

## German Strategy in the Tripartite Pact during the Second World War

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Germany and Japan both had the intention to wage a major war and they unleashed World War II. But both of them waged and fought the war basically separately, although they were Allies of a special kind since 1936.<sup>1</sup>

The expansionist plans of Germany, Italy and Japan against a world order of settled or status-quo oriented powers meant a kind of hazard under the conditions of the international world system of the 1930ies and early 1940ies. They had the chance to challenge the rest of the world, if they would coordinate their expansionist plans and later their war strategy as a kind of fascist common plan. This at least was feared by British officials since the early 1930ies: in a subcommittee of the Committee of Imperial Defense, Japan was seen as an immediate danger to the British Empire while Germany was regarded by Sir Maurice Hankey as “the ultimate potential enemy”.<sup>2</sup>

This kind of fear finally remained without substance: A comprehensive pact between the three powers was never concluded or implicitly carried out. The Antikomintern Pact of 1936 between Germany and Japan, which Italy joined a year later, was mostly an ideological instrument, although it included secret clauses for mutual assistance. One of the effects, just because of its demonstrative effect was to alarm the status-quo powers and drive them closer together. This indeed was a fear which Italian foreign minister Ciano uttered in October 1938. For a rational strategy the procedure would have meant: not to feign or demonstrate too much common aggressive unity and firmness, but nevertheless intimidate the democracies as far as possible by demonstrating unity. A course thus with major problems of perception and misperception.

Thus in the years up to 1940, in Berlin, Rome or Tokyo, there was always a question of balancing the degree of deterrence which might be reached with the amount of provocation and

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<sup>1</sup> Indispensable for the German side is still: Bernd Martin, *Deutschland und Japan im Zweiten Weltkrieg, 1940-1945*, Göttingen 1969 (reprint Hamburg 2001) and many following articles by the same author; a good recent overview in articles: Christian W. Spang/ Rolf-Harald Wippich (ed.), *Japanese-German Relations, 1895-1945. War, Diplomacy and Public Opinion*, Milton Park/New York 2006 and Kudo Akira, Tajima Nobuo, Erich Pauer (ed.), *Japan and Germany.. Two Latecomers to the World Stage, 1890-1945*, Global Oriental 2009, 3 Vol. – The notes are confined to basic literature about the aspects of German politics in the alliance, do not document general developments of World War II.

<sup>2</sup> Jost Dülffer, *The Impact of World War II on Decolonization*. In: Marc Frey, Ronald W. Pruessen, Tan Tai Yong (ed.), *The Transformation of Southeast Asia. International Perspectives on Decolonization*, Armonk/London 2003, pp.23-34 (23).

counter-measures, especially by Great Britain, the Soviet Union (until August 1939), France (until June 1940) and then increasingly by the neutral USA (until December 1941).

During the same time, the pragmatic aspects of each countries' alliance politics fundamentally diverged. This is less the case with Italy. Germany concluded a bombastic "pact of steel" with this country on 22 May 1939 which seemed to be a kind of overall pact with ideological as well as military implications. But when German war plans to unleash a war with Poland became reality in August 1939, Italy shrank back, claiming unrealistic military hardware and support. Before this agreement was reached, tripartite negotiations for a general pact had taken place since spring 1938. Germany and especially Foreign Minister von Ribbentrop wanted to keep the United States neutral and Great Britain out of the play,<sup>3</sup> while Japan more and more intended to keep the Soviet Union out of the Chinese-Japanese War, raging since July 1937. With regard to Japan, Germany clearly broke all commitments when concluding the Hitler-Stalin Pact in August 1939 at the same time when Japan fought (and lost) tank battles in China (as well in summer 1938 as well as the Nomonhan battles in summer of 1939) against the Soviet Union. Under the impression of the German-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact, the Japanese government had to retreat and concluded an armistice with the Soviet Union on 15 September 1939. Bilateral relations reached a low point as never before.

The main reason for Germany's change of alliance can be seen in the following: Japan in the summer of 1939 was not regarded as the best deterrent for the European Western powers when Germany wanted to attack and destroy Poland. But the Pact with the Soviet Union could much more effectively deter Great Britain and France to interfere by entering the war which now became the Second World War. Japan on the one hand side was too distant from Europe. On the other hand it was not regarded as such a potent military power that it could ensure the democratic states to refrain from entering a German-provoked war. Thus for Hitler, at this point, the Soviet Union was a much more effective ally to deter the Western powers than Japan. His best-case thinking was erroneous: Great Britain and France nevertheless declared war on Germany, but despite far reaching claims for a future world power, German strategy remained mainly concerned with Europe and could not really affect a global dimension.

Japanese-German relations fundamentally improved again in summer of 1940, when Germany had defeated France and thus had overrun large parts of Northern and Western Europe. In the shadow of these military achievements, Italy in the last days of the victorious German

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<sup>3</sup> Report Oshima March 1939: „What Germany and Italy want above all is to keep the United States in check, ensuring that it remains neutral. In short, the main purpose of this agreement is political: as long as there is this agreement, the United States will not get involved in Europe.” Kudo, Vol. 1, Overview (Tajima), p. 17

campaign in France had entered the war, while Japan after the seize-fire between France and the Axis powers occupied bases in Northern Indochina and improved its chance to cut support for China from the south. This was seen in Germany as a result of its own victories, but Japanese measures were not communicated in advance.

The German hope for an end of the war in Europe in summer 1940 was not fulfilled. Germany neither succeeded in arranging peace with Great Britain on the basis of its dominance nor a British military surrender after Operation Sea Lion had proved to be impossible and the air battle of Britain could not be won. Thus Germany's leaders followed alternative strategies: 1. the weaker one relied on geopolitics in the Haushofer tradition.<sup>4</sup> It was developed especially by foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and aimed at a continental bloc from Madrid to Yokohama which would include the Soviet Union. It was temporarily also supported by Hitler and took over corresponding Japanese plans. The basis was a common southward expansion by Germany, Italy, the Soviet Union and Japan. This was clearly directed against the sea powers, namely the United States and Great Britain. The negotiations for such a continental bloc culminated in a visit by Soviet foreign minister Vyacheslav Molotov on 12 and 13 November 1940 when Hitler and Ribbentrop outlined these plans.<sup>5</sup> Hitler and Ribbentrop openly hinted to a common strategy towards the "world bankruptcy remains of the British Empire (which unfortunately was not yet defeated!). The Soviet minister was only interested in Finland, Bulgaria and the Straits, thus not in the "great basic questions" (Ribbentrop) to which he did not answer directly and also not after his return to Moscow and further consultations with Stalin. Thus this alternative for the German (and Japanese) side faded away.

The stronger alternative<sup>6</sup> was the return to the programmatic line of Adolf Hitler: the attack on the Soviet Union with the purpose to create a German continental living space. At this time, this war would have an additional strategic purpose and Japan got a role in this. To quote Hitler's remarks (31 July 1940):<sup>7</sup> "If Russia drops out of the picture, America, too, is lost for Britain,

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<sup>4</sup> Masaki Miyaek, *Die Idee eines eurasischen Blocks Tokio-Moskau-Berlin-Rom 1939-1941*. In: Martin Sieg/Heiner Timmermann (ed.), *Internationale Dilemmata und europäische Visionen*, Münster 2010, pp.340-351.

<sup>5</sup> Akten zur deutschen Auswärtigen Politik (also English edition: *Documents on German Foreign Policy*), Series D, Vol XI, 1, Bonn 1964, Doc.No 308 (German draft of a treaty; Nos. 325-328 (Protocols of conversations between Hitler, Ribbentrop and Molotov).

<sup>6</sup> For the context: Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitlers Strategie. Politik und Kriegführung 1940-1941*, Frankfurt 1965, chapters III and IV (with a differentiated assessment of the quick change of situations); Gerhard Weinberg, *The World at Arms. A Global History of World War Two*, Cambridge 1994, German version p.223-227 (stresses the continuity of German military preparations against the Soviet Union since July 1940).

<sup>7</sup> Generaloberst (Franz) Halder, *Kriegstagebuch*, ed. Hans-Adolf Jacobsen, Stuttgart 1962, Vol. II, p. 182 (own translation).

because elimination of Russia would tremendously increase Japan's power in the Far East... Russia is the Far Eastern sword of Britain and the United States, pointed at Japan". This led to early military operation plans for a quick victory over the Soviet Union which since March 1941 were supplemented by criminal orders which implied an upcoming war of racial annihilation against Bolsheviks and Jews.<sup>8</sup>

Before these developments took place, negotiations with Japan became important again. In the beginning there was a Japanese proposal of a treaty about separate zones of influence. This gained German (and Italian) interest and finally was furthered more by the Germans. While for the Japanese side the most important effect of such a treaty was to improve relations with the Soviet Union and keep the way open for further negotiations with the United States, the German side was overall interested to deter the United States from a deeper engagement into the war on the British side. Thus the Tripartite Pact of 27 September 1940 on the surface was a treaty of mutual assistance, which promised support "with all political, economic, and military means", it was confined to an attack by a power not at present involved in the European War or the Sino-Japanese conflict. This could mean the United States or the Soviet Union. But because the latter was explicitly excluded, only the US remained as a potential enemy. Instead of deterring the United States, most of the North Americans regarded the pact as a provocation, an attempt for world-wide encirclement. The consequence was a speed-up support for Britain as well as of US war preparations proper. The pact finally was only concluded, because Germany made some formal concessions in an additional exchange of letters by Ambassador Eugen Ott and Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka which ran contrary to the orders by Ribbentrop. Tripartite commissions for political, military and economic questions were formally established in Berlin, but never reached greater importance.<sup>10</sup>

The Tripartite Pact did not result in any common plans for military cooperation, but in great power politics guided by "sacro egoism(sacred egotism)", as the Italian way of warfare was called when it started a North African campaign in late 1940 and another one in Yugoslavia in April 1941. Both campaigns of Italy did not result in immediate defeat, because Germany stepped militarily in

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<sup>8</sup> A good overview: Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt, Vol. IV: Der Angriff auf die Sowjetunion, Stuttgart 1983; part 1. Die deutsche Kriegspolitik und die Sowjetunion, pp.1-450 (contributions by Jürgen Förster, Rolf-Dieter Müller) (also in English: Germany and the Second World War); Richard J. Evans, The Third Reich at War. How the Nazis led Germany from Conquest to Disaster, London/New York 2008, pp. 146-186

<sup>9</sup> See my earlier version: Jost Dülffer, The Tripartite Pact of 27 September 1940: Fascist Alliance or Propaganda Trick? In: Ian Nish (Hg.), The Tripartite Pact (= International Centre for Economics and Related Disciplines, London School of Economics, International Studies 1984/III), London 1984, pp. 1-24, reprinted in: The Australian Journal of Politics and History 32, 1986, Nr. 2, S. 228-237.

<sup>10</sup> Martin, fn. 1, pp.54-60.

to support its ally. In a similar way the Japanese and German ways to war parted. While Germany prepared its war of annihilation against the Soviet Union, Japan felt encouraged to secure its neutrality in case of such a war. Foreign Minister Matsuoka arrived by train via Moscow in Germany where he had long talks with Hitler and Ribbentrop in late March 1941.<sup>11</sup> Both in advance had decided not to inform their partner of the plans for upcoming war. This resulted from the conviction that the Germans could win the war alone and Japanese participation would only complicate things. Thus the Japanese Foreign Minister on his return trip in Moscow signed a neutrality pact. Of course this would be valid only for the time being. Briefly before the attack which actually started on 22 June 1941, there were some German attempts to give some information on the upcoming war, but for the second time, the Japanese side had all reason to be surprised by the parting of ways and the little confidence of their ally.

Things changed after the “lightning victories” over Soviet forces by the Germans in the first month, a result that had been expected. The military and the political leadership feasted in far-reaching plans for the near and far future. On the height of success, on 14 July 1941, Hitler had an interview with Japanese ambassador Oshima Hiroshi.<sup>12</sup> He warned him about the United States’ imperialistic spirit as well as the Soviet threat. Each of these powers would exert pressure either on Germany or on Japan: “Thus he opined that we had to annihilate them in joint action. There were moments in history which were hard to tackle with ... The moment when we crush Russia will be fateful for Japan, too... The annihilation of Russia should become the political destiny of Germany and Japan”. This was the definition of a perceived rare window of opportunity for a real world strategy when a Japanese participation even would immensely have deteriorated the Soviet chances for survival. It was not only the idea of Japan to participate in the victory over the Soviet Union (which seemed to be only a matter of weeks). But these hopes failed: the Soviet Union was not yet defeated and the German armed forces suffered defeats in 1941 from which they never could really recover, besides all apparent gains of territory until late 1942.<sup>13</sup> But the offer of 14 July 1941 ran even farther. Japan was regarded as a necessary partner for the following step of expansion: also to crush the Anglo-Saxon powers. It was a design for a joint rule of the world which would never again appear in a similar form and was the result of an overestimation

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<sup>11</sup> ADAP, D, Vol. XII, Nos. 218,222,230,233,266,278; Theo Sommer, *Deutschland und Japan zwischen den Mächten 1935-1940. Vom Antikominternpakt bis zum Dreimächtepakt*, Tübingen 1962.

<sup>12</sup> *Staatsmänner und Diplomaten bei Hitler*, ed. Andreas Hillgruber, Frankfurt 1967, Vol. I, pp. 606/7; Andreas Hillgruber, *Die Bedeutung der Schlacht von Smolensk in der zweiten Julihälfte 1941 für den Ausgang des Ostkrieges*. In: idem., *Die Zerstörung Europas. Beiträge zur Weltkriegsepoche 1914 bis 1945*, pp. 296-312.

<sup>13</sup> See the overall synthesis by the Militärgeschichtliche Forschungsamt (of the Bundeswehr), *Das Deutsche Reich und der Zweite Weltkrieg*, 10 Vol., Stuttgart 1979-2008, esp. Vol. IV, VI (contributions by Bernd Wegner).

of the already achieved victory of the Germany's armed forces. As it turned out, this situation of July 1941 remained the only opportunity for a real global strategy when the German army conquered the Russian city of Smolensk in a major battle of Smolensk, but during this onslaught lost as well the confidence as the ability to quickly conquer the whole of the Soviet Union as foreseen. Japanese war plans at that time were finally directed to the priority of southern expansion.

Since this time, Adolf Hitler returned to his earlier skepticism about the desirability of a really functioning military alliance with Japan while others, especially Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop and to a degree also the German navy, continued their efforts to diplomatically court Japanese politicians into the war with the Soviet Union. From this time on, Japanese continental politics fluctuated between the weaker possibility to declare war on the Soviet Union and the stronger one to induce the Germans to a separate peace with the Bolshevik regime. Only at the time of the German defeat at Stalingrad, at the beginning of 1943, German politics again seriously demanded a Japanese entry into the war with the Soviet Union when from the backlashes of Japanese warfare it was too late to expand the number of enemies.

The Japanese way into the Pacific war, until November 1941 implicated the alternative of a settlement with the United States. In the prehistory of this development, the Antikomintern (which had become obsolete after the Hitler-Stalin-Pact) was renewed on 25 November 1941, but without the defunct additional Protocol directed against the Soviet Union. And in the same time, Japan tried to initiate negotiations for an automatic access of its Tripartite Pact partners to an upcoming war with the United States, but Germany and Italy again were not informed and surprised by Pearl Harbor and the consequences.

The German (and Italian) declaration of war on the United States on 11 December 1941 is one of the most debated decisions of World War II<sup>14</sup> because the Japanese attack did not as such prompt this. It was the only case when Germany resorted to the means of such a formal act in accordance with international law. Without going into a deeper debate on the reasons, two factors seem to have been most important. First: the battle of the Atlantic with German submarine warfare at this time waged only against British cargo ships, but the U.S. informally hunting them was barely supported by the still existing formal neutrality. In this situation, in Hitler's view unequal engagement, the German declaration of war was a kind of step forward. It legalized a war which

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<sup>14</sup> Recently: Ian Kershaw, Berlin, Herbst 1941. Hitler beschließt, den Vereinigten Staaten den Krieg zu erklären. In: id., Wendepunkte. Schlüsselentscheidungen im Zweiten Weltkrieg, Stuttgart 2008, pp. 481-539 (English edition not available: Fateful choices. The decisions that changed the world, 1939-1945, London 2007).

on the German side was already informally waged. The second reason in a way was connected with this and took up the perspective of global strategy: The U.S. was regarded as the economically and thus also maybe in military terms the most powerful state in the world and the chances that their fully mobilised potential would win the war, once it had entered, was great. This would hold especially true for an isolated Japanese - U.S. war, which might be easily won by the North Americans. Thus a real world war which forced the Anglo-Saxon powers in a two ocean-war on the Atlantic and the Pacific Ocean would, in a division of labour between Germany and Japan, create a better or the only opportunity to win such a global war by splitting up the enemy forces. What five months earlier, in an optimistic mood, was an attempt by Hitler to lure Japan into a world war strategy, by now had changed to a more pessimistic forward strategy which already showed some features of despair. But even more: it left out their two countries' different status in regard to the Soviet Union.

The publicly effective declaration of the Tripartite Powers not to conclude a separate peace in connection together with the declaration of war on 11 December was not followed by a true common strategy.<sup>15</sup> In fact the Tripartite Military Agreement of 18 January 1942 on Japan's request mainly delineated separate spheres of interests. The 70th parallel which crossed the Indian Ocean ran through British India (region of Karachi), leaving its western part to the German/Italian zone, implicitly also Africa. Of course there was no agreement, whether the territory of the Soviet Union which was touched by this parallel, had any meaning in this declaration. Separation, not co-operation also in this case remained the dominant feature. Only once, in February 1942, did the Japanese Fleet sail to the western shores of the Indian Ocean. Vichy France with Germany grudgingly consenting, thus offered Japan bases on the island of Madagascar, but before this could be attained or the Germans agree to this infringement in their zone of influence, Great Britain landed in the French colony. A real military cooperation was and remained difficult. It was only when defeat in the long run for both sides had become evident that the German navy was allowed to use bases in Penang (Malaya) and since 1943 a rudimentary common submarine war started in the Indian Ocean

This illuminates the fact that both powers (Italy was mostly left out) tended to politically transcend the zones of influence.<sup>16</sup> This became especially true with Germany's interest in India<sup>17</sup>. The symbolic story of Subhas Chandra Bose cannot be told here, but suffice it to say that

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<sup>15</sup> Martin (fn1), pp. 61-93.

<sup>16</sup> Martin (fn1), pp. 129-151

<sup>17</sup> Milan Hauner, *India in Axis Strategy. Germany, Japan, and Indian Nationalists in the Second World War*, Stuttgart 1981.

until fall 1942 there were some common efforts of the two powers to find a connection not so much in the north, via the conquered Soviet Union, but in the south: military operations and a revolutionizing of the Arab and Indian world should mutually enforce each other. A “Declaration on Free Arabia” in which the Japanese participated according to German invitation and a similar Declaration on Free India in which both powers cooperated, were commonly prepared, but never issued: The greatest German military successes in North Africa stopped west of the Egyptian border in late July 1942.

Before this time, a connection between the theatres of operation via the Mediterranean, Egypt, and the Arab countries to the Japanese sphere seemed possible. But Japan also in the following period could not prioritize a westward move to India, and only in the second quarter of 1944 they got direct access to Indian (Imphal). Even more decisive than the German setback in North Africa was the Japanese naval defeat in the battle of Midway in early June 1942. Again the Germans were not informed directly of this major setback of their ally. After this time, Japanese naval strength could no more compete with the Anglo-Saxon fleets, thus marking a turning point of the whole war. It was accompanied by the decisive defeats in late 1942 in North Africa as well as in the Soviet Union. Since 1943 a common strategy also militarily was no longer a realistic possibility. While large amounts of Allied goods for the support of the Soviet Union were delivered via Vladivostok (30 to 50 %), the Japanese navy saw no reasons to interfere into this by trade war. Anglo-American support for the Soviet Union via Iran was likewise not hindered by the Tripartite Powers – in this case out of strategic means.

This said, the question of Japanese - German cooperation in the economic and technological field needs further consideration<sup>18</sup>. Germany’s traditionally dominant economic relations with China in 1938 were changed to a preference for Japan which for the time being cost Germany a major market. Mutual trade structures between Germany and Japan were not really promising. Japan had ambitions to acquire German industrial products which during the war but they were needed for European warfare. On the side of German interests Japan proper could hardly deliver raw materials of which it was in need itself. A rather modest commercial treaty between the two countries was initialed, but not signed because of the Hitler-Stalin Pact. But after September 1939 when sea transport was endangered by the British blockade of German trade, the Trans-Siberian Railway offered good alternative chances for the exchange of goods.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Martin (fn.1), pp. 152-172; Kudo, Tajima, Pauer, Overview 2, pp. 44-87. Kudo, Vol II, pp.199-237.; John Chapman in Ian Nish(ed.), *The Tripartite Pact* (London School of Economics, International Studies 1984/III), London 1984.

<sup>19</sup> Heinrich Schwendemann, *Die wirtschaftliche Zusammenarbeit zwischen dem Deutschen Reich und der Sowjetunion von 1939 bis 1941*, Berlin 1993.

While Germany received rubber, food products and fat as well as chrome and manganese via Rail, Japan remained interested in manufactures goods, especially military products. Because all off these were urgently needed for Germany's own warfare – a dilemma that had influenced German commercial relations also to European satellite countries earlier. Trade negotiations after the conclusion of the Tripartite Pact until mid-1941 led to no important results; a Japanese “shopping-list” of military material reached an absurd amount in regard to German possibilities<sup>20</sup> It became especially difficult because the idea of mutual spheres of influence also in economic terms were not easily accepted by the Germans for South East Asia.

After the German aggression against the Soviet Union, transport became increasingly a difficult problem for mutual trade. While at first the idea of an upcoming free sea transport, secured by a joint rule of the sea, bolstered up mutual wishes, in reality only less than half of (only German) blockade runners in 1942 found their way either from or to Germany – and some of them only with half the possible cargo. Negotiations for a trade agreement after December 1941 began early in the following year. The implicit basis was more or less the Great East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere and the Greater German Empire. For the German side it was difficult to accept the new Japanese Empire, because of the raw materials from former French or Dutch colonies now under Japanese control. German attempts on the other side to offer technologic licenses and patents “was not really a fair offer” <sup>21</sup>, but nevertheless became increasingly important.

Ambassador Oshima developed ideas about a German one billion Yen loan to Japan. Especially the Japanese side operated with comparatively fantastic large shopping lists – among them one million tons of steel or 500.000 tons of ship cargo equipped by German crews - , the negotiations dragged into January 1943 when the agreement was finally signed. Ironically of course: it was just the time of the first major visible German defeat when the agreement was reached. Thus it is not astonishing that the real effect of commercial exchange was and remained small. But especially the raw materials from Asia, increasingly shipped by submarines, gained a crucial role for German warfare in the last two years of the war. In summer 1944 Hitler forbade the employment of German surface blockade runner because of the risks. Only submarines remained which because of their size were less fitted for trade. The last German surface blockade runner ship reached France in November 1943, providing the German war industry with rubber for another year. “Attempts for political, maritime and armaments co-operation were successful

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<sup>20</sup> Kudo, Vol.II, p. 371 sq., Martin (fn.1), p. 165.

<sup>21</sup> Martin (fn.1), p. 161.

only when they were hopelessly engaged in a strategic defensive”<sup>22</sup>. It was only in May 1944 that Hitler ordered to provide Japan with German patents or blueprints of all industrial products. This should be effected during the war without payment. After the war of course this was no longer discussed and it remains an open question, how far Japan’s rise to industrial world power was influenced by this.

Cultural cooperation was extended after 1938.<sup>23</sup> Especially Military Attaché and later ambassador Oshima was featured prominently as the incorporation of the new partner in the Far East and he himself did not hesitate to visit such Nazi sites as the newly founded Nazi order castle of Vogelsang in the Eifel region, close to Cologne. Cultural exchange flourished to a certain extent after the cultural agreement of 1936 and there are clear signs of ongoing cultural transfers to Japan also in the new Nazi sense, less the other way round. In 1940 under the directory of Foreign Ministry von Ribbentrop a journal “Berlin-Rom-Tokio” was founded and served as an advertisement for cooperation. The two embassies of Italy and France in the Berlin Tiergarten in a representative style according to German plans were finished during the war in 1942 although most of the other fantastic Nazi plans for a reconstruction of a new capital of Germania instead of Berlin were adjourned. <sup>24</sup>The annual rituals of celebrating pacts and agreements led to friendly press releases and official public speeches which underlined common values and interests. Public ritualisation of politics in the public sphere became an important part when the real value of the alliance declined.

This leads us to the last point of the paper: how far was racial discrimination on the German side instrumental in the lack of success of the Alliance? Only recently the thesis was developed that the earlier discriminative attitude of Hitler and his leadership changed during the war to a real admiration on equal terms.<sup>25</sup> This view is far too simple, if not basically wrong. Of course there was a plurality of assessments, especially Hitler and Ribbentrop differed considerably. Thus a few remarks on the German “Führer’s” attitude may suffice. Universal racism was the basis of his orientation. The German/Aryan race was the best equipped and thus fit for world dominion, if it would keep racial purity. The whatsoever defined Asian race of Japan was basically inferior which on several occasions became the tenor of interior arguments and rhetoric.

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<sup>22</sup> Martin (fn.1), p. 213.

<sup>23</sup> A recent overview: Till Philip Koltermann, *Der Untergang des Dritten Reiches im Spiegel der deutsch-japanischen Kulturbegegnung, 1933-1945*, Wiesbaden 2009

<sup>24</sup> Jost Dülffer, *Die japanische Botschaft im Tiergarten im Rahmen der nationalsozialistischen Umgestaltung der Reichshauptstadt Berlin*. In: *Die deutsch-japanischen Beziehungen in den 30er und 40er Jahren*. Japanisch-Deutsches Zentrum Berlin, Veröffentlichungen, Bd. 17, Berlin 1993, pp. 28-41 (ibid. 1994 also in Japanese).

<sup>25</sup> Till Koltermann (fn.23), esp.pp.129sqq..

Racial purity, best indicated by a fighting spirit, could as well be found in Europe as in other parts of the world. German/Aryan characters, threatened by Jewish penetration via Bolshevism or democracy, could and should cooperate with equally racially threatened Great Britain. Hitler still admired Britain during the war and its racial nucleus which had enabled the United Kingdom to conquer a world empire, including India. Thus especially in Indian-Japanese relations, Hitler oscillated between an admiration of the “white”, Caucasian rule of the Britains and the alliance with “coloured” Japan. His well documented private commentary after the fall of Singapore in February 1942, he rather would have liked to send – the war enemy – Great Britain 20 divisions of troops instead of seeing the Japanese rule, documents this attitude. In October 1942 he mourned, that “these rich territories will be lost for the white race by the guilt of England und all business from our side, even when approved by the Japanese, will be limited for the time being and mean a waste of our forces”.<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, especially after Japan formally joined the war, the heroic aspects of this “race” became paramount: “There always have been two Germanys, and the same is true for Japan: a capitalist, thus anglophile one and as well the Japan of the rising sun, of the Samurai”.<sup>27</sup> This meant, that two heroic peoples were aligned, two “soldier-nations” which were not equaled elsewhere in the world. Hitler brought forward such a view in a conversation with Oshima, also regarding him as a personification of this assessment; the General returned in the same kind. Regardless of his minor influence on Japanese decisions, thus the cult of mutual heroism, of Samurai and Germanic virtues, functioned as a cultural bond. Suffice it here to say, that this became strongest, after both sides suffered their major defeats in battles. Instead of real political, military and economic cooperation in the framework of the alliance, the heroic ideal of fight until death, the perseverance besides all military means remained a common and mutually communicated chain between the axis partners. Racial categories for Nazi Germany remained central also in regard to Japan, but they could be modified by the acceptance of military virtues which could be underlined also by positive racial standards.

To conclude: the alliance between Germany, Italy and Japan never attained the quality of a common strategy during World War II. Especially the egotistic ideologies of supremacy were responsible for that. But even more so, the former have-not powers never attained the military performance to really challenge the world coalition of the Anglo-Saxon powers on one side, the Soviet Union on the other. This could have happened only, if Germany would have refrained from regarding the Soviet Union as its major enemy, but this would have meant to have National

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<sup>26</sup> Martin (fn.1), p. 167

<sup>27</sup> Koltermann (fn.23), pp.35 sq.

Socialism without National Socialists.

Nevertheless, the separate, but in its effect combined challenges of Germany and Japan were mutually enforcing. They meant diversions of the enemy states. In this sense they formed the preconditions for the relative success of the Axis powers in the years up to 1942: Japan could start its southern expansion and thus the Pacific War, only after Germany had defeated the metropolitan basis of France and the Netherlands and weakened Great Britain.<sup>28</sup> Italy without previous German conquests would have had no chances for a “parallel war” which it started in 1940. And Germany profited from Anglo-Saxon commitment in the Far East after 1941, especially because their “Europe first” strategy at the beginning nevertheless meant a stronger attachment to the Pacific War. Finally, the downfall of the Tripartite Powers, each of which was less powerful than their main enemies, was protracted by their parallel and thus to an extent common military challenge of the rest of the world, but this was not the direct effect of their alliance and their ensuing politics as such.

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<sup>28</sup> Gerhard Weinberg, *The World at War*, Cambridge 1994, German version *Eine Welt in Waffen*, Stuttgart 1995, p. 358.