had taken power in 1922 as an opponent of the Versailles system, was reinforced by realistic reasons for Italo-German friendship: Italy was in perpetual conflict with France over naval and colonial matters in the Mediterranean, while Germany's ambitions in Eastern Europe and Russia posed no direct threat to Italy's vital interests (save Hitler's designs on Austria).

It is worth pausing at this juncture to remark on the extent to which this program for continental domination diverged from the foreign policy objectives of the political elite of the Weimar Republic. The superficial similarity between the immediate foreign policy goals of Stresemann and Hitler has led some historians to emphasize the continuity of German foreign policy throughout the interwar period. Some have been tempted to view Hitler as a traditional German nationalist pursuing the policy that had been adopted in the 1920s by his republican predecessors: the recovery of the territory lost by Germany at Versailles, the annexation of adjacent regions with substantial German populations on the basis of the principle of national self-determination, and the restoration of military parity for Germany with the other powers of Europe. The plausibility of this interpretation stems from the incontestable fact that all of Hitler's official diplomatic initiatives from his accession in January 1933 to March 1939 were aimed at securing these traditional objectives of German foreign policy. What this interpretation overlooks are Hitler's numerous unofficial references to the expansionist program delineated above. The reversal of the "unjust" settlement after the last war, which implied the recovery or annexation of all German-speaking regions of Central Europe, was but the first step in Hitler's grand design. In truth he cared nothing about the fate of the German-speaking citizens who had been incorporated within half a dozen neighboring states in 1919. Their grievances merely served as a pretext for destroying the territorial settlement, and therefore the balance of power in Europe, as a prelude to conquering and exploiting the vast expanses of territories to the east where few Germans lived but where German colonists were to be sent in some distant future. Though his grandiose ambitions beyond the regions of German settlement were not openly pursued until as late as March 1939 with the absorption of the non-German sector of Czechoslovakia, they were frequently and forcefully expressed in speeches and writings that were well-known to the world's political leaders.

In the light of this program of eastward expansion, the disarmament talks in Geneva to which the German representatives returned in February 1933 were exercises in futility. Even the compromise plan drafted by British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald that projected parity of national armies in Europe at 200,000 men each, to be achieved by the gradual reduction of French forces over five years, failed to secure the approval of Hitler's hand-picked delegation, which had been instructed to reject any multilateral restrictions on the German rearmament program already underway. When the German demand for the immediate right to construct proscribed weapons and increase the size of the standing army encountered the anticipated French opposition, Hitler summarily withdrew Germany from the disarmament conference and the League of Nations on October 14. Germany's simultaneous withdrawal from the conference and the League dealt a devastating blow to the principle of collective security that was soon to prove fatal. Though that principle had already been severely undermined in the Manchurian affair (see p. 231), this was an incident in far-off Asia that did not involve the vital interests of the great powers in Europe and therefore could be conveniently overlooked. But

the advent of an aggressive German foreign policy in the autumn of 1933 compelled French officials to abandon whatever hopes they may have entertained of restraining Germany by the application of the pressure of world opinion through the instrument of the world body in Geneva. In the following year they struggled to bolster France's sagging security arrangements on the continent through bilateral approaches to two great powers that had been allies of France in the Great War but had been alienated from it ever since.

The Wooing of Italy

The first of these was Italy. Even before the advent of the Fascist regime in 1922, Italy had nurtured deeply felt grievances against France. All of these were related in one way or another to the frustration of Italian aspirations to become an imperial power in the Mediterranean basin. The long-simmering Italian resentment at France's acquisition of Tunisia, a North African territory across the Mediterranean from Sicily, came to a boiling point after the war when France repudiated its earlier pledge to respect the special privileges of the large Italian population there. Reinforcing these territorial and colonial disputes was an intense Franco-Italian naval rivalry that developed in the course of the 1920s. Though France had been compelled to accept parity in capital ships with Italy at the Washington Naval Conference of 1921–22 (see p. 223), it offended Italian sensibilities by insisting that the necessity to divide the French fleet between the Mediterranean and the oceanic routes to the French empire in Africa and Asia entitled it to superiority in auxiliary craft such as cruisers and submarines.

In spite of these obstacles to Franco-Italian cooperation, the two countries shared one common objective that French officials hoped would serve as the basis of reconciliation. This was the preservation of the political independence of the German-speaking rump state of Austria. The periodic calls for the political unification of Austria and Germany, or *Anschluss,* that had emanated from pan-German circles since the end of the war had caused considerable alarm in Rome throughout the 1920s. That sense of alarm was increased after January 1933 when a pan-German zealot of Austrian birth came to power in Berlin. The source of Italy's anxiety about the extension of German sovereignty to its northern frontier was its potential effect on the German-speaking inhabitants of the south Tyrol region in the Alps that had been ceded by Austria to Italy at the Paris Peace Conference. France opposed the *Anschluss* both because of the threat that it would pose to its ally Czechoslovakia (which would be caught in the vise of an enlarged Germanic state) and because of the increase in Germany's population and industrial potential that such a union would entail.

Officials at the French foreign ministry hoped that this shared interest in preserving Austria's independence would serve as the basis for Franco-Italian cooperation in the defense of the territorial status quo in Central Europe. The prospects for such a Rome–Paris axis were enhanced by Italy's reaction to the Austrian crisis of July 1934, during which local Nazis in Vienna assassinated Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss (a determined foe of *Anschluss*) and appealed to Hitler for assistance in their prospective coup d'état. Italian troops that had coincidentally been on maneuvers near the Austrian border in the Alps staged a show of force there, prompting Hitler to repudiate the plot that his own embassy in Vienna had played a role in hatching. The ignominious collapse of the venture enabled Mussolini to take credit for having deterred Germany from interfering

in Austria's internal affairs. Suitably impressed, Parisian authorities hastened to seek formal arrangements with Italy to deter any future German initiatives of similar stripe. In January 1935, Foreign Minister Pierre Laval of France journeyed to Rome to sign an agreement with Mussolini, which settled most of the outstanding Franco-Italian differences in Africa to the Duce's satisfaction in return for an Italian pledge to consult with France in the event of German violations of the Versailles clauses on disarmament and the independence of Austria.

The emerging Franco-Italian entente received its first test in March 1935 when Hitler formally repudiated the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty. It had long been apparent that the military forces that the German dictator considered essential for his foreign policy objectives could no longer be forged in secrecy. The construction of a navy, an air force, and a mechanized army could not escape detection. Thus, on March 9 Hitler revealed the existence of a German air force as well as plans to expand its size and strength. On March 16 he decreed the reintroduction of conscription with the announced goal of creating a thirty-six-division army (compared to the seven divisions permitted by the Versailles Treaty and the thirty divisions of the existing French army). A week later Mussolini invited the French and British prime ministers to the Italian resort city of Stresa for the purpose of fashioning a coordinated response to Germany's flagrant repudiation of the Versailles military restrictions. At the conclusion of this conference, held from April 11 to 14, the three powers issued a joint communiqué that sternly condemned the German action and threatened joint opposition to any further treaty violations. Moreover, France and Italy secretly exchanged pledges of military assistance to counter German violations of either the Rhineland demilitarized zone or the independence of Austria. Italy's commitment to cooperate with France in resisting further German revisionist bids reached its apex in June 1935 when Franco-Italian military conversations were resumed for the first time since the end of the war.

The Wooing of Russia

These fruitful French approaches to Fascist Italy were paralleled by simultaneous overtures to the Soviet Union. From the vantage point of ideological consistency, it may seem astonishing that a parliamentary democracy such as France could hope to base its system of continental security on diplomatic links with Fascist and Communist dictatorships. But the realities of international power in Europe seemed to dictate just such an ideologically contradictory policy during the interwar period. In its frantic search for an effective anti-German coalition in the mid-1930s, France expressed an eagerness to obtain allies wherever it could find them, regardless of the character of their domestic political institutions. The approach to Italy, though distasteful to democratic opinion in France, was pursued with minimal domestic opposition. The overtures to Soviet Russia predictably provoked some agitation in the ranks of the anti-Communist right in France, but not enough to derail the Quai d'Orsay's efforts to reach an accommodation with the Kremlin. The national interest, which was thought to require a diplomatic strategy of encircling Germany with hostile powers associated with France, prevailed over the promptings of ideological preference in the minds of all but the most vociferously anti-Fascist and anti-Communist French officials.

The possibility of a diplomatic understanding with the Soviet Union had long tempted Parisian officials because of the obvious advantages of confronting Germany

with the prospect of a war on two fronts after the fashion of 1914. But the obstacles to a resurrection of the prewar Franco-Russian alliance were even more formidable than those that had hindered a Franco-Italian rapprochement: On the French side there was lingering resentment at the Soviet government's conclusion of a separate peace with Germany during the First World War and its repudiation of the enormous debt to French investors that had been contracted by the tsarist regime; on the Russian side there was bitterness at France's anti-Bolshevik posture in the Russian Civil War and its support of Poland's military offensive against Soviet Russia in 1920. Added to these historical animosities and their mutual ideological hostility was the underlying incompatibility of foreign policy between the two states throughout the 1920s. As the major beneficiary of the peace settlement of 1919, France vigorously defended the postwar status quo in Europe by extending its financial support and political protection to the states of Eastern Europe that had also profited from the defeat of the Central Powers. Russia, which had lost a considerable portion of its territory in Europe to these new or enlarged states on its western frontier, accordingly favored the destruction of the postwar European system and had not hesitated to cooperate with the other great revisionist power, Germany, throughout the twenties (see p. 117).

But the rise of Hitler and the stalling of the disarmament talks in Geneva precipitated a simultaneous reversal in official French and Soviet attitudes toward each other. Hitler's oft-stated intention of seeking living space at Russia's expense, together with his frequent denunciations of communism as a political ideology, were well-known to the leaders of the Kremlin. In February 1933, the Soviet foreign minister, Maxim Litvinov, officially reversed his government's long-standing support for revision of the peace treaties by openly endorsing the French position on collective security at the disarmament conference. In subsequent remarks the Russian diplomat clearly enunciated his government's new official line: Treaty revision meant war and therefore had to be avoided at all costs. The French government responded with alacrity to this stunning Soviet volte-face. For the first time since Russia's withdrawal from the world war, a French military attaché was dispatched to Moscow on April 8, 1933, as a gesture of interest in the Kremlin's new anti-German orientation. By the summer of 1933 the secret collaboration between the German and Soviet armies came to a halt, all German military facilities in Russia were closed, and visits of Soviet officers to Germany were cancelled.

The declaration of German rearmament in March 1935 forced the anti-Communist officials in France to swallow the ideological prejudices. On May 2, 1935, France and Russia concluded a pact of mutual assistance that was followed on May 16 by a similar agreement between the Soviet Union and France's principal Eastern European ally, Czechoslovakia. For a brief moment, Germany seemed isolated by a powerful coalition of states determined to resist further violations of the peace treaty. This impression was enhanced by a dramatic policy reorientation at the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, the international organization of Communist parties loyal to the Soviet Union, in August 1935. Whereas the Communist parties outside Russia had previously been instructed to refuse all political cooperation with "bourgeois parties" (including the Socialists), Hitler's liquidation of the German Communist party had revealed the dangers of this sectarian strategy. The new Comintern line called for Communist participation in a "Popular Front" with all political groups opposed to fascism at home and German expansion in Europe.

But the revival of Franco-Russian cooperation to restrain Germany was a pale shadow of the military alliance that had compelled the kaiser's armies to fight a war on two fronts in 1914–17. The effectiveness of the pact was undermined by the French government's insistent refusal to accept a military convention stipulating the way in which the two armies would coordinate actions in the event of war with Germany. The effectiveness of the Czechoslovak-Soviet Pact was similarly weakened by a provision subordinating it to the prior application of the Franco-Soviet Pact as well as by the failure to resolve the problem posed by the absence of a common border between the two signatories.

The issuance of the Stresa declaration in April 1935, the signing of the Franco-Soviet Pact in May, and the advent of Franco-Italian military talks in June collectively gave the impression that France was well on the way toward fashioning the system of European security that had eluded it since the end of the last war. In addition to its alliances with Belgium, Poland, and Czechoslovakia and its treaties of friendship with Romania and Yugoslavia, France finally seemed about to resurrect the old wartime coalition of Great Britain, Russia, and Italy in an effort to prevent further German violations of the peace settlement.

The Breakdown of the Anti-German Bloc

Yet within less than a year, that coalition was in shambles as a result of the defection of Great Britain, Italy, and Belgium, France's three Western friends. The first chink in the armor of the anti-German coalition appeared on June 18, 1935, the 120th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, the date the British government tactlessly chose to unveil a bilateral naval agreement that it had secretly negotiated with Germany behind the backs of the French. The accord permitted Germany to exceed the naval limitations of the Versailles Treaty in exchange for a promise not to increase its total tonnage beyond 35 percent of that of the combined fleets of the British Empire. This Anglo-German naval agreement torpedoed the Stresa front by providing for precisely what the Stresa declaration had forbidden, namely, a further violation by Germany of its treaty obligations. London's motivation for acquiescing in Germany's repudiation of the last remaining armament restriction of the Versailles Treaty was obvious: It was known from intelligence sources that while Hitler planned to build a navy that would eventually enable Germany to play a global role, the German naval construction program for the immediate future was geared to the limited objectives of assuring control of the Baltic against the Soviet Union and harassing France's oceanic communications with its colonies and foreign sources of supply. In April 1935 the German government had informed the British of a construction program of twelve destroyers, two cruisers, and twelve submarines. Faced with this evidence of Hitler's intention to violate the treaty restrictions with impunity, the British judged it opportune to obtain at least the assurance that Germany would not threaten Great Britain's supremacy in the Mediterranean and the North Atlantic. The agreement had no effect whatsoever on Germany, who constructed as many ships as its resources permitted and continued to develop plans for ultimately contesting British naval power on the high seas once its predominance in Europe had been assured.

The second dramatic defector from the anti-German front established in the spring of 1935 was Italy. This defection was caused by Mussolini's invasion of the East African

empire of Ethiopia, one of only two African states (the other being the Republic of Liberia) that had successfully resisted absorption by European powers during the imperial expansion of the prewar years. Italy's interest in Ethiopia dated from the last two decades of the nineteenth century. After a humiliating military defeat at the hands of Ethiopian warriors in 1896, Italian colonial forces had retreated to the coastal enclaves of Eritrea on the Red Sea and Somaliland on the Indian Ocean. But by the mid-1930s, Mussolini's grandiose design for a new Roman Empire inspired a revival of the dormant territorial claims against the independent East African state. Great Britain and France, who had minimal interests in the area and were intent on securing Italian support for resistance to German adventurism in Europe, did nothing to discourage Italy's belated colonial aspirations. During his meeting with Mussolini in Rome in January 1935, Foreign Minister Laval of France formally renounced his country's minor economic interests in Ethiopia and gave the Italian leader verbal assurances of a free hand there. At the Stresa Conference in April, Mussolini's intimations of Italian ambitions in East Africa elicited no objections from the French and British heads of government. In August 1935 London and Paris went so far as to offer Rome a privileged economic position in Ethiopia together with the right to appoint Italian advisers to the country's civil service, army, and police, the traditional prelude to the establishment of a protectorate.

These extensive Anglo-French concessions to Italian ambitions in Ethiopia clearly indicate that Mussolini could have obtained effective control of that country through patient diplomacy. But the prospective leader of the new Roman Empire was intent on obtaining military glory with a minimum of risk. He therefore launched a full-scale armed attack against Ethiopia on October 3 with the expectation that Italy would encounter little military resistance from the ill-equipped forces of the Ethiopian emperor, Haile Selassie, and no diplomatic opposition from the European powers. On the first count he was correct. The introduction of air power and poison gas routed the Ethiopian forces in the spring of 1936. But on the diplomatic front in Europe, the Duce was to be first disappointed and then outraged by the unsympathetic response of his friends in London and Paris. Britain and France prodded the League of Nations (of which Ethiopia was a member) into condemning the Italian offensive as an act of aggression and imposing economic sanctions on the aggressor state on October 18. The hypocritical policy of the two powers that had divided up most of the continent of Africa between them before the First World War, and had recently given Italy the green light belatedly to obtain its share of the spoils, left a lasting negative impression on the Italian leader. His feelings of betrayal and annoyance were not assuaged by subsequent efforts by London and Paris to undermine the very policy that they had promoted at Geneva. A secret Anglo-French agreement in December providing for the cession of most of Ethiopia to Italy and the reduction of the remainder to the status of an Italian client state had to be disavowed when its embarrassing contents were leaked to the press by unsympathetic personnel at the Quai d'Orsay. But the abortive Hoare–Laval Pact, named for the British and French foreign ministers who devised it, accurately reflected the true policies of the two governments, as had the earlier efforts to placate Mussolini. This was shown by their refusal to extend the economic sanctions to an embargo of oil, which Italy required to fuel its mechanized army and air force in Ethiopia and which it had to import from foreign sources.

The most important consequence of the Ethiopian affair, apart from the military defeat of Haile Selassie's empire and its annexation by Italy in May 1936, was the deterioration of relations between Italy and her erstwhile partners in the Stresa front against Germany. By supporting economic sanctions against Italy and verbally condemning its actions in the League, Britain and France had antagonized Mussolini without succeeding in denying him the objectives he sought in East Africa. The Hoare–Laval scheme and the half-hearted application of sanctions also undermined the principle of collective security. If such an unmistakable instance of aggression against a member of the League could go unpunished, what was to prevent the more subtle forms of aggression practiced and planned by Germany in Europe?

The Remilitarization of the Rhineland

In the meantime, Hitler remained neutral in the Italo-Ethiopian struggle while expressing his willingness to supply Mussolini with iron, coal, steel, and other scarce materials. Berlin's benevolent neutrality was greatly appreciated in Rome. Thus, with the two guarantors of the Locarno treaties (Great Britain and Italy) at loggerheads over East Africa and Mussolini grateful for Germany's acquiescence in his imperial policies, the Führer correctly gauged that the time was right for a daring probe of the anti-German diplomatic coalition. The submission of the Franco-Soviet Pact to the French Chamber of Deputies for ratification in February 1936 supplied the perfect pretext for Hitler's first provocative move since his announcement of German rearmament a year earlier. The Führer warned that he would regard the Franco-Soviet alliance as a violation of the multilateral agreement signed at Locarno and a grave threat to Germany's security; he would therefore feel free to renounce Germany's end of the Locarno bargain by repudiating the demilitarized status of the Rhineland. After the French Chamber ratified the treaty, three battalions of German infantry, accompanied by antiaircraft guns and air force squadrons, moved into the Rhineland on March 7.

As we have seen, the demilitarized status of the Rhineland was widely regarded as the most important guarantee of German good behavior in Europe. It was thought to preclude a German advance against France and Belgium and, by exposing Germany to invasion from the west, to deter German aggression eastward. Its disappearance in March 1936 ought therefore to have elicited a strong response from France. But no such response was forthcoming. French military strategy as developed over the past several years dictated just such a posture of passivity. By constructing the Maginot Line, France had in effect already written off the Rhineland as indefensible. It would make little difference on which bank of the river German forces were situated so long as France retained its impregnable bastion of concrete and gun emplacements along the Franco-German frontier. Accordingly, the French army possessed no mobile force that could be dispatched to the Rhineland to expel the German battalions and had devised no advance plan for such an operation. The creation of such a force and the development of such a plan, suggested a year earlier by the politician Paul Reynaud on the advice of Colonel Charles de Gaulle, was rejected as incompatible with the defensive strategy so tenaciously pursued by the French general staff.

The civilian government in Paris, a caretaker ministry in power pending the legislative elections scheduled for the following month, displayed greater interest in an offensive operation to expel the German forces from the Rhineland than did the military authorities. Foreign Minister Pierre-Etienne Flandin flew to London to discuss the possibility of a joint Anglo-French countermove. He was greeted with the news that the British government did not view the remilitarization of the Rhineland as a "flagrant" violation of the treaty of Locarno because it was not accompanied by menacing German moves toward the French frontier; consequently Britain would neither participate in any military response nor approve of a unilateral French action. Beneath this narrow, legalistic interpretation of the language of Locarno lay the real reason for Britain's hesitation: its desire to avoid at all costs the European war that it believed would inevitably result from a French or Anglo-French advance into the Rhineland. Consequently, the response of London and Paris was confined to the issuance of stern protests, the sponsorship of a pro forma condemnation of the action by the League of Nations. Thus the remilitarization of the Rhineland had become a fait accompli.

As noted above, the remilitarization of the Rhineland did not appreciably alter the strategic balance between France and Germany in Western Europe since France's previously adopted defensive posture along her eastern frontier had rendered the Rhenish buffer zone irrelevant to French military calculations. Nor did it suddenly negate the value of France's security commitments to Poland and Czechoslovakia. Those had previously been rendered incapable of realization once construction of the Maginot Line had begun half a decade earlier. But the failure of France to react firmly to Hitler's unilateral repudiation of the Locarno Pact had a devastating psychological impact on all of the smaller countries on the continent that had expected France to take the lead in restraining Germany.

The result of this French abstention was a radical reorientation of the foreign policies of these minor powers. The Polish government resumed with greater enthusiasm its policy of detente with Germany that had been inaugurated at the beginning of 1934, when it had prudently concluded a nonaggression pact with the Reich to balance Soviet claims on Polish territory. Belgium, France's neighbor in Western Europe and its earliest and staunchest ally against Germany, also drew the appropriate conclusions from French inaction during the Rhineland crisis and acted accordingly. On October 14, 1936, the Belgian government formally renounced its military alliance with France and reverted to its prewar status of neutrality. The dramatic Belgian reversal stemmed in part from domestic political tension between the French-speaking Walloons and the Flemish population, the latter of which had long resented their country's diplomatic subservience to France. It also reflected the reluctance of anti-Communist elements to see their nation dragged into a war with Germany on behalf of France's new Russian ally. But the principal reason was the belief that neither France nor Great Britain could or would afford Belgium the kind of protection it required for the preservation of its security. The military consequences of the Belgian defection were critical: Anglo-French forces were no longer guaranteed transit rights across Belgian territory in case of war with Germany. Franco-Belgian military coordination, a key element in France's strategy for the defense of her unfortified northeastern frontier, was abruptly terminated.

By the autumn of 1936, Germany had thus obtained geographical protective screens on its western and eastern borders that effectively insulated it from the threat of military intervention by the great powers in alliance against it. In the west, a neutralized Belgium and a remilitarized Rhineland (which was in the process of being reinforced

by the construction of elaborate fortifications along the French frontier) shielded Germany's industrial heartland in the Ruhr Valley from French military power. To the east, an increasingly cooperative Poland served as a barrier against the Soviet Union. To the southeast, the nations of the Little Entente (Czechoslovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia), geographically separated from their undependable French patron, were driven to seek improved relations with Germany in the hope of stabilizing the political situation in that region. Hitler wasted no time in profiting from Germany's enhanced position on the continent to expand his nation's economic and diplomatic influence in those nations of Central and Southeastern Europe whose cooperation or acquiescence he desired in the fulfillment of his short-term objectives in foreign policy, which were the annexation of Austria and the destruction of Czechoslovakia. At the same time he took steps to accelerate the pace of German rearmament and to reorient the economy in such a way as to prepare his nation for the major war that he planned to launch in the more distant future.

The Distraction in Spain

The failure of the Western powers to recognize the implications of this process of consolidation, both within Germany and between Germany and its neighbors to the south and east, was in large part due to the fixation of world attention on the civil war that erupted in Spain in the summer of 1936. On July 17 of that year, military officers in command of the garrisons in Spanish Morocco rebelled against the left-leaning government in Madrid that had been elected the previous February and proceeded to organize an uprising on the Spanish mainland. When the navy and air force remained loyal to the Republican government, the leader of the coup, General Francisco Franco, was compelled to look abroad for assistance in transporting his forces in North Africa across the Straits of Gibraltar to the Iberian peninsula. This appeal from the Spanish rebels, or Nationalists as they called themselves, received a sympathetic response in Berlin and Rome. By the end of July German and Italian planes were ferrying Franco's troops to the mainland, where they quickly established contact with the rebel-held sector in the country. By the autumn of 1936 the quantity of German and Italian aid markedly increased. Hitler dispatched a special air force unit, the Condor Legion, to provide air cover for the rebel forces while Mussolini contributed large contingents of Italian infantry in the guise of "volunteers."

Hitler's decision to assist the military rebellion in Spain was determined by a number of factors. The most important military advantage to be gained, apart from the opportunity to test the tactic of terror bombing of civilian population centers that would later be used against Warsaw, Rotterdam, and London, lay in the promise of access to Spain's abundant supply of strategic raw materials. With Germany engaged in a massive rearmament program at a time when it suffered from a severe shortage of foreign exchange, Hitler hoped to obtain Spanish iron and copper ores without having to pay for them in scarce foreign currency. An arrangement to this effect was reached in the summer of 1937, once the major iron- and tungsten-producing regions of Spain had fallen under Franco's control. Large quantities of these strategic materials, which had previously been exported to Great Britain, were diverted to the German rearmament program in payment for the military supplies that Hitler was furnishing Franco. In addition to this expectation of economic advantage, two diplomatic considerations dictated Germany's active support of the Nationalist insurrection in Spain. The first was the likelihood that cooperation with Italy on Franco's behalf would cement the friendly relations between Berlin and Rome that had been established during the Ethiopian

affair. This became all the more apparent when France and Great Britain organized a nonintervention committee in September 1936 to curb all foreign involvement in the Spanish conflict. Once Mussolini had committed his personal prestige to a rebel victory in Spain, the Western democracies' expressions of displeasure at the Italian intervention, though no more effective than their exhortations during the Ethiopian affair, dashed whatever chances may have existed of reconstituting the Stresa coalition and drove Mussolini even closer to Hitler. But the most obvious benefit that Germany derived from the Spanish civil war was the diversion of French and British attention from the process of German rearmament and continental economic consolidation that

Loyalist Propaganda Poster during the Spanish Civil War. The image of a civilian armed with a rifle and the ghost of a soldier behind him conveyed the Spanish government's message that the civil war pitted an army against a people. Although Fascist Italy sent soldiers and Nazi Germany sent air units to support the Nationalist forces, no country intervened directly on behalf of the government in Madrid. But Loyalist sympathizers from several foreign countries, responding to images such as the one in this poster, enlisted in a volunteer organization called the International Brigades to defend the embattled regime.

was underway. For this reason it was to Hitler's advantage to prolong the military conflict on the Iberian peninsula as long as possible instead of helping the rebels to achieve a quick victory. This was accomplished by refusing Franco's urgent request for large German infantry units after the failure of the rebel offensive against Madrid at the end of 1936, as well as by restricting the Condor Legion to its original size for the duration of the conflict.

The ideological overtones of the Spanish civil war were apparent from the outset and contributed to its image in the popular imagination as an epic confrontation between the forces of international fascism and the defenders of the democratic cause. Franco's tactical alliance with the small Spanish Fascist movement, the Falange, viewed in the context of his dependence on Mussolini and Hitler for military support, seemed to herald the spread of the ideological doctrine hatched in Italy and perfected in Germany to the western tip of Europe. Conversely, the arrival in Spain of the "International Brigades," groups of left-wing volunteers organized in various foreign countries to fight on behalf of the beleaguered Republic, expressed the democratic world's commitment to oppose fascism in all its forms. The conspicuous presence of the small Spanish Communist party in the Popular Front coalition in Madrid and the flow of military aid from the Soviet Union to the Spanish government reflected the Kremlin's newly adopted "Popular Front" policy of defending parliamentary institutions against the Fascist menace.

In fact, this ideological dichotomy was deceptive. Franco and the military, clerical, and landowning groups that formed his base of support were reactionary devotees of a premodern era who shared little in common with the Falangist firebrands, who were reduced to insignificance when the marriage of convenience with them had outlived its usefulness. Once Franco's military victory in the spring of 1939 relieved the Spanish dictator of the need to rely on German and Italian assistance, he displayed little interest in joining a "Fascist crusade" in league with Hitler and Mussolini. Fears of a menace to France from a Nationalist regime across the Pyrenees proved ill founded. The Spanish Caudillo was to remain neutral for the duration of the Second World War despite strenuous German efforts to secure his active cooperation with the Axis war effort.

In the opposite camp, all manner of internal tensions and contradictions undermined the political unity and ideological consistency of the anti-Fascist cause. Within Republican Spain itself, Communists, Anarchists, Trotskyists, and Socialists repeatedly clashed over matters of political ideology and military strategy, with differences often settled by a burst of machine-gun fire. Outside of Spain, the nations supposedly committed to the defense of democratic government against the menace of fascism behaved in ways ill suited to that objective. The Conservative government in Great Britain could scarcely conceal its distaste for the leftist regime in Madrid and refused to lift a finger in its defense. Even the recently elected Popular Front government in France, dominated by Socialists with Communist support, refused Spanish Republican appeals for military supplies for fear of antagonizing Britain and further inflaming domestic Catholic opinion already agitated by reports of monasteries looted and nuns murdered by defenders of the regime in Madrid. The Soviet Union, though the only European power to furnish supplies to Republican Spain, kept the flow of aid to a minimum and demanded immediate payment in gold or raw materials. Stalin's parsimony was prompted by the same considerations that caused Hitler to restrict his assistance to Franco, namely, to keep

the Spanish pot boiling as a diversion from domestic turmoil, in the Soviet dictator's case the purge trials that he had launched a month after Franco's insurrection.

The Economic Basis of Blitzkrieg

While the Spanish civil war occupied the attention of the world, Germany proceeded to inaugurate a program to put its economy on a wartime footing while mounting a diplomatic offensive in several directions to facilitate the realization of Hitler's two immediate objectives: the annexation of Austria and the annihilation of Czechoslovakia.

The economic situation of Germany in 1936 was marked by superficial signs of prosperity that concealed a structural weakness of alarming proportions. The major achievement of the Nazi economic policy was the elimination of unemployment by the rearmament boom fueled by the deficit financing of the government. But an underlying weakness of the German economy began to occupy the attention of Hitler's economic policy makers at the beginning of 1936: Because of its heavy reliance on foreign imports of raw materials required by the rearmament program, Germany had begun to suffer from a severe shortage of foreign exchange. If present trends continued, the rearmament and economic recovery it had stimulated risked being halted in its tracks by the inability of the German government to pay for the continued importation of strategic raw materials that could not be produced domestically.

The crisis of raw material imports that loomed in the winter and spring of 1936 reminded the Nazi leaders of Germany's plight in the Great War, when its dependence on foreign supplies had exposed it to the crippling effects of the British blockade. Hitler's proposed solution to this threat to his future plans took the form of a short-term program of economic development designed to render Germany self-sufficient in the strategic materials she required to prepare for the European war that was expected to begin in the year 1940. The Four-Year Plan, launched on October 18, 1936, under the supervision of Hermann Göring, aimed at establishing Germany's absolute independence from foreign trade by fostering the production of synthetic materials as substitutes for the natural resources unobtainable domestically. In time the German chemical industry developed artificial rubber, textiles, and plastics. A synthetic fuels program was expanded whereby oil was extracted from Germany's abundant coal supplies. The utilization of Germany's low-grade iron ore for the production of steel was intensified to reduce the nation's dependence on the high-grade ores of Sweden and Spain.

The unfolding of Hitler's military strategy in the mid-1930s reflected the precarious position of the German economy at that time. The shortage of raw materials, even with the compensation provided by the development of synthetic substitutes, meant that Germany could not hope to win a long war of attrition against Russia and the British Empire, especially if American assistance were eventually thrown in the balance against it. Such was the lesson of the 1914–18 war. Hence the adoption of the strategy of "blitzkrieg," a series of short, swift engagements against isolated opponents. The principal weapons to be used were tanks and airplanes, both of which required large quantities of oil, rubber, and other products that Germany was preparing to produce synthetically. But the brief duration of these "lightning wars" would permit victory with only a modest mobilization of Germany's economic power. The territory conquered by Germany in these mechanized thrusts against isolated opponents would eventually afford it access to the raw materials of the European continent that would bring self-sufficiency at last.