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The approximate extent of Italy's territorial ambitions in the Mediterranean area was outlined on a map given by Count Ciano to Ribbentrop in the summer of 1940. In the western Mediterranean, the Italian goals were limited to Nice, Tunisia, and Corsica; Tunisia was to be extended to the west and south, so that the entire eastern Sahara would become Italian. In the eastern Mediterranean area an enlarged Albania, including parts of Greece, together with the occupation of all the Ionian islands and extension of control over the Dodecanese was to assure Italian hegemony in the Balkans, while in the Near East, Italy sought to take the territories of England and France including Palestine, Syria and Iraq. These countries were to continue a more or less independent existence, but were to be brought into a relationship of dependence upon Italy after the British pattern in Egypt and Iraq. Thus the realm of actual Italian hegemony in the New Roman Empire of which Mussolini dreamed was to stretch from eastern Algeria in the west, from Lake Chad to the Somaliland coast south of Ethiopia, while the land mass from Egypt to the Persian Gulf and the peninsula of the Balkans were to be under Italian domination. When in 1941 Yugoslavia also became a theater of war, this program was considerably expanded toward the Northeast, although the course of the war in Albania and Tripoli had showed within a few weeks that Italy by no means possessed the military strength with which to attain such extended political goals.

During the first phase of these conflicts, Hitler strictly observed the principle that Italy was to have a free hand in the Mediterranean, or at least was to be the unqualified leader, since he considered Italy Germany's most important ally and the Berlin-Rome-Axis the foundation of his foreign policy. Only after Japan had entered the war was Italy displaced as the chief ally of Germany, so that finally Hitler's policy was reduced to preserving Mussolini's prestige, and at the end he hardly troubled even to do that.

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