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# Hitler's Downfall and the Collapse of the Thousand Years Reich: Multi Fronts and Incapable Allies

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**Abstract:** The downfall of Adolf Hitler was a significant development in the history of the world. His armies conquered almost all of Europe in a dramatic span of time by the employment of Blitzkrieg tactics. Before the outbreak of the Second World War, Hitler assisted General Franco in the Spanish Civil War. Later, while still fighting on the Western front, Hitler ordered the Afrika Korps to assist Italians in Northern Africa and in the Balkans region and finally launched Operation Barbarossa by invading the Soviet Union. The Anti-Comintern Pact, Pact of Steel and Tripartite Pact brought the Third Reich, the Empire of Japan and the Kingdom of Italy onto one page. This paper attempts to probe the multiple fronts and the efficacy of Hitler's allies including Japan, Italy, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Croatia and to try and find the causes behind the downfall of one of the strongest men the world has ever seen from a theoretical perspective. This research did not intend to glorify Hitler or Nazism, but focuses on how the maximization of power and the states' actions with hegemonic aspirations triggered a balancing coalition and ultimately resulted in punishment from the system itself.

**Keywords:** Hitler, Second World War, Blitzkrieg, Alliances, Multi-Front War.

## Prelude

Hitler's National Socialist German Workers Party (NSDAP) came to power democratically and legally<sup>1</sup> on January 30, 1933.<sup>2</sup> It was the result of a long and relentless effort in the pursuit of power and gained public prominence since he was a strong critic of the surrender of Germans and the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918.<sup>3</sup> During his speeches, Hitler overtly criticized the politicians for the German defeat in World War I, as he himself served during First World War and received the Iron Cross for brave and bold actions during the Great War. He

1 Isabelle Clarke and Daniel Costelle, *Apocalypse - The Second World War (Part-I Aggression)*, DVD (France Televisions Distribution, 2008). (00:05:20 - 00:05:30).

2 Isabelle Clarke and Daniel Costelle, *Apocalypse - The Rise of Hitler (Part-II The Fuhrer)*, DVD (National Geographical Channels International, 2011). (00:15:20 - 00:16:20).

3 Alan Swayze, *The End of World War I: The Treaty of Versailles and Its Tragic Legacy*, World War I Remembering the Great War (New York, New York: Crabtree Publishing Company, 2014), 5.

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advocated that the grounds German soldiers won by fighting on the battlefield and by sacrificing blood, the politicians lost on the negotiations table and often referred to those politicians as ‘November Criminals’.<sup>4</sup>

Hitler believed that the Treaty of Versailles of 1919 was quite inhumane and the punishment for Germany was unjustified. During a speech he threw away the copy of the treaty and rejected the loss of territories of the former German Empire.<sup>5</sup> Due to his extraordinary oratory skills, he soon became the leader of German Workers Party and renamed it as the National Socialist German Workers Party. On September 2, 1923, Hitler made his very first available appearance on film during ‘German Day’ rally.<sup>6</sup> The zeal of the people appearing in film makes clear Hitler’s charisma and magnetism. Just after two months of this appearance, Hitler and his party members including former General Erich von Ludendorff and leader of the *Sturmabteilung* (The Storm Troopers or Brown Shirts) Captain Ernst Rohm led a coup against the State of Bavaria on November 8-9, 1923; the coup is remembered as the Beer Hall Putsch.<sup>7</sup> Sixteen men belonging to the nascent party were killed as a result of the attempt. Although the coup was not successful, and Hitler was arrested on the charges of high treason, it gave him fame and respect in the eyes of the German people. As a result, he was imprisoned and there he wrote his famous book *Mein Kampf* (My Battle)<sup>8</sup> in which he envisaged the ideology of his party.

The political career of Adolf Hitler began to come in to the limelight and after almost ten years of struggle, he and his party managed to dominate politics in the Weimar Republic. His commitment to the cause that he clearly expressed in his book, and sometimes considered as the constitution of the NSDAP, brought him to the heights of glory. Hitler was a great critic of the Treaty of Versailles, as it had 440 clauses in total and 414 were dedicated to punishing Germany.<sup>9</sup> After his rise to power he began to do everything in his powers to bring Germany back on the centre stage of European politics. There were great feelings of revenge and hatred among the German nation for being punished as the sole perpetrator for the outbreak of World War I. Hitler fuelled these feelings and exploited the thoughts of the German people. In his book, he advocated that German blood was superior, and that they had the right to rule the rest since they were the *Aryan* masters. His racial beliefs created a sense of superiority among the German nation. He promised the German people that since they were the master race, so there was a need for the nation to acquire more living space or *Lebensraum* for their survival. He was born in Austria and believed that the German speaking areas are ideological territories of Germany. This led to the *Anschluss* (reunion) with Austria on March 12, 1938. The next target was Czechoslovakia and it was conquered by the Nazis.<sup>10</sup> The Munich Agreement on September 30, 1938 was perceived by the British as an end of the crisis in Europe.<sup>11</sup> However, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain upon his arrival to London said that ‘I believe it is peace in our time’.<sup>12</sup> The peace didn’t last long and the need for more land led to the outbreak of another World War.

## 1 Introduction

Great powers compete in a great manner. Quite often, this strategic competition for power and prestige is overshadowed by their intransigent worldview. As, Hitler asserted that “Germany will either be a World Power or there will be no Germany.”<sup>13</sup> With his nationalistic thoughts and expansionist designs, he pursued

4 Swayze, 37.; Isabelle Clarke, *Apocalypse - The Rise of Hitler (Part-I Becoming Hitler)*, DVD (National Geographical Channels International, 2011). (00:18:50 – 00:19:10).

5 *Hitler: The Rise of Evil (Part-I)*, DVD (Alliance Atlantis, 2003). (00:30:35 – 00:31:20).

6 *Third Reich: The Rise And Fall (Part-I The Rise)*, DVD (A&E Television Networks, 2010). (00:07:15 – 00:08:00).

7 William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 1990), 68–75.

8 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf (My Battle)*, trans. E.T.S. Dugdale (Munich, Germany: Franz Eher Nachfolger GmbH, 1933).

9 *Third Reich: The Rise And Fall (Part-I The Rise)*. (00:04:40 – 00:04:50).

10 Ronald Story, *Concise Historical Atlas of World War Two: The Geography of Conflict* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006), 12.

11 Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 414–17.

12 Shirer, 420.

13 Earle Rice Jr., *The Third Reich Demise of the Nazi Dream*, History’s Great Defeats (San Diego, CA: Lucent Books, 2000), 17.

the journey to take revenge for the humiliation and embarrassment of German people that they endured as a result of the defeat in the World War I and the subsequent Treaty of Versailles. It openly defied the Treaty of Versailles and gave the order of rearmament to build strong German Armed Forces.<sup>14</sup> With Hitler in power for nearly a month, the *Reichstag* (German Parliament) building was set ablaze by a Dutch communist named Marinus van der Lubbe on February 27, 1933.<sup>15</sup> This symbolic attack on the German state infuriated the Reich and it demanded the suspension of several civil and political rights in Germany. Hitler's personal insistence resulted in the 'Enabling Act' that was similar to the 'Patriot Act'<sup>16</sup> enacted by Bush Administration in the aftermath of 9/11 Attacks.<sup>17</sup> The Enabling Act gave National Socialist Government with powers to brutally, yet indiscriminately crush the enemies of the German State, the unwanted and undesired opposition under legal framework. It also helped in establishing the Dachau Concentration Camp in conducting mass murders. It is pertinent to note that Hitler started war against communism in 1933 and even before that in *Mein Kampf*; however, the Liberal World started it off just after the Fall of Berlin in 1945, against the Soviets.

The German *Wehrmacht* carried the Prussian military traditions and fielded superb military brains like Heinz Guderian (later served as General and author of *Achtung Panzer* (Attention Tank) originally published in 1937)<sup>18</sup> and Erwin Rommel (recipient of highest gallantry award *Pour le Merite* in World War I, later served as Field Marshal and author of *Infanterie greift an* (Infantry Attacks).<sup>19</sup> These men under the light of their World War I experiences envisaged and shaped the German way of war in their respective books. Before these men, the *Reichswehr* under General Hans von Seeckt conducted clandestine military preparations. In 1934, while witnessing Guderian's tank manoeuvres, Hitler was so impressed that he repeatedly said "That's what I need! That's what I want to have." Guderian contributed towards Hitler's conquests by giving him a force capable of knocking down the enemy with unprecedented speed, surprise, firepower and deception. Later, Guderian's thinking and ideas were named as Blitzkrieg or the lightning war. Consequently, Blitzkrieg enabled Hitler to conquer Europe and overpower his enemies in an unparalleled manner. It was Guderian who envisaged an attacking force comprising of a division size after a long and lengthy debate with his superior and Chief of the Staff General Beck in 1933 – this idea became the cornerstone of the Blitzkrieg doctrine.

Just nearly a year and half later after Hitler's rise to power, the German President and retired Field Marshal Paul von Hindenburg passed away on August 2, 1934. It was a perfect opportunity for Hitler that he ultimately seized to consolidate more power in his own hands. As a consequence, the Chancellor absorbed the Presidential powers and became *Fuhrer* (the leader) – a portfolio he kept until his death by suicide on April 30, 1945.

## 2 The overview of the study

The article starts with a brief introduction of the conditions prevailing in inter-war Germany and the power vacuum that was filled by Hitler in making it a giant war machine. It then sheds light on the Spanish Civil War prior to the initiation of the war. It discusses the major military campaigns launched by the *Wehrmacht* during the Second World War. The study analyses the formation of the Axis Powers and the bilateral and multilateral agreements which brought them together. The study tries to probe the strategic value of alliances with regards to Germany and the impact of such arrangements on the German armed forces during the war. It analyses the efficacy of Blitzkrieg in overpowering rival armed forces. Nonetheless, it attests the

<sup>14</sup> Lieutenant Colonel Eddy Bauer, *Illustrated World War II Encyclopedia*, ed. Brigadier Peter Young, vol. 1 (Westport, Connecticut, United States of America: H.S. Stuttman Inc. Publishers, 1978), 116.

<sup>15</sup> Clarke and Costelle, *Apocalypse - The Rise of Hitler (Part-II The Fuhrer)*. (00:21:50 – 00:22:30).

<sup>16</sup> Cindy C. Combs and Martin Slann, *Encyclopedia of Terrorism*, Revised Edition (New York, NY: Facts On File, Inc., 2007), 351–53.; Susan A. Brewer, *Why America Fights: Patriotism and War Propaganda From the Philippines to Iraq* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2009), 237–38.

<sup>17</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 196–201.

<sup>18</sup> Heinz Guderian, *Achtung-Panzer Die Entwicklung Der Panzerwaffe, Ihre Kampftaktikund Ihre Operatioen Möglichkeiten* (Stuttgart, Germany: Union Deutsche Verlagsgefellschaft, 1937).

<sup>19</sup> Will Fowler, *Blitzkrieg France, Holland and Belgium 1940-1941*, vol. 2 (Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allan Publishing, 2002), 39.

power of nationalism in offering unmatched resistance to the occupying forces. Lastly, the article presents major findings and conclusions.

### 3 The Condor Legion in the Spanish Civil War

Before the outbreak of the Second World War, a military coup took place in July 1936 against the Second Spanish Republic and a fierce fight erupted between Communists and Nationalists. General Francisco Franco led the nationalists and was supported by Hitler.<sup>20</sup> The Fuhrer saw this situation as an opportunity to examine the operational capability of the *Wehrmacht* and sent the German Air Force Junkers Ju-52 airlift aircrafts to help Franco to transport his troops from Morocco to Spain. Hitler also deputed the especially created Condor Legion to help Franco in defeating communists. He tested his newly manufactured Junkers Ju-87 *Stuka* dive bombers to attack Guernica on April 26, 1937.<sup>21</sup> The Spanish Civil War proved to be what famous historian Steven J. Zaloga called it as ‘The Proving Ground for Blitzkrieg’.<sup>22</sup> Hitler helped General Franco during the Spanish Civil War in 1936-1937; nevertheless, Franco never took notable action in helping and assisting Hitler in the years to come.

### 4 The Polish Campaign

*“The hour of trial has come. When all other means have been exhausted, weapons must decide. We enter the fight knowing the justice of our cause and for a clear goal: the permanent security of the German people and German living space from foreign trespass and presumptions to power...We believe in the Fuhrer. Forward, with God for Germany!”*

*Order of the Day Oberkommando des Heeres September 1, 1939”<sup>23</sup>*

While violating the ten-year friendship pact between Germany and Poland signed by Hitler in January 1934;<sup>24</sup> – at 4:45 A.M. on the morning of September 1, 1939,<sup>25</sup> the ferocious *Wehrmacht* unleashed havoc in Poland from Warsaw’s West. The attack was so swift and speedy that it was named as Blitzkrieg or the lightning war by the Western journalists.<sup>26</sup> The Poles were not able to withstand German might and their forces were swept away by the invading forces. Later, on September 17, the Red Army invaded Poland from the East honouring the German-Soviet Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact that was signed on August 23, a few days before the invasion of Poland.<sup>27</sup>

Consequently, Poland was virtually removed from the map of the world since it was divided between Germans and the Soviets. It was the first time that the *Wehrmacht* employed new tactics on the battlefield, since Germans suffered the bitter consequences of stalemate in the Great War. The new battle plan was designed and developed during the inter-war period. Subsequently, Britain and France declared war on Germany on September 3, 1939.<sup>28</sup> By the end of September, Poland was divided between Germany and the Soviet Union and most of the Polish Generals along with their troops surrendered to their invaders.<sup>29</sup> The attack on Poland was among several moves by Hitler to gain more land for the German people. His aims were to gain more and more power. The Polish army though was not much capable in terms of technology

<sup>20</sup> Will Fowler, *Blitzkrieg: Poland and Scandinavia 1939-1940*, vol. 1 (Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allan Publishing, 2002), 20–22.

<sup>21</sup> Fowler, 1:21.

<sup>22</sup> Steven J. Zaloga, *Spanish Civil War Tanks: The Proving Ground for Blitzkrieg*, New Vanguard 170 (Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, 2010), 4.

<sup>23</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg: Poland and Scandinavia 1939-1940*, 1:8.

<sup>24</sup> Louis L. Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich* (Hertfordshire, Great Britain: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998), 164.

<sup>25</sup> David Irving, *Hitler’s War and the War Path* (London: Focal Point Publications, 2002), 245.; General Heinz Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 2nd ed. (Boston, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2002), 68.

<sup>26</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg: Poland and Scandinavia 1939-1940*, 1:6.

<sup>27</sup> Irving, *Hitler’s War and the War Path*, 199–214.

<sup>28</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg: Poland and Scandinavia 1939-1940*, 1:23.

<sup>29</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 64–88.

and tactics, but they did offer considerable resistance to the *Wehrmacht*. Warsaw officially surrendered on September 27, 1939.<sup>30</sup>

## 5 Scandinavians Conquered

The Germans conquered Norway and Denmark swiftly. It was a miracle that the Danish capitulated within a few hours of the invasion. The attack on Denmark and Norway was codenamed as 'Operation Weserübung' and the attack was initiated on April 9, 1940. The plan was signed by Adolf Hitler on March 1, 1940. The army was not happy about the plan to open a new front;<sup>31</sup> nonetheless, it was perceived by the Germans that if the British and French were swift enough to deploy their forces in Norway and Denmark then it would be a difficult situation for Germany. It was also thought that the supply of iron ore from Sweden would be stopped. The *Kriegsmarine* suffered considerable losses at Norway. The fighting in Norway came to an end on June 9, 1940 when an armistice was signed by Major General Otto Ruge of the Norwegian Army.<sup>32</sup> The involvement of the French and British expeditionary forces in Norway and Denmark made them believe that the next target of Hitler would be either France or Britain. The British already deployed their expeditionary force in France in order to protect it from a possible Nazi invasion. They had experience from World War I in the form of the failed Schlieffen Plan.

## 6 Success in The West

The Battle of France is one of the most significant battles in the history of warfare. The French were quite confident of the fact that they had established the Maginot Line for the defence of their homeland. They were aware of the growing military aims of Hitler and saw the fates of Poland, Norway and Denmark. Here, the Germans were quite successful in deceiving the British and French forces in the course of action they adopted.<sup>33</sup> Field Marshal von Rundstedt and Field Marshal Erich von Manstein were quite instrumental in setting the strategy to invade France. The Manstein Plan<sup>34</sup> was employed to completely deceive the French. They amassed the bulk of the panzer divisions in the centre rather than to be placed on the far right. This thrust Army Group B through the "impassable" thick forests of Ardennes. The Allied forces moved as per the expectations of the Germans into Belgium. However, the Allied forces in Belgium were out flanked by Army Group A due to the massive close air support of the German Air force.<sup>35</sup>

Later, Field Marshal Erich von Manstein was called the "General's General" and Germany's greatest military strategist of the Second World War.<sup>36</sup> The swift execution of the Manstein Plan completely intimidated the French. They were not expecting to be completely enveloped by the Germans and as a result of the pincer movement of the *Wehrmacht*, British and French forces retreated to the town of Dunkirk. The French Prime Minister Paul Reynaud called his counterpart in London and expressed his defeat at the hands of Germans.<sup>37</sup> The French surrendered on June 22, and an armistice was proclaimed on June 25, 1940.<sup>38</sup>

German Forces used only one panzer division to overawe the Netherlands. The German paratroopers (*Fallschirmjäger*) and several troops from the *Waffen SS* were dropped inside the Netherlands and it took only five days for them to conquer and the Dutch surrendered on May 15.<sup>39</sup> The Germans caught the Dutch by

<sup>30</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg: Poland and Scandinavia 1939-1940*, 1:61.

<sup>31</sup> Irving, *Hitler's War and the War Path*, 276–84.

<sup>32</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg: Poland and Scandinavia 1939-1940*, 1:91.

<sup>33</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 89–98.

<sup>34</sup> Guderian, 90.

<sup>35</sup> Joseph Miranda, "Leningrad, 1941: Manstein's Truly Lost Victory," ed. Joseph Miranda, *World at War*, no. 17 (May 2011): 6–13.

<sup>36</sup> F.W. Von Mellenthin, *German Generals of World War II: As I Saw Them* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1977), 19.

<sup>37</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 720.

<sup>38</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg France, Holland and Belgium 1940-1941*, 2:86–87.

<sup>39</sup> Fowler, 2:25–27.

complete surprise, and they were not able to offer any considerable resistance.<sup>40</sup> Luxembourg was already fallen in the German hands. Belgium was attacked on May 10, 1940, the same day the attack was initiated on France. It was part of the Manstein Plan. Germans totally deceived the Allies in their intention to defend France. They created a deviation by attacking Belgium and the main thrust came from the Ardennes forest. The Belgian military surrendered on May 28, 1940.<sup>41</sup> The accumulation of power was Hitler's only aim and he believed that only by conquering more and more lands would his power ultimately increase.

## 7 Afrika Korps in the Northern Africa

Field Marshal Erwin Rommel commanded the *Deutsches Afrika Korps* in the Northern Africa from February 6, 1941 to March 9, 1943 and showed some unprecedentedly remarkable fight against the British and the Imperial Forces.<sup>42</sup> Among the objectives to deploy the *Afrika Korps* in Africa was to launch an attack on the Suez Canal and to help the Italians in the Libya and Tunisia. It was also intended by Hitler that the campaign in Africa would serve as a disguise to conceal his plans to attack the Soviet Union – Operation Barbarossa.<sup>43</sup> The *Afrika Korps* performed exceptionally well in the deserts and tough terrains of the Northern Africa. The almost two years of unprecedented desert warfare under severe shortage of logistics, close air support, equipment, ammunition and men; exhausted the *Afrika Korps*. The initiation of Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 further contributed in the difficulties of German Forces in Africa. The *Afrika Korps* fought some memorable battles against the Allied Forces which are considered as the cornerstone of desert and armoured warfare.

## 8 Operations in the Balkans and Greece

The Italian grip in the Balkans was losing and a pro-German government in Yugoslavia was ousted in March 1941. Consequently, Hitler was left with no choice but to invade the Balkans. On April 6, 1941, the *Wehrmacht* invaded Greece and Yugoslavia. It was a swift operation and by the end of April the region was under Hitler's control. Apparently, Hitler invaded this region to rescue his ally – Mussolini.<sup>44</sup>

## 9 Opening of the Eastern Front

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of August 23, 1939 provided Hitler with a safe East and he was able to fully focus his attention on the West, the North and the Northern Africa.<sup>45</sup> The North Africa campaign was focused to seize the Suez Canal in order to inflict loss and damage to the British in which Hitler ultimately failed. He took advantage of the non-aggression pact and tightened his grip on almost all the Europe. It was the perfect time to fulfil his dream of *Lebensraum* for the German people in the East and to crush the communists that he believed to be responsible for the 'Great Stab in the Back'.<sup>46</sup>

On June 22, 1941, German armed forces invaded the Soviet Union; the operation was codenamed as "Barbarossa."<sup>47</sup> It was the largest invasion in the history of warfare when almost four million troops attacked the Soviet Union. Hitler gathered all his military commanders in the Reich Capital to discuss his reasons for attacking Moscow. He was clear that he could not defeat Britain so the European mainland

<sup>40</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 721–23.

<sup>41</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg France, Holland and Belgium 1940-1941*, 2:60.

<sup>42</sup> Fowler, 2:39.

<sup>43</sup> Franz Kurowski, *Das Afrika Korps: Erwin Rommel and the Germans in Africa, 1941-43* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2010), 1–4.

<sup>44</sup> Richard Overy, *The Origins of the Second World War*, 3rd ed. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008), 219.

<sup>45</sup> Dianne Stine Thomas and George Constable, eds., *WW II: Time-Life Books History of the Second World War*, First Edition (New York, New York: Time-Life Books Inc., 1989), 57.

<sup>46</sup> Hitler, *Mein Kampf (My Battle)*, 127–32.

<sup>47</sup> Thomas and Constable, *WW II: Time-Life Books History of the Second World War*, 120.

must remain in the dominance of the National Socialists.<sup>48</sup> The *Oberkommando der Wehrmacht* (OKW) and the *Oberkommando des Heeres* (OKH) were so confident of a short and decisive victory that they didn't give much importance to the winter gear. They believed that eight to ten weeks would be a sufficient amount of time to defeat the Soviet Union and capture Moscow.<sup>49</sup> The *Wehrmacht* was quite successful in achieving victories against the Soviets. The speed with which the Germans were moving was dramatic. All the cities on their way to Moscow were captured. Cities like Yelnya, Roslavl, Orsha Talashkino Smolensk Bialystok Dorogobush and Cherikov, were under German control.<sup>50</sup>

It was the time when the German forces were standing much near to Moscow. The political interference in the military matters was becoming a routine and growing much dangerous for the continuance of the whole effort. Hitler wanted to seize control of Leningrad because of its industrial importance. He took a decision against the choice of military leaders and ordered the capture of Ukraine instead of Moscow.<sup>51</sup> The drive towards Ukraine to seize control of the Caucasian oil fields and mineral resources looked like a spectacular success for Germans but it ultimately proved to be a beginning of the annihilation of Hitler and the Third Reich.<sup>52</sup>

*"The struggle for Stalingrad is nearing a successful conclusion. Today or tomorrow we may expect to receive important OKW announcements about the success achieved. The German Press will have to prepare an impressive tribute to celebrate the victorious outcome of this all important battle for the city of Stalingrad.*

*Daily Keynote from Reich Press Chief Tuesday September 15, 1942.*<sup>53</sup>

Hitler wanted to capture Stalingrad and later was obsessed with it. This obsession combined with the level of nationalism and resilience of the Red Army proved to be a disaster. The Siege of Leningrad, Battle of Stalingrad and the Battle of Kursk drew a clear picture of the coming German defeat. The decision of German generals was to abandon the city of Kharkov to avoid another Stalingrad, but their decision was overruled by Hitler and they were ordered to hold regardless of the circumstances.<sup>54</sup> The hunger and lust for more power began to punish Hitler.

## 10 The Axis Powers

Historically, great powers choose their strategic partners in a significantly cautious manner. As mutually they have to bear the burden of history. Nonetheless, a great powers' vicious actions momentarily shrink its options in choosing strategic partners. Perhaps Germany under Hitler presented the best historical precedent of such an occurrence. Hitler signed Anti-Comintern Pact with the Empire of Japan on November 25, 1936.<sup>55</sup> The pact was a result of hatred in the heart and mind of Hitler in relation to communists and wanted to focus its attention to keep communists far away from the Third Reich. It was also aimed to help Japan to retain its regional hegemony in China. Hitler's foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop was quite instrumental behind the signing of this pact. Later, the Kingdom of Italy also joined the pact. Before that, Hitler signed the Rome-Berlin Pact on October 25, 1936, with Mussolini to form a common front against Bolshevism.<sup>56</sup> Later on, Nazi Germany signed The Pact of Steel with Kingdom of Italy on May 22, 1939.<sup>57</sup> This pact was an effort by both states to draw combined efforts against Britain and France. Japan wanted to sign

<sup>48</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 150.

<sup>49</sup> Guderian, 151.

<sup>50</sup> Guderian, 175–89.

<sup>51</sup> Guderian, 189–90.

<sup>52</sup> Will Fowler, *Blitzkrieg Russia 1942-1943*, vol. 5 (Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allan Publishing, 2003), 4.

<sup>53</sup> Fowler, 5:6.

<sup>54</sup> Earl F. Ziemke, *Stalingrad to Berlin: The German Defeat in the East* (Washington, D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1987), 153.

<sup>55</sup> Thomas and Constable, *WW II: Time-Life Books History of the Second World War*, i.

<sup>56</sup> Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, 157.

<sup>57</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 482–83.

the pact but could not reach a consensus to do so. However, the Empire of Japan, Kingdom of Italy and Nazi Germany signed The Tripartite Pact on September 27, 1940.<sup>58</sup> Later on, other Axis Powers like Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia and Croatia also joined the pact.<sup>59</sup> Japan had no geographical proximity with Germany and other Axis Powers were not able to provide Hitler with any assistance. Clear evidence of this assertion can be seen that, when Italian Dictator Benito Mussolini was deposed by the Grand Council of Italy on July 25, 1943 and was imprisoned at Gran Sasso Hotel.<sup>60</sup> Soon after, Hitler ordered the elite Waffen SS paratroopers to rescue Mussolini. The mission was quite unique as the Waffen SS rescued and recovered Mussolini without firing a single bullet. The rescue attempt was codenamed as Operation Oak and was carried out on September 12, 1943.<sup>61</sup>

The United States was pursuing isolationism and was not a part of the war; however, on December 7, 1941, the Japanese Forces launched a surprise attack on U.S. Naval Forces at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, the U.S. declared war on Japan but did not declare war against Germany. On December 11, Hitler declared war against the U.S., an act which astonished the German generals.<sup>63</sup> However, the Empire of Japan did not declare war against the Soviet Union, while Germany was still fighting against it.<sup>64</sup> Hitler wanted to maximize his power by even confronting those who were not a direct threat to his empire. It resulted in a disaster that the U.S. Army generals were the chief architect of breaching Hitler's Atlantic Wall by designing the Normandy Landings of June 6, 1944 i.e. Operation Overlord.<sup>65</sup> The shift in focus towards the Atlantic and the West, the Eastern Front was dominated by the Red Army; soon the Soviets were able to capture Bulgaria, Romania, and Hungary.

Mussolini declared war on Greece without consulting Hitler. Italian forces brought poor results and were not able to conquer it. The burden fell on the shoulders of Hitler and he ordered German troops to invade Greece and help Italians in this pursuit.<sup>66</sup> The Italians proved to be a burden on Germany and began to rely on German forces. Mussolini requested Hitler to help them in Libya and as a consequence, German Field Marshal Erwin Rommel restored order.<sup>67</sup> The Allies invaded Sicily in July 1943 and the Italian King Victor Emmanuel deposed Mussolini on July 25, 1943.<sup>68</sup> He was arrested and put under house arrest. Hitler ordered the commandos of Waffen SS to rescue him. As a result, on September 12, 1943, Mussolini was rescued and he formed a de facto government in Florence, Italy. This successful operation is remembered as Operation Oak.

## 11 Analysis and Afterthought

Mearsheimer argued that “War is the most controversial strategy that great powers can employ to increase their share of world power.”<sup>69</sup> A former bohemian corporal and later self-proclaimed Fuhrer, Hitler employed this strategy in the pursuit of maximization of power and becoming a regional hegemon. Nonetheless, waging wars on multiple fronts which were geographically displaced with minimal communications resulted in strategic overstretch. Mearsheimer also asserted that “Wars are won by big battalions, not by

<sup>58</sup> Will Fowler, *Blitzkrieg The Balkans and North Africa 1941-1942*, vol. 4 (Hersham, Surrey: Ian Allan Publishing, 2003), 6–7.

<sup>59</sup> Fowler, 4:7.

<sup>60</sup> History.com Staff, “Mussolini Falls from Power,” History, June 26, 2017, <http://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/mussolini-falls-from-power>.

<sup>61</sup> Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany*, 901–3.

<sup>62</sup> Amanda Lomazoff and Aaron Ralby, *The Atlas of Military History: An Around-the-World Survey of Warfare Through the Ages* (San Diego, California: Thunder Bay Press, 2012), 258.

<sup>63</sup> Lomazoff and Ralby, 117.

<sup>64</sup> Guderian, *Panzer Leader*, 259–60.

<sup>65</sup> Guderian, 369–73.

<sup>66</sup> Guderian, 140.

<sup>67</sup> Guderian, 141.

<sup>68</sup> Snyder, *Encyclopedia of the Third Reich*, 240.

<sup>69</sup> John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001), 147.



armadas in the air or on the sea. The strongest power is the state with the strongest army.”<sup>70</sup> In hindsight, it can be said that Hitler maintained considerable land power and the *Wehrmacht's* infantry was mechanised; its armour had considerable mobility and carried lethal firepower; and its artillery was mobile. All the components of land power were intact; however, Mearsheimer alarmed that “Nationalism is probably the most powerful political ideology in the world, and it glorifies the state.”<sup>71</sup> It also predicted the efficacy of nationalism in invoking “massive popular resistance” against the victor state.<sup>72</sup> Clausewitz highlighted the importance of moral forces in defeating the enemy. It can be argued that perhaps the level of nationalism prevailing in the subdued nations provided them with the fuel to act as a formidable fighting force against Hitler and its armies. The spirit of nationalism along with patriotism can be regarded as the most arduous form of Clausewitzian *friction* which catastrophically confronted the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>73</sup>

To further strengthen the land component, it is noteworthy that the *Waffen Schutzstaffel* (armed protective squadron or Waffen SS) fought alongside the *Wehrmacht*.<sup>74</sup> And the former's division *SS Totenkopf* (Death's Head) was primarily tasked with suppressing the resistance and insurgency in occupied territories. In such operations, the *SS Totenkopf* committed heinous crimes against humanity including massacres and ethnic cleansing.<sup>75</sup> The crimes were later extended to prisoners of war (POWs) and in December 1944, Sepp Dietrich of the *Waffen SS*, led the executions of the American POWs known as Malmedy Massacre.<sup>76</sup> It is pertinent, that the violence-ridden atrocities committed by the Nazi war machine, triggered a massive counter force that offered resistance. This resistance existed eternally and within the echelons of Nazi hierarchy. The infamous Operation Valkyrie of July 1944 can be taken as an exemplary example when high-ranking officers unsuccessfully attempted to overthrow Hitler. The intentions of coup plotters remain a moot-able topic; nevertheless, it resulted in mass executions and forced suicides including Field Marshal Rommel.

It is worth mentioning that Nazi Germany achieved geopolitical gains but could not articulate and employ a culminating point of attack (CPA) and culminating point of victory (CPV) in its overall war effort and doctrine. For instance, the Prussian Army under Wilhelm I and Otto von Bismarck captured Paris and defeated France during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870-71. Nonetheless, after exhibiting military prowess and achieving geopolitical gains including the annexation of Alsace and Loraine, the Prussians sought peace. The annexation of territories for geopolitical gains is a useful strategy for great powers. However, conquests and occupations of entire countries generate insurgencies and armed resistance movements.

Arguably, Hitler chose such allies and formed alliances with those nations which could not provide Germany with much assistance and ultimately became a liability. For instance, Japan was not even in Germany's continental access and was of little or no strategic value. Similarly, Mussolini attacked Albania on April 7, 1939, and later invaded Greece on October 28, 1940.<sup>77</sup> The news of these attacks was shocking for Hitler since he was neither consulted nor informed about these Italian actions. Out of his drive for the maximization of power while honouring the moral obligations to fulfil the pacts with Italy, Hitler offered Mussolini military assistance. The Duce turned down the Fuhrer's offer but ultimately Italian Forces became bogged down and were rescued by the German Forces.<sup>78</sup> Italian dictator Mussolini could not effectively fight the Allied Forces and was deposed by the King Victor Emanuel III. In this regard Mearsheimer put it quite rightly that “alliances are only temporary marriages of convenience.”<sup>79</sup> However, I would argue that as long as the marriage lasts, it benefits both partners. Regardless of their relationship, after the culmination

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<sup>70</sup> Mearsheimer, 84.

<sup>71</sup> Mearsheimer, 365.

<sup>72</sup> Mearsheimer, 148.

<sup>73</sup> Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1989), 119–21.

<sup>74</sup> Gordon Rottman and Ramiro Bujeiro, *Waffen-SS in Action* (Hong Kong: Concord Publication Company, 2009), 3.

<sup>75</sup> S. Hart and R. Hart, *Weapons and Fighting Tactics of the Waffen-SS* (Kent, UK: Spellmount Limited, 1999), 7.

<sup>76</sup> Rupert Butler, *The Black Angels: The Story of the Waffen-SS* (Middlesex, England: Hamlyn Paperbacks, 1978), 198–228.

<sup>77</sup> Fowler, *Blitzkrieg The Balkans and North Africa 1941-1942*, 4:7.

<sup>78</sup> Fowler, 4:7–9.

<sup>79</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 33.

or termination, both can be enemies. However, the experience gained by this marital relationship greatly allows for the choice of better partners in the future. How could a bachelor know or have the slightest idea of the utility of a marriage or even a marriage of convenience. Perhaps, it was rightly noted that good judgement comes from experience, but a lot of that comes from bad judgement. Generally, states do not make good or bad judgements, they just opt for the most appropriate and circumstantial choice. However, Hitler acted contrarily by not only helping its allies but in such a pursuit, it also endangered the very existence of its armed forces. In retrospect, its allies including Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, and Croatia were of no strategic use.

The realist tradition encourages a state in relying on its own muscles by mobilizing and building its resources in ensuring its survival. If a state fails to do so, then, it inherently resorts to external balancing by entering into coalitions and alliances. The latter serves as a useful strategy in balancing the threat.<sup>80</sup> However, the ultimate objective is survival. Hitler drove Germany into such alliances which were neither a structural requirement nor a strategic necessity and ultimately resulted in the strategic overstretch of armed forces. For instance, Japan was of little strategic value and its attack on U.S. Navy at Pearl Harbour, Hawaii, dragged Germany into declaring war on the U.S. four days later, on December 11, 1941. Despite the fact that the German Navy carefully conducted its unrestricted submarine warfare in the North Atlantic while not targeting U.S. vessels. The endeavour was to avoid another Sinking of RMS *Lusitania* that killed 128 American citizens on May 7, 1915.<sup>81</sup> German Armed Forces seemed to be constantly rescuing its allies. The *Kriegsmarine's* U-boats even reached Indonesia in providing fire support to the Imperial Japanese Forces.<sup>82</sup>

Timeliness has great value in conducting military operations and Hitler invaded Denmark and Norway in a timely manner in order to secure the supply of iron ores from Sweden. Strategically, both states carried enormous worth in maximizing his power. Also, Denmark and Norway acted as effective platforms in putting anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) strategies to test in relation to perceived Britain and French invasions. The decision to invade France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium gave him significant amounts of advantages and earned power and prestige. However, Hitler made a huge mistake in underestimating the Soviets. He neglected the fact that Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact was to his benefit and it provided him with a safe East. When Germany acted as an irrational actor, the system punished it and Hitler faced a bitter ending and had no choice but to commit suicide on April 30, 1945, with his Thousand Years Reich plummeting into the abyss of darkness. The German Chancellor-turned absolute ruler was not rational while choosing its allies. The analysis in this research has provided significant evidence that he chose those allies who were either incapable or had no geographical proximity with Germany. If he had acted like a true realist and did not declare war on the United States on December 11, 1941 to please Empire of Japan (since declaring war on the U.S. was not in his interest), he could have had a better ending. It ultimately resulted in the gain of U.S. and loss of Germany on the strategic level. Hitler made a huge mistake by sending his troops to Libya to assist Italian Forces. He repeated the same mistake on several occasions. The *Afrika Korps* led by Field Marshal Erwin Rommel was a unique expeditionary force of that era. They were always busy in rescuing the Italian Forces, since the Italians were incapable in solving their own problems. They created the mess which German Forces had to clean.

Aspiring powers tend to become regional hegemons. Mearsheimer noted that “Once a state achieves that exalted position, it becomes a status quo power.”<sup>83</sup> From 1933 till 1945, Germany remained a revisionist state and aspired to achieve regional hegemony. However, in September 1938, the Munich Peace Agreement was taken as an indicator by then British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain as Germany becoming a status

<sup>80</sup> Stephen M. Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” *International Security* 9, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3–43.

<sup>81</sup> Spencer C. Tucker, ed., *The European Powers in the First World War: An Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2013), 83.; However, Preston noted that 159 Americans lost their lives. Please see: Antony Preston, *Submarine Warfare: An Illustrated History* (London: Brown Books, 1998), 30.

<sup>82</sup> Gordon Williamson, *Wolf Pack: The Story of the U-Boat in World War II*, General Military 024 (Oxford, United Kingdom: Osprey Publishing, 2005), 116.

<sup>83</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 40.

quo power that led the PM say that “We have achieved peace for our time.”<sup>84</sup> In hindsight, Chamberlain resorted to the strategy of appeasement in dealing with a revisionist, yet overly aggressive Germany. Mearsheimer clearly forbade states in adopting appeasement, as it concedes “power to a rival state, which is a prescription for serious trouble in an anarchic system.”<sup>85</sup> The “serious trouble” became evident, when Germany invaded Poland in September 1939.

Structural realists differ on a states’ rationality. Defensive realists such as Kenneth Waltz argued that it is not necessary for states to behave rationally in the international system.<sup>86</sup> However, Mearsheimer asserted that “Great powers are rational actors.”<sup>87</sup> The rational orientation and position of great powers fundamentally draws from their strategic history and determination in making the legacy as enduring. However, when great powers behave irrationally, acting out of the strategic calculus, resulting in overstretch – a hostile balancing coalition punishes the great power. Overstretch diminishes the efficacy of great powers in fighting wars and concluding multiple fronts. It divides the cohesion of fighting forces in vastly geographically displaced forces’ command and control and makes the supply lines dangerously vulnerable resulting in a logistical nightmare. Kennedy and Layne lamented the relevance of overstretch in maintaining the great power status and the sustenance of grand strategy.<sup>88</sup> Mearsheimer noted such an occurrence by arguing that “Overexpanders, on the other hand, are the irrational aggressors who start losing wars.”<sup>89</sup>

## 12 Conclusions

Leaders are the decisive drivers in the lives of nations and states. However, great powers greatly draw their grand strategic orientation from their strategic history. As Martel noted, “America’s distinctiveness lies in the exceptionalism of its grand strategic history.”<sup>90</sup> In some cases, leaders and states become synonyms, and the former asserts itself more than the latter. The perfect example of such a case is Germany under Hitler.

The research was conducted in the pursuit of two main questions. Did the opening of multiple fronts ultimately lead to disaster? And did Hitler choose the best possible allies in his war effort? While remaining in the theoretical framework of Offensive Realism, it can be understood that states always try and ensure their survival by attaining as much power as they can. The lust for control and authority over others leave little or no choice for states to behave in a moral way. Understandably, the structure of the international system is a complex one and there is an inherent need for aspiring states to acquire supremacy over others. Also, the international system is under the influence of anarchy and it greatly encourages states to gain maximum power in order to maximize the chances of their survival. However, since the system itself is in control of anarchy, then the latter may also punish the state if the state becomes an aggressive one.

Germany under Hitler received enormous rapid military successes which were neither predictable nor anticipated by anyone. However, the operational level execution of Blitzkrieg resulted in strategic gains and allowed to quickly end operations by not entering into long, lengthy, and expensive wars. The Polish Campaign gave him huge strategic and economic benefits and his dream to get more living space for the German people was more or less becoming real. The research has unveiled one amazing fact that the

<sup>84</sup> Spencer C. Tucker and Priscilla Mary Roberts, eds., *World War II: A Student Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2005), 1523–29.

<sup>85</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 139.

<sup>86</sup> Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, eds., *Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy* (New York, United States of America: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>87</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 31.

<sup>88</sup> Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict from 1500 to 2000* (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1988), 515.; Christopher Layne, “From Preponderance to Offshore Balancing: America’s Future Grand Strategy,” *International Security* 22, no. 1 (Summer 1997): 110.

<sup>89</sup> Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, 211.

<sup>90</sup> William C. Martel, *Grand Strategy in Theory and Practice: The Need for an Effective American Foreign Policy* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 19.

German attack on Poland was reciprocated by declaring war on Germany by Britain and France, but on September 17, 1939,<sup>91</sup> when the Soviet Union invaded Poland from the East, Warsaw's allies did not declare war on Stalin's Soviet Union. Was that an irony of London and Paris or did it just simply revolve around Mearsheimer's notion regarding alliances?

In hindsight, geopolitics remains the dominant driving force in conceiving and executing aggressive military doctrines such as the German Blitzkrieg. However, such instruments are useful in the annexation of territories and the destruction of enemy's main fighting force. Expanding the area of operations by conquering and occupying entire countries greatly hampers utility. Instead, it surges the hostile sentiment, results in the form of insurgencies, and a military operation becomes a protracted war. Mao's War of Resistance greatly emphasises the latter. Consequently, a military victory becomes a political nightmare.

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<sup>91</sup> Lomazoff and Ralby, *The Atlas of Military History: An Around-the-World Survey of Warfare Through the Ages*, 117.

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