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Strategy, Theory, and History: Operation Husky 1943

Abstract *In his 1987 work 'Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace', Edward Luttwak described strategy as a field of activity characterised not only by an innately complex relationship between designs, actions, and outcomes, but so too by the frequent disparity between its theory and praxis. Similar observations on this subject have since been made by Richard K. Betts, Lawrence Freedman and Antulio Echavarría II. This article will use the Allied invasion of Sicily July-August 1943 as vehicle through which to test these theories against a signal event in the European theatre of World War Two. It will illustrate how Operation Husky and its aftermath are a paradigm of the confusing and often illogical course of events associated with the process of formulating strategy and waging war. In so doing it demonstrates the benefits of using strategic theory to illuminate events and so move beyond the often insular focus of campaign histories, and simultaneously reinforces the importance of military history in informing a theoretical understanding of strategy.*

Keywords: Second World War, Sicily, Strategy, Strategic Theory.

I: Introduction

Operation Husky, the Allied invasion of Sicily in 1943, fits neatly within the familiar narrative of Allied operations in Europe during the Second World War. A pivotal event within that narrative, it has been the subject of a number of studies examining its genesis, planning, and prosecution.¹ However, despite doing much to further our understanding of the campaign itself, historians have tended to consider Operation Husky from a predominantly operational perspective; understandably so given the novelty, brutality and ultimately the controversy of its undertaking as the initial Allied landing on 'Fortress Europe'. Yet although its significance within the broader sweep of Allied Mediterranean strategy and the debates therein is acknowledged, studies have seldom sought deeper insight into what that campaign might actually tell us about the subject of strategy itself; its conception, its nature, its ability to regulate outcomes, and the effects of these outcomes upon the course of events as we know them. This is the symptom of a broader trend within 'operational' military history, namely to privilege an essentially positivist, orderly viewpoint of strategy; its conception, its formulation and its course. This article takes an alternative approach of borrowing from theoretical discussions of strategy and its nature to consider the Allied

¹ Sir Michael Howard, *The Mediterranean Strategy in the Second World War* (Greenhill Books, London 1993), Douglas Porch's *Hitler's Mediterranean Gamble: The North African and the Mediterranean Campaigns in World War II* (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 2004), Gerhard Weinberg's *World at Arms: a Global History of World War II* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1994), Simon Ball, *Bitter Sea: The Brutal World War II Fight for the Mediterranean* (Harper Press, London, 2010) and also 'The Mediterranean and North Africa' in J. Ferris and E. Mawdsley, *The Cambridge History of the Second World War Volume 1: Fighting the War* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015) 358-389. With respect to the intelligence and deception campaigns that underpinned Allied strategy in that theatre see F. H. Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War: Its Influence on Strategy and Operations* Volumes 2 (HMSO, London 1981), and volume 3, Part 1 (HMSO, London 1984), Michael Howard, *Strategic Deception in the Second World War* (Pimlico, London 1990), and Michael Handel (ed) *Strategic and Operational Deception in the Second World War* (Frank Cass, London 1987).

invasion of Sicily in a different light. It argues that whilst Operation Husky is undoubtedly a fascinating subject for scholars of tactics and operations, its study can also serve a far broader purpose; namely educating us to the variables and consequences at play in terms of the broader management of war. In that respect, Operation Husky deserves to be seen not only as a stepping-stone in the Allied defeat of Germany but as a looking-glass through which to identify certain truths about the prosecution of war; namely the relationship between military operations and strategic ‘ends’, the inherent tensions between design and causation, and the dissonance between the theory and practice of strategy.² Husky and its aftermath offer a valuable vantage point in these respects. Although a neat and self-contained campaign it resided in the midst of a much wider web of actions and relationships, enabling us to judge the interplay of a variety of operational and strategic issues across time and space. Time in the sense of that period from late 1942 to autumn 1943 that encompassed Husky’s planning, prosecution and aftermath; space in the sense of a range of military and diplomatic actions, by both Allies and Axis, reaching from the Mediterranean through the Balkans to the Russian steppe. For both sides, the choices and actions undertaken within these temporal and spatial parameters provide examples of the counterintuitive nature of strategy, and indeed war itself.

It should be emphasised therefore that this article is not intended to be an operational account of the invasion of Sicily. Neither does it promise to reveal hitherto unseen evidence in relation to the event – one suspects that the archives have been picked clean in that respect. What it *does* do, however, is use the example of this particular event as a way of articulating three particular themes in relation to the study of strategy. At first glance, this may appear a tired avenue of approach in relation to Operation Husky, so long the centrepiece in a long-standing historical debate over the merits of the Allies’ Mediterranean strategy in the Second World War. But whereas that debate has traditionally centred upon the respective merits of rival political and military visions in application to the Allied campaign against Germany, what has not been explored is the relationship between Operation Husky and the nature of strategy itself. The first theme of this essay therefore is to provide that insight by relating the invasion of Sicily to a variety of arguments offered by strategic theorists intended to encourage us to think more carefully about the degree of rational control that exists in the formulation and implementation of strategy and the prosecution of war.³ The second theme explored is the utility of history in providing weight to these theoretical observations. By using the detail provided by that history we can more properly illuminate the complex and contingent nature of strategy in terms of its formulation and implementation in war, and the uneven consequences that accrue. Lastly,

²This article utilises Hew Strachan’s definition of strategy as, ‘the control and direction of war’. See *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge, 2012), 56.

³Ibid,54. The matter is not helped by rival intellectual perspectives. Thomas Schelling viewed strategy not solely as the management of war, but also the *potential* use of force i.e. deterrence. See *The Strategy of Conflict* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts 1960), 9.

the essay engages at a broader level with the subject of military history itself and what its proper focus should be – a debate articulated initially by Hans Delbruck, reiterated by Theodor Ropp in the 1940s, by Peter Paret and Sir Michael Howard in the 1960's and 70's, and lately reinforced by Hew Strachan.⁴ Robert Citino states – accurately - that the 'big tent' of military history is unparalleled in its potential sophistication and breadth. But Strachan observes an emerging 'chasm' between operational military historians on the one side and theorists of war on the other.⁵ As he argues, for military history to provide the requisite intellectual gravity, and to do due service to itself, it needs to approach the ideal embodied by Howard, (and indeed Strachan himself), in whose form operational history and a deep knowledge of strategic theory encompassed one another.⁶ This article argues in support of Strachan's perspective.⁷ If overly conventional and prescriptive in its analysis, if tending toward an antiquarian and intellectually incurious version of events that ignores wider political and social contexts, or if promoting linear narratives over the realm of contingent 'possibilities' that frames the outcome of military operations, then operational history fails in its potentially vital contribution to our understanding of war in a wider sense. But if utilised with these wider perspectives in mind, it provides a crucial bridge to alternative intellectual approaches to the subject.

This article does not pretend ownership or originality over the concepts that it uses, but it does seek to apply them in a combination that is seldom seen. It is intended to advertise a more methodologically diverse and questioning approach to the study of military history, one that in particular can encourage and reinforce an accurate understanding of the purpose and nature of strategy in the conduct of war. In return, it emphasises to historians the potential value of theory to their own analysis of events. And ultimately, it hopes to encourage a new way of looking at signal event of the Second World War.

Theory and Strategy

There exists a certain dissonance between the theory of strategy and common understanding of the concept. This is not the fault of theorists. Rather it is the fault of a reductive approach to the teaching of teaching of strategy. For ease of comprehension this tends to emphasise neat hierarchies and logical relationships, none more so than the 'ends-ways-means' dynamic beloved of military academies.⁸ This frequently prescriptive approach

⁴ Ropp, 'The Teaching of Military History' *Military Affairs*, 13/1 (1949), 14-19, Paret, 'The History of War' *Daedalus*, 100/2 (1971), 376-396

⁵ See R.M. Citino, 'Military Histories Old and New: A Reintroduction', *The American Historical Review* Vol. 112, No. 4 (Oct, 2007), 1070-1090 and Strachan, 'The Study of War at Oxford 1909-2009' in C. Hood, D. King and G. Peele, *Forging a Discipline: A Critical Assessment of Oxford's Development of the Study of Politics and International Relations in Comparative Perspective* (Oxford, 2014), 204-224

⁶ Michael Howard, *The Use and Abuse of Military History*, *RUSI Journal*, 107/625 (1962), 6

⁷ As Paret stated: '[T]he largely narrative, unanalytic treatment of military operations...was not conducive to the development of creative historical hypotheses, or to the closer integration of military history with other kinds of history' *Understanding War*, (Princeton, 1993), 217

⁸ Ends equal objectives, means equal resources, and strategy comprises the 'ways' that link the two together. See Stephen Miller, 'On Strategy Grand and Mundane' *Orbis* 60:2 (Spring 2016), 237-247. With respect to

encourages a false confidence in sequences, order and cohesion. It envisages easily identifiable and fixed ‘ends’, subscribed and adhered to by a range of political and military actors working in unison with one another. It promotes the sanctity of ‘policy’ as a method of controlling war - rather than acknowledging war’s tendency to shape policy instead - and it leaves unsaid the input provided by blind fortune and by an intelligent and reactive opponent. Without taking these sorts of considerations into account, our often superficial understanding of strategy as an ordered application of resources in pursuit of political ends provides a sanitized and unhelpful articulation of the concept. In practice, of course, matters generally refuse to obey such neat rules, as the theorist Edward Luttwak illustrated by describing strategy’s tendency toward ‘paradox, irony and contradiction’.⁹ As any military historian or strategic theorist knows, defeats can be advantageous, victories less so. Mistakes at the tactical level can lead to success at the operational level; success at the operational level can lead to failure at the strategic level.

So what does this mean in relation to Operation Husky? Firstly, if as Luttwak states there is no natural harmony between the levels of war, then a study of that campaign and its aftermath tests assertions concerning the ability (or otherwise) of military operations to provide chosen strategic outcomes; a matter of relevance both to historians and theorists.¹⁰ Secondly, as a case study it also helps test and clarify his notions of ‘paradox, irony and contradiction’ in terms of the way that strategy may ultimately deliver effect. Lastly it supports one of his less prominent but still highly valuable observations, namely that the *theoretical* superiority of proper strategic conduct can often be disputed in practice.¹¹

The first point is a crucial one, both in terms of interpreting an historical event but so too when contemplating the broader use of military power in the service of political designs. As Antulio Echavarría reminds us, there is a fundamental requirement to visualise strategy not as a set of independent and controllable variables, (resources, alliances, the shaping of one’s capabilities, the sequencing of military operations and the selection of aims) but rather as the management of the chaotic interplay between innumerable dependent ones, i.e. one’s own designs and capabilities versus the dynamics of rival alliances; the acumen and judgement of enemy political leaders; the capabilities of, and resources open to, their military commanders; the relationship between those military and political elites; and of course pure luck (good or bad), to name but a few. Only with these volatile and uncontrollable dynamics in mind can we begin to understand the challenge of employing

military teaching see H. Richard Yarger, ‘Toward a Theory of Strategy: Art Lykke and the Army War College Strategy Model’ in *U.S. Army War College Guide to National Security Policy and Strategy*, 2nd ed., ed. J. Boone Bartholomees (Department of National Security and Strategy, Carlisle Barracks: U.S. Army War College, 2006) 108.

⁹ Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002) xii

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 234

power as an accurate instrument of political intent.¹² For both the Allies and Axis, Husky and its aftermath emphasise such vital yet often hidden relationships.

On the second issue, that of ‘paradox, irony and contradiction’, theorists adopts slightly differing viewpoints. Echavarria for example argues that the substantive meaning of the term ‘paradox’ when applied to strategy is unhelpful for a variety of reasons, not least because an apparent paradox is often, technically, nothing of the sort.¹³ Heeding Echavarria’s warnings this article nevertheless contends that the term retains value if understood in the broader sense advocated by Thomas Schelling i.e. as a contravention of common sense, or accepted rules.¹⁴ Such an understanding may open one up to accusations of imprecision, but it serves to provide useful and tangible explanation as to the confusing flow of events in war, and in relation to Husky in particular.

The final point made by Luttwak; that relating to the inherent possibility of ‘proper’ strategic conduct needing to be overturned in war, is fundamental to any discussion regarding the balance between theory and practice. Luttwak refrained from offering any further substantive detail, but his observation touches upon concepts explored in much greater depth by others. Richard Betts’ exploration of the myriad complexities of actually enacting strategy leaves him seemingly sceptical of its utility as a practicable concept. In particular, he observed fundamental problems with the notion of the seemingly sacrosanct triptych of ends, ways and means and strategy’s role in relating those three elements. Specifically, Betts identifies the way that this theoretical understanding of how strategy works sits in opposition to the actual nature of war, which as he points out exists to serve itself, not policy. The notion of an ordered and controlled sequence of moves in pursuit of fixed political ends is thus a dangerous illusion.¹⁵ This perspective echoes that held by Lawrence Freedman; that strategy is too readily misconceived as a rigid process that envisages an ordered and pre-ordained sequence of events that obey neat theoretical precepts. Instead, he argues, it is more accurately described a relatively modest process; a form of muddling through that simply creates new realities to be contested in turn. It is, he proposes, a matter of ‘stages’ rather than ‘conclusions’.¹⁶

Operation Husky provides rich evidence in support of such theoretical observations. Its planning, undertaking and aftermath reveal certain of Schelling’s ‘paradoxical’ elements. It is a model of Echavarria’s ‘dependent variables’, and of Freedman’s ‘muddling through’. It is an example of how established principles of strategic theory appear to founder in contact with the realities of the situation as they stood, and yet it still witnesses beneficial

¹² Antulio Echavarria II, ‘Preparing for One War and Getting Another?’ (Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2010), 6

¹³ Ibid 3-4. Echavarria states that paradoxes are usually resolvable. Eventually, we either find (1) the essential item of information that reconciles contradictory statements, or (2) that the premises of one or all statements are false, or (3) that apparent the paradox was based upon hasty generalizations

¹⁴ Schelling, 18.

¹⁵ Richard K. Betts, ‘Is Strategy an Illusion?’ *International Security*, 25:2 (2000) 37

¹⁶ Freedman, *Strategy: A History* (OUP, Oxford, 2013), 726

outcomes for those protagonists that declined to be bound by hierarchies, and who were able to best manage changing circumstances.¹⁷ Crucially, it also serves to illustrate how politics provides logic to what would otherwise appear illogical acts and outcomes from a purely theoretical perspective.

Importantly, in order to give weight to the argument, this essay will rely upon counterfactual reasoning to agree. This is deemed appropriate for two reasons. Firstly, any analysis that unpicks the explanations as to why decisions are made or not made in terms of their perceived causality, and examines the tensions between actual outcomes and the alternative futures that may have played out in their place, tends towards the counterfactual.¹⁸ Secondly, such analytical techniques are not the preserve of the fantasist. Used to great intellectual effect in Julian Jackson's studious examination of the fall of France 1940, other noted military historians such as Denis Showalter and Gerhard Weinberg have utilised the same methodology.¹⁹ As the historian and theorist Patrick Porter reasons, 'Predicting the past and imagining paths not taken is speculative. But *any* argument about causality is counterfactual'. To that end, he argues, we can make informed guesses in an 'evidence-rich' environment in order to estimate alternative futures.²⁰

Structure and Background

In order to best apply the theoretical insights explained above, the article will provide a brief outline of Operation Husky for those unfamiliar with the narrative, before examining four distinct aspects of the event itself. The first of these will be its genesis at the Casablanca conference of January 1943, and which will illustrate the problem of visualising strategy as a neat interlinking of means and ends. The second aspect examined will be the Axis preparations for the defence of Sicily, and the seemingly paradoxical dynamics undermining the German ability to successfully protect such a vital yet defensible position. The third aspect examined will be the ways in which Operation Husky related to events on the Eastern Front during the summer of 1943, and the degree to which seemingly positive strategic effects for the Allies could hide genuinely quite counterproductive outcomes. Lastly it will examine Husky's effect upon subsequent events in Italy. Aside from illustrating the (again) counterproductive consequences of a supposedly beneficial outcome, in this case the collapse of the Mussolini regime, it will examine the extent to which Allied strategy was not simply a closed cosmos of Anglo-US deliberations, but rather an 'open' system, deeply exposed and highly vulnerable to contingency.

¹⁷ Betts, 36.

¹⁸ Particularly Carlo D'Este's *Bitter Victory* (Harper, London, 2008) which remains the most comprehensive study of the Sicily campaign to date

¹⁹ See Jackson, *The Fall of France: The Nazi Invasion of 1940* (Oxford University Press, 2001), particularly his chapter 'Causes, Consequences and Counterfactuals' pp. 185-228, Harold Deutsch and Denis Showalter (eds) *What if? Strategic Alternatives of World War II* (Chicago, Emperor Press 1997).

²⁰ See 'A Matter of Choice: Strategy and Discretion in World War Two' *Journal of Strategic Studies* 35/3 (2012), 317-343.

Operation Husky 10th July -17th August 1943

Between 9th July and 17th August 1943, Allied forces mounted an operation to secure the Island of Sicily from Axis control. Commencing with large scale airborne and seaborne landings, the operation soon degenerated into a desperately contested land campaign. US forces in the form of 7th Army under the command of General George Patton alongside the Anglo-Canadian forces of General Bernard Montgomery's 8th Army fought bitterly to take control as heavily outnumbered Axis units, in the face of immense pressure, sought to conduct an orderly retreat to the Italian mainland. A seeming lack of clear intent on the part of General Harold Alexander, in control of the land campaign, combined with the wilfulness of both Montgomery and Patton caused the Allied effort to fracture into two largely separate efforts to the great benefit of German commanders.²¹ Combined with an inability to harness their dominance in the air and at sea as part of a wider 'operational' design in concert with land forces, the Allies were forced to watch as the Axis evacuated over 100,000 troops to the mainland almost entirely unhindered. The success of the latter event in particular, as well as the stuttering performance of Allied commanders, caused observers at the time, and historians subsequently, to lament Husky as a missed opportunity to deliver a comprehensive defeat upon German forces. The author of perhaps the best operational history of the campaign, Carlo D'Este, would later condemn Operation Husky as a 'Bitter Victory'.

I: Ends and Ways

The paradoxical character of the Allied Mediterranean campaign in World War II has already been highlighted courtesy of recent literature on the topic.²² As historians have noted, triumph in North Africa in the spring of 1943 delivered the defeat of Axis combat power on that continent but it also, unhelpfully, delivered a form of strategic 'pull' that sucked the Allies onward in the search for continued success. This deeply antagonised senior US strategists who feared the inexorable dilution of their vision for the defeat of Germany. In such a way, success had led inexorably to tension and division. In application to Husky however, such logic would be reversed. By way of a thorough corruption of the proper principles of strategy, tension and division would create the necessary 'space' for success to occur.

Any student of Anglo-US relations during this period knows that January-April 1943 was a time of tension, uncertainty and ambiguity where respective visions of the

²¹ Alexander was commander 15th Army Group. He was in effect in control of the land campaign, while his superior, General Dwight Eisenhower, attended to broader strategic and political considerations. Such a command structure prohibited the unifying of a theoretically joint campaign due to the former's lack of authority and the latter's distraction with other matters.

²² M.K.Barbier, 'The War in the West 1943-45' in Ferris and Mawdsley, *The Cambridge History of the Second World War Volume 1: Fighting the War*, 389-419

Mediterranean theatre were concerned. Although the inter-Allied conference at Casablanca in January had agreed that Sicily would be the appropriate target following victory in North Africa, there existed significant and potentially divisive differences of opinion between British and American service chiefs as to how the military effort should flow from that point.²³ It should be emphasized that the ultimate political authorities in question, Roosevelt and Churchill, were essentially unified in their respective understandings that operations should continue to focus on the Mediterranean theatre, although opinion was divided as to precisely where in the Mediterranean. Therefore the evident tensions should not be misinterpreted as being politically more serious than they were.²⁴ But rough political unity could not forge military-strategic synergy among the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS); the senior Allied military caucus responsible for both advising its political leaderships, and devising and enabling the most appropriate strategies for the global war against the Axis.

On the question of Mediterranean strategy, divisions within the CCS were carved along roughly national lines. British representatives under the guidance of General Alanbrooke, Britain's Chief of the Imperial General Staff, heavily favoured a commitment to Italy subsequent to the successful conclusion of the Sicilian campaign.²⁵ Within the US chain of command General George C. Marshall, Chief of Staff of the Army and Roosevelt's principal military adviser, and Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of the Naval Staff, viewed any tendency toward continued operations in the Mediterranean post-Sicily with deep suspicion.²⁶ Marshall in particular maintained fundamental objections to an indirect strategy that placed Italy, rather than northern France, at the centre of any strategy to defeat Germany. Although eventually convinced at Casablanca to give his blessing to Husky, he steadfastly refused to sanction further military operations in the Mediterranean subsequent to its conclusion.²⁷ As late as 25 April 1943 he declared emphatically that such operations (Sicily, et al) "[A]re not in keeping with my ideas of what our strategy should be. The decisive effort must be made against the continent from the United Kingdom sooner or later."²⁸ In fact his eventual agreement to the *notion* of an invasion of the Italian mainland would not come until 16 July 1943, four months after Casablanca and in the midst of the Sicilian campaign itself. His subordinate General Albert Wedermeyer, a committed advocate of

²³ See Barr, *Yanks and Limeys*, (Vintage, London, 2016) 140-142, Sir John Kennedy, *The Business of War* (Walter Millis, London 1958), 279-288, and Alex Danchev, Dan Todman, *Alanbrooke: War Diaries* (Wiedenfield and Nicholson, London 2002), 465-470

²⁴ For more on this debate see Michael Howard, *Grand Strategy, Volume 4: September 1942-August 1943*, (HMSO, London 1970) *passim*

²⁵ General Dwight D. Eisenhower was an advocate of an invasion of Italy, as were USAAF officers who eyed airbases on the mainland for strategic bombers to carry the war to southern Germany. See M. Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-44* (Centre for Military History, US Army 1994), 153. However, neither Eisenhower nor the USAAF had any significant influence over Allied strategy in the Mediterranean at this stage.

²⁶ Wedermeyer, a graduate of the German *Kriegsacademie* 1936-38, was the author of the so-called 'Victory Programme'. On the role of Wedermeyer in devising the concepts underpinning US war planning see Barr, 114-155

²⁷ *Ibid* 220-223. Barr highlights the antipathy displayed by Marshall toward any overt agreement to an Italian campaign post-Husky. Marshall was President Roosevelt's most valued military advisor.

²⁸ Matloff, 75.

early landings in N.W. Europe in 1943, remained thoroughly unconvinced even of Husky's merits.²⁹

The Allies therefore entered the post-Casablanca phase in a conceptual limbo as to the intended aims of their next operational 'leap'. The point has been made by historians of course that the decision to invade Sicily was lent necessary intellectual and thus strategic coherence by virtue of its relationship to broader grand-strategic objectives. Specifically the requirement to free up lines of communication through the Mediterranean for the benefit of logistical preparations for Overlord; as a method of dealing a fatal blow to the rotten structure of Italian fascism, and as a way of relieving pressure upon the Eastern Front. But in reality that coherence was illusory. As admitted by Britain's senior naval commander in the Mediterranean the possession of Sicily provided little increased protection to Allied lines of communication through the Mediterranean.³⁰ Furthermore, Britain's Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) admitted that while the invasion of Sicily might deal a fatal blow to Mussolini's regime, such effect could be equally accomplished by landings elsewhere.³¹ As for impacting German fortunes on the Eastern Front, such impact was not necessarily wholly beneficial to Allied interests, as will be illustrated. While previous and subsequent Allied operations in the Mediterranean displayed a firm adherence to the theoretical ideals of strategy making in the sense of displaying an understanding as to precisely what they were designed to achieve, Husky did not.

In practice therefore, although the invasion of Sicily was agreed as an objective the intended outcome was fundamentally ambiguous and thus open to interpretation by all parties. The practical implication of this was that conditions necessary to achieve a unified vision of where Allied strategy should go post-Husky would therefore have to be generated by military action. In other words battle, or the prospect thereof, would have to *create* strategy, or at least create the conditions by which strategy could be made. This stood as a fundamental reversal of the ideal, whereby tactical actions were to be mounted pursuant of stated strategic objectives.³² Why this should be so problematic lay in the theoretical basis of how to arrange these tactical actions in the absence of clearly identifiable and agreed upon objectives. In such a scenario operational commanders ran the risk of fashioning their enterprises without a firm understanding of what precisely these were designed to achieve, a phenomenon that might lead to a series of un-coordinated engagements with little overarching coherence. Such was the spectre that Soviet theorists of the 1920's and 30's had sought to avoid, and such is the accusation levelled at Operation Husky.³³ That as a

²⁹ For more on General Albert Wedermeyer, see Barr, 141-2.

³⁰ Ball, 'The Mediterranean and North Africa 1940-1944', 364

³¹ The National Archives, Kew, London, [Hereafter referred to as TNA] CAB (Cabinet Papers) 121/152 COS (S) 'Symbol Conference at Casablanca between UK and USA January 1943, 12th Meeting 21st January 1943. The Joint Intelligence Committee recommended Sardinia as a more suitable target in this respect.

³² Higher level British doctrine stated that, 'It is essential to decide on and clearly to define the aim that the use of force is intended to attain'. Field Service Regulations: Operations, Higher Formations (London, HMSO 1935) 14

³³ David M. Glantz, 'The Nature of Soviet Operational Art' *Parameters* 15/1 Spring 1985, 2-13

consequence of the requirement to ameliorate political tensions at Casablanca, subordinate military planners were condemned to visualising it as an end in itself (the occupation of Sicily) rather than a means to an end (the destruction of German combat power on the island with a view to facilitating rapid exploitation on the mainland, for example).³⁴ Hence, due to their being forced to envisage the operation in isolation from any subsequent exploitation of changed circumstances, the military planning staff were forced to craft an inherently conservative, short-sighted and uncoordinated plan, one that would allow the escape of over 100,000 enemy troops.³⁵

Ultimately it is fair to say that Operation Husky evolved as a plan that possessed some sense of what it was meant to achieve, but little sense of how to further capitalise upon that achievement – a corruption of the fundamentals of effective strategy-making. But for overwhelmingly important political reasons, strategy in any detailed sense was less important than the sheer necessity for action. A tactical enterprise would occur, and in the process create the necessary space for strategy to form. This may have contravened theoretical principles, but ambiguity and lack of direction suited Allied interests at that moment in time. Regardless of the primacy of civilian control, it was inconceivable for political leaders to publicly articulate future strategy without the support of their chief military advisors. As a consequence, the prospect of stipulating post-Husky strategy at Casablanca was highly undesirable. The British could not tolerate any answer other than continued operations in the Mediterranean; yet forcing Marshall to acquiesce to such a vision at this stage would have proved highly damaging to the critical relationship with his President. Indeed, so self-evident were these concerns that matters played out as they did at Casablanca.

Did lack of consensus at Casablanca and in the initial months afterward have an effect upon Husky's fortunes as a military enterprise? Many of those involved at the time, on both sides, castigated a campaign plan that appeared to eschew the chance of 'decisive' victory by deliberately avoiding creating the conditions necessary for such success to be achieved.³⁶ This argument will be dealt with in greater depth later but it is undeniable that the military planning process was constrained by its inability to treat the Italian mainland as a fundamental or subsequent component of the campaign. The absence of any agreed sense of where Husky might lead ensured the failure to engineer at the outset the wholesale defeat of Axis forces on Sicily. The point, however, is not whether this state of affairs was problematic *per se*. In a purely military sense it may have been. But its disadvantages paled

³⁴Both D'Este, *Bitter Victory* and Martin Blumenson, *Sicily, Whose Victory?* (Ballantine, 1972) adopt this narrative.

³⁵ For more on Husky's planning, see TNA WO (War Office) 106 (War Office: Directorate of Military Operations and Military Intelligence, and predecessors: Correspondence and Papers) 5823 (planning for Husky) 1 Feb-31 March 1943. Mitcham and Stauffenberg state that 39,569 German combat troops and 62,000 Italian troops were evacuated. See *The Battle of Sicily: How the Allies Lost Their Chance for Total Victory* (Stackpole, New York, 2007), 307.

³⁶ Simultaneous landings on Sicily and the Italian mainland in the Calabria region would, it has been argued, have created the conditions for encirclement, destruction, and 'success'. See D'Este, 76

in comparison to the political flexibility afforded. In other words, and in contradiction of theoretical best practice, it was precisely the lack of clearly articulated ‘ends’ that served Allied interests so well. It allowed Husky to proceed as a concept and so preserved the momentum that would carry the Allies into Italy. By preventing an untimely confrontation at the highest levels over the setting forth of definite ‘next steps’, Husky was able to create the necessary politico-strategic conditions for consensus to be reached.

II: German Decision-making and the ‘Paradox of Plenty’.

The reasons for the Axis failure to prevent the capture of Sicily were multifarious. Undoubtedly, Allied deception operations found their target in a highly dysfunctional German intelligence apparatus. Although this article does not wish to re-tread the well-worn debate over the utility of Allied deception operations in relation to Husky, it is reasonable to accept that the misdirection created was a powerful distraction for a German high command confronted by so many seemingly credible targets for enemy action.³⁷ A distraction enhanced by its habit, Michael Handel observes, of continually interpreting potential Allied actions by way of a strategic culture that prioritised purely military considerations and failed to conceptualise how the Allies might unfurl their operations with grander designs in mind.³⁸ But while these criticisms hold true in terms of German analysis of Allied objectives, they tend to marginalize a matter of fundamental importance to the German defence of Sicily, namely the fragile state of the Italian fascist Government by the early summer of 1943. This political aspect of the debate is central to understanding German decision making with respect to the defence of Sicily, and in the process illustrates additional factors that matter hugely with respect to Husky’s strategic narrative. In particular they echo certain of the observations made by Luttwak and Betts in particular. With respect to the former, we see emerging ‘paradox of plenty’ where the Axis is concerned. Large numbers of Italian divisions should have been perceived as a relative strength in the minds of German strategists contemplating a map of the Mediterranean at the same time as their Allied counterparts at Casablanca. Instead, from that same month those Italian divisions begin to inexorably assume the form of a critical vulnerability and ultimately a threat; a curse that transformed theoretical strength into a practical weakness, and which shaped German freedom of action where the defence of Sicily was concerned. Meanwhile, Betts’ observations regarding complexity and contingency require us to understand how Allied strategy was dependent not only upon its own designs, but also reliant for success upon frictions deep within the Axis system, frictions that were largely self-inflicted.

³⁷ Hinsley, *British Intelligence in the Second World War Volume 3*, 69-117

³⁸ Michael Handel, ‘Strategic and Operational Deception in Historical Perspective’ in *Strategic and Operational Deception*, 76

In the introduction to his edited volume on strategic and operational deception in World War Two, Handel engages in a lengthy dismissal of arguments proposed by those querying the importance of Allied deception in shaping German thinking and behaviours in the lead up to Husky.³⁹ Whilst many of his observations hit the point squarely, there remain uncertainties in divining the precise reasons as to why significant numbers of German forces remained uncommitted to Sicily and Italy despite evident suspicions that the former was a likely target.⁴⁰ Even accounting for the uncertainty caused by Allied deception, the subsequent movement of German units to the Balkans, and the apparent belief by senior personalities within Hitler's inner circle that Greece was the next target for Allied invasion, sufficient formations remained available to secure both Sicily *and* other threatened sectors in Italy.⁴¹ But while several of these divisions did move into Italy and Sicily during May and June 1943, the bulk of available divisions remained in France or Southern Germany.⁴² Tasked with ensuring a swift, armed take-over of Italy in the case of a political collapse they were positioned in such a fashion that they could not be wholly consumed by the chaos of that collapse or by an armed revolution on the part of the still sizeable Italian Army.⁴³ Indeed, fears of this sort had an absolutely critical impact on Sicily itself. Field Marshal Albert Kesselring, C-in-C South and the commander responsible for determining the German defences on Sicily in the build up to Husky, purposely segregated the elite 15th Panzer Division from its Italian counterparts for fear of the latter's treachery. This would have hugely significant consequences for the tactical defence of the island.⁴⁴

It is undeniable therefore that German strategizing with respect to the defence of Sicily was, in addition to Allied deception operations, fundamentally influenced by the increasing fragility of the Italian fascist regime.⁴⁵ Seen from this perspective it could be argued that the defence of Sicily should have been made a priority lest its loss fatally undermine Mussolini. For the Germans however the priority over time was less a question of *preventing* a potential crisis, but being positioned securely if and when it happened.⁴⁶ The resourcing of Sicily had to be placed in the context of a political crisis on the mainland that might see it, and potentially much of the Balkans courtesy of the huge Italian military

³⁹ Klaus Jurgen-Muller 'A German perspective on Allied Deception operations in the Second World War' in *Intelligence and National Security* 2/3 (1987), 301-326. Handel questions Jurgen-Muller's analysis but acknowledges that the effectiveness of Allied deception upon German thinking remained 'circumstantial'. See his 'Strategic and Operational Deception in Historical Perspective', 80.

⁴⁰ Ibid,78. Handel acknowledges that the Allied bombing of Pantellaria, an Island fortress guarding the southern approaches to Sicily, roughly a month prior to Husky likely led the Germans to believe that Sicily was the target.

⁴¹ Ibid,79. Handel is referring to General Alfred Jodl, Chief of the Operations Staff of the OKW. Muller states that 11 Divisions in total were under Army Group B's command, of which only a small proportion were deployed into Italy prior to operation Husky. See 'A German Perspective...', 314

⁴² Ehrman states that 8 full divisions were stationed near Munich in July for this purpose. See *Grand Strategy Vol V The History of the Second World War* (HMSO, London 1956), 65.

⁴³ Ibid

⁴⁴ D'Este states that Kesselring '[P]rudently dispersed his forces so as to be able to disarm the Italians in the event they defected', 198.

⁴⁵ See Helmut Heiber and David M. Glantz, *Hitler and his Generals: Military Conferences 1942-1945* (Greenhill Books, London 2002), 119-144

⁴⁶ Ibid.

presence there, slip from Germany's political and military orbit.⁴⁷ The irony was this, however. In contemplating the unravelling of their political and military relationship with Italy in the spring of 1943, and the concomitant strategic dilemmas that accrued as a consequence, Hitler and the OKW (*Oberkommando der Wehrmacht*) were confronting the consequences of Mussolini's attempts to strengthen that very same relationship, an attempt which had only exacerbated the fundamental fault lines within.⁴⁸

The key to such an observation lay not in Italy but in Russia, specifically the debacle at Stalingrad in the winter of 1942/3 where the 235,000 strong Italian 8th Army, acting in support of German forces, was to all intents and purposes destroyed. In conjunction with the loss of its 1st Army in Tunisia three months later, that destruction represented the end of Italy's ability to carry out any effective defence of the homeland.⁴⁹ But in political terms the losses in Russia were a different order of magnitude. Defeat in North Africa was the unfortunate result of an otherwise comprehensible strategy centred on Italy's traditional sphere of influence. Not so Russia, where Mussolini's demand for a military presence in support of Germany's efforts had long antagonised his military commanders and threatened the legitimacy of his regime.⁵⁰ The loss of those troops and the apparent circumstances in which many of those losses occurred was to have profound political consequences, resulting in significant changes at the head of the Italian Armed forces.⁵¹ As a direct result of events in Russia, Field Marshall Ugo Cavallero was replaced in January 1943 as Chief of the Defence Staff by General Vittorio Ambrosio. For Hitler and the OKW the latter's openly hostile attitude, his desire to re-orientate the Italian war-effort away from the Balkans and Russia toward the protection of the homeland, and above all his perceived political unreliability, were of deep and sudden concern.⁵² So too was Germany's position in the Balkans, where the implications of Italian politico-military upheaval upon this economic satrapy of the Reich suddenly loomed large.⁵³ Such concerns were enhanced by evidence of a clique within Mussolini's domestic political opposition exploring the notion of a separate peace with the

⁴⁷ Italian commanders were engaged in clandestine arrangements with Partisan forces. See Jovan Marjanović, Mihailo Stanišić, *The Collaboration of D. Mihailović's Chetniks with the enemy forces of occupation: 1941-1944* (Beograd, Arhivski Pregled, 1976) *passim*.

⁴⁸ Translated as 'Supreme Command of the Armed Forces'. By 1942 it had operational responsibility for the Mediterranean theatre although in reality this generally meant translating Hitler's operational demands into reality.

⁴⁹ Italian divisions in the Balkans were, in reality, only suitable for anti-partisan activities. Those on Sicily and Sardinia were untested and of limited utility.

⁵⁰ Italian troops were first sent to Russia in the guise of the *Corpo di Spedizione Italiano in Russia* (CSIR) until July 1942 when they were reinforced into the 235,000 strong Italian 8th Army and renamed the *Armata Italiana in Russia* (ARMIR)

⁵¹ Italian formations in the vicinity of Stalingrad had been sacrificed by German commanders in order to safeguard the withdrawal of their own units. See Deakin, *Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Collapse of Italian Fascism* (Harper and Row, London, 1962), 205. This was a common occurrence in North Africa. See Niall Barr, *Pendulum of War: Three Battles at El Alamein* (Pimlico, London 2005), 399.

⁵² Upon appointment, Ambrosio had immediately informed Mussolini that Italy was 'not obliged to follow them [Germany] in their erroneous conduct of the war'. See Deakin, *Brutal Friendship* p 166.

⁵³ The German war effort drew 100 per cent of its chrome, 60 per cent of its bauxite, 50 per cent of its oil, and more than 20 per cent of its copper from the Balkans.

British and Americans in conjunction with Germany's Balkan allies.⁵⁴ The prospect of Italy, Romania and Hungary simultaneously deserting the Axis cause raised the possibility of cataclysmic damage to German interests.⁵⁵ The sudden German reinforcement of the Balkans in May 1943 may have been prompted by Allied deception but they also sent a convenient, obvious and timely reminder of German capabilities to its regional allies.

This was the juncture at which the inherent politico-military frailties of the Axis, as well as the artificiality of its supposed community of interests, became a fundamental problem for those in charge of German strategy.⁵⁶ It was the point at which Italy's political weakness, a weakness caused ironically by a desire to strengthen relations with Germany, began to impinge upon a variety of the latter's military, economic, political and diplomatic interests. The sudden presence of Ambrosio at the head of the Italian armed forces; growing evidence of a dissident faction within the top echelons of the Fascist regime; Mussolini's vain attempts to strengthen his position by way of large-scale changes to his Government; the wavering loyalties of Antonescu and Horthy; these all impacted German priorities.⁵⁷ The growing sense of potentially new political realities exerted increasing influence upon how Hitler and the OKW were forced to conceptualise the defence of Axis territory. As General Warlimont, Deputy Chief of the Operations Staff at OKW during this period observed in relation to Italy's growing political crisis, 'There were definite limitations on any German action which concerned Italian territory, whether or not it was intended to secure our own security in the event of Italy going out of the war'.⁵⁸

Sicily was an intractable problem for the Germans, a true Gordian knot. Its loss might trigger Italy's political collapse, but the full range of resources that would guarantee its defence could not be deployed for fear of the same outcome occurring. A rational assessment of the dilemma led inevitably to one conclusion; that the ability of German forces to safely and rapidly secure both Italy and the Balkans if and when the Italian collapse came was a greater priority than the successful defence of Sicily, even if the loss of the latter might conceivably contribute to the former. As a consequence, German strategy was forced to follow an inherently paradoxical course. In order to best satisfy its own requirements, it simply help set the conditions for Allied success on Sicily, and thus brought about the very conditions that it so feared.

III: Eastern Promises

⁵⁴ Aside from Operation Mincemeat, that sought to convince the Germans that Sicily was to all intents and purposes a diversionary target, there were a number of deception operations designed to promote the notion of a British 12th army in the Middle East ready to descend upon the Balkans. See Howard, *Strategic Deception in the Second World War* pp.83-99

⁵⁵ For Allied understanding of these tensions, see TNA HW (Intercepted enemy traffic) 1/1637 Portuguese Minister Budapest to Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lisbon, 23 April 1943.

⁵⁶ For more on this period see Ball, *Bitter Sea*, 212-247

⁵⁷ Marshal Ion Antonescu and Admiral Miklos Horthy, respective leaders of Romania and Hungary.

⁵⁸ Walter Warlimont, *Inside Hitler's Headquarters* (London, Weidenfield and Nicholson 1962), 332

The third aspect of Husky worth examining is its relationship to Operation Citadel, the pivotal German offensive at Kursk in July 1943.⁵⁹ This is a comparatively subtle aspect of the Husky debate but it reminds us to consider the implied logic of how events evolved, and whether our understanding of the relationship between Operations Husky and Citadel may require some adjustment.⁶⁰

On 4th July 1943 and after months of preparation the Germans began their attempt to sever the Kursk salient; a prominent bulge in the front line left as the result of a fateful Soviet attack earlier in the year. If destroyed, Hitler would be able to re-establish initiative in the East, shorten his line, and bolster his positions elsewhere. Thus three entire German armies and the vast proportion of available tank strength including the entire German strategic reserve, was to be thrown against the salient. But after five days of brutal fighting, and as Field Marshal Von Manstein's Panzer Corps advanced toward its climactic showdown with the Red Army's 1st Tank Army near Prokhorovka on 10th July, Allied forces landed on Sicily. Kesselring reassured Hitler that counterattacks could hold the Anglo-US assault on the Island. Within two days, however, Hitler had ordered a halt to Citadel and directed that divisions now be sent toward Italy. On 17th July OKH (*Oberkommando des Heeres*) ordered 4 divisions, including the elite II SS Panzer Corps and the *Grossdeutschland* mechanized infantry division, south.⁶¹ In the words of David M. Glantz, the foremost authority of the Red Army in World War II, '[T]he Sicilian invasion ultimately helped doom Operation Citadel'.⁶²

Husky's impact was clear. Anglo-American action in the Mediterranean had served to fatally weaken Hitler's chances of striking a significant blow against the Red Army. If one takes the view that victory at Kursk was a realistic prospect for German forces, then the obvious conclusion is that Hitler's decision to call an early halt to the offensive was a wholly positive outcome for the Allies. A breakthrough would have dealt a huge blow against the Reich's most potent land enemy at a crucial point in the war. However, not only was Citadel an open secret to the Russians who had prepared accordingly but, as Glantz states, the depth of those preparations and the resources accorded to them illustrates that Citadel was perceived not as a threat but as an opportunity. Ultimately the Russian intention at Kursk envisaged an initial absorption of the German assault to be then followed by the second phase of the operation; a vast counterattack designed to eliminate the German 'main groupings' i.e. its potent armoured and mechanised formations.⁶³ Seen in this light, Hitler's decision to withdraw those divisions at a crucial point in order to respond to the landings in Sicily assumes an altogether different hue. At this critical juncture, rather than

⁵⁹ For more on the relationship between *Husky* and *Citadel*, see Denis Smyth, *Deathly Deception: The Real Story of Operation Mincemeat* (Oxford University Press, 2010) pp. 277-8, Weinberg *A World at Arms*, 603, and Heiber and Glantz, *Hitler and his Generals*, 166

⁶⁰ Unfortunately, volume XIII of *Germany and The Second World War*, that volume of the German Official History covering events on Sicily and at Kursk, has not yet been published.

⁶¹ OKH: Supreme High Command of the German Army

⁶² David Glantz, Jonathan House, *The Battle of Kursk* (University Press Kansas 1999), 151

⁶³ *Ibid*, quoting Marshal Georgi Zhukov, Deputy Commander of the Red Army, *Battle of Kursk*, 29

sacrificing his reserves, Hitler was encouraged by Husky to halt that process, and divert his precious resources elsewhere.

Such a reading of events is not intended to suggest that Husky was materially damaging to Allied interests. Certainly when one considers that by being forced to relinquish the initiative at Kursk, Hitler was condemned to lose it on the Eastern Front for the remainder of the war. But any analysis of the relationship between Husky and Citadel points the undeniable fact that the former ultimately prevented the potential destruction or degradation by the Red Army of further German divisions including its critical elite armoured formations. Formations that would, ironically, face the Allies in Normandy a year later.⁶⁴ In that sense Husky is an example of Luttwak's 'contradiction'; a hugely successful enterprise, and one that caused immense danger to the entire Axis system, but which simultaneously contravened the maxim, 'Never interfere with your enemy while he is making a mistake'.⁶⁵

IV: Cause and Effect

The historiography of Operation Husky frequently laments the Allied failure to inflict a decisive military defeat upon the Axis. It acknowledges however that it was at least decisive in a political sense, insofar that it was the final straw for Mussolini's tottering regime. Seen in this light, the removal of Italy from the Axis alliance was more than enough to justify the faith placed in the operation by far sighted Allied leaders.⁶⁶ But such a simplistic narrative obscures important questions in relation to the causality of Allied actions. It misreads the effect of Italian collapse upon the enemy system, and it fails to consider how activities designed to facilitate Husky as both a military and political endeavour came to condition German actions in the months following. Most crucially, it fails to consider the inevitable implications that those actions would have in return for Allied strategy.

In relation to its effects therefore as an operation of war, Husky offers the following observations. Firstly, that the debate should adopt subtly different terminology; by substituting the term 'decisive' for that of 'transformative' one is able to reach a more accurate judgement of Husky's true effect upon the Axis system. Secondly, that such an adjustment is necessary due to the fact that its potential for decisive effect was, counterintuitively, undermined by the very measures designed to enable it to succeed. Thirdly, that the resulting strategic 'straightjacket' that emerged post-Husky was the optimal outcome for the Allies. It may have contravened Strachan's theoretical principles of good strategy making, but it was oddly pivotal in maintaining the harmony of Anglo-US relations at this critical stage in the war.

⁶⁴ Specifically the 2nd SS Panzer Corps' 1st and 2nd SS Panzer Divisions

⁶⁵ For evidence that actions in the Mediterranean were intentionally designed to help relieve pressure upon the Eastern front, see TNA CAB 121/128 COS (43) 69th (0) meeting, 8th April 1943.

⁶⁶ D'Este *Bitter Victory*, Hugh Pond's *Sicily* (Kimber, London 1962) and Blumenson, *Sicily: Whose Victory?* Mussolini was removed from office on the 25th July, three days after the fall of Palermo.

The key to understanding the first of these propositions lies in acknowledging that to be truly decisive, Husky required a far greater impact than toppling Mussolini's regime and even (ideally) destroying the entirety German of combat power on the Island. The collapse of the Italian Fascist regime may have caused temporary difficulties for German commanders and deprived them of the remaining - albeit very poor quality - Italian divisions, but such problems were fleeting. Indeed, such a development conferred a relatively greater advantage to the Germans than to the Allies. The defection/disintegration of the Italian Army and much of the Fascist state simply cleared the way for a German defence of the peninsula largely unhindered by competing demands and requirements and where purely military considerations counted.⁶⁷ In other words Italian collapse replaced ambiguity with certainty; a development greeted with obvious relief by German commanders.⁶⁸ As for the loss of German troops on Sicily, even a total victory would have conferred minimal advantage to the Allies in light of their pre-determined inability to immediately exploit their advantage post-Husky.⁶⁹ In light of these points it can be argued that Husky was indecisive in both military and political terms. That is not to deny its evident effect. In that respect Husky was transformative, albeit in a balanced sense. On the one hand it toppled a Fascist icon and transformed Italy from enemy to partial ally. On the other it simultaneously transformed Germany's problem from a complex political challenge to a more straightforward military one.

In light of the above it can be argued that to be truly decisive Husky required the forcing of genuine change in German thinking; from one of narrow tactical considerations of where precisely to defend in southern Italy to one of entirely alternative strategies that might, for example, advocate the giving up of the majority of the mainland. But any such change would be fatally arrested by a significant obstacle; the logic of the actions undertaken to ensure Husky's initial feasibility as a military operation. How this should be the case lies in tracing the uncertainty underpinning German decision-making during the period August-October 1943, during which Hitler's views on the defence of Italy fluctuated between the advice provided by his two respective commanders in theatre; Kesselring and Rommel. The former, C-in-C South, advocated that Italy should be defended to the hilt.⁷⁰ The latter, appointed as Commander of Army Group B in Northern Italy two months previously, argued that German forces should be withdrawn and redistributed to other theatres, and that minimal resources be retained to protect remaining approaches through Italy's mountainous north.⁷¹ Hitler's views alternated between the two respective courses

⁶⁷ The defection of Italian troops to Partisan bands created problems for German commanders, but to a much lesser extent than the Italian Army's continued presence as a functioning military entity.

⁶⁸ Porch, 507

⁶⁹ The agreement to invade Italy was not reached until 26th July.

⁷⁰ For Kesselring's view of the Sicily campaign see *The Memoirs of Field Marshal Kesselring* (The History Press 2015).

⁷¹ Warlimont, 383

of action proposed but, at the beginning of October 1943, German forces were instructed to hold the line in southern Italy.⁷²

The reason for Hitler's decision lay not in Italy *per se* but in the Balkans. The importance of that region both to the German war effort and also to supposed Allied war aims not only dictated a strengthening of the German position there but, importantly, maintenance of a strong position in southern Italy. This would prevent the latter being used as a springboard onto the Dalmatian coast.⁷³ The significance of this strategic appreciation lies in the fact that it was conditioned by Allied deception operations, which suggested that the Balkans continued to be the target of their main assault into Europe. Such a feint had had been mounted prior to Husky in an effort to draw German forces away from Sicily, but continued subsequently in order to encourage the further dissipation of German forces away from Italy. Hitler's linking of the occupation of southern Italy with the security of his Balkan flank dictated that Allied strategy suddenly lacked coherence.⁷⁴ By seeking to fix the Germans in the Balkans the Allies had simultaneously fixed them in southern Italy, and by extension hampered their own ambitions to advance rapidly into Europe's soft underbelly.

Yet this unfortunate impasse has to be analysed with broader considerations in mind. For while the total commitment to battle imposed by the Germans in southern Italy now shouldered the Allies with the brutal realities of fighting through the length of the Italian peninsular, the alternative strategy over which Hitler had vacillated for two months had in fact offered them a far more troubling scenario: options. It has been argued that 'Good strategy provides options, not a straightjacket', a proposition that would ordinarily be considered wholly incontrovertible.⁷⁵ But in the context of Allied Mediterranean strategy in the summer of 1943 a straightjacket was precisely what was required. For the emergence of options merely raised the prospect of forcing competing and highly divisive perspectives on strategy back into the open, with potentially incalculable consequences for Allied unity. In particular, such a move would have revealed the confusion and incoherence present in British strategy at that critical juncture. While the passing of time may allow us to understand how sudden contradictions and discrepancies may have been ultimately resolved, British policymakers in the pressured atmosphere of late summer and early autumn of 1943 appeared thoroughly unprepared for such an eventuality.

The consequence of a German withdrawal from Italy and/or the redistribution of forces within was problematic for the British in two distinct ways. Firstly, if significant numbers of German divisions were withdrawn with relatively small numbers held back to contest the land routes out of Italy, Alanbrooke's long-articulated vision of Italy acting as a

⁷² See Warlimont, 385. Hitler's prevarication was reflected in the lack of accurate Allied intelligence as regards his intentions during this period. See TNA CAB 87/117 Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) memoranda (43) 381 (0) 14 September 1943

⁷³ Warlimont, 385

⁷⁴ Howard, *Strategic Deception in the Second World War*, 71-103

⁷⁵ Hew Strachan quoted in Miller, 247

magnet for German formations that might otherwise be employed in France would be rendered hollow.⁷⁶ It would add to the misgivings of senior American strategists who still questioned the ability of British counterparts to provide a coherent justification for Italy's central role in Allied strategy, and the vast military commitment required as a consequence.⁷⁷ But if the effective abandonment of Italy by the Germans was unlikely, the more realistic prospect of withdrawal to the North still threatened immense military and political complications for the Allies. At the QUADRANT conference in Quebec in August 1943 the British Chiefs of Staff recommended that if the opportunity were to present itself Allied forces should advance in strength to positions covering Milan and Turin.⁷⁸ This, it was argued, would require the Germans to cease the re-allocation of forces to North-West Europe and cause significant amounts of their fighter strength to be deployed south in order to meet the threat posed by Allied strategic bombers operating from northern Italy. But such a proposal exposed significant flaws in thinking. Firstly it was of dubious accuracy with respect to the advantages for strategic airpower. Senior British planners admitted that Allied bombers operating from airbases located so close the Alps would be hampered by the savagely steep climb required to clear the mountaintops en-route to targets in Southern Germany; targets moreover which were already within range of bombers operating from the UK.⁷⁹ Secondly, an advance so far into northern Italy visualised force ratios that were entirely incompatible with agreements already reached over the allocation of forces for OVERLORD the following year. The Italian peninsular widens dramatically at its neck, tripling the length of any front line to be held by the Allies. As a consequence, pressure could only be maintained north of the Apennines if the agreement reached by the Combined Chiefs at the May 1943 TRIDENT Conference regarding the numbers of divisions to be devoted to Overlord was torn up, and those divisions earmarked for France retained instead in the Mediterranean. At Quebec, however, the US Chiefs of Staff explicitly prohibited any weakening in the agreed commitment to Overlord, to the evident dismay of their British counterparts who remained convinced of the need to react to changing circumstances in Italy.⁸⁰ But so problematic was the prospect of advancing as far as Milan and Turin in military terms that Sir John Kennedy, Britain's Director of Military Operations, had already admitted in private that it was unfeasible at that point for Allied armies to operate north of the Apennine range.⁸¹

A German withdrawal therefore stood to create genuine problems for Allied planners, British in particular, who in turn exhibited real uncertainty as to how they might react to such a development. Although both the US and British Chiefs of Staff were in

⁷⁶ Danchev, Todman, *War Diaries*, 463-466

⁷⁷ Matloff, *Strategic Planning for Coalition Warfare 1943-44*, 164

⁷⁸ Hinsley, *British intelligence in the Second World War*, (Vol 3) 10

⁷⁹ Kennedy, 333

⁸⁰ Hinsley, 10.

⁸¹ Kennedy, 297

accordance over the requirement for an Italian campaign as a secondary theatre, there was a clear difference of opinion on the crucial matter of how to react to sudden changes in strategic circumstances should they occur. US planners remained fixed in their determination any Allied reaction be governed by the availability of divisions agreed at TRIDENT.⁸² British military Chiefs, on the other hand, were of the opinion that forces be made available to capitalise upon whatever opportunities revealed themselves.

Most significantly perhaps, the latter's opinion was shared by Churchill, whose determination at this point to maintain maximum pressure on the Italian front was evident. Obviously such considerations can be painted as mere speculation, but the prospect of Churchill's political opportunism being ignited by sudden opportunities in the Mediterranean has already been exposed. David Reynolds, perhaps the pre-eminent historian of Anglo-US relations during this period, states that Churchill's 'cover-up' on the matter of favouring a commitment to Italy at the possible expense of OVERLORD at this point was, '[T]he most blatant piece of distortion in the six volumes of his memoirs'. Indeed, he proposes that Churchill and his Chiefs came close, in early October 1943, 'to throwing Overlord overboard'.⁸³

As Reynolds argues, Churchill's may publicly have given the impression that Overlord was never in doubt, but evidence suggest otherwise. His determination to seek any advantage in the Mediterranean and Balkans during this period could be seen in his obstinate championing of an ill-fated offensive in the Dodecanese in the autumn of 1943, and his anger at being held to the decision for a May 1944 date for Overlord was evident.⁸⁴ The official history reveals that on the 19th October he instructed his staff to conduct a secret study of the situation in the Mediterranean with changes to force commitments for Overlord in mind.⁸⁵ In a telegram to his Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden the following week, he exclaimed that Allied fortunes were being dictated by agreements persisted in without due regard to changing circumstances.⁸⁶ He finished by acknowledging that, in giving Eisenhower and Alexander what they required to win the battle in Italy, "[T]his may certainly affect the date of Overlord".⁸⁷ The Americans noted with unease that Eden himself was heavily in favour of using Italy as a stepping stone into the Balkans.⁸⁸ Similar turmoil was reflected by Churchill's Staff, who exhibited intense frustration at being prevented from capitalising upon opportunities in the Mediterranean due to the rigid commitment to

⁸² See Chartwell Papers Churchill College, Cambridge [Hereafter referred to as CHAR], 23/12 Official War Cabinet: Quadrant. Records of meetings and proceedings, 9

⁸³ David Reynolds, *In Command of History: Churchill Fighting and Writing the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2005), 379- 381

⁸⁴ TNA CAB 119/145, War Cabinet, Chiefs of Staff Committee, 'Situation in the Eastern Mediterranean', 7 October 1943.

⁸⁵ J. Ehrman, 113-15

⁸⁶ CHAR 20/122/43, Foreign Office to Moscow, Most secret and personal, 26 October 1943.

⁸⁷ In late December 1943 he warned against sacrificing the 'vital task' in Italy in favour of Overlord. See CHAR 20/130/89 Prime Minister to Chiefs of Staff, 26 December 1943.

⁸⁸ Matloff notes that in conversation with Roosevelt on 10 August 1943, Secretary of State for War Henry Stimson affirmed that Eden, '[W]ished the Allies to invade the Balkans'. *Strategic Planning*, 215

Overlord.⁸⁹ Alanbrooke spent much of the autumn of 1943 lamenting US short-sightedness while Sir John Kennedy, now Assistant Chief of the Imperial General Staff, suggested that the British would, ‘if circumstances changed’, ensure that relevant forces remained in Italy even at the expense of Overlord.⁹⁰

The most important issue at play however is not whether as a consequence of different German choices in Italy at this point the Anglo-US alliance would *definitely* have been damaged, or that Overlord would *certainly* have been delayed with obvious yet incalculable consequences. Such claims are of course entirely speculative. What is more important is the logic of our understanding of these debates. They reveal that Allied strategy in Italy post-Husky accorded not to the neat principles of ends, ways and means but to the more elemental forces of unpredictability and contingency. This is not to say that Allied strategy lacked coherence. On the contrary, if defined by the visions of those such as Alanbrooke, Eisenhower and Churchill, then Allied strategy in Italy exhibited a thoroughly firm understanding of how military operations should satisfy a range of political goals. But that is only half of the equation. It was *only* once Hitler decided to defend southern Italy that Allied strategy was able to function effectively. Yet that decision was itself dependent upon a series of events and considerations, decisions and outcomes, political and military, across space and time, that were largely beyond Allied control. Allied strategy at this crucial point functioned, in reality, at the mercy of contingency.

VI: Conclusion

As a military operation Husky deserves the attention accorded to it on the basis of its complexity, the brutality of the fighting, and its role in facilitating the entry of Anglo-American forces onto mainland Europe. From a more heightened perspective its centrality to Anglo-US debates on the importance of the Mediterranean theatre in World War II confers further weight as to its value as a topic of study. But our understanding of Husky as an operation of war should be encouraged to evolve further. Poised at an intersection between Allied and Axis strategy at this crucial juncture in the war, Husky allows us to explore a range of factors posed by theorists and historians and which serve to inform our thinking about how strategy plays out in reality. Importantly, addressing matters from a theoretical perspective only reinforces the importance of the historical. Theory may offer important insights, but those insights rely absolutely upon an accurate reading of events at all levels of war – tactical, operational and strategic. In such a way military history ceases the potential tendency to speak only to itself, and serves instead to properly inform intellectual debate.

⁸⁹ TNA CAB/65/40/6 OZ 3384 ‘Future Operations’ 147th Conclusions, Minute 1 Confidential annex 27 October 1943

⁹⁰ See Danchev, Todman, 465, and Kennedy, 299.

That debate is a crucial one. Indeed it is a timeless one, concerned as it is with the ability of strategy to guide the emergence of desired outcomes. What Husky illustrates in this regard not only provides weight to observations as to the often random and unpredictable nature of strategy as a concept, but also the way in which our own theoretical understanding of its principles and ideals is shown to be vulnerable when exposed to the harsh reality of war. In particular the ways in which political expediency subverted the hypothetical paradigm of effective strategy-making from one where objectives were set, and then sought by military action, to one whereby military action was instead utilised to identify those objectives in the first place. So too the ways in which ‘good’ strategy could be entirely contextual. Strategy post-Husky was best served not by flexibility and ‘options’ but by the strict constraints of alliance politics; constraints that may have confined available courses of action but which in so doing facilitated the continuing harmony of a war winning relationship.

In the final analysis, the question might be raised as to whether Husky’s success was due to its successful flouting of the guidelines for successful strategy, or whether success was so dependent upon non-events and uncontrollable factors that it was to all intents and purposes a matter of fortune as to whether the Allies prevailed or not. In retrospect, the fact that the invasion of Sicily and subsequent events in Italy roughly accorded with prior Allied intentions and objectives suggests a degree of rational control on their part that outweighed the vagaries of chance. But it must also be acknowledged that events, particularly with respect to Husky’s genesis and aftermath, played out not simply because of rational operational or strategic choices on the part of respective operational and political commanders, but because of the always unpredictable and contingent nature of strategy itself. In such ways Operation Husky and its aftermath provides interesting food for thought for both the theorist and the historian. Borne of confusion and compromise, flawed in execution, and indecisive in terms of effect, it was a hugely successful endeavour. Irony or paradox?

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