Framed in Death: The Historical Memory of Galeazzo Ciano

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The Historical Memory of Galeazzo Ciano

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History Senior Thesis
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Seldom in my life have I been near men of such contrasting qualities, joined in just one person: a very lively, quick and intuitive intelligence, and a grievous and idle intellectual laziness; a memory surprising in particulars, minutiae and frivolity and a not-less-surprising failure of memory of the essential, of ideas, of sentiments; a varied, prompt and curious culture and a total ignorance of the most current problems of social life; a very refined elegance of style, of relations and of behavior and a vulgar carelessness of manners and accents...capricious in his admirations and in his affections, in his political tendencies and in his intellectual gestures. There was, in him, in a disturbing coexistence, something repulsive and something attractive. That ensured him very convinced detractors and admirers.¹

¹ Ray Moseley, Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano (New York: Yale University Press, 1999), 240-241. Taken from the diary of Giueseppe Bottai, a member of the Nationalist fascist party. This entry was written in reaction to Galeazzo Ciano’s death.
Introduction

Count Galeazzo Ciano di Cortellazzo

It was not my intention, while I was writing these hasty notes, to release them to the press just as they are […] But perhaps in this skeleton form and in the absolute lack of the superfluous are to be found the real merit of these diaries. Events are photographed without retouching, and the impressions reported are the first, the most genuine […] I was accustomed to jot down the salient happenings day by day, hour by hour, and perhaps at times repetitions or contradictions can be found, in the same way in which, very often, life repeats and contradicts itself.²

Galeazzo Ciano penned his final diary entry while sitting in cell 27 of Verona’s Scalzi Prison on December 23, 1943, just weeks before his execution. The diary, cradled in Ciano’s hands, bristled with emotional prose of his experiences throughout the turbulent and unpredictable years prior to and during World War Two, namely from 1937 to 1943. Revealed in the pages are the confessions of a man who was a central figure in the Italian fascist regime, but who was plagued by his constant doubts of the regime’s leader, Benito Mussolini.

Ciano was a prominent member of Mussolini’s cabinet, an ardent fascist and Mussolini’s son-in-law. He was known throughout Italy, and is still remembered today, for his sexual escapades, financial dishonesty and his unethical warmongering in Albania and Greece. He was a pompous and vain individual who reveled in a life brimming with wealth, elegance and prestige; but beneath this distasteful exterior, Ciano was a sensitive individual tormented by his undying love and devotion to his regime and its leader. Ciano

thoroughly detested the men of the Third Reich and yearned to free Italy from her partnership with Germany, yet he made no active move to counteract Mussolini’s decision to align with Germany and enter the war at Hitler’s side in June 1940. When Italy’s political and military unpreparedness became strikingly evident and all hopes for an Italian victory were obliterated, Ciano’s disillusionment with Germany increased.

The maturation of Ciano’s contempt created a major political divergence between him and Mussolini, a dictator handicapped by his desire to be a part of Hitler’s militaristic glory. The relationship between the Duce and his son-in-law was characterized by discontent and mistrust from the birth of the Axis alliance.

**The Italian Foreign Minister**

On April 24, 1930 Ciano married Edda Mussolini, Benito’s favorite daughter. Soon after he was transferred to China and became the Consul General and then the Chargé d’ Affaires. When the Second Italo-Abyssinian War began in October 1935, Ciano assumed an active role as a pilot. The Ethiopian War provided Ciano with an opportunity to assert his capability as an adroit solider and natural-born leader. Although his instructors referred to him as a “mediocre pilot,” Ciano “started the war by dropping the first bombs over Aduwa. His plane was the first to be hit by an enemy bullet. He was the first Italian flier to land in Addis Ababa at the war’s end. For all this Galeazzo was promoted to the rank of major and was awarded two silver medals. Il Duce began to be convinced he had the makings of a leader.”

well with Mussolini, who believed that war set “the seal of nobility on those peoples who have the courage to face it.” On June 10, 1936, Galeazzo officially became the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs at thirty-three years of age, the youngest to do so in European history.

Opinions vary on the apparent ease of Ciano’s swift political ascent. Some argued that it was due to Galeazzo’s father, Costanzo Ciano, with whom Mussolini was incredibly close, that paved the way for Galeazzo’s success. Others maintained that it was Ciano’s marriage to Edda that largely aided his rise to political office. All these ideas were strongly refuted by Edda:

I have often read in newspaper articles and books dealing with my father or my husband that Galeazzo Ciano had been appointed Foreign Minister only because he was Mussolini’s son-in-law. That is not only false, but it shows how little they knew my father. The Mussolini’s have always refused to indulge in nepotism.

Edda’s statement alludes to Mussolini’s fondness of Ciano in the early years of the Foreign Minister’s political career. There was a strong paternal bond that developed between the Duce and his son-in-law.

Throughout his time in office, Ciano maintained an undying devotion to Mussolini and was often deeply moved by the Duce’s small expressions of gratitude. In his diary Ciano recounts an incident on July 4, 1938 when he was moved to tears by one of Mussolini’s speeches: “When I heard his voice,” Ciano admits, “I started to cry like a

5. Costanzo was a highly decorated World War I veteran who was named senior commander at the wars end and was dubbed Count of Cortellazzo and Buccari by King Victor Emmanuel III. He became a devoted fascist and partook in the March on Rome in October 1922. From 1934 and nearly up until his death in 1939 he was president of the Italian Chamber of Deputies.
small child.” Episodes such as this, as recorded by Ciano, shed light on the complexity of his relationship with Mussolini. Ciano’s constant oscillations between his support for and aversion to Mussolini’s wartime policies, primarily from 1938 to 1940, make it challenging to pinpoint his specific mindset and feelings towards the Duce and the war in general. Ciano did not disapprove of the partnership for ethical reasons, but because it put Italy in a subordinate position and threatened her pursuit of military success and Mediterranean domination.

Edda claimed that Ciano “had never liked Germany or the Germans” but it was not for political reasons but rather he had an innate aversion to the German culture—“he was a true Latin and therefore not attracted to their mentality.” His dislike only worsened with Hitler’s continuous betrayal of Mussolini. Ciano did not have the same contempt for the Allies, however, and he was drawn to their way of life and way of being. “[H]e enjoyed going to London and he much admired the English for their self-possession, their humor, and their elegance.” Mussolini, on the other hand, greatly admired Germany. Not particularly the Third Reich, according to Edda, but the country’s great intellectual and militaristic figures—men like Kant, Wagner, Nietzsche, Goethe, Luther, Marx, Frederick II, and Bismarck. It was a quality that made the two men characteristically different and it greatly influenced their political mentality.

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8. Edda, My Truth, 152.
Mussolini obdurately maintained that Italy and Germany shared a common destiny united by the wrongdoings each suffered at the end of World War One.\textsuperscript{11} The Duce hoped to establish an Axis alliance founded on loyalty; but in reality its true foundation was mired in competition and immense distrust. Mussolini’s own pride, perhaps driven not only by his innate aggressive nature but also by his fervent patriotism, clouded his perception of Italy’s desire to fight alongside Germany. Ciano, on the other hand, along with many leading Italian diplomats recognized the dangers in uniting with Hitler; however, not one of them spoke against the Italo-German alliance until 1943 when Italy was already up to her knees in war. Ciano used his diary as an outlet for his bouts of frustration with Mussolini and Hitler, and to express his growing concern of and hatred for Nazi Germany. Hitler’s dismissal of the 1938 Munich Pact initiated the beginning of Ciano’s disdain for the Third Reich; however he kept silent and continued to do so when the Pact of Steel was signed in May 1939, and later in August 1939 when Hitler broke the pact by entering what are today the Czech and Slovak Republics. War ensued weeks after in September 1939 yet Mussolini refused to break the alliance and Ciano did not actively oppose the Duce or leave office.

Ciano’s decision to take part in the Grand Council meeting on July 24, 1943, which reinstated military power from Mussolini to the Monarchy, was a long time in the making. It was this event that led to Ciano’s downfall: he was labeled a traitor and killed. In the photograph taken right before his death, Ciano’s head was turned to face his executioners. It was a moment of defiance captured by chance- it appeared that Ciano

\textsuperscript{11} MacGregor Knox, \textit{Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany} (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 142.
looked death in the face and by doing so challenged his label as a traitor. The photo fixed a moment, but one open to malleable and far-ranging interpretation

Ciano was an individual torn between love of country and love of leader, and this tormented him daily. Ciano was not strong enough to refute Mussolini or abdicate his position as Foreign Minister, nor was he able to oppose Mussolini with conviction in 1943. Ciano was not inherently good nor was he inherently evil, but he straddled those extremes. While some pity Ciano and others detest him, it is hard not to be intrigued by the elaborate, and often contradictory, nature of his character.
Chapter One
Changing the “map of the world”

Introduction

Fascism does not, generally speaking, believe in the possibility or utility of perpetual peace. [...] War alone keys up all human energies to their maximum tension and sets the seal of nobility on those peoples who have the courage to face it.

The striking “‘parallelism’” between the political aims of the Nazi and fascist regimes was made evident starting from their collaboration in the Abyssinian Crisis (1935-1936), and further solidified after the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). “It was only natural that at a given moment contacts were established to co-ordinate the action of the two countries, which were aiming at the same goal, and which found themselves up against the same opposition and coalition of common adversaries” remarked one international news bulletin in December 1939. The bond between Hitler and Mussolini was a menacing force with which to reckon.

There were many Italian diplomats, however, that despised Italy’s partnership with the Third Reich. Ciano was among them. Over a series of pertinent historical moments leading up to the Second World War, Ciano’s attitude towards Germany permanently altered- Hitler, whom he once believed to be a respectable dictator who could assist Italy with her hope of Mediterranean domination now appeared to him as a deceitful, malicious individual whose political gambles would significantly weaken the

13. Mussolini, The Doctrine of Fascism, 19
fascist regime. Hitler’s dismissal of the 1938 Munich Pact, the signing of the Pact of Steel in May 1939, the Salzburg Meeting between Ciano and German Foreign Minister Joachim Ribbentrop in August 1939 and finally, Hitler’s invasion of Poland in September 1939 were key events that fueled Ciano’s disillusionment with the Axis partnership.

The formidable Fascist-Nazi alliance not only altered Ciano’s outlook on Germany. It also changed his opinion of Mussolini’s political decisions; and although the Italian Foreign Minister revered the Duce and did not physically oppose his desire for war, there was a noticeable rift between Mussolini and his son-in-law that worsened with the coming years.

An Inkling of Doubt

On the twenty-fourth of September 1937, Mussolini and Ciano embarked on a five-day trip to Berlin to sign the October Protocols, a secret Italian-German alliance. On September twenty-ninth, Ciano wrote:

the Duce’s presence in Germany has popularized friendship for Fascism- I dare not yet say for Italy. […] Will the solidarity between the two régimes suffice to form a real bond of union between two peoples drawn in opposite directions by race, culture, religion, and tastes? No one can accuse me of being hostile to the pro-German policy. I initiated it myself. But should we, I wonder, regard Germany as a goal, or rather as a field for manoeuvre? The incidents of the last few days and above all Mussolini’s fidelity to his political allegiance make me incline towards the first alternative. But may not events develop in such a way as to separate our two peoples once again?16

Although it was done clandestinely, the October Protocols, building off of the 1936 Rome-Berlin Axis, which Ciano described as “a force to reckon with,” reinforced the maturation of an Italian-German partnership. What is pertinent here is not the signing of the protocols, which bore little significance until the fabrication of the Pact of Steel, but rather Ciano’s articulation of these events. Ciano’s prose reflects an immediate antagonism to the growing bond between the two European powers, an omen that would prove true in Italian social and political circles with the formation of the Axis alliance. More remarkable is the difference between Mussolini and Ciano’s interpretations of the event. The Duce “declared that, in his opinion, it represents the first basic gesture which will lead to a much closer understanding of a political and military nature between the three powers.” Mussolini’s statement, unlike Ciano’s, is not overshadowed by an inkling of doubt. Although subtle, it foreshadows the beginning of a political break between Ciano and Mussolini. While Ciano acknowledged his own support in forming the alliance, there are subtle undertones that suggest he recognized the possible fractures that may have arisen from it.

During his early years in office, Galeazzo’s entries emanated confidence and a sure optimism of Italy’s ever-growing alliance with Germany. On November 6, 1937 Italy, Japan and Germany signed the Tripartite Pact, which aligned the three nations against the threat of communism and Great Britain. Ciano’s enthusiasm is evident: “Italy has broken out of her isolation: she is in the centre of the most formidable political and military combination which has ever existed.” Mussolini yearned to lead Italy on a path of glory and triumph and he believed that the way to do this was align with Germany, a

17. Ciano, Ciano’s Hidden Diary 1937-1938, 16.
18. Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 142.
country, like Italy, driven by motives of imperialistic glory. Ciano supported this ideology, but as long as Italy maintained political power and control.

According to one international news bulletin published by the Royal Institute of International Affairs dating October 2, 1937, Italy was extremely bitter over the outcome of World War One and her lack of reparations at the Paris Peace Conference. “This feeling of dissatisfaction was translated into diplomatic action by Signor Mussolini” in the shape of a partnership with Germany. The Duce was determined “to shape his foreign policy as to make Italy’s influence felt in Europe and thus to win for her that place in the affairs of Europe and the world in which he claimed to be her right.”\(^{20}\) Ciano, too, recognized the importance of Italian redemption, and thus resolvedly spoke of an alliance with Germany during the early years of 1937. He professed that it was necessary for the fascist regime to partner with the Third Reich “in order to break through the crust which is stifling the energy and the aspirations of the young nations.”\(^ {21}\) In other words, the Italo-German alliance would lift Italy from the post-war injustices and depravations placed upon her.

Despite Ciano’s sense of commitment to the alliance, as evidenced in his diary entries throughout late 1937 and into 1938, the Foreign Minister also constantly second-guessed Hitler’s loyalty to Mussolini. This hesitancy was also felt among many leading members of the Corpo Diplomatico. On December 12, 1937 Ciano met with Grandi and they both expressed their desire to reach an understanding with London:


Talk with Grandi. I tried to cheer him up, as he was rather worried. He sees no hope of an understanding with London. I told him that on the contrary I am just as optimistic about one as I was before [...] Naturally I too prefer an agreement with London. Though I fully agree with the Duce that on the historical plane a conflict between Italy and Great Britain is inevitable.\(^{22}\)

While Ciano and Grandi both understood the importance of establishing a partnership with London, Ciano believed in Mussolini’s premonition that it would take a long time to fully develop. More importantly, this statement highlights the contradictory nature of Ciano’s personality, a quality that carried with him for the rest of his political career. While Ciano expressed his desire to partner with Great Britain, he immediately turned back on his word and convinced himself that a clash between the two countries was unavoidable. Even at an early stage Ciano was not only indecisive, but also confused about his opinions on Italy’s position in the international political arena.

In some respect, the diary entry reflected Ciano’s subtle realization that an alliance with Germany might be a more natural course on which Italy could embark. Tensions between Italy and Britain had been broiling for some time. In a letter from Grandi to Ciano a year prior, on November 6, 1936, Grandi already started to articulate the hostility forming between the two nations: “The close Italo-German understanding […] is the highest achievement of the DUCE’s foreign policy,” Grandi expressed. And it “is at present the subject of constant anxiety and thought among those who direct British policy.”\(^{23}\) Grandi went further to state that “British diplomacy, it is clear, wants to fight ITALY and GERMANY one at a time, at present on the field of diplomacy and

\(^{22}\) Ciano, Ciano’s Hidden Diary 1937-1938, 43.
An alliance between Germany and Italy threatened the security of Great Britain and she hoped that negotiations with Italy could prevent its formation.

There were Italian diplomats who, unlike Ciano at this time, had a hard time accepting the Italo-German alliance during 1937. Though fascist officials revered the Duce, they did not revere his political decisions, and

By 1937 a “fronde” [mimicking the French civil war from 1650 to 1653] had formed within the Grand Council. The group included [Balbo, along with] two of Balbo’s closest personal friends, Federzoni and Bottai, as well as two of his fellow quadrumvirs, De Vecchi and De Bono. Dino Grandi, Balbo’s old comrade from his days as a squadrista, and Alberto De Stefani, the economist and former finance minister, completed the group.

The “fronde” was unsuccessful at changing Mussolini’s policies; however, its formation sheds light on the cracks and divisions already forming within pre-war Italy. Resistance such as this tainted the regime, and slowly ate away at its core foundation.

By early 1938, Ciano’s attitude towards Germany and the major political bounds she was making began to shift. Germanic power continued to increase and it posed a major threat to the security of her neighboring nations, Hungary, Austria, Poland, and what are today the Czech and Slovak Republics. As reflected in Ciano’s diaries throughout this period, the Foreign Minister’s views of Germany were in constant oscillation: on February 5th, Ciano optimistically noted that Hitler was “making rapid strides towards total nazification” which would prove beneficial to strengthening the

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24. Dino Grandi, “Letter from Dino Grandi, Italian ambassador in London, to Galeazzo Ciano, Foreign Minister and Mussolini’s son-in-law, 6 November 1936, on Italian-German relations.”

25. Claudio G. Segrè, *Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 334. Italo Balbo was Marshal of the Italian Air Force; Luigi Federzoni was President of the Senate and President of the Royal Academy of Italy; Giuseppe Bottai was the Italian Minister of Education; Cesare Maria de Vecchi was an Italian politician, soldier and colonial administrator; Emilio De Bono was an Italian General and Marshal; and Dino Grandi was the President of Chamber of Fasci and Corporations; All seven men, including Alberto De Stefani, were members of the fascist Grand Council.
Axis. Although excited by Germany’s growing power, Ciano expressed another bout of hesitation just a few days later on February 13th after receiving a report on the Austro-German agreement made between Hitler and Austrian Chancellor Kurt von Schuschnigg stating the impending Nazification of Austria. This was the first moment when the political divergences between Ciano and Mussolini became blatantly noticeable— the former hoping to delay German action for as long as possible, and the latter enthusiastically supporting a German takeover.

On March 11, 1938 the Austrian plebiscite failed and by March 12th, Austria was annexed into the Third Reich- Germany was well on her way to becoming the mightiest nation in Europe. Despite Ciano’s distaste, he did not openly protest Mussolini’s desires to strengthen ties with Germany. “When the Anschluss came up for discussion before the Grand Council, Balbo was the only member who opposed Mussolini’s decision to accept the annexation. Balbo fears for Trieste and criticizes the proceedings of the Germans, Ciano remarked.” After his protests were unsuccessful, Balbo realized that his efforts to oppose the Duce were futile and he stopped protesting. Although wary of the event, none of the members of the diplomatic corps, Ciano included, openly spoke out against Mussolini’s acceptance of the Anschluss. This not only revealed a great deal about the political relationship between Ciano and Mussolini, but also about the inner-workings of Italian diplomacy at this time. The Duce was more important than Italy- Mussolini had to be appeased at any cost.

Tensions over the Anschluss soon boiled over to the modern day Czech and Slovak Republics, and Italy became concerned that Germany intended to extend her influence throughout the area and possibly Poland as well. The diaries shed light on an Italian regime overwrought with anxiety, alternating between Germany and Great Britain and desperately trying to understand Hitler’s objectives. “[T]hey will, however, have to let us know their real intentions,” Ciano wrote, “do they want to proceed to the disintegration of Czechoslovakia or are they satisfied with a system of regional autonomy?”

Hitler’s political and military ambiguity left Italy feeling unsettled and vulnerable, but Ciano was confident that after Ribbentrop’s visit to Rome, Germany would choose the latter of the two; many others, however, did not share this positive outlook and were overwhelmed with contempt. “A brief talk with Balbo,” Ciano penned, “[he is] Sour and hostile to everything. He spoke ill of the Germans, defended the Jews, [and] attacked Starace.”

Despite their frustration, members of the *Corpo Diplomatico* believed their efforts to change Mussolini’s political mindset were useless.

Ciano’s diaries reveal that by September, members of the fascist regime, including Mussolini, recognized Italy’s subordinate position to Germany: “The Duce is disturbed by the fact that the Germans are letting us know almost nothing of their programme with regard to Czechoslovakia. […] It is clear that the Germans do not want to let us into the game. That leaves us the most complete liberty of action in any eventuality.”

Although there was resonating hope of a potential development of an Anglo-Italian partnership, which would ultimately prevent Italy from finalizing an

alliance with Germany, Mussolini was never wedded to the idea and his feelings on the subject constantly changed. The Czech crisis was yet another incident that increased the Duce’s avid support for Hitler: “Benito Mussolini, who, in a series of speeches begun on September 18th, had been pouring forth a torrent of abuse of the Czechs, [and] support for Hitler.”

The Munich Conference was the light of hope in this time of unease, and it was also an opportunity for the Duce to act as a great Italian conciliator and bestow peace upon Europe. The Conference, Richard Lamb contends, allowed Italy to keep both political doors open, that of Germany and that of Great Britain. This is highly debatable. Some historians, like Renzo De Felice, agree with Lamb and maintain that Mussolini and Ciano wanted to preserve an alliance with both Germany and Great Britain; while other historians, like Denis Mack Smith, claim that Mussolini, unlike Ciano, was quietly pro-German all along. Nonetheless, the conference did wonders for Mussolini’s image as an agent of peace, and on September 29, 1938 Great Britain, France, Italy and Germany met in hopes of discovering a solution to the ongoing problem of the Sudetenland and the present day Czech and Slovak Republics.

34. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 234.
35. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 234.
36. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 232.
Interpretations of the event vary. From a German perspective, Mussolini was intimidated by Hitler’s presence, while a French source contended that Hitler greatly admired and imitated the Duce. Nonetheless,

The two Caesars and their aides were in great fettle; Hitler with the swagger of a conqueror, Mussolini ‘cocky as a rooster’, Goring obesely gloating. This was their day and they knew it, and, while they preserved a certain decent modicum of reserve in the presence of their French and British colleagues, among themselves they did not hide their contempt for these champions of Western Democracy. In reality the Munich Conference was but a ceremony. Its very existence meant that in all essentials Hitler had won his demands.

On the morning of September 30, 1938 at half past two, the Munich Agreement was signed. According to its stipulations, the Sudetenland was relinquished to Germany—the territory was divided into four zones for organizational purposes and evacuations lasted from October 1st through the 7th. The agreement also addressed the Third Reich’s occupancy of additional German territory outside the Sudetenland, and it determined what areas would hold plebiscites and which would be transferred without.

The conference at Munich, although intended to check German power, did just the opposite: it instilled Hitler with a new sense of courage for he realized that no nation would actively oppose his goals for European domination. “The Pact of Munich is signed, wrote Jodl in his diary, with mingled relief and satisfaction, Czechoslovakia as a Power is out…The genius of the Fuhrer and his determination not to shun even a World War have again won victory without the use of force.” In actuality,

By letting Germany take Austria and make what was left of Czechoslovakia into a virtual German protectorate, Mussolini gratuitously helped the German drive into

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39. Wheeler-Bennett, *Munich: Prologue to Tragedy*, 177. ‘Jodl,’ real name Alfred Josef Ferdinand, was a German Military Commander.
the Balkans and along the Danube, two areas that he had once marked out for himself: and all without receiving anything in exchange.  

Within a week of signing, all restrictions placed on Germany were lifted and Czechoslovakia was forced to cede almost 11,000 square miles to Germany, consequently losing a population of 2,800,000 Sudeten Germans and 800,000 Czechs. The Munich Agreement planted a seed of doubt into the heads of many fascist officials, including Ciano, over the impending alliance with Germany, and it set the stage for many tumultuous years to come. “Munich marked the moment when the Third Reich took over from the British, the French and the League of Nations as regional arbiter of central Europe.” Hitler made it clear that his regime was the most powerful in Europe.

John W. Wheeler-Bennett argues that, “Munich only stands as a milestone between the years which the locusts had eaten and the months which they were about to devour.” The Germans were the locusts and devour they did. The following year on March 12, 1939, Hitler, in complete disregard of the Munich Agreement and without informing Mussolini first, ordered troops to march over the Czech border and into Prague. Consequently, the independent state of what is now the Czech and Slovak Republics disappeared. In response, Ciano questioned Mussolini’s commitment to the Italian-German alliance. On March 15, 1939 Ciano penned: “What weight can be given in the future to those declarations and promises which concern us more directly? It is

41. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy, 194.
42. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy, 195.
44. Wheeler-Bennett, Munich: Prologue to Tragedy, 200.
45. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 241.
useless to deny that all this concerns and humiliates the Italian people.”

And later on March 19th Ciano confessed that “The events of the last few days have reversed my opinion of the Führer and of Germany; he, too, is unfaithful and treacherous and we cannot carry on policy with him.” Hitler’s betrayal of the Munich Pact set off the initial spark of discontent within Ciano, which only grew as tensions throughout Europe escalated. It is important to recognize, however, that although Ciano’s contempt and unease for the partnership with Germany increased, he did not speak out against Mussolini’s decisions.

“[T]he pact of blood”

Germany’s invasion of the present Czech and Slovak Republics on March 14, 1939 left fascist officials dumbfounded; they did not know the extent to which Germany could be trusted. Hitler completely disregarded the Munich Pact and in doing so, slighted Italy. The Duce appeared to be one of the few, if not the only one, who argued for the continuation of Italian allegiance to Hitler. “[A]t the Grand Council meeting of March 21, in a speech that Ciano described as argumentative, logical, cold, and heroic, the Duce called for uncompromising loyalty to the Axis. De Bono and Balbo jeered, and Balbo retorted, You are licking Germany’s boots.” Ciano said nothing to counteract Mussolini, and instead directed his anger towards Balbo and De Bono—he violently rejected their statements and “proved to them that Mussolini’s policies had always been those of a proud man. The Duce approved of what I had done, and told me that Balbo will

48. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 231.
always remain […] democratic swine.” Here it is obvious that despite the resonances of discontent Ciano remained loyal to Mussolini although he, too, wanted to align with Great Britain. The diary entry highlights one of the central inconsistencies of Ciano’s character- although Ciano described Mussolini’s speech as cold and argumentative, he also labeled it as heroic and logical. This implied that he respected the Duce, and this respect continued to override his objections to the Axis alliance. Ciano was unable to make a complete physical and emotional break from Mussolini until 1943. In four years time, many members of the diplomatic corps collaborated to strip the Duce of military power. Only with the support of others would Ciano gain confidence to oppose Mussolini.

The diaries indicate that throughout March 1939, Mussolini “did not seem to attach great importance to” Hitler’s dismissal of the Munich Pact, and he continued to maintain “that what Germany has done is logical and that we would have acted similarly under like circumstances.” Mussolini, most likely propelled by personal pride and fear of Hitler’s wrath, refused to turn against Germany. “We cannot change politics,” he declared, “because after all we are not prostitutes.”

Most members of the Corpo Diplomatico disagreed with Mussolini’s decision, Ciano included, and they continued to push for an alliance with Great Britain. But no one was actively defiant. Despite the threat of Italy succumbing to Hitler’s control, men like “Balbo chose to stay aboard, bail, and from time to time shout advice to a deaf captain.”

52. Ciano, The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943, 47.
“Talk to the boss about it?” asked De Bono, “Never. Mine would be a solitary voice. Everyone or nearly everyone thinks like me, but who has the courage to speak up?”

Bastianini considered opposing Mussolini, but realized the complicities of such an act, complicities that arose from

a residual loyalty to the man [Mussolini], a sense of patriotism, and a faint hope that somehow in the end, the Duce’s ‘genius’ would save Italy from disaster. ‘We love him with that love that nourishes itself on admiration and suffering. We stand beside him and do our duty as Italians,’ wrote Bastianini and so summed up the choice that virtually every major gerarca—including Balbo—made. In the name of loyalty, patriotism, and duty, Italy went down to disaster.

Ciano exemplified the same level of commitment to Mussolini and as Edda reflects, he “nourished no more illusions. But he never thought of abandoning my father, that is to say, of resigning.” The Corpo Diplomatico had a warped sense of duty, pledging allegiance to a man who was leading Italy on a path of destruction. This extreme sense of piety significantly weakened the core Fascisti by preventing them from making sensible decisions on a political, militaristic and social level.

While Mussolini was enticed by the prospect of glory, fame and power to join Germany and her push for war, he recognized that Italy was still not militarily ready for battle and thus he, largely listening to Ciano’s concerns, formulated the idea of a peace conference to settle the controversy over the Polish city of Danzig. On May 6th and 7th, 1939, Ciano ventured to Milan where he met with the German Foreign Minister, Joachim von Ribbentrop, to discuss Mussolini’s proposal. To Ciano’s dismay, Ribbentrop instantly made it clear that Hitler opposed the idea of a conference for two reasons: firstly, it would place Germany and Italy in a “numerically inferior” position

57. Ciano, My Truth, 178.
against France, England and Poland. Secondly, it would achieve nothing positive but only “aggravate the Poles hysterical state of mind.” Ribbentrop informed Ciano that Germany soon needed Danzig and the highway across the Corridor, and a military and political alliance between Italy and Germany would only frighten France and Britain, thus enabling Germany to invade Poland and quickly end the war. “Germany, too, is convinced of the necessity for a period of peace,” Ribbentrop stated reassuringly, “which should not be less than four or five years.” Ciano, although skeptical at the beginning of the meeting, fell for Ribbentrop’s act and departed with a restored feeling of confidence in the partnership, which he transmitted to Mussolini upon returning to Rome.

Ciano was certain that Italian diplomacy halted any deceitful maneuvers on behalf of the Third Reich, while Mussolini deluded himself with the hope that if Germany did take Poland it would be done effortlessly and without a fight. Mussolini also secretly desired that in return for Poland, Germany would grant Italy “a freehand in the Balkans” from which she could invade Turkey, Greece and even Switzerland or Romania. Instilled with a hollowed sense of security, Mussolini agreed to solidify relations with Nazi Germany.

On May 22, 1939, Herr Joachim von Ribbentrop and Count Galeazzo Ciano signed the Italo-German Military Pact, dubbed the Pact of Steel, in Berlin. It was an alliance intended by “the German and Italian peoples […] to stand side by side and with

58. Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 283.
59. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 248.
60. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 248.
61. Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 284.
63. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 233.
64. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 232.
65. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 232.
united strength to render secure their space for living […] in the midst of a world of unrest and disintegration.”66 The pact guaranteed the continuation of Italian-German cooperation for a period of ten years and it ensured that war would not ensue for at least another three years.67 “Nine days earlier, during the negotiations, Ciano had remarked, I have never read such a pact. It contains some real dynamite.”68

Despite Ciano’s praise for the alliance, there were many members of the Corpo Diplomatico who recognized the dangers of the pact and of Mussolini’s resulting ‘appeasement.’ To begin with, a majority of Mussolini’s ambassadors abroad had no idea what the Duce’s intentions or political aims were, or whether he desired peace or war.69 “Some of the wiser and better informed gerarchi now had further evidence that fascist policy had been entirely wrong, because Hitler had managed to deceive Italy into becoming his accomplice in a highly dangerous adventure.”70 Arguably, Ciano recognized the dangers of signing such a pact; however, as mentioned above, he admired Mussolini and thus foolishly clung to his faith that the pact would benefit Italy. Hitler’s actions in the following months, however, replaced Ciano’s ignorant self-assurance with upset and despair. Even then Ciano and the other fascist government officials who yearned to openly denounce the alliance were deterred from doing so. “[T]he few brave enough to hint as much to Mussolini were silenced by shouted obscenities or dismissed from their posts” and thus exemplified the unfortunate fate of whoever spoke against the Duce.71 Ciano was part of the majority of fascist diplomats who learned to remain silent.

70. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 234-235.
71. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 234-235.
It was clear that Mussolini refused to listen to anyone, affirming to his belief that he was the only diplomatic professional.\textsuperscript{72}

The Pact of Steel was a dangerous undertaking for another reason as well; there was no clause included in the alliance that called for a meeting between the two dictators before any action was taken and this was a major threat unrecognized by Italy.\textsuperscript{73}

Unbeknownst to Ciano or Mussolini, Germany was seeking a détente with Russia while the pact was signed, and they were technically within complete legal rights to do so.\textsuperscript{74} Additionally, it was not a defensive pact and consequently if Germany chose to declare war on Poland, Italy was forced to follow.\textsuperscript{75}

In a previous meeting between the Duce and Ribbentrop on October 28, 1938 it was evident that Mussolini blindly, and foolishly, trusted Germany to fulfill her obligations of a proper alliance to Italy:

between Italy and Germany there exist no written pacts [...] there is a solidarity of regime, as well as mutual interest in helping each other, even if the undertaking is not recognised in an official document. The attitude of Italy has been clear in the past and will always be so, even should the fate of the two empires be at stake.\textsuperscript{76}

The Duce liked the idea of an alliance, but not the finicky details of its terms and conditions\textsuperscript{77} and thus allowed the Germans to formulate the document.\textsuperscript{78} Ciano did not to suggest anything otherwise. The Germans, fully aware of Mussolini and Ciano’s placidity, cleverly manipulated the provisos for their personal benefit. The Pact of Steel was as much the fault of Ciano’s as it was Mussolini’s. “Mussolini rushed into it

\textsuperscript{72} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 233.
\textsuperscript{73} Lamb, \textit{Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage}, 249.
\textsuperscript{74} Lamb, \textit{Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage}, 248-249.
\textsuperscript{75} Segré, \textit{Italo Balbo: A Fascist Life}, 360.
\textsuperscript{76} Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 244.
\textsuperscript{77} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 232.
\textsuperscript{78} Lamb, \textit{Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage}, 249.
irresponsibly, and Ciano’s diplomacy was ham-fisted.”\textsuperscript{79} It made little sense that the Italian Foreign Minister, who already expressed concern over the trustworthiness of the Third Reich, relied on Hitler to formulate the alliance. It alludes to Ciano’s confidence in the Duce, and perhaps in fate itself, that the pact would work to Italy’s favor. Mussolini nor Ciano displayed any political tact, and it marked a huge failure in Italian history.

By mid-summer of 1939, tensions were high between England and Italy over the signing of the pact, and over Germany’s resolve to take Danzig. In a conversation between Ciano and Sir Percy Loraine on July 21, 1939, Loraine recalled that the Italian Foreign Minister maintained that neither Germany nor Italy wanted war, and that he was personally looking forward to peace.\textsuperscript{80} Ciano spoke preemptively, perhaps letting his own hope for peace cloud his judgment of the present European situation. Just six days after, on July 27, Hitler, without warning Mussolini or Ciano, ordered troops to take Danzig.\textsuperscript{81} Both men were shocked. Mussolini, in a desire to diffuse the situation, wanted Ciano to meet with Ribbentrop and again propose a European Conference to enable Hitler to peacefully obtain Danzig. The meeting was set for August 11\textsuperscript{th} at Salzburg and though Ciano went into it with good intent, the meeting revealed to the Foreign Minister the deceptive nature of the Third Reich and permanently altered his once positive opinion of the Italo-German alliance.

The meeting lasted ten hours in total, and throughout Ribbentrop repeatedly affirmed Hitler’s intent to destroy Poland. There would be no room for compromise despite Ciano’s attempts to speak to the Reich’s foreign minister with the “utmost

\textsuperscript{79} Lamb, \textit{Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage}, 249.
\textsuperscript{80} Lamb, \textit{Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage}, 252. Sir Percy Loraine was the last British ambassador to Italy before the Second World War.
\textsuperscript{81} Lamb, \textit{Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage}, 252-253.
frankness”\textsuperscript{82} of the devastation another European war would render. Ciano’s frustration with Germany appears in his records of the meeting:

I must add that he [Ribbentrop] gives an impression of an unreasonable, obstinate determination to bring about this conflict. [...] I several times stated our point of view. I showed that everything in present European politics leads one to consider armed intervention by France and England inevitable together with the support or the direct aid of numerous other countries. It was useless. Ribbentrop takes refuge in the negative pure and simple, saying that his information and above all his psychological knowledge of England make him certain that any armed British intervention is ruled out.\textsuperscript{83}

Ciano believed that the meeting was an opportunity to achieve peace, and thus was disheartened by Germany’s headstrong desire for violence. It became clear to the Italian Foreign Minister that Europe would become prey to German barbarity. The following day Ciano met with Hitler who revealed his intentions to “liquidate the Polish situation by 15 October.”\textsuperscript{84} According to Hitler, the Poles “sat like misers on their heaps of gold, wallowing drunkenly in their riches without being able to put them to productive use. The Western democracies were guided by the desire to dominate the world and did not regard Germany and Italy as equals.”\textsuperscript{85} The Third Reich would not stand for these ‘injustices’ any longer- the Polish ‘threat’ needed to be suppressed. Hitler believed that it would be a quick and easy development, and that France and Britain would not intervene due to their insufficient armaments.\textsuperscript{86}

Ciano disagreed, arguing that the war could not be localized and Italy was not prepared to fight; but his attempts met with no success. Hitler and Ribbentrop worked to

\textsuperscript{82} Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 299.
\textsuperscript{83} Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 297.
\textsuperscript{84} Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 253.
\textsuperscript{86} Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 253.
appease Ciano, and reassured him that Britain and Russia would not take part and thus Italy would not have to fight. They even promised Italy claims to Greece and Yugoslavia. According to Denis Mack Smith, “At this wonderful news, Ciano’s doubts disappeared and he accepted that the German analysis of the situation must be right. He therefore failed to make the point that Hitler, by refusing to consult or inform Rome, had broken the terms of their alliance.” Ciano exhibited the same qualities of submission in the presence of the Fuehrer as he did with Mussolini. Interestingly, Ciano’s forceful declarations to terminate the Italo-German partnership began, not during the meeting, but after it’s completion when Ciano was back in Rome.

To add salt to the wound, a telegram from the German Embassy in Moscow announcing Russia’s agreement to send a political negotiator to Moscow from Berlin interrupted Ciano’s conversation with the Fuehrer. “Hitler was triumphant.” The Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact, what Mark Mazower called “the greatest diplomatic coup” of Hitler’s career and what Ribbentrop labeled as his utmost diplomatic achievement, was made in complete secrecy, a move on Germany’s behalf that, according to Ciano, confirmed Hitler’s untrustworthiness. “[T]he so closely guarded secrecy on the progress of these negotiations,” Ciano bitterly admitted, “is difficult to reconcile with the terms of our alliance and with the complete loyalty we have shown towards Germany.”

Before his departure, Hitler and Ribbentrop confirmed that no press statement about the meeting would be released; but on his way back to Rome, Ciano caught wind

87. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 234.
88. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 234.
89. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 254.
90. Mazower, Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe, 64.
91. Mazower, Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe, 134.
92. Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 298.
that Ribbentrop issued a report saying Italy was in complete agreement with Germany
and that she would always be on her side. 93 From that moment on, “Relations between
Ciano and Ribbentrop became icy, and thenceforward Ciano was a convinced anti-
Nazi.” 94 “That man Ribbentrop is a sinister being,” Ciano wrote in his diary, “and his
influence on events is extremely dangerous.” 95 After the Salzburg meeting, Ciano
realized that Italy’s role in the Axis partnership was diminishing, thus he became alarmed
and angered by Hitler’s dealings. Ciano arrived in Rome with a resolute determination to
arouse in Mussolini any anti-German sentiment possible. To Ciano’s dismay, Mussolini
refused to acknowledge the severity of the situation. On August 21st, Ciano penned:

  When I entered the room Mussolini confirmed his decision to go along with the
Germans. ‘You, Duce, cannot and must not do it. The loyalty with which I have
served you in carrying out the policy of the Axis warrants my speaking clearly to
you now. I went to Salzburg in order to adopt a common line of action. I found
myself face to face with a diktat. The Germans, not ourselves, have betrayed the
alliance in which we were to have been partners, and not servants. Tear up the
pact. Throw it in Hitler’s face and Europe will recognize in you the natural leader
of the anti-German crusade.’ […] He [Mussolini] does not want the Axis to
collapse for the time being, but if it should I would not be the one to weep over
it.” 96

There were moments when Ciano’s concerns resonated with Mussolini, yet the Duce
never broke ties with Hitler. He remained committed to the Third Reich.

The Salzburg Meeting marked a definitive turning point in Ciano’s attitude
towards Germany- not only did Ciano deem Hitler untrustworthy, but he also vowed to
speak out against these injustices and inform Mussolini of his true opinion of Germany. It

93. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 254.
94. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 253.
is crucial to recognize that the change in Ciano’s attitude was not sparked by his steadily growing doubt in Mussolini’s politics. Rather,

that it was sudden, and, as such, in complete accordance with Ciano’s characteristic approach to diplomacy. As we have seen, Ciano was little inclined to base his policy on considerations of permanent and underlying forces and interests. He approached policy in terms of personality, relying heavily upon his judgment of the leading figures of other countries. Thus, Ribbentrop’s arrogant announcement of Germany’s approaching military action against Poland, which revealed that the Italians had been trapped and overplayed, was a blow to Ciano’s pride. He must have regarded it as quite a personal failure of his diplomacy, and turned now with vehemence against those whom he had misjudged.97

Hitler and Ribbentrop undermined Mussolini’s diplomacy and Ciano’s diplomatic tact. They challenged Ciano’s aptitude as an Italian attaché, which Ciano interpreted as a direct insult to his pride. The drastic change in Ciano’s view of Germany generated from Germany’s sudden attack on his character, not from an annoyance with Mussolini and his unwise political decisions.

Ciano’s diaries describe concerns emitted by men such as Ambassador Attolico, who forewarned of impending German sedition.98 The Germans “are possessed by the demon of destruction,”99 wrote Ciano; and he did not hesitate to share these feelings with Mussolini, however he met with no luck. “At first he agreed with me, Ciano remembered. Then he said that honour compelled him to march with Germany. Finally he said that he wanted his part of the booty.”100 Mussolini “fears Hitler’s rage,” Ciano noted in recognition that the Duce’s loyalty to Germany could not be swayed. “All this makes him nervous and disturbed. My suggestions are given short shrift […] and he refuses to be

influenced by me.”

On August 23rd, Stalin cancelled negotiations with France and Britain and signed a non-intervention pact with Germany. Mussolini was furious. Despite his anger, the Duce still wanted to assist Hitler with his conquest of Poland. “He fears the bitter judgment of the Germans, and wants to intervene at once,” Ciano penned. At one point it appeared that Ciano was able to calm Mussolini down and convince him to write a forceful letter to Hitler stating that Italy was “not ready to go to war.” In his letter, the Duce reiterated Italy’s military unpreparedness due to her involvement in the Abyssinian War and the Spanish Civil War; but Mussolini also congratulated Hitler on his success with the Nazi-Soviet Pact. “Mussolini sought to evade war without formally denouncing the Pact of Steel,” and he chose to praise Hitler’s underhanded maneuver. Ciano’s fight was now not simply aimed at the Fuehrer, but at the Duce as well.

Germany’s dealings left a bad taste of deceit in the mouths of most Italian Diplomats. “The Nazi-Soviet Pact, with its betrayal of both the Pact of Steel and the very anti-bolshevik cornerstone of fascist ideology, outraged Balbo and Quilici.” Ciano dubbed the Germans as “treacherous and deceitful,” and he adamantly believed that “Any kind of alliance with them becomes a bad alliance in a little while.” The Nazi-Soviet Pact, as the diaries emphasized, was a “monstrous union” that was “anti-Roman and anti-

105. Also known as the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact
Catholic.” Overall, it was “a return to barbarism, which it is our historic function to resist with every weapon and by every means.” Ciano’s diary entry for September 26th reveals a deep concern for Italy’s future well-being. It also stressed the feelings of despair that spread throughout fascist political circles. Hitler noticed the rising tensions and proclaimed that Mussolini’s existence was decisive to the effectiveness of the Italo-German partnership. “If anything happens to him, Italy’s loyalty to the alliance will no longer be certain. The Italian Court is fundamentally opposed to the Duce.” The Pact of Steel bound Italy to Germany’s side and signified that for the rest of the war she would be taken in tow whether she agreed with Hitler’s decisions or not. The Nazi-Soviet Pact was a further reminder of this truth.

**Operation Fall Weiss**

The Salzburg meeting was a defining moment in Ciano’s relationship with Germany, and in his opinion of the ever-growing Italian-German partnership. “This is very serious,” Ciano solemnly wrote. “The situation which during the past few days had an undeniable clarity may become very obscure from one hour to the next.” Ciano went on to state:

The thing that disturbs me most in his conversations is the tone in which he [Goering] described relations with Poland; it reminds me peculiarly of the same means used at other times for Austria and for Czechoslovakia. But the Germans

111. "Documents on German Foreign Policy - Series D - Volume VII - August 9 - September 3 1939.pdf."
112. Operation Fall Weiss (also known as Operation White) was the title for the German invasion of Poland on September 1, 1939.
are mistaken if they think they can act in the same way; Poland will undoubtedly be overrun, but the Poles will not lay down their arms without a hard fight.\textsuperscript{114}

The threat to Poland was a major source of contention. An ominous cloud shrouds Ciano’s diary entries on the days leading up to the German invasion of Poland, and it is clear that the Italian Foreign Minister desperately wanted to negotiate with the Allies. On August 31\textsuperscript{st} Ciano called

Halifax by telephone to tell him that the Duce can intervene with Hitler only if he brings a fat prize: Danzig. Empty-handed he can do nothing. [...] The sky is becoming darker and darker. [...] I see the Duce again. As a last resort, let us propose to France and Great Britain a conference for September 5, for the purpose of reviewing those clauses of the Treaty of Versailles which disturb European life. I warmly support the proposal, if for no other reason than because it will widen the distance between us and Hitler, who wants no conferences and has said so many times.\textsuperscript{115}

From what the diaries reveal, Ciano supported Great Britain’s cause at this time and his opposition to Germany was resolute.

Despite Ciano’s preference for the Allies and their political ideology, it is important to distinguish between Ciano’s writing and his actions. Although Ciano wrote about his dislike of the Italo-German alliance and his desire to collaborate with Great Britain, he still did not resign from office or take other drastic measures to support his cause. The reasons for this are debatable. Perhaps Ciano did nothing to affirm of his loyalty to Mussolini and the regime; or perhaps he did not want to surrender his power and prestige. It was most likely a combination of both. Nonetheless, Ciano’s inability to actively oppose Mussolini was one of his most notable flaws as diplomat.

\textsuperscript{114} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 67.
\textsuperscript{115} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 134. Lord Halifax was the British foreign secretary.
At 4:30 a.m. on September 1, 1939, German troops crossed over the border into Poland and were ‘attacked’ by Polish officers. In actuality, the attack was entirely simulated: the Polish officers were really German criminals who, after ‘assaulting’ German soldiers, were brutally killed. World War Two was officially declared at eleven that same morning. Hitler had not informed Mussolini of his plans and once again the Duce, along with the men of the Corpo Diplomatico, were shocked. Fascist officials like Starace and Alfieri who once embraced the prospect of war, now firmly opposed it. They were completely disgusted with Germany’s behavior. The Duce continued to express full solidarity with Hitler. “The idea of joining the Germans attracts him,” Ciano’s diaries reveal, and no one could persuade him otherwise. Mussolini, knew, however, that Italy was still unprepared for war and wanted to call together a European Conference to peacefully negotiate. Ciano fully supported the Duce’s decision, and was amazed when Hitler was willing to compromise. Unfortunately, Lord Halifax would not agree to such a meeting until German troops exited Polish territory. “The last note of hope has died,” Ciano dismally wrote. “Nothing can be done. I throw the proposal in the wastebasket without informing the Duce. […] I am not a military man. I do not know how the war will develop, but I know one thing- it will develop and it will be long, uncertain, and relentless.”

116. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 262.
119. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 263. Hitler never planned to negotiate. He had every intention of continuing the invasion, but wanted the delay to prevent Britain and France from intervening. Ciano had been duped.
120. Ciano, The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943, 137.
Due to Italy’s “disastrous”\textsuperscript{122} armament situation and unpreparedness for war, the Duce was forced to announce Italy’s non-belligerency on September 1\textsuperscript{st}. According to Denis Mack Smith, “the word ‘neutral’ was un-fascist, [so] he [Mussolini] expertly coined the term ‘non-belligerent’ to disguise the stark truth.”\textsuperscript{123} Mussolini was humiliated by his inability to enter the war and fight alongside Germany, however his political cabinet, especially Ciano, approved of this decision: “The position of playing a neutral part in a Europe that is fighting or getting ready to fight humiliates him. […] The day will come when everybody will see the great advantages that non-belligerency has given Italy.”\textsuperscript{124}

Italy’s forced ‘nonbelligerence’ in September 1939 was thus not an example of Mussolini’s purported realism, but rather the establishment’s last victory over the regime’s revolutionary expansionism. Pope Pius XII and Badoglio, diplomats, industrialists, and King Emmanuel III, all coalesced behind Mussolini’s son-in-law and foreign minister, Galeazzo Ciano, to hold back Mussolini and the Party enthusiasts.\textsuperscript{125}

Due to his familial connections, many fascists saw Ciano as the closest link to the Duce and they hoped the Foreign Minister could prevent Mussolini from entering the war on Germany’s side. It was a useless pursuit; Ciano had no greater sway over Mussolini’s political decisions than did anyone else. A noticeable rift formed between the minority who shared Mussolini’s mortification and supported entering the war as quickly as possible, and the majority who worked to prolong neutrality. The recordings of President Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy adviser, Sumner Welles, depict an awareness of the same political divisions in the fascist regime as expressed in the diaries.

\textsuperscript{122} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 76.
\textsuperscript{123} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 237.
\textsuperscript{124} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 178.
\textsuperscript{125} Knox, \textit{Common Destiny: Dictatorship, Foreign Policy, and War in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany}, 100.
After meeting with Ciano in the spring of 1940, Welles described the Italian Foreign Minister as incredibly anti-German and anti-war. “Count Ciano insisted that the Italian government had the deepest sympathy for the real Poles. […] No country, Count Ciano declared, would want to have Germany as a neighbor. Italy now has her as a neighbor and we must do the best we can to get on with her.”\textsuperscript{126} According to Welles, anti-German sentiment permeated throughout Italian political, military, religious and social circles. “The Italian General Staff was wholly antagonistic, and […] The newer and increasingly strong element in the Fascios, led by Ciano, Grandi, and Balbo, was strongly opposed,” observed Welles. “So was the Royal Family. The Church was openly against it […] and every man and woman with whom one could talk. Popular feeling was not pro-Ally, but it was anti-German.”\textsuperscript{127}

Ciano did not conceal his hatred of Hitler and the Third Reich, especially throughout the closing months of 1939. On December 16, 1939 he gave a speech to the Chamber of Fascios in which he addressed Italian-German relations, the Munich Crisis, the Pact of Steel, the Russo-German Pact, and Italian non-belligerency. The speech was readily equipped with anti-German sentiment. “My speech had great success, even if everybody did not discern the subtle anti-German poison which permeated it,” Ciano reflected on December 16\textsuperscript{th}\textsuperscript{128} “They tell me that the German Ambassador listened to it in silence, and at times was not able to conceal his disappointment. Good.”\textsuperscript{129} First it was Russia, and then it was Poland— “Everybody knows and understands that Germany has

\textsuperscript{127} Welles, \textit{The Time for Decision}, 146.
\textsuperscript{128} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 179.
\textsuperscript{129} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 179.
betrayed us twice.” The speech was the first time that Ciano formerly proclaimed his dislike of Nazi Germany and his disproval of the Axis partnership to Mussolini, the fascist diplomatic corps, and to Hitler. Consequently, it solidified Ciano’s anti-German position for the rest of the war. This would eventually have major consequences in his political career and in his personal life.

Mussolini’s attitude towards Germany constantly changed throughout the end of 1939 and early 1940, and these variations are perfectly exemplified in a letter he wrote to Hitler on January 3, 1940 concerning Ciano’s speech. In the body of the letter, the Duce agreed with Ciano; however, at the end he contradictorily maintained Italy’s allegiance to the Third Reich and her desire to help Germany in any way possible. By 1940, Mussolini had given up on the prospect of peace and there was even an apparent change in Ciano’s personality- he “was still rebellious, but with less and less conviction.” Italy’s predicament took a turn for the worse when Britain revealed that starting March 1, 1940, she would halt all German ships carrying coal from Rotterdam to Italy. Mussolini was outraged, and rejected all British attempts to negotiate to partake in such discussions entailed turning his back on Germany, an act the Duce was not yet willing to commit. Hitler, aware of Mussolini’s emotional state, sent Ribbentrop to Rome on March 10, 1940 to try and persuade Italy to officially enter the war as Germany’s partner. “I dread the Duce’s contact with the Germans,” Ciano confided to his diary. “

131. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 270-271.
132. Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers, 335.
133. Italy desperately needed coal but German coal shipments, which came from Switzerland via rail, did not bring enough. Consequently, Germany began sending Italy coal by sea from Rotterdam. Great Britain, however, was determined to halt all German shipping despite the negative effects it would have on her relationship with Italy.
134. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 272. Britain tried to negotiate with Italy, and stated that she would supply British coal in return for Italian war materials.
thought of war dominates him [...] Inaction will [...] go against the grain of his aggressive temperament."

On March 18th, Mussolini and Hitler had a follow-up meeting at the Brenner Pass, which frightened Ciano: “the Duce is fascinated by Hitler, a fascination which involves something deeply rooted in his make-up. The Führer will get more out of the Duce than Ribbentrop was able to get.” Ciano’s premonition was correct. The Duce declared to Hitler that as soon as Germany made admirable gains in the west, Italy would join them. Ciano was aware that Hitler was baiting Mussolini by using Germany’s military strength to appeal to the Duce, who was consumed by thoughts of war and conquest.

The following month on April 9th, Hitler attacked Norway and Denmark then immediately sent four messages to Mussolini describing his success. The Duce was ecstatic- with each one of Hitler’s conquests Mussolini became more excited to fight alongside Germany. “I approve Hitler’s action wholeheartedly,” Mussolini confided to Ciano. “It is a gesture that can have incalculable results, and this is the way to win wars. The democracies have lost the race. I shall give orders to the press and to the Italian people to applaud this German action without reservation.” On May 10th Germany invaded Holland and Belgium and continued to experience outstanding success against the British and French. By May 30th Mussolini officially made up his mind for Italy to

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138. Page 362 in *Ciano’s Diplomatic Papers* reveals that: “The Fuehrer described the organisation and the strength of the German army, which today includes in all 205 divisions, of which the vast majority are of first class quality. Ammunition is available in quantities never seen before. [...] Confidence in success is extraordinarily high both in the army and among the people”.
enter the war. On June 1st, the King gave his approval. Ciano was at a loss and interestingly his diary entry does not express contempt for the king, but for Mussolini. Arguably, if King Emmanuel III had forbade the war, Mussolini would have maneuvered around it.

**Italy’s “‘hour of destiny’”**

On June 10, 1940, Mussolini stood from his balcony overlooking Piazza Venezia, which brimmed with throngs of people who impatiently awaited Mussolini’s declaration of war. “The news of the war does not surprise anyone and does not arouse very much enthusiasm.” Ciano wrote, echoing the feelings of many Italians who had become disenchanted with Mussolini and his pursuit for military excellence. As Welles recognized,

If there was ever a case in modern history when a dictator plunged a great nation into a wholly unjustified and wholly unpopular military adventure, it was when Mussolini forced the Italian people into a war against their traditional friends, solely to serve the interests of a country which for generations they had both feared and hated.

In his diaries Ciano firmly maintained that neither he, nor any other members of the *Corpo Diplomatico*, had the ability to stop Mussolini and his decision to enter the war alongside Germany: “Badoglio wanted the Duce to procrastinate as usual, so as to have more time to prepare, but the die was cast, and Mussolini” itched “to get his fingers on the booty.” In his memoirs, Badoglio further reminisced about June 10th with an air of

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exasperation and despair: “I found myself in a corner of the room, feeling miserable. Ciano came up to me and said: Now it’s done. There is no time for recriminations, only for action. Pray heaven we have good luck.”

Ten days after entering the war Mussolini, refusing to listen to the concerns of many fascist officials, attacked France. From the Duce’s point of view, Italy had been left out of the war for long enough and it was time to prove herself as Germany’s potent ally. Badoglio gave two reasons not to launch an attack: “The first was technical- our positions were purely defensive, as he knew, and it would take twenty-five days to go over to the offensive. The second was moral- the French army was disintegrating and the Germans had no need of our help to complete its destruction. […] This was the second clash which I had with Mussolini; the first had been over the declaration of war.” Ciano’s diaries echo this same belief, professing that

The war has been won by Hitler without any active military participation on the part of Italy, and it is Hitler who will have the last word. This, naturally, disturbs and saddens him. His reflections on the Italian people, and, above all, on our armed forces, are extremely bitter this evening.

At this point, fascist officials were already predicting a German victory and knew that Italian ruin was inevitable. Achille Starace, upon returning from the Alpine front on June 25th, a day after an armistice was signed between Italy and France, was bewildered by the number of men who were pointlessly dying in such a useless operation.

This was one of the many military endeavors initiated by Mussolini to reinforce Italy’s prestige throughout Europe and the Mediterranean, especially in regards to her

main competitor, Germany. Most, if not all, of Mussolini’s wartime decisions germinated from his acute awareness that Hitler’s political and military supremacy was constantly increasing, and it was the Duce’s primary desire to outdo this supremacy.

Mussolini was undeterred by Italy’s weak and futile offensive against France and instead, two days after the French armistice, he turned his attention to Great Britain. Germany was planning an attack, known as ‘Operation Sea Lion,’ on the British Isles and the Duce wanted to participate in order to show Hitler that Italy was well-equipped to fight. “I am ready to contribute ground forces and air forces and you know how much I desire to do so,” Mussolini proclaimed. Ciano, too, affirmed Mussolini’s desire to participate when he met with Hitler fourteen days later in Berlin. German military generals were horrified, and Goering, who was in command of the German Air Force, worried that Italy was not prepared for such an endeavor. He was right. When Germany began bombing London on September 7, 1940 (the Blitzkrieg lasted 57 days), Hitler allowed Italian planes to participate in what Mussolini referred to as a symbolic expression of Italo-German partnership. The results were catastrophic. The Italian planes were outdated and slow, and thus the German Air Force had to protect them from harm. It was an embarrassing and ignoble military endeavor that produced undeserved Italian losses, and, once again, tarnished Italy’s militaristic image in the eyes of the Germans.

149. Operation Sea Lion was never carried out due to Germany’s loss at the Battle of Britain, which took place throughout August and September 1940. On October 12, 1940, Operation Sea Lion was postponed to the following year.
150. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 289.
151. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 290.
152. Lamb, Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage, 290.
In less than two months’ time, Italy attacked Egypt, marking the start of the North African campaign, and Greece- the former on September 14, 1940 and the latter on October 28, 1940. The diaries provide evidence that Mussolini instigated the Greek war simply out of spite for Germany’s unexpected occupation of Rumania. “Hitler always faces me with a fait accompli,” Mussolini angrily confided to Ciano. “This time I am going to pay him back in his own coin. He will find out from the papers that I have occupied Greece. In this way the equilibrium will be re-established.” The Duce’s immense pride barred him from realizing the precariousness of Italy entering into a war with Greece, and Mussolini met much criticism from not only military leaders, but also Hitler who was “pessimistic and considers the situation much compromised.” As recorded in the diaries, the three heads of General Staff declared themselves against war with Greece and claimed that Italy did not have the equipment or military preparedness needed. On November 26th, Badoglio, thoroughly disgusted with Mussolini, handed in his letter of resignation. Mussolini met the same criticism with his North African campaign; by December Marshal Graziani, commander of the Italian army in Libya, complained via telegram that his fight was like that “of the flea against the elephant.”

All Italians- government officials, soldiers, civilians- were thoroughly disillusioned with Mussolini, Germany, and the war in general. “Those few officers brave enough to disagree with decisions of policy risked being humiliated and silenced. Nor had parliament ever been allowed any serious discussion of either foreign policy or the military budget, and any public reference to possible weaknesses had always been

stamped on at once.”\textsuperscript{157} By January 1941, there were stirrings of an impending coup ‘d’état that many prominent fascists, such as Bottai, were ready to lead. At this point many diplomats had reached their breaking point and realized that something needed to be done in order to save Italy from destruction.

**Conclusion**

The period from 1938 to 1940 marked a significant change in both the life of Galeazzo Ciano and the fascist regime. Ciano was upset by Hitler’s betrayal of the 1938 Munich Pact; however he agreed to sign the Pact of Steel in May 1939 after instilling himself with a false sense of assurance that the fledgling partnership between Germany and Italy would help Italy conquer the Mediterranean regions and establish herself, once again, as a glorious empire.

The Salzburg meeting between Ribbentrop and Ciano, just three months after the creation of the pact, was a major turning point in Ciano’s opinion of Hitler and the Third Reich. As Sir Percy Lorraine reported, whenever “Ciano spoke of Salzburg and of Germany’s default on her obligations to Italy, his eyes flashed with indignation.”\textsuperscript{158} Ciano’s mentality at Salzburg did not evolve from his growing frustration with Mussolini’s political decisions, but rather from his own bitterness towards Ribbentrop and Hitler. Both offended Ciano by carelessly dismissing Mussolini’s attempts at peace. From this point onward, Ciano openly spoke out against Hitler and the Italo-German

\textsuperscript{157} Mack Smith, *Mussolini*, 238.

\textsuperscript{158} Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce’s Italy on the World Stage*, 270.
alliance; and though he made no initiative to physically rise against the Duce, his opinions caused a major political breach between he and Mussolini.

The events between the remaining months of 1941 and 1942 were not of great importance to Ciano’s life. Throughout 1942, Ciano’s disillusionment, and that of many men in the diplomatic corps, significantly increased. Italy’s role in the war faltered and she suffered both militaristically and politically. The tumultuous months of 1942 sparked Ciano’s decision to side with the opposition in 1943, when he worked to strip Mussolini of political power. It was the choice that sent Ciano to an early grave.
Chapter Two
The Dissolution of a Regime

Introduction

Within a few days a sham tribunal will make public a sentence which has already been decided by Mussolini under the influence of that circle of prostitutes and white slavers which for some years have plagued Italian political life and brought our country to the brink of the abyss. I accept calmly what is to be my infamous destiny. I take some comfort in the thought that I may be considered a soldier who has fallen in battle for a cause in which he truly believed.  

The meeting of the fascist Grand Council on July 24, 1943 was the result of Italy’s disastrous participation in World War Two. The war severely strained the Italian public, soldiers, and elite political circles alike; by 1943 feelings of resentment, weariness and distrust plagued all areas of Italian life.

The nineteen men who voted in favor of the Grandi Resolution did not fathom that it would generate such dramatic results: Mussolini was removed from power and replaced by Marshal Pietro Badoglio who, along with King Emanuel III, assembled a temporary regime that lasted only forty-five days before surrendering to the Allies on September 8, 1943. “It was the first time a fascist regime had collapsed, and not just any regime either, but the one that had launched the fascist revolution.”  

The immediate impact of Italy’s surrender was marred by social and political chaos as the country split in

160. Mazower, Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe, 361.
half: one side occupied by the Germans, the other by the Allies. But high-officials of the fascist government were oblivious to the bleak futures awaiting them.

Prior to the summer of 1943, no definitive action was taken to remove the Duce from power. However, men of the Corpo Diplomatico were losing patience with Mussolini’s political decisions. Ciano was among them. In his last diary entry dating December 23, 1943, Ciano bitterly remarked that “[T]he policy of Berlin towards Italy was nothing but a network of lies, intrigue and deceit.” Italians were “treated, never like partners, but always as slaves. […] Only the base cowardice of Mussolini could, without reaction, tolerate this and pretend not to see it.” Ciano’s frustrations reflected the frustrations of the greater fascist political body; Dino Grandi and Emilio De Bono were among the many who worried about the security of Italy’s future as a fascist dictatorship because they too disapproved of the Italian-German alliance. Springing from a collective desire to end Italy’s participation in a disastrous war, the Grand Council called for, what was to be, their final meeting. By doing so, they initiated a wave of change that dramatically altered the course of Italian history.

The Departure

On February 5, 1943, Ciano was called into the grandiose Sala del Mappamondo, Mussolini’s office at Palazzo Venezia, and dismissed from his position as the Italian Foreign Minister. The news did not appear to shock Ciano, who was used to the constant oscillations in both Mussolini’s temperament and decisions; after all, it was one of the

Duce’s many unbecoming characteristics that members of the elite diplomatic corps were forced to adjust to during the war. In a manner that was both calm and dignified, Ciano accepted his release and agreed to become Ambassador to the Holy See. This was a pertinent moment in the history of the fascist regime for two main reasons. First, it suggested that Mussolini suspected Ciano had been acting seditiously. Just a few days prior, a telegram from Hitler, who intercepted it from the head of the American OSS (The Office of Strategic Services), Allen Dulles, arrived at Mussolini’s office revealing Ciano as one of the leaders in developing plans to remove Mussolini from power. The telegram, dated February 1, 1943, stated:

When the African Campaign has been concluded and preferably choosing the time when illness eliminates Mussolini from political activity, there might be made an arrangement with the group Badoglio, Ciano, Grandi, Caballero, Umberto. […] It is reported that they are now persuaded that the defeat of Italy is inevitable […] It is possible that such a group could deliver a part of the Navy and the Army at least, their chances of success being dependent upon (1) ability to discard Mussolini, assuming the man is still living; (2) the extent to which the Germans would resist; (3) and complete victory in the Allied African campaign.

It is unclear if this was the leading element in the Duce’s decision to remove Ciano, but it nonetheless was an incredibly influential factor that built on other circulating rumors of Ciano conspiring against the Mussolini. What this quote does indicate, however, is that

162. James Srodes, *Allen Dulles: Master of Spies* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 1999), 256. Hans Bernd Gisevius- a former member of the German intelligence service who became anti-Hitler and met and began working with Allen Dulles in 1943 in Switzerland- received cable traffic that revealed the Gestapo had intercepted and decoded much of the State Department’s code traffic that left Switzerland. In doing so, the Germans discovered Telegram 729, which revealed plots to overthrow Mussolini were circulating among the uppermost members of the Italian government.


the Allies recognized the uneasy relationship between the Italian Navy and the fascist regime. At this time, there was a great amount of disloyalty circulating between them.

More importantly, Ciano’s dismissal emphasized Hitler’s role in the removal of prominent political figures like Ciano; at this stage in the war, Germany held more power and influence over Mussolini than did the men of Italy’s diplomatic corps. In an interview with America’s LIFE Magazine in February 1945, Dino Grandi revealed that the Duce “simply wanted Ciano out of the way” and the Foreign Minister was one among many men whose position was revoked. Ciano’s dismissal not only revealed Mussolini’s growing distrust of the top ministerial leaders, but also the strength of his loyalty to Hitler, which caused a significant division to form between the dictator and his diplomats. Throughout 1942, Mussolini dismissed many men from their positions, either replacing them with other incompetent individuals or claiming the positions for himself. As Dulles observed, the constant alterations in Mussolini’s political cabinet “indicate that the purpose of the changes in the Italian ministries was to remove from positions of responsibility those leaders whose loyalty to the Axis powers was open to question, and who might be susceptible to various forms of Allied pressure.” Their dismissal signified to the world “the first serious rend within the party ranks of the Fascists.”

It is clear that a majority of fascist ministers remained in office for very short periods of time; there were a high percentage of ministers (35%) who held political

positions for one to three years, while a little over 30% stayed in office for less than one year [Appendix Figure One].\(^{168}\) This indicated that Mussolini’s cabinet was in constant flux and consequently, the Duce did not have a solid network of people on which to rely. Moreover, it suggests that a large number of men who held political titles were robbed of much needed time to become acquainted with their position and thus did little to benefit the regime. As Italy’s ties to both the war and to Germany strengthened, the Duce shifted ministers to a greater extent, and this, as Dino Alfieri suggested, “emphasized that the change of ministers in Italy meant nothing more than a confirmation of the Duce’s habit of changing his collaborators from time to time. The most that one could say was that the will to work with Germany had therefore been even more strongly emphasized by the Duce.”\(^{169}\) In light of this, it is safe to say that Ciano’s dismissal was not extraordinary nor does it imply that Mussolini was vindictively targeting Ciano at this stage in the war. It simply indicates that Ciano was no longer exempt from Mussolini’s rash decisions- now he, too, would suffer the brunt of his faith-in-law’s ever-increasing loyalty to Hitler. The importance of familial ties was dissipating.

Mussolini’s control over the Italian government was severely waning, and this was further reinforced by the dismissal of his son-in-law. Fascism rested on a bed of political disunity, and although this was true for the entirety of its existence, before the war Mussolini was able, with the support of the elite fascists, to create a façade of strength and aggression that hid the regime’s innate weaknesses. The war systematically destroyed this façade and it was now becoming publicly clear that fascism was plagued


by fragility and mistrust. This was reflected in a conversation Ciano recorded in his diary on January 15, 1943, less than a month before his dismissal:

Mussolini telephones, wishing to know if it is true that I went to a luncheon at Farinacci’s home with Bottai, Scorza, and Turaboni. It is very true. But also nothing was more insignificant. Farinacci had invited me to see his new country home; a bad luncheon, a banal conversation. Evidently somebody is trying to sow distrust and suspicion in the mind of the Chief, and I am sorry that he could fall for it even for a moment.\textsuperscript{170}

This statement reveals that Mussolini no longer had faith in Ciano, a longtime confidant, nor the other men who composed his regime’s elite political circle. And Mussolini’s insistence on dissolving his political cabinet made fascism inherently weaker. Furthermore, Ciano’s tone appears relaxed, which suggests that he had not yet recognized the danger of Mussolini’s inquiry.

Ciano’s removal was also an ominous foreshadowing of his death. Hitler, unlike Mussolini, applauded the Duce’s choice to deplete the regime of any one who hindered the German-Italian alliance. Germans were primarily concerned about Ciano because of his connection to Dino Grandi, Giuseppe Bottai and Luigi Federzoni, who were all suspected of developing plots to overthrow the Duce, break ties with Germany, and surrender to the Allies. It was true that Ciano was commonly seen “ceaselessly chattering at the Golf Club and in the salons of Rome” about the “anti-German sentiments of the upper middle class and the aristocracy. Many of these conversations were reported to Mussolini”\textsuperscript{171} and stirred the pot of distrust. In autumn 1942 when Mussolini’s health was failing, many believed that Farinacci or Ciano would succeed him. Although he would not outwardly profess his desire to take power from his father-in-law, Ciano came into

\textsuperscript{170} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 570. \textsuperscript{171} Deakin, \textit{The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism}, 122.
contact with various groups who were formulating plans to remove Mussolini. He also expressed a desire to see if the Allies would consider settling terms with a new Italian government. There were a few times when Ciano even mentioned concocting a traceless poison to feed the Duce.\textsuperscript{172} From Mussolini’s perspective, these were hollow threats. Throughout his political career, Ciano devoutly followed the commands of his father-in-law, and not once acted against him, regardless of his personal feelings- the events throughout 1938 to 1940 pay testament to this. Ciano was a follower not a leader, and Mussolini expected nothing more. What the Duce failed to see, however, was that Ciano’s threats indicated that he had seriously contemplated and articulated the possibility of assuming a proactive role in the fascist government, and had subconsciously prepared the Foreign Minister to politically break from the Duce.

The telegram was incredibly unsettling to the Duce not only because of its content, but also because Hitler sent it. If Mussolini disregarded the message and allowed Ciano to remain in office, he would be simultaneously dismissing the Fuehrer’s warning. In order to prove to Hitler, and to himself, his allegiance to the Axis Alliance, Mussolini needed to wipe himself free of Ciano. Interestingly, Ciano’s reflections of the event, as articulated in his diary, were ridden with remorse rather than anger at having to leave a post he occupied for most of his political career.

To leave the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, where for seven years-and what years-I have given my best, is certainly a hard and sad blow. I have lived too much, in the full sense of the word, between those walls not to feel the anguish of my removal. But that does not matter. I know how to be strong and to look to the morrow, which may require an even greater liberty of action. The ways which Providence chooses are at times mysterious.\textsuperscript{173}

\textsuperscript{172} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 285.
\textsuperscript{173} Ciano, \textit{The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943}, 579.
Although they may not appear as such at first glance, these were fighting words; almost immediately, Ciano’s tone changed from that of remorse to exuding a strong sense of personal pride. His statement was, in fact, not a casual acceptance of his fate, but an avowal of his strength as a great political leader of Italy. Ciano relinquished his position with the premonition that the fascist regime would undergo profound political changes in the near future, and that he would be involved in these changes. What Ciano did not know, however, was that he would take a central part in bringing about these changes.

Not only did Ciano hold a high political title, but Grandi also believed that due to his personal ties to the Duce, the Foreign Minister might be able to convince Mussolini to pass the resolution. (Although the past few years should have been enough indication that Ciano had no power to alter Mussolini’s decisions.) Backed by a group of men, Ciano’s voice might have some affect. The real question was Ciano’s preparedness to take on such a daunting task. His above statement to Mussolini might appear resolute and determined; but at the meeting in the presence of the Duce, Ciano had a much harder time supporting the resolution’s content.

Ciano’s dismissal virtually severed the final sense of political obligation he felt to Mussolini; although he remained loyal to the Duce and had no initial intention of collaborating against him, the door to join the opposition was now unlocked and certainly looked more enticing then letting his country go to ruin. Ciano, who continued to express a strong personal attachment to Mussolini and stated that he “shall miss […] contact with him,”174 was no longer obliged to take a back seat to Mussolini’s idiocies.

Giuseppe Bastianini, the former Italian Ambassador to London, replaced Ciano; however, the Duce only gave Bastianini the title of undersecretary for foreign affairs and granted the title of full secretary to himself. It is important to note that by the time the Grand Council met later that July, Mussolini assumed nine administrative titles- prime minister, minister for foreign affairs, minister of war, minister of the navy, minister of air, first marshal of the empire, minister of the interior, supreme commander of the forces in the field, and president of the Grand Council- which was an exorbitant amount for an individual to successfully manage.\textsuperscript{175} Mussolini’s temperament at this time “was such that he could not concentrate his attention on general policy or on his duties as supreme commander, but continued to indulge his passion for petty administrative details in order to give the superficial appearance of being in charge at every level.”\textsuperscript{176} The Duce tried to present himself as a knowledgeable, highly capable political leader and he spent hours reading newspapers, police reports and other invalid sources that were tainted with inaccuracies.\textsuperscript{177} Bastianini, like Ciano, experienced problems working with Mussolini once he came into office. “When Bastianini had replaced Ciano, he had argued with Mussolini about foreign policy and on one occasion, told Ciano his troubles. Ciano had laughed. You’re still at the period when it was possible to talk to Mussolini. Now he doesn’t listen to anyone and always wants to be right. Happily, his ideas change like the wind.”\textsuperscript{178}

What Ciano voiced to Bastianini was in fact true- Mussolini’s ideas did “change like the wind.” Ironically, Mussolini once again demonstrated his inability to make a


\textsuperscript{176} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 279.

\textsuperscript{177} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 280.

clear-cut decision for the day after he discharged Ciano, he humbly asked his son-in-law to return. At this point, Ciano already confirmed his position as Ambassador to the Holy See and thus politely rejected the offer. Mussolini, apparently feeling trapped between two worlds, made rash decisions that were often driven by inconsistent emotions that arose from his sense of humiliation at Italy’s increasing dependence on Germany throughout the war. Ciano symbolized a crumbling regime while Hitler embodied glory and fortitude, thus Mussolini was drawn to the latter; but Mussolini obviously regretted his decision and wanted Ciano to return.

On February 6, 1943 Ciano wrote: “The Duce telephones quite early in the morning, to hold up my nomination to the Holy See. […] But I, who had foreseen Mussolini’s vacillations, had already sent Ambassador Guariglia to ask the Secretariat of State for my acceptance.”¹⁷⁹ This was a defining moment in Ciano’s own future, and in the future of his relationship with Mussolini; Ciano made a choice to decline Mussolini’s offer and officially leave his position as Foreign Minister. Mussolini’s superfluous wartime decisions put Italy in the line of fire for quite a long time, and Ciano was forced to either support his country or support his dictator who was plunging it into a state of darkness. Ciano chose his country. This was the first time when he made a public display of allegiance to Italy over the Duce; the well-being of his country, according to Ciano, was more important than the well-being of its leader.¹⁸⁰ Unfortunately, this decision was made in 1943 not in 1939, three years too late.

On February 8, 1943 Ciano ventured to Palazzo Venezia to bid Mussolini a formal farewell; it was a cordial visit brimming with tensions of unspoken frustration and remorse. As revealed in Ciano’s diaries, the Duce treated Ciano with a sense of reverence, professing to his son-in-law that “you must consider that you are going to have a period of rest. Your turn will come again. Your future is in my hands, and therefore you need not worry.”

Ciano, warmed by Mussolini’s oath of confidence, made a final attempt to convince the Duce of German sedition, and he even used his diary as support:

He then asked me if I had all my documents in order. ‘Yes,’ I answered. ‘I have them all in order, and remember, when hard times come […] I can document all the treacheries perpetrated against us by the Germans, one after another, from the preparation for the conflict to the war on Russia, communicated to us when their troops had already crossed the frontier. If you have need of them I shall furnish the details, or, better still, I shall, within the space of twenty-four hours, prepare that speech which I have had in my mind for three years, because I shall burst if I do not deliver it.’ He listened to me in silence and almost agreed with me.

The outburst did nothing to change Mussolini’s allegiance to Hitler, however, indicating that although the Duce may have comprehended the validity of Ciano’s declaration, his commitment remained to Germany and not to his country.

No longer the Foreign Minister and thus, not deterred by political obligations or Mussolini’s presence, Ciano underwent profound changes. He slowly “began to plot and scheme behind the scenes” to find a way to break ties with Germany and salvage whatever pride Italy had left.

He made contacts with anti-Fascists, dissident Fascists and generals known to be anti-Mussolini but not necessarily anti-Fascist. A friend described him as ‘a politically sick man hanging on to various strings of numerous plots,’ and longtime intimate friend Filippo Anfuso said that he was ‘up to his neck’ in so

many anti-Fascist, anti-royalist, anti-German plots that Anfuso could not figure out ‘who was in what conspiracy.’

Ciano was not anti-fascist, but collaborated with any individuals who disagreed with Mussolini’s politics and wanted to break relations with Germany. Ciano, like so many fascists who regretted the regime’s political and military choices, struggled to envision what Italy should become. Worse, his options were limited- the war had gone terribly and Italy was in no position to negotiate with the Allies from a position of strength.

On June 13, 1943, Ciano met with King Emanuel III and expressed his desire, and that of many others, to re-instate a new military leader and ask the Allies for an armistice. At this point, the King deemed this a treacherous act and, unknown to Ciano, immediately relayed the information to Mussolini; however, the King’s feelings changed when, on the evening of July 9, 1943, Allied troops landed on the coast of Sicily and began a successful operation to take over the island. Ten days later on July 19th the Allies bombed the Eastern suburbs of Rome. Italy was slowly taken in the grips of enemy power and both the monarchy and the combined powers of Mussolini and Hitler were unable to stop it. King Emanuel III watched as flames blanketed the eternal city and “It was then that” he convinced “himself that […] Mussolini had suddenly changed for the worse,” and he decided to place Italy’s fate in the hands of one man who could “gather all the strings and see to it that the various plots which had received tact approval worked out to the benefit of the shaky monarch.” This man was Dino Grandi, now chairman of the

184. Davis, *Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943*, 23. It is an exaggeration to claim that Ciano was “anti-royalist.” In his diary, he steadfastly defended the monarchy against Mussolini’s criticisms.


Grand Council. Grandi, appointed a body of political figures, Ciano among them, with the hopes of protecting Italy and salvaging the legacy of Italian fascism.

**Digging the Grave**

The meeting of the fascist Grand Council took place on July 24, 1943. The Grand Council had not convened since the start of the war, and it was for the sole purpose of transferring military power, a role that Mussolini took on in 1940, back to the King.\textsuperscript{187} The meeting marked the first action taken by Ciano and the other members of the diplomatic corps to speak out against Mussolini,\textsuperscript{188} and it initiated an era of change for the future of Italian fascism. Dino Grandi, creator of the resolution and its aim to change military hands, professed to American readers in the February 26, 1946 publication of \textit{LIFE} Magazine that the meeting “was our chance, though a desperate one. We had to take the Grand Council, a weapon shaped by Mussolini for his own purpose, and turn its point against the breast of the dictator. [...] To overthrow a dictator and prove it could be done by constitutional means, that was our duty.”\textsuperscript{189} Despite its ‘constitutionality,’ the meeting of the Grand Council set into motion a tidal wave of destruction; it led to the immediate arrest of Mussolini, the disintegration of the fascist regime, and, most importantly, the execution of Galeazzo Ciano.

Grandi arduously worked to find a group who would back his decree, and he knew he could count on the unwavering support of men like Giuseppe Bottai, who had

\textsuperscript{187} Morgan, \textit{The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War}, 13-14.  
\textsuperscript{188} Morgan, \textit{The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War}, 17-18.  
\textsuperscript{189} Grandi, “Dino Grandi Explains,” 81.
always been against the war. He was wary of other individuals, like De Bono and De Vecchi, who “all agreed to support Grandi’s resolution, but none of them would take responsibility of committing themselves during the meeting unless the debate appeared to take a favorable turn.” Currently, Ciano was the only man who had enough influence to sway members of the Corpo Diplomatico to side with the opposition, and Bottai recognized the importance of getting the ex-Foreign Minister on board. Grandi, although leery to trust Ciano, understood “that if he were persuaded to support the revolt many wavering votes might be given to the resolution.” Ciano was hesitant as well to align himself with Grandi; although Ciano had his own bouts of anger towards the Duce and his loyalty waned, he never rose against Mussolini or honestly professed his feelings of contempt towards his weak leadership skills. Ciano and Grandi were not friends, nor was there an indication of an innate bond of trust between them: “Count Ciano was a man Grandi regarded as the very antithesis of himself in everything, in mode of living, political ideas, diplomatic methods, functions within the party, [and in his view of] the ideals of fascism.” But they each agreed on one thing: the restoration of power to the monarchy. Ciano, shoving all differences aside, agreed to join Grandi and his followers in pursuit of a goal that would hopefully restore justice to Italy.

There were inconsistencies and confusion with the Grandi Resolution from its birth. “Mussolini’s position was not very clearly envisaged” by members of the Grand Council; there were those that “wanted him to disappear altogether, others proposed that

191. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 175.
192. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 176.
he should be given some post but without any power,”194 while some continuously vacillated between loyalty to the Duce and loyalty to the opposition. Many of these men, nonetheless, disregarded these inconsistencies. Badoglio, while discussing Italy’s present condition with Grandi and Federzoni, stated “that whatever was the eventual outcome, it would certainly be better than fascism, which had corrupted the soul of the nation and finally led the country to its present desperate straits.”195 What Badoglio did not realize, however, were the dire consequences the ideological and political divergences between members of the Grand Council would have on the outcome of not the resolution, but on the integrity of the fascist regime and some of its most prominent members, especially Ciano.

Interestingly, what appeared to be an organized meeting championed by men who were unified in their desire to remove Mussolini from military power, was, in reality, plagued by disorder. The men at the meeting desired to remove Mussolini for their own personal gain.

Each petty gerarca (boss) clung to the illusion that it might actually be his moment, above all. Grandi, in particular, envisaged a Grandian Fascism which, under a Grandi-led government, would keep the authority held by the best people and the resultant discipline over the feckless masses but would also, in some totally unexplained fashion, magically render Italy’s war happy not sad. Grandi was the most pompous and deluded but, should the truth be admitted, he, like his colleagues, was worried less about matters of high strategy than about the present.196

Ciano was no different. In his final diary entry on December 23, 1943, he stated that he took “comfort in the thought that I may be considered a soldier who has fallen in battle

194. Badoglio, Italy in the Second World War: Memories and Documents, 45.
for a cause in which he truly believed.” Ciano’s use of “I” not “We” further solidifies how Ciano and the other men of the diplomatic corps casted themselves as individual heroes of the regime and state. Naturally, from this state of disjointedness birthed chaos, and in such an environment it was impossible to formulate a political plan that ensured the well-being of both Italy and the men present at the meeting. It was this lack of organization and pre-meditated planning that endangered Ciano’s safety in the meeting’s aftermath.

Guido Buffarini-Guidi, Undersecretary of the Interior, upon hearing about Grandi’s conspicuous dealings approached Mussolini with the information; but his efforts were immediately disregarded and if the information frightened Mussolini, he failed to show it. Throughout the previous winter and up until the spring of 1943, a multitude of plots were devised that all aimed at taking power from the Duce; but despite the warnings he received, Mussolini persistently refused to listen. Perhaps he was too weary from the war, or perhaps he lacked faith in the power of his conspirators- whatever the reason, Mussolini did nothing to stop his impending downfall. He even made the mistake of carelessly trusting certain individuals who aimed to rise against him. For instance, despite the admonitions he received about Ciano, he immediately wanted him to return to office the day after his dismissal. Yet another example was Mussolini’s replacement of General Cavallero with General Vittorio Ambrosio as Chief-of-Staff on January 30, 1943 in what Ciano noted as “a good change, imposed by honesty.” Mussolini believed General

198. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 62.
Ambrosio to be the only trustworthy individual in the regime;\textsuperscript{200} however, Ambrosio was “one of the men most deeply implicated in the plots to overthrow him”\textsuperscript{201} and up until the Duce’s removal, Ambrosio slyly networked with Grandi and Ciano.\textsuperscript{202} Mussolini remained ignorant to this, wholly consumed by his personal political predicament.

Even Grandi, whom the Duce dubbed “‘the finest man Fascism produced,’”\textsuperscript{203} attempted to forewarn Mussolini of the impending action and at five o’clock on July 22\textsuperscript{nd}, he met Mussolini in the Sala del Mappamondo and read him the resolution.\textsuperscript{204} Mussolini, seemingly thinking nothing of it, dismissed Grandi once he finished. Interestingly, a few days prior to this encounter, German Field Marshal Albert Konrad Kesselring, who was stationed in a villa near Frascati, met with the Duce and noticed how positively the dictator spoke of Grandi: “Do you know Grandi? Mussolini asked. He’s just left me. We had a heart-to-heart talk, our views are identical. He is loyally devoted to me.”\textsuperscript{205}

It is apparent that Grandi, like Ciano, maintained a sense of loyalty to the Duce and thus it is arguable if he was prepared to resolutely rise against him. Moreover, Mussolini, who was made fully aware of the events to come, completely underestimated the power of his political cabinet and thus did not believe they could effectively oppose him. In reality, the Grand Council could have convened at an earlier point instead of waiting until 1943 to act. This highlighted the extreme political discrepancies among the elite governing officials, and it pinpoints the regime’s weaknesses: men of the diplomatic corps, like Grandi, had the ability to openly oppose their leader through an approved legal

\textsuperscript{200} Davis, Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943, 49.
\textsuperscript{201} Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 163.
\textsuperscript{202} Davis, Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943, 47.
\textsuperscript{203} Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 256.
\textsuperscript{204} Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 175.
\textsuperscript{205} Davis, Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943, 88.
process and nothing was done to stop them. No longer did Mussolini have political control, if he arguably had any to begin with, and he was now bound up in a delusional reality, completely detached from the chaotic political scene.

On the morning of July 24th as Mussolini prepared for the meeting taking place later that evening, Rachele, Mussolini’s wife, voiced her concerns; but the Duce, a captive to his innate stubbornness, brushed past her warnings. “Rachele, I’m worrying about the American tanks, not about Badoglio’s listening-in or the intrigues of the others.” 206 Once again, Mussolini ignored the power of the Grand Council which he believed was, compared to his own power, incredibly minute:

> What do they want? What authority do they have? Only that of orators which lasts as long as their speeches. You can be sure,’ he told the head of his police, ‘that I won’t find anyone opposing me or causing disturbances. Don’t you know these members of the Grand Council? They have poor intelligence, very poor, hesitant faith and even less courage. They are people who live because of a light coming from a flood-lamp; if you turn off the source, they’ll fall into the darkness from which they came.” 207

Mussolini believed that he was their “flood-lamp” and his acerbic words brought to the surface a profound truth, that even he had no faith in the foremost men working beneath him to effectively lead the regime. From Mussolini’s perspective, the “spinelessness” of his colleagues, men whom he often referred to as “cowardly and lacking in brains,” posed little threat to his rule. 208 In Italy, Mussolini assumed he “could rely on unquestioning obedience.” 209

208. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 294.
209. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 294.
As recorded in Rachele’s diary, Mussolini “honestly believes that everything will turn out for the best […] although he did admit the other day that there would certainly be a lively debate.” Rachele was suspicious of Ciano, and her suspicions were further exacerbated when Mussolini caught wind that Ciano had been secretly meeting with Grandi and his followers. It is hard to understand why Mussolini did not mistrust Galeazzo; perhaps it was Mussolini’s faith in family loyalty that allowed him to overlook Ciano’s dealings. Galeazzo had not only been his political sidekick, he was also his son-in-law and thus bound to Mussolini by what seemed to be a ‘gentleman’s agreement’ of impenetrable familial bonds. “[I]t will not be difficult for me to shepherd them back into the fold—that Grandi, that Bottai, also Count Ciano,” Mussolini confidently remarked on the eve of the meeting. Ciano had always been a follower never a leader. Mussolini had gotten his way with every political decision made thus far. The meeting posed no threat- it would “only be clearing the air between friends.”

Mussolini opened the Grand Council meeting with a speech acknowledging that he had contemplated splitting from Germany for a long time but ultimately deemed it impossible; to do so would “mean the instant annulment of the regime.” It would be ludicrous to “give up so easily twenty years’ work and abandon the realization of all our hopes, accept the recognition of military and political defeat, the disappearance of Italy from the world scene.” In order to uphold fascism, Mussolini proclaimed, Italy had to maintain allegiance to Germany- only through Germany would Italy be able to solidify a respectable standing in the European and Mediterranean world. Despite the

210. Mussolini, My Life With Mussolini, 125.
211. Mussolini, My Life with Mussolini, 125-126.
213. Mussolini, My Life with Mussolini, 125.
circumstances, Mussolini’s outlook had not changed and this further confirmed for the men sitting before him the necessity of getting the resolution passed. Ciano was one among many who became excited by Mussolini’s opening statements, and he unabashedly rose to give a speech thronged with anti-German sentiment in which he specified events that, he believed, were reasons for Italy to back out of her alliance with Germany.

Ciano’s main concern lay root in Hitler’s disregard for the Pact of Steel and his move to invade Poland; this event proved that Germany had no respect for Italy, and, according to Ciano, it signified a bleak future for Italy if she continued the partnership.215 In addition to the invasion of Poland, Ciano also discussed his meeting with Ribbentrop in August 1939 at Salzburg in which Germany undermined Mussolini’s attempt at peace, and deceptively aligned with Russia without informing Italy.216 Although he had repeatedly professed these warnings throughout the past few years, Ciano hoped, yet again, that his plea would resonate with Mussolini and spark the dictator to act:

‘Let us recall that we can make decisions with full liberty as far as our ally is concerned, since it is the Germans who betrayed us, starting the war. We will not have to fear any negative judgment by history as far as the correctness of our international relations are concerned if we should decide to separate our decisions from those of our ally. No one can accuse us of being traitors because the incontrovertible truth is this, we will never be the traitors, only the betrayed.’217

This paragraph sums up Ciano’s reasons for attending the meeting; he did not wish to deprive Mussolini of total power, nor did he want the collapse of the fascist regime. He wanted to restore pride and security to Italy, and the only way to accomplish this was to either convince or force Mussolini to surrender military power. When Ciano rose to

speak, Mussolini grew incredibly angry. According to Federzoni, who was only a few meters away from Mussolini, the Duce’s face was wrought by bitter exasperation:

\[Gli\ \text{o}\text{cchi\ roteanti\ lampeggiavano\ d’ira\ appena\ contenuta,\ e\ le\ mascelle\ fattesi\ scarne\ masticavano\ visibilmente\ tacite\ imprecazioni\ e\ sinistre\ promesse\ contro\ il\ genero\ infedele.}’\ E\ Buffarini\ Guidi:\ ‘La\ faccia\ che\ fece\ quando\ parlò\ Ciano\ non\ potrà\ mai\ essere\ descritta.\]^{218}

[He could barely contain his anger, which flashed in his rolling eyes, and his visibly gaunt jaw chewed and left unspoken curses and sinister promises against his unfaithful son-in-law. And Buffarini Guidi stated: I will never be able to describe that face when Ciano spoke.]

This was the first moment that Ciano partook in a planned operation to oppose Mussolini, signifying a drastic change in Ciano’s relationship with the dictator. Although Ciano expressed his discontent openly, it took him three years to muster the courage and only then could he do it in a formal, politically regulated setting among a group of men who, for the majority, echoed the same beliefs.

Scorza\^{219} and Grandi, who was armed with two hand grenades in case the gathering got out of hand,\^{220} also gave speeches in which they pronounced “the urgent necessity of putting these reforms and innovations into effect”\^{221} in order to preserve “the honour and salvation of the nation.”\^{222} Ciano, Bottai, Federzoni, and Grandi continuously reiterated their devotion to fascism, the Duce, and the war if it could be continued successfully.\^{223} “But in both moderates and extremists there was an

\footnotesize{\begin{itemize}
\item 219. Carlo Scorza, Secretary of fascist party
\item 221. Deakin, \textit{The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism}, 456.
\item 222. Deakin, \textit{The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism}, 455.
\item 223. Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 295.
\end{itemize}}
undercurrent of resentment at having been left uninformed and powerless.”

They needed a military change.

As tensions increased and the time to vote drew near, the group’s confidence wavered and many men who once supported the resolution began to doubt their decision: Count Giacomo Suardo, President of the Senate, withdrew his support for Grandi and tried to convince people to vote for Scorza’s alternative resolution. As ideas ping-ponged across the table, Ciano also began to second-guess his decision and he proposed that a commission be allotted to analyze both Grandi and Scorza’s resolutions to come up with a decree that combined the two.

Melton Davis claimed that, regardless of Ciano’s displays of arrogance and pride he was a very insecure individual, and he felt vulnerable in the company of many of the other fascists at the meeting. Ciano did not contribute to the preliminary years when the regime was forming, nor had he assumed a prominent role during the March on Rome in 1922. One of the greatest mistakes that Ciano made, as did many other members of the Grand Council, was that he undermined the impact the resolution would have. “No need to have any scruples or misgivings, Ciano said, [...] It’s simply a memorandum. During the discussion we shall, as always, treat the Duce with the utmost respect and deference.” It is widely speculated that Grandi explained the resolution differently to each participant and thus was at fault for the confusion. To some, he magnified its

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225. Scorza believed that because Mussolini had not been dictator for very long, and thus to ensure that he could efficiently perform all his duties, Mussolini should put Graziani in charge of the Armed Forces. Scorza vowed to remain loyal to the fascist regime and fight until the war was won.
importance, while to others he diminished it,\textsuperscript{228} revealing a central inconsistency amidst members of the opposition.

Anfuso’s account of the events of that morning provides evidence of how little they trusted each other. At Montecitorio, Anfuso says, Grandi and Ciano ‘went off and talked together in a corner.’ Then they began arguing. ‘It was clear that Grandi hid a lot from Ciano.’ A little later, when Ciano and Anfuso had left Grandi and were going back together to Anfuso’s house, Ciano showed that his knowledge of the Court’s intentions was as uncertain as Grandi’s. ‘All is arranged, you’ll see,’ he said confidingly. ‘The Ministry is already made. Pirelli will be Foreign Minister. I believe Vitetti is Under-Secretary. General Carboni is Minister of Propaganda.’\textsuperscript{229}

There was no definitive plan. ‘Everybody’s afraid,’ said Ciano, ‘and it could mean that we’ll all finish behind bars. But you’ll see that in the end he will be finished and we can straighten things out somehow.’ \textsuperscript{230} Despite Ciano’s decision to support Grandi’s resolution, it is evident that he was not entirely wedded to the idea; and thus when his presence had a greater impact than expected, he panicked for fear of the ramifications his participation might render.

Nonetheless, the vote was cast. Nineteen out of twenty-eight men voted in favor of the Grandi Resolution,\textsuperscript{231} Ciano included. The Duce was officially ousted by a democratic procedure, which was glaringly ironic.\textsuperscript{232} It was nearly three a.m. on July 25\textsuperscript{th} when everyone left Palazzo Venezia and ventured home. Mussolini was shocked: ‘Even

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{228} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 15.
\item \textsuperscript{229} Hibbert, \textit{Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce}, 190.
\item \textsuperscript{230} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{231} Renzo Montagna, \textit{Mussolini e il processo di Verona} (Milan: Edizioni Omnia, 1949), 103-104. “Lettera del giornalista Achille Benedetti a Badoglio, scritta alla mezzanotte del 25 luglio 1943: ‘Amato Marescillo, la mozione Grandi per la cessione dei poteri al Re (cioè l’andata via di Mussolini) ha avuto i seguenti voti: contrari (cioè per la permanenza di Mussolini): Alfieri, Buffarini, Galbiati, Albini, Scorza, Biggini e Acerbo; favorevoli (cioè per l’andata via di Mussolini): Grandi, Federzoni, Bottai, De Bono, Cianetti, De Vecchi, Ciano, Balella, Gottardi, Frattari, Di Marzio, Rossoni e qualche altro; astenuti Farinacci e Suardo.’”
\item \textsuperscript{232} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 126.
\end{itemize}
Ciano, Albini and Bastianini\textsuperscript{233} he exclaimed in amazement on his way back to Villa Torlonia. Surprisingly, however, the Duce refused to take any immediate action against the men who voted against him, which provided these individuals with premature feelings of security and excitement that their goal had been accomplished.

When Mussolini returned home in the early morning of July 25\textsuperscript{th} Rachele was there to greet him. “His haggard, woe-begone face showed how things had gone” Rachele wrote.\textsuperscript{234} “There’s nothing more I can do,” Mussolini confided, “they’re set on our ruin. I’m afraid my orders don’t count any more.”\textsuperscript{235} For nearly twenty minutes Mussolini described the meeting and the surprising events that took place. Rachele “only interrupted him once when he said that Galeazzo had sided with the opposition. He too! I cried, shocked to the core, thinking that though life has its mysterious ways, there are times when the burden seems too hard to bear.”\textsuperscript{236} Ciano’s vote against the Duce was perhaps the most rattling event for the Mussolini family; through one flick of his pen Ciano instantly severed not only political ties but, most importantly, familial ties. Ciano’s signature transformed the resolution into his personal suicide note.\textsuperscript{237} It was for this act he would pay.

\textsuperscript{234} Mussolini, \textit{My Life with Mussolini}, 126.
\textsuperscript{235} Mussolini, \textit{My Life with Mussolini}, 127.
\textsuperscript{236} Mussolini, \textit{My Life with Mussolini}, 127.
\textsuperscript{237} Morgan, \textit{The Fall of Mussolini: Italy, the Italians, and the Second World War}, 18.
On the afternoon of July 25th, Mussolini, exhausted and plagued by intense pains from his stomach ulcer, ventured to Villa Savoia despite Rachele’s warnings against it. “I’m a man of honour,” Mussolini told her, “we have a pact with Germany to which we cannot be false. The King signed it too and we must discuss the matter together. If necessary, I shall remain at the head of the services to see that we keep our word.” Mussolini adamantly believed in the King’s loyalty: “He’s a friend. He’s on my side.” Mussolini continued to indulge himself with the delusion that the Grandi Resolution was utterly powerless and that he remained head of the regime. The meeting between King Emanuel III and Mussolini lasted no more than twenty minutes; the conversation was affable but their words were weighted with undertones of extreme apprehension concerning the present political situation. Upon descending the steps to leave, Mussolini was approached by Captain Vigneri who claimed he was “ordered by the king to protect your person.” A feeling of doubt seeped into Mussolini’s subconscious as he saw an ambulance round the corner, and he refused the offer, insisting that he wanted to take his own car. Captain Vigneri persisted and it did not take long for the Duce to concede and enter into the back of the ambulance. At this moment, unbeknownst to Mussolini, the once almighty fascist dictator was placed under arrest. The Duce was now a prisoner of the monarchy and the newly instituted Badoglio

239. Mussolini, My Life with Mussolini, 130.  
regime; and he remained this way for two months until the Germans rescued him on September 12, 1943 at Gran Sasso.

The responses to Mussolini’s arrest varied: a majority of Italians celebrated the news and reveled in their “sudden gift of liberty.”\textsuperscript{243} Reactions among the fascist political circles, however, were extremely different.

One minor gerarca [boss] committed suicide […] and one or two others, including Farinacci, fled in disguise to hide in the German embassy: but dozens of leading fascists, headed by Grandi and Starace, at once wrote to ingratiate themselves with the new regime and congratulate Badoglio on his accession to power.\textsuperscript{244}

Ciano left the meeting without much concern for his personal safety: “In a few hours Mussolini will have me arrested […] But then the king will take away his power and I will be let out.”\textsuperscript{245} It is evident that Ciano was completely oblivious to the resolutions outcome, and was overconfident in the king’s ability to save him from punishment.

After Ciano heard of Badoglio’s promotion to head of government and Mussolini’s arrest, he was flabbergasted: “What a mess, he said. It’s the collapse of everything. Now they will handcuff us as well”\textsuperscript{246} Badoglio, against the king’s wishes, sought to eliminate all members of the fascist Party,\textsuperscript{247} and Ciano was one of his primary targets- his relationship with Badoglio was already tense. Badoglio was looking to arrest Ciano for the “enormous, illicit fortune”\textsuperscript{248} the Foreign Minister had acquired throughout

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\textsuperscript{243} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 158.  \\
\textsuperscript{244} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 298.  \\
\textsuperscript{245} Moseley, \textit{Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano}, 173.  \\
\textsuperscript{246} Moseley, \textit{Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano}, 174.  \\
\textsuperscript{247} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 200.  \\
\textsuperscript{248} Ciano, \textit{My Truth}, 192.
\end{flushright}
his political reign; meanwhile Ciano had documents that revealed illegal, and unflattering information about Badoglio’s military past.\textsuperscript{249}

Ciano and his family were in grave danger, and both General Ettore Muti and General Ambrosio recommended that Ciano try to obtain passports from Badoglio and flee.\textsuperscript{250} This met with no avail, however, and Ciano was at a loss. As Edda recounts, on July 31\textsuperscript{st} Ciano resigned from his position as Ambassador to the Holy See and remained in his house for two weeks,\textsuperscript{251} unsure of how to act or where to go. After much insistence from Edda, who, unlike Ciano, liked the Germans very much and was highly favored by Hitler, the Ciano’s resolved to ask Germany for help to escape to Franco’s Spain where they could seek protection. Ciano was apprehensive about the idea, but his desperation prevailed and he supported Edda in her pursuit to contact German Lieutenant, Colonel Eugene Dollman, who was head of the Roman S.S..\textsuperscript{252} This decision was without a doubt an absurd one, but it illuminates the extreme anxiety plaguing Ciano at this time and his inability to develop a well thought-out plan to ensure his survival. In such a state of emergency Ciano was quick to capitalize on any hope of salvation.

On August 27\textsuperscript{th}, Galeazzo, Edda and their children boarded a flight to Munich where they were supposed to rest and obtain passports for their second, and final, flight to Spain; however, upon arriving in Munich the Ciano’s were detained and placed under house arrest. The Germans wanted two things from Galeazzo: his diaries and his life. The Diaries revealed information about the Third Reich that was highly confidential and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{249} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 199. The information included crooked deals Badoglio made in Greece and Ethiopia, and indicated that Badoglio had approved the murder of the Yugoslavian King and the French Foreign Minister, Barthou, in 1934.
\item \textsuperscript{250} Davis, \textit{Who Defends Rome? The Forty-five Days, July 25 to September 8, 1943}, 199-200.
\item \textsuperscript{251} Ciano, \textit{My Truth}, 192.
\item \textsuperscript{252} Ciano, \textit{My Truth}, 193.
\end{itemize}
unflattering; information that, if fallen into Allied hands, would humiliate the German empire and illuminate many of the wartime crimes she committed. As Goebbels recounted in his diary:

The Fuhrer rightly suspects that such memoirs can only be written in a manner derogatory to us for otherwise he could not dispose of them in the international market. There is therefore no thought of authorizing Ciano to leave the Reich: he will remain in our custody, at least for the present. 253

Securing the diaries was most essential. If fallen into Allied control, they would be a major "political weapon," and could be used as "a master directory for both short and long-range politico-military intelligence." 254, 255 Furthermore, Hitler, who already held the ex-Foreign Minister in great contempt, hated Ciano even more after the Grandi Resolution was instituted and wanted him punished as a traitor of the regime. Extreme fascists, such as Alessandro Pavolini, Minister of Popular Culture until January 1943 and later head of the successor of the fascist Republican Party, also believed that the members of the diplomatic corps who voted against Mussolini, especially Ciano, should be executed as traitors. Their vote was an attack on Mussolini’s personal character, a direct challenge to his ‘fascism.’

On September 15, 1943, a few days after German troops rescued Mussolini from Gran Sasso, Mussolini met with Hitler and it was here that the Fuhrer expressed extreme disdains for the men who took part in removing Mussolini from power just a few months prior. Hitler’s main focus was Ciano. “It is obvious that the Duce cannot start criminal

255. Charlesworth, “Ensuring the After-Life of the Ciano Diaries: Allen Dulles’ Provision of Nuremberg Trial Evidence,” 572. Allen Dulles, the senior wartime intelligence official with the OSS stationed in Bern, Switzerland, obtained Ciano’s Diaries in 1945 after partaking in a long series of negotiations with Edda Ciano.
proceedings against the traitors of Fascism if he is not willing to call his own son-in-law to account,” Goebbels concluded in his diary. “If he were a man of really great revolutionary caliber, Mussolini would have asked the Fuhrer to hand Ciano over to him and would personally have taken him to task.” When he heard of Mussolini’s arrival in Germany, Ciano requested a meeting with him. “This means this poisonous mushroom is again planted in the midst of the new Fascist Republican Party, Goebbels commented in disgust.” Although the meeting did nothing to change Ciano’s situation, it suggests that Mussolini wanted to forgive and pardon his son-in-law. The Duce was already extremely hesitant to punish the fascist traitors, which baffled Hitler and left him disillusioned with the faltering dictator. Mussolini recognized this, and perhaps from a mixture of embarrassment, fear, and a need to exert his masculine dominance, he reluctantly agreed to punish Ciano and the other men who rose against him. As the Duce noted: “To vote for the Grandi resolution meant opening the crisis of the regime and my succession; to plunge it, in other words, into the abyss. […] Ciano himself was not ignorant of these ends, and he played the extreme game with them.” And if nothing was done to vindicate the regime, then Italy’s prestige, Mussolini feared, as well as his own would be destroyed in the eyes of the Germans.

Ciano and his family were sent back to Rome on October 17, 1943 where Ciano was to face the long-awaited consequences of his involvement in the Grand Council meeting. On October 19th, Ciano, accompanied by Frau Felicitas Beetz, an agent of

256. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 562.
257. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 237.
258. Moseley, Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano, 229.
259. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 237-238.
260. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 634.
the German security service who was given the task of discovering the whereabouts of Ciano’s diary and diplomatic papers, departed from Munich and landed in Verona airport where he was immediately arrested and incarcerated in Verona’s Scalzi Prison.

Only six out of the nineteen members who voted for the resolution were found and detained: Luciano Gottardi was arrested at the end of September, while Carlo Pareschi, Emilio De Bono, Giovanni Marinelli and Tullio Cianetti were arrested in early October. Others, such as Grandi, fled Italy and took refuge in places like Spain.

**Conclusion**

In the aftermath of the meeting, most of the Grand Council members were well aware of the dire repercussions they would face and thus fled the country; but there were some who believed there were no serious consequences and thus stayed in Italy. Ciano was among them. He had faith that the Grandi Resolution would bring about more positive changes than negative, and that he played an essential role in helping Italy rise from her degenerative state. Unfortunately, Ciano was wrong and he would soon face ramifications for the major role he played in the resolution’s birth.

261. Although Frau Felicitas Beetz (birth name Hildegard Burkhardt Beetz) was employed by the Germans and was German herself, she sympathized with Ciano and believed that Germany betrayed him. She often acted as an intermediary between Edda and Galeazzo, and even helped form a plan for Ciano’s escape to Switzerland called “Operation Conte.” The plan was discovered and immediately stopped by Hitler. Nonetheless Frau Beetz played a major role in assisting Edda with her successful attempts to smuggle Ciano’s diaries and diplomatic papers into Switzerland. It is often speculated that Frau Beetz was in love with Ciano but this was never confirmed. Frau Beetz maintains her relationship with Ciano was solely platonic.

262. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, 634.

263. Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, 635.

Although Grandi was the resolution’s creator and primary champion, Ciano became a symbol of the Grand Council Meeting and thus of Mussolini’s demise.

“Mussolini never holds many heads responsible for anything,” Filippo Anfuso once stated to Italian journalist, Curzio Malaparte. “He needs only one head, a head that seems to be made for that special purpose. He would hold Galeazzo responsible. What other use could there be for Galeazzo? Mussolini keeps him for that special purpose.” 265 Many members of the diplomatic corps recognized this from the start, and they were only proven true by the events following July 24th. Ciano was blamed for the initial disintegration of Italian fascism, and he represented the downfall of the regime and its dictator.

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Chapter Three
Le Memorie

Introduction

Un giorno non troppo lontano il ventennio fascista finirà relegato in qualche riga nei libri: ma si ricorderà sicuramente il processo di Verona, non tanto dalla prospettiva storica, quanto da quella familiare. Una tragedia che uccise corpi e anime…

[One day, not too far away, the two decades of fascism will be relegated to a few lines in a book: the Verona Trials will be remembered, not so much from a historical perspective, but from that of a family. A tragedy that killed bodies and souls…]

On the morning of January 10, 1944 Count Galeazzo Ciano, along with four other members of the Grand Council, were sentenced to death by firing squad. It was a moment that resonated deeply among extreme fascists and Germans, who vehemently supported Ciano’s death, and the Duce himself, who painfully grappled with executing his son-in-law and once close friend. The meeting of the fascist Grand Council in July 1943 and the consequent fragmentation of the fascist regime that followed all set the stage for the 1944 Verona Trial and the untimely fate that Ciano and the four men met.

To some, Ciano’s death was well deserved: he was a traitor to the Axis alliance, his country, his regime, and his family. But to many others, Galeazzo’s death was an act committed by a prideful dictator trying to reassert control over a crumbling regime.

Ciano’s presence at the Verona Trial and his subsequent execution is controversial, as

267. ‘Extreme fascists’ were members of the far-right in the Italian government. They vehemently believed in the fascist cause and were fervent supporters of the Duce.
268. Tullio Cianetti was the sixth member of the group, but his life was pardoned and he was sentenced to 30 years imprisonment.
indicated by the high number of historical sources and accounts that have opposing opinions and viewpoints on the event and its main actor. Nonetheless, the trial is one of the most important events of Ciano’s political career, not simply because it brought an end to his life, but because it illuminates the complexity of his role in the fascist regime and of his overall character.

A “‘Premeditated Murder’”269

The Verona Trial took place on January 8, 1944 in the Castelvecchio hall located in Verona. Although it was open to the public, the courtroom was primarily filled with extreme fascists and German soldiers who eagerly awaited for justice to be restored to the regime.270 The meeting of the fascist Grand Council left a bitter taste in the mouths of extreme fascists present at the trial, and in the name of the regime and the Duce, they desired retribution. Even before the tribunal began there was a prefixed notion that the six men would be deemed guilty despite all effort to prove their innocence. Just before nine in the morning the six men- Ciano, De Bono, Pareschi, Marinelli, Gottardi and Cianetti- filed into the courtroom. “Old Marinelli came in with a bewildered expression. The other defendants were calm.”271 Ciano walked “in with a display of bravura,”272 looking composed in a beige overcoat, dark brown sports jacket and a pair of gray trousers.273

Ciano and the five other men were the only members of the Grand Council who were caught and brought to trial. The others either left Italy or were able to renounce

270. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 637.
271. Moseley, Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano, 225.
fascism and join Badoglio’s regime, and thus cleverly cheated punishment. Although the six present at the trial still supported the Grandi Resolution, individuals like Marshal De Bono, who was seventy-eight at the time, and Carlo Pareschi, the former Minister of Agriculture, adamantly claimed there had been no pre-meditated plot to overthrow Mussolini. “I have never thought that the Duce should leave his post as Head of Government: my devotion to Mussolini was boundless,” stated De Bono, while Pareschi confessed that “It never passed through my mind that the Duce should leave office.”

Meanwhile, there were a few whose loyalty to the Grandi Resolution changed: Cianetti swore that he had withdrawn his vote for the resolution immediately after it passed, claiming that his confidence in Mussolini was strong. Moreover, Gottardi, the former President of the fascist Confederation of Industrial Workers, stated that he only voted for the resolution to “liberate the Duce from the grave responsibilities of military command when the war was taking such a bad turn.” Gottardi further claimed that he had the clear impression that there was a split between the Party, the people, and the army, and that the morale of the nation was shaken. Since it emerged from the Duce’s own account at the Grand Council that the army did not want to fight, I thought that, if the Crown took a direct part in the fortunes of the war, perhaps the army would be able to recover. He, like Cianetti, feared the consequences of opposition.

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274. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 637-638.
275. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 638.
276. Tullio Cianetti, Memorie dal carcere di Verona (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1991), 11 & 389. It is worth noting that Cianetti’s unhappiness over the Grand Council Meeting was blatantly revealed throughout the opening pages of his memoir, Memorie dal Carcere di Verona. On page 11, Cianetti stated “sento nell'anima una tristezza infinita” (I feel an infinite sadness in my soul); and he entitled his chapter on the Grand Council Meeting, “Fine di un Sogno” (the end of a dream) on page 389.
277. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 249.
278. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 638.
Moreover, sixty-five year old Marinelli, former Treasurer of the Party, suffered from bad hearing and consequently barely heard any of the speeches made at the Grand Council meeting- he voted for the resolution, believing that because the Duce was present, it was ok to do so.\textsuperscript{279} The personal statements of the first five men were important; however it was Ciano’s testament that the judges eagerly awaited. Ciano’s involvement in the Grand Council meeting sparked the most controversy due to his personal ties to the Duce. It went unspoken that he was not only on trial for betraying his regime, but also his family. The dual-nature of Ciano’s crime was recorded in the memoirs of one Judge at the trial, Renzo Montagna. According to Montagna, there was a unanimous vote to condemn Ciano because his actions were considered to be the most despicable among the men for two reasons:

\begin{quote}
primo, perché era parente del Duce, e poi perché unicamente al Duce doveva l’alta sua posizione politica. Non c’è, difatti, chi non pensi che egli sarebbe eternamente rimasto nella categoria della gente oscura, se non avesse sposato la figlia di Mussolini.\textsuperscript{280}
\end{quote}

[first, because he was a relative of the Duce, and then second because he owed his high station solely to the Duce. There are those who, indeed, think that he would have eternally remained in the category of obscure people if he had not married the daughter of Mussolini.]

Family loyalty was a basic yet highly valued part of Italian culture and so Ciano was deemed a traitor to the Duce in both a political and familial sense. This was one of the major reasons for Ciano’s condemnation and downfall.

\textsuperscript{279} Hibbert, \textit{Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce}, 249.
\textsuperscript{280} Montagna, \textit{Mussolini e il processo di Verona}, 190-191.
When Ciano took the stand to pledge his case, he was arguing against a sentence that had already been carved into stone. The ex-Foreign Minister beamed with anger.\textsuperscript{281}

I reject categorically and indignantly the accusations against me,’ he said. ‘They represent an offense to my entire past as a citizen, soldier and above all Fascist…If the Duce had asked me about the meeting of the Grand Council, I would have advised him against it because in that moment such a convocation was not prudent, due to the international repercussions it could have…With my vote I only intended to engage the Crown and make it intervene in the war because it had remained outside it during the entire conflict.\textsuperscript{282}

Ciano persisted onward to prove his innocence, claiming that “Grandi never suggested […] and I never imagined that the resolution would cause the fall of the régime.”\textsuperscript{283} He had only “voted for Grandi’s motion because I wanted to commit the monarchy, and force it out of its nebulous state.”\textsuperscript{284} But his attempts met with no avail.

The statement above indicates that Ciano was fully aware that the accusations of treason made against him had no legal justification. In actuality, Ciano’s involvement in the events of July 24\textsuperscript{th} were perfectly legal- Mussolini permitted the members of the Grand Council to meet and cast their vote for the resolution, knowing all the while that it would strip him of military power if the vote passed.\textsuperscript{285} Consequently, the trial’s purpose was not to punish Ciano for his participation during the meeting, but to legally and systematically disparage Ciano’s image as a diplomat, as a fascist, and most importantly as a son-in-law in order “to place Mussolini morally with his back to the wall”\textsuperscript{286} and reestablish the integrity of the fascist regime. Ciano recognized this. In a letter dating December 23, 1943 that he wrote to the King while imprisoned at Scalzi, Ciano referred

\begin{flushright}
281. Moseley, \textit{Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano}, 225. \\
283. Hibbert, \textit{Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce}, 249. \\
284. Deakin, \textit{The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism}, 639. \\
285. Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 303. \\
\end{flushright}
to the trial as “nothing else but premeditated murder.” This was the argument that composed Ciano’s entire defense. As expressed in Edda’s memoir, Ciano was “Il Duce’s Achilles’ heel”: Mussolini’s decision to kill Ciano “carried a heavy implicit message. It signified the boasted liquidation of the bourgeois version of Fascism, with its weak acceptance that […] corruption and high living, ideological equivocation and practical realism, are necessary parts of life.” More importantly, it signified the Duce’s unwavering commitment to Hitler and the Italo-German alliance; and this was acknowledged throughout Italy and Germany. “There can be no doubt, an Italian diplomat wrote to Mussolini from Berlin, that the Verona trials have revealed here that Republican Italy has cut its link with the past, and intends to be near to Germany always and in every way.”

It is important to note, however, that on two separate occasions before the trial Mussolini acknowledged that he did not believe Ciano, De Bono, Pareschi, Marinelli, Gottardi or Cianetti were the main culprits of the Grandi Resolution. In a conversation with Edda in Munich in mid-September 1943, shortly after the Duce was freed from captivity on September 12th, Mussolini admitted that “Most of those who voted the Grandi motion did so in good faith, though they were idiots. The only real traitors are Grandi, Bottai, Federzoni, Albini, and Bastianini.” Oddly, the “real traitors” were not present at the trial—either a result of their masterful escape artistry or the inability of the fascist search party to find them. The following month while speaking to one of his

287. Saporiti, Empty Balcony, 71.
288. Ciano, My Truth, 236.
290. Mazower, Hitler’s Empire: How the Nazis Ruled Europe, 364.
291. Ciano, My Truth, 202. Edda worked to arrange a meeting between Galeazzo and Mussolini with the hope that Galeazzo would be pardoned and his life spared.
secretaries, Giovanni Dolfin, Mussolini confessed that “Ciano was no better and no worse than the others. All the hatreds that focus on him are designed to strike against me.”293 Ciano was a pawn in Mussolini’s game, and his condemnation enabled the Duce “to conceal his own manifold failures and contradictions”294 in an attempt to restore both the pride and power of fascism. Ironically, the Verona Trial was Mussolini’s last exhibition of dictatorial strength in the newly established Republic of Salò.295

The men who were tried alongside Ciano were simply there as “an excuse,”296 Edda admitted years later. They were the unfortunate sufferers of a prosecution targeted at one specific individual. “It is horrible to think that those men are dead only because my husband had to die,” Edda remorsed. “I have often been saddened by the thought of those wives who suffered because of us.”297 As Judge Renzo Montagna revealed, Ciano’s case was the only one that procured a homogeneous consensus.

Quando viene la volta di Ciano, la discussione si svolge invece in un’atmosfera di solidarietà, poiché in tutti era la convinzione che proprio lui, parente del Duce, non avrebbe mai dovuto, per nessun motivo ed a nessun costo, dare la sua adesione ad un atto che tendeva a defenestrare l’Uomo al quale egli tutto doveva!298

[When it came Ciano’s turn, the discussion takes place in an atmosphere of solidarity, because the conviction of all was that he, a relative of the Duce, should never, for any reason and at no cost, adhere to an act intending to unseat the man to whom he owed everything!]

If the death sentence was not issued, Ciano and the other defendants would have been killed either in the courtroom itself after the verdict was given, or in the police van on

293. Bosworth, Mussolini’s Italy: Life Under the Fascist Dictatorship 1915-1945, 515.
295. Saporiti, Empty Balcony, 88.
296. Ciano, My Truth, 238.
298. Montagna, Mussolini e il processo di Verona, 206.
their return to Scalzi prison.\textsuperscript{299} The judges’ lives were also on the line: if the prisoners were not found guilty, the judges, would have all been shot by the fascist guards in the courtroom.\textsuperscript{300} “We were determined not to allow Ciano to escape…” Nicola Furlotti, commander of Ciano’s firing squad, stated to Italian journalist Gian Franco Vené in an 1967 interview.\textsuperscript{301}

The trial spanned for two days. When the Clerk finally read Ciano’s deposition, time seemed to stand still for it was the most highly anticipated deposition of the trial.\textsuperscript{302} It pleaded not guilty of treason. “It may be that I committed an error, but it is out of the question to mention treason, which would contrast with all my activity as a soldier, a Fascist and a man.”\textsuperscript{303} Ciano’s error, the deposition stressed, was not synonymous with betrayal.

The official sentence of the men was not determined until the morning of January 10\textsuperscript{th}. Everyone but Cianetti, who was condemned to thirty years imprisonment, was sentenced to death.\textsuperscript{304}

[H]aving, on the occasion of the vote taken by the Grand Council of Fascism on 25 July 1943 in Rome, conspired among themselves and attempted to destroy the independence of the State and of having thwarted, by the encouragement of illusions of easy terms of peace, not only the moral resistance of the nation but military operations also, and, by doing so, of having given aid and comfort to the enemy.\textsuperscript{305}

\textsuperscript{299} Ciano, \textit{My Truth}, 241.
\textsuperscript{300} Mack Smith, \textit{Mussolini}, 304. Also stated by Judge Renzo Montagna in his memoir, \textit{Mussolini e il processo di Verona}.
\textsuperscript{301} Ciano, \textit{My Truth}, 242.
\textsuperscript{302} Saporiti, \textit{Empty Balcony}, 79.
\textsuperscript{303} Saporiti, \textit{Empty Balcony}, 79-80.
\textsuperscript{304} Hibbert, \textit{Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce}, 251.
\textsuperscript{305} Hibbert, \textit{Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce}, 428.
Reminiscing about the event, Aldo Vecchini, the tribunal President, stated that “When he came to Ciano, he recalled Ciano’s reaction upon learning from Ettore Muti [the former Party Secretary] of the arrest of Mussolini: It is too bad; now they will handcuff us as well. That demonstrated, he said, that Ciano was more concerned about himself than about the fate of his chiefs, his benefactor and relative.” This further validated, at least for Vecchini, the reason for Ciano’s execution, which was scheduled for the morning of January 11, 1944. And it suggests that throughout the trial’s entirety, Ciano was treated with extreme hostility. In reality, the trial was staged and the ex-Foreign Minister entered the courtroom already a condemned man.

**The Death of Five**

As dawn peeled back night’s heavy blanket and daylight slowly illuminated the inside of Scalzi prison where the five men sat in despair, rumors circulated that Mussolini had called together a Cabinet meeting at Gargnano. In a final attempt at salvation the men had signed a request for pardon the previous night, and they hoped that the meeting was summoned in order to grant their requests. But it was an empty hope- their plea was held up by Alessandro Pavolini, the now successor of the fascist Republican Party, who wanted to spare the Duce “the necessity of confirming the death sentence,” and the meeting never took place.

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308. Moseley, *Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano*, 230. Ciano was reluctant to sign the request and only penned his name when warned that if he did not do so, he would jeopardize the other prisoner’s chances of receiving pardon.
Although he did nothing to intervene,\(^{310}\) Mussolini wrestled with his decision throughout the entire night; at three o’clock in the morning, he telephoned General Wolff, the Supreme SS and Police Leader of Italy, with the hope that Ciano’s life, and that of the remaining four, could be spared.\(^{311}\) According to Ribbentrop, Germany wished to be informed of the proceedings but maintained “that the trial of Ciano is exclusively a matter for the Duce, and that on our side no pressure whatever shall be exerted in favour of a condemnation.”\(^{312}\) General Wolff, relayed Hitler’s orders that Ciano’s case was “an exclusive and absolute internal Italian nature”\(^{313}\) and if Mussolini failed to follow through with the execution, he would lose the Fuehrer’s respect. Ciano’s fate was sealed by this phone call. The execution was confirmed at eight o’clock that morning, and by nine,\(^{314}\) Ciano, De Bono, Pareschi, Marinelli and Gottardi, accompanied by German escorts, were driven to the shooting range in a suburb of Verona called Forte San Procolo.\(^{315}\)

Ciano suffered from fits of rage and he cursed Mussolini during the drive; but upon arriving at the execution site, the ex-Foreign Minister became an exemplar of bravery and stoicism.\(^{316}\) As Ciano was tied to a rickety wooden chair that faced away from the firing squad, he remained “perfectly composed” and refused the blindfold that was offered to him.\(^{317}\) He was a starring comparison to his companions, some of whom were on the brink of fainting or trembling in fear. In his last few minutes, Ciano solemnly confided to the priest: “We were all swept away by the same storm […] Let my children

\(^{310}\) Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, 640-641.
\(^{312}\) Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, 637.
\(^{315}\) Deakin, *The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism*, 645.
\(^{316}\) Hibbert, *Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce*, 252.
know I died without bitterness to anyone.”318 As the executioners raised their guns, De Bono, in one last display of pride, sounded a triumphant shout that was echoed by Ciano: “Long live Italy!”319

Immediately before orders were given to shoot, Ciano looked over his shoulder and boldly faced the gunmen as if to stare death in the face [Appendix Image One]. It was an act that “cheated the symbolism of fascist political justice, which insisted that traitors be shot in the back.”320 “Spara!” yelled Nicola Furlotti, the chief of police in Verona and the commander of Ciano’s execution.321 The sound of gunshots and bullets connecting with flesh pierced the air. According to one German report it was an embarrassing display of gunmanship; all five men were inaccurately hit and thus “writhing and screaming”322 in pain. Ciano was among the suffering and twisted in agony on the ground until a man approached him, held a pistol to his head, and put a bullet into his temple, ending his life.

When informed of Ciano’s death, Mussolini detachedly remarked that “Justice has been done”323; to the Duce, “Ciano ha[d] been dead for ages.”324 Despite Mussolini’s cold exterior, his wife Rachele revealed that he was incredibly depressed and mourned the loss of his son-in-law by “weeping tears of despair”325 in the privacy of his own

318. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 253.
322. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 645.
323. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 253.
324. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 303.
325. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 253.
room. The Duce was also haunted by guilt, for after the trial and execution he made a point to pardon all traitors.  

326

The Germans were avid supporters of the execution. In Filippo Anfuso’s summary of a German dispatch from Berlin to the Duce, it was affirmed that “[M]embers of the Grand Council had to be punished as examples not only to the Italian masses, but also to the Germans.”  

Moreover, Anfuso stated that

The Fuhrer and Ribbentrop had spoken […] of Count Ciano bitterly, but without hatred. For them, there no longer existed a Ciano case but a general phenomenon of a political nature which had to be resolved in conformity with their political interests. […] I heard many people who, referring to the terrible tragedy which was weighing our country down, uttered a few words of sympathy for Count Ciano, whose marked intelligence and handsome appearance were admired in Germany. The connection of his name with so many recent events in German history had created a halo of sympathy for him which in the heart of a people like this, had not faded away. I repeat on the other hand that the opinion of this ruling class on the political crime of which the nineteen members of the Grand Council were guilty, is different and resolute: that the crime is not only condemned, but they are asking here why it was not condemned before […] In any case, there can be no doubt that the Verona trials have revealed here that Republican Italy has cut its link with the past, and intends to be near to Germany always and in every way.  

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While some German citizens sympathized with Ciano, most German government officials were satisfied that he, along with the other men who supported the Grandi Resolution, was killed. From their perspective, Ciano’s death eliminated the main source of opposition against the Italian-German alliance and thus it indicated a positive future for the partnership. Additionally, it confirmed Mussolini’s unwavering commitment to Hitler.

326. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 124.  
327. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 647.  
There were many, however, who were displeased with the execution. At the end of May 1944, the Spanish Foreign Minister, Serrano Súñer, made it clear to Mussolini that Ciano’s death was a “political error.” Mussolini’s response was evident: “I have sometimes thought that the end of Count Ciano would have particularly saddened you, and this I understand. In the many agitations of my life, what happened at Verona has been the most dramatic chapter. Sentiment and raison d’état have sharply collided in my spirit.” Likewise, many Italians were shocked that Mussolini permitted a member of his own family to die in such a brutal and dishonorable manner. As Renzo Montagna predicted, the trial and execution only highlighted the Duce’s own inhumanity at being able to kill “il marito di sua figlia e padre dei suoi nipoti” [the husband of his daughter and the father of his grandchildren]- it marred his role as a respectable family man and as a powerful dictator.

Remembering Galeazzo Ciano

Photographs play a significant role in shaping historical memory, and reconstructing and understanding the past. Images throughout the war, particularly those of the fascist regime, have become interwoven into historical culture and affect, either consciously or subconsciously, how history is remembered. Sometimes, if powerful enough, a photo can redefine a historical event or figure- imagery has the power to fabricate an entirely new history. Many have tried to understand Ciano’s death and his ethical character throughout the war, including diplomats, leaders and historians alike.

329. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 646.
330. Deakin, The Brutal Friendship: Mussolini, Hitler and the Fall of Italian Fascism, 646.
331. Montagna, Mussolini e il processo di Verona, 173.
332. In her rage, Edda abandoned Mussolini and did not forgive him until long after his death.
And when trying to make sense of the array of interpretations, the picture of Ciano’s execution acts as a good platform off of which to start. The snapshot of Ciano bound to a chair, his head turned to catch a glimpse of the firing squad behind him immediately before he was shot, has become a popular image of the war that has shaped Ciano’s legacy after his death. It captures Ciano in a moment of defiance. His head is turned and thus he died while ‘looking death in the face,’ an act that challenged his conviction as a traitor to fascism.333

This was one of the final images taken of Ciano, and it is the only one of the execution that has gained prominence; and in it Ciano appears brave, perhaps inquisitive, and utterly defiant of his death as traitor. The twist of his head elucidates the strength of his inner spirit. Ciano vehemently upheld his innocence up until his death, a fact entirely supported by the photograph. Undoubtedly Ciano was corrupt, and he spearheaded many immoral wartime atrocities that will forever taint his character; yet there is something admirable in the way he met his fate. This photo captures Ciano not as a dissolute fascist, but as an individual who steadfastly believed in his fight for the good of Italy. And arguably, this is how he is remembered by a majority of wartime figures and historians.

Winston Churchill, for example, labeled Ciano’s death as an episode in “keeping with Renaissance tragedy.”334 Ciano and the five men, according to Churchill, fell victim to Mussolini’s “wave of calculated vengeance”335 and “died bravely.”336 The Verona Trial and subsequent execution no doubt influenced Churchill’s historical interpretations

333. All traitors were executed with their backs turned away from the firing squad. It was a procedure meant to degrade and embarrass those who had disgraced their country.
of Ciano and Mussolini, and the legacy of Italian fascism. Ciano’s character, and his role as a principal member of the *Corpo Diplomatico*, is unmistakably overshadowed by the brutality and injustice of his death, and, for some, it has reincarnated him into a martyr of the fascist regime. Ciano is included in two of Churchill’s wartime memoirs, the second volume, *Their Finest Hour*, and the fifth volume, *Closing the Ring*. Not only did Ciano’s diaries assist Churchill in composing his six-volume memoir of the Second World War, as evidenced in the extensive bibliography; but it is clear that Churchill used Ciano as a looking glass into the world and workings of Italian fascism and her partnership with Nazi Germany. Through Ciano’s trial and execution, Churchill was able to excavate the mind of Benito Mussolini and most importantly understand where to place fascist Italy in the context of his historical wartime memory. According to Churchill, “Mussolini’s submission to Hitler’s vengeful demands brought him only shame, and the miserable neo-Fascist republic dragged on by Lake Garda- a relic of the Broken Axis.”\(^{337}\) Thus, Ciano’s death, which Churchill dubbed an “Italian tragedy,”\(^{338}\) was a reflection of Mussolini’s deference to Hitler and ultimately marked the beginning of the internal collapse of the Italian fascist regime.

While many historians focus on his cruel, often unjust acts throughout World War Two, they also focus on Ciano’s execution as a traitor and the controversy surrounding his death. Due to this, Ciano is often perceived as a weak-minded, cowardly individual who bore the brunt of Mussolini’s political failures. The picture of the execution is also an overarching symbol of the fascist regime itself: the boldness of Ciano’s actions attest

\(^{337}\) Churchill, *Closing the Ring*, 439. It is interesting that Churchill does not mention the role of the extreme fascists who were the main advocates of Ciano’s execution. This suggests that by the late 1940’s early 1950’s, politicians and historians alike were still grappling to discover the primary proponents of Ciano’s death.

The photograph of Benito Mussolini at the time of his death lies in stark contrast to that of Ciano. In April 1945, Mussolini, along with his lover Claretta Petacci and a few loyal fascists, attempted to bypass German patrols and flee to Switzerland. Italy, occupied by both the Germans and the Allies, was in an ever-growing state of desperation and hostility, which posed a threat to Mussolini’s security; however right before reaching the border, Mussolini was shot multiple times by Italian partisans, severely beaten, and then taken to Piazzale Loreto in Milan where he was hung up by meat hooks from a gas station roof truss, a spectacle for everyone to see (Appendix Image Two).339 This image of Mussolini- bound and hung upside down by his feet as if he were livestock, hands extended above his head in a position of final surrender, his skull and face severely broken and swollen, making him utterly unrecognizable- is one of the most widely circulated photographs of the Duce. This was also one of the last images taken of Mussolini and thus it also determined how his legacy was remembered by the world. Both Mussolini’s body dangling in the Piazza and its pictorial depiction acted as visual verifications of the regime’s downfall. The Duce’s deformed body elucidates the intense violence and chaos of his murder. The photograph of the dictator bound and mutilated

339. See image two in Appendix
became a metonym of Italy at this stage in the war—her people were starving, thousands had died, and the land had been ravished by German patrols and Allied bombs.

The juxtaposition of these two images reflects the powerful influence of imagery on the human psyche and historical memory. The photograph of Mussolini is the complete antithesis of the photograph of Ciano. Mussolini’s death was unexpected but the photo was staged—it was taken with the intent to stir the viewer’s emotions. In death, the Duce represented the dismemberment and ruin of Italian fascism. Ciano’s death, on the other hand, was planned but the picture was not. It was an accidental occurrence that captured an emotional moment in Ciano’s life. It was an honest moment in time—Ciano’s movement is natural and his true emotions are exposed. The photograph pays testament to Ciano’s bold stoicism, a boldness that shaped Ciano’s historical legacy and the varied interpretations of his character.

Many historians interpret the “judicial murder”340 of Galeazzo Ciano as an event in keeping with Mussolini’s other wartime blunders. It was another attempt by the Duce to salvage his political eminence and personal pride that was challenged during the events of July 24th. According to Denis Mack Smith, Mussolini’s “overriding preoccupation was that others must not think him weak or guilty of nepotism, and he explicitly said that ‘reasons of state’ must, on this occasion, take precedence over legality.”341 Mack Smith pieces together the trial and execution, not with extreme sympathy towards Galeazzo Ciano, but with the acknowledgment that the Verona Trial, although disguised as a legal proceeding, cleverly averted regulations of the Italian judicial system in order to kill a

340. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 304.
341. Mack Smith, Mussolini, 303.
man who had embarrassed and insulted the Duce and the entire regime. Likewise, Richard Bosworth referred to the Duce as “a coward of the most profound sort” who found no true justification for killing Ciano. Mack Smith and Bosworth, both distinguished historians of Italian fascism, view Mussolini with contempt. Mussolini, rather than Ciano, is the primary target of their criticisms; and this is true in a number of historical interpretations.

In September 1985, *Mussolini and I*, a film documenting Mussolini’s rule and downfall, aired on HBO. The movie, directed by Alberto Negrin, a native of Casablanca, Morocco, and story and screenplay by Nicola Baddalucco, a native of Milan, Italy, tracked the downfall of the fascist regime and examined the Duce’s numerous complex relationships, particularly that with Ciano, who was played by Welsh actor Anthony Hopkins. The film was entirely in English and thus directed for a predominantly American audience; however it was translated and shown in Switzerland, France, Italy and West Germany and thus it became a multi-cultural film appealing to both the Eastern and Western hemisphere.

Throughout Ciano appeared not only as a political figure but also as a family man, a lover, and most importantly a loyal son-in-law to the Duce who constantly grappled with his own morality. Negrin and Baddalucco, like Mack Smith and Bosworth, portray Mussolini as a hollow leader desperately trying to hide behind a veil of maturity and strength but in reality, lacked all of these qualities. In the film, Mussolini did not want to sentence Ciano to death, but he did so anyway for fear of losing respect from Hitler and

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loyal fascists. The Duce’s personal prestige remained the highest priority. There was not a moment in the film that Mussolini came across as a likeable character; when Ciano meet him in Munich and begged for his life to be spared, the Duce, after much angry banter, promised Ciano his security. The promise was false and Ciano was killed, further reinforcing Mussolini’s incapability to fulfill his own political desires.

Ciano, in comparison to Mussolini, was a likeable character throughout the film. He was loyal to the Duce and to the regime, and it is clear that his sole purpose for voting in favor of the Grandi Resolution was to better Italy. One day prior to the meeting, Ciano and Edda are shown on a beach when Ciano nonchalantly mentions the impending conference. Ciano contends that his sole intent is to transfer military power to the King, and that he loves Mussolini. Negrin and Baddalucco did not present Ciano as a traitor to the Duce or the regime, but rather as an individual torn between love of family and love of country. While at the Grand Council meeting, Ciano pleaded with Mussolini, but the Duce grew angrier and threatened Ciano and the others who favored the Resolution: “Don’t fool yourselves, any of you. I’m not about to turn myself into a firing squad.”

343. Alberto Negrin, “Mussolini and I,” DVD.

The Grand Council meeting was staged as a fight between the protagonist, Ciano, and the antagonist, Mussolini- a classic Hollywood portrait of good versus evil. And the viewer cannot help but pity Ciano, a victim of the both the regime’s, and Mussolini’s, mercilessness.

More importantly, the film dedicated a scene to Ciano’s execution and emphasized the moment in which Ciano turns his head to stare down his executioners. When Mussolini was killed in the last scene, however, his death was announced over the

343. Alberto Negrin, “Mussolini and I,” DVD.
radio. The film placed more importance on Ciano’s execution, and it was evident that producers modeled the execution scene off of the photograph. Hopkins turned his head to look at his executioners just like Ciano. The fact that Ciano’s, and not Mussolini’s, death was shown suggests that Ciano’s death was more controversial and unjustified than was Mussolini’s. After Ciano was killed, the priest present at the execution informs Mussolini of his son-in-law’s death. The priest’s voice is filled with contempt and Mussolini looks horrified. This was an important moment that showed Mussolini’s blooming guilt over allowing the event to occur.

Negrin and Baddalucco do not mask their opinions of Mussolini or of Ciano, and it is interesting to see the way in which they track Ciano’s career throughout the war. They did not portray Galeazzo as the leader of the catastrophic Greek war, a “mistaken war,” as it was dubbed by Mario Cervi, that cost the Italians and Greeks hundred of thousands of dead and wounded”\(^\text{344}\); or as an ignorant diplomat “engaged in making love” rather than politics.\(^\text{345}\). These unflattering details of Ciano’s life are purposefully left out, and only the remaining years of Ciano’s life, 1943 and 1944, the years in which he attempted to do some good for Italy, are shown. This is important for two reasons: it makes Ciano appealing to the viewers, who can’t help but sympathize with his unfortunate plight. Moreover, the film’s focus on the Grand Council Meeting, the Verona Trial, and Ciano’s execution suggest that the filmmakers believed these were the most historically important moments in Ciano’s life. While they are significant episodes, they do not fully encapsulate the realities of Ciano’s role in the fascist regime and his

\(^{345}\) Malaparte, *Kaputt*, 280.
relationship with Mussolini. The film’s limited timeline further obscures an already complex story.

Ciano’s contemporaries, as well, had a wide range of opinions after his execution; and a common response was one of pity. Notably, to the Allies, he was a controversial figure - Ciano understood that the partnership between Germany and Italy was destructive yet did nothing to stop it. Sumner Welles, the American Under Secretary of State who met with Ciano in the Spring of 1940 and remarked on the Foreign Minister’s humanity and simplicity, composed the introduction of the English translation of The Ciano Diaries 1939-1943 in which he lay-forth that Ciano was “the amoral product of a wholly decadent period in Italian, and for that matter, in European history. To him morality in international relations did not exist. He was wholly seized of the concept that only makes might makes right.” According to Welles, Ciano’s immorality was a construct of the time and place in which he lived: he “was a creature of his times, and the times in which he had his being are the least admirable mankind has known for many centuries.”

Ciano’s actions were not indicative of the nature of his true character; and as Welles contended, when the Foreign Minister was away from the political limelight he “possessed both dignity and personal charm” and “there was not the faintest trace of the pompous and self-conscious fascist dignitary who appeared in public.” Welles did not absolve Ciano for his numerous political, social, and economic wrongdoings, but rather approached Ciano as the unfortunate prototype of the fascist regime - a diplomat who lacked the courage to resign from office after the solidification of the Italian-German

346. Welles, The Time for Decision, 82.
alliance. Ciano’s major flaw was his inability to actively fight against Mussolini’s
wartime policies.

It was obviously difficult for men like Welles to cast Ciano in a solely negative
light after they conversed with the Foreign Minister in a private setting and seen a
different, more attractive side to him. Although accounts from those who had personal
ties with Ciano may contain biases, they still illuminate important characteristics that
often go unnoticed in broad historical accounts; and by doing so, they make Ciano’s
character more multifaceted than often perceived. Curzio Malaparte, an Italian
journalist sent by the newspaper, Corriere della Sera, to cover the fighting on the eastern
front, was Ciano’s friend and his depiction of the Foreign Minister testifies to the
intricacies of Ciano’s personality. Throughout his memoir, Kaputt, Malaparte recorded
numerous conversations, which reveal Galeazzo’s constant emotional oscillations: one
minute Ciano feared Mussolini, the next he spoke of the Duce with great contempt, the
next he feared for his own life, and the next he filled himself with delusions of his
personal safety.

‘I will always be Galeazzo Ciano, even if I cease to be a Minister. My moral and
political position will only stand to benefit if Mussolini sends me away. You
know what the Italians are; they will forget my mistakes and my sins, and they
will see my only as a victim.’

[...] ‘You are mistaken,’ I said. ‘The Italians are no longer what they once were. They
would be pleased to see you die—him and you. Him and you, and all the others.’
‘And what would our deaths accomplish?’ asked Galeazzo.
‘Nothing. Nothing at all.’

350. The account of Curzio Malaparte (born Kurt Erich Suckert) should be interpreted with an air
of caution. Malaparte was a distasteful character who often exaggerated and/or fictionalized parts of his
books. The reader must be aware of this, and judge the information he lays-forth accordingly.
351. Malaparte, Kaputt, 399. According to Malaparte, he and Ciano were childhood friends. Over
the years Ciano defended Malaparte when he was arrested in 1933, 1938, 1939 and 1941, and stood up for
him against high-powered fascist officials, including Mussolini.
Galeazzo was silent. He was pale and his brow was damp with sweat. At that moment a girl crossed the meadow on the way to meet a group of golfers who were walking towards the clubhouse, swinging their putters in their hands. ‘What a good-looking girl!’ Galeazzo said. ‘Would you like to have her?’ and he gave me a slight dig in the ribs with his elbow.\(^{352}\)

Ciano appeared juvenile, naïve and wholly detached from the plight of the Italian people. Based on Malaparte’s personal account, Ciano recognized and articulated concern for his safety; however he continuously tried to deceive himself by avoiding the crisis and changing the topic of conversation. These faults, according to Malaparte, made for a poor diplomat but they were not cause for Ciano’s execution; rather Ciano was Mussolini’s scapegoat,\(^{353}\) “a tool of tyranny rather than a tyrant.”\(^{354}\)

Malaparte’s view is very much in keeping with that of Welles, namely that Ciano was a product of the environment he lived, groomed to unquestionably abide by Mussolini’s command.

Galeazzo trembles from morning till night in fear of the kick in the behind. Face to face with Mussolini, Galeazzo is like everybody else, like all of us—a frightened menial. He always says ‘Yes’ to Mussolini. But behind Mussolini’s back, he has the courage of a lion and is afraid of nothing. […] No one can deny that he has wit or intelligence.\(^{355}\)

This presentation of Ciano’s relationship with Mussolini differs from many other historical interpretations. Although Ciano was incapable of standing up to Mussolini and thus appears as an inept political leader, Malaparte generalized this negative characteristic with the rest of the Italian populace. Malaparte bridged the gap between the Italian social and political circles by connecting Ciano’s plight with that of the general populace. This suggests that members of the *Corpo Diplomatico* were not the only ones

who ‘trembled’ in Mussolini’s presence—the Italian masses lived in fear as well. Ciano’s downfall came to represent their unfortunate plight, and due to his familial ties to the Duce and his unsavory label as traitor, he received a great deal of their criticism and blame. Malaparte alleviated Ciano of a great deal of political responsibility that has often dampened his historical image.

No doubt Ciano “was a mass of contradictions” who “displayed a crippling political and personal immaturity” which was coupled with his genuine desire to break from Germany and collaborate with the Western democracies. Ciano’s former political colleagues recounted the dual-nature of the ex-Foreign Minister’s professional character: he was at times self-important and greedy, just as much as he was kind and decent. Dino Alfieri acknowledged that “Ciano was a good-natured, generous man” but this was hard to tell at times due to the “fickleness” and “inconsistency” of his personality, which often perplexed those around him. Alfieri maintained that Ciano was serious and even cynical at times, but by nature he was “extremely vivacious, whimsical, inquisitive, ironical, and sentimental. He always had a ready retort and his wit was facile and spontaneous.”

Giuseppe Bastianini, the Italian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, had a different opinion of Ciano. He believed that the former diplomat was pompous and insecure. Ciano “didn’t give the minimum satisfaction to those diplomats who were not to his taste. To those who might have in some way, even without warning it, touched his

356. Moseley, Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano, 239.
357. Moseley, Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano, 239.
358. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 81.
359. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 81.
360. Hibbert, Mussolini: The Rise and Fall of Il Duce, 81.
susceptibility or that of Mussolini, he made his own aversion felt severely.”\textsuperscript{361} Felix Gilbert agrees with Bastianini. Gilbert contends “There was a kind of silent war, between Ciano and his young men on the one side and the professional diplomats on the other. Ciano wanted to keep all the threads in his own hands”\textsuperscript{362} due to a distrust of his colleagues and for his personal betterment. Ciano’s concern, according to Gilbert, lay in any area that gave him political prestige and power, as exemplified by his participation in the annexation of Albania in April 1939 and the Greek war in October 1940.\textsuperscript{363}

The same contentions were held abroad. In 1939, an American paper portrayed Ciano as a socialite overtaken by the frivolity of the Italian social scene.

Before his marriage Galeazzo was another of those golden lads who liked to hang around the Excelsior and Grand Hotels in Rome, where rich U.S. heiresses generally stayed. He had been a cub reporter and a society journalist who did bits of drama and literary criticism for an obscure Roman sheet. After that his father managed to get him minor posts in the consular and diplomatic service. Few people thought he displayed great ability except that languages came-easy to him.\textsuperscript{364}

Ciano did not have the wisdom or the experience of the older diplomats, a majority of whom had been involved in the fascist movement since its birth. Consequently, many saw Ciano’s promotion to Foreign Minister not as an advancement that was rightly earned but one resulting from nepotism. Edda, Ciano’s wife, was arguably Mussolini’s favorite daughter and she held much political sway when it came to making these decisions; moreover, the Duce was incredibly close to Ciano’s father, Costanzo, and promoted Ciano to full-fill Costanzo’s political legacy.

\textsuperscript{361} Moseley, \textit{Mussolini’s Shadow: The Double Life of Count Galeazzo Ciano}, 31.
\textsuperscript{362} Gilbert, “Ciano and his Ambassadors,” 519.
\textsuperscript{363} Gilbert, “Ciano and his Ambassadors,” 526.
\textsuperscript{364} Time Magazine, “Lady of the Axis,” 19.
Ciano was a man loved and hated, respected and disrespected, by his peers and the multi-varying interpretations of his character directly correspond with the inconsistencies seen throughout his diplomatic career and in his dealings with Mussolini and Germany. Despite the array of opinions, Bastianini and Alfieri did not label Ciano a traitor. Alfieri was among the men who voted in favor of the Grandi Resolution, thus his interpretation of Ciano may be biased because of his political affiliations. Bastianini, on the other hand, did not vote for the resolution and thus was in the closest position to judge Ciano’s actions in the Summer of 1943; however he did not do so. Although Bastianini’s opinion of Ciano is unflattering, he does not brand Ciano a conspirator despite their vast political differences. The same can be said for Gilbert. It is crucial to overlook the negative interpretations of Ciano and recognize that uncomplimentary opinions are not synonymous with labeling him a traitor.

In the archives of the Italian newspaper, the Corriere della Sera, there is an ongoing dialogue about Galeazzo Ciano. It is evident that Italians continues to grapple with the life of Ciano, his mark as traitor, and the legacy of the fascist regime that undoubtedly lives on in Italy today. On July 24, 2003, in commemoration of the 60th anniversary of the Grand Council Meeting, the Corriere della Sera published an article taken from a collection of Edda Ciano’s memoirs.365 Throughout the piece, Edda reflected on the dramatic events of July 24, 1943 and the execution of her husband. “Non sapevo che sarebbe venuto un tempo in cui avrei dovuto scegliere fra mio padre e mio marito,”366 [“I did not know there would come a time when I would have to choose...”]

365. Edda Ciano died on April 9, 1995 but this was part of a memorial she wrote and published on Ciano and the events of July 24, 1943 before her death.
between my father and my husband”] Edda professed. Mussolini ordered Ciano to be shot “perché non aveva il coraggio di opporsi ai tedeschi che reclamavano la sua testa.”367 [“Because he did not have the courage to oppose the Germans, who wanted Ciano’s head”].

The subtitle of the article reads, “Il 25 luglio nel racconto della donna che sposo «il traditore» Ciano.”368 [“The story of July 25th by a woman who married “the traitor” Ciano.”] The quotations around “traitor” alludes to the controversy still surrounding Ciano’s death. Even in the 21st century there is a debate over labeling Ciano a traitor; clearly, many Italians do not take the mark seriously. Ciano’s execution sparked a new public dialogue, one that focused on his demise rather than his role leading up to and during the war. There is a national and international fascination, not with the Ciano family in general, but with one particular event- Galeazzo’s execution. Publishers of the Corriere della Sera recognized this fascination when they published Edda’s recollections of the events. Ciano’s legacy continues to perplex 59 years later.

**Conclusion**

In 1942, Ciano confessed to Serrano Suñer, Spanish Minister of the Interior and Foreign Affairs: “Life is always good and pleasant. When I am eighty I shall stroll along here swinging my cane and enjoying the lovely sun. I want to die here in Leghorn after I have seen all my enemies passing before me on their way to death.”369 Ciano’s prophecy

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367. Ciano, “Edda, figlia del dittatore per l’ultima notte.”
368. Ciano, “Edda, figlia del dittatore per l’ultima notte.”
largely reflects how he saw himself leading up to his death. He was a hero, fighting for
the just cause of Italian redemption and prosperity.

Although Ciano was labeled a traitor, he vehemently denied this denunciation and
went to his grave fighting. On December 14, 1943 while detained in Scalzi Prison, Ciano
proclaimed his belief that “Che il voto del Gran Consiglio sia stato un errore, lo ammetto
e gli errori pesano sugli uomini e sui popoli, ma respingo la parola tradimento con
disprezzo.”370 [That the vote of the Grand Council was an error, I admit, and errors weigh
on men and people, but I reject with contempt the word treason.] ‘Traitor’ was an
insulting term that had enough power and influence to permanently ruin an individual’s
reputation. In Ciano’s circumstance, however, it did not tarnish his name but ignited a
historical dialogue over the controversial nature of his character and role in the fascist
regime that has continued into the 21st century.

The photograph of Ciano’s execution significantly influences how Ciano is
viewed and interpreted throughout the annals of history. The photograph also
significantly shape how Ciano’s legacy is remembered today. Pictures are cross-cultural.
They provided ways for Ciano’s execution to transcend international lines. The meaning
imbedded within Ciano’s defiant stare and bold twist of his head are comprehensible to
people everywhere. The image of Ciano with his head turned to face his executioners is a
bold display of bravura that causes historians to debate his death as a traitor, and the
importance of his role as the Italian Foreign Minister during World War Two.

As evidenced by the national and international responses of historians, diplomats,
and others, attitudes towards Ciano range from extreme disdain to pity. Nonetheless,

370. Montagna, Mussolini e il processo di Verona, 128-129.
Ciano is never labeled as a traitor. Instead, historiography condemns Mussolini’s faulty leadership as the reason for Ciano’s death. The complexities surrounding Ciano are intriguing and at times confusing, but they nonetheless allude to the controversy of his role during the War as well as the many dimensions of his character. Ciano’s label as traitor cannot be taken at face value. To do so would obscure a significant period in Italian history and the involvement of the leading political figures.
Epilogue
The Afterlife

_Life is not what one lived, but what one remembers and how one remembers in order to recount it._  

The location of Ciano’s body after his death was no secret. The ex-Foreign Minister was immediately returned to his family and then transported to Livorno where he was buried in the Ciano family Mausoleum. The tomb is nestled atop the _Monte Burrone_ and hovers high above the village. It remains completely isolated from the hustle of civilization. To the untrained eye, it does not look like a sacred burial site. In an online photo blog from August 2010, an inhabitant of Livorno posted pictures of the Ciano Mausoleum and revealed that when he “was a kid I suspected that this massive structure […] was a money bin of sort.” To many residents, the tomb is an obscure building, its meaning cloaked in mystery. Mussolini originally ordered the construction of the tomb in honor of the death of Costanzo. It was intended to be a grandiose structure, but its construction was halted by the war and today it stands unfinished, a skeletal remnant of Italy’s fascist past and its leaders.

Mussolini’s body, on the other hand, was not so quick to find a resting place. After being on display in Milan, the Allies ordered that Mussolini’s body, along with the bodies of Claretta and the other murdered fascists, be taken down from the roof truss and prepared for burial. At first, Mussolini was buried in Musoco Cemetery in Milan beneath

an unmarked grave; but his body was dug up and moved numerous times until, after many requests from Rachele, it was permanently buried in the Mussolini family vault in San Cassiano cemetery on September 1, 1957. It was here that the Duce was given a small, private ceremony; after much controversy, Mussolini’s death was finally granted some closure.

When Ciano’s body was put to rest in Livorno, his prevalence in Italian politics was put to rest as well. There was no mystery or intrigue surrounding the location of his body; everyone knew what had become of the Italian diplomat. It was the exact opposite for Mussolini. Italians desired to know what had become of their Duce. In an interview with the New York Times in November 2011, Sergio Luzzatto, author of *The Body of Il Duce* and professor of history at the University of Turin, stated that “The vitality of Mussolini’s afterworld life was great as long as the mausoleum didn’t exist. A corpse that is nowhere is everywhere.” Mussolini’s legacy gained prominence from the mysterious twelve year disappearance of his corpse, and over time he has been revitalized as a central figure in Italian society in both the political and commercial spheres.

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373. San Cassiano is located in Predappio, a small village near Forlì in Emilia-Romagna where Mussolini was born on July 29, 1883.
“[I]n this land of Caesar, can Mussolini be far behind?”

Elisabetta Povoledo, a journalist for the New York Times, composed an article last November 2011 on Mussolini’s tomb, which has become a famed tourist attraction and place of worship since 1957 and receives between 80,000 to 100,000 visitors a year. Povoledo interviewed numerous people who flocked to the grave. Gianni, a man from Turin, stated that some Italians simply want to pay their respects to Italy’s fascist past: “We don’t want to restore that era, we just don’t want to deny it either.” Fascism is an undeniable part of Italian history and culture; Mussolini’s tomb has become a historical symbol, and it provides visitors with the chance to connect to and make amends with their country’s tumultuous past.

There are Italians, however, who glorify the fascist regime; they view it as “an epoch in which they believe that Italy, in contrast to today, counted for something in the world.” The Mussolini name still remains in Italian politics today. In 1992, Alessandra Mussolini, the granddaughter of the Duce, began her political career as a member of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, and she is now a member of the Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of the Italian Parliament. Italy is a county “where Fascism is a political force and followers of Mussolini hold high office.” For some, Alessandra’s involvement in the Italian government is a constant reminder of Italy’s fascist past; and the people who continue to visit and pay respects to Mussolini’s tomb “constitute a disturbing trend” of

377. Povoledo, “A Dead Dictator Who Draws Tens of Thousands in Italy.”
378. Povoledo, “A Dead Dictator Who Draws Tens of Thousands in Italy.”
Italian political ideology. To some, “the return of Fascism” is inevitable. “The feeling was that the country desperately needed to have law and order restored, and Fascism seemed the only avenue available, though the price would be high.” 380 “Italy needs a distinct change, […] said Enrico Cozzani, the owner of a security firm based in Lucca. We’re the laughingstock of Europe.” 381 Although fascism was a thing of the past, it constantly hovers over the Italian populace as an institution, not associated with its terrible downfall, but rather with its almighty birth in the early twentieth century. Italians desire power, influence and respect- qualities that the Duce once projected. Visitors of Mussolini’s grave are a powerful testament to the influence and importance of the Duce to many Italians today. Mussolini’s ghost continues to haunt Italy.

On the main street in Predappio near Mussolini’s tomb, there are a number of shops that sell fascist paraphernalia and memorabilia, such as Mussolini calendars. 382 One vendor beamed that these items sold better than his “sexy calendars”; these businessmen and women “just keep another kind of tourism at large.” 383 A tourism in which dictators and dictatorships are trivialized. Arguably through this commercialization, the brutality of the Duce, and fascism as well, is not only minimized but also imbedded into the foundations of Italian society. Consequently, Italians and tourists alike become desensitized to Italy’s horrifying past. Mussolini’s “second Rome,” the Esposizione Universale Roma, or the EUR still stands today outside the center of Rome. It is now home to a number of businesses and residential homes. Fascist murals and engravings cover buildings, while fascist statues of horses and men pepper well-

380. Fato, “In Italy, They Talk Again of Fascism as a Cure.”
381. Povoledo, “A Dead Dictator Who Draws Tens of Thousands in Italy.”
382. Povoledo, “A Dead Dictator Who Draws Tens of Thousands in Italy.”
383. Povoledo, “A Dead Dictator Who Draws Tens of Thousands in Italy.”
manicured lawns and walkways; but these remnants of Italy’s fascist past often go unnoticed by the people who live and work in this area. Like the Ciano Mausoleum, they have subconsciously become a part of the Italian psyche, a normative feature of daily life. Fascist symbols are scattered throughout Rome as well, engraved on the uppermost corners of buildings and walls. Even the walkway encompassing Rome’s *Stadio Olimpico* is adorned with fascist emblems and phrases so that every time a futbol fan glances down, he or she is instantly reminded of Italy’s militaristic past.

Today, Mussolini’s vault is kept in pristine condition. Fresh flowers envelop the tomb and it is frequently visited by those who wish to pay their respects. The Ciano Mausoleum, on the other hand, is abandoned. It is overtaken by vegetation and trash, and graffiti covers the inner and outer walls. To the unknown viewer, it looks like a decrepit hangout for Italian thugs. It receives the occasional visitor, but not many desire to tackle the hike up *Monte Burrone*. Ciano, unlike Mussolini, plays no role in the Italian commercial or political limelight. Even in “Verona, memories of Ciano had faded. A plaque marks the site of the Scalzi Prison where he was held, a site now largely occupied by a modern bank. Across the street, there is a statue of Don Chiot, the prison chaplain who witnessed the execution.” But there is nothing to commemorate Galeazzo Ciano.384 So where does he fit in to Italian society? How does his legacy continue? History. Ciano has created an ongoing, ever important historical dialogue that has helped historians and the public alike to understand fascist Italy in the midst of World War Two. To understand Ciano’s contradictory nature and emotionally tormented soul is to understand the depths of Italian fascist politics, the inner workings of a disjointed regime that fell to the idiocies

of its dictator. Ciano’s diaries nourish an ongoing historical debate that is not about resurrecting his character but about interpreting and understanding Italy’s fascist past. Ciano’s body now lies in seclusion yet it speaks to the ambiguities of modern Italy, ones that Italians would be well served to confront.
Appendix:

Figure(s)

Source: ICS Database on Fascist Elite, University of Lisbon

**Figure One:** Shows the permanence (x-axis: number of years) of Ministers in the fascist government (y-axis: frequency and percent).
Pictures:


**Image One:** The photograph of Ciano’s execution on January 11, 1944. Ciano is sitting farthest to the right in the beige overcoat. His head is turned to stare down his executioners.
Image Two: The bodies of Benito Mussolini (left) and Claretta Petacci (right) hanging from a gas station roof truss in Piazzale Loreto, Milan on April 29, 1945.
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