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# Winston Churchill and the “Second Front”: A Reappraisal\*

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The invasion of France and its timing was one of the most important issues in the course of the war, and it continued even after the war to spur historiographical disagreement. Churchill, British Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, was a key figure in the controversy. After the war, he was charged by both American and Russian personalities with having been against the invasion and having played an important role in its postponement. Churchill countered these contentions in his book on the war. He asserted that he had never opposed the invasion and even considered himself as having originated the concept of a massive invasion of Western Europe. According to him, where he differed from the Americans was not on the plan to invade northern France but on the proper timing, the invasion had to be carried out in 1944 and not before, because only then would conditions be ripe for it.<sup>1</sup> His arguments were buttressed by the official British history of the Grand Strategy of the war, written jointly by a number of historians, which appeared mainly in the 1950s and 1960s. This official history influenced American researchers as well, and they accepted Churchill's version even before the British archives were opened.<sup>2</sup> The historian A. J. P. Taylor opined twenty years ago, “Churchill's version of the second World War is likely to dominate the writing of its history for many years to come,” a belief still basically valid today.<sup>3</sup> As this article

\* I would like to thank Lynne Rienner Publishers for allowing me to draw material from my forthcoming book, *Churchill Strategy and History*. I also wish to acknowledge the financial assistance granted by the Leonard Davies Institute for International Relations.

<sup>1</sup> See Winston S. Churchill (WSC), *The Second World War*, 6 vols. (Boston, 1948–53), vol. 2, bk. 1, chap. 13, esp. p. 254, 3.655, 659–61, 4.651, 659, 5.253–55.

<sup>2</sup> For example, M. Howard, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 4, (HMSO, London, 1972), pp. 208, 421, 431, 565; J. Ehrman, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 5 (HMSO, London, 1956), pp. 105–21, and also M. Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (New York, 1968), passim. For the opinion of American official historians, see R. M. Leighton, “Overlord Revisited: An Interpretation of American Strategy in the European War, 1942–1944,” *American Historical Review* 68, no. 4 (July 1963) 919–37; K. R. Greenfield, *American Strategy in World War II: A Reconsideration* (1963, reprint, Baltimore, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> A. J. P. Taylor, *English History, 1914–1915* (1965, reprint, Harmondsworth, 1977), p. 771, and also, J. H. Plumb, “The Historian,” in *Churchill: Four Faces and*

will make clear, however, a renewed scrutiny and study of the documents and of the issue do not conduce to confirming Churchill's contentions and the conclusions of the official British historians.

The development of the joint Anglo-American strategy has to be divided into two periods: the years 1940–41, when the British stood alone, and the period after the United States entered the war. The first period is very important because in its course the foundations were laid on which the later Anglo-American strategy was based. In this first period, and even after it, Churchill told his military advisers that he did not know how Britain would win the war, and as a matter of principle he even doubted the efficacy of long-term planning because of the constantly changing face of the conflict.<sup>4</sup> He was clear nevertheless about the opening moves. He had thought them out before the war began and even tried to initiate them before the fall of France.<sup>5</sup> After his Scandinavian campaign failed, and France—the cornerstone of his plans—was overpowered by the Germans, he turned to the Mediterranean area, the last remaining feasible move among those he had planned before the war, which coincided with the strategy of the Chiefs of Staff. An offensive in that region against Italy was included in their plans even before September 1939. On October 31, 1940 Churchill outlined his strategic thinking to his military advisers. He asserted that what was left was to pressure Germany and Italy by means of a blockade and unrestricted strategic bombing, and his goal was to transfer to the Middle East twenty-five to thirty British divisions<sup>6</sup>—the

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*the Man*, ed A J P Taylor (London, 1969), pp 148–49, on Churchill's strategy, e.g., R. Lewin, *Churchill as Warlord* (New York, 1973), passim, esp p 247; C Baxter, "Winston Churchill Military Strategist?" *Military Affairs* 47 (February 1983) 7–10, M Gilbert, *Winston Churchill Road to Victory, 1941–1945* (Boston, 1986), passim, and "The Big Two," *New York Review of Books* 32, no. 2 (February 14, 1985) 33–35

<sup>4</sup> Defence Committee, October 15, 1940, CAB 69/1, and October 31, 1940, CAB 69/8. These and all other archival materials cited are from the Public Record Office in London. Files designated PREM are files of the prime minister's office, CAB files are War Cabinet's minutes and memoranda, Defence Committee's minutes and papers, and Chiefs of Staff Committee's minutes and memoranda.

<sup>5</sup> See House of Commons, March 16, 1939, April 12, 1939, April 13, 1939, in R Rhodes James, ed., *Winston Churchill. His Complete Speeches, 1897–1963*, 8 vols (New York, 1974), 6:6088, 6097–99, 6099–6105, WSC, "Memorandum on Sea-Power, 1939" (March 27, 1939), in *Companion Volumes* of documents to the official biography of Winston S. Churchill by R S Churchill and M Gilbert (London, 1967–82), 5, pt. 3:1414–17, "The Anglo-Turkish Alliance," *Daily Telegraph* (May 18, 1939), in Churchill and Gilbert, 5, pt. 3:1494, R Macleod and D Kelly, eds., *The Ironside Diaries, 1937–40* (London, 1962), July 25, 1939, pp 83–84, August 27, 1939, p 90.

<sup>6</sup> Defence Committee, October 31, 1940, Confidential Annex, CAB 69/8 and also CAB 69/1.

lion's share of the fifty-five divisions planned for the British army when brought to its full complement—as swiftly as sea transport could effect it. (In the spring of 1943 there were more British combat divisions in the Mediterranean area than in the British Isles.)<sup>7</sup> With these forces he planned to strike at the Italian forces in North Africa and to take Sicily, as first steps toward getting Italy out of the war, and to establish a joint military front with the Balkan states. The center of gravity of the British war effort on land began to shift to the Middle East, as planned, and the army scored impressive victories over the Italians, but the British defeat in the Balkans in the spring of 1941 enabled the Germans to take firm possession in North Africa and to turn the tables in this area. The British forces in the Middle East bogged down in difficulties and began to consume a considerable part of the resources of the British Empire. This pointed up the contradiction in Churchill's strategic approach. All his hopes of victory were based on the United States' entry into the war, but the general lines of his strategy were not built around joint Anglo-American military operations in the future. On the contrary, the decision that the British center of gravity on land would be in the Middle East made it still more difficult to create quickly a natural focal point for future Anglo-American cooperation in and around the British Isles.<sup>8</sup> Even while the United States was still neutral, its army leaders did not hide their doubts concerning the logic of extending British commitments in the Middle East,<sup>9</sup> but as long as the United States was neutral their influence was limited. In any case, after the serious deterioration in the military situation in the area in the spring of 1941, it is doubtful whether it would have been possible to refrain from extending Britain's commitments there.

The German attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941 gave birth to the Russian demand for the creation of a "second front." Churchill and his military advisers were to some extent taken by surprise by this demand,

<sup>7</sup> See W. S. Dunn, *Second Front Now 1943* (University, Ala., 1980), chap. 14, esp. pp. 220–21; WSC, *The Second World War*, 4:821–22. From August 1940 to August 1941 the British force in the Middle East grew from 80,000 to 600,000 men. During this period and even later, reinforcements were sent to the Middle East at the rate of 30,000–40,000 men each month (see House of Commons [Secret Session] June 25, 1941, in James, ed., 6:6431–44; J. M. Gwyer, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 3, pt. 1 [HMSO, London, 1964], p. 126).

<sup>8</sup> In a "Brief Survey of Situation in Middle East," to be sent to the Americans, the Chiefs of Staff wrote, "the war can only be won or lost in and around the United Kingdom." When rejecting the paper, Churchill said that the war could be lost there, but "it is not true it can only be won there" (April 29, 1941, May 4, 1941, PREM 3/296/17).

<sup>9</sup> Gwyer, pp. 126–27; M. S. Watson, *Chiefs of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations*, U.S. Army (Washington, D.C., 1950), pp. 400–408; WSC, *The Second World War*, 3:423–25.

because up to June 1941 they were not contemplating any large military land operations involving the northwestern area of Europe. Moreover, because of the prime minister's opposition, no general strategic plan had been officially accepted for the final defeat of Germany.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, certain basic ideas were elaborated that left a deep impress right till the end of the war. The line of thought was that Germany could not be defeated in a continental campaign but only indirectly by attrition from the air and sea and by encouragement offered to the conquered populations to subvert German rule. The collapse of Germany as a result of the war of attrition would evoke a mass uprising of these populations, and afterward small land forces could be despatched to the Continent to deal the final blow. This conception, largely born of wishful thinking, came naturally to the leaders of a country in the strategic situation Britain was in at that time. At this stage Churchill and his military advisers differed among themselves only on some fine points.<sup>11</sup> At all events the Soviet appeals for help led the British planners to work out operational plans of action against western Europe. These were, however, on a limited scale and their execution was explicitly made dependent on a Russian collapse or a sudden German collapse.<sup>12</sup>

The entry of the United States into the war—a revolutionary change in its course—did not engender any change of corresponding magnitude in the strategic thinking of the prime minister and his military advisers. On their way to the first Washington Conference at the end of 1941, the Chiefs of Staff and Churchill separately put down on paper their plans for Anglo-American strategic cooperation. The military advisers were of the opinion that Britain and the United States must do their utmost to support the Soviet Union, since there was “a front on land there from which to make a direct assault on the frontiers of Germany at the first sign of enemy disintegration.” The United States and Britain would carry on softening-up operations and attrition by strategic bombing, internal subversion, and joint military operations for the purpose of conquering all of North Africa and getting Italy out of the war. Only when Germany had been bled white would a number of simultaneous assaults be launched on the European coast: by the British from the west and the Americans from the south. One of their main assumptions was that on logistic grounds it would not be possible to put in large American land forces

<sup>10</sup> Defence Committee, June 25, 1941, CAB 69/2

<sup>11</sup> Defence Committee, October 15, 1940, CAB 69/1, June 17, 1941, CAB 69/2, WSC, “General Directive, Anglo-American-Russian Conference,” September 22, 1941, CAB 69/3, J Butler, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 2 (HMSO, London, 1957), pp. 341–45, 478–79, 547–50, Gwyer, pp. 42–44, WSC to Roosevelt, July 25, 1941, in F. Loewenheim et al., eds., *Roosevelt and Churchill: Their Secret Wartime Correspondence* (New York, 1975), pp. 151–52

<sup>12</sup> J. Butler, *Grand Strategy* (London, 1964), 3, pt. 2, 568–69

in the final phase. They were of the opinion that there would be no need for this because in any case the final stage would only take place after a German collapse.<sup>13</sup>

Churchill manifested his general agreement with the Chiefs of Staff's program, but he stated that it was important "to put before the peoples of the British Empire and the United States the mass invasion of the continent of Europe as the goal for 1943." In his own plan he wrote, "The war can only be ended through the defeat in Europe of the German armies, or through internal convulsions in Germany produced by the unfavourable course of the war, economic privations, and the Allied bombing offensive . . . An internal collapse is always possible, but we must not count on this. Our plans must proceed on the assumption that the resistance of the German Army and Air Force will continue at its present level."

For all that, his plan was in fact much like that of his military advisers, with the addition of some flaws. He contended that a joint Anglo-American operation was necessary in 1942 to assist in conquering the whole of North Africa, and he raised the possibility that the next phase would be to take Sicily and seize a foothold in Italy. Also, the strategic bombing of Germany should be intensified. He warned, "What will harm us is for a vast United States Army of ten millions to be created, which for at least two years while it was training would absorb all the available supplies and stand idle defending the American continent."

The Allied offensive in 1943 would have to be carried out by landing armored forces simultaneously along the coasts of Europe, in Norway, Denmark, Holland, Belgium, France, Italy, and perhaps the Balkans, in sufficient strength to spur the occupied populations to revolt. They would never rise up of their own accord, but the moment that this rising succeeded, it would turn into the main bulk of the liberating forces. The Germans could not hold out at one and the same time against the liberating armies and the mass rising in Europe.<sup>14</sup>

After the war, Churchill contended that this plan was proof that he "always considered that a decisive assault upon the German-occupied countries on the largest possible scale was the only way in which the war could be won"<sup>15</sup>—but it is not so. It is true that he stated at the beginning of his plan that it was built on "the assumption that the resistance of the German Army and Air Force will continue at its present level," but there is a complete break

<sup>13</sup> See Joint Planning Staff, "The Basis of Anglo-American Strategy," December 16, 1941, CAB 80/61, and British Chiefs of Staff (COS), "American-British Strategy, Grand Strategy," December 22, 1941, CAB 80/61.

<sup>14</sup> See December 18, 1941, CAB 80/61, WSC, "The Atlantic Front," "The Pacific Front," "The Campaign of 1943," December 18–20, 1941, PREM 3/499/1–2.

<sup>15</sup> WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), 3 655, 659–61.

between this statement and the plan itself, which was based and dependent on a great, simultaneous uprising of the peoples of Europe. Apart from the operative difficulties, the plan was also flawed logically. The relatively small liberation forces, whose success depended on a simultaneous uprising, would not be landed until it was known for certain that there would be a successful mass rising. On the other hand, the risings would not take place until their leaders knew that the armored forces had in fact succeeded in landing on the shores of Europe. In June 1941, when the people on the planning staff of the British General Staff (hereafter, the planners) put forward a similar idea, the Chiefs of Staff discerned this logical flaw.<sup>16</sup> From this point of view, the plan of the Chiefs of Staff was more logical: the landing on the shores of Europe would be carried out only after a German collapse.

The Chiefs of Staff differed from Churchill's contention that liberation forces should be landed on the shores of the Continent while the German army was still at its present level of strength. They reiterated that a landing would be possible only when the German army and air force's capacity to resist had been broken. In their opinion this point would be secured by the strategic bombings that were to be the main war effort in 1943.<sup>17</sup> Even though Churchill thought that there was no guarantee that the strategic bombings would achieve their purpose, he replied that there were no significant differences of view between himself and the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>18</sup> In Washington he made it clear to the Americans that he saw no need to transfer large American forces to Europe. Field-Marshal Dill told the American generals—who wondered what Churchill meant—that “the general idea was that it would not be possible to undertake land operations on a large scale in Europe until the Germans showed signs of cracking.”<sup>19</sup>

Churchill sensed the basic flaw in the line of British strategy. He even knew that the Americans were not happy with this line. He tried to get closer to the American stand, but after turning round and about he came back to his starting point—the German collapse and the peoples' risings must come first. His plan then was based on the action or inaction of others—the Russians, the conquered populations, the Germans—but not on the actions of the Anglo-American armed forces. Instead of basing the long-term strategic plans for winning the war on the power of the United States and its army, he built it as before on the basis of the advantages and the failings of British military power.

<sup>16</sup> Gwyer (n. 7 above), pp. 44–48.

<sup>17</sup> D. Pound, J. Dill, and C. Portal to WSC, December 20, 1941, PREM 3/499/2.

<sup>18</sup> See, WSC to Brigadier Hollis for COS Committee, December 21, 1941, PREM 3/499/2, COS to WSC, December 22, 1941, PREM 3/499/2.

<sup>19</sup> Meeting of U.S. and British Chiefs of Staff, December 24, 1941, CAB 80/61, see also WSC, Broadcast, London, February 9, 1941, in James, ed. (n. 5 above), 6 6348.

In Washington at the beginning of 1942, the American army people did not have their hearts in this discussion but rather in the crisis in the Pacific and the Philippines. They did not have a strategic plan of their own on hand, and they were impatient to end the conference, so they accepted the plan of the British Chiefs of Staff almost offhandedly. The advantage of the British plan was its vague wording, and the Americans were careful not to commit themselves on its offensive phase. The reference to the Anglo-American offensive across the Mediterranean in 1942 was taken out, and so was the sentence on “simultaneous landings in several of the occupied countries” in 1943, one of Churchill’s key points. It was agreed that after the phases of halting and attrition and the conquest of North Africa (by the British), there would be “a return to the Continent” in 1943 “across the Mediterranean from Turkey into the Balkans, or by landings in Western Europe.” Owing to opposition from Marshall and his colleagues, no agreement was reached at all on an Anglo-American landing in French North Africa (code named “Gymnast”) despite President Roosevelt’s support for the idea.<sup>20</sup> At all events, Churchill returned to England with the feeling that, given President Roosevelt’s stand, he would be able to get the Americans to agree to a joint offensive in northwestern Africa. In his view this operation appeared a natural first step in Anglo-American cooperation.<sup>21</sup>

In Washington they thought otherwise. Though it is true that the American military leaders were absorbed in the Far East crisis and in the process of reestablishing their army, in April 1942 Marshall, the army chief of staff, already had a plan in hand for the defeat of Germany. It stemmed from the “Victory Plan” initiated by Roosevelt in July 1941, whose author was then-Colonel Albert Wedemeyer. It was intended to be the economic and organizational master plan for the military system if the United States entered the war. Wedemeyer came to the conclusion that there was no other way to defeat Germany and prevent its dominating the “Euro-Asiatic Heartland” than by defeating the German land army with a superior land army on the European continent. According to his planning, the United States would have to create an army of 8.8 million men, comprising 200 divisions, eighty-one of them armored divisions, to be ready for action by July 1943. American superiority in production would make it possible to build a great air force, which would make up for the absence of sufficient quantitative advantage for the attacking forces on land. (In his calculations, Wedemeyer did not take into account the strength of the Red Army.) The conception behind this plan was

<sup>20</sup> Compare COS, “American-British Strategy” (n 13 above), and “American and British Strategy,” Memorandum by the U S and British Chiefs of Staff, COS (42)75, CAB 80/33

<sup>21</sup> War Cabinet Discussion, January 17, 1942, CAB 65/29



reincarnated in General Marshall's plan, through Eisenhower, then head of the Operations Division.<sup>22</sup>

Marshall's plan was simple. It was based on the premise that the west European area was logistically the most suitable for the joint Anglo-American offensive. The shortest route to Germany and the Ruhr, its war industrial center, is through France and Belgium and lies within reach of the French coast. An operation in this area would allow utilization of the tremendous air power that had already been concentrated in existing British bases near northern France. The Atlantic route between the United States and Britain was the shortest one, and only in Britain were there enough harbors and port installations to receive a great American army speedily. If any other war zone were chosen for the center of gravity of the Anglo-American operation, such as the Middle East Area, the British and Americans would still have to defend the vital Atlantic sea route to Britain. It was therefore preferable to concentrate the maritime transport and defense effort on this route instead of dispersing it over a number of routes. Marshall stated that if a positive decision were taken at once it would be possible to concentrate a large assault force in Britain—an American army of a million men, comprising thirty divisions, which would be joined by eighteen British divisions. This force would be ready for a landing on the French coast between Le Havre and Boulogne on April 1, 1943. The great Allied air superiority over northern France would prevent the reinforcement of the German forces facing the invading army. Marshall warned against dispersing the Anglo-American effort and argued that forces should be sent to other theaters only to stabilize them. He also advised carrying out a preliminary, limited attack to seize a small bridgehead on the French coast in 1942 as an "emergency offensive" if there were signs of a Russian collapse or a German one.<sup>23</sup>

Here for the first time was a strategic plan to engage the German army directly at its present strength in order to defeat it in the field according to a clear timetable, a plan that did not depend on an extreme weakening or collapse of the German military machine. It was built on what the Allies might have been able to do and not on internal factors on the Continent over which they had little control, as in the plan of Churchill and his Chiefs of Staff. This was the fundamental difference between the American and British approaches.

<sup>22</sup> A. C. Wedemeyer, *Wedemeyer Reports'* (New York, 1958), pp 49–53, chap 5, esp p 65, Watson (n 9 above), chap 2, esp pp 338–46, 352–57, J Keegan, *Six Armies in Normandy* (Harmondsworth, 1983), pp 31–34

<sup>23</sup> See General Marshall's Plan, "Operation in Western Europe," in Butler (n 11 above), 3, pt. 2.675–81, F Pogue, *George C Marshall Ordeal and Hope, 1939–42* (New York, 1966), pp. 304–5, D Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York, 1952), pp. 58–65

Marshall went to London in April 1942 to secure immediate British consent to his plan. The British Chiefs of Staff's first reaction was cool, but they changed their position in a short while, stating that "in the broadest terms General Marshall's proposal was in line with our strategy."<sup>24</sup> It was the prime minister who influenced their change of attitude. To the Americans Churchill said that he was in agreement with the plan. "The conception underlying it accorded with the classic principles of war—namely, concentration against the main enemy. One broad reservation must however be made—it was essential to carry on the defence of India and the Middle East."<sup>25</sup>

Marshall left London with the feeling that he had been accorded full British consent to his plan. When the British shortly afterward abandoned the "Emergency Offensive" put forward for 1942 and Churchill reverted to the idea of conquering northwestern Africa, Marshall saw this as a breach of faith. Churchill and the authors of the official British history contend that the British agreement in principle to Marshall's plan had been completely sincere. The historians add, however, that the British should have made their reservations concerning the plan perfectly clear to the Americans<sup>26</sup>

The fundamental problem was that the prime minister's and his military advisers' interpretation of the plan was different from the Americans', although it looked as if they were talking about the same things. This already appeared in the letter that Churchill wrote to Roosevelt expressing agreement with the Marshall Plan but denoting the targets of Anglo-American attacks in 1943 as stretching from the North Cape to Bayonne on the south Atlantic coast of France to the foot of the Pyrenees. He was still thinking, then, in terms of his plan of late 1941 for an attack spread over the coasts of Europe, while Marshall's plan was based on concentration on a small stretch of French coastline opposite the British coast.<sup>27</sup> The vagueness and differences between the British and American conceptions increased because the code names of the earlier British plans were transferred to some of the American plans. The Emergency Offensive of 1942 was called "Sledgehammer," the code name for a similar British plan. The logistical and organizational apparatus connected with transferring the American army to the British Isles and the preparation of the forces intended for the 1943 invasion was called by a new code name, "Bolero." The code name given to the 1943 invasion itself was "Round-up," a code name taken from a British staff plan elaborated at the

<sup>24</sup> See COS Meetings, April 9–10, 1942, CAB 79/56

<sup>25</sup> COS Meeting, April 14, 1942, CAB 79/56, Defence Committee, April 14, 1942, PREM 3/333/6

<sup>26</sup> Butler, 3, pt 2 575–81, Lord Ismay, *Memoirs* (London, 1960), p 249, Pogue, pp 318–20

<sup>27</sup> WSC to Roosevelt, April 17, 1942, in Leowenheim et al, eds (n 11 above), pp 206–8

end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, which was based on an entirely different conception (that of a previous German collapse) and was in fact only an expanded edition of Sledgehammer. At the end of 1942, Field-Marshal Dill, head of the British Joint Staff Mission in Washington, asked London to clarify the intentions behind the code names “as the term ‘Round-up’ appears now to have various interpretations ranging from a full-scale frontal attack against unbroken Germany to preparation to take advantage of a sudden crash in German military power.”<sup>28</sup>

The confusion was mainly one-way, since Churchill and his advisers were clear as to the Americans’ intentions; in contrast, the Americans were in the dark when they tried to place the British stand at any given moment, although they were not unaware of the fact that the British were relying on a preliminary German collapse.

Churchill had good grounds for accepting the Marshall Plan. First and foremost, he wanted to make sure that the Americans would center their war effort on Europe. He had had disturbing information from Washington in the previous four months indicating a growing trend in the direction of the Pacific. He and his chiefs of staff were very interested in the first phase of the plan—Bolero—because it would give them more room for strategic maneuver. American forces stationed in Britain would enable them to dispatch additional British divisions from the British Isles to the Mediterranean or any other theater, even without American consent.<sup>29</sup> An additional factor that made it easier for Churchill to accept the Marshall Plan was the cumulative intelligence evaluation (founded on the basic concept that had not changed since the war started) to the effect that, if Germany failed in its expected offensive in Russia in 1942, its vital oil reserves would be exhausted and its military and economic apparatus would be severely damaged. If this happened, then indeed “they [might] collapse with unexpected rapidity as they did in 1918.” It was thought that there were good prospects of the Russians’ halting the German offensive.<sup>30</sup> Churchill was of the opinion that these

<sup>28</sup> JSM (Dill) to War Cabinet, December 31, 1942, PREM 3/499/7, see COS Meeting, March 10, 1942, CAB 79/86; COS Meetings, March 17, 1942, April 8, 1942, CAB 79/56, Butler, 3, pt 2 568–69. There are many instances of misunderstandings and misuses of the code names, e.g., A Brooke’s mistake (War Cabinet Discussion, June 27, 1942, CAB 65/30), Dill’s mistake (Dill to WSC, July 15, 1942, PREM 3/333/19); Roosevelt’s mistake, which was noted by Churchill (WSC to COS Committee, April 9, 1943, CAB 79/60).

<sup>29</sup> See Major-General Sir J. Kennedy, *The Business of War* (London, 1957), p. 224, Lord Moran, *Winston Churchill: The Struggle for Survival, 1940–1965* (London, 1968), p. 52, see also, WSC, *The Second World War* (n. 1 above), 3 684–85.

<sup>30</sup> Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC), “Enemy Intentions,” April 6, 1942, PREM 3/135/2, “The Possible Course of the Russian Campaign and Its Implications,” June

evaluations were “very good,”<sup>31</sup> and he may have assumed that if Hitler were indeed to fail, then conditions would be ripe in 1943 for an invasion in line with his conception—a German collapse and an extensive uprising in Europe. But if Hitler reached the oil wells of the Caucasus, the idea of the invasion of the Continent in 1943 would in any case fall away.

The problem now facing the British and the Americans was the future of Sledgehammer—the landing on a limited scale on the French coast planned for 1942. Originally Sledgehammer was planned only as an emergency operation in the event of a Russian collapse, but afterward Marshall turned it into the first phase of the plan for the big invasion in 1943 without any preconditions. He was afraid that if Sledgehammer were not carried out this would lead to a diversion of forces to other areas, and Round-up would suffer as a result. Moreover, Roosevelt very much wanted to see contact between American and German forces in 1942, Marshall knew that if Sledgehammer were not carried out, Roosevelt, not to mention Churchill, would seek the Germans somewhere else. He also feared that if there were no large-scale diversionary operation in the West, there was the danger that Russia might crack up and with it all the prospects of an invasion in 1943.<sup>32</sup> But while Marshall clearly discerned the trend of the pressures at work in the field, his influence was limited: first, the veto was in the hands of the British, because the greater part of the forces for Sledgehammer was supposed to come from their army in the first stage, and second, because there were sound operational reasons against Sledgehammer—what was needed to carry it out was a firm faith in the strategic conception that Sledgehammer was part of.

In London, however, no such firm faith prevailed.<sup>33</sup> After Marshall returned to Washington, Churchill put forward strategic ideas and took steps that bore witness to the low priority he accorded to the execution of Round-up in 1943. In May 1942 he suggested a landing of Allied forces in northern Norway (“Jupiter”) instead of Sledgehammer, and this idea he was to cling to almost till the end of the war. The British Chiefs of Staff simply did not

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6, 1942, CAB 66/25, see also, F. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War*, 3 vols. (HMSO, London, 1981–84), 2: 88–96.

<sup>31</sup> WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, June 7, 1942, PREM 3/395/13.

<sup>32</sup> JSM (Dill) to the Chiefs of Staff, June 15, 1942, PREM 3/492/2, Dill to WSC, July 15, 1942, PREM 3/333/19, American Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum, July 21, 1942, PREM 3/333/9, Pogue (n. 23 above), pp. 342–46.

<sup>33</sup> In the course of discussion on future operations, Lord Mountbatten, Chief of Combined Operations, had told the War Cabinet that “the implications of mounting an operation on the scale of ‘Sledgehammer’ at the present juncture would be most serious and in my judgment they should not be accepted unless there is a firm intention of actually carrying out the operation” (W.P. [42] 278, July 2, 1942, CAB 66/26).

accept the logic behind this move; they rejected it outright on the grounds that the enemy had great air superiority in that theater and that Jupiter would demand all the escort forces engaged on Britain's western approaches.<sup>34</sup>

For all that, Churchill's thinking focused primarily on an invasion of northwestern Africa (Gymnast), and his problem was how to persuade the Americans to agree to this as a substitute for Sledgehammer. All his Chiefs of Staff agreed with him but made it clear that carrying out Gymnast in 1942 would mean canceling Round-up, planned for the spring of 1943, mainly on logistical grounds<sup>35</sup>—which was also Marshall's opinion, of course. All this did not, however, deter Churchill from proposing to his military advisers to carry out Jupiter and Gymnast simultaneously.<sup>36</sup> He instructed them not to admit to the Americans that Gymnast would be at the expense of Round-up in 1943. Moreover, he and his military advisers contended that in fact carrying out Sledgehammer would harm the prospects of effecting Round-up according to plan. In his book Churchill does not present the real force of the basic dilemma. On the contrary, he cites the contention that Gymnast would cancel Round-up in 1943 as if it were a purely American argument without indicating that his own military advisers were of a similar opinion.<sup>37</sup>

When Churchill learned from Dill, who was stationed in Washington, that there were differences of opinion between Roosevelt and Marshall about these military measures,<sup>38</sup> he left for Washington in order to deepen the rift between the two; but he did not succeed in securing American agreement. He did succeed in doing so in July when Marshall came to London in a last attempt to save Sledgehammer. Marshall had to give in, both because he lacked sufficient backing from Roosevelt and because the British vetoed Sledgehammer.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, in June and July the British were sinking still

<sup>34</sup> WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, May 1, 1942, in WSC, *The Second World War*, 4 348–50, COS Meeting, May 27, 1942, CAB 79/56, WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, June 2, 1942, CAB 80/63; War Cabinet Discussion, June 11, 1942, CAB 65/30, WSC, "Memorandum—Operation Jupiter," June 13, 1942, CAB 80/63, War Cabinet Discussion, July 7, 1942, CAB 65/31, A Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939–1943 (Based on the Diaries and Autobiographical Notes of Field-Marshal Alan Brooke)* (London, 1958), p. 284.

<sup>35</sup> COS Meeting, June 30, 1942, July 16, 1942, CAB 79/56, COS to WSC, July 8, 1942, PREM 3/257/5

<sup>36</sup> COS Meeting, July 6, 1942, CAB 79/56, War Cabinet Discussion, July 7, 1942, CAB 65/31

<sup>37</sup> WSC, Personal Minute, July 5, 1942, PREM 3/257/5, COS Meeting, July 6, 1942, CAB 79/56, WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, July 23, 1942, PREM 3/257/5, WSC, *The Second World War*, vol. 4, bk. 2, chap. 2, and also p. 659

<sup>38</sup> JSM (Dill) to the Chiefs of Staff, June 15, 1942, PREM 3/492/2

<sup>39</sup> COS Meeting, June 30, 1942, CAB 79/56, War Cabinet Discussion, July 7, 1942, CAB 65/31

deeper into the quicksands in the Middle East, and it became clear that it was imperative to put an end to their strategic predicament once and for all. The invasion of North Africa was agreed on and the Chief of the Imperial General Staff Alan Brooke told the War Cabinet that in consequence Round-up would not be carried out in 1943. Churchill maintained that he did not agree with this, but he did not give reasons <sup>40</sup>

Churchill visited Moscow early in August. He promised Stalin that the "Second Front" would be opened in 1943 without indicating that a certain postponement of the invasion might be possible. This was a promise without cover. Both his own military advisers and the Americans had made it clear in writing that "Torch" (the new code name for the invasion of North Africa) would be the main operation in the coming year and would render Round-up "in all probability impracticable of successful execution in 1943." True, in Cairo, some days before his visit to Moscow, Churchill contended that he did not agree with this evaluation, and in his view Torch would mean postponing Round-up only to the late summer or the autumn of 1943 <sup>41</sup> Even from this angle he should have qualified his promise to Stalin, and in any case he had no right to make so far-reaching a promise contrary to the views of his military advisers and the Americans. Hence his contention, "My conscience is clear that I did not deceive or mislead Stalin," falls far short of exculpating him. <sup>42</sup>

The premise that an invasion of Europe would only be possible after the collapse of Germany was the basis of the future Anglo-American strategic plan proposed by the British Chiefs of Staff at the end of October. They stated that experience showed that a large invasion of northern France would not be possible unless and until German military strength had been notably weakened. Russia was the only Power capable of slowing down the Germans and defeating them on land. Anglo-American operations must from now on be directed first and foremost to helping Russia, and strategic bombing of Germany must therefore be stepped up and reach its peak in the summer of 1944. In the meantime limited amphibious operations would be carried out in the Mediterranean theater in the course of 1943 and in 1944, aimed at "extending" and pinning down the German forces in that theater and turning Italy into a burden on Germany. At the same time the build-up of the Anglo-American forces in Britain must be continued, since it might be needed even after Germany's power had been dealt a mortal blow. The force would

<sup>40</sup> See War Cabinet Discussion, July 24, 1942, and app. A, "Proposals for Operations in 1942/3," CAB 65/31

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, Minutes of a conference held at Cairo August 4, 1942, August 28, 1942, CAB 66/28, Meeting at the Kremlin, August 12, 1942, CAB 66/28, Record of Meeting with Sir A. Clark-Kerr, December 15, 1942, COS Meeting, CAB 79/87

<sup>42</sup> WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), 4 659

only “re-enter the Continent at the psychological moment . . . when there was a definite crack in German morale.”<sup>43</sup>

Churchill dwelt on the weakness in this stand: he voiced his disappointment at the passive attitude of the Chiefs of Staff and at the fact that there was “a prevailing inhibition against facing the Germans anywhere except on the other side of salt water.” He disagreed with the assertion that the Russians must bear the brunt of the fighting on land, pointing out that he had promised Stalin to open a Second Front in 1943 and that what the Chiefs of Staff were proposing was only some limited landings on enemy shores in 1943 and 1944. As for the Mediterranean and “stretching the enemy” in that theater, he asked ironically if what they wanted was to extend the Germans’ commitments in the Balkans and Italy or to drive them out.<sup>44</sup>

His own proposals were not clear, however: at one moment he was for intensifying the offensive in the Mediterranean and attacking Italy from the air and on land in order to get it out of the war, initiating military cooperation with the Russians in the Balkans, and invading the south of France from the sea; another time he reverted to the idea of carrying out Round-up as planned but at a later date. Up till mid-December 1942 he swung widely back and forth.<sup>45</sup> When the Chiefs of Staff clarified their position, Churchill affirmed that “it was clear that there were no fundamental differences of opinion between the Ministers and their military advisers.”<sup>46</sup> Within a matter of days, however, he was arguing that he could not agree to a strategic plan that did not include a Second Front in 1943, and he instructed his Chiefs of Staff to reexamine the whole question.<sup>47</sup> Nevertheless, when the time was near for the projected meeting with the Americans in Casablanca in January, Churchill realized that the debate was finished and that they must face the Americans with a united front. He told his Chiefs of Staff that his wish to reexamine the possibility of Round-up for 1943 as against the Mediterranean strategy was intended to ensure that “both lines of strategy were fully explored.” He was

<sup>43</sup> COS Committee, “American-British Strategy,” October 30, 1942, CAB 80/65, see also Joint Planners, October 3, 1942, CAB 79/57, and October 18, 1942, CAB 79/58, COS Meetings, October 22–23, 1942, CAB 79/58

<sup>44</sup> WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, November 9, 1942, November 16, 1942, PREM 3/499/6

<sup>45</sup> WSC, “Policy for the Conduct of the War,” October 24, 1942, CAB 66/30, WSC, November 9, 1942, PREM 3/499/6, and, “Note by Minister of Defence,” November 14, 1942, CAB 80/65, COS Meeting, November 15, 1942, CAB 79/58, Defence Committee, November 29, 1942, CAB 69/4, WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, November 29, 1942, CAB 80/66, WSC, “Note by the Minister of Defence,” December 3, 1942, CAB 80/66

<sup>46</sup> Defence Committee, November 16, 1942, CAB 69/4

<sup>47</sup> WSC, “Strategy in 1943,” November 18, 1942, CAB 80/65, Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939–43* (n 34 above), pp 433–42

now convinced that their approach was the right one, but he favored a broader offensive in the Mediterranean conquering Sicily and then landing in the south of Italy to get it out of the war and to prepare a base for entering the Balkans, and also getting Turkey into the war<sup>48</sup> The differences of opinion now boiled down to Churchill's wanting to invade the Italian mainland while the Chiefs of Staff still hesitated<sup>49</sup> In the end, the basic stand of the Chiefs of Staff became the position put forward at Casablanca by the British, with Churchill supporting it wholeheartedly

It is difficult to pin down exactly Churchill's position in the autumn of 1942 One cannot conclude that he in fact intended to carry out Round-up in 1943 before a German collapse occurred because there are no clear pronouncements to this effect, but there are some statements that it was to be carried out if there should be a collapse<sup>50</sup> It may be conceded that for this short time he attached equal importance to a western European assault and to the "Mediterranean Strategy" on condition that the former should not be at the expense of the latter Churchill's vacillations were due to a number of factors First, he had promised Stalin that the Second Front would be opened in 1943<sup>51</sup> Second, once the decision had been taken in favor of Torch in July, with the result that Round-up would not be carried out in 1943, the Americans once more diverted considerable resources to the Pacific theater and announced a slow-down in concentrating forces and equipment in Britain for the invasion (*Bolero*) Along with this announcement, Marshall even voiced the threat that he would send "no more American forces" to Britain apart from those needed for its defense until the Combined Chiefs of Staff agreed on an offensive operation from British territory "which did not depend on a crack in German morale" Churchill, and also the Chiefs of Staff who were against the invasion in 1943, were thoroughly shaken, because as has been said *Bolero* was important not only for the invasion but also for the British war effort as a whole<sup>52</sup> Third, there was cumulative intelligence at the end of

<sup>48</sup> COS Meeting, December 16, 1942, CAB 79/58

<sup>49</sup> Defence Committee, November 29, 1942, CAB 69/4, Eden to WSC, December 12, 1942, PREM 4/100/8

<sup>50</sup> See WSC, "Policy for the Conduct of the War" (n 45 above), and Churchill's clarification of his intention, WSC to Lord Cherwell, October 24, 1942, PREM 3/499/10 Major-General J Kennedy, Director of Military Operations, "could not help wondering" whether Churchill had really intended to invade France in 1943 during this debate with his military advisers (Kennedy [n 29 above], p 277)

<sup>51</sup> See COS Meeting, November 15, 1942, CAB 79/58, WSC to COS Committee, November 16, 1942, PREM 3/499/6, Defence Committee, November 16, 1942, CAB 69/4, COS Meeting, December 3, 1942, CAB 79/58

<sup>52</sup> See COS, August 21, 1942, CAB 79/57, JSM (Washington) to COS September 10 and 27, 1942, PREM 3/492/3, WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee,



1942 indicating *Wehrmacht* weaknesses<sup>53</sup> as well as firm indications of the breakdown of the German summer offensive in Russia, all of which reinforced previous optimistic evaluations. Fourth, since before the First World War Churchill had always attached crucial importance to the west European theater and the dispatch of large British forces there;<sup>54</sup> he was certainly not prejudiced against acting in that theater. Nevertheless, these reasons were not sufficient to make him give continued and outright support to an invasion of western Europe.

At Casablanca Churchill's task was easy. What helped him was the fact that the Allies had not succeeded in conquering all of North Africa and that the Americans came to the conference without having reached a coordinated approach toward the British beforehand. The British proposed that the next step should be the conquest of Sicily. Marshall had in fact given up hope of carrying out the massive invasion in 1943, but he was against multiplying operations in the Mediterranean once the conquest of North Africa was completed. Instead he was in favor of a limited landing on the north coast of France, such as Sledgehammer, as a basis for the main invasion in 1944.<sup>55</sup> The Americans had their doubts about the British plan. What would happen after the conquest of Sicily? Did the British have any clear overall plan for the defeat of Germany? They argued against relying on the assumption that there would be a German collapse, contending that it would only be possible to defeat Germany by direct action on land, while Portal (British Chief of Air Staff) and Dill optimistically kept repeating that Germany would certainly collapse in 1943. Alan Brooke, who believed that complete victory over Germany would be possible in 1943, responded that it was for Russia to carry

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November 9, 1942, PREM 3/499/6, Defence Committee, November 16, 1942, CAB 69/4, COS Meeting, November 20, 1942, CAB 79/58

<sup>53</sup> Note by the Minister of Defence, December 3, 1942, CAB 80/66, Hinsley (n 30 above), p 113

<sup>54</sup> For example, WSC, "Military Aspects of the Continental Problem," August 13, 1911, in WSC, *The World Crisis, 1911–1918*, 2 vols (London, 1938), 1 42–46, WSC to Lloyd-George, August 31, 1911, in Churchill and Gilbert (n 5 above), 2, pt 2 1119, WSC to E Grey and H Asquith, August 23, 1912, in Churchill and Gilbert, 2, pt 3 1638–39, WSC, *The World Crisis, 1911–1918*, 1 160–66, 187–89, House of Commons, in James, ed (n 5 above) May 2, 1935, 6 5590–96, October 24, 1935, 6 5681, February 22, 1938, 6 5911–17, March 14, 1938, 6 5923–27, March 24, 1938, 6 5939–45, February 21, 1939, 6 6069–71, WSC to Hore-Belisha, June 4, 1938, in Churchill and Gilbert, 5, pt 3 1052–54, Macleod and Kelly, eds (n 5 above), August 27, 1939, p 90

<sup>55</sup> Dill to the War Cabinet Office, December 11, 1942, PREM 3/492/3, COS Meeting, December 28, 1942, CAB 79/58, COS Meeting, December 31, 1942, CAB 80/66

the main burden of the fighting on land. The Anglo-American contribution would have to be slight until “there were definite signs that Germany was weakening”<sup>56</sup>

Churchill instructed his military advisers to tell the Americans that the possibility of seizing a foothold in the north of France (Sledgehammer) might arise at the end of 1943 and provide a base for the massive invasion of 1944, in order to reconcile them to his “Mediterranean Strategy,” although he regarded such an operation as a “residuary legatee”<sup>57</sup> There was however no need for this maneuvering. Admiral King’s heart was in the Pacific, and Roosevelt was convinced by what Churchill had to say, Marshall had no choice but to throw up his hands. He emphasized that the conquest of Sicily would prevent effecting a limited landing operation in the north of France that year, but he was convinced that it was necessary to pursue operations in the Mediterranean theater, since large forces were already concentrated there and because, for logistic reasons, a considerable time would have to elapse between completing the conquest of North Africa and an operation such as Sledgehammer. Thus, even when the British began to emerge from the quagmire in the Mediterranean theater, the difficulties there still provided them with leverage to promote their strategic approach.

For the British, then, the Casablanca conference was a great success. The decision was taken that the next step would be the conquest of Sicily, victory in the “Battle of the Atlantic” would be the main target for 1943, strategic bombing would be intensified, Bolero would continue, reentering the Continent would depend on a German collapse, no firm date was set for the massive invasion of France<sup>58</sup>

While the Anglo-American forces were completing the conquest of the whole of North Africa—which was not over until the end of April 1943—and preparations were begun for the assault on Sicily, Churchill started discussions on the next phase to begin after the conquest of the island. He gave instructions for a reappraisal—to be kept strictly secret from the Americans—of the possibility of carrying out an invasion of Norway in 1943 instead of Sledgehammer (with regard to which nothing had been settled one way or the other). Churchill also ordered a reduction in the staff of Lieutenant-General Morgan, head of the body planning the invasion of France, since there were practically no American forces in Britain and none would be arriving at all

<sup>56</sup> Combined Chiefs of Staff, Minutes of Meetings, January 14, 1943, January 16, 1943, Casablanca, CAB 80/67

<sup>57</sup> COS Meetings, January 13 and 15, 1943, Casablanca, CAB 80/67

<sup>58</sup> Combined Chiefs of Staff, Minutes of Meetings, January 18 and 23, 1943, CAB 80/67, and “Conduct of the War in 1943,” January 19, 1943, CAB 80/67, Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939–1943* (n 34 above), p 462

soon.<sup>59</sup> He gave these instructions even before it finally became clear, as had already been foreseen at Casablanca, that the conquest of Sicily would demand the entire reserves of landing craft, including the training craft in Britain. This meant that even an operation of limited scope such as Sledgehammer would be out of the question.<sup>60</sup> At the beginning of April, Churchill wrote to the Chiefs of Staff that the conquest of Sicily would be only a springboard and not an objective on its own. The next stage would have to be a landing in southern Italy; if the Germans made the choice of abandoning Italy, it would collapse and the Allies would have to advance northward as far as the Brenner Pass. The Chiefs of Staff replied that they had never been of the opinion that operations in the Mediterranean that year would end with the conquest of Sicily, and they agreed that there would have to be a landing in southern Italy and an advance northward.<sup>61</sup> This was the opposite of what they had told the Americans at Casablanca. Sir Alan Brooke had made it clear at that conference that he “did not believe we could undertake any further operations in Italy from Sicily in 1943, unless Italy collapsed completely . . . To do so might only immobilise a considerable force to no useful purpose.”<sup>62</sup> Churchill, at all events, even before the outbreak of war, had planned to get Italy out of the conflict; at the end of 1941 he raised the possibility of seizing a foothold in the south, and from the autumn of 1942 he was open about his wish to invade.

At the beginning of May, the prime minister went to Washington, his main purpose being to convince the Americans that after the conquest of Sicily the next target must be the Italian mainland.<sup>63</sup> This time, however, the Americans were on home ground, and they were properly prepared for the meeting. Marshall had firmly made up his mind to get a commitment from the British to carry out the invasion of France in the spring of 1944. From his point of view, they were in a bad situation in May 1943. In Britain, there were only two American divisions, and of the thirty British divisions stationed there only nineteen were combat divisions, while in the Mediterranean area and the Middle East there were nine American divisions and twenty-nine British divisions, most of them combat divisions. In the United States there were about sixty-one American divisions, most of which had completed their

<sup>59</sup> COS Meeting, February 17, 1943, CAB 79/59, WSC to Alan Brooke, March 2, 1943, CAB 79/59

<sup>60</sup> COS Meetings, March 11 and 26, 1943, CAB 79/59, General Ismay to WSC, April 3, 1943, CAB 79/60, Joint Planners, “European Strategy, 1943–44,” April 7, 1943, CAB 79/60, COS Meeting, April 13, 1943, CAB 79/60

<sup>61</sup> WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, April 2, 1943, CAB 79/60, Brigadier Hollis to WSC, April 12, 1943, CAB 79/60

<sup>62</sup> Combined Chiefs of Staff, January 16, 1943, Casablanca, CAB 80/67

<sup>63</sup> COS Meeting, May 10, 1943, CAB 80/69

training<sup>64</sup> The forces were thus distributed absolutely contrary to his plan, while preparations for the invasion of France were then only in the embryonic stage. Marshall feared that an invasion of Italy with the danger of getting bogged down there would make it still more difficult to carry out the invasion in 1944

In Washington, Churchill and the British Chiefs of Staff argued that invading Italy and getting it out of the war would lead to German forces being diverted both from the Eastern front and from France<sup>65</sup> After the war, they claimed—and the official British history joined them—that from the outset they saw the campaign in Italy as intended to divert and wear down the Germans in order to subserve the main campaign, the invasion of western Europe<sup>66</sup> There is, however, sufficient ground for doubting this assertion. Unlike Marshall, they were of the opinion that the Italian campaign would be easy and that the Germans would prefer to withdraw to the Alps This was also the intelligence appraisal prevailing in London up to the invasion of the Italian mainland itself<sup>67</sup> The planners' assessment was that if the Germans chose to withdraw to the Alps, the strategic reserves in Germany would be doubled from seven to fifteen divisions, while there would be no reduction in the number of divisions in the west Alan Brooke, like his colleagues, thought that the Germans would choose to withdraw to the Alps; and he contended that they would establish a strategic reserve as well<sup>68</sup> After the war Churchill wrote that Hitler made "a crowning error" in war strategy when he decided to defend the Balkans and every inch of Italy, instead of withdrawing and establishing a large strategic reserve that would be able to move between the European fronts<sup>69</sup> That is to say, in the case of a German retreat to the

<sup>64</sup> Dunn (n 7 above), chap 14, esp pp 212–13, 220–21, Howard, *Grand Strategy* (n 2 above), 4 419

<sup>65</sup> Minutes of Meetings, Trident, May 12 and 24, 1943, CAB 80/70

<sup>66</sup> See WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), passim, e g , 5 154, 253–55, 344–46, 426–27, A Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939–1943*, pp 510–13, 520–21, 558–61, 580, and *Triumph in the West, 1943–1946* (London, 1959), pp 30–33, Howard, *Grand Strategy*, 4 421, 565

<sup>67</sup> See WSC, "The Position of Italy," November 25, 1942, CAB 66/31, JIC, "German Strategy in 1943," December 3, 1942, PREM 3/190/3, "Operations Subsequent to Huskey," April 11, 1943, CAB 79/60, and "German Plans and Intentions during Summer and Autumn 1943," April 20, 1943, CAB 79/60, Alan Brooke, Note, April 22, 1943, CAB 79/60, COS Meetings, April 20 and 22, 1943, CAB 79/60, Minutes of Meeting, Trident, May 12, 1943, CAB 80/70, WSC, "Background Notes," May 31, 1943, in *The Second World War*, 4 821–25, Joint Planners, "Mediterranean Operations," July 28, 1943, CAB 79/63, JIC, "German Plans and Intentions during Second Half of 1943," August 3, 1943, CAB 79/63

<sup>68</sup> Joint Planning Staff, "Future Strategy," January 10, 1943, CAB 79/59, Alan Brooke, Note, April 22, 1943, CAB 79/60

<sup>69</sup> WSC, *The Second World War*, 5 52

Brenner, according to the British forecast, Hitler's capacity to repulse the invasion in the west would in fact have been increased. When Hitler remained set on defending Italy and the British forecast was disproved, the Italian campaign attained a certain inner logic, since it pinned down the German forces in this theater at the moment of the invasion of western Europe (though the forces pinning them down were several times their number).<sup>70</sup> In this way Churchill and Alan Brooke were enabled to argue as they did with wisdom after the event.

At the Washington meeting, the prime minister failed to get American agreement to the invasion of Italy. In contrast, the Americans did succeed in getting the British committed to a defined plan and a target date for opening the Second Front. The date for the invasion was set for the first of May 1944. By that date there were supposed to be twenty-nine Anglo-American divisions in Britain to constitute the invasion force. After the initial assault, reinforcements from the United States or elsewhere would be transported at the rate of three to five divisions per month. Three experienced British divisions and four American ones were to be dispatched to Britain from the Mediterranean area from the beginning of November 1943.<sup>71</sup> Churchill was dissatisfied with the outcome of the meeting, and immediately afterward he urged Marshall to go with him to Algiers in order to persuade Eisenhower to agree to the military venture in Italy, openly admitting his passionate wish to see the invasion of Italy. Although he failed to elicit agreement from Marshall and Eisenhower, he considerably softened their position. It was agreed that the matter would be examined favorably. Eisenhower would prepare two plans, one for operations against Sardinia and Corsica, the other for a landing on the Italian peninsula, and would make a recommendation to the Combined Chiefs of Staff concerning the two options as soon as possible after the invasion of Sicily had begun.

The success of the landings in Sicily on July 10, the feeble opposition of the Italian troops on the island, intelligence on the deterioration of morale of the Italian divisions in the Balkans, and signs of political turmoil in Italy (Mussolini was forced out of power on July 25) convinced Marshall and Eisenhower that they should take advantage of the expected collapse of Italy with an invasion of the Italian mainland. It seemed that the British forecast of the future developments on the Italian front were materializing. (Even on September 29, after the invasion of the peninsula, the Joint Intelligence Committee reiterated that the Germans would withdraw to a defense line in the north of Italy.) However, the American Chiefs of Staff made an important

<sup>70</sup> WSC, "Future Operations in the European and Mediterranean Theatre," November 20, 1943, CAB 80/77

<sup>71</sup> Minutes of Meeting, Trident, May 19, 1943, CAB 80/70, Combined Chiefs of Staff, Memorandum, May 25, 1943, in Howard, *Grand Strategy*, vol. 4, app. 6(C)

qualification that the Italian campaign was to be conducted by forces already stationed in the Mediterranean and that the agreement reached in May regarding the invasion of western Europe was to be respected<sup>72</sup>

In mid-July, immediately after Eisenhower's decision to invade Italy as soon as all of Sicily was captured, Alan Brooke told Churchill that to invade Italy would require postponing "Overlord" (the new code name for the full-scale invasion of France). Therefore, the prime minister suggested to his Chiefs of Staff that there should be an invasion of Norway instead of Overlord, or that Overlord should be postponed until August 1944. He was of the opinion that twenty-seven divisions would not suffice for the success of the invasion "in view of the extraordinary fighting efficiency of the German Army." "The right strategy for 1944," he wrote, was to advance to the Po, thereby opening the option of advancing westward to southern France or toward Vienna and getting the Germans out of Greece and the Balkans.<sup>73</sup> It must be emphasized that the idea of advancing on Vienna, now raised as an alternative for the first time, did not spring from any political considerations of forestalling the Russians in central and eastern Europe. Vienna was an abstract target, the political context of an advance to Vienna did not arise before the second half of 1944.<sup>74</sup>

In August Churchill went to another meeting with the Americans at the first Quebec Conference. The Americans were still dubious as to how far the British would adhere to Overlord, and they tried to ensure the priority of this operation over operations in the Mediterranean theater, while Churchill and Alan Brooke for their part tried to back out of what they had agreed on in May—the transfer of seven divisions from the Mediterranean to Britain in preparation for the invasion. The prime minister even tried to set definite operational conditions for carrying out the invasion. The Americans sought a measure of flexibility from him, and he complied, stating that he "wished to emphasize that he strongly favored 'Overlord' for 1944. He was not in favor of 'Sledgehammer' in 1942 or 'Round-up' in 1943. However, the objections which he had had to those operations have been removed."<sup>75</sup> His flexibility did not last more than a few days, however. At a further meeting with

<sup>72</sup> WSC, *The Second World War*, 4 810–11, 816–26, Howard, *Grand Strategy*, 4 497–507, Hinsley (n 30 above), 3, pt 1 100–117

<sup>73</sup> COS Meeting, July 19, 1943, CAB 79/62, WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, July 19, 1943, PREM 3/333/19

<sup>74</sup> See below, and Ehrman (n 2 above), 5 111–12, 393, Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (n 2 above), pp 52–53, 65–67, see also Howard's "Introduction," in C. Wilmot's book, *The Struggle for Europe* (London, 1965)

<sup>75</sup> U.S. Chiefs of Staff, "Strategic Concept for the Defeat of the Axis in Europe," August 16, 1943, CAB 80/74, Howard, *Grand Strategy* (n 2 above), 4 559–71, Quadrant Conference, Minutes, August 19, 1943, CAB 80/74

Roosevelt and his advisers, Churchill raised his conditions for carrying out the invasion. Contrary to the urgings of his military advisers, who were alive to the Americans' suspicions, Churchill proposed that if it turned out that his conditions were not fulfilled, there should be an invasion of Norway instead of Overlord. The Americans did not give way on their stand, and the decision to transfer seven divisions from the Mediterranean still held good.<sup>76</sup>

Churchill tried again and again during September and into October, without success, to get the Americans to agree to the capture of the Dodecanese and to provide landing craft for this purpose. He wanted to get Turkey into the war and produce changes in the Balkans that would lead to Germany's leaving the region. This idea was anathema to the Americans, who saw it as a diversion that would endanger Overlord. The official British historian, Michael Howard, admits that even if Italy had surrendered without German resistance the other operations proposed by Churchill and his advisers in the Mediterranean, from Sardinia to the Dodecanese, would have drawn off forces and rendered the 1944 assault "almost impossibly difficult."<sup>77</sup>

In mid-September 1943 the members of the Intelligence Committee completed a comparative study of the period leading up to Germany's collapse in 1918 and the situation at the end of 1943. Their conclusion was that Germany's present situation was worse than it had been on the eve of the collapse in 1918, and had it not been for the totalitarian regime there today, they would not have hesitated, they said, to affirm that Germany would seek an armistice that year. The Chiefs of Staff accepted this conclusion, and Churchill asked to distribute the document to his Cabinet members. The thesis of collapse took such firm hold that the committee members forgot that only two months before they had asserted that the effect of the bombings on Germany had so far been slight.<sup>78</sup>

The way the campaign had developed in Italy since September did not, however, indicate that Germany was on the brink of collapse. On the contrary, at the start of October Hitler decided to defend Italy south of Rome. What was supposed to be a swift and easy descent on Rome turned into a slow campaign

<sup>76</sup> COS Meeting, (Q)17, CAB 80/74, Quadrant Conference, Minutes, August 23, 1943, CAB 80/74, Combined Chiefs of Staff, "Strategic Concept for the Defeat of Axis in Europe," August 17, 1943, CAB 80/74

<sup>77</sup> WSC to Roosevelt, October 7, 1943, in Leowenheim et al., eds. (n 11 above), pp 370–71, Ehrman, 5 75–105, Bryant, *Triumph in the West, 1943–1946* (n 66 above), p 50, WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), vol 5, bk 1, chap 12, Howard, *Grand Strategy*, 4 431

<sup>78</sup> JIC, "Probabilities of a German Collapse," September 9, 1943, CAB 66/42, COS Meeting, September 14, 1943, CAB 79/64, October 25, 1943, WP (43) 479, CAB 66/42, JIC, "Effects of Bombing Offensive on German War Effort," July 22, 1943, CAB 79/63

in the Italian winter against a stubborn adversary who had the benefit of terrain that favored the defense. Churchill was greatly disappointed. He was worried over the commitment he had recently accepted regarding the invasion of western Europe and found it intolerable to think of having to weaken the Mediterranean theater in order to open the Second Front. At that same moment, the Americans were demanding a start in the agreed-on transfer of divisions from Italy to Britain in preparation for Overlord. For the first time since the second half of 1940, British divisions were about to be brought back from the Mediterranean to Britain in order to take part in future operations.

This state of affairs led Churchill to convene an important meeting on October 19 with the Chiefs of Staff, the South African premier, General Smuts, who had a great deal of influence over Churchill, and leading members of the War Cabinet. At this meeting Churchill argued that to undertake Overlord was liable to bring about an equal distribution of Allied forces between the northwestern theater and the Mediterranean, enabling Hitler to concentrate his armies and wipe out each force separately. As for the invasion of France, Churchill claimed that he was not afraid of the amphibious landing itself but "it was the later stages of the operation which worried him." Hitler, he said, would be able to concentrate an overwhelming force and "inflict on us a military disaster greater than that of Dunkirk." He pointed out that he had agreed to implement Overlord solely if certain conditions were fulfilled. The strategy now agreed on with the Americans was wrong. Unfortunately, he said, we, the British, do not settle strategy by ourselves. If it depended on us, we would reinforce the Italian theater "to the full," "enter the Balkans," extend the bombing of Germany, and "encourage the steady assembly in this country of United States troops, *which could not be employed in the Pacific theatre owing to the shortage of shipping*, with a view to taking advantage of the softening in the enemy's resistance due to our operations in other theatres, though this might not occur until after the spring of 1944" (emphasis added). In other words, the invasion of the Continent would be carried out only after the collapse of Germany.

Air Chief-Marshal Sir Charles Portal remarked that in that case the Americans would choose to concentrate their forces in the Pacific theater, since their dilemma was the choice between that theater and Europe and not between the Mediterranean and western Europe. Churchill replied that if the Americans wanted to transfer their main forces to the Pacific as a result of the British desire to change the strategic agreements he would be ready to accept this, on condition that the forces in Britain (six divisions) should remain there and that the build-up of American air strength in Britain should continue as promised. It was agreed that they should try to arrange another meeting with the Americans for the purpose of reexamining the agreements. No one



manifested opposition to what Churchill had said.<sup>79</sup> On the contrary, on the same day Alan Brooke in his diary recorded his agreement with Churchill but also his fear of a clash with the Americans. Portal too was alive to this and advised against canceling Overlord and in favor of treating it as the “residuary legatee.” This would inevitably lead to its being postponed.<sup>80</sup>

Churchill and Alan Brooke, with support later from the authors of the official history, contended that the British stand at the end of 1943 stemmed from their desire to prevent the Italian campaign from faltering to a stop or even going into reverse in face of the unexpected German resistance, all in order to ensure preparing the ground for Overlord, still their main aim.<sup>81</sup> What was said at the meeting referred to above (a meeting not even mentioned in Churchill’s book and treated only incompletely and by the way in the official British history),<sup>82</sup> together with the record of the British position up till then, does not bear out their contention. Moreover, Churchill and Alan Brooke tried to change the decision on the transfer of the seven divisions from Italy even before the campaign on the Italian mainland opened and its character became evident.<sup>83</sup>

A short while later, Churchill asked Roosevelt to arrange another Anglo-American meeting as soon as possible for the purpose of reexamining the decisions of the Quebec Conference. Roosevelt and the American Chiefs of Staff tried to avoid further discussion of the decisions of the previous conference. The president gave as his excuse that an Anglo-American conference on the eve of the three-part conference in Teheran would likely be interpreted by the Russians as a conspiracy against them. He proposed that Russian military representatives should participate in the preliminary meeting in Cairo before their arrival in Teheran, as the meeting was to concern itself only with operational matters. Churchill was against the idea of having a

<sup>79</sup> COS Meeting, October 19, 1943, CAB 79/66, see also Lord Cranborne to WSC, October 5, 1943, PREM 3/344/1, King George to WSC, October 14, 1943, and WSC to King George, October 14, 1943, PREM 3/344/1, Brigadier Hollis to WSC, October 14, 1943, PREM 3/344/1, WSC to Brigadier Hollis for COS Committee, October 19, 1943, PREM 3/344/2, WSC, “Relations of ‘Overlord’ to Mediterranean,” CAB 80/75

<sup>80</sup> Bryant, *Triumph in the West, 1943–1946*, pp. 55, 59, COS Meeting, October 20, 1943, CAB 79/58

<sup>81</sup> WSC, *The Second World War*, vol. 5, bk. 1, chap. 14, esp. pp. 253–55, and also pp. 344–46, Bryant, *Triumph in the West, 1943–1946*, pp. 30–35, 47, Howard, *Grand Strategy*, 4:431, Ehrman, 5:105–21.

<sup>82</sup> See WSC, *The Second World War*, vol. 5, bk. 1, chap. 14, esp. p. 254, Ehrman, 5:106–7 and app. 6 (Howard does not mention this meeting in his volume of *Grand Strategy*)

<sup>83</sup> See above pp. 21–22

Soviet representative in Cairo “He would simply buy for an earlier ‘Second Front’ and block all other discussions,” he wrote to Roosevelt.<sup>84</sup>

Even before the meeting with Roosevelt, however, the Chiefs of Staff realized that, though they all agreed with Churchill, it would be impossible to change the earlier decision on Overlord. They now claimed that the date for Overlord must be postponed, that the transfer of troops and of the vital landing craft from the Mediterranean to Britain must be delayed in order to continue advancing to the Pisa-Rimini line north of Rome, since a stalemate could end in defeat in Italy, and that Turkey should be brought into the war, and to open the Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. The General Staff considered that if this were put into effect Overlord would be carried out in the summer of 1944, perhaps on a much smaller scale after Germany’s collapse (Major-General Sir John Kennedy, Director of Military Operations, reflected the opinion prevailing among his colleagues in his assurance that this collapse would occur before the date set for Overlord.) Churchill for his part was still inclined to believe that he would be able to influence Roosevelt personally as he had done before, and he hoped to extend the operations in the Mediterranean to the Dodecanese as well.<sup>85</sup>

In Cairo on the eve of the Teheran Conference, the prime minister made fruitless attempts to get American consent to postponing the invasion. In Teheran Churchill could not hold out against the combined front of Stalin and Roosevelt, who at first stuck firmly to opening the Second Front on the first of May as planned. However, in a supreme effort Churchill and Alan Brooke succeeded in persuading the Americans to postpone Overlord to the end of May and to delay the transfer of landing craft from Italy to Britain.<sup>86</sup> Churchill had fought to put off the invasion, nursing the hope that a delay would increase the prospects of Germany’s collapsing before the date that would be set for Overlord. In January 1944 he asked for another intelligence

<sup>84</sup> WSC to Roosevelt, October 23, 1943, PREM 3/344/2, Roosevelt to WSC, October 26, 1943, November 11, 1943, in Leowenheim et al., eds. (n 11 above), pp 391–92, 393–94, WSC to Roosevelt, October 27, 1943, November 12, 1943, in WSC, *The Second World War*, 5 315, 319

<sup>85</sup> WSC, “Future Operations in the European and Mediterranean Theatre” (n 70 above), and “Future Operations in the Aegean,” November 21, 1943, CAB 80/77, WSC to Eden, October 26, 1943, and General Marshall to WSC, October 27, 1943, both in PREM 3/344/2, Joint Planners, October 28, 1943, CAB 79/67, COS Meeting, November 2, 1943, CAB 79/67, COS, “Overlord and Mediterranean Operations,” Aide Memoire, PREM 3/344/2, Kennedy (n 29 above), p 313

<sup>86</sup> “Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Marshall Stalin at the Soviet Embassy at Teheran on 30th November, 1943,” January 7, 1944, CAB 66/45, Bryant, *Triumph in the West, 1943–1946* (n 66 above), p 89, Ehrman (n 2 above), 5 155–58, 165–66, 176, 180–81

evaluation as to whether conditions for this had matured. The members of the Intelligence Committee had learned their lesson, and this time they answered in the negative.<sup>87</sup>

After Teheran Churchill reconciled himself to accepting his commitment to Overlord, though even now he still defined his own and his advisers' view of the invasion as "residuary legatee." His pessimism did not lessen. The most he expected from the invasion was an advance as far as the Meuse or the Rhine, Hitler would be able to block both the Russian and the Anglo-American forces. Overlord would in fact be only "an important diversionary operation" to assist the Russian advance, he asserted.<sup>88</sup> On the eve of the invasion, the fears of the leading British soldiers gained ground. Churchill (as befitted a scion of Marlborough, one of the greatest soldiers in history) wrote to Sir Alexander Cadogan, Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office (scion of the Earl of Cadogan, Marlborough's right hand in his great campaigns on the Continent), and said that the generals should not "start shivering before the battle. This battle has been *forced upon us* by the Russians and the United States military authorities. We have gone in wholeheartedly, and I would not raise a timorous cry before a decision in the field has been taken" (emphasis added).<sup>89</sup>

In the light of all that has been presented here, it is possible to reach a single clear conclusion: if it had depended on Churchill and the British chiefs of staff alone, they would not have invaded western Europe until after a collapse or drastic weakening of Germany. The western European invasion would not have been carried out in 1944, since no such crack-up happened in that year.

The question is why Churchill preferred a peripheral strategy and opposed a massive invasion of Europe independently of a previous German collapse. There are three basic possible explanations: (1) He feared the heavy casualties that would be inflicted by the invasion and the difficult campaign in France and Germany. The memory of the Great War was embedded in his mind. (2) Based on long-range political calculation, Churchill chose to postpone the invasion as long as possible, in order that the Soviet Union would be greatly weakened by the end of the war. (3) Churchill dreaded defeat or indecisive results of the clash on the European plains with the German land army because of its superior fighting capability over the Anglo-American armies. As will be shown, the latter explanation was the principal motive, with the first as an accompanying and secondary enforcement.

<sup>87</sup> See January 11, 14, and 20, 1944, PREM 3/396/10.

<sup>88</sup> WSC, "Supreme Commander of All Operations against Germany," December 28, 1943, CAB 66/44, and "Operations in South-East Asia and the Pacific," CAB 80/80, see also J. Colville, *The Fringes of Power: Downing Street Diaries, 1939-1955* (London, 1985), January 5 and 25, 1944, pp. 463, 468, respectively.

<sup>89</sup> WSC to A. Cadogan, April 19, 1944, PREM 3/197/2.

Counterarguments were propounded regarding all the technical and operational problems that threatened the success of an invasion of France. The degree of Churchill's readiness to accept these counterarguments was profoundly affected by his fundamental conceptions. In his book on the war, Churchill claimed that the fear of heavy losses, a fear stemming from his experience and memory of the tremendous casualties in the battles of the Somme and Paschendaele in the last war, was what inspired his caution over ensuring the best possible timing for the invasion.<sup>90</sup> This argument was propounded during and after the war by many of the British in order to promote and defend the British strategic approach.<sup>91</sup> It is unquestionable that memories of the First World War influenced senior British military men, but there is good ground for doubting whether the problem of losses had a *dominant* effect on Churchill's strategic thinking. He was not subject to the trauma of the First World War as were many of the political elite between the two world wars. His criticism of that war was not directed at the war as such, nor at the dispatch of massive land forces to France, but at its strategic execution. He believed that that war would have broken out sooner or later and that Britain's involvement had been vital. Churchill differed from the British generals regarding their operative-strategic line, but the difference of opinion was less forceful than is usually thought. The fact that these generals were extremely insensitive to human slaughter does not make Churchill a vegetarian. During the Gallipoli campaign he maintained that the attacks should be continued until a decision had been reached in spite of further expected casualties, and he opposed the evacuation of the peninsula. Before 1939, he was not deterred like others by memories of the last war from calling for a military alliance with France and pressing for the dispatch of a massive military force to France in the event of war.<sup>92</sup>

In his last book that appeared before the Second World War, his biography of the Duke of Marlborough, Churchill attacked and even ridiculed the ruling school of strategic thought at the close of the seventeenth century, which was based on maneuver and an almost obsessive avoidance of battles and losses. He contended that Marlborough was guided, like Napoleon after him, by

<sup>90</sup> WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), 1 384, 5 582–83

<sup>91</sup> See Bryant, *Triumph in the West, 1943–1946*, pp 53–55, Ismay (n 26 above), p 297, Howard, *Grand Strategy* (n 2 above), 4 561, Moran (n 29 above), pp 50–53

<sup>92</sup> See T Ben-Moshe, "Churchill's Strategic Conception during the First World War," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, vol 12, no 1 (March 1989), the sources cited in n 54 above, and WSC to G M Trevelyan, January 3, 1935, in Churchill and Gilbert (n 5 above), 5, pt 2 984–85, WSC to Lord Rothermere, May 12, 1935, in Churchill and Gilbert, 5, pt 2 1169–70, James, ed (n 5 above), March 1936, 6 5694–96

sound military instinct when he sought the decisive battle despite the heavy losses involved, since he wanted to end the war swiftly.<sup>93</sup>

Churchill's line of strategy was not based on the principle that in the first place human lives should be spared, but that a strategy must be put together that would *inter alia* reduce casualties. His attitude to the question of losses was relative, not absolute. In Churchill's verbal presentations and papers addressed to his *inner circle* throughout the war there is nothing to show that he was particularly bothered over the problem of losses. At the important meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee on October 19, 1943, mentioned above, Churchill did not raise the issue of losses among his reasons against undertaking the invasion as planned. After reading the complete correspondence between Churchill and Roosevelt, J. K. Galbraith noted "It has long been assumed that in resisting Overlord, Churchill was moved by his terrible memories of the Western Front, but this he nowhere makes explicit." Galbraith finds the explanation in Churchill's need as a leader to take a business-like approach and to stay detached from the horror of war.<sup>94</sup> However, the above reason is simpler. In fact, the prime minister grumbled over and over again that senior army commanders would not take risks and were not prepared to bear losses on what he saw as a tolerable level. When he had instructed that Egypt should be defended at any cost, he ordered that units must fight until they sustained 50 percent casualties. Even after knowing that the defense of Singapore was doomed, he wrote to General Wavell "There must at this stage be no thought of saving the troops or sparing the population. The battle must be fought to the bitter end at all costs. Commanders and senior officers should die with their troops. The honour of the British Empire and of the British Army is at stake." He did not accept the reservations of the Chiefs of Staff over his plan to invade Norway on account of the expected losses. (In his eyes a 30 percent rate of losses in the invading force seemed reasonable)<sup>95</sup> Toward the close of the war, in the spring of 1945, he pressed Eisenhower on political grounds to cross the Elbe and take Berlin. Generals Eisenhower and Bradley refused *inter alia* because of losses foreseen.<sup>96</sup> (Bradley estimated that it would cost the Anglo-American forces 100,000

<sup>93</sup> WSC, *Marlborough His Life and Times*, 4 vols (London, 1934–38), 2 141, 258–61, 432, 499–500, 594

<sup>94</sup> See J. K. Galbraith, review of *Churchill and Roosevelt The Complete Correspondence*, ed. W. F. Kimball, *Times Literary Supplement* (February 8, 1985)

<sup>95</sup> For example, WSC, Directive, April 28, 1941, PREM 3/296/2, WSC to General Wavell, February 10, 1942, in *The Second World War*, 4 100, WSC, "Operation 'Jupiter,'" June 13, 1942, CAB 80/63

<sup>96</sup> WSC, *The Second World War*, vol. 6, bk. 2, chap. 8, esp. pp. 455–57, and also 601–3, T. Sharp, *The Wartime Alliance and the Zonal Division of Germany* (Oxford, 1975), pp. 133–34

troops It cost the Russians some 300,000 ) Furthermore, the Americans were supposed to provide the lion's share of the invading forces and also of the reinforcements to be sent to the Western theater once the beachheads were secured Roosevelt and Marshall emphasized that they were prepared to accept a high casualty rate <sup>97</sup> The conclusion is that Churchill was prepared, in certain circumstances and for certain purposes that seemed vital to him, to pay the price in heavy losses

It is no accident that till now there has been practically no discussion of the political aspects of the invasion issue, since Churchill did not combine the military and political dimensions until after the invasion of western Europe, until June 1944 he did not seek to harmonize military strategy with long-term political aims that went beyond winning the war to treat the nature of the peace after it His strategic decisions in the course of the years 1940–43 and especially those in 1942–43 about opening the Second Front were considered and adopted without any thought being given to long-term political aspects and in particular to the issue of the Soviet threat to Europe This is of the highest importance, since these were the years when the principal Anglo-American strategic decisions were taken that governed the course of the war and the way it ended

The prime minister focused on the military dimension of the war strategy as a result of his approach adopted on principle at the beginning of the war “As you know I am very doubtful about the utility of attempts to plan the peace before we have won the war,”<sup>98</sup> he wrote to Eden, the foreign secretary When at the end of 1942 Eden submitted a memorandum to him putting forward his views and plans regarding future Anglo-Soviet relations and the European political settlement after the war, Churchill replied that “speculative studies” should be left to people with time on their hands — “we shall not overlook Mrs Glass’s Cookery Book recipe for Jugged Hare—‘First catch your hare ’ ” Disappointed, Eden well portrayed his prime minister’s attitude when he replied, “It is from every point of view bad business to have to live from hand to mouth where we can avoid it ”<sup>99</sup>

Churchill was of the opinion, then, that the long-term political dimension should be kept separate from the military conduct of the war and that the political problems should be postponed till the close of the war, when they would be settled by a peace conference There was no knowing how the war would end and where the victorious armies would be, and it was essential to

<sup>97</sup> For example, COS Meeting, April 9, 1942, CAB 79/56, Meeting with Molotov, June 9, 1942, PREM 3/333/8

<sup>98</sup> WSC to Eden, May 24, 1941, PREM 4/100/5

<sup>99</sup> A Eden to WSC, “Proposals for a Policy,” October 1942, A Eden, “The Four Power Plan,” November 8, 1942, WSC to Eden, October 18, 1942, and Eden to WSC, October 10, 1942 — all in PREM 4/100/7

concentrate on defeating Germany militarily and not to deal with subjects liable to divert energy from this aim or even make it harder to attain. Hence despite pressure from various quarters Churchill also refused to define Britain's war aims,<sup>100</sup> and it will be recalled that he doubted the value of long-term military planning as well.<sup>101</sup> His immersion in the military conduct of the war had an additional and not unimportant reason—his almost compulsive attraction to and enjoyment of the military aspects of the war. He admitted that it had been his life's ambition "to command great victorious armies in battle," and that "a political career was nothing to him in comparison with military glory."<sup>102</sup> In spite of this attitude, he did put forward some "impressionistic" reflections on the postwar political settlement and future Anglo-Soviet relations, mainly in response to pressure from others, but he did not translate these reflections into practical terms consonant with the strategic planning of the war.<sup>103</sup> Moreover, the optimistic nature of his thinking in the years 1942 and 1943 on future relations with Russia did not impel him to combine such considerations with settling on military strategy in the war at that time.<sup>104</sup> He held fast to this approach for most of the war years. True, when he weighed steps to be taken in the war *for the purpose of securing military victory*, he did attach great importance to political considerations, but when he sketched his strategy in broad outline and the *principal* military moves he wanted carried out, he hardly viewed them from the higher standpoint of the peace and of political aims beyond winning the war. This he did only in the final phase of the war. A number of the military setbacks at the beginning of the war can be traced to his persisting in making military moves on account of their political importance despite their inadequate operational basis, and this set off a reaction on his part. He argued that operations on the

<sup>100</sup> Colville (n 88 above), August 10, 1940, p 215, A Speech, London, March 27, 1941, in James, ed., 6 6363–66, House of Commons, September 9, 1941, in James, ed., 6 6480–81, WSC to Eden, January 8, 1942, PREM 3/399/6, War Cabinet Discussion, February 6, 1942, CAB 65/29, Meeting with Molotov, June 9, 1942, PREM 3/333/8, WSC to Eden, October 18, 1942, and October 21, 1942, both in PREM 4/100/7, A Eden, *The Reckoning* (London, 1965), esp pp 441–42, and also pp 272, 282, 350, 517

<sup>101</sup> WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), 3 673, and see also nn 4 and 10 above

<sup>102</sup> Churchill and Gilbert (n 5 above), 3, pt 1 163, H Asquith to V Stanley, October 7, 1914, in Churchill and Gilbert, 3, pt 1 176–78

<sup>103</sup> See WSC to Eden, October 21, 1942, PREM 4/100/7, WSC, "Morning Thoughts, Note on Post-War Security," February 1, 1943, in Howard, *Grand Strategy* (n 2 above), vol 4, app 5, A Record of a Conversation at the British Embassy, Washington, D C., May 22, 1943, CAB 66/37

<sup>104</sup> See WSC to Eden, January 8, 1942, PREM 3/399/6, WSC, "Morning Thoughts", WSC to Smuts, September 4, 1943, PREM 3/344/1, and esp WSC to Eden, January 16, 1944, PREM 3/399/6, House of Commons, February 22 and May 24, 1944, in James, ed. (n 5 above), 7 6881–94, 6930–45

northern coast of France such as “Imperator” and Sledgehammer should not be carried out since “political considerations need not be taken into account,” as their failure “would be cited as another example of sentimental politics dominating the calm determination and common sense of professional advisers”<sup>105</sup>

In the light of these considerations, it must be concluded that Churchill’s consistently wanting to postpone opening the Second Front was not the result of any long-term calculation aimed at weakening Russia in order to ensure the Western Powers’ superiority after the war, an insinuation rejected by Churchill himself. There are no real signs in the documents, especially in the important years 1942 and 1943, testifying to any such intention. (A researcher who still clung to this contention has had to admit that “there is little printed evidence”)<sup>106</sup> On the contrary, in the autumn of 1942, when Churchill was pressing his military advisers to reexamine the possibility of invading western Europe in 1943, one of his motives was his promise to Stalin and his realization that it was not fair that Russia alone should bear the main burden of the war on land against Germany.<sup>107</sup>

Be that as it may, even the official British historians affirmed “In 1943, and through most of 1944, the Prime Minister was unwilling and indeed unable to give much thought to the post-war settlement of Europe” They stated that the “Balkan strategy” was “a myth” and that Churchill’s proposal for advancing to Vienna in order to forestall the future Soviet threat to southeastern Europe (and in fact to Europe as a whole) only came to the fore in the summer of 1944.<sup>108</sup> This strengthens the contention that up to this stage of the war Churchill did not introduce long-term political aims into the fabric of his war strategy. It was not until July–August 1944 that (in some dismay, it may be added) he abandoned his previous stand and began to fit long-term political aims into his military strategy, but this was after the Western Allies had designed and applied the main moves in their European strategy.

The optimistic forecasts that Churchill had received from his military advisers over a long period as to the approaching German collapse had naturally affected his outlook on the invasion, since it was preferable to wait

<sup>105</sup> WSC to COS Committee, June 8, 1942, CAB 66/26, COS Meeting, June 8, 1942, CAB 79/56, House of Commons, November 11, 1942, in James, ed (n 5 above), 6 6696–6709

<sup>106</sup> Dunn (n 7 above), pp 1–3, 267–68

<sup>107</sup> See n 52 above, Hinsley (n 30 above), 2 113

<sup>108</sup> L. Woodward, *British Foreign Policy in the Second World War* (HMSO, London, 1962), pp xliii, xlvii, xlix, Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (n 2 above), pp 52–53, 65–67, and “Introduction” (n 74 above), Ehrman (n 2 above), 5 111–12, 393. For example, see War Cabinet Discussion, July 7, 1944, CAB 65/47, COS to WSC, September 7, 1944, PREM 3/275/2, WSC to General Ismay for COS Committee, September 9, 1944, PREM 3/275/2



for a while rather than to take the risk involved in a massive invasion in the face of strong resistance. He did feel, however, that the Western strategy should not be based on the collapse thesis, and he said so clearly at the end of 1941 at the beginning of his major plan for the war. Yet the very fact that he failed to shake off dependence on this thesis in the plan itself and throughout the war points to the main reason for his opposing the invasion. He feared the direct and massive confrontation with the German land forces “in the open field,” division against division. In addition, there was his desire to prevent heavy casualties. Nevertheless, Churchill did not confuse cause and effect. In the course of the war, he intimated a number of times that he did not fear failure at the amphibious assault stage and establishing of bridgeheads but in the land campaign that would develop afterward.<sup>109</sup> His consternation sprang from lack of confidence in the British army’s capability on land, regarding both its command level and the fighting spirit of its soldiers—a distrust that he extended automatically to the American land forces. Indeed, he had always entertained a very dubious assessment of the British generals and the military establishment. He poured out the vials of his wrath on them in his book on the First World War, contending, “The experts were frequently wrong. The politicians were frequently right.”<sup>110</sup> He did not, however, cast doubt on the fighting spirit of the rank and file and junior officers in that war. At the outbreak of the Second World War he had no very great expectations of the higher military leadership, but he did look to the same hardy spirit and stubborn determination that had characterized the lower ranks in the First World War.

The failure in France did not lead him to conclude that something was fundamentally wrong in the British military system. The defeat in the West was blamed on the French military leadership and the low morale of their soldiers, the proficiency and new military doctrine of the German army, and the fact that a massive British army had not been sent to France. The impressive victory over the Italians in the desert at the end of 1940 buttressed his evaluation that the British army and its leadership, once they completed their preparations, were no less good than the German army.<sup>111</sup> His distrust began in the period immediately after the defeat in Greece with the fall of Crete and the reverse in North Africa. The fact that in the course of 1942 British forces surrendered in Malaya and Singapore to a Japanese force

<sup>109</sup> COS Meeting, October 19, 1943, CAB 79/66, “A Record of a Conversation between the Prime Minister and Marshal Stalin on 30th November 1943” (n 86 above)

<sup>110</sup> WSC, *The World Crisis, 1911–1918* (n 54 above), 2:915

<sup>111</sup> House of Commons, December 19, 1940, in James, ed., 6:6316–22, M. Gilbert, *Winston S. Churchill: Finest Hour, 1939–1941*, 8 vols. (London, 1983), 6:459, Colville (n 88 above), June 29, 1940 and August 9, 1940, pp. 177–78 and 213, respectively

considerably inferior in size (“the worst disaster and largest capitulation in British history,” as Churchill called it) and that the forces invested in Tobruk surrendered to the attacking force, although it was only half their size, he saw as “a disgrace.” The repeated defeats and setbacks in the years 1941 and 1942 he described as “galling links in a chain of misfortune and frustration to which no parallel can be found in our history.”<sup>112</sup> The cumulative evidence of the lack of sufficient fighting spirit in the British army affected him deeply. At different times he argued that all the great struggles in history were decided by superior willpower snatching victory in the face of greatly superior forces or when there were small differences between them.<sup>113</sup>

The defeats in the desert in 1942 so upset Churchill and the members of his Cabinet because the British army enjoyed air superiority, a flow of extraordinary intelligence reports, and a considerable numerical advantage over Rommel, who had only three German divisions. The prime minister’s mockery of his generals—his daily bread all through the war—reached its peak at this time.<sup>114</sup> He was not convinced by the explanation that blamed the setbacks on German technological superiority, and he began to inquire into the reasons for their superiority on the command level.<sup>115</sup> It may be doubted whether his senior commanders’ replies were of a nature to calm him down. Generals Auchinleck and Nye (Alan Brooke’s vice-chief of the general staff) admitted British inferiority and saw its roots in the lack of proper military education and training in the prewar period, but Nye hastened to reassure Churchill, “there is nothing inherently superior in the German leader or soldier.”<sup>116</sup> In July 1942, in another connection, Dill recommended that the

<sup>112</sup> WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), 4 92, 383, 549–50, Moran (n 29 above), pp 43–44

<sup>113</sup> See Moran, pp 43–44, R Parkinson, *Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat* (New York, 1973), pp 370–71, House of Commons, June 25, 1941, in James, ed (n 5 above), 6 6431–44, WSC, *The World Crisis, 1911–1918*, 2 900–906, 919, WSC, *The Aftermath* (1929, reprint, London, 1944), pp 275, 445, Kennedy (n 29 above), pp 105–7, WSC to General Auchinleck, July 20, 1941, PREM 3/296/17

<sup>114</sup> On Churchill’s attitude toward Dill, see A Danchev, “‘Dilly-Dally’ or Having the Last Word: Field Marshal Sir John Dill and Prime Minister Winston Churchill,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 22 (1987) 21–44, Kennedy, pp 60, 62–64, 73–74, on his opinion on Wavell, WSC to Eden August 13, 1940, PREM 3/296/7, Colville September 28, 1941, p 443, on Brooke’s impressions in his diaries, Bryant, *The Turn of the Tide, 1939–1943* (n 34 above), pp 245, 275, 415, and also Gilbert, *Winston S Churchill: Finest Hour, 1939–1941*, p 685, and *Winston Churchill: Road to Victory, 1941–1945*, pp 844–45, Colville, September 28, 1941, pp 443–44. Seeing the generals with disdain was common among the senior civilians, see, e.g., D Dilks, ed., *The Diaries of Sir Alexander Cadogan, 1938–1945* (London, 1971), pp 360, 370–71, 385, 449, 458

<sup>115</sup> Defence Committee, March 2, 1942, CAB 69/4

<sup>116</sup> General C Auchinleck to the War Office, March 7, 1942, PREM 3/296/18A, Lieutenant General Nye to WSC, March 22, 1942, CAB 64/4

supreme commander of the European invasion force should be an American, not only in order to side-step blame in case of failure but also because “the fresh mind of an American would have many advantages over that of some Briton whose cares of the past three years have been so largely centered on defending England”<sup>117</sup>

The same month Attlee and Stafford Cripps called Churchill’s attention to the striking inferiority of the British army, stemming in their view from the poor level of the high command. Churchill answered that before the war few men had been drawn to the career of an army officer. The inducements of the civilian marketplace were many, and “most of the rewards of British public life went to the politicians.” The spread of pacifism in English society before the war had affected fighting spirit. “*Continuous reflection*,” he wrote, had left him with the conclusion that the best chance of winning the war was with the Bombers. “It certainly will be several years before British and American land forces will be capable of beating the Germans on even terms *in the open field*” (emphasis added)<sup>118</sup>

When the British began winning victories at the end of 1942 his opinion did not change. He was well aware of the considerable quantitative advantages and the valuable intelligence at Montgomery’s disposal at El Alamein, in spite of which the victory there had been won with difficulty. It would seem that the success in deciphering the German codes undermined Churchill’s assurance instead of reinforcing it, because in spite of this important advantage the British Army had great difficulties. At all events, the intelligence secured by means of “Ultra” was confined to the tactical and operational level and was not of decisive weight when the *central* Anglo-American decisions on the forthcoming western European invasion were thought out and arrived at on the highest strategical level.<sup>119</sup> Operation Torch, which Churchill expected would be swift and easy, got into trouble, and completing the conquest of North Africa was delayed. The fact that the campaign in Italy was brought to a standstill deepened Churchill’s lack of confidence in his army. Along with this he began to endow the German land forces with an almost magical capability. This was an erroneous perception. Undoubtedly, the German army was an excellent fighting machine. Churchill’s error was not that he was impressed with “the extraordinary fighting efficiency of the German Army” but that he greatly overestimated the qualitative gap between it and the Anglo-American armies. By the end of 1943 he did not believe that the

<sup>117</sup> Dill to the Chiefs of Staff, July 7, 1942, PREM 3/492/2

<sup>118</sup> Sir Stafford Cripps to WSC, July 2, 1942, in WSC, *The Second World War*, 4 395–96, C. Attlee to WSC, July 10, 1942, PREM 3/499/9, WSC to Attlee, July 29, 1942, PREM 3/499/9

<sup>119</sup> See also R. Bennett, “Ultra and Some Command Decisions,” in *The Second World War*, ed. W. Laqueur (London, 1982), pp. 218–35, esp. p. 227

quantitative advantage of the latter on land and its air and intelligence superiority were enough to overcome the gap during a 1944 western European campaign. Churchill voiced fears of a second Dunkirk and of the Germans' defeating the Allied forces in Italy and in western Europe in detail<sup>120</sup> when the German army had already suffered the debacles at Stalingrad and Kursk and was clearly defeated in the war in Russia. He claimed in his book that he "became increasingly conscious" during the 1943 campaigns that if the invasion had been attempted in 1943 it would have failed.<sup>121</sup> However, these 1943 campaigns, as we have said, only strengthened his belief that an invasion in 1944 would be doomed to failure. On the other hand, while the Americans did not err in their overall strategic conception, it is possible that they were mistaken in believing that it was feasible to establish a bridgehead in France in 1942 and to invade western Europe in 1943. A number of works have been written to prove that if the invasion had occurred in 1943 it would have succeeded, yet these are not convincing.<sup>122</sup> The issue will remain one of the eternal "what if" questions of history.

The strategic conception behind the invasion of northern France proved itself. The invasion shortened the war and produced the largest Western contribution to the German defeat after the victories of the Red Army. If the invasion in the West had not been carried out in 1944, it is very doubtful that the Western democracies could have succeeded in defending their interests in Europe against the Soviet threat. After the event and without foundation, Churchill attributed to himself a clear, coherent strategic conception whose pivot and peak was the invasion of western Europe. If it had failed, he could have contended with the greatest of ease, on the strength of his quality as a writer and a correct presentation of his documents, that he had always opposed the invasion, had warned against it, and had finally been forced to agree to it.

<sup>120</sup> See COS Meeting, October 19, 1943, CAB 79/66

<sup>121</sup> WSC, *The Second World War* (n 1 above), 3 659–61, 4 659

<sup>122</sup> For example, Dunn (n 7 above), J. Grigg, *1943 The Victory That Never Was* (New York, 1980)