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Containment in the Soft Underbelly: The Allies, Italy, and Communism in 1945

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Abstract

(Italy, Communism, World War II)

This thesis deals with the motivations behind the final Allied campaign conducted in Italy during April of 1945. The role that the fear of communist expansion at least partially influenced the decision to conduct the campaign is evaluated in light of numerous factors that existed at the time including the presence of the Italian Resistance in Northern Italy. Numerous primary and secondary sources were utilized to help construct a picture of the Allied situation at that point in the war in order to help explain the thesis. Additionally, analysis is conducted using Carl von Clausewitz’s work, On War, in order to further tie the concept of political influence on wartime decision making to the campaign in Northern Italy.
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CONTAINMENT IN THE SOFT UNDERBELLY:
THE ALLIES, ITALY, AND COMMUNISM IN 1945

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I. Introduction

It is a land that has stood at the very heart of history. For millennia, the most notable of soldiers and generals have passed through the fertile valleys and rough-hewn land of the north of Italy. Just as the Po River cuts through its landscape, so to have luminaries like Julius Caesar and Napoleon marched their legions to glory through the breadbasket of Italy. In April 1945, once again men and machines of war filled the Valley of the Po as they participated in the last gasps of a campaign that marked the end of two brutal years of combat to eject Nazi Germany from some of the worst terrain on the European Continent. The fighting that raged that month was just as ferocious as any that had preceded it, but why the Allies launched their assault that spring remains an intriguing and, sometimes, frustrating question. Why would Britain and the United States expend more blood and treasure on an assault directly into strong Nazi fortifications when the war in Europe had clearly been won? Why would they have spent more time and energy in planning an offensive that would be a sideshow, at best, to the Allied invasion of Germany? Why take the risk of floundering on the same obstacles that had made the Italian Campaign a drawn-out affair?

The Allied Offensive in the Po Valley in the spring of 1945 was just as bloody and hard-fought as those operations that had come before it on the Italian Peninsula but it has received less attention in comparison to many other actions against the Axis. Compared with the Invasion of Normandy or the Battle of Stalingrad, Allied actions in Italy have not been subject to as much scholarly or public inquiry. The Po River Campaign has garnered even less as it came in the
wake of the opening of the Western Front in France. The fact that Allied troops had already crossed the Rhine and the final Soviet assault on Berlin had begun by the time Allied forces began moving forward in Northern Italy is puzzling. On the surface, there appears to be no real reason for the Allies to undertake this operation, as the collapse of the Germany was very clearly at hand and for all intents and purposes assured by this point. The lack of an accepted or even clear answer to this question of why this campaign was conducted is grabs one’s attention.

To find the answer or answers to this question, one must look beyond merely military goals. While certainly they contributed at least partly to the reasoning behind the campaign, these goals alone cannot explain its undertaking. No military action exists in a vacuum, particularly in the realm of politics. When famed Prussian military strategist Karl von Clausewitz spoke of the nature of war as an extension of politics in the middle of the Nineteenth Century, he was not simply grandstanding for future readers. Politics has always been intertwined with war and a close study of it reveals much about the motivations behind military actions in addition to the details of the campaign itself. Thus, an understanding of the political landscape and the goals of the nations engaged in combat are important if one desires to fully appreciate a military campaign.

The political environment during which the Allied offensive in the Po Valley came into existence was one of both promise and uncertainty. The defeat of the Third Reich was imminent and while Imperial Japan had not surrendered, the leaders of the Allies had begun the process of consolidating their gains and laying out the map of the post-war world. But, it was at this time that the old contradictions and friction between the USSR and the Western Allies had begun to emerge once again. With the danger of Hitler’s Germany almost fully extinguished, the differences that had been papered over in the interim began to once again emerge. While the
Cold War did not come about in a day, the frostiness that would one day divide the former allies was starting to become apparent with their very different conceptions of what the post-war world would look like. The fear of Soviet expansion would be proven a legitimate concern, a concern that had much more influence on Allied actions than is usually conceived.

Thus, examining the Allied situation in Italy in the spring of 1945 and the growing cloud of rivalry with the Soviet Union may help to provide an answer to the question of why the Allied offensive was undertaken. Analyzing the conditions that existed in Northern Italy at the time demonstrates why assaulting the Germans in the Po Valley directly aided the interests of the United States and Great Britain. The large concentrations of communist partisans and the threat of communist interference in Italy convinced the Allies that this offensive would help to strengthen their post-war position and place them in a favorable position in the Mediterranean to counter-act and contain potential communist intrusions. Defeating the Germans in Northern Italy would serve as a jumping-off point for this anti-communist position and serve as one of the first battlefields for the coming Cold War.

II. The Italian Campaign

The Allied offensive in Italy in 1945 marked the end of a campaign that had been slogging up the Italian Peninsula for nearly two years. In the aftermath of the great Allied victory of May 1943 over the Germans and Italians in North Africa, they launched a bloody invasion of Italy’s southernmost island, Sicily, in July.¹ This offensive, meant to secure Allied shipping lanes through the central Mediterranean and to weaken the fascist government of Benito Mussolini, concluded in August after a desperate defense was put up by the Germans and their

erstwhile ally.² The fall of Sicily helped precipitate Mussolini’s fall from power, after which he was promptly replaced by a caretaker government that was nominally fascist but who would soon begin secret surrender negotiations with the Allies.³

However, much of the German army that had defended Sicily had managed to escape back to the Italian mainland. Thus, Britain and the United States faced a critical choice. Should they be content with what their operations in the Mediterranean had already achieved and concentrate their attention on preparing for the landings in France scheduled for the next summer? Or should they continue their pursuit of German forces by landing on the Italian Peninsula? While some in the American camp favored the former approach, the pressures of wartime compelled the latter.⁴ While 1943 had seen key reverses for the Third Reich, Germany was not yet defeated. The Soviet Union had won stunning victories at Stalingrad and Kursk but they were still deep within their own territory, fighting an ever bloodier campaign against the Germans. The Western Allies were keenly aware that the vast majority of the Wehrmacht, the German Army, was pinned down fighting the Russians and that their contributions in North Africa and Sicily were relatively small in comparison.

The Soviet leader Joseph Stalin was constantly demanding that a second front be opened in France to relieve the enormous pressure that the Red Army was facing in its struggle with Germany. While the Americans had proposed a landing of this sort in late 1942, they had been convinced by the British that they did not have the manpower, experience, or equipment to carry

⁴ Gooderson, A Hard Way to Make a War, 28.
out such an operation at that point in time. The Americans had begrudgingly agreed to this delay and supported operations in the Mediterranean instead. This did not sit well with Stalin, who accused the Western Allies of conspiring with the Germans to destroy him and even at points cryptically hinted that he could pursue a separate peace with the Nazis. These concerns weighed on men like President Franklin Roosevelt and propelled them to authorize an invasion of Italy. From their point of view, it was better to be seen fighting the Germans on land somewhere than to potentially cause a serious rift in the already tenuous relationship with the Soviets.

The invasion of Italy proper began in early September of 1943 with American forces landing at Salerno near Naples and British forces landing at the bottom of the boot of Italy near Taranto. These forces, especially the Americans, encountered ferocious resistance from the Germans as they attempted to overrun the southern end of the peninsula. When the Italian government announced that they were leaving the conflict, Hitler ordered the occupation of Italy by German troops. He refused to give up the fight and ordered his troops to battle for every inch of ground. While orders like these would prove disastrous later in the war on both the Eastern and Western Fronts, in Italy they proved very deleterious to the Allies and killed any sort of real offensive momentum they had coming off their earlier victories in the Mediterranean.

The geological and topographical make-up of Italy would be crucial to enabling this tactic to succeed. The narrow peninsula that comprises Italy, only about one hundred miles wide prevents large scale movements, like a flanking attack, that the Allies had used for good measure.

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in North Africa. The Apennine Mountains ran down the center of the peninsula, making coordinate attacks difficult. Most of the terrain was rock, with hills and mountains flanking small valleys that rendered the use of armor in sizable formations virtually impossible. These hills additionally made for excellent defensive positions, where dug-in troops with machine-guns and artillery could not only inflict heavy losses but also neutralize the superiority that the Allies had in manpower and armor. The rivers that the Allies would have to ford as they pushed up the Peninsula also ran diagonally across the countryside, meaning that American and British forces would have to conduct assault crossings, as their layout made for additional strong defensive positions for the Germans. On top of this, heavy winter rains and snow turned much of the countryside into thick, congealed mud that further hindered any sort of mobile operations.

If these topographical features made battling in Italy difficult enough, the Germans took the time presented to them to construct at least six major defensive lines along with several smaller ones that crossed the peninsula like thick, heavy chains. Saddled with names like the Gustav, the Genghis Khan, and the Gothic Line, they lived up to their fearsome reputations. German engineers took advantage of the terrain to create lines of barbed wire, mines, and reinforced bunkers that meshed with the surrounding hills, mountains, and rivers to create incredible obstacles to any force attacking them. The Germans would have the advantage of the high ground in almost any battle they would fight. They could use their positions to observe Allied movements and call down artillery fire. Any attacking force would have to fight their way uphill in rocky terrain into the teeth of fortifications. These defensive lines rivaled those that had been constructed during the First World War in France and Belgium. Too often during

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10 Ibid., 298.
the Italian Campaign, Allied assaults would bog down to the same level of attrition that had been encountered on the Western Front thirty years previously, a testament to the strength of the German defensive schemes implemented on the peninsula.  

These advantages for the Germans were compounded by the leadership they possessed throughout the majority of the Italian Campaign. The German commander was Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, often known as “Smiling Albert” because of his sunny disposition. However, Kesselring’s cheeriness did not limit his fighting abilities. He was a masterful tactician who was very cognizant of his situation and the limitations of his resources. Kesselring was also aware of the deficiencies he faced in the number of men and tanks he had relative to his opponents. Thus he would maximize his strength by forcing the Allies to attack into the heart of his defenses, where he could wear them down. Even if they managed to breach his lines, he would use his carefully marshalled armored forces to counterattack and erase the Allied gains. He would rely heavily on elite troops, like his Fallschirmjaegers or paratroopers, to fight beyond their numbers, using their combat experience and strong leadership by officers and senior enlisted men to hold them together and to ensure that any Allied gains would only be made after heavy fighting and at a dear cost to the attackers. Kesselring would be forced to fall back as the campaign progressed but he never shirked from his mission and turned the Italian Campaign into an expensive sideshow for the Western Allies. His actions in Italy were so effective that Hitler would put him in charge of much of the Western Front and Italy in early 1945 to see if he could replicate the same results against the Western Allies that he had achieved in Italy. He was

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12 Atkinson, The Day of Battle, 93.
unable to succeed in this objective but this assignment speaks to his abilities as a commander, particularly in Italian Campaign.

The Allies would be confronted with all of these German advantages as they broke out of their beachheads and proceeded on the long slog up the boot of Italy. After capturing Naples, both British and American forces ran into the first serious German defensive lines. Based on the Volturno and Rapido Rivers, these lines proved to the Allies that Italy would be a difficult nut to crack and that Rome was not going to fall anytime soon.\textsuperscript{14} American and British soldiers would show great bravery as they bashed their way through defensive belt after defensive belt. But obstacles continued to bar their way. One American soldier described it as, “Every five hundred yards, there is a new defensive position for a company; every five miles a new line for a division.”\textsuperscript{15} These sorts of defenses wore greatly on Allied troops. Trench foot, a common infantryman’s malady in the First World War from standing constantly in water, became common once more.\textsuperscript{16} Combat dissolved into small company-sized fire fights, where the great numerical advantage the Allies held dissolved. The body count continued to grow but the American Fifth and British Eighth Armies slowly pushed their way northward. Finally, towards the end of 1943, they encountered the Gustav Line. Centered on the ancient medieval abbey of Monte Cassino, it was the strongest defensive line south of Rome, and proved too much for the exhausted Allies to crack by the end of the year. Desperate for a way around the line, a plan was drawn up for an American corps to conduct an amphibious landing at Anzio halfway between the Gustav Line and Rome.\textsuperscript{17} It was hoped that the Anzio landing would be able to flank the

\textsuperscript{14} Shepperd, \textit{The Italian Campaign} 1943-45, 140.
\textsuperscript{15} Martin, \textit{The GI War}, 128.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 129.
\textsuperscript{17} George Botjer, \textit{Sideshow War: The Italian Campaign, 1943-1945} (College Station, TX: Texas A& M Press, 1996), 74.
German defenses and force the line open. Then the German troops could be caught in the open be the superior Allied air power and destroyed, which the Allied High Command hoped would open the road to Rome and break the stalemate on the Italian Front.

High hopes followed the Allies ashore in January 1944. However, these would quickly fade away. Mismanagement of the operation by Allied commanders combined with a quick and strong response from German forces caused this new offensive to bog down like those that had come before it. Now a large force of troops was trapped in a small coastal enclave surrounded by Germans while the Gustav Line remained unbroken. Italy seemed mired in an almost unbreakable stalemate but other events in Europe contrived to help change that. The Soviet onslaught on the Eastern Front was gaining steam by the day and the threat of an Allied invasion of France grew ever closer. Huge Allied bomber raids were pounding the Reich by day and night, forcing the diversion of precious resources away from all fronts. The German forces in Italy had held strong but they were not unbreakable. The constant fighting that had been ranging for well over six months had worn on them as much as their opponents. Allied domination of the skies over Italy saw them suffer constant attacks by fighter-bombers and Allied heavy bombers flying from bases around Foggia in the south of Italy caused further havoc on their supply lines. Their bravery and skill were admirable but it was only worth so much in the era of modern, mechanized warfare.

The Allies would finally see a glimmer of success when they cracked the Gustav Line in May 1944. Polish troops fighting for the Allies gallantly captured Monte Cassino and after much

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18 Botjer, Sideshow War, 74.
19 Ibid., 77.
20 Roberts, The Storm of War, 397.
21 Shepperd, The Italian Campaign 1943-45, 301.
bashing from the Americans and the British, the line finally gave way. Kesselring managed to evacuate most of his troops before American forces broke out of the Anzio beachhead as well. However, he was unable to prevent them from taking one of their great prizes, the Eternal City, Rome. The commander of the American Fifth Army, General Mark Clark, and his men would march into it on June 5, 1944, the first of the Axis capital cities to fall into Allied hands. This event would be overshadowed the next day by the landings in Normandy but it served as an important transitional moment for those fighting in Italy. For a few months, the war on the peninsula would once again become mobile. Allied forces made great progress as they chased Kesselring’s legions through Tuscany and north towards the Po Valley, the industrial heartland of Italy. The superiority they held in armor now proved to be an advantage as it allowed them to keep a hot pursuit while their superior air power pounded the fleeing Germans. This momentum petered out as they drew closer to the Po, but it did allow them to gain as much ground in a few months as it took them to capture in over nine months of combat in southern Italy.

As their momentum slowed, Allied forces ran into their next great obstacle, the Gothic Line. Running from just north of Pisa on the west coast to Pesaro on its east coast, this line was Kesselring’s hope to halt the Allied momentum before it swept into Northern Italy. Construction had been ongoing for months as the line was prepared as the last true peninsula spanning defensive belt. After it, there were a few other defensive lines but none with the size or scope of the Gothic Line. When Allied forces arrived at its gates in late August 1944, they again launched themselves headlong into its defenses. In the savage fighting that would continue

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until December, the Allies continued to pound away at the Germans. The combat in the British sector along the eastern end of the line bordering the Adriatic Sea was particularly ferocious as it was mainly fought in lowlands made up of swamps. Attack and counterattack crisscrossed this territory but the British and their Commonwealth troops kept up the offensive.\textsuperscript{27} The Allied pressure was too much for the worn out Germans and by the end of the year most of the Gothic Line had been overrun.\textsuperscript{28} However, accomplishing this had worn the Allies to the bone and they halted their advance without capturing the vital city of Bologna, the gateway into the north of Italy.\textsuperscript{29}

The period after the end of the campaign against the Gothic Line saw major reorganization among the Allies. A total of seven divisions were detached from Italy in the aftermath of the fall of Rome to be deployed in the invasion of Southern France, Operation Anvil-Dragoon, in August 1944.\textsuperscript{30} A corps of French colonial troops who had proven invaluable in combat in the Apennines Mountains was sent to France as well.\textsuperscript{31} A corps of Canadian troops, including an armored division, was sent to France to help form a Canadian Army for the final assault on Germany. These losses stung badly as they included many veteran divisions experienced in combat on the Italian Peninsula. The Allies would not be entirely under-manned however. The 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division arrived from the United States to add a strong group of regiments trained for combat in the rocky terrain of Italy.\textsuperscript{32} The famed 442\textsuperscript{nd} Regimental Combat Team, comprised of Japanese-Americans and one of the most decorated combat units of

\textsuperscript{27} Shepperd, \textit{The Italian Campaign} 1943-45, 311.
\textsuperscript{28} D’Este, \textit{World War II in the Mediterranean}, 185.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 186.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 182.
\textsuperscript{31} Strawson, \textit{The Italian Campaign}, 169.
\textsuperscript{32} D’Este, \textit{World War II in the Mediterranean}, 192.
the entire war, returned to Italy from France.\textsuperscript{33} The 92\textsuperscript{nd} Infantry Division, comprised of African-American units, arrived from the United States to bolster the depleted ranks of the Fifth Army. To flesh out their forces further the Allies would assemble a multi-cultural force that was unmatched in any theater of the war. New Zealanders, Indians, South Africans, and other troops from the Commonwealth filled out the ranks of the British Eighth Army. One of its strongest and most experienced units was the II Polish Corps, made up of refugees who had been released from Soviet gulags. A brigade compromised of Jewish soldiers from Palestine was among the British order of battle. The American Fifth Army had British units within its own ranks and even a large contingent of Brazilian troops.\textsuperscript{34} Altogether, a total of sixteen nationalities were represented among the Allied forces.\textsuperscript{35} This diversity in the make-up of the armies was matched by a shake-up in the Allied command structure. Field Marshal Sir Harold Alexander was elevated to command of the entire Mediterranean Theater while the glory-seeking and imperious American General Mark Cark became the commander of the Fifteenth Army Group.\textsuperscript{36} Despite Clark’s elevation, Italy remained a British dominated theater, as American focus had shifted to France and Belgium to not only counter the German attack during the Battle of the Bulge but also to prepare for the final advance into Germany.\textsuperscript{37}

This British influence would see another Allied undertaking in the Mediterranean that would later have profound consequences on the Cold War. In October 1944, Prime Minister Winston Churchill ordered the deployment of British forces to Greece.\textsuperscript{38} The Germans had evacuated from the peninsula, leading to increasingly dangerous confrontations between

\textsuperscript{33} Shepperd, \textit{The Italian Campaign 1943-45}, 355.
\textsuperscript{34} D’Este, \textit{World War II in the Mediterranean}, 193.
\textsuperscript{35} Roberts, \textit{The Storm of War}, 385.
\textsuperscript{36} D’Este, \textit{World War II in the Mediterranean}, 191.
\textsuperscript{37} Shepperd, \textit{The Italian Campaign}, 325.
communist guerillas and royalist supporters of the pre-war regime. With the threat of a civil war breaking out, British troops from Italy were dispatched to prop up the side of the royalists.\(^{39}\) Churchill saw this deployment as very important, as he felt it was the first battlefield between the Western Allies and the Soviets for control of post-war Europe.\(^{40}\) An initial force of 5,000 men would grow to over 40,000 as the British sought to contain the substantial communist forces in the country.\(^{41}\) This deployment worried many in the Allied High Command as it reminded them of a campaign Churchill had ordered in the Dodecanese Islands off of Greece in October of 1943.\(^{42}\) The possibility that it could be an extreme waste of men and materiel combined with the chance of being sucked into an internal feud were apparent but Churchill forged ahead with his attempts to stabilize Greece. While most of these men would be returned to Italy before the spring offensive, their deployment demonstrated that the British were not only attempting to take advantage of German movements but that the Allies, especially Britain, had begun to orient its actions towards shaping a post-war world with the Soviets, a key motivating factor for the campaign in northern Italy.

The German forces underwent their own set of turnovers as they regrouped from 1944. After being injured in a car crash in October, Kesselring had been replaced by General Heinrich von Vietinghoff, a dependable commander who had seen his men through the crucible of the previous campaigns in Italy.\(^{43}\) His Tenth and Fourteenth Armies were all that stood between the Allies and the Po Valley. A few small detachments of Italian troops from Mussolini’s puppet government propped up his forces but they were simply not enough. Additionally, several of his

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40 Ibid.
armored divisions, including the experienced Hermann Goering Division had been stripped from his command and sent to other fronts in an attempt to stem the coming Allied onslaughts aimed at the heart of the Third Reich. These troops would be sorely missed in the coming months. On top of these difficulties, von Vietinghoff had to contend with the growing power of Italian partisans, particularly communist ones, in Northern Italy. These partisans, who would eventually number in the hundreds of thousands, were supplied by the Allies and grew bolder as the German position weakened. Attacks got so bad that German bridges were built and then stored underwater to prevent their destruction before they were needed. Kesselring estimated that six divisions worth of men were tied down battling the partisan threat. Indeed, the German position was tenuous to the point that Kesselring suggested to Hitler that German forces be withdrawn to the Italian Alps. There they would take up positions protecting the Brenner Pass and the Ljubljana Gap, the two main routes into Austria and southern Germany. Steadied by the excellent terrain, the Germans would be in a position to halt further Allied advances. Hitler disagreed and ordered von Vietinghoff to hold his line in front of the Po River. Many of the German generals knew this would doom their armies if the Allies broke out of their positions but, lacking any other choice, obeyed orders and prepared for another confrontation in the spring.

The lead-up to the spring offensive saw relative quiet on the Italian Front. A probing attack against the Americans in February caused some consternation as it caught several units off guard. After initial confusion and retreat, reinforcements arrived and stopped the German advance. While this action did not do much to change the front, it did show that many of the

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new American troops who had recently arrived in Italy, including the African-American 92nd Infantry Division, had much to learn from the stinging lesson they had received from the Germans.\textsuperscript{50} The build-up on the ground continued while the Allied air offensive ran wild. B-17s and B-24s flew from their bases in southern Italy to pound German industry in Austria and other Axis allies like Hungary.\textsuperscript{51} They additionally struck hard at the railroad marshalling yards in places like Udine in northern Italy that kept supplies flowing to the Wehrmacht. These attacks caused much consternation and damage to the Nazi war effort in Italy as von Vietinghoff and his other generals had to deal with crippling supply shortages which made their task even more difficult than it already was.\textsuperscript{52} Allied medium bombers and fighter bombers complicated this further when they began concerted assaults in March on the bridges that spanned the Po River.\textsuperscript{53} These attacks were meant to destroy any road connection and potential path of retreat that the Germans had if an Allied offensive managed to dislodge them from their positions south of Bologna. The Germans realized this but were helpless to do anything about it. Allied fighters had all but swept the Luftwaffe from the skies over Italy and von Vietinghoff could only hope for the best in the event of an Allied attack.

The realization of how hopeless their situation really was in Italy compelled some in the Nazi command to begin to assess their options. Throughout the war, the majority of German officers had followed their orders and had fought hard to stem the Allied tide. This was no less true in Italy, where the Germans had been as successful as on any of their fronts in delaying the American and British advance. However, by the spring of 1945, the writing was on the wall. Almost all the German commanders realized that the war had been lost and that there was

\textsuperscript{50} Brooks, \textit{The War North of Rome}, 349.  
\textsuperscript{51} Shepperd, \textit{The Italian Campaign 1943-45}, 355.  
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid.
nothing that they could do to prevent the collapse of the Third Reich. This realization drove General Karl Wolff, the commander of SS forces in Italy, to do something remarkable. He sent some of his staff officers to Switzerland where he made contact with the American OSS spy agency and requested that surrender negotiations begin for the Italian front. This was an incredible turn of events, especially for an SS general. However devoted Wolff may have been to the Nazi cause prior to 1945, it was clear even to him that the Germans in Italy should seek the best possible terms from the Western Allies and not wait to see what would happen in case they were captured by Soviet forces. Secret negotiations would continue into the next month with the OSS station chief in Switzerland, the future head of the CIA Allen Dulles. There was initial promise but progress slowed as General von Vietinghoff refused to budge from his orders to prevent any Allied advance. He would not change his position until late April, as his forces were being driven back to the Po. Ironically it was Kesselring, the Allies’ old foe throughout the Italian campaign, who ordered von Vietinghoff to surrender to the Allies.

As these negotiations continued, the Fifteenth Army Group prepared for its final offensive. Its military objective was simple. Destroy the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies south of the Po and advance towards Austria and the Italian city of Trieste on the Adriatic coast. It was hoped that after these objectives were accomplished any remaining Nazi resistance in the area would crumble. The fierce struggle that the Allies had endured throughout the campaign had taught them to carefully plan their assault to make sure they would be able to penetrate German lines and not get bogged down again in the sort of fighting that the Germans had used to their own advantage. Specialized units would be carefully marshalled and unleashed at the right

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55 Ibid., 63.
time. The troops of the 10th Mountain Division, trained for combat in the mountains, would be used to capture vital German positions overlooking Allied lines so that American infantry and armored units would be able to break into more favorable terrain near the Po. The Eighth Army would use a force of commandos to launch an assault across Lake Commachio, which anchored the German right flank. These troops would help neutralize positions that could potentially delay a British advance. The British Eighth Army would begin the attack on April 9th by pounding the German line to the southeast of Bologna. Their goal was to smash through the enemy and hook to the northwest where they would meet the Americans somewhere north of Bologna and south of the Po. The Americans would kick-off their end of the offensive on April 14th, moving west of the target city and swinging to the northeast where they would complete the link-up with the British and trap as many German soldiers as possible. This would allow the Allies to prevent any attempt by the Germans to make one last stand in the much more defensible Alps.

The Allies would kick-off their offensive on April 9, 1945 with overwhelming strength. A combined force of 2,297 Allied heavy and medium bombers spent hours plastering German positions with bombs. Artillery units added their own firepower to this bombardment, pounding the German lines. In some sectors, German soldiers would endure six hours of these attacks before Allied troops moved forward, supported by fighter bombers that blasted every position that resisted. The British attacked towards their main objective, the Argenta Gap. This gap was the only route to the flatter ground near the Po that was more conducive to armored

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58 Ibid., 354.
59 Ibid., 354.
60 Ibid., 354.
62 Ibid.
operations. However, the area around the entrance to the gap was marshland that had been flooded by the Germans. After much consideration, the commander of the Eighth Army, General Richard McCreery, decided to use amphibious vehicles similar to the ones utilized during the Normandy landings the year before. This proved an excellent choice, as they were used to outflank the German positions. Additionally, the two attacking corps kept up pressure on most of the German Fourteenth Army. The success of these attacks deeply concerned von Vietinghoff, who was afraid that his left flank would be turned and thus his entire defensive line unhinged. However, when he requested from headquarters the authorization to retreat behind the Po, the response came back, “The Fuhrer expects now as before the utmost steadfastness in the fulfillment of your present mission, to defend every inch of the north Italian areas entrusted to your command.” This order would prove disastrous for von Vietinghoff and his men, but they soldiered on, grimly battling their quickly oncoming fate.

As the British were smashing their way through the German left flank, the Americans opened their attack on April 14th. General Lucian Truscott, the commander of the Fifth Army, had previewed the ground that his men were to traverse as they attacked up Highway 64 to link up with the British. He had suggested an alternative to this difficult route but had been turned down by his superior General Clark. He then tasked the 10th Mountain Division with an assault of the heights around Highway 64, hoping to clear them to help lead the way for the US 1st Armored Division and the South African 6th Armoured Division, the two mobile units the Fifth Army had at its disposal. 10th Mountain kicked off this attack with great vigor, pushing

63 Strawson, The Italian Campaign, 183.
64 Ibid., 184.
65 Ibid., 185.
through intense fighting to capture several important positions and villages.\textsuperscript{67} Their attack was reinforced by the full effort of the two American corps, the II and IV, which joined in with their assault.\textsuperscript{68} Pressure continued to build on the Germans as the Americans pressed forward with their one-two punch of their mountain troops followed by their armored formations backed by experienced infantry. The German Tenth Army reeled under this pressure but did manage meager counterattacks at some points, vainly hoping to stem their enemy’s advance.\textsuperscript{69} These attacks were unable to halt the Americans, who used their superiority in airpower and artillery to repulse the Germans.

Momentum continued to build for the Allies as they drove further north. The British, who had just passed through the Genghis Khan line without much opposition, sought to cut off the Germans before they could reach the Po. Attacking across a narrow isthmus that existed on the edge of Lake Commachio, they were aided by local partisans who showed them alternative routes through the existing minefields.\textsuperscript{70} This allowed the Eighth Army to punch through one of its final objectives and continue its pressure on the rapidly crumbling German forces. Once proud formations like the German 4\textsuperscript{th} Parachute Division were reduced to small units of desperate men by the fighting as it wore on.\textsuperscript{71} British and Commonwealth soldiers continued the desperate fight as they battled with bayonets and flamethrowers to clear out the Argenta Gap and open the route to the Po.\textsuperscript{72} On the Americans’ front, the 10\textsuperscript{th} Mountain Division supported by a force of Brazilians managed to cut one of the main communications lines for the German Tenth

\textsuperscript{67} Brooks, \textit{The War North of Rome}, 373; 374.
\textsuperscript{68} Ibid., 371.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 380.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid., 378.
\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid., 378; 379.
Army.\textsuperscript{73} This moved them closer to breaking out onto the Po River plain, where they would be able to move freely and mop up the remains of the Wehrmacht in Italy. The efforts of the American II Corps were particularly intense, as they battled through very rough terrain in order to draw off German attention from Bologna.\textsuperscript{74} At this point in the battle, the Germans had very little left to offer in the form of resistance. On the 21\textsuperscript{st} of April, 10th Mountain broke into the Po River Valley. Bologna would fall that day as both American and Polish forces arrived in the city within hours of each other.\textsuperscript{75} Victory in Italy was finally within reach.

The Fifth Army would not let this opportunity pass as it pressed home its attack on the German forces. Now that the battle was being waged on flat terrain, the heavily mechanized American forces had a distinct advantage over the Germans.\textsuperscript{76} If they kept up enough pressure, the retreat towards the Po could turn into a rout, the best possible situation for the Allies. While pockets of resistance were encountered, the Americans managed to sweep forward with great speed. The Germans, who had become accustomed to moving during the night to avoid Allied air attacks, abandoned this in the all-out retreat for the Po. This would prove disastrous. Fighter bombers pounded the Germans who were strung along the broad roadways of the Po Valley.\textsuperscript{77} They suffered terribly from this constant harassment but had no choice if they wanted to flee to safety. Huge amounts of equipment were lost to these attacks.\textsuperscript{78} But this did not compare to the number of men who were falling into Allied hands. The American 88\textsuperscript{th} Infantry Division alone took 11,000 prisoners in the span of two days.\textsuperscript{79} By the 24\textsuperscript{th} of April, the Allies occupied sixty

\textsuperscript{73} Linklater, \textit{The Campaign in Italy}, 443.
\textsuperscript{74} Linklater, \textit{The Campaign in Italy}, 446.
\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., 450.
\textsuperscript{76} Ibid., 450, 451.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid., 451.
\textsuperscript{78} Brooks, \textit{The War North of Rome}, 382.
\textsuperscript{79} Linklater, \textit{The Campaign in Italy}, 451.
miles of the bank of the Po. Some units had already maneuvered over the river while others prepared for an almost unopposed crossing. Some German units had managed to make their way across the Po, often swimming, but what did make it across was not enough to contest the combined forces of the Allies. The breakout onto the river plain and the drive to the Po had only taken a few days but the Americans and British had finally managed to break the back of the German defenses in Italy. Soon the long, bloody campaign would finally come to an end.

As the German army in Italy was destroyed by its adherence to Hitler’s orders, General Wolff and his compatriots accelerated the surrender negotiations with the Allies. He managed to convince the commanders of the two German armies in Italy, Generals Traugott Herr and Joachim Lemelsen, that they must surrender to the Allies and that continuing the fighting would be of no advantage to them. Casualties were spiraling out of control as the front disintegrated and Benito Mussolini, the very face of fascism in Italy, had been captured and killed by partisans. After a visit to Berlin to assess the mood towards a potential surrender, Wolff returned to Italy to find even von Vietinghoff in agreement that a cease-fire must be implemented. By April 29th, terms of surrender had been written up and finalized. However, Kesselring, close to the Nazi center of power in Berlin, hesitated to give his final approval to the agreement drawn up by Wolff. Finally, on May 2nd the word would come through to Italy. Kesselring had given his final approval to von Vietinghoff and Wolff to officially enact the surrender terms. Thus peace came to the Italian Front six days before the rest of Europe, and

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80 Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy*, 452.
83 Botjer, *Sideshow War*, 194.
84 Shepperd, *The Italian Campaign 1943-45*, 367.
marked the conclusion of two long and bloody years of combat that had stretched almost the entirety of the Italian Peninsula.\footnote{Dulles, \textit{The Secret Surrender}, 204.}

The Allied campaign in Italy has caused controversy ever since the first debates over the landings in southern Italy. Many scholars have doubted the necessity of American and British forces spending some two years and 312,000 casualties to battle the Third Reich that ended with the Germans controlling more of Italy than of Germany on the day of their surrender.\footnote{Atkinson, \textit{The Day of Battle}, 581.}

Whatever the merits of this argument, the enormous sacrifices made by the troops of all the nationalities participating in actions on the Italian Peninsula should not be forgotten. Through the desperate and vicious fighting that raged from Salerno to the Po, they kept constant pressure on the Germans and proved to the world the determination of the forces of the Western Allies to win a decisive victory over Nazi Germany.

III. Literature Review

My analysis of the Po Campaign required me to draw together a large cross-section of works to fully understand the scope of the operation and its political effects. Both primary and secondary sources were important in developing my thesis with a great emphasis placed on the memoirs and writings of those in senior levels of command. However, because the campaign in Italy has received less attention than other theaters of the war, I had to rely on secondary sources to fill out much of the research, especially when it came to specific details and figures. Thus it made up a great deal of the material I reviewed during the research phase of my paper.

As I began my literature review, I found one apparent fact that echoed through almost any book that I read through. Italy was a forgotten theater of war. Even the primary sources I
found, such as Mark Clark’s autobiography, *Calculated Risk*, and Field Marshal Alanbrooke’s diary entries, constantly referenced this fact. One of the works I found written by George Botjer was even entitled *Sideshow War*, which further emphasized this point. In many of the books I found that discuss more than one theater of combat; the Italian Front received very little attention for actions that occurred prior to the Normandy Invasion and very little, if any, care paid to what happened after the fall of Rome. This mode of thinking even seems to influence many of the writers who address this front of the war. Constantly this topic is raised, as if it is the only real point of value in their discussion of what occurred from 1943 to 1945. The reader is bombarded by this point as one reads through campaign descriptions and can even come to embrace it to a certain degree if not careful.

However, I found that while this is an important point to make about the Italian Campaign, it is not an entirely fair assumption. While Italy certainly received less attention than the Western and Eastern Fronts, I found that this was due more to the more limited nature of the campaign. The mere fact that operations were actually undertaken even after the fall of Rome indicates that the front still had a great deal of importance to the Allied High Command, a fact that is sometimes forgotten in a good deal of the literature that I reviewed. One of the great weaknesses of the works I read was the fact that the lessened public attention on this campaign has translated into an unwillingness to truly dive deeply into analyzing more than just the actual military operations that took place. For my thesis, I would need to find a way around this lack of attention.

Much of this unwillingness to analyze deeply the motivations behind many Allied actions in Italy seems to stem from a common theme among many of the authors who write about this era. Often in works detailing military campaigns, the writers will discuss the necessity of certain
actions undertaken by those planning and carrying out campaigns. Why certain battle plans were put in place or why specific units were used for certain tasks are often subject to in-depth review and criticism. However, most of the secondary sources I read seemed mainly focused on what actually happened in the campaign. The actions undertaken are described and the order of battle is presented but no or very few serious questions are asked about why a certain path of action was chosen. Furthermore, when this sort of analysis is present, it focuses almost solely on whether the Italian Campaign should have been undertaken at all. While any scholarly examination of the deeper motives of the campaign is appreciated, it is often not directed at the specifics of why the Po Valley campaign was conducted, which is of greater interest to me for the purpose of this thesis.

While the debate over why the campaign was even undertaken at all is not directly helpful to me, it was of use in that it allowed me to grasp how most military historians view the campaign as a whole. While discussing the necessity of landing at Salerno in 1943 is not directly applicable to talking about an operation conducted in April of 1945, understanding the consensus of historians about this campaign has been critical. It provided me with a basis from which I could analyze the offensive in the Po Valley and build upon established thought on why Italy became a battleground in the first place. While there is not much in the existing literature that directly discusses the necessity of carrying out an offensive in 1945, the discussion about the undertaking of the campaign as a whole is of great use in establishing how historians view the campaign and how the Allied command saw Italy fitting into the greater scheme of strategic thought.

While this existing literature has provided me with an established basis from which to work, a major flaw has been its relative lack of political analysis in relation to the military
campaigns undertaken. Authors that I reviewed like Rick Atkinson and John Strawson do an excellent job of describing the battles but they do not delve as deeply into political discussion as one might hope. On one hand this is understandable as Italy on the surface seems far removed from the political centers of decision making. However, the reality of this is much more nuanced. Because of the fact that Italy seemed to be a backwater, historians have not put nearly as much emphasis on the dimensions of the campaign that were driven by political policy and the ways in which Italy influenced how leaders in the Allied countries viewed their strategy towards conducting the war. Understanding how Allied leaders viewed Italy is very important for analyzing strategic maneuvering for the post-war era.

While this lack of political analysis does not reduce the value of the sources I have used, because of it I must compensate by heavily relying upon combining different threads of thought from various works. The descriptions of British relations with Yugoslav partisans must be melded with the autobiography of the leading American general on the Italian Front. Small snippets of thought from one author are combined with those from another to reveal if they agree upon what course the Italian Campaign was taking. And very often throughout my research, I have had to rely upon clues like these. Because of the lack of attention that the Po Valley Campaign gets, some of the works I reviewed, like Carlo D’Este’s *World War in the Mediterranean, 1942-1945*, hardly speak about the campaign at all, taking a few paragraphs or an epilogue to talk about a period of time that would have commanded a great deal more attention earlier in the work if it had spoken about January through April of 1944 rather than January through April of 1945. This is not to say that all the works I could find ignored the final campaign in Italy. G. A. Sheppard’s *The Italian Campaign* works along with James Holland’s *Italy’s Sorrow* to speak at great length about this period of time, 1945, that I am interested in.
However, even they do not include political analysis on the scale or depth that I would have preferred. But, they do provide a very solid background from which to work and expand my research.

To help build my political analysis of the Italian Campaign, I needed to take a different approach to help coalesce my varied research. I found an avenue to accomplish this by utilizing the Prussian writer Carl von Clausewitz’s seminal work on military thought and strategy *Vom Kriege* or in English *On War*. Clausewitz, a veteran of the Napoleonic Wars and a military instructor in Prussia, sought to create a manual from which the very nature of conflict itself could be analyzed and applied in an academic way. This tome was incredibly influential for many years, as it was one of the first attempts by a writer in the Western tradition to create a systematic study of war and to proscribe principles that would guide commanders in future conflicts.

Clausewitz took a unique approach for his time in that he grounded his analysis of war in the realm of politics. He was famous for his statement that “war is only a branch of political activity; that it is in no sense autonomous.” Commonly put, war is simply politics carried on by other means and a logical end result of political confrontation. This maxim is vital in understanding any sort of military conflict, in that it always reminds the reader that war and politics are intertwined and that their goals are very often the same thing. Indeed, Clausewitz is vocal throughout his work that war is more a tool of politics than the other way around. Constantly he reminds the reader that the two fields work together with the same purpose and goal; defeating your enemy and creating for yourself the best possible political position you can

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90 Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.
91 Ibid., 7.
92 Ibid., 606.
attain via military strategy. In this way, Clausewitz put on to paper what many before him had understood, the inseparability of politics and war. Clausewitz spends a great deal of time throughout his work speaking about more specific military strategy but his focus on the relation between politics and war stands out as one of the most important messages he presents.  

Clausewitz’s work, does however, have some issues if it is applied in a discussion of modern warfare. His main basis of analysis had been his own experience in the Napoleonic Wars as a Prussian and Russian staff officer. He derived much of his work from academic and theoretic concepts present in military writings at that time. Additionally, his tome does not give specific details on how one would wage an actual military campaign. Instead, a reader has to sift through the broad but detailed principles of war that he elucidates throughout his work. However, this weakness is in some ways an advantage for me when using it in my analysis of Allied actions in northern Italy. The fact that he paints his work with a broad, theoretic brush allows me to use his concepts in a campaign nearly a century removed from the writing of his book. If Clausewitz had spoken on specifics, it would have been difficult to separate his analysis from the time in which he wrote and the technology and conditions that would limit his understanding of the full range of possibilities in warfare. However, since he talks about concepts like the relation between politics and war, issues that exist in any era, I can use what he wrote to further flesh out my analysis.

Overall, in the context of my thesis, Clausewitz provides a way for me to overcome the lack of scholarship examining the connections between politics and military strategy in Italy in 1945. While some authors hint at this connection, very few, if any, of the secondary sources

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93 Clausewitz, On War, 9.  
94 Ibid., 4.
really flush it out in detail enough to provide an in-depth analysis of how politics interacted with the forming of the campaign strategy. This great weakness in the secondary sources is mitigated by the fact that Clausewitz provides an established academic work that makes a convincing argument for the deep connections between politics and war making. Thus, it is a tool that can help me link together my various sources and create a viable connection between actions such as the invasion of Greece by Britain to the orders to Italian partisans to stand down to the timing of the actual campaign. All of these are related to one another and Clausewitz provides me with the causal mechanism to clearly establish a vital linkage between various political and military actions as well as how they relate to the Po Valley Campaign.

Finally, the progeny of Clausewitz’s work also provides me with tools with which I can further analyze the campaign. There has been a great deal of work done in recent years by military historians about how Clausewitz’s work applies in the context of modern warfare. While his initial work was not that far removed in years from the dawn of modern warfare as a work like Sun-Tzu’s *The Art of War*, he certainly wrote in an era in which warfare was radically different in many ways. But works like Michael Handel’s *Clausewitz and Modern Strategy* or Antulio Echevarria’s *Clausewitz and Contemporary Strategy* have provided in-depth analysis of how they see *On War* applying to modern day war making. While I do not agree with every one of the propositions raised in books like these, they have provided me a glimpse of how they interpret Clausewitz in the context of modern war. This has proved invaluable in my research, as it is a benchmark from which I can go forward and apply my own analysis of how Clausewitz’s work provides a basis from which one can understand the Po Valley Campaign of 1945.

To add to my research of secondary sources, I also sought out works that addressed more specific areas of the conflict to help provide a more well-rounded understanding of the
campaign. First, as I had read through the more general sources that provided an overview of the various Allied offensives, I noticed a great deal of attention was paid to the issue of Italian Partisans and their role in northern Italy. I was shocked to read about the sheer numbers of guerillas that were active as well as how heavily they weighed on the minds of the Allied generals conducting the campaign. Additionally, I found valuable information about how they played into the Allies’ perception of how much control they would have in Italy after the war because of their usually very prominent left-wing leanings. I felt that this was a very important point of analysis and likely a powerful factor for the Allies to consider when deciding on how to proceed with their campaign.

Because of the importance of this issue in northern Italy, I sought out works that could increase my understanding of how partisans operated at the time. Tom Behan’s *The Italian Resistance: Fascists, Guerillas, and the Allies*, provided an excellent overview of the nature of the partisan movement. It evaluated in depth the beliefs, structure, and history of the force, providing deep insights into how it viewed the world and, most importantly, how it functioned in the final days of the conflict, where its actions become very important when analyzing American and British actions. Additionally, it serves as an excellent resource for data such as numbers of troops and unit organization of resistance groups, which can be hard to come by in other works. It is not a perfect summation of all things related to the Italian Resistance but in combination with an autobiography by American soldier Leon Weckstein, who served with the partisans, it provides a great deal of useful information. Weckstein’s story is a great addition to Behan as it provides insight into how resistance units operated and what they thought about the war, which can only aid my analysis. Additionally, any primary source that I can find that addresses the campaign of the time will prove to be useful for my work.
Often going hand-in-hand with these guerilla operations by the Resistance were actions undertaken by American and British special operation forces to support them. Among the works I utilized was a history of special operations by the OSS, the American forerunner to the CIA. Many of these actions were conducted in Italy, and I included this work among others because I wanted to round out my understanding of what was going on in the theater at the time. Often an army’s highest priorities are revealed by its most sensitive missions and any details that relate to what sort of goals that the Americans and British sought to accomplish behind enemy lines can only help with appreciating the overall goals of the campaign.

Building on this work is a series of books that address not only OSS operations in Italy during the war but also how the Allies perceived and dealt with the complex situation that existed among the ranks of the partisans who fought under Josip Tito in the mountains of Yugoslavia. Tito’s partisans did a great deal of damage to the Germans during the war but the proximity of a large, well-trained force with communist interests posed a threat to the Western Allies. Their military strength and eagerness to recover land from Italy makes them an underappreciated but absolutely vital topic to understand in the context of the end of the war in the Mediterranean. Works including Walter Roberts’ *Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies, 1941-1945* provide a solid background in an area of the theater that strongly influenced Italy and provided a wealth of information on how Tito and his forces saw their role in the war. This is vitally important for me as it provides information on the intentions of Tito in the immediate post-war, which weighed heavily on the Allies and are very relevant to my analysis of Allied goals.

These works do not, however, provide a complete picture of Yugoslavia’s role in Italy. Most of the works that I could find that related to this topic focused on the very complex relationships and rivalries that vexed the various partisan bands that operated in Yugoslavia.
These internal divides, while bitter and bloody, do not have much to do with Italy in 1945, as they had been settled by the time Yugoslav forces could be a threat to northern Italy and the Allies’ post-war plans. Additionally, there is not a tremendous amount of analysis present on how Tito might fit into the post-war communist plans of the Soviet Union, another topic that I was interested in learning about further. This mirrors the lack of in-depth political analysis of the Mediterranean campaign that is present in many works that address the war in Italy. But, overall the works I found on Yugoslavia helped to fill in some important details regarding Tito and his forces, which is very important for developing my own analysis.

I also reviewed several memoirs from important figures of the time that I believed would aid me in the writing of my thesis. In particular, I read General Mark Clark’s, Field Marshal Harold Alexander’s, and Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke’s recollections of the war years. I also reviewed relevant portions of Prime Minister Winston Churchill’s *The Second World War*. All of these have proven to be some of the most invaluable resources as I have moved forward. All these men played vital roles in shaping strategy in the Mediterranean and had a direct say in how the war was conducted in Italy. Clark and Alexander directly commanded the operation undertaken in the Po Valley, and Alanbrooke was their immediate superior. Churchill’s importance in directing the war effort is self-evident from the position that he occupied. All of these are excellent primary sources, but more importantly they provide access to the prevailing thought in the Allied High command at the time. If I want to know what Allied commanders were thinking, there are no better sources than the recollections of the men who made these decisions. All of their memoirs are quite extensive and devote a great deal of attention to the topic of Italy and the Mediterranean, which is helpful to me by providing behind the scenes information on the topic. There are numerous first person accounts of fighting in Italy and while
these are valuable, the testimony of the commanders who created strategy and guided the war effort is valuable beyond measure.

To build on my understanding of the campaign, I also located and studied *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring* which have been translated into English. This serves as an excellent source of information on the German side of the campaign. Kesselring devotes numerous chapters to discussing the history of the war in Italy and speaking at length on the issues that most concerned German forces. He touches on virtually all aspects of the campaign as well as speaking at length on relevant issues such as the partisans. His insights are particularly vital in areas like these, as Allied sources simply cannot provide this type of viewpoint. Additionally, having his viewpoint complements Alexander’s and Clark’s, as he served in approximately the same level of command with similar responsibilities. Overall, Kesselring’s memoirs are an important addition as they help to round out my sources with key input from the German side of the campaign.

These memoirs, while important, also suffer from some weaknesses. Mark Clark was a man not known for his humility and the fact that he and Alexander spent their war careers in the Mediterranean has in a sense led them to inflate the overall importance of the theater in light of the entire war in Europe. Additionally, there are self-serving statements and justifications of failures that take away from the honesty and earnestness of the authors. Alanbrooke’s particular and very often controversial view of the war effort combined with the fact that his work is composed of short diary entries in some ways renders it difficult to extract in-depth information of what was going on at the time in the Allied High Command. And Churchill’s famous quote about history judging him kindly because he would write it is a fact that I had to always hold in my head as I parsed through his work. Additionally, Churchill’s often questionable decisions
about the conduct of the war in the Mediterranean, especially after 1943, make much of what he writes about the war in *The Second World War* potentially a cover for his decisions, many of which were as controversial at the time as they are now. Finally, while Kesselring’s work is an important addition to my sources, he also has potential to manipulate how he is viewed. More than one historian has charged him with involvement in massacres of Italian troops and civilians. While these charges are still controversial, Kesselring has a motive to paint a picture of himself to the reader that may be an absolutely accurate reflection of what he did during the war. This is something that I have certainly taken into account as I have read through his memoirs. While these weaknesses are present, they do not render the sources invalid. They have mainly focused me on carefully sifting through them to detect potential bias and to be ready to counter it in my own writing.

The final works I reviewed dealt with the wider issue of diplomacy in the context of the Second World War. I chose to utilize these works because they can provide an understanding of how the Allied powers interacted, especially as the alliance with the Soviet Union became more harried as the war neared its conclusion. It is important to have an understanding of this relationship, as it is critical in fleshing out Allied intentions in Italy during the early months of 1945. How the Americans and the British viewed the Soviet Union is absolutely critical for my analysis and sources that can aid me in understanding this are vital. In addition, I added two other works. One was Viktor Suvorov’s *The Chief Culprit*, a work that focuses mainly on Soviet intentions about Germany in the summer of 1941 but crucially addresses the way in which the Soviets saw the rest of Europe and Stalin’s attention to spreading the communist cause, which is relevant to my paper. Suvorov has attracted attention in the past for his controversial views on

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the start of war between the Germans and the Soviets but he does provide an excellent view of how the Soviet’s saw Europe.\textsuperscript{96} I have not in any way adopted the main thrust of his argument but he does provide an interesting and unique viewpoint on this issue. Also, I reviewed Allen Dulles’ account of the German surrender negotiations in Switzerland in spring 1945. He provides excellent insight into how the Allies saw the situation in Italy at a crucial juncture in the conflict, right before they began their final offensive. While most of these works do not focus on Italy directly, they provide further material that can help me construct my analysis.

The works that I have reviewed for my thesis have given me a very solid basis from which to work. I have collected a wide variety of works that I believed have done a good job fleshing out the relevant aspects of the Italian conflict and other topics that are important in analyzing the Allied actions in Italy during the final months of the war. However, this literature has not been without weaknesses. The overall lack of political analysis has been frustrating, as an almost unending focus on military strategy has made it difficult but not impossible to construct a unified explanation of the two in the context of northern Italy. While this has made my work more difficult at times, it also makes my thesis relatively new and unique in that it directly seeks to shed more light on the links between politics and combat in Italy and how this influenced the Allied commanders to make the decisions that they undertook in the spring of 1945 in the hopes of solidifying the future of Italy in their favor.

IV. Argument

The Allied attack in April 1945 that marked the end of combat in the Italian Theater seems a logical extension of the campaign that had been ongoing for two years. For many

\textsuperscript{96} Viktor Suvorov, \textit{The Chief Culprit: Stalin’s Grand Design to Start World War II} (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2008), XI.
months, troops from a whole host of nations had battled their way through some of the harshest terrain in Europe. A great deal had been achieved by this point but Kesselring’s men had not yet been defeated. Thus, it appears that the assault undertaken in the final month of the war was the natural culmination of years of momentum and a mere continuation of the push up the Italian peninsula.

On the surface, this seems to be an adequate explanation. The Allies were fighting a war, so naturally the campaigns they undertook would be influenced almost entirely by military reasoning. This is bolstered by the fact that there were legitimate military objectives underlining the campaign. Any German troop formation that had to be deployed in Italy was a group of soldiers that could not be sent to either the Eastern or Western Fronts. These troops additionally had to be equipped over a long supply route that exposed increasingly rare and valuable German railroad stock and other vehicles to unrelenting Allied air attack.97 The Allies were seeking to defeat the Germans as quickly as possible and pressure on the Italian Front would force the Germans to divert their attention to yet another theater of war. A “ring of fire” was closing in on the Third Reich and waging war on all fronts kept up the unrelenting pressure in hopes of hastening its collapse.

Leaving the Italian Front idle could invite other unwelcome developments. The German Army was always keen on retaking the offensive in order to restore balance and control of the battlefield when confronted with greater numbers.98 Throughout the war, from the ruins of Kharkhov to the hedgerows of Normandy, the Wehrmacht had pitched into its foe with

devastating force. The Allies on both major fronts often found themselves driven back by
coordinated and well-commanded attacks. Experienced and battle-tested officers and non-
commissioned officers provided this leadership which made the Wehrmacht deadly right up until
the end of the war. And this did not only apply to when the Allies themselves had attacked. The
German offensive in the Ardennes in December of 1944 had caught the Allies as they were
recovering from their great push across France and into the Low Countries.\(^9\) Allied leaders
were shocked by the fact that their opponents, who they had thought were beaten by the
ferocious fighting that had raged since June, were able to launch a powerful and coordinated
attack that caused them to initially lose ground.\(^10\) The Battle of the Bulge would ultimately end
as an Allied victory, but it was a stark reminder of the power of the German Army, even late in
the war.

This danger was not lost upon the Allies and may have provided them with an incentive
to attack in the spring of 1945. While they realized the Germans were nearing the end of their
rope and that they would indeed be victorious in the European Theater, the ever present threat of
a German counterattack was in the back of their minds. This was not just because of the static
nature of the Allied lines in Italy that closely paralleled the situation in Belgium prior to the
Battle of the Bulge. The German Tenth Army had launched a probing attack in February of 1945
that had caught the Americans off guard.\(^11\) Initially, the Germans had a good deal of success
and managed to drive the inexperienced American troops in the sector back.\(^12\) The arrival of

1953), 272.

\(^10\) Ibid.

\(^11\) Linklater, *The Campaign in Italy*, 417.

\(^12\) Ibid.
more experienced formations insured that the Germans did not make further headway, but what happened did raise troubling questions.

Many of the American units in Italy were inexperienced formations that had replaced more veteran units that had been sent to liberate southern France and link up with the troops breaking out of Normandy.\(^{103}\) Their performance in the face of a German attack left much to be desired. Additionally, many of the British formations, while experienced, had been worn down by years of combat. Many of the British Commonwealth nations, especially the United Kingdom, were short on replacements for the casualties incurred on the drive through northern Europe. This made it very difficult for Commonwealth commanders in Italy to make good on their own losses. A German counterattack in Italy would not have to be on the scale of the Ardennes offensive to wreak a great amount of havoc on the Allied Fifteenth Army Group.

In addition to preventing the backlash that could come from such an attack by the Germans, the Allies needed to continue to present the image that they were advancing on all fronts. Getting caught twice by German attacks on two different fronts would have simply been unacceptable. An offensive in Italy by the Allies would serve to not only prevent this by taking any momentum away from the Germans but it would present the proper image to the home front. The Allies would be seen wasting no time in striking the final, fatal blows against the Third Reich, wherever its soldiers may be. Any loss of territory to Germany at this stage of the war would be disastrous to the public image of the Western Allies. It would also be of no help in relations with the Soviet Union, which still harbored lingering doubts about the Allies for taking so long to open a second front in France.\(^{104}\) An offensive would also allow the Allies to prevent


\(^{104}\) Hastings, *Winston’s War*, 237.
any loss of ground by utilizing the principle that “the best defense is a good offense.” Their strength in airpower, artillery, and armor could be put to best use in an attack upon the Germans, rather than waiting for the Germans to come to them.

Launching an offensive in Italy in 1945 also made sense in that it continued to build upon the progress that had already been made in the theater. Italy had become the central thrust of Allied actions in the Mediterranean and much blood and treasure had been expended in conquering most of the peninsula. It had been the Allies longest toehold on the European continent and still harbored a weakened fascist state allied with the Germans. A great number of Allied lives had been expended, particularly in 1944, driving the Germans back and to entirely stop the momentum of the offensive did not make sense in the context of the Allied approach toward defeating the Third Reich. While their numbers may have been sapped by combat and the removal of units to other fronts, the American and British forces present in Italy were still potent and would be wasted if they remained behind entrenchments for the remainder of the war. Thus they would be put to use in the final push against the Axis in Italy.

However, this explanation does not fully grasp what the Allies could or could not have done in the Mediterranean. While several strong motives pushed the Allies to continue their offensive, this was not necessarily mandated by the conditions that existed at the time. The Allied High Command could have decided to remain in their positions and not push forward with an attack. The year 1944 had seen the Germans suffer great setbacks and had lost many men along with Rome, an Axis capital. Their final true line of defense had been pierced by the end of the year and not much impeded further Allied drives to the north. Additionally, staying in their positions held several distinct advantages. The Western Front already received priority over
Italia for reinforcements of troops and equipment.\textsuperscript{105} But still, supplying the forces present on the peninsula required the diversion of resources from the main thrust over the Rhine, something many Americans, including President Roosevelt, were not keen on.\textsuperscript{106} Staying put in their lines in Italy would lessen this burden and help keep focus on the final push into Germany.

Holding the line in Italy also held other military advantages. No matter what actions the Allies undertook, the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies would still have to man their lines. They would still need to receive reinforcements and be resupplied. Precious German time and effort would have to be expended to maintain these positions in northern Italy, regardless if the Allies attacked or not. Much of the scholarship on this insists that the Allies had to attack to keep the Germans from sending troops and supplies to other fronts including the Western Front.\textsuperscript{107} This is weakened by several facts. First, the Germans did not send much from the Italian front when it would have helped prior to the Allies crossing the Rhine in March 1945. Even if more was sent there was not much they could do at that point to impact the conduct of the war.\textsuperscript{108} Additionally, any force dispatched northward would be subject to savage air attack by Allied air units, severely reducing their effectiveness. Second, the extensive activity of the Italian partisans forced the Germans to maintain additional units to keep their supply lines open and to protect the rear of their forces deployed on the front lines. Finally, Hitler had refused requests from Kesselring to withdraw from northern Italy to a more defensible line based on the Alps that would have freed up troops.\textsuperscript{109} The Fuhrer stuck with the mentality that had plagued him throughout the war and insisted that there would be no withdrawal by the German forces.

\textsuperscript{105} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 64-65.  
\textsuperscript{106} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 64.  
\textsuperscript{108} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 520.  
\textsuperscript{109} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 189.
Kesselring’s effort would be in vain and would insure that regardless of what the Allies did, the two German armies would remain condemned to maintain their positions in Italy awaiting whatever decision the Allies made. Because of these facts, the Allies could have remained in place and achieved substantially the same goals that they gained during the actual assault on the Po Valley.

The overall military situation in Europe at the time supports this assertion. By April 1945, the Third Reich was in its final gasps. In the east, the Red Army was in the process of launching the final assault on Berlin and Hitler was sealed off in a bunker that would eventually see his demise.\footnote{Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 506.} In the west, American, British, and Canadian forces had crossed the Rhine and were racing toward Berlin.\footnote{Ibid., 505.} Day and night, thousands of Allied bombers thundered over Germany, pummeling German cities and war industry. German troops were surrendering en masse and could barely put up minimal resistance to the advancing Western Allies.\footnote{Ibid., 506.} Kesselring, the mastermind of the defensive lines in Italy that had caused the Allies so much trouble, was unable to produce a solution for the wasting away of the Wehrmacht.\footnote{Albert Kesselring, \textit{The Memoirs of Field-Marshal Kesselring} trans. William Kimber Ltd. (Novato, CA: Presidio Press, 1989), 256.} Germany had been utterly defeated militarily.\footnote{Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 506.} No amount of troops that could be transferred from Italy and deployed in Germany proper would be able to change the tide of the war.

While the overall military situation in Europe argued against an attack in Italy to merely keep German forces there preoccupied, the tactical situation in Italy further backed this position. The bloody year and a half of fighting up the Italian peninsula had painfully demonstrated to the
Allies the cost of attacking in mountainous terrain.\textsuperscript{115} The Germans had maximized this advantage and there was no sign that they would relinquish it in any further confrontations. While the flat terrain of the Po Valley would be conducive to the superior armored forces of the Americans and British, they would first have to fight through mountains and swamps to get there. The fighting in late 1944 to breach the Gothic Line in similar terrain had been very bloody. The Germans had suffered numerous setbacks but the Allied forces in Italy had learned at a high cost the determination and effectiveness of German forces when fighting on the defense. The fighting that did occur in April of 1945 validated this. While the German lines would be pierced and eventually overrun, they fought with tenacity and managed to delay the Allies for a considerable amount of time, especially considering their circumstances. Not only were their supplies low, they knew that they were fighting a lost cause. While the German propaganda machine had been spreading only good news, the truth must have been clear to those on the front. So whether it was pride, belief in the Nazi cause, or simply trying to survive, they fought on and inflicted a terrible price. A great number of Allied troops would be killed driving the final miles into the Po Valley, a cost that could have been avoided. The military necessity of attacking that April becomes tenuous when examined in the light of both the tactical and strategic military positions of the Allies at that stage of the war.

The existing military conditions of the time are not the only support for why the Allies did not need to attack in the spring of 1945. SS General Kurt Wolff’s outreach to the Allies in March of that year offering peace negotiations provides another reason for this.\textsuperscript{116} This remarkable event demonstrated that there was support among the leadership of the German


\textsuperscript{116} Dulles, \textit{The Secret Surrender}, 63.
forces in Italy for peace with the Allies, as they had certainly recognized the hopelessness of their situation.\textsuperscript{117} The Allied High Command knew of these negotiations and had the power to delay any offensive to see if an acceptable agreement could be reached. While the negotiations had not been completed by April 9\textsuperscript{th}, there was no reason why the Allies had to press forward with an attack. Very importantly, Wolff stated to Dulles during negotiations that, “I am willing to place myself and my entire organization at the disposal of the Allies to terminate hostilities.”\textsuperscript{118} While Wolff was not the overall commander in Italy, his position gave him a great deal of strength along with an ability to continue to press his superiors to surrender.\textsuperscript{119} This meant that Wolff stood a strong chance of success if given time.\textsuperscript{120} On top of this clear knowledge of the desire of many Germans to end the war, the Allied realization that the collapse of Germany could be completed within a matter of weeks would have been further incentive to see if these negotiations could work. If the war ended before they could, then Allied forces in Italy would have been spared further bloodletting and the exact same military objectives would have been achieved. These negotiations are a crucial piece of evidence as they material demonstrate the viability of taking the position of refusing to attack the Germans and let the end of the war play out. The weary American and British Commonwealth forces that had ground their way through Italy and achieved so much but at a very steep price could have been spared further bloodshed by awaiting the end of these negotiations.

Additionally, an offensive in northern Italy would not obtain any major set objectives that would have materially aided the Allies at that stage of the war. While the industrial centers of Italy still lay behind German lines, Allied bombings, partisan attacks, and the inefficiencies of

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{118} Dulles, \textit{The Secret Surrender}, 81.
\item\textsuperscript{119} Ibid.
\item\textsuperscript{120} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 526.
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German governance had made them not as valuable a target. Even if they had been running at full capacity, they were not as important as the manufacturing in the Ruhr Valley of Germany. This valley was in the process of being surrounded at the time that the Allied offensive in Italy kicked off in April 1945. Even when the offensive did begin, these industrial centers were not the target as Allied forces pushed northeastward towards the Austrian border and not north towards industrial cities such as Milan.\textsuperscript{121}

Another plausible military objective could have been the destruction of the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies. Decisively defeating these two forces would not only further weaken the military power of the Third Reich but it would have been a satisfying way to wrap up a campaign that had cost the Allies dearly in casualties and time.\textsuperscript{122} The whole goal of the Allied campaign in Europe up until this point had been to push back the Germans and attempt to destroy their armies in hope of shortening the war. However, while this reasoning may seem tempting, it does not hold up when compared to the circumstances of the time. This sort of reasoning would have been absolutely plausible a year before when the Allies were still battling their way through the German defensive lines south of Rome. It also would have been applicable in 1945 if the assault had been taking place from Allied positions along the Rhine.

The fact simply exists that there was no major objectives to be accomplished by way of an offensive in Italy at this point in the war. While it would have been a vindication of all that the Allies had put into the campaign if they ended it with a victory over the Germans in battle, it simply was not necessary. The campaign that would conclusively knock Germany out of the war was being waged in Germany proper by both the Western Allies and the Soviet Union. Indeed, some in the Allied High Command doubted whether a final offensive could succeed in Italy in

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  \item\textsuperscript{121} Behan, \textit{The Italian Resistance}, 202.
  \item\textsuperscript{122} Blaxland, \textit{Alexander's Generals}, 238.
\end{itemize}
the spring of 1945.\textsuperscript{123} Simply, whatever actions the Allies took in Italy simply would not be decisive in determining the fate of the Third Reich.

There does exist another argument for militarily justifying the campaign that was considered urgent at the time but has faded somewhat from awareness. A constant worry of the Allied High Command was that the German forces would form an “Alpine Redoubt” or “Southern Redoubt.”\textsuperscript{124} This “redoubt” would be made up of defensive positions taken in the Alps in southern Germany or Austria where die-hard Nazis would fight to the death in a losing battle in order to inflict as many casualties on the Allies as possible.\textsuperscript{125} Its power would have lain in its symbolism, with the Nazis fighting to the death in Bavaria where the party had originated. The Allied Command was concerned that this would occur and would almost certainly prolong the end of the war in Europe and cost unnecessary casualties among the victorious Allied forces.\textsuperscript{126} While certain German units would fight on, none would take up positions in the Alps. While this fear did not pan out, it was very real for Allied commanders.\textsuperscript{127} The danger of Germans taking up positions that would be very difficult to dislodge them from was certainly something the Allies would have to take seriously.

This fear was not as dominating on the Italian Front, but it did still exist. While there were not as many German troops in Italy and the section of the Austrian Alps they could fall back on was not as wide as the Bavarian Alps, there still existed the threat of it occurring. During World War I, Austro-Hungarian and Italian forces had spent years bogged down in fighting in this terrain which was among the most difficult in the world to wage a military

\textsuperscript{123} Alexander, \textit{The Alexander Memoirs}, 147.
\textsuperscript{124} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 532.
\textsuperscript{125} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 208.
\textsuperscript{126} Franklin Lindsay, \textit{Beacons in the Night: With the OSS and Tito’s Partisans in Wartime Yugoslavia} (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1993) 241.
\textsuperscript{127} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 208.
campaign. In addition to this, Field-Marshal Kesselring had proposed to Hitler that the German armies fall back on the Alps entirely because of their defensibility. The Brenner Pass was the only major route into Austria and even in their diminished state, the German Tenth and Fourteenth Armies would be more than able to mount a stout defense of the position that could cause great loss to the Allies. Hitler’s orders to stand fast and not abandon their positions would keep them from undertaking such an action but the fanaticism and willingness to fight to the bitter end demonstrated by many German units created the possibility that such an action could take place. The potential costs of such an action very well could have weighed heavily enough on the Allies that it spurred them to attack in order prevent it from taking place. This would follow the logic of engaging the Germans in known territory where the Allies knew they had a decent chance of victory instead of yielding to the Germans a tremendous advantage in terrain that could cost the Allies dearly.

However, this threat also would not be enough on its own to motivate the Allies to undertake the offensive in northern Italy. While there was the threat of the Germans retreating from their lines and falling back to create an “Alpine Redoubt”, there are several factors that weighed against this. First, Hitler’s insistence on holding the existing line regardless of the advantages of a strategic retreat rendered this plan highly unlikely. Second, the overwhelming air superiority of the Allies would doom any withdrawal. The German troops who tried to cross the Po in late April 1945 were exposed to the destructive force of Allied tactical air power, which would have been unleashed on any German force that tried to retreat northward to take

positions in the Alps. This would have wreaked untold destruction on the already stretched German forces and would have made it very difficult for them to assume defensible positions in the Alps.

Additionally, they would have to cross the Po River, which would block their route north towards the Austrian border. Every bridge over the Po had been destroyed by either air or partisan attack which would have made it impossible for the Germans to move heavy equipment like tanks and artillery north with them. A retreat northward would additionally force them to abandon the tactic of only moving at night, which would further expose their forces to destruction at the hands of the Allies. And this would not stop as the open ground that surrounded the Po offered no natural protection from aerial assault. On top of all of this, a large force of retreating Germans would make a perfect target for the ever growing numbers of Italian partisans that were growing more aggressive as the Axis continued to crumble. Overall, while the threat of the Germans forming an “Alpine Redoubt” did exist, the advantages the Allies held in Italy rendered the threat of it motivating a campaign mostly moot.

All of these factors demonstrate that the Allied Command would have been very aware that numerous military factors weighed against a continuation of the Allied offensive on the Italian Peninsula. While there did exist some compelling military reasons for attacking the Germans at that point, they simply do not add up in the face of what was known at the time. As satisfying as it would have been to end the long, brutal war in Italy with a military victory, the same goals could have been achieved through inaction and waiting for the end of the war. In the grand scheme of things, the Allies did not need to attack and, if the campaign was premised

solely on military reasoning, then it was not necessary and many brave men lost their lives for an ephemeral goal. Trying to explain these actions in light of what would have been clearly known at the time poses one of the most maddening questions of the entire Italian Campaign. Why did the Americans and British attack? Why endure more suffering?

The answer to this question seems to lie beyond the purely military realm. If it was not military goals driving the campaign, then the next most obvious answer was politics. No military action exists in a vacuum. The existing scholarship has not extensively discussed the role that politics had on influencing military decisions in the final months of the war in Italy. The answer to why the Allies attacked seems to lie here. Perhaps something about the political conditions that existed at the time would hold key evidence for this vexing riddle.

The most applicable political situation in play at the time was the contest that was beginning to emerge between the Western Allies and their war time comrade, the Soviet Union. They had fought together throughout the war, but tensions had begun to develop between them. While relations with the Soviets had always been alternatingly tempestuous and icy, which was a natural byproduct of having Joseph Stalin in charge of your ally, the approach of the end of the war had injected extra difficulty into it. Many within the British camp, particularly the irascible and ever-determined Churchill, openly suspected that the Russians coveted control of postwar Europe. Franklin Roosevelt, keen on implementing his vision of a world made peaceful through a strong United Nations, was not as willing to act on his misgivings about

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133 Hastings, *Winston’s War*, 351.
Stalin as Churchill was. Indeed, at times he started to pull away from Churchill and move closer to Stalin, as he saw that he would have to deal with him in a postwar world. He was not happy at times with this, even saying after Yalta, “We can’t do business with Stalin. He has broken every one of the promises he made at Yalta.” Exhausted by the war, he was a realist, however, and strove to do only what was humanly possible when dealing with a man of Stalin’s temperament backed up by the most powerful fighting force in the world. Stalin was ultimately a survivor and was going to fight for what he wanted. He was determined to emerge from the war as not only the leader of one of the two most powerful nations in the world but as a master over much of Europe which could provide a buffer zone against further invasions of the Russian motherland. The alliance with Stalin, forged in the darkest days of the war, would bear bitter fruit for the Allies.

This growing tension had been manifesting itself in ever more apparent ways. In the late summer of 1944, the Warsaw Uprising had temporarily driven the Germans from the Polish Capital. However, the pro-British rebels of the Armia Krajowa or Polish Home Army were eventually defeated. Some in the Allied camp accused the Soviets of allowing the uprising to be destroyed by preventing Allied aid from reaching the rebels. This view was reinforced as the Russians started to back a pro-Soviet government in the liberated areas of eastern Poland. This government was adamant that it would be taking control of all of Poland when the war ended without any input from the British-backed Polish Government-in-Exile located in London, a

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138 Ibid., 523.
139 Ibid., 517.
140 Suvorov, *The Chief Culprit*, X.
141 Higgins, *Soft Underbelly*, 266.
point reinforced at Yalta in 1945.\textsuperscript{142} And the Soviet actions at the Yalta Conference made it abundantly clear that they were carving out a zone of influence in Eastern Europe without regard for the wishes of those who would live under their control.\textsuperscript{143} These signs were unmistakably clear and there was not much any of the Allies could do about it.\textsuperscript{144} The Soviets would almost certainly be the great rival of the West when the world emerged from the destruction of the world war.\textsuperscript{145} While the specifics of the Cold War could not have been predicted exactly, the danger posed by the Russians was very real and apparent to the Allied camp.\textsuperscript{146}

The Allies would not wait until the end of the war to act to prevent or at least mitigate these Soviet actions. In September and October 1944, the Germans evacuated their positions in Greece which were in serious danger of being cut off by Allied advances in Italy and Soviet breakthroughs into Romania.\textsuperscript{147} In the wake of their departure, long-held grudges and conflicts boiled to the surface between pro-Royalist and Communist guerillas.\textsuperscript{148} Soon, open conflict had erupted. Believing that the communists were stronger and had the upper hand, Churchill ordered the immediate deployment of large numbers of British troops.\textsuperscript{149} Some British commanders, like Field Marshall Alanbrooke, looked askance at this action, seeing it as a distraction from the overall war effort.\textsuperscript{150} However, this was the first move on the post-war chessboard by Churchill.\textsuperscript{151} He was absolutely horrified by the possibility of the Soviets gaining such an

\textsuperscript{142} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 371.
\textsuperscript{143} Atkinson, \textit{The Guns at Last Light}, 517.
\textsuperscript{144} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{147} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 188-189.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid., 190.
\textsuperscript{150} Alanbrooke, \textit{War Diaries}, 631-632.
\textsuperscript{151} Ibid., 638.
important position in the Mediterranean, where they could threaten British interests like the Suez Canal.\textsuperscript{152} In the years since the war, there has been an indication that Stalin was not heavily invested in the Greek communists and ultimately believed that Greece would probably end up in the Western sphere.\textsuperscript{153} This, however, does not negate the importance that it had on the Allies during the war.\textsuperscript{154} They were not cognizant of this fact, and their fear of communist expansion would drive them to take actions like this.

The British forces would ultimately manage to stabilize Greece, but the communists would not be decisively defeated until the late 1940s. What the Allies did though was immensely reflective of how they were beginning to view their war strategy in relation to the Soviet Union. What had once been a mere battle of survival against Nazi Germany was transforming into a competition between rivals.\textsuperscript{155} This troop deployment was in many ways a pivotal moment in the war in the Mediterranean. What had been a campaign driven mainly by military concerns had now become one where political decisions would rule. As Trumbull Higgins put it, “From December 1944, at the very latest, British policy and thus increasingly British strategy, were moving against the growing Russian rather than declining German threat.”\textsuperscript{156} British strategy in the Mediterranean had shifted into one whose main objective was to resist the Communists.\textsuperscript{157} Thus the actions undertaken in the wake of this would be directed towards stifling potential communist objectives as much as they were aimed at defeating the Germans. This would have immense impact on the war in Italy.

\textsuperscript{152} Alanbrooke, \textit{War Diaries}, 634.
\textsuperscript{153} Sainsbury, \textit{Churchill and Roosevelt at War}, 102.
\textsuperscript{154} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 76.
\textsuperscript{156} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 206.
\textsuperscript{157} Ibid.
In addition to this fundamental shift in British policy in the Mediterranean, they were gaining more strength in determining the course of that theater of war. This was an odd turn of events in the face of long-existing trends that had been playing out within the Allied forces. As the war progressed, the British had less and less power to influence the strategy of the war. While they had great say in directing what happened in 1942 and 1943, the ever-increasing numbers of Americans arriving in Europe had shifted this balance.\textsuperscript{158} With an American Supreme Commander of Allied Forces in Dwight Eisenhower and increasingly greater proportions of Allied troops made up of Americans, their wishes for how the war would be carried out became more and more prominent. Many American commanders became tired of what was known as “the British tail wagging the American dog.”\textsuperscript{159} There was an undercurrent of resentment that the British still insisted upon military objectives that did not seem to focus on American goals.\textsuperscript{160} But the Americans were becoming more and more adept at utilizing this influence to bend the course of the war to their liking.\textsuperscript{161} Churchill and other British leaders became more marginalized as the war raged on and at times felt entirely ignored.\textsuperscript{162}

But, Britain would still carry great weight in the Mediterranean.\textsuperscript{163} While their influence had been diminishing, the degree to which this was occurring varied by theater of war. In the West, where the Allied Expeditionary Forces were preparing for the final assault upon Germany, Britain had very little say in what went on. But this was natural, as the vast majority of troops undertaking operations to finish off the Germans were American. However, this was not exactly so in Italy. While there was a very large contingent of Americans in the form of the Fifth Army,

\textsuperscript{158} Hastings, \textit{Winston’s War}, 400.  
\textsuperscript{159} Ibid., 348.  
\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., 312.  
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., 400.  
\textsuperscript{162} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{163} Ibid., 354.
the vast array of multi-national troops present on the peninsula had reduced American influence somewhat. This combined with the large proportion of troops that came from the British Commonwealth meant that the British had much more influence in how the campaign was run.\textsuperscript{164} Additionally, the Supreme Commander in the Mediterranean was a favorite of Churchill’s, Harold Alexander, a man who would retain his enthusiasm for the importance of the Mediterranean. This influence would allow them to imbue an anti-communist bent to the Mediterranean Campaign that was not as present on the Western Front. This would be a very important factor for the offensive that would start in April 1945.

The British actions in Greece represented a key turning point for the Italian Campaign. Allied actions in the Mediterranean could no longer be separated from the British goals of halting Soviet expansion.\textsuperscript{165} Indeed, this would become the overriding goal for the Allies, particularly the British, in this sector of the war. It would be the very justification of future actions as the existing military conditions argued against further assaults upon the Germans. While small in scope, this undertaking in Greece is key to understanding the Allied Mediterranean strategy and the future moves they would make against the Soviets. However, this did not come without significant risks. Counteracting Soviet ambition was very important for the Allies but it was in a way putting the cart before the horse. While the Third Reich was diminishing in power, it had not been defeated yet and focusing too much on fighting against their current ally would not help this most central of Allied war objectives.

Undertaking this position also posed great risks as it held many similarities to a strategy that Churchill had been pursuing through much of the war. He always had a deep interest in side

\textsuperscript{164} Hastings, \textit{Winston’s War}, 354.
\textsuperscript{165} Roberts, \textit{Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies}, 266.
operations that he felt would siphon away the power of the Germans through minimally expensive operations. His advocacy of the Mediterranean Theater over the Western Front was part of his strategy of pursuing war against “the soft under-belly of Europe.” While Italy was the most notable example of this strategy, Churchill also pushed through an operation in the Dodecanese Islands of Greece.\(^{166}\) These islands had been occupied by the Italians and Germans and Churchill sought to liberate them in order to drive nearby Turkey into the Allied camp.\(^{167}\) However, this attempt to bolster Britain’s position in the Mediterranean utterly failed as a result of British mismanagement of the operation and heavy German resistance. It was an unmitigated disaster and very much hurt the credibility of Churchill’s strategic thinking.\(^{168}\) It was events like these that would cast a shadow over his determination to co-opt the Soviets and push back their potential gains before they had even been made. The Americans had refused to participate in the Dodecanese operation and were suspicious from then on of what they would see as sideshows.\(^{169}\)

Because of disasters like this, if Churchill wanted to gain his objective of counteracting the Soviets, he had to find a way to couch his objectives within the already existing framework of the war. The situation in Italy fit this perfectly. The Allies had yet to defeat the Germans there but the area had intrinsic value to communist interests. Supporting an offensive in this area would thus accomplish the goal of continuing the fight against the Germans while simultaneously working against communist interests. The stronger British say in this theater additionally helped them in their confrontations with the Americans over strategy and would help push forward this offensive into reality.

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\(^{166}\) Hastings, \textit{Winston’s War}, 327.

\(^{167}\) Ibid., 324.

\(^{168}\) Ibid., 327.

\(^{169}\) Ibid., 324.
On the surface, this communist threat to the Allied position in Italy does not seem to be as serious as some in the Western Allies made it out to be. Post-war knowledge of where Soviet forces had reached by the end of the war reinforces this. However, the perceptions of the Allied High Command of the capabilities of the Soviets at the time is what is most important in this analysis. In early 1945, the possibilities looked endless for the Red Army. They were about to erupt from behind their lines on the Vistula River in Poland and drive straight for Berlin. To the south, they were in the process of clearing out the Balkans and were coming close to a link-up with the large left-leaning partisan forces under the control of Yugoslavian Marshal Josip Tito. The Hungarian capital of Budapest was under siege and once it fell, the road to Vienna was open. The Allies were very aware of the possibilities that lay before the Soviets and many, particularly Churchill, were terrified by what they could possibly achieve.

Of particular importance to the Italian Campaign was the positioning of Soviet armies in Hungary. These forces lay on the flat Hungarian Plain, which was very conducive to the rapid movements that the Red Army favored. Soviet armor could be unleashed very easily here in comparison to many other areas of the Balkans, where treacherous, rocky terrain was the rule rather than the exception. They had used this terrain to their advantage and by 1945 only the capital city of Budapest barred their way. It would not hold much longer, as the Soviets had surrounded the city and were engaged in a furious attempt to whittle down its defenders before a

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172 Ann Lane, Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity, 1941-1949 (Brighton, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 1996), 108.
173 Higgins, Soft Underbelly, 204-205.
final, brutal assault.\textsuperscript{175} When the city fell, there would not be much to bar the way of Soviet troops into Austria.\textsuperscript{176} Vienna would almost certainly fall soon after Budapest and the Soviets would be free to roam around much of Central Europe.

This was of particular concern for the Allies because the road to northern Italy was much the same as the road to Vienna. Soviet troops pushing through Austria needed to only skirt the southern border of the country to find a route into Italy through either the Brunner Pass or the Ljubljana Gap. If the Soviets could penetrate through either of these, then the spoils of northern Italy would be ripe for their picking. The German forces there could barely contain the Western Allies and the partisans and would not have been able to stop a serious Russian advance. A scenario like this would be a disaster for the Allies. Soviet control of Italy would make their planned post-war occupation even more difficult as the territory would have to be wrested from the control of the communists, a proposition that would entail great difficulty. They only had to look at the machinations of the Polish communist government that had been set up in Lublin as a potential example of what they would face in Italy if the Soviets managed to establish a foothold there.\textsuperscript{177} The possibility of this scenario coming to fruition is key to understanding why the April 1945 offensive was undertaken. The fear of this occurring plainly existed in the minds of the Western Allies. Having this happen while doing nothing was simply not an option and measures had to be taken to prevent a nightmare like this.

The reality of this scenario was much different, however, from the worst fears of some in the Allied camp. While Stalin was very expansionistic, his interest was not centered on what was happening in Italy. Greece had already been written off by the Soviets as part of the Allied

\textsuperscript{175} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 329.
\textsuperscript{176} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 204.
\textsuperscript{177} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 371.
sphere post-war and it is not difficult to see that Italy was in the same position.\textsuperscript{178} Stalin’s overriding concerns lay in Germany, Poland, and the other large nations of Central and Eastern Europe.\textsuperscript{179} It would be these countries that would form the protective shield for the Soviet Union in the post-war. While northern Italy held a large manufacturing base that could certainly be helpful for the Soviets, it could not help form the carapace that Stalin wished to wrap the Soviet Union in to protect it from future invasions. Simply, it was too distant from the USSR to be a priority. The fortunes of war would also render prognostications of how far the Soviets could advance much less accurate. Budapest would fall to the Soviets, but not until after a bloody, brutal battle that would be a miniature version of the hell of the Battle of Berlin. This was combined with a surprise German counter-attack, the last major one of the war.\textsuperscript{180} This attack was defeated but these two combined with the unexpected ferocity of the German defense of Berlin and eastern Germany drew attention away from the peripheral Soviet advances. Vienna and a large chunk of Austria would be occupied by the Soviets but not until a few weeks before the war ended, when pushing into Italy would have made no tactical or strategic sense to them.

The limitations on the reality of this threat to Italy may have made it unlikely, but what is important in the analysis of the actions of the Western Allies is whether they believed that it was viable. Whether or not it actually occurred does not matter. And for men like Churchill, this was a plausible threat particularly when combined with the presence of Marshal Tito’s forces very near to Italy.\textsuperscript{181} Tito and his forces have never held an important position in the popular memory of the war. When mentioned, it is almost always in relation to the bitter power struggle

\textsuperscript{178} Agarossi and Zaslavsky, \textit{Stalin and Togliatti}, 50;52.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid., 50.
\textsuperscript{180} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 505.
\textsuperscript{181} Ibid., 457.
that raged between Tito, his rivals the Chetniks, and the Germans.\footnote{Roberts, \textit{Tito, Mihailovic and the Allies}, 199.} Allied special operations forces were constantly working with Tito and Churchill was a vigorous supporter, particularly early in the war.\footnote{Lindsay, \textit{Beacons in the Night}, 334.} As the war progressed, Tito and his forces grew in power. After defeating their Chetnik rivals, Tito built his diverse group of partisans and resistance fighters into an actual army with a prescribed structure and units that functioned in a standard military fashion. They would prove invaluable in holding down some nineteen divisions in the mountains of Yugoslavia, men that could have been put to good use on any other front.\footnote{Alexander, \textit{The Alexander Memoirs}, 152.} They believed strongly in their equality as an Allied partner and that their army was large enough and accomplished enough to earn respect.\footnote{Lindsay, \textit{Beacons in the Night}, 307.} Indeed, most of Yugoslavia was not liberated by the Soviets but by Tito and his men.\footnote{Lane, \textit{Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity}, 109.}

Tito and his forces had proven an excellent Allied resource during the war but as the clocks chimed in 1945 they began to produce problems for the Western Allies. Tito had always had a leftist bent and this became much more pronounced as the Soviets drew closer to Yugoslavia.\footnote{Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 456-457.} His forces, so admirable in their ability to liberate their home country, suddenly started to look like a liability as they could pose a real challenge to the Allies as a fighting force. But, what would scare the Allies the most was Tito’s growing insistence on the return of the city of Trieste and the Istrian Peninsula to the control of Yugoslavia.\footnote{James Holland, \textit{Italy’s Sorrow: A Year of War, 1944-1945} (New York, NY: St. Martin’s Press, 2008), 527} Located at the northeastern corner of the Adriatic Sea, the Istrian Peninsula had been part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire prior to 1919 and possessed a substantial ethnic Italian population. Yugoslavia had laid claim to
it as well but it had remained under the control of Italy during the inter-war years.\textsuperscript{189} With the end of the war in sight in 1945, Tito started to turn his attention to reclaiming what he saw as rightfully Yugoslavian territory.\textsuperscript{190} This was a great concern for the Allies as Trieste lay on the southernmost end of several rail lines that ran into central Europe.\textsuperscript{191} These rail lines would be a key outlet into Soviet controlled areas and would serve a very useful purpose for the Americans and British.\textsuperscript{192} Having this area under Yugoslavian control would be unacceptable, especially considering the increasing left-wing, pro-Soviet rhetoric of Tito.\textsuperscript{193}

Indeed, after the war ended, the Istrian Peninsula became a flashpoint for one of the first major confrontations of the Cold War.\textsuperscript{194} Field Marshal Alexander dispatched a division of New Zealanders who rushed to capture Trieste as quickly as possible.\textsuperscript{195} They were so desperate to capture the city first that an arrangement was worked out with the Germans so that they would prevent the city from falling into Yugoslav hands.\textsuperscript{196} They reached the city on May 1\textsuperscript{st} and took most of it. However, some Yugoslav forces had arrived at the same time so control of the city had to be split.\textsuperscript{197} Tito’s men began to retaliate against thousands of Italians in the city as fascists as they enforced their side of the “dual administration” of the city with the Allies.\textsuperscript{198} The American and British forces found it impossible to move them as they appeared to settle in to control the city. Churchill, forever a foe of the communists, signaled that he was ready to order Alexander to force the Yugoslavs out of the city and the entire peninsula to ensure it was free of

\textsuperscript{189} Lindsay, \textit{Beacons in the Night}, 307.
\textsuperscript{190} Lane, \textit{Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity}, 54.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid., 55.
\textsuperscript{192} Alexander, \textit{The Alexander Memoirs}, 151.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Lane, \textit{Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity}, 53.
\textsuperscript{195} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{196} Holland, \textit{Italy's Sorrow}, 527.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 527.
\textsuperscript{198} Ibid., 528.
communist control. However, he needed additional support from the Americans. American President Harry Truman would support him by demanding that the city be handed over to the British forces nearby or there would be consequences. Tito continued to bluster and Truman, furious at what he saw as subterfuge, threatened the use of force to remove Tito. He was talked out of this but this incident shows how serious the Allies were about protecting themselves against what they saw as aggression by not only Tito but greater communist forces as well. A deal was eventually negotiated between the two sides that saw Trieste stay with Italy but the majority of the Istrian Peninsula went to Yugoslavia. This flashpoint between former Allies speaks to the influence of Yugoslavia on the campaign in northern Italy and its importance in postwar political positioning.

Even before the confrontation at Trieste, the Yugoslavians would help drive Allied policy concerning Italy forward. The Allies were cognizant of Tito’s interest in securing the area around Trieste. However, there was even more concern about his intentions for the rest of northern Italy. Indeed in April of 1945, Tito gave an interview to a Soviet magazine in which he defiantly stated that “We have no intention of laying down our arms after liberating Trieste.” If this was not a threat to the Allied position in Italy, it is hard to imagine a more direct wording. This fully encapsulated Allied fears that Tito in particular and communist forces in general may not be as keen on honoring their commitments to the Western Allies as they said they were. While not as strong as the claims to the Istrian Peninsula, there were irredentist Yugoslavian claims that could be made to further chunks of Italy, along with parts of virtually every other

199 Holland, Italy’s Sorrow, 528.
200 Higgins, Soft Underbelly, 209.
201 Agarossi and Zaslavsky, Stalin and Togliatti, 146.
202 Holland, Italy’s Sorrow, 529.
203 Ibid., 527.
204 Lane, Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity, 57.
nation that bordered Yugoslavia. Indeed, Tito demanded at one point that Styria and Southern Carinthia in Austria be turned over to the Yugoslavians. These threats, while overreaching when viewed from far in the future, were frightening when combined with the large, organized forces that were at the disposal of the Yugoslav communists. In the minds of the Allied planners prior to the end of the war, it would not be very difficult for these forces to advance out of Yugoslavia, past Trieste and into the flat terrain of northern Italy. With German attention focused on the Allies, there was a strong possibility that they could make significant gains before the Americans and British could stop them. This would pose a similar problem to Soviet forces advancing into Italy and place the Allies in an awkward position of trying to dislodge troops from land that had already been earmarked for post-war occupation by the American Military Government.

This problem is very reminiscent of the old saying “possession is nine-tenths of the law.” Regardless of how lands had been distributed at the Yalta Conference, it would be very difficult for the Allies to dislodge other forces from Italy if they had arrived before them, something clearly demonstrated by their experience in Trieste in the immediate aftermath of the war. This would certainly be a problem if the Soviets had reached Italy but the Yugoslavs posed an even bigger problem. While they were philosophically close to the Soviets, they and their leader retained a very noticeable streak of independence. Tito had no problem acting defiant towards any of the Allied powers, even Russia. He would become notorious after the war for brazenly defying Stalin and charting an independent path for Yugoslavia, holding his country together by

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205 Agarossi and Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti*, 141.
206 Lane, *Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity*, 100.
207 Holland, *Italy’s Sorrow*, 528.
208 Lane, *Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity*, 109.
force of will. Of course, none of these incidents had happened by early 1945, with relations between the Soviets and Tito reaching a “high-water mark” in the opinion of some in April 1945. The Allies were very aware of this coziness along with Marshal Tito’s strong and defiant personality. They knew that it would be hard to contain him and the spread of communism if he decided to push deep into the north of Italy.

This fear was certainly justified as his actions around the Istrian Peninsula would later demonstrate. The Yugoslavian forces were an existential threat to the Allied interests in northern Italy and were a very strong motivator for Allied action. If the Allies stood still in their lines, then they ran the risk of Tito becoming a major power player in Italy. This was simply unacceptable from their point of view and a major reason to push forward despite the other calculations that weighed against continuing the Allied offensive in Italy. If the Allies were ever in doubt about the need to continually pressure the German forces, then this fear was a clear impetus. It would be better that the Americans and British suffer casualties driving the Germans out of their positions, allowing them to take over control of the Po Valley region than to let it fall into the hands of Tito. This was the principle of containment implemented indirectly. Fighting the Germans in April 1945 would ultimately help the Allies secure their position and fight communism by depriving any intruding communist forces from gaining control of vital post-war areas.

The worries the Allies held about intrusion by outside communist forces was complemented by the immense problem that was posed by the Italian Resistance. Originally the

209 Lindsay, Beacons in the Night, 332, 335.
210 Lane, Britain, the Cold War, and Yugoslav Unity, 109.
211 Ibid., 109.
212 Agarossi and Zaslavsky, Stalin and Togliatti, 141.
resistance had not started out strong, as Italy was a firm ally of Germany. Resistance started to coalesce as Benito Mussolini’s government lost both popularity and credibility with the continuing reverses and defeats suffered by the Axis in North Africa and Sicily.\textsuperscript{213} The resistance would be thrust into action when German forces retaliated against the government that had replaced Mussolini and had left the war against the Allies. The brutality with which the Germans suppressed the Italians and treated their army units caused a good deal of the populace to turn against their erstwhile allies. The Germans would find themselves battling against an insurgency that was late on getting into the game but determined to drive their occupiers out of the country.

The Italian Resistance continued to grow throughout the war and was still gaining strength as the conflict drew to a close. What were once meager forces had reached numbers roughly in excess of 300,000 by the spring of 1945.\textsuperscript{214} The OSS pegged this conservatively at 182,000 and some even believed they might number up to half a million with further manpower to draw upon.\textsuperscript{215} This was an immense force and its presence was very much felt by the Germans and by Italians who remained loyal to the puppet government, the Italian Socialist Republic.\textsuperscript{216} Their strength lay in the unliberated lands of northern Italy, where they constantly harassed the Germans and drew their attention away from the Allied forces present to the south. By the end of the war, the Resistance was forming itself into fighting units similar to those present in Tito’s Yugoslav army. This was relatively rare among resistance forces in Europe and caused no end to the trouble the Germans faced. As German forces streamed back to the Po after their lines had been broken, a general uprising was called against the wishes of the Allies by the

\textsuperscript{213}Behan, \textit{The Italian Resistance}, 4-5.
\textsuperscript{214}Ibid., 3.
\textsuperscript{215}Ibid., 1.
\textsuperscript{216}Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 528.
partisans.\textsuperscript{217} Even in defeat, German soldiers were attacked everywhere they went by the resistance.\textsuperscript{218} Indeed the partisans would be responsible for one of the most famous incidents of the war that occurred in Italy. At the end of April, with the German armies broken and the Allies streaming towards Austria, the once powerful ruler of Italy attempted to escape to Switzerland with his mistress.\textsuperscript{219} However, they were recognized and captured by partisans on April 27\textsuperscript{th} near the town of Dongo.\textsuperscript{220} After contacting the central command of the resistance, they were told that death sentences had been passed in absentia against them along with any other fascist leader on the run.\textsuperscript{221} The Americans and British contacted the resistance and asked them to turn over Mussolini. However, they ignored this request and executed him and his entourage.\textsuperscript{222} Their bodies were then dumped in the Piazzale Loreto in Milan and subjected to abuse by local citizens before being strung up by meat hooks at a nearby gas station.\textsuperscript{223} This was a powerful message not only to fascist sympathizers but also to the whole world of the power and ruthlessness of the Italian partisans.

The nature of the resistance fighters who killed Mussolini also speaks to an important aspect of the Italian resistance movement. Its members came from varied backgrounds, with some units derived from military units that had refused to surrender to the Germans and had fled into the countryside to fight them.\textsuperscript{224} It had an overarching governing body, the CLN or “National Liberation Committee” later known as the CLNAI the “National Liberation

\textsuperscript{217} Higgins, \textit{Soft Underbelly}, 208.
\textsuperscript{220} Holland, \textit{Italy’s Sorrow}, 523.
\textsuperscript{221} Behan, \textit{The Italian Resistance}, 111.
\textsuperscript{222} Ibid., 111.
\textsuperscript{223} Holland, \textit{Italy’s Sorrow}, 523.
\textsuperscript{224} Behan, \textit{The Italian Resistance}, 2.
Committee for Upper Italy.” While it did not fully control all partisan bands, it was to achieve a great deal during the war including negotiating with the Allies and coordinating large scale operations that could make life very difficult for the Germans. It even spread out smaller committees to individual areas that reported to it that helped bring further coordination to the organization. But, for all of its advantages, like many other resistance movements including the French Maquis, communist aligned men and women made up a large percentage of those actively resisting the Germans. Indeed, it has been estimated that upwards of 85 percent of the resistance in Italy was comprised of members of three left-wing groups, the most prominent of which were the communists. Some of its most key fighting units were the Garibaldi brigades, communist units that had a strong evangelical political philosophy. Likewise, the overall leadership of the organization was very much a part of the communist and far left-wing camp. And while they were staunchly opposed to the Germans, their vision of what Italy would be like post-war was not the same as what was envisioned by the Americans and the British. This would prove problematic in their relationship with the Allies but this was brushed aside to a degree as long as the Germans remained a threat on the Italian Peninsula.

There was good reason for this. The Resistance was particularly bold in striking the Germans considering the fact that major population centers such as Milan were still under their control. Additionally, they were very active in trying to smuggle Allied POWs and downed airman back to the safety of American and British lines. They would suffer the wrath of the

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227 Ibid., 51.
228 Ibid., 3.
229 Agarossi and Zaslavsky, *Stalin and Togliatti*, 93.
228 Ibid., 3.
230 Ibid., 60.
231 Ibid.
Germans for these actions and numerous massacres of Italian civilians were carried out under the auspices of both the SS and the Wehrmacht. Even Kesselring was implicated in these actions. But the resistance persevered and proved a constant threat to the Germans. In May 1944, Harold Alexander conservatively estimated that at least six divisions’ worth of men out of the twenty-five available to the Germans had to be diverted to battling the partisans. Of these six, four could have been put to good use on the front battling the Allied Fifteenth Army Group.

The partisans were notoriously dangerous for their ability to target infrastructure like bridges and roads. This infrastructure was vital to the German war effort and constantly targeted by Allied bombers and fighters. Resistance attacks upon these targets only added to the pressure. Mechanized troops, vital for front-line operations, were diverted to confront the threat. Indeed, Kesselring stated that the Germans “must tactically put the struggle against the armed bands on the same level as that of front line warfare.” It has been estimated that there were over two thousand partisan attacks a month in German occupied territory. The Resistance’s ability to carry out these operations would see the Allies parachute special operatives including members of the OSS to help them increase the efficiency and damage of such operations.

All of these factors made the Italian Resistance a very dangerous fighting force but also a serious threat to the Allies. Their political views were unacceptable as the war drew closer to an end and their communist beliefs became more apparent. In fact, in November 1944 Harold

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233 Weckstein, *200,000 Heroes*, 226.
236 Ibid.
237 Ibid.
238 Ibid.
239 Botjer, *Sideshow War*, 168.
240 Weckstein, *200,000 Heroes*, 162.
Alexander had ordered the partisans to stand down and not take action until they had received further orders from the Allied Command.241 This order was on its face in reaction to several failed partisan operations that had suffered heavy casualties.242 However, it is hard to believe that this was simply a militarily driven decision. Tensions had always existed between the two groups and was growing as the war pushed further north. Concern over what left-leaning partisans seems to have had an impact on this decision. The Allies were aware that much of their postwar policy would be dictated by the partisans.243 They could exercise control over them at this point, and many in the Allied command still believed they had great use to the war effort.244 However, they could not be allowed to run wild and trying to bring them in line seems like a reasonable position for the Allies to assume at this point. However, this pronouncement from Field Marshal Alexander was met with outrage and confusion, particularly among the CLNAI.245 Most would ignore it but the damage in a sense was already done. This stunning act undertaken well before fighting in Italy had come to an end demonstrates the growing bad blood between the two groups and foreshadowed the future confrontations between them. The 300,000 fighters that the partisans could muster was a powerful force that could be used against the Germans.246 However, their weapons could just as easily be pointed at American and British troops as they could be at Germans.

The presence of a large, powerful, and experienced fighting force in northern Italy was a concern for the Allies. This became an outright threat when considered alongside their political leanings. For men like Churchill, preventing the partisans from grasping too firm of a hold

241 Holland, Italy’s Sorrow, 445.
242 Ibid., 445.
243 Ibid., 446.
244 Ibid.
245 Ibid., 445.
before the war ended was critical. Some could criticize this viewpoint as placing insufficient trust in the partisans and failing to appreciate what they had done against the Germans. However, the very actions of the partisans towards the end of the war would indicate that this view was correct. As German control in Italy collapsed, these partisans moved out of the hills and the streets in which they had once sheltered. After driving out their foes, they started to retaliate against fascist sympathizers and collaborators. This was not uncommon for resistance groups but what was more shocking was the fact that they started to set up their own governments in the areas they had liberated. A total of fifteen of these “republics” were created during the war, with some as early as June 1944.247 This was a disturbing trend as it would be difficult to regain control in an area that had already freed itself. These areas also often undertook actions that sowed further discord. Tribunals against “war criminals” were conducted and justice was delivered from the barrel of a gun.248 This would be very disconcerting for Allied leaders. Having communists and other left-wing resistance fighters setting up local governments that were gleefully enforcing their views was deeply disturbing to them, and they would move quickly to neutralize them. The threat they posed to Allied plans for Italian occupation were too great to be left unchecked.

However, some in the Allied camp rightly suspected that this could be a potential outcome.249 All of the warning signs, particularly the communist beliefs of many of the partisans indicated that this is what would happen in the absence of Allied control. The threats of Soviet troops or Yugoslavian forces pouring into Italy each encapsulated different Allied fears and had differing levels of plausibility. The Soviets were a threat only in the minds of the Allies, and

247 Behan, The Italian Resistance, 176.
249 Ibid., 313.
while they did butt heads with the Yugoslavians, they did not threaten more than the northeastern regions of Italy. The partisans were a fundamentally different threat. While not organized, they were everywhere. They had the ability to and often did set up their own governments to rival the Allies. They had combat experience and an ideology that would situate them in direct opposition to the post-war goals of the Allies. They were an absolute threat, and both they and the Allies knew it.

This situation provides some of the best support for the contention that the Allies undertook their operations in northern Italy as a means of preventing partisan control and foiling communist desires for Italy as much as it was aimed at pushing the Germans out of their final positions in front of Bologna. The communist partisans posed both a political and military threat. Their politics were directly in conflict with those of the Western Allies, and one did not have to be an excellent reader of tea-leaves to see that in the post-war years the Allies and the Soviets would be rivals for dominance in Europe and possibly beyond. From a military perspective, they were an experienced, organized force that could bog down American and British troops in the same sort of hellish guerilla warfare to which they had subjected the Germans. They could throw a wrench into occupation plans, plans that would have to be implemented by American and British soldiers who would be at risk from armed, angry communist partisans. Additionally, having to tear down local resistance governments, however ephemeral, could only tarnish the Allied reputation. It did not matter that the Allies had spent two bloody years battling to wrest the peninsula from the Germans. Actions like that ring of a tyrant and almost never result in a population giving more respect to an occupying force. Thus, it was clear that the Allies had to preempt the partisans.
In these conditions, striking against the partisans was clearly the most rational strategy. Preventing communist forces in whatever form they existed from gaining control of Italian territory was as important an objective as pushing back the Germans. At this stage of the war, post-war considerations wore heavier every day, and securing the best deal for the Western Allies in the face of communist forces that grew more wearied of their alliance with capitalist powers had to take precedence.\textsuperscript{250} In this context, Churchill’s strategy of achieving goals on the periphery of major fronts seems much more clearly linked with post-war positioning against the Soviets. The Americans may have been confused at times by his insistence on focusing on actions in places that seemed to be far removed from the major movements in the German heartland. These maneuvers may have seemed to be merely actions attempting to prop up the British Empire. But they fit in well with the idea that they were attempting to provide the best position possible for the Allies.\textsuperscript{251} Additionally, plans that were never carried out, like Churchill’s and Alexander’s scheme to land an amphibious force at Pola and push through the Ljubljana Gap towards Vienna also appear to be more than just gallivanting flights of fancy.\textsuperscript{252} Indeed, Field Marshal Alexander himself stated that the planned offensive via the Istrian Peninsula were specifically designed to counter-act the Soviet advance.\textsuperscript{253} It would block potential moves by the Soviets and Yugoslavs towards Italy and would cut off the Italian partisans from potential aid from forces with sympathetic political beliefs.

These plans, along with the operation actually undertaken in April of 1945, were a form of insurance by the Allies. They were hedging their bets by fighting the Germans in 1945 in order to fight the Soviets later. Every inch of ground, every city, and every crucial objective

\textsuperscript{251} Alanbrooke, \textit{War Diaries}, 612.
\textsuperscript{252} Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 61.
\textsuperscript{253} Alexander, \textit{The Alexander Memoirs}, 151.
achieved by the Allies was something that communist forces could not get.\footnote{Churchill, \textit{The Second World War}, 457.} Sending their troops into the Po Valley would insure that communist expansion would be halted. This was the essence of the strategy of containment. One would use military force and the attainment of certain objectives to physically block the expansion of communism. This would make it easier to foil communist expansion by already controlling the communist objectives instead of having to wrest away communist gains. Containment would not become a well-defined Western strategy until after the Second World War had ended. However, the Allied actions in Italy during this time uncannily resemble this strategy. It was an unconventional idea, but it was brutally simple: spill blood now to prevent it on an even greater scale in the post-war period. And if this could be achieved in Italy indirectly by way of fighting the Wehrmacht, then from their perspective it was worth the effort in firing off some of the first shots of the Cold War.

A post-script to the war in Italy reveals the prescience of pursuing this strategy. The Communist Party would hold a significant position in post-war Italy.\footnote{Behan, \textit{The Italian Resistance}, 137.} In fact it came within reach of winning control of the country in nation-wide elections.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 128.} The Americans and the British narrowly avoided a disaster with this vote, and it is hard to imagine that the outcome would have been in their favor if they had allowed cohesive, communist governments to be formed by the partisans. Indeed, communists would continue to plague Italy through many of the postwar decades.\footnote{\textit{Ibid.}, 145.} One needs only to look to the chaos unleashed by the Red Brigades to see the danger of unchecked communist forces on the Italian Peninsula. The Allies recognized this in a different format but they appreciated the danger all the same.
When examining the conduct of war, strategist Carl von Clausewitz provides an incredible lens to view war and politics along the same continuum. His analysis is of particular pertinence as it serves as an academic tool to link political analysis with the conduct of war. Most of the existing works on the Po Valley Campaign and on the Italian Campaign as a whole spend most of their time tied up in a military-only style of analysis. Campaigns are only looked at in terms of how they affected the war and what sort of military goals were derived from them. This is the most serious weakness of the literature, but Clausewitz’s approach in *On War* provides a way to link these together.

First and foremost, Clausewitz’s most famous saying is very apt in this analysis. Roughly quoted, war as simply politics in another form not only appeals to common sense but it very much fits into what is understood about war.\(^ {258}\) It does not occur in a vacuum.\(^ {259}\) Wars do not just erupt without some sort of reason or rationale. Politics is what ultimately drives war and conflict.\(^ {260}\) Politicians make decisions about the use of force in the context of geopolitical situations they and their countrymen face. War is not only very often a direct result of these circumstances but it also shapes politics through the gains it makes and the pressure that it exerts on populations. Clausewitz sees these two as part and parcel of one another, truly inseparable when one academically analyzes warfare.\(^ {261}\)

This principle very much applies to the entirety of the Italian Campaign. In fact it stretches even before that. In the dark days of 1942, many American commanders, including General George Marshall, were very keen on launching an invasion of France by year’s end.\(^ {262}\)


\(^{259}\) Clausewitz, *On War*, 605.

\(^{260}\) Ibid.

\(^{261}\) Ibid.

\(^{262}\) Higgins, *Soft Underbelly*, 32.
Part of their reasoning was militarily based. They were desperately concerned that the Soviet Union would fall under the enormous pressure that was being exerted against it at Stalingrad. But, this strategy was just as much driven by political considerations.263 The Roosevelt Administration had publically pledged to a “Germany First” strategy of defeating the Third Reich before turning their attention against the Japanese Empire. American forces needed to be seen as undertaking some sort of action against their foes in Europe, especially in light of the fierce battles that had been raging in the Pacific all throughout 1942.264 An attack against the Germans was presumed to be a way of keeping up morale at home while also simultaneously keeping support for the concept of tackling the Germans first. The American public had never forgotten that it had been the Japanese who had driven America into the war and who had been their main adversary through its early months.

However, British political considerations impeded the Americans here. The leaders of the United Kingdom had been veterans of the First World War and knew that both the Americans and British had neither the experience nor strength to challenge the Germans in France in 1942.265 More importantly, they knew how much of a bloodbath it would be confronting the Germans at this point, a fact that was simply politically unacceptable to the British leadership.266 This was further compounded by the fact that they were battling for their very lives in North Africa against Erwin Rommel. They would fight long and hard to convince the Americans to undertake actions in the Mediterranean instead. Over several joint conferences, the British managed to persuade the Americans to follow this course.267 It would be politically acceptable

265 Ibid.
266 Hastings, *Winston’s War*, 239.
267 Ibid., 254.
for the Americans as they would be seen taking action against the Germans and the British could avoid the political disaster of another Dunkirk.\textsuperscript{268} They both would also receive the political boost of looking like they were undertaking some sort of action against the Germans while the Russians were shouldering almost the entire burden of weathering the homicidal fury of the Third Reich.\textsuperscript{269} Thus Clausewitz’s theory is proved right by this example. While military concerns were serious in shaping this decision, it was ultimately politics that determined the fate of American and British strategy in the Mediterranean Theater.

The Allied Invasion of Italy was a continuation of these political decisions. They could have chosen to halt their advance after Sicily fell in order to focus on preparations for Operation Overlord in Normandy the next year.\textsuperscript{270} German divisions would still be tied down by the threat of Allied invasion of the Italian Peninsula and, even if a few German divisions could be dispatched to the Eastern Front, they would not have made a serious difference on a front which had exceeded all previous wars in the scope of sheer numbers and destruction.\textsuperscript{271} However, this was not a politically expedient position. The Soviets had been balking at the fact that the Western Allied contribution to the war effort had been so small.\textsuperscript{272} This political relationship with the Soviets had to be maintained if the Allies were to prevail against the Third Reich. Action had to be undertaken on the Italian Peninsula. Additionally, a ten month lull in combat with only Allied air raids would have also been unacceptable for morale on the home front. Finally, the Allies were aware of the fragility of the Axis government in Italy. With Mussolini gone, an invasion of the mainland would almost certainly cause this government to collapse or,

\textsuperscript{268} Hastings, \textit{Winston’s War}, 254.
\textsuperscript{269} Ibid., 312.
\textsuperscript{270} Linklater, \textit{The Campaign in Italy}, 48.
\textsuperscript{271} Glantz, “The Soviet-German War”, accessed March 3, 2014. Located at \url{http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Clz27nghlg}
\textsuperscript{272} Hastings, \textit{Winston’s War}, 312.
more likely, surrender. The political value of having one of the main three Axis Powers surrendering at that point in the war was too good of a political opportunity to pass up. This factor would further impel the Allies to make the decision to land on the mainland of Europe in force in September of 1943. These three political factors would force the Allies to decide to continue their Mediterranean offensive, showing the preeminence of Clausewitz’s concepts even in the modern day.

The undertaking of the Po Valley offensive is an excellent vindication of the concept of politics being the ultimate driver of the shape of war. Most of the factors existing on the ground at the time clearly argued against pressing the attack further. Yet that is exactly what happened. A decision that cut against the grain of military logic was made. However, this puzzle makes perfect sense in light of Clausewitz’s concepts. Ultimately the decision to attack in April of 1945 was a political one. All of the frustrating contradictions of why this decision was made become less confusing when one observes the existing political landscape. The stage was being set for the grand confrontation between the forces of capitalism and communism. The Germans had been defeated. The final campaigns were simply mopping up the remains. The Soviets were the bright light that pierced the remaining fog of the Third Reich. They would be the next challenger. If the Western Allies were to be able to face down the largest army the world had ever seen for hegemony over Europe, then they had to be prevented from gaining as much territory as possible. The Allies had to contain their advance by blocking them out of potential land grabs. Northern Italy would be a perfect place to put this strategy into effect. Not only would any potential advances by Soviet forces be blocked, their proxies in the form of local partisans would be prevented from grabbing power in the place of the Red Army. Clausewitz’s

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aphorism had come to life on the Italian Peninsula. The Allies were deploying their forces for purely political reasons, to achieve political goals.

Thus the campaign in northern Italy would become an excellent example of how politics is the ultimate driver of not only military strategy but war itself.

V. Conclusion

The Po Valley Campaign will unfortunately never receive the attention that it is truly due. It is replete with stories of great courage and bravery, of a sense of vindication that after years of brutal combat the Allies had won a clear victory. The long awaited breakthrough had finally been achieved. In the final days of the campaign, the Allied forces could push forward along the dusty roads of Italy towards the glistening peaks of the Alps, knowing that they had finally defeated the Germans.

However, what they had accomplished in the last weeks of the war was more than just a victory over the Germans. They had fired some of the first shots of the Cold War. The campaign that they had fought may have broken through German defensive lines, but it had also helped to prevent the Soviets from literally crossing the Rubicon. Stalin and his proxies gained much territory in the final days of the war but Milan, Venice, and Rome would lie outside their grasp. This blow against the Soviets and the communist cause in Europe had been achieved in an indirect fashion, but it was real nonetheless. It may have been difficult to comprehend at the time but every town, every inch of territory that the Allies captured in Italy would help to hold back Soviet expansion.

Certainly controversy emanates from proposing this theory regarding the Allied actions. It makes them seem much more cynical. What looked like a great crusade to rid the world of
Nazism seems to have turned into squabbling among allies over who would control what territory. And the breakdown of the great Anglo-American-Soviet Alliance seems to be in some way partially the fault of the Western Allies, something that contrasts the viewpoints of very many people. However, these actions by the Allies fit perfectly into the mold of the world as men like Carl von Clausewitz saw it, a world of politics and power, of zero-sum games and political hegemony. They were rational actors reacting to the reality of the situation they were faced with. Confrontation with the Soviets was inevitable. They merely seized what advantage they could, preempting their soon to be rivals.

The Italian Campaign has always been subject to much criticism. Many historians have second-guessed the decisions of Allied generals and have even questioned the necessity of the campaign at all. However, in the end, the Allies achieved a great deal in Italy. They showed their determination to carry out a war against a most formidable foe that was dug into some of the most defensible terrain on the European continent. Their sacrifices gained much for the Allies. The land they paid for with their blood would help to strike the first counter-blow against communism in Europe. The Cold War continued on for another four decades after the last shots of the Second World War, but no matter how much the campaign has faded from memory, what happened in northern Italy mattered and helped to change the world.
Bibliography


