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Rank : Ambassador at large
Unit : Foreign Office, Berlin
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I/O: Capt. Halle

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Report : Plans for Peace after the Armistice with France.

After the French and the Germans had concluded an armistice on 22 June 1940, the immediate future of German-French relations was of paramount importance. Prevailing opinion supported a plan to follow the armistice with a quick peace, with the provision that the Germans remain in control of northern and western France until the conclusion of the war with England, but embodying otherwise such lenient conditions that the regime of Marshall Petain would be certain to underwrite the treaty. The culmination of such a plan could have far-reaching effects upon the general political situation in Europe, and pave the way to ending the war with the other nations on the continent as well.

Adolf Hitler did in fact at first, consider this line of policy. At any rate, Ribbentrop allowed directions to be sent to Berlin from his field headquarters in the Ardennes that preliminary work for a peace treaty with France was to be begun in the Foreign Office immediately, and that the opinion of all the other German state ministries was to be consulted on such a peace treaty as quickly as possible. This work was begun, but it soon became evident that Hitler was personally undecided as to the character which the treaty with France was to have; no more precise directives followed, and the matter was allowed to die a natural death. The chance to exploit a favorable political situation was forfeited.

The chief cause underlying this indecision was probably Hitler's desire to impose terms which would render the French nation militarily impotent and dependent politically upon Germany in the event of an early favorable end of the war. In any case, the Vichy government could be expected to sign a treaty which provided for only the return of Alsace and Lorraine to Germany, and left France in possession of the remainder of its territory and of its colonial empire. Such a solution, however would have been strongly opposed by the Italian government whose thirst for Corsica and Tunisia, regardless of Germany's position, had been whetted by the suddenness of the French collapse. In Rome, according to the announcements of Count Ciano, there was a desire to extend the boundaries of Tunisia, so as to include part of the Department of Constantine on the west and the entire eastern part of the Sahara to Lake Chad on the south. An agreement was reached between Ribbentrop and Ciano in 1940 which provided for an east-west line running through the northernmost point of Lake Chad as the future boundary of the colonial spheres of interest of Italy and Germany. The German colonial aspirations in Africa which Rib-

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BENTROP furthered, although Hitler professed no special interest in them, were allegedly to be satisfied south of this line, presumably centering in the Congo.

During the summer of 1940, various quarters in Germany worked out proposals for the redetermination of the border between Germany and France, some of which were rather extravagant. One of the most thorough-going was a proposal calling for the transfer of Burgundy to Germany (to the Langres - Besancon line, or even to Dijon), in order to provide space for the settlement of Germans who were to be repatriated from the south Tirol at some future date according to the terms of an earlier treaty with the Italian government. Other plans started with the promise that Belgium, or at least the area of Liege and the northern part of Belgium inhabited by Flemings, should be annexed by Germany in preparation for an extension of German control to the Channel coast at Calais and Boulogne. Hitler agreed to none of these plans, but reserved for himself all the decisions for the future. He prescribed only that the district of Eupen and Malmedy which had been ceded to Belgium in 1920, was again to be incorporated into Germany. In addition, Luxemburg and the provinces of Alsace and Lorraine, according to the boundaries of 1871 were to be de facto if not de jure German territory. The french Vichy government protested several times against the measures which were subsequently taken, but finally resigned itself to the futility of its position.

The above mentioned outline of a treaty with France which never passed the preliminary stage was the only official German policy formulated in that direction, at any time during the war. The longer the war lasted, and the greater the proportions which it assumed, the more pronouncedly did Hitler avoid making any sort of commitment for the future, even if it amounted only to the drawing up of plans, reserving everything for his personal decision at a later time. He directed that no official plans be made, probably in fear that knowledge of these plans could provoke innumerable difficulties between Germany and her allies, or among the allies themselves. Hitler once said that when events were favorable he would announce his decision immediately and that he required no official preparations beforehand. He held to this point of view later, when his allies pressed him again and again for more precise statements about the new Europe for which he was planning. The Italian government in particular believed clarification was necessary, and Laval too, pressed for commitments. Nonetheless, no announcements were made.

As the war progressed, however Hitler's peace objectives assumed an aspect of clarity which revealed his predilection for the concept of a "Great -German State" which was to comprise an area north of the Alps, including Germany, the Netherlands, the Belgian territories of Flanders and Brabant, Luxemburg, and possibly in a form of semi-dependency Denmark and Norway. Hitler remained averse to the wishes of Quisling for a treaty between Germany and Norway, any such treaty would certainly have implied recognition of national independence of Norway, and Hitler contemplated a more subordinate relationship on Norway's part.

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As for eastern Europe, the largest portion of Poland had been joined to Germany in 1939 as the "General government". Further to the east, large territories formerly belonging to Russia, and extending as far as the Black sea were to be annexed by Germany, Hitler planning that their relationship to Germany would be the same as that of India to the British Crown. He had outlined the status which these territories were to have under German sovereignty in Mein Kampf twenty years earlier. Toward the end of the war, following Italy's move into the camp of the enemy, Hitler gave the impression that he wanted to claim south Tirol and the coastal region of Trieste for Germany in the future. The sole effect of this attitude was to weaken considerably the foundation of Mussolini's "republican Fascist government"; furthermore, the prospect seemed almost ridiculous at that late stage of the war, when the possibility of a German victory had vanished. The previous concept of a partnership composed of the north-European "Great German State" and the Mediterranean area dominated by Fascist Italy, receded gradually into the backgrounds as the political and military weaknesses of the Fascist state became evident in the world.

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