

social order and mass uprisings leading to demands for capitulation by the terrorized civilian victims of such air power. Though German bombing raids killed 51,509 British civilians and damaged or destroyed one out of five British homes, they did not produce the widespread demoralization and civil unrest that the theorists of strategic bombing since Douhet had predicted. On the contrary, the Blitz, as these bombing raids were collectively called in Britain, galvanized the population behind its leadership and stiffened its resolve to carry on the war. The campaign to terrorize the metropolitan centers of Britain proved counterproductive in strategic terms also because it diverted German air power from the military targets that really counted: the fighter bases of the RAF, which had been severely damaged by the initial onslaught and might very well have been wiped out by a continuation of the precision bombing that Göring had initiated in the late summer.

### **Mediterranean Diversions**

The postponement of Operation Sea-Lion and the dispersal of the cross-Channel invasion flotilla in mid-September did not signify the end of the Luftwaffe's bombardment of British cities, which continued through the spring of 1941. But the air war in the British skies thereafter took second place to the project that had remained the touchstone of Hitler's foreign policy: the annihilation of the Soviet Union. On July 31, two weeks before the beginning of the bombardment of Britain, Hitler informed his generals of his plan to invade Russia the following May. In the early autumn the redeployment of German forces from occupied France to the east began. But "Operation Barbarossa" against Russia was unexpectedly delayed when Mussolini, who had entered the war against France and Britain in June, imprudently embroiled Italy in conflicts in the Balkans and North Africa, which required the diversion of German forces southward in rescue operations. Italian troops based in the recently acquired protectorate of Albania had attacked Greece in October 1940 in search of a quick, cheap victory. Instead they encountered fierce resistance from the Greek army and by March 1941 faced the prospect of a humiliating military defeat when British troops landed in Greece at the invitation of the Athens government. The sudden reappearance of a British army on the continent elicited a swift response from Berlin. When the new government of Yugoslavia bravely repudiated its predecessor's pledge to grant transit facilities to the German army, Hitler launched an invasion from bases in Hungary and Bulgaria that crushed Yugoslav and Greek resistance in three weeks and forced a hasty evacuation of the British force from the Greek peninsula.

In the meantime, an offensive mounted in mid-September by Italian forces in Libya against the lightly defended British garrison in Egypt (which protected the Suez Canal and the Middle Eastern oil fields) ground to a halt and then was transformed into a rout as British forces counterattacked deep into Libyan territory. In February 1941 Hitler was compelled to dispatch an armored "Afrika Korps" under General Erwin Rommel to relieve the battered Italian forces in North Africa. Within two months Rommel's panzers had hurled the British back to the Egyptian frontier. Though successful in the short run, these two Mediterranean diversions caused a six-week delay in Hitler's timetable for the invasion of the Soviet Union. The loss of precious time during a season of favorable weather caused little concern in Berlin because of Hitler's confident expectation, based on the French precedent, that Russian resistance would crumble within



**Inspecting the damage:** British Prime Minister Winston Churchill (1874-1965) observes the extent of property damage caused by the German bombing campaign against British cities in the autumn of 1940. "The blitz," as it was popularly known, had the opposite effect on the British people from the one that Hitler had intended. It bolstered their commitment in support of their government's war effort instead of frightening them into demanding an armistice like the French had obtained a few months earlier.

three months, before the onset of winter. So confident was the German military command of a speedy victory in the east that it had ordered winter clothing only for the small contingent of troops that were to remain in Russia for occupation duty after the withdrawal of the victorious invasion force.

## THE WORLD WAR

### “Operation Barbarossa”

The German invasion of the Soviet Union began on June 22, 1941, the 129th anniversary of the launching of Napoleon's ill-fated expedition to Moscow. Four million men, 3,300 tanks, and 5,000 aircraft were sent eastward to wage what was to become the greatest land war in history. Ignoring warnings from British, American, and even Soviet intelligence sources about the impending attack, Stalin and his military advisers were totally unprepared for the German onslaught. As the Soviet armies reeled in confusion before the offensive in the summer and fall of 1941, the consequences of Stalin's purge of the officers' corps in 1937–38 were graphically revealed in the tactical incompetence of the inexperienced junior officers who had replaced the executed members of the high command. In the first three months of battle, over half of the Soviet army was killed, wounded, or captured. At the farthest extent of the German army's three-pronged advance—toward Leningrad in the north, Moscow in the center, and the Ukrainian grain fields and Caucasian oil wells in the south—almost half of Russia's industrial resources and cultivated land were under enemy control.

It has often been asserted in justification of Stalin's separate peace with Hitler in August 1939 that the Soviet Union gained valuable space and time to prepare for its defense. But the space gained in the Baltic states and eastern Poland proved of no strategic value and was overrun by the invading German armies in the first few days of the eastern offensive. The time gained by Stalin for the reorganization of the Red Army and the construction of munitions factories far to the east of Russia's exposed western frontier was also time gained by Hitler that the latter put to good use. Freed from the threat of a two-front war by Russia's indulgence, Germany forcibly acquired the economic and strategic resources of a dozen countries for use against the Soviet Union. With the fall of Kiev and the siege of Moscow and Leningrad in the autumn of 1941, the benefits of Russia's abstention from the war in Europe that had begun in September 1939 were difficult to identify. Space and time counted for little in the type of war that Germany was waging against the Soviet Union—a blitzkrieg whose aims were to rout the Red Army and topple the Stalinist regime before the arrival of the winter snows.

The failure of the German army to deliver the decisive blow before the Russian winter ground its mechanized offensive to a halt in December 1941 has been traced by some military historians to the six-week delay caused by the Balkan and Mediterranean diversions of the previous spring. Others have blamed Hitler's decision to detach armored divisions from the Center Army Group advancing along Napoleon's road to Moscow to bolster the drive against Leningrad in the north and Ukraine in the south. But whatever its tactical cause, the strategic result of the stalled eastern offensive was unmistakable: Hitler's swift war of annihilation became a long war of attrition. This change upset the calculations of the German leader, which rested on the presumption of total victory in Russia within three months. It also enabled Stalin's Machiavellian diplomacy during the 1939–41 period of Russian abstention to yield its anticipated dividends. Shielded from the effects of the European war by the nonaggression pact with Hitler, the newly constructed factories east of the Urals began to compensate during the winter of 1941–42 for the lost production in the regions of European Russia that had been overrun by the invading German armies. The nonaggression pact that Stalin had signed with Japan on April 13, 1941, freed Russia from the threat of a war on two fronts and permitted the

redeployment of large numbers of troops from the Far East to replenish the depleted ranks of the defenders of Moscow. Once the promise of a quick German triumph was buried in the snows of December, the scales gradually began to tip in favor of the Soviet Union, whose seemingly inexhaustible reserves of military manpower and strategic raw materials represented a formidable advantage in a long-drawn-out struggle.

### **The End of American Neutrality**

The potential vulnerability of Germany in a conflict of long duration became evident during the six months that it waged war against two powers, Great Britain and Russia, which together commanded almost a quarter of the world's resources. The imbalance became all the more pronounced with the transformation of the European conflict into a world war on the entry of the United States a few days after the Russian counteroffensive from Moscow began. Though the brunt of America's military power could not be hurled against the Third Reich for another two and a half years, its vast economic resources were placed at the disposal first of Great Britain and then of Russia just as they had been in the period before the active participation of the American Expeditionary Force in the earlier war against Germany.

During the twelve months after the fall of France when Great Britain faced Germany alone, the isolationist policy of Washington gradually evolved into a pro-British strategy, as the damaging consequences to American national interest of a German victory against England became apparent to Roosevelt and his foreign policy advisers. On September 2, 1940, as the Luftwaffe began its furious air assault on the British Isles, the United States transferred fifty overage destroyers to Great Britain in exchange for a ninety-nine-year lease of naval and air bases on eight British possessions in the western hemisphere. This arrangement supplied the Royal Navy with desperately needed ships with which to wage the Battle of the Atlantic against German submarines, while the sale of surplus American munitions enabled the British army to replace the materiel abandoned on the beaches of Dunkirk. On December 20 Roosevelt established a defense board to plan and coordinate American assistance to the embattled British, a move that was denounced by the German government as an unwarranted intervention in the European war that compromised America's neutral status. But the "cash-and-carry" provisions of American neutrality legislation, which prohibited American merchant vessels from entering the war zone in Europe and required advanced payment for purchases by belligerents in the American market, had brought Britain to the brink of bankruptcy by the end of the first year and a half of the war. The decline of Britain's foreign trade, caused by the conversion from production for export to production for war making and aggravated by German submarine attacks on British merchant shipping, left that country without a sufficient reserve of dollars to finance its mounting purchases from the "arsenal of democracy" across the Atlantic. Even the sale of its remaining foreign assets and the depletion of its gold stocks would not bridge the gap for very long. The American response to the exhaustion of British dollar reserves was the enactment on March 11, 1941, of the so-called Lend-Lease Act. This legislation repealed the "cash" part of the cash-and-carry requirement, authorizing the sale of American products on credit to "any country whose defense the President deems vital to the defense of the United States." Under the authority granted by this law, a million tons of American agricultural surpluses were shipped across the Atlantic between April and December

1941 to alleviate Great Britain's serious food shortage caused by the German submarine campaign. On November 6, 1941, the Roosevelt administration extended a \$1 billion Lend-Lease credit to the Soviet Union, which was struggling to defend its major cities against the German attack that had been launched that previous summer. In this way a considerable proportion of the strategic arsenal and economic resources of the United States was made available to the two major powers in the anti-Axis coalition during the remaining months of American neutrality.

### Roosevelt's "Europe First" Strategy

The intervention of the United States in the Second World War was precipitated not by any quarrel with Nazi Germany but by Japan's surprise attack on the American Pacific fleet based at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, on December 7, 1941.\* By the spring of 1942, all of East Asia had come under the domination of Japan. American forces had been expelled from the Philippines, Britain's major East Asian base at Singapore had surrendered, and Japanese military and naval power began to fan out in three directions—toward Australia, India, and the Aleutian Islands off Alaska (see p. 342). Despite the expanding power of Japan across the Pacific and the absence of any immediate German threat to America's vital interests, Roosevelt resolved to pursue a "Europe-first" strategy in the war. By the summer of 1942 the United States had replaced Britain as the major foreign supplier of the Soviet Union, shipping foodstuffs, clothing, and mechanized vehicles across the Atlantic to the northern ports of Murmansk and Archangel as well as to the Persian Gulf for transshipment by rail across Iran to the embattled cities of European Russia. The menace of German submarines, which had sunk a third of Britain's merchant fleet tonnage by the time of the Pearl Harbor attack, was removed by the spring of 1943 with the help of American convoys and reconnaissance planes equipped with microwave radar to detect U-boats. In April German naval authorities conceded defeat in the Battle of the Atlantic by recalling the submarines to their bases along the Norwegian and French coasts. Anglo-American control of the sea-lanes to Europe enabled Allied strategists to envision for the first time an invasion of the continent.

### Dispute Over a "Second Front" in Western Europe

But that invasion was not soon in coming. For three full years—from June 1941 to June 1944—the Soviet army fought the German army on the continent virtually unaided. The British government's enthusiastic expressions of solidarity with and tendering of economic assistance to its newly acquired ally against Germany† were not translated into concrete actions on behalf of the common struggle in the form of direct military intervention. Despite urgent pleas from Stalin for some kind of diversionary action in Western Europe to relieve the pressure on the Soviet armies, Churchill steadfastly declined to risk such a direct assault on the western flank of the German-controlled continent. The British preferred to engage the vulnerable Italians in their ersatz empire in the Mediterranean basin rather than challenge the formidable German forces ensconced in their *Festung Europa*, except for long-range bombing raids on German cities that had no discernible effect on Germany's capacity to wage its land war in the

\* Germany and Italy declared war on the United States on December 11, 1942.

† On July 13, 1941, London and Moscow had concluded a pact of mutual assistance.

east. The American intervention did not change the situation, in spite of Roosevelt's professed enthusiasm for an Anglo-American landing in northern France, for the British prime minister was able to persuade the American president that such an operation was inopportune. The extensive inter-Allied discussions about the opening of a "second front" in France appear to have been intended mostly to placate the increasingly insistent Stalin. Why it took the Western powers so long to organize and execute such an operation has remained a point of intense historiographical controversy. Defenders of the Soviet Union detected a cynical motive behind this Anglo-American hesitation, namely, the desire to see Russia bled white while its Western allies conserved their military and economic resources to step in at the last moment to replace defeated Germany and preempt exhausted Russia to dominate the continent. To judge from the statements of the principals themselves, what prompted Churchill to oppose an early Allied landing in Western Europe, and what persuaded Roosevelt to acquiesce in this postponement, were two considerations. The first was the insufficient number of landing craft, the risks of transporting large numbers of American troops to Britain while German submarines still roamed the North Atlantic with impunity, and the entrenched position of the German forces along the French Channel coast. This caused Churchill to fear that a premature landing of ill-equipped, undermanned Allied forces in northern France would suffer the same fate as the suicidal amphibious operation at the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey, for which he had been blamed during the First World War and that had almost cost him his political career. The second consideration was the existence of a much more attractive alternative: an Allied landing in the lightly defended North African colonies of Vichy France, which could then serve as a springboard for the invasion of Fortress Europe through its back door in the Mediterranean.

### **The Mediterranean Front**

The revival of the German offensive in Russia in the summer of 1942 placed a considerable strain on the Grand Alliance,\* as Stalin vainly badgered the Anglo-American leadership to open the much-discussed second front in the west. The invasion of French North Africa, which took place in November 1942, was a spectacular success from the Western Allies' point of view. It led to the surrender in the following May of the Axis armies in Libya, which were caught in the vise between the Allied forces landed in Morocco and Algeria and the British army in Egypt that had pierced the German-Italian front at El Alemein. It also brought southern Italy within range of Allied bombers stationed in Tunisia just across the Mediterranean narrows. But the liberation of North Africa was accomplished at the expense of the long-delayed, cross-Channel invasion of France. To the suspicious Stalin it seemed a disappointing diversion of Anglo-American military power from where it was needed in Western Europe. The trans-Mediterranean landing on Sicily in July, which paved the way for the Allied invasion of the Italian mainland in September, did little to calm Soviet anxieties about the implications of Allied strategy. It merely increased Stalin's exasperation at his allies' reluctance to engage the German army directly while Soviet troops were mounting their own ferocious counterattack in the east.

\* The popular term for the American, British, and Soviet coalition against Germany.



The professed objective of the Anglo-American Mediterranean strategy was to force an Italian surrender and to pin down as many German troops as possible on the Italian peninsula in preparation for the invasion of France. In this the British and the Americans were signally successful. The landing of Allied troops in Sicily, coming as it did amid desperate shortages of food, fuel, and munitions and mounting evidence of social unrest in Italy, compelled Mussolini to convene on July 24, 1943, a meeting of the Fascist Grand Council, his rubber stamp "parliament" that had not met for years, to shore up the deteriorating prestige of his regime. Instead, the Council voted to confer emergency powers on King Victor Emmanuel, who the following day replaced Mussolini with Marshal Pietro Badoglio and had the Duce arrested. The new Italian leader promptly dissolved the Fascist party, approached the Allies for an armistice (which was finally concluded on September 8), and announced his country's adherence to the Allied cause. The German military forces in Italy, which had been increased to twenty-five divisions in anticipation of just such a turnabout, proceeded to disarm the Italian army, occupy the northern two-thirds of the peninsula, and install Mussolini as head of a new "Italian Social Republic" in the northern city of Saló after his spectacular rescue from prison by German paratroopers. The subsequent squandering of Anglo-American lives and supplies in the long and costly advance up the Italian peninsula, which took more than a year after the landing in Sicily, was unquestionably one of the greatest strategic blunders of the Allied campaign in Europe.

### **Soviet Counteroffensive and Anglo-American Second Front**

As the Anglo-American forces cleared North Africa of Axis troops, gained effective control of the Mediterranean, and began their Italian campaign, the Soviet armies in the east finally turned the tide of battle against the German invaders. The German army in southern Russia had been advancing toward the strategically situated city of Stalingrad on the Volga throughout the summer of 1942, threatening to sever the direct railway and river connections linking the major Soviet armies to their sources of fuel in the oil wells of the Caucasus. By mid-September the German Sixth Army had reached the outskirts of the city that bore Stalin's name, the industrial and communications hub of southern Russia, and proceeded to place it under siege. But the gradual buildup of a numerically superior Russian defense force in the autumn prompted the German commander, General Friedrich von Paulus, to request authorization to fall back to a more defensible position. Refusing to countenance what would have been regarded as a humiliating retreat, Hitler ordered a fight to the finish. After three months of what one military historian has called "the most senseless example of human slaughter in history," von Paulus disobeyed his Führer's orders and surrendered the tattered remnant of his army on February 2, 1943. The loss of half a million Axis soldiers dead, wounded, or captured and the opening of a massive Soviet counteroffensive in the spring signaled the beginning of the end of Hitler's obsessive drive for German *Lebensraum* in the European part of the Soviet Union. By the end of the year two-thirds of the Soviet territory under German occupation had been liberated by the advancing Red Army.

As the Soviet counteroffensive from the east gathered momentum, Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin met together for the first time at Teheran, Iran, in November 1943 to plan the timing and strategy of the projected invasion of Western Europe. Churchill, true to form, unveiled an elaborate proposal for an Anglo-American landing at selected