LESSON 10
CASE STUDY: AXIS STRATEGY IN WORLD WAR II

The sleep of reason brings forth monsters.
-- Goya

Introduction

Purpose	The purpose of this lesson is to explain the following through the study of axis strategy in World War II: National decision making Coalition warfare Relationship between strategy and policy Civil-military relations Post-war settlements War termination The Axis and Allied strategy case studies are classic reminders of the need to balance political and military relationships as a prerequisite for winning future wars.
Importance of the Study	Studying the grand strategies of the antagonists will help you to analyze successes and failures in national decision making. You will be able to use the recurring themes to understand the constraints national decision makers face in wartime.
Relationship to Military Operations and Tactics	This lesson is part of the World War II case study series. An in-depth look at the Axis strategy during this period is essential to understanding not only strategy but also the military operations and tactics that eventually turned the war in favor of the Allied forces.
Study Time	This lesson, including the issues for consideration, will require about 4 hours of study.

Educational Objectives

Axis Strategy	Explain axis grand strategy. [JPME Area 3d]
Axis Decision Making	List key components of decision making in axis political and military hierarchies.
Axis Goals & Objectives	Relate axis goals and objectives to its imperial ambitions.
Relationship between Germany and Japan	State the relationship between German and Japanese strategies and policies. [JPME Area 3d]
JPME Areas/ Objectives/Hours (accounting data)	3/d/3.0

Overview of German Strategy

German Strategy

This lesson includes a study of the major German policies, strategies, and strategists of World War II. The focus is on the development of Germany's pre-war national strategy, its military component, and its subsequent wartime implementation, including Hitler's personal role in decision making.

Key Themes

Key themes are force requirements and availability in relation to strategy, the impact of military events on the evolution of German strategy during the war, coalition politics, and the German concept of conflict termination. The following illustrate main themes:

The Battle of Britain/*Operation Sea Lion*, 1940
Operation Barbarossa, 1941
Stalingrad/Kursk, 1942-1943
Africa-Italy, 1942-1943
France, 1944
The Battle of the Bulge, 1944
The Lufwaffe
U-boats

Overview of Japanese Strategy

Components of Strategy

This lesson also includes a study and assessment of Japan's grand strategy in Asia and the Pacific before and following the 7 December 1941 attack on the U.S. Pacific Fleet at Pearl Harbor. This part of the lesson focuses on

Japanese assumptions regarding Japan's military and nonmilitary capabilities relative to those of its enemies

Important Japanese military campaigns in the context of its grand and national military strategy. The lesson readings assess

Japan's grand strategy in Asia before and following the attack on Pearl Harbor
Selected military campaigns
Japan's policy and strategy-making process during the 1930s
Japan's involvement in China
U.S. diplomatic and economic policies regarding Japan that motivated Japan to seize the southern resources area
Japan's geography and resources
Japan's strategic objectives
Japan's decision to attack U.S. possessions and forces at the outset.

Overview of Axis Strategy and Ideology

Contrast with European Allies	The strategies of the Axis powers (Germany, Japan, and Italy) provide a rich, thought-provoking contrast to the strategies of the European allies during War World II. What were the ultimate strategic or geostrategic objectives of the Axis? How did the Allies confront these objectives? Was the conflict with Germany and Japan inevitable?
Axis Ideology	Axis ideology transformed the entire European continent from a position of preeminence (politically, economically, and militarily) at the beginning of the 20th century to a position of weakness following World War II.
Philosophical Roots	The philosophical roots of the Axis strategic ideology--at least on the European continent--can be traced to Marxism and socialism. Both movements include the idea of the "class struggle" and the dichotomy between capitalists and the proletariat as embodied by working classes, petit bourgeoisie, and the middle classes. Marxism became transformed by men interested in power and dominance. Italian Fascism and German Nazism sought to change the European order through revolution. Thus, conflict occurred between the revolutionary left as embodied by the Soviet Union and the reformist right embodied by Germany and Italy during World War II.
Japanese Ideology	Japanese ideology and the rise of militarism differed from the European model. Marx did not influence the course of Japanese history in the 20th century, but remnants of European fascism were clearly evident in Japan. The elements of fascism included autocratic rule by a specific class (the military) and the god-like figure of the emperor. The Japanese case was unique in that it blended eastern ideological and mystical culture with European modernism.

German Strategy

Germany's War Aims	Hitler's national strategy was to use the conquest of Europe to consolidate his power beyond the German border and to become the undisputed leader of the European continent. Hitler's strategy took into consideration the isolationist sentiments that were prevalent in the United States. Hitler saw the U.S. as a nonplayer in global (European) affairs, and hence, irrelevant to the balance of power there.
The Military Role	German strategy included military operations as a key component. Germany planned to achieve its national strategy through a series of military advances beginning in Central Europe (Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland) and then focusing on France in Western Europe before moving against the Soviet Union. The war in the East would permit expansion in pursuit of the German goal of *Lebensraum*, or "living space" for the German people. Germany focused military force requirements on quick, decisive wars (*Blitzkrieg*) and believed that victory against the U.S.S.R. would be easy after the surprisingly easy victory over the French. German intelligence underestimated the Soviet ability to mobilize adequate human and economic resources, which led Germany to launch *Operation Barbarossa* without fully mobilizing itself for total war.
Policy and Strategy Mismatch	Germany's general war aims of hegemony over Europe, expansion to the East, and the subjugation of "inferior" races and cultures were supported by vague operational objectives and defective military policies to achieve key political and military strategies. Broadly speaking, strategy is a vision of **what** needs to be achieved and **policy** is how this vision is going to be achieved. Throughout WWII, there was a clear mismatch between strategy and policy because of the high level of power concentration in the hands of Germany's national command authority, Hitler himself.

Japanese Strategy

Strategic Rationale for Attacking Pearl Harbor

Japan went to war with no concrete plan for achieving U.S. defeat. Japan vaguely hoped that Washington would quit after the costs of the war became too great. From the Japanese perspective, Pearl Harbor was a sound decision because it would eliminate any serious naval threat to Japanese operations in Southeast Asia. Japan calculated that

- It had won against odds before in the Russo-Japanese war in 1905.
- It had a good chance of avoiding defeat as long as Germany continued to be engaged.
- Much American planning and decision making was based on ignorance of and/or stereotypes regarding Japan.

Required Readings

Strategic Level of War Readings

- Weinberg, Gerhard L. *The World at Arms*: *A Global History of World War II*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 48 to 52, 107 to 115, 305 to 308, 341 to 349, 355 to 360, 408 to 412, 464 to 470, 587 to 593, 871 to 875. This reading is located immediately following this lesson, pp. J-3 to J-67. This work is a general history of World War II based on both the existing literature and extensive work in British, American and German archives. It deals with the war from a global perspective while covering all theaters of the war, weapons used, and developments on the home front. The author examines the role of diplomacy and strategy, of intelligence and espionage, and the impact of war on society. The author presents arguments that refute the assertion that Allied victory was certain and that German and Japanese efforts in the last years were therefore futile.

- Ickle, Fred. "The Purpose of Fighting." *Every War Must End*. Columbia: University Press, 1971, pp. 1 to 38. This reading is located immediately following this lesson, pp. J-69 to J-84. This work examines the relationship between military plans for the prosecution of war and the plans for termination of conflict. The author examines cases such as the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor to illustrate the manner in which decisions to undertake military action are made. The author asserts that key factors such as conflict termination are often neglected by military and political leaders alike in the debate over whether to engage in military action. Additionally, the author illustrates the manner by which the purpose for fighting can change over the course of a conflict.

Issues for Consideration

Hitler's War Aims	What were Hitler's war aims? How did he attempt to achieve those ends? Were his ends attainable, given better strategic and operational decision making?
German Miscalculations and Mistakes	What do you see as the principal strategic political and military mistakes and miscalculations made by Hitler and other German military leaders during the period from 1939 to 1942?
Operation Barbarossa	Analyze the origins and execution of *Operation Barbarossa*. What were the ramifications of this operation and what was learned from it?
Japanese War Aims	What were Japan's war aims in World War II and how did it attempt to achieve these ends? Were those ends attainable, given better strategic and operational decision making?
Pearl Harbor	What was the strategic rationale for the Japanese decision to attack Pearl Harbor? Was the attack a good or bad decision?
The Meaning of Victory	Victory is relative and depends on both the stated objectives and the psychological effect of domestic and international opinion. A negotiated settlement can probably be achieved more easily than unconditional surrender, but it may not achieve all of the objectives sought and may not be proportionate to the costs already incurred. The public may thus see the war as a failure. The allies defined victory as the unconditional surrender of the axis powers. What are the benefits of seeking unconditional surrender? Consider the effect this objective had on material requirements and human resources. What effect does the threat of war crimes trials have on determination to prolong the fight?