

**INTERWAR EUROPE
(1919-1939):
MUSSOLINI AND HITLER:
PACT OF STEEL 1939**



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Description

Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources on the subject, including various types of visual media in addition to electronic and written sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the major points of the “Pact of Steel” between Germany and Italy in 1939, how the once rocky relationship between Fascist Italy and NAZI Germany developed between 1935 and 1939, and how the signing of the agreement was one of the major steps that led to the opening of the Second World War.

Subjects

European History
World History

Grade Level

11-12

Duration

90 minutes

Tour Links

- Rome, Italy
- Berlin, Germany

Essential Questions

- What was the “Pact of Steel”?
- Why was it signed in 1939?
- What were the provisions of the pact?
- Why was the pact an important step towards the opening of the Second World War?

Academic Summary

Italo-German Alliance, 22 May 1939

Commonly Referred to as the “Pact of Steel”

The German Reich Chancellor and His Majesty the King of Italy and Albania, Emperor of Ethiopia, consider that the time has come to confirm through a solemn pact the close relation of friendship and affinity which exists between National Socialist Germany and Fascist Italy.

... Firmly bound together through the inner unity of their ideologies and the comprehensive solidarity of their interests, the German and the Italian people are determined also in future to stand side by side and to strive with united effort for the securing of their Lebensraum [living space] and the maintenance of peace. In this way, prescribed for them by history, Germany and Italy wish, in a world of unrest and disintegration, to carry out the assignment of making safe the foundations of European culture. ... have agreed upon the following terms:

ARTICLE I.

The Contracting Parties will remain in permanent contact with each other, in order to come to an understanding of all common interests or the European situation as a whole.

ARTICLE II.

In the event that the common interests of the Contracting Parties be jeopardized through international happenings of any kind, they will immediately enter into consultation regarding the necessary measures to preserve these interests. Should the security or other vital interests of one of the Contracting Parties be threatened from outside, the other Contracting Party will afford the threatened Party its full political and diplomatic support in order to remove this threat.

ARTICLE III.

If it should happen, against the wishes and hopes of the Contracting Parties, that one of them becomes involved in military complications with another Power or other Powers, the other Contracting Party will immediately step to its side as an ally and will support it with all its military might on land, at sea, and in the air.

ARTICLE IV.

In order to ensure, in any given case, the rapid implementation of the alliance obligations of Article III, the Governments of the two Contracting Parties will further intensify their cooperation in the military sphere and the sphere of war economy. Similarly the two Governments will keep each other regularly informed of other measures necessary for the practical implementation of this pact. The two Governments will create standing commissions, under the direction of the Foreign Ministers, for the purposes indicated in paragraphs 1 and 2.

ARTICLE V.

The Contracting Parties already at this point bind themselves, in the event of a jointly waged war, to conclude any armistice or peace only in full agreement with each other.

ARTICLE VI.

The two Contracting Parties are aware of the importance of their joint relations to the Powers which are friendly to them. They are determined to maintain these relations in future and to promote the adequate

development of the common interests which bind them to these Powers.

ARTICLE VII.

This pact comes into force immediately upon its signing. The two Contracting Parties are agreed upon fixing the first period of its validity at ten years. In good time before the elapse of this period they will come to an agreement regarding the extension of the validity of the pact.

SECRET SUPPLEMENTARY PROTOCOL (not published)

On signing the friendship and alliance pact, agreement has been established by both parties on the following points: 1. The two Foreign Ministers will as quickly as possible come to an agreement on the organization, the seat, and the methods of work on the pact of the commissions on military questions and questions of war economy as stipulated in Article IV of the pact. 2. For the execution of Article IV, par. 2, the two Foreign Ministers will as quickly as possible arrange the necessary measures, guaranteeing a constant cooperation, conforming to the spirit and aims of the pact, in matters of the press, the news service and the propaganda. For this purpose in particular, each of the two Foreign Ministers will assign to the embassy of his country in the respective capital one or several especially well-experienced specialists, for constant discussion in direct close cooperation with the resp. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the suitable steps to be taken in matters of the press, the news service and the propaganda for the promotion of the policy of the Axis, and as a countermeasure against the policy of the enemy powers.

Berlin 22 May 1939 in the XVII year of the Fascist Era.

On 22 May 1939, at the newly completed and gleaming Reich Chancellery in Berlin, foreign ministers from the German Reich and the Kingdom of Italy signed a formal military alliance, binding the two central European Axis powers together and helping set the stage for what would become the Second World War. For Adolph Hitler, Chancellor of the German Reich, and Benito Mussolini, Prime Minister and Duce of Italy, the alliance formalized a relationship that had been growing over the previous few years.

When Hitler and the Nazis had come to power in 1933, Mussolini and the Italian government didn't think much of the "new upstart" north of the Alps. Although the Duce's Fascism and Hitler's National Socialism shared much in common in terms of philosophical and economic roots, there were still vast differences between the two on many issues. Italian Fascism looked back to Rome's glorious past for inspiration and the Duce saw himself as a new Caesar in his quest to recreate the old Roman Empire. Much of Mussolini's program focused on the goal of uniting Italians across regional and social lines in this common quest. In 1929, Mussolini had forged a peace with the Roman Catholic Church specifically to further this program. Under the fascists in Italy, militarism and totalitarianism ruled, but there was no room in the Duce's program for racial laws, especially those hinting of anti-Semitism. German National Socialism had no such ancient lineage. It looked instead to a modern age where racially pure Germans (however that might be defined) would dominate Europe. In order to achieve this goal, as soon as the Nazis came to power in 1933 they quickly implemented a program specifically dedicated to creating a racially pure society north of the Alps. At first, Mussolini thought little of Hitler and his Nazi plans, and the Duce dismissed his younger rival on numerous occasions in 1933 and 1934 (even to the point of refusing Hitler's request for an autographed photo of the Duce). In fact, when Hitler started making noise about going after Austria in 1934, Mussolini even took the extraordinary step of increasing Italian troops on the Austrian

border as a warning to Hitler not to push the subject. Geopolitical events in the mid-1930s, however, would bring the two closer together.

In October 1935, as his first step towards recreating an empire centered in Rome, Mussolini ordered Italian troops to invade Ethiopia. France and England, at that time desperately trying to placate Italy in anticipation of expected German moves, stood by and did nothing. Within months the African nation had been “pacified.” Haile Selassie, Ethiopia’s leader, gave a stirring speech to the League of Nations in which he denounced Italy’s actions and criticized the world for doing nothing to support Ethiopia (also a member of the League). During the Ethiopian crisis, Hitler took advantage of Europe’s preoccupation with Africa and had marched German troops into the Rhineland (a demilitarized zone along the Rhine River) in violation of the Versailles Treaty. Hitler then offered Mussolini congratulations on his conquest in Africa. The Duce reciprocated. The beginning of an understanding was born.

Over the next couple of years, as Hitler and Mussolini looked to expand their “living space” in Europe, the two leaders began to forge closer and closer ties. Italian and German military units, operating under separate commanders, worked together in supporting General Franco’s side in the Spanish Civil War. German moves towards Austria and Czechoslovakia were supported by the Duce’s government, and Italy’s moves in Libya and Albania were supported by Berlin. In November 1938, the Italian Kingdom even passed a series of racial laws (they were unpopular with the Italian people and were never harshly enforced). By the spring of 1939, with Hitler’s next moves against Eastern Europe likely to finally bring a French and British response, the two Central European powers finally sat down to discuss a formal military alliance. The “Pact of Steel” (as it was called by Mussolini) was a result of those discussions. It formally obligated each nation to support the other in the event of military hostilities with a third country. Both military command staffs were to work together to plan joint exercises. Both foreign ministers would coordinate control of the press and propaganda. In essence, the road to war was paved with the signing of the agreement. Italian troops would stay neutral in Poland that fall and would fight with the Germans in France the following spring. In the end, Italy was always the junior partner in the alliance. By 1939, the German war machine was far superior to that of Italy’s, but Hitler was also able to ensure that the Italians would not ally themselves with France and Britain as they had in 1915.

Through an examination of both primary and secondary sources on the subject, including various types of visual media in addition to electronic and written sources, students in this lesson will identify, understand and be able to explain the major points of the “Pact of Steel” between Germany and Italy in 1939, how the once rocky relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany developed between 1935 and 1939, and how the signing of the agreement was one of the major steps that led to the opening of the Second World War.

Objectives

1. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain the major points of the “Pact of Steel” signed between Germany and Italy in 1939.
2. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the once rocky relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany developed between 1935 and 1939.
3. Students will identify, understand and be able to explain how the signing of the agreement was one of the major steps that led to the opening of the Second World War.

Procedures

I. Anticipatory Set

- Writing / Question: Could Hitler's moves in Europe have been stopped before 1939? (5 min)
- Handouts – Copies of documents and readings from the websites listed. (5 min)

II. Body of Lesson

- Lecture – Pact of Steel 1939 (20 min)
- Video – Pact of Steel (10 min)
- Independent Activity – Students read the articles and sources on the Pact of Steel signed between Germany and Italy, taking notes as appropriate. (20 min)

- Suggestion: Have the students read some of these articles and sources before class.
- Group Activity – Socratic Seminar: Pact of Steel and the Road to WWII. (15 min)

III. Closure

- Assessment / DBQ – Essay: Explain in detail the major points of the “Pact of Steel” between Germany and Italy in 1939, how the once rocky relationship between Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany developed between 1935 and 1939, and how the signing of the agreement was one of the major steps that led to the opening of the Second World War.

Extension

On tour: Fascist Symbols in Rome

While on tour, you will visit the Piazza Venezia in Rome, where students will have the opportunity to see for themselves the balcony from where Mussolini often rallied crowds with his fiery oratory. Although many of the “fascist” symbols from that era were purposely taken down after World War II, it is still possible to see a few examples in areas around the Italian capital. Look carefully.

Web Links

Lesson Plan Websites

- http://astro.temple.edu/~rimmerma/Italo_German_alliance_1939.htm
Italo-German Alliance, 22 May 1939 (primary source) – from Richard, Immerman, Director of the Center for the Study of Force and Diplomacy, Temple University
- www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_image.cfm?image_id=1998
The Pact of Steel (website) – from the German Historical Institute
- www.historylearningsite.co.uk/italy_and_germany_1936_to_1940.htm
Italy and Germany 1936-1940 (website)
- <http://alphahistory.com/nazigermany/hitler-and-mussolini/>
Hitler and Mussolini (website)
- www.teachingchannel.org/videos/choosing-primary-source-documents?fd=1
Reading Like a Historian: Primary Source Documents (video). Great 2-minute video on how to incorporate primary sources into the Common Core and history classes. From Shilpa Duvoor of Summit Preparatory Charter High School in Redwood City, CA. Highly recommended for teachers.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=2zly0Ai2-sA
Pact of Steel (video) – primary source video of the signing of the pact
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Vf_gUvPVUU
Mussolini's Speech (English Subtitles) declaration of war on Great Britain and France, 10 Jun 1940 (video) – primary source from with English subtitles.
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Ofa9nhPjN8
Benito Mussolini: Hero or Villain (video) – from the Biography Channel. This 45-minute video is probably too long for most in-class showings, but it is well worth it. Highly recommended for AP / Advanced students.

Background Information

- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pact_of_Steel
Pact of Steel – Wikipedia article
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rome-Berlin_Axis
Axis Powers – Wikipedia article

Other Relevant Passports Lesson Plans

- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/mussolini-and-the-fascists
Mussolini and the Fascists 1922-1943
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/solving-the-roman-question-lateran-accords-of-1929
Solving the Roman Question: Mussolini, Pius and the Lateran Accords 1929
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/italy/interwar-europe-rome-berlin-pact-of-steel-1939
Interwar Europe (1919-1939) – Pact of Steel: Rome-Berlin Axis
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/austria/interwar-europe-anschluss-of-1938
Interwar Europe (1919-1939) – Austro-German Anschluss
- www.passports.com/lesson_plans/czech/munich-accords-of-1938
Interwar Europe (1919-1939) – Munich Accords of 1938

Key Terms

- Adolf Hitler
- Axis powers
- Benito Mussolini
- Pact of Steel 1939

