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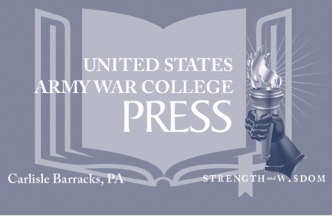

ENDS, MEANS, IDEOLOGY, AND PRIDE: WHY THE AXIS LOST AND WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ITS DEFEAT

Jeffrey Record

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FOREWORD

Dr. Jeffrey Record, a professor emeritus of strategy at the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, examines the causes of the Axis defeat in World War II and postulates still relevant lessons that we can learn from that defeat. Record contends that the Axis was beaten by a combination of resource inferiority (after 1941) and strategic incompetence—for example, the pursuit of territorial ambitions far beyond the limits of Axis strength. World War II's lessons for the future include the enduring importance of material strength even in an age of irregular warfare; the pernicious effects of extreme ideology on sound strategic judgment; and the limits of operational and tactical superiority in delivering strategic success.

Dr. Record completely dispels the notion that the Second World War has no pertinence to navigating through the strategic challenges of the present era.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.
Director
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JEFFREY RECORD is Professor Emeritus at the Air War College in Montgomery, Alabama, where he taught strategy for 20 years. Before that, Dr. Record served as pacification advisor in the Mekong Delta during the Vietnam War; Rockefeller Younger Scholar on the Brookings Institution's Defense Analysis Staff; Senior Fellow at the Institute for Foreign Policy Analysis, the Hudson Institute; and the BDM International Corporation. Dr. Record also has extensive Capitol Hill experience, having served as a legislative assistant to Sam Nunn and Lloyd Bentsen, and later as a professional staff member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. He is the author of 10 books and 24 monographs, including: *Wanting War: Why the Bush Administration Invaded Iraq; Hollow Victory: A Contrary View of the Gulf War;* and *The Wrong War: Why We Lost in Vietnam*. Dr. Record received his doctorate at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies in 1973.

SUMMARY

Why did the Axis Powers lose World War II, and what can we learn from its defeat? The Axis seemed on top of the world until 1941, when it added to its list of enemies the United States and the Soviet Union. The entry of Russia and America into the war decisively tipped the balance against Germany, Italy, and Japan. Resource-rich Russia and the United States were prepared for protracted conflict, whereas the Axis was not. From Pearl Harbor onward, it is difficult to imagine how the Axis could have avoided the fate that befell it, short of Stalin's defection from the Allied side.

Material weakness should have imposed strategic discipline on Axis territorial ambitions, but none of the three major Axis states seemed to recognize the limits of their power. Imperial ambitions, fueled by extreme ideologies, held sway over a realistic grasp of what was possible and what was not.

An examination of World War II's outcome reveals three lessons. First, numbers still matter. The best strategy is to be strong. The strong sometimes lose, but the weak lose more often. Second, ideology can distort sound strategic thinking. Both Germany and Japan were victimized by extreme racial ideologies that prompted them to overestimate their own fighting power and underestimate that of their enemies. Third, operational and tactical superiority cannot redeem a faulty strategy. Throughout the war, Germany outperformed its enemies on the battlefield; however, it was still crushed strategically.

ENDS, MEANS, IDEOLOGY, AND PRIDE: WHY THE AXIS LOST AND WHAT WE CAN LEARN FROM ITS DEFEAT

INTRODUCTION

Carl von Clausewitz believed that "superiority of numbers is the most common element of victory," and that the "best strategy is to be strong." However, the great Prussian philosopher of war also recognized that:

> superiority of numbers in a given engagement is only one of the factors that determines victory. Superior numbers, far from contributing everything, or even a substantial part, to victory, may actually be contributing very little, depending on the circumstances.[1]

Those circumstances might include a weaker enemy with a stronger willingness to fight and die, or with a superior strategy, such as irregular warfare of the kind that sapped the French and American will to win in Indochina. Nevertheless, it is always better to be stronger than weaker, especially when both sides are waging a regular war. All armed combatants, be they states, insurgencies, or gangs, seek strength because strength protects, confers security choices, and usually—though not always—prevails. Guerrilla warfare, terrorism, and other forms of irregular warfare are hardly the preferred choices of the weaker side. On the contrary, they are dictated by weakness. Irregular warfare is a matter of necessity, not choice. Colin Gray observed:

> In irregular warfare a relatively resource-rich regular side is pitted against a resource-challenged foe. Of necessity, the latter must operate by stealth, and has to avoid open combat except under conditions of its own choice.[2]

Mao Zedong himself rejected guerrilla warfare as a means to decisive victory; it was but a preparatory stage to gaining the ability to conduct operations from superior strength—i.e., final-phase conventional warfare.

Almost a decade ago, the study *Beating Goliath: Why Insurgencies Win* was published, which examined weaker-side victories over powerful states and the reasons for their success.[3] According to extant theory, as well as my own thinking, the weaker-side wins rested on some combination of a stronger will to win,[4] a more effective strategy,[5] the political composition of the stronger side (democracy versus dictatorship), and access to external assistance.[6] My research revealed that foreign help was a common enabler of victorious insurgent wars, and that such help, while certainly no guarantee of insurgent success, can even transform the weaker side into the stronger one.[7] For example, the available evidence suggests that by the time of the Battle of Yorktown in October 1781, the American side, which included the Continental Army, local militias, and French naval and ground forces (to say nothing of massive French financial credits and gunpowder shipments), was the materially preponderant side.[8]

Here, this monograph wishes to explore the causes of conflict outcomes not between strong states and weak nonstate challengers, but rather between strong states **themselves**, using World War II as an illustrative vehicle and focusing on the relative role that the war's tangibles and intangibles played in that conflict's outcome. On its face, World War II would seem to offer little insight into the kinds of war that have dominated the post-1945 era, especially the post-Cold War period. However, the relative influence of material versus nonmaterial factors, especially the degree to

which they can be substituted for each other, remains an enduring issue in the study of war. World War II was the last and most stupendous great power war, and although predominantly a regular war, it contains instruction relevant to other forms of armed conflict.

Great powers are by definition the strongest of states in terms of territory, population, industrial power, financial resources, technological prowess, and military forces. Of course, there are considerable disparities in strength among great powers. In terms of raw physical strength, for example, the main Axis Powers (Germany, Japan, and Italy) were severely disadvantaged by the major Allied Powers (Great Britain and its empire, the Soviet Union, and the United States). In the case of Italy, pretensions of great power status were delusional, and Japan's fighting power, though impressive, could not overcome the American homeland's geographic advantage (being beyond Tokyo's military reach) and overwhelming war production superiority. Indeed, the degree of Allied superiority over the Axis, including a near monopoly of access to the world's petroleum deposits, points to the conclusion that World War II's outcome was predetermined. The resource disparity between Japan and the United States was especially severe, leading Colin Gray to judge that the Pacific War "was a conflict that Imperial Japan was *always* going to lose [emphasis in original]."[9]

"For all of its operational-tactical brilliance, stunning initial victories and plunder, the Axis . . . possessed less than half the economic power of its enemies," observed MacGregor Knox, and:

> Barring improbable levels of incompetence or irresolution in Britain or the United States, that crushing imbalance doomed the Axis in the intercontinental war of attrition

> that emerged from Hitler's failure to destroy Soviet Russia, Imperial Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor, and the Fuhrer's immediately following and wholly eccentric declaration of war on the United States.[10]

The numbers are stark. The Allies (excluding China) enjoyed a 2.7:1 advantage in population and a 7.5:1 advantage in territory, in addition to controlling access to almost the entire world's known oil reserves.[11] In addition, in each of the wartime years (1939-1945), the Allies' collective gross domestic product (GDP) never fell below twice that of the Axis.[12]

I resist being a determinist when it comes to war outcomes. Resource superiority is always nice to have, but the trick is to translate that raw superiority into capable fighting power and then to employ that power effectively at the tactical and operational levels on behalf of a competent strategy. This is what the Axis failed to do.

Germany, Japan, and Italy were **strategically incompetent**—i.e., they failed to discipline the relationship between their imperial ambitions and their military means. Simply put, they bit off more—far more—than they could chew. They allowed hope to subvert reality and illusions to subdue sound strategy. Sir Basil Liddell Hart defined strategy as "the art of distributing and applying military means to fulfill the ends of policy." It depends for success:

> first and foremost, on a sound calculation and coordination of the ends and means. The end must be proportional to the total means, and the means must be used in gaining each intermediate end which contributes to the ultimate end.[13]

I believe that the combination of resource inferiority and strategic incompetence doomed the Axis to defeat.

This is not to denigrate the record of the Allies. Despite a very mixed tactical and operational performance in the early years of the war, the Allies orchestrated a war effort that hitched their material advantage to an effective war-winning strategy. I take no issue with Richard Overy's *Why the Allies Won*. The key to victory was material superiority **plus** "a very great improvement in the military effectiveness of Allied forces."[14] It was not just a question of brawn but also of brains. The Allies painstakingly learned how to deal with Axis superiority at the sub-strategic levels of war, sometimes overcoming it with sheer brute force, unpleasantly defined by John Ellis as "two things: an overwhelming physical . . . superiority . . . and a marked lack of finesse in applying that superiority."[15] Raw power alone does not confer strategic success. That power has to be transformed into effective war-winning outcomes.

Much has been written about why the Allies won. However, it is equally important to address the question of why the Axis lost. Germany almost certainly could have prevailed had Hitler recognized the limits of German power—the first obligation of a sound strategy. He could have refrained from attacking the Soviet Union and declaring war on the United States, and simply stood pat on his European territorial gains as of May 1941. Absent war with the Russians and Americans, Hitler would have remained dominant on the European continent with the Soviet Union, still Hitler's ally by virtue of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Non-Aggression Pact of 1939, continuing to supply Germany with vital quantities of oil, foodstuffs, and other raw materials. (Ironically, Nazi-occupied western Russia supplied Germany but a fraction of what Germany obtained from a friendly Stalin.) Great Britain would have remained strategically isolated, with little chance

of overthrowing German power on the continent and little chance of inducing an isolationist United States to enter the war. Barring war with Russia, Hitler might have had more than sufficient force to sweep British power and influence out of the Mediterranean and North Africa, including Gibraltar, Malta, Cyprus, and Suez. Under such circumstances, even Winston Churchill likely would have been compelled to stop fighting Germany and come to some kind of terms with Hitler—e.g., Britain's acceptance of German rule on the continent in exchange for Hitler's agreement to leave the remaining British Empire alone.

Hitler seemingly had it made in May 1941. His forces occupied France, the Low Countries, Denmark, Norway, most of Eastern Europe, and the Balkans, including Greece. He enjoyed friendly fellow fascist regimes in Spain, Italy, and Romania, as well as a very beneficial alliance with Stalin. Adam Tooze has concluded that with:

> hindsight it is hard to avoid the conclusion that after the defeat of France Germany would have done better to adopt a defensive posture, consolidating its position in Western Europe, attacking British positions in the Mediterranean and forcing the British and the Americans to bomb their way onto the Continent.[16]

Douglas Peifer contends, however, "an Axis victory over the Anglo-Americans in 1941-42 was not as self-evident as one might think." He points out that by mid-1941, Franklin Roosevelt was firmly determined to enter the war of Britain's side and was already supplying Churchill with massive quantities of Lend-Lease assistance. Moreover, Hitler was in less a position to invade the British Isles than he was in 1940. He had no means of coercing Churchill into some

kind of settlement, especially given what was already a de facto Anglo-American alliance, and Germany's growing war production disadvantage vis-à-vis Britain alone, to say nothing of the United States. Peifer also questions whether the Germans had "a viable strategy for winning the war in the Mediterranean . . . absent Spanish assent to [a German] attack on Gibraltar," which was **not** forthcoming. Also lurking in the background, although unbeknownst to Hitler, was the likelihood of an American atomic bomb, which assuredly would have been dropped on German targets had Germany not surrendered before the summer of 1945.[17]

Foreswearing conquest of Russia would of course have forced Hitler to do something that he could never bring himself to do: renounce a central tenet of his core ideological convictions. Hitler believed it was his historical destiny to rid Europe of Jews and communism and to establish a race-based empire in Slavic Europe stretching from Poland to the Ural Mountains, with surviving Russians reduced to hungry serfs to be worked to death by their German masters. Hitler also believed that only the creation of a German empire from the Atlantic to the Urals would enable him to defeat the United States, which he regarded as an inevitable enemy that stood in the way of German world domination. Thus, Hitler's decision to invade the Soviet Union was the most consequential strategic decision of the Second World War. Without it, it is difficult to imagine how Hitler could have been defeated.

IMPERIAL JAPAN

As for the Japanese, who were never as powerful as the Germans (at least on land), they could have avoided war with America had they not been victimized by

their own racial ideology, which told them they were destined to rule the Chinese and other "lesser" peoples of Asia, and had they not been persuaded, as was Hitler, that war with the United States was inevitable. They could have invaded Southeast Asia, as they did in 1941-42, without attacking American territory. Former U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt is known to have worried that a Japanese invasion of only the European-controlled portions of Southeast Asia (e.g., Malaya, the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, French Indochina) would make it impossible for him to unite the country behind a declaration of war against Japan.[18] How could Roosevelt, who in 1941 was straining to join the war in Europe against Nazi Germany, which was a far more urgent threat to first-order U.S. security interests than Japan, make the case for spilling American blood over a bunch of European colonies in the Far East? "Perhaps the major error of the Japanese was their decision to attack the United States when the main objective was to gain the strategic resources of Southeast Asia," contends Louis Morton.

> Had they bypassed the Philippines and rejected Yamamoto's plan for a strike against Pearl Harbor, it is possible that the United States might not have gone to war or, if it had that the American people would have been more favorably disposed to a negotiated peace.[19]

Belief in the inevitability of war often becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy because it encourages believers to strike the first blow—to start wars at times and places of their own choosing. Had the Japanese been attuned to Roosevelt's political dilemma—his inability to take a united America into war absent a direct attack by Germany or Japan—they might have avoided the strategic disaster that befell them. The irony, at least

for the Japanese, was that their attack on Pearl Harbor inflicted only modest damage on the U.S. Pacific Fleet. The fleet's three invaluable aircraft carriers were elsewhere on December 7, 1941, and most of the battleships that were sunk were later refloated and returned to service. If the attack was but a "military inconvenience" for the United States, it was a "political disaster" for Japan because it implanted in the American electorate a burning desire for revenge that culminated in the mass destruction of Japanese cities in 1945.[20]

The magnitude of Japan's strategic incompetence is jaw dropping. Consider the following facts of 1941.

First, Japan's economy, though fully mobilized for war, was one-tenth the size of the American economy, a disparity certain to widen as the United States moved toward complete mobilization.[21] (The power of the United States turned out to be such that Japan's defeat consumed only about 15 percent of America's total war effort.)[22]

Second, Japan was vitally dependent on the United States for key raw materials, including oil, of which the United States supplied 90 percent of Japan's requirements.

Third, Japan was a resource-poor state, completely dependent on seaborne commerce that it was poorly prepared to protect in war. For Japan's Mahan-worshipping Imperial Navy, defending the country's merchant marine was an afterthought.

Fourth, Japan's Army ground and air forces were already tied down in Manchuria (deterring a Soviet invasion) and in China, where they were stuck in a 4-year unwinnable war. For Japan, the "China Incident" was a Vietnam War writ large.

Fifth, Japan lacked the military wherewithal to threaten the continental United States, whereas the

United States could—and eventually did—obliterate the Japanese home islands. Japan was a regional power, whereas the United States would soon become a global power.

Given these facts, a prolonged war with an enraged United States, in which American war production would prove decisive, was to be avoided at all costs. However, how could Japan prevent the United States from taking its time, years if necessary, to amass overwhelming force and project it across the Pacific? It could not, and some Japanese understood this. Admiral Isoroku Yamamoto, for one, who knew America well, declared in October 1940 that a war with the United States would be a protracted one, during which Japan's resources would be slowly exhausted to the point of having to quit. "We must not start a war with so little chance of success," he warned.[23]

Certainly, in retrospect, Japan's decision to attack the United States seems self-evidently suicidal. "The Japanese bet in 1941," wrote Raymond Aron in 1966, "was senseless since [Japan] . . . had no chance of winning and could avoid losing only if the Americans were too lazy or cowardly to conquer."[24] Gordon Prange, the great historian of the Pearl Harbor attack, called it "a reckless war. [Japan] could not possibly win."[25] Roberta Wohlstetter, in her groundbreaking work, *Pearl Harbor: Warning and Decision,* condemned the fanciful Japanese assumption that the United States:

> with ten times the military potential and a reputation for waging war until unconditional surrender, would after a short struggle accept the annihilation of a considerable part of its naval and air forces and the whole of its power in the Far East.[26]

Toshikazu Kase, a Japanese foreign policy official who was present on the USS *Missouri* when Japan surrendered, concluded that the Pacific War "was unequal from the start. [It] was the product of brains fired by sheer madness."[27] Looking back on Pearl Harbor, Haruo Tohmatsu and H. P. Willmott observed simply "no state or nation has ever been immune from its own stupidity."[28]

How, then, to explain Japan's decision? Was it madness? Or simply inexplicable? Here we enter an all too familiar world—actually the real world—in which rational calculation of ends and means is constantly threatened by arrogance, ideology, prejudice, wishful thinking, and pride.

In the summer of 1941, the Japanese were confronted by what they viewed—with considerable justification—as a stark choice between war with America and a humiliating political submission to the United States involving Japan's ruin as an aspiring great power via severe U.S. economic sanctions and insistence that Tokyo abandon its empire in China. For Japan, pride or "face" dictated a decision to fight regardless of the consequences. Acceptance of the Roosevelt administration's suspension of oil deliveries to Japan and diplomatic insistence that it evacuate China and Indochina in exchange for a resumption of trade with the United States would have reduced Japan to an American vassal state. Ian Kershaw argued:

> For no faction of the Japanese elites could there be a retreat from the goals of a victorious settlement in China and a successful expansion to establish . . . Japanese domination of the Far East. . . .[These objectives] had not just become an economic imperative. They reflected honor and national pride, the prestige and standing of a great power. The alternatives were seen as not just poverty, but

> defeat, humiliation, ignominy, and an end to great power status in permanent subordination to the United States.[29]

Japanese reasoning was summed up by Admiral Osami Nagano, Chief of Staff of the Imperial Japanese Navy in September 1941: "Japan would rather go down fighting than ignobly surrender without a struggle because surrender would spell spiritual as well as physical ruin for the nation and its destiny."[30] No wonder the Japanese fought so long and fanatically to stave off defeat! The employment of suicide aircraft in 1944-45, like today's Islamic suicide bombers, testifies to a remarkable combination of determination and tactical military effectiveness. Indeed, Tokyo's attitude in late 1941 was not dissimilar from Churchill's in the summer of 1940 when he publicly asserted that he would prefer that Britain go down fighting rather than submit to Hitler.

Clearly, the Japanese understood they could not defeat the United States outright, as had Nazi Germany vanquished France in 1940, and that Japan's prospects in a long war with the United States were poor, even non-existent. They also assumed, however, that war with the United States was inevitable, in part because they regarded the United States and Great Britain as strategically inseparable. This meant that a Japanese invasion of Southeast Asia would automatically trigger war with the United States. This was not in fact the case. War with America was certain only if American territory was attacked.[31]

A second—and self-evident—assumption was that time was working against Japan. The longer Japan waited to strike the United States, the dimmer its prospects for avoiding defeat. As the trade embargo took hold and the United States accelerated its rearmament,

Japanese economic and military power relative to that of the United States began to decline rapidly. In the critical category of naval tonnage for example, Japan in late 1941 possessed a competitive 70 percent of U.S. tonnage (including tonnage deployed in the Atlantic), but the Japanese correctly projected, based on published sources (and excluding estimated war loses), that that ratio would drop to 65 percent in 1942, 50 percent in 1943, and 30 percent in 1944.[32] The Two-Ocean Navy Act passed by the U.S. Congress in July 1940 called for construction of 6 battleships, 18 aircraft carriers, 33 cruisers, 115 destroyers, and 43 submarines.[33] H.P. Willmott has observed that the act "doomed the Imperial Navy to second-class status, since the activities of American shipyards would be as catastrophic for Japanese aspirations as a disastrous naval battle would be."[34]

Yamamoto had warned Japanese leaders that, "Anyone who has seen the auto factories of Detroit and the oil fields in Texas knows that Japan lacks the national power for a naval race with America."[35] Japan's relative power would never be better than in 1941. Indeed, during the war years the United States built 8,812 naval vessels to Japan's 589.[36] Japan's productive disadvantage in combat aircraft was almost as grim. In 1941, the United States produced 1,400 combat aircraft to Japan's 3,200. Three years later the ratio was 37,500 to 8,300.[37]

A third assumption, which reflected the near certainty of a long war, was that Japan could force the United States into a murderous, island-by-island slog across the Pacific which, it was hoped, would eventually exhaust the Americans' political will to fight on to total victory. To bring their power directly to bear against the Japanese home islands, the Americans

would have to drive thousands of miles westward from Hawaii and northward from Australia, plowing through New Guinea and the Philippines, and the Central Pacific island chains of the Carolines, Gilberts, and Marianas. By heavily fortifying these territories and defending them to the death, the Japanese could raise the blood price to the point where the Americans might settle for terms that would permit Japan to retain its mainland, if not insular Asian empire. After all, the strength of U.S. security interests in East Asia could never equal that of Japan's.

"The Japanese theory of victory," contends Colin Gray:

> amounted to the hope—one hesitates to say calculation—that the United States would judge the cost of defeating Japan to be too heavy, too disproportionate to the worth of the interests at stake.[38]

Referring to the tenacity of Japan's hopeless defense of its Central Pacific bastions, Adrian Lewis argues that the Japanese understood the "futility of their situation," but that their objective was not victory. Rather, "it was to inflict as many casualties as possible on American forces, to hold out as long as possible, and to prolong the war [and] destroy the will of the American people."[39] This strategy persisted even into 1945, with Japanese hardliners in Tokyo insisting that they could achieve a **conditional** surrender to the Americans by turning, or threatening to turn, the defense of the home islands into an American bloodbath.

The Japanese were correct in assuming they could impose a protracted war of attrition on the Americans. They employed a combination of distance and ferocity to force the Americans to grind their way, bloody assault after bloody assault, across the vast expanses

of the Pacific. Yet, Japan was destined to lose unless America's overwhelming capacity for war was subverted by a collapse of political will to pay the necessary price. However, the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor had eliminated that possibility. Again, the intriguing question arises: What if Japan had avoided attacking U.S. territory in December 1941?

Belief that the Japanese could bleed the Americans into a compromise settlement of the war rested on a fourth assumption (or at least hope): Japanese racial and spiritual superiority could neutralize America's physical superiority. Japan was neither the first nor last of America's enemies to stress the human element in war and to underestimate the resolve of Americans at war. Mao Zedong, Ho Chi Minh, Mohamed Farad Aideed, and Osama bin Laden all recognized America's material advantage but believed they could defeat it by mobilizing such intangibles as a greater willingness to fight and die and a strategy and set of tactics designed to sidestep superior U.S. firepower. The Japanese knew they would be outgunned by the United States, but they believed that the unique qualities of their race—racial purity, martial skill, willpower, discipline—could defeat the "soft" Americans. "The Japanese regarded us as a decadent nation in which pacifism and isolationism practically ruled the policy of our government," testified Joseph Grew, U.S. Ambassador to Japan, after the war. Willmott notes that modern Japan in 1941 was:

> a nation with no experience in defeat and, more importantly a nation [that believed itself] created by gods, and ruled by a god [Emperor Hirohito]. . . . This religious dimension provided the basis for the belief in the superiority of the Japanese martial [prowess] that was a guarantee against national defeat.[40]

As for America, many Japanese shared the view of Rear Admiral Tasuku Nakazawa, Chief of the Imperial Navy's operational section:

> a composite nation of immigrants [that] lack[s] unity, [can] not withstand adversity and privation, and regard[s] war as a form of sport, so that if we deal a severe blow at the outset they will lose the will to fight.[41]

In Japanese eyes, writes John Dower, "all Westerners were assumed to be selfish and egoistic, and incapable of mobilizing for a long fight in a distant place." It was also assumed that Germany would defeat Britain and that the U.S. war effort "would be undercut by any number of debilitating forces endemic to contemporary" American society such as "isolationist sentiment, labor agitation, racial strife, political factionalism [and] 'plutocratic profiteering'."[42] As a creature-comforted society, America was simply too feckless to sustain the blood and treasure costs of a long, faraway, and harsh war, especially in a region where the strength of U.S. interests was weak relative to Japan's. At some point, the capitalists who controlled the country would turn against a war whose balance sheet was registering far more costs than benefits.

John Lynn has pointed out that, barring Japanese racial stereotyping of Americans as:

> soft, self-indulgent, and incapable of serious sacrifice . . . Japanese war plans made no sense, since Tokyo realized that the advantage of numbers in manpower and material always rested with the United States.[43]

Japan's relative poverty virtually dictated an embrace of racial and spiritual power over material strength. (Fairness demands recognition that racism also colored American views of the Japanese. Aside from a

long history of anti-Asian racism in the United States, especially on the West Coast, many Americans in 1941 regarded the Japanese as racially inferior, even barely human, and the German-Japanese alliance of 1940 as a union of master and servant. Indeed, many Americans, including Secretary of War Henry Stimson, believed the Japanese were incapable of planning, much less executing the attack on Pearl Harbor, and were dumbfounded by the string of stunning operational successes the Japanese achieved against the West in Southeast Asia in the first half of 1942. In fact, the Germans were not even informed of the Pearl Harbor attack by their Japanese "allies.")[44]

The presence of a materially superior enemy, especially one as powerful as the United States, encourages the conviction that the intangibles of war can be employed to neutralize or even overcome physical disadvantage. Mao Zedong clearly understood this and adopted a strategy of prolonged irregular warfare as the solution. The prerequisite of weaker-side success, however, is not to go "regular" prematurely—i.e., to avoid falling into the trap before one is ready; of playing the stronger side's game of engaging in direct, regular, and conventional combat. That is a recipe for defeat, as the Vietnamese communists discovered during the Tet Offensive of early 1968, and the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) discovered later in Syria and Iraq when it attempted a positional defense of the territory it controlled.

The Japanese, however, had no viable irregular warfare options. They were compelled to wage the kind of war for which they had been trained and equipped, as eager imitators of the Western great powers, and to wage it against a firepower-dominant foe, which among other things possessed the resources

and scientific talent to harness the destructive power of the atom. Given Pearl Harbor's inoculation of American public opinion against any thought of a conditional Japanese surrender, it is difficult to imagine any outcome of the Pacific War other than unconditional surrender.

This is not to belittle the contribution to victory of the U.S. performance at the operational and tactical levels of war. The Americans planned effectively and presciently, were well led, and fought with skill and determination. They perfected the complex art of amphibious warfare and used their submarine force and air power with devastating effect against Japanese shipping and the Japanese home islands themselves. Moreover, they demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice blood and treasure that utterly refuted Japanese assumptions.

Midway, Guadalcanal, Leyte Gulf, the Philippine Sea, and Okinawa have all been cited as turning points in the Pacific War. What about Pearl Harbor? Did it not initiate a war that Japan was doomed to lose? Could the Japanese have done anything differently after Pearl Harbor to avoid defeat?

FASCIST ITALY

Shortly before he committed suicide, Adolph Hitler confessed that his friendship with Benito Mussolini:

> could be added to the list of my mistakes. It is visible that the Italian alliance rendered more service to the enemy than to ourselves. The intervention of Italy . . . brought us an infinitesimal aid in comparison with the numerous difficulties which it has created for us. [Italy] contributed . . . to making us lose the war. . . .[Hitler concluded] The greatest service which Italy could have done to us was to have kept out of the conflict.[45]

Italy was the weakest of the three major Axis Powers, and in fact lacked the resources and military prowess to become the great power that Mussolini longed for her to be. In terms of peak-year wartime GDP (in billions of 1990 dollars), Italy ($151 billion in 1939) ranked well behind Germany ($437 billion in 1944) and Japan ($197 billion in 1942). Italy was dwarfed by the United States ($1,499 trillion in 1944), Russia ($495 trillion in 1944), and the United Kingdom ($351 billion in 1943).[46] As Hitler judged, Italy proved to be a strategic liability for Germany. Italian military failures in the Balkans and North Africa in 1941 diverted German forces into both areas just as Hitler was preparing to invade the Soviet Union. It is testimony to the Mussolini regime's fundamental feebleness that Hitler felt compelled to invade most of Italy in 1943, in the wake of Mussolini's dismissal and arrest by King Victor Emmanuel. (Unlike Hitler, Mussolini was simply head of government, not head of state. In addition, unlike Hitler, who brooked no institutional challenge to his authority, Mussolini shared power and authority in Italy with both the Vatican and the monarchy, which commanded the Italian military's primary loyalty.)

Fascist Italy's ends-means gap was even greater than Imperial Japan's. Mussolini had visions about recreating a Roman-dominated Mediterranean empire, which of course would have required the expulsion of the British and French powers in the region—a task well beyond Italy's military capacity. Throughout the war Britain controlled the western (Gibraltar) and eastern (Suez) entrances to the Mediterranean, which among other things forced Italy into utter dependence on Germany for its industrial raw materials. British forces also routinely defeated Italian naval forces at sea and military forces on land in North Africa. The

battleship-centric Italian Navy lacked aircraft carriers and effective radar, and the Italian Army's leadership rejected mechanization in favor of continued reliance on foot infantry and mules. The army entered World War II with essentially the same weapons and mindset it had in World War I.

Compounding the Italian military's mediocre performance—and in part a cause of it—was the war's unpopularity. Despite almost 20 years of Fascist rule, most Italians had little taste for a war of any kind in 1940, much less a war on the side an overbearing ally and (after 1941) against an enemy as popular in Italy as the United States. In contrast to Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, the regime's attempt to inspire popular worship of national martial glory failed utterly, and Mussolini's strategically nonsensical decision to send a large Italian Army to fight alongside Germany in Russia hardly improved the dictator's popularity. Italian forces retreated and/or surrendered in droves wherever they were sent, prompting Mussolini to complain to his foreign minister (and son-in-law) Count Galeazzo in 1941:

> Have you ever seen a lamb become a wolf? The Italian race is a race of sheep. Eighteen years [of fascist rule] are not enough to change them. It takes a hundred and eighty, or maybe even a hundred and eighty centuries.[47]

Unlike the Germans and the Japanese, the Italian performance at all three levels of war—strategic, operational, **and** tactical—was disastrous, dooming her to certain and early defeat. Indeed, it is difficult to speak of an Italian war effort when compared to the other major belligerents. Italian military expenditure peaked at 23 percent of GDP in 1941 (compared, for example, to Germany's 70 percent in 1943, and America's 42

percent in 1944). Moreover, Italy lost only 205,000 military and 25,000 civilians in World War II, or just over one-third of its death toll in World War I. By comparison, Germany suffered 7,000,000 military and civilian deaths.[48]

Italy was simply not a serious military power when compared to her allies and enemies (except backward foes like the Libyans and the Ethiopians), and she was trapped in the suffocating embrace of a contemptuous ally.[49] MacGregor Knox observed:

> the humiliating inadequacy of Italian military performance in 1940-43 had sources far more complex than the alleged primacy of the regime's propaganda, and . . . those sources were reciprocally interrelated at a variety of levels. Parochialism, fragile military traditions, shortages of key technical skills; energy and raw material dependence; the regime's inability to mobilize effectively what resources existed; the incompetence and venality of industry; the deficiencies in military culture that prevented the armed forces from imagining, much less preparing for modern war; strategic myopia, dissipation of effort, passivity, logistical ineffectiveness, and dependence [on Germany]; and the armed forces' greater or lesser degrees of operational and tactical incapacity were so interwoven that separating them analytically is a thankless task.[50]

Italy's fortunes in World War II might have fared better had the so-called Rome-Berlin-Tokyo Axis been a genuine alliance, based on common war aims and governed by a unified command structure. However, the Axis Powers had nothing but divergent war aims and no common command apparatus remotely resembling the Anglo-American Combined Chiefs of Staff or even the more informal consultative but effective strategic relationship between Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin. On the contrary, the Axis was little more than a collection of tyrannical regimes united only by their

hatred of the West and communism and by their desire for imperial expansion in their respective regions of the world. Neither Hitler, Mussolini, nor Hedeki Tojo bothered to inform each other of their plans, including the momentous German decision to invade the Soviet Union and the no less fatal Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor. Geography in any event prohibited any meaningful direct cooperation between Nazi Germany and Imperial Japan, and Fascist Italy's proximity to Hitler's Germany proved fatal.

NAZI GERMANY

I have argued that the combination of acute material inferiority and gross strategic incompetence condemned Japan and Italy to certain defeat. To be sure, one can never dismiss the role of contingency and human factors in determining war outcomes. However, given the degree of Japanese and Italian resource inferiority and strategic recklessness, it is difficult to imagine the circumstances that could have spared Tokyo and Rome the fate that befell them. For example, suppose that the Japanese had destroyed the entire U.S. Pacific Fleet (including its three aircraft carriers) in December 1941, and then went on to occupy the Hawaiian Islands. Such a feat clearly would have delayed the return of U.S. naval and air power across the Pacific and the ultimate destruction of the Japanese home islands (an aircraft carrier-less U.S. Pacific Fleet could not have stopped the Japanese in the critical battles of the Coral Sea and Midway). In the final analysis, however, the United States was simply too powerful, too distant, and too enraged to have been denied an eventual and decisive victory in the Pacific War.

Nazi Germany presents a more complicated case. Like Japan, Germany was physically weaker than its combined adversaries were, at least after 1941, when it added the Soviet Union and the United States to its list of enemies. Even by the time of Pearl Harbor in December 1941, however, German misfortune in Russia may have already fated Hitler to ultimate strategic disaster. Blitzkrieg, a novel method of employing mechanized ground forces, tactical air power, and radio communications in tandem that had worked so well elsewhere in Europe, came to grief in Russia for reasons that ought to have been apparent to its proponents. Once again, as with the Japanese in East Asia, German imperial objectives were permitted to outrun available economic and military means. "Hitler was powerless to alter the underlying balance of economic and military force," concludes Adam Tooze:

> The German economy was simply not strong enough to create the military force necessary to overwhelm all its European neighbors, including both Britain and the Soviet Union, let alone the United States.[51]

Nazi Germany was nonetheless the most powerful and strategically dangerous Axis state. Had it defeated Russia in 1941, as it expected to do—and almost did—it is difficult to envision how Britain and the United States could have successfully challenged Hitler's control of Europe. As John Lukacs observed:

> the Anglo-American alliance, for all its tremendous material and financial and industrial and manpower superiority, could not really have conquered Hitler's Germany without Russia. That's why June 22, 1941 [the date of Operation BARBAROSSA, Germany's invasion of Russia] was the most important turning point of the

> Second World War, [even] more important than Pearl Harbor.[52]

The Soviet Union was the only state within Hitler's military reach that was big enough, powerful enough, and fierce enough to absorb a German attack and then counterattack. To be sure, Russia benefitted substantially from U.S. Lend-Lease assistance, including weapons, ammunition, foodstuffs, vehicles, aircraft, oil, and other raw materials. However, that assistance did not arrive in great quantities until early 1943 (just as the Germans were surrendering at Stalingrad).

The numbers are stupendous. The German war against Russia cost the Soviet Union an estimated 27,000,000 military and civilian deaths (out of a total population of 160,000,000) and much of its territory and industrial infrastructure. Yet in each year of the 4-year conflict, including the disastrous year of 1941, the Soviets out-produced Germany in such key items as aircraft, tanks, and artillery.[53] (In terms of gross war production of World War II's major combatants, the Soviet Union ranked second only to the United States.)[54] In 1942 alone, despite territorial and other losses that amounted to a 25 percent drop in GDP, the Soviet Union achieved war production ratios over Germany of 3:1 in small arms and artillery, 4:1 in tanks, and 2:1 in combat aircraft.[55]

Moreover, though Germany consistently outperformed all of its enemies at the tactical and operational levels of war, it was Russia which, to paraphrase Winston Churchill, tore the guts out of the German Army.[56] Though the Soviets suffered 65 percent of all Allied military casualties during the war (the United States and Britain about 2 percent each),[57] they accounted for 4 out of 5 (80 percent) of all German military dead in

World War II.[58] According to John Ellis, between June 1941 and March 1945 (2 months before Germany surrendered), a total of 4,900,000 German soldiers were killed or wounded on the Eastern Front, as opposed to about 580,000 in northeastern Europe against Eisenhower's armies.[59] Even by November 1, 1941, a month **before** the Battle of Moscow, German casualties totaled 686,000, or one-fifth of Operation BARBAROSSA's starting invasion force of 3,400,000 (with one-for-one replacements nowhere in sight).[60]

As a killing machine, the German Army was unquestionably better than its competitors, especially the Red army. The statistics are unequivocal: up to the end of 1944, "on a man-to-man basis, the Germans inflicted between 20 and 50 percent higher casualties on the British and Americans than they suffered, and far higher than that on the Russians," notes Andrew Roberts. Moreover, they did so "under almost all military conditions [including Allied air superiority]. . . . it is indisputable that the Germans were the finest fighting force of the Second World War."[61] No wonder it took the overwhelmingly resource-rich Allies so long to bring Germany down! (Even before BARBAROSSA and the full ramp-up of the U.S. war economy, the combined GDP of the United States, Britain, and the Soviet Union exceeded that of Germany by 436 percent.[62]) Even in 1939, the combined GDP of just Britain and France alone was 60 percent greater than that of Germany and Italy.[63]

Clearly, the Eastern Front was the decisive theater of operations of World War II (although this conclusion has been recently—and ridiculously—challenged by Phillips Payson O'Brien[64]). However, why did events there turn out the way they did? Was it simply a clash of strength? Or were there other factors at work? How

could an army as tactically and operationally skilled as the Wehrmacht be defeated? Indeed, why did Hitler invade Russia in the first place? Was not Nazi domination of Europe already a fact? Could Hitler have won in Russia, and why did he not?

First things first: Hitler believed he was destined by Providence to invade the Soviet Union for ideological and strategic reasons. His Nazi ideology told him that it was his fate to establish a race-based empire in Slavic Europe that would put an end to Jewry and communism and that he was the only German capable of fulfilling that mission. "Essentially it all depends on me, on my existence because of my political talents," Hitler pronounced in 1939.[65] Ian Kershaw observed that even before World War II, Hitler had "little sense of his own limitations." On the contrary, he had:

> a calamitous over-estimation of his own abilities, coupled with an extreme denigration of those—particularly in the military—who argued more rationally for greater caution.[66]

Hitler also believed that destroying Russia would eliminate Great Britain's last remaining potential ally on the continent and thereby finally compel London to come to terms—Hitler's terms of course—with Berlin. Hitler's reasoning was not unsound. Britain had little chance of surviving a war with Germany in full control of continental Europe's vast resources, including those of Russia. Conquest of Russia would also afford him (he thought) the resources necessary to defeat the United States, which he regarded as an inevitable enemy.

Hitler further saw in Russia's conquest the destruction of the world's only communist regime and the opportunity—finally—to rid Europe of its Jewry.

In fact, within weeks after the first German soldier crossed the Russian border the mass shooting of Jews (and communists) began. The campaign in Russia provided "the cover of traditional [military operations]" under which Hitler could launch "a murderous racial struggle."[67]

Finally, Hitler believed he could take Russia, just as he had taken France in 1940. After all, had not Germany already overrun most of Europe in lightning campaigns? True, Britain remained in the field, but no English Channel protected the Soviet Union. And were not the Russians racially dullard Slavs incapable of conducting modern warfare or designing first-class weapons? And had not Stalin recently murdered the best and the brightest of the Red army's senior leadership? And did not Russia's post-purge military performance in its war against Finland (1939-40) prove to be nothing short of embarrassing?

There were good reasons to conclude that the Soviet Union could be knocked out in a single summer campaign in 1941. Ideology and recent history bred confidence in Berlin, and of course the Germans didn't know what they didn't know—for example, that the size and regenerative power of the Red army was far greater than estimated, and that the quality of many Soviet weapons, notably the T-34 tank, was much better than imagined. The Germans also seemed oblivious to the fact that blitzkrieg, which had worked so well in the relatively small and developed Western European states, might not work in the vast and comparatively road-less expanses of Russia.

In the case of France, Hitler did not seem to recognize what a high-risk gamble the German victory had been. Tooze has argued that the 1940 campaign against France:

> was not a repeatable outcome. In fact, when we appreciate the high risks involved in Manstein's plan, the attack on France appears to be more similar to the Wehrmacht's other great gamble, the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941.[68]

Blitzkrieg was a fast, short-reach instrument dependent on a network of all-weather roads and on good weather itself. It also rested on a single-shift, short-war German economy, which was not fully mobilized for total war until 1942 after it became evident that Germany was facing a long war. Such an economy could support swift, sequential military campaigns, but not a protracted war against a giant, resource-rich coalition. (If one can get away with a string of short wars, why waste the time and money preparing for long ones?) Indeed, Germany in 1941—before the war turned global—was neither economically, nor militarily prepared for a multi-year conflict with a resource-superior coalition. For Germany, operational success still meant strategic success, and the Germans were in fact prone to equate the two.

The Germans also seemed to ignore the implications of their army's own force structure. The army that entered the Soviet Union in June 1941 had a blitzkrieg component, but was still predominantly a slow-moving, muscle-powered force of foot infantry and horses. The army's cutting edge—the face of blitzkrieg—consisted of 19 armored (tank) divisions and 14 motorized (truck-mounted infantry) divisions. It was this spear tip that crashed through Russia's border defenses and raced deep into the country, encircling vast Soviet forces as they went. The rest of the Operation BARBAROSSA force consisted of 112 infantry divisions that relied on marching for their mobility and horse-drawn artillery for their organic fire support.[69] (The German Army

entered Russia with an estimated 600,000 to 750,000 horses.[70]) Predictably, the fast tip outran the slow shaft, creating problems of coordination and leaving gaping open spaces between the two.

Operation BARBAROSSA failed for several reasons. First, Hitler's military plate was already pretty full. Substantial German forces were tied down in Western and Central Europe. Additionally, Fascist Italy was fast becoming a costly strategic liability for Germany. Italian military failures in Greece and Libya had sucked German forces into the Balkans and North Africa. And of course the British, whom the Germans could not conquer, remained defiant and in a de facto alliance with the United States. Indeed, Hitler was motivated to invade Russia in part because he believed the United States was fast moving to enter the war on Britain's side and he wanted to eliminate the Soviet Union before that happened.

In attacking the Soviet Union, Hitler violated perhaps the most important, hard-learned German military injunction of all: avoid the trap of a two-front war. (The United States turned out to be the only World War II combatant capable of successfully waging a robust two-front war.) Even Stalin was surprised. He ignored repeated warnings of BARBAROSSA because he believed them to be disinformation and because he refused to believe that Hitler would be so reckless to start a war with the Soviet Union before he had first finished off Britain. Albert Seaton has argued that:

> the overthrow of the USSR [Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] would have required the whole German economy and all of the German reserves, and there could have been no question of dissipating forces in Africa, the Balkans, Scandinavia and Western Europe, or of fighting

Britain in a bitter air and sea war. Adding the United States to its enemies was the final senseless act.[71]

Second, blitzkrieg ran afoul of Russian distances, weather, and primitive infrastructure. Russia was not France or the Low Countries. Stephen Fritz has estimated that the German Army's armored and motorized components could project themselves in a single bound no farther than 300 miles, after which they would have to stop, rest, and refit for additional operations.[72] This limit did not matter much in Western Europe, where states were relatively small and had good road networks. In Russia, however, a thrust of 300 miles left invading German forces still 400 miles from Moscow and much farther from the oil and other resources of southern Russia. Moreover, those miles were not just any miles. Of the 850,000 miles of road in the USSR in 1941, only 40,000, or less than 5 percent, were hard-surfaced, all-weather roads.[73] The rest were dirt roads or sandy tracks that turned into goo in the spring and fall rainy seasons.

To the long east-west distances must be added the peculiar challenge of expanding north-south distances. The farther the Germans moved eastward, the broader the front became because of the funnel-like shape of Soviet territory west of the Urals. Operation BARBAROSSA started along a front of 900 miles, which later expanded to 1,500 miles.[74] Together these horizontal and vertical distances dramatically reduced German force-to-space rations to the point where large expanses of Russian territory escaped German control, a situation ideal for the kind of partisan warfare the Russians waged with increasing effectiveness after 1941.

As for the Russian weather, much has been made of it. Yes, Russian winters were harsh, as Napoleon discovered in 1812. However, the point is that the Russians were prepared for it whereas the Germans were not. Hitler did not order the issuance of winter gear and clothing to the German Army in Russia either because he thought the war would be over before the first snowfall or because he thought it would demoralize the troops, or both. The end result was that those German forces that made it far enough to be thrown back before Moscow were severely disadvantaged in dealing with fresh Soviet forces, especially Siberian divisions trained, equipped, and clothed for winter warfare.

Third, the scope and tenacity of Russian resistance, the apex of which was Stalin's iron determination, greatly exceeded German expectations. A combination of murderous German behavior in Russia, Soviet reliance on a vast pool of trained manpower reserves, and an astonishing war production capacity that permitted Moscow not only to replace its battlefield losses but also to expand the Red army at the same time stunned the Germans. Russian manpower losses were, to be sure, historically unprecedented. Stalin and his generals were bowled over by what hit them on June 22, 1941. Between late June and the end of the year the Red army sustained losses (killed and captured) of about 3,000,000 men, including 2,000,000 prisoners of war (POWs) (most of whom the Germans allowed to die in captivity). Equipment losses included almost 15,000 tanks, 66,000 artillery pieces, and 7,000 aircraft.[75]

The key to this transition from near swift and utter defeat to resurrection, which amounted to the most spectacular military recovery in history, was the existence, unbeknownst to the Germans, of a rapidly mobilized

pool of trained military reserves of 14,000,000 men.[76] On the eve of BARBAROSSA, the Germans estimated that the Red army contained 200 divisions available for combat in western Russia. By the end of the year, the Russians had generated enough new divisions to stop further German advances: 97 divisions from outside western Russia, including 17 from Siberia, and 94 newly raised brigades.[77] An unnerved General Franz Halder, Chief of Staff of the German Army, confided to his diary that "we have underestimated the Russian colossus. . . . At the start of the war we had counted about 200 enemy divisions. We have now counted about 360." To be sure, "These divisions are not as well armed or equipped as ours [and] they are often poorly led. But there they are. And if we knock out a dozen of them, then the Russians put up another dozen."[78]

Fourth, the savagery of German behavior stiffened Soviet resistance and precluded any thought of exploiting ethnic and other discontent with Stalin's rule. Hitler made it crystal clear from the beginning that the war in the East was going to be quite different from the 1940 campaigns in the West. It was to be a war of annihilation and enslavement against Germany's political and racial enemies—i.e., communists, Slavs, and Jews. No quarter would be given. Commissars and other Soviet officials would be shot on the spot. Millions of Slavs, including Soviet POWs, would be left to starve or worked to death. Indeed, the Nazis had developed a plan to deliberately starve 30,000,000 Russian city-dwellers in order to free up foodstuffs for delivery to Germany.[79] As for the Jews, the opportunity to kill them outright had at last arisen, and in fact, the first mass shootings of Jews began in the summer of 1941. Geoffrey Megargee summarized the set of attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions behind the German campaign

of conquest and genocide in the East. In addition to "faith in their own superiority," "loathing of Jews and Slavs," and "fear and hatred of Marxism and conflation of it with Jewishness," the Germans believed they were locked in an "existential struggle" that granted "Germany's right to use any means to win."[80]

By the end of September, none of this was lost on the Russians. If they had no future under Nazi rule except serfdom or death, then they had every reason to fight on to the death. Certainly, Stalin and his regime had no future under Hitler, which raises the still-debated questions of Moscow's strategic value and whether Stalin would have continued fighting had the Germans taken the city. Would Moscow's fall have made any difference in the war? The answer is: probably not. Napoleon took Moscow in 1812 and still lost his war against Russia. Moreover, taking Moscow would have been a tall order given the onset of winter, Hitler's indecision, the ragged state of Army Group Center, and the arrival of fresh Soviet divisions for Moscow's defense. Second, Stalin, though prepared to evacuate the city and fight on (as had Czar Alexander I in 1812), nevertheless ordered a last stand before Moscow that in fact saved the city. He was a man who certainly had nothing to lose. Defeat of the Soviet Union almost certainly would have meant the liquidation of Stalin and his regime. Even with Moscow gone, "there can be little doubt that Stalin would have continued," contends Seaton, "particularly when he had been assured the support of the United States."[81]

Looking back, the failure of Nazi Germany to conquer the Soviet Union in 1941 was the turning point of World War II. Hitler's only hope was that BARBAROSSA would deliver a shock that the Soviet Union could not withstand. With Russia out of the war, Hitler

would have been able to mobilize all the resources of continental Europe solely against the Anglo-Americans who, without the Russian giant, would have been hard put to challenge Hitler's writ on the continent. Yet Stalin did not break, which meant that Hitler was no longer able to translate even the most spectacular operational victories into war-winning outcomes. Particularly with entry of the United States into the war, Nazi Germany was condemned to probable destruction. After 1941, Germany could and did rack up impressive operational successes, but not of sufficient strategic significance to alter the war's ending. Moreover, by failing to avoid a protracted war, Hitler afforded a resource-rich United States time to mobilize overwhelming power, including the time to develop and field atomic weapons.

The key to Soviet survival was Stalin's ability to absorb BARBAROSSA without losing his nerve and then to transition to offensive operations. The Soviet Union and its leadership simply turned out to be too big and too determined to buckle in the face of the Nazi onslaught. True, there was a moment when Stalin wavered. A week after the invasion, when the magnitude of the disaster became apparent, Stalin, depressed by manpower and territorial losses and the breakdown of communications between Moscow and Soviet forces in the field, "withdrew in despair to his *dacha* outside Moscow, prompting his frightened politburo colleagues . . . to drive out and coax him back to the Kremlin."[82] From then on, however, Stalin remained resolute. By the end of 1941, Stalin had taken the worst that Hitler could throw at him, and he remained firmly in political control of Russia. He made good his military losses and was increasingly ahead of Hitler in war production. He was also already formulating his

territorial objectives in post-Nazi Europe. The road ahead would be long and hard, but he had survived to fight on.

By the end of 1941, Hitler had allowed Germany to be trapped in a protracted war against a coalition possessing—or soon to possess—overwhelming material superiority. It was now a war he could not win as long as the Grand Alliance remained committed to Germany's complete defeat. Hitler's only hope was Stalin's defection from that alliance. However, this was most unlikely absent substantial German territorial concessions (starting with Berlin's agreement to evacuate Russia) that Hitler was hardly prepared to make to a Stalin bent on exacting terrible revenge and securing a Soviet security buffer zone in Eastern Europe. By failing before Moscow and then gratuitously declaring war on the United States, Hitler had escalated his war aims well beyond his capacity to fulfill them. Yes, there were considerable tensions between the Anglo-Americans and the Russians—e.g., the timing and location of a second front against Germany and the disposition of post-war Europe, especially Germany and Eastern Europe—but Germany was in no position to forge a separate peace with Moscow that was mutually acceptable to both Hitler and Stalin.

It should be noted at this juncture that Russia's survival in 1941 was no guarantee of Germany's defeat in 1945. While it is true that the Russians tore the guts out of the German Army, they could not have done so without Anglo-American participation in the war, absent which the Soviet Union might well have been destroyed by Hitler. The Russo-German War was a close-run contest, especially in 1941-42, and Russian manpower reserves were not unlimited, especially given the horrendously unfavorable casualty exchange

rations the Germans managed to impose upon the Russians throughout the war. The Anglo-Americans not only compelled Hitler to divert significant forces away from the Eastern Front—in North Africa, Italy, and in the skies over Germany itself—they also provided Russia enormous quantities of Lend-Lease assistance, especially after 1942, that permitted Russia to replace its huge material losses, including hundreds of thousands of motor vehicles that afforded the Red Army the mobility that enabled it to exploit its critical victories of 1944-45. If the Anglo-Americans could not have defeated Hitler without Russia's help, the Russians alone could not have done so without Anglo-American military pressure on the Third Reich and massive material assistance to Stalin. Additionally, the Pacific War, conducted almost exclusively by the United States, insured that the Soviet Union could wage its one-front war against Germany without fear of having to fight in the Far East as well.

At this point in our examination, Hitler himself, the most destructive leader in human history,[83] deserves further comment. For starters, Hitler had no sense of the limits of German power despite Germany's defeat in World War I (in which he served) by essentially the same coalition that he found himself at war with in World War II. He believed, at least until Stalingrad (or Kursk or Normandy), that Germany's racial and martial superiority—plus his own genius, Providential destiny, and iron will—made victory inevitable.

His ideology also told him that the Russians were a bunch of sub-human Slavs destined for slavery or extermination under German rule and that the United States was a Jewish-dominated and racially mongrelized society that lacked the will and military skills to defeat Germany. (The Japanese, as noted, also

dismissed America as a decadent society lacking the will to wage decisive war.)

Nor did Hitler recognize that the odiousness of Nazi ideology, Germany's behavior in Russia, and Berlin's manifest territorial ambitions all generated both powerful enemies and weak allies. He valued Mussolini as Europe's senior fascist leader, but was victimized by Italy's military incompetence, and in the end invaded his ally and reduced Mussolini to a pathetic German puppet. Hitler respected Japan's fighting power, although he regarded the Japanese themselves as nothing more than little yellow monkeys.

Hitler also believed himself to be a military genius on par with Frederick the Great. He never fully trusted Germany's military leadership and constantly interfered at the operational and even tactical levels of decision-making. (Can anyone imagine President Franklin Roosevelt telling Eisenhower or MacArthur how to run their campaigns and fight their battles?)

Hitler, in short, was an incompetent strategist and military leader, and he was so in part because of a pernicious ideology and extreme self-worship that polluted his judgment. These factors also help explain why Hitler chose to fight on long after it became objectively clear that Germany was defeated. Hitler was notoriously stubborn, and he had come to believe, in his last surreal underground bunker days, that the "master race" German people had failed **him**. (How dare they!) Indeed, the once subhuman Slavs, now practically standing on top of his bunker, were now the race of destiny. Under these circumstances and given Hitler's evident responsibility for the massacre of millions, Hitler had no future preferable to death by suicide. Therefore, he killed himself.

SOME CONCLUDING OBSERVATIONS

What does World War II tell us about ends, means, ideology, pride, and war? First, Clausewitz—to repeat—was right: numbers matter, and the best strategy is to be strong. The strong lose occasionally, but it is easier to win if you are stronger. In the case of World War II, acute resource inferiority is the starting point for explaining why the Axis lost. The Axis faced an array of enemies (after 1941) whose collective resources posed a daunting challenge to strategic military success. Consider, for example, that in 1941 the combined GDP of Britain, the Soviet Union, and the United States were twice that of the Axis Powers, a ratio that grew to 3:1 in 1944.[84] In the case of Japan, its resource inferiority vis-à-vis the United States was such that it almost certainly doomed Tokyo to defeat from the start of the Pacific War regardless of Japan's subsequent operational performance.

This is not to argue that the strong always win. They do not. However, for the weak to win they must find ways to compensate for their weakness—a greater willingness to fight and die, a more effective strategy, foreign help, etc. Germany and Japan knew they were physically disadvantaged, but believed that their racial superiority and advantage in other intangibles provided sufficient compensation.

Second, ideology can distort sound strategic judgment. Tooze has rightly observed "Hitler's conduct of the war involved risks so great that they defy rationalization in terms of pragmatic self-interest."[85] Why he did so—and why the Japanese took even greater risks in attacking the United States—can be explained only by the presence of powerful ideologies that poisoned common sense. Both Germany and Japan were

victimized by extreme ideologies of racial superiority that prompted them to overestimate their own fighting power and underestimate that of their enemies. Confidence in the success of Operation BARBAROSSA rested heavily on the assumption that the Slavic Russians were incapable of effectively resisting an invasion by the Aryan Germans. The Japanese viewed the Americans as a racially impure country too undisciplined to sustain the blood and treasure sacrifices necessary to drive the Rising Sun out of East Asia. True, the Americans also disparaged the Japanese, but there is no evidence that their racism significantly affected U.S. strategic decision-making or operational planning. The Roosevelt administration's critical decision to prioritize Germany's defeat over Japan's was based on the indisputable fact that Germany was by far the greater threat to core U.S. security interests.

Enemy derogation of American society continues to this day. To survive war with the United States, much less win, adversaries must not only adopt some form of protracted irregular warfare, but also must convince themselves that Americans are morally weak—i.e., that notwithstanding their superior hard power, they lack the guts and political stamina to prevail in the end. Osama bin Laden, who was emboldened by America's defeats in Vietnam, Lebanon, and Somalia, believed that he could force a casualty-sensitive United States out of the Middle East by committing acts of terror against the American homeland. He sorely underestimated, as did the Japanese in 1941, the consequences of directly attacking American territory and the resilience and determination of American society at war once attacked.

True, suicide bombers, be they kamikazes directed against U.S. warships or Islamic terrorists flying

commercial airliners into buildings, are tactically very effective and difficult to deter or stop. They can, and have, inflicted considerable death and destruction. However, they do not confer strategic victory. Nor do they pose an existential threat to the United States—any more so than did the Axis, for whom the United States was simply too distant and powerful to be threatened, much less defeated. Even the detonation of a nuclear device in an American city by an Islamic terrorist group, though horrible to contemplate, would not threaten the survival of the United States. Only massive thermo-nuclear missile strikes could do that. After all, most German and Japanese cities were obliterated by air attack in World War II, and both countries survived and rebuilt themselves. The Axis states posed a far greater threat to world peace in the 1940s than do terrorist organizations today, precisely because they were powerful states and not weak nonstate actors. Terrorism **is** a challenge, but overreaction to it—e.g., invading Iraq and embracing torture—is self-defeating. ISIS is an exceptionally vicious organization and it has inspired a growing amount of terrorist attacks in the West. However, it should not be mistaken for anything other than a desperate, weak actor incapable of overthrowing the established democratic order in Western societies. Nazi Germany it is **not**.

A striking example of ideology's capacity to deform strategic judgment was Hitler's attitude toward the prospect of developing an atomic bomb. Hitler rightly rejected a proposed German bomb program on the grounds that World War II would be over by the time the bomb became available.[86] (Former Third Reich armaments minister Albert Speer declared in his memoirs that even an all-out effort would not have produced a German atomic bomb until 1947.[87])

However, Hitler scuttled the project for another reason: Anti-Semitism. Hitler often referred to nuclear physics as "Jewish physics" because the science was so closely associated with prominent Jewish physicists. If nuclear physics was in fact a Jewish discipline, then anything it claimed the potential capacity to do was automatically suspect.[88] Thus, even had Germany been able to build the bomb before 1945, Hitler probably still would have rejected it.

Third, operational and tactical superiority cannot redeem a faulty strategy. The Germans outperformed all their enemies at the sub-strategic levels of war throughout the conflict under almost all military conditions. The problem for Germany, as for the Confederate States of America and the United States in Vietnam, was that winning battles and campaigns was not sufficient to win the war—especially against a larger, more powerful, and determined foe. Hitler had hoped to fight a sequence of short wars against individual states rather than a long war against an array of states. He was surprised in 1939 when Britain and France honored their defense guarantees to Poland, and he was undoubtedly surprised when the German Army came up short in Russia in December 1941. Numbers counted, and at that point, Hitler did not have them and could never hope to obtain them, especially once the Americans joined the war. The gap between Hitler's war aims in Europe and German power could no longer be bridged. After 1941, his only hope was political, not military—i.e., making the concessions necessary to detach the Soviet Union from the Grand Alliance.

As for the Japanese, who displayed very impressive tactical and operational skills in the early years of World War II, their decision to attack the United States

at a time when they were bogged down in an unwinnable war in China was strategically catastrophic. The Pacific War was a conflict Tokyo could not possibly win absent a collapse of American will—itself an impossibility given the impact of Pearl Harbor on American opinion. The Germans had a chance against the Soviet Union; the Japanese had no chance against the United States.

Fourth, considerations of pride and honor should never be ignored in war. The Japanese fought as long and hard as they did because they believed surrender to be worse than death. Better to die with honor than to live without it. Indeed, but for Emperor Hirohito's decisive intervention to break a deadlocked war cabinet in the wake of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the diehard militarists running Japan would have compelled the Americans to invade the Japanese home islands, which promised a senseless (for the Japanese) bloodbath that would have made no difference in the Pacific War's outcome.

The Japanese should have surrendered—at the very latest—in March 1945, when it became clear (with the massive firebombing of Tokyo on the night of March 9-10) that they could no longer muster an effective defense against U.S. strategic incendiary attacks on Japan's largely wood-and-paper cities, to say nothing of the tightening U.S. naval blockade of the home islands. They deluded themselves into believing that the Americans, facing the prospect of a bloody ground assault of the home islands, would agree to a conditional surrender that among other things would leave Japan's established political order in place, and spare Japan the humiliation of a U.S. occupation.

There was also the issue of reputation. Modern Japan had never been militarily defeated and had

proudly created in Asia the kind of colonial empire the West had earlier imposed on the region. Japan had successfully mimicked and borrowed from the Western powers to become an Asian copy of a Western imperial state complete with Western-style naval, air, and ground forces. Having avoided the humiliation of the kind of subjugation the West imposed on the rest of Asia, Japan was desperate to avoid the abasement of total defeat, which accounts in large measure for the savagery of Japanese resistance in the Pacific, highlighted by banzai and kamikaze attacks.

It is worth noting that humiliation can and often does promote a fanatic will to fight and die. Hitler's rise in the 1930s was certainly encouraged by the punitive Treaty of Versailles that the victors of World War I imposed of Germany in 1919. Another example is found in Osama bin Laden's worldview, which was profoundly shaped by an Arab world humiliated by over a century of Western domination, mostly through indigenous surrogate regimes happy to serve Western interests as well as their own. The mess that is the Middle East today rests in part on a platform of violent opposition to continued Western intrusion on the soil of a once and deservedly proud Arab civilization. One wonders if there is a strategy, or at least a coherent strategy, underlying America's repeated and ongoing military interventions in the Middle East. What is their purpose? To prop up friendly regimes, some of which—like Saudi Arabia, with its extreme religious and gender bigotry—are reactionary and therefore part of the problem? To kill terrorists, whose supply in the region appears to be inexhaustible? To be seen to be doing **something** about the chaos and anarchy there, because we do not know anything else to do? Or have we simply become addicted to knee-jerk military

interventionism as a substitute for a broader, more nuanced foreign policy?

Western uses of force in the Middle East generate hatred and often violent responses, and the West's strength of interests in the region, though substantial, can never equal that of the people who live there. This means that whatever the short-term benefits of military intervention, the long-term consequences could be worse, much worse. That is the central lesson of the Iraq War. Yes, the war removed Saddam Hussein, but are we better off with today's violent, anarchic, and pro-Teheran Iraq than Saddam's stable and anti-Persian Iraq? To ask the question is to answer it.

In the end, the Axis lost World War II because it was strategically incompetent. It failed to recognize the limits of its own power and permitted its political ends to fatally outrun its military means. Indeed, the Axis Powers mistook operations for strategy and campaigns as war-winners. "Germany lost the Second World War in part because it . . . made operational thought do duty for strategy," concludes Hew Strachan, "while tactical and operational success was never given the shape which strategy could have bestowed."[89]

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11. Based on numbers appearing in Mark Harrison, "The Economics of World War II: An Overview," in Mark Harrison, ed., *The Economics of World War II: Six Great Powers in International Comparison*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 3.

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15. John Ellis, *Brute Force: Allied Strategy Tactics in the Second World War*, New York: Viking Books, 1990, p. 122.

16. Adam Tooze, *The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy*, New York: Viking Penguin, 2007, pp. 424-425.

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18. See Jeffrey Record, *A War It Was Always Going to Lose: Why Japan Attacked America in 1941*, Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2011, pp. 104-106.

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20. John Mueller, "Pearl Harbor: Military Inconvenience, Political Disaster," *International Security*, Vol. 16, No. 3, Winter 1991/92, pp. 175-182.

21. Illustrative of America's overwhelming production advantage over Japan is the ratio of U.S.- Japanese output (Japan being "1") in the following selected strategic items, 1942-45: crude oil, 222:1; bituminous coal, 11:1; pig iron, 15:1; finished steel, 14:1; aluminum, 7:1; and merchant shipping, 16:1. Ellis, p. 478.

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51. Tooze, p. xxv.

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54. For data on Axis vs. Allies' population, territory, armed forces, gross domestic product (GDP), and war production, see Harrison, pp. 3, 13-14, 17.

55. Tooze, p. 588.

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61. Roberts, pp. 598-599.

62. Based on figures appearing in Tooze, p. 639.

63. *Ibid*., p. xxiii.

64. See Phillips Payson O'Brien, *How the War was Won: Air-Sea Power and Allied Victory in World War II*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. O'Brien contends that World War II was essentially a competition between Allied and Axis war production and that it was decided by the Allies' success, via air and sea power, in stopping most Axis production from ever reaching the battlefield. Thus, the outcome of land campaigns was more or less predetermined by prior air and sea power successes or failures—never mind generalship, luck, chance, friction, motivation and the other eternal intangibles of war. "There were no decisive battles in World War II," he states (p. 1). Equipment production and technology were far more decisive than the number of soldiers deployed (see p. 485):

> That the Eastern Front was responsible for the greater human suffering is undeniable. But this human suffering should not obscure that fact that it was a secondary theater in terms of production and technology, where force was actually used in a far more limited front-based manner which caused considerably fewer choices to be made and smaller amounts of equipment to be utilized and destroyed.

So Stalingrad and Kursk were meaningless! Indeed, if war production alone decides wars, the United States should have defeated the Vietnamese communists in 1965.

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74. Bellamy, p. 166.

75. Evan Mawdsley, *Thunder in the East: The Nazi-Soviet War 1941-1945*, London: Hodder Arnold, 2005, pp. 86-87, 102-105.

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79. See Lizzie Collingham, *The Taste of War: World War II and the Battle for Food*, New York: Penguin Books, 2011, pp. 32-39.

80. Geoffrey Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941*, New York: Rowan and Littlefield, 2006, p. 10.

81. Seaton, p. 216.

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83. It is difficult to imagine World War II, at least in Europe, without Hitler. No other world leader wanted a general war in Europe in the 1930s, but he was prepared to risk one to get what he wanted. Hitler sought to conquer Europe as a prelude to war with the United States, and presided over unprecedented acts of genocide. He was responsible, directly or indirectly, for the deaths of an estimated 27,000,000 Russians, 6,000,000 Jews, and millions of other Europeans, including 7,000,000 Germans. The political purges and social engineering debacles of Mao Zedong and Stalin killed millions, but their human toll could not equal what Hitler inflicted on the world. The sole competition might be Mao's disastrous "Great Leap Forward" program of 1958-62, which caused the death by starvation of as many as 30,000,000 Chinese.

84. Harrison, p. 13.

85. Tooze, p. xxv.

86. *Ibid*., pp. 510-511; and Kershaw, *Hitler*, pp. 731-732.

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89. Quoted in Clark, p. 391.

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