

Ideology, Politics and Armaments in the Italian Strategy of the Tripartite Pact

Nicola Labanca

A few days following Tokyo's intervention in the war aside Berlin and Rome, Italian Admiral Riccardi would say "Japan will take care of itself."¹ He addressed this comment to the Chief of the General Staff, and Italian Supreme Command, General Ugo Cavallero, Fascist Italy's third in line after the King and the Duce. A short time later, referring to the blossoming strategic differences between the three powers, and the weak role Italian Fascism could play in relation to German Nazism and Japanese ultranationalism, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Galeazzo Ciano would say, "Japan is far away – while Germany is very, very close by."² The key to understand Italian military approach to the Tripartite lies in these two sentences: autonomous action, even competition, and Italy's weakness in comparison to Hitler's Germany.

Now known to historians are the events that lead to the formation of the Tripartite, and within it, a certain closeness (that would never cross the line of aspiration) between Fascist Italy and ultranationalist Japan, in the face of the determined and driving role Nazi Germany played. It has been recently and clearly written that, "the Japanese government and military forces considered Italy to be a German satellite." "If we negotiate with Germany, we will have also negotiated with Italy,"³ Ambassador Matsuoka would say in 1941. But all this leads to ignoring what Italy thought, therefore losing a complete overview of what the Tripartite was. The following pages will attempt to review the available information regarding Italian strategy, if there was a strategy at all, in relation to Japan, and more generally, to the Tripartite itself. In the end, examining the military aspects of the Tripartite could be seen as a case study of the alliances of Nazifascist alliance in relation to those of democratic and antifascist countries, and why the latter, rather than the former, achieved victory.

As was the case at that time, the history of Italian-Japanese relations is unfortunately still relatively unknown and not studied as it should deserve⁴. There was and is a great linguistic

¹ *Diario storico del Comando supremo. Raccolta di documenti della seconda guerra mondiale*, edited by Antonello Biagini and Fernando Frattolillo, Roma, Ufficio storico, Stato maggiore dell'esercito, (from now *Diario storico del Comando supremo*), 1996, vol. VI : 1.1.1942-30.4.1942, t. I, p. 164, 17 gennaio 1942.

² Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, Torino, Einaudi, 1990, p. 487.

³ Peter Herde, *Il Giappone e la caduta di Mussolini : la fine del regime fascista agli occhi di 'Magic'*, in "Nuova storia contemporanea", a. 2000 n. 5, p. 120.

⁴ Fundamental are Franco Gatti, *Il fascismo giapponese*, Milano : Angeli, 1983; and Rosa Caroli, Francesco

barrier, both then as well as today⁵. Just a few books about Japanese history of the period this article is interested in have been translated into Italian⁶. Even if we have some knowledge of that which occurred in the 19th century⁷, embarrassing memories regarding the period between the wars have slowed Italian historical study.

Little has been written in Italian about the Tripartite Pact, and in particular on Italian-Japanese relations⁸, not only by military historians⁹. The topic deserves more attention

Gatti, *Storia del Giappone*, Roma, Laterza, 2007³.

⁵ Among the few review articles on Japanese studies published in Italian see Saburo Ienaga, *La situazione degli studi nipponici sulla Resistenza in Giappone durante la Seconda Guerra Mondiale*, in "Rivista storica italiana", a. 1977 n. 2 pp. 263-280; Atsushi Kitahara, *Gli studi di storia italiana e contemporanea in Giappone negli ultimi decenni*, in "Rivista storica italiana", a. 1977 n. 2 pp. 406-418; Ron Matthews, *Il militarismo giapponese visto in prospettiva inglese*, in "Rivista internazionale di scienze economiche e commerciali", a. 1982 n. 7 p. 700 sgg; Atsushi Kitahara, *La storia dell'Italia contemporanea nella storiografia giapponese*, in "Studi storici", a. 1993 n. 1 pp. 83-94; Hatsushi Kitahara, *Dal Giappone*, in Filippo Mazzonis (editor), *L'Italia contemporanea e la storiografia internazionale*, Venezia : Marsilio, 1995; and more recently Sebastian Conrad, *Crisi della modernità? Fascismo e seconda guerra mondiale nella storiografia giapponese*, in "Novecento", a. 2001 n. 5 pp. 37-52.

See also Maria Sica, Antonio Verde, *Breve storia dei rapporti culturali italo-giapponesi e dell'Istituto italiano di cultura di Tokyo*, Ravenna : Longo, 1999.

⁶ Most important is Peter Herde, *Pearl Harbor, 7. Dezember 1941. Der Ausbruch des Krieges zwischen Japan und die Vereinigten Staaten und der Ausweitung des europäischen Krieges zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1980: the (updated) Italian translation is *Pearl Harbor*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1986.

But many others are not available for Italian readers. For instance, to a better understanding of Japan attack at Pearl Harbor, there are no translation in Italian for Arthur J. Marder, *Old friends, new enemies : the Royal Navy and the Imperial Japanese Navy*, Oxford : Clarendon, 1981-1990; or Anne Sharp Wells, *Historical dictionary of World War II : the war against Japan*, Lanham, Md. : Scarecrow Press, 1999. Recently, from the French, Jean-Louis Margolin, *L'esercito dell'imperatore : storia dei crimini di guerra giapponesi, 1937-1945*, Torino : Lindau, 2009, has been translated. But see also Ken Ishida, *Crimini di guerra in Giappone e in Italia. Un approccio comparato*, in "Italia contemporanea", a. 2008 n. 251, pp. 251-260 (paper for the the Conference 'Memoria e rimozione. I crimini di guerra del Giappone e dell'Italia', Florence, 24-25 September 2007: proceedings under press.)

⁷ For instance, *Lo Stato liberale italiano e l'età Meiji : atti del I. Convegno italo-giapponese di studi storici : Roma, 23-27 settembre 1985*, Roma : Edizioni dell'Ateneo, 1987.

⁸ The most important scholar of the field is Valdo Ferretti, *Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana : 1935-41*, Milano : Giuffrè, 1995. Among other his studies are: Id., *Dalle 21 domande alla seconda guerra mondiale: una chiosa storiografica*, in *Atti del VI convegno di Studi Giapponesi*, Gargonza, 1982; Id., *La Marina giapponese e il governo Tojo: il dibattito sull'inizio e l'epilogo della guerra del Pacifico*, in "Storia contemporanea", a. 1989 n. 1 pp. 103-130; Id., *La marina giapponese dal patto anti-komintern alla guerra contro gli Stati Uniti: un approfondimento documentario*, in "Storia Contemporanea", a. XXI (1990), n. 3, pp. 439-462. See also R. A. Graham, *Il Giappone e il Vaticano in tempo di guerra. Corrispondenza diplomatica inedita*, in "La civiltà cattolica", a. 1980, n. 3127, pp. 11-25; Donatella Bolech Cecchi, *La S. Sede tra imparzialità e tutela dei cattolici: la missione giapponese in Vaticano (1942)*, in "Il politico", a. 1996 n. 3 pp. 385-410. Useful informations also in P. Jannelli, *Italia e Giappone dopo l'armistizio dell'8 settembre 1943*, in "Storia e Politica", a. 1963 n. 2; Marino Viganò, *Il Ministero degli affari esteri e le relazioni internazionali della Repubblica sociale italiana, 1943-1945*, Milano : Jaca book, 1991; Ercolana Turriani, *La Repubblica sociale italiana e l'estremo oriente*, in "Africana", a. 2005, pp. 111-128; Pio D'Emilia, *La guerra dimenticata tra Italia e Giappone: una pagina inedita di storia politica e diplomatica*, in *Atti del XXIV convegno di Studi Giapponesi*, Savona 2000, pp. 181-214.

from scholars than that received so far¹⁰. Much still needs to be done and it could quite easily be accomplished: for example, a study of Italian-Japanese relations based on the documents of both Rome and Tokyo's military attachés. This and other studies would allow us to add more information, not only regarding Italy's approach to the Tripartite and to the war but, more generally, to Italian and international fascism. (A good example is the extraordinary analyses drawn by a Japanese naval officer of Fascism and the reason of his fall in 1943 wrote a few months after the events: this exceptional document, not so frequently used by Italian historians, is a good evidence of how acute was the Japanese eye on his wartime allies¹¹.)

In Italian studies there has been only a limited debate on the nature of Japan's political regime and its evolution¹². Regarding this, Mussolini's statement of that time was brutally simplistic, "Japan is not 'officially' fascist, but its anti-Bolshevik attitude, the direction of its policies, the style of its people make it part of the other fascist countries"¹³ (this already on

Take note also of Allan Beekman, *Taranto: catalyst of the Pearl Harbor attack*, in "Military Review", Nov. 1991, Vol. 71 Issue 11, p. 73-77.

⁹ For a first introduction to the study of Italian military history see Nicola Labanca, *L'istituzione militare in Italia. Politica e società*, Milano, Unicopli, 2002, and, for a directory, Nicola Labanca, Gian Luca Balestra (editors), *Repertorio degli studiosi italiani di storia militare*, Milano, Unicopli, 2005.

¹⁰ The starting point for discussion is that, at large, even German-Italian military relations during the war are not so studied. See Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*, Torino, Einaudi, 2005. For some research see Pier Paolo Battistelli, *La guerra dell'Asse. Condotta bellica e collaborazione militare italo-tedesca 1939-1943*, tesi di dottorato, Università di Padova, tutor Giorgio Rochat, 1999. Then, it should not be surprising if Italian-Japanese military relations during the war have been somehow neglected. See Giuseppe Fioravanzo, *The Japanese military mission to Italy in 1941*, in "U.S. Naval Institute Proceedings", Jan. 1956, Vol. 82 Issue 1, p. 24-31 (actually, I was not able to read this article); Peter Herde, *Italien, Deutschland und der Weg in den Krieg im Pazifik 1941*, Wiesbaden, Steiner, 1983; Luca Valente and Paolo Savegnago, *Il mistero della Missione giapponese. Valli del Pasubio, giugno 1944: la soluzione di uno degli episodi più enigmatici della guerra nell'Italia occupata dai tedeschi*, Milano, Cierre, 2005. Of the latter author see also Paolo Savegnago, *Il Giappone in guerra*, in "Storia militare", a. 2001, n. 94, pp. 45 sgg.; Id., *La Missione dell'esercito giapponese in Italia (1940-45)*, in "Protagonisti", a. 2007 n. 92 pp. 19-39; Id., *La missione navale giapponese in Italia 1940-1945*, in "Storia militare", a. 2008 n. 180, p. 46 sgg. On the Internet see Alberto Rosselli, *Le unità di superficie italiane in Estremo Oriente 1940-1943*, <http://www.icsm.it/regiamarina/oriente.htm>.

One of the many evidences for this neglect could be Andreas Krug, *Coordination and Command Relationships between Axis Powers in the Naval War in the Mediterranean 1940-1943*, Toronto: Canadian Forces College, Master of Defence Studies, CSC 31/CCEM 31, 2005: even if speaking of Axis and Tripartite, Japan receives no mention.

¹¹ *Osservazioni sulla guerra in Italia dal 1940 al 1944 dell'addetto navale giapponese presso il governo di Roma*, in "Il movimento di liberazione in Italia", a. 1956 n. 44/45, pp. 31-38.

¹² Franco Gatti, *Il Giappone contemporaneo: un equivoco storiografico*, in "Rivista di storia contemporanea", a. 1975 n. 3 pp. 396-416; and Angelo Del Boca, Massimo Legnani and Mario G. Rossi (editors), *Il regime fascista: storia e storiografia*, Roma, Laterza, 1995; and Enzo Collotti (editor), *Fascismo e antifascismo: rimozioni, revisioni, negazioni*, Roma, Laterza, 2000, both proceedings of scholarly conferences organized by Istituto nazionale per la storia del movimento di liberazione in Italia.

¹³ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, p. 484.

October 6, 1937).

On the contrary many are the studies on German-Japanese relations available in Western languages¹⁴. The Tripartite Pact is therefore known to us from this 'bi-lateral' (German-Japanese) more than from the needed 'multilateral' (at least German-Japanese-Italian) point of view. Of course, even waiting for the necessary 'multilateral' multilateral research, many of the characters of the Tripartite Pact has already been well clarified by the scholars¹⁵: an alliance most propagandistic and ideological, the mutual disloyalties, clashes, lack of understanding, and the rivalry between the allies etc. Thanks to available studies we know that there was not a lack of ideal points of connection among the grand and unsettling visions of the New European Order, the New Mediterranean Order, and the Co-Prosperity Sphere: but these points were mixed in with differences, suspicions, and rivalries. An effective alliance would be difficult between radically nationalist regimes (and extremely violent societies). Among diverse ambitions and interests, often contradictory, and with opposition to the League of Nations, to the democratic nations, and to Sovietism, the Tripartite Pact - together with the various opportunities the alliance hinted at, both internally and internationally – still remained that which cemented things together: this plan was more negative than positive. In addition, the Tripartite Pact ended up having elements of fascist ideologies: the barbarization of the war, national racism, the war against the Resistance and the people, and war crimes. As is the case in all alliances, particular emphasis was given to mutual economic aid, the transfer of arms, external political support, and the stir caused by propaganda.

If general opinion was already defined, study of Italian side of the Tripartite Pact confirms and adds a view of Italy in relation to other fascist regimes: even junior partners do not just exist, but are also needed.

¹⁴ Among many, in a short list see Johanna Menzel Meskill., *Hitler & Japan; the hollow alliance*, New York, Atherton Press, 1966; Bernd Martin, *Deutschland und Japan im Zweiten Weltkrieg : Vom Angriff auf Pearl Harbor bis zur deutschen Kapitulation*, Marburg, 1967 (Dissertation Marburg, Phil. F., Diss. v. 6. Dez. 1967), and after Göttingen-Zürich-Frankfurt, Musterschmidt, 1969 (Series: Studien und Dokumente zur Geschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges, v. 11), and lastly Berlin, Nikol Verlag, 2001; Id. *Japan and Germany in the Modern World*, New York-Oxford, Berghahn, 1995 (pbk 2006); Paul Brooker, *The faces of fraternalism : Nazi Germany, fascist Italy, and imperial Japan*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1991; Gerhard Krebs, Bernd Martin (editors), *Formierung und Fall der Achse Berlin-Tokyo*, München, Iudicium-Verl., 1994.

¹⁵ Fundamental is Jost Dülffer, *The Tripartite Pact of 27 September 1940: Fascist Alliance or Propaganda Trick?*, in "Australian Journal of Politics & History", Volume 32, Issue 2, pages 228-237, August 1986. Relevant for our research is J. W. M. Chapman, *The Price of admiralty : the war diary of the German naval attaché in Japan, 1939-1943*, Ripe, East Sussex, Saltire Press, 1989. See also Hans-Joachim Krug, et al. *Reluctant Allies: German-Japanese Naval Relations in World War II*, Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press, 2001; and, for the context, Allan R. Millett and Williamson Murray (editors), *The Second World War*, vol. III of *Military effectiveness*, Boston : Allen & Unwin, 1988; and Mark Harrison (editor), *The economics of World War II : six great powers in international comparison*, Cambridge ; New York : Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Before the War (until 1940)

Military relationships between Italy and Japan were not born with either the Anti-Komintern Pact or the Tripartite. Even though there were diplomatic differences between Rome and Tokyo, as revisionist powers of the international structure formed in Versailles, they marched along parallel lines. Following the Japanese occupation of Manchuria, and after the rise of Hitler, the Fascist war in Ethiopia (October 1935 to May 1936) pushed an alliance.

Among the Italian military, even if acclaimed as the winner of the war against Ethiopia, most prudent general Pietro Badoglio, Italian Chief of the General Staff, came out of the conflict with a reduction in his power. Chiefs of Staff (Army, Navy, Air Force) gained more power. Among them were the Chief of Army Staff Pariani, a dynamic character and a German sympathizer, and the Chief of Navy Staff Cavagnari, proponent of an offensive strategy. The Navy in particular hoped for an agreement between German, Italian, and Japanese fleets, where the Japanese would snare the British Navy for control of the Indian Ocean¹⁶. This objective was already seen in the staff meetings of December 1936, but formally devised in Italian official planning of September–November, and December 1937. In Italian grand strategy, this would have helped the Army to attack, and in win in, North Africa, thus giving Fascist Italy control of the Mediterranean.

In talks later aborted, and closely studied by Valdo Ferretti, that took place at the close of 1938 and brought forth by Tokyo naval officers, along with Yokoyama and other Japanese military, “issues were drawn up that needed to be addressed by both General Staffs.” It is interesting to note that, from Italian side, the first priority was “mutual supply.” Only after came exchanging “support for naval forces and freighters surprised by enemy units far from their home bases, information services, cipher books, common codes, etc.”¹⁷ Beyond Germanism and offensive spirit, above all strategic supply would be part of pro-Japanese Italian expectations – which, it seems, were stronger for the Navy than for the Army. (After all, it is known that Fascist armed forces were preparing to fight different wars not always coordinated between one another¹⁸).

It was in this atmosphere that the Rome-Berlin Axis, and later Italian adherence to the

¹⁶ John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals. The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007; Robert Mallett, *The Italian Navy and Fascist Expansionism 1935-1940*. London: Frank Cass, 1998.

¹⁷ Valdo Ferretti, *Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana : 1935-41*, p. 225.

¹⁸ Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*; Fortunato Minniti, *Fino alla guerra : strategie e conflitto nella politica di potenza di Mussolini, 1923-1940*, Napoli: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 2000.

Anti-Komintern Pact, was considered “dynamite”¹⁹ by Italian Foreign Minister Ciano. Already at this time, Italian thoughts of cooperation with Japan in military operations go hand in hand with the hope of receiving prime strategic raw materials: military (direct or indirect) support, and help with propaganda, from both Japan and Germany, stayed on the second line²⁰.

The Pact, a Political Matter (1940-1941)

Important clues about how, and how much the Italian military watched Japan, are to be found in the volumes of the *Diario del Comando Supremo*, Italian Supreme Command’s daily war diary. The War Diary, a source whose forms of publication can be debated, has strangely enough been ignored by scholars²¹. If *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, Italian diplomatic documents²², lay out the picture of the main themes of Italian-Japanese political relations, then *Diario del Comando Supremo*, War Diary of Italian Supreme Command, is the primary source from which we can judge how much those diplomatic intentions and relations translated into actual military

¹⁹ Galeazzo Ciano, *Diario 1937-1938*, Bologna, Cappelli, 1948, and Id., *Diario*, Milano, Rizzoli, 1950, 2 voll. (1, 1939-1940; and 2, 1941-1943); then Id., *Diario 1937-1943*, edited by Renzo De Felice, Milano, Rizzoli, 1980. Cfr. Marco Palla, *La fortuna di un documento: il diario di Ciano*, in “Italia contemporanea”, a. 1981 n. 142, pp. 31-54.

²⁰ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l’alleato*, vol. I, *L’Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, p. 485.

²¹ Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*; Fortunato Minniti, *Fino alla guerra : strategie e conflitto nella politica di potenza di Mussolini, 1923-1940*.

²² “Serie IX” of *Documenti diplomatici italiani*, with documents about years 1939-1943, has ten volumes, edited and published as follows (volume-dates-editor-year of pub): 1939-Mario Toscano-1957; vol. 3-1 gennaio-8 aprile 1940-Mario Toscano-1959; vol. 4-9 aprile-10 giugno 1940-Mario Toscano-1960; vol. 5-11 giugno-28 ottobre 1940-Mario Toscano-1965; vol. 6-29 ottobre 1940-23 aprile 1941-Pietro Pastorelli-1986; vol. 7-24 aprile-11 dicembre 1941-Pietro Pastorelli-1987; vol. 8-12 dicembre 1941-20 luglio 1942-Giuseppe Vedovato-1988; vol. 9-21 luglio 1942-6 febbraio 1943-Pietro Pastorelli-1989; vol. 10-7 febbraio-8 settembre 1943-Pietro Pastorelli-1990. Id est it took 36 years to be completed...

²² *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, with documents about years 1940-1943 has nine volumes, each of two books (one for the text of the Diary, and the other for annexed documents, severely selected for publication: the selection of documents for this latter book can be debated). Formally, the editors were the chief of archive (an Army officer) of the Historical Branch of General Staff of Italian Army along with a historian, professor of History of Eastern Europe at the University of Rome. The series was published from 1986 to 2002: id est it took 16 years to be completed.

²² *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, vol. I (1986): *11.6.1940-31.8.1940*, t. II, p. 10, 27 maggio 1939.

²² Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*; Nicola Labanca, *Una guerra per l’impero. Memorie della campagna d’Etiopia 1935-36*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005. (publication): vol. 1-4 settembre-24 ottobre 1939-Mario Toscano-1954; vol. 2-25 ottobre-31 dicembre 1939-Mario Toscano-1957; vol. 3-1 gennaio-8 aprile 1940-Mario Toscano-1959; vol. 4-9 aprile-10 giugno 1940-Mario Toscano-1960; vol. 5-11 giugno-28 ottobre 1940-Mario Toscano-1965; vol. 6-29 ottobre 1940-23 aprile 1941-Pietro Pastorelli-1986; vol. 7-24 aprile-11 dicembre 1941-Pietro Pastorelli-1987; vol. 8-12 dicembre 1941-20 luglio 1942-Giuseppe Vedovato-1988; vol. 9-21 luglio 1942-6 febbraio 1943-Pietro Pastorelli-1989; vol. 10-7 febbraio-8 settembre 1943-Pietro Pastorelli-1990. Id est it took 36 years to be completed...

plans and operations²³.

Japan did not play a big role in actual military operations during the first few months following Italy's intervention in the war. Japan was very far away. On the contrary, in May 1939 a reference to Tokyo in his correspondence with Hitler helped Mussolini delay Italy's intervention in the war until 1942: "one could also argue that Japan would conclude its war with China in three years."²⁴

Unlike the diplomats, the military could not explicitly rely on Japan until it entered the war. However, an Italian-Japanese tie was already present, and there were traces of continuity with the past. At the time of the Ethiopian war, despite differences (for example, regarding the presence of Japanese commerce in Ethiopia and the supply of arms to the Negus, which Nazi Germany was also doing), Fascist Italy's armed forces had relied on Japan for some supply of rubber and tires, fundamentals for Rome's 'modern' war in the Horn of Africa²⁵. In July 1940, as has already been the case in 1935-36, the Chief of the General Staff and of Italian Supreme Command General Pietro Badoglio called meetings "to establish the precise terms of the Japanese supply of Italian East Africa"²⁶ (AOI). This dealt with the secret supply of materials ("needless to say, it is necessary to maintain and guarantee the utmost secrecy regarding the origins of the supplies"²⁷), considering Japan's position in relation to the hostilities. Actually the aid amounted to little: in late August 1940, there was talk of 3,000 metric tons of fuel, 400 metric tons of alcohol, 11,000 tires and tubes. And in the end it seems that these figures dropped to 2,500 metric tons of aircraft fuel, 6,000 tires, 1,000 metric tons of rice, 500 of sugar, and 200 of olive oil²⁸. The Chiefs of Staff of each of the armed forces likely expected more (we saw that the Navy hoped for a formal connection to Tokyo well prior to the war), but at the level of Italian Supreme Command, that is, the top management of Italian war, it seems that Japan did not count much.

The size of Japanese presence in Italy's strategic military horizon was also influenced by the model of civil and military relations of the Fascist regime. With the exception perhaps of the Navy, the Chiefs of Italian services realized that Japan was too far away to make its aid of concrete

²³ *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, with documents about years 1940-1943 has nine volumes, each of two books (one for the text of the Diary, and the other for annexed documents, severely selected for publication: the selection of documents for this latter book can be debated). Formally, the editors were the chief of archive (an Army officer) of the Historical Branch of General Staff of Italian Army along with a historian, professor of History of Eastern Europe at the University of Rome. The series was published from 1986 to 2002: id est it took 16 years to be completed.

²⁴ *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, vol. I (1986): *11.6.1940-31.8.1940*, t. II, p. 10, 27 maggio 1939.

²⁵ Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*; Nicola Labanca, *Una guerra per l'impero. Memorie della campagna d'Etiopia 1935-36*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2005.

²⁶ *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, vol. I : *11.6.1940-31.8.1940*, t. I, p. 134, 5 luglio 1940.

²⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 184, 13 luglio 1940.

²⁸ *Ibidem*, vol. II (1988) : *1.9.1940-31.12.1940*, t. II, p. 48, 26 agosto 1940, and p. 50, 7 luglio 1940.

benefit to Italian military plans. In a dictatorial regime, however, their freedom of action was limited. Despite the fact that the Chief of the General Staff had brought the Italian military's unpreparedness to the Duce's attention, Mussolini pushed for intervention in war. At the end of March, 1940, the Duce said, in front of the practical and timid Badoglio, that it was the moment to let go and "leave much to the unexpected (...) and to keep in mind how much can happen with the political policy of far away countries such as the United States and Japan." 29 Italy had to be ready, at least for a war 'parallel' to the German conflict. Civil-military relations of the regime strongly limited even information passed onto the military regarding diplomatic developments. Even if the agreement was up in the air, we read in the War Diary that in September 1940, when the Tripartite Pact was sealed, the highest military chief would only be informed of matters just about completed. For these reasons Badoglio wrote on September 23, 1940, that "The Duce told me an alliance treaty between Italy, Germany, and Japan would be signed during the week, and following that, a secret agreement between Italy, Germany, and Spain." 30

The signing of the Tripartite Pact did initiate a change in the strategic scenario for the Italian military. Was Japan becoming politically closer? Geographically, Japan remained located far away and was still difficult to understand. Thus, in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command, it mostly appeared only in the periodic reports of the Military Information Service (SIM). More concrete signs of a tie between Italy and Japan were episodic, and not found only in the first stages of the war. Though Badoglio had counted on this for some time, it was only in Autumn 1940 that the secret supply from Japan of strategic raw materials would arrive in Italian East Africa (which, in the meantime, was left for dead, or at least left to itself) 31. It is interesting to read what Italy requested from Japan: strategic war materials, instead of men and weapons. In any case, the secret Japanese aid was just a drop in a far too large and already punctured bucket.

Furthermore, Japan was not making up its mind to enter the war (and Tokyo had some reasons, namely aspirations regarding China and the strategic importance of the Pacific): in the meantime Fascist Italy's plans and problems had to do with the Mediterranean, North Africa, and Greece. The first year of the Tripartite, therefore, dealt with diplomatic preparations for the creation of, and the regulations for, the military committees of the Pact³². Formal gestures came from both sides in order to keep the new alliance alive (for example, in June 1941 the Japanese symbolically offered funds as aid for wounded Italian soldiers³³) and as far as strategic

²⁹ *Ibidem*, vol. I : 11.6.1940-31.8.1940, t. II, p. 176, 31 marzo 1940.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, vol. II : 1.9.1940-31.12.1940, t. I, p. 124, 23 settembre 1940.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 25, 5 settembre 1940.

³² *Ibidem*, vol. IV (1992) : 1.5.1941-31.8.1941, t. I, p. 277, 6 giugno 1941.

³³ *Ibidem*, p. 288, 6 giugno 1941.

masterplans, if not yet in actual operational plans, the presence of a new ally was foreseen in Rome. The new Chief of the General Staff, Ugo Cavallero (Mussolini had replaced Badoglio following the failed invasion of Greece) anticipated that Japanese intervention would help, at least indirectly, the uncertain Italian fate in North Africa. Once again, however, the most important military interest that Rome brought to Tokyo was the need for those strategic raw materials that Italy lacked. It was, therefore, not coincidental that in September 1941 the visit by the important industrialist Pirelli to Italian Supreme Command was documented³⁴. Pirelli spoke to Cavallero about the importance of Japan's attitude, and the help that could be obtained in light of Italy's (and the Pirelli company's) need for rubber. A few days later, another evidently requested report from SIM regarding Japan landed on Cavallero's desk³⁵.

It seems that the turn taken by the drafting of the regulations for Tripartite committees was to discourage any solid hope of multilateralism. The regulations of the military committees (Commissioni militari) of the Tripartite Pact finally approved in May-June 1941³⁶ set forth that no topic could be presented to these bodies without five days notice, and each matter needed unanimous approval by the representatives of the three nations (other questions would not be voted on, but set aside). This meant that the Tripartite military committees would be bureaucratic entities, without autonomy, created only to reassert the Pact's ideological unity, but not able to create an agreed drafting of common strategy. It could be for this reason that there is no mention of them in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command (another reason was the secrecy that was needed to hide their work: an element that would suggest further archival research). Apart from that, we may assume that within the Tripartite Fascist Italy and Japan had greater points of mutual consensus than they did with Germany: but judging from the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command, either the Italian military were not looking to Tokyo, or if they were, this happened more in the realm of bilateral relations than in official Tripartite and multilateral venues. It is not hard to believe that from the bilateral relations – above all, between Italy and Germany, but also between Italy and Japan – Italian Supreme Command expected more than that expected from the formal ties of Tripartite.

For the Italian military, the Tripartite remained a political horizon far from its urgent operational needs.

Japan's Intervention in the War. A (limited) Military Turning Point (December 1941)

³⁴ *Ibidem*, vol. V (1995) : 1.9.1941-31.12.1941, t. I, p. 31, 4 settembre 1941.

³⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 323, 16 ottobre 1941.

³⁶ *Ibidem*, vol. IV : 1.5.1941-31.8.1941, t. I, p. 277.

For the Italian military, it was Japanese intervention in the war that changed things, more than the signing of the Tripartite. Yet again, however, this was not enough. Japan remained far away. The needs of Fascist Italy at war were greater than any aid that could have been provided by the Far East.

However, the days following December 7, 1941 were marked by frenetic and numerous meetings at Italian Supreme Command. Under debate were the changes in the war caused by the Japanese intervention³⁷. But it does not seem there was talk of a direct contribution. Again, attention was concentrated on transportation and aid (that could finally be out in the open) of strategic raw materials³⁸. In that December 1941 Italian Supreme Command was busy with attempts to fend off English attacks in North Africa: Graziani had advanced into Egypt in September 1940 but, after three months, had been subjected to the English counteroffensive. In Spring of 1941, Rommel evened things out, but in November-December 1941 Auchinlek had yet again completely pushed forward into Libya. For these reasons it is easy to understand the enthusiasm spread in Rome following December 7.

Even the restrained style of the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command showed ample signs of this enthusiasm. Cavallero recorded the words of Ciano, who seemed enthusiastic in saying that there would be a “likely decisive effect, and a necessity for the English and the Americans to move forces out of the Atlantic. Probable English difficulties in replacing military units they were losing in the Mediterranean.”³⁹ Though confident, the military were more measured. The Chief of the Army Staff, Mario Roatta, listed several possible advantages in terms of the “losses sustained by England and America, repercussions regarding the situation in the Mediterranean”⁴⁰. We can feel a difference, between the decisive effects of the diplomats and the possible military repercussions. General Efisio Marras, military delegate and – from 1940 on – Chief of Italian Mission to German High Command in Berlin, was even more critical. In a confidential report, he saw that “Japanese and U.S. intervention can lead not only to a lightening up of the naval situation in certain areas of the war in the West, but also places Germany in a war against the United States, something that German political policy had tried to avoid thus far.”⁴¹

In a word, Italian military leaders were immediately aware that Japan’s intervention in the

³⁷ *Ibidem*, vol. V : 1.9.1941-31.12.1941, t. I, p. 728, 8 dicembre 1941.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 737, 9 dicembre 1941.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 754, 11 dicembre 1941.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 753, 11 dicembre 1941.

⁴¹ Sergio Pelagalli, *Il generale Efisio Marras addetto militare a Berlino, 1936-1943*, Roma, Stato maggiore dell'esercito, Ufficio storico, 1994, p. 174.

war would draw the United States of America into the conflict. Therefore, any possible advantage from Tripartite cooperation would be crushed by this new world-wide face of the conflict (this also had been made evident by a convergent series of SIM reports, by both Berlin and Washington, already released at the beginning of March 1941.) Then it was not by chance that the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command reported on December 16, 1941 that Japanese aid could only “buy time,”⁴² and not change the outcome of the war for Italian forces fighting in North Africa.

Despite of this consciousness, Italian military chiefs continued to look to Japan for strategic raw materials, more than for direct military aid – about which the Italian military (with a few exceptions in the Navy) seemed rather skeptical. It is not accidental that the Chief of the Office of War Economy of Italian Supreme Command, Lieutenant-Colonel Ferretti was presenting Cavallero with a reliable report regarding Japanese tires, only two days following Tokyo’s intervention in the war. At the same time, the Chief of the General Staff outlined an “examination of the transportation situation following the Japanese intervention,”⁴³ with Admiral Girosi. From the eastern corner of Tripartite the military in Rome expected supplies, raw materials and transportation, more than men.

Nonetheless, the arrival of a new ally obviously changed many procedures. Italian Chief of the General Staff ordered that the “same accommodations accorded to the Germans”⁴⁴ be conceded to the members of the Japanese Military Mission to Rome – something they evidently lacked up until then. On this base, Japanese high officers were officially and periodically hosted at the Comando supremo. But who among the military seemed to count upon Japan’s intervention in the war? More than the Army, this feeling could be seen in the Air Force and the Navy. It is certainly significant, however, that the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command never did contain a permanent and daily section regarding Italian-Japanese relations, like that one dedicated to “Italian-German military relations.” Even though Japan entered the war, it was still situated far away.

Among Tokyo and Rome’s military, and perhaps more the latter rather than the former, it was very clear that Berlin was the Axis strong point. In some cases, and at moments, Italy and Japan were obviously destined to find points of reciprocal agreement, even to the detriment of Germany: for example, for different but convergent reasons, there was more agreement between Tokyo and Rome than between Rome and Berlin or even Tokyo and Berlin about the limitation of the role of Nazi Germany’s war in the East with the USSR in the general balance of the conflict, a

⁴² *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, vol. V : 1.9.1941-31.12.1941, t. I, p. 796, 16 dicembre 1941.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 737.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 746, 10 dicembre 1941.

war for which neither Rome nor Tokyo held any particular interest after Berlin showed not to be able to win. Rome was interested in the Mediterranean, while Japan was – especially Japanese naval forces – busy with both the Royal and the U.S. Navies. When such harmony within the realm of the Tripartite came to the surface, a Japanese-Italian closeness seemed to develop.

Berlin was, however, the heart and moving force of the Axis and the Tripartite Pact. This is clearly readable in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command: it was rather common that, to understand intentions and moves of Tokyo, Rome would turn to Berlin and to his men down there⁴⁵.

For all this, following December 1941, pro-Japanese enthusiasm among Italian military quickly disappeared.

A Disinterested Routine (1942)

1942 was the last year of the war in which Nazifascist powers spread out in Europe and, along with Japan, in Asia. The turning point closed in at the end of that 1942.

Meanwhile, Italian situation had become more problematic. The Fascist war grew increasingly difficult, was anymore (if it ever had been) ‘parallel’, and became more and more subordinate to the Nazi one. Reasons for this were inability to overtake North Africa, wear and tear as a result of the war with the anti-nazifascist Resistance among the Balkan peoples, extreme difficulties and defeats in Russia, economic problems caused by the lack of armaments and strategic raw materials and, from a political stance, a severe reduction in internal consensus. In this atmosphere, Japan could do little for Italy.

For this reason, the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command coldly related the signing of Tripartite military agreements, notwithstanding they should have been the new alliance’s strategic foundation “in order to assure cooperation in the area of military operations, and the defeat of enemy forces in the shortest time possible.”⁴⁶ The first part of the text of the agreements was predictable (‘a subdivision of areas for military operations’), but India’s placement in the Japanese zone created problems and diplomatic debates with Berlin and Rome. Moreover the text was generic in its second part (‘directives for the operations’), and theoretic in its third (‘principal points of military collaboration’).

The text set forth three strategic scenarios: a certain one, a possible one, and one that was theoretical and hypothetical. In the first scenario the agreement, following a generic and undefined

⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, vol. VI : 1.1.1942-30.4.1942, t. I, p. 689, 10 marzo 1942.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, t. I, p. 68, 7 gennaio 1942, and p. 172, 18 gennaio 1942, and t. II, n. 27/29, 7 gennaio 1942.

“cooperation with Japan’s military in the South Seas and in the Pacific” (unattainable and set aside), foresaw for the Italian military a direct involvement in the Near and Far East as in the Mediterranean and Atlantic against enemies “whose main bases they (the Tripartite powers) will destroy (...) they will conquest and occupy their territories”: this was followed by a possible undertaking: “they will attempt to crush land, sea and air forces (...) and to destroy enemy commercial traffic”. In the second scenario – even rather improbable though likely desired by the Japanese to create a balance in the alliance – against the English and North American fleets “for the most part concentrated in the Pacific”, Italy and Germany “will send a part of their Naval forces to the Pacific to directly work with the Japanese Navy.” The third scenario of collaboration should have been based only on “mutual contact” (but not cooperation). More than common operational plans, generically the text spoke about exchanges only regarding not well defined “important points,” generic “collaboration” in the war against traffic, collection of information, and in the general “area of the disruption of enemy forces.” In other parts the text shifted between too much general, and pleonastic, points such as “the mutual transmission of military information,” and other too much specific ones, like “implementation of the military air link” and “the opening of the maritime route and transportation that crosses the Indian Ocean” (a point, however, already in the text, put under the condition that it would be done “if technical capabilities would permit” 47). The military agreements, in last analysis, appeared too much generic to be military: the text sounded more diplomatic than military and seemed to address political issues more than technical, whether they were immediate or strategic. On the contrary, Italy had far more urgent needs.

In any case, at the level of multilateral Tripartite relations, the first half of 1942 saw a meeting of the Permanent General Tripartite Council at the end of February and, on a technical level, a meeting of the Military commission at the beginning of June. Seeing as they were scheduled monthly, these meetings still deserve in depth research, though it does not appear they made much of a difference. From what we already know, on the contrary, they brought to light a mutual suspicious reserve among the three allies. For instance, as a demonstration of certain military skepticism regarding the concrete possibilities of a Tripartite collaboration, War Diary of Italian Supreme Command reveals that the three services delayed in instituting even their own scheduled Tripartite offices. As far as Italian Supreme Command was concerned, it seems that it urged their institution only at the end of February 1942⁴⁸, and we have clear sign only about the

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, t. II, p. 27, 7 gennaio 1942.

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*, t. I, p. 513, 21 febbraio 1942.

Air Force, that created his Ufficio Tripartito at the beginning of April⁴⁹ – however some time after the signing of Tripartite military agreement, six months after Japan’s intervention in the war, and a year and a half after the Pact had been signed. And we have to bear in mind that the Air Force, ‘the Fascist service’, was directly involved in the institution of a Rome-Tokyo-Rome air link – with all his propagandistic (and certainly not military-operation) taste. Another point for the impression that the Italian military took Italian-German collaboration into high, though worrisome, consideration, but looked at the Tripartite collaboration as something bureaucratic and political, not easily to be inserted into their military planning. (During these months Japan’s repeated insistence on Rome regarding the strategic importance of conquering Malta did not help).

On the contrary, yet again Rome looked to Tokyo more for indirect help (that is, for Japan to distract British forces, by taking London attention off the North African front) and above all for direct support and supplies in terms of strategic raw materials. It was no coincidence that general Pugnani, chief of Italian motorized armored troops, was received by the Chief of the General Staff at the end of April and urged Cavallero to have Japan send rubber and tires⁵⁰. This necessity for strategic war materials would likely become more urgent as Italian military situation became more difficult over the course of the year. At the beginning of December, Cavallero – since July promoted ‘Maresciallo d’Italia’ – “asked the Japanese to provide Italy with rubber,”⁵¹ as soon as they presented him a document regarding the direction of the war. Rome needed materials rather than suggestions and plans.

As a matter of fact in one of the few entries in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command not dedicated to convoys, transports, supply, or strategic raw materials, that is, the August 3, 1942 encounter with the Japanese Military Mission, the Chief of Italian General Staff did not hesitate to define the Tripartite strategy in terms of a “Japanese collaboration with the Axis,” a collaboration “that is indirect, in general, but that at certain points, such as in the Indian Ocean, can become direct (an example of indirect collaboration: an Axis attack on Moscow and a simultaneous Japanese attack in the Far East),” thus bringing attention to the Middle East, “which is the true second front, according to the Duce.”⁵²

In conclusion, in 1942 – and that year ended to be decisive for the fate of the Nazifascist war –, apart from this insistence and a few bureaucratic references, in our document substantial is the silence on Italian-Japanese relations. Italian Supreme Command, id est the highest ranking

⁴⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 932, 7 aprile 1942.

⁵⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 1070, 23 aprile 1942.

⁵¹ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, p. 469.

⁵² *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, vol. V, t. II, p. 818, 3 agosto 1942.

commanders, could have even been divided about the forms and the scope of Italian-German collaboration but, from the pages of the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command, they seemed harmonious in their limited interest, or disappointment, regarding Italian-Japanese relations. The December 1941 enthusiasm revealed itself to be only a spark, and the hope that Tokyo's intervention in the war would distract London quickly vanished. At the same time, the fate of the Fascist war was becoming bleaker and bleaker now that Washington's 'arsenal of democracy' entered the conflict. In the face of this paramount change of the war, the Tripartite could not look but a political and propagandistic event, of little military real value. It was for this reason that Japan appeared in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command because mentioned in reports by SIM, the Foreign Ministry, and military attaches (in March 1942, for example, it was mentioned regarding the important question of Madagascar). But relevant documentation regarding a serious, direct, and continuous relationship between the allies in that decisive year of the Fascist war is absent from the War Diary.

Major involvement of 1942 in Italian-Japanese relations seems confined to preparation and undertaking of the direct flight from Rome to Tokyo and back to Rome (June 29–July 3, then again from July 15 to 19)⁵³. In one word, propaganda.

The End (1943)

In the first half of 1943, things were getting tougher for the Nazifascist powers, and in particular for Italy. Italian situation plummeted both militarily and politically: in Italian society there was now scarce popular consent. Also within the Court circles and the military there were signs and plans to distance from Mussolini.

It is true that, as it is known, and all notwithstanding, in the face of the imminent Allied landing in Italy, the Foreign Minister took the initiative to favor a combined Italian-Japanese action in Berlin, and that on January 20, 1943 two commercial agreements (between Germany and Japan and between Italy and Japan, likely one of the few concrete elements of this period of Tripartite) were signed. (We may add a meeting among Japan military and naval attachés in Europe, to be held in Rome at the end of January.) But it was in Summer 1943 that not only Italy's collaboration with Japan in the context of the Tripartite Alliance, but properly Fascist war and

⁵³ Publio Magini, *L'uomo che volò a Tokyo: storia di un aviatore del ventesimo secolo*, Milano, Mursia, 2009. For a comparison see Peter Herde, *Der Japanflug : Planungen und Verwirklichung einer Flugverbindung zwischen den Achsenmächten und Japan 1942-1945*, Stuttgart : Steiner, 2000.

Fascism itself came to an end. Weaker and weaker, Rome had very little to offer to Tokyo, while having much to ask – and in this context (to be precise, since Spring-Summer 1942) Tokyo took some liberty with Rome. Of course, to understand this Japanese stance we have to remember that throughout these months Fascist Italy's military continued to find themselves in greater and greater trouble: even in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command there was no hesitation in acknowledging in March 1943 “the irreparable arms and fuel crisis.”⁵⁴ More or less in the same months, at least since the end of 1942, Japan was troubled not only by the substantial failure of the Nazi offensive in the East but, above all, by the defeat of Italian (and German) forces in North Africa: in particular the loss of Libya and Tunisia seemed to Japanese eyes symbolizing a serious strategic defeat for the entire Tripartite: those ‘whites’ (Nazifascist) Europeans had entirely lost their grasp on the ‘black’ African Continent, leaving the ‘yellow devils’ at odds in Asia. For this reason, Tokyo urged Rome and Berlin that everything be done to keep Tunisia, otherwise it would have been easy for the Tripartite's enemies (as in the end was) to “conquer Italy separately,” now that Libya was in English hands and the Americans were advancing from Morocco into Algeria. Surely in 1943, but in some ways even before, *id est* in the year following Japan's intervention in the war, the continued Tripartite relations had developed in an environment of a growing level of mutual irritation and incomprehension. As noted by many authors, and among them Gerhard L. Weinberg, at this time the Tripartite witnessed the surfacing of strategic differences and lack of understanding, not only between Tokyo and Rome, but also with Berlin⁵⁵. In Rome, for example, even if the Japanese Military Mission was more frequently received at Italian Supreme Command, little contributed to fraternization among allies.

For instance on December 5, 1942, the Japanese Military Mission in Rome – on behalf of the Chief of Japan's Army Staff, the General Staff, and the Japanese Minister of War – delivered to Italian Supreme Command a document that was courteous in style but severe in substance⁵⁶. And six months later on June 25, 1943, in a meeting between Mussolini, the Chief of the General Staff General Vittorio Ambrosio (Cavallero was replaced on February 1), General Moriakira Shimizu, and Admiral Hiroaki Abe, Japanese criticisms not only on the Italian military but on Fascist regime at large were even more scathing⁵⁷. For Rome the issue was always the same: request of supply of strategic raw materials (even by means of submarine). But Tokyo, in a word,

⁵⁴ *Diario storico del Comando supremo*, vol. IX (2002) : 1.1.1943-30.4.1943, t. I, p. 628, 12 marzo 1943.

⁵⁵ Gerhard L. Weinberg, *Il mondo in armi : storia globale della Seconda guerra mondiale*, Torino : Utet, 2007.

⁵⁶ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. II, *Crisi e agonia del regime*, Torino, Einaudi, 1990, p. 1444 (1 and 5 dicembre 1942).

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 1449 (25 giugno 1943).

replied asking for an increase in military effort on Italian side, with some better propaganda favoring Japan.

These two documents, only a year after Japanese intervention in the war aside Germany and Italy, reveal how Tokyo, aware of her allies' difficulties, explicitly refused to directly support their war.

In December 1942, if not before, it is only two years following the signing of the Pact, and one year after Japan's intervention in the war, it was clear that the Tripartite war was in reality a collection of parallel wars by ultranationalist regimes. Not by chance the Japanese military mission now clearly stated to Italian Chief of General Staff: "It is superfluous to say that the final outcome of this war depends on weighing the total power of the Tripartite and, above all, a joining of efforts of the three powers in order to attain maximum results (...) But, at this time, our [Japanese] situation does not allow us to directly support Axis operations, having to face the current issues in the Pacific. Our forces, having to carry out the great task of breaking the enemy forces in order to open the way, do not currently have room to directly contribute to Axis operations."

Revealing to be not very happy with the Tripartite collaboration ("we are not well acquainted with the entity of the Axis forces, just as we do not have sufficient information regarding the progress of the war"), Tokyo did not hesitate to criticize. "We do not intend to criticize like professional critics, nevertheless, we do not want to use diplomatic or complimentary expressions, like in times of peace." They did not like "to repeat discussions on opinions they we have already expressed, or rather, let us say, 'beat a dead horse to death'," but, "we would be very happy to discuss things candidly and without euphemisms." In this sense, they clearly wrote of being in favor of a revision in the Nazi war: in Japanese view, "The Eastern Front would have to assume a defensive role", and Italy and Germany would have better "to strengthen North Africa, then to move on to a possible counter-offensive (...) to strengthen the Mediterranean and to destroy enemy naval forces (...) to conquer Batum, therefore dominating the Black Sea and advancing into the Middle East." 58

In mid June of 1943, these criticisms became even more severe. In front of Mussolini, Shimizu told that Tokyo felt proud for the fact that "Japan is always on the offensive, and the Japanese people are sure about the final victory": but could Italy say the same? Shimizu allowed himself to, more or less, explicitly give advice to the Duce: he clearly stated that in Italy "the question of oil is serious. There are many checks to be done in order to avoid wastes..." On the

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 1444-1448 (1 and 5 dicembre 1942).

contrary, in Japan “compulsory savings have been instated, and donations to the military urged (the people donate airplanes)... women take on a role even in anti-aircraft defense, junior high school girls go to work in industrial factories (like my daughter, for example)... everything is rationed, there is a civil organization... all that is useless is stopped.”⁵⁹ It was clearly more than a message – whether a message Mussolini or Ambrosio liked to receive is not known.

Perhaps a symbolic close to this story, during the morning of July 25, 1943, the same day the Duce was arrested (at the behest of those who turned their backs on him, starting from the King and some in the military, including Badoglio), Mussolini met with Ambassador Shinrokuro Hidaka. At the meeting, after Hidaka like Shimizu boasted once again about Japan’s success in Asia and India, and this while Italian territory had already been invaded by U.S. and English troops, a dejected Mussolini likely said to him, revealing what Italy expected from Japan: “it is a great thing. It will not, however, be until next spring that you will attain something, and it will be too late to help us...”⁶⁰ The Japanese Ambassador’s point of view regarding that meeting is now known. He was surprised (and it was not the first time) by Mussolini’s unrealistic war plans or wishes, as well as by his “bewildering thoughts” that were dictated by failure and by his “great agitation.”⁶¹

Deep down, the Japanese military and diplomatic representatives were not wrong in their analysis when, between December 1942 and June 1943, they clearly expressed their dissatisfaction regarding the progression of the war first to Italian Supreme Command, and then to Mussolini. In this regard, what can be read in a report by Japanese Navy officer Toyo Mitsunobu, a document (Personal Opinion on the Reconstruction of Italy) written some months afterwards to try to understand what went wrong and why in Italian war, remain extraordinary for his deep and acute analysis. Japanese military observers complained that in Italy there was not (anymore) an offensive spirit, and above all that Italian people seemed not tolerate, nor want, the war.

In any case, a few hours after his meeting with Japanese ambassador in Rome, Mussolini would be arrested and removed from power, without having received from the East either that help or the strategic raw materials, both of which Rome counted on. As a matter of fact, neither the Führer nor the Emperor could help the Duce in the face of failure in his war and the collapse of consent for his regime. The first corner of the Tripartite had crumbled.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, pp. 1449-1452 (25 giugno 1943).

⁶⁰ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, p. 523.

⁶¹ Peter Herde, *Il Giappone e la caduta di Mussolini : la fine del regime fascista agli occhi di 'Magic'*, p. 132.

Another Study to be Done, and its Place within Italian Historiographical Debate

War-time relations between Fascist Italy and Japan have seemed of not big interest for historians. Then, a complete study on military relationships of the Tripartite Pact still needs to be done. We already know much on relations between Germany and Japan, but on Italian-Japanese relations much archival sources still have to be studied.

However references found in published literature and in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command are sufficient enough to provide us with an initial view of the situation. The War Diary in particular, ignored up until now by scholars, leads us to re-assess former Italian historiographical studies and views.

In the works of Italian greatest military historians on World War II, Japan quite does not appear. Great Italian japanologists (Guido Borsa, Fabrizio Gatti, and now Rosa Caroli) had not taken up these matters in their details. Even the most important Italian expert on these issues, Valdo Ferretti, unfortunately concludes his book on Italian foreign policy towards Japan with year 1938⁶². The reason is that, in his study prevalently centered on the history of foreign policy, Ferretti (not at a military historian) argued that after that date Fascism lost interest in Japan and the Far East, once it subjugated its foreign policy to German foreign policy, and to the possibility of war. On the contrary, in the last book of his huge biography of Mussolini, Renzo De Felice has contrasted this view⁶³ – as we will see, exaggerating a bit.

But a silence on the Tripartite's Italian-Japanese military relations during the war is not a solely an Italian trend. In John Gooch's mighty book on fascist generals⁶⁴, Japan receive only three or four lines. And MacGregor Knox, who initiated an important and systematic work comparing German Nazism and Italian Fascism, taking into account strategic and military issues, has remained silent on Japan for now⁶⁵. Among other studies published in Western languages, we could mention an outstanding article by Ken Ishida on German-Japanese-Italian relations, an article that helps to understand the dynamics of the Tripartite Pact⁶⁶: but it focuses on 1937. Of

⁶² Valdo Ferretti, *Il Giappone e la politica estera italiana : 1935-41*.

⁶³ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, p. 406.

⁶⁴ John Gooch, *Mussolini and his Generals. The Armed Forces and Fascist Foreign Policy, 1922-1940*.

⁶⁵ MacGregor Knox, *To the threshold of power, 1922/33 : origins and dynamics of the Fascist and national socialist dictatorships*, vol. I, Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2007.

⁶⁶ Ken Ishida, *The German-Japanese-Italian Axis as Seen from Fascist Italy*, in Kudo Akira, Tajima Nobuo, Erich Pauer (editors), *Japan and Germany : two latecomers to the world stage, 1890-1945*, Folkestone, UK : Global Oriental, 2009, vol. II, *The pluralistic dynamics of the formation of the Axis*. But see also Ken Ishida, *Interpretazioni del fascismo in Italia e Giappone. Renzo De Felice e Masao Maruyama*, in "Italia contemporanea", a. 2001 n. 223 pp. 325-331; and Id., *Racisms compared: Fascist Italy and ultra-nationalist*

course we can learn something more about Italian-Japanese relationships during the war from the rather wide literature on German-Japanese intercours: from Carl Boyd's books⁶⁷, for instance, and from a relevant article by Tajima Nobuo⁶⁸ and some recent interesting notes by Masaki Miyake⁶⁹. But none of these historians studied in Italian archives, or even went through the War Diary of Italian Chief of General Staff.

In front of this not only national but international and widespread scholarly silence, or indifference, or more simply linguistic-barred works, we must acknowledge that – before our present pages – only Italian historian Renzo De Felice made several references in his studies to Rome-Tokyo relations during the war. Even if De Felice's approach and interests were in the fields of history of Italian politics and of diplomatic relations far more than in military history, his notes deserve attention – and some critics.

De Felice liked partially to stray from the generally agreed upon opinion of – say – irrelevance of Italian-Japanese relations during the war. On the contrary he highly praised these relations. According to his interpretation (mainly in the already mentioned last volume of his biography of the Duce), De Felice's Mussolini wanted to give a “privileged place” to Italian-Japanese relations within the Tripartite. In De Felice's opinion, in front of fading of his strategy of ‘parallel’ war, and trying to escape from falling into a subordinate war under Hitler, the Duce would have seemed to want to play “the Japanese card”. Mussolini would have tried to play Tokyo against Berlin in order to re-obtain the lost “determinant weight”⁷⁰ Rome previously

Japan, in “Journal of Modern Italian Studies”, Volume 7, Issue 3 October 2002, pages 380-391.

⁶⁷ Carl Boyd, *The extraordinary envoy : General Hiroshi Oshima and diplomacy in the Third Reich, 1934-1939*, Washington : University press of America, 1980; and Id., *Hitler's Japanese confidant : General Oshima Hiroshi and MAGIC intelligence, 1941-1945*, foreword by Peter Paret, Lawrence, Kan. : University Press of Kansas, 1993. Among others see also Id., *The Berlin-Tokyo axis and Japanese military initiative*, in “Modern Asian Studies”, Mar. 1981, Vol. 15 Issue 2, p311-338; Id., *Significance of Magic and the Japanese ambassador to Berlin: (IV) confirming the turn of the tide on the German-Soviet front*, “Intelligence and National Security”, Volume 4, Issue 1, January 1989, pages 86-107; and more recently Carl Boyd, Akihiko Yoshida, *The Japanese submarine force and World War II*, Annapolis, Md. : Naval Institute Press, c1995.

⁶⁸ Tajima Nobuo, *Japanese-German relations in East Asia, 1890-1945*, in Kudo Akira, Tajima Nobuo, Erich Pauer (editors), *Japan and Germany : two latecomers to the world stage, 1890-1945*, Folkestone, UK : Global Oriental, 2009, vol. I, *A chance encounter in East Asia*

⁶⁹ Masaki Miyake, *Die Idee eines eurasischen Blocks Tokio-Moskau-Berlin-Rom 1939-1941*, in Martin Sieg, Heiner Timmermann (editors), *Internationale Dilemmata und europäische Visionen. Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Helmut Wagner*, Berlin, Lit, 2010.

⁷⁰ As it should be known, the historical interpretation based on the hypothesis of an Italian “determinant weight” stems from the writings of Dino Grandi, accepted by Renzo De Felice in his biography of the Duce: Dino Grandi, *25 luglio: quarant'anni dopo*, edited by Renzo De Felice, Bologna : Il mulino, 1983; Id., *Dino Grandi racconta l'evitabile Asse*, memorie raccolte e presentate da Gianfranco Bianchi, Milano : Jaca book, 1984; Id., *Il mio paese : ricordi autobiografici*, edited by Renzo De Felice, Bologna : Il mulino, 1985; Id., *La politica estera dell'Italia dal 1929 al 1932*, prefazione di Renzo De Felice, introduzione e cura di Paolo Nello, Roma : Bonacci, 1985, 2 voll. For a radical critic, see Enzo Collotti, *Fascismo e politica di potenza. Politica*

would possess. In De Felice's words Japan would have been for Mussolini "the most reliable" 71 card.

In truth, as should be clear after our pages, a reading of the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command does not at all support this interpretation. Furthermore, looking at Fascist-Japanese relations in the Tripartite pact from the military point of view addresses questions not only to De Felice's studies. For instance, it adds to classic studies in Italian military history such as Rochat's ones that there was a Tripartite dimension in Italian strategy. It reminds to japanologists like Ferretti that this dimension existed after 1938. And eventually suggests to Renzo De Felice that probably he put too much emphasis in Mussolini's dreams – if they were.

If in Ferretti's case the reason for different interpretations seems rather simple (the author based his studies on diplomatic and not military sources: but the strategy of a nation at war is not fully understood by means of its foreign policy, and in studying it military aspects and military sources must be taken into account), with De Felice the question is more complex, involves general interpretation, and deserves attention.

To credit Fascism with a maneuvering area within the Tripartite and to credit Mussolini with coherent strategies to exploit between Tokyo and Berlin would attribute to Rome a farsightedness and political and diplomatic power she hardly possessed. On the contrary, reading the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command clarifies how weak Italian war was – starting from its needs in terms of strategic raw materials. Rather surprisingly, it could be noted that De Felice had full access to military sources and archives. But – in spite of this documentation – in his book De Felice put a rather strong emphasis on the 'Japanese card' for Mussolini. Indeed it does not seem only a question of sources. Regarding De Felice's view of fascist policies in the Far East⁷², and in particular Italian-Japanese relations during the war, the impression is that interpretations went before documents⁷³.

estera 1922-1939, Firenze, La nuova Italia, 2000.

⁷¹ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l'alleato*, vol. I, *L'Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. II, *Crisi e agonia del regime*, p. 1291 (referring to February 1943): in Italian language: "quella sulla quale Mussolini avrebbe fatto più affidamento".

⁷² One of De Felice's most original points of interpretation has been Fascism's relationship with the Far East: see Renzo De Felice, *Il fascismo e l'Oriente. Arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini*, Bologna, il Mulino, 1988. In his interpretation, he attributed a large role to the (presumed) fascist manipulation of Middle Eastern and Indian nationalist movements and leaders. But it is now that even from diplomatic documents another interpretation is possible – one that does see the relationship with these movements as a new and present element in the regime's foreign policy, but that by no means looks at the 'peripheral' and 'subordinate' actors a passive role. On the contrary it could be documented that the initiative would not come from the fascist 'center' but from the 'subordinate' periphery. And it seems that also the advantages (if any) of this Fascist policy went more to the periphery than to the center.

⁷³ It should also be remembered that, while military historians talk of transition from a parallel to a

This seems curious because De Felice, in other pages of his works, admits or is forced to admit “the disproportion, the gap between his [Mussolini’s] general ideas, his intentions, and the strategic plans and the irregularity and superficiality in his efforts to put them into concrete and coherent political action.”⁷⁴ And this admission is particularly and easily adaptable to the Duce’s ‘general ideas’ regarding Tokyo, that never developed in serious military plans. Even if his ‘ideas’ truly existed and were consistent, there is no concrete trace of their translation into plans – as it should have been – in the War Diary of Italian Supreme Command). Moreover, and curiously enough, an underlying interpretation aimed at a re-evaluation of Mussolini and Fascism mixes together, in De Felice’s work – even in a contradictory fashion – with other admissions. They included views that Japanese, German and Italian foreign policies were radically revisionist and warmongering; that Italy and Germany were not acquainted with Japan and their politics were spoiled by nationalist and racist prejudice; that Rome only needed a relationship with Tokyo so as not to be alone in its subordination to Berlin; that the Japanese looked to Berlin much more than to Rome, and that the hypothesis of a preferential Italian-Japanese axis within the Tripartite could rest only on occasional and instrumental bases; and that, within the Tripartite, Nazism fought its war without worrying much about its allies – therefore the Pact was, above all, propaganda. In a word all this seems concurrent with general existing studies on the Tripartite Pact seen as, to use an expression by Jost Dülffer⁷⁵, more as a Propaganda Trick than a true Fascist Alliance.

Nevertheless the biographer praises the lonely foresight of Mussolini, who would predict the U.S. intervention in the war as a consequence of Japanese intervention – but, as we saw, this was already well perceived by the military (and by the diplomats). He sees Mussolini’s pro-Japanese attitude in terms of a sign and refuge, as a result of vanishing of all chances of peace with England – but sources explain that this attitude, at least among the military, was not caused by any intention of peace (?) with London but had former roots tied to both Rome and Tokyo’s revisionist and war politics, and had very solid basis in Italian expectancy of strategic raw materials and indirect help coming from the Far East to Italian war operations in North Africa and in the Mediterranean. In a word, De Felice says he would propose a “richer and softer vision”⁷⁶

subordinate war (see Giorgio Rochat, *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943*), De Felice prefers making distinctions between short war and long war (starting from the title of his book: Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l’alleato*, vol. I, *L’Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*). But when Italy entered into the war, in Spring 1940, it should already be clear that war would be long, and in any case the most relevant political point was the increasing subordination of Italian-Fascist war to German-Nazi one – regardless Italian and Mussolini’s ‘ideas’ and ‘plans’.

⁷⁴ Renzo De Felice, *Il fascismo e l’Oriente. Arabi, ebrei e indiani nella politica di Mussolini*, p. 10.

⁷⁵ Jost Dülffer, *The Tripartite Pact of 27 September 1940: Fascist Alliance or Propaganda Trick?*.

⁷⁶ Renzo De Felice, *Mussolini l’alleato*, vol. I, *L’Italia in guerra, 1940-1943*, t. I, *Dalla guerra breve alla guerra lunga*, p. 526.

of Fascism. In truth also in this case De Felice must be judged on his merits for identifying new sources and bringing to light relatively unknown aspects of the history of the Fascist regime – but his interpretation seems to contrast former serious studies (starting with Ferretti's work) and, based on some selection from the archives (only diplomatic and not military sources), he ends in making a re-evaluation of Fascism.

According to De Felice's biography of Mussolini, Fascism did not emerge as a totalitarian and warmongering regime, as a regime reazionario di massa (mass reactionary regime), but rather as an authoritarian government that publicly threatens war but secretly desires peace. More generally, De Felice seems to be interested in distancing Fascist regime from Nazism, and from its sad umbra. It not coincidental that he implicitly criticizes Enzo Collotti and his insistence on the common aspects – even not without obvious differences – between the various national cases of fascism as an international political movement. But, as Bernd Martin (among the first to study the German-Japanese military relations) would say, the fascist regimes had A Common Past Full of Crimes⁷⁷.

In conclusion, and apart from Italian historiographical debate, Japan's role within the Tripartite's Fascist strategy – id est not only Italian-Japanese diplomatic relations, but also the military ones – proves itself an important topic⁷⁸. It deserves to be studied more in-depth than Italian, Japanese, German, and international historians have done so far. In particular, the study of the military aspect and plans of these relationships will allow a measurement of the substantiality of the projects that diplomats outlined. There is hope that in the future studies will be done on military sources, on those relating to the military commissions of the Tripartite, and in general on exchange of resources, strategic raw materials, men and ideas⁷⁹ in the international Fascist

⁷⁷ Bernd Martin, *A Common Past Full of Crimes: Japanese-German Collaboration in the Development of Bacteriological and Chemical Weapons and the War in China*, paper read at Deutsches Institut fuer Japan Studien, Tokyo, October 17th 2000: see http://www.djtokyo.org/events/a_common_past_full_of.

⁷⁸ See Junichiro Shoji, *The Japan Strategies of the Allies during the Road to Pearl Harbour*, in *The Japan Strategies of the Allies during the Road to Pearl Harbour. 2008 International Forum on War History: Proceedings*, Tokyo, NIDS, 2009, pp. 7-18; and, of the same author, among many others as a topic more and more sensitive, *Historical Perception in Postwar Japan. Concerning the Pacific War*, in "NIDS security reports", a. 2003 n. 4, pp. 109-132.

In some sense, for the Second World War, there is need of a 'Western'-European equivalent to the important 'Eastern'-American book of Williamson Murray and Tomoyuki Ishizu (editors), *Conflicting currents. Japan and the United States in the Pacific*, Santa-Barbara, CA, Praeger, 2010.

⁷⁹ In spite of limitation in direct and military mutual help in the field, the Tripartite Pact was large in words. The role, dimension and trends in propaganda still need to be properly studied.

A minor but interesting Italian contribute to this story can read in Juri Meda, *Venti d'amicizia. Il disegno infantile giapponese nell'Italia fascista (1937-1943)*, in "Memoria e Ricerca", n.22, maggio-agosto 2006, pp.135-164 (in general see Juri Meda, Elena Pasetti, Valentina Tiracorrendo (editors), *Infantàsia. Lo straordinario del quotidiano nei disegni dei bambini italiani e giapponesi, 1938-2004*, Firenze, Polistampa,

alliance.

The War Diary of Italian Supreme Command confirms the Tripartite Pact based itself on an ideological and political alliance between the three regimes, but that – above all, judging from Italian-Japanese relations – did not know any close collaboration and cooperation like the one shared by the anti-fascist alliance of the United Nations. As the study of Japanese-Italian military relations explains, the Fascist Tripartite did not have Lend Lease acts, combined staffs, combined strategic planning, cooperation on the level of ideology and propaganda: all elements which, even with difficulties and clashes, the antifascist powers learned to agree upon.

As a matter of fact, the Second World War was a total war, a war of movement and materials, on which economic and industrial power had a relevant effect. From this point of view, the United Nations was so much stronger than the Tripartite, and in particular precisely after the United States entered the war as a result of Japanese aggression. Then, even if collaboration within the Tripartite Alliance had had all the elements as these shared by the United Nations, the outcome of the war would not likely have been much more different, this caused by gaps in the Tripartite material foundation.

From the examination of Italian-Japanese relations, it appears that the form of relationships between the Tripartite powers – even if not decisive – was clearly the consequence of the character and politics of their fascist and nationalist regimes, and that that form acted as an accelerator – if not caused – to their final defeat.

2005, and Juri Meda, *È arrivata la bufera : l'infanzia italiana e l'esperienza della guerra totale (1940-1950)*, Macerata : Eum, 2007). The subject of this articles is the war propaganda that led (obliged?) Italian and Japanese primary school pupils to prepare drawings of Japan and of Italian-Japanese alliance: two subjects about which they did not know so much...

But the whole Italian propaganda production (leaflets, articles, books etc.) about Japan still deserve proper and close study.