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978-0-521-85254-8 - Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders

Gerhard L. Weinberg

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Visions of Victory

Visions of Victory explores the views of eight leaders of the major belligerents in World War II – Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo, Chiang Kai-shek, Stalin, Churchill, de Gaulle, and Roosevelt – and compares their visions of the future assuming their side emerged victorious. While the leaders primarily focused their attention on strategies for fighting and winning the war, these strategies were often shaped by their aspirations and hopes for the future. Weinberg assesses how subsequent events were impacted by their decisions and examines how their visions for the future changed and evolved throughout the war. What emerges is a startling picture of post-war worlds: Besides the extermination of the Jews, Hitler intended for all the Slavs to die off and for the Germans to inhabit all of eastern Europe. Both Mussolini and Hitler intended to have extensive colonies in Africa. Churchill hoped to see the reemergence of the British and French Empires. De Gaulle wanted to annex the northwest corner of Italy (but Truman forced him to back down). Stalin wanted control of eastern Europe, and he got it. Roosevelt's vision of the future was the closest to being fulfilled, including, importantly, the establishment of the United Nations. Astonishing in its synthesis and scope, Weinberg's comparison of the individual portraits of the wartime leaders is a highly original and compelling study of history that might have been.

Gerhard L. Weinberg is Professor Emeritus of History at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He is the author of numerous books and articles on the origins and course of World War II, including *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II* (Cambridge, 1994), which won the George Louis Beer Prize of the American Historical Association, and *Germany, Hitler, and World War II* (Cambridge, 1995).

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WORLD WAR II LEADERS

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To my students

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PREFACE

When working on my general history of World War II, I was intrigued by what appeared to me at the time to be a highly unusual concept of Charles de Gaulle, the leader of the Free French movement. He evidently wanted the southern portion of the Italian colony of Libya annexed after victory to what was then French Equatorial Africa. The area involved is desert, with one oasis. At the time, France already controlled most of the Sahara Desert; why acquire more desert? Into what sort of vision of the postwar world held by de Gaulle did such an annexation fit? It was this question that led me to the idea of looking at the postwar visions of major leaders of World War II.

In my work on this project, I have again been indebted to the William R. Kenan Jr. Charitable Trust. A period as scholar in residence at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum provided time and support for my work, though nothing in this book represents the views of the museum or its council. The librarians at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill have been as patient and helpful as always. Any errors and shortcomings are, of course, my own.

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To assist the reader who would like to pursue the issues touched on in the text further, I have tried to provide sources in English wherever possible. If it looks at first as if numerous citations are to a collection with a German title, the big series *Dokumente zur Deutschlandpolitik*, it is important to note that the documents from British and American archives reproduced in this collection invariably appear in the original English and with proper archival references. The broader context of the war can be followed in my *A World at Arms: A Global History of World War II*, where relevant published and unpublished sources are provided in considerable detail and my many debts to institutions and individuals are acknowledged. In the text, the spellings and names of places are generally those used at the time. Thus, the colonies of European powers appear under their old names, Chinese names have not been altered to the new system, and Japanese names are in the Japanese form, with the family name first.

If the focus in this work is on a small number of individuals at the top of their respective states, there are two reasons for this. The first is what I would call the intrinsic fascination of the leaders of the major powers involved in the greatest war in history. There are many biographies and other studies of them and their activities, but none that compares their views of the future assuming their side of the war emerged victorious. The second reason is that, especially in wartime, the urgent demands of the conflict almost automatically make the individual at the top more important and, in terms of the society that the individual leads, more powerful. This was most certainly the case during World War II.

Whatever rivalries existed in National Socialist Germany, there can be no doubt that the major decisions on policy were made by Adolf Hitler himself. Benito Mussolini was obliged to defer

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minimally to those elements that had enabled him to assume power, but not only did he resent them, he generally kept them out of the decision-making process – until they succeeded in removing him from office. Tojo Hideki, as Chapter 3 demonstrates, was not in the dictatorial position that Hitler and Mussolini held, but he played an important role in the complicated way decisions were arrived at in Tokyo all the same. After the great purges, there was certainly no one in the Soviet Union who could imagine an internal challenge to the absolute dominance of Josef Stalin. It should be remembered that when assuming the office of prime minister, Winston Churchill also insisted on creating and holding the office of minister of defence. He did this so that he could work either directly with the military chiefs of staff or do so through an intermediary, General Hastings Ismay, whom he had chosen himself. Charles de Gaulle in a real sense personified as well as led the Free French movement. Franklin D. Roosevelt carefully emphasized his constitutional role as commander-in-chief, and no one in the political or military hierarchy of the United States had any doubts about that. When he agreed with proposals submitted to him, he would note in the margin, after the initials of the proposer, “OK FDR.” But if he disagreed, the typed indication of his disapproval would be followed by his full signature with “Commander-in-Chief” typed underneath.

The leaders of World War II belligerents were in practice limited by the human and material resources at their disposal as well as by the geographic factors that often made some choices either impossible or especially inviting. What I have found striking is the extent to which each of the leaders examined here tended to assume that limitations of human and material resources could be coped with by careful planning, the assistance of associated powers, and, in the final analysis, by sheer determination and will-power. The

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occasionally voiced view that the Allies won the war by sheer numbers of men, planes, ships, and tanks would have come as astonishing news to the British pilots in the Battle of Britain, the Red Army soldiers fighting in the streets of Stalingrad, and the sailors on the three American aircraft carriers coping with the six Japanese carriers in June of 1942. The English Channel was equally wide and stormy for the Germans at the height of their victories in 1940 as it was for the Allies as they planned an invasion of northwest Europe in 1943 and 1944. Certainly both resources and geography had to be taken into account; what is so interesting is that in the urgencies of a desperate war all leaders concentrated on aims first and strove to harness resources and strategic decisions to them. It was the hundreds of millions of ordinary people across the globe who fought, suffered, labored, and died in the war, and they were the ones who had to live, and work out the best adjustments that circumstances allowed, in the postwar world that was so largely not of their own making. It was also by no means precisely the postwar world that the leaders studied here wanted or expected, but the aspirations that they held during the great conflict are surely worthy of some attention.

The world created by the war is still very much the world in which we live. Decisions and the outcomes of battles in places that few can identify today have shaped our world. In many ways the successes and the failures of the years of fighting have created the issues that confront the governments of our own time. It is true that one can now travel under the English Channel on a train, but the heritage of choices made by World War II leaders continues to affect the relations of Britain with France and other states on the continent. The position of the United States in the world and the multitude of newly independent countries in the United Nations – itself a wartime creation – are both examples of developments that

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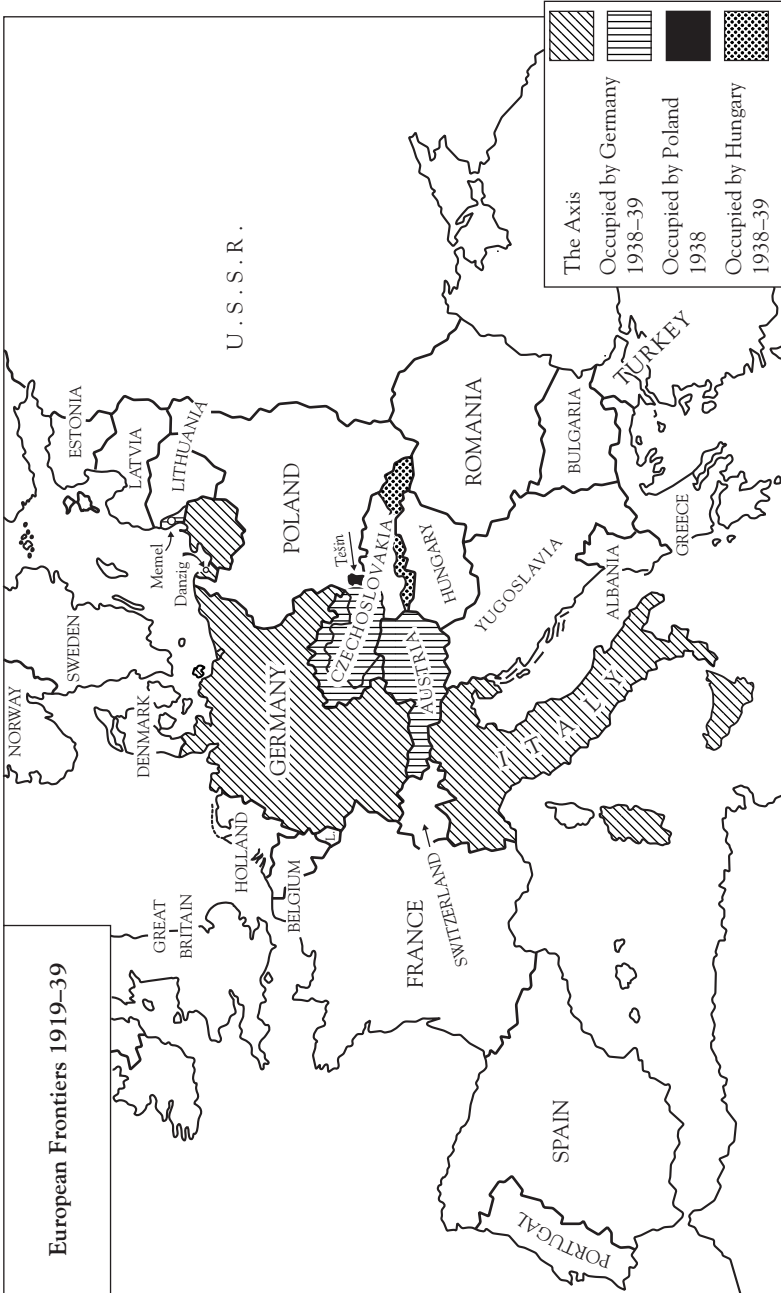
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cannot be understood unless their origins in World War II are taken into consideration. This book is designed to assist in that process of understanding.

Over a period of forty-five years of teaching, my students, both undergraduate and graduate, have inspired, challenged, and cheered me. It is to them that this book is dedicated.

Efland, North Carolina, July 2004

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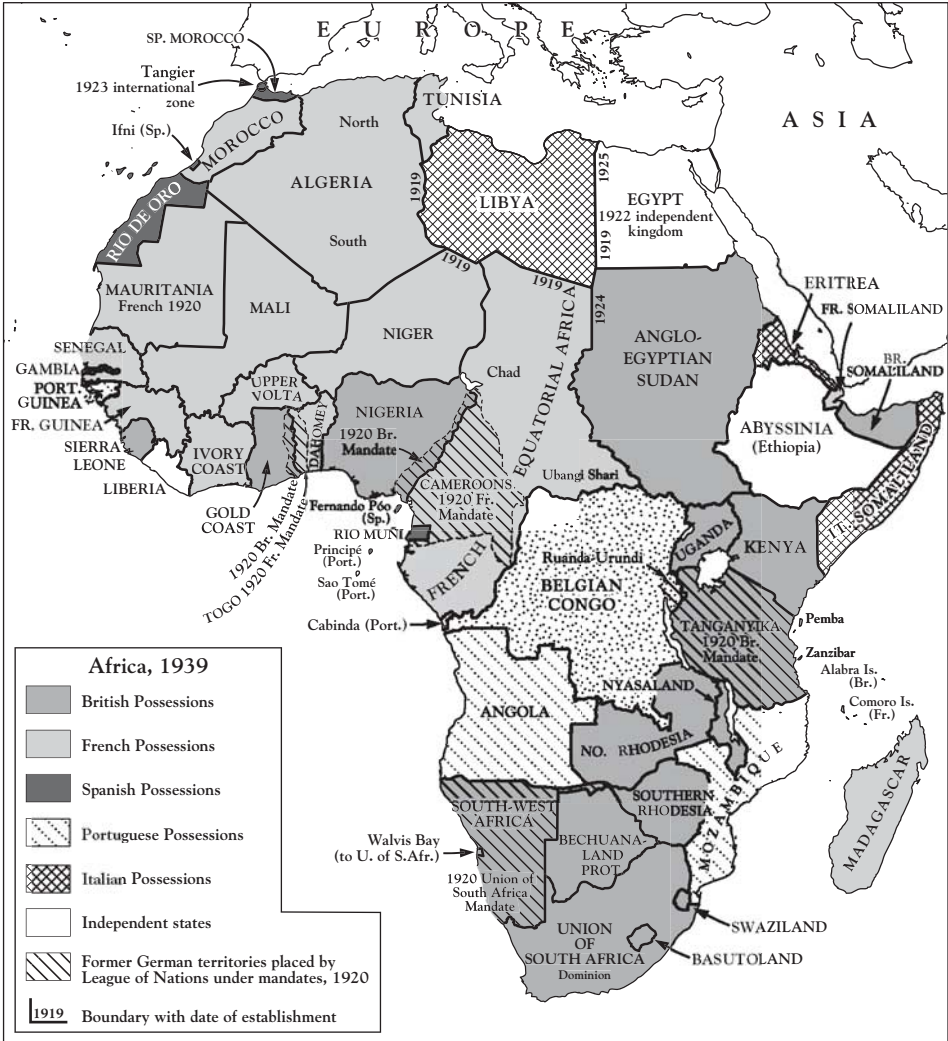
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