had taken power in 1932 as an opponent of the Versailles system, was reinforced by realist
nic 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 continui-
ity 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 resto-
ration of military parity for Germany with the other powers of Europe. The repudiation
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 those traditional objectives of German foreign policy. What this interpretation
overlooks are Hitler's numerous unofficial references to the expansionist program deline-
ated above. The reversal of the "unjust" settlement after the 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 number. Though his designs on the
Czech lands in the east and on the Baltic coast in the north were undermined by the
rejection of the Anschluss by the Austrian electorate in 1934, he continued to press
his ambitions beyond the regions of German settlement in Europe until World War
II. The fate of the Czech lands in the east and on the Baltic coast in the north was
ultimately determined by the war itself, and the collapse of Germany in 1945.

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 Mac Donald
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 German rearmament. When the German refusal to agree to these pro-
scriptions led to the collapse of the talks, the French were forced to conclude a new
armistice with Germany on October 14, 1938.

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.

Chapter 4: The Western World in the Thirties: The Illusion Dispersed

The Woooling 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 acqui-
sition 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 terri-
torial 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 all these obstacles to Franco-Italian cooperation, the two countries shared
one common objective that French officials hoped would serve as the basis of reconcili-
ation. 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 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 grip 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
Austrian 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 Woosin 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'Ivry'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 vociferous 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 resuscitation 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 policies between the two states throughout the 1920s. As the major beneficiary of the peace settlement of 1919, France vigorously defended the postwar European system and political protection for the 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 states, 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.

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. German influence over its 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, 1935, as a gesture of interest in the Kremlin's new anti-German orientation. By the summer of 1935 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 of states united to resist further violations of the peace treaty 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.
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 their own expansion 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 the Italian legions and 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 hypocrisies 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 the disgruntled foreign minister 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, France and Britain had antagonized Mussolini without succeeding in denying him the objectives he sought in East Africa. The Hauze-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-Benno 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 the surface of any military response nor approve of a unilateral French action. Beneath the surface of any military response nor approve of a unilateral French action. Beneath the surface of any military response nor approve of a unilateral French action.
by the construction of elaborate fortifications along the French frontier. Shielded by 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 south, the nations of the Little Entente (Czecho-Slovakia, Romania, and Yugoslavia), geographically separated from their dependant 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 Czecho-Slovakia. 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 Strait 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 Srenta 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 pitied 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 con-
ict 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 sup-
port, seemed to herald the spread of the ideological doctrine hatched in Italy and per-
fected in Germany to the western tip of Europe. Conversely, the arrival in Spain of the
Nationalist sympathizers, organized in various foreign countries to fight on behalf of the
bureaucratic Republic, expressed the democratic world's commitment to oppose fascism in
its fullest form. 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 institu-
tions 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 support, he displayed little interest
in joining a "Fascist crusade" in league with Hitler and Mussolini. Fears of a menace to
Spain 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 stren-
uous German efforts to secure his active cooperation with the Axis war effort.

In the opposite camp, all manner of internal tensions and contradictions under-
mind 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 com-
mittcd to the defense of democratic government against the menace of fascism behav-
ied 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 to
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 the French 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 immi-
diate 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 diplo-
matic offensive in several directions to facilitate the realization of Hitler's two immedi-
ate 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 rearma-
ment 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 16, 1936, under the
supervision of Hermann Göring, aimed at establishing Germany's absolute indepen-
dence from foreign trade by fostering the production of synthetic materials as substi-
tutes 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 unfulfilling of Hitler's strategy of "blitzkrieg," a series of short, swift engagements against isolated opponents, led to the eventual 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.