racial "undesirables" who fell victim to the murderous impulse of National Socialist racial policy. The question remains however, "Can the events of the Holocaust be compared to other genocidal campaigns in the twentieth-century?" Social scientist R. J. Rummel, in *China's Bloody Century: Genocide and Mass Murder since 1900* (1991) studied the course of contemporary mass murder and established that, between 1900 and 1987, governments or quasi-governmental organizations killed at least 120 million civilians throughout the world. Rummel found that the government of the Soviet Union murdered 61,911,000 persons; the Chinese Communists killed 38,702,000 persons; the National

Socialists murdered 22,000,000 persons; the Chinese Nationalists killed 10,214,000 persons; and Japanese militarists murdered 5,890,000 persons in this century alone. From these numbers, it is clear that humankind has evidenced a disturbing penchant for self-annihilation in the twentieth century.

When considering the millions of individuals murdered in the twentieth century, one justifiably might question the premise concerning the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Steven T. Katz, an avid proponent of the uniqueness argument, in *The Holocaust in Historical Context: Volume 1: The Holocaust and Mass Death before the Modern Age* (1994) contends that “the concept of genocide applies *only* when there is an actualized intent, however successfully carried out, to physically destroy an *entire* group (as such a group is defined by the perpetrators).” Katz then argues that attempts to annihilate parts of a group do not then qualify as genocide according to his definition. Katz’s definition is at best a type of academic sleight of hand, and at worst, a glaring example of theoretical sophistry. Furthermore, Bauer, another strong supporter of the uniqueness argument, finds in his essay in *Lessons and Legacies: The Meaning of the Holocaust in a Changing World*, edited by Peter Hayes (1991), that the Turkish massacre of its Armenian population during World War I fulfilled the requirements of even Katz’s highly restrictive definition. Bauer even describes the Armenian genocide “as a Holocaust-related event, somewhere between genocide and Holocaust.”

In some respects, it appears that the uniqueness argument approaches the debates of medieval theologians concerning the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. Clearly, one can attempt to so narrowly define a term as to make it exclusively applicable to one event. Or more profitably, one can recognize the singular aspects of historical occurrences and still place these events within the broader course of historical developments. In an insightful series of essays in *Murder in Our Midst: The Holocaust, Industrial Killing, and Representation* (1996), Israeli historian Omer Bartov argued that the Nazi genocide of European Jews was “unprecedented,” rather than unique. Bartov’s contention offers an important distinction that allows the events of the Holocaust to remain within the course of human history, while also providing the contemporary historian with a framework for comparing the multifarious manifestations of genocide and mass murder in the modern world.

The vast scope of government-sponsored acts of annihilation clearly indicates that genocide is far from a unique occurrence in this century. In contrast, the motivations behind mass murder are diverse. The motives for genocide

range across a wide spectrum including ideological, religious, ethnic, racial, cultural, and economic grounds and often involve a poisonous admixture of several of these elements. In this respect, the rationale offered by the National Socialists for the annihilation of the Jews based on a bastardized variant of Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution is largely unprecedented. Even in this regard, however, there exists some debate concerning the singularity of the Jewish experience under the Third Reich. In fact, some high-ranking National Socialists sought to apply the standard of biological extermination not only to the Jews, but to the Sinti and Roma as well. For example, the Reich Minister of Justice, Otto Thierack, met with the Reich Propaganda Minister, Josef Goebbels, in September 1942. After his meeting, Thierack wrote, “with respect to the extermination of antisocial forms of life, Dr. Goebbels is of the opinion that the Jews and the Gypsies should simply be exterminated.” Likewise, Edward B. Westermann in a 1998 article for *German Studies Review* reported that a senior German Uniformed Police leader in the occupied Eastern territories, recommended that Sinti and Roma with “contagious diseases” and those classified as “unreliable elements” should be “handled exactly as the Jews.” It is therefore questionable as to the degree of distinction that should be made between the Jews and the Sinti and Roma. In any event, the National Socialists’ use of an immutable biological standard as the rationale for annihilation was itself unprecedented.

The motivations for genocide may in fact be diverse, but motives do not make events singular. For example, throughout history wars have arisen from several motives, but this fact does not prevent the historian from drawing comparisons between them. In reality, the singular aspect of genocide in this century is not to be found in the motivations of the perpetrators, but rather in the social and political matrix that allowed for the multiple manifestations of genocide around the globe. The environment of annihilation that has accompanied the historical events of the last one hundred years is not coincidental. Indeed, this century’s genocidal actions were primarily associated with the actions of totalitarian or authoritarian governments. These governments were themselves products of mass politics arising out of a process of industrialization in which modern society itself became increasingly atomized and its citizens subsumed into a corporate mass where individualism became equated with alienation. Indeed, the forces of modernity created an environment in which individual human life was as inconsequential as the teeming anthills smashed by ignorant children whether out of curiosity or malice.



## ARRIVAL AT AUSCHWITZ

*In this interview a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust describes her arrival at Auschwitz, the notorious death camp in Poland, where an efficient Nazi killing machine was established.*

*“This text has been suppressed due to author restrictions”*

*Source: Interview of Helen L., by Beth B., 13 February 1989, Holocaust Oral History Project, on-line edition, <http://remember.org/witness/wit.sur.lazar.html>*

German intellectual Theodor W. Adorno's admonition that "after Auschwitz no poetry is possible" was more than a statement on the aesthetic possibilities of expression in the postwar world; it was moreover a political statement that served as an indictment of these forces of modernity. In fact, historians Max Horkheimer and Adorno traced *Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragments* (1944) in the emergence of modern barbarism and totalitarianism as the natural offshoots of the Enlightenment tradition. In short, the Enlightenment's instrumentalization of both man and nature led to the horrors of the twentieth century from the camps of Poland to the gulags of Siberia. The political and ideological motivations associated with this view were linked on the one hand to a critique of capitalism, and on the other to a rejection of any degree of authoritarian control. Likewise, in his thought-provoking examination of the emergence of industrialized killing in the twentieth century, Bartov remarked on the "powerful reluctance to admit that industrial killing is very much a product of modernity."

Still, the negative features that have emerged alongside the progressive elements of modern industrialized society constitute only a partial variable in the genocidal equation. The growth and actions of antidemocratic political philosophies provide the missing variable in the calculus of annihilation when examining the practices of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich, Joseph Stalin's Russia, or Mao Tse-tung's Middle Kingdom. In her classic work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951), German Jewish philosopher and historian Hannah Arendt observed, "The totalitarian attempt at global conquest and total domination has been the destructive way out of all impasses. Its victory may coincide with the destruction of humanity; wherever it has ruled, it has begun to destroy the essence of man." Admittedly, Arendt's work is in some respects a product of the Cold War, but many of her conclusions offer keen insight into the motivating force behind this century's genocidal impulse. Like Arendt, Rummel identified the root cause of modern genocide and mass murder as "arbitrary, undisciplined power in the hands of tyrants." He continued by alleging that "wherever such power has been centralized and unchecked, the possibility exists that it will be used at the whim of dictators to kill for their own ends." Furthermore, in his analysis of the National Socialist dictatorship, Rummel concluded in *Democide: Nazi Genocide and Mass Murder* (1992) that "Nazi democide is another instance of the principle that absolute ideology coupled with an absolute power of the state is absolutely deadly to human life."

In the final analysis, the Holocaust represents but one horrendous example of genocide in the twentieth century. Sadly, this "Sword of

Damocles" continues to hang over the collective head of humanity. The elements that allowed Hitler to pursue the destruction of the European Jews and enabled Mao to initiate his "Cultural Revolution" are still present and remain embedded in the fabric of modern industrialized societies. It requires only the emergence of a Führer or a *vozhda'* (leader) adept at championing an antidemocratic philosophy and capable of manipulating mass politics to unleash the forces of annihilation. Time spent debating the question of uniqueness detracts from the important task of preventing future genocide. In the words of Bartov, "There may perhaps not be any lessons to be learned from the genocide of the Jews; but, all the same, we must know that the killing goes on, and even if we are safe from it today, we may become its victims tomorrow. This is not a memory, not even a history, for the murder is in our midst, and our passivity will be our nemesis."

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# IMPERIAL SYSTEMS

## Did the British and French view World War II as the beginning of the end for their respective empires?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, although the British and French saw World War II as the beginning of the end for their empires, they marshaled all their colonial resources to defeat the Axis.

**Viewpoint:** No, the British and French hoped to retain, if not reform, their colonial systems after World War II.

For Britain and France, World War II seemed to prove the underlying viability of imperial systems that over the previous quarter century had been increasingly criticized as retrograde and moribund. One of the major, welcomed surprises after the collapse of France and Britain's expulsion from the continent was the continued obedience of their respective non-European possessions. From a French perspective, even those colonies that broke with Vichy to support the Free French affirmed the imperial concept because they followed their local governors, as opposed to acting on populist impulses. The combats of "Frenchmen against Frenchmen," notably in Syria, actually pitted non-European troops against each other—and each side obeyed its officers. The French army created in the aftermath of the North African campaign was primarily composed of North African and sub-Saharan African troops, whose combat performance gave added impetus to the idea of a "French Union" that would recognize the contributions of the colonies and begin integrating them into a commonwealth.

Britain's experiences were similar. If the Commonwealth countries (Canada, Australia, and New Zealand) were not as complaisant as in 1914, they nevertheless came well up to scratch in terms of men and money. South African participation might have been ambivalent, but its troops played a vital role in the African campaign of 1940–1941 and afterward. Black contingents from West and East Africa served as far afield as Burma and Italy. Above all, India, despite the best efforts of the Congress Party, remained a reliable base and provided the largest volunteer army in the history of modern warfare—an army that fought as well as any European counterpart once it found its feet. It was clear even to committed imperialists such as Winston Churchill that there would be changes after the war. Nevertheless, his statement that he had not become prime minister to oversee the dismantling of the British Empire was by no means unrealistic.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, although the British and French saw World War II as the beginning of the end for their empires, they marshaled all their colonial resources to defeat the Axis.**

Few historians of the British or French imperial mind between 1900 and 1940 would agree that the need or desire for empire was over as global war loomed for the second time, but there is some evidence that transformations were taking place that would eventually lead to decolonization. According to A. D. Roberts in *The Colonial Moment in Africa: Essays on the Movement of Minds and Materials, 1900–1940* (1990), “the extent of empire, in the sense of political overrule, was related in no simple way to metropolitan strength.” Europe had been gravely enfeebled by World War I and then by the worldwide economic depression of the 1930s. Warfare caused the deaths of more than twenty million in Europe (excluding Russia), a mortality rate of about 7 percent. France had lost more than two-thirds of its foreign investments as a result of World War I and at home had suffered great physical damage. Thus, both Great Britain and France were struggling to rebuild their economies; colonies were a drain on funds needed badly at home. Final responsibility for colonial rule, however, lay with the legislatures in the respective countries. Advocates for colonial reform began to discuss how to manage the empire more progressively, but these issues mattered little prior to World War II.

Since 1920 the official policy of the British Empire had been to make the best of the League of Nations. In 1935 the League ignominiously failed to prevent Benito Mussolini from invading Ethiopia, the last independent African nation and itself a member of the peace organization. An irreversible change had occurred in the world’s attitude to colonies in the twenty-seven years since the end of World War I. Gone was the empire-building triple alliance of gold, God, and glory that had helped launch the scramble for colonies in 1884. Colonies were considered unfashionable, and many colonial enterprises had proved to be costly. It is quite debatable, however, whether the British government was actually still imperialist in sentiment or the reverse. The experience of Labour governments in 1924 and 1929–1931 bore this out. The voice of Ramsay MacDonald, laying stress on what he called the “the confusions of an imperialist inheritance,” was often raised at annual Labour Party conferences. He warned his listeners that the cor-

rect policy for the Left was to create a transition period between the conditions that had prevailed before the war and those that were going to come afterward. Many Left stalwarts favored the doctrine of self-determination—of which imperialism was, by definition, a negation. Self-determination was often equated with nationalism and the concept that each nation should be the master of its own fate. Between the two wars, Labour governments in Britain held office, but not power, as their members were quick to point out. The Liberals enjoyed an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons, though fifty-three Labour members had been elected. Ramsay and others had no mandate to act according to their own teachings. Some Liberals also talked of restoring the old ideas of less imperial intervention and more colonial self-government. In a deeply pacifist age, many British citizens were skeptical of empire and the commitment of military forces to quell growing opposition to colonial rule in Africa and the rest of the British empire.

Militarism was vilified in Great Britain because it was assumed it would prove an inefficient instrument to stop the rising tide of nationalism. A system of imperial government that was bound to call soldiers to its aid when colonies grew hostile was not that which commanded respect or support. Labour resistance demanded the nation look at what had happened in Palestine, where Great Britain was scorned by both sides to whose protection they had sworn. Consequently, defense budgets in the 1930s were promptly attacked both by Labour and by men such as Winston Churchill before World War II.

In 1939 the British people were so pacifist they were determined not to go to war for any reason at all. Neville Chamberlain hoped he could achieve peace with his policy of appeasement. Doubts abounded among imperialists, who had at least never held so low an opinion of Great Britain that they could believe that peace should come at any price. Chamberlain belatedly dropped appeasement to build up collective security and an alliance system in Europe. The ideals of imperial consolidation were gaining strength in Great Britain; however, many people around the globe did not fully comprehend the development of a British Commonwealth of Nations and the incumbent responsibilities of partnership. So Great Britain would go to war lacking a strong patriotic and imperialist spirit. Reform was needed, both to forestall subversion and to advertise to the world Britain’s fitness to be a great power.

The impact of war reverberated throughout Great Britain, and Churchill demanded total loyalty of the British Empire in its hour of need. Viscount Alfred Milner had foreseen an age of



## A SIGHTING OF GOUMS: ITALY, 1944

My attention is diverted from the dead by one of my sergeants, who asks me to observe a long column of troops approaching us from the rear on our right flank. The column moves very rapidly down one slope and up another. In about thirty minutes it should reach us. Are these bypassed Germans? We hide behind boulders until we can get a close look at them. I finally recognize their long column as French colonial troops, or Goums. They are the boys who are expert at knife work. As they reach our position, they come to a halt. For the first time I have a chance to get a close view of these fellows I have heard so much about. They are a fascinating lot; French officers are in command. The native warriors wear dirty gray robes, and their long hair is braided in pigtails. They sing, chatter, and howl. Many carry chickens under their arms, and some herd goats before them. All are armed with large machete knives. They bivouac for their evening meal by building a large bonfire directly on the skyline, kill one of the goats, and roast it over the open flames. The Krauts must be able to see them for miles away, but the Goums are completely unconcerned. They plan to bypass our troops after dark and carry on their silent warfare during the night. I suggest to my sergeant that we find our battalion as soon as possible before we tangle with these boys in the dark. They may not remember us. We are told that they receive fifty cents per enemy ear. I would like to keep mine. . . .

*Source:* Klaus A. Huebner, *Long Walk Through War: A Combat Doctor's Diary* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1987), p. 81.

imperial unity; Churchill would be the architect to make it come true. There were to be no bystanders in the conflict, and every resource (food, men, and supplies) would be tapped to protect British national interests. Britain's role was to protect its imperial rights. All this was done in a highly emotional atmosphere, wherein men were killed and causes desperately gained. The question remained whether these ideas could be maintained once the war ended. The tide of opinion had irreversibly shifted in Great Britain. "The empire was a responsibility that should be taken more seriously," argued many policymakers. Imperial and foreign policy should be in the hands of a single minister. A clear and decided British policy, added Edward Hallett Carr in *Conditions of Peace* (1942), would make the active cooperation of the United States and the Dominions more, and not less, certain.

Opposition to imperial consolidation came after the war from every corner of the empire,

and critics within Great Britain recognized that the nation had expended all of its resources. Britain could not assume that it could take up where it had left off before World War II. The war had bred nationalism in the colonies, and the white man's prestige around the world was irrevocably damaged. The Australian premier, John Curtin, told his own Labour Party in 1943 that he for one did not believe that Britain could or should be allowed to manage the Empire on the old basis of a government sitting in remote London, moving dominion destinies about the board as pawns in its own game of foreign policy. As Great Britain began to withdraw from the colonies after the war, it struggled to make sense of a world it could not control. Nationalism was erupting like a volcano in India, the Middle East, Palestine, Egypt, and the Sudan.

According to British historian A. P. Thornton, in *The Imperial Idea and Its Enemies: A Study in British Power* (1959), it was the liberal tradition of reform in Great Britain that challenged imperialism and the fundamental assertion of power that was a prerequisite of maintaining control around the world. It had been an axiom of the British, however, that they would have decades to turn colonies into nation states. In contrast, the French had dreamed of a unified community of nations since the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. It was first applied in Africa in 1848 when the residents of the four historic French communes on the coast of Senegal were granted French citizenship and representation in the National Assembly in Paris, along with the residents of Reunion, the French West Indies, and a few other scattered dependencies with French connections dating back to the ancien régime (pre-1789).

*Assimilation* and *association* were the principal philosophical themes that dominated French colonial thought and practice during most of the life of France's second colonial empire (1880–1960). The concept of assimilation refers to a process by which non-French peoples were to be assumed into the body of the French nation, taught its language, and indoctrinated in its culture. They were to become French through an acculturation process. Difficulties with this romantic idea emerged with the expansion of French control into the Senegalese hinterland. General Louis Faidherbe (1818–1889) realized he was faced with large numbers of people living in a totally different culture, who had little basis for understanding or relating to French civilization. As with the British in West Africa, it became apparent that a policy of indirect rule would be least disruptive, the cheapest, and therefore the most practicable means of governing at minimum cost and fuss. This pragmatic approach was later termed "association."



Between the world wars, France experienced a chronic shortage of money for colonial development. How could assimilation occur if there was no money for education and language training? The colonies were heavily taxed to aid the *métropole* (metropolis) with its own postwar financial difficulties. France had relied heavily on its colonies for military manpower during World War I, and it was the only country to pass a military conscription law in peacetime called the “blood tax.” The French were also the first to amalgamate African soldiers into French units that were called *Regiments d’Infanterie Coloniale Mixtes Sénégalais* (RICMS, Composite Colonial Senegalese Infantry Regiments). Annual levies averaged twelve thousand men in the prewar years. It appears that France could not rebuild its world power status without its colonies.

The stunning defeat of the French in June 1940 delivered a rude shock to the colonies and divided their loyalties between the government in Vichy and an obscure general named Charles de Gaulle. With the improved fortunes of the Free French, de Gaulle consolidated his power in the colonies at the Brazzaville Conference (1944). He warned that France’s colonial empire, “belonged to the French nation, and only to her, to proceed, when the time is opportune, to make reforms in the imperial structure.” French policymakers planned for a stronger federation under a new constitution for the “whole French nation.” Colonies would be represented in the constituent assembly based upon universal suffrage. In the mythmaking process that often surrounds such historic events, the Brazzaville Conference has come to be seen as the first step in the process leading to independence sixteen years later. Any careful reading of the documents, however, indicates that independence outside a French context was explicitly excluded. Nevertheless, African nationalists hailed it as a move in the right direction. Jean-Hilaire Aubame of Gabon later wrote, as quoted by Francis Terry McNamara in *France in Black Africa* (1989):

It was impossible to continue to think according to the old colonialist conceptions. In this regard the Conference of Brazzaville can be considered a real Declaration of the Rights of African Man; perhaps a timid Declaration, incomplete and sometimes reticent, but rich in possibilities.

Regardless of postwar possibilities, both Great Britain and France depended heavily on their colonies during World War II. Imperial soldiers answered the call of their respective colonial power and served with honor on the battlefields of North Africa, the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. Myron Echenberg, in *Colonial Conscripts: The Tirailleurs Sénégalais in French West Africa, 1857–1960* (1991), estimates that the

French alone recruited in excess of two hundred thousand black Africans during World War II. Despite the fact that decision-makers in both countries recognized the need for permanent change in their colonial policies prior to 1939, the realities of war prevented any efforts to dismantle what had been created since the Berlin Conference of 1884. The great days of empire were waning, but first each power must defend its strategic interests against German aggressions. That would demand total mobilization of all colonial assets by both Great Britain and France.

—DEBORAH A. SHACKLETON, U.S. AIR FORCE  
ACADEMY, COLORADO



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the British and French hoped to retain, if not reform, their colonial systems after World War II.**

Considered in hindsight, nothing seems a more natural consequence of World War II than the collapse of Europe’s empires—particularly the African ones. On one hand there was the emergence in activist roles of the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as the economic and emotional costs to the imperial powers of six years of war, accompanied in most cases by occupation. The imperialist West was hoisted on its own rhetoric of universal human rights. On the other side of the equation stood a “new class” of nationalists, supported by populations with their consciousness raised by wartime experiences, acting in an international atmosphere where even the newest, least-credible sovereign body could claim a seat in the United Nations and apply for development loans. The collapse of empires seems foregone, retarded only by attempts to export to Asia or Africa a Cold War that at bottom had little to do with the non-European peoples. Yet, viewed from the perspective of 1944–1945, an alternate case could be made—not for the continuation of empires in their traditional forms, but of reorganized systems taking advantage of the economic and political lessons of World War II to develop an alternate means of integrating regions and peoples, something as different from the current pattern of self-sufficient sovereignty as it would have been from its traditional predecessor.

The scenario began with will. None of the European states had any intention of resigning their empires. Winston Churchill was determined that not only Britain but also France and the Netherlands should get back their colonies as a precondition for restoring order and stabil-

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

ity in a chaotic world. The future might not have the form of the past, but it was likelier to endure if it had its prewar shape. Clean slates had been tried in 1918, with results plain for all to see.

Except at his most reactionary, Churchill did not believe a return to the status quo antebellum was possible. By 1945 nationalism had so permeated India, the “jewel of the Raj,” that Sir Claude Auchinleck, its army’s commander in chief, declared that every Indian officer “worth his salt” was some kind of nationalist. The relative peace and stability India had experienced after 1942, a situation that had allowed raising the largest volunteer army in history, had in good part been contingent on the understanding—accepted by the Congress Party, and which British officials on the spot had done nothing to discourage—that independence in both the formal and real sense would be forthcoming after the destruction of the Axis.

That presupposition, however, did not inevitably mean a hostile divorce. The British Commonwealth, created in 1933, had proved a promising umbrella institution during the war. An independent India had every reason to consider Commonwealth membership a stepping stone to the wider world its nationalists sought. In that context, moreover, World War II had done much to modify the anti-British sentiments of the Congress Party. The “Quit India” campaign of 1942 had been the end of a phase rather than a pattern for the future. The death in a plane crash of Subhas Chandra Bose (18 August 1945) had removed one of the leading advocates

of violent resistance. The behavior of the Japanese on India’s eastern frontier had demonstrated that, Mohandas Gandhi to the contrary, there were worse alternatives to association with the British. Wartime demands on British manpower had meant the de facto devolution of administrative authority and military command to Indians on a large and expanding scale. If—and it would turn out to be a decisive counterfactual—the growing Hindu-Muslim antagonism could be successfully brokered, an independent India might well illustrate the aphorism that the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Similar patterns seemed to be developing in sub-Saharan Africa. Long a backwater of the empire, that region bade to become its postwar focal point. Military necessity had generated a network of ports and airfields—not a few paid for by the United States. Air routes, whose military flights proceeded with near-peace-time regularity, crisscrossed the once “Dark Continent.” African soldiers had demonstrated their fighting power against Italians and Japanese, creating a possibility of taking India’s place as a source of manpower for regional power projection. Demobilized soldiers as well brought with them to civilian life a relative technological sophistication that seemed to offer a way of compensating for long-neglected educational systems. In London, advocates of planned economies saw in Africa, particularly West Africa, fertile ground for the kind of large-scale projects that so far British voters had rejected for themselves. Pea-

nuts were projected to make the Gold Coast, already with some experience in a world economy, into a showplace for postcapitalist development. That would be only a beginning.

In terms of politics too, Britain expected to profit from its errors in India. African nationalist movements were in their early stages, still dominated by journalists imitating Fleet Street and barristers who wore robes and wigs into court during an African summer. This time surely power could be shared—not only with the nationalists, but also with the new immigrants, who, all signs suggested, would take their demobilization and seek fresh opportunities in farming or business in the southern hemisphere.

Imperial prospects in the Middle East did not seem nearly as promising. Iraq had been kept in line only by direct force. Palestine was a trouble spot even without the certain challenge the Yishuv (Jewish community in Palestine) would mount to immigration restrictions once Adolf Hitler was out of the way. The U.S.S.R. had occupied half of Iran. Even if it could be induced to withdraw peacefully, the Iranian government had been provoked to the limits of endurance by four years of being treated as a right of way. Egypt too, whose King Farouk I had proven anything but a compliant figurehead, was a question mark.

At the same time, what alternatives existed to continued British paramourcy in the region? The possibilities of Islamic societies and oligarchic governments turning to the Soviet Union seemed remote at best. The United States had never expressed any political interest in a region that was as far away as could be imagined from America's psychological as well as its political foci. The situation would require careful management but was far from hopeless—at least in the general context of optimism with which it was still possible to consider Britain's imperial situation as the war wound down.

France was in a different position. Even before the catastrophe of 1940, its empire had been increasingly regarded as the makeweight of a *métropole* (metropolis), overmatched if thrown on its own resources. Almost a quarter of the men assigned to the army's combat arms in France on 1 September 1939 were Africans, Malagasies, and Indochinese. Between 1943 and 1945, France had been liberated from North Africa—by an army that was strongly integrated at the small-unit level. Metropolitan refugees and *piéd-noir colons* (Frenchmen from North African colonies) served alongside Algerians, Moroccans, and Senegalese in rifle companies and gun crews. If the Europeans still gave the orders, or still held most of the officers' commissions, that reflected the exigencies of modern war as much as any structural racism. It was France's African

soldiers who had shown metropolitan *maquisards* (resistance fighters) and conscripts the techniques of frontline survival when the army was "whitened" in the Alsatian winter of 1944 and the hard-ried veterans from across the Mediterranean were withdrawn to more familiar climates for the respite they had earned. That was the kind of fundamental role reversal that suggested a new era for France and its colonies.

Sentimentality aside, it was brutally clear across the spectrum of French public and political opinion as World War II drew to a close that without empire, restored independence promised little more than client status. It was also clear that France's friends posed a greater threat to that empire than did nationalist movements that still seemed susceptible to co-option on one hand and firing squads on the other.

Republican France had never been excessively squeamish about spilling blood to maintain its authority, on the general premise that a large number of dead dissidents at once saved even more corpses later. What France had not faced was having its allies on French-claimed ground, in superior force. Syria and Lebanon had claimed independence in 1941, in the aftermath of the defeat of their Vichy government by a British-led force that included a significant Free French contingent. Subsequently the Levant had become a British base area, with correspondingly few prospects for France to reassert its prewar position. In North Africa, Britain, and the United States, the Americans in particular had done nothing significant to support local nationalist and anti-French movements. Neither, however, had they done anything to suppress them. The Americans, moreover, had taken pains to ensure that the weapons and equipment they provided were used against the Germans, as opposed to being held back to underwrite an administration whose Vichy connections were an ongoing source of embarrassment to Washington.

In those contexts it was unremarkable that the newly organized Fourth Republic in 1945 created the French Union. This umbrella organization incorporated metropolitan France; the "overseas departments," Algeria and the Antilles; and the "overseas territories" of French West and Central Africa, Madagascar, and the Pacific islands. These regions composed the republic proper, with all inhabitants possessing a common citizenship. Included as well were the "associated states" of Tunisia and Indochina. In principle all Union members were autonomous, except for foreign policy—that was to continue under the auspices of a *Quai d'Orsai* (French Foreign Office) that presumably had learned something from the events of 1940.

The French Union might have been *dirigiste* (centrally controlled) in concept, but it was not without prospects. The failure of the Fourth Republic to bring the Union to life lies outside the scope of this essay, but Ho Chi Minh spent most of 1946 engaged in negotiations for a Vietnamese state that would retain ties to France. His frustration at their collapse reflected something more than belief he had been played for a fool. Ho might have been willing to fight indefinitely at a ten-to-one loss rate in order to achieve independence. That did not make him eager for the experience. Algerian nationalists who resorted to insurgency in 1954 did so only after a similar, but longer, experience of negotiations that went nowhere. Both events suggest a basis of good will and habit that offered some promise of comity, if not community, as an alternative to the violence that ultimately tore the French Empire apart.

In the end Niccolò Machiavelli's aphorism, that a strong man may thrash his enemies while a weak man must kill them, might stand for all the European empires, Dutch and Belgian as well as British and French. At their beginnings, empires signified power. By the end of World War II they had become necessary institutions—necessary, that is, to uphold claims and pretensions so costly that it did not take long for the citizens of the ill-named “mother countries” to reject them decisively and comprehensively. A “dirty war” in Indochina, a partition of India indecent in its haste and heedless of its consequences—these were the fruits of hopes that, at the end of World War II, briefly stirred for not merely the revival but the transformation of empire.

—DENNIS SHOWALTER, COLORADO COLLEGE

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# ITALY

## To what degree did Italy hinder the Axis war effort?

**Viewpoint:** The inability of Italy to counter the Allies in the Mediterranean gradually drained German strength from the Eastern Front.

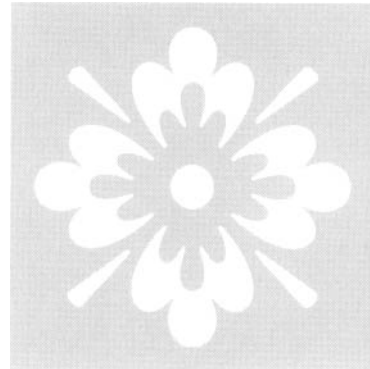
**Viewpoint:** Italian strategic blunders, poor training, inadequate equipment, and military defeats greatly harmed the Axis war effort.

War correspondent Ernie Pyle once wrote that Italy reminded him of a dog hit by a car because it had run into the street and tried to bite the tires. That image continues to epitomize Italy's role in World War II for most general readers and not a few scholars. It was fostered during the war by a series of military defeats that were both comprehensive and embarrassing. It was encouraged by the "Rommel legend," a good part of which pits the heroic front-line German general against an Italian system neither willing to recognize his genius nor able to provide him with supplies. Not least, the concept of Italy as a burden also reflected wartime and postwar efforts within Italy to portray the country as an unwilling participant, dragged into war at Adolf Hitler's heels by Benito Mussolini, eager to withdraw at the first opportunity.

Italy in fact possessed and pursued its own agenda in the Balkans and Mediterranean—an agenda in which the imperialist aspects long antedated Mussolini's rise to power. The brutality demonstrated in conquered Abyssinia, however, was a Fascist contribution to the mix and suggested the probable fate of other subject peoples. Nor was Italy merely a German client. As late as 1940–1941, Mussolini's intransigent independence was one of the reasons Hitler turned away from a Mediterranean option.

Much of the subsequent criticism of Italy's war effort was made by German generals unable or unwilling to understand why Italy simply did not follow German policy blindly and accept German advice uncritically. In that sense at least, the Third Reich got the ally it deserved. If Italy's policy and strategy were coherent, however, its operational and tactical capacities were insufficient to turn concepts into realities. In material terms, Italy suffered from having peaked too early. Its armaments programs had produced weapons that were well up to the standards of the mid 1930s. Lack of raw materials and tensions within the Fascist system retarded the development of a second wave of high-tech hardware until late 1942. As a result, Italy's armed forces stood significantly behind their principal ally and opponents in cutting-edge technology.

Italian armed forces were too poorly commanded and motivated to bridge the gap by fighting power. In particular, an army whose small arms were the worst in Europe, and whose artillery depended on guns captured from the Austrians in 1918, was unlikely to compensate successfully for its lack of up-to-date armored vehicles. Defeat bred defeat: repeated defeat bred disillusion. Fascist Italy fought its war with a poorly tempered sword.





**Viewpoint:**  
**The inability of Italy to counter the Allies in the Mediterranean gradually drained German strength from the Eastern Front.**

Studies of Italian participation in World War II—especially in English—have concentrated on June 1940–March 1941, during which Benito Mussolini enjoyed political and strategic independence. Beyond that period, historians have devoted some attention to Italian operations in North Africa and the Mediterranean. Such accounts generally examine Italian actions as adjuncts to those of the Germans. Neither approach has dealt with the far more serious damage Italy caused to the Axis, which occurred on a strategic level from late 1942 onward. In their first year of hostilities, Italian defeats had little influence on German conduct of the war. The large, brief, and ineffective offensive by the *Regio Esercito* (Royal Italian Army) in the French Alps contributed nothing to the German victory in the west. From July 1940 to March 1941, neither the setbacks suffered by the Italian navy in the Mediterranean nor the pitiful participation by the Italian air force in the Battle of Britain caused the cancellation of Operation Sealion. Adolf Hitler's February 1945 lament that the failed Italian invasion of Greece forced him to intervene in the Balkans—thus causing a fatal six-week delay in the initiation of Operation Barbarossa—represented a dishonest fantasy. True, the Führer ordered contingency planning for an invasion of Greece within two weeks of the Italian attack on 28 October 1940, but those plans involved a force of only ten divisions and one air corps, which would be initiated only if German diplomacy failed to settle Balkan matters, and avoided any compromise of Barbarossa.

Only in late March 1941, when Hitler realized the anti-Axis nature of the recent coup in Belgrade, did he order an offensive doubled in size from previous intentions to smash through the Balkans. While he also intended to reverse the Italian fiasco, Hitler's motivations centered on punishing the Yugoslav government and obliterating the vestiges of Soviet influence in Romania and Bulgaria. Furthermore, the Balkan campaign succeeded far more quickly than the German high command expected and did not disrupt preparations for the attack on the Soviet Union. Any significant delays were caused by unusually heavy rains and consequent flooding throughout eastern Europe that spring. Since the opportunity to land forces in Greece persuaded Winston Churchill to call off the Commonwealth advance on Tripoli in February 1941, one can even argue that Mussolini's invasion of Greece ultimately provoked an unintended boon

to the Axis. It prompted the salvation of the Italian position in North Africa and led Britain to a severe defeat.

From 22 June 1941, however, the fate of the Axis rested primarily on the outcome of the German-Russian war and, to a lesser extent, on those of the Battle of the Atlantic and the Allied strategic bomber offensive against *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe). Events elsewhere, in which the Italians dominated—counterinsurgency in the western Balkans, Mediterranean aeronaval operations, the ongoing North African campaign, and the fall of Italian East Africa—were of far less consequence in the struggle for control of Europe. Perhaps the *Armata Corazzata Italo-Tedesca* could have reached the Suez Canal in the summer of 1942. This operation would have disrupted, yet hardly derailed, Allied strategy. Neither the German nor Italian armies possessed the motor transport or logistics capacity to support Erwin Rommel's advance to the Persian Gulf or Caucasus oil fields, let alone link up with Japanese forces in southern Asia. Thus, even spectacular victories in North Africa could not have fundamentally changed the outcome of the war in Europe.

Some figures help illustrate these points. Not counting allied Axis units, the Germans began Operation Barbarossa with 136 divisions equipped with 3,671 tanks and self-propelled guns. At that time, only two German divisions with 173 tanks were serving in North Africa. In Egypt sixteen months later, the Germans had four understrength divisions and one light brigade, along with 238 tanks fit for combat, prior to the Battle of El Alamein (July 1942). Simultaneously, 192 German divisions supported by 3,133 tanks and self-propelled guns were committed to the Eastern Front. Likewise, only small portions of German naval and air forces served in the Mediterranean theater until late 1942. *Wehrmacht* (German Army) assistance to the Italians was no more than a minor diminution of forces conducting crucial campaigns elsewhere. The twelve depleted Axis divisions, dug in at the outskirts of Alexandria in the fall of 1942, faced a strategic cul-de-sac. Hitler understood this fact even if Rommel and Mussolini did not.

From November 1942, however, Italian participation in the war effort increasingly damaged the Axis cause. The incompetent leadership of the Italian Eighth Army, which held the northeast shoulder of the Stalingrad salient, combined with lack of armor and antitank guns, led to the Italian collapse beneath the Soviet Red Army's Operation Uranus and contributed significantly to the encirclement of the German Sixth Army. Meanwhile, the Allied landings in French North Africa (8 November 1942, Operation Torch) and the Commonwealth forces' advance from their victory at El Alamein created a dilemma for Hitler and Mussolini. Should they evacuate their forces from Libya

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

to reinforce southern Europe or rush reinforcements into Tunisia in preparation for a counteroffensive? The Axis dictators chose the latter course, but the heavy burden this move placed on limited German air transport made adequate aerial resupply of the trapped Sixth Army impossible. At the same time, Hitler broke his promise to Mussolini to mount a counterattack into Algeria and Morocco. The pressing need for mechanized forces to stem the growing disaster in southern Russia prevented the shipment of sufficient panzer divisions into Tunisia. The results were two great Axis catastrophes, rather than just costly withdrawals. About 130,000 German survivors of the Sixth Army surrendered in February; 240,000 Axis troops—including about 125,000 Germans—fell captive in Tunisia three months later. The six German divisions lost in Tunisia could have contributed greatly to the defense of Sicily and the Italian mainland during the summer of 1943.

In December 1942, if not earlier, leading Italian military figures contacted the Allies to discuss the overthrow of Mussolini. German intelligence soon reported these approaches to the Führer. Shortly afterward, Mussolini began to implore Hitler to negotiate a separate peace with Joseph Stalin. At the same time that Hitler was attempting to shore up the crumbling Eastern Front, he nonetheless had to withhold forces both to defend Italy from invasion and to occupy the peninsula in case of an antifascist coup. In the spring of 1943 the Führer decided to conduct a limited offensive in the Ukraine, code-named Operation Citadel. While complete information is lacking, some evidence suggests that Hitler hoped to administer a severe

blow to the Red Army, then negotiate a cease-fire with Stalin, and finally to assemble such overwhelming military power in southern Europe as to doom any British-American attempt to come ashore. Originally, the German attempt to destroy the Soviet forces in the Kursk salient was scheduled for May. Hitler postponed the start of Citadel several times, however, in order to assemble as many as possible of the new Tiger and Panther tanks. Early models of both vehicles had exhibited a range of mechanical problems, and mass production only began in March and April 1943, respectively. Nevertheless, Hitler sent forty Tigers to Tunisia, ordered another battalion of forty-five of these tanks to Italy in February, and supplied Mussolini with a third of the heavy panzer battalions in May. The latter, manned by Germans, formed the core of the new Fascist Militia M Division created to guard *il Duce* (The Leader) against his own army. Such generosity further delayed the Kursk offensive, but Hitler thought he could spare the time. Neither German nor Italian intelligence believed the Western Allies could make a landing on Sicily, Sardinia, or elsewhere in the Mediterranean until the late summer of 1943. After several more last-minute delays, on 25 June Hitler definitely scheduled the start of Citadel for 5 July 1943.

Only in the last days of June did the Italian-German strategic intelligence committee, recently formed to determine Allied intentions in the Mediterranean, agree that an invasion might be imminent. Axis analysts, however, considered that evidence indicated Sardinia, Greece, or even Provence were far more likely targets than Sicily. Hitler himself thought Sardinia likeliest. As a



result, the actual target of Allied operations received little reinforcement. Mussolini did command the transfer of the M Division to the island, despite the unit's incomplete equipment and training. After the Germans agreed to send both a *panzergrenadier* (mechanized infantry) and an understrength panzer division to Sicily, il Duce revoked his order. By early July, Sicily held a garrison of five virtually worthless and immobile Italian coastal divisions, four poorly equipped regular Italian infantry divisions, and two German divisions. The Germans had 149 tanks, of which 17 were Tigers, detached from the M Division; the Italians possessed about 110 tanks—mostly captured French Renault 35s but also a dozen or so twenty-year-old Fiat 3000s—64 self-propelled guns, and 13 armored cars.

This pitiful Italian armored force represented the best the Regio Esercito could scrape together following its losses in Russia and North Africa. It also indicated how little Italian war industries, plagued by bad designs and poor manufacturing techniques, as well as rotten with inefficiency, incompetence, and corruption, could do to replace battlefield losses. Yet, to preserve their lucrative monopoly supplying shoddy armored vehicles to their army, Italian industrialists rejected Hitler's offer of plans and machine tools to manufacture the *Panzerkampfwagen* IV and Panther tanks in Italy. During the period of March–June 1943, deliveries of new armor to German forces on the Eastern Front alone totaled 699 tanks and 498 self-propelled or assault guns. In the first eight months of that same year, Italian manufacturers produced only 147 tanks—32 of which weighed only 3.5 tons—and 279 self-propelled guns. Many of these were lost in attacks on Axis ships bound for Tunisia or in combat if they reached their destination. Such figures indicate how much of a burden supporting the Italians had become for the Germans by 1943.

Germany's double-envelopment offensive against the Kursk salient commenced on 5 July. Attacking or in reserve were 35 infantry, 14 panzer and 5 *panzergrenadier* divisions, equipped with a total of 2,249 tanks and 730 assault and self-propelled guns. These included about 200 Panthers and 178 Tigers. The Red Army, however, had enjoyed abundant warning to fill the salient with successive defense lines: behind each lay huge armor and artillery forces. For eight days, Wehrmacht and *Waffen Schutzstaffel* (SS) troops battered their way forward, suffering severe losses. Finally, Hitler decided his best forces were being slaughtered to no good purpose and severely restricted further offensive operations late on 12 July.

Whether or not the German forces lost in Tunisia or stationed in Italy might have tipped the balance if employed at Kursk is unknowable. The 130 Tigers deployed in the Mediterranean theater,

however, might have decided the battle if shipped instead to the Eastern Front in February–May 1943. In that case, Hitler could have had the confidence to commence Citadel six to eight weeks earlier. Many military historians believe that launching the operation in May would have led to a German victory, but Hitler had not only lost hope in Citadel by 12 June, but he also needed to employ some of his mechanized forces in the Ukraine elsewhere. Alarmed by simultaneous events in the Mediterranean, he decided he must reinforce the Italian front.

Allied paratroopers began dropping onto Sicily on the evening of 9 July. Nonetheless, the Italian high command still judged the operation a possible diversion from a major amphibious assault on Sardinia. Finally, as news of the massive landing by seven Allied divisions on Sicily reached Rome on the morning of 10 July, the enormity of unfolding events became clear. Mobile Axis divisions on Sicily counterattacked on 11 July, enjoying some success against the American beachhead, but two Italian divisions were effectively destroyed by Allied firepower in the process, and by 14 July, Axis forces were in full retreat. Over the next week, tens of thousands of Italian troops either fell into Allied hands or fled into the hills. Lacking motor transport, they had no way to withdraw to the new Axis defensive line. Thereafter, helped by reinforcements, the Germans conducted a masterful fighting withdrawal to the mainland, evacuating some 53,000 of their troops and 95,000 Italians in the process. By the time Allied forces reached the Strait of Messina on 17 August, the Germans had lost 14,400 dead and prisoners, the Italians 157,400. Eighteen hundred fifty Axis aircraft, 167 German tanks, and all 187 Italian armored vehicles on Sicily had been destroyed in the campaign.

In the meantime, Mussolini had been removed in a military coup on 25 July—the M Division did nothing in response—and King Victor Emmanuel III had appointed Marshal Pietro Badoglio as prime minister. Since Badoglio had been one of the Italian leaders German intelligence had detected extending peace feelers to the Allies seven months earlier, Hitler ordered extensive preparations to seize control of Italy if the marshal's government attempted to abandon the Axis. In June four German divisions were stationed in Italy; immediately following the overthrow of the Fascist regime they were joined by five more, and in early August another eight arrived. After the Badoglio government switched to the Allied side on 8 September, the seventeen German divisions in Italy—eight infantry, four panzer, three *panzergrenadier*, and two paratroop—easily disarmed the Regio Esercito and seized control of the country.

The Red Army, however, had begun the first of a series of offensives along the entire Eastern Front on 12 July. By late September the Soviets



had crossed the Dnieper River and recaptured Kiev in early November. When winter weather brought the Soviet summer offensives to an end, the Red Army had advanced some six hundred miles by late December, driven the Germans out of most of the Ukraine, and cut off Wehrmacht forces in the Crimea. Between 1 July and 1 October 1943, German forces on the Eastern Front suffered one million casualties. Certainly, the twenty-three German divisions sent to Tunisia and Italy in November 1942–August 1943 could not have reversed the tide of war on the Eastern Front. That turn had taken place irreversibly in December 1941. As reinforcements to the Wehrmacht battling the Red Army in the summer of 1943, an additional twenty-three divisions could certainly have prevented disaster on the scale suffered by German arms. By not being able to mount a credible defense of their sector of the Axis empire, the Italians had wrecked any chance for an acceptable separate peace with Stalin before the crack of doom sounded for the Reich.

Given Hitler's failure to seize the strategic advantages open to him in the Mediterranean and Middle East in 1940–1941, the area remained of secondary importance until late 1942. Early Italian failures provoked few serious consequences for the Axis, but the situation altered drastically after El Alamein, Operation Torch, and Stalingrad. For the next ten months the accelerating Italian collapse placed a fatal strain on the German war effort for which even the Wehrmacht's brilliant success in taking control of Italy in September 1943 could not compensate. The Italians might not have been able to do much to help the Germans win World War II, but they certainly did a great deal to make sure that Hitler lost.

—BRIAN R. SULLIVAN, VIENNA, VIRGINIA



**Viewpoint:**  
**Italian strategic blunders, poor training, inadequate equipment, and military defeats greatly harmed the Axis war effort.**

The “Pact of Steel” that Benito Mussolini forged with Adolf Hitler in 1939 seemed to hold considerable promise for both Italy and Germany. For Italy, Mussolini's vision of a revived “Roman Imperium,” centered on the Mediterranean Sea as an Italian lake, now seemed attainable. For Germany, Italian forces vying for control of the Mediterranean promised to create serious difficulties for France and Britain, with the British in particular finding it difficult to keep open the Mediterranean–Suez Canal–Red Sea–Indian Ocean supply route and thus maintain control over its

far-flung colonial possessions. The Italian navy, impressive on paper, would help compensate for Germany's naval inferiority vis-à-vis Britain and France. A glorious future of conquest seemed to await *il Duce* and *Der Führer*.

Yet, the future would hold its share of surprises for both leaders. For Germany, the future meant costly diversions of men and matériel to salvage poorly planned and executed Italian campaigns in North Africa and Greece. In 1941, the crucial year of the war for Germany, the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) and *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) found themselves fighting in a theater ancillary to Germany's titanic struggle against the Soviet Union, a conflict that ultimately doomed the thousand-year Reich to a more abbreviated, yet nevertheless cataclysmic, thirteen-year existence. In calling on its German rescuer, Italy forfeited independence of action and most of the spoils of its ersatz conquests. After suffering enormous casualties supporting German efforts on the Eastern Front in 1942, the Italian military conspired to remove Mussolini from power in 1943 and attempted to exit the war, only to see Germany occupy most of Italy, conscript thousands of Italian soldiers as slave laborers, and create a puppet government with the discredited Mussolini as its figurehead.

Perhaps the most grievous error committed by both countries was the failure to communicate and cooperate honestly and openly with one another. The result was an alliance characterized by deceit, dysfunction, and distrust. Italians were quick to conclude that Germans were arrogant, meddlesome, overweening, and reckless, while the Germans described Italians as duplicitous, feckless, indecisive, and incompetent.

Mutual antipathy led to fundamental disagreements in military timelines and strategy. Still recovering from fighting in Ethiopia (1935–1936) and the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), the Italian military opposed Germany's invasion of Poland in 1939 and would have preferred postponing all offensive operations until 1943 at the earliest. Fearing French and British reprisals in the Mediterranean, Italy remained “nonbelligerent” (a more respectable term than “neutral,” Mussolini thought) until the closing stages of Germany's conquest of France in June 1940. Even after declaring war on France and Britain, Mussolini anticipated a quick diplomatic settlement, from which he hoped to gain a healthy share of the spoils.

Such hopes proved illusory. Encouraged by Germany to exploit apparent British vulnerabilities in North Africa, Italy launched a limited offensive in September 1940 against British forces in Egypt that accomplished little. Assuming static defensive positions sixty-five miles within Egypt, the Italians waited for a German cross-Channel invasion of Britain that never came.



## ALL FOR LOVE

*Both Allied and Axis troops remarked that the fighting on the Italian peninsula was some of the fiercest in the war. There was little to cheer the men, but on occasion a moment of levity did interrupt the brutality.*

NAPLES, February 24—The fatherland was betrayed in unseemly fashion a few nights ago by its most faithful servants—an odd collection of Dobermans and police dogs which had been set to guard a stretch of German lines against Allied night patrols.

The Canadian troops facing this section of the German front had been having trouble with the German hounds, all of which were trained to bark like mad the minute they heard or smelled our troops moving around in the dark. One patrol after another had been found to retire before accomplishing its mission.

Then a Canadian soldier, who knew something about dogs, had a happy thought.

The next night the Canadians took their own kennel out into no-man's-land—a lady dog.

There was no barking that night, and when the patrol returned to the Canadian lines its kennel had increased. A small flock of enemy dogs brought up the van, thoughtless of anything but love. Frantic attempts were made to catch the pack, but most of the dogs had to be shot.

This is one not so secret weapon about which even the Germans, obviously, just cannot do anything.

*Source: Chicago Daily News, 24 February 1944.*

General Sir Archibald P. Wavell, the British commander in the Middle East, quickly recognized an opportunity to counterattack. Initially designed as a large-scale raid, Britain's counterstroke against Italian forces turned rapidly into a rout. By February 1941 Italy had lost Cyrenaica, Libya, and nearly 130,000 men (mostly as prisoners of war). More importantly, Italy's decisive defeat cheered and inspired the British Empire at a time when Axis power had seemed unstoppable.

Besides having better led and motivated soldiers, Britain's key advantage was its superiority in armor, including fifty Matilda tanks whose thick armor made them virtually impervious to Italy's antitank weapons. Technological inferiority was an important reason why Italian forces often failed to hold their own in battle. By the standards of 1936, Italy's latest tanks and planes were state-of-the-art; by 1940, however, they were obsolete. Indeed, weapon obsolescence was one reason why Italy had sought to forestall war until 1943, when a new generation of improved tanks and planes were to be fielded.

Italy's weak industrial base, lack of indigenous and vital raw materials such as oil, and rapidly decreasing reserves of hard currency only exacerbated the problem of technological obsolescence. Once embroiled in war, Italy found it nearly impossible to replace its losses while simultaneously developing a new generation of weaponry. As a stopgap, Italy sought to license and produce superior German designs and to buy outright German weaponry. Such efforts failed since Germany was only willing to sell its designs at prices Italy was loath to pay. Germany's own shortages of military equipment as well meant that its most advanced tanks and planes were not for sale at any price.

Like its army and air force, Italy's navy had also hoped for three or four extra years to prepare for war. Lacking radar, a naval air arm, and courageous admirals, Italy's battleships spent most of their time in port, where they proved vulnerable to air attack. At Taranto in November 1940, twenty-one antiquated British torpedo planes damaged three of Italy's six battleships, one beyond repair. While the Italian submarine fleet often performed bravely during the Battle of the Atlantic, sinking more tonnage than German surface raiders, the timidity and ineffectuality of Italy's surface fleet proved a major disappointment to Germany.

Italy's most humiliating military performance came in its invasion of Greece. While Mussolini had always had Balkan ambitions, the event that precipitated his move against Greece was Hitler's decision to send troops to Romania. Motivating Hitler's decision was the desire to thwart Joseph Stalin's designs on Romania and to shore up Germany's southeastern flank in preparation for the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 (Operation Barbarossa). Offended that Hitler poached on his Balkan preserve without consulting him first, Mussolini decided to return the favor by invading Greece without informing Hitler beforehand. Even worse, he persisted in attacking without adequate forces, as Italy had demobilized large portions of its army for the fall harvest. Launched on 28 October 1940, Italy's attack quickly fizzled as the more motivated and skilled Greek forces, in command of the heights, outflanked and defeated the poorly led Italian units. Within three weeks Greek forces had seized the initiative from Italy and by Christmas had thrown Italian forces back into Albania. Subsequent Italian counteroffensives failed, resulting in temporary stalemate.

Italian forces, sent reeling in both Libya and Greece, next suffered complete defeat in East Africa. By adopting a defensive posture in Ethiopia, Italy allowed Britain to assemble an army of seventy-five thousand in Kenya and Sudan and attack in February 1941. Despite an often spirited defense, Italian forces proved incapable of holding Eritrea, Somaliland, and Ethiopia. Another one hundred thousand Italian soldiers became prison-

ers of war, and Mussolini's proudest military accomplishment—the subjugation of Ethiopia—was overturned. After these three debacles, Hitler concluded that Germany had to move promptly to rescue its ally before the Italians lost their appetite for war, and also before Winston Churchill could move to create a Balkan front or air bases in Greece to threaten Romanian oil fields.

In January 1941 Hitler sent two divisions, including a precious panzer division, to North Africa under General Erwin Rommel to keep the Italians fighting and secure Germany's southern flank. Rommel restored offensive spirit to the demoralized Italian forces and quickly went on the offensive against British troops. Under Rommel's inspired leadership, Italian troops proved they too could perform well. By April, Rommel's *Afrika Korps* (Africa Corps) had regained Libya and Cyrenaica, and pushed British forces back into Egypt (except for an important garrison at Tobruk).

Meanwhile, a military coup in Yugoslavia on 27 March 1941 overthrew the government of the prince regent, Paul, who had decided a week earlier to ally with Germany and Italy. The coup presented Hitler with an opportunity to aid Italians in fighting Greeks and teach the turncoat Slavs a lesson. Taken together with Rommel's tactically impressive but logistically costly offensives in North Africa, Hitler's Balkan offensive established a major strategic and logistical commitment to the Mediterranean that Germany could ill afford during preparations for a massive assault on the Soviet Union. While Germany conquered Yugoslavia in a matter of days and Greece within a month (Greece surrendered on 23 April 1941), Hitler's Balkan expedition had serious repercussions for Germany. The most immediate effect was wear and tear on tanks and other vehicles needed for Barbarossa. More seriously, the Wehrmacht soon learned that Serbian Chetnicks and Communist partisans, the latter led by the future marshal Josip Broz Tito, had not reconciled themselves either to German rule or to atrocities committed by Germany's puppet government in Croatia. Guerrilla fighting in Yugoslavia tied down substantial German forces well into 1945.

By committing forces in the first five months of 1941 to restore Italy's crumbling position in the Mediterranean and Balkans, Hitler diluted his strength precisely when he needed to concentrate it. That he was willing to bail out Mussolini while simultaneously preparing for Barbarossa reflected his supreme confidence in Germany's ability to defeat the Soviet Union in eight short weeks. In hindsight, Rommel's Afrika Korps (incorporating elements of two panzer divisions, of which the Germans had only nineteen), together with a Luftwaffe air corps of five hundred planes, would be sorely

needed for fighting in the Soviet Union. Equally as important, Germany's entanglements in the Mediterranean gave the British opportunities to launch counterattacks in an area where they could employ their advantage in sea power.

A further disadvantage to Germany's expanding commitment to the Mediterranean was a lack of opportunities for quick victories. Before Barbarossa, Hitler's conquests had been decisive and brief, thereby obscuring limits in Germany's military and industrial strength and endurance. Heavy campaigning on the Eastern Front in 1941 cruelly exposed these limits and led to shortages in equipment and raw materials, especially oil. Italy's dependency on Germany for oil and coal imports stretched Germany's limited resources even thinner.

Shortages of men and matériel haunted Germany the next year when Hitler decided against reinforcing Rommel's brilliant victory in June 1942 to concentrate instead on subjugating Stalin. With an extra division or two Rommel may have captured all of Egypt and the Suez Canal, cutting the British Empire's Mediterranean lifeline. Left with no alternative but to dig in and watch as the British rebuilt their army with supplies from the United States, Rommel's outnumbered and outgunned army failed to hold at El Alamein in October and retreated across the desert. Hitler then unwisely decided to reinforce failure, sending troops and supplies to Tunisia in a futile attempt to hold on to territory. The end result was the surrender of 275,000 Axis troops in Tunisia in May 1943. Sadly for the Italians, the denouement was not swift in coming. Mussolini's overthrow in July marked a new phase of the Pact of Steel in which Italy became Germany's captive and suffered accordingly.

In his vainglorious attempt to re-create a Roman empire, Mussolini in 1940–1941 committed military forces to battle before they were ready. Obsolete arms and equipment, together with sycophantic generals who tolerated within their units low standards of training among junior officers and a woefully inadequate number of experienced noncommissioned officers, unsurprisingly conspired to end in heavy losses and humiliating defeats. Individual Italian units, such as *Alpini* (mountain) infantry and the *Ariete* and *Trieste* divisions under Rommel, fought well, and the Italian merchant marine distinguished itself by continuing to supply Afrika Korps in the face of severe losses. Yet, in most cases Italy's army, navy, and air force exhibited serious weaknesses in equipment, leadership, and training that ultimately led them meekly to relinquish their autonomy to Nazi Germany.

In rescuing Italy, however, Germany became committed to a new theater of operations that drained its military and economic resources. Italy and the Balkans may not have been the "soft under-

belly” of Churchill’s dreams. Yet, it was a theater where Britain and the United States could mount damaging and carefully limited offensives in North Africa and Italy in 1942–1943 while gearing up for massive and far riskier assaults to come in France. Italy’s eventual surrender in 1943 forced Germany to occupy northern and central Italy, as well as commit more troops to garrisoning the Balkans, where Tito’s partisans had grown stronger by seizing weapons and ammunition abandoned by the departing Italians. Brutal repression of these partisans, Germany would discover, only encouraged more people to join them. By 1944 Germany had committed fifty-two divisions to Italy and the Balkans, or roughly 20 percent of the Wehrmacht’s combat strength.

Clearly, the poor strategy and incompetent performance exhibited by Italy’s military hindered rather than helped Axis efforts in World War II. By forcing Germany to expend blood and treasure in a theater of marginal strategic import, Mussolini’s pursuit of glory ironically helped the Allies win the war.

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# JAPANESE INTERNMENT

## Was the internment of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians during the war justified?

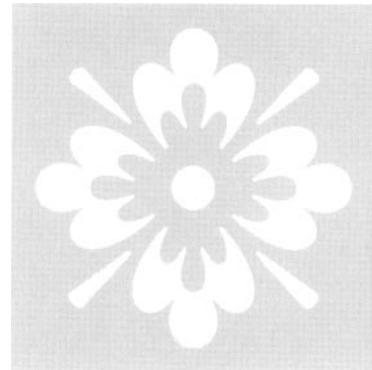
**Viewpoint:** Yes, although the selective internment of citizens and resident aliens of Japanese descent was a racist policy, it was also necessary to hinder espionage and acts of sabotage.

**Viewpoint:** No, the internment of Japanese in the United States and Canada was not justified because they had committed no wrongdoing and were no threat to either nation's security.

In the immediate aftermath of the attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), no significant support developed for collective measures against the small Japanese community of the U.S. West Coast. Surveillance or detection of suspect individuals was considered satisfactory. The pattern began to change in early 1942 as a series of military disasters in the Far East coincided with an explosion of unfounded rumors about sabotage and espionage conducted by Japanese reverting to ancestral loyalties. Calls for drastic action clashed with standard interpretations of the U.S. Constitution. The ambiguous Executive Order 9066 allowed the War Department to exclude designated persons from certain military areas. That was the basis of a series of directives by the army's Western Defense Command providing for the transportation of all Japanese in its territory to camps in the interior of the United States.

The camps were primitive, remote, and uncomfortable. Yet, those who call them "concentration camps" would do well to remember that almost from the beginning, internees used the legal system to challenge their incarceration—much to the concern of a government regretting its initial actions for reasons of pragmatism and principle. It was a far cry from Dachau or the Gulag. That the Supreme Court upheld the evacuation's legality on the narrowest possible grounds did nothing to legitimize the process morally. The legendary performance of the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, recruited in part from among internees, stands as a reproach and an embarrassment to the United States.

The internment of the Japanese is generally and appropriately interpreted as having been fueled by an explosive mix of fear and racism. Yet, neither of these attitudes was an extreme reaction to the circumstances of America's entry into World War II—or to the enthusiasm with which Japanese residents of the Philippines and Malaya greeted their conquering army. The Hawaiian Japanese remained free not only because they were needed as labor, but also because the U.S. military presence on the island was considered strong enough to deal with any sabotage or insurgency. Nor were all of the U.S. internees enthusiastic supporters of the country in which they had chosen to live. Before and during the war, a significant number of Japanese identified with their country of origin. The interned, moreover, though their economic losses were considerable, experienced no pogroms or systematic brutalization. In the midst of a global total war, their circumstances could have been far worse—ask any survivor of the Bataan Death March (April–May 1942).





**Viewpoint:  
Yes, although the selective  
internment of citizens and resident  
aliens of Japanese descent was a  
racist policy, it was also necessary  
to hinder espionage and acts of  
sabotage.**

Among all the entries in the two volumes of *History in Dispute* on World War II, challenging the conventional wisdom on this chapter's subject seems almost perverse. The internment of the Japanese by the United States has been repeatedly and eloquently denounced as a racist-inspired violation of legal and constitutional principles, unjustified by even the broadest definition of pragmatic grounds. For practical purposes, the standard interpretation runs that no acts of espionage or sabotage, nor evidence of consequent disloyalty, can be traced to the Japanese communities of the United States and Canada. Even the large-scale renunciation of citizenship that occurred among U.S. internees at Tule Lake was essentially a response to months of persecution, compounded by general misunderstanding of the issues involved.

The case against internment may be taken further by demonstrating that during World War II isolated, small-scale partisan activity had no effect on the outcome of general events anywhere in the world. Subversion and sabotage depended on levels of preparation, participation, and external support beyond anything conceived of in Tokyo—or for that matter by even the most patriotic Japanese resident of the Western Hemisphere. In other words, a few cut phone lines or slashed plane tires, a derailed train or two, or a clandestine radio link would have been no more than gestures best dealt with on an individual basis.

Even in these contexts, however, it is possible to explain the concepts behind the internment and relocation of the Japanese communities of mainland North America. A good beginning is Hawaii—where such measures were never seriously considered, much less implemented. Why not? The stock answer is that the Japanese population of Hawaii was too large, and too essential to the economy of the island, including the direct war effort, to make segregation feasible. Those conditions, however, existed under a state of martial law, proclaimed on 7 December 1941 and lasting until October 1944. Under its provisions the writ of habeas corpus was suspended. Curfew and blackout regulations were stringently enforced. Military tribunals were established for the trial of civilians. About two hundred Japanese were taken into immediate

custody, based on intelligence information collected before the attack. The number of detainees eventually reached more than three thousand. The Japanese were ordered to turn in weapons, binoculars, cameras, and short-wave radios.

The atmosphere of intimidation, in other words, was strong and comprehensive enough to offset what might be described as “reasonable anxieties” about the nature and degree of Japanese loyalty. It must be remembered as well that even before Pearl Harbor, the Hawaiian Islands were a major military base area, with a garrison more than ample to deal with any small-scale disaffection—particularly when, as became clear within days, a Japanese invasion was not part of the attack. In that context the military consistently acted to suppress rumors involving the Japanese, in a context of preserving calm by controlling information.

A case might be made as well that Hawaii was already sufficiently dirigiste that martial law and its spinoffs were less incongruous than anywhere else under the American flag. The islands were essentially controlled at this period of their history by a small group of conglomerates whose owners and managers were linked by marriage, heritage, and ideology. The territorial government, while a bit more than a mouthpiece for the corporations, could by no stretch be described as populist—or arguably even democratic in either the general or party sense of the term. Hawaii, in short, was able to pass through the war's early stages by behaving in ways if not always acceptable, then at least understandable, to its inhabitants.

The situation on the U.S. mainland was almost a direct opposite. Immediate concerns for preventing a second Pearl Harbor, with accompanying more-or-less random roundups of Japanese civilians, faded in a matter of days. The U.S. Army, however, remained anxious about what might come next. The military presence on the West Coast was thin by the standards of 1944. The precedents for martial law, and for extensive long-term control of civilian behavior, were even thinner. Army general John L. De Witt and a varying supporting cast of West Coast politicians at this point normally assume center stage as acting on their fears and prejudices to push for an unnecessary evacuation. Other cultural factors, however, more recent but no less compelling, were also involved.

One involved the desire of many Japanese to preserve their identity by maintaining ties with their homeland. Ethnic newspapers and after-school programs in Japanese language and culture were in such respects no different from most other immigrant groups. Sending one or more sons back to Japan for education was also, if not

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universal, a respected decision in the Japanese American community. The development of a multicultural perspective in American scholarship in the past quarter-century has demonstrated that these connections were not vestigial; not the province of first-generation immigrants—and not merely the negative consequence of assimilation denied by racism. Instead, they reflected strong positive statements affirming an identity as Japanese that was as yet unbalanced by visibility in the wider society.

It seemed ridiculous, for example, to intern the parents of the three DiMaggio brothers. They might be technically enemy aliens, but their sons Joe, Dom, and Vince were headline figures, instantly recognizable, and beyond question Americans. The same might be said for Italian crime lords, by this time American by ascription and correspondingly “ours.” The Japanese by contrast (like other Asians and the Mexican-American community) were perceived by a white “mainstream” as undifferentiated. In a culture emphasizing individuality, it was correspondingly difficult to make exceptions.

Related to this situation was a political phenomenon almost entirely the creation of the Left: fear of “fifth columnists.” The phrase itself came from the Spanish Civil War (1936–1939), when Nationalists advancing on Madrid boasted that they had four columns of troops outside the city and a fifth, of concealed sympathizers, inside. The catastrophic Allied defeats of May and June 1940 were widely attributed to Fascist elements within the conquered countries such as France and Denmark. As a result, well before Pearl Harbor an internal security mania gripped the United States, with radio shows and comic strips fanning the flames of warning against espionage and subversion. Anxiety was paradoxically enhanced by the very few cases that actually existed and were publicized—it was like waiting for the other shoe to drop. That nothing happened in the immediate aftermath of Pearl Harbor became the prospect that something might happen, under circumstances even worse.

That feat in turn generated the third factor in Japanese internment: the widespread and increasing need to do something in the face of a Japanese advance and a German U-boat offensive that left the United States a blinded, helpless giant, seemingly able neither to reinforce its Pacific outposts nor protect its Atlantic coastlines. The soldiers, politicians, and even judges who prepared the orders and authorizations for the deportations shared one common attribute: they were men of action rather than reflection. Removing the Japanese from the West Coast became the first steps on the road to Tokyo, not because of what the Japanese might do, but because it was something Americans could do.

Official and private correspondence exchanged in January and February 1942 contains a strong proactive subtext, one ultimately overriding issues of constitutionality, legality, and even expediency. The camps, after all, had to be built, supplied, and guarded; their projected inhabitants had to be assembled and relocated. Were these optimal uses of the resources of a nation still in the process of mobilizing for total war?

The ultimate answer was affirmative. The United States (and Canada, which did no more than follow its larger neighbor’s lead in its relocation policy), began expressing doubts and regrets during the war, and have continued doing so ever since. The remorse is objectively justified. At best it is possible to provide no more than a thin structure of support for what was arguably both a mistake and a crime. Yet, it represents no error to say that by comparison with the behavior of other combatants confronting similar situations, the United States stands out. Britain, for example, counted its potentially threatening aliens in no more than the hundreds. As for France, Italy, and Russia, the record requires no elaboration.

The United States, moreover, was not only racist. Its citizens were heavily armed; its culture celebrated violence. During the 1930s lynchings were numbered in the dozens. Still, there were no pogroms, no mass actions against Japanese Americans—no counterparts of the Detroit or “zoot suit” riots. What today are called “hate crimes,” killings or assaults inspired during the war by the victim’s Japanese ethnicity, were few enough that they are susceptible of being individually remembered and commemorated. War is at its best ugly and hateful. Perhaps—just perhaps—the internment of the Japanese Americans and Canadians was less ugly, less hateful, a good deal less so, than it might have been under the circumstances.

—DENNIS SHOWALTER, COLORADO COLLEGE



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the internment of Japanese in the United States and Canada was not justified because they had committed no wrongdoing and were no threat to either nation’s security.**

The internment that relocated more than 120,000 Japanese Americans and 23,000 Japanese Canadians between the years 1942 and 1946, was not justified. Immediately after the war, intensive sociological studies based on the University of California Japanese American



Evacuation and Resettlement Study (conducted between 1942 and 1948) started a critique of the relocation experience. Since then criticism of the decision to intern these individuals have revolved around two main arguments. First, the notion of military necessity has been questioned. Second, studies influenced by the early stage of the Civil Rights movement in the 1960s challenged the abrogation of individual rights. After an in-depth reflection on the above issues, there can be no doubt that the internment of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians was a tragic mistake of World War II.

As Japan flexed its military muscle in the Pacific, with demonstrations of power in Manchuria (1931) and China (1937), the United States increasingly kept a wary eye on this developing nation. The 1940 U.S. census recorded that the Japanese population totaled 126,948, constituting about .02 percent of the total population and .1 percent of the population of California. Because of earlier opposition to Chinese immigration, all Asians were prohibited from naturalization; thus, the Issei, or first generation Japanese immigrants, were considered aliens ineligible for citizenship. Census data also revealed that 62.7 percent of the Japanese population was second generation Nissei, who were born in the United States. The Japanese attack at Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), caught the American public by surprise. This aggression launched a vehement response toward both generations of Japanese; however, there was no military precedent for the internment of Issei, not to mention the incarceration of Japanese American citizens.

Prior to Pearl Harbor, military thinking was at least partially guided by a World War I statute that defined enemy aliens as males above the age of fourteen. Following the guidelines of the Geneva Convention, internment was a legal process in which enemy nationals were confined during war. In the summer of 1940, Army major general Allen W. Gullion, in an internal memorandum stated that the military did not have the right to either arrest or seize civilian citizens unless it involved a case of espionage. Furthermore, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) never found any evidence of espionage against any Japanese person who lived in the United States. In fact, the issue of the loyalty of Japanese citizens in Hawaii and on the West Coast had been under special investigation by Curtis B. Munson, Special Representative of the State Department, from October to November of 1941. Munson's report further corroborated the data of both military and domestic intelligence services that maintained there was not a Japanese problem. Munson concluded that neither the Issei nor Nisei were a threat to internal security.

Thus, pre-Pearl Harbor, the internment of civilians was not a viable option.

After Pearl Harbor, the War Department expanded its authority and included the West Coast and Alaska as a part of its theater of operations. On 10 December 1941, General John L. De Witt, chief of the Western Defense Command, headquartered at San Francisco's Presidio, was the first within the military to propose mass evacuation. Twelve days later, General Allen Gullion, Provost Marshall General, began the bureaucratic process for internment by asking Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson to request a transfer of responsibility regarding enemy aliens from the Department of Justice to the War Department. Even within the military, however, the opinions of De Witt and Gullion were not unanimously accepted. After receiving several false reports about attacks by Japanese warships along the coast of California, General Joseph W. Stilwell, who was in charge of operations in Southern California, believed that De Witt and his staff were amateurish and panic-ridden. Brigadier General Mark W. Clark disagreed with Gullion's mass evacuation plan. Clark reasoned that the number of soldiers needed to guard the Japanese was not militarily expedient and was a detriment to the overall war offensive. Thus, even after Pearl Harbor there were military personnel who cautioned against over zealousness and argued for restraint.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the Department of Justice interned about 1,500 alien Japanese. Although German and Italian nationals were also interned, the rights of the Japanese were breached. German and Italian nationals were given hearings to determine loyalty prior to internment. The Japanese, however, were given individual hearings only after their internment. During World War II, internment was supposed to be based on an individual act of wrongdoing. The Japanese were rounded up based on ties to the Japanese embassy and consulates, as well as contacts with ethnic organizations. In addition to this violation, the Department of Justice continued to show a prejudice against the Japanese. Attorney General Francis B. Biddle closed the Canadian and Mexican borders to enemy aliens after the declaration of war; however, the order denied U.S. citizens of Japanese heritage movement across these borders. It is important to note that second-generation Germans and Italians were not subjected to these violations of individual rights and internment. Compared to other nations, since Britain and France interned all of their enemy aliens, the Department of Justice acted with a modicum of restraint, yet they failed to protect the

rights of Japanese Americans; therefore, they endangered the individual liberty of all American citizens.

As public sentiment and military pressure continued to build, the president eventually capitulated to the demand of mass evacuation. On 19 February 1942, Franklin D. Roosevelt created his own “day of infamy” when he signed Executive Order 9066, which transferred presidential authority to the War Department, which basically terminated due process for Japanese Americans. Although the document did not specifically mention any ethnic or racial group, it was understood that the U.S. Army now possessed the authority to evacuate U.S. citizens of Japanese descent. More than 120,000 persons were incarcerated in relocation camps in desolate locations for almost four years. Although Roosevelt’s reasons for signing the order are not clear, it is known that he had the advice of those who opposed the uprooting of civilians available to him. In fact, Biddle stated that the Justice Department would take no part in the War Department’s mass evacuation plan and in a letter written on 17 February 1942, he urged the president not to evacuate Japanese American citizens.

The weakness of the argument for military necessity, which helped influence the signing of Executive Order 9066, is apparent when considering the treatment of the Japanese in Hawaii. The 1940 U.S. Census reported that 150,000 Japanese resided on the islands, 120,000 of whom were native born. Yet, after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, less than 1,500 persons were incarcerated. Lieutenant General Delos C. Emmons rejected two War Department orders, no doubt following the instructions of General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff. First, Emmons argued that the request to move Japanese aliens for internment onto a smaller Hawaiian island was impractical. Second, he refused to dismiss Japanese civilians who were employed by the U.S. Army. Finally, even after the decision was made to intern the Japanese on the mainland, Marshall and Admiral Ernest J. King wrote a memorandum that resisted the mass evacuation of Hawaiian Japanese. This particular display of resistance in Hawaii shows that the West Coast internment and evacuation was generated by considerations other than military necessity.

The process of relocating 120,000 people to assembly centers and eventually to ten internment camps took more than seven months. During this time three Japanese Americans protested the military curfew and exclusion orders. After criminal convictions in 1942, Gordon Hirabayashi, Minoru Yasui, and

Fred Korematsu each brought separate petitions to the highest court. In all three cases, the Supreme Court upheld the authority of the U.S. Army to relocate citizens based on ancestry alone. In both *Hirabayashi v. U.S.* (May 1943) and *Yasui v. U.S.* (June 1943) the Court’s decisions were unanimous. In *Korematsu v. U.S.* (December 1944), however, conviction was decided by a vote of six to three. Close examination of each of these cases shows that the judges wrestled with the decision over whether the evacuation was unconstitutional. Yet, in the end, the notion of military necessity prevailed and justice was not upheld.

Each dissenting opinion lent credence to the fact that internment of Japanese Americans was not justified. In *Hirabayashi* (1943), Justice Frank Murphy initially prepared a dissenting opinion that stated that the U.S. Army orders were at the “very brink of constitutional power”; however, he was persuaded to change his opinion. Judge James A. Fee, U.S. District Court in Oregon, presided over Yasui’s case and wrote an opinion that declared the curfew order a violation of an American citizen’s constitutional rights, but he held that Yasui had forfeited his citizenship because he had worked for the Japanese consulate in Chicago. The Supreme Court reversed Fee’s decisions on both points, but upheld the criminal conviction against Yasui. At the time of *Korematsu*, Japan’s defeat seemed imminent; thus, three justices expressed their reservations about the incarceration of Japanese Americans. Justice Owen J. Roberts stated that internment was a “clear violation of Constitutional rights” because conviction was determined by the defendant’s ancestry rather than evidence of wrongdoing. Murphy pointed out that in the absence of martial law, internment of aliens and citizens “falls into the ugly abyss of racism.” In sum, when Justice Robert H. Jackson wrote that “guilt is personal and not inheritable,” it is clear that at least a few on the Supreme Court were no longer willing to sacrifice justice in the interests of military necessity.

Although Japanese people were uprooted all over the Western Hemisphere, the decisions of the United States had a profound effect on other countries as well. In some ways, the internment of Japanese Canadians mirrored U.S. policies; in other ways, the discrimination was more excessive. The number of Japanese living in British Columbia at the time of war was approximately twenty-three thousand, 75 percent of whom were Canadian citizens. Similar to the United States, Canada initially rounded up a small number of Japa-



## A NEW HOME

*In 1942 thousands of Japanese Americans were relocated from the West Coast of the United States to detention centers in the interior. A young Japanese mother later recalled her arrival at a camp in Utah.*

As we stepped down from the bus, we were at the entry gate and I could see the earlier arrivals, among them my brother Bill, waiting to greet us. Bill had come in the advance work group of 214 volunteers who had reached Topaz on September 11. He was a bacteriologist, so he was included in the sanitary engineering crew. A small band of uniformed Boy Scouts stood in the hot sun and played on their brass instruments. When I heard them blare out the strains of "hail to California," the song of my alma mater, I was suddenly homesick for Berkeley.

Although we had become accustomed to the barracks in Tanforan, this permanent camp was a strangely desolate scene of low, black, tar-paper buildings, row on row, through each block. The camp was only two-thirds finished, construction continuing even after people were moved into the unroofed barracks. The camp contained forty-two blocks, thirty-five of which were residential. All the blocks looked alike, so that later, weeks after we had settled in, camp residents would occasionally lose their sense of direction at night and wander into barracks not their own, much to their embarrassment and that of the occupants.

With eleven members, our family was larger than most, so we were assigned to the two middle rooms of a barracks in Block 4. To go from one room to the other, we had to go outside. My brothers quickly opted to occupy

one of these. Mother soon became tired of going outside whenever she needed to see one of them, so one day Father cut a door-sized opening between them.

The first sight of our rooms was dismal—no furniture, unfinished walls and ceiling, a two-inch layer of fine dust on the floor and windowsills. We had to sweep out the dust and mop before we could bring our suitcases in. Eventually Father made a table and stools of varying heights from scrap lumber. Long afterwards I captured the initial impression of that moment in a sonnet.

### Barracks Home

This is our barracks, squatting on the ground,  
Tar-papered shack, partitioned into rooms  
By sheetrock walls, transmitting every sound  
Of neighbor's gossip or the sweep of brooms  
The open door welcomes the refugees,  
And now at last there is no need to roam  
Afar: here space enlarges memories  
Beyond the bounds of camp and this new home.

The floor is carpeted with dust, wind-borne  
Dry alkali, patterned by insect feet.  
What peace can such a place as this impart?  
We can but sense, bewildered and forlorn,  
That time, disrupted by the war from neat  
Routines, must now adjust within the heart.

*Source: Toyo Suyemoto Kawakami, "Camp Memories: Rough and Broken Shards," in Japanese Americans: From Relocation to Redress, edited by Roger Daniels, Sandra C. Taylor, and Harry H. L. Kitano (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1986), pp. 27–28.*

nese nationals, yet when public pressure increased, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police gained the authority to relocate Japanese Canadians, as well. Drawn up five days after Executive Order 9066, Canada's Order in Council P.C. 1486, gave power to the Minister of Justice and focused on removing all persons of Japanese ancestry from the West Coast. The Canadian cabinet also banned all Japanese Canadians from commercial fishing, seized their boats, and sold their property at public auctions. After the war, the Canadian policy of dispersal prevented Canadian Japanese from returning to their original home communities until March 1949. Canadian prime minister William Lyon McKenzie King later acknowl-

edged that the incarcerated Japanese Canadians, like their American counterparts, did not commit a single act of espionage or disloyalty.

The internment of the Japanese was tragic. Yet, the story does not end there—one country, the United States, made restitution and apologized to the citizens they interned. In 1988 President Ronald W. Reagan signed the Civil Liberties Act, which gave the Japanese internees a payment of \$20,000 each and offered a national apology to the survivors. Another aspect of the redress movement took the form of the *coram nobis* effort by lawyers who sought the legal vindication of Hirabayashi, Yasui, and Korematsu. In reopening the cases, the U.S. District Court for Northern

California granted Koromatsu a writ of coram nobis; yet, Yasui and Hirabayashi, whose hearings were held in other courts, failed to get their convictions completely reversed. Thus, as this redress movement strongly argues, the internment of Japanese Americans and Japanese Canadians was not justified.

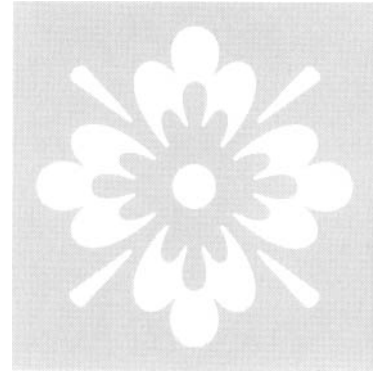
—F. H. MIN MIN LO, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA AT BERKELEY

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# NATIONALIST CHINA

## Did Western support of Nationalist China during World War II represent a wasted effort?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, resources committed to support for Nationalist China could have been used to more quickly defeat Germany.

**Viewpoint:** No, U.S. aid to Nationalist China was not a waste, as it helped pull Japanese troops away from the South Pacific.

Western support of China during World War II represented less a positive commitment to the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek than a hope of keeping Chiang from making an agreement that would free Japanese resources for use elsewhere in Asia. The corruption and inefficiency of the Nationalist system was a constant source of frustration, even to Chiang's Western partisans. U.S. general Joseph W. Stilwell, officially Chiang's chief of staff, privately called him "the peanut" and composed doggerel and derogatory verses with Chiang as the subject. At least as provoking as the war progressed was the growing body of evidence that Chiang intended to do no more against Japan than was absolutely necessary to keep open the pipelines of Allied money and equipment, meanwhile building strength for an eventual showdown with his real enemies, the Communists of Mao Tse-tung.

This negative picture was balanced in President Franklin D. Roosevelt's mind by an alternate postwar vision, one of a world kept at peace by a combination of the United Nations and the cooperation of the great powers that had defeated the Axis in arms. China belonged to that group—partly because of its sheer size, partly because an Asian primary power would be necessary in the postwar order, and not least because China was playing an important part in the war simply by remaining a belligerent. While a de facto cease-fire existed between the Japanese and the Chinese Nationalists (*Kuomintang*, *KMT*) in many areas, China continued to absorb by far the largest part of the Japanese army. As much to the point, years of garrison and occupation duty had "demodernized" that army to a significant degree, reducing it to a rifle-and-bayonet force structure and mentality. Every man stationed in a blockhouse in Hunan was one less for the Burma front, or the islands of the South Pacific.

Maintaining that status quo, moreover, required only military pocket change. As late as 1945, even U.S. fighter squadrons in China were flying P-40s—obsolescent on the day of the attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941). The Ledo Road and the B-29 airfields were tours de force of engineering, but they absorbed only minuscule fractions of the American war effort. China may have been a bargain-basement ally—but it came at a bargain-basement price.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, resources committed to support for Nationalist China could have been used to more quickly defeat Germany.**

Traditional Western scholarship on World War II has never seriously asked the question of whether or not it was worth the resources and effort to aid Nationalist China's fight against Japanese military invasion. Certainly, on the face of it, one can hardly imagine a moral or sensible reason to support the harsh and cruel activities of the Japanese Imperial Army up to 1941—the ethnic cleansing in Korea, harsh colonial rule in Manchuria, the Rape of Nanjing during the 1937 main assault on the China mainland. Yet, asking this “impossible” question—that it might not, after all, have been worth the costs to support China's resistance and thereby enter into direct war with Japan—can cast fresh light on U.S.-Asian relations and, indeed, perhaps the general history of World War II. Most importantly, this exercise can free one to reconsider assumptions about the goals of U.S. support for China in the 1940s.

These were the costs of U.S. involvement in what inevitably became the Pacific war: the actual running of armies and navies, military and civilian casualties to each side, and economic disruption, as well as the opportunity costs of men and matériel not available to other theatres—in this case, the war in Europe. The second kind of costs entails an assessment of what was achieved in the aftermath of supporting China's resistance to Japanese aggression. This approach involves a counterfactual comparison of what happened with what might reasonably be expected to have happened if the United States had not become a combatant in Japan's China War. Then one can estimate the balance between actual costs and actual results, as well as probable costs with probable results. This “what if” scenario cannot be scientific proof, but the exercise can challenge one to test assumptions about the past and scrutinize current foreign policy with rising powers in the twenty-first century that so eerily parallel Japan's 1930s search for economic security and a place in the sun as a great global power.

The actual price of U.S. support in China became that of nearly sole participation in the Pacific war against Japan, when, after the dismal defeat of British forces—with the fall of Singapore (15 February 1942)—the conflict rested effectively on American shoulders. One

can think of the actual costs in three areas: U.S. military losses, Japanese sacrifices, and the human tragedy of Asian civilian casualties and economic destruction. The United States paid dearly to support China and resist Japan in terms of men under arms, equipment for several armies and navies, and casualties. U.S. losses began, in part, with the ships lost or damaged at Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941). This initial cost resulted directly from U.S. decisions to support Chinese resistance to Japanese aggression. After the United States firmly instituted its growing economic sanctions against Japan with a full boycott in July 1941, the Japanese military was confronted with a stark choice—whether or not to submit to U.S. terms: that Japan should unconditionally withdraw from all China, including Manchuria, or run out of oil and other strategic resources for national defense within some six to eight months. The Japanese chose to fight rather than submit. According to Michael A. Barnhart, in *Japan Prepares for Total War: The Search for Economic Security, 1919–1941* (1987), the vote for war among Japan's leading councils, however, was a close one—with more pacific factions nearly holding the day.

Japanese costs from U.S. support of Nationalist China, and thus the Pacific war, were catastrophic. The entire Japanese military machine was destroyed; Tokyo was fire-bombed nearly off the map; and, in the end, Hiroshima and Nagasaki were devastated by atomic devices. Some two hundred thousand civilians died in the Hiroshima and Nagasaki blasts. Less noted were the tens of thousands who died much more painfully in the fire-bombing of Tokyo in March 1945. The bulk of Japan's hard-won industrial and economic base was squandered and bombed into oblivion. The entire society was ravished at incalculable human suffering, most especially among the poor and then among the women who had precious little say in Imperial diplomacy. One must remember that the phoenixlike rise of Japan after the war, while based on prewar economic and democratic institutions from Taisho Japan (1912–1926), as well as the grit and determination of ordinary Japanese workers, required more costs: massive U.S. investment in administration (General Douglas MacArthur's occupation forces, 1945–1952) and finances. A Japan not decimated by war with the United States would not have required such massive U.S. investment.

Finally, the human and economic toll of the Pacific war in Asia was horrific. The bulk of the suffering was in China, most of which would have occurred without U.S. involvement because it occurred before U.S. support

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was sufficient to impede Japan's aggression. The most brutal fighting was in 1937 and 1938. After that, it was a war of attrition. The rest of Southeast Asia was not directly attacked before Japan went to war with the United States and Britain. Japan had actually negotiated rights to station troops in northern Vietnam in September 1940 with the French Vichy government, and the German invasion of Holland weakened that colonial regime's influence in Asia. After the Pacific war began with Pearl Harbor, Japan made a military sweep of Southeast Asia with brutal and successful assaults on the Philippines, Vietnam, the Malay Peninsula, Burma, and the Dutch East Indies. Even so, the Japanese tried to promote a version of their “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” in Southeast Asia and, in the initial months of occupation, to support local home rule and the appearance, at least, of economic development and cooperation. Japanese military atrocities in Southeast Asia date mainly from the later stages of the war, in response to the pressures of the American advance. There were atrocities—not the least

the mistreatment of prisoners of war and depredations on local populations. “Comfort women”—local females forced into prostitution for the Japanese army—suffered in all areas of Japanese military control. Finally, the economic disruption of Japanese invasion, then harsh military rule and extraction, and finally Allied reoccupation, laid waste to the economy of Southeastern Asian societies.

A final consideration of the actual costs of U.S. support for the Nationalists must be a recognition of the opportunity costs—what if the Pacific war forces were free to be used in Europe? It takes no imagination to figure that the huge resources expended in the Pacific would have strengthened Allied firepower in the European theater. Discounting U.S. involvement in Asia, and hence lacking the goal of Pearl Harbor, one must imagine a slower timeline for ultimate U.S. involvement in Europe. Nonetheless, it seems reasonable to assume that U.S. forces would have been committed by 1942. They would be sufficient to put much more pressure on the Axis forces and would have brought the fighting in Europe to

an earlier close—there may have been no D-Day slaughter, no Stalingrad. Perhaps the financial resources would have been sufficient to support the Russians enough to prevent Joseph Stalin's desperate efforts to gain Russian security at the cost of antagonism with the United States.

One must also compare what the United States actually achieved by its support of the Nationalist Chinese and what might have happened if it had not intervened. This comparison requires an assessment of Japanese intentions, Chinese realities, and the possible impact on European actors of a different placement of war resources. Without stretching current scholarship on Japanese diplomacy and Chinese political history beyond the consensus of academic historians, one can imagine the following scenario as plausible in the absence of U.S. support for China in the 1940s. Japan would not have attacked Pearl Harbor and would have secured reliable access to oil, rubber, and other strategic resources through a version of an Asian "Monroe Doctrine" that would not have been all that different from the puppet regimes the United States maintained at the same time in Central America. Such regimes would have been dependent on Japan and subject to its economic interests, but internal forces in Japanese society would have pushed for a paternalistic patina that would seek to avoid harsh rule. On the Chinese mainland, Japan would either have "won all" or settled for a "Three Kingdoms" solution—with a puppet state ruling the economic core under Wang Ching-wei and two rogue states on the inner-Asian periphery: one in southwest China run by the Chinese Nationalists (Kuomintang, KMT) under Chiang Kai-shek and one in northwest China run by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) under Mao Tse-tung. Either scenario would suck Japan's resources into the China quagmire, already bemoaned by Japan's Cabinet Planning Board in 1938. In an imaginary calculus, the suffering on the ground in China would have been about the same as it was with U.S. intervention. It is the outcome that would be different.

Assessing the outcomes of Japanese victory in China requires understanding Japanese intentions, as well as those of the three possible Chinese governments—puppet, KMT, and CCP. Many scholars take the view that U.S.-Japanese confrontation was a tragedy rather than a necessity. Japanese leaders were divided over how to achieve national security and recognition for Japan's developmental achievements in the context of global politics in the 1920s and 1930s. Militarism was not the only option, as the record of moderate Jap-

anese diplomacy in the 1920s demonstrates. Japan signed naval accords, especially in 1931, that structurally guaranteed European dominance in Asia. One must recall the world of 1930 in order to assess the rise of militarism as a force in Japan's government. Having industrialized, taken on European forms of government and trade regimes, and sunk the Russian navy in 1905, Japanese leaders felt their country was due a place at the table among world leaders. Yet, Japan was treated as a second-class citizen. The United States, among others, placed racial barriers against Japanese immigration, and all countries had tariff protections. Japan was resource-poor and overpopulated. When the Great Powers thwarted both nationalistic pride and economic security for Japan, such nationalist ideas gained credence. The lesson of World War I for Japanese military planners turned the tide. Germany, with the greatest land army in Europe, was defeated in 1919, it appeared, because it was economically strangled by the Allies. Japan was even more vulnerable than Germany to potential blockade, lacking oil, coal, and enough agricultural space. It was what the Japanese most feared and what the United States ultimately threatened.

The record of Japanese diplomacy up to 7 December 1941 shows a rational effort to achieve economic security and national dignity short of all-out war. The Japanese, even their military, were neither monomaniacal imperialists nor agreed on what to do in general. In particular, there was a strong policy split between the navy (with many British-trained officers cognizant of the need to maintain trade relations) and the army (with many German-trained officers sympathetic to a radical *volk* [people] ideology and confrontation). Japanese advances in Manchuria were not part of an orchestrated campaign in Tokyo, but the result of rogue officers handing Tokyo diplomatic embarrassments that, in the face of Western disdain for Japan, became *faits accomplis*. There were forces in the government, particularly under Prime Minister Fumimaro Konoe, that sought accommodation and compromise. It was only the life or death choice of capitulation or war in late 1941 that provided the ground for the final rise of the militarist faction and the rule of Hideki Tōjō—the hated General Tōjō of the Pacific war.

A sober comparison of what U.S. involvement achieved to what Japanese overlordship might have delivered in 1930s China is needed. The KMT was, by the late 1930s, woefully corrupt and dependent on a landlord base that had come to exploit its farmer majority. The CCP, on the other hand, rose from a fringe fac-



tion in Chinese politics to a popular government, in large measure because of the breathing space from its running fight with the KMT and peasant mobilization produced by years of harsh Japanese military rule. U.S. support of the KMT after World War II led to a cold war in Asia—isolating the “Reds” after Mao’s victory over the Nationalists in the Chinese Civil War in 1949. This situation left the new People’s Republic of China with no recourse but to model itself on Stalin’s Soviet Union, in return for the only foreign aid available. Without external support or influence Mao led China through the disasters of the Great Leap Forward (1958–1960) and the Cultural Revolution (1966–1969).

The puppet government of Wang Ching-wei collapsed with Japan’s defeat in 1945. If the United States had not supported Chiang Kai-shek by attacking Japan, this puppet government would likely have become the titular government of all or most of China. Chinese experience in Taiwan, annexed by Japan in 1895, is instructive here: left to their own devices, Japanese colonial administration was not unusually harsh. It was, by Taiwanese reckoning, more efficient and predictable, as well as less corrupt, than the KMT regime that took over the island in 1945. One might reasonably expect that Japan would have run a puppet regime in China under its “Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere” policy in much the same manner as U.S. application of the Monroe Doctrine in Latin America—for the economic benefit of the homeland, but modified by self-proclaimed paternalism.

In summary, were twenty-five years of isolated, extreme Stalinism in China, and U.S. responsibility for the only two nuclear detonations made in war (and against civilian populations), evils worth avoiding? The costs of potential alternatives cannot be imagined to be small, but they are conceivably less than what was paid, especially if even the minimal effects would have been putting men and matériel of the Pacific war into the European theatre in 1942—not to mention the maximal conceivable result of a much shorter European war and avoidance of the U.S.-Soviet Cold War. This imagined alternative is not the noble path forgone by evil or stupid leaders. Even if the Allies had followed such a path and events proceeded in broad strokes as imagined here, there would have been years, even decades, of authoritarian colonialism in Asia, Soviet puppet regimes in Eastern Europe (elected or otherwise), most likely a much stronger Soviet presence in the Middle East, and a world of “Monroe Doctrines” at each end of Eurasia, as well as in North America, that would have

severely limited U.S. economic growth in the 1950s onward. Would there have been no Maoist China, no cold war arms race? The lessons are worth contemplating as one considers the needs and aggression of China and Russia.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, U.S. aid to Nationalist China was not a waste, as it helped pull Japanese troops away from the South Pacific.**

The view that Western support for Nationalist China was useless is based on the argument that the Nationalists (KMT) formed a pathological regime that could not have been saved, no matter how much military aid it would have received. The image of this government as hopelessly incompetent, corrupt, and unconcerned either with the fate of its people or gathering its strength to fight Japan became established first as a result of interservice rivalries between Joseph W. Stilwell and Claire L. Chennault. It was sustained in Stilwell’s attempt to salvage his reputation after his recall in October 1944, and in U.S. domestic political conflicts about the China issue during the late 1940s. To challenge this argument, one must review the Allied campaigns in which Nationalist China participated (especially Burma), the emergence of this negative image of the Nationalists, and the military/political uses to which it was put.

Stilwell was the commander of U.S. forces in the China-Burma Theatre, served as Chiang Kai-shek’s chief of staff, and controlled Lend-Lease supplies to China. Stilwell also advocated a “Burma First” strategy for the Asian mainland. In 1942, after the attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), the Japanese had seized Britain’s colonies in Southeast Asia and thereby cut China’s last links with the outside world. Stilwell believed that the recovery of Burma was necessary to establish an overland supply line to China. He hoped that once properly supplied, China’s armies could drive toward the south China coast and then march north to eliminate Japan from China. Lacking primary resources, especially oil but also rubber, coal, and food, Japan’s collapse would be assured.

Chennault went to China in 1937 as a volunteer to assist China’s air force. In 1940 he was allowed to recruit one hundred ostensibly retired U.S. military pilots as volunteers and

acquire one hundred P-40 fighters. He also developed an early warning system and new air tactics that proved successful against the Japanese air force. After Pearl Harbor, Chennault advocated building up the air force to provide air cover for China's land forces, protect China's cities from Japanese bombing, and interdict Japanese supply lines. This strategy matched with the preference of the U.S. Navy, which opposed the Europe First doctrine and advocated opening up harbors in south China, from where it would be easy to supply the Nationalists.

Following the battles of Midway (3–6 June 1942) and Guadalcanal (August 1942–February 1943), it was only a matter of time before the U.S. Navy recovered control of the Pacific. In this changed strategic situation, the importance of Burma to Allied strategy declined. In early 1943, President Franklin D. Roosevelt declared his support for Chennault, as did Winston Churchill and Lord Louis Mountbatten, the Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asia Command (SEAC). In May 1943 the Trident Conference of the Allied Chiefs of Staff downgraded Stilwell's Burma campaign and increased support for Chennault's air strategy.

Stilwell nevertheless remained wedded to the recovery of Burma and denigrated Chennault's air campaign. Following his retreat from Burma in 1942, Stilwell began a program of retraining Chinese forces with whom he had retreated to Ramgargh in India (the X-Force), as well as Chinese forces in Yunnan in Southwest China (the Y-Force). In January 1944 the second Burma campaign began, not just to open a road through north Burma, but to draw Japanese forces away from the Pacific. That in turn was expected to make recovery of the Pacific islands easier; to enable air support over Rangoon, which would make naval landings there and perhaps at Sumatra possible; and to counter the Japanese offensive toward Imphal, which threatened the British position in India.

In the same month Japan began Operation Ichigo to establish a defense perimeter that included Burma, China, and Pacific islands such as Iwo Jima. Japan hoped to secure overland transport routes to the oil fields of Southeast Asia and destroy meaningful military opposition within the perimeter. Within China this included the remaining Nationalist armies, as well as the bases from which Chennault's air force was operating. The Japanese army mobilized five hundred thousand men, two hundred bombers, and sixty-seven thousand horses for the operation.

It had stocked aviation fuel for eight months and ammunition for two years in China.

The second Burma campaign did not initially go well. The Japanese came close to victory at Imphal. The X-Force advanced only slowly through the Hukawng Valley, while the Y-Force, fighting in ten-thousand-foot-high mountains, suffered five thousand casualties per month. Without informing his superiors, Stilwell in May launched a "secret dash" toward the key city of Myitkyina in north Burma. Having taken the airstrip, Stilwell refused to fly in a British division from India to take the city, preferring to use exhausted U.S. forces. As a result, the Japanese were able to reenforce the city, and Stilwell was dragged into a siege that would last eleven weeks.

At the same time, Operation Ichigo advanced rapidly. After taking Henan, the Japanese took Changsha in Hunan in May—a fortified city that had been defended successfully three times before. At this critical juncture, Stilwell refused to release supplies and aircraft to Chennault, with the result that his air force was grounded. Stilwell also refused a request by Chiang Kai-shek, his superior in the military chain of command, to mount an attack on Bhamo, Burma, in order to draw off Japanese forces from Southwest China. Instead, he demanded that more Chinese troops be thrown into the Burma campaign and that he be given unrestricted command over all Chinese forces. George C. Marshall, the U.S. Army chief of Staff, backed him up, unwilling perhaps to commit further resources to East Asia just before the Normandy landings (6 June 1944). Roosevelt acceded and demanded Chiang's compliance. Unwilling to risk the loss of Western support, Chiang agreed to Roosevelt's demands, on the condition that Stilwell be replaced, as he indeed would be. Only days after Stilwell finally took Myitkyina, on 8 August 1944 the Japanese seized the key strategic city of Heng-yang after Chinese forces had stoutly defended it for six weeks. Chinese resistance collapsed, and the Japanese marched into Guangxi. With Japanese forces also having advanced toward southeast China from Vietnam, the Japanese had achieved their aim of securing overland routes to South and Southeast Asia.

Chennault had been able to gain acceptance for his air strategy in good part because he was admired by the influential journalist Joseph Alsop, who had close links with Harry L. Hopkins, Roosevelt's adviser. Stilwell, on the other hand, was supported by Marshall. He also was on good terms with U.S. journalists such as Theodore H. White (*Time*) and Brooks Atkinson (*The New York Times*), to

whom he supplied good stories. He also recruited John S. Service of the U.S. Embassy in Chongqing as his policy adviser. According to Barbara W. Tuchman in *Stilwell and the American Experience in China, 1911-45* (1970), Stilwell, worried about his reputation following his recall on 19 October, called in White and Atkinson to “tell them in confidence what had happened and urge that the facts be recorded for history.” He sent Atkinson and Service back to the United States. Articles in *The New York Times* described Stilwell’s recall as the “political triumph of a moribund anti-democratic regime” with Chiang “bewildered and alarmed by the rapidity with which China is falling apart.”

Stilwell returned to a hero’s welcome. In 1946, White published, with Annalee Jacoby, *Thunder Out of China* (1946), advertised as “the background for an understanding of China today and of America’s role in the Chinese revolution.” It depicted Chiang’s regime as a nasty and corrupt dictatorship that had not been interested in fighting the Japanese. Following Stilwell’s death in 1948, White helped edit and publish *The Stilwell Papers* (1948), which naturally further supported Stilwell’s views.

In 1967 the U.S. State Department published *The China White Paper August 1949*. Following both the failure of Marshall’s mediation efforts to end the civil war and the collapse of the Nationalist armies, it justified U.S. withdrawal of support for the Nationalists in terms of the latter’s incompetence and corruption. By then saving the Nationalists would have required massive military intervention, which the United States was not willing to contemplate. The publication of the White Paper followed the Democrats’ unexpected election victory in the 1948 elections, which gave them control over both houses of Congress. Because the Republican-dominated China Lobby in Congress had made U.S. policy toward China a major political issue, it was an attempt to close the debate on China by letting the record speak for itself.

McCarthyism prevented that. As U.S. ambassador to China, Patrick J. Hurley had come to blows with China specialists in the Department of State such as Service and John Carter Vincent. In Hurley’s letter of resignation of 1945 he charged them with communist sympathies. In 1950 Senator Joseph R. McCarthy (R-Wisconsin) began to make speeches against, and soon initiated hearings to ferret out, alleged communists from the State Department. Following this bout of political nastiness, much effort went into defending and exonerating U.S. critics of the



## THE FALL OF BURMA

*Jack Belden, a war correspondent who accompanied General Joseph W. Stilwell during his retreat through Burma in early 1942, provided glimpses of the debacle to readers in the pages of Time. In this passage he describes the last days of the retreat and provides some explanation for it.*

Briefly, here are the last days of Burma. For the last two months the result of the campaign has been almost a foregone conclusion. In the first place, we lacked the sound political theory that we had no war aim in Burma. The people advocating independence were unfriendly from the beginning and when the Japanese began to gain in their successes, this unfriendliness ripened into open hostility. Not only the puppet army was formed, officered by Japs and fighting fanatically, but vast behind-the-lines process of sabotage, fifth-columning, burning, looting, and semi-guerrilla warfare was begun with devastating, demoralizing effects. Without air support, the open hostility caused us to fight blindly. We scarcely ever knew where the enemy was, where he would appear, or in how much strength.

Intelligence broke down almost completely, but the Japs were led by Burmese through jungle thickets into the rear of our positions time and again, causing road blocks, clogging supply lines, disrupting communications and causing an adverse psychological effect on men and officers. As the Japanese advanced, lawlessness behind the lines increased. Railroads were wrecked, cars were fired upon in the dark, and even in the daylight several Chinese were murdered on the road. Gangs of *dacoits*, as many as 500, armed with butcher-knife-like *dahs* and with torches in hand, often went through towns completing the work of destruction begun by Jap incendiary bombs. The Japanese, and the small but active group of Burmese, literally and devastatingly burned their way through Burma. In the Sittang River Valley from Tounggo to Mandalay, a distance of over 2000 miles, and in the Irrawaddy Valley between Prome and Mandalay, every town, to my personal knowledge and observation, was burned to the ground. Pyimana, Yenanguang, Meiktila and others—these are only names now. Nothing remains of the wooden-housed marts which once stood on the road to Mandalay. . . .

*Source: Louis L. Snyder, ed., Masterpieces of War Reporting: The Great Moments of World War II (New York: Messner, 1962), pp. 164-168.*

Nationalists. Stilwell was an excellent vehicle to do so. No one could accuse him of being a communist; his views about the unreformable Nationalists now looked prescient; and he had worked with great energy during his Far East years. Service and White had developed a genuine admiration for him, and an equally honest loathing of the Nationalists. In 1971, Tuchman rendered the Stilwell-Chiang clash as a

grand tragedy of American values running into the blinkered authoritarianism of Chiang. She described Stilwell as “quintessentially American,” a man who had made the maximum effort because “his temperament permitted no less.”

Tuchman built on the work of the official U.S. Army historians, Charles F. Romanus and Riley Sunderland. In their three-volume account of the war, they praised Stilwell’s attempts to reform the Chinese army, underscored the correctness of his strategic analysis, praised his command capabilities, and defended him against Chennault’s charges of gross misconduct and major strategic errors during Ichigo. Tuchman agreed, but put the political issues at center stage. According to her, the Nationalists were doomed to waste America’s “supreme try in China” because the “regenerative idea,” for which America stood, could not be “imposed from the outside” on a politically debilitated “husk.” This view was one way of coming to terms with the U.S. failure on the East Asian mainland after the Pacific war.

As Louis Allen argues in *Burma: The Longest War* (1984), even during the first Burma campaign in 1942 Stilwell probably made a grave strategic mistake in ordering the Chinese 5th Army to Toungoo on the Sittang River—well beyond its supply lines—in an effort to threaten the Japanese flanks in Malaya and Thailand. When the Japanese then escalated their Burma offensive, Stilwell allowed one of the Chinese divisions, fighting in terrain for which it did not even have maps, to become encircled. During the retreat Stilwell failed to blow up a bridge over the Sittang, enabling the Japanese to thrust themselves between British forces and the Chinese armies under Stilwell’s command, splitting the Allied effort and threatening their flanks and rear services, as well as command and logistical installations. The Japanese raced to Lashio in north Burma and seized its oil fields, making the further defense of Burma impossible. If other factors played a role in the fall of Burma, including British demoralization after the fall of Singapore and Burmese antipathy toward British, Indian, and Chinese troops, Stilwell’s errors probably did so too.

Stilwell’s strategy during the second campaign was also debatable. He did not understand the Chinese situation as well as has been claimed. His oft-repeated view that Chinese soldiers were great but that their officers, especially senior commanders, were inept played well to American populism, but it has been shown to be the reverse of the truth. His advocacy of military reforms in China was neither new nor exemplary of an American spirit. They

copied what German advisers had suggested in the early 1930s, advice of which Stilwell was aware. China had worked hard to implement these recommendations and continued to do so during the war.

Stilwell also alienated his British counterparts, seemingly wanting, according to Allen, to “refight the War of Independence” in Burma. In Stilwell’s accounts of the Burma War, as well as most subsequent U.S. histories, the tens of thousands of British and Chinese troops are portrayed as having much less of an impact than the less than three thousand U.S. combat troops—Merrill’s Marauders—that actually fought there. In fact, British general William J. Slim’s 14th Army played the central role in Japan’s defeat in Burma. Orde C. Wingate’s ten thousand guerrillas interdicted Japanese supply lines and were the key to Stilwell’s capture of the Myitkyina airfield, which Stilwell desperately wanted to portray as a U.S. victory. Chinese casualties during the second Burma campaign numbered sixty thousand, while British Empire forces suffered thirty thousand.

What, then, about Allied aid and its importance to the West and China? It must be mentioned that Germany had first armed China and continued to supply it until 1938, when Germany turned to Japan. The Soviets took up the slack. Between 1937 and 1941 the Soviet Union supplied China with 348 bombers, 542 fighters, 44 other planes, 82 T-26 tanks, 2,118 motor vehicles, 1,140 pieces of artillery, 9,720 machine guns, 50,000 rifles, and 18 million rounds of ammunition. By February 1939, according to John W. Garver in *Chinese Soviet Relations, 1937–1945: The Diplomacy of Chinese Nationalism* (1988), there were 3,665 Soviet military advisers, including 200 to 300 pilots, in China. This aid helped China gain the morale-boosting tactical victory at Taierzhuang in April 1938. It also was important during the ultimately unsuccessful defense of Wu-han, which fell in October 1938. Russian aid rapidly declined after 1939 and stopped after 1941, when it needed all its resources to fight Germany.

The gain for the Soviet Union was that Japanese forces became bogged down in China and the Soviets never had to face a two-front war. If in part the result of the Soviet defeat of the Japanese at No-men-k’an in 1939, China’s continued resistance made it difficult for Japan to join Germany in its attack on the U.S.S.R. Instead, it was Germany that was attacked from several sides.

U.S. aid to China did not begin to flow until 1941. Modest credits for nonmilitary purposes were first made available in Decem-

ber 1939. Chennault's Flying Tigers became active in 1940. Immediately after Pearl Harbor, the United States agreed to a \$500 million loan. Most was not used for military purposes, but to fight inflation. Whether it really was possible to do so by restricting government expenditures and intervening in currency markets, as the U.S. financial adviser Arthur Young maintained, remains a moot point. Lend Lease supplies to China did not become significant until 1945, in part because transport lines had been cut. China received only 0.5 percent of Lend Lease supplies in 1943 and 1944, and only 1.5 percent of the total, with 70 percent of this delivered in 1945 and half of that only after the Japanese surrender. Most went to Stilwell's X and Y Forces. Chiang listed Lend-Lease equipment received by other forces as "60 mountain guns, 320 anti-tank rifles, and 506 Bazookas." Total U.S. personnel in the China-Burma-India theatre reached 33,000 by 1944 and doubled the next year, but few were combat troops.

British aid to China is more difficult to quantify. Like the United States, the United Kingdom provided a modest amount of credit in 1939, but it was financially or industrially unable to deliver massive military or financial assistance. During the first Burma campaign, besides deploying its own forces, Britain supplied China's six divisions with their needs and provided logistical support. Afterward it provided the field installations, oil, and rations for the X-Force at Ramgarh. Britain furthermore trained Chinese guerrilla forces and assisted with the creation of an intelligence network, as did the Soviets and later the United States. Against these developments must be set the fact that British secret service ran a smuggling operation in China that, according to the Public Records Office, "saved the Treasury not less than one million sterling monthly."

Was the aid given important to the Allied victory? It was valuable in preventing a Japanese attack on the U.S.S.R. Britain's aim was to defend India and recover its colonies: SEAC was nicknamed Save England's Asian Colonies. Whatever the morality of British imperialism, a Japanese conquest of India would have been worse. Straining to give meaning to an enormous investment of Allied resources and effort, Allen submits that without the Burma war, Japan could have knocked Britain out of Asia and allowed a linkup of Japan and Germany through Persia and the Caucasus.

After Pearl Harbor the United States was committed to recovering its possession in the Pacific, returning to the Philippines, and gaining Japan's unconditional surrender. Surely

without China and Britain the campaigns for Guadalcanal, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, and Iwo Jima would have been even tougher. They were fought, of course, not for Chinese, but for U.S., purposes. After the advance of the Pacific Fleet, China became strategically less important, but Roosevelt believed that China should be built up as a Great Power to become a pro-Western pillar of the new world order in Asia after the defeat of Japan. The frustration of this hope had less to do with World War II than with the civil war in China and the beginning of the Cold War.

For China, Burma was important, first of all to keep its Western allies involved in the war against Japan. Lacking an industrial base, Nationalist China was dependent on foreign countries to supply its armies. This dependency is why, after the fall of Wu-han in 1938 and Japan's success in cutting China's access to international markets, China reduced large-scale military operations. Instead it pursued a war of attrition, developed guerrilla warfare involving initially some three hundred thousand troops, sought to drag the Japanese into the countryside, and deny economic resources to Japan. China's lack of "offensive spirit," for which Stilwell derided it, was in reality a rational response to objective conditions, something that Stilwell, wedded to pre-World War I infantry warfare advocated by Prussian Carl von Clausewitz (1780-1831), never understood. Access to foreign markets was also important because much of South China, especially Kwangtung, was a food deficit area. Because of this background, Chiang sent six of his best divisions into Burma in 1942, and again in 1944, even though they were needed in China. His Western allies continued to renege on their promise to assist the Burma campaign with naval landings on the Burmese coast, increase deliveries of aircraft and other supplies, and provide more loans.

For China the alliance with the Allies was a mixed blessing. If the "Europe First" strategy was entirely understandable, the Soviet victory at Nomanhan, Chennault's successes in the air, and the rapid recovery of the U.S. Fleet in the Pacific suggests that Japan was not as strong as it was only natural to believe in the aftermath of Pearl Harbor and the fall of Singapore. An "Asia First" strategy might have brought rapid success, with reciprocal effects elsewhere. The wisdom of the Burma strategy was doubtful at best, and China paid a high price for it. Western aid to China was limited, though important in keeping China in the war, preventing a Japanese attack on the Soviet Union, and thwarting the collapse of the British position in India. The suggestion that it was all a

“waste of effort” is grossly unfair to the Chinese who themselves aided the Allies significantly in Burma. It ignores that Allied aid served their strategic purposes first and China only second. It also occludes Western strategic stubbornness, personal ambitions for glory, incompetence, and debilitating interservice rivalries.

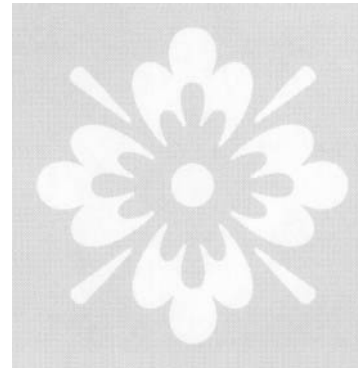
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# NAVAL TREATIES

## Was it wise for signatory nations to agree to the interwar naval disarmament treaties?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, in the context of the unsettled world situation, the interwar naval disarmament treaties were a well-advised effort to avoid a new, unrestrained arms race; forestall future conflict; and promote the economic stability of the signatories by a voluntary reduction of their naval forces.

**Viewpoint:** No, the interwar naval disarmament treaties were unwise. The Japanese broke the letter and spirit of agreements, secretly building a superior navy, but the compliance of Western allies reduced the threat to Japan.

The interwar naval treaties, beginning with the Washington Conference of 1921–1922, grew out of a burgeoning three-way naval race involving Britain, the United States, and Japan. The two latter powers had embarked during World War I on major programs of naval construction whose sustainability after 1918 was at least questionable, but which neither was willing to abandon unilaterally. Britain, however exhausted by its wartime efforts, was compelled at least to keep pace. As if that were not enough, France and Italy began their own mini-race for supremacy in the Mediterranean.

U.S. president Warren G. Harding's call for a conference to discuss naval strengths and their ramifications was greeted with corresponding—albeit private—sighs of relief. The initial negotiations established fixed ratios of capital ship tonnage for the five major powers, set limits on the future size of capital ships, and provided for a ten-year moratorium on construction. These provisions were welcome to beleaguered finance ministries and not entirely unwelcome to admirals who had seen the pre-World War I naval races do nothing to alter existing force relationships. Later conferences extended the Washington Treaty's parameters to include cruisers and other smaller warships.

Underlying these negotiations, however, was growing Japanese resentment. As a consequence of the original Washington negotiations, the Anglo-Japanese alliance, in existence since 1902, was terminated. In return, Britain and the United States agreed not to fortify their Pacific bases, except for Pearl Harbor and Singapore. Both these bases were far enough away from Japan that they posed no threat to its position in the northwest Pacific. The treaty ratios, moreover, virtually guaranteed Japan's naval superiority in that region against anything but a direct Anglo-American alliance.

The extreme unlikelihood of that circumstance nevertheless paled before a growing belief in Japan that the nation's interests and autonomy had been sacrificed to Occidental cunning and chicanery. This conviction increased as Japan became more deeply involved with a China on the edge of chaos, only to face Western criticism that at its best seemed sanctimonious. In the 1930s Japan paid little more than lip service to both the letter and spirit of the treaties. The irony was that the navy buildup in consequence was just powerful enough to encourage risk-taking—but ultimately lacked sufficient strength to back the play begun on 7 December 1941.



### Viewpoint:

**Yes, in the context of the unsettled world situation, the interwar naval disarmament treaties were a well-advised effort to avoid a new, unrestrained arms race; forestall future conflict; and promote the economic stability of the signatories by a voluntary reduction of their naval forces.**

World War I swept away many pillars of the traditional world order. In its aftermath, beyond the devastation and loss of life, it left economic collapse and political disruption. Meeting in Paris, the victors struggled with the uncertainties of future world organization. The Versailles Treaty, signed in 1919, attempted to resolve these problems. By means of the League of Nations, it created a whole new framework, based on collective security, for the interrelationship of states.

The League of Nations was the brainchild of U.S. president Woodrow Wilson. Wilson believed lasting peace could only be ensured if each nation reduced its arms to the “lowest point consistent with domestic safety.” Collective security was to be made practicable by disarmament agreements and pledges to observe such international principles as freedom of the seas. Naval warfare had been pivotal and costly in the recent conflict, and efforts to reduce the possibility of war at sea were an integral part of the larger negotiations at Versailles. The end of the war had not ended all rivalries, however; within two years of the treaty, among rising tensions, the victors were already rearming.

Once the fighting ended, rather than reduce its naval estimates, the United States announced a peacetime naval construction program that would greatly expand its battleship fleet. Instead of deferring to British naval supremacy, as in the past, this program was designed to eventually produce an American navy “second to none.” In part this challenge may have been influenced by America’s growing sense of itself as a world power, and in part by resentment of the 1902 Anglo-Japanese treaty that recognized Japanese dominance in Asian waters. Britain, though, was an island nation with a worldwide empire to protect and was outraged by the American naval-building plan. Unlike America, Britain had emerged from the war with its economy shaken, but it still had the largest navy in the world and every intention of maintaining that lead. In a heated moment at Versailles, British prime minister David Lloyd George declared that

“Great Britain would spend her last guinea to keep a navy superior to that of the United States or any other Power.”

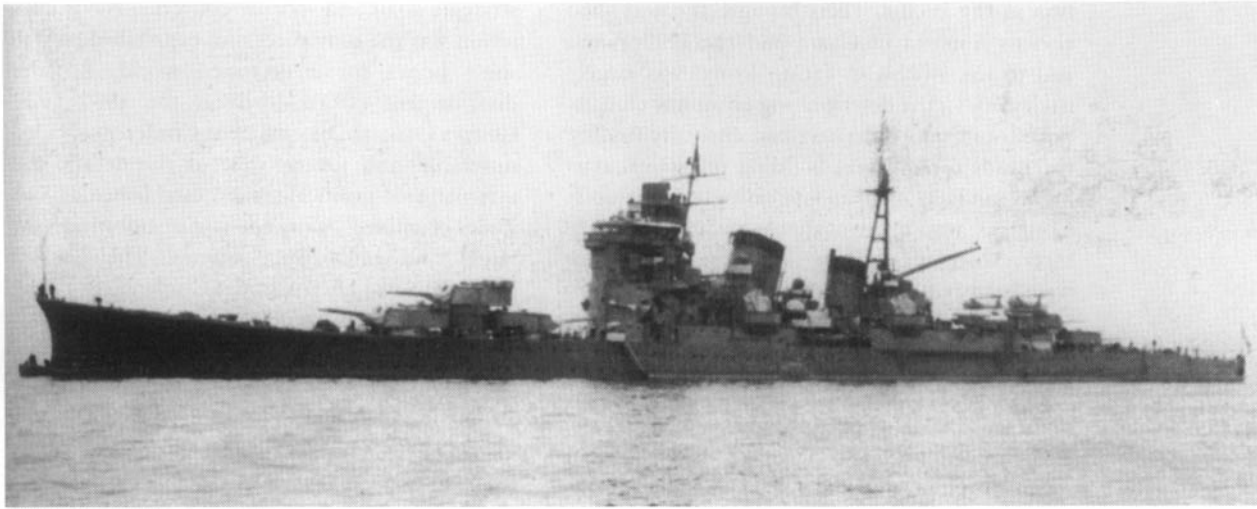
Even Britain, however, did not have enough ships to dominate its home waters and the Mediterranean and Suez routes to her possessions in the east, as well as maintaining a fleet in Asia. The treaty with Japan assured protection of British interests in Asia and, although increasingly wary of Japanese ambitions, George was reluctant to abandon it. He did not believe Wilson’s league could replace treaties to keep the peace, and he refused to support it. Without the economic resources to outbuild America, however, Lloyd George finally agreed to a compromise: in exchange for a reduction in American naval construction, Britain accepted the League of Nations. Soon after Wilson suffered a paralyzing stroke, and the U.S. Congress rejected the league; without American participation it never became the forum Wilson had intended for the negotiation of widespread arms reductions. Rather than resolving differences, an Anglo-American naval rivalry resurfaced at Versailles.

Versailles also raised marked disagreements between America and Japan. With the destruction of the German fleet, and treaty limitations preventing a renewal of German naval construction, America now viewed Japan, the third largest naval power, as a potential rival. In spite of American opposition, the Versailles treaty confirmed Japan’s control of the western Pacific islands it had seized from Germany. From these mandate islands Japan could dominate America’s sea routes to its territories in Guam and the Philippines; Japanese incursions in China also threatened America’s trading interests there. The only American defense seemed to be a strong navy. Japan, for its part, saw a strong U.S. Navy as not only a challenge to Japanese expansion in Asia and the Pacific but also a threat to its very existence.

In 1920, in response to the American naval building program, Japan initiated a plan that would give it a big, all-new navy by 1927. With the tensions increasing, America began to shape its naval plans to the possibility of a war against Japan. It established a separate battle fleet in the Pacific for the first time, expanded West Coast naval facilities, and considered building larger cruisers suitable to the Pacific.

On the other hand, there were also growing pressures for disarmament. Even though—unlike most other powers—Japan and America had ended the war with strong economies, each began to feel the effects of the postwar depression. For those unswayed by Wilsonian ideals of international disarmament, fiscal pressures were a strong inducement to limit naval spending. In





addition, antinavalism, increasing isolationist sentiment, and calls for unilateral arms reduction in the U.S. Congress whittled away at navy budgets. At this point the naval powers had a choice: they could ignore economic reality, whip up support at home for large building programs, and indulge in a full-scale arms race accepting the risk of war or they could find a way to stabilize international relations, pull back from dangerous escalation, and negotiate mutually agreed arms limitations. Wisely, they chose limitations.

On 12 November 1921, delegates met at a naval disarmament conference in Washington that resulted in several agreements signed by different participating nations. The main settlement was a reduction in the total tonnage allowed each navy, the amount based on recognition of existing strengths. A ratio of 5:5:3 was established for the three major naval powers: Britain, the United States, and Japan. To meet this standard the United States took the unprecedented step of proposing to scrap thirty ships, while Britain and Japan together would have to dispose of thirty-six. The destruction of naval assets that followed this agreement assured a real reduction in the size of battle fleets. Next, the Five-Power Naval Limitation Treaty, which included third-ranked naval powers France and Italy, provided for a ten-year holiday on capital ship construction as well as a limitation on total tonnage of capital ships and aircraft carriers following the agreed ratios. In addition, no capital ship could exceed 35,000 tons, no aircraft carrier 27,000 tons. The size of armament on these vessels was also limited.

The Japanese resisted the 5:5:3 ratio, which they saw as demeaning, and the British only accepted the idea of American naval parity with extreme reluctance, but they both signed. Anglo-American relations were improved when Britain canceled its 1902 treaty with Japan. In its place a four-power pact was signed, with France

joining the three principals to guarantee that each would “respect” the possessions of the others in the Far East. By including four nations in the pact the Anglo-Japanese treaty could be dropped without unduly offending Japan, while removing a major source of American discontent with Britain. Following a similar principle of collective guarantees, Belgium, China, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal joined the other four powers in the Nine-Power Pact affirming joint responsibility for the Open Door policy in China.

The nonfortification clause of the Washington Treaty, however, has been seen as its most controversial aspect. Critics maintain that it essentially gave Japan a free hand in the western Pacific because America agreed not to fortify any possessions west of Hawaii, nor Britain any territory east of Singapore and north of Australia. Japan pledged not to fortify its Pacific possessions outside the home islands, but this is characterized as an empty promise since most of its territories were already covered by the nonfortification provisions of the mandate agreement with the League of Nations. Thus, some argue that without strong American or British naval bases in the Pacific only the two weak multinational pacts stood between Japan and its expansionist ambitions.

The German islands Japan had acquired, however, could not be taken away after the seizure was sanctioned by Versailles, and America could not realistically expect to dominate western Pacific waters, so the best that could be hoped for was to neutralize Japan’s growing naval power. The agreements reached at Washington were the most effective way to do this. They froze major naval assets at the status quo, giving America and Britain a combined overwhelming preponderance of force. They at least inhibited military exploitation of Japanese-held islands by agreements banning future fortifica-

**The Japanese heavy cruiser *Ashigara* in 1937, the year it made trips to Germany and Britain**

*(PA Vicory)*

tion in the Pacific. That this agreement applied also to America in Guam and the Philippines, and to the British in Hong Kong, was largely irrelevant. In the deteriorating economic climate, both countries would have had difficulty finding the funds for overseas building programs. It is highly unlikely that an increasingly isolationist Congress would have approved such expenditures. Moreover, existing Japanese naval bases were balanced by purposely excluding Singapore and Hawaii from the nonfortification clause.

The naval-limitation provisions of the Washington Treaty were wise because disarmament diminished the chance of an aggressive arms race. Economic motives also suggested the wisdom of cooperation among the three major naval powers. Although the treaty resulted in giving Britain an essentially free hand in European waters and in the sea routes to India, British reliance on strategic materials from the United States discouraged Anglo-American hostilities. By the same token, although Japan might have battlefleet supremacy in the western Pacific, it was still a resource-poor island nation and, like Britain, dependent on American markets for raw materials, especially iron and oil.

The Washington Treaty had two major weaknesses. First, it did not completely end Anglo-American naval rivalry, and as long as there was a possibility of conflict between the two, it encouraged Japanese expansion. Secondly, by only covering battleships and aircraft carriers, the treaty did not go far enough in arms limitation. Both these problems were addressed in subsequent naval disarmament conferences.

In 1927 a second naval conference was convened in Geneva to address the issue of cruisers, but the meeting broke up having accomplished nothing, particularly because of disagreements between American and British delegates. By 1930, however, a third naval conference met in London, amid growing Anglo-American cooperation and increasing awareness of shared interests. The resulting Five-Power Treaty, signed by America, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, imposed limits on cruisers, destroyers, and submarines. In addition, the ban on capital ship construction was extended through 1936. Failing to get a comprehensive change of ratio to 10:10:7, however, Japan negotiated a change for smaller cruisers and insisted on parity in submarines. Since the Japanese failed to use their submarines to best effect in World War II, in contrast with the highly effective American submarine campaign in the Pacific, it is hard to argue that parity was a flaw in the 1930 treaty.

Indeed, the 1930 London Conference was the high point of the interwar effort to find a just and peaceful solution to clashing national

strategic goals and security concerns. Naval limitation was the only successful expression of Wilson's hopes for a disarmed world. Broader disarmament efforts, such as the 1932-1933 Geneva General Disarmament Conference, failed miserably, and for the rest of the decade the international political system established at Versailles crumbled before the rise of ambitious dictators and militaristic regimes. The Second London Naval Disarmament Conference (1935-1936) achieved nothing, sabotaged by the growing aggression of Japan, Italy, and Germany. Japan demanded parity in all categories of ships and withdrew from the conference when this was denied them. By then, the threat from its increasingly militaristic and expansionist regime was clearly recognized. Meanwhile, Germany had rejoined the group of naval powers, after being excluded for fifteen years. In 1935, with its economic and military power revived under Adolf Hitler, Germany signed a bilateral naval treaty with Britain—potentially including parity in submarines—that unwisely gave away Britain's negotiating position before the conference began. The expiration of the original Washington agreements on 31 December 1936 signaled the end of the effort to limit naval buildup. From then on the escalation of forces was dramatic.

It would be a mistake to suggest that because Germany initiated a naval campaign in the Atlantic in 1939, and Japan provoked a naval war in the Pacific in 1941, the interwar naval disarmament treaties had been unwise. Rejecting the notion, discredited by World War I, that armed security worked to maintain peace, the successive interwar naval conferences aimed instead at creating a new era in international relations of voluntary arms reduction and limitation. Even granting the likelihood of treaty violations, the practical result was to avoid an early war in the Pacific and, ultimately, to reaffirm the Anglo-American alliance so critical to victory in World War II. Nor can the treaties be blamed for lack of American naval preparedness. At no time did the three administrations following the Washington Conference allow the U.S. Navy to reach treaty size.

Had the naval disarmament treaties been given teeth, they might not only have been wise in the short run but also have been successful in the long run as well. In 1917 U.S. secretary of the navy Joseph Daniels had proposed an international navy to keep world peace. If the League of Nations had created such a force, with a parallel international army, it, too, might have had a different record. Naval and military arms limitations might have been enforceable, even on the errant dictators and militaristic regimes of the 1930s.

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**Viewpoint:  
No, the interwar naval disarmament treaties were unwise. The Japanese broke the letter and spirit of agreements, secretly building a superior navy, but the compliance of Western allies reduced the threat to Japan.**

There is mixed sentiment as to whether the interwar naval disarmament treaties were wise or unwise. That they were designed with the perceived lessons of World War I in mind, aimed at reducing tensions and the means to wage war, is undoubted. Lacking either means for inspections to gauge compliance or means of enforcement, however, they permitted an unscrupulous signatory to cheat, and as such were disasters in which Japan duped the West. They were only successful insofar as only the nations that wished to be disarmed were. From any sober assessment of their impact on the conduct of the opening phases of World War II, especially in the Pacific, they were clearly a disaster for the West.

The United States emerged from World War I as the world's most powerful nation, but rather than assuming a wider role in world affairs, it turned inward, or isolationist. However, it did participate on several occasions in treaty negotiations to limit armaments. The first of these meetings was the Washington Naval Conference, involving the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Japan, which lasted from 12 November 1921 to 6 February 1922.

The U.S. delegation was led by Secretary of State Charles Evans Hughes, closely advised by Assistant Secretary of the Navy Teddy Roosevelt Jr., the son of the former president. Hughes's welcoming speech to the delegates on 12 November 1921 stunned the audience with proposed massive reductions in battleships and cruisers of the United States, Britain, and Japan. Under the plan the United States would scrap or cancel no less than fifteen newer and fifteen obsolescent capital ships; Britain would get rid of four new and nineteen old vessels; and Japan would eliminate seven new and ten aged ships. Additionally, Hughes proposed a ten-year "holiday" on new construction. The plan would leave the United States with eighteen capital ships of 500,650 tons aggregate, Britain with twenty-two of 604,450 tons, and Japan with ten of 299,700 tons.

Hughes concluded his speech with a proposal that as the retained ships were replaced after 1932, an upper limit be set for the United States and Britain of fifteen modern ships of 500,000 tons aggregate, while Japan was allotted nine ships of 300,000 tons aggregate. This pro-

posal was expressed as a ratio of 5:5:3, and this figure became the principle point for which the conference has since been remembered. It proved a sticking point during and after the negotiations, especially for Japan.

Britain's delegation, led by former prime minister Arthur Balfour, included First Sea Lord Admiral Sir David Beatty. They realized that Britain could not afford both its war-loan repayments to the United States and a new naval building program. They agreed in principle on the 5:5:3 ratio. Beatty, however, hoped that as Britain had not launched a new capital ship since 1916, they might retain at least a few of the four new 45,000 ton "super-*Hood*" battle cruisers that had just been ordered by his government.

Simultaneous with the conference, Britain's bilateral 1902 naval treaty with Japan was up for review. This treaty had been of considerable use to Britain before World War I, but the two principle powers against which Britain had striven to protect itself, Russia and Germany, were now in ruin or disarray. To the Americans the treaty was, however, a source of great irritation. As early as 1905 an article appeared in the *Journal of the United States Cavalry Association* examining the threat Japan posed to the Philippines and what the United States might do about it. American planners considered a war with Britain remote and felt that despite their treaty Britain might not support Japan in a fight with America. On the other hand, they were convinced that the Japanese, out of self-interest in the western Pacific, would weigh in on the side of the British in any war against the United States.

The Japanese delegation was headed by Navy Minister Admiral Kato Tomosaburo and included their ambassador in Washington, Shidehara Kijuro. From the beginning the Japanese realized that a principle American objective of the talks was abolition of the Anglo-Japanese treaty. The Japanese were prepared to see that agreement scrapped, but at a price: agreement by the western powers to forego strengthening old or building new naval facilities and fortifications in the western Pacific. Under such a scheme, the United States would be precluded from improving existing facilities in Hawaii or the Philippines, and it could not build advanced bases on Midway Island or Guam. The British would likewise be constrained in building Hong Kong into a first-class naval facility.

Under the League of Nations, Japan had gained control, or mandates, over former German possessions in the western Pacific. American naval planners were adamant that the Japanese proposal would leave Guam surrounded and cut off from lines of communications to the Philippines. Hughes and Balfour were prepared to sacrifice in the interests of

securing an agreement. Kato and Shidehara were prepared to consider amendments, and in the end the Americans gained a reprieve on Hawaii, while Britain secured its right to facilities at Singapore. The American base at Pearl Harbor and the as-yet-to-be-built British base at Singapore were 3,374 miles and 2,888 miles, respectively, from Tokyo Bay. The westerners had their agreement all but assured, but Japan had secured the much greater strategic prize of making impossible the military intervention of either power in the western Pacific. The two were now dependent upon continued good relations with Japan to secure their commercial interests in the Orient.

With essential agreement on the base issue, the Americans then insisted that France be made a signatory to a four-power treaty on the Pacific. Together with Britain and Japan, they pledged to consult one another if any of their island possessions were threatened; this treaty was duly signed on 13 December 1921. Up to this point France and Italy had been effectively sidelined at the conference. Sensing some leverage from the Four-Power Treaty, France now demanded parity with Japan, with a right to ten capital ships of 350,000 tons. The Americans had since the end of World War I begun building toward a navy "second to none." Until the conference the British had a "two-fleet" policy, whereby the Royal Navy was to be as powerful as any other two fleets combined. The British now accepted parity with the Americans but were adamant that their fleet must still meet the "two-fleet" test when matched with any other states. Thus with Britain allowed a ratio of five to three with Japan, the British insisted France must be held to under two. Hughes sought to persuade the French and Italians to accept the ratio 5:1.75 with Britain. French premier Aristide Briand accepted, but then adamantly refused to apply the new ratio of 5:5:3:1.75:1.75 to what he termed "defensive" warships, defined by the French to include light cruisers, but also, ominously, submarines. In fact, France demanded parity with the Americans and British at 90,000 tons on submarines, more than 47,000 tons more than the French then possessed. The British loathed the submarine after the experience of World War I and opposed the proposition. The French were finally cajoled into supporting the "Root Resolutions" on restricting the nature of future submarine warfare, but refused to budge on submarine tonnage. It was also agreed that cruisers, destroyers, and "auxiliary" warships should not exceed 10,000 tons. The conference, however, failed to extend the 5:5:3 ratio to "auxiliary" vessels.

Hughes did succeed in extending the ratio to aircraft carriers, with an agreed standard displacement for a single ship not to exceed 27,000

tons. Immediately, the Americans fell foul of this provision. They possessed two partially built battle cruisers, USS *Lexington* and *Saratoga*, that they wished to save from the breakers' yard by converting them into aircraft carriers of 33,000 tons each. The British now saw a chance to retain at least two of the "super-Hoods" in similar circumstances. In order to retain their ships, the Americans agreed that each signatory was to be allowed at least one aircraft carrier of up to 33,000 tons, while the Americans, British, and Japanese could have two. In the end the ratio was accepted, with an agreed tonnage of 135,000 for the Americans and British, 81,000 for the Japanese, and 60,000 for the French and Italians. Given their nature as experimental vessels in 1921–1922, it was also agreed that carriers could possess any number of eight-inch caliber guns, and there was no limit to the number or type of aircraft in the complement of these vessels.

In the waning days of the conference the Americans sought a nine-power treaty with China. The Americans wished to affirm the "Open Door" in China and wanted the Japanese to surrender Shantung, seized from the Germans in 1914. The Japanese were not prepared to negotiate on this point. When it became clear, however, that the U.S. Senate probably would refuse to ratify either the Naval or Four-Power Treaties without the China accords, the British teamed with the Americans to pressure the Japanese. Realizing that the gains they had made, particularly over the bases in the western Pacific, were at stake, Kato and Shidehara sensibly yielded. In February the Washington Naval Limitations Treaty was signed, together with the Nine-Power Treaty (including Belgium, the Netherlands, Portugal, and China).

After a few years respite, President Calvin Coolidge invited the signatories of the Five-Power Treaty to meet in Geneva for the General Disarmament Conference of 1927. Coolidge hoped to capitalize upon the successes of the Washington Conference by discussing the issues left unresolved, including controls on vessels less than 10,000 tons, especially cruisers. Cruisers performed roles as scouts of the fleet, protected trade as well as acted as commerce raiders, and "showed the flag" on colonial stations. Throughout the naval conferences of the 1920s cruiser design was consistently defined by two classes. Heavy cruisers approached the Washington Treaty limits of 10,000 tons and usually carried main batteries of guns of eight-inch (203-mm) caliber, while light cruisers averaged 6,000 tons and carried six-inch (152-mm) caliber guns or less. The Americans demanded parity with the British in cruisers, as they had in capital ships,

but the British had built many such ships before and since the Washington Naval Conference, as had the Japanese to a lesser degree, while the Americans had built almost none. The Americans therefore wished not only to limit numbers but also to actually scrap some British and Japanese vessels. As a tactical consideration the Americans wanted parity in heavy cruisers, not least because their eight-inch guns could pierce the armor of lightly armored British and Japanese battle cruisers.

The Americans and British were irreconcilable over the size and number of cruisers to be permitted. The British demanded seventy cruisers of both types to patrol their far-flung empire. The Americans insisted they be permitted twenty-three heavy cruisers based on a need to operate over greater strategic distances without the lavish support-base structure the Royal Navy enjoyed. Neither Coolidge nor British prime minister Stanley Baldwin were prepared to authorize their delegations to compromise sufficiently to achieve success, and the conference failed. The Japanese themselves were not content with the 5:5:3 ratio being applied to smaller vessels and argued during negotiations for a higher percentage for themselves of 10:10:6.5. They were preparing to up the ante to 10:10:7 when the conference broke up. The Japanese were therefore content to watch the growing Anglo-American rift and guard their gains from Washington.

With a change in both their governments in 1929, the strained relationship between the United States and Britain eased. The London Naval Conference of 1930 grew out of a mutual desire to recover momentum lost at Geneva. The five signatories from Washington agreed to extend that agreement to cruisers and destroyers, regulate submarine warfare, and limit ship construction until 1936. Britain, Japan, and the United States also accepted limiting future battleships to 35,000 tons.

Since 1922, however, Japan had built their navy up to the limits set in Washington: three aircraft carriers, twenty cruisers, fifty destroyers, and fifty submarines. America, on the other hand, did not lay the keel to a single cruiser until 1926. Alarmed at having slipped to third behind Japan in cruisers, it was prepared to compromise with the British, who for their part agreed to the principle of American parity in cruisers and restricted the Royal Navy to fifty cruisers, down from the seventy demanded in 1927. The U.S. Navy compromised by agreeing to eighteen heavy cruisers to Britain's fifteen, of which three were not to be built until after 1936. The Americans also agreed to achieve parity by building new ves-



## NAVAL LIMITATIONS

*On 6 February 1922 the United States, Britain, Japan, Italy, and France signed a treaty designed to limit naval arms competition and fortification of possessions in the Pacific. The section of the Naval Limitations Treaty pertaining to territorial agreements is reproduced below.*

The United States, the British Empire and Japan agree that the status quo at the time of the signing of the present Treaty, with regard to fortifications and naval bases, shall be maintained in their respective territories and possessions specified hereunder:

(1) The insular possessions which the United States now holds or may hereafter acquire in the Pacific Ocean, except (a) those adjacent to the coast of the United States, Alaska and the Panama Canal Zone, not including the Aleutian Islands, and (b) the Hawaiian Islands;

(2) Hong Kong and the insular possessions which the British Empire now holds or may hereafter acquire in the Pacific Ocean, east of the meridian of 110° east longitude, except (a) those adjacent to the coast of Canada, (b) the Commonwealth of Australia and its Territories, and (c) New Zealand;

(3) The following insular territories and possessions of Japan in the Pacific Ocean, to wit: the Kurile Islands, the Bonin Islands, Amami-Oshima, the Loochoo Islands, Formosa and the Pescadores, and any insular territories or possessions in the Pacific Ocean which Japan may hereafter acquire.

The maintenance of the status quo under the foregoing provisions implies that no new fortifications or naval bases shall be established in the territories and possessions specified; that no measures shall be taken to increase the existing naval facilities for the repair and maintenance of naval forces, and that no increase shall be made in the coast defences of the territories and possessions above specified. This restriction, however, does not preclude such repair and replacement of worn-out weapons and equipment as is customary in naval and military establishments in time of peace.

*Source: Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History, eighth edition (New York: Meredith, 1963), pp. 182–183.*

sels, rather than requiring Britain or Japan to scrap theirs; the British also actually enjoyed a small advantage of 15,500 tons in cruisers. Japan came to London demanding a revision of the 5:5:3 ratio to 10:10:7 in auxiliary vessels, especially heavy cruisers, which they now saw as extensions of the battleship and battle cruiser. The United States would not agree and finally prevailed, only allowing Japan twelve cruisers to their eighteen, but as three of those were not to be built until after 1936, the effective ratio for the life of the treaty was

10:10:7.2, as Japan desired. Japan also won agreement that the ratio for light cruisers would be 10:7 with the United States and 10:5.2 with Britain. The ratio for destroyers was fixed at 10:10:7, and Japan gained parity in submarines. Thus in auxiliary vessels, Japan gained its desired ratio.

America, already in the throws of the Great Depression (1929–1941), would not reach its desired parity until 1939 and would really only achieve its “second to none” navy with the massive building program of World War II. Thus the conference, while a success, had far more to do with limiting arms building than reducing them, although even this was a questionable success.

A major flaw in the treaties was the absence of any inspection or enforcement clauses. As early as 1924 Japan had begun building the heavy cruisers *Myoko* and *Nachi* of 12,374 tons each, 20 percent more than the 10,000-ton limit for non-capital ships. In other words, the ink was barely dry before the Japanese began secretly violating the terms of the Washington Treaty, and in 1925 two sister ships, *Haguro* and *Ashigara*, were begun. In 1927, the same year as the failed Coolidge Conference, Japan laid down the 12,986-ton cruisers *Takao* and *Atago*, which violated the treaty by almost 30 percent. Greater weight permitted improved cruising radii as well as more guns or other heavier armament, both significant strategic advantages in war.

Meanwhile, reeling from the trauma of the Great Depression, the U.S. fleet actually shrank to a de facto 10:8 ratio against Japan. Inexplicably, preoccupied as they were, it seemed enough for the Americans to enjoy the right to build to the 5:3 ratio, without a need to do so. President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s administration responded slowly to the Japanese threat, winning a \$238 million naval-construction appropriation from Congress, as part of an unemployment works program, and did not project building to the London treaty limits until 1942.

A second London Naval Conference was held from 9 December 1935 to 26 March 1936. This meeting was essentially pointless as, on 29 December 1934, Japan had announced their intent to abrogate the Washington and London treaties. Japan presented demands permitting it to increase its fleet to parity with Britain and the United States. The latter two refused to consider the demand, and on 15 January the Japanese abandoned the conference and embarked on unfettered unilateral rearmament. In December 1936 the Washington Naval treaty of 1922 and London Naval treaty of 1930 expired.

The Roosevelt administration approached naval policy after 1936 with timidity and prevarication. Roosevelt and his advisers refused to believe reports that Japan was constructing vessels above treaty limits, even as the keel of the behemoth 66,000-ton battleship *Yamato*, mounting 18.1-inch guns, was being laid in 1937. By 7 December 1941 the fleet ratio between the Americans and Japanese stood at 10:8, better than Japan had achieved through diplomacy. Japan’s secretive building program since 1924 ensured that when they met the western powers in battle in 1941 and 1942, its ships were heavier and carried heavier armament than the western “treaty” ships. The building program, together with diplomatic successes at the Washington and London conferences, ensured Japanese security by making impossible the military intervention of any western power in the western Pacific before 1943. From the beginning of the process the Japanese were duplicitous, breaking the letter and spirit of these naval treaties when in secret from 1924 it built ships exceeding treaty limits in tonnage and armament. It broke the treaties in spirit as naval buildup gave Japan near-parity with the British and American fleets, and actual superiority in the western Pacific, thus strengthening the hand of its militants instead of dampening their ardor for war.

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# NAZI RISE TO POWER

## Was the German population a willing supporter of the Nazi regime?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the German people willingly supported Adolf Hitler because he brought to the country law and order, economic prosperity, international recognition, and assurances of future greatness.

**Viewpoint:** No, many Germans were coerced into supporting the Nazi regime and opposed Hitler's policies.

National Socialism came to power in Germany as a mass, popular protest party, building on the aspirations and grievances of an increasingly fragmented society unwilling to consider the alternatives offered either by the Weimar Republic or the Socialist/Communist Left. Adolf Hitler's voters supported his promises to change things, on the grounds that they could hardly get worse. After the Nazis took control of the government in 1933, the New Order was welcomed, or at least accepted, by every significant focus group in Germany. Clergymen, businessmen, military officers, academicians, farmers, workers, and women all found something to believe. Skeptics were submerged by a propaganda campaign designed to convince every German that every other German was a Nazi, or at least a sympathizer.

The appeal of joining the wave of the future for Germany was complemented by a repressive apparatus that was sufficiently public to make potential dissenters think twice. Finally, and a point often overlooked, no feasible alternative existed. Even supporters of a military coup were not convinced their soldiers would obey the necessary orders.

Between 1933 and 1939 the regime established enough credibility to sustain it during five years of total war. Its only challenges were clandestine conspiracies. Hitler never confronted public, mass opposition, not least because until close to the end, Germany lived well on the spoils of conquest. Nazi Germany remained loyal to its Führer until it was literally overrun by its enemies. Can this situation be classified as positive enthusiasm or a fear of alternatives? The question remains open; perhaps it cannot be answered.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the German people willingly supported Adolf Hitler because he brought to the country law and order, economic prosperity, international recognition, and assurances of future greatness.**

The scale, intensity, and totality of World War II demanded that each combatant mobilize the resources, both human and industrial, of its entire nation. This situation was the reality not only for Nazi Germany, but the Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States. Indeed, the war aims of Nazi Germany—destruction of the traditional state structure in Europe and the creation of a racially ordered continent under German rule—demanded an even greater



*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

degree of participation from its population. In order to carry out Adolf Hitler’s massive racial program and war of conquest, ordinary Germans had to actively support their regime. While some of the German population might have been coerced by the police of the Nazi state, the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) never could have fought the war it did with soldiers unconvinced of their cause, and the attempted extermination of European Jews never could have been carried out without individuals and bureaucratic organizations willing to implement the Nazi program.

Indeed, Hitler and his National Socialist German Workers’ Party (Nazi Party) enjoyed a large degree of support even before he seized power from the democratic Weimar Republic (1933) and created his totalitarian state. In the wake of the severe economic and political crises of the late 1920s, Hitler’s hitherto marginalized Nazi Party scored impressive electoral victories.

Moving from the periphery to the center stage in the course of only four years, the Nazis went from 2.6 percent of the national vote in May 1928 to 18.3 percent in September 1930 and finally to 37.4 percent in July 1932, making the Nazi Party the largest single faction in the *Reichstag* (German Parliament).

The Nazi successes in the polls demonstrate the strong support they enjoyed throughout the nation. They were able to appeal to, and to mobilize, an extremely wide range of German voters. Through sophisticated electioneering in the early 1930s, the Nazis were able to get their message across more effectively than any previous right-wing party. Recent research has shown that the Nazi Party was able to build upon their early base of small shopkeepers, white-collar workers, and low-ranking civil servants—in other words the *Mittelstand* (middle class)—to become a “people’s party.”

The Nazi electoral achievements in the early 1930s owed much to their ability to exploit the hardship and confusion brought about by the economic depression that had begun in the late 1920s. The Nazi Party was extremely successful in playing upon the traditional fears of many people in Weimar Germany, fears that were heightened by the economic distress. Voters, having lived through war, revolution, and economic hardship, desired, above all, stability and order. Instead, they faced unemployment and further social unrest generated by the Great Depression. In 1928, 1,368,000 Germans were out of work. By July 1932, the height of Nazi electoral success, the unemployment figure had reached 5,392,000. In Berlin alone, in 1930, 750,000 of its 4,000,000 inhabitants were out of work and tent cities grew up on the city's outskirts, populated by families who had been unable to keep up their rent or mortgage payments. To many ordinary Germans, the Weimar system had failed in its most basic function—protecting the people from instability.

The Nazi Party offered an alternative to the increasingly discredited Weimar Republic. Hitler and other Nazi leaders took their message to the people in an almost nonstop national campaign, giving speeches at public rallies and over the radio, and organizing public events such as demonstrations and parades. They were adept at tailoring their political messages to their target audiences. To farmers, they promised government aid and protection. To small shop owners, they promised relief from the competition of large department stores. To craftsmen, they promised protection from large industry and wage caps.

In addition to these individualized appeals, several themes remained constant and popular regardless of the audience. Hitler and the Nazis guaranteed to restore Germany's greatness, both at home and abroad. The Nazis intended to reestablish order within Germany and to cast off the hated Treaty of Versailles (1919), thus making Germany an international power once again. To accomplish these ends Hitler encouraged the need to create a national community, or *Volksgemeinschaft*. This mythical community was ill defined, but its ambiguity allowed the concept to mean different things to different people. Generally, it meant the rejection of the party politics of the Weimar system in favor of a government that represented the interests of Germany as a whole rather than those of a small segment of society. In other words, this *Volksgemeinschaft* was to be a society free of socio-economic, religious, or political divisions. This concept appealed to Germans weary of the divisive politics of the Weimar Republic, and many Germans believed that this

community would be the path to stability at home and greatness abroad.

Even after they seized power in 1933, the Nazi Party was successful in retaining, and expanding, the public support demonstrated in the elections of 1932. This success was due in large part to the seeming accomplishments of Nazi policy. At home, the effects of the economic depression rapidly receded. Helped by a vast rearmament program, the German gross national product (GNP) increased from 58 billion reichsmarks in 1932 to 93 billion reichsmarks by 1937. The growing strength of the economy was reflected in increased employment and increased personal income. By 1937, 18.9 million Germans were at work, compared to 12.9 million in 1932, and salaries had increased from 27.4 billion reichsmarks in 1932 to 41.5 billion reichsmarks in 1937. Consumer goods, perhaps epitomized by the *Volkswagen* (people's car), were becoming more readily available. Under Hitler, the German economy before the outbreak of World War II surpassed even the accomplishments of Germany's "Golden Twenties."

Moreover, Germans approved of the manner in which Hitler dealt with his political opposition, crediting him with having reestablished law and order at home. For instance, when, on Hitler's orders, Ernst Röhm and other leaders of the Nazi Party's paramilitary wing, the *Sturm Abteilungen* (SA), were murdered, even some Social Democrats pointed to this action as proof that Hitler wanted order and decency. Broad approval for Hitler's concept of *Volksgemeinschaft* made the exclusion, and even the repression, of "alien" elements such as the Jews or the Socialists acceptable to the bulk of ordinary Germans. While they might not have been conscious of the scale of the concentration camps, ordinary Germans viewed Hitler's measures as having created a Germany free from "disruptive" and "asocial" elements. Unlike life under the Weimar system, conformist Germans no longer had to fear political or social unrest.

The image of Hitler as leader played a crucial role in understanding the popular support enjoyed by the Nazi regime. Hitler was able to distance himself from unpopular events and policies and to associate himself with the accomplishments of the Nazi Party. In the minds of many Germans, Hitler stood above particular problems of the regime. The problems were caused not by Nazi policies, but rather by corrupt or inefficient party officials. Germans believed that these officials were operating counter to the Führer's will and that if he had only known about these offenses he would have done something to fix the problems. This so-called "Hitler myth," or "Führer myth," played an increasingly

important role in maintaining support for Hitler's government as Germany suffered losses during the course of World War II.

The popular image of the Nazi government, and in particular of Hitler himself, was further heightened by successes in the international realm. True to his promises, immediately upon taking power Hitler began challenging the Treaty of Versailles and he soon threw off its restrictions completely. By 1935, Germany had unilaterally reintroduced conscription and general rearmament. Additionally, the geographical areas separated from Germany by the treaty were claimed back. The Saarland was reincorporated into Germany and the Rhineland was remilitarized. Even the *Anschluss* (Union) with Austria, the occupation of Czechoslovakia, and, with these actions, the real threat of another world war, were well received by the German people who were happy to see Germany reestablished as a great power.

On the eve of World War II the German people were satisfied with the Nazi government. Still, most were reluctant to enter into a new world war and viewed the brinkmanship of the Nazis with some skepticism. Two factors that sustained the Nazis until the end created a degree of support for the war once it had begun. The first of these was the stunning achievement of the Wehrmacht in the early days of the war. The initial German successes seemed to expunge once and for all the shame of the defeat of World War I and the subsequent Versailles Treaty. German territory given to Poland was reclaimed, and the ancestral enemy, France, was rapidly defeated. Most Germans believed that Hitler and his policies were responsible for restoring Germany to its former glory and rightful place in the world.

Naturally, maintaining popular support became more difficult for the Nazi regime as the war increasingly went bad for Germany. Hitler and the Nazis were able to play upon, and even to create, fear of Bolshevism and revolution. They were particularly successful in transmitting this propaganda message to the youth of Germany through educational programs, such as the Hitler Youth, which dominated the lives of every young German during the Nazi reign. Even after it became clear that the war would be lost, ordinary Germans continued to do their duty, at the front or in the factory, in an attempt to stem the tide from the East and perhaps to save Germany from falling prey to the dreaded Bolsheviks. This determination, created by Nazi propaganda, was the final expression of the German population's support for Hitler and the Nazi regime.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, many Germans were coerced into supporting the Nazi regime and opposed Hitler's policies.**

Early postwar studies understood the Nazi rule as heavily relying on a terror-spreading secret police and a monopoly over the media. Some of these studies stressed the role of the police forces, explaining the seemingly uniform readiness of Germans to support the Nazis by an all-pervasive system of supervision. A vast network of spies and brutal repression by the *Geheime Staatspolizei* (Gestapo, Secret State Police) rendered futile all attempts to resist. Other studies emphasized the significance of the media, pointing to the successful seduction of the Germans by Nazi propaganda and their integration into the regime's organizations and mass rallies.

The new focus on social history in the 1960s and 1970s and, later, on *Alltagsgeschichte* (the history of everyday life) helped to question these interpretations. It revealed strikingly widespread acts of nonconformity and disobedience to the local representatives of the Nazi Party and State. The image of a population, which largely resisted Nazism, replaced the former picture of a *gleichgeschalteten* (coordinated) society subjected to coercion and manipulation.

Most modern scholars consider both of these images as flawed. Instead, they point to a more differentiated approach that embraces seeming paradoxes as useful for explaining the attitudes and opinions of the German population in the Nazi period. The same people who agreed with certain ideological or material aspects of the Nazi rule from which they benefited could also engage in acts of dissent. These acts could, for example, take the form of verbal criticism of individual Nazi policies such as the murder of handicapped and disabled Germans that began in 1939. To characterize the German population as willing supporters of the Nazi regime is inaccurate. The majority of the Germans turned neither into committed Nazis nor heroic resistance fighters, but showed, as Klaus-Michael Mallman and Gerhard Paul adequately expressed it in *Herrschaft und Alltag* (1991), a *loyale Widerwilligkeit* (loyal unwillingness). Coercion, thereby, played an important role in keeping dissent at a low level and preventing it from assuming collective forms. Yet, the Gestapo, one instrument of coercion, never assumed the all-encompassing nature that earlier studies attributed to this force.

The German society of the Weimar period was a class society marked by sociopolitical tensions that intensified during the political and

economic crisis of the early 1930s. The Nazis confronted these developments with the propagandistic image of a classless and harmonic *Volks-gemeinschaft* (national community). It became the central concept of the Nazi State's social policies. The *Volksgenossen* (national comrades) were not only seen as united in their service for the new Germany and the Führer, Adolf Hitler, but also shared the chimeric construct of a common racial belonging. The National Socialists turned groups of German citizens whom they deemed to be of another race into *Volksfeinden* (enemies of the people). In the prewar years, the Nazis ostracized and systematically excluded these people, especially the German Jews, from the country's political, social, cultural, and economic life.

In the enforcement of racial and social policies, the Gestapo emerged as a feared—and to some extent effective—instrument. It interacted with the criminal police, the Nazi Party, the *Schutzstaffel* (SS, Protection Squad), and the *Sicherheitsdienst der SS* (SD, Security Service of the SS). The mechanism of the *Schutzhaft* (protective custody), introduced by emergency decree in February 1933, enabled the police to arrest people arbitrarily and imprison them without trial. The attempts by the mostly conservative ministerial bureaucracy and judiciary to regain full control over the criminal prosecution came to an end with the promulgation of the third Gestapo law of 10 February 1936. This law secured the status of the Secret State Police as an autonomous organization. The restructuring of the police later in the same year unified the Gestapo forces of the individual states under the leadership of Reinhard Heydrich, thereby increasing their efficiency. According to one of the Gestapo's chief organizers, Werner Best, the agency, along with the SS, was to become part of a *Staatsschutzkorps* (State Protection Corps). In sole loyalty to Hitler, it had to fight against the "internal enemies" of the Nazi State. In Best's own words, the Gestapo formed "an institution which carefully supervises the state of health of the German body politic, discerns every symptom in time, and diagnoses the destructive germs . . . and eliminates them with the suitable means."

Yet, the "internal enemy" was neither clearly defined nor did it remain static. In the mid 1930s, Gestapo and SS strategists added constructs such as "asocial," *Arbeitsscheuer* (work-shy), and "vagabond" to the existing categories of "Bolshevik," "Jew," and "political priest." Thus, the status of *Volksfiende* was not limited to people with a supposedly different racial make-up, but included those who differed socially and politically from the vague "norms" of the Nazi State. Consequently, the line between "national comrade" and "enemy of the

people" was often thin. A denunciation by a spy or—more likely—by a fellow *Volksgenossen* could be enough to cross that line. For many, the prospect of a subsequent confinement in a concentration camp for the purpose of "re-education" was enough of an incentive not to engage in acts of dissent, but instead conform and participate in the organizations and rituals of the Nazi State.

In the eyes of most Germans, the Gestapo emerged as an all-pervasive and omnipresent institution. Even informants of the *Sopade*, the exiled executive of the German Social Democratic Party, who were usually keen to record any form of voiced disagreement with the Nazis, talked about an army of disguised Gestapo agents. These agents tried to provoke political discussions in order to arrest critics of the regime. The inhabitants of the North German town of Northeim, for instance, according to William Sheridan Allen in *The Nazi Seizure of Power: The Experience of a Single German Town, 1930–1935* (1965) had "the general feeling . . . that the Gestapo was everywhere." Yet, like the chimeric Nazi concepts of the enemy, popular perceptions often proved to be exaggerated. The Gestapo had a single "official" informant in Northeim, while many villages and towns lacked these spies altogether. As recent case studies of Lower Franconia and the Saarland demonstrate, the main office of the Gestapo in Berlin did anything but supervise an extensive network of agents and informants. The sense of being spied on, however, in combination with public demonstrations of arbitrary violence, the deportations of people to concentration camps, and the dissemination of stories about concentration-camp atrocities, sufficiently created autopolicing and a largely "disciplined society."

It would be misleading to treat the German population as a coherent whole. The National Socialists failed to fully create the "national community" and the "racially pure" and socially disciplined "new German." Class barriers and social inequalities persisted. While many people across the social divide were loyal to elements of Nazism, especially mythical depictions of Hitler as a "bulwark" against Bolshevism and the architect of the "economic miracle," they often engaged in acts of dissent and were critical of the Nazi functionaries. Germans retained attitudes and behaviors rooted in their diverse socio-economic cultures that did not completely cease to exist in spite of the changes brought about by Nazi social policies.

In the early months after Hitler's nomination as chancellor on 30 January 1933, members of the working class who belonged to the Social Democratic or Communist Party suffered the brutal onslaught of the Nazi Party and its paramilitary *Sturm Abteilung* (SA, Storm Troopers).



## THE TRAGEDY

BUCHENWALD, April 16, 1945—German civilians—1200 of them—were brought from the neighboring city of Weimar today to see for themselves the horror, brutality, and human indecency perpetrated against their “neighbors” at the infamous Buchenwald concentration camp. They saw sights that brought tears to their eyes, and scores of them, including German nurses, just fainted away.

They saw more than 20,000 nondescript prisoners, many of them barely living, who were all that remained of the normal complement of 80,000. . . .

One of the first things that the German civilian visitors saw as they passed through the gates and into the interior of the camp was a display of “parchment.” This consisted of large pieces of human flesh on which were elaborate tattooed markings. . . .

In addition to the “parchments” were two large table lamps, with parchment shades also made of human flesh.

The German people saw all this today, and they wept. Those who didn’t weep were ashamed. They said they didn’t know about it, and maybe they didn’t, because the camp was restricted to Army personnel, but there it was right at their back doors for eight years.

The visitors stood in lines, one group at a time passing by the table on which the exhibits were displayed. A German-speaking American sergeant explained from an adjacent jeep what they were witnessing, while all around them were thousands of liberated “slaves” just looking on. . . .

The German visitors were to see them, too—and much more—but at the moment they were merely seeing “Exhibit A” and fainting.

Some Germans were skeptical at first, as if this show had been staged for their benefit, but they were soon convinced. Even as they had milled along from one place to another, their own countrymen, who had been prisoners there, told them the story. Men went white and women turned away. It was too much for them.

These persons, who had been fed on Nazi propaganda since 1933, were beginning to see the light. They were seeing with their own eyes what no quantity of American propaganda could convince them of. Here was what their own government had perpetrated.

*Source: New York Times, 18 April 1945.*

The emergency decrees of February 1933 made sure that the law no longer protected these groups. The Nazis crushed the workers’ movement and destroyed their organizations and formal social networks in housing estates. Even when the arbitrary outburst of terror came to a temporary end by mid 1934, the Gestapo continued the terror on a more subtle level, targeting many workers as potential supporters of the arguably weak communist and socialist resistance movement.

It cannot be denied that previously unorganized workers supported elements of the Nazi message and enjoyed the social services and jobs eventually made available in the growing armament industry. Even former members of the workers’ movement fell prey to the propaganda of the “national community.” Yet, both groups were subjected to the daily pressure to conform and became increasingly suspicious even of their

neighbors and friends. Informal elements of the once-organized leftist workers’ culture, nonetheless, survived and presented a space for dissent and limited collective action. As a whole, to argue that workers became willing supporters of Nazism would be misleading.

The National Socialists flattered the German peasantry with their propaganda of a return to *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) as the key foundation of the new Germany. Nonetheless, the *Kirchenkampf* (Church Struggle) waged by the Nazis alienated many people in the rural areas, for example, of Catholic Bavaria, whose religious affiliation formed an important part of their identities. Moreover, the material conditions of most peasants did not improve significantly. On the contrary, the Four Year Plan of 1936, with its emphasis on industrial production, prompted a labor crisis in the agricultural sector and posed a serious threat to many peas-

ants. The coercive economic and social policies of the Nazis mostly increased rural discontent. Manifestations of dissent such as verbal attacks on the Party's *Ortsbauernführer* (Local Peasant Leader), however, did nothing to threaten Nazi rule. Yet, they demonstrate the misperception of the German peasant population as willing supporters of Nazism.

Historiography on the social formation and electorate of the Nazi Party rightly stresses its broad, lower-middle-class following, while still acknowledging its status as a *Volkspartei* (people's party) based on the significant electoral support for the Nazis across social divides. The traditional anti-Marxism of upper and lower middle classes led many of their members to greet the Nazi terror against communists and socialists with enthusiasm. Moreover, the end of the economic slump in the late 1930s removed most of the middle class's anxieties about socio-economic displacement.

Yet, middle-class support for Nazism was not unanimous and those with a strong grounding in a Catholic social milieu, for instance, did not comply with all elements of the emerging Nazi order. The middle class shared the perception of all-encompassing surveillance by the Gestapo that translated into an increasing pressure to conform. This development prevented many from showing dissent, when the regime experienced its various crises such as the 1938 conflict over the Sudetenland that almost led to war. Even among the German middle class, an unlimited willingness to go along with Nazism did not exist, as their attitudes toward the persecution of the Jews—as a last example—amply demonstrates. While many supported the “legal” measures against the German Jews, middle-class support began to cease once the anti-Jewish policies escalated, as during *Kristallnacht* (Night of Broken Glass) in November 1938. Their perception of the Nazi Party and the Gestapo as brutally enforcing the regime's racial policies, coupled with their traditional anti-Semitism, however, did not lead any discernible number of middle-class Germans to protest against these crimes. Their attitude was, as Ian Kershaw correctly asserts in *The “Hitler Myth”* (1987), “largely indifferent,” but they did not willingly support Nazi violence against the German Jews or engender the increased radicalization of the regime's racial policies, as Nazi propaganda trumpeted.

For the German elites, the National Socialists largely represented a group of social climbers without any sociopolitical credentials, especially the riff-raff in the proletarian SA, which generated distaste and feelings of social superiority. A segment of the conservative political elite around Franz von Papen, nonetheless, significantly

helped Hitler, the failed artist and lance corporal of World War I, to become chancellor. Their plan to use the Hitler movement and their large following as a way to regain popular support and legitimization failed. As the Nazi dictatorship took shape in the course of the 1930s, the old power elites were increasingly turned into functional elites. Moreover, the appeal of Nazi anti-Bolshevism and national chauvinism could not outweigh upper-class anxieties over the egalitarian element of the “national community,” the self-destructive course of Nazi Germany, and its looming defeat after 1943.

Church leadership—Catholic more than Protestant—resented the staunch anti-Christian policies of Alfred Rosenberg and other “little Hitlers.” Upper clergy such as Bishop Clemens August Count von Galen heavily criticized the Nazis for their mass murder of mentally ill Germans at the beginning of the war (while no one spoke out against the mass murder of the Jews). The Nazis also failed to make inroads into some segments of the upper-class milieu. Still, the majority fell prey to the “Hitler myth,” perceiving the Nazi leader as the trustful protector of traditions and Christianity. Once deprived of the power they had wished to secure, the upper classes were increasingly subjected to similar pressures to conform in the face of real or imagined police terror. Like other social groups, they had not turned into ready and willing supporters of the Nazi State.

During the war years, especially after the German military defeat at Stalingrad in 1942–1943, the terror and sociopolitical pressure in Nazi Germany intensified once more. The Nazi Party and Gestapo's growing awareness of the limits of their power did not prevent, but rather contributed to an increased brutality and steep rise in death penalties for “enemies of the people.” In the light of area bombardments and ever-growing casualty lists, the largely coerced support by the German people began to vanish. The situation reports of the SD increasingly provided the Nazi leadership with evidence of popular dissent. Wives, for example, complained about the hardship of the war, called for its end and the return of their husbands. Ordinary workers challenged low-ranking party members, asking them “to quit.” The last months of the war also witnessed an increase in collective acts of dissent. Many women and old people refused to evacuate urban areas on the Western Front designated for fighting, and Bavarian miners did not obey orders to destroy their machinery. The stepped-up terror along with a popular condemnation of resistance as “anti-German,” however, prevented the emergence of widespread activities against the Nazi regime.

There can be no doubt that the vast majority of Germans went along with the Nazis and even shared elements of their ideology and propagated political goals. Yet, it is a distortion to characterize them as willing supporters. Their compliance came increasingly to rest on sociopolitical pressure to conform to the Nazi dictatorship's vague standards and manifestations of police terror. Neither of these stopped acts of dissent. The widespread "loyal unwillingness" did not pose a threat to Nazism, but worked hand in hand with its destructive policies and practices.

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# NUREMBERG

## Should the Nuremberg Trials have been held to establish the guilt of Nazi war criminals and sentence them?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the enormity of Nazi crimes demanded a public trial where those responsible were formally accused and their guilt established.

**Viewpoint:** No, the Nuremberg Trials were the victor's justice, complete with improper judicial proceedings, inadequate opportunities for defense, and no appeals process.

The Nuremberg Trials (1945–1946) originated with the repeated warnings by Franklin D. Roosevelt, Winston Churchill, and Joseph Stalin that condign retribution would be exacted for the Nazis' multiple crimes. Such proposals as the deindustrialization of Germany or the summary execution of its leaders gradually gave way in Britain and the United States to the concept that formal trials should be held, in which the accused would have an opportunity to defend themselves and the evidence of their guilt would be made public.

While no exact precedent for such procedures existed in international law, court trials offered the best prospects for avoiding future accusations that the victors had merely exercised arbitrary power against representatives of a defeated enemy. The trials were also expected to establish legal and procedural precedents. Hard cases may make bad law, but the prudent selection of major defendants seemed likely to demonstrate such overwhelming proofs of criminal behavior that guilty verdicts would convey a sense of justice having been served despite some procedural irregularities.

France and the U.S.S.R., each for its own reasons, agreed to participate in a process they considered irrelevant. From a legal perspective, the major reservations involved the issue of *ex post facto* law—particularly relative to charges of conspiring to wage aggressive war. Procedurally, the refusal to admit a *tu quoque* defense made it impossible to address Allied behavior, especially the conduct of the U.S.S.R. Neither of these problems, however, were central to the proceedings that demonstrated beyond any doubt that the Third Reich and its leaders had in fact committed, systematically and as a matter of policy, and by any definition, war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Nuremberg Trials were imperfect and might have been improved—for example, by including judges from other countries, they nevertheless represented a successful combination of principle and pragmatism, applied at a time when the world stood badly in need of both.





**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the enormity of Nazi crimes demanded a public trial where those responsible were formally accused and their guilt established.**

Given the horrors of Auschwitz, Dachau, and many other death camps, and the general unleashing of six years of madness that killed tens of millions of people and threatened the very existence of civilization, how could there have been any other response by the Allies to the Germans than the trials at Nuremberg? The arguments that have emerged long after the war, that Nuremberg was somehow simply a show trial, a “victor’s justice,” ring hollow when compared to the enormity of the crimes committed against humanity. There was, however, a profound difference between the trials at Nuremberg and the simple dealing out of a victor’s justice, or what is far more common, a victor’s revenge.

Throughout history it has been common practice to place the heads of the losers of a war on pikes, parade them through the streets in triumph, and then publicly display them as trophies. There have been times when the victims of such justice deserved the treatment, although more often than not heads were removed simply because the victim was on the losing side. Western European societies have attempted in the last three centuries to post facto establish limits to this carnage. Thus has evolved the concept of the “rules of war”: prisoners are to be treated decently; captured wounded are to receive medical attention; civilians are to be treated as non-combatants, unless they violate the “rules” and take up arms while not wearing a uniform; spies may be executed; and it is generally forbidden to target a particular individual for death. What evolved from the old customs of kings and nobility was a respect for the life and power of their opponents, even while at war, which has been translated in the twentieth century as a rule that considers it “unfair” to send assassins with the clear and stated intent of killing one particular leader. Therefore, the assassination of *Schutzstaffeln* (SS) official Reinhard Heydrich, which was supported by British Special Operations, was openly denounced by the Nazis as a violation of the rules of war.

This “respect” was supposed to extend beyond the ending of a war as well. This sentiment seems to be a paradox, given the fact that it is indeed the leaders who trigger wars but rarely suffer the direct results on the battlefield or in the bombed-out cities. Thus, though the Allies in 1919 imposed a host of dire terms on fallen Germany and Austria, no serious effort was ever

made to bring the “bloody Kaiser” or the survivors of the Hapsburg dynasty to trial. World War II must stand as an exception.

A full cataloging of the Nazis’ “Crimes Against Humanity” would take up more space than this entire text, but a brief review is in order. A war of aggression was launched without provocation by the Germans against the sovereign nation of Poland (September 1939). From that initial act a general conflagration exploded that consumed all of Europe, parts of the Middle East, and North Africa. In addition, a pogrom using, as Winston Churchill put it, “a dark and perverted science,” was initiated that stripped almost all citizens of the conquered nations of their most basic human rights and condemned, as well, the Jewish and Gypsy populations to certain death. Concerning the Slavic people, a policy was established to depopulate those conquered countries through a calculated denial of food and medical treatment.

By the end of the second year of World War II a deliberate and scientific approach was taken to the mass extermination of entire races. This massacre was cold-bloodedly calculated and designed not just to exterminate, but also to wring the last possible ounce of economic gain from the victims before finally consigning them to the ovens. Thus were clothes, shoes, eye glasses, human hair, and even teeth “harvested” for use by the executioners.

Millions of innocent civilians were deported from their homelands on a level not seen since the depredations of Genghis Khan (ca. 1162–1227) and Tamerlane (1336–1405). Used as slave labor in the Nazi war machine, these workers were treated with cruel calculation as to the precise number of calories of food needed to extract the maximum amount of work until they died from exhaustion. With the full knowledge and cooperation of the German Military High Command, “special orders” were issued to the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) prior to the invasion of the Soviet Union (June 1941), designating certain sectors of the general population, and the Soviet military, for “special treatment.” Orders were conveyed as well discouraging troops from taking prisoners if it in any way might impede their advance, or to offer treatment to wounded prisoners. These orders were in direct violation to the generally accepted principles of war and, as well, the sacred oaths taken by German officers. It was, in short, the open sanctioning of murder.

It is impossible to accept the argument that those in the German Army’s high command, especially on the Eastern Front, were not aware of the “Final Solution.” Although secondary evidence abounded, primary evidence was available for any who had the moral character to look. In



**German defendants, seated in guarded boxed area, at the Nuremberg Trials, 1946**

*(National Archives, Washington, D.C.)*

addition, SS Special Operations Units openly worked within territory under the direct control of the army. Massacres were a daily occurrence, witnessed by Wehrmacht troops and routinely reported by outraged junior officers to their superiors.

These systematically organized atrocities demanded a response, and though limited in scope, Nuremberg was that response. If it was a show trial, the show aspect was necessary to document and display a lesson to all humanity that national leaders must ultimately answer to a higher law than that of their own nation. It raised, as well, one of the great arguments of the twentieth century—the validity of the response, often given in this age of bureaucracy, that one was “only following orders.” When must one repudiate their obligation to their employer, leader, and nation once orders become so repugnant that they should no longer be followed? When is simply following orders no longer an excuse that one can hide behind? When is a line crossed that requires each and every person to demonstrate the personal strength to refuse and if need be resist, no matter what the risk? If Nuremberg did nothing else, it thrust these

questions into the forefront and made people think about the full moral implications of their actions.

It should be noted that one argument presented in the defense of German war criminals, that if they did not follow orders they would have been executed or punished, has been proven false. Recent studies, documenting the recruitment of workers for the first activity of the Holocaust, the annihilation of the physically disabled and mentally retarded in Germany, clearly showed that of the hundreds who were recruited to do the killing, only a handful objected when they found out the full extent of their assignment. Those who objected were allowed to withdraw from this “service” and reassigned elsewhere without punishment.

Recruits into the SS were made aware of the extent of what was expected of them and they too were given the option to withdraw with reassignment to regular army units. Few took that option. The vast majority of SS members appointed to the killing camps accepted their assignments without complaint, many of them agreeing with the party line that they were performing a sacred duty. It is frightful to

contemplate how such men, who but a few short years before worked in businesses, taught in schools or were students, and who attended church, could so easily be converted into satanic-like killers. They were no different than normal men prior to their conversion, and that is perhaps the most frightening fact of all.

There is clear evidence of a perverse concern among German officials regarding the health and morals of the death-camp operators. Their reassignment was possible if severe mental stress was noted. It must be remembered that when it came to the actual engineering design of the camps, and especially the assembly-line process of killing, special consideration was given to distancing Germans from the agonies of the condemned so that they would not be psychologically injured. In all things related to the Holocaust, the Nazis tried to be scientific, even when it came to the mental health of the Germans assigned to the killing.

What is terrifying to contemplate is the obvious fact that so few objected, or even bothered to choose a “sin of omission” by asking to be excused from the killing process, let alone raise a voice in protest. If there was a need for Nuremberg, here alone was another reason: to ask how a people, who supposedly represented the heights of culture, the arts, and civilization could so easily become accomplices to genocide.

Officers of higher rank in the German Army throughout the war regularly resigned from the service or “retired” for health reasons if they objected too strenuously to military plans issued from above. Almost nowhere is there evidence of a concerted effort on the part of the Wehrmacht to voice a protest against the horrors being committed on the battlefields of Russia and the Balkans, or in the murder camps behind the lines. Several officers did attempt to organize such efforts, but to no avail. Generals such as Fritz Erich von Manstein and Heinz Guderian were informed by staffers of the truth regarding the Nazi killing frenzy and nearly all of them turned a blind eye to the atrocities.

A final argument against Nuremberg was that war crimes were committed on both sides. This argument rings hollow as well. The logic says that if one crime, or possible crime, is not pursued, then all crimes must be ignored. There were indeed war crimes committed by the Allied side. The Soviet Union was a state built upon a system of crimes against humanity, but the ability of the Western Allies to control that behavior was impossible in 1945. Churchill was right in his logic that he would ally with the devil if need be to destroy an equal devil: Adolf Hitler. Better one demon in the world than two

who might well have been united against the remainder of humanity.

Regarding Allied faults in World War II, nowhere do they match the cruel calculation and savage extent of the Nazis. Historian Stephen E. Ambrose is absolutely correct in his assertion that unique throughout the world was the fact that when American or British Commonwealth troops entered a village or town, whether it was Allied, neutral, or enemy, the citizens there knew they were safe and would have compassion and help. The arrival of any other army usually meant pillage, terror, rape, and murder.

Nuremberg as well forced even the victors who imposed it to consider their own skeletons in the closet. Justifiable questions have indeed been raised, asking if the firebombing of Dresden and the atomic bomb attack on Hiroshima might not be war crimes. Whether these are comparable to the Holocaust is not the point of this essay. What was important was that at least the victors in World War II had the moral strength to ask such questions of themselves. Consider the alternative had the Nazis won: Who would have stood trial then and what questions would be asked today?

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**Viewpoint:  
No, the Nuremberg Trials were the victor's justice, complete with improper judicial proceedings, inadequate opportunities for defense, and no appeals process.**

When one speaks of the “Nuremberg trial,” one means the Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal (IMT) at Nuremberg from November 1945 through September 1946. Here were tried twenty-two top German officials and six German organizations on four separate criminal counts. The tribunal found three of the organizations criminal and convicted nineteen of the individuals, twelve of whom, including the infamous Hermann Göring, received the death penalty. Subsequent trials of thousands of Germans, under the same legal bases as the Nuremberg Trials, were conducted by individual Allied tribunals in Germany. More trials took place in France, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Czechoslovakia, the U.S.S.R., and elsewhere. The IMT trial, though, started the judicial process by which

Nazism was confronted, if not by the Germans, then certainly in part for the Germans.

Therein lay the rub, for the aim of the Nuremberg Trial involved only partly retribution for the guilty and justice for the victims. The rest lay in setting international precedent for conduct in war, while establishing a new political tone within Germany. Justice had to be seen as truly just, not only by those administering the trials, but also by those for whom the trials were to serve as the ultimate example. Yet, the fact that many people, particularly in Germany, would view the trial as victor's justice was partly the result of the trial's own character. Moreover, because the IMT was the most publicized post-war trial, and the only one carried out under international auspices while providing the legal precedent for the remainder, its flaws might have indelibly colored the judicial processes that tried later defendants.

Much of the problem involved legalities, which seem hair-splitting to historians, but that remain essential if one is to evaluate any legal proceeding. Winston Churchill's wartime suggestion that the Allies capture the top Nazis and quickly shoot them was a lazy argument that sought to avoid a repeat of the embarrassing Leipzig trials of 1921, which ostensibly addressed German atrocities from World War I. In Leipzig, with retribution left to a biased German court, justice was not served. Churchill, however, had also touched on the inherent problem of legal proceedings. If they were to be of value, then prosecutors and judges had to color strictly within the legally prescribed lines. As it was, the lines as they existed in 1945 only covered wartime acts committed against the enemy. The Hague Conventions of 1907 and the Geneva Convention of 1929 set clear, legal boundaries for the wartime mistreatment of enemy civilians, crews at sea, and prisoners of war. With Nuremberg the aim was to be much broader—a blanket legal condemnation of the Nazi state for all acts conducted, even before the war. This aim was a tall order, particularly given the desire that justice be swift and the concomitant need to invent a legal tradition where none existed.

The rules for the Nuremberg Trial were set after much inter-Allied discussion by the so-called London Charter of 8 August 1945. The charter established the rules and procedures of the IMT, itself an entirely new body, as well as the law under which the defendants would be tried. Part of the law included traditional war crimes as defined by The Hague and Geneva Conventions, but the remainder was entirely new. The concept of Crimes against Peace made the launching of aggressive war a criminal offense. That of Crimes against Humanity

allowed the prosecution of state officials for offenses against political, racial, or religious communities, even in peacetime, both within its own borders or those of its allies. The concept of conspiracy to commit the above acts meant that the planning and preparation—as well as the acts themselves—were now crimes too.

The legal problems were apparent to all involved. There had never been a serious international legal discussion concerning these new concepts. That of conspiracy, the rubric under which most Nazi acts were to fall, was not even a part of the continental European legal tradition, and historians remain divided over the existence of a bona fide conspiracy. The trial of entire organizations, in which millions could have been labeled as criminally liable-by-association, moreover, was shaky in the legal sense. The innovations had come from American legal theorists, but even American officials were divided over the promulgation of such sweeping new precedent. The U.S. Chief Prosecutor at Nuremberg, Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, argued that given the enormity of Nazi crimes, international law could and would adapt after the fact. If the law was unprecedented, then it was simply because Nazi acts were too. Other individuals, such as Robert Davies, the U.S. ambassador to the U.S.S.R., were less sure. It would be more convincing, argued Davies, to prosecute German criminals on the basis of existing Hague and Geneva law. New laws could then be promulgated after the trials that the world could then apply to future atrocities and aggression. To establish new legal precedents, Davies warned, would open the Allies to the charge of imposing ex post facto law. In the long run Davies was right, but for the moment, his was the voice in the wilderness.

Thus, while there is much to admire about the Nuremberg Trials, there remains much to criticize. The judges appointed to serve at Nuremberg had to navigate the uncharted legal waters of the London Charter with only the prosecutors to guide them in the legal discussions that took place before and during the trial. Yet, the leading prosecutors, such as Jackson and Soviet Major General Iola T. Nikitschenko, had been the major force in drafting the London Charter. Nikitschenko, to complicate matters, became the lead Soviet judge once the trial began. Though the Western judges managed to resist the most extreme prosecution arguments (they limited the conspiracy charge to the years following 1937 and limited individual liability for membership in organizations deemed criminal), it is disturbing that the prosecution enjoyed this degree of legal advantage.

The position of the German defense attorneys was unenviable for other reasons as well.



## JUDGMENT AT NUREMBERG

*The U.S. Chief Counsel to the Nuremberg trials, Robert H. Jackson, made his final argument before the International Military Tribunal on 26 July 1946. A portion of his remarks on some of the defendants is presented below.*

The large and varied role of Göring was half militaristic and half gangster. He stuck a pudgy finger in every pie. He used his SA muscle-men to help bring the gang into power. In order to entrench that power he contrived to have the Reichstag burned, established the Gestapo, and created the concentration camps. He was equally adept at massacring opponents and framing scandals to get rid of stubborn generals. He built up the Luftwaffe and hurled it at his defenseless neighbors. He was among the foremost in harrying the Jews out of the land. . . . He was, next to Hitler, the man who tied the activities of all the defendants together in a common effort. . . . The zealot Hess, before succumbing to wanderlust, was the engineer tending the party machinery, passing orders and propaganda down to the Leadership Corps, supervising every aspect of party activities, and maintaining the organization as a loyal and ready instrument of power. When apprehensions abroad threatened the success of the Nazi scheme for conquest, it was the duplicitous Ribbentrop, the salesman of deception, who was detailed to pour wine on the troubled waters of suspicion by preaching the gospel of limited and peaceful intentions. Keitel, weak and willing tool, delivered the armed forces, the instrument of aggression, over to the party and directed them in executing its felonious designs. . . . Kaltenbrunner, the grand inquisitor, took up the bloody mantle of Heydrich to stifle opposition and terrorize compliance, and buttressed the power of National Socialism on a foundation of guiltless corpses. It was Rosenberg, the intellectual high priest of the "master race," who provided the doctrine of hatred which gave

the impetus for the annihilation of Jewry, and put his infidel theories into practice against the eastern occupied territories. His woolly philosophy also added boredom to the long list of Nazi atrocities. The fanatical Frank, who solidified Nazi control by establishing the new order of authority without law, so that the will of the party was the only test of legality, proceeded to export his lawlessness to Poland, which he governed with the lash of Caesar and whose population he reduced to sorrowing remnants. . . . Streicher, the venomous vulgarian, manufactured and distributed obscene racial libels which incited the populace to accept and assist the progressively savage operations of "race purification." As Minister of Economics Funk accelerated the pace of rearmament, and as Reichsbank president banked for the SS the gold teeth fillings of concentration-camp victims—probably the most ghoulish collateral in banking history. . . . Von Schirach, poisoner of a generation, initiated the German youth in Nazi doctrine, trained them in legions for service in the SS and Wehrmacht, and delivered them up to the party as fanatical, unquestioning executors of its will. . . . Sauckel, the greatest and cruelest slaver since the Pharaohs of Egypt, produced desperately needed manpower by driving foreign peoples into the land of bondage on a scale unknown even in the ancient days of tyranny in the kingdom of the Nile. . . . Speer, as Minister of Armaments and War production, joined in planning and executing the program to draagoon prisoners of war and foreign workers into German war industries, which waxed in output and waned in starvation.

*Source: Robert H. Jackson, "The Crimes of the Nazi Regime," Vital Speeches of the Day, 12 (15 September 1945), pp. 711–712.*

They found themselves defending discredited, and often uncooperative, individuals against unprecedented charges in a completely unfamiliar legal system that depended on foreign Anglo-American practices, such as the adversarial cross-examination of witnesses. The documentary evidence on which the trial hinged was also skewed toward the prosecution's advantage. Though prosecutors had had access to captured German files for months, the defense did not

obtain the same documentation until shortly before the trial commenced. Allied files that might have aided the defense cases by allowing tu quoque arguments were not made available. Thus, arguments that the Soviets had themselves engaged in conspiracy and crimes against peace in their invasions of Poland and Finland in 1939, as well as committed obvious war crimes in the Katyn forest (May 1940) by murdering thousands of Polish officers, or that the British had

engaged in the legal definition of conspiracy by planning an invasion of Norway before the Germans had launched its attack, were made difficult by the withholding of documents or refusal—in the case of the secret protocol to the Nazi-Soviet Pact (August 1939)—to admit such documents properly into evidence.

Most serious, however, was the absence of any sort of appeals process. Judgments at Nuremberg, including death sentences, were final as per the London Charter. This issue made the Americans and British, whose legal systems rested on the appellate process, seem more vengeful than necessary, especially since the executions came but two weeks after the verdicts. The lack of appeal, combined with speedy execution, was the characteristic most salient of Soviet show trials of the 1930s and also those trials that the Soviets conducted against German officers in Smolensk, Leningrad, and elsewhere in December 1945. This flaw was especially evident in the Nuremberg case against Julius Streicher, the vile anti-Semitic editor of *Der Stürmer*, who represented hateful speech in its purest form, but was no high policymaker. His guilt of crimes against humanity was ultimately based on his newspaper's opinions, and his death sentence was voted with disturbing casualness, even by American judge Francis Biddle. Ironically, one of the major forces behind the finality of the Nuremberg judgments was Jackson himself, a member of the highest American appeals bench.

Whether the correction of all these legal problems would have changed the final outcome is not the point. Neither is it salient for this discussion that the guilty may richly have deserved their fates. In a public trial aimed at the establishment of new precedents, perception is everything. The wave of criticism that washed over the trial from American, British, French, and German jurists alike damaged the image of the trial, and could have been avoided.

Beyond the legal issues lay symbolic ones, which are perhaps even more important given what is known about the long-term representative effects of great trials in history. Given the failure of the earlier Leipzig trials, the angry mood of the Grand Alliance in 1945, and the absence of a permanent international criminal court, it is hard to imagine alternatives to the IMT. Still, it is difficult to argue that the Nuremberg Trial was not an exercise in victor's justice when the tribunal was comprised solely of the victors. Most serious here was the aforementioned overweening presence of the Soviets. It is true that the judges voted on verdicts and punishments and that often Nikitschenko was outvoted three to one. On the other hand, the mere presence of Nikitschenko, a major figure in the Soviet purge trials of the 1930s, smacked of

hypocrisy, and the willingness of Western judges and prosecutors to cooperate with him on several issues only made matters worse. A case in point was the inclusion in the formal indictment of Joseph Stalin's political argument that German, and not Soviet units, had murdered thousands of Polish officers and then buried them in mass graves at Katyn. Another was the conscious omission of the Nazi-Soviet Pact from discussion in the final judgment—a document that demonstrated Stalin's own collusion with the regime on trial. That the Allied prosecutors, conscious of the place of Nuremberg in history, cooperated in these steps was unfortunate, even given the desire to present a united front against Nazism.

The use of capital punishment in twelve cases did not further Allied aims either. Satisfying though it may have been, the killing of other human beings allowed the moral high ground to slip further from the cause of postwar justice. The use of hanging rather than the more honorable alternative of shooting, moreover, intoned to the class-conscious Germans that the condemned—among whom were two generals—were nothing more than common criminals. This view may well have been true, especially since these generals (Wilhelm Keitel and Alfred Jodl) relayed overt orders to murder civilians and prisoners. The fact that the tribunal debated the relative merits of hanging and shooting, however, and then decided on the former, largely at the Soviet insistence, reflects the desire to send a political rather than a judicial message. An anecdotal reference in the 1990s by a German innkeeper to Nuremberg's Palace of Justice as not being an historic landmark, but as “the place where they hanged our generals,” makes this problem clear. The awkward association of the Western Allies with the Soviets in the business of postwar justice would continue until 1987 in the symbolic form of Spandau prison. Located in the British sector of Berlin, this forbidding structure was where the seven men given prison sentences by the IMT served out their especially harsh terms. The fact that some of them were old, sick, and in the case of Rudolf Hess, mentally incompetent, made the Allies subject to criticism on human-rights grounds by various groups, including the American Civil Liberties Union. The Allies' own discomfort with this arrangement was always manifest.

The legal and symbolic flaws of the Nuremberg Trial colored subsequent judicial proceedings by the Allies. These courts, like the IMT, used the London Charter as their guide and adjudicated many of their cases quickly, sometimes condemning individuals on evidence that Allied officials later admitted would not have withstood appeal in their own countries. Yet, as with the Nuremberg Trial, there were no provi-

sions for appeal. It did not matter, then, that the hundreds of Germans sentenced to Allied military prisons in western Germany by U.S., British, and French military courts lived in conditions far better than those at Spandau. It did not even matter that the Allied governments commuted many of the death sentences that their courts had prescribed and revised prison sentences downward, while executing only the most heinous criminals. Postwar trials, if they had ever had a chance to be seen objectively, were tainted by the perception that judicial procedures were victor's justice, carried out under *ex post facto* law in the land of the defeated. Even the hanging of Otto Ohlendorf, who was convicted by the American Military Tribunal in the "Einsatzgruppen Case" for his direct role in the murder of millions, met with grassroots German protest. It has been argued with great effect that the emptying of U.S., British, and French military prisons in West Germany in the 1950s to assuage German official and public opinion represents a disappointing failure by the German public to master its own past. It may also be seen as an admission by the Allies that they had failed to force the Germans to do so through judicial means.

Nothing brings these issues into focus more than the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda, which have borrowed from Nuremberg precedent, while consciously attempting to avoid the mistakes. These tribunals are in neutral sites (The Hague and Arusha, Tanzania); the judges and prosecutors are from non-involved states; an appeals process is included in the form of a special-appeals chamber; death sentences are prohibited; imprisonment is carried out in volunteer states under humane conditions; indictments are based on existing legal tradition; cases are built slowly and methodically; and the defense is given full access

to evidence and time to build its case. Yet, convictions have still occurred. All of these procedures represent a conscious admission that the Nuremberg Trial, while establishing the precedent of accountability, leaned too far in the direction of victor's justice. Whether Serb or Hutu transgressors will argue five decades later that their courts dispensed victor's justice remains to be seen, but at the very least, these tribunals acknowledge their debt to Nuremberg while avoiding earlier flaws of that trial.

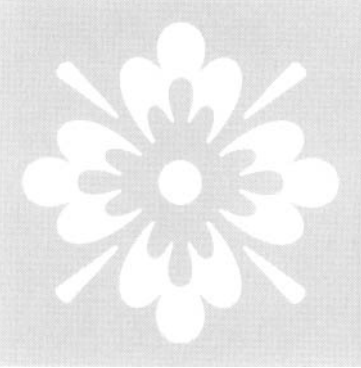
—NORMAN J. W. GODA, OHIO UNIVERSITY

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# OPERATION BARBAROSSA

## Was it prudent for Germany to invade the Soviet Union in 1941?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, Germany invaded the Soviet Union when it did because the Soviet military leadership had been gutted; the Red Army was stunned by its losses in Finland; the Wehrmacht was at its zenith; and Joseph Stalin continued to believe in the Russo-German non-aggression pact of 1939.

**Viewpoint:** No, Adolf Hitler should have sent more forces to North Africa in 1941 and invaded the Middle East, providing his army with much-needed oil before attacking the Soviet Union.

Russia proved for Adolf Hitler what Spain was for Napoleon Bonaparte between 1808 and 1813—a running sore that drained resources and gave nothing back. Whether Operation Barbarossa was the legitimate strategic option or an ideologically motivated exercise in genocide, the question remains whether Hitler would have been better advised to explore a Middle Eastern option. Hitler's trans-Atlantic ambitions depended on eventually acquiring bases on the North African coast. If Britain could not be directly invaded, then perhaps cutting its Mediterranean “lifeline” might bring the island empire to reason. More concretely, given what field marshal Erwin Rommel achieved in North Africa with Germany's military leftovers, the consequences of adding even a half dozen mobile divisions to his order of battle continues to engage war gamers and counterfactualists.

Analyzed at closer range, the Mediterranean scenario had significant drawbacks as well as inviting possibilities. Diplomatically, it involved balancing the claims and ambitions of Italy, Spain, and Vichy France—a task that proved well beyond the capacities of the Führer and his officials. Spain refused to participate without guaranteed compensation from France's colonial empire—on which Benito Mussolini also had designs. France was determined to maintain its position in North Africa. The resulting imbroglios were never resolved—only put on the back burner when Hitler turned toward Russia.

In specific military terms, committing significantly larger German forces to the Mediterranean in 1940–1941 would have created logistical problems that might well have proved insoluble given the shortcomings of the Italian navy. An expanded *Afrika Korps* (Africa Corps) that was kept supplied might reasonably be assumed capable of inflicting a decisive theater-level defeat on the British whether Rommel was in command or that post was assumed by a more senior panzer general—by no means improbable in the context of Barbarossa's postponement. What would happen, however, after a victory parade through Cairo? Britain had already proved able to survive losing control of the Mediterranean. Palestine and Iraq could offer no more than token resistance. What impact would such a run of victories have on the policies of Russia and the United States? Might the matériel costs of an expanded Mediterranean campaign—particularly tanks and aircraft—have significantly reduced already thin replacement margins? Like the steppe, the desert might have given nothing back, or it might have been a road to Axis victory.





**Viewpoint:  
Yes, Germany invaded the Soviet Union when it did because the Soviet military leadership had been gutted; the Red Army was stunned by its losses in Finland; the Wehrmacht was at its zenith; and Joseph Stalin continued to believe in the Russo-German nonaggression pact of 1939.**

If Germany's plans to create *Lebensraum* (living space) for Germans in the east made an invasion of the Soviet Union inevitable, then the summer of 1941 represented the perfect time to attack. In June 1941 the Soviet military was still reeling from its recent debacle in Finland and, as a result, found itself without allies. The Soviets also had to station considerable forces in Asia to guard against a possible attack from their eastern rival, Japan. Furthermore, the Soviets placed too much faith in a series of agreements, collectively known as the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact (1939), to keep peace between Germany and Russia into 1942 or perhaps even 1943. As a result, the Soviet military was caught completely by surprise by the German attack, code-named Operation Barbarossa, on the morning of 22 June 1941.

Amazing German successes in the early weeks and months of Operation Barbarossa prove the utility of attacking when the Germans did. The Soviet Air Force lost 1,200 planes (one-quarter of its front-line strength) on the first day of the campaign; it lost 1,800 more in the next four days. In the first week German Army Group Center alone captured 324,000 Russians along with 3,300 tanks. By mid July it had taken another three hundred thousand prisoners and three thousand more tanks. Darker days were ahead for the *Wehrmacht* (German Army), but the seemingly incredible successes of June and July led General Franz Halder, chief of the *Ober-Kommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW, German General Staff) to write in his diary "It is, therefore, truly not claiming too much when I assert that the campaign against Russia has been won in fourteen days."

Why had the Russians been caught so badly off guard? German antagonism against the Soviets was no secret. Anyone who had read Hitler's *Mein Kampf* (My Struggle, 1925–1927), where he wrote of a war of annihilation against Slavic and Bolshevik Russia, or took a careful look at a map of eastern Europe, could readily see that German and Russian interests were in conflict. Why then were the Red Army and Air Force so terribly unprepared for the German invasion? The first part of the answer lies in the Great

Purges that Joseph Stalin undertook in his own military in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Stalin mistrusted the ideological commitment of the Red Army's officer corps, and therefore sought to remove those officers whose politics he doubted, regardless of their military abilities.

The Great Purges removed 36,671 officers including 403 of Russia's 706 brigade commanders, three of five marshals, all eleven deputy defense commissioners, and sixty of sixty-seven corps commanders. At one point three successive commanders of the Soviet Air Force fell victim. Only 15 percent of purged officers ever returned to service; most were executed. These purges continued up to the eve of the German invasion. The Great Purges thus wiped out an entire generation of Russian military and intelligence leaders, and created tremendous instability inside the armed forces. Those who remained had to command in an atmosphere of constant fear and suspicion. The purges also touched civilians in key areas. Dozens of aircraft designers were purged for "sabotage" when experimental aircraft crashed, hampering Soviet efforts to gain an upper hand in aircraft design.

The purges also help to explain Russian embarrassment in the "Winter War" against Finland (30 November 1939–12 March 1940). Finland had achieved independence from Russia in 1917; the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact placed it inside the Soviet sphere of influence, and Stalin was determined to get it back. The Red Army committed 1,000,000 men and 1,000 planes against a 175,000-man Finnish army supported by fewer than 400, mostly obsolete, planes. Stalin seriously misjudged the Finns, who put up a fierce resistance and aroused the sympathy of the Western Allies (Britain and France) and the United States. Nevertheless, the Finns could not overcome Soviet numbers. By the end of March 1940, Finland had surrendered, but the Russians lost two hundred thousand men to Finland's twenty-five thousand.

Stalin's Finnish fiasco went a long way toward convincing the German high command that a quick victory against the Soviet Union was not only possible, but likely. According to David M. Glantz and Jonathan M. House in *When Titans Clashed: How the Red Army Stopped Hitler* (1995), the Soviets looked "hurried and amateurish" in Finland. They note that "everything possible went wrong." Soviet tactics were predictable and unimaginative. Inside the U.S.S.R., a new round of purges removed dozens more senior officers. In June 1941, 75 percent of Soviet officers had been in their current positions less than one year and the General Staff had gone through three different chiefs in the preceding eight months. The Soviets also reintroduced the cumbersome commissar sys-

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

tem, which divided decision-making authority between military and party officials.

The Winter War also exacerbated the U.S.S.R.’s already tense relations with Britain and France. As a result of the invasion the League of Nations took the mostly symbolic step (its last, as it turned out) of expelling the Soviet Union. Britain and France saw the Winter War as further proof of their fears of growing links between Stalin and Hitler; they risked war with Stalin by supplying the Finns through Arctic convoys. The Russians were now completely without allies.

The Germans took advantage of Russian diplomatic isolation. Finland, seething for revenge, contributed 500,000 men to the German invasion and Romania, from whom Stalin had taken the Bessarabia region in 1940, fatefully contributed another 250,000. “When it’s a question of action against the Slavs,” Romanian prime minister Marshal Ion Antonescu told Hit-

ler, “you can always count on the Romanians.” Both the Finns and Romanians would later turn on the Germans, but in the summer of 1941 their cooperation meant an additional seventy-five divisions for Barbarossa.

The German military, in stark contrast to the Russian, sat at the height of its power. It had conquered Czechoslovakia, western Poland, Norway, Yugoslavia, Greece, Crete, the Low Countries, and, most remarkably, France, all with light casualties. German commanders believed that their faith in armor and *Blitzkrieg* (Lightning War) had been vindicated. The vast and featureless Russian steppes, many thought, would be ideal tank country. Germany had 3,500 tanks ready for the invasion. Unlike Russian tanks, the German Panzers were connected by radio to other combat arms and experienced in conducting successful combined operations. The supreme confidence of the Wehrmacht led to a belief that the incompetent Russians, humiliated

by the Finns, would be little more than the next in a long line of victims.

The Germans also benefited from the threat posed to Russia by Japan, a cosignatory of the Anti-Comintern (Communist International) Pact of 1936. Relations between the Soviet Union and Japan had been tense since Japan soundly defeated Russia in the Russo-Japanese War (1904–1905). Soviet and Japanese troops clashed again (with thirty thousand combined dead) in 1939 as Japanese influence in Manchuria continued to grow. A truce in April 1941 eased tensions, but the threat of a Japanese attack remained a distinct possibility until the Japanese struck Pearl Harbor in December. The summer of 1941, as rising tensions between Japan and the United States increasingly turned Japanese attentions away from Russia, therefore represented a final chance for Germany to take advantage of the Japanese threat to eastern Russia.

While Hitler counted on military and diplomatic help from Finland, Romania, and Japan, Stalin erroneously counted on his pact with Hitler to maintain peace. For many years after the war Soviet historians argued that Stalin signed the pact to buy time to prepare his nation to fight Germany. Few historians make that argument today. Stalin made remarkably few preparations for war with Germany, even as tensions between the two nations increased throughout early 1941. In order to appear nonthreatening, Stalin forbade frontier military districts from taking, in the words of Glantz and House, “measures vital for their own survival.” The Soviets arrayed their forces in a line across the frontier instead of concentrating them in areas of greatest military utility. Stalin also ordered his air force not to respond as German planes flew three hundred reconnaissance missions over Soviet lines.

Stalin believed that the Germans were using troop buildups in the east to cover Hitler’s next step, an invasion of England. As such, he refused to believe British intelligence reports, as well as a report from a communist agent in Japan, that an invasion of Russia was imminent. The Soviets were not yet willing to trust the British, nor for that matter their own intelligence, and were thus blind to German ambitions. Stalin’s fear of a war with Germany even led him to continue grain and mineral shipments to Germany up to the morning of the invasion. The German strike hit Russia at precisely the right time.

The Germans made many mistakes in their campaign against Russia, but timing was not among them. The summer of 1941 represented Germany’s best chance to achieve total surprise. If anything, Germany waited too long to strike. An attack earlier in the summer might have given the Wehrmacht enough additional time to

capture Russian cities before the onset of the dreaded Russian winter. In the words of Glantz and House, Operation Barbarossa caught the Russians “poorly arrayed, trained and equipped.” Soviet leadership, paralyzed by purges, could not make up the difference. Only the tremendous sacrifices of the Soviet people achieved that end and defeated the German invaders.

—MICHAEL S. NEIBERG, U.S. AIR FORCE  
ACADEMY, COLORADO



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, Adolf Hitler should have sent more forces to North Africa in 1941 and invaded the Middle East, providing his army with much-needed oil before attacking the Soviet Union.**

Prudence is not a virtue normally associated with Adolf Hitler. Nor did he decide to invade the Soviet Union in June 1941 after cautious or judicious contemplation of the project. Hitler’s prejudices convinced him that a German attack on the “Judaeo-Bolshevik” state would bring it crashing down in weeks. However, even the Führer’s army planners estimated that five months at most would be needed to destroy the Red Army. Hitler, nonetheless, hardly wished for a campaign doomed to failure, but factors pointed in that direction prior to the start of Operation Barbarossa.

By January 1941 the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH, German army high command) knew that the automobile industry would produce only two-thirds of the vehicles stipulated for delivery by that spring. Even the extensive use of trucks captured from 1939 to 1941 still left the army 2,700 trucks short of its needs for Barbarossa. Given the difficulties in providing feed for the 600,000–750,000 horses assembled for the campaign, the shortages and multiplicity of vehicles in the German army presaged problems. As the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) moved east, it could easily be foreseen that increasing numbers of trucks would break down, that providing parts for many different models would grow ever more difficult, and that feed, fodder, and grass for horses would diminish with increasing mud, cold, and snow. These challenges strongly suggested delay of Barbarossa until 1942, while large numbers of uniform-model vehicles and spare parts were manufactured.

While the *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW, German General Staff) would assemble nearly 3,700 armored fighting vehicles for the 1941 campaign, most were obsolete German or reconditioned Czech models. Of the armored fighting vehicles dedicated to Barbarossa, less than 20 percent were modern: 440 new *Panzerkampfwagen (PzKw) IV* tanks and 250 *Sturmgeschütze* assault guns. Hitler had ordered all *PzKw III* tanks upgraded from a short 37mm to a long-barreled 50mm gun. To his rage, however, the Führer later discovered that the army ordnance office had ignored his directive and the 965 *PzKw III*s assigned to the Eastern Front went to war with inadequate firepower. By June 1941 most German vehicles had been subjected to severe stress in two or three major campaigns since September 1939. Delaying Barbarossa until 1942 would have allowed delivery of 4,300 new, more powerful tanks and self-propelled guns, as well as a thousand improved *PzKw III*s. Finally, unlike the Panther tank, development of the powerful Tiger began before encounters with Soviet armor in 1941. Sufficient Tigers for two or three battalions would have been combat-ready by the fall of 1942, enough to have a small but perhaps significant influence on a postponed Operation Barbarossa.

In May 1940–June 1941, the *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) suffered heavy losses over France, Britain, and Crete. As a result, although the OKW was to launch an offensive over a far larger area than it had previously, German aircraft strength for Barbarossa was no greater than at the start of the Western campaign in May 1940: some 2,800 planes were available, of which many were in serious need of repair. Given the far greater need for air transport, reconnaissance, and ground-attack missions over the vast spaces of Russia and Ukraine, such weakness counseled delay in the German attack. Germany produced some 11,800 military aircraft in 1941 but 15,600 the following year. With no heavy aircraft losses from Barbarossa in 1941 and 4,000 additional aircraft received in 1942, the *Luftwaffe* would have been far better prepared if the invasion had been postponed for a year.

Unusually heavy rains in March and April 1941 caused severe flooding in eastern Europe, forcing the postponement of the invasion from 15 May to 22 June. Unlike Hitler's optimistic forecasts, OKH estimated the campaign would last at least until late October, possibly even early December. Autumn rains would bring the *rasputitza* mud in September, turning the dirt roads of the Soviet Union into glutinous rivers. Six weeks or so after that, the ferocious Russian winter would begin. The actual weather conditions of spring 1942 would have allowed Barbarossa's initiation five to seven weeks earlier.

What most undermined the success of Barbarossa were petroleum shortages. These not only helped prevent the Wehrmacht from reaching its Arkhangel'sk-to-Astrakhan-line objective. They left German forces crippled by oil shortages and stranded deep in enemy territory during the brutal winter and paralyzing spring thaw. Hitler's perverse but effective orders against retreat helped salvage the German position on the Eastern Front. Afterward, ingenuity and efficiency allowed the Wehrmacht to operate effectively until late 1944 with oil derived from synthetic manufacture, Romania and the small fields in Austria, Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, and Albania. But the low point of Axis fuel supplies occurred in November–December 1941, precisely when the Germans most needed fuel to reach Moscow and, failing that, to maneuver during the subsequent Soviet winter counter-offensive. Lack of oil also severely reduced German synthetic rubber production for tire manufacture. Huge sources of oil, however, lay relatively close at hand to the Germans in the spring of 1941. If they had captured them that summer and fall, they would have been far better prepared to invade the Soviet Union in 1942.

Suppose all this information had persuaded Hitler to delay Barbarossa. He could not and his enemies would not have remained inactive. What might have been the possibilities for a strategy leading to a 1942 invasion of Russia? Since Hitler's objectives would still have been the defeat of Britain and destruction of the Soviet Union, the situation in the period of November 1940–March 1941 points toward a variant of the Mediterranean strategy advocated by Admiral Erich Raeder.

With hindsight, it seems such a successful strategy would have required three major elements: capture of Gibraltar, acquisition of bases in Morocco and French West Africa and/or on the Spanish Atlantic coast and the Canaries, and possibly invasion of Portugal and its Atlantic islands; contested or uncontested advances through Turkey to the southwest border of the Soviet Union, along the eastern Mediterranean coast to Suez and across Iraq to the Persian Gulf; and relief of Italian forces in Libya, followed by a counteroffensive to the Nile. Of these, the third operation would have been least significant. If successful, all three would have improved vastly OKW ability to wage the Battle of the Atlantic and gain Mediterranean dominance. They also would have allowed seizure of the Middle East oil fields, while denying their production to Britain, and to position German forces to capture the Soviet Caucasus oil fields in mid 1942.

Such campaigns might have begun with a January 1941 attack on Gibraltar. Obviously, Spanish cooperation would have been highly



## THE NIGHT SKY

The bombing of Moscow began exactly one month after war started. The four million citizens of the city had been prepared for its coming by a series of practice air-raid alarms, and half an hour before the first explosive, a one-thousand-pounder, dropped in front of the Kremlin gates, practically everyone in the city was sitting in a shelter. . . .

The Germans dropped everything they could unload from two hundred planes that night, coming over the city in waves at half-hour intervals for five and a half hours. Thousands of fire bombs about the size and shape of prizewinning cucumbers were showered on buildings and streets. Weeks of training in fire-fighting had its results when city fire-fighting brigades and citizens posted on every roof of the city prevented Moscow from burning to the ground. As fast as the incendiaries fell they were snuffed out with sand or by dunking them into barrels of water which had been placed on top floors and rooftops. Occasionally a fire would get started, and its fiery red glow would flare up for a short time and then die down as it was brought under control.

During all this time explosive bombs were whistling downward, blasting into buildings and tearing craters in streets. The raid was directed at the entire city, the Kremlin not excepted, and for miles in all directions the sound of exploding bombs rocked and jarred the night. The hailstorm of fire bombs came down without letup for three hours, and the only times bombs were not falling were when the raiders, their racks empty, streaked back towards the west. There was only a short interval of time before a new wave of fully loaded planes came in from the northwest to dump their loads.

The air defense was in action continuously for those five and a half hours. Searchlights by the hundreds stabbed their beams into the sky, most of them being concentrated in a ring around the city. Anti-aircraft guns cracked and boomed all night long from another circle, filling the night with dazzling star-bursts. This city defense formed a complete circle around Moscow. The ring was about three miles deep, with alternating sections of searchlights and anti-aircraft artillery. The defense was concentrated five miles from the center of the city, and had a circumference of about fifty miles. . . .

For the first and only time, the Luftwaffe flew low over Moscow. The planes, when caught in searchlight beams, were usually at heights of about 1,000 feet, although I saw one plane, which looked like a huge silver moth, at five hundred feet. At the peak of the raid I saw a plane, caught in the web of five searchlight beams, suddenly nose-up and apparently come to a dead stop in the air. It had been hit by fire from one of the quick-shooting rooftop cannons. There was an explosion, the plane shook like a leaf in a storm, and a moment later it nosed down and plummeted to earth like a dead duck. Half-way down it burst into flame. A moment later a parachute fluttered open and drifted slowly downward with a figure of a man dangling like a puppet from its harness. Just after the first parachute, a second one streaked downward, unopened. It fell like a stone in the street. . . .

*Source: Erskine Caldwell, All Out on the Road to Smolensk (New York: Duell, Sloan, & Pearce, 1942), pp. 57-63.*

desirable. Still, if the Spanish had resisted, the weak Spanish armed forces could not have effectively resisted a blitzkrieg across the Iberian peninsula. Madrid's acquiescence would have brought serious consequences in Vichy France and Rome, if bought with guarantees for Spain of African territory that the French wanted to retain, but that the Italians were determined to gain. Given their weakness at the time, it would have been relatively easy to placate the Italians, especially with the promise of British territory in

the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and Africa. Satisfying both the French and Spanish would have been more difficult, given Madrid's insistence on obtaining French Morocco and western Algeria. Various and sufficient inducements, however, lay at Hitler's disposal: the return of French prisoners of war, partial evacuation of German-occupied France, and guarantees of Belgian Wallonia, French Switzerland, and the Channel Islands, combined with firm offers of British West Africa and the northern Belgian

Congo. Even the implementation of German and Italian plans to create huge African empires would have left plenty to throw to the jackals.

Of course, the British would have not remained inert following any German activity against Gibraltar and their intelligence would have alerted them to many details of Axis plans. German moves into the Atlantic in 1941 would almost certainly have prompted American counteractions, too. Probably the Germans only could have sustained a landing on the Canaries and that action, as Raeder argued, would have succeeded only before the Gibraltar operation. The Germans almost certainly could have gained bases along the Iberian coast and as far south in Africa as Dakar. These would have allowed the OKW to direct far more effective attacks on Britain's maritime lifelines and begun the process of driving the Royal Navy out of the Mediterranean.

The Germans actually overran the Balkans in the spring of 1941. The next steps would have been more difficult: a move into Asiatic Turkey; entrance of Axis warships into the Black Sea; and significant assistance to the anti-British Iraqi uprising in April–May 1941. Most difficult would have been response to Turkish rejection of demand for transit. Possibly the argument of force majeure, coupled with promises of Cyprus and Kurdish Iraq, and a sphere of influence in the Caucasus and Soviet Central Asia, would have sufficed. On the other hand, the Turks might have decided to fight, backed by British and American promises of arms.

The Luftwaffe could have prevented much foreign aid from reaching the ill-equipped Turks. Furthermore, Britain's need to protect the Atlantic islands, evacuate their expeditionary force from Greece, as well as to defend their position in North Africa and the Middle East, would have left them little to send to Turkey. Yet, even on their own, the Turks could have presented ferocious resistance and continued guerrilla warfare indefinitely. Nonetheless, as the Wehrmacht demonstrated elsewhere, it could have overcome such opposition. Nor would logistical realities and the state of Turkish communications have supported the advance of more than fifteen German panzer and motorized divisions—possibly as few as nine or ten—to the borders of Syria, Iraq, the Soviet Union, and Iran. As the *Afrika Korps* (Africa Corps) demonstrated, however, just two or three German mobile divisions moving in separate columns through Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, and the Sinai to Suez, across Mesopotamia to Basra and Abadan, and thrusting from Anatolia up to the frontiers of Georgia and Armenia could have torn British defenses in the Middle East to shreds.

The dispatch of a German corps or small army to Libya in February 1941 would have served more of a political end than a military purpose. The limited port capacity of Tripoli and Benghazi, the distance from Bizerte's better facilities to Egypt, the lack of railroads in Libya and the narrow traversable North African coastal plain would have combined to make a large campaign in the region impractical. Furthermore, an operation across the Middle East to Egypt would have rendered it unnecessary. Salvaging the Italian position in Tripolitania, however, would still have helped in the aforementioned negotiations with the Spanish and French, shored up Benito Mussolini's then-shaky regime, and allowed the Italian army to recover its pride through a German-assisted counteroffensive into Cyrenaica, followed by an advance to the Nile Delta in the summer of 1941. After linking with the German corps moving simultaneously through the Sinai, the Italian portion of the Axis North African army might have advanced down the Nile to rescue their forces still holding out in northern and southern Ethiopia. The reestablishment of Italian East Africa over the fall and winter of 1941–1942 would have proved of little strategic consequence. Axis bases along the Gulf of Aden and the Indian Ocean coast of Somalia, however, would have permitted aeronaval operations in the Arabian Sea and helped block the Mozambique Channel. If Japan had gone to war under these circumstances with the United States and the British Empire in December 1941, such a German presence in East Africa—along with the presence recently established in the northern Persian Gulf—would have posed a great threat to Allied interests in the Indian Ocean and possibly led to European-Asian Axis thrusts across India from either side in 1942.

Such campaigns would have greatly improved the chance for a successful German invasion of Russia. While the British would have sabotaged Middle Eastern oil facilities before withdrawing, the Germans, Italians, and French would have had time prior to Barbarossa to restore some production and arrange transport to the Black Sea and the eastern Mediterranean. In 1941, Iranian fields produced 6.7 million metric tons of oil, Iraqi fields a little more than half that much, and those in Egypt pumped out 1.3 million tons. That year, natural and synthetic oil production of Axis Europe totaled sixteen million metric tons. For their industries and transport to operate at capacity, the Axis needed about ten million tons more. While the Axis could have restored quickly only a fraction of the production of fields they could have seized in 1941, by mid 1942 they could have been getting two to three million tons and restored full output by 1943. That amount would have more than satisfied Axis needs for an invasion of Rus-

sia. While oil had been discovered in Arabia in 1938, production began only after 1945. If the Axis had begun extraction in 1942–1943, it would have gained a huge oil surplus.

In any case, for ten to fifteen Axis divisions and a Luftwaffe air corps along the Turkish-Iranian border with the Soviet Union in May 1942, the Soviet oil fields at Maikop, Grozny, and Baku would have been no more than 250 air miles distant. While the Caucasus Mountains would have placed an imposing barrier between the German army in northeastern Turkey and northwest Iran, a summer advance probably would have brought them to Baku in several weeks, to the more northern Soviet oil fields by August and to Astrakhan, Stalingrad, and Rostov by September. In the meantime, the Luftwaffe could have destroyed the productive capacity of the Maikop and Grozny fields. Seizing them intact would have mattered little to the Germans if already in possession of Egyptian and Mesopotamian petroleum. German air attacks would have denied the Red Army and Soviet industry most of their oil after mid 1942. As it was, because of the disruptions caused by the German invasion, Soviet oil production fell from thirty-three million tons in 1941 to twenty-two million in 1942 to eighteen million in 1943. If the Germans had captured the Caucasus-Caspian oil fields, the Soviets still would have possessed significant known petroleum resources in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Bashkir, and the Kashpir shale region. Damage to the rail system, pipelines, refineries, and oil equipment factories would have made extraction, refining, and transport difficult, and it is likely that the Soviets would have faced severe oil shortages by late 1942.

Of course, postponing Barbarossa until 1942 would have granted Stalin time to restore much of the damage to his armed forces from the purges and to gain much modern armament. The shock from the German victories of May 1940 onward had already prompted the Soviets along those lines. Eleven more months would have allowed many improvements in the Red Army and Air Force. The army would have received 1,000 more KV-1 and perhaps 2,500 additional T-34 tanks, which would have given even the counterfactual improved panzer forces of 1942 a terrible shock. Unlike 1941, a year later the air force would have flown new Yak, MiG and LaGG fighters, as well as the deadly *Sturmovik* attack aircraft. These improvements would have presented the Germans with formidable foes, unlike the antiquated Soviet aircraft they faced in 1941.

The fundamental ability of the Soviet forces to resist a German invasion, however, rested on their political and military leadership, as well as on the capacity of Soviet industry to support and replace them. It is less certain that these factors

would have been improved between 1941 and 1942. Stalin would have remained the same man, with all his ideological handicaps. He may well have been as much the victim of his own self-deception and Hitler's trickery in 1942 as he was in 1941. A great many of the nonmaterial deficiencies of the Red Army and Air Force were remedied only after the early successes of Barbarossa pointed out the dire necessity for such changes. Modern aircraft caught on the ground too far forward in 1942 would have been destroyed just as easily as their obsolete predecessors were in 1941. Even thousands more T-34s would have made only a marginal difference to Red Army resistance in 1942 if still employed according to retrograde concepts. Nor would aircraft or tanks, however well-designed, have done much to stop the Germans if the Soviets lacked fuel and lubricants. If the thousands of Soviet officers released from the Gulag in 1941 after the German invasion instead had languished for another year under the merciless care of the *Narodny Kommissariat Vnutrennikh Del* (NKVD, People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs), how many would have still been alive or fit to return to duty? All this evidence suggests that a 1942 Operation Barbarossa might have succeeded.

This counterfactual scenario raises the question of German and Italian choices in December 1941. Had Hitler already established the position described above, such a decision on his and Benito Mussolini's part would not have had the disastrous consequences it historically did. For Hitler to destroy the Soviet Union in 1942, it would have been better to avoid war with the United States. Franklin D. Roosevelt, however, still would have continued his assistance to Britain and extended Lend Lease aid to the Soviets. While loss of the Middle East oil fields and refining plants would have severely limited British operations in the Indian Ocean, American, Mexican, and Venezuelan oil would have continued to supply the British war effort with the fuel and synthetic rubber it required. Thus, British and American power to damage the Germans would still have been formidable. The Allies' need to divert forces to defend against a Japanese onslaught in 1942, however, would have proved valuable to Hitler on the eve of his invasion of Russia. If the necessary prerequisite for a Japanese attack on Southeast Asia and the Pacific had been an Axis war declaration on the Americans, it may have been wise for the European dictators to comply.

Even if a variant of Operation Torch, the Allied invasion of North Africa, took place in late 1942, it would have faced the firm Axis position in the eastern Atlantic and West Africa. Thus, Torch might have failed, or succeeded only if carried out well south of Morocco. If the

Allies reached North Africa, it probably would have been only in late 1943. If so, Hitler would have had two seasons to destroy the Soviet Union, or to force Stalin to make peace and withdraw over the Urals.

—BRIAN R. SULLIVAN, VIENNA, VIRGINIA

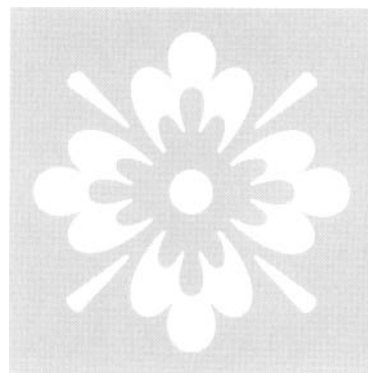
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# OPERATION DRAGOON

## Was the invasion of southern France in 1944 strategically effective?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, the invasion of southern France was important for obtaining control of needed ports, drawing German attention from the Normandy invasion, and introducing Free French forces into the war.

**Viewpoint:** No, although Operation Dragoon was militarily a triumph and diplomatically important for Free French forces, it was a strategic failure because it allowed Soviet domination in Eastern Europe, which in turn helped set the stage for the Cold War.

Operation Dragoon, the Allied invasion of southern France on 15 August 1944, was originally called Operation Anvil, but the name was changed at the last minute for security reasons. Winston Churchill found the new name appropriate because he claimed that he had been dragooned into an enterprise that he regarded as a further dispersion of already-overstretched Allied forces. In part this sentiment reflected Churchill's concern for the risks of diverting landing craft from the Normandy invasion. In part it reflected his concern for maintaining Britain's influence in an alliance to which U.S. contributions were increasingly overshadowing those of the exhausted empire.

Not only Churchill, but also the U.S. and British commanders in the Mediterranean, favored leaving the divisions earmarked for Dragoon in Italy, where they were presently committed. From the perspective of Operation Overlord supreme commander Dwight D. Eisenhower, however, Italy was a strategic dead end. A secondary front in southern France meant that the soldiers of the Normandy invasion would not have to worry about a long, exposed flank below the Loire. It would also give Eisenhower the dual option he preferred to keeping all his strategic eggs in one operational basket.

In a policy sense the question was moot. While the Free France of Charles de Gaulle was not quite a full-fledged ally, there was no question that the divisions it had raised in North Africa were intended for the liberation of France. That four of them fought in Italy was a recognition that the French depended on the United States for supply and equipment. There was, however, no possibility of leaving these troops in Italy once the invasion of France was under way without serious morale risks, both to the French personnel and the North Africans, who formed the bulk of the infantry and the support services but did not regard themselves as mere mercenaries, to be committed at the will of a transatlantic paymaster. In that context at least, Eisenhower's grip on reality was a good deal clearer than Churchill's.

In any event, Dragoon pushed the Germans out of southwestern France and back into Alsace-Lorraine, where they formed a defensive front whose rupture cost heavily in French, African, and American lives. The "champagne campaign" in the Loire Valley nevertheless represented an opportunity reasonably well exploited—particularly when compared to the alternatives.



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, the invasion of southern France was important for obtaining control of needed ports, drawing German attention from the Normandy invasion, and introducing Free French forces into the war.**

General Dwight D. Eisenhower referred to the decision for Operation Dragoon as “one of the longest-sustained arguments that I had with Prime Minister Churchill throughout the . . . war.” Few operations during World War II caused as much controversy between the leaders of Great Britain and the United States as the invasion of southern France in 1944. To the Americans it was a crucial component of the Allied invasion of France and the operations in Normandy. To the British it was late, unnecessary, and conducted at the expense of other operations in the Mediterranean. The arguments over the operation centered on several points: concentration of strength to defeat the main German forces in France and Germany; the Allied investment in the Italian campaign; campaign options in the eastern Mediterranean, the Balkans, and Austria; and finally, the role French forces would play in Europe. In the end, Dragoon proved useful, more so than other options.

Once the United States entered the war against Germany, American military leaders were inclined to use the direct approach in terms of military strategy, specifically to get on the continent of Europe and advance directly on Germany proper in the shortest possible time with concentrated resources. The British, more prone to the indirect approach in warfare, had reason to be wary of the Germans by that stage of the war. Germany had beaten them repeatedly on the ground and provided a significant threat from the air. British successes, limited as they were, came mainly through its advantage in sea power and projecting land and airpower along the periphery of Europe.

Early in the war, British military experience and Winston Churchill’s persuasion led President Franklin D. Roosevelt to side against his own military advisers who wanted to devote all efforts to a buildup in Britain followed by a cross-Channel invasion. The British felt the Germans were too strong for an invasion of France to succeed in 1942 or 1943. It was more prudent to fight the Germans where they were overextended rather than where they were strong, as well as where Allied naval power could be exploited. To the British that meant North Africa and the Mediterranean, which led to Operation Torch in 1942 in North Africa, Oper-

ation Husky in mid 1943 to take Sicily, and then operations in Italy proper. Germany promptly occupied most of Italy with mobile forces, however, and conducted a successful delay. Operations were reduced to attrition warfare that favored the Germans. The Allies were on the European continent, but far from Germany—with some of Europe’s most formidable terrain in-between. While the British wanted to pursue the Italian campaign with vigor, American leaders wanted to focus on a cross-Channel attack, Operation Overlord.

An assault in southern France to support Overlord was included at the Trident Conference in Washington in May 1943. By the Quadrant Conference in Quebec in August, the southern France assault had been code-named Anvil, and was considered by some to be little more than a feint. At the Teheran conference in November, Overlord received great attention and Anvil was upgraded to more than a feint, to be conducted concurrently with Overlord. The purpose of Anvil was to fix German forces in southern France and induce Germany to weaken its defenses in Normandy by sending forces south. The Americans considered Anvil an essential extension of Overlord. Churchill was not opposed to Anvil at that time, but wanted to consider other options in the Mediterranean, particularly if Turkey entered the war. Soviet premier Joseph Stalin was strongly in favor of both Overlord and Anvil and saw no advantage to splitting Allied forces for another effort in the eastern Mediterranean. He stated that the most effective Soviet technique in fighting the agile Germans was to hit them with a large pincer movement, suggesting that Overlord required an Anvil.

Perhaps Churchill’s interest in the eastern Mediterranean was less on defeating Germany and more on how each of the Allies would be positioned after the war to influence the political development of Europe. If the Allies put all of their uncommitted forces in France at the expense of Italy and the eastern Mediterranean, then the Soviet advance against Germany would leave them in control of much of eastern and southern Europe. Churchill became determined to make the Italian campaign successful. He wanted Allied troops to advance north through the Ljubljana Gap in Slovenia to enter Austria and take Vienna before the Soviets got there. He assumed the partisan effort in the Balkans would be enhanced in the process. Neither the Soviets nor the Americans supported that British quest. The Soviets certainly had political interests in eastern Europe, but they also felt Allied efforts there would be too limited and dispersed to effectively defeat the Germans. American leaders

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wanted the greatest possible concentration in France. Other operations would be a distraction.

When the Italian campaign bogged down south of Rome by the end of 1943, Churchill promoted an amphibious landing at Anzio to turn the German defense. A limited number of landing craft, however, kept the assault to two divisions and the mobile Germans reacted quickly and contained the beachhead. By early spring 1944 it was apparent that there was insufficient landing craft to support Overlord and Anvil concurrently. The British wanted to cancel Anvil, because if it could not be concurrent with Overlord, it would not draw off significant German forces in northern France. Churchill argued that it would take three months before Allied forces in southern and northern France could join in a common front. He contended that southern France was strongly fortified and that Anvil could get bogged down like the effort at Anzio. Furthermore, by invading southern France well after D-Day, the defending German occupation formations would be driven north where they could be concentrated against the Normandy invasion. Since the forces for Anvil—three American divisions for the assault followed by seven French divisions—were to come from

the Mediterranean theater, they would be at the expense of the Italian campaign. In the British view, Anvil would not provide substantial operational support for the main effort in France and would almost certainly degrade the potential of the Italian campaign by taking ten divisions from that theater. American leaders saw greater operational utility in Anvil. If it would not draw off German forces from Normandy, the ports in southern France would support the logistical effort necessary to sustain the invasion, as well as the role to be played by French forces. Neither of these issues seemed to interest the British, but they became central concerns for the Americans.

The amphibious assault for Overlord could be supported across the beach, but substantial ports were required in the following phase to sustain an invasion of Europe by some thirty-five divisions. Those ports were well fortified and defended by the Germans. Eisenhower believed that the ports in southern France, notably Marseilles and Toulon, would be easier to take and could be more quickly exploited. Churchill argued that those ports were too well fortified.

Eisenhower's other concern was the French forces available for an invasion of southern France, one of the least-studied issues related to

the controversy over Anvil. After the fall of France early in the war, the British armed and employed the available French forces, less than two divisions. When the Americans entered the war with their greater logistical capability, they took over the effort to equip and train French formations. By 1943 that effort had laid the groundwork for eight French divisions, three armor and five infantry, using American weapons and equipment. By the end of 1943 several of those divisions were fighting as a French corps in Italy under American control, while another division had taken Sardinia and Corsica, which provided Allied airfields and other facilities as launching bases for Anvil.

The French wanted to liberate France. As invasion planning developed, General Charles de Gaulle, leader of the French forces, stated, "It is inadmissible for French troops at this stage of the war to be used elsewhere than in France." The French fought well in the Italian campaign to prove their new divisions, but with the understanding that they would soon be used to fight in France.

Churchill noted that the maritime effort in Britain focused on bringing American formations across the Atlantic on the shortest possible route, leaving little shipping available to move the French divisions from the Mediterranean. To represent France in the Normandy invasion, one division was moved from the Mediterranean to Britain. With limited shipping available, however, it took several months to get it there. If the other seven French divisions were to fight in France, Anvil was the only way to get them there. The alternative was for them to fight in Italy. If the main thrust from Italy was to be northeast toward Austria, French forces might not even fight in France at all, an unacceptable option for their leaders.

There were reasons other than the desire to liberate France to put French forces in Anvil rather than in another campaign. Despite their fighting quality, the French formations were deficient in service-support units, making them dependent on American formations for such support. Close to 70 percent of their soldiers came from French colonies. They were formidable in battle but lacked the skills required for maintenance and supply. French leaders argued that if their divisions were employed in France, the French population would flock to join them—to include those with the necessary skills and capacity for employment in service support units. The French also intended to raise additional fighting formations as they recovered French territory. Many of them would come from the French resistance, which was strongest in southern France, with about seventy-five thousand men. They could not stand and fight against the occu-

pying German divisions, but they would be a significant force to be absorbed within Allied French forces landing in southern France. There can be little question that French divisions employed in southern France would achieve a multiplier effect well beyond any role they could have played in the Italian campaign or elsewhere.

After the Normandy invasion in early June, the arguments for and against Anvil intensified. As Churchill had argued, without a concurrent Anvil, the Germans reduced their forces in southern France by several divisions to reinforce those in northern France. Furthermore, as Allied forces built up in Normandy, logistics and ports became a crucial issue when the Germans tenaciously turned many of the ports into fortresses and destroyed the port infrastructures. As Eisenhower encountered strong resistance in July, he wanted Anvil both for the ports it would bring and the ten divisions projected for it.

Through June, July, and early August, Churchill argued repeatedly for the cancellation of Anvil as an unnecessary distraction from the Italian campaign. Most British military leaders supported him; American leaders supported Eisenhower. By the middle of 1944, Eisenhower was well established as the senior Allied commander in Europe and resisted Churchill's arguments.

Churchill then went to Roosevelt, but found the president less easy to persuade in 1944. When Churchill argued that the forces programmed for Anvil could be better used in the eastern part of the Mediterranean, Roosevelt responded, "I cannot agree to the employment of United States troops against Istria [in the Adriatic] and into the Balkans, nor can I see the French agreeing to such use of French troops." He went on to the importance of domestic political concerns with the upcoming presidential elections, "For purely political reasons over here, I should never survive even a slight setback in 'Overlord' *if it were known that fairly large forces had been diverted to the Balkans.*"

In July, Churchill made one last effort to have Anvil canceled and the forces projected for it sent to French ports in the Bay of Biscay, arguing that landing further north would provide Overlord more momentum. Churchill must have known that there was inadequate shipping to project Anvil's ten divisions to the Bay of Biscay, which would have left some part of them available to the Italian campaign. Eisenhower had no interest in such an abrupt shift and the complications it would cause. Furthermore, there were no air bases close by to support landings in the Bay of Biscay in contrast to air bases in Corsica that could support Anvil.

Anvil was renamed Dragoon in early August and executed on the 15th of that month.

Although Allied forces were initially outnumbered, few German forces met them on the beaches or resisted as aggressively as they had to the Italian landings. French forces quickly followed the American divisions ashore and took the southern ports before they could be destroyed. General Alexander M. Patch's Seventh Army linked arms with General George S. Patton's Third Army in less than a month, far sooner than Churchill's ninety-day projection, and took fifty thousand German POWs in the process. Once joined with the Allied forces, German resistance in France collapsed and another twenty thousand POWs were taken. French divisions fought well in France, integrated quickly with the French resistance, and raised the needed logistical units, as well as another two divisions and other combat units, from the French population.

Eventually, the French formed a full army to fight through France and on into southern Germany. From late August through December 1944, Marseilles received more Allied supplies than any other port. After Antwerp became operational in January 1945, Marseilles remained the second most important port, with 25 percent of the total supplies moving through southern French ports.

Churchill called Dragoon "bleak and sterile," and felt that the forces could have made greater contributions in Italy or elsewhere. Eisenhower stated emphatically that "There was no development of that period which added more decisively to our advantages or aided us more in the accomplishing attack up the Rhone Valley." The facts support Eisenhower's view that the Dragoon invasion was a preferable alternative to leaving the forces in Italy.

—GORDON W. RUDD, USMC SCHOOL OF  
ADVANCED WARFIGHTING



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, although Operation Dragoon was militarily a triumph and diplomatically important for Free French forces, it was a strategic failure because it allowed Soviet domination in Eastern Europe, which in turn helped set the stage for the Cold War.**

At the Quebec Conference in August 1943 the Americans proposed Operation Anvil to the British. It was a plan to launch an invasion into southern France simultaneously with Operation Overlord, the Allied invasion of Normandy. The

idea was immediately a topic of tension between the allies. Opposition against the plan was voiced in the arguments of Prime Minister Sir Winston Churchill, who saw no military value in the plan but instead preferred an advance into eastern Europe from Italy. American general Dwight D. Eisenhower became the chief advocate of Anvil, which he believed would complement the Normandy landings. The French, looking to increase their role in the war, also pushed for the execution of the southern invasion. In the end, the Americans were given their operation, though it did not occur until months after Normandy. Anvil's tactical success was lost in its strategic failure that helped to secure the Soviet stronghold over eastern Europe in the Cold War.

Churchill was always opposed to the idea of Anvil. He believed that military reasoning showed that Anvil contained no advantage for the Allies. First of all, in order for troops to be used in southern France without detracting from the Normandy invasion, men would have to be taken from the Allied effort in Italy. The Italian campaign under British general Sir Harold Alexander was a bloody affair; and it was taking much longer than planned to capture Rome and gain complete control of the theater. Churchill could not envision taking troops out of Italy for other purposes until the Allies had liberated Rome. He thought it foolhardy to start another major operation in the Mediterranean.

Another factor in Churchill's low opinion of Anvil was timing. Originally, Anvil was planned to occur simultaneously with Overlord. As Churchill pointed out to his fellow leaders, however, they did not have the landing craft necessary to execute two major invasions of the French coast at the same time. They could not allow anything to take away from the importance of Normandy, so Anvil had to be pushed back until after D-Day. This decision also did not satisfy Churchill. If Anvil was to complement the Normandy landings, then it would have to occur close enough to D-Day to insure that Adolf Hitler would be willing to move troops from Normandy and northern France to face the Allied forces in the south. As a result Anvil would drain off some forces from the north and soften the German resistance that faced the Allies in Normandy. Logistically, Anvil could not be executed close enough to Overlord, however, to induce the Germans to reinforce the south. The Germans would quickly realize that the main Allied thrust was in Normandy and would not bother with the south. Churchill knew that the Allies could not have both Overlord and a useful Anvil. It would be best to leave Allied resources slated for Anvil in Italy where they could be better utilized.



## IN CHURCHILL'S OPINION . . .

*Winston Churchill opposed Operation Dragoon, the invasion of southern France, but agreed to it if launched after the fall of Rome. Following the D-Day landings and subsequent march into France by Allied forces, he again tried to get troops scheduled for Dragoon shifted elsewhere. In a 6 August 1944 letter to Harry Hopkins Churchill restated his case in the hope that he might influence President Franklin D. Roosevelt in his favor:*

Even after taking the two fortresses of Toulon and Marseilles we have before us the lengthy advance up the Rhone valley before we even get to Lyons. None of this operation can influence Eisenhower's battle for probably ninety days after the landings. We start 500 miles away from the main battlefield instead of almost upon it at St. Nazaire. There is no correlation possible between our armies in the Brest and Cherbourg peninsulas and the troops operating against Toulon and Marseilles. . . .

Of course we are going to win anyway, but these are very hard facts. When 'Anvil' was raised at Teheran it was to be a diversionary or holding operation a week before or a week later than 'Overlord' D-Day, in the hope of drawing about eight German divisions away from the main battle. The decision to undertake Anzio and the delays at Cassino forced us to continue putting off 'Anvil,' until its successor 'Dragoon' bears no relation to the original operation. However, out of evil came good, and the operations in Italy being persevered in drew not fewer than twelve divisions from the reserves in North Italy and elsewhere, and they have been

largely destroyed. The coincidence that the defeat of Kesselring's army and the capture of Rome occurred at the exact time of launching 'Overlord' more than achieved all that was ever foreseen from 'Anvil,' and, to those who do not know the inner history, wears the aspect of a great design. Thus I contend that what 'Anvil' was meant for is already gained.

Bowing to the United States Chiefs of Staff under recorded protest and the overriding of our views, we have done everything in human power, including the provision of nearly one-half the naval forces about to be engaged. If nothing can be done to save the situation I earnestly pray the American view to be right. But now an entirely new situation has developed through the victories that have been won in France and the greater victories that seem possible. It is in these circumstances that I have thought it right, on the recommendations of the British Chiefs of Staff, to reopen the question. There are still three or four days in which the decision to send to St. Nazaire the forces now destined and largely loaded for 'Dragoon' could be reconsidered. I admit the arguments against late changes in plans, but they ought to be fairly weighed against what seems to us to be the overwhelming case for strengthening the main battle, and thus possibly finishing up Hitler this year.

*Source: Winston Churchill, Triumph and Tragedy (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1953), pp. 68–69.*

Churchill instead envisioned a different plan, one that the Americans would criticize him for. He planned to use a decisive Allied victory in Italy as a pathway into eastern Europe. The Allies would advance from Italy into Istria, go over the Ljubljana Gap, and march into Vienna. The Western Allies, therefore, would make major contributions in the liberation of eastern Europe. The Soviets would not stand alone as victors there, and in the postwar world the West could still wield influence in the East. Churchill foresaw the future political realities of an eastern Europe without support from the West. The area would become a puppet to the Soviets, increasing Soviet power and creating a new opponent for the West.

The Americans, in their usual fashion, let the field commander, Eisenhower, determine

their views toward Anvil. Eisenhower discounted Churchill's views toward the operation as being politically motivated. The American general focused solely on winning the war and did not worry about the postwar implications of victory. In his opinion, no rational military commander would have abandoned an operation that was filled with as much promise as Anvil. Eisenhower did not see the importance of the Western influence in the Balkans that a strengthened Italian campaign would give the Allies. His sole concern was Overlord, and he saw Anvil as a way to strengthen the Allied attack. Churchill looked to solve not only the problems of the moment, but also the future, while Eisenhower only saw the here and now.

Anvil answered many of Eisenhower's concerns about Normandy. He worried that the

ports of Brittany would not be captured in a timely manner, and that they would be unusable. He knew that the Germans, if given enough time, would not leave ports behind that the Allies could use. He worried that the railways from Brest to the Metz region could be easily demolished by retreating Germans. He further worried that his right flank would be vulnerable from the Brittany coast up to the front of his spearhead if adequate provisions were not made to clear out southern France.

By invading southern France, however, Eisenhower could watch these particular fears be washed away in Anvil's certain success. The port of Marseilles could easily compensate for the inadequacies of Brittany's harbors, and he believed that the Allies could take it quickly and keep the Germans from destroying its harbor facilities, allowing hordes of Allied troops to enter France from the south. Also, the distance between the French Riviera and Metz was much smaller than that from Brest to Metz. Eisenhower believed that the Allies could keep the retreating Germans from destroying the rail lines between the two areas. He also would no longer have to worry about the right flank of the main Allied advance if his own troops were clearing out the Germans and establishing themselves in the south.

Eisenhower furthermore saw a role for the French. The American government had spent much time and effort in supplying and organizing French divisions that were placed under Eisenhower's command. He did not see a major role for them in the drive from Normandy. From the south, however, Eisenhower saw possibilities of the French having a major role in liberating their homeland. Most of their troops were located in North Africa and Italy, and the only way to quickly get them involved in the fighting in France was to bring them through southern ports.

The final decision was made at the highest levels. There was discussion of bringing Soviet premier Joseph Stalin into the decision-making process to include his opinions on Anvil. He supported Anvil to insure that the British would not move out of Italy and into the Balkans. In the end Churchill, without the backing of his chiefs of staff, and President Franklin D. Roosevelt, fully backed by his chiefs of staff, decided that they would have to come to a judgment together. They sent telegrams back and forth mulling over the merits and disadvantages of the operation. The Allies entered Rome on 4 June, undercutting Churchill's argument that there was still a hard fight in Italy. Additionally, the British could no longer expand their participation in the war, while the Americans were rapidly increasing the number of divisions they

commanded. The decision for Anvil would be an American one. Churchill knew it was a losing battle, and on 6 July 1944, he conceded. Seven divisions, consisting of three American and four French, were removed from Italy to participate in the Riviera landing. The British agreed to allow the Americans to use any landing craft that they could find in the European theater, but the British would not participate in the operation with ground troops. Instead, Churchill ordered that the British Army focus on bringing about a decisive victory in Italy and prepare for moves into eastern Europe.

It would be wrong to discount the influence of Free French leaders in this debate. They desperately wanted to become involved in the liberation of their homeland and were putting pressure on Eisenhower and the Americans to get them into battle. The French felt that they needed to remove the stain of the quick defeat of 1940, before the war came to an end. The Americans, who were paying to outfit and train Free French forces, legitimately wanted to help the French reenter the Continent and restore their pride. It did not seem practical for the Allies to move French forces out of the Mediterranean just so that they could enter France from the Atlantic; the French Riviera was the best entrance onto the Continent for French soldiers. If the French wanted to make serious contributions to the war effort it would have to be through Anvil and not Overlord.

In the end, the French proved their worth in Normandy. French underground forces provided information to the Allies and committed acts of sabotage against the Germans as the Allies moved toward Paris. Eisenhower stated that without their help, the liberation of France would have entailed much higher casualties and would have been much more time consuming. National dignity was further restored on 25 August 1944, by General Philippe LeClerc's French 2nd Division when they entered Paris at the head of the victorious Allied army, pushing out of Normandy. The French did not need Anvil to restore their pride. They regained it through Overlord.

On 15 August 1944 Anvil, newly christened Dragoon for security purposes, was launched off the French Riviera. Churchill, who had violently opposed the operation, observed the landing from the deck of a British destroyer supporting the invasion. Dragoon proved to be a great tactical success. The Allies captured the ports of Marseilles and Toulon in usable condition. The advancing Allies collected an enormous number of German prisoners, eliminating them from the war. In less than a month Dragoon and Overlord forces joined hands.

Dragoon, however, was a strategic failure. It did not siphon German troops from the north into the south. Allied soldiers in southern France faced only those Germans who had originally been assigned to the Riviera. The lives of Allied soldiers in Normandy were not saved because of the advance from the south. In the end, the Western Allies became committed to an entirely Western strategy that kept them from being able to exert influence in Eastern Europe. The war in Italy ground to a halt and the British, lacking resources, were denied a decisively quick victory. The Allies were unable to open the gateway from Italy into the east. The Soviets were allowed to gain control over Eastern Europe, setting the stage for the Cold War. Perhaps if the Americans had listened to the wisdom of Churchill and strengthened the Italian strategy, the Soviets would not have come to dominate all of Eastern Europe.

The decision to invade southern France was a mistake. Churchill understood what the postwar world would look like without a Western military presence in eastern Europe: Soviet domination. He also understood that militarily, Dragoon could add little to the strength of Overlord. German troops were not moved away from the advance of the Allied armies in Normandy in order to stop the offensive in the south. Instead, the Allies should have left their resources in Italy and kept that campaign from stalling. Then they could have moved out of Italy and left their mark in Eastern Europe, strengthening their position for the inevitable confrontation with the Soviets. Southern France was an unneeded front that contributed neither to Allied victory over the Germans nor to strengthening the Anglo-American position in the postwar world.

—DANIEL LEE BUTCHER, KANSAS  
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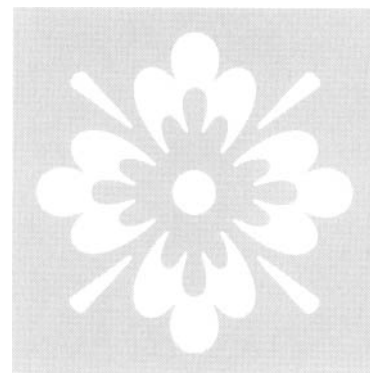
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# RESISTANCE MOVEMENTS

## Were resistance and partisan movements decisive in bringing about the defeat of Germany in World War II?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, resistance fighters and partisans contributed significantly to the military defeat of Germany by undermining morale, disrupting transportation, tying down troop formations, and providing intelligence.

**Viewpoint:** No, although resistance and partisan movements did help boost national pride and distract enemy troops, they were not decisive in bringing about the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Evaluating the contributions of partisan and resistance movements to the defeat of Nazi Germany is complicated because of the central role resistance mythologies played in the post–World War II politics of areas that had been occupied by Germany. Who resisted, with whom, in what ways, and for what reasons, structured election campaigns in France and Italy, fostered civil war in Greece, and contributed to the establishment of communist governments in the Soviet sphere of influence. Apart from political implications, questioning the effectiveness of wartime resistance became tantamount to questioning the undoubted sacrifices made by resisters—and perhaps inviting pointed questions about one’s own behavior. The result was a kind of democratization of the resistance process, on the principle that all the decent people of a given country had done what they could do against the Nazi occupiers. Other kinds of behavior had been exceptional and warranted exclusion from the public community.

Resistance, as opposed to opposition, fell into three categories. The first was espionage/sabotage, usually conducted in close cooperation with an external intelligence agency such as Britain’s Special Operations Executive (SOE). Whether it involved copying *Gestapo* (secret state police) documents in France or sabotaging heavy-water shipments in Norway, it was high-risk, high-payoff activity, usually conducted at low intensity so as to minimize risk of exposure.

The second category of resistance involved “forces in being.” Epitomized by the Polish Home Army and the *Maquis* (French resistance), their members were motivated by varying combinations of patriotism and self-interest—in particular, going on the run to avoid Nazi forced-labor drafts. “Forces in being” were reluctant to take direct action independently unless absolutely necessary for survival. Instead, they saw their purpose as being a focal point of the reconstruction of their countries once the war ended. The much-vaunted Yugoslav partisans also fell into this category. Josip Broz Tito did no more against the Germans than was necessary to keep his army in the field and to secure support from the Western allies.

The third class of resisters were the partisans, who fought the Axis, rather than simply seek to survive the occupation. Most effective in that context were the Russians, who within a few months of Operation Barbarossa (June 1941), were not only in communication with their government, but were being supplied and organized by the Soviet high command. When the counteroffensives began, conventional military operations were precisely coordinated with partisan attacks. The result was a 360-degree war in which the Germans were safe nowhere—and which prefigured by a quarter century similar wars around the world.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, resistance fighters and partisans contributed significantly to the military defeat of Germany by undermining morale, disrupting transportation, tying down troop formations, and providing intelligence.**

World War II was a “total war” in which distinctions between soldiers and civilians were blurred and erased. Most civilians directly or indirectly contributed to their nations’ war-making capacities, which led to their being targeted by blockades and bombs. Many, albeit a minority of civilians in occupied Europe, took up arms against the German occupier and its satellites or cooperated with those who did. The result of this erasure of the line between combatant and noncombatant was a higher number of civilian than military casualties. Nonetheless, argues A. W. Purdue in *The Second World War* (1999), “the victories and defeats of the war were military and not because of civilian unrest, while resistance movements made little difference to the outcome.” The problem with this conclusion is that Allied military victories did not occur in a vacuum. The war was not simply about tactics, strategy, and leadership in battles between regular armies, although these things played a central role in its outcome. The *Wehrmacht’s* (German Army’s) fighting ability was shaped by its size, the quality and morale of its personnel, its equipment, and the ability of Germany to produce replacements, supplies, and armaments—and deliver them to the front. It is in this context that the contribution of the resistance and partisan movements to Germany’s defeat should be interpreted.

The difficulty with such an approach, however, is measuring the impact of armed civilians on Germany’s fighting ability. How many German soldiers did they kill, or keep occupied away from the front? How did they affect the morale of German soldiers? How many locomotives, how much rolling stock, and how much railroad infrastructure did they destroy? How did this sabotage affect the Wehrmacht’s supply situation and its military operations? The historiography offers contradictory answers to these questions because it is based on contradictory testimony. Partisans exaggerated their kills during the war in order to increase their value to the Allies, from whom they sought material support and political recognition. They continued to exaggerate their effectiveness after the war in order to strengthen their domestic claims to political legitimacy and power. German officers also exaggerated the par-

tisans’ effectiveness after the war to justify the extreme measures they had ordered against civilians. Their internal wartime reports of partisan strength were more accurate, although here one must be cautious about German claims to success, because those reporting could not afford to appear as failures. Moreover, “partisan” often served as a euphemism for “Jew.” The historiography does not offer enough evidence for a precise assessment of the resistance and partisan movements’ contribution to Germany’s defeat; however, there is enough to suggest that these movements significantly prejudiced the German military’s ability to wage war.

Resistance or partisan movements existed in varying degrees of strength in most of occupied Europe. They were small in the beginning and then attracted more members because of the occupiers’ extreme retributive killings. Still more people joined or cooperated with them after Germany’s defeat appeared certain. France provided the most famous, albeit often exaggerated, example of resistance in western Europe. It supplied the Allies with intelligence, helped downed pilots return to England, sabotaged facilities important to the German war effort, and engaged German soldiers in armed conflict—most notably in conjunction with the Allied invasion of France. As early as August 1941, Marshal Philippe Pétain, the French head of state, warned against real and latent resistance on the radio. “From several regions of France I can feel an evil wind blowing. . . . The authority of the Government is being called into question. Orders are not being carried out.” Toward the end of 1942, Marshal Karl R. G. von Rundstedt, the German commander in chief in France, admitted, “It was already impossible to dispatch single members of the Wehrmacht, ambulances, couriers, or supply columns without armed protection to the First or Nineteenth Army in the south of France.” In October 1943, Rundstedt wrote to Adolf Hitler of his “alarm” at “the rapid increase in rail sabotage.” In September there had been “534 very serious rail sabotage actions, as compared to a monthly average of only 120 during the first half of the year.” Vichy police also reported much sabotage of the French railroads, which had forced the occupiers to bring some twenty thousand German railway workers into the country. Moreover, *Schutzstaffeln* (SS) units were diverted from the front to guard railroad facilities. Railroad sabotage hit the German forces in a sensitive spot. Only a small part of the Wehrmacht was mechanized, so the railroad was crucial to Germany’s ability to control Europe. It moved troops from one hot spot to another, and it fed and supplied them. Besides serious logistic problems, Rundstedt’s testimony suggested declining morale and a feeling of insecurity among German officers. Civil-

ian resistance did not liberate France, but it helped to weaken the enemy's fighting ability.

Civilian resistance in eastern and southeastern Europe also contributed to Germany's defeat. Polish spies provided Britain and the United States with intelligence from Europe and North Africa, including information on, and actual parts of, German secret weapons as well as data about the German army's order of battle. The quality and military significance of this information was suggested by an American intelligence officer, who wrote on two Polish reports, "This is an excellent report" and "This type of information is extremely valuable." By August 1944 the Polish Home Army felt strong enough to attempt an open military uprising, which would have worked had Joseph Stalin's nearby troops moved forward instead of allowing German troops to massacre the Polish insurgents, whose politics were inimical to the Soviet leadership's postwar political designs. Partisans in Yugoslavia did not defeat the Wehrmacht, but their ability to remain in the field and control large areas forced the Germans to devote troops to counterinsurgency that it desperately needed on the front. By 1943, Josip Broz Tito had some 100,000 men under arms in Yugoslavia, and this number soon grew to around 220,000. Against this force Germany set some 140,000 German troops and another 66,000 from its satellites. Some of these soldiers had to guard against a potential Allied invasion in the Balkans; however, many of them could have been used in Italy or the Soviet Union. The same was true of the German divisions tied down by the less powerful partisan movements in Albania and Greece.

The Soviet Union poses particular interpretive difficulties, because millions of civilians there were deliberately exterminated—especially Jews. Wehrmacht and SS units often tried to put a gloss on their murders by calling the victims "partisans." This tactic helped soldiers and officers overcome any inhibitions they might have had about killing unarmed civilians, because the German military had never doubted the efficacy and legitimacy of making short work of real and suspected partisans; it had done so in the Franco-Prussian War (1870–1871), the Herero uprising in southwest Africa (1904–1907), and World War I (1914–1918). During their invasion of the Soviet Union, German forces eliminated entire villages in the course of combating "partisans"; however, SS task force leaders made finer distinctions in their official reports. For example, one officer reported killing 240,000 people, of whom only 1,044 were "partisans" and 8,359 "communists." As Lutz Klinkhammer argues in an essay in *Die Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität* (The Wehrmacht: Myths and Reality, 1999), German operations against partisans in the Soviet Union were a mixture of both counterinsurgency and the outright murder of innocent civil-



## FRENCH RESISTANCE

*Active French resistance to Nazi occupation grew ever stronger as the expected Allied invasion of France neared. On 8 January 1944, René Massigli, Commissioner for Foreign Affairs of the French Committee of National Liberation, sent a note to his American liaison requesting assistance. The note, a portion of which appears below, was translated and forwarded to the U.S. State Department on 12 January.*

The time is approaching when the Allied armies will undertake on French territory operations the success of which will deal a decisive blow to German military power. Nothing therefore must be neglected to insure their success and it is with this conviction that the French Committee of National Liberation has directed me to call Your Excellency's attention to the following considerations:

Under the impulsion and direction of the French Committee of National Liberation French resistance has today become an organized force which represents a military potential ready for use in these operations. Organized at first on a moral plane it rapidly became an element of strategic value.

Right now the idea of destructions carried out [against] enemy installations impede considerably the functioning of the German war machine in French territory. For example, an official document emanating from Vichy sets forth 1800 instances of sabotage carried out in the period from September 25 to October 25 last. At the moment of landing, the systematically prepared intervention of the patriot groups at . . . the German front and in the enemy's rear will have an even greater importance and will represent substantial support for the Allies. The value of this support will increase in the same measure that arms and material placed at the disposal of French resistance permit of the calling in of a greater number of [the] group.

It must, unfortunately, be noted that the material which the resistance groups dispose of at the present is out of proportion to the number and quality of the effectives which it could put in line if proper steps were taken in good time.

*Source:* U.S. State Department, Foreign Relations of the United States, 1944, volume 3 (Washington D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1965), pp. 638–639.

ians. One must reject German veterans' claims that their massacres of civilians were purely defensive or retributive measures directed against an omnipresent partisan danger. One must, however, also avoid letting recognition of the Wehrmacht's murderous activities blind us to the existence of a real partisan movement, which threatened German lines of communication, drew troops away from the front, hurt their morale, and took many of their lives. Indeed, partisans in the Soviet Union were strong enough by 19–20 June 1944 to explode thousands of

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

mines on railways, bridges, and roads to the rear of Army Group Center, just prior to the Red Army’s final assault on it.

Linguistic evidence also points to the real military threat that partisans represented to German forces across Europe. At the beginning of the war, German officers described partisans with the term *Freischärler*, which meant guerrillas and suggested small, relatively harmless numbers of armed civilians or soldiers caught behind the front. The derogatory term *Banden* appeared in 1942. It also described small groups (“bands”) of guerrillas, but suggested formations more threatening than *Freischärler*. In late summer 1944 the growing strength of partisan groups in the Balkans and Italy led one officer to observe that *Banden* was no longer an adequate description of these irregular enemy forces. He noted that “With the exception of the new formations, we are dealing with operatively and tactically well-led forces, who are enviably armed with heavy weapons and buoyed by a dynamic that should not be underestimated, and whose number is constantly growing.” The European resistance and partisan movements did not decide the war’s outcome, but neither can they be left out of the equation of forces in this “total war.” Besides possessing moral, symbolic, and political significance, these movements represented a serious military threat to the German Army. They sup-

plied information about the army to the Allies; sabotaged the transportation network upon which it depended; and attacked it directly, tying it down and undermining its morale, thus weakening it for the Allied forces to kill.

—MARK R. STONEMAN, GEORGETOWN  
UNIVERSITY



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, although resistance and partisan movements did help boost national pride and distract enemy troops, they were not decisive in bringing about the defeat of Nazi Germany.**

Resistance and partisan groups cannot, by their very nature, be decisive in defeating a stronger enemy. This handicap does not imply that they were not useful or did not contribute, just that they did not decide the outcome of World War II. When hostile forces overrun a country, its population frequently establishes resistance or partisan units to fight this enemy after their “regular” forces

are beaten. It is important for occupied nations to maintain their resistance to enemy rule, for if they give up, the war is totally lost. For this reason, one of their primary goals is to simply keep fighting. Resistance forces will harass the enemy as much as possible, attacking power plants, supply lines, communications, troops, depots, and other necessities of war or occupation. Another main, possibly more important, mission of resistance organizations is to try to prevent, root out, and punish fellow countrymen who collaborate with the enemy. This tactic undermines the occupying power's ability to effectively run the territory by denying them vital resources for information, work, and support within the territory—without which they cannot rule.

By themselves, however, resistance groups or partisans cannot win a war. Few guerrilla forces have ever won a war against a more powerful country. There have been guerrillas who forced a political settlement, but a settlement was not at all possible in the total war of World War II. On this point, all of the theorists and practitioners of guerrilla warfare agree: unconventional warfare is *not* decisive.

This recognition is not to say that resistance groups did not achieve great success within the constraints of unconventional warfare. In fact, they achieved more than could have been expected in three major areas: maintaining morale (and conversely attacking that of the Germans), communications and logistics, and industrial sabotage.

In just six weeks in 1940 the vaunted French Army had been all but destroyed by the Germans and their new style of mobile warfare. After this stunning upset in the Battle of France, the populace felt betrayed by Marshal Philippe Pétain, leader of what would be called Vichy France. In his defense, he had no real choice in the matter. As a result the French population was itself emotionally devastated. Just when they needed a boost, it came from across the English Channel, from the leader of the so-called Free French, General Charles de Gaulle. De Gaulle, in a radio address, told the French populace to keep up the fight, that the Allies would win. French resistance groups, which would eventually come under the umbrella of de Gaulle, started almost immediately harassing German forces wherever they could. Up to the invasion of Normandy in June 1944, the French resistance was most effective in their attacks on collaborators, which prevented the Germans from exploiting a valuable resource: people.

In this arena, the effects of guerrilla attacks on the occupiers are just as cumulative for the subjugated population as they are for the intended targets and this was definitely true in World War II. Every attack on the Germans became a victory and increased morale. The importance of good morale can never be overstated and in France, as well as

other occupied territories, it was critical because it helped to recruit new soldiers for the resistance and allowed ordinary people to get involved. Every time a person did not give information, or did a poor job in their work at a defense plant, or provided supplies, the resistance became that much more powerful.

The resistance groups of World War II were also important to the morale of the Allies, especially aircrews who had the unenviable task of flying into occupied "Fortress Europe" to attack the Axis at home. The idea that, if shot down, they had a chance, albeit a small one, to link up with a resistance cell and somehow escape to neutral or friendly territory made it seem as if they were not alone. This morale factor was absolutely critical in the air war.

Resistance groups were involved in more than just the intangibles such as morale. They attacked communications and logistics, specifically, railroads, bridges, and telecommunications. In fact, during the Allied landings at Normandy in June 1944, the French resistance cut the telephone lines from France to Berlin, waited for the Germans to repair them, and immediately cut them again—repeating the process several times. So effective were these attacks, that General Dwight D. Eisenhower placed their importance before that of the U.S. Army Air Force (USAAF) bombardment preparation of the landing areas.

Sabotage comes in at least two forms: passive—which would usually take the form of omission or negligence; and active—an attack using violence. Resistance in World War II used both methods. The passive forms, using the morale factor, would include factory workers not properly doing their jobs. In some cases, forced and unforced laborers were able to damage equipment before it left the assembly line so that it would not work properly in the field. As collectors of World War II militaria know well, German firearms must be checked before using them because of this problem; it was (and is) not unknown for weapons to explode on use in the field. Of course, sabotage took on more direct and violent measures as well.

Just one example of active resistance comes from France in early 1944, when the resistance visited the managers of several automobile factories and told them that they were going to blow up their plants. To minimize friendly casualties, they asked for assistance. They justified their requests by explaining that if they were able to knock out the critical machinery of a factory, they would not have to destroy the entire building and everything in it. Likewise, the Allies would not have to bomb the entire area. After the war, they argued, the factory could be rebuilt quickly with less expense. Whether it was the appeal to nationalism or economics, the plant managers agreed and the factories were successfully attacked.

Just prior to the Normandy invasion, the Belgian resistance was given limpet mines by the Allies to attach to the sides of German ships in Antwerp harbor. The German plan, in the event of an invasion, was to steam the ships to the mouth of the harbor and sink them, thereby making it unusable and slowing the Allies down. The Belgian resistance was able to sink the ships at the pier.

In Norway in 1944 the resistance attacked the heavy-water facilities where the Germans were working on an atomic bomb. By destroying heavy-water production and, later, the heavy water itself, the resistance denied a vital component to the German nuclear program. Historians argue about whether the Germans would have finished in time, but regardless of the physics involved, this attack ensured that they would not.

Resistance operations took place throughout Europe during the war. In the Balkans, the situation was much more complex than fighting a foreign invader, for the multiethnic, Yugoslavs were fighting amongst themselves while fighting the Germans. Regardless of why and for what they fought, the various Yugoslav resistance groups were able to hold up an entire Axis army group (approximately seven hundred thousand men) during the war. These troops might have prolonged the war if deployed elsewhere.

Did the various resistance organizations win the war? Of course not, but probably their most important contributions were to shorten it, save Allied lives, and maintain their own dignity for when the war ended.

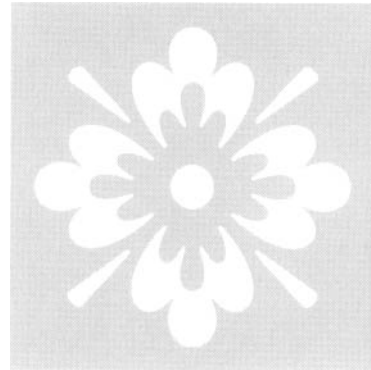
—WILLIAM H. KAUTT, SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS

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# ROOSEVELT

## Was Franklin D. Roosevelt a great war leader?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, Franklin D. Roosevelt was an astute and effective war leader, who picked excellent military subordinates, prepared the United States for war, and helped orchestrate an effective grand strategy and maintained close ties to Britain.

**Viewpoint:** No, Franklin D. Roosevelt was not a great war leader because he too easily followed the British lead, favored the Navy over the Army, and let his personal feelings interfere with policy, especially with regard to General Douglas MacArthur.

Franklin D. Roosevelt has become such a symbolic figure that it is easy to overlook the fact that prior to the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941) he was both generally controversial and unpopular with many people. The New Deal had come under increasing criticism from both the Left and the Right as the Great Depression (1929–1941) lingered. Since the outbreak of war in Europe (September 1939), America's foreign policy was similarly denounced as too much and not enough. Roosevelt's conduct of foreign affairs was attacked as secretive and authoritarian. All of these challenges were exacerbated by the president's unprecedented run for a third term in 1940.

It was a less than promising matrix for wartime greatness. Yet, the qualities that seemed dubious in domestic contexts met the needs of a nation at war. On the most basic level, Roosevelt represented continuity. By 1945 he was the only president many Americans remembered, a fixed point in a rapidly-changing age. Roosevelt epitomized as well the connection between the humane aspirations of the New Deal and a worldwide crusade for decency. He recognized the material and human potential inherent in the United States; supervised its development in only five years into the world's greatest military and economic power; simultaneously kept focused a country not under direct threat, and maintained essentially its full panoply of domestic rights and protections. Exceptions were just that—and they were usually put right soon afterward.

Roosevelt picked good men at the top levels of military command. He controlled and coordinated their actions, avoiding micromanagement while keeping the armed forces concentrated on the destruction of the Axis. Roosevelt cultivated a close relationship with Britain and did his best to satisfy the U.S.S.R., while at the same time seeking to lay the groundwork for a new world order giving a voice to all nations and sustained by the great powers. If these policies led him into the questionable decision to support nationalist China and encouraged his overlooking Stalin's increasingly hostile wartime behavior, the stakes justified the risks—in Roosevelt's mind.

Perhaps the best indication of Roosevelt's qualities as a war leader is that after the first six months the United States never took a backward step above the tactical level. No other combatant country in World War II, and few at any time, can make a similar statement.



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, Franklin D. Roosevelt was an astute and effective war leader, who picked excellent military subordinates, prepared the United States for war, and helped orchestrate an effective grand strategy and maintained close ties to Britain.**

Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin, Hideki Tojo, Winston Churchill, and Franklin D. Roosevelt were the most prominent war leaders of World War II. Of the five, Roosevelt arguably had the least experience and interest in military matters. Hitler had served heroically during World War I, and as Führer was far more comfortable wearing military uniforms than civilian suits. Stalin had demonstrated decisiveness and ruthlessness as a political commissar during the Russian Civil War (1918–1920) and during his purges of the Soviet officer corps in the 1930s. Tojo was an army general who rose to power in the wake of assassinations in Japan in 1941. Churchill had fought in the Boer War (1899–1902) and served as First Lord of the Admiralty. Compared to these resuméés, Roosevelt’s service as Assistant Secretary of the Navy during World War I appeared somewhat anemic. Yet, despite his lack of firsthand combat experience, Roosevelt emerged as perhaps the most astute war leader of the five during World War II, proving particularly strong in his understanding and handling of grand strategy.

Even before World War II began for the United States, Roosevelt had carefully maneuvered a reluctant country into a position of greater preparedness. Care was needed to thwart efforts of isolationists in the America First Committee, a powerful lobby whose members included Charles A. Lindbergh. Not only did isolationists, through the passage of neutrality acts in 1935–1937, seek to prevent the United States from intervening in Europe, they also sought to inhibit U.S. industrial preparation and rearmament. At a time when most Americans saw economic depression instead of Hitler as the real enemy, Roosevelt painstakingly built a constituency to support greater spending on national defense. Cozying up to big business, Roosevelt cleverly sold rearmament as a “jobs for the boys” program. Isolationists might insist that the United States refuse to sell weapons to combatant countries, but they found it difficult to oppose rearmament when it meant jobs for American workers.

Roosevelt fully recognized the depth of America’s opposition to foreign entanglements,

which included a strong distrust of British motives. Roosevelt shaped and molded public opinion, however; he was not molded by it. Fully aware of his countrymen’s anglophobia, Roosevelt nevertheless steadfastly continued to support Great Britain because he presciently recognized that Hitler would not confine his ambitions to Europe. In fact, Hitler planned to build long-range bombers and a blue-water navy to strike at the United States—plans that were overcome by events on the Russian front. Strengthening Britain, especially on the high seas, was the most cost-effective way to safeguard U.S. national security. Thus, in September 1940, Roosevelt sold fifty destroyers to Britain in exchange for leases to bases that the United States largely did not need. In December, Roosevelt made his famous “arsenal of democracy” speech in which he declared the United States would use its industrial might to aid democracies in their fight against Nazi Germany. Three months later, in March 1941, Roosevelt convinced Congress to support Lend Lease, which overturned prior isolationist policies of “cash and carry” and instead freely extended economic and military aid to Germany’s enemies. With the psychological support of Roosevelt’s promise of U.S. industrial might, Churchill and Britain never wavered in their opposition to Hitler.

On the home front Roosevelt continued to educate the American people about the need to prepare for war. In 1940 he oversaw the passage of the Selective Service Act, which instituted the first peacetime draft in U.S. history. That this act was controversial was readily shown in 1941 when the House renewed it by only one vote (203 to 202). A correspondingly consummate politician, Roosevelt recognized that he needed to build bipartisan support for his policies. He therefore nominated two Republicans—Frank Knox and Henry L. Stimson—to serve as Secretary of the Navy and as Secretary of War, respectively. Finally, Roosevelt understood that Americans saw war as an aberration to be avoided, but not at all costs. By articulating the Four Freedoms on 6 January 1941, Roosevelt described the approaching war in morally righteous terms, tapping into America’s idealism and its strong moral reserve, defining the war as a crusade against tyranny and evil.

By midsummer of 1941 the United States was fighting an undeclared war in the Atlantic against German submarines. In escorting merchant shipping to Iceland, the U.S. Navy soon came to blows with the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy), losing the destroyer *Reuben James* to German torpedoes on 29 October. Tensions were even higher with Japan, as Roosevelt pursued a policy of trade embargoes and diplomatic pres-



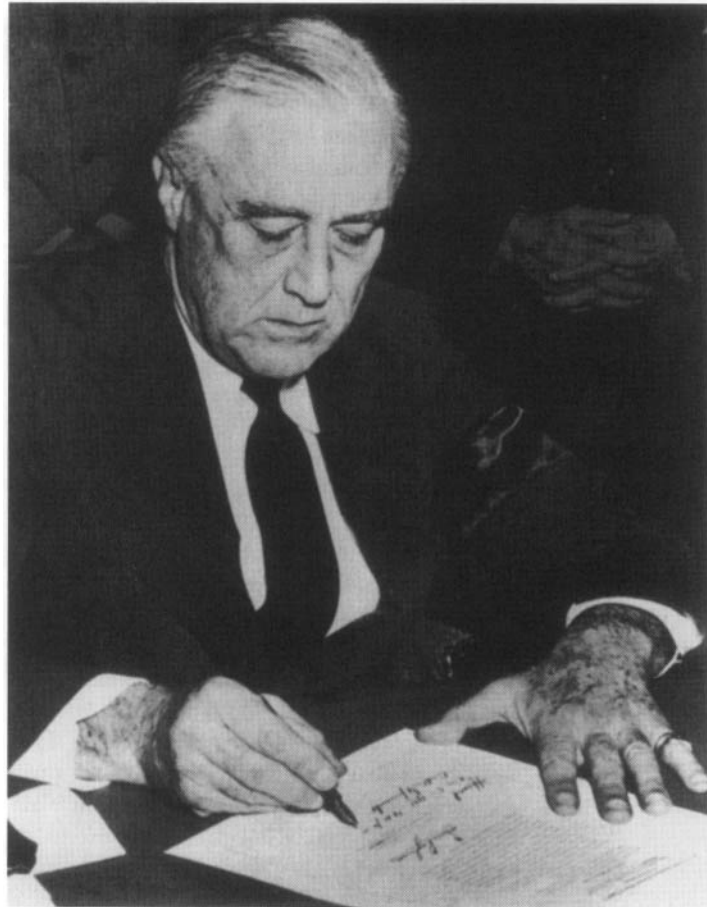
sure to force concessions from a militaristic Japanese government. Japan's sudden and deliberate attack on the U.S. Pacific fleet on 7 December 1941 marked the failure of this policy and catapulted the United States into war in the Pacific, and, within four days, a global struggle as Hitler declared war on the United States on 11 December.

Roosevelt thus found himself facing the horns of a dilemma: should he stay with the previously agreed-upon policy of defeating Nazi Germany first, or should he attempt to reorder priorities to contain a surging Imperial Japan? With the U.S. Navy and the American people clamoring for revenge against Japan, it would have been easy for Roosevelt to put Japan first. Roosevelt knew, however, that Japan's victories in the Pacific, as decisive as they were in places such as Singapore and the Philippines, were more easily reversible than Hitler's triumphs in Europe. In consultation with Churchill, he put the defeat of Germany first.

The wisdom of this decision quickly became apparent. At the Battle of Midway (3–6 June 1942), the U.S. Navy inflicted a stunning defeat on Japan that turned the tide of the war in the Pacific. Much hard fighting remained, of course, but the eventual outcome was never seriously in doubt. In contrast, Germany was still riding high in 1942. Erwin Rommel appeared on the verge of capturing Egypt and the Suez Canal, thereby cutting Allied communication lines in the Mediterranean. U-boats had the upper hand in the battle for the Atlantic. Even Stalin seemed on the ropes as the Soviet Union reeled from German offensives in the Caucasus.

During these black hours Roosevelt's most important leadership trait was his calmness and deep understanding of the American people. As Japan seized the Philippines and other Pacific possessions, and U-boats torpedoed scores of merchant vessels within sight of bathers on the East Coast, Roosevelt remained outwardly calm and continued to exude confidence and an urbane normality. Because Roosevelt did not panic or overreact, neither did the American people. He knew them—what they were prepared to do and sacrifice—and they knew him.

The seemingly dire situation in Europe in 1942 pushed General George C. Marshall, Roosevelt's brilliant Army chief of staff, to recommend an immediate cross-Channel invasion to open a second front in Europe. In rejecting Marshall's recommendation and extending his support instead to Churchill and a combined Anglo-American landing in French North Africa (Operation Torch) in November 1942, Roosevelt demonstrated his superior grasp of grand strategy. He recognized that the United States could ill afford a major defeat and that U.S. troops



lacked experience, especially in joint operations with Allies. That U.S. troops were still somewhat green was amply shown in Erwin Rommel's rout of them at Kasserine Pass (14 February 1943). Despite this setback, Roosevelt achieved his objectives. The North African invasion strengthened solidarity and mutual trust within the British and U.S. combined staffs, and the U.S. Army gained invaluable combat experience that would see the U.S. First Infantry Division through the horrors of Omaha beach on 6 June 1944.

More important perhaps than what Roosevelt accomplished in North Africa was what he avoided in Europe. A cross-Channel invasion in 1942 or early 1943 might have brought a repeat of the disastrous Dieppe raid (19 August 1942), but on a much costlier scale. The psychological cost of a disastrous cross-Channel invasion might possibly have delayed the opening of a second front in Europe several months, if not years, beyond the eventual and successful D-Day invasion in June 1944. Instead of stopping at Berlin, the Soviet juggernaut may have continued west to the Ruhr valley, with the Iron Curtain falling from Kiel on the Baltic instead of from Stettin (now Szczecin), Poland.

Although Roosevelt overruled Marshall in regards to the timing of a cross-Channel inva-

**President Franklin D. Roosevelt signing the declaration of war against Japan, 8 December 1941**

*(U.S. Department of the Interior)*

sion, he rarely intervened in the day-to-day running of the war. Roosevelt knew he had found in Marshall his organizer of victory. Unlike Hitler, who after 1941 appointed himself head of the army and intervened increasingly in operational, and even tactical, decisions on the battlefield, Roosevelt allowed Marshall and his generals to get on with the job. Here Roosevelt demonstrated a key element of leadership: he picked strong subordinates and delegated the task of winning battles to them.

Related to his ability to delegate wisely was Roosevelt's global outlook and his ability to recognize the limits of his country's considerable power. Comparisons to Hitler are again revealing. Even in 1945 Hitler was still fighting to win the war. His near complete ignorance of the United States led him to underestimate vastly its economic capacity and will. In desperation he sought total victory or utter annihilation and found the latter. Similarly, Tojo vastly underestimated U.S. military potential and will. Hitler and Tojo failed to read or recall the advice of fourth-century-B.C. Chinese strategist Sun Tzu, who wrote that wise leaders must know their enemies. Roosevelt had no illusions about Nazi Germany or Imperial Japan and the extent of their combined might. He therefore assiduously cultivated a close alliance with Churchill, and a difficult but ultimately successful coalition with Stalin. With Roosevelt often serving in his favorite role of mediator between Churchill and Stalin, the "Big Three" effectively combined forces to mount a synergistic war effort. The Axis powers, in contrast, failed almost entirely in their efforts to coordinate their respective war efforts, a failure attributable to poor leadership at the top.

Roosevelt did not escape criticism in his conduct of diplomacy and grand strategy during World War II. By announcing a policy of unconditional surrender at Casablanca in January 1943, he was charged with prolonging the war. At Yalta in February 1945, he was accused of being too conciliatory to Stalin's demands and naive in his estimation of Stalin's ambitions and plans in Eastern Europe. Both of these charges deserve scrutiny. The policy of unconditional surrender may indeed have prolonged the war, but the added cost in blood and treasure was arguably worth it. Only an utterly defeated Germany and Japan, Roosevelt believed, would prove malleable to the radical postwar reforms required to restore them to a democratic world order. Here Roosevelt held the lesson of World War I firmly in mind. Germany, he believed, must be forced to admit defeat to prevent a repeat of the "stab-in-the-back" legend that arose after World War I and which Hitler cleverly exploited in his rise to power.

Yalta provided a sterner challenge to Roosevelt's leadership. At the meeting in the Crimea, Roosevelt's health was definitely in decline; he died two months later. His chief goal was to obtain Stalin's promise to enter the war against Japan after Germany was defeated, and here he succeeded. Soviet entry into the war against Japan in August, together with the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, compelled the emperor to intervene to end the war before Japan was utterly destroyed. Yet, it was true that Roosevelt failed to appreciate fully the aggressive designs Stalin had in Eastern Europe, although it is difficult to see if a more assertive stance would have deterred a Soviet leader and people bent on revenge. Predictably, Stalin violated the Yalta accords and refused to hold free elections in Eastern Europe or respect rights to self-government. Again, it is difficult to see what Roosevelt could have said or done differently, short of military action, that might have sown the seeds of a third world war, to prevent Stalin and his military from dominating the region.

It is indeed ironic that historical commentators have the temerity to question Roosevelt's toughness even in 1945, for strength of character was Roosevelt's ultimate trump card. In the modern media-saturated political arena, in which "image is everything," it seems astonishing that an aging and polio-stricken cripple could both reassure Americans in defeat and rally them to victory. His example is a salutary reminder that leadership is much more than managing one's image. Rather, leadership stems from confidence, conviction, and strength of character, qualities that Roosevelt possessed in abundance and that led the American people to place their full faith and trust in him.

—WILLIAM J. ASTORE, U.S. AIR FORCE  
ACADEMY, COLORADO



**Viewpoint:**  
**No, Franklin D. Roosevelt was not a great war leader because he too easily followed the British lead, favored the Navy over the Army, and let his personal feelings interfere with policy, especially with regard to General Douglas MacArthur.**

War is the extension of politics by violence. Its origins are grounded in politics, its ends are political. Particularly in the twentieth century, war has been conducted by political men, with an ultimate eye for political, rather than strictly military, ends. Roosevelt was a consummate

national leader whose responsibilities encompassed addressing America's national interests and simultaneously reassuring Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, no political lightweights themselves, in times that would have sent lesser men into hysteria and panic. Roosevelt succeeded in transforming the United States, which until 7 December 1941 had been tilting rather strongly toward limited commitment and noninvolvement, into a well-oiled and massive war machine. He also suffered from a disease that seems particularly infectious among civilian war leaders—the desire to outgeneral the generals. There were three significant areas in which Roosevelt allowed his prejudices to override his sense of boundaries. They involved pursuing a Mediterranean strategy, favoring the Navy, and personal enmity toward Douglas MacArthur.

The first problem Roosevelt faced on 8 December, one day after declaring war on both Germany and Japan, was “whom do we fight and where?” For the previous two years Roosevelt had been funneling crucial help to Britain in the face of increasing antiwar sentiment throughout the country. In May of 1941, at a secret meeting with Churchill off the coast of Newfoundland, he pledged that when America entered the war, the defeat of Germany would be the major objective. This “Europe first” decision, of course, was made before the Japanese all but destroyed the Pacific Fleet and were well on their way toward the complete domination of the western Pacific. The country's antiwar sentiment evaporated in the nationwide roar for Japan's annihilation. Churchill, justly worried that these new circumstances would divert the energies of the United States to the Pacific, immediately rushed to Washington and began an active publicity campaign to woo the U.S. public, Roosevelt, and his administration to proceed with the Germany-first strategy. He succeeded with everyone except Army chief of staff General George C. Marshall.

The British, in no position to confront the Germans head-on, wanted to nibble the Reich to death on the periphery—primarily in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. Marshall believed a direct invasion in western Europe was the best way to defeat the enemy. His main rationalization was the major part of the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) was pinned down in Russia and presented a relatively undefined rear. He also feared, justly, a dispersion and erosion of forces in a dozen inconsequential theaters of operations. This situation was virtually the only time in the subsequent course of the war that Roosevelt did not listen to Marshall. As a consequence, according to some commentators, he lengthened the war by at least a year.

Roosevelt's second lapse as a war leader reflected his previous experience. He had spent



## THE DEATH OF FDR

*When President Franklin D. Roosevelt died on 12 April 1945, the United States as well as many nations around the world was plunged into a deep sadness. British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said “I have lost a dear and cherished friendship which was forged in the fires of war.” American newspapermen in their columns paid homage to Roosevelt; Walter Lippmann's tribute appears below.*

Roosevelt lived to see the nation make the crucial decisions upon which its future depends: to face evil and to rise up and destroy it, to know that America must find throughout the world allies who will be its friends, to understand that the nation is too strong, too rich in resources and in skill, ever to accept again as irremediable the wastage of men who cannot find work and of the means of wealth which lie idle and cannot be used. Under his leadership, the debate on these fundamental purposes has been concluded, and the decision has been rendered, and the argument is not over the ends to be sought but only over the ways and means by which they can be achieved.

Thus he led the nation not only out of mortal danger from abroad but out of the bewilderment over unsettled purposes which could have rent it apart from within. When he died, the issues which confront us are difficult. But they are not deep and they are not irreconcilable. Neither in our relations with other peoples nor among ourselves are there divisions within us that cannot be managed with common sense.

The genius of a good leader is to leave behind him a situation which common sense, without the grace of genius, can deal with successfully. Here lay the political genius of Franklin Roosevelt: that in his own time he knew what were the questions that had to be answered, even though he himself did not always find the full answer. It was to this that our people and the world responded, preferring him instinctively to those who did not know what the real questions were.

*Source: New York Herald Tribune, 13 April 1945.*

World War I as Assistant Secretary of the Navy. In peacetime he had used a heavy cruiser as a fishing platform. Even after Pearl Harbor, Roosevelt habitually referred to Admiral Ernest J. King and the Navy as “we” and Marshall and the Army as “they.” These terms were no mere verbal tilt, no quirk of the kind common to powerful chief executives. It was a bias that showed up in such matters as procurement and force allocation. King's ruthless campaign to secure every possible landing craft and amphibious ship for the Pacific created critical shortages in the Mediterranean theater in 1943–1944 for no compensatory advantage on the other side of the world. A case can be made as well that rigorous execu-

tive oversight might have pruned naval construction programs that by the end of 1943 clearly exceeded—by several orders of magnitude—the requirements for victory in the Pacific. Presidential involvement might have made available surplus Navy manpower to an Army that by late 1944 was cannibalizing noncombat battalions for infantry replacements. It could have limited the Marine Corps’s arguably disproportionate levies on the pick of the combat-eager teenagers.

Roosevelt’s third shortcoming emerged during the course of operations in the Pacific theater. Roosevelt, in accordance with King’s vision of the Pacific as the Navy’s exclusive playground, decided to give command of the central Pacific to Admiral Chester W. Nimitz and make it the primary sector of engagement. That left MacArthur in the southwest Pacific, in effect twiddling his thumbs. His missions were to prevent the invasion of Australia, a moot possibility after Midway, and to serve as guardian of Nimitz’s flank. There were several complex reasons for this decision, including that no other command open was appropriate to a general of his seniority and Marshall dreaded the thought of MacArthur on the loose in wartime Washington. King and Nimitz detested MacArthur. The overriding reason for his relative isolation, however, was the long political memory of Roosevelt. He had never forgotten, nor forgiven, several harsh exchanges a decade earlier when MacArthur was Chief of Staff. MacArthur was also the darling of the Republicans and was perceived as a serious challenger for the presidency in 1944. For these reasons Roosevelt felt New Guinea was the perfect place for him. It was the most remote place on earth from the White House and it looked like MacArthur would be bogged down indefinitely in the jungles. Instead MacArthur, a master of military politics, used every ounce of his influence, called in every chit, and intrigued successfully for a two-pronged Pacific offensive. He then proceeded to capture more territory with less material and fewer casualties than any other general in any theater of the war. His successes

are a case study for the argument that a great war leader uses all the tools at his disposal—not just those comfortably fitting his hand.

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# SUBMARINES

## Did submarines play an important role in World War II?

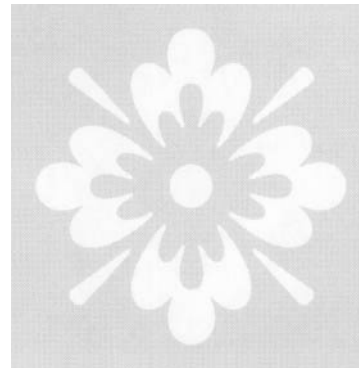
**Viewpoint:** Yes, German U-boats waged a relentless campaign against shipping in the Atlantic, seriously threatening Allied efforts in North Africa and Europe, while in the Pacific, American submarines played a vital role in defeating Japan by destroying the enemy's merchant fleet and cutting off imports to the home islands.

**Viewpoint:** No, submarines absorbed more resources and suffered greater losses in World War II than their combat successes justified.

Submarines might not have decided World War II at sea, but they did define it. Prior to 1939 none of the major navies emphasized undersea warfare—an approach encouraged by the relative limitations of submarine technology. “Submarines” at this period were not true submersibles, and were designed to spend most of their time on the surface. Defensive technologies, plus the convoy system as developed in 1917–1918, were widely considered to have raised the cost of undersea attacks to a point where only warships were appropriate targets. The British and Germans both followed that policy in the first months of World War II; the Japanese never abandoned it. The U.S. Navy, by contrast, waged almost from the beginning a campaign against merchant shipping—but that emphasis was in part a product of torpedoes that were clearly ineffective against Japanese warships.

Germany's shift to commerce warfare owed something to the internal politics of the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy), and something more to the heavy losses suffered by the surface fleet during the Norwegian campaign. Closely controlled from shore-based headquarters, making the most devastating attacks at night, the *Unterseeboot* (U-boat) campaign came close enough to severing Britain's transatlantic links that the Battle of the Atlantic is usually described as one of the war's turning points. Certainly it altered Allied procurement and strategy. An increasing amount of Britain's limited shipbuilding capacity, and an unexpected amount of the United States and Canada's as well, was devoted to constructing escort and antisubmarine vessels that were only marginally useful for anything else. The chronic shortage of landing craft in 1943–1944 reflected in no small measure the demands of the antisubmarine campaign. The U-boats may have done more to prolong the war in that context than by their actual successes in sinking merchantmen. The snorkel device that enabled U-boats to remain submerged longer was introduced too late, and had too many teething problems, to make a real difference in the pattern of operations.

In the Pacific, Japan's antisubmarine measures remained limited and primitive. By mid 1945, U.S. subs had eviscerated Japan's merchant marine, scored some notable successes against surface combatants, and facilitated the destruction of other warships by compelling them to use unrefined and volatile fuel oil because too few tankers remained to ship oil back to Japan. Japanese submarines for their part spent increasing amounts of time running supplies to isolated garrisons—a dead end epitomizing an undersea war of lost opportunities.





**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, German U-boats waged a relentless campaign against shipping in the Atlantic, seriously threatening Allied efforts in North Africa and Europe, while in the Pacific, American submarines played a vital role in defeating Japan by destroying the enemy's merchant fleet and cutting off imports to the home islands.**

The submarine played an important, if not critical, role in World War II because control of the sea was vital for Britain, the United States, and Japan. Each nation's lines of communication and supply ran across the water and they could neither project their power abroad nor defend themselves at home without access to the ocean highways. Britain and Japan, moreover, were island nations whose economies were absolutely dependent on seaborne imports. They each drew resources from extensive overseas empires, which they maintained and controlled by sea. To protect these interests in the interwar years, Britain, America, and Japan maintained the three largest navies in the world. Small wonder, then, that much of World War II revolved around great struggles at sea. The only surprise was the part played by Germany, a continental power with a relatively small surface fleet. Yet, Germany's attempt to prevent supplies from crossing the Atlantic to reinforce her enemies became one of the decisive campaigns of World War II; another was America's effort in the Pacific to cut off supplies to Japan. These struggles over seaborne trade influenced the outcome of the war for Axis and Allies alike, and the best and most successful weapon against trade was the submarine.

After World War I (1914–1918), naval powers were still mesmerized by big battleships. While acknowledging the rise of submarines and airpower, in the continuing tradition of Alfred Thayer Mahan they concentrated naval resources on capital ship construction. When war broke out again in 1939, however, battleships proved unexpectedly vulnerable to attack from the air. In the end, the battleship's role in World War II was largely reduced to shore bombardment and defense of that other capital ship built between the wars, the aircraft carrier.

Because of the vast distances involved in the global maritime war, aircraft carriers quickly reached a preeminent position. Aircraft had limited ranges and aircraft carriers made it possible to extend air power to the farthest corners of the most distant oceans. British aircraft, flying off carriers in the Mediterranean, staged a successful

attack on the Italian fleet in Taranto in November 1940, sinking or damaging all six Italian battleships and proving the power of naval air. Inspired by this example, on 7 December 1941 Japanese carrier planes attacked the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. They inflicted great damage on the U.S. Pacific Fleet and brought America into the war. Thereafter, large fleet carriers and smaller escort carriers revolutionized naval warfare, taking over from the battleship and greatly increasing the range of naval striking power. Airpower alone, even shipborne, however, could not win the maritime war for either side.

As unexpected as the weakness of the battleship and the dominance of the aircraft carrier, was the preeminence achieved in World War II by the submarine. Between the wars all the major naval powers—Britain, America, Japan, France, Italy, and ultimately Germany—and several others, built submarines. They were expected to provide coastal defense and to act as auxiliaries to battlefleets, especially for reconnaissance. Myopically focusing on the clash of great warships, almost no one—except Karl Dönitz, head of the German *Unterseeboot* (U-boat) arm—anticipated the submarine's use against trade as anything but secondary. When war came again, Axis and Allied submarines saw action in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans, in the Mediterranean and Arctic seas, and in other waters around the globe. They served many different functions including reconnaissance, mine-laying, air-sea rescue, and blockade running. They sank significant numbers of warships and were used as weapons against each other in antisubmarine warfare (ASW). Their defining role in World War II, however, and the measure of their effectiveness, was their success in the war against trade.

The submarines of World War II were submersibles rather than true submarines, with limited underwater speed and endurance. Their prime weapon, apart from stealth, was the torpedo, though early in the war this threat was often mitigated by significant technical flaws. On the other hand, ASW was primitive in the beginning, and apart from sonar, the only real defense against submarines, also used successfully in World War I, was to gather merchant ships together in convoys protected by naval escorts. ASW measures improved dramatically, however, and as the number, type, and skill of escorts increased, submarines suffered heavy losses. The Japanese lost 130 submarines during the war, cutting their force in half. In the Pacific, the United States lost 52 submarines from all causes, the British lost 3 and the Dutch, 5. Germany lost 754 U-boats, or 73 percent of their total, most of them in the Atlantic. It was a dangerous and costly form of warfare, and submariners suffered

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

among the highest casualty rates of any branch of service. Yet, the pivotal role of the submarine in the war against trade ensured the continuation of the effort in spite of the losses incurred.

German U-boats waged the longest campaign of the war, struggling for control of the Atlantic sea-lanes from September 1939 until the German surrender in May 1945. Handicapped by the severe restrictions on its navy imposed by the Treaty of Versailles (1919), Germany had been late to enter the interwar naval race; it built battleships and battle cruisers, but no aircraft carriers and relatively few submarines. U-boats were low on the scale of Nazi priorities, especially in competition with the army and air force for vital construction materials such as steel. Adolf Hitler, concerned with continental conquest, took little interest in the maritime war, and only belatedly recognized the importance of U-boats.

When Britain stood alone against the German domination of Europe in the summer of 1940, the Royal Air Force defeated Hitler's *Luftwaffe* (German Air Force) in the skies over Britain. Without air supremacy, and given the superior strength of the Royal Navy, a cross-Channel invasion was too dangerous, so the job of holding Britain in check was handed to the *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy). In spite of some early successes, German warships and other commerce raiders were soon neutralized which, by default, left the blockade of Britain to German submarines.

Admiral Dönitz's main weapon was the relatively small 750-ton Type VIIC U-boat, half the size of American fleet submarines, and considered by some critics too small for open ocean operations. Because it was relatively quick and cheap to build, however, and because Dönitz continued to face time and budget constraints, the Type VIIC remained the backbone of his fleet, accounting for almost two-thirds of the 1,170 U-boats built. The Type VIIC was generally armed with fourteen torpedoes and carried deck guns and anti-aircraft armament of various kinds. In September 1939 Dönitz had only fifty-seven U-boats, instead of the three hundred he believed necessary to win the war against British trade. Nevertheless, he quickly instituted night surface attacks against convoys, eventually with enough U-boats to form them into highly effective wolf packs.

By the end of 1941 U-boats were sinking ships faster than they could be replaced, and it was not clear how much longer Britain could continue in the war. Then, on 11 December, Hitler unexpectedly supported his Axis partner Japan by declaring war on the United States. Thanks to increased U-boat production, Dönitz finally had almost three hundred boats at his command and he immediately launched an assault on ships sailing unescorted in American coastal waters. In the first four months of 1942, U-boats sank 1.2 million tons of Allied shipping. The resulting shipping crisis worried U.S. Army

chief of staff George C. Marshall, who was concerned about transports to carry American troops for Operation Torch—the invasion of North Africa—in November.

The invasion went forward, but wolf-pack successes continued into March 1943, reaching a climax of ferocious convoy battles in the North Atlantic. Eventually, however, American industry began to churn out more ships than could be sunk, and a whole range of new and more-effective submarine countermeasures came into play to defeat the U-boats.

In the sixty-eight months the Atlantic campaign lasted, U-boats sank nearly 3,000 merchant vessels, or 14 million tons, as well as 175 warships. Tens of thousands of Allied seamen died. British prime minister Winston Churchill later confessed that the only thing he had really feared during the war was the U-boat. He believed that had Dönitz begun his campaign with more submarines he might have succeeded in forcing Britain to negotiate before America entered the war. Churchill saw that once the Luftwaffe failed to bomb Britain into surrender, Dönitz's U-boats held the key to the balance of power in Western Europe. Even the proponents of strategic bombing must acknowledge that the air campaign against Germany could not have been conducted without supplies carried across the Atlantic. Even those who believe the Soviet Union was largely responsible for defeating Germany recognize the importance of opening a second front in the west. Dönitz's U-boats jeopardized both those campaigns.

Unlike the naval war in the Atlantic, much of the Pacific war hinged on the clash of battle fleets and on seaborne assaults against scattered Japanese-held islands. While American submarines played a part in all these operations, their major role was not as a corollary to larger actions. They had an offensive of their own: the interdiction of Japanese trade. Like the U-boats, American submarines were aimed principally against merchantmen.

Immediately after Pearl Harbor, American submarines went on the offensive, waging an unrestricted campaign against the enemy. At the start of the war the U.S. Navy had only forty-four fleet-type submarines in the Pacific. They were mostly 1,500 tons, 312 feet long, with a cruising range of 12,000 miles. They carried twenty-four torpedoes, a three-inch deck gun, and light automatic weapons.

At first, the effectiveness of the American submarine campaign was seriously compromised by the continuation of overly cautious peacetime tactics. An even more critical handicap was the defective magnetic detonators and faulty firing-pin assemblies of American torpedoes. Between January and March 1942, fifteen Amer-

ican submarines out of Pearl Harbor sank fifteen ships in Japanese waters, while at the same time Dönitz's eleven U-boats sank 204 ships in American waters. The American submarine campaign in the Pacific, however, had the full support of Chief of Naval Operations Ernest J. King, a former submariner, who appointed Vice Admiral Charles A. Lockwood to reorganize and revitalize the force. The tactical problem was solved by bringing in aggressive young skippers, and the torpedoes' technical flaws were eventually eradicated, although not until 1943. By then, American submarines were waging a highly successful war against Japanese merchant shipping.

Inexplicably, the Japanese failed to protect their merchant ships, building few new escorts and instituting convoying only late in the war, and even then only half-heartedly. By 1944 American submarines had cut Japan off from oil and other vital supplies of its Southern Resources Area. In June 1945 they struck at Japan's main lifeline from the continent across the Sea of Japan, virtually stopping all traffic to the home islands. American submarines sank at least 1,113 Japanese merchant vessels of more than 500 tons, for a total of 5,320,094 tons, crippling the island nation and helping to bring it to the point of surrender.

When the war began, the Japanese had forty-six large I-class submarines—as large as the American boats—and fourteen medium RO-class boats. Both were armed with a far more effective torpedo than the Germans or Americans had; it was faster and more dependable, with a longer range and more powerful warhead. Like the U-boats, however, Japanese submarines were inferior to American and British boats in electronics, and lacked radar for most of the war. Also like the Germans, and unlike the American “silent service,” Japanese submarines frequently broke radio silence, which laid them open to location by signals intelligence. Furthermore, as Japanese submarines were sunk they could not be readily replaced by an economy increasingly starved of resources, especially steel.

The United States, on the other hand, once its economy was on a war footing, not only replaced lost submarines but also steadily expanded its force. By January 1945 there were seventy-five American submarines in the Pacific, mostly of the large fleet type. However, the reason American submarines played an important role in the Pacific, while the Japanese submarines did not, had less to do with material factors than with their strategic use. Disdaining the role of commerce raiders embraced by the Americans, Japanese submarines continued to press costly attacks against even well-screened warships, instead of aiming at the more vulnerable tankers and freighters on which the Allied fleets relied.



Although Japanese submarines scored some notable successes in 1942, improved American ASW soon cut this rate to almost nothing. Their force was further dissipated by the Japanese having to use their submarines as supply transports. The Japanese navy failed to direct its submarines against extended and vulnerable Allied supply lines. By underrating the war against trade, it wasted a potentially significant weapon, denying its submarines the important role they might have had.

Dönitz had insufficient U-boats to isolate Britain at the beginning of World War II, when England was weak and before America was involved. Arguably, with more boats he might have succeeded. That is an unresolvable and, finally, immaterial question. He made the movement of men and supplies across the ocean so difficult and costly for the Allies that it retarded a full-scale invasion of the Continent, prolonging the war perhaps by as much as a year. He also tied up large numbers of Allied vessels, which might have been used to shorten the war against Japan, and delayed the defeat of Germany. In the Pacific, American submarines helped to win a victory against Japan.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, submarines absorbed more resources and suffered greater losses in World War II than their combat successes justified.**

Framing this question requires one to place submarines in context throughout World War II. All major naval combatants, except Canada, employed submarines in their navies, with roughly two thousand submersibles built for their parent fleets before and during the conflict. While submarines did score some notable successes during World War II, the key question to understanding their value must be whether the resources staked on their construction and crewing proved justified by their performance in war. Each submarine represented a large investment of scarce materials and personnel for its country, which would only be worthwhile if it produced a payoff in the form of sinking a large amount of enemy shipping before being sunk itself.

Several characteristics of World War II submarines decisively shaped the nature of undersea operations. Most importantly, these submarines were in reality temporarily submersible torpedo

boats that largely sailed on the surface. To provide power for underwater cruising, submarines relied upon electric batteries whose low capacity severely limited their submerged range, and which needed to be charged daily by using the diesel engines as generators while surfaced. Their strongest defensive asset, the ability to conceal themselves while sailing submerged, was therefore only used selectively. These limits meant that navies had to acquire large numbers of submarines to have any impact with them in combat, and had to have well-trained crews in order to make the best use of the boats.

The crew and construction material requirements of submarines made them expensive vessels for their parent economies. Typical training times for submarine crews in some navies took more than a year, because of the need to master the complex operations of the boats. As World War II progressed, high casualty rates among submariners also compelled navies to cast an ever-wider net to secure enough recruits for their services. Similarly, the materials and shipbuilding facilities needed to build submarines taxed the wartime resources of nations. As a consequence, the cost of building submarines amounted to as much as five times the cost of building surface warships and fifty times the cost of building merchant ships. The long training times needed only added to the expenses of maintaining a submarine force.

Further complicating the process of building submarines in World War II were the many technological changes introduced by navies. During the war new electronically-based systems, such as radar and radar detectors, acoustic homing torpedoes, and improved underwater sonar, added complexity to submarine designs. Other technical innovations, largely initiated in Germany, included the snorkel, which permitted submerged use of diesel engines, and streamlined hull forms, which allowed higher underwater speeds; both added capabilities but also absorbed valuable design and manufacturing resources.

The main measure of submarine success in World War II was the ability to sink enemy merchant shipping. Scouting for and attacking enemy warships, a major part of prewar submarine doctrine, rarely proved profitable. The higher surface speeds of naval vessels and their greater maneuverability made submarine attacks on warships risky propositions that were frequently unsuccessful. Thus, submarine attempts to conduct antiwarship operations, by the Germans off Norway in 1940 and near Normandy in 1944, the British off French ports in 1940–1941, and the Allies off the Dutch East Indies in 1942, proved to be wasted efforts. The only way that



## THE ATHENIA

On 3 September 1939 the British liner HMS *Athenia* was torpedoed by a German *Unterseeboot* (U-boat) off the Irish coast. Aboard the vessel were 1,450 passengers, including 314 Americans. An Associated Press report of the incident included several eyewitness accounts.

One survivor, John McEwan, of Glasgow, said a submarine torpedoed the *Athenia* and then twice shelled the vessel as its lifeboats were being lowered.

A member of one of the rescue crews said the first SOS from the *Athenia* was received at 10 p.m. (G.M.T.) Sunday.

"I saw the *Athenia* take her final plunge, stern first, the next morning," he declared. "I saw a group of five boats and in the water a number of young children who had been drowned. The boats were full, some of them badly flooded and some had people clinging to their sides. . . ."

Perhaps the saddest sight of all was 9-year-old Roy Barrington, of Toronto. His mother went down with the *Athenia*.

Pathetic scenes were enacted as the first of the rescued arrived at Glasgow's Adelphia Hotel.

Women and children limped weakly from motor busses, wearing navy boiler suits and pajamas, some with curtains around their heads and most of them without shoes.

Almost all of them were bandaged. . . .

Mr. and Mrs. W. H. Cox, of Neepawa, Manitoba, said they just got into a life boat when the rope broke, throwing them into the water.

Mrs. Cox said: "We were soon taken into the boat, but we had to bail with our shoes. While we rowed during the night we were almost submerged by the swell from the submarine as it passed under us."

A Mrs. Brown, from New Orleans, and her 11-month-old baby were rescued. She said the torpedo struck close to her cabin, carrying away the companionway to the deck above.

"I handed the baby to someone on the deck above me and scrambled up myself later. When I found the baby in the same lifeboat with me I was crazy with joy."

"We had a terrible time," said McEwan, "and we knew at once what it was."

"There was a great deal of smoke when the torpedo struck our vessel. But through the smoke I could see the submarine break the surface and, before we knew where we were, it had opened up with its gun and fired two shots at us."

"Every lifeboat was away an hour after we were struck. The liner first of all listed and then righted itself and began to go slowly down by the head."

"We learned afterward that a woman on whom an operation had just been performed had been left on the *Athenia*. One of the lifeboats went back and took her off. . . ."

*Source: Louis L. Snyder, ed., Masterpieces of War Reporting: The Great Moments of World War II (New York: Messner, 1962), pp. 7-8.*

submarines could be decisive was to sink enemy cargo ships.

The world's largest fleet in 1939, the British Royal Navy used 230 submarine boats against the Axis powers, losing seventy-four during the conflict, while sinking 1.5 million tons of shipping. By its very nature a seagoing campaign could only have a limited impact on either the German or Italian war efforts, since both powers were largely landbased. Only in the Mediterranean did British submarines exert a strong influence, where they attacked Axis shipping between Italy and North Africa. In this campaign, mostly based from the island of Malta, the Royal Navy enjoyed much success until an extensive Italian

mining campaign circumscribed British submarine operations in 1942. Most importantly, however, the Mediterranean fighting cost the British forty-five submarines, an expensive rate of loss. The need to maintain a large training establishment of up to twenty-two boats in the United Kingdom during the war, both to instruct new crews and provide targets for Allied antisubmarine escorts, limited the combat power of Britain's submarines. The age of British submarines also limited their effectiveness, compelling the service to retire many boats in the middle of the conflict. British submarine personnel proved to be in short supply from 1944 onwards as well. Thus, while the Royal Navy also employed its

boats in the Pacific and Indian oceans against the Imperial Japanese Navy, sinking some important warships, their limited designs and restricted numbers constrained their wider use. All of these problems prevented the Royal Navy's submarines from exercising a decisive effect against Axis merchant shipping during World War II.

The Italian *Regia Marina* (Royal Navy) possessed seventy-one submarines when the fascist state entered World War II and built fifty-eight more craft during the conflict. The Italians sailed their submarines from bases in mainland Italy, Ethiopia, the French port of Bordeaux, and Penang, in Malaya, sinking seven hundred thousand tons of merchant shipping in the process. Italian submariners were hampered by a doctrine that emphasized attacking warships, forcing commanders to launch submerged attacks at long ranges rather than to close with their intended targets. With this handicap, and facing strong Allied antisubmarine measures in the Mediterranean and Atlantic, Italian submarines scored only modest success. The loss of eighty-five Italian boats in combat did not justify the relatively minor losses inflicted by the service's submarine arm during World War II.

The Soviet Union deployed 272 submarines for combat during World War II, losing 109 in the process. Operating in three areas, the Soviet Baltic ("Red Banner"), Black Sea, and North Sea fleets used their submarines to attack Axis shipping for almost four years of the conflict. Soviet submarines faced several extraordinary difficulties in waging their war against enemy shipping. In particular, the geographical location of Soviet harbors meant that they were either distant from Axis shipping lanes or that approaches to their ports could be easily mined. Exploiting this vulnerability, Germany and Finland constructed a barrier of ten thousand mines and a forty-eight kilometer-long submarine net across the mouth of the Gulf of Finland in 1942. While the Red Banner submarines repeatedly tried to force this barrier, their attempts proved costly failures until the surrender of Finland in September 1944. Soviet submarines in the North Sea (Norwegian Sea) escorted Allied convoys to Murmansk and Archangel, making their role largely defensive in nature. The Black Sea boats proved capable of doing better, because of a large number of ports available for bases and the greater exposure of Axis shipping there. Nonetheless, Soviet submarine operations in the Black Sea proved to be more of a nuisance to enemy ships than a true threat. Overall in World War II, Soviet submarines claimed to have sunk just 160 Axis merchant ships of 402,000 gross tons. Such an exchange rate, one-and-a-half transports sunk per

submarine lost, constituted an extremely expensive way to sink enemy shipping.

The Imperial Japanese Navy, as one of the world's premier fleets, held a large and fairly modern submarine force when it attacked the United States in December 1941. It employed 160 boats during World War II, many of them large and fast vessels, and sank nine hundred thousand tons of Allied merchant shipping. The reason for Japan's relatively low sinking rate lies in its initial submarine doctrine, which called for the boats to operate as scouts for the main battle fleet, rather than to attack enemy merchant ships. After some initial successes in the Indian Ocean in 1942, the Imperial Japanese Navy reallocated its submarines to reinforce the empire's defenses in the Southwest Pacific Ocean. That support mission consisted of ferrying troops and supplies to beleaguered island garrisons, the role that occupied Japanese submarines for the balance of World War II. There Japanese boats and their crews ran into the teeth of American combat power, scoring only limited results and resulting in the grievous loss of 127 boats.

The U.S. Navy, the second largest fleet in the world in 1939 and the largest in 1945, had a sizeable submarine service throughout the conflict. Beginning with a force of just more than 100 boats in 1941, the navy acquired 252 and lost 51 during World War II. The initial performance of American boats against the Japanese proved disappointing, the result of a combination of faulty torpedoes that failed to explode properly and the excessive caution of U.S. Navy submarine captains. Beginning in August 1943, however, the boats accelerated their attacks on Japanese shipping, and single-handedly destroyed 1,800 vessels, totaling five million tons during the entire war. American submarines were therefore responsible for sinking fully 60 percent of Japan's merchant marine. These achievements came at considerable cost to the American submarine arm, which lost 3,500 crew members, or 22 percent of its personnel, during World War II. These losses gave U.S. Navy submariners the distinction of having the highest casualty rate of any branch of the American military. Moreover, even the heavy losses inflicted on Imperial Japan's merchant marine did not compel that state to surrender in 1945. Only after the dropping of the atomic bombs did the empire capitulate. In spite of its impressive record of successes and the best balance of success and cost of any service, the performance of the U.S. Navy's submarine force was not decisive to the outcome of World War II.

The *Kriegsmarine* (German Navy) had the world's largest force of almost 1,200 submarines, which sank fourteen million tons of merchant shipping during World War II. Under the lead-

ership of Admiral Karl Dönitz, the *Unterseeboot* (U-boat) arm operated against Allied shipping throughout the war. German submarine operations spanned the full breadth of the Atlantic Ocean, Caribbean Sea, Mediterranean Sea, Norwegian Sea, and Indian Ocean looking for targets and sorely testing Allied defenses wherever they went. The National Socialist state devoted a large share of its resources to building submarines, which eventually represented 70 percent of the ship tonnage Germany built during the war. Late in the conflict they even introduced a new design of U-boat that could be prefabricated in sections and then quickly assembled at a dockyard. Nonetheless, the determined Allied defenses, which sank many U-boats even early in the war, meant that the rapid pace of German submarine construction proved inadequate to keep even one hundred boats on patrol at any time. Similarly, the resources needed to train German crews for U-boat duty proved substantial. More than one hundred U-boats served exclusively as training vessels and much of the surface fleet spent World War II supporting submarine crew training as well. The result of these huge construction and training efforts was a large German submarine force, but more than 785 U-boats were sunk during World War II, resulting in the deaths of more than 50 percent of the force's personnel. These German sacrifices did not prevent enemy merchant shipping from moving the supplies needed for the Allied offensive operations around the world, and in that light the U-boat campaign must be judged a catastrophic failure as a consequence.

Seen in this light, the sinking of 1,231 submarines of the major World War II navies represented the loss of a huge investment on the part of the parent countries. While making a contribution in combating their opponents, submarines wound up costing these nations too much and never achieved decisive results on their own.

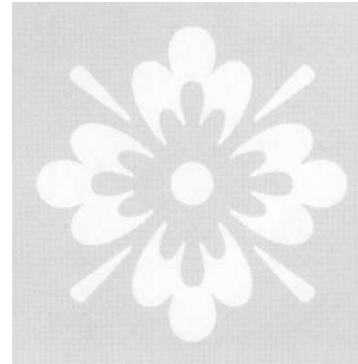
—SARANDIS PAPADOPOULOS,  
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# THE TOKYO TRIALS

## Were the Tokyo Trials of accused Japanese war criminals conducted fairly?



**Viewpoint:** Yes, the trials of Japanese war criminals were fairly administered, and the defendants had ample representation and appeals.

**Viewpoint:** No, the Tokyo Trials were essentially without legal validity; they were conducted as retribution against the Japanese for initiating the war.

The Far East war-crimes trials were modeled on the German war-crimes trials held in Europe: a central tribunal located in Tokyo for the principal defendants, along with several regional hearings that addressed specific allegations of atrocities. The Tokyo Trials, which began in May 1946 and ended in November 1948, had neither the drama nor the cathartic effect of their Nuremberg counterparts (1945–1946). The twenty-eight “Class A” defendants, representing a cross section of Japan’s policy elite, essentially faced charges of committing crimes against peace and against humanity. From the beginning of the trials, critics argued that the accused had been chosen not on the basis of their responsibility for Japan’s policies, but on the strength of the evidence against them. Of more significance was the absence from the docket of many key government leaders—and Emperor Hirohito himself.

It has been argued that the defendants, unlike their German counterparts, went along with the prosecution’s case in order to shield the emperor—in return for the tacit agreement of occupation authorities that Hirohito would remain on the throne. While unprovable, the allegations are significantly credible. As for the trials themselves, the charge of conspiracy to wage aggressive war encountered sharp criticism even from the judges’ bench, whose Indian member made a strong case that Japan’s leaders had done no more in the 1920s and 1930s than those of the other great powers—specifically Britain. The validity of this *tu quoque* position did not change a final verdict that found all but two of the defendants guilty. It did contribute, however, to the negative image of the Tokyo Trials.

In considering the charge of “crimes against humanity,” moreover, the Tokyo tribunal was thrown back on inference to a far greater extent than was the case at Nuremberg. Proving direct responsibility for the outrages that Japanese forces had committed throughout Asia was difficult. Instead, the prosecution asserted a variant of “command responsibility,” arguing that asserted lack of direct knowledge was no excuse for failure to act against criminal behavior. In that context the regional trials were far more successful in convincingly demonstrating guilt for a broad spectrum of atrocities that might be described as conventional war crimes—though whether specific sentences exactly fit the offenses remains a matter of some dispute.



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, the trials of Japanese war  
criminals were fairly administered,  
and the defendants had ample  
representation and appeals.**

It is sometimes asserted that Japan was singled out for unusually rough justice following its defeat in September 1945 and that the roughest justice was carried out by the United States. This claim is based partly on a popular notion that the Americans attempted through trials to assuage their own national guilt for the use of atomic weapons. It is also based partly on arguments similar to those concerning war-crimes trials in Europe—that the accused were unfamiliar with Anglo-American legal practices, were victims of *ex post facto* law, and were denied proper appeal procedures. All trials in which one state prosecutes the nationals of another are difficult to reconcile for everyone; they are based on military victory, and thus a power imbalance that can cloud fairness. Still, when one looks at the results of the U.S. war-crimes program in the context of the war, and of post-war trials in general, one can see that the criticisms are overblown.

Japanese leaders were given ample warning from 1941 onward that they would be held legally accountable for violations of the rules of war concerning the treatment of prisoners of war. These rules, established by the Hague Conventions of 1907 and the Geneva Convention of 1929, were hardly *ex post facto* laws, and the Japanese government had signed them. Tokyo was thus hardly in the dark when Secretary of State Cordell Hull asserted on 18 December 1941 that the United States expected the treatment of prisoners to accord with Geneva rules. The St. James Declaration (January 1942) was prompted by German crimes, but it provided other states with which Japan was at war a chance to echo the warning that those who violated established laws and customs would be held accountable. The creation of the United Nations War Crimes Commission in October 1943 in London was also prompted by German crimes in Europe, but the presence of a Chinese representative on the commission (who wished to extend war crimes retroactively to the 1931 Japanese attack in Manchuria) was hard to miss. All of these warnings Tokyo chose to ignore through the torture, starvation, murder, and frightful mutilation of prisoners and civilians. While American and British prisoners in German hands suffered a death rate of about 4 percent, those in Japanese hands suffered a death rate of 27 percent. The wanton destruction and murder of civilians by the Japa-

nese in cities such as Nanking (December 1937–January 1938) and Manila (January 1942), meanwhile, easily rivaled that of Warsaw (July–October 1944).

Thus, by the time of the 25 July 1945, “Potsdam Declaration,” which again promised “stern justice . . . to all war criminals, including those who have visited cruelties upon our prisoners,” the die had been cast by Tokyo itself. Yet, one cannot say even here that Japanese leaders faced an alien legal system. Trials in which written and spoken evidence would be decisive were expected, and in the war’s closing days Japanese state and military officials launched systematic efforts to destroy as much written evidence as possible. Bonfires, particularly outside the Ministry of War, burned day and night, consuming records on everything from imperial conferences to the treatment of POWs. In addition, phony written and physical evidence was created wherein Japanese perpetrators could pretend that murdered prisoners had died in air raids. Prisoners’ bodies in some cases were actually exhumed and moved to sites of air attacks. The Imperial Cabinet, meanwhile, passed a resolution ten days after the surrender wherein they would short-circuit Allied trials by holding their own war-crimes proceedings. Hundreds of junior and senior officers, meanwhile, including Prime Minister Hideki Tojo himself, chose suicide rather than legal retribution, though, unlike Tojo’s, most attempts were successful. The Japanese leaders liable to stand trial understood that their proceedings would be more evidence-based than those that captured Allied flyers suffered during the war under Japan’s 1942 “Enemy Airmen’s Act.” Here, Allied airmen were beheaded after Japanese courts-martial in which the accused received no legal advocate, could call no witnesses, and could make no appeal—and the only possible sentence, according to the act, was death.

The 427 U.S. Army trials held in Manila, Yokohama, and Shanghai, in which 1,116 of 1,286 Japanese defendants were convicted mostly on war crimes and murder charges, would be different. The initial regulations, issued on 24 September 1945 by General Douglas MacArthur in his capacity as Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (SCAP), demanded that all sessions be public, that each trial commission produce a complete record of its proceedings, and that defendants receive representation and the right to cross-examine. There was also a built-in appeals process of sorts whereby a staff of civilian and military reviewers would examine the proceedings, then make recommendations to the judge advocate general’s office, which, after examining the record, would send it to the legal staff of the commanding general (in this case

MacArthur) for approval. The commanding general could approve, reduce, commute, or suspend the sentence, or order a new trial. He could not, however, increase the severity of a sentence: in fact, of the 124 death sentences issued at Yokohama, only 51 were actually confirmed and carried out. Japanese defendants could also appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, and since they benefited from the service of U.S. civilian defense attorneys (at American expense), writs of habeas corpus were indeed filed in the higher profile cases.

It is true that the rules of evidence in these cases were relaxed so as to admit anything of probative value, including the affidavits of absentee witnesses, some of which were based on hearsay. This provision was due partially to the aforementioned destruction of evidence (including witnesses) and partially to the far-flung nature of the Japanese empire, which precluded the travel of thousands of witnesses (many of whom were rebuilding their lives) over thousands of miles. It is also true that MacArthur himself insisted on a certain degree of haste, owing in part to his desire to discredit militarism in Japan. On the other hand, MacArthur was cautious rather than reckless with arrests, ordering that they not take place without the existence of a clear prima facie case. The idea here was to avoid the embarrassment of acquittals, but this still worked to the benefit of Japanese personnel, only 2,636 of whom had been ordered arrested by SCAP by July 1948—the year the trials were winding down. It should be noted that in addition to the Army proceedings, the U.S. Navy held its own trials of 123 Japanese war criminals, primarily on Guam. These cases involved particularly horrible crimes, such as the beheading and cannibalization of U.S. prisoners, and in one case the application of tourniquets to prisoners' limbs so that on their removal the victims died instantly of shock. Yet, Navy rules included an appeals process running from the U.S. Navy's Director of War Crimes to the Judge Advocate of the Navy to the Secretary of the Navy. Thirty of those tried by Navy courts received the death penalty—all were for murder convictions, and most of these sentences were revised downward.

The U.S. program comes under the heaviest criticism for the sensational October–December 1945 trial of Tomoyuki Yamashita (commander of Japanese army forces in the Philippines from October 1944 to 2 September 1945). The trial, the first of an enemy before a five-man American military commission, is often condemned for two reasons: first, the haste with which it occurred, presumably at the defense's expense, and second, the broad precedent of command responsibility it aimed to establish for later trials, wherein a senior officer was liable for the unlaw-



ful conduct of his subordinates even if, as in this case, the prosecution could not demonstrate conclusively that the accused ordered or even knew of such conduct. In this case, Yamashita was held liable for many atrocities carried out under his rather chaotic command (most notably the Rape of Manila by Japanese naval forces) for which he claimed to have given no orders and about which he claimed to have no contemporary knowledge.

There were unfortunate “show trial” elements to the case, such as the reading of the guilty verdict on the anniversary of the Pearl Harbor attack (7 December 1941). It is also true that the newly established precedent on which Yamashita was found guilty and hanged would be pared down in subsequent trials. In Nuremberg, the American Military Tribunal would determine that knowledge of atrocities by a commanding officer had to be proven by orders from above or reports from below. Yet, if one accepts the notion that courts operate within the context of their times and that this context invariably affects their actions, one must argue that even Yamashita's trial was extraordinary. Unlike real show trials, where the prosecution gains confessions through torture and where the accused receives neither a proper defense nor appeal, this trial included 286 witnesses and more than 3,000 pages of testimony. Yamashita's U.S. defense team cross-examined witnesses and argued that the prosecution had not proved guilt; the commission remained unconvinced by the argument. Moreover, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld the validity of the military commission decision by a vote of six to two, and

**Japanese general Tomoyuki Yamashita, seated, at his war-crimes trial in Manila, Philippines, 1945**

*(U.S. Army)*



## MISTREATMENT OF AMERICAN POWS

*During World War II the U.S. State Department repeatedly denounced the mistreatment of American soldiers and civilians by Japanese military personnel. Below is a portion of a letter sent through the Swiss government that protested the alleged massacre of 150 U.S. prisoners of war on Puerto Princesa, Palawan, Philippine Islands, on 14 December 1944.*

At noon of that day the prisoners who had been detailed to work on a nearby airfield were recalled to camp. Following upon a series of air-raid alarms the Japanese guards forced the prisoners into air-raid shelters within the camp compound. The shelters were tunnels some 75 feet long with openings at each end. About 2 o'clock in the afternoon 50 to 60 Japanese guards armed with rifles and machine guns, and carrying buckets of gasoline and lighted torches, approached the shelters. They emptied the gasoline into the openings of the tunnels and hurled the blazing torches after it. Violent explosions followed. The victims, enveloped in flames and screaming in agony, swarmed from the shelters only to be mowed down by machine guns or attacked with bayonets. Four officers who had sought shelter elsewhere suffered a similar fate. One of them, emerging in flames from his retreat, approached a Japanese officer and pled that the carnage be stopped. He was ruthlessly shot down. In order to insure that no living prisoners remained in the shelters, the guards fired the tunnels with dynamite charges.

About 40 prisoners succeeded in escaping from the compound by throwing themselves over a 50-foot cliff onto the beach below. Landing barges patrolling the bay and

sentries on the shore fired upon them. Many moaning in agony were buried alive by their captors. One, who had reached the water and struck out to sea, was recaptured and brought back to land which Japanese soldiers, prodding him with bayonets, forced him to walk along the beach. A Japanese guard poured gasoline upon the prisoner's foot and set fire to it. Ignoring his entreaties that he be shot, the Japanese soldiers deliberately set fire to his other foot, and to both his hands. They mocked and derided him in his suffering and then bayoneted him until he collapsed. Thereupon they poured gasoline over his body and watched the flames devour it.

Such barbaric behavior on the part of the Japanese armed forces is an offense to all civilized people. The Japanese Government cannot escape responsibility for this crime. The United States Government demands that appropriate punishment be inflicted on all those who directed or participated in it. It expects to receive from the Japanese Government notification that such punishment has been inflicted. The United States Government further demands that the Japanese Government take such action as may be necessary to forestall the repetition of offenses of so heinous a nature and assure the United States Government that such outrages will not again be inflicted upon American prisoners in Japanese custody.

*Source: "Japanese Brutality to American War Prisoners," Appendix to the Congressional Record, 91, part 12, 11 June 1945–11 October 1945, p. A3788.*

Yamashita was hanged after acknowledging himself that his trial was a fair one. Germans at Nuremberg were not given the opportunity of review or appeal at all. Finally, the Yamashita case was among the first to wrestle with a most complicated aspect of war-crimes justice—the extent of command responsibility. Legal criticism was inevitable.

The other sensational trial that has been heavily criticized was that of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East (IMTFE)—the so-called Tokyo Trials—in which twenty-eight major Japanese governmental leaders were tried for Crimes against the Peace, War Crimes, and

Crimes against Humanity. Though the Americans played a leading role in the proceedings (MacArthur initiated them and an American, Joseph B. Keenan, was the chief prosecutor), this was truly an international trial in which all participating states received equal voice. A comparison with Nuremberg here is natural, and in almost every respect the Tokyo trial compares favorably. In Tokyo there were eleven judges instead of four, one representing each country with which Japan was at war, plus India and the Philippines as members of the Far Eastern Commission. Dissents by the justices were permitted despite the fact that they could prove embarrassing and



might question the IMTFE's legitimacy. One of these, a published 511-page dissent by Indian Justice Radhabinod Pal, justified the attack on Pearl Harbor, questioned the occurrence of the Rape of Nanking, and served the cause of Japanese historical revisionism for years. Pal, though, had made his opinions clear before the trial began; had the occupation authorities not wished for a pro-Japanese judge to preside, they could have removed him on one pretext or another.

The twenty-eight Japanese leaders tried before the IMTFE, unlike the twenty-two Germans who were sentenced at Nuremberg, were chosen more for their positions of authority than for their representation of each sector of Japanese society, and unlike some of the German defendants, all had held positions of true authority. They included four prime ministers, four foreign ministers, five war ministers, two navy ministers, a lord keeper of the privy seal, and four ambassadors, but no businessmen, bankers, publishers, or member of "criminal organizations" as there had been at Nuremberg. The military-dominated government was on trial at Tokyo, not Japanese society as a whole, and it was for that reason that MacArthur insisted, against strong protests, that Hirohito, who was honored by the Japanese as a quasi-religious figure, not stand trial. Such a trial, MacArthur argued, would cross the line between a trial of aggression and war crimes on the one hand and a trial of Japanese society on the other. It would, he continued, necessitate a million more American occupation troops. Since the Tokyo defendants, unlike their German counterparts, also benefited from American defense attorneys who did not miss an opportunity to cross-examine witnesses or motion for the exclusion of certain evidence, no one can say that the Tokyo trial was a hurried affair. Unlike its Nuremberg counterpart, which took less than a year from opening testimony to sentencing and carried out its death sentences within two weeks of conviction with no reviews or appeals, the Tokyo trial took nearly two and a half years (June 1946–November 1948) and generated more than 45,000 pages of transcripts. This period included seven months in which the justices wrote their opinions. Unlike the Nuremberg defendants, those at Tokyo also had their cases reviewed by the legal office of SCAP and were able to appeal, albeit unsuccessfully, to the U.S. Supreme Court. In terms of punishment, the IMTFE was actually more lenient than its Nuremberg counterpart. Seven of the twenty-eight Japanese leaders indicted received a sentence of death by hanging. At Nuremberg the ratio of hangings to overall indictments was higher (twelve of twenty-two). Finally, while one could make the criticism that two of the three groups of crimes listed in the

Tokyo indictment were based on *ex post facto* law (these being Crimes against Peace and Crimes against Humanity), each of the seven men sentenced to hang at Tokyo was also found guilty on those charges that fell under the rubric of conventional war crimes as defined by older Hague and Geneva Laws. No one, in other words, received a death sentence based on *ex post facto* legality. The Filipino Justice, Delfin Jaronilla, complained that ". . . if any criticism should be made at all against this Tribunal, it is only that [it] has acted with so much leniency in favor of the accused and has afforded them, through their counsel, all the opportunity to present any and all pertinent defenses they had, thus protracting the trial."

War-crimes programs in the Far East for the most part stand up to statistical scrutiny for fairness to the accused. With figures on Soviet trials still unavailable, the most reliable compilations show that 5,573 Japanese suspects stood trial in 2,240 different sets of trial proceedings before national American, British, French, Dutch, Chinese, Australian, and Filipino commissions. Of the 4,488 convicted by these courts in aggregate, only 1,041 received the death penalty. A slightly smaller number, 1,014, were acquitted altogether. Of the aforementioned nations, the United States conducted the most trials with the most defendants (474/1,409), with the Netherlands close behind (448/1,038). The highest percentage of acquittals came from the Republic of China (350 of 883 defendants—nearly 40 percent), with most acquittal figures considerably lower. Dutch courts acquitted the lowest percentage (55 of 1,038—about 5 percent), followed by the Philippines (about 6 percent) and Great Britain (about 11 percent). The United States acquitted 180 of 1,409 defendants—about 12 percent. Given the extent of Japanese crimes in the Far East and the troubles that Japanese society has endured in mastering its own past, these are generous figures indeed.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, the Tokyo Trials were essentially without legal validity; they were conducted as retribution against the Japanese for initiating the war.**

On 23 December 1948 seven prominent Japanese military and civilian leaders of the fifteen-year war in Asia and the Pacific were marched up the steps of the gallows at Tokyo's Sugamo Prison and duly executed by Allied mili-

tary authorities. Meanwhile, eighteen of their colleagues had just begun serving long prison sentences ranging from seven years to life. These men were all condemned as major war criminals by the International Military Tribunal for the Far East, a judicial body comprised of representatives from each of the victorious Allied powers. Led by the United States, the Allies had convened the Tokyo War Crimes Trial as the Asian counterpart to Nuremberg with the same lofty motive of upholding international law by trying and punishing transgressors. However, the decision to convene the International Military Tribunal for the Far East was based on dubious legal principles; its proceedings were marked by serious flaws in judicial procedure; and its verdict was filled with historical inaccuracies. Consequently, the Tokyo War Crimes Trial was simply a case of “victors’ justice,” leveled against the hapless wartime leaders of a defeated Japan.

Both the Nuremberg and Tokyo Trials represented a considerable departure from international legal precedent. Conventional war crimes, such as the killing of prisoners of war, had been enumerated in international law agreements such as the Hague Convention of 1899, which, incidentally, Japan did not sign. However, in 1945 the victorious Allies, largely at American insistence, extended the scope of the postwar tribunals to prosecute German and Japanese wartime leaders on the additional charge of engaging in a conspiracy to commit “crimes against peace” (namely to wage aggressive war against the Allies) and “crimes against humanity.” Proponents of the war-crimes trials reasoned that the indictment of leaders of nations that had committed aggression would send a signal to would-be aggressors that the international community would hold them personally accountable for their actions.

Nevertheless, defense attorneys at the Tokyo Trial offered a cogent challenge to these premises. First, they argued that the concept of criminal conspiracy is peculiar to the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, and lacked precedent in international law. Therefore, how could the defendants be charged with conspiracy when conspiracy was yet not defined as a crime? Second, the defenders questioned the legal validity of holding individuals responsible for acts of state, which was also without precedent. Third, tribunal members failed to define aggression or aggressive war, although it was one of the major charges against the accused. Fourth, having no direct proof that any of the accused had actually ordered wartime atrocities, the tribunal was instead employing the legally dubious principle of negative criminality. As a result, the accused could be convicted for failing to prevent atrocities they might not even have been aware of.

These objections raised serious questions about the legal basis of the Tokyo Trials. However, the majority of the justices on the tribunal rejected defense arguments out of hand. Richard Minear points out that the Tokyo Trials, which had been convened in large part in order to guarantee peace by demonstrating to the world that the rule of international law would be upheld, were in fact based on several violations of fundamental legal principles. By establishing new categories of war crimes, the justices were in effect legislating from the bench and creating *ex post facto* laws: in other words, laws created after the perceived crimes were committed. Moreover, the justices failed to define these new offenses adequately, and therefore the charges against the accused were unclear.

Minear argues that the proceedings of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East also raised disturbing questions about its competence and fairness. The tribunal was composed entirely of justices from the victorious nations. There were no Japanese members, nor were any neutral powers represented on the tribunal. Only one of the eleven justices, Radhabinod Pal of India, was trained in international law. Pal was the only justice to vote in favor of acquitting all of the defendants, and his dissenting opinion is a trenchant critique of the dubious legality of the proceedings.

An examination of the selection of defendants also reveals that the proceedings of the Tokyo Trials were politicized “victors’ justice.” The fact that only Japanese were tried, despite the fact that the Soviet Union, which was represented on the tribunal, had entered the war against Japan in violation of a neutrality pact between the two countries, attests to the partisan nature of the trial. The justices entirely sidestepped the sensitive question of whether the Soviets had waged aggressive war against Japan. The Tribunal also ignored the question of whether the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were “crimes against humanity” committed by the United States. The most notable absence among the defendants was the emperor of Japan. Although Japan’s “war of aggression” had been waged in the emperor’s name, his political value to the Allied authorities ensured that the tribunal entirely ignored the issue of his personal responsibility for war crimes.

Moreover, the proceedings of the Tokyo Trials were characterized by the lack of a clear standard regarding evidence. The justices had broad powers to admit or reject evidence, and their rulings favored the prosecution to a considerable extent. As Justice Pal pointed out in his dissenting opinion, the tribunal rejected evidence dealing with the state of political affairs in China when Japanese armed forces attacked as well as

evidence showing that Japanese armed forces had restored peace and stability in areas of China under occupation. On the other hand, the prosecution was permitted to introduce hearsay and other legally dubious sources of evidence.

Given the above conditions, convictions were inevitable. Unlike Nuremberg, there were no acquittals at the Tokyo Trials. Sentences were severe and often meted out in an inconsistent manner. Nowhere was this more apparent than in the case of Hirota Koki, the only civilian defendant to receive the death penalty. Hirota, who had served as prime minister and foreign minister during the 1930s, was convicted for failing to take stronger action to prevent war crimes and for conspiracy to commit aggression. Hirota's defenders argued that as a civilian official he had no power to influence the military. Indeed, Justice Pal concurred, arguing in his dissenting opinion that Hirota should have been acquitted of all charges. Hirota's sentence also stirred debate among the justices, as evidenced by the fact that he received the death penalty by a six-to-five vote. Nevertheless, Hirota was hanged, leading to the perception that he had been chosen as the civilian scapegoat.

Beyond trying and punishing the defendants, the International Military Tribunal for the Far East issued a lengthy judgment that was supposed to serve as the definitive history of Japan from the late 1920s to 1945. This judgment depicted events during that period as the product of a well-organized conspiracy on the part of the accused to seize power in Japan and then to embark on a systematic campaign of aggressive war and conquest in Asia and the Pacific. While this interpretation possesses the virtue of simplicity, it is the product of the biased judgment on the part of the tribunal. In fact, Japan's road to war in Asia and the Pacific was more the product of chaotic domestic politics, lack of discipline on the part of the military, and desperate, ill-conceived decisions by leaders convinced that they were launching a defensive war against the United States and European colonial powers in 1941.

The creators of the International Military Tribunal for the Far East had intended it to lay bare the perfidious conspiracy of Japan's leaders to wage aggressive war and fulfill a longstanding urge to subjugate Asia. They reasoned that by exposing these crimes to the world and punishing the guilty, the tribunal would serve as a powerful champion of the rule of international law and deter potential aggressors. But in reality the Tokyo Trial, meant as an apotheosis of the "civilized world," was based on shaky legal premises, its proceedings characterized by arbitrariness, and its verdict seriously flawed as a

work of history. Ironically, the victor's justice carried out in Tokyo later served to support the arguments of those who would seek to portray the condemned men as martyrs to Allied vengeance.

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# UNCONDITIONAL SURRENDER

## Was it wise for the Allies to demand the unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan in World War II?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, the demand for unconditional surrender was a wise policy despite the questionable claims that it cost the Allies additional resources and casualties to win the war.

**Viewpoint:** No, unconditional surrender was not a wise policy, especially in relation to the defeat of Japan; but Harry S Truman's desire to follow Franklin D. Roosevelt's course, the availability of the atomic bomb, and the need to placate American feelings forced Truman to seek total defeat of the enemy.

The proclamation of unconditional surrender as the bedrock of Allied war aims at the Casablanca conference (12–23 January 1943) was a product of expedience and experience. It seemed to Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill an appropriate response to Joseph Stalin's continuing demand for a second front in northwestern Europe. It represented as well a reply to the public anger in both Britain and the United States concerning the negotiated compromise with Vichy French authorities in North Africa. Unconditional surrender was a statement of intent to stay the course—to remove any fears, whether in Moscow or on the home fronts, that the Western Allies would make a separate peace with their enemies.

Even before Casablanca, British and American officials had come to a common conclusion that unconditional surrender was a precondition for an effective peace—not least because it would prevent the perpetrators of Nazi atrocities from negotiating some kind of immunity. Unconditional surrender would also prevent any recurrence of the “stab-in-the-back” legends, such as those that haunted the Weimar Republic.

Arguments that unconditional surrender prolonged the war overlook the fact that the leaders of neither Germany nor Japan ever showed the slightest interest in any negotiations involving terms even remotely credible to their adversaries. Nor did the previous behaviors of Germany and Japan suggest anything but commitment to total victory at any cost. Against such enemies, flexibility was neither positive nor negative—it was irrelevant.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, the demand for unconditional surrender was a wise policy despite the questionable claims that it cost the Allies additional resources and casualties to win the war.**

The demand for unconditional surrender was primarily a product of President Franklin D. Roosevelt. He announced this policy at the Casablanca conference (12–23 January 1943) and despite some reservations from Winston Churchill and Joseph Stalin, it became the established policy of the Allies in World War II. At the time of Roosevelt's announcement, few American, British, or



## OBJECTIVE ACHIEVED

Instrument of surrender of all German forces to General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Forces, and to the Soviet High Command.

Rheims. May 7, 1945.

1. We the undersigned, acting by authority of the German High Command, hereby surrender unconditionally to the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and simultaneously to the Soviet High Command all forces on land, sea, and in the air who are at this date under German control.
2. The German High Command will at once issue orders to all German military, naval and air authorities and to all forces under German control to cease active operations at 2301 hours Central European time on 8 May and to remain in the positions occupied at that time. No ship, vessel, or aircraft is to be scuttled, or any damage done to their hull, machinery or equipment.
3. The German High Command will at once issue to the appropriate commanders, and

ensure the carrying out of any further orders issued by the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and by the Soviet High Command.

4. This act of military surrender is without prejudice to, and will be superseded by any general instrument of surrender imposed by, or on behalf of the United Nations and applicable to Germany and the German armed forces as a whole.
5. In the event of the German High Command or any of the forces under their control failing to act in accordance with this Act of Surrender, the Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force and the Soviet High Command will take such punitive or other action as they deem appropriate.

Signed at Rheims at 0241 on the 7<sup>th</sup> day of May, 1945.

*Source: Henry Steele Commager, ed., Documents of American History, 2 volumes, 8th edition (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968), II: 500.*

Soviet citizens seemed to doubt the wisdom of demanding unconditional surrender from Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan; but some diplomats and military leaders questioned what they felt was a drastic policy, and many postwar historians have argued that the lack of a flexible Allied peace proposal motivated the Axis to fight harder and prolong the war. Despite these objections, the unconditional surrender policy was sound. The Axis war effort gained little real benefit from this declaration, and the propaganda value to Germany and Japan was far outweighed by the benefit to the morale of the Allies, the clarity of purpose of Anglo-American strategy, the unification of the Allied coalition, and the unambiguous postwar message sent to the people of Germany and Japan—that has made those nations powerful modern examples of peaceful societies.

The unconditional surrender policy, though ultimately a sound approach, had differing effects on the two major Axis powers. When analyzing the consequences of unconditional surrender on Germany, opponents of the Allied policy generally claim that it prolonged the war by affecting three particular groups:

the German home front, German military forces (focusing on the Army), and the anti-Nazi resistance movement.

There is little viable evidence to support the claim that the unconditional surrender policy was the major factor that motivated the German home front—the German population at large—to continue to support and prolong the war. Lacking extensive data on the entire population, many scholars base their beliefs instead on Joseph Goebbels's speeches and diary entries. The fallacy of this concept is clear: simply because the Nazi propaganda minister rejoiced in his ability to make use of the Allied policy does not mean his pleas had any real effect on the German people. This is not to deny the genuine determination, or perhaps resignation, of Germans to continue the war in the face of desperate circumstances in 1944–1945. The question remains, however: was it the Allied unconditional surrender policy that fueled workers, farmers, and their families to continue the war effort?

In fact, a myriad of factors contributed to this phenomenon. Some German civilians were cowed by the specter of the Nazi police state and

threats of severe punishment or death if they resisted. Others were loyal supporters of the Nazi regime, determined to support Adolf Hitler to the end. Some Germans were simply more concerned with carrying on with their own lives—determined to do a good day's work regardless of the tragedy surrounding them. Still others were primarily motivated to distrust and resist the Allies because of the bombing of German cities. In this last regard, logic would suggest that German civilians would have a greater resentment toward the indiscriminate Allied bombing of their homes than to ephemeral policies announced at Casablanca. In any case, there is ample evidence that the German population continued to support Hitler's regime for reasons of more importance than the Allied surrender policy.

The determined resistance of the German armed forces (especially the army) in the last year of the war is also often attributed to the unconditional surrender policy. This argument is frequently based on Allied intelligence reports that urged the military command (and Roosevelt) to change the surrender policy. These assertions, however, founder on similar ground as the above contention concerning civilians. Allied intelligence had ample evidence that the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) was showing incredible determination but did not connect this resistance directly to the surrender policy. There are many possible reasons for the staunch resistance of German soldiers that may have been equal or possibly more important than Allied surrender demands. These include the well-known training and discipline of the German Army, a less enthusiastic resignation to carry on, fear of punishment from superior officers or reprisals from the Nazis (to include those against family members at home), a desire for revenge against Allied bombings or Russian atrocities (some alleged and some true), and perhaps a genuine (if misplaced) belief in "miracle weapons" long after there was no hope for victory. All of these reasons have some validity, and the letters, diaries, memoirs, and postwar accounts of German soldiers reflect this multitude of explanations. Anecdotal evidence may mention unconditional surrender, but it is not extensive, exclusive, or persuasive.

Finally, claims that the Allied surrender policy undercut the German anti-Nazi resistance movement—and thus negated an opportunity to remove Hitler from power and shorten the war—also have serious flaws. In particular, there are two glaring weaknesses in this argument. First, the timing of the unconditional surrender announcement (January 1943) clearly shows that the German resistance movement had serious problems long before the policy was announced.

Time and again prior to Casablanca, those who opposed Hitler failed to act (for example, the Rhineland in 1936, Czechoslovakia in 1938, and the invasion of France in 1940). Some resisters later claimed, rather conveniently, that a lack of Allied support prevented them from taking decisive steps; but even if this assertion were true, it is irrelevant to the argument over unconditional surrender. In fact, Hitler's initial successes in 1939–1941 (not Allied policy) truly discouraged all but the most determined members of the resistance, and the only overt attempt to remove Hitler from power came in July 1944, a year and a half after the Allies established their surrender policy.

The second clear flaw in the "resistance" argument concerns the anti-Nazi movement's terms of surrender, which consisted of unrealistic claims that included much of the territory diplomatically annexed or conquered by Hitler from 1936 to 1941. The resistance movement could never offer terms that would have been acceptable to the Allies. While heroic Germans of the resistance took enormous risks to oppose the Nazis in many forms, it is difficult to fault the Allies for not compromising with a movement that did not have the strength or resolution to take concrete action and wished to negotiate a peace that legitimized some of the ill-gotten gains of the Hitler regime.

There are some general similarities between German and Japanese reactions to the Allied surrender policy; however, it is important to note the unique aspects of the Japanese situation in each category. Although stereotypes of the Japanese as mindless subjects of the emperor is a gross simplification, there is ample evidence that Japanese civilians, probably even more than German, were willing to support the war effort to the bitter end. In light of the Imperial government's firm control of information, and the religious—as well as ideological—devotion of the vast majority of Japanese people to their cause, there is little reason to believe that a change in the unconditional surrender policy would have had any significant impact. In fact, the Japanese had been convinced that they were in a struggle for their cultural survival before the Allies announced unconditional surrender. The Allied policy was probably a convenient tool for Japanese propagandists, but not a major factor in keeping the mass of the population behind the war effort.

As for the Imperial armed forces, their determination to continue the war was even more fervent than that of the general population and less connected to Allied policy. The almost suicidal attacks by Japanese soldiers at Guadalcanal, and on other occasions prior to the Casablanca announcement, indicate an incredible

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

devotion to duty and the cause that did not depend on any Allied surrender policy. Second, after the Allies made unconditional surrender their official policy, letters and other contemporaneous documents from Japanese soldiers demonstrate that it was only a minor factor in their grim determination to continue the struggle—far less important than their devotion to the emperor and genuine belief in an honor code that made surrender a shameful and unacceptable alternative.

Finally, the Japanese did not have a resistance movement like that of the Germans. Instead, Japan had a peace faction that worked cautiously from within the government structure to seek a compromise peace with the Allies. For this reason many scholars assert that the Allies missed a great opportunity to shorten the war, and perhaps avoid dropping the atomic bomb, by insisting on unconditional surrender and thus enabling the war faction to keep the peace proponents out of power. As Robert J. C. Butow’s excellent primary research demonstrates, in *Japan’s Decision to Surrender* (1954), the struggle for power within the complex Japanese political system and the resulting decisions concerning surrender were only partially connected with Allied policy. Butow’s work explains that the

Japanese war faction had a firm grip on power until the end of the war and that Allied surrender proclamations had almost no effect on their determination to prosecute the war as long as possible. Even after the United States dropped the atomic bomb and the Soviet Union crushed Japan’s Manchurian Army, the war faction insisted on three conditions for negotiation: no Allied occupation of Japan, no trials for war criminals, and permission for the Japanese to disarm their own military forces. These conditions were clearly unacceptable to the Allies. In addition, it took the last-minute, personal intervention of the emperor to bring the weak peace faction to power. In short, the Allies could not adopt any acceptable compromise surrender terms with the war faction, and the peace faction could not take power until Japan was faced with absolute defeat. Under these conditions, the unconditional surrender demand did little to prolong the resistance of the Japanese leadership.

While the surrender policy provided little concrete benefit to the Axis powers, it certainly assisted the Allied cause. It was a boost to morale at home and in the armed forces. Although evidence of the policy’s effect on morale is somewhat anecdotal, there are some important indications. One of the main reasons

for the policy had been the strong discontent of the American and British public with the Darlan episode, which was interpreted by many at home as a compromise with profascist elements. (During the November 1942 landings by the Allies in North Africa, Vichy vice-premier Jean-Louis-Xavier-François Darlan convinced local forces to allow the invasion to go unopposed, and then was allowed to put his troops under Free French control.) Also, the vast majority of letters from the fighting men, even when yearning for a safe return home, show a willingness to carry the war to absolute victory. The Japanese surprise attack on Pearl Harbor (7 December 1941), their atrocities against China and Allied prisoners, German brutality on the Eastern Front, and the growing knowledge of Nazi death camps all combined to harden Allied resolve. The Allied leaders came to feel that any compromise peace would undermine public support and betray the efforts of servicemen.

Second, unconditional surrender gave a greater clarity of purpose and focus to Allied strategy (particularly for the Anglo-Americans), which is not to deny that British and American leaders constantly wrangled over military plans. The surrender policy, however, at least eliminated many other questions that could have further clouded strategic issues. It gave more teeth to the “Germany First” concept by forcing the Allies to commit to the complete destruction of Germany’s armed forces before transferring resources to the Pacific. The policy also ensured that the British ultimately agreed to the cross-Channel invasion. Even if Churchill hoped to soften the German defenses with peripheral operations, he knew that eventually the Anglo-Americans had to strike deep into the heart of Germany to achieve unconditional surrender. Likewise, the surrender policy meant that the Allies were fully prepared for an invasion of the Japanese homeland (even if the atomic bomb and Soviet intervention avoided this step), which in turn gave strategic decisions in the Pacific a common focus.

Third, few historians would deny the political benefits that unconditional surrender brought to the Allied coalition, especially in relations with Soviet Russia. Although the policy could never completely satisfy Stalin’s demands for an immediate second front, it did mollify the Soviet leader during the crucial period of 1943–1944 while the Allies prepared their invasion. Perhaps just as important, it convinced Stalin that his capitalist allies would not seek a separate peace with Germany and thus helped to bring some measure of trust into the alliance. Another benefit to the coalition was its effect on discussions of postwar settlements. For example, Herbert Feis’s excellent work on the Allied alliance, *Churchill, Roosevelt, Stalin: The War They Waged*

*and the Peace They Sought* (1957), correctly emphasizes that the Allies constantly postponed decisions on postwar Europe to cover their basic disagreements. Given these difficulties, unconditional surrender was a superb policy—even in its vagueness. It allowed the Allies to fight to a complete victory, even if they had intractable differences over their views for the postwar world.

Finally, the Allied surrender policy accomplished its essential objective as first envisioned by Roosevelt. It ensured that Germany and Japan could never claim that they had not been defeated on the battlefield and revive the “stab-in-the-back” theory as used by the Nazis. Thanks in part to the unconditional surrender policy, the people of Germany and Japan recognized their defeat and repudiated the actions of the Nazis and Japanese militarists. Also, the Allied surrender policy, when combined with generally benevolent Allied postwar actions, have helped to make Germany and Japan two of the most productive and peace-loving nations in the world today.

In sum, claims that the unconditional surrender policy prolonged Axis resistance remain on shaky ground. There are a myriad of other, more potent, factors that can account for the determined resistance of German and Japanese civilians and their fighting men; and the opposition movements in both countries either never had a chance to seize power or offered compromise terms that were unacceptable to the Allies. On the other hand, the policy’s benefits to Allied morale, the coalition, and postwar settlement were real and extensive.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**No, unconditional surrender was not a wise policy, especially in relation to the defeat of Japan, but Harry S Truman’s desire to follow Franklin D. Roosevelt’s course, the availability of the atomic bomb, and the need to placate American feelings forced Truman to seek total defeat of the enemy.**

After the trauma suffered by the United States from the Vietnam War (1955–1975), some Americans looked back to World War II and the Allied policy of unconditional surrender as a textbook example of how to establish political objectives in war. To many Americans, especially the men and women who served and fought in



Southeast Asia, the Vietnam War seemed to have had no transparent political purpose, no fundamental reason for being fought. Juxtaposed to Vietnam, the policy of unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan established a knowable, understandable, and clearly defined purpose for fighting World War II.

Unconditional surrender of Germany and Japan—meaning that once those countries were defeated no conditions could be set by them on the surrender terms—provided a unifying purpose for the United States in World War II. It also helped maintain the unity of the Allies by showing the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin, that the United States was committed to the total defeat of Germany and Japan. This policy, however, caused some uncertainty and disagreement between American political leaders and their military chiefs. For historians writing about World War II, unconditional surrender has provided grist for debate about the wisdom of a wartime policy that called for Germany and Japan to surrender without conditions, thereby eliminating the possibility of negotiations that may, in hindsight, have ended the war sooner with less bloodshed.

One might think that the policy of unconditional surrender came about immediately after the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, but it did not. On 8 December 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt asked Congress for a declaration of war against Japan. The president told them that “no matter how long it may take us to overcome this premeditated invasion, the American people, through righteous might, will win through to absolute victory.” A few days later, in response to Adolf Hitler’s declaration of war on the United States, Congress reciprocated by declaring war on Germany.

Calling for the “absolute victory” over Germany and Japan, however, was a murky concept to the principal allies of the United States, the American people, and the American military. For example, did “absolute victory” mean defeating both countries to a point where they would have to give up fighting, but not allow an occupation of their homelands, like Germany after World War I? Or, did it mean something along the lines of the American Civil War (1861–1865) where the North was able to defeat the South totally, thereby imposing its will on the loser? Throughout 1942 convincing Stalin to keep the Soviet Union in the war after suffering withering defeats in battle by the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) was a real concern to FDR. Not only did he have to worry about the morale of the Soviet Union and its leader, FDR also knew well of the fickleness of the American people when it came to fighting a long, total war.

At a conference between the Allied Big Three (Roosevelt, Britain’s Winston Churchill, and Stalin) at Casablanca, Morocco, in January 1943, FDR stated the wartime policy of the United States to be the unconditional surrender of Germany (and later, Japan). This policy accomplished two important goals. First, it provided an understandable, overriding objective for the American people to fight the war: to force the Germans, and the hated Japanese, to surrender without conditions. Second, proclaiming unconditional surrender helped to convince Stalin that the United States would eventually open up a second front in the West against the Germans on the continent of Europe, something that the Soviet leader desperately wanted.

In order to force the Germans and Japanese to surrender unconditionally, the American military sought to destroy the war-making capacity of the enemy through aerial bombardment. Such a course of action might, it was hoped, bring about early surrender. If nothing else, FDR and his military chiefs believed that air power, in conjunction with a naval blockade of the Japanese home islands in the Pacific, would set the conditions for a successful ground invasion of the enemy homeland.

At least in the case of Germany, strategic air power and the massive ground offensives of the Soviets from the east and the Americans and British from the west forced the German state to collapse and accept unconditional surrender. Initially, there was concern on the part of American military chiefs that calling for the total defeat of Germany would actually cause them to fight longer and harder. This concern became moot, though, on 30 April 1945 when Hitler committed suicide; eight days later the remnants of the German forces surrendered to Allied authorities without conditions. The ensuing Allied occupation and complete restructuring of the German government attests to the total defeat of Germany and its acceptance of unconditional surrender.

If the accomplishment of unconditional surrender against Germany was relatively simple to carry out in practice by matching military means to political ends, it became more complicated in the Pacific against the Japanese. Indeed, the successor to the American presidency after FDR’s unexpected death on 12 April 1945, Harry S. Truman, had to deal with a myriad of complexities in trying to end the war quickly against Japan.

Maintaining the morale of the American people and their willingness to continue the war effort against Japan worried Truman. After the collapse of Germany, the president sensed that many Americans would lose the strident desire to defeat Japan unconditionally as they had

when fighting the Germans. Truman's chief army advisor, General George C. Marshall, also worried that American troops, like citizenry from whom they were drawn, would concern themselves more with starting a new life back in the states than with heading off to the Pacific to defeat Japan. Moreover, Marshall, along with Truman, believed that the ultimate event that would force Japan to accept surrender without conditions would be the land invasion of the Japanese home islands. American leaders realized, based on the way the Japanese had fanatically defended the islands of Iwo Jima and Okinawa, that such an invasion would be costly in lives and matériel.

Thus, Truman wanted to avoid a land invasion of Japan. One alternative to doing so, recommended in May 1945 by Undersecretary of State Joseph C. Grew, was to modify the policy of unconditional surrender. Grew advised the president that if the Japanese leadership were allowed to keep the emperor, Hirohito, in power after the war, they would probably accept surrender, thereby avoiding a land invasion. Such actions would have changed unconditional surrender to conditional surrender by letting the emperor remain in position. This outcome was something Truman was simply not prepared to do. He believed that the American people would not support such a change in wartime policy. The president also wanted to stay true to what he believed FDR would have done—force Japan to surrender unconditionally—had he still been in office.

Historians have speculated whether or not Japan would have ended the war sooner if the United States had modified their unconditional surrender demand. Gar Alperovitz, in *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam: The Use of the Atomic Bomb and the American Confrontation with Soviet Power* (1965), has argued that Truman's desire to use the atomic bomb on Japan to intimidate the Soviet Union kept him from adjusting the surrender terms. Although the emperor did in fact stay in power once the war had ended, this decision was the result of the occupation policy of General Douglas MacArthur, not conditions placed on surrender. Another historian, Michael D. Pearlman, in *Unconditional Surrender, Demobilization, and the Atomic Bomb* (1996), believes that the fickleness of the American people during World War II forced FDR, and then Truman, to adhere to a simplistic policy of unconditional surrender; thus not allowing for negotiations with either Germany or Japan that might have ended the war sooner.

Yet, it seems clear that without the unconditional surrender of both Germany and Japan their postwar histories would have been mark-

edly different. Considering the brutal actions taken against their enemies during the war, a Germany or Japan not forced to surrender unconditionally would have proved troubling in the aftermath of World War II.

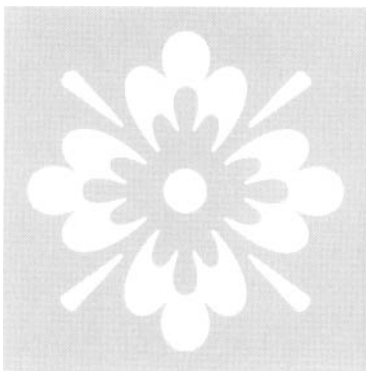
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# U. S. COMBAT EFFECTIVENESS



## Were U.S. ground troops less effective than the Germans and the Japanese?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, defects in organization and leadership made American combat divisions significantly inferior to German and Japanese units in World War II.

**Viewpoint:** No, experience and an effective use of firepower made American ground forces superior to their enemies.

The combat effectiveness of U.S. ground forces in World War II was a subject of controversy from their first sustained commitments, on Guadalcanal (August 1942–February 1943) and at Kasserine Pass (14 February 1943). In the Pacific theater, the question was significantly simplified by a Japanese way of war fundamentally based on fighting to the last man as normative behavior. That paradigm rendered direct comparisons of “fighting power” irrelevant: the issue became which was the best way to kill as many Japanese as possible while minimizing American losses in the context of mission performance. The Army tended to favor firepower and the Marines *virtu* (valor). The debate, however, was in-house.

The European theater had a different story. German soldiers seemed consistently able, at a tactical level, to do anything the Americans could do and do it better, while simultaneously exacting high prices for every U.S. gain. After the war, German generals were fond of explaining their successes in terms of the quality of their soldiers. The Americans, by contrast, were described as depending on mass and firepower: American infantrymen shunned their weapons, lacked initiative, abandoned attacks too quickly, and surrendered too easily. If it had not been for the American air power, artillery, and sheer numbers of tanks, the familiar argument went, the Americans would have wound up shaking hands with the Russians somewhere around Paris.

The U.S. Army all too conscious of its shortcomings reacted to the criticism by developing a kind of post facto inferiority complex. The sense of cutting-edge deficiency relative to the Germans played into wartime as well as postwar images of citizen-soldiers, accepting the need to defeat the Axis but reluctant to acculturate to battle more than was absolutely necessary.

Evaluating the performance of U.S. ground forces in the European Theater of Operations (ETO) requires considerable time, structure, and method. The United States produced a mass army under forced draft, beginning the process only in 1940. National policy and grand strategy were oriented away from waging a massive ground war. Original projections for an army of 250 divisions rapidly shrank, in favor of the Navy and Army Air Forces, to a “minimalist” structure of ninety divisions. The United States lacked both the cadres and culture appropriate even to this reduced force. As in the Civil War (1861–1865), the peacetime regular army was inundated by millions of draftees. Training, doctrines, even equipment, were adjusted to achievable levels. The ultimate variable was adaptability. How quickly could American soldiers, and the U.S. Army, learn from experience gained at the hands of an enemy who charged high prices in blood for every mistake?



**Viewpoint:  
Yes, defects in organization and leadership made American combat divisions significantly inferior to German and Japanese units in World War II.**

On 18 December 1942, Lieutenant General Robert L. Eichelberger wrote from his corps advance combat post to Lieutenant General Leslie J. McNair, the commanding general of Army Ground Forces, on the subject of combat effectiveness. "I find myself in a steaming New Guinea jungle, pushing poorly trained American troops who have been spoiled by experts, up against Japanese who have had the opportunity to thoroughly intrench themselves. . . . The sins of our military system rise up to haunt us. Where are our trained corporals, sergeants and lieutenants who can lead men?" He concluded his letter noting that he had some ideas on "how to train troops to fight Japanese" and if he survived he would "be an expert on how to train men for jungle fighting." Writing to McNair on 17 May 1944, Eichelberger emphasized that "Again I have had forced upon me the necessity for sound training in our infantry. . . . While there are many things that I feel are necessary, just scouting and patrolling, fire control and good old fashioned discipline seem to be the most important."

The important aspect of American combat effectiveness in World War II was timing. George C. Marshall, the American army chief of staff, knew when he took office on 1 September 1939 that U.S. fighting forces were far from ready to enter combat. In January 1942 he lamented that the American army "used to have all the time in the world and no money; now we've got all the money and no time." In the early years of the war until the summer of 1943, the Americans were inferior to both their allies and enemies in their capacity to generate effective, sustained ground combat power. Early setbacks in Tunisia were slowly corrected by confident soldiers and unit cohesion as battle began to shape the American fighting divisions into effective human-machine teams. McNair organized teams of observers to go to the combat zones and report back on key issues of leadership, training, and logistical support. This excellent system resulted in the molding of an effective American ground-forces organization for the critical later phases of the war in the Pacific and Europe. At the outset for the Americans, however, it was hold on and catch up.

Fighting power is a slippery term in which the definition sets the boundaries of the debate. The "fighting power" of a military unit is the

combination of all human and material assets of that unit organized for accomplishment of assigned missions. It includes effective training and morale of individual soldiers, as well as the skill of commissioned and noncommissioned officers in leadership positions. It includes soldiers' perceptions of public and official support of their efforts, and how they view the importance of their assigned military tasks. Tangible and intangible assets make up the fighting power of a military unit. The dilemma is not the existence of "fighting power," but the measurement of it.

The effectiveness of combat divisions in World War II was a function of appropriateness for the task at hand: the organization, weaponry, leadership and logistical support relative to what the division was expected to accomplish. This effectiveness involved preparation to deal with terrain, weather, enemy forces, and timing. At the time of the commitment of American combat divisions in the fall of 1942 in both the Pacific and Mediterranean theaters of war, their opponents, the Japanese and Germans (with Vichy French and Italian support), fought more effectively for the first year of combat. That condition can be inferred from measurable factors such as time taken to seize objectives, casualties taken and inflicted, captured friendly and enemy soldiers, and sufficiency of logistical support. On the Eastern Front in Europe, the Red Army exhibited many of the same deficiencies as the Americans in their first encounters with the Germans and their auxiliaries, but like the Americans their fighting effectiveness improved with time. By early 1944 the balance began to shift away from the Axis forces and in favor of the Allies. Early on, however, the Americans and Russians existed on raw talent and increasing numbers.

When American divisions were "triangularized" in September 1939, in accordance with Marshall's concept for reorganization of army ground forces, manpower levels in infantry combat divisions were reduced from the 28,000 common to the square divisions of World War I to a more manageable 14,000. Regiments were reduced from four to three per brigade; artillery with a division was reorganized so that a direct support battalion would be available to each of the three fighting regiments, or in the case of armored divisions—combat commands. Span of control for senior commanders was a factor in Marshall's plan; so was a recognition of changes in firepower within the division, including the soon-to-be-verified superiority of American artillery. By streamlining the combat division, the War Department had removed the surplus, or reserve, manpower that had existed in the old square divisions. Everything that the American fighting division now had in its Tables of Orga-



**Soldiers of the U.S. Third Army move into Angers, France, 10 August 1944**

*(U.S. Army)*

nization and Equipment (TOE) was intended to be committed in combat.

Major Albert C. Wedemeyer of the War Plans Division, War Department General Staff, worked out the number of combat divisions that could be mobilized by the United States by reasoning backwards from the population of available males, and making assumptions as to distribution among infantry and other branch needs, among other parameters. The number derived was 215 divisions. In reality the United States was able to form, man, and partly train only 89 divisions—the so-called 90-division gamble (one division was counted twice as it stood down and was remobilized). Working with many unknowns early in 1942—such as the possibility of a sudden collapse of Soviet armies or the success of the planned strategic air offensive against

Germany—army planners still estimated that a large force of ground divisions would be required until the program of 1943 revised the estimates downward to about 100 divisions. Part of that refined reality was that “it took a year to train a division for combat,” and the increasing needs of the Army Air Forces and the industrial base, all of which made a larger force improbable.

Accompanying these changes was a policy specifying how replacements, later termed reinforcements by some to avoid the grisly connotation, would come to divisions depleted in strength during combat operations. Herein was a major feature of U.S. personnel policy—replacements were made individually from replacement depots, “reple depples” in G.I. slang, according to requisitions from units based on shortages

from assigned, not authorized, strength. As the “pipeline” clogged up with desperately needed infantry awaiting division requisitions, supply and demand became severely imbalanced. The army adjusted by releasing men from special training programs and stepping up the deployment of new divisions, but it took nine months of ad hoc measures to stabilize the strength of front-line combat divisions. Reporting on the lessons of the Leyte campaign (20 October–5 December 1944), the U.S. XXIV Corps noted that “The problem of early provision of personnel replacements in [amphibious] campaigns of this nature has not yet been solved.” Noting that “casualties of even one thousand (1,000) men in a division result in a serious impairment of its combat efficiency,” the corps staff recommended that each assault division for an amphibious operation have “a replacement battalion to accompany it on the assault.” This early attachment, they reasoned, “will provide a period in which replacements could get the ‘feel’ of a combat zone” and help the division to replace its early losses. Some individual training, such as qualification with the rifle or pistol, took place in the replacement stream, but virtually no unit training and certainly no familiarization with the destination unit’s Standing Operating Procedure (SOP) could happen prior to arrival at the unit. The XXIV Corps solution addressed that deficiency and bore a resemblance to the German system of incorporating replacement units within the structure of the combat units. Veterans within units receiving replacements, however, often treated those new soldiers ambivalently; on one hand they were glad to be receiving help, but on the other hand they knew that today’s new soldiers were often tomorrow’s first casualties—the “new guy” syndrome. This process often had a negative effect on individual soldier morale and ultimately on unit esprit and effectiveness. The better units learned to deal with the replacement system effectively.

In the fall of 1944, as the Western Allied armies were moving toward the German border and anticipating the final campaign, “rifle strength” was falling in British, Canadian, and American divisions. Casualties were not being made up by the arrival of sufficiently trained replacements. General Dwight D. Eisenhower vigorously sought out soldiers to be sent forward from the rear areas, to include forming combat infantry platoons from African American soldiers in support units. The bottom of the ninety-division gamble barrel had been reached by the end of March 1945. Fortunately for the Allies, V-E Day (8 May 1945) was only five weeks away.

In the Pacific theaters where the Americans, Australians, and New Zealanders were carrying

the major burden of ground combat against the Japanese, Eichelberger’s concerns had registered with both General Douglas MacArthur and McNair. Woefully short on understanding the Japanese military system, American army planners worked with stereotypes and intelligence that often was wrong to inform American soldiers about their enemy. Japanese army units, benefiting partly from prewar training by German officer cadres and mostly from the lessons of combat experience in Manchuria since 1937, were appropriately organized for their culture, but not necessarily for a long, hard series of expeditionary campaigns at the end of a long logistical tether. Japan at war was an enigma not just to the rest of the world, but also to themselves and particularly to their German ally. Adolf Hitler promised much, but delivered little in terms of shared information. Most important, the Imperial Japanese Army and Imperial Japanese Navy existed independently in an uncoordinated strategic system. As Alvin D. Coox concluded in his essay in *Military Effectiveness* (1988), “Japanese performance in the Second World War was characterized by calculated risk, intuition, and poorly defined objectives, as well as by a lack of flexibility and resilience.”

In a system marked by a tradition of personal combat, teamwork was often lacking in Japanese infantry units. Discipline was rigid, but artillery support was not exceptional. Logistical support was intentionally neglected. Their fighting effectiveness was multiplied by the fact that the Americans had to face them on a host of small islands accessible only by deliberate amphibious assault with overwhelming naval and air gunfire. Entrenched in fortifications, even with minimal fire support and meager logistics, the Japanese were able to impose withering attrition-style fighting on their American attackers. With priority to Europe, American resources often were in short supply. Nonetheless, in the early encounters with Japanese units on Guadalcanal (August 1942–February 1943) and in the Philippines (October 1944), American soldiers and marines fought bravely, but not effectively against highly disciplined and well-trained Japanese army units. By the fall of 1944 when Major General John R. Hodge’s U.S. XXIV Corps reported on the lessons of the Leyte campaign, it was clear that some, but not all problems of training had been solved. The report noted that the Japanese had suffered about thirty soldiers killed in action for every American killed. This striking imbalance was attributed to “meticulous training of the individual soldier and small units, with particular emphasis upon effective use of their weapons, maneuver and cover and concealment.” The report warned, however, that as the ring tightened on the Japanese home islands, it would become more important that

American units, “regardless of branch of service or duties . . . be trained in handling their weapons and in the establishment of their own defensive areas” because of the Japanese soldier’s skill, at infiltration tactics.

German units often fought effectively when understrength or when manned with second-tier troops, for example those from satellite nations such as Romania. Prior to the Normandy invasion (6 June 1944), the only direct contact between Americans and Germans on the battlefield had been in the Mediterranean theater of operations. American combat divisions were outclassed by battle-seasoned German-Italian forces at Kasserine Pass (14 February 1943), but had quickly rebounded by the invasion of Sicily (10 July 1943). The German army system, however, lost its administrative and logistical coherence in 1944. Despite dramatic increases in junior officers, losses in the fall of 1944 exceeded input. The *Wehrkreise* (Army District) system of the geographically raised and supported regiments had bottomed out. Like the Japanese Imperial Army, the *Wehrmacht* (German Army) tactical doctrine stressed offensive action. The demands of a two-front war, by late 1942, had forced the reality of the strategic defensive on Hitler and his generals, although limited tactical offensive operations were the means to that end. Reorganization of combat divisions in mid 1944 reduced both the manpower and tanks in order to sustain maneuver units. By the time of the Ardennes counteroffensive (December 1944), as Jürgen Förster concluded in his essay about the German military establishment in *Military Effectiveness* (1988), the “mission-oriented command system was supplanted by an order-oriented one.” Nonetheless, at places like Aachen (October 1944) and the Hürtgen Forest (November–December 1944) that preceded the Battle of the Bulge (16 December 1944–16 January 1945), the German Army showed its mettle had not eroded completely. American mistakes were rewarded with casualties.

The Soviet Army in World War II fielded combat divisions in both the Far East in border clashes with the Japanese and on their western frontier against the Germans and their auxiliaries. These armies were put at an immediate disadvantage in the west when Joseph Stalin refused in June 1941 to believe the warnings provided by international intelligence sources. This situation was partly compensated by the German propensity to underestimate the Soviet army after a bold movement into the vast areas of the Polish plains and eastward in an effort to envelop their enemy and win a short war. It was a major error for the Germans because as the Soviets fell back they regrouped and stiffened their ideological and physical resolve to resist in

what for them was a war of survival. The Soviet instrument, like the American, was incomplete at the moment of commitment in June 1941 in the west. One point of interaction, Lend Lease, between the United States and Soviet Union did affect at the outset the quantity of war material available to each nation—a short-term negative factor for the Americans and a positive one for the Soviets. Logistics, as noted repeatedly, affected the fighting power of combat divisions.

Martin van Creveld has argued in *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939–1945* (1982) that the primary fault of American combat divisions was the “less than mediocre” quality of their first echelon officer leadership, not the courage or raw abilities of their soldiers. Russell F. Weigley made a strong case in *Eisenhower’s Lieutenants: The Campaign of France and Germany, 1944–1945* (1981) that the U.S. high command emphasized weight of resources, both human and matériel, as a means to impose its will on the Axis enemy. Moreover, the organization for combat of American fighting divisions was designed for mobility more than slugging it out with German divisions: in other words, a comparatively light force head-to-head with substantially heavier enemy forces. The operational doctrine chosen by the American high command to employ these mobile divisions, however, was that head-on slugging match. This policy made the war longer and bloodier than it might have been, argued Weigley. Peter R. Mansoor, in *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941–1945* (1999), and John Sloan Brown, in *Draftee Division: The 88th Infantry Division in World War II* (1986), have presented information and analyses to show that America’s citizen-manned combat divisions were up to the challenge and on measure did well against the Germans, primarily later in the war. It is significant, as well, that the Soviet, German, and Japanese governments were dictatorships with fewer, if any, obligations to be accountable to their citizens in the mobilization of war resources.

American divisions did not match up well with their German and Japanese enemies early in the war. The American and Russian field armies, while appropriate to their respective societies, exhibited defects of organization and leadership. After the assault on continental Europe and the battle for Leyte in 1944, however, American combat divisions were holding their own. If the war had dragged on for another year in both theaters, the ninety-division gamble might have failed as casualties and damage to matériel equaled logistical replacement capabilities. The Italian-German machine failed first, allowing the Americans to begin to concentrate against the Japanese. In the end it was the quantum expan-



sion of total combat power with nuclear bombs, not just the fighting power of combat divisions, that ended the war.

—JOHN F. VOTAW, THE FIRST DIVISION  
MUSEUM AT CANTIGNY



**Viewpoint:  
No, experience and an effective use  
of firepower made American ground  
forces superior to their enemies.**

Historians have, of late, begun to remember that the United States and its allies actually won World War II. Such a conclusion might seem obvious to the layman, but only if they had not read the revisionist apologia of former *Wehrmacht* (German Army) commanders, or the arguments advanced by advocates of “maneuver warfare.” While the latter of course conceded Allied victory, they contended that it resulted not from any particular military merit on the part of the Allies, but rather sheer bloody mass at the tactical and operational level of war. There is some small degree of merit to this argument, in that neither American infantry squads nor platoons were, for the most part, the equal of their German counterparts. Yet, at the level at which U.S. units generated combat power through synchronizing the effects of maneuver and supporting arms, American units quickly mastered their enemies. Critics have also lambasted American performance at the operational level, citing an adherence to a conservative, “attrition-based” style of warfare that foreswore maneuver and accepted unnecessary casualties. In fact, while American commanders did place an exceedingly high value on firepower, their actual operations reflected a keen appreciation of the possibilities offered by deep battle. Still, they did seem to feel that the best way to get inside an opponent’s decision cycle was to kill him. U.S. military leaders furthermore demonstrated an ability to coordinate and successfully execute operations vastly more complex than those of either ally or foe during the course of the war, amphibious landings being the best but by no means the only example. Contrary to revisionist historiography, the soldiers of the U.S. Army defeated the Germans through superior skill.

Recently a small but widening trickle of works have begun to challenge the myth of Wehrmacht superiority. That myth has three sources: American military leaders, deeply dissatisfied with the performance of their army; defeated German generals, anxious to redeem with the pen the military reputation, and pen-

sion, that they lost with the sword; and advocates of maneuver warfare, who perhaps coincidentally also tend to be British historians carrying a torch for Viscount Bernard Law Montgomery’s “knifelike thrust.” According to Martin van Creveld, in *Fighting Power: German and U.S. Army Performance, 1939–1945* (1982), the American Army was wasteful and unimaginative in its tactics, engaging unnecessarily in grinding battles of attrition in which the inadequate fighting power of its small units condemned it to excessive casualties. Colonel T. N. Dupuy’s exhaustive studies, the spirit of which is accurately captured in his *Numbers, Prediction, and War: Using History to Evaluate Combat Factors and Predict the Outcome of Battles* (1979), have provided a seemingly solid factual basis for these arguments. He found that, all things considered, the average German soldier was worth 1.66 Americans. As John Sloan Brown pointed out in *Draftee Division: The 88th Infantry Division in World War II* (1986), while one cannot argue with Dupuy’s data, his selection is open to question. Dupuy’s conclusions, and those who rely upon him, rest upon battles between elite and experienced German divisions, such as the *Panzer Lehr*, against American units frequently and literally “just off the boat.” Further, his data is substantially skewed in favor of the battles in Italy and Normandy, where the mountains and *bocage* (hedgerows) favored the German defense to an immense degree, for which Dupuy did not sufficiently compensate.

The critics have properly framed the debate in terms of the relative combat power of American and German formations. Comparing the U.S. Army with its British or Russian ally is a speculative exercise in what might have been. On the one hand, it was obvious to the Imperial Japanese Army that their troops were not even in the same league as the Americans. On the other hand, as Michael D. Doubler, in *Closing With the Enemy: How GIs Fought The War In Europe, 1944–1945* (1994), Peter R. Mansoor in *The GI Offensive in Europe: The Triumph of American Infantry Divisions, 1941–1945* (1999), and Brown himself have pointed out, the units of the U.S. Army, to include tactical air forces, rapidly grew in competence and sophistication to a point, probably by the time the Western Allies commenced operations against the Siegfried Line, that they had mastered their German opponents. One does not have to accept Keith E. Bonn’s spirited defense of the American soldier in *When the Odds Were Even: The Vosges Mountains Campaign, October 1944–January 1945* (1994) to conclude that the U.S. Army represented an acme of military effectiveness by the conclusion of operations in the Eastern Theater of Operations (ETO).

That is not to say that American units at every level were superior to their German enemies; at the squad, platoon, and frequently the company level, superior infantry doctrine and personnel policies often made German units more effective than the equivalent American formation. Indeed, the degree of difference was vast enough to allow one German battalion commander to conclude:

The American soldier is cowardly without the support of heavy weapons. He feels especially helpless without tank and air support and will not attack. If met with only a few of our own heavy weapons, whether it be artillery, anti-tank guns, or mortars, the attack will be broken off and the fire from enemy heavy weapons renewed. . . . The Americans have little love for nightfighting; most units rest during the night.

Even Allan R. Millett, who fired one of the first salvoes against the revisionist school in *Military Effectiveness* (1988), concedes certain inadequacies based on the low manning priority infantry units had. Additionally, as John English points out, the German small-unit organization, with its emphasis on machine guns and simpler structure, was better equipped to deal with ground combat as it actually was, as opposed to how coast artilleryman General Leslie J. McNair thought it would be.

In equating ground-combat power with the relative effectiveness of small infantry units, however, the critics' arguments err. The Americans considered that ground-combat power grew from the barrel of a gun, preferably of at least 105 millimeters in diameter. While German doctrine stressed that maneuver units, such as infantry or armor formations, constituted the means of decision, the Americans did in fact rely on firepower. The job of the infantry was to fix the enemy so that air and artillery firepower could destroy him. General William E. DePuy remarked of his experiences as a battalion commander in WWII that "when I soberly considered what I had accomplished . . . I had moved the forward observers of the artillery across France and Germany." The Americans, perhaps through sheer serendipity, refused to try to match the Germans in "maneuver warfare," in which the latter might conceivably compete, but created an asymmetry by making combat turn on firepower, against which the Germans could do little.

Contemporary German intelligence estimates reveal an active and growing respect for American units and commanders. To be sure, the Germans were making official explanations for their defeat in a regime where failure was sometimes equated with treason. Nonetheless, at the conclusion of the Normandy cam-

paign, Freiherr Rudolf von Gersdorff, chief of staff to the mangled German 7th Army, was compelled to note that:

The striving to avoid casualties and replace the sacrifice of men with the weight of material remains constantly at the forefront. It is demonstrated most emphatically in the attack, in which, not the infantry, but the massed employment of tanks, artillery, heavy infantry weapons, special weapons and air support carry the first line of resistance; to the infantry falls the task of securing and widening the breach won by these heavy weapons. Absent from these tactics, for example, is the German method of fire and movement, with the American infantry instead proceeded by a slowly advancing "Firewaltz" that protects both their flanks and front. The divisions are for that purpose reinforced with Army tank units, (one per Infantry Division on average), artillery, and special troops. *With* these usually superior supporting arms the American soldier has shown himself to be a respectable opponent, who before everything defends tenaciously. He [the enemy] would prefer to avoid close-in fighting in order to allow his material superiority to have its full effect.

A certain amount of unreality pervades von Gersdorff's observations, almost as if he believed that defeat by heavy weapons did not really count. He also noted the American soldier's dread of the frontal attack and his great preference for maneuver. In any case, the Germans found these tactics especially tough to cope with, and the Americans got tougher as the war wore on. As Doubler recounts, American units continually improved their ability to integrate heavy weapons; tanks were modified to allow intimate cooperation with infantry; the already exceptional responsiveness of American artillery improved; and techniques of close air support improved to the point where the minimum safe distance for bombing dropped to three hundred meters. After the 1944 Ardennes campaign, the German intelligence estimates expressed unqualified respect for the American soldier, and noted the care and skill with which American commanders conducted maneuvers. Even while noting that hastily mobilized "Reserve" officers varied tremendously in quality, the Germans expressed tremendous respect for the senior, "Regular" officers. The genius of the American army was in ensuring that the decisive component of the war, the synchronization of supporting arms, lay in the hands of better officers.

General Dwight D. Eisenhower and his lieutenants created and exploited asymmetry at the operational level of war as well. Critics implicitly contrast the Allied campaign in France with the brilliant results obtained by the Germans in 1940 or the Red Army in the "Destruction of Army Group Center," neglecting the tremendously different contexts. Instead of a French



## CALL OR TOSS IN?

*In early December 1943 a small American contingent of forty paratroopers and three officers was assigned the relatively easy task of capturing a German radar station on the Italian island of Ventotene in the Tyrrhenian Sea. Once they landed on the island, however, the Americans discovered that the German post had a garrison of eighty-seven heavily armed men. Consequently, the American commander allowed one of his lieutenants to try to talk the Germans into surrendering without a fight.*

The lieutenant walked slowly up the hill toward the German positions. He carried his white flag over his head, and his white flag was a bath towel. As he walked he thought what a fool he was. He had really stuck his neck out. Last night when he had argued for the privilege of going up and trying to kid the Jerry into surrender he hadn't known it would be like this. He hadn't known how lonely and exposed he would be.

Forty paratroopers against eighty-seven Jerrys, but Jerry didn't know that. The lieutenant also hoped Jerry wouldn't know his guts were turned to water. His feet sounded loud on the path. It was early in the morning and the sun was not up yet. He hoped they could see his white flag. Maybe it would be invisible in this light. He kept in the open as much as possible as he climbed the hill. . . .

Ahead was a small white stone building, but Jerry was too smart to be in the building. A trench started behind the building and led down to a hole almost like a shell hole.

Three officers faced him in the hole. . . .

The Oberleutnant regarded him closely and said nothing.

"Do you speak English?" the lieutenant asked.

"Yes."

The lieutenant took a deep breath and spoke the piece he had memorized. "The colonel's compliments, sir. I am ordered to demand your surrender. At the end of twenty

minutes the cruisers will move up and open fire unless ordered otherwise following your surrender." He noticed the Oberleutnant's eyes involuntarily move toward the sea. The lieutenant lapsed out of his formality, as he had planned. "What's the good?" he said. "We'll just kill you all. We've got six hundred men ashore and the cruisers are aching to take a shot at you. What's the good of it? You'd kill some of us and we'd kill all of you. Why don't you just stack up your arms and come in?"

The Oberleutnant stared into his eyes. That what's-in-the-hole look. The look balanced: call or toss in, call or toss in. The pause was centuries long, and then at last, "What treatment will we receive," the Oberleutnant asked.

"Prisoners of war under Convention of The Hague." The lieutenant was trying desperately to show nothing on his face. There was another pause. The German breathed in deeply and his breath whistled in his nose.

"It is no dishonor to surrender to superior forces," he said. . . .

And now a little pageant developed. As the Germans marched down the path, American paratroopers materialized out of the ground beside them, until they were closely surrounded by an honor guard of about thirty men. . . .

The lieutenant who had carried the white flag sat down on the steps of the city hall a little shakily. The captain sat down beside him. "Any trouble?" the captain asked.

"No. It was too easy. I don't believe it yet." He lighted a cigarette, and his shaking hand nearly put out the match. . . .

*Source: John Steinbeck, Once There Was a War (New York: Viking, 1958), pp. 168-173.*

army saddled with an ineffective doctrine, incompetent senior leadership, and political schisms in the rear, the U.S. Army faced the wounded, but still formidable, Wehrmacht. Instead of possessing decisive material superiority, broad expanses of Europe suitable to operational maneuver, and a Red Army hardened by three years of war, the Americans had to fight

through the bocage with near numerical parity and an army largely composed of strangers to combat. Facing the Germans in 1944, Eisenhower intelligently pitted American strengths against Nazi weaknesses to create a situation in which the Germans simply could not win. It was the soundest military strategy given the formidable nature of the enemy, the existing tactical and

operational asymmetry between the Germans and the Allies, and the mix of personalities, logistics, and terrain available. Within the context of this sound strategic concept, the 12th Army Group conceived and executed its operations with sophistication and daring. While operations against the so-called Falaise Pocket generated inter-Allied and postwar recriminations, it was a good first effort after which Allied operations only improved.

In fact, the breakout from Normandy illustrates a keen American appreciation of what the Soviets called “deep battle.” Major General J. Lawton Collins’s infantry-heavy VII Corps created the breakthrough, allowing General George S. Patton’s 3rd Army to ruthlessly exploit the opportunity. Meanwhile, American aircraft, employed in both operational and tactical roles in support of ground operations, paralyzed the Germans, isolated the battle area, and helped artillery destroy the Germans in the pocket. Though General Omar N. Bradley’s preference for “a strong shoulder at Argentan than the possibility of a broken neck at Falaise” may have unnecessarily allowed some German formations to escape destruction, the 3rd Army had successfully executed more than its share of a daring operational plan. Bradley’s statement at least illustrates an understanding of the opportunities and risks inherent in such plan, rather than mere stolid adherence to “attrition warfare.” Nor was this an isolated occurrence; General Lucian K. Truscott Jr.’s memoirs, *Command Missions: A Personal Story* (1954), portray a deliberate and driving effort to achieve the same sort of battle of encirclement during Operation Anvil/Dragon, the invasion of southern France (15 August 1944), as did the subsequent creation and reduction of the Ruhr (6–14 April 1945) pocket. While the employment of airpower in an operational role was unique to American doctrine, the synchronization of effects mirrored that of the Red Army.

Finally, Eisenhower’s broad-front strategy represents not so much caution as a sound appreciation of military realities. To be sure, most of Montgomery’s argument in favor of a single thrust into Germany were valid; the Germans were in fact nearing collapse and had not yet adequately prepared their defenses. The one major problem with a calculated risk of this nature is that neither Montgomery nor his 21st Army Group were capable of executing it. Montgomery’s innate fastidiousness and his micromanaging style of command, prevented him from executing complex operations with dash and daring, as the delay at Falaise and Market Garden demonstrated beyond the shadow of a doubt. Unfortunately, the 21st Army Group possessed the only terrain suitable for such a large-scale

thrust. More importantly, electing to pursue such a strategy risked narrowing the operational gap between the Germans and the Western allies. Confronted with one major offensive along a single axis and possessing strong operational reserves, as the 1944 Ardennes counteroffensive demonstrated, the Germans might well have defeated the “knifelike thrust” with significant consequences. Confronted with strong armies pushing in at the Reich from all directions, there was nothing the Germans could do to reverse the trend. The Battle of the Bulge, doomed from the start, was their best attempt.

The Americans beat the Germans because they fought better, not simply because there were more of them. For all the weaknesses in American units and leaders, their reliance upon firepower reflected a more realistic appraisal of the conditions of modern war. While the Germans were right to conclude that, in the end, war always comes down to the man, Americans understood that it helped immeasurably if the man in question had access to a battalion of artillery. The Army of the United States fashioned itself into a highly effective tactical and operational instrument, acting in support of a sound strategic concept. To be sure, U.S. infantry squads and platoons were not, in and of themselves, the equals of their enemies. The better performance, however, came from conscious decisions that resulted in the tremendously effective synergy between maneuver forces and supporting arms. Rather than becoming entranced by the German method, the student would be better advised to look at American results.

—WADE MARKEL, U.S. MILITARY ACADEMY,  
WEST POINT

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# U.S. ISOLATIONISM

## How did U.S. isolationism contribute to the cause of World War II?

**Viewpoint:** U.S. isolationism led Britain to continue policies of appeasement that made war inevitable.

**Viewpoint:** The principle significance of isolationism was its encouragement of the Axis belief that the United States would do nothing of substance to challenge aggression.

U.S. isolationism between the world wars was a bipartisan policy, drawing support from across the social and political spectrum. Its fundamental postulate was not absolute withdrawal behind the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, but a belief that the United States should retain the independence in foreign policy that had been its norm until 1917. America's direct losses in World War I were less significant in reinforcing that position than a growing sense that the war had been fought over nothing; that America's former allies were less concerned with peace and justice than with victory and plunder; and that the United States had obtained nothing from its participation except uncollected debts. In January 1937 almost three-fourths of the responses to an opinion poll believed that American participation in World War I had been a mistake.

Rejection of the League of Nations covenant in 1919 was the first of a series of bipartisan steps designed to move the United States as far as possible from the diplomatic and economic woes of both Europe and Asia. Increasingly high tariffs, themselves in part a response to the Great Depression, limited commercial connections. Neutrality legislation passed in the 1930s forbade selling on credit to belligerent nations and asserted that Americans traveling on the ships of states at war did so at their own risk. U.S. military spending was repeatedly reduced, to the point where as late as 1939 the army and air corps were about on par with those of Romania. Nor did American diplomacy assert consequent, systematic opposition to the increasing aggression of Italy, Germany, and Japan.

These policies were in tune with a public opinion that in May 1939 identified keeping out of war as the major issue facing the country. During the 1940 election campaign, President Franklin D. Roosevelt insisted that America's sons were not going to be sent into any foreign wars. An arguable result was that the Axis powers took American isolationism seriously enough that they did not consider the prospect that the United States would oppose them with anything stronger than words, or more formidable than material "lend-lease" to other governments. It was one of the century's greatest miscalculations.



**Viewpoint:**  
**U.S. isolationism led Britain to continue policies of appeasement that made war inevitable.**

Isolationism in America was based on two beliefs. The first was the view that the United States should avoid any political commitment that tied American policy and action to the policies and actions of other nations. The second was a pervasive belief that the central aim of American foreign policy was to avoid foreign wars at all costs. These isolationist views in the 1930s were the result of several specific beliefs, the central one being that the United States had been duped into participating in World War I by a combination of British propaganda, greedy munitions makers, bankers holding European loans to pay for those munitions, and a naive administration in Washington. In the mid 1930s congressional hearings into the munitions industry provided evidence that American firms had made enormous profits from the war, strengthening the view of that industry's role in American involvement. Influential books and articles of the 1920s put forth the argument that our involvement in World War I had been a tragic mistake, and that the British and French bore a great responsibility for its outbreak. As a result American public opinion in the mid 1930s strongly supported the belief that the nation should do everything possible to keep out of any future European war, a view reflected in public-opinion polls.

Isolationist sentiment prompted the passage, in 1935, of the first of several neutrality acts that were aimed at preventing American involvement in any future conflict. The various neutrality acts prohibited the export of arms to belligerent states, prohibited the carrying of munitions in American ships to belligerents or through neutral countries to belligerents, and included provisions barring loans to warring nations. The 1937 revision included a "cash and carry" provision that allowed foreign nations to buy goods other than finished arms by paying cash for them and shipping them on non-American ships. This provision, however, expired in May 1939.

Public-opinion polls of the time also show considerable support for mandatory neutrality measures as a means of keeping the nation out of wars abroad. A large and vocal isolationist bloc in Congress, composed of both Republicans and Democrats, supported this legislation, and many were strongly in favor of provisions that limited presidential discretion. Newspapers, particularly those of the Hearst chain and the influential

*Chicago Tribune*, along with many periodicals, such as *New Republic* and *The Saturday Evening Post*, gave support to neutrality legislation. Peace societies, many women's organizations, and some religious groups also supported mandatory neutrality provisions and the embargo of arms sales. As late as 1939, sentiment against participation in a European war was so strong that President Franklin D. Roosevelt's attempt to gain revision of the neutrality laws in the first session of the Seventy-sixth Congress was a failure. Only after war came to Europe in September 1939 were changes in the neutrality laws that allowed for the sale of arms on a "cash-and-carry" basis finally made. Until then the isolationists in the United States prevented the country from playing a concrete role that might have prevented the outbreak of war.

Roosevelt was, at heart, an internationalist. He had spent a good part of his youth on many trips to Europe. By the time he completed his secondary education he believed, as did other graduates of the prep school at Groton, that the United States must play a useful role in world affairs. His early political years were influenced by the presidency of his uncle, Theodore Roosevelt, and by his work as Assistant Secretary of the Navy in Woodrow Wilson's administration. FDR was a proponent of the League of Nations and spoke often for international cooperation in his unsuccessful campaign for the vice presidency in 1920. At the beginning of his presidency in 1933 he maintained a strong belief in the interdependency of nations—the idea that nations depended upon each other for long-term prosperity and peace. While domestic economic problems demanded his primary attention during his first term in office, FDR gave considerable attention to foreign affairs, particularly U.S. relations with Latin America. During his second term he became concerned about the deteriorating global situation—Italy's aggression in Africa, the Spanish Civil War, Japanese expansion in China, and the growing menace of Nazi Germany. He considered several foreign-policy initiatives in the mid 1930s, including the calling of international conferences to discuss ways to ensure peace. Against all his efforts, however, was the reality of an isolationist congress that supported by an active press and vocal organizations, firmly opposed to any American response that had the potential for involvement in war.

What might Roosevelt have done if it had not been for the existence of the neutrality laws and a strong isolationist Congress? An American administration, free from the restraints of isolationists, would have been able to provide assistance to Great Britain in its search for peace. The British government of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain found itself facing three potential

*“Image not available for copyright reasons”*

enemies: Germany, Italy, and Japan. Britain's armed forces could not meet the demands posed by dealing with all three at once. Chamberlain had several policy choices: work to eliminate one or more potential enemies, seek allies to support his country in a search for peace, or follow a policy that would make concessions to Germany and Italy that might dissuade them from aggression. This policy came to be known as appeasement. Because of the significant influence of congressional isolationists, the United States was seen as an unreliable potential ally. Early in 1938, Chamberlain wrote in his diary: “The U.S.A. has drawn closer to us but the isolationists are so strong & so vocal that she cannot be depended on for help if we should get into trouble.” British foreign secretary Anthony Eden believed that the policy of appeasement, pursued so diligently by Chamberlain, had to be implemented from a position of strength. An American government

firmly backing British policy would have added greatly to Britain's bargaining position as it dealt with the increasing menace of German and Italian aggression.

It has been argued that Chamberlain needed to try to appease Germany in order to buy time for Britain to rearm. An American government able to develop its munitions industry free from isolationist fears and the restrictions of neutrality laws would have been able to sell arms to Britain and France. Knowing they had access to additional armaments would have strengthened those nations in their relationships with a resurgent Germany.

Roosevelt was also deeply concerned with the situation in Asia, where Japan had been fighting sporadically with China. His “quarantine speech” of October 1937 was an attempt to express not only his concern with the growing international instability, but appeared also to call for some sort





## NEUTRALITY ACT OF 1937

*In an attempt to keep the United States from entering into another world war, American isolationists in Congress pushed through a series of neutrality acts. A portion of the act of 1937, prohibiting the export of arms, is presented below.*

### Section 1

(a) Whenever the President shall find that there exists a state of war between, or among, two or more foreign states, the President shall proclaim such fact, and it shall thereafter be unlawful to export, or attempt to export, or cause to be exported, arms, ammunition, or implements of war from any place in the United States to any belligerent state named in such proclamation, or to any neutral state for transshipment to, or for the use of, any such belligerent state.

(b) The President shall, from time to time, by proclamation, extend such embargo upon the export of arms, ammunition, or implements of war to other states as and when they may become involved in such war.

(c) Whenever the President shall find that such a state of civil strife exists in a foreign state and that such civil strife is of a magnitude or is being conducted under such conditions that the export of arms, ammunition, or implements of war from the United States to such foreign state would threaten or endanger the peace of the United States, the President shall proclaim such fact, and it shall thereafter be unlawful to export, or attempt to export, or cause to be exported, arms, ammunition, or implements of war from any place in the United States to such foreign state, or to any neutral state for transshipment to, or for use of, such foreign state.

(d) The President shall, from time to time by proclamation, definitely enumerate the

arms, ammunition, and implements of war, the export of which is prohibited by this section. The arms, ammunition, and implements of war so enumerated shall include those enumerated in the President's proclamation Numbered 2163, of April 10, 1936, but shall not include raw materials or any other articles or materials not of the same general character as those enumerated in the said proclamation, and in the Convention for the Supervision for the International Trade in Arms and Ammunition and in Implements of War, signed at Geneva June, 17, 1925.

(e) Whoever, in violation of any of the provisions of this Act, shall export, or attempt to export, or cause to be exported, arms, ammunition, or implements of war from the United States shall be fined not more than \$10,000, or imprisoned not more than five years, or both.

(f) In the case of the forfeiture of any arms, ammunition, or implements of war by reason of a violation of this Act, . . . such arms, ammunition, or implements of war shall be delivered to the Secretary of War for such use or disposal thereof as shall be approved by the President of the United States.

(g) Whenever, in the judgment of the President, the conditions which have caused him to issue any proclamation under the authority of this section have ceased to exist, he shall revoke the same, and the provisions of this section shall thereupon cease to apply with respect to the state or states named in such proclamation, except with respect to offenses committed, or forfeiture incurred, prior to such revocation.

of action against those nations that were threatening peace, particularly Japan. Shortly after FDR's speech, the League of Nations condemned Japan's aggression and called a nine-power conference to consider possible action against Japan. Roosevelt's endorsement of the League of Nations' position and his administration's willingness to participate in the conference aroused outspoken opposition from isolationists. When the Hearst newspapers threatened a campaign against the idea of a "quarantine" or any positive concerted action with other nations, Roosevelt retreated and no effective action

was taken by the administration. The failure to take firm action in this situation has been seen by some historians as an example of Roosevelt's sensitivity to isolationist opinion. It seems clear that had there been a strong body of public opinion that favored action, such as sanctions against Japan, the president might well have been bolder and future Japanese aggression checked.

In both Europe and Asia, potential responses of the United States that might have influenced the direction of events in those regions were restrained, if not prevented, by

vocal, determined, and effective isolationists both in Congress and the nation as a whole. It is clear that isolationism in the 1930s played a significant role in the coming of World War II.

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**Viewpoint:**  
**The principle significance of isolationism was its encouragement of the Axis belief that the United States would do nothing of substance to challenge aggression.**

*Isolationism* is a somewhat pejorative term for the traditional American policy of not engaging in permanent or long-term alliances with other countries, preserving U.S. freedom of action, and relying on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, rather than allies, to protect the United States. During the period between World Wars I and II, advances in technology overtook this time-tested philosophy by making it possible for a foreign power of sufficient strength to directly threaten the United States. At the same time, many Americans, disillusioned by the outcome of World War I, embraced an extreme form of isolationism. Combined, these two changes encouraged aggression by Germany and Japan, and thus contributed significantly to the outbreak of World War II.

Following the conclusion of World War I, the United States experienced a sharp and rude awakening. Dragged reluctantly into the war, the United States, once committed, embarked on a moral crusade to “Make the World Safe for Democracy,” with every intention of bringing democracy, freedom, and the American way of life to the entire planet. Even though the national leadership had some idea that neither our enemies nor our allies would gladly accept every tenet of this philosophy, these aims garnered acclaim abroad and popular support at home.

In November 1918 the war came to an end and with it the universal acclaim for American war aims. Territorial ambitions, desires for revenge, and the opportunities for material gain soon distanced the Allies from American president Woodrow Wilson’s ideals. The Versailles Treaty (1919) the victors ultimately forced on the defeated powers contained virtually nothing for which the United States had fought. Instead, the peace settlement placed the sole blame for the outbreak of war on Ger-

many. The treaty required Germany, as the only identified aggressor, to repay the Allies for the cost of the war in the form of large indemnities. It also severely limited the size and composition of Germany’s armed forces, giving them only enough strength to perform internal police functions. French marshal Ferdinand Foch, supreme commander of the Allied forces during the war, acknowledged that the Versailles Treaty was not a peace, but merely an armistice he expected to last twenty years.

The theoretical saving grace of Versailles was the League of Nations. This organization of states was intended to prevent war by utilizing the principle of collective defense. All League members would unite to punish aggressors. No nation could be so strong or so foolish as to defy the collective might of the world. Many who opposed the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles hoped that the League would be able to rewrite the unfair and unduly harsh terms once national tempers had cooled.

The United States, however, did not join the League. Disillusioned by the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, the Senate rejected the treaty in its entirety, including membership in the League, and eventually concluded separate peace treaties with the defeated nations. The principle of collective security was fatally weakened by the absence of the one power whose strength might well make it a reality.

The failure of the United States to join the League not only weakened collective security, but ensured no efforts would be made to revise the terms of the Treaty of Versailles to make them less harsh to the defeated powers. The voice of the United States was absent, weakening the call for revision, and France, deprived of American guarantees of security, was unwilling to budge in a direction that might allow Germany to regain strength. Without revision, Foch’s vision of a renewed war was almost certain to come true as a result of German resentment.

The United States had abandoned its isolationist garb for the crusader’s armor; then, disappointed that the world did not work out as it had dreamed, it retreated back to isolationism. Yet, the world the United States faced at the end of World War I was not the same world that George Washington, James Monroe, or even William Howard Taft had faced. Modern industrial methods had been applied to war. If a nation hostile to the United States gained control of much of the economic might of either Europe or East Asia, it would become a continental power, similar to the United States itself. Continental powers could develop enough logistical strength to deploy and support military

forces across an ocean barrier, as the United States had done in World War I. The safety of the United States was no longer predicated on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. Instead, for the United States to remain safe, it must prevent a hostile power from gaining continental status in either Europe or Asia.

The majority of Americans after World War I did not understand the change that had taken place. Only the most thoughtful Americans realized the world had changed so dramatically. There were hints in the 1920s and 1930s, many of them ironically coming from the United States itself, such as the pursuit of heavier bombers—culminating in the “hemisphere defense weapon,” the B-29 Superfortress. A bomber with intercontinental range presented clear advantages for the United States, which did not wish to engage in alliances or treaties to acquire overseas bases; but in the hands of an enemy, such a weapon spelled the end of security for the United States.

In rebuffing the League of Nations, the United States rejected the organization most likely to prevent the emergence of another continental power to threaten U.S. security. The decade of the 1920s, however, seemed to belie the error. The “Spirit of Locarno” (Treaty of Locarno, 1 December 1925) prevailed as Europeans rejected territorial ambitions against their neighbors in a treaty signed in that Italian city. The “Spirit of Washington,” named after the American capital where the great powers agreed to limit naval forces in the winter of 1921–1922, resulted in the Five Power Naval Limitation Treaty (6 February 1922), and pointed toward an era of cooperation and disarmament. Beneath the calm surface, however, dangerous trends continued. In Europe, Italians felt cheated out of the fruits of victory. Germany fumbled with the unfamiliar concepts of democracy, achieving only a fragile stability. Across the Pacific, Japan gloomily assessed its meager resources and concluded the only way to ensure its security was to gain control of vital raw material currently under the control of its neighbors.

The Great Depression destroyed the calm surface of the 1920s. In both Europe and Asia, governments emerged that embraced both continental ambitions and totalitarian or militarist philosophies. These were precisely the sorts of governments that could shatter the United States’s cherished two-ocean security, but the United States was not a member of the single organization that might have stopped these ambitions. Without the power of the United States behind it, the League of Nations allowed Japan, Italy, and Germany in turn to disregard international law and absorb territory by force or the threat of force.

At the precise moment when the transoceanic threat to American security emerged, the United States embraced an extreme form of isolationism that made the rise of hostile continental powers possible. Isolationism had originally intended to preserve American freedom of action. Now, in a desperate attempt to avoid another war and another disappointing peace, the United States abandoned freedom of action for inaction. Many isolationists believed the United States had been drawn into World War I because the United States sold war materials and extended loans to the Allies, and later had to intervene to protect those investments. This simplistic analysis led to the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937, which progressively restricted the United States or its citizens from providing any sort of armament, war matériel, or financial support to belligerents. The laws made no distinction between aggressor and victim, and no provision for supporting countries with philosophies similar to those of the United States against those who harbored the very ambitions that would make them a threat to the security of the United States.

The Neutrality Acts were interpreted by potential adversaries as indications that the United States would not go to war to prevent the growth of a hostile continental power. These acts ensured that the United States would not provide aid to those countries that might resist aggression by Germany, Italy, or Japan, even when such resistance served the interests of the United States. These acts encouraged states with continental ambitions to strike quickly and absorb their neighbors so that they might gain the continental power that would allow them to face the United States as equals in power. It is not coincidental that the Neutrality Acts of 1935, 1936, and 1937 were followed by the Japanese invasion of China in 1937, the *Anschluss* (Union of Austria with Germany) in 1938, and the German invasion of Poland in 1939.

If the actions of the isolationists in Congress did not convince Germany and Japan that the time was ripe for them to achieve their continental ambitions, the rhetoric of the isolationist America First Committee made it seem likely that the United States would not enter the war no matter how close those nations came to their ambitions. Founded following the fall of France in 1940, the America First Committee violently opposed President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s efforts to support the beleaguered United Kingdom with “all measures short of war.” This group, which remained in operation until the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor (7

December 1941), failed to see the threats that a continent-spanning Nazi Germany or an empire of Japan controlling all of East Asia would present to the United States. The threat was doubled by the entry of Japan into the Tripartite Pact (1940), better known as the Axis. The goal of the pact was to keep the Soviet Union and the United States out of the two existing wars—that in Europe and that between Japan and China—until each Axis power had achieved its continental ambitions. At that point, there would be four continental powers—Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, the Empire of Japan, and the United States—each of roughly equal potential strength. Such an alignment of power would not bode well for the United States, the only democratic state among them.

Traditional American isolationism was corrupted by the horrors of World War I and the disillusionment of Versailles into a philosophy that blinded many Americans to their vital national interests and encouraged aggressors to move quickly before the United States returned to the international scene. By removing even the possibility of American intervention until well after the Axis powers had begun their drives for continental power, isolationism contributed to the coming of World War II.

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# U.S. MARINES

## Was the “island hopping” of the U.S. Marines in the Pacific theater an effective strategy?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, U.S. Marine strategy in the central Pacific kept the Japanese off balance and effectively isolated island defenders during the American advance toward Japan.

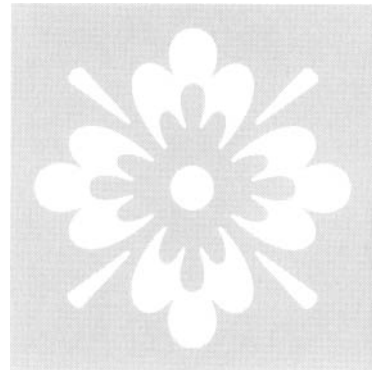
**Viewpoint:** No, resources given to the island-hopping campaign could have been better spent supporting the U.S. Army’s advance through the Philippines, the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and a submarine blockade of Japan.

The tactics of the U.S. Marine Corps in the island-hopping drive across the central Pacific were controversial even during World War II. Critics, including elements of the U.S. Army, argued that the Marines knew only one way to fight—direct assault, cost what it might. They pointed to the losses at Tarawa (20–23 November 1943), with a thousand dead the price of a few acres of coral; Iwo Jima (19 February–16 March 1945), where more than a third of the Marines committed were killed or wounded; and emphasized Peleliu (6 September–13 October 1944), where the 1st Marine Division was bled white because of the alleged bloody-mindedness of its commanders.

Marine Corps tactical doctrine reflected a prewar strategy based on a main-fleet advance across the central Pacific. That understanding meant clearing Japanese air and submarine bases from the line of advance and seizing staging points for the next phase of the offensive. Success depended first on getting ashore as quickly as possible: a landing was most vulnerable when the men were on the way to the beach. It then depended on completing the operation expeditiously, because the landing force’s naval component was significantly vulnerable to air, surface, and undersea counterattack as long as it was tied to the shoreline.

Operational requirements thus fostered a mentality that encouraged speed and shock as opposed to finesse. This mind-set was reinforced by the nature of the battlefields. Atolls and islands offered no room for maneuver. Japanese defenses survived the heaviest air and naval bombardments; Japanese garrisons did not surrender. In those contexts it was arguably the better part of tactical effectiveness to take a week’s casualties in a day and finish the job. The alternative too often resembled testing the speed and sharpness of a moving buzz saw.

By the time the Marines left the “coral war,” their regimental officers and old hands in the rifle companies were conditioned to favor the direct approach, dismissing alternatives as wasting time and lives in the long run. If anything, moreover, Japanese defenses and determination increased as the Marines came closer to the home islands. By the end of the war, Marine Corps identity was strongly predicated upon what had begun as a tactical approach but became a way of war and a source of identity.





**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, U.S. Marine strategy in the central Pacific kept the Japanese off balance and effectively isolated island defenders during the American advance toward Japan.**

On one level the performance of the U.S. Marine Corps in the Pacific War was—literally—the stuff of which legends were made. From Wake Island, through Guadalcanal and Tarawa, to the epic flag-raising on Iwo Jima, the Marines built a deserved reputation as elite shock troops to match any in the world. Yet, as the war progressed, Marine achievements acquired a shadow. From second lieutenants to three-star generals, Marine officers were accused of sacrificing more than necessary to achieve their objectives. “See the pillbox—take the pillbox” was presented as the limits of Marine tactical sophistication. Operationally, critics argued, the Marines knew only one way to fight: frontal attack, with firepower and maneuver replaced by the blood of teenage volunteers who were the backbone of the rifle companies.

The argument did not lack for illustrations. More than a thousand Marines died in three days on Tarawa (20–23 November 1943). A full division was broken on Peleliu (6 September–13 October 1944). Three more divisions were so shattered on Iwo Jima (19 February–16 March 1945) that they never fought again. More, however, than lists of dead and wounded were involved. The place and performance of the U.S. Marine Corps from Guadalcanal (7 August 1942–February 1943) to Okinawa (1 April–2 July 1945) involved questions of strategy, force structure, and ethos at national levels far above the interservice rivalry that allegedly led one senior army general to dismiss Marines as “a bunch of beach runners,” while his Marine counterparts consistently seemed to affirm the Army’s fighting power with their tongues more or less visible in their cheeks.

The place of the Marines in the Pacific was above all a consequence of the decision to mount a two-pronged drive against Japan, one based on Pearl Harbor and the other in Australia. Purists have criticized the decision on strategic grounds. In policy terms, however, it was an updated application of Carl von Clausewitz’s dictum on the appropriate relationship between military operations and national decision making. Not U.S. planning, but Japan’s offensive of 1941–1942 had created the two Pacific Ocean sectors. It was initially necessary to support both for defensive reasons. The commanders of both, Admiral Chester W. Nimitz in the center and

General Douglas MacArthur in the south, began their initial offensives with limited resources, and both were sufficiently successful to attract reinforcements. Particularly given the limited infrastructure of the Pacific theater, continuing that pattern was to reinforce success—again in the best tradition of Clausewitz.

A two-pronged Pacific offensive also had the effect of dissipating Japan’s diminishing resources by keeping the Japanese off balance. Given a chance to concentrate their efforts, even during the middle of the war, Japanese armed forces were a formidable adversary. Required to watch the west and south, while supporting both Truk and Rabaul, they were susceptible to being taken off balance—vulnerable too to the attritional effect of U.S. aircraft and submarines. Many American lives were saved because Japanese troops either drowned en route or reached land with no more than the clothes they wore and rifles they carried.

Last but not least, the dual assault in the Pacific reflected the relationship between the U.S. Army and Navy. This again was not mere interservice rivalry. From the beginnings of the Republic the two had developed as equals, neither dominating except in particular situations. Apart from the alpha personalities of two key participants, MacArthur and Admiral Ernest J. King, the Army and Navy each had a distinct, defensible approach to fighting the Pacific War. As long as resources were available to support both, and neither resulted in a disaster, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had every practical reason to sustain the situation.

That relationship in turn determined the destiny of the Marines. In MacArthur’s theater the 1st, and then the 3rd, Marine Divisions played—at least in principle—the role for which armies intended Marines since the eighteenth century: a relatively small elite of amphibious shock troops, forcing entry for the army, then moving on to the next beachhead. The central Pacific was a different story. For at least a decade before the outbreak of World War II, the Navy and Marines had been developing a doctrine based on “storm landings” to seize bases the Pacific Fleet would need in its long-projected trans-Pacific offensive in a future war with Japan. That doctrine called for getting ashore as quickly as possible under massive supporting fire from offshore, then completing the operation rapidly enough to restore the fleet’s freedom of operation against air and naval counterattack. For the Marines, the best defense was a good offense. Their own losses were projected as likely to be lower if their tactics were aggressive. More to the point, however, a naval defeat could easily leave the landing force hopelessly isolated. That fear came sufficiently close to being reality on Guad-



alcanal, and for the rest of the war it became a Marine cultural subtext to take losses in order to take objectives—before the Navy somehow disappeared again.

Marine doctrine and culture were sustained by the nature of their opposition in the first stages of the central Pacific campaign. They were attacking small islands and atolls, whose garrisons often fought to the last man. There were few opportunities for tactical sophistication. Command devolved downward, from divisions to regiments and companies, with senior officers more engaged with driving and reinforcing their subordinates than in planning the next stages of operations that had no future stages, but merely ended once the island was overrun.

The Marine paradigm began to shift with the invasion of the Mariana Islands in the summer of 1944. On one hand, the Navy was by then in a position to stay; on the other, the islands to be conquered were larger. Saipan and Guam were division- and corps-level battles.

Marine inexperience with that scale of war manifested itself most spectacularly in the behavior of General Holland M. “Howlin’ Mad” Smith, who capped his frustration by relieving an army subordinate for slow progress. Some of Smith’s Marine subordinates, however, openly argued that the Tarawa model was not relevant to the new conditions. By 1945 the Marines adjusted accordingly. Marine contributions to Iwo Jima and Okinawa were administratively and operationally sophisticated. Marine tactics were no whit inferior to the Army’s in their synergy of firepower, maneuver, and fighting spirit. Marine casualties were high—but the Japanese had something to do with that.

Ironically, the Marines’ very success in meeting the changing terms of the Pacific War left them vulnerable to two other criticisms. One was that they had emerged as America’s version of the *Waffen SS* (Combat SS)—not in the sense of being racist militarists, as implied in such works as Craig M. Cameron’s *American Samurai: Myth,*

**U.S. Marines planting the American flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima, February 1945**

*(Joe Rosenthal, Associated Press)*



## TARAWA

*From 20 to 23 November 1943, U.S. Marines fought a brutal battle against Japanese troops on Tarawa atoll in the Gilbert Islands. Richard W. Johnston, a journalist with the Associated Press, filed a report of the battle, excerpted below.*

The Japanese soldiers are not surrendering, but are beginning to commit hara-kiri. There is every indication, however, they will fight to the end from strong positions and that many more American boys will die before the last Japanese are driven from Tarawa.

No victory in American military history was ever attained at a higher price. . . .

The sweet, sickening smell of death literally permeates the blasted, shell-torn beaches, scarred blockhouses and riddled plateau topped by splintered, topless coconut trees on this tiny island—only two and one half miles long and 800 yards wide. . . .

Dead Japanese are everywhere, in blockhouses, in the surf and scattered among tattered palm fronds which they have used incessantly as cover for sniping.

The assault was made against three designated beaches by three battalion landing teams going shoreward through a lagoon on the north coast of the fortified air base island of the Tarawa atoll.

These battalions and others supporting the three landing teams went shoreward in Higgins boats and other landing craft under cover of naval and air attacks, but they encountered ferocious fire from Japanese shore batteries and emplacements, of which few were affected by the bombing and shelling.

A shelving reef hung up most of the Higgins boats and wave after wave of infantry had to struggle 500 yards through water neck deep under a murderous Japanese barrage. At low tide many of their bodies dot the reef. . . .

In the initial landings at 8:30 A.M., November 21, one of the three landing teams was so powerfully opposed that only two companies were able to land. They held a beachhead seventy yards wide for more than twenty-four hours.

I landed at the center beach under Major Henry Pierson Crowe, 44, and like the Marines, I had to walk 500 yards shoreward through a machine-gun crossfire.

Because of the low altitude of the island, which is under ten feet above sea level at all points, it was impossible to secure any point against enemy fire. Throughout the last sixty hours, and probably through the next sixty, Japanese snipers have been taking, and will take, a heavy toll.

From the outset the Japanese fought with amazing fury and even now with occasional surrenders and hara-kiris there is no indication of mass surrenders or evacuation. Instead the indication is the Japanese will fight to the death, which means they will make a vicious defense of an area more than a mile long and subject only to frontal assault and naval and aerial bombardment. . . .

*Source: Louis L. Snyder, ed., Masterpieces of War Reporting: The Great Moments of World War II (New York: Messner, 1962), pp. 310–313.*

*Imagination, and the Conduct of Battle in the First Marine Division, 1941–1951 (1994), but rather in the sense of being a second army that in this case drained not equipment but personnel from its larger counterpart. For half the war the Marines had been an all-volunteer force. Even after the Corps began accepting draftees, its reputation as the best of the best continued to attract teenagers who wanted to fight. Given initial projections of a 250-division army, that claim to fame had not mattered too much. Given the ninety-division force structure finally accepted, however,*

*the six Marine divisions arguably represented an inappropriate concentration of fighting power. Related to that was what might be called a distinctive Marine mind-set uncomfortably at home with face-to-face killing. After 1945 the Marine Corps confronted both arguments: the first by standing on its record, the second by citing the nature of war. Their success, while outside the direct scope of this essay, reflects achievements during World War II that on any fighting front were matched by few and exceeded by none.*

—DENNIS SHOWALTER, COLORADO COLLEGE





### Viewpoint:

## **No, resources given to the island-hopping campaign could have been better spent supporting the U.S. Army's advance through the Philippines, the D-Day invasion of Normandy, and a submarine blockade of Japan.**

In 1941 the Marine Corps was a branch of the U.S. military system waiting for a mission. Its older, original purpose, to provide boarding crews and shipboard security for naval officers was obsolete even by the time of the American Civil War (1861–1865). After World War I (1914–1918), there was serious debate about the complete abolition of the Marine Corps, until a small group of Marine personnel developed the doctrine of direct amphibious assault against fortified positions. Thus a mission was created for a service branch threatened with extinction. It led, however, to a costly strategy that took the Corps from Tarawa (20–23 November 1943) to Iwo Jima (19 February–18 March 1945) during World War II.

New Marine doctrine, with its emphasis on specially designed ships such as the LCT (Landing Craft, Tank) and LST (Landing Ship, Tank), the concept of “combat loading,” (stowing a ship so that supplies immediately needed, such as ammunition, were quickly available instead of giving priority to weight distribution), and the development of a logistical system for rapid off-loading and deployment of men and matériel had a profound impact on the outcome of World War II. The evolution of this doctrine made Operation Overlord (6 June 1944) possible.

Yet, between the Army and Marines, there was a key difference in operational and tactical concepts. Marine doctrine taught that the moment an amphibious operation was launched, the supporting fleet was at its most vulnerable, locked into a static position until the objective was taken and a base secured for the docking of ships. In addition, air superiority had to be achieved by the rapid construction of air bases, thereby freeing carriers from their support role, with the additional benefit of providing a secondary means for the inputting of supplies and personnel.

Therefore, regardless of losses, the assault must press forward with all possible speed, hence the reliance on direct frontal attacks. Army doctrine placed a greater emphasis on securing a beachhead; the buildup of fire support and land-based air support; and then a

safer, but slower advance dependent on superior firepower. In short, Marine doctrine directly traded lives for the speedy taking of the objective; the Army was willing to take more time to achieve the same objective, believing that the support fleet could, if need be, take care of itself without serious loss.

This belief shows the traditional fault line between services. The Marines being, at least on paper, a subsidiary branch of the Navy would, of course, have a doctrine that placed supreme emphasis on the protection of naval assets, even if it meant higher ground-based casualties. The Army, in contrast, held as a primary concern its own personnel and objectives, therefore the Navy was supposed to be in the support role. These doctrinal differences would result in several serious clashes between commanders and staff in combined Army-Marine-Navy operations, such as at Saipan (15 June–9 July 1944) and Okinawa (1 April–2 July 1945). Beyond the dispute regarding tactical and operational techniques there was a far broader debate: was the best road to Tokyo from the south—coming up through New Guinea, to the Philippines, then Okinawa and finally to the main islands of Japan—or across the central Pacific?

The merits and drawbacks of each plan are well known. It was, as well, a debate of personalities, pitting General Douglas MacArthur against Holland M. “Howlin’ Mad” Smith of the Marines and Admiral Chester W. Nimitz of the Navy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt solved the debate in typical American fashion, through a compromise: both approaches were used. MacArthur would have control of the southern route, with the Navy in a subsidiary role, while the Navy and Marines controlled the central route, with the Army in a supplemental role. The question this compromise left unanswered though is simple: was there a better way?

Many argue that the compromise strategy kept the Japanese off balance, forcing them to spread resources across two broad fronts of operations and leaving them guessing as to the true axis of the advance. Consider the following scenario, however: the green light for a Marine Corps operation across the central Pacific is not given, and all emphasis is placed, instead, on MacArthur’s campaign from the south, with a scaled-back Marine Corps placed in a support role. The strategies of the two service branches would have been drastically altered.

The large scale, specialized logistical support needed for Marine operations would have been diverted elsewhere if the historic central Pacific campaign had not gone forward. It can-

not be emphasized enough just how complex was the logistical and industrial demands of this campaign. Landing craft requirements alone, both for Europe and the Pacific, were so intense that they received the highest production priority, higher even than for aircraft or submarines. Intense bureaucratic battles raged in the Pentagon between the Army, with its emphasis on Europe and MacArthur's objective, and the Navy as to where these craft were to be sent. The Navy won: the much sought-after LVTs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked) became the sole possession of the Marines, much to the detriment of Army troops who had to storm the beaches of Normandy aboard the "tincan" LCIs (Landing Craft, Infantry). Had the Army instead received the resources given to the Marines, it would have sped up the assault on *Festung Europa* (Fortress Europe) and most definitely added greater punch to the campaign through the Solomons, New Guinea, and then on into the Philippines.

This change would have had a significant impact on the timetable of the European invasion. One of the primary reasons for the postponement of the D-Day invasion from April or May, to June, was to allow an additional two months of specialized production in landing craft. Without that production the first-day assault forces would have been cut by more than 20 percent. The original Overlord plan of launching a near simultaneous assault on the coast of southern France had to be scrapped as well, with that landing not occurring until August. It should be noted that in the same month as the assault on Normandy another amphibious campaign in the Pacific started against Saipan (15 June–9 July 1944), Guam (21 July–10 August 1944), and Tinian (24 July–1 August 1944).

It is interesting to speculate what might have happened if even half the assets involved in those landings had been committed to Europe instead. One could conceive of a scenario that might have put the Allies into Paris by early July and to the Rhine before winter, perhaps even initiating a final collapse of Germany before the Russian spring offensive of 1945. The postwar implications are profound. In the South Pacific, even with but half of the additional resources freed from the central Pacific it is possible to consider that MacArthur might have been six months, perhaps even nine, ahead of the historical schedule.

As to the supposed diversion of Japanese resources by the two-front operation, they would have been locked into defending the central Pacific anyhow. The Japanese grand strategy of seizing an outer perimeter, digging in, and holding until America was exhausted

from losses was already in place long before the U.S. strategic response was set in motion. The Japanese troops were there, and there they would stay. Minor diversionary operations would have kept them locked in place. Japanese placement of thousands of troops on hundreds of islands across the Pacific in 1942–1943 is a forgotten aspect of the war. The majority of them never fired a shot. More Japanese soldiers died of disease and malnourishment, trapped in forgotten and bypassed garrisons, than were killed by all the Marine assaults of World War II. Regardless of whether the Marines were storming Tarawa or Iwo Jima, the Japanese garrisons in the central Pacific would have been there nevertheless—rotting, cut off, and forgotten while American troops sliced into Japan three thousand miles behind them.

Another factor in this equation, often forgotten by the proponents of the direct Marine assaults, is the submarine war. Plagued by doctrinal problems and faulty torpedoes (U.S. torpedoes were equipped with a detonator that almost inevitably failed to explode and had a disturbing tendency to circle back on the firing submarine), the undersea service had a minimal impact during the first two years of the Pacific War. By the middle of 1944, however, the problem with the torpedoes had finally been solved, despite military inefficiency and bureaucratic bungling of the worst kind. Operational doctrine was changed as well, freeing submarines from wasteful picket and defensive duties. The Navy had a wealth of experience from combating German U-boats in the Atlantic but failed miserably when it came to applying that knowledge offensively in the Pacific. When doctrinal changes were at last implemented, including the use of wolf packs, the impact on Japan was stunning.

One should remember that by the end of the first year of the war in Europe the Germans, with less than a hundred U-boats, had all but paralyzed England. In the months after America's entry into the war, less than two dozen U-boats created havoc along the eastern seaboard. When the reorganized and properly armed U.S. submarine fleet was finally cut loose in 1944, Japan began to starve. The submariners' efforts have often been ignored when compared to the far more "glamorous" and photogenic Marines. Until it was far too late, the Japanese failed to develop an effective convoy system. Their antisubmarine technology was woefully inadequate when compared to the Allied "wizard war" during the Battle of the Atlantic.

Japan, even more than Britain, was totally dependent on import of nearly everything,

from coal and iron ore, to food, aluminum, rubber, and even the cloth for uniforms. Unlike Britain, however, Japan did not have a powerful oceangoing ally who could ship supplies to it no matter what the cost.

Advocates of the submarine school argue that if but a fraction of the matériel committed to supporting the Marine assaults had been diverted instead to the manufacture of subs and effective torpedoes, Japan as a military entity would have been paralyzed by the end of 1944. The starvation of Britain in 1940–1941 had been a near-run thing; with Japan it would have been a foregone conclusion by the end of 1944. Combining this improved submarine effort with a unified front advancing from the south, and thus cutting off crucial imports of oil, rubber, and food supplies, the war in the Pacific might have ended even before the fighting in Europe. This conclusion would have had profound implications for the postwar world, blocking the entry of Russia into Korea and Manchuria. That denial of Russian participation in the final campaign of World War II the Orient might have changed all the tragedies that followed for American foreign policy

in East Asia, and may have, as well, avoided the use of atomic weapons.

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# WOMEN'S ROLE

## How important was the role of women in World War II?

**Viewpoint:** Women were significant contributors to the war effort in Allied countries and helped win the conflict.

**Viewpoint:** Although women contributed in home-front roles, they did not significantly affect the conduct of World War II.

Women's experiences in World War II pushed gender envelopes on all fronts. Aerial bombardment did not discriminate between the sexes. Conscription diminished the number of males available even for war work, to say nothing of the service jobs necessary in industrial societies. Men in uniform were absent for longer periods, and at longer distances, than in World War I, with a corresponding effect on family dynamics. Sexual behavior and expectations reflected the destabilizing effects of geographic mobility and personal uncertainty.

All the major combatants, except Japan, used women in auxiliary military roles, mostly administrative. In the United States some women were "ferry pilots" who flew planes to different locations. In Britain, women served in anti-aircraft units. Soviet women flew combat missions; a few served in the front lines of the ground war as tankers or snipers. Despite significant ex post facto efforts to construct a combat role for women, however, it remained a male sphere for all practical purposes. The exceptions were intelligence work, with the British and the Americans making significant use of female agents, and in resistance and partisan movements—though there too, women were employed in administration rather than combat roles as far as was possible.

War work was another matter. Britain made the most comprehensive use of its womanpower, in 1941 instituting conscription for auxiliary service. That applied, however, to single women between twenty and thirty, reflecting a general belief that women served the war effort better by caring for their families. With men gone and money to be made, that caring increasingly involved taking jobs in war production. Even in the United States, which mobilized the smallest percentage of its males, women moved into factories. Soviet women participated by the millions—encouraged by the better rations available for war workers. Nazi Germany modified its cult of domesticity to move women into "men's jobs" throughout the Reich.

At the same time, women's nurturing roles increased and acquired a direct sexual dimension. If in World War I the ideal had been a kid sister or platonic sweetheart, the latter conflict arguably laid the foundations for the "three shift" phenomenon confronting women in developed countries during the second half of the twentieth century: career woman, homemaker, and lover—all in the same twenty-four hours. In any case, the disruption of traditional sex-and-gender roles and stereotypes was one of the greatest consequences of World War II.



**Viewpoint:**  
**Women were significant contributors to the war effort in Allied countries and helped win the conflict.**

Women played a larger role in World War II than ever before, but was their involvement significant to the Allied victory? There are two major arguments voiced by those who believe that women made only a minimal contribution to the Allied success. One argument asserts that the number of women was too small to make an appreciable difference; the second comes from those who debate that only battlefield accomplishments matter in a war. Both arguments fail to account for the significant fact that the victors mobilized women extensively as a part of an effort to use all available resources, while the losers did not. While a full examination of resource management during World War II lies beyond the scope of this essay, even a short comparison illustrates that those countries who most actively involved women from the beginning of the war maintained a distinct advantage.

In 1939 no one expected women to become so actively involved in wartime production or service. While probably only the Germans believed that this war would be a short one requiring minor economic mobilization, the real barriers to women's participation came as a result of the strong ideological constraints against females working in jobs that violated the contemporary gender divisions of labor. With the onset of war, most Allied countries set aside many of these ideals and mobilized their women in some fashion. England, protected from invasion by only a narrow channel of water, mobilized the most extensively. By 1944, 17.7 percent of its labor force worked in defense-related jobs. Nearly every man and woman under the age of fifty, without small children, went to work. In the United States, women comprised 36 percent of the total manufacturing labor force. There were more than 6.5 million women working in the defense industry by 1944, and many more who worked in government offices doing clerical or administrative tasks. Women filled a variety of factory jobs, including welders, joiners, and ammunition workers. They built ships, planes, and tanks, as well as producing a wide selection of munitions from bombs to small arms ammunition. The antiquated British industries produced an amazing 131,000 airplanes, while the United States manufactured more than 284,000 planes during the course of the war. More than 2,700 Liberty Ships, primarily cargo or troop-carrying ships, were manufactured, many by the 1,000 African American women

employed at the Kaiser shipyard in Richmond, Virginia. Women were an important part of the massive logistical effort required to support armies of millions of soldiers on multiple fronts using complex machinery. Unlike warfare through the end of the nineteenth century, where an army's most important need was food, which could be foraged, supplying warfare in the twentieth century required feeding millions, as well as providing vast quantities of shells, bullets, fuel, and replacement parts to support complex machines such as aircraft carriers, bombers, and tanks.

Women also served in uniform. Despite longstanding traditions that kept women out of the armed services, the Allies recognized the resource benefits of recruiting women. England was the first to break with this tradition. In 1941 they drafted 125,000 women into the military and received another 43,000 over the next three years. The United States never resorted to drafting women (although they considered it when recruiting efforts lagged), but they established a Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC) in 1942, which became the Women's Army Corps (WAC) and part of the U.S. Army in 1943. Eventually, women served in every military branch, including the Marine Corps and Coast Guard.

Servicewomen held a wide variety of jobs that contributed significantly to the overall war effort. Initially, military-occupation specialties permissible for women paralleled the gendered labor divisions in civilian society. Almost all nurses were female; 64.4 percent, or 28,451, of U.S. WACs did office-related work; nearly all clerical and administrative work at the Naval Department at the Pentagon was accomplished by women. By 1944, however, as the women proved their worth and the need for combat forces required more and more men, more than two hundred jobs, many in nontraditional occupations such as pilots, chemists, and airplane or light-vehicle mechanics, opened up to women. Women's Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs) flew newly repaired planes across the country. At Cherry Point Marine Base in North Carolina, all of the Link airplane instructors were women; they did 90 percent of parachute packing and 80 percent of landing-field control operations. Although the number of women in uniform was a small percentage of the total military forces, 2 percent of the U.S. Army and 8.3 percent of the Soviet army, these women freed men to do other jobs that women were either unable or not allowed to do. Winston Churchill claimed that the women operating the anti-aircraft guns freed up 44,000 men for combat.

Some women even fought in combat. England established female gun crews, known as "Ack Ack Girls," to defend the many miles of

*"Image not available for copyright reasons"*

English coastline. These women, who were noted for their exemplary job performance, did most of the tasks required to fire the guns; however, they were not allowed to pull the trigger. By 1943, more than 56,000 women were working for British Anti-Aircraft (AA) Command. The U.S. Army also experimented with female gun crews, who performed exceptionally well. General George C. Marshall, the U.S. chief of staff, however, refused to actually field the unit, fearing the negative public response. The Soviet Union, on the other hand, made the most complete use of its women in uniform. Approximately one million Soviet women served in every military specialty, including infantry, armor, and field artillery. Soviet women drove tanks, became snipers, and operated anti-aircraft guns. One woman, when her tanker husband died, enlisted

and served in a tank she named "Front-line Female Comrade." There were three regiments of Soviet female pilots, including the famed 588th Night Bombers, who were so proficient at hitting their targets they became known as the "Night Witches." German soldiers mockingly called these women *flintenweiber* or "gun women," but it was an uneasy joke. One German soldier stated that he would rather fly over English air defense positions in North Africa all day than attempt to fly once across Soviet air-defense positions.

Not every woman in an Allied country worked in a factory or donned a uniform. Many stayed at home and kept the home fires burning. As D'Ann Campbell argues in *Women at War With America: Private Lives in a Patriotic Era* (1984), these activities were an important part of

the war effort. The very act of compliance with rationing and recycling, the continued “making do or doing without” begun in the Great Depression, allowed for the diversion of massive amounts of natural and manufactured resources needed to fight the war. Had women chosen instead to mutiny against these restrictions, it might not have been possible to sustain the war logistically—it certainly would have been more difficult. Women and children collected scrap metal, rubber, and newspapers, walked or rode bicycles to save fuel, and even saved cooking fat to be turned into glycerin for explosives. Victory gardens provided one-third of the vegetables grown in the United States, and canned goods and staples such as flour, sugar, and butter were rationed in every country. As the main consumers of scarce goods, women’s cooperation in rationing and recycling was central to the war effort.

Even the necessities of war were not enough to force the Axis political and military leaders to abandon their beliefs, which encouraged a strict gender-based distribution of labor. Any efforts to utilize female labor more fully were too little and too late. In Germany, Adolf Hitler’s reluctance to allow women to work for wages was linked not only to his male-dominated Nazi ideology but also to his reluctance to place the German economy on a wartime footing. From 1940 to 1943, while Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union were conducting massive mobilization and rearmament efforts, German factories maintained their normal eight-hour, six-day work weeks. Hitler discouraged women from doing almost any nontraditional jobs even as his wartime industries scrambled to provide the munitions and matériel needed to cope with the steady onslaught of the strategic-bombing campaign and the pressure of a two-front war. Some women, mainly those who were single, began working in factories or in the Female Auxiliary Units doing clerical or administrative work for the military by 1941. Women also served in the *Schutzstaffeln* (SS), working with women at the prison camps. Not until 1943, when Hitler made Albert Speer the head of industry, were more women conscripted into defense industries and the military. Overall, about 450,000 women served in the auxiliaries, in addition to the nurses. This participation was less than half the number, however, of American women who volunteered for service with the U.S. armed forces—a small number considering that Germany was facing enemies on all sides. The Nazis passed any legislation to conscript these “Blitz Mädchen” with extreme reluctance and enforced the laws lightly. Even Hitler’s 1945 proposal to form an all-female combat unit was not enough to overcome the inertia of his early slowness to mobilize

and Nazi society’s unwillingness to make good use of half of its working-age population.

Benito Mussolini’s fascist ideology produced similar restrictions on Italian women. In fact, their main wartime efforts did not support the political regime but countered it as members of resistance units. Many Italian, French, Russian, Greek, and Balkan women became partisan fighters. There were more than two million in Yugoslavia, and they made up 10 percent of Italian partisans. Fierce fighters, they were noted for their bravery. These women spied, planted bombs, and conducted reconnaissance. Many of their advantages as guerrilla fighters lay in their femininity. Partisans in France and Italy soon learned that Nazi conceptions of women’s fragility and need for protection made women ideal for planting bombs. They could go unseen in situations where the presence of a man might be suspect. These efforts in intelligence gathering and sabotage comprised a significant part of the partisan efforts and aided in an Allied victory.

There is little evidence to show how Japanese women supported the war. Despite Japan’s logistical and manpower problems, political and military leaders clung to their beliefs that women should not work outside of the home. Japan made few systematic efforts to mobilize its female population. Small home-guard units and women with bamboo sticks were minute efforts at best.

This enormous conflict between highly industrialized nations placed unprecedented demands upon the resources of the participants, and strategies employed to meet these demands were pivotal in the outcome of the war. Both Germany and Japan experienced successes on the battlefield, but the countries that devised the best strategy and made the most effective use of all of their resources ultimately achieved victory. One resource was the people involved in the war effort—including women. All of the major players in the conflict utilized their women to some extent. They worked in factories, kept the home fires burning, cared for wounded soldiers, served in auxiliary units, and even fought on the front lines. The Soviet Union, Great Britain, and the United States, however, were much more willing to involve women actively in the war effort and use them in nontraditional roles almost from the beginning. Germany, Japan, and Italy utilized their countrywomen unwillingly and ultimately too late. As Speer commented after the war:

How wise you were to bring your women into your military and into your labor force. Had we done this initially, as you did, it could have affected the whole course of the war. We would have found out, as you did, that women were equally effective, and for some skills, superior to males.

Although no country fully mobilized its women, when viewed in the larger strategic picture, the efforts of the Allied women were certainly an important part of their victory.

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WEST POINT



**Viewpoint:**  
**Although women contributed in home-front roles, they did not significantly affect the conduct of World War II.**

Women had a higher profile in World War II than in any other war. Media coverage of women in armaments factories, airplanes, army hospitals, and bombed-out cities placed them in the center of wartime propaganda. This publicity created the illusion that women were active participants in this war and played a vital role in its conduct and outcome. In fact, women played minor roles on the battlefield, figured primarily as objects that the governments manipulated, and were targeted as a by-product of the concept of “total war.”

No one would dispute that women’s contributions on the homefront added considerably to the success of the winning powers in World War II. They took factory jobs, allowing men to join the army, and kept the armies well supplied with weapons, uniforms, food, and other items. There is some question, however, as to whether or not the mobilization of women as opposed to other groups was necessary. In the United States, there were abundant sources of underutilized labor that could have been tapped—unemployment among minority groups and unskilled laborers had risen to astronomical proportions during the 1930s. The U.S. government could just as easily—perhaps more so—have engaged these groups in war production, but instead chose to encourage white middle-class women to work. This option was a propaganda issue. By sending housewives to work the government created the illusion that this was “total war” (although for the United States it certainly was not) and advanced its campaign to whip up patriotism and support for the war effort. Sending minority migrant farm workers into the munitions factories simply would not have had the same public-relations potential, nor would they have been as easy to get rid of after the war when soldiers came home to reclaim their jobs. White middle-class women were photogenic, quick to learn, eager to do their part for the war effort, and, perhaps most importantly, apparently satisfied to

leave their jobs when their husbands and boyfriends returned from the war. This is not to say that their production efforts were not valuable, but it was not particularly important for women to do this work from a production point of view. If other groups of the population had taken over these jobs, the outcome of the war would not have been materially affected.

Even women in uniform played a minor role in the war itself, serving, with a few exceptions, in support positions. Women usually took on noncombat jobs in order to free up men for the front. The Soviet Union was the only exception to this scenario. It alone mobilized women for combat in World War II. With three air regiments composed entirely of women, the Soviet Union broke new ground by placing females in combat. The most well-known work of these regiments was to harass German forces during the night, earning them the name “Night Witches” from the German troops. Despite their notoriety, women totaled only 12 percent of Soviet aviation personnel and were not pivotal to the outcome of the war. To a great extent the state used these units for propaganda purposes—the idea was to break the morale of the German troops and make sure that Soviet men knew that even women were brave enough to defend their homeland. In addition, the Soviets took this opportunity to experiment with women in combat, but on a limited basis. In the Soviet Union, as in other countries, women made their biggest contribution on the economic front and in the medical corps. Of the 29,574,900 personnel mobilized by the Soviet Union, women constituted only 8 percent, mostly in support positions. Even at this low rate, the Soviet army had more women in it than any other—for example, women never exceeded 2 percent of the U.S. forces. Women were a negligible force on the battlefield.

While women had little impact on the conduct of the war, they were profoundly affected by it. Strategists, policymakers, military commanders, and political leaders were all men. In fact, women had less to do with the conduct of this war than perhaps any other war in history, since both sides chose to ignore the traditional injunctions against attacking civilians. In past wars, although civilians certainly ended up as victims, it was considered dishonorable to target them—especially women and children. In addition to the conventions of warfare, civilians were simply not as cost-effective as military targets. Rather than expending men and ammunition in destroying a city, armies concentrated on destroying each other as the fastest way to end the war. In this way, women had affected strategy by defining what was a reasonable target and what was not. Technological advances and the perception that this was “total





## ROSIE THE RIVETER

*Women accepted many industrial jobs during World War II that were formerly restricted to men, including the production of munitions. Peggy Terry, who worked in a Kentucky munitions plant, recalls:*

The first work I had after the Depression was at a shell-loading plant in Viola, Kentucky. It is between Paducah and Mayfield. They were large shells: anti-aircraft, incendiaries, and tracers. We painted red on the tips of the tracers. My mother, my sister, and myself worked there. Each of us worked a different shift because we had little ones there. We made the fabulous sum of thirty-two dollars a week. To us it was an absolute miracle. Before that, we made nothing. . . .

I worked in building number 11. I pulled a lot of gadgets on a machine. The shell slid under and powder went into it. Another lever you pulled tamped it down. Then it moved on a conveyer belt to another building where the detonator was dropped in. You did this over and over.

Tetryl was one of the ingredients and it turned us orange. Just as orange as an orange. Our hair was streaked orange. . . . We never questioned. None of us ever asked, What is this? Is it harmful? We simply didn't think about it. That was just one of the conditions of the job. The only thing we worried about was other women thinking we had

dyed our hair. Back then it was a disgrace if you dyed your hair. We worried what people would say.

We used to laugh about it on the bus. It eventually wore off. But I seem to remember some of the women had breathing problems. The shells were painted a dark gray. When the paint didn't come out smooth, we had to take rags wet with some kind of remover and wash the paint off. The fumes from these rags—it was like breathing cleaning fluid. It burned the nose and throat. Oh, it was difficult to breathe. I remember that.

Nothing ever blew up, but I remember the building where they dropped in the detonator. The detonators are little black things about the size of a thumb. This terrible thunderstorm came and all the lights went out. Somebody knocked a box of detonators off on the floor. Here we were in the pitch dark. Somebody was screaming, "Don't move, anybody!" They were afraid you'd step on the detonator. We were down on our hands and knees crawling out of that building in the storm. (Laughs.) We were in slow motion. If we'd stepped on one . . .

*Source: Studs Terkel, ed., "The Good War": An Oral History of World War II (New York: Pantheon, 1984), pp. 108–109.*

war" created a shift in war operations. Air power made hitting civilian targets easier and less costly in terms of men than it had been previously. In addition, the awareness that they were engaged in total war encouraged belligerents to attack war production and concentrate on demoralizing the enemy. This change in the conduct of war placed women in the bull's eye to a much greater extent than in any previous wars.

The Germans instituted the practice of targeting civilians. Since they were on an ideological mission, they considered any means justified that would accomplish their goals, as evidenced by their racial policies. In their attempt to "purify" the world, the Germans killed men, women, and children indiscriminately. From this point, the jump to killing enemy civilians in order to carry out other goals was not great, and in their air war against Great Britain, the Germans targeted civilian areas in hopes of breaking British morale and obtaining a surrender. This civilian targeting paved the way for the Allies to

follow suit by bombing Dresden and Berlin in order to demoralize the Germans. The decision to drop nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki was simply the logical extension of this policy—with the most frightening and controversial results. The escalation of the air war that culminated in atomic warfare eliminated any pretense of protecting civilians or saving women from the horrors of war. Noncombatant women emerged as viable targets and as such lost significance in the conduct of war. War would go wherever logistical considerations took it, regardless of the consequences for the civilian population.

Only a few women played an active role in World War II; the vast majority were objects to be manipulated in a variety of ways. Women were asked to work in factories and tend to injured men—essentially to keep the home fires burning and nurse soldiers as they had done since the beginning of warfare. On the other hand, they assumed a new role as targets and so lost their protected status. Still, they overwhelmingly

remained noncombatants. Not only were they not represented in the groups that made the decisions to hit civilian targets, they were also not even allowed to arm themselves in defense or to retaliate. Targeted but powerless, women ceased to have any place in the decision-making process even as objects to protect. They were propaganda tools, military targets, and factory hands, but they did not materially affect either the outcome or conduct of the war.

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# YALTA

## Did the Yalta conference represent an Anglo-American capitulation to Soviet occupation in Eastern Europe?

**Viewpoint:** Yes, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, both concerned with protecting their own national interests, capitulated to Soviet demands in Eastern Europe even before the Yalta conference, and Joseph Stalin was buttressed in this situation by his Red Army control of the region.

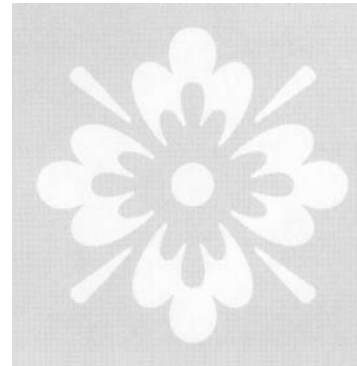
**Viewpoint:** No, the Yalta agreement was a compromise designed to continue cooperation among the Allies and to prevent them from turning their armies on each other after defeating Germany.

The Yalta conference (4–11 February 1945) was only the second occasion that Winston Churchill, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin met face-to-face. The meeting was of corresponding importance: determining the immediate outlines of a post–World War II settlement. Churchill was increasingly convinced of the importance of limiting Soviet influence in central and western Europe. Stalin feared the resurgence of Germany and suspected the ramifications of Roosevelt’s pet project, the United Nations (UN). Roosevelt sought to mediate between his allies while securing Soviet participation in the war against Japan.

Roosevelt addressed the UN issue by proposing that each permanent member of the Security Council, the regional hegemony, be given a veto. Stalin accepted. The German issue proved more difficult. Stalin sought to diminish Germany’s power permanently by transferring its territory east of the Oder to Poland—which in turn would cede its eastern provinces to the U.S.S.R. In this way Stalin would both handicap German recovery and make Poland a permanent Soviet client.

Roosevelt and Churchill were dubious about the effect of this transfer of land and people on Europe’s stability—particularly since implementing Stalin’s proposal meant abandoning the Polish government-in-exile, which adamantly refused to accept the new boundaries. The eventual approval of the leaders was shaped by three arguments: the war with Japan remained to be won; the Red Army was on the ground in Poland; and Soviet cooperation was essential if the UN system was to have a chance of working as Roosevelt intended.

In any event, Stalin proposed to join the war against Japan within three months of victory in Europe—from his perspective a significant concession, given Russia’s heavy losses in the war. Certainly, Churchill and Roosevelt left Yalta with a sense that favorable conditions had been established for cooperation on the basis of mutual interests—not exactly a new world order, but by no means a bad beginning.





**Viewpoint:**  
**Yes, Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt, both concerned with protecting their own national interests, capitulated to Soviet demands in Eastern Europe even before the Yalta conference, and Joseph Stalin was buttressed in this situation by his Red Army control of the region.**

Let us assume that revisionist accounts from the 1970s about the Yalta conference (4–11 February 1945)—particularly Diane Shaver Clemens’s excellent analysis *Yalta* (1970)—had never been published. Instead, let us conjecture that conservative assessments from the 1940s and 1950s about the conference stand unchallenged. Such works include William C. Bullitt’s “How We Won the War and Lost the Peace” in *Life* (1948), John T. Flynn’s *The Roosevelt Myth* (1948), William Henry Chamberlin’s *America’s Second Crusade* (1950) and *Beyond Containmentment* (1953), and George N. Crocker’s *Roosevelt’s Road to Russia* (1959), to name just a few.

How do all of these works fit within the context of the Yalta conference? In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Thomas S. Kuhn argued that disciplines are governed by an established reigning paradigm that is used to explain why things happen. “In the development of any science,” he wrote, “the first received paradigm is usually felt to account quite successfully for most of the observations and experiments easily accessible to that science’s practitioners.” All reigning paradigms, however, contain anomalies that cannot be explained by researchers. If the anomalies resist explanation and increase in number over time, the reigning paradigm undergoes a crisis and can be pushed aside by another that explains things better. “The decision to reject one paradigm,” Kuhn thus concluded, “is always simultaneously the decision to accept another, and the judgment leading to that decision involves the comparison of both paradigms with nature *and* with each other.”

Such a process is at work concerning interpretations of the Yalta conference. Currently, the revisionist paradigm of the 1970s stands paramount. Yalta, it is argued—especially by Clemens—was a typical diplomatic conference among the great powers. Each of the Big Three came to the conference with his viewpoints and presented his policies: the United States, for instance, wanted support for its United Nations (UN) voting formula; Great Britain wanted to revive France; and the Soviet Union wanted to use the conference to gain international recogni-

tion of the Lublin-based Polish government over the London-based Polish government-in-exile. In the end, all three powers negotiated their respective policies and obtained consensus on some points. This process, Clemens argued, is the most “realistic way” to understand Yalta.

Let us assume further that this argument has not been made; instead, consider that the reigning paradigm about Yalta is still based on the conservative accounts of the 1940s and 1950s. For the followers of this paradigm, Yalta constituted the worst of Anglo-American capitulation to the Soviet Union, especially in Eastern Europe. Does this argument have any merit, however?

The answer is affirmative. In February 1945, Prime Minister Winston Churchill, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Premier Joseph Stalin met at Yalta to formalize plans for the postwar world. By the end of the conference they had obtained agreements about Germany, the UN, Poland, and Soviet entry into the war against Japan. On Germany, they agreed on the creation of four occupation zones, disarmament, de-Nazification, and punishment of war criminals. Reparations would be extracted through the removal of German national wealth, the annual delivery of goods, or the use of German labor; however, a commission of American, British, and Soviet representatives would meet later to fix the total sum to be paid. Turning to the UN, the three decided to hold a conference in San Francisco in April 1945 to finalize the charter. They further agreed that the Soviets would have three votes in the General Assembly and that the Security Council veto could only be used against substantive issues and not to block general discussions.

Churchill, Roosevelt, and Stalin also concluded that Poland would lose some of its eastern lands to the Soviet Union but would be compensated with German territory in the west and north. Although they agreed to the Curzon Line for Poland’s eastern boundary, disagreement still existed about the Oder-Neisse Line for its western borders. The Big Three nevertheless accepted the creation of a Polish Provisional Government of National Unity, composed of members of the Soviet-supported Lublin Poles and the British- and American-backed London Poles; free and unfettered elections would be held as soon as possible. Finally, Roosevelt obtained a secret agreement on Soviet entrance into the Pacific War. Two to three months after Germany’s surrender, Stalin pledged to enter the war against Japan. In return, he received certain concessions: Outer Mongolia would remain a communist satellite; the southern half of Sakhalin Island would be returned; Port Darien would be internationalized with Soviet interests safe-

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guarded; Port Arthur would be leased as a Soviet naval base; the Manchurian railroads would be operated under a joint Soviet-Chinese company, with Soviet interests safeguarded and Chinese sovereignty assured; and the Kurile Islands would be returned to Russia. These last two decisions have been the most hotly debated topics and have drawn the wrath of conservative critics about Yalta.

In *The Roosevelt Myth*, Flynn argued that Poland, for instance, had been “thrown to the wolves in the new era of appeasement,” and as a consequence, Stalin had been given the opportunity to seize huge portions of Eastern Europe. On a similar note, Chester Wilmot argued in *The Struggle for Europe* (1952) that Stalin had presented Churchill and Roosevelt with a fait accompli by the time of the Yalta conference. It was no coincidence, he stressed, that Yalta took place when the Red Army occupied Poland. History had shown that the Russians viewed international meetings as a way to gain recognition of geopolitical conditions that had been created through the use of military power, not as a way for negotiating reasonable settlements. As a result, Stalin was not interested in meeting with his allies, Wilmot argued, until he had obtained strong military positions. By Yalta, he had such a position with the Red Army in Eastern Europe.

Wilmot is only partially correct. The military maneuvers of World War II gave Stalin an advantageous position in Eastern Europe because his forces occupied most of the region by February 1945. He had not presented Churchill and Roosevelt, however, with a fait accompli that the British and Americans had to accept, given the geopolitical situation at the time; instead, both governments had capitulated to Stalin earlier. Well before the meeting in the Crimea, Stalin knew that his forces would not have to leave Eastern Europe once the war against Nazi Germany had been concluded, and as a result, the Red Army remained there during the immediate postwar years and into the Cold War. Yalta represented Anglo-American capitulation to Russian aggrandizement in Eastern Europe for one simple reason: both Churchill and Roosevelt, who were responsible for this outcome, openly invited Stalin to establish his own sphere of influence over postwar Eastern Europe.

Churchill bears most of the responsibility for the Yalta outcome, for he agreed to divide Eastern Europe between himself and Stalin, thereby establishing British-Soviet spheres of influence in the region. Such an arrangement was reached at the Moscow Conference in October 1944. The talks between Churchill and Stalin embodied the finest elements of naked power

politics and ambition; although American ambassador William Averell Harriman attended the meetings, he merely acted as an observer and was not invited to Churchill and Stalin's more intimate discussions. During these talks, in fact, the prime minister and the premier agreed to carve up Eastern Europe. More concerned about Soviet incursions into the Mediterranean—a region the British viewed as their traditional sphere of influence—Churchill gave Stalin parts of Eastern Europe as a diversionary tactic to protect his own vested interests. By the end of the talks they had divided the region along the following lines: the Soviet Union would have 90 percent control over Romania and 75 percent over Bulgaria; Great Britain would exercise 90 percent control over Greece; and Yugoslavia and Hungary were originally to be evenly split between the two, but Foreign Minister Anthony Eden would later grant the Soviets 75 percent control over Hungary. When forced to rationalize his actions after the Moscow Conference, Churchill emphasized that British interests—particularly protecting those traditional strategic positions in the Mediterranean from the Soviet Union—had motivated him. According to Warren F. Kimball in *The Juggler: Franklin Roosevelt as Wartime Statesman* (1991), Churchill argued that:

Arrangements made about the Balkans are, I am sure, the best that are possible. Coupled with our successful military action recently we should now be able to save Greece and, I have no doubt that agreement to pursue a fifty-fifty joint policy in Yugoslavia will be the best solution for our difficulties in view of Tito's behavior and changes in the local situation, resulting from the arrival of Russian and Bulgarian forces under Russian command to help Tito's eastern flank. The Russians are insistent on their ascendancy in Roumania and Bulgaria as the Black Sea countries.

Nevertheless, Churchill agreed to divide Eastern Europe, thereby giving the Soviet leader a green light to keep the Red Army in the region once it had vanquished the *Wehrmacht* (German Army).

Roosevelt was just as culpable. The president knew about Churchill and Stalin's spheres-of-influence arrangements, yet he did nothing to dissuade their creation. Although Harriman was not allowed to attend Churchill and Stalin's meetings, he nevertheless knew what had happened. "Churchill and Eden will try to work out some sort of spheres of influence with the Russians, the British have a free hand in Greece and the Russians in Rumania and perhaps other countries," he told Roosevelt, adding that "the British will attempt to retrieve a position of equal influence in Yugoslavia." Roosevelt ignored Harriman's concerns, as well as advice offered by Harry Hopkins—his closest personal

adviser—and Secretary of State Cordell Hull, both of whom had grave doubts about the spheres-of-influence arrangements and attempted to dissuade the president from accepting it. By ignoring his advisers, Roosevelt followed his typical foreign-policy style, that is, disregarding the counsel of others so that he could act on his own, no matter the consequences. He had done so many times—for instance, sending Hull to the London Economic Conference of 1933, after which the president disregarded his advice and adopted a unilateral nationalistic policy to promote American economic development.

Faced with Churchill and Stalin's spheres-of-influence agreement, Roosevelt did not act any differently, and as a result, his foreign-policy conduct would have disastrous consequences for Eastern Europe in the long run. Roosevelt, however, did not think so. "My interest at the present time in the Balkan area," he told Harriman, "is that such steps as are practicable should be taken to insure against the Balkans getting us into a future international war." As reported by Kimball, in the end, moreover, Roosevelt made it clear to Stalin that he had approved the arrangements:

I am delighted to learn from your message and from reports by Ambassador Harriman of the success attained by you and Mr. Churchill in approaching an agreement on a number of questions that are of high interest to all of us in our common desire to secure and maintain a satisfactory and durable peace. I am sure that the progress made during your conversations in Moscow will facilitate and expedite our work in the next meeting when the three of us should come to full agreement on our future activities and policies and mutual interests.

As Churchill had done, Roosevelt had sanctioned Stalin's seizure of the region.

Churchill and Roosevelt's supporters would later argue that the decisions both men reached at Yalta represented the geopolitical situation as it existed in February 1945. James F. Byrnes, for instance, in *Speaking Frankly* (1947) maintained that one should "consider the circumstances under which the promises were made." In *Roosevelt and the Russians: The Yalta Conference* (1949), Edward R. Stettinius suggested that the military situation in eastern Europe affected the outcome. By the time of Yalta, he argued, most of eastern Europe had been occupied by the Red Army. "It was not a question of what Great Britain and the United States would permit Russia to do in Poland," Stettinius therefore asserted, "but what the two countries could persuade the Soviet Union to accept." Stalin did indeed have his army in Eastern Europe, making negotiations at Yalta much more difficult; however, what Stettinius failed to mention is that the Soviet leader had been invited into the region long before the

Yalta conference. In this regard, the conservative paradigms of the 1940s and 1950s have merit: both Churchill and Roosevelt are guilty for capitulating to Stalin and agreeing to establish a Soviet sphere of influence in Eastern Europe, because both men were more concerned with protecting their own interests.

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**Viewpoint:  
No, the Yalta agreement was a compromise designed to continue cooperation among the Allies and to prevent them from turning their armies on each other after defeating Germany.**

The Western world has often accused Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill of selling out Eastern Europe, and especially Poland, at the Yalta conference (4–11 February 1945). By allowing the Soviet Union to maintain the Lublin government in Warsaw and oversee the establishment of “free” governments in the rest of Eastern Europe, these critics argue, the West wrote off the region, not to mention Mongolia, the Kurile Islands, and parts of Manchuria, and practically invited the Soviet Union to establish control in these areas.

This argument is riddled with flaws. It completely ignores the fact that the Red Army had already liberated Eastern Europe and firmly established Soviet control there. It overlooks the concessions Joseph Stalin made to the West regarding the disposition of Berlin, the structure and membership of the United Nations (UN), and American desires to engage the Soviet Union in the Pacific war. In addition, this argument proceeds from the knowledge that the Cold War was right around the corner and that Stalin would not, in fact, meet the agreements he made at the conference—knowledge that the participants did not have at the time. By judging the actions of the Yalta participants based on subsequent events, these critics downplay the issues that the three leaders faced and debated in 1945. While Stalin may have known full well that he was not going to allow free elections in Eastern Europe, Roosevelt and Churchill had to assume that he would honor their agreements—otherwise, what good was a conference at all? As much as they may have distrusted Stalin—and Churchill at least had few illusions about Stalin’s honesty—the only way that they could hammer out any kind of postwar settlement was for each leader to work on the assumption that the agreements were made in



## THE AGREEMENT

*The following is a portion of the statement issued after the Big Three meeting in the Crimea in February 1945.*

Nazi Germany is doomed. The German people will only make the cost of their defeat heavier to themselves by attempting to continue a hopeless resistance.

We have agreed on common policies and plans for enforcing the unconditional surrender terms which we shall impose together on Nazi Germany after German armed resistance has been firmly crushed. These terms will not be made known until the final defeat of Germany has been accomplished. Under the agreed plan, the forces of the three powers will each occupy a separate zone of Germany. Coordinated administration and control has been provided for under the plan through a central control commission consisting of the supreme commanders of the three powers with headquarters in Berlin. It has been agreed that France should be invited by the three powers, if she should so desire, to take over a zone of occupation, and to participate as a fourth member of the control commission. The limits of the French zone will be agreed by the four governments concerned through their representatives on the European advisory commission.

It is our inflexible purpose to destroy German militarism and Nazism and to insure that Germany will never again be able to disturb the peace of the world. We are determined to disarm and disband all German armed forces; break up for all time the German general staff that has repeatedly contrived the resurgence of German militarism; remove or destroy all German military equipment; eliminate or control all German industry that could be used for military purposes; bring all war criminals to just and swift punishment, and exact reparation in kind for the destruction wrought by the Germans; wipe out the Nazi party; Nazi laws, organizations and institutions, remove all Nazi and military influences from public office and from the cultural and economic life of the German people, and take in harmony such other measures in Germany as may be necessary for the future peace and safety of the world. It is not our purpose to destroy the people of Germany, but only when Nazism and militarism have been extirpated will there be hope for a decent life for Germans, and a place for them in the comity of nations.

*Source: “The Crimea Conference,” Vital Speeches of the Day, 11 (15 February 1945): 258.*

good faith and to make the most advantageous compromise that he could. Given the situation in February 1945, the Yalta agreement was a solid compromise designed to prevent the Allies from turning their armies on each other after defeating Germany and to lead to a continuation of cooperation between the West and the Soviet Union.

The decisions to delay the second front until 1944 and to launch it finally in Normandy

(6 June 1944) resulted in Soviet control of Eastern Europe after the war. While the Americans and British waited and then focused their attention on France and western Europe, the Soviets doggedly pushed the Germans out of Russia, through Poland, and into the rest of Eastern Europe. The fact that the Red Army occupied Eastern Europe left the West with little room to bargain over the postwar political composition of this area. Whether the Western leadership understood it at the time or not, they made the decision to give Stalin Eastern Europe long before February 1945. Far from being a capitulation to Russian aggrandizement, the Yalta conference merely acknowledged military and strategic decisions made months before.

The Western powers were faced, therefore, with two choices—either acknowledge Stalin's position in the east or prepare to force him out with arms. It is clear that neither the United States nor Great Britain were willing to fight the Soviet Union for the freedom of Eastern Europe. After four years of sending soldiers to die in Europe and with plenty of rebuilding to do at home, it would have been nearly impossible for Churchill to convince his country to continue to fight indefinitely against a new enemy. The United States was better equipped to continue fighting, but the senior leadership was unwilling to do so. As George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff wrote to General Dwight D. Eisenhower in the spring of 1945, "I would be loathe to hazard American lives for purely political ends," and Eisenhower himself declared that he was unwilling to begin a new war. Since the military leaders were opposed to such a war, it would be difficult, not to say impossible, for Roosevelt to convince Congress to continue fighting in Europe when the war in the Pacific was far from over. As long as the Japanese remained undefeated, the Americans could not consider Soviet control over the new governments in Eastern Europe a sufficient threat to draw their forces away from more immediate enemies.

Since they were unwilling to go to war with the U.S.S.R., the Western powers concentrated on exacting promises from Stalin that would ensure a measure of self-determination for the countries in Eastern Europe. The Americans and British intended to allow the western European countries they had liberated to determine their own postwar governments; it was reasonable to ask and expect the same from Stalin in the areas liberated by the Red Army. Indeed, whether they actually trusted Stalin to do so or not, Churchill and Roosevelt had little choice but to accept the Soviet leader's word that he intended to allow free elections in these areas. To doubt Stalin's honesty at such a time, with the war in Europe not finished and the Pacific war continu-

ing apace, would have proved disastrous both for postwar settlements and the continued alliance against Germany and Japan. Stalin's assurance that he would allow a certain degree of self-determination had to be accepted if diplomacy was going to have any chance at all. It would become apparent within a few months that Stalin was not going to live up to his promises, but this conduct was not a foregone conclusion in February 1945. Based on the information at their disposal, the agreement on Eastern Europe was not a sell-out, but a compromise that, if it had been honored, would have placed the East within the Soviet sphere of influence, but would also have allowed local control over domestic affairs.

Given that the world had not yet split into the opposing camps of the Cold War and that the leaders had all declared themselves committed to the UN, it was not unreasonable for the Western leaders to hope that Eastern European countries would also have a voice in the conduct of their foreign affairs. In 1945 the Soviet Union declared itself concerned mainly with containing any future German aggression—a reasonable and highly believable claim. Having a "sphere of influence" to the east and south of Germany would provide the Soviet Union with formidable protection. Presented in this light, and with the atmosphere of cooperation that existed between East and West at the time, Western leaders could not assume that Stalin would close off Eastern Europe to all western influence and aid, nor that he would so completely control their governments that they would pose a united voting bloc in the UN. Certainly, Roosevelt and Churchill were concerned about the amount of power the Soviet Union would have in the UN, but they focused on the control that Stalin held over the supposedly separate republics of the U.S.S.R. that he insisted should have voting rights, not on the countries of Eastern Europe.

The most important issue from the American viewpoint was the war in the Pacific, and Roosevelt was anxious to enlist Soviet help. Rather than antagonizing Stalin by refusing to acknowledge the situation in Eastern Europe, Roosevelt bargained for Soviet help against Japan—after all, the atomic bomb was not yet ready and experts predicted that it would take the United States another eighteen months to defeat Japan in a conventional war. With his influence in Eastern Europe secure, Stalin agreed to join the Pacific war. He would drag his feet as much as he could in subsequent months and managed to join the war only after it was essentially over, but in February 1945, Soviet help seemed vital, and, if the atomic bomb had not worked, it could have made an enormous difference in the number of Americans killed in the Pacific. Ending the war with Japan was a pri-



mary concern with Americans, while the political composition of Eastern Europe was not.

The Yalta agreement did not meet all of the West's hopes. It succeeded in preventing war between the West and the Soviet Union over postwar Europe, but it failed to create lasting cooperation between East and West. This conference was the last time that the great powers met and reached viable compromises, acknowledging one another's interests as reasonable concerns, without allowing ideological differences to overshadow all other considerations. Judged from this perspective, the agreement was far from a unilateral capitulation to Stalin's demands. Instead, all three leaders put their demands forward and reached a compromise that allowed each of them to report to their constituencies that they had been able to reach a satisfactory agreement.

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