

S E C R E T

Report of Interrogation: No. 5747 of  
 P/W : ~~\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$\$~~ 3WG-1293  
 Rank : Ambassador at large  
 Unit : Foreign Office, Berlin  
 Capt'd: 7 May 1945 - Garmisch-Partenkirchen

6 September 1945  
 I.O.: Capt HALLE

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Veracity: Believed reliable

Report : Italy's Declaration of War on Greece and the Italian war Objectives.

After meeting Petain in Montoire, Hitler went immediately to Florence to meet Mussolini. Various announcements had come while Hitler was still en route to Hendaye which showed that Italy was preparing to declare war on Greece. Hitler and Ribbentrop were assuredly against starting such a war in the Balkans, for at the very time when Hitler was contemplating war on Russia, they had no desire to see trouble start up in the region of the Aegean Sea. Nonetheless, Hitler refrained from advising Mussolini against such a step, probably to avoid irritating him. In consequence, Mussolini met Hitler in Florence with the announcement that Italy had declared war on Greece.

This rather strange step of Mussolini's was probably founded upon Rome's impatience with Hitler's practice of announcing important decisions to his allies at the last minute, or even after the actual steps had been taken. Hitler used this method because his greatest concern was always to prevent little knowledge of his intentions from getting out to the enemy, and because of his preference for surprise. Hitler had great personal trust in Mussolini, but none at all in those around him, particularly the Italian royal court and the Italian General staff. The longer the war went on, the stronger became this distrust; he continually stigmatized these circles as "traitors" in 1943. A further circumstance was the presence in Rome of the Vatican, which Hitler and Ribbentrop regarded as the greatest center of espionage in the world. They were afraid that any plans which became known in Rome would immediately be revealed to persons in the Vatican where countries at war with Germany were represented. Finally Germany assumed that all telegraphic communications between the Italian Foreign Ministry and the Italian ministries and embassies abroad were being read by the enemy. The Italians themselves clearly did not realize this, and had to be warned later by the Foreign Office in Berlin.

The campaign against Greece was part of Mussolini's ambitious plan to dominate the Mediterranean area, including the Balkan peninsula. He had already acquired a spring-board for this purpose with the invasion of Albania in April 1939, when the crown of King Zog, passed to the King of Italy. Just as the invasion of Albania at that time represented the Duce's desire to emulate Hitler's march on Prague, so this time Mussolini's resolve to extend his foothold on the Balkan peninsula as quickly as possible was apparently motivated by the German guarantee of Rumanian boundaries, and the subsequent dispatch of a German military mission to Rumania.

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The approximate extent of Italy's territorial ambitions in the Mediterranean area was outlined on a map given by Count Ciano to Ribbentrop in the summer of 1940. In the western Mediterranean, the Italian goals were limited to Nice, Tunisia, and Corsica; Tunisia was to be extended to the west and south, so that the entire eastern Sahara would become Italian. In the eastern Mediterranean area an enlarged Albania, including parts of Greece, together the occupation of all the Ionian islands and extension of control over the Dodecanese was to assure Italian hegemony in the Balkans, while in the Near East, Italy sought to take the territories of England and France including, Palestine, Syria and Iraq. These countries were to continue a more or less independent existence, but were to be brought into a relationship of dependence upon Italy after the British pattern in Egypt and Iraq. Thus the realm of actual Italian hegemony in the New Roman Empire of which Mussolini dreamed was to stretch from eastern Algeria in the west, from Lake Chad to the Somaliland coast south of Ethiopia, while the land mass from Egypt to the Persian Gulf and the peninsula of the Balkans were to be under Italian domination. When in 1941 Yugoslavia also became a theater of war, this program was considerably expanded toward the Northeast, although the course of the war in Albania and Tripoli had showed within a few weeks that Italy by no means possessed the military strength with which to attain such extended political goals.

During the first phase of these conflicts, Hitler strictly observed the principle that Italy was to have a free hand in the Mediterranean, or at least was to be the unqualified leader, since he considered Italy Germany's most important ally and the Berlin-Rome-Axis the foundation of his foreign policy. Only after Japan had entered the war was Italy displaced as the chief ally of Germany, so that finally Hitler's policy was reduced to preserving Mussolini's prestige, and at the end he hardly troubled even to do that.

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