

*Italy*

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Reprinted from the pages of ULTRA, a quarterly newsletter devoted to *A WORLD AT WAR*, GMT Games' strategic simulation of World War II.

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# ITALIAN ENTRY INTO THE WAR

## When to Take the Plunge

by Greg Bangs

### Introduction

During the early months of World War II, Italy sat on the sidelines and watched as Germany enjoyed many successes. From the annexation of Austria and Czechoslovakia, to the quick victory over Poland, to the early successes in Denmark and the Low Countries, everything seemed to be going Germany's way. Meanwhile, Mussolini was sitting at home, watching with envy. He wanted Italy to have its share of the spoils of war, as well as to gain the same type of fame and notoriety as Hitler. On June 10, 1940, with a French surrender imminent, Italy declared war on France and Britain.

### General Considerations

One of the first important considerations for the Axis in *A WORLD AT WAR* is deciding when Italy should enter the war. Italy starts the game as a neutral major power, but will eventually join the war as Germany's ally. The timing of Italian entry is generally determined by the Axis player, although there could be instances where the Western Allies will declare war on Italy first. Those instances are rare enough that I will disregard that option in this article.

So when should Italy declare war on the Western Allies? To some extent it is a matter of player style, but more importantly it is a question of opportunity. The timing and nature of Italy's opportunities will vary from game to game and can come in many forms, but we can define some of the typical considerations which determine when Italy takes the plunge.

### The Italian Options

Italy's legal options are set out in rule 50.32B:

**50.32 DECLARATIONS OF WAR ON MAJOR POWERS:**

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**B. ITALY:** Italy may not declare war on Britain or France in Fall 1939. Italy may not declare war on the Western Allies once the U.S. is at war with Germany. Italy may not declare war on Russia.

This means the earliest Italy can declare war is Winter 1939, and latest is some time in 1941, before the U.S. enters the war. Delaying entry until 1941 or later also reduces the Italian resistance level:

**56.12 ITALY'S DP TOTAL:** Italy's DP total is calculated according to Appendix II at the end of the Allied player turn. In addition, the following modifiers apply:

**A.** If the Western Allies declared war on Italy, a +2 modifier applies.

**B.** If Italy declared war on the Western Allies in 1941, a -1 modifier applies; if Italy declared war on the Western Allies in 1942, a -2 modifier applies; and so on.

Because of the -1 resistance modifier, waiting until 1941 or later to declare war with Italy is a gambit which should be reserved for an unusual Axis strategy. Quite apart from the -1 resistance modifier, of course, Italian neutrality until 1941 means that nothing happens in the Mediterranean during Britain's most vulnerable period. Leaving this sort of esoteric strategy to one side, that leaves Winter 1939 and the four 1940 turns as the remaining options.

### Effects of Italian Entry

Regardless of when it is made, the Italian declaration of war on the Western Allies will cost Italy 35 BRPs, which is substantial, given Italy's limited resources.

In addition, the Italian declaration of war increases USAT by +2, as a one-time event modifier.

These two effects are the cost of doing business, and the Axis can control only whether they happen in Winter 1939 or sometime in 1940.

The Italians must also bear in mind two key geographical areas that are of vital importance to

them: Egypt and Malta. The balance of forces in these areas must always be considered before any declaration of war with Italy.

First and foremost is the situation on the Libyan-Egyptian border. Ideally Italy would like to push the British back into the Middle East, but at the very least they want to be able to maintain their position along the border, if only to give the Axis chances in Egypt later on. If capturing Lyons or Marseilles allows the British to attack successfully in North Africa and results in the loss of Tobruk, this is a bad trade for Italy.

Malta is also vitally important for Italy to consider. If the British can supply Malta it will undoubtedly turn into a very painful thorn in Italy's side. Not only will the British submarines be able to operate freely from Malta and attack the Italian fleet when it runs supply and units into North Africa, but Malta could be the base for an early Western Allied invasion of Italy.

The Axis player needs to have a plan for each of these two areas before bringing Italy into the war. The Italians will usually want to reinforce the Libyan-Egyptian border with infantry units before the Western Allies can interfere with NRs to North Africa, and may well want to have Italian air units in Sicily to keep an eye on Malta. Once Italy is in the war, Sicily may host a portion of the Luftwaffe, and German ground units may be sent to the desert.

A third consideration is Ethiopia, which the Italians may reinforce before going to war by sending one ground unit through the Suez canal each turn. The Italians have to weigh the costs and benefits of committing additional ground units to Ethiopia in the context of the planned Axis grand strategy.

Beyond these immediate considerations, there are other, more turn-specific, factors to be taken into account.



## Winter 1939

An Italian declaration of war in Winter 1939 has

plusses and minuses, which have to be carefully considered by the Axis.

One of the biggest advantages to a Winter 1939 declaration of war is that the 35 BRP cost of the Italian declaration of war is paid in 1939, rather than 1940. Italy starts with 40 BRPs, and adds another 10 BRPs for its Fall 1939 mobilization. Of these 50 BRPs, in Fall 1939 Italy will spend 8 BRPs to build infantry and 3 BRPs to build its submarine, leaving it with 39 BRPs. Since Italy's shipyards are at capacity in Winter 1939, it can't build anything else, so it will have 39 BRPs at the end of the year. With all major powers limited to a 10% growth rate in the 1940 YSS, this means Italy's base will grow by only 3 BRPs.

It's much more efficient for Italy to use its 1939 BRPs to declare war, so that it can use all its 1940 BRPs for offensives and unit construction. This makes it unlikely that Italy will need BRP grants from Germany to get through the year. And if Italy manages to have some BRPs left at the end of 1940, it will be able to use its full 20% growth rate in the 1941 YSS to increase its BRP base.

A second, lesser advantage is that Italian participation in the war might allow Germany to attack the French along the Franco-Italian border and take one or more hexes in time for the 1940 YSS. From the French Diplomatic Table:

-1 Axis control and full supply of two or more hexes in European France

The missing French DP can be important, because the Western Allies may end up with six, rather than seven, DPs, which means the maximum number of DPs they could place in a diplomatic target in 1940 would be two, rather than three. But the Axis can only hope to achieve this if the French defend poorly in 1939. And since exploitation is prohibited on the western front during Winter 1939, it's too much to hope that anything more significant can be achieved unless the French put their army in some other country.

The Axis must balance the guaranteed 1940 BRP benefits for Italy and the possible capture of two French hexes against some significant drawbacks to a Winter 1939 Italian declaration of war.

The first drawback is that Anglo-French cooperation restrictions will be lifted a turn early. There are four events which start the clock running on improved Anglo-French cooperation:

**53.21 COOPERATION RESTRICTIONS TEMPORARY:** Friction between Britain and France early in the war limits cooperation between

the two powers as set out below. Some or all of the Anglo-French cooperation restrictions can be lifted by a successful Anglo-French cooperation research result. Regardless of the current Anglo-French cooperation level from research, all Anglo-French cooperation restrictions are lifted at the earliest of the following three times:

A. The start of the second Allied player turn following any one of:

- An Italian declaration of war against Britain or France;
- The first Axis full offensive on the western front; or
- The first German declaration of war against a minor country on the western front.
- A German declaration of war on Russia.

An Italian declaration of war in Winter 1939 results in the lifting of Anglo-French cooperation restrictions at the start of the Allied Spring 1940 player turn. Usually an early Italian declaration of war will be coupled with a Winter 1939 German offensive in the west, since both are triggering events for ending Anglo-French cooperation restrictions. Because Germany will be attacking with smaller forces in Winter 1939 than if it waits until Spring 1940, the Axis won't conquer France in two turns unless the Western Allies defend poorly. Therefore Anglo-French cooperation restrictions will be lifted when the French campaign is reaching a critical stage.

At the very least, this should result in a pro-Allied French surrender level and higher German losses, and at the worst France might survive until Fall 1940. A Fall 1940 French surrender is not a game-breaker for the Axis, but it is still a pro-Allied result, although the Axis may get sufficient compensation in other areas.

The second potential drawback is that an Italian declaration of war triggers a +2 increase in USAT, resulting in the following USAT profile:

		1939		1940	
		Fall	Win	Spr	Sum
Automatic	+1	+1	+1	+1	+1
DPs and covert operations	+/-1	0	0	0	0
<b>Allied major powers at war<sup>1</sup></b>	+	+1	+1	+1	+1
Axis offensive operations <sup>3</sup>	+	+1	+1	+1	+1
Axis declarations of war <sup>4</sup>	+		+4	+1	
Allied aggression <sup>9</sup>	-	-2			
Current turn tension change		+1	+7	+4	+3
Actual tension level		1	8	12	15
American mobilizations (12)				M1	

In Fall 1939, USAT will rise +1 for the turn, +1 for two major powers at war with Germany (France and Britain) and +1 for the German offensive in Poland. This will be offset by -1 for Russia entering eastern Poland and -1 for a Russian declaration of war against the Baltic States. USAT will therefore be at +1 at the end of the Fall 1939 game turn.

If Italy declare wars in the Winter 1939 turn, it can be assumed that this will be in conjunction with a German attack in the west. Germany will probably declare war on The Netherlands and Belgium/Luxembourg, and will conduct a full offensive on the western front. So in Winter 1939 USAT will rise +1 for the turn, +1 for two major powers at war, +2 for the German declarations of war against neutral minor powers, +2 for the Italian declaration against the Western Allies and +1 for the German offensive. USAT will increase by +7 in Winter 1939, to a total of +8.

This opens the door for a possible U.S. mobilization in Winter 1939 if the random tension die roll is a "6". If the Western Allies are psychic and use a covert operation to modify USAT by +1, the U.S. will mobilize on a random tension die roll of "5" as well. While the odds are against a Winter 1939 U.S. mobilization, this is a significant pro-Allied result and has to be kept in mind.

A third drawback is that in Winter 1939 Italy will be pretty much on its own in Africa. Sea supply to Tripoli may well fail, so losses from a Western Allied attrition in North Africa must be taken by Italian units in Libya, which will weaken Italy's position.

All in all, an Italian declaration of war on the Western Allies in Winter 1939 is good for Italy, but because it is linked to a German attack on the west in Winter 1939, it is not so good for the Axis as a whole. This issue is analyzed elsewhere.



## Spring 1940

In Spring 1940 France is not strong enough to defend itself adequately in both the north and the

south, even with significant British aid. Since the Western Allies must block the northern route to Paris to avoid a Spring 1940, the Axis can expect to make gains in southern France in Spring 1940.

This possibility is significant because Marseilles and Lyons are important modifiers for the French Surrender Level, which impacts the level of Free French forces the British will gain, the level of Vichy French forces, the status of the French colonies and the basic diplomatic modifier for Vichy France.

If the Axis don't take out the southern flank of the French defenses, at least partially, it will be difficult for them to gain a pro-Axis French Surrender Level. So if either of the southern French objectives can be taken relatively easily it may be worthwhile to declare war with Italy in Spring 1940 and take them while you can, provided the price the Italians pay in North Africa is not too steep. A nice side effect of an Axis capture of Marseilles or Lyons is that the French construction limit will be reduced by three BRPs for each objective. This may seem minor, but the French construction limit is only 20, so this can make a difference.

Of course there's always the chance that the Western Allies will completely disregard the possibility of an attack into southern France in Spring 1940, in which case the Axis might capture Paris in Summer 1940 from the south.

There are fewer drawbacks to Italy declaring war in Spring 1940, as opposed to a turn earlier. The +2 increase in USAT guarantees an American mobilization in Spring 1940, but this is likely to happen anyway, especially if Germany declares war on Denmark and Norway (+1 USAT) in Spring 1940, as it normally would. And since Italy will have been able to reinforce North Africa and, if desired, Ethiopia in Fall and Winter 1939, its position in the Mediterranean should be stronger than in Winter 1939. Neither of these consequences to a Winter 1939 declaration of war can be considered "drawbacks".

The main problem Italy will have is that its economic situation in 1940 will be fragile, because it will start 1940 with 73 BRPs, and will spend 35 BRPs on a declaration of war and 6 BRPs on shipbuilding, to launch two of its BB4s. This leaves Italy with 32 BRPs. In Spring 1940 Italy may also conduct offensive operations in France, probably using five AAF and a 2-5 armor unit, for an expenditure of 7 BRPs. That drops Italy to 25 BRPs. On top of that, if Italy mobilized one 2-5 armor unit (available in

Spring 1941) and 4 BRPs of either infantry (available in Spring 1940) or air (available in Spring 1940), it will want to build the latter sometime in 1940, for another 4 BRPs).

This leaves Italy with 21 BRPs for the remaining three turns of 1940. Italy will definitely spend 6 BRPs on shipbuilding in Summer 1940, to advance its other two BB4s, and would like to build DDs in Fall and Winter 1940, perhaps conduct additional offensive operations and, if necessary, replace losses.

The only way Italy will be able to actively participate in the war during the remainder of 1940 is with funding from German BRP grants. Every BRP granted to Italy in 1940 will mean one less German unit built in preparation for Germany's 1941 campaign against Russia, so the Axis have to weight the costs and benefits of German BRP grants carefully.

Again, these economic realities are not so much a drawback to a Spring 1940 Italian declaration of war as they are a fact of life. The numbers are not much different if Italy waits until Summer or Fall 1940 to enter the war. The Spring and Summer 1940 Italian naval builds are pretty much mandatory, and the 35 BRP cost of the declaration of war itself is inevitable.

The final consideration is that Italy will be unlikely to supply North Africa in Spring 1940 if it enters the war, as the last thing it wants to do is fight the French Navy.



## Summer 1940

Historically Italy entered the war in Summer 1940, and there's a reasonable argument to be made that this is a good time to do so in A WORLD AT WAR as well.

Depending on how the Western Allies react to the German attack through northern France, an Italian declaration of war may facilitate the Axis capture of

Lyons or Marseilles in Summer 1940. The participation of Italian AAF in the French campaign may also help shift the French Surrender Level in favor of the Axis.

But it is likely that by this point the Germans will need Italian help in France about as much as they did historically. Italian entry into the war will have more effect in the Mediterranean. Specifically, Italy's main focus will be Malta.

If the British haven't defended Malta adequately, the Italians may be able to take it in the turn in which they declare war. But even a single replacement in Malta will have a defense of five, and a 3:1 attack will require four Italian ground factors (carried by eight Italian DDs), five AAF flying ground support and six factors of shore bombardment (from 18 Italian fleet factors). The Italians have the forces for the job, but only barely, and any Western Allied interference will likely drop the attack to a more risky 2:1. Remember, the Italian CTL of one gives them only one chance to take Malta.

It is unlikely the British will be that cooperative, of course. Malta will contain either two replacements or even a 3-4 infantry factor. The French navy will also be ready to intercept an Italian invasion, so Plan A is largely a fantasy.

Plan B, an Italian siege of Malta, is an entirely different matter. By the time the Western Allies have to trace sea supply to Malta, the French fleet will be unable to assist:

**75.41 ADDITIONAL RESTRICTIONS:** The following additional restrictions apply while Paris is occupied by Axis ground units. These additional restrictions do not apply if Paris is merely Axis-controlled rather than occupied (i.e., if an Axis unit moved through Paris and did not remain in it). While Paris is occupied by Axis ground units:

...

**75.43 NAVAL UNITS:** French naval units may only change base. French naval units may not escort sea supply, conduct naval missions, intercept enemy naval activities, NR or provide sea escort.

This means the British will be on their own, against six Italian battleships, CA12, DD9 and two Italian submarines, as well as the Italian army and naval air. The Italians are happy to fight this battle, as the British will also incur a -1 modifier in fleet combat for protecting sea supply. Usually the British will pass on supplying Malta in Summer 1940.

This doesn't solve Italy's problem of tracing sea supply to North Africa, but it's a start:

**32.248** Submarines may operate out of an isolated port containing a fortification or fortress, but the Naval Nationality DRM of the submarines is reduced by one for each turn the port has failed to receive full supply, to a minimum of zero.

If Malta is isolated in Summer 1940, it will incur a -1 DM during the Allied Summer 1940 player turn and submarines will be able to operate out of Malta during the Axis Fall 1940 player turn with a -1 modifier on its Nationality DRM. A second turn of isolation in Fall 1940 will trigger a -2 DM for Malta during the Axis Winter 1940 player turn, and the British submarines will have a -2 modifier on its Nationality DRM, and so on with each consecutive turn of siege, until the other DMs of the hex are reduced and the submarines operate with minimum effectiveness.

British submarines are a major headache for the Italians if they want to trace supply to North Africa, and the sooner Malta is neutralized, the better. Beginning the siege of Malta in Summer 1940 may well save the Italians several light ship factors later on, as well as opening up the possibility of invading Malta in Winter 1940, which would solve the Malta problem giving Italy an additional DP in the 1941 YSS.



## Fall 1940

It's very unusual for Italy to wait until Fall 1940 to enter the war. Certainly this allows the Italians to carefully arrange their forces in the Mediterranean without interference and defers the +2 USAT for several turns, but at a high cost. Other than being able to ship forces to North Africa without the risk of Western Allied naval interception, there are few advantages to waiting past Summer 1940, as with a little planning the Italians can get whatever forces they wish across to Libya by Summer 1940.

At this point, the topic of when Italy might declare war morphs into a broader discussion of how the Axis

can effectively fight in the Mediterranean. Germany will want to concentrate on Britain or Russia, but a small force in Sicily or North Africa may pay big dividends. The challenge for the Germans is to assign units to the Mediterranean front which act as a force multiplier, making the Italian army, air force and navy more effective than they would be on their own. The problem facing the Axis, of course, is that the Germans can't intervene in the Mediterranean until Italy declares war, and Italy would like to defer declaring war until the Germans intervene.

Germany can indirectly help Italy in the Mediterranean by threatening a Fall 1940 invasion of Britain, which forces the British to keep ground and air units in Britain. This may allow the Italians possibilities in both Egypt and Malta. But it's difficult for the Italians to gain a concrete advantage without some German aid, and if Italy waits until Fall 1940 to declare war on the Western Allies, this aid won't arrive until Winter 1940.



## Winter 1940

It's difficult to see any advantage in waiting until Winter 1940 to declare war. If the Italians want to remain passive and minimize the possibility of losses in the Mediterranean, they may as well declare war earlier and just sit. At least the British will have to worry about the possibility of Axis activity in the Mediterranean.

The Axis player should keep in mind that whatever problems the Axis might have in 1940, the British have worse problems. The Axis are unlikely to have as great a superiority in the Mediterranean in 1941 as they will in 1940, unless the Germans forego attacking Russia.

## Conclusion

While historians may question the wisdom of

Italy's declaration of war, this is hindsight from which A WORLD AT WAR players may not benefit. In the game, the question is not whether Italy will enter the war on the Axis side, but only when it will do so.

In one sense, however, Axis players can benefit from the negative example provided by Mussolini in the real war. The Italian declaration of war should not be a spontaneous, impulsive act, and the Axis should know better than assuming the war is as good as won just because France falls. In mid-1940, the real war is just beginning.

Italy's declaration of war should be a carefully considered decision which forms parts of a largely Axis strategy, whatever it might be. This article has looked at the Italian declaration of war mainly from the Italian point of view, but the Axis cannot afford to be this provincial if they hope to win the game.

The most obvious example of this is the Winter 1939 Italian declaration of war, which from one point of view is the most advantageous for Italy. By using otherwise almost worthless 1939 BRPs to pay for the declaration of war, Italy will considerably strengthen its economic position in 1940. The economic advantages to a Winter 1939 declaration of war are real, and for some players they're enough.

But the drawbacks are real as well, because of the effect on the Anglo-French cooperation restrictions. From the design point of view, the conclusion is that the pros and cons of a Winter 1939 declaration of war are fairly balanced, because the benefits to Italy and the costs to Germany of a Winter 1939 attack on the west are comparable. For that reason, many players don't bring Italy into the war in Winter 1939, preferring the more historical Spring 1940 attack in the west.

This article doesn't pretend to resolve these and other difficult questions, but the essential point has been made that the timing of the Italian declaration of war is one of a number of strategic decisions which affect the European Axis as a whole, and has to be analyzed in that light. If your Italy acts in isolation, its war will likely turn out no better than Mussolini's.

### The Italian Bid for Glory

"On this tenth day of June 1940, the hand that held the dagger has struck it into the back of its neighbor."

Franklin Delano Roosevelt. speaking at the University of Virginia, June 10, 1940