

Axis powers

Summary: The Axis powers, originally called the Rome Berlin Axis and also Rome Berlin Tokyo Axis, was the military coalition which initiated World War II and fought against the Allies. Its principal members were Nazi Germany, Kingdom of Italy and the Empire of Japan. The Axis were united in their far-right positions and general opposition to the Allies, but otherwise lacked comparable coordination and ideological cohesion.

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The Axis grew out of successive diplomatic efforts by Germany, Italy, and Japan to secure their own specific expansionist interests in the mid-1930s. The first step was the protocol signed by Germany and Italy in October 1936, after which Italian leader Benito Mussolini declared that all other European countries would thereafter rotate on the Rome Berlin axis, thus creating the term "Axis". The following November saw the ratification of the Anti-Comintern Pact, an anti-communist treaty between Germany and Japan; Italy joined the Pact in 1937, followed by Hungary and Spain in 1939. The "Rome Berlin Axis" became a military alliance in 1939 under the so-called "Pact of Steel", with the Tripartite Pact of 1940 formally integrating the military aims of Germany, Italy, Japan, and later followed by other nations. The three pacts formed the foundation of the Axis alliance.

At its zenith in 1942, the Axis presided over large parts of Europe, North Africa, and East Asia, either through occupation, annexation, or puppet states. In contrast to the Allies, there were no three-way summit meetings, and cooperation and coordination were minimal; on occasion, the interests of the major Axis powers were even at variance with each other. The Axis ultimately came to an end with its defeat in 1945.

Particularly within Europe, the use of the term "the Axis" sometimes refers solely to the alliance between Italy and Germany, though outside Europe it is normally understood as including Japan.

Origins and creation

The term "axis" was first applied to the Italo-German relationship

by the Italian prime minister Benito Mussolini in September 1923, when he wrote in the preface to Roberto Suster's *La Germania Repubblicana* that "there is no doubt that in this moment the axis of European history passes through Berlin"

(non v'ha dubbio che in questo momento l'asse della storia europea passa per Berlino). At the time, he was seeking an alliance with the Weimar Republic against Yugoslavia and France in the dispute over the Free State of Fiume.

The term was used by Hungary's prime minister Gyula Gombócs when advocating an alliance of Hungary with Germany and Italy in the early 1930s. Gombócs' efforts did affect the Italo-Hungarian Rome Protocols, but his sudden death in 1936 while negotiating with Germany in Munich and the arrival of Kálmán Darányi, his successor, ended Hungary's involvement in pursuing a trilateral axis. Contentious negotiations between the Italian foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, and the German ambassador, Ulrich von Hassell, resulted in a Nine-Point Protocol, signed by Ciano and his German counterpart, Konstantin von Neurath, in 1936. When Mussolini publicly announced the signing on 1 November, he proclaimed the creation of a Rome Berlin axis.

Initial proposals of a German Italian alliance

Italy under Duce Benito Mussolini had pursued a strategic alliance of Italy with Germany against France since the early 1920s. Prior to becoming head of government in Italy as leader of the Italian Fascist movement, Mussolini had advocated alliance with defeated Germany after the Paris Peace Conference (1919-1920) settled World War I. He believed that Italy could expand its influence in Europe by allying with Germany against France. In early 1923, as a goodwill gesture to Germany, Italy secretly delivered weapons for the Reichswehr, which had faced major disarmament under the provisions of the Treaty of Versailles.

Since the 1920s Italy had identified the year 1935 as a crucial date for preparing for a war against France, as 1935 was the year whe

n Germany's obligations under the Treaty of Versailles were scheduled to expire. Meetings took place in Berlin in 1924 between Italian General Luigi Capello and prominent figures in the German military, such as von Seeckt and Erich Ludendorff, over military collaboration between Germany and Italy. The discussions concluded that Germans still wanted a war of revenge against France but were short on weapons and hoped that Italy could assist Germany.

However at this time Mussolini stressed one important condition that Italy must pursue in an alliance with Germany: that Italy "must ... tow them, not be towed by them". Italian foreign minister Dino Grandi in the early 1930s stressed the importance of "decisive weight", involving Italy's relations between France and Germany, in which he recognized that Italy was not yet a major power, but perceived that Italy did have strong enough influence to alter the political situation in Europe by placing the weight of its support onto one side or another, and sought to balance relations between the three.

Danube alliance, dispute over Austria

In 1933, Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party came to power in Germany. Hitler had advocated an alliance between Germany and Italy since the 1920s. Shortly after being appointed Chancellor of Germany, Hitler sent a personal message to

Mussolini, declaring "admiration and homage" and declaring his anticipation of the prospects of German Italian friendship and even alliance. Hitler was aware that Italy held concerns over potential German land claims on South Tyrol, and assured Mussolini that Germany was not interested in South Tyrol. Hitler in *Mein Kampf* had declared that South Tyrol was a non-issue considering the advantages that would be gained from a German Italian alliance. After Hitler's rise to power, the Four Power Directorate proposal by Italy had been looked at with interest by Britain, but Hitler was not committed to it, resulting in Mussolini urging Hitler to consider the diplomatic advan

tages Germany would gain by breaking out of isolation by entering the Directorate and avoiding an immediate armed conflict. The Four Power Directorate proposal stipulated that Germany would no longer be required to have limited arms and would be granted the right to re-armament under foreign supervision in stages. Hitler completely rejected the idea of controlled rearmament under foreign supervision.

Mussolini did not trust Hitler's intentions regarding Anschluss nor Hitler's promise of no territorial claims on South Tyrol. Mussolini informed Hitler that he was satisfied with the presence of the anti-Marxist government of Engelbert Dollfuss in the First Austrian Republic, and warned Hitler that he was adamantly opposed to Anschluss. Hitler responded in contempt to Mussolini that he intended "to throw Dollfuss into the sea". With this disagreement over Austria, relations between Hitler and Mussolini steadily became more distant.

Hitler attempted to break the impasse with Italy over Aust

ria by sending Hermann G ring to negotiate with Mussolini in 1933 to convince Mussolini to press Austria to appoint Austrian Nazis to the government. G ring claimed that Nazi domination of Austria was inevitable and that Italy should accept this, as well as repeating to Mussolini of Hitler's promise to "regard the question of the South Tyrol frontier as finally liquidated by the peace treaties". In response to G ring's visit with Mussolini, Dollfuss immediately went to Italy to counter any German diplomatic headway. Dollfuss claimed that his government was actively challenging Marxists in Austria and claimed that once the Marxists were defeated in Austria, that support for Austria's Nazis would decline.

In June 1934, Hitler and Mussolini met for the first time, in Venice. The meeting did not proceed amicably. Hitler demanded that Mussolini compromise on Austria by pressuring Dollfuss to appoint Austrian Nazis to his cabinet, to which Mussolini flatly refused the demand. In response, Hi

tlter promised that he would accept Austria's independence for the time being, saying that due to the internal tensions in Germany (referring to sections of the Nazi Sturmabteilung that Hitler would soon kill in the Night of the Long Knives) that Germany could not afford to provoke Italy. Galeazzo Ciano told the press that the two leaders had made a "gentleman's agreement" to avoid interfering in Austria.

Several weeks after the Venice meeting, on 25 July 1934, Austrian Nazis assassinated Dollfuss. Mussolini was outraged as he held Hitler directly responsible for the assassination that violated Hitler's promise made only weeks ago to respect Austrian independence. Mussolini rapidly deployed several army divisions and air squadrons to the Brenner Pass, and

warned that a German move against Austria would result in war between Germany and Italy. Hitler responded by both denying Nazi responsibility for the assassination and issuing orders to dissolve all ties between the German Nazi Party and its Austrian branch, which Germany claimed was responsible for the political crisis.

Italy effectively abandoned diplomatic relations with Germany while turning to France in order to challenge Germany's intransigence by signing a Franco Italian accord to protect Austrian independence. French and Italian military staff discussed possible military cooperation involving a war with Germany should Hitler dare to attack Austria.

Relations between Germany and Italy recovered due to Hitler's support of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, while other countries condemned the invasion and advocated sanctions against Italy.

Development of German Italian Japanese alliance

Interest in Germany and Japan in forming an alliance began when Japanese diplomat Hiroshi Oshima visited Joachim von Ribbentrop in Berlin in 1935. Although at the time Japan was unwilling to make an alliance against the United Kingdom and France, Oshima informed von Ribbentrop of Japan's interest in forming a German Japanese alliance against the Soviet Union. Von Ribbentrop expanded on Oshima's proposal by advocating that the alliance be based in a political context of a pact to oppose the Comintern. The proposed pact was met with mixed reviews in Japan, with a faction of ultra-nationalists within the government supporting the pact while the Imperial Japanese Navy and the Japanese Foreign Ministry were staunchly opposed to the pact. There was great concern in the Japanese government that such a pact with Germany could disrupt Japan's relations with Britain, endangering years of a beneficial Anglo-Japanese accord, that had allowed Japan to ascend in the international community in the first place. The response to the pact was met with similar division in Germany; while the proposed pact was popular amongst the upper echelons of the Nazi Party, it was opposed by many in the Foreign Ministry, the Army, and the business community who held financial interests in the Republic of China to which Japan was hostile.

On learning of German Japanese negotiations, Italy also began to take an interest in forming an alliance with Japan. Italy had hoped that due to Japan's long-term close relations with Britain, that an Italo-Japanese alliance could pressure Britain into adopting a more accommodating stance towards Italy in the Mediterranean. In the summer of 1936, Italian Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano informed Japanese Ambassador to Italy, Sugimura Yotaro, "I have heard that a Japanese German agreement concerning the Soviet Union has been reached, and I think it would be natural for a similar agreement to be made between Italy and Japan." Initially Japan's attitude towards Italy's proposal was generally dismissive, viewing a German Japanese alliance against the Soviet Union as imperative while regarding an Italo-Japanese alliance as secondary, as Japan anticipated that an Italo-Japanese alliance would antagonize Britain that had condemned Italy's invasion of Ethiopia. This attitude by Japan towards

Italy altered in 1937 after the League of Nations condemned Japan for aggression in China and faced international isolation, while Italy remained favourable to Japan. As a result of Italy's support for Japan against international condemnation, Japan took a more positive attitude towards Italy and offered proposals for a non-aggression or neutrality pact with Italy.

The Tripartite Pact was signed by Germany, Italy, and Japan on 27 September 1940, in Berlin. The pact was subsequently joined by Hungary (20 November 1940), Romania (23 November 1940), Slovakia (24 November 1940), and Bulgaria (1 March 1941).

Ideology

The Axis powers' primary goal was territorial expansion at the expense of their neighbors. In ideological terms, the Axis described their goals as breaking the hegemony of the plutocratic Western powers and defending civilization from communism. The Axis championed a number of variants on fascism, militarism, conservatism and autarky. Creation of territorially contiguous autarkic empires was a common goal of all three major Axis powers.

Economic resources

The Axis population in 1938 was 258.9 million, while the Allied population (excluding the Soviet Union and the United States, which later joined the Allies) was 689.7 million. Thus the Allied powers outnumbered the Axis powers by 2.7 to 1. The leading Axis states had the following domestic populations: Germany 75.5 million (including 6.8 million from recently annexed Austria), Japan 71.9 million (excluding its colonies), and Italy 43.4 million (excluding its colonies). The United Kingdom (excluding its colonies) had a population of 47.5 million and France (excluding its colonies) 42 million.

The wartime gross domestic product (GDP) of the Axis was \$911 billion at its highest in 1941 in international dollars by 1990 prices. The GDP of the Allied powers was \$1,798 billion. The United States stood at \$1,094 billion, more than the Axis combined.

The burden of the war upon participating countries has been measured through the percentage of gross national product (GNP) devoted to military expenditures. Nearly one-quarter of Germany's GNP was committed to the war effort in 1939, and this rose to three-quarters of GNP in 1944, prior to the collapse of the economy. In 1939, Japan committed 22 percent of its GNP to its war effort in China; this rose to three-quarters of GNP in 1944. Italy did not mobilize its economy; its GNP committed to the war effort remained at prewar levels.

Italy and Japan lacked industrial capacity; their economies were small, dependent on international trade, external sources of fuel and other industrial resources. As a result, Italian and Japanese mobilization remained low, even by

1943.

Among the three major Axis powers, Japan had the lowest per capita income, while Germany and Italy had an income level comparable to the United Kingdom.

Romania's oil gave the country a disproportionate importance in the global conflict. In 1940 and 1941, Romania supplied 94% and 75%

of Germany's oil imports respectively. Italy which lacked both natural and synthetic output was even more reliant on Romanian oil than Germany. The loss of Romania's oil following the country's defection from the Axis in August 1944 resulted in Hitler's first admission that the war was lost.

Major Axis powers

Germany

War justifications

Hitler in 1941 described the outbreak of World War II as the fault of the intervention of Western powers against Germany during its war with Poland, describing it as the result of "the European and American warmongers". Hitler had designs for Germany to become the dominant and leading state in the world, such as his intention for Germany's capital of Berlin to become the Welthauptstadt ("World Capital"), renamed Germania. The German government also justified its actions by claiming that Germany inevitably needed to territorially expand because it was facing an overpopulation crisis that Hitler described: "We are overpopulated and cannot feed ourselves from our own resources". Thus expansion was justified as an inevitable necessity to provide lebensraum ("living space") for the German nation and end the country's overpopulation within existing confined territory, and provide resources necessary to its people's well-being. Since the 1920s, the Nazi Party publicly promoted the expansion of Germany into territories held by the Soviet Union.

Germany justified its war against Poland on the issues of German minority within Poland and Polish opposition to the incorporation of the ethnically German-majority Free City of Danzig into Germany. While Hitler and the Nazi party before taking power openly talked about destroying Poland and were hostile to Poles, after gaining power until February 1939 Hitler tried to conceal his true intentions towards Poland, and signed a 10-year Non-Aggression Pact in 1934, revealing his plans to only to his closest associates. Relations between Germany and Poland altered from the early to the late 1930s,

as Germany sought rapprochement with Poland to avoid the risk of Poland entering the Soviet sphere of influence, and appealed to anti-Soviet sentiment in Poland. Hitler even tried to convince Poland to join the Anti-Comintern Pact. The Soviet Union in turn at this time competed with Germany for influence in Poland. At the same time Germany was preparing for a war with Poland and was secretly preparing the German minority in Poland for a war.

A diplomatic crisis erupted following Hitler demanding that the Free City of Danzig be annexed to Germany, as it was led

by a Nazi government seeking annexation to Germany. Germany used legal precedents to justify its intervention against Poland and annexation of the Free City of Danzig (led by a local Nazi government that sought incorporation into Germany) in 1939. Poland rejected Germany's demands and Germany in response prepared a general mobilization on the morning of 30 August 1939.

Germany justified its invasion of the Low Countries of Belgiu

m, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands in May 1940 by claiming that it suspected that Britain and France were preparing to use the Low Countries to launch an invasion of the industrial Ruhr region of Germany. When war between Germany versus Britain and France appeared likely in May 1939, Hitler declared that the Netherlands and Belgium would need to be occupied, saying: "Dutch and Belgian air bases must be occupied ... Declarations of neutrality must be ignored". In a conference with Germany's military leaders on 23 November 1939, Hitler declared to the military leaders that "We have an Achilles heel, the Ruhr", and said that "If England and France push through Belgium and Holland into the Ruhr, we shall be in the greatest danger", and thus claimed that Belgium and the Netherlands had to be occupied by Germany to protect Germany from a British-French offensive against the Ruhr, irrespective of their claims to neutrality.

Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 involved issues of leb

ensraum, anti-communism, and Soviet foreign policy. After Germany invaded the Soviet Union in 1941, the Nazi regime's stance towards an independent, territorially-reduced Russia was affected by pressure beginning in 1942 from the German Army on Hitler to endorse a "Russian Liberation Army" led by Andrey Vlasov. Initially the proposal to support an anti-communist Russian army was met with outright rejection by Hitler, however by 1944 as Germany faced mounting losses on the Eastern Front, Vlasov's forces were recognized by Germany as an ally, particularly by Reichsfhrer-SS Heinrich Himmler.

After the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor and the outbreak of war between Japan and the United States, Germany supported Japan by declaring war on the US. During the war Germany denounced the Atlantic Charter and the Lend-Lease Act that the US adopted to support the Allied powers prior to entry into the alliance, as imperialism directed at dominating and exploiting countries outside of the continenta

I Americas. Hitler denounced American President Franklin D. Roosevelt's invoking of the term "freedom" to describe US actions in the war, and accused the American meaning of "freedom" to be the freedom for democracy to exploit the world and the freedom for plutocrats within such democracy to exploit the masses.

History

At the end of World War I, German citizens felt that their country had been humiliated as a result of the Treaty of Versailles, which included a war guilt clause and forced Germany to pay enormous reparations payments and forfeit territories formerly controlled by the German Empire and all its colonies. The pressure of the reparations on the German economy led to hyperinflation during the early 1920s. In 1923 the French occupied the Ruhr region when Germany

defaulted on its reparations payments. Although Germany began to improve economically in the mid-1920s, the Great Depression created more economic hardship and a rise in political forces that advocated radical solutions to Germany's woes. The Nazis, under Hitler, promoted the nationalist stab-in-the-back legend stating that Germany had been betrayed by Jews and Communists. The party promised to rebuild Germany as a major power and create a Greater Germany that would include Alsace-Lorraine, Austria, Sudetenland, and other German-populated territories in Europe. The Nazis also aimed to occupy and colonize non-German territories in Poland, the Baltic states, and the Soviet Union, as part of the Nazi policy of seeking Lebensraum ("living space") in Central and Eastern Europe.

Germany renounced the Versailles treaty and remilitarized the Rhineland in March 1936. Germany had already resumed conscription and announced the existence of a German air force, the Luftwaffe, and naval force, the Kriegsmarine in 1935. Germany annexed Austria in 1938, the Sudetenland from Czechoslovakia, and the Memel territory from Lithuania in 1939. Germany then invaded the rest of Czechoslovakia in 1939, creating the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia and the country of Slovakia.

On 23 August 1939, Germany and the Soviet Union signed the Molotov Ribbentrop Pact, which contained a secret protocol dividing eastern Europe into spheres of influence. Germany's invasion of its part of Poland under the Pact eight days later triggered the beginning of World War II. By the end of 1941, Germany occupied a large part of Europe and its military forces were fighting the Soviet Union, nearly capturing Moscow. However, crushing defeats at the Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Kursk devastated the German armed forces. This, combined with Western Allied landings in France and Italy, led to a three-front war that depleted Germany's armed forces and resulted in Germany's defeat in 1945.

Occupied territories

The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia was created from the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia. Shortly after Germany annexed the Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia, the Slovak Republic declared its independence from the rump Second Czechoslovak Republic. The new Slovak State allied itself with Germany. The remainder of the country was occupied by German military forces and organized into the Protectorate. Czech civil institutions were preserved but the Protectorate was considered within the sovereign territory of Germany.

The General Government was the name given to the territories of occupied Poland that were not directly annexed into German provinces, but like Bohemia and Moravia was considered within the sovereign territory of Germany by the Nazi authorities.

Reichskommissariats were established in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Norway, designated as places the "Germanic" populations of which were to be incorporated into the planned Greater Germanic Reich. By contrast the Reichskommissariats established in the east (Reichskommissariat Ostland in the Baltics, Reichskommissariat Ukraine in Ukraine) were established as colonies for settlement by Germans.

In Norway, under Reichskommissariat Norw

egen, the Quisling regime, headed by Vidkun Quisling, was installed by the Germans as a client regime during the occupation, while king Haakon VII and the legal government were in exile. Quisling encouraged Norwegians to serve as volunteers in the Waffen-SS, collaborated in the deportation of Jews, and was responsible for the executions of members of the Norwegian resistance movement. About 45,000 Norwegian collaborators joined the pro-Nazi party Nasjonal Samling (National Union), and some police units helped arrest many Jews. However, Norway was one of the first countries where resistance during World War II was widespread before the turning point of the war in 1943. After the war, Quisling and other collaborators were executed. Quisling's name has become an international eponym for traitor.

Italy

War justifications

Duce Benito Mussolini described Italy's declaration of war against the Western Allies of Britain and France in June 1940 as the following: "We are going to war against th

e plutocratic and reactionary democracies of the West who have invariably hindered the progress and often threatened the very existence of the Italian people". Italy condemned the Western powers for enacting sanctions on Italy in 1935 for its actions in the Second Italo-Ethiopian War that Italy claimed was a response to an act of Ethiopian aggression against tribesmen in Italian Eritrea in the Walwal incident of 1934. Italy, like Germany, also justified its actions by claiming that Italy needed to territorially expand to provide spazio vitale ("vital space") for the Italian nation.

In October 1938 in the aftermath of the Munich Agreement, Italy demanded concessions from France to yield to Italy in Africa. Relations between Italy and France deteriorated with France's refusal to accept Italy's demands. France responded to Italy's demands with threatening naval manoeuvres as a warning to Italy. As tensions between Italy and France grew, Hitler made a major speech on 30 January 1939 in whi

ch he promised German military support in the case of an unprovoked war against Italy.

Italy entered World War II on 10 June 1940. Italy justified its intervention against Greece in October 1940 on the allegation that the Kingdom of Greece was being used by Britain against Italy, Mussolini informed this to Hitler, saying: "Greece is one of the main points of English maritime strategy in the Mediterranean".

Italy justified its intervention against Yugoslavia in April 1941 by appealing to both Italian irredentist claims and the fact of Albanian, Croatian, and Macedonian separatists not wishing to be part of Yugoslavia. Croatian separatism soared after the assassination of Croatian political leaders in the National Assembly of Yugoslavia in 1928 including the death of Stjepan Radić, and Italy endorsed Croatian separatist Ante Pavelić and his fascist Ustaše movement that was based and trained in Italy with the Fascist regime's support prior to intervention against Yugoslavia.

History

The

intention of the Fascist regime was to create a "New Roman Empire" in which Italy would dominate the Mediterranean. In 1935-1936 Italy invaded and annexed Ethiopia and the Fascist government proclaimed the creation of the "Italian Empire". Protests by the League of Nations, especially the British, who had interests in that area, led to no serious action, although the League did try to enforce economic sanctions upon Italy, but to no avail. The incident highlighted French and British weakness, exemplified by their reluctance to alienate Italy and lose her as their ally. The limited actions taken by the Western powers pushed Mussolini's Italy towards alliance with Hitler's Germany anyway. In 1937 Italy left the League of Nations and joined the Anti-Comintern Pact, which had been signed by Germany and Japan the preceding year. In March/April 1939 Italian troops invaded and annexed Albania. Germany and Italy signed the Pact of Steel on May 22.

Italy was ill-prepared for war, in spite of

the fact that it had continuously been involved in conflict since 1935, first with Ethiopia in 1935-1936 and then in the Spanish Civil War on the side of Francisco Franco's Nationalists.

Mussolini refused to heed warnings from his minister of exchange and currency, Felice Guarneri, who said that Italy's actions in Ethiopia and Spain meant that Italy was on the verge of bankruptcy. By 1939 military expenditures by Britain and France far exceeded what Italy could afford. As a result of Italy's economic difficulties its soldiers were poorly paid, often being poorly equipped and poorly supplied, and animosity arose between soldiers and class-conscious officers; these contributed to low morale amongst Italian soldiers.

By early 1940, Italy was still a non-belligerent, and Mussolini communicated to Hitler that Italy was not prepared to intervene soon. By March 1940, Mussolini decided that Italy would intervene, but the date was not yet chosen. His senior military leadership unanimously opp

osed the action because Italy was unprepared. No raw materials had been stockpiled and the reserves it did have would soon be exhausted, Italy's industrial base was only one-tenth of Germany's, and even with supplies the Italian military was not organized to provide the equipment needed to fight a modern war of a long duration. An ambitious rearmament program was impossible because of Italy's limited reserves in gold and foreign currencies and lack of raw materials. Mussolini ignored the negative advice.

By 1941, Italy's attempts to run an autonomous campaign from Germany's, collapsed as a result of military setbacks in Greece, North Africa, and Eastern Africa; and the country became dependent and effectively subordinate to Germany. After the German-led invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia and Greece, that had both been targets of Italy's war aims, Italy was forced to accept German dominance in the two occupied countries. Furthermore, by 1941, German forces in

North Africa under Erwin

Rommel effectively took charge of the military effort ousting Allied forces from the Italian colony of Libya, and German forces were stationed in Sicily in that year. Germany's insolence towards Italy as an ally was demonstrated that year when Italy was pressured to send 350,000 "guest workers" to Germany who were used as forced labour. While Hitler was disappointed with the Italian military's performance, he maintained overall favorable relations with Italy because of his personal friendship with Mussolini.

On 25 July 1943, following the Allied invasion of Sicily, King Victor Emmanuel III dismissed Mussolini, placed him under arrest, and began secret negotiations with the Western Allies. An armistice was signed on 8 September 1943, and four days later Mussolini was rescued by the Germans in Operation Oak and placed in charge of a puppet state called the Italian Social Republic (Repubblica Sociale Italiana/RSI, or Repubblica di Sal) in northern Italy. In order to liberate the country

from the Germans and Fascists, Italy became a co-belligerent of the Allies; as result, the country descended in Civil War, with the Italian Co-Belligerent Army and the partisans, supported by the Allies, contended the Social Republic's forces and its German allies. Some areas in Northern Italy were liberated from the Germans as late as May, 1945. Mussolini was killed by Communist partisans on 28 April 1945 while trying to escape to Switzerland.

Colonies and dependencies

In Europe

The Dodecanese Islands were an Italian dependency known as the Italian Islands of the Aegean from 1912 to 1943.

Montenegro was an Italian dependency from 1941 to 1943 known as the Governorate of Montenegro that was under the control of an Italian military governor. Initially, the Italians intended that Montenegro would become an "independent" state closely allied with Italy, reinforced through the strong dynastic links between Italy and Montenegro, as Queen Elena of Italy was a daughter of the last Montenegr

in king Nicholas I. The Italian-backed Montenegrin nationalist Sekula Drljevi and his followers attempted to create a Montenegrin state. On 12 July 1941, they proclaimed the "Kingdom of Montenegro" under the protection of Italy. In less than 24 hours, that triggered a general uprising against the Italians. Within three weeks, the insurgents managed to capture almost all the territory of Montenegro. Over 70,000 Royal Italian Army troops and 20,000 of Albanian and Muslim irregulars were deployed to suppress the rebellion. Drljevic was expelled from Montenegro in October 1941. Montenegro then came under full direct Italian control. With the Italian capitulation of 1943, Montenegro came directly under the control of Germany.

Politically and economically dominated by Italy from its creation in 1913, Albania was occupied by Italian military forces in 1939 as the Albanian king Zog I fled the country with his family. The Albanian parliament voted to offer the Albanian throne to the King of It

aly, resulting in a personal union between the two countries.

In Africa

Italian East Africa was an Italian colony existing from 1936 to 1943. Prior to the invasion and annexation of Ethiopia into this united colony in 1936, Italy had two colonies, Eritrea and Somalia since the 1880s.

Libya was an Italian colony existing from 1912 to 1943. The northern portion of Libya was incorporated directly into Italy in 1939; however the region remained united as a colony under a colonial governor.

Japan

War justifications

The Japanese government justified its actions by claiming that it was seeking to unite East Asia under Japanese leadership in a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere that would free East Asians from domination and rule by clients of Western powers. Japan invoked themes of Pan-Asianism and said that the Asian people needed to be free from Western influence.

The United States opposed the Second Sino-Japanese War, and recognized Chiang Kai-Shek's Nationalist Government as the leg

itimate government of China. As a result, the United States sought to bring the Japanese war effort to a halt by imposing an embargo on all trade between the United States and Japan. Japan was dependent on the United States for 80 percent of its petroleum, and as a consequence the embargo resulted in an economic and military crisis for Japan, as Japan could not continue its war effort against China without access to petroleum.

In order to maintain its military campaign in China with the major loss of petroleum trade with the United States, Japan saw the best means to secure an alternative source of petroleum in the petroleum-rich and natural-resources-rich Southeast Asia. This threat of retaliation by Japan to the total trade embargo by the United States was known by the American government, including American Secretary of State Cordell Hull who was negotiating with the Japanese to avoid a war, fearing that the total embargo would pre-empt a Japanese attack on the Dutch East Indies.

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pan identified the United States Pacific Fleet based in Pearl Harbor Naval Base as the principal threat to its designs to invade and capture Southeast Asia. Thus Japan initiated the attack on Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 as a means to inhibit an American response to the invasion of Southeast Asia, and buy time to allow Japan to consolidate itself with these resources to engage in a total war against the United States, and force the United States to accept Japan's acquisitions. On 7 December 1941 Japan declared war on the United States and the British Empire.

History

The Empire of Japan, a constitutional monarchy with Hirohito as its Emperor, was the principal Axis power in Asia and the Pacific. Under the emperor were a political cabinet and the Imperial General Headquarters, with two chiefs of staff. By 1945 the Emperor of Japan was more than a symbolic leader; he played a major role in devising a strategy to keep himself on the throne.

At its peak, Japan's Greater East Asia Co-Pro

sperity Sphere included Manchuria, Inner Mongolia, large parts of China, Malaysia, French Indochina, the Dutch East Indies, the Philippines, Burma, a small part of India, and various Pacific Islands in the central Pacific.

As a result of the internal discord and economic downturn of the 1920s, militaristic elements set Japan on a path of expansionism. As the Japanese home islands lacked natural resources needed for growth, Japan planned to establish hegemony in Asia and become self-sufficient by acquiring territories with abundant natural resources. Japan's expansionist policies alienated it from other countries in the League of Nations and by the mid-1930s brought it closer to Germany and Italy, who had both pursued similar expansionist policies. Cooperation between Japan and Germany began with the Anti-Comintern Pact, in which the two countries agreed to ally to challenge any attack by the Soviet Union.

Japan entered into conflict against the Chinese in 1937. The Japanese invasion an

d occupation of parts of China resulted in numerous atrocities against civilians, such as the Nanjing Massacre and the Three Alls Policy. The Japanese also fought skirmishes with Soviet Mongolian forces in Manchukuo in 1938 and 1939. Japan sought to avoid war with the Soviet Union by signing a non-aggression pact with it in 1941.

Japan's military leaders were divided on diplomatic relationships with Germany and Italy and the attitude towards the United States. The Imperial Japanese Army was in favour of war with the United States, but the Imperial Japanese Navy was generally strongly opposed. When Prime Minister of Japan General Hideki Tojo refused American demands that Japan withdraw its military forces from China, a confrontation became more likely. War with the United States was being discussed within the Japanese government by 1940. Commander of the Combined Fleet Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto was outspoken in his opposition, especially after the signing of the Tripartite Pact, saying

on 14 October 1940: "To fight the United States is like fighting the whole world. But it has been decided. So I will fight the best I can. Doubtless I shall die on board Nagato [his flagship]. Meanwhile, Tokyo will be burnt to the ground three times. Konoe and others will be torn to pieces by the revengeful people, I [shouldn't] wonder. " In October and November 1940, Yamamoto communicated with Navy Minister Oikawa, and stated, "Unlike the pre-Tripartite days, great determination is required to make certain that we avoid the danger of going to war. "

With the European powers focused on the war in Europe, Japan sought to acquire their colonies. In 1940 Japan responded to the German invasion of France by occupying northern French Indochina. The Vichy France regime, a de facto ally of Germany, accepted the takeover. The allied forces did not respond with war. However, the United States

instituted an embargo against Japan in 1941 because of the continuing war in China. This cut off Japan's supply of scrap metal and oil needed for industry, trade, and the war effort.

To isolate the US forces stationed in the Philippines and to reduce US naval power, the Imperial General Headquarters ordered an attack on the US naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on 7 December 1941. They also invaded Malaya and Hong Kong. Initially achieving a series of victories, by 1943 the Japanese forces were driven back towards the home islands. The Pacific War lasted until the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. The Soviets formally declared war in August 1945 and engaged Japanese forces in Manchuria and northeast China.

Colonies and dependencies

Taiwan was a Japanese dependency established in 1895. Korea was a Japanese protectorate and dependency formally established by the Japan Korea Treaty of 1910.

The South Seas Mandate were territories granted to Japan in 1919 in the peace agreements of World War I, that designated to Japan the German South Pacific islands. Japan received these as a reward by the Allies of World War I, when Japan was then allied against Germany.

Japan occupied the Dutch East Indies during the war. Japan planned to transform these territories into a client state of Indonesia and sought alliance with Indonesian nationalists including future Indonesian President Sukarno, however these efforts did not deliver the creation of an Indonesian state until after Japan's surrender.

Other Tripartite Pact signatories

In addition to the three major Axis powers, six other countries signed the Tripartite Pact as its member states. Of the additional countries, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, the Independent State of Croatia, and Romania participated in various Axis military operations with their national armed forces, while the sixth, Yugoslavia, saw its Tripartite signatory government overthrown earlier in a coup merely days after it signed the Pact, and the membership was reversed.

Hungary

The Kingdom of Hungary, ruled by Regent Admiral Miklós Horthy, was the first country apart from Germany, Italy, and Japan to adhere to the Tripartite Pact, signing the agreement on 20 November 1940.

Political instability plagued the country until Miklós Horthy, a Hungarian nobleman and Austro-Hungarian naval officer, became regent in 1920. The vast majority of the Hungarians desired to recover former territories of the Lands of the Crown of Saint Stephen lost through the Treaty of Trianon. During the government of Gyula Gömbös, Hungary drew

closer to Germany and Italy largely because of a shared desire to revise the peace settlements made after World War I. Many people sympathized with the anti-Semitic policy of the Nazi regime. Hungary refused to participate in Nazi Germany's planned invasion of Czechoslovakia during the Sudeten Crisis, but after the Munich Agreement carried out a diplomatic rapprochement in order to avoid Germany developing too close of an alliance with Hungary's rival Romania. Due to its supportive stance towards Germany and the new efforts in the international policy, Hungary gained favourable territorial settlements by the First Vienna Award, after the breakup of Czechoslovakia occupied and annexed the remainder of Carpathian Ruthenia and in 1940 received Northern Transylvania from Romania via the Second Vienna Award. Hungarians permitted German troops to transit through their territory during the invasion of Yugoslavia, and Hungarian forces joined the military operations after the proclamation of the Independent State of Croatia. Parts of the former Yugoslavia were annexed to Hungary; the United Kingdom immediately broke off diplomatic relations in response.

Although Hungary did not initially participate in the German invasion of the Soviet Union, Hungary and the Soviet Union became belligerents on 27 June 1941. Over 500,000 soldiers served on the Eastern Front. All five of Hungary's field armies ultimately participated in the war against the Soviet Union; a significant contribution was made by the Hungarian Second Army.

On 25 November 1941, Hungary was one of thirteen signatories to the renewed Anti-Comintern Pact. Hungarian troops, like their Axis counterparts, were involved in numerous actions against the Soviets. By the end of 1943, the Soviets had gained the upper hand and the Germans were retreating. The Hungarian Second Army was destroyed in fighting on the Voronezh Front, on the banks of the Don River.

Prior to the German occupation within the area of Hungary around 63,000 Jews perished. Afterwards, in late 1944, 437,000 Jews were deported to Auschwitz-Birkenau, most of them to their deaths. Overall, Hungarian Jews suffered close to 560,000 casualties.

Relations between Germany and the regency of Miklós Horthy collapsed in 1944 when Horthy attempted to negotiate a peace agreement with the Soviets and jump out of the war without German approval. Horthy was forced to abdicate after German commandos, led by Colonel Otto Skorzeny, held his son hostage as part of Operation Panzerfaust. Hungary was reorganized following Horthy's abdication in December 1944 into a totalitarian regime called the Government of National Unity, led by Ferenc Szálasi. He had been Prime Minister of Hungary since October 1944 and was leader of the Hungarian Arrow Cross Party. Its jurisdiction was effectively limited to an ever-narrowing band of territory in central Hungary, around Budapest since by the time they took power the Red Army was already far inside the country. Nonetheless, the Arrow Cross rule, short-lived as it was, was brutal. In fewer than three months, Arrow Cross death squads killed as many as 38,000 Hungarian Jews. Arrow Cross officers helped Adolf Eichmann re-activate the

deportation proceedings from which the Jews of Budapest had thus far been spared, sending some 80,000 Jews out of the city on slave labour details and many more straight to death camps. Most of them died, including many who were murdered outright after the end of the fighting as they were returning home

. Days after the Sz lasi government took power, the capital of Budapest was surrounded by the Soviet Red Army. German and Hungarian forces tried to hold off the Soviet advance but failed. After fierce fighting, Budapest was taken by the Soviets. A number of pro-German Hungarians retreated to Italy and Germany, where they fought until the end of the war.

In March 1945, Sz lasi fled to Germany as the leader of a government in exile, until the surrender of Germany in May 1945.

Romania

With the exception of Germany and Italy, Romania was the only country where a Fascist movement came to power without foreign assistance. When war erupted in Europe, the economy of the Kingdom of Romania was already subordinated to the interests of Nazi Germany through a treaty signed in the spring of 1939. Nevertheless, the country had not totally abandoned pro-British sympathies. Romania had also been allied to the Poles for most of the interwar era. Following the invasion of Poland by Germany and the Sovi

et Union, and the German conquest of France and the Low Countries, Romania found itself increasingly isolated; meanwhile, pro-German and pro-Fascist elements began to grow.

The August 1939 Molotov Ribbentrop Pact between Germany and the Soviet Union contained a secret protocol ceding Bessarabia, and Northern Bukovina to the Soviet Union. On June 28, 1940, the Soviet Union occupied and annexed Bessarabia, as well as part of northern Romania and the Hertsa region. On 30 August 1940, as a result of the German Italian arbitrated Second Vienna Award Romania had to cede Northern Transylvania to Hungary. Southern Dobruja was ceded to Bulgaria in September 1940. In an effort to appease the Fascist elements within the country and obtain German protection, King Carol II appointed the General Ion Antonescu as Prime Minister on September 6, 1940.

Two days later, Antonescu forced the king to abdicate and installed the king's young son Michael (Mihai) on the throne, then declared himself Conduc tor

("Leader") with dictatorial powers. The National Legionary State was proclaimed on 14 September, with the Iron Guard ruling together with Antonescu as the sole legal political movement in Romania. Under King Michael I and the military government of Antonescu, Romania signed the Tripartite Pact on November 23, 1940. German troops entered the country on 10 October 1941, officially to train the Romanian Army. Hitler's directive to the troops on 10 October had stated that "it is necessary to avoid even the slightest semblance of military occupation of Romania". The entrance of German troops in Romania determined Italian dictator Benito Mussolini to launch an invasion of Greece, starting the

Greco-Italian War. Having secured Hitler's approval in January 1941, Antonescu ousted the Iron Guard from power. Romania was subsequently used as a platform for invasions of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union. Despite not being involved militarily in the Invasion of Yugoslavia, Romania requested that Hungarian troops not operate in the Banat. Paulus thus modified the Hungarian plan and kept their troops west of the Tisza. Romania joined the German-led invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941. Antonescu was the only foreign leader Hitler consulted on military matters and the two would meet no less than ten times throughout the war. Romania re-captured Bessarabia and Northern Bukovina during Operation Munchen before conquering further Soviet territory and establishing the Transnistria Governorate. After the Siege of Odessa, the city became the capital of the Governorate. Romanian troops fought their way into the Crimea alongside German troops and contributed significantly to the Siege of Sevastopol. Later, Romanian mountain troops joined the German campaign in the Caucasus, reaching as far as Nalchik. After suffering devastating losses at Stalingrad, Romanian officials began secretly negotiating peace conditions with the Allies.

Romania's military industry was small but versatile

, able to copy and produce thousands of French, Soviet, German, British, and Czechoslovak weapons systems, as well as producing capable original products. The Romanian Navy also built sizable warships, such as the minelayer NMS Amiral Murgescu and the submarines NMS Rechinul and NMS Marsuinul. Hundreds of originally-designed Romanian Air Force aircraft were also produced, such as the fighter IAR-80 and the light bomber IAR-37. The country had built armored fighting vehicles as well, most notably the Mareșal tank destroyer, that likely influenced the design of the German Hetzer. Romania had also been a major power in the oil industry since the 1800s. It was one of the largest producers in Europe and the Ploiești oil refineries provided about 30% of all Axis oil production. British historian Dennis Deletant has asserted that Romania's crucial contributions to the Axis war effort, including having the third largest Axis army in Europe and sustaining the German war effort through oil and oil