

## SPEECH DELIVERED BY PREMIER BENITO MUSSOLINI

Rome, Italy, February 23, 1941 [1]

Blackshirts of Rome! I come among you to look you firmly in the eyes, feel your temperature and break the silence which is dear to-me, especially in wartime. Have you ever asked yourselves in an hour of meditation, which every one finds during the day, how long we have been at war. Not only eight months, as a superficial observer of events might believe, not from Sept. 1, 1939, when through guarantees to Poland, Britain unleashed the conflagration with a criminal and premeditated will.

We have been at war six years, precisely from Feb. 1, 1935, when the first communiqué announcing the mobilization of Peloritana was issued.

The Ethiopian war was hardly finished when from the other shore of the Mediterranean there reached us appeals from General Franco, who had begun his national revolution. Could we Fascisti leave without answer that cry and remain indifferent in the face of the perpetuation of the bloody crimes of the so-called popular fronts? Could we refuse to give our aid to the movement of salvation that had found in Antonio Primo de Rivera its creator, ascetic and martyr? No. Thus our first squadron of airplanes left on July 27, 1936, and during the same day we had our first dead.

We have actually been at war since 1922-that is from the day when we lifted the flag of our revolution, which was then defended by a handful of men against the Masonic, democratic, capitalistic world. From that day world liberalism, democracy and plutocracy declared and waged war against us with press campaigns, spreading libelous reports, financial sabotage, attempts and plots even when we were intent upon the work of international reconstruction which is and will remain for centuries, as the undestroyable documentation of our creative will.

With the outbreak of hostilities on Sept. 1, 1939, we had just finished two wars which imposed relatively modest sacrifices in human life but had forced us to make an enormous logistic and financial effort.

On another occasion-not to tire you with too many figures-our intervention in the Falangist Revolution will be documented. This is why-and was publicly declared in December, 1939-when the reckoning of accounts had to be reached between two worlds which were inevitably antagonistic, we preferred to have it retarded as long as necessary for us to replace that which we consumed or ceded.

But developments in history, which sometimes are speeded up, cannot be halted any more than the fleeting moment of Faust could be halted. History takes one by the throat and forces a decision. This is not the first time this has occurred in the history of Italy! If we had been 100 per cent ready we would have entered the war in September, 1939, and not in June, 1940. During that brief period of time we faced and overcame exceptional difficulties.

The lightning-like and crushing victory of Germany in the West eliminated the eventuality of a long continental war. Since then the land war on the Continent has ended and it cannot flare back. The German victory was facilitated by Italian non-belligerency which immobilized heavy naval, air and-land forces of the Anglo-French bloc. Some people who today apparently think Italy's intervention was premature were probably the same who then I deemed it too late.

In reality the moment was timely because if it is true that one enemy was in the course of liquidation there remained the other, the bigger one, the most powerful enemy number one against whom we are engaged and against whom we will continue the struggle to the last drop of blood.

Having definitely liquidated Britain's armies on the European Continent, the war could not but assume a naval, air and, for us, also a colonial character. It is the geographic and historic order of things that the most difficult and most faraway theatres of war are reserved for Italy. War beyond the sea and in the desert. Our fronts stretch for thousands of kilometers and are thousands of kilometers away. Some ignorant foreign commentators should take due account of this. However, during the first four months of the war we were able to inflict grave naval, air and land blows to the forces of the British Empire.

Since 1935 the attention of our general staff has been focused on Libya. All the work of the Governors who succeeded each other in Libya was aimed at strengthening economically and militarily that large region, transforming the former desert or desert zones into fecund land. Miracles! This word is able to sum up what has been done down there. With European tension becoming graver, and following the events of 1935 and 1936, Libya, reconquered by Fascism, was considered one of the most delicate points in our general strategic setup, since it could be attacked from two fronts.

The effort carried out militarily to strengthen Libya is shown by these figures.

Only during the period that goes from Oct. 1, 1937, to Jan. 31, 1940, were sent to Libya 14,000 officers and 396,358 soldiers, and organized two armies-the fifth and tenth. This latter had ten divisions. In the same period were sent 1,924 cannon of all calibers and many of them of recent construction and model; 15,386 machine-guns; 11,000,000 rounds of shells; 1,344,287,275 bullets for light arms; 127,877 tons of engineers' materials; 779 tanks with a certain percentage of heavy tanks; 9,584 auto vehicles of various kinds; 4,809 motorcycles.

These figures show that to the preparation of the Libyan defense we devoted an effort which can be described as imposing. The same thing can be said as far as East Africa is concerned, where we were prepared to resist despite the distance and total isolation, which is a tribute to the will and courage of our soldiers. The soldiers who are fighting in the empire-without any hope of help-are farthest but therefore nearest our hearts. Commanded by the born soldier the Viceroy is and by a group of generals of great valor, the national and native soldiers will cause great trouble to the enemy.

It was during October and November that Great Britain gathered and lined up against us the mass of her imperial forces, recruited from three continents and armed by a fourth. She concentrated in Egypt fifteen divisions and a considerable mass of armored means and hurled them against our lines in Marmarica where on the first line were Libyan divisions, brave and faithful but unsuited to bear the attack of enemy machines. On Dec. 9 a battle was thus started, which was only five or ten days in advance of ours, and which brought the enemy to Bengazi.

We are not like the English. We boast that we are not like them. We haven't elevated lying into a government art nor into a narcotic for the people the way the London government has done. We call bread bread and wine wine, and when the enemy wins a battle it is useless and ridiculous to seek, as the English do in their incomparable hypocrisy, to deny or diminish it.

One entire army-the Tenth-was broken up almost completely with its men and cannon. The Fifth Air Squadron was literally sacrificed, almost entirely. Where possible we resisted strongly and furiously.

Since we recognize these facts it is useless for the enemy to exaggerate the figures of its booty. It is because we are certain regarding the grade of national maturity reached by the Italian people and regarding the future development of events that we continue to follow the cult of truth and repudiate all falsification.

The events during these months exasperate our will and must accentuate against the enemy that cold, conscious, implacable hate, hate in every home, which is indispensable for victory.

Great Britain's last support on the Continent was and is Greece, the only nation that did not want to renounce the British guarantee. It was necessary to face Greece, and on this point the accord of all responsible military leaders was absolute. I add that the operative plan, prepared by the superior command of the armed forces of Albania, was unanimously approved without reservations. Between the decision and the start of action there was a delay of only two days.

Let it be said once for all that the Italian soldiers in Albania combated superbly. Let it be said in particular that the Alpini wrote pages of blood and glory that would honor any army. When the sufferings of the march by the Julia division almost up to Metzovo are known all will appear legendary.

Neutrals of every continent who are spectators at the bloody clashes between the armed masses must have sufficient shame to keep quiet and not express libelous provocative opinions.

The Italian prisoners who fell into the hands of the Greeks are a few thousand, most of them wounded. The Greek successes do not go out of the tactical field and only megalomania has magnified them. The Greek losses are very high and shortly it will be Spring, and as befits such a season our season-beautiful things will grow. I say beautiful things will be seen in every one of the four cardinal points.

Not less heavy are the losses we inflicted on the English. To state as they do that their losses in the battle of sixty days in Cyrenaica are not above 2,000 dead and wounded means adding a grotesque note to the drama. It means attempting to exceed themselves as far as shameless lies are concerned, which should seem difficult for the English. They must add at least one zero to the figures of their communiqués.

From Nov. 7 to when English torpedo planes, which took off not from Greek bases but from an aircraft carrier, succeeded with their coup at Taranto, which we admitted, we met adversity in the war. We must recognize this. We had gray days.

This happens in all wars, in all times. Think of the Punic Wars when the Battle of Cannae threatened to crush Rome. But at Zama, Rome destroyed Carthage and wiped it out from geography and history forever. Our capacity to recuperate in moral and material fields is really formidable and constitutes one of the peculiar characteristics of our race.

Especially-in this war, which has the world as its theatre and pits continents directly or indirectly one against another. On land and sea and in the air it is the final battle that counts. That we shall have to fight hard is certain, that we shall have to fight long is also probable, but the final result will be an Axis victory.

Great Britain cannot win the war. I can prove this logically and in this case belief is corroborated by fact. This proof begins with the dogmatic premise that although anything may happen Italy will march with Germany, side by side, to the end.

Those who may be tempted to imagine something different forget that the alliance between Italy and Germany is not only between two States or two armies or two diplomacies but between two peoples and two revolutions and is destined to give its imprint upon the century.

The collaboration offered by the Fuehrer and that which the German air and armored units are giving in the Mediterranean are proof that all fronts are common and that our efforts are common. The Germans know that Italy today has on her shoulders the weight of 1,000,000 British and Greek soldiers, of from 1,500 to 2,000 planes, of as many tanks, of thousands of cannon, of at least 500,000 tons of military shipping.

Cooperation between the two armed forces occurs on the plan of comradely, loyal, spontaneous solidarity. Let it be said for foreigners who are always ready to libel that the comportment of German soldiers in Sicily and Libya is under all respects perfect and worthy of a strong army and a strong people brought up under severe discipline.

Follow me now please:

First, in war potentiality Germany not only did not decrease after seventeen months of war, but increased in gigantic proportions. From the standpoint of human losses, they have been at a minimum if compared with the masses in action. Losses of materials were more than compensated for by immense booty and were absolutely insignificant.

The unity of political and military command in the hands of the Fuehrer-he who once was simple soldier and volunteer Adolf Hitler-gives to the operations an enthusiastic, irresistible, revolutionary and therefore National Socialist rhythm that begins with the highest generals and goes to the humblest soldiers. Britain will realize that once again.

Second, German armaments are in quality and quantity infinitely superior to those available at the start of the war. Germany has not yet brought to the limit the employment of her human forces. For Italy it is just the same. We have at present under arms more than 2,000,000 men, but within the year we will, if necessary, reach, 4,000,000.

Third, while during the World War Germany was isolated from Europe and the world, today the Axis is master of the Continent and allied with Japan. The Scandinavian world (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark) is directly or indirectly inside the German orbit. The Danubian and Balkan world cannot ignore and does not ignore the Axis, Hungary and Rumania have joined the Tripartite Pact. Occupied France, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg are, like the Scandinavian and Danubian worlds, within the orbit of Germany. In the Mediterranean Italy is allied with a friendly Spain. There remains Russia, but her fundamental interests advise her also to follow in the future a good-neighbor policy with Germany. Europe therefore, with the exception of Portugal, Switzerland and, for a little while yet, Greece, is all outside the orbit of Britain and against Britain.

Fourth, with this situation things are diametrically opposed to conditions from 1914 to 1918. Then the blockade was a terrible weapon in the hands of Great Britain. Today this is a broken weapon because, from being a blockading nation, Britain became blockaded by the Axis air and naval forces and will increasingly be blockaded until catastrophe comes.

Fifth, the morale of the Axis people is infinitely superior to the morale of the British people. The Axis fights in certainty of victory, while the British fight because, as Lord Halifax said, they have no other choice. It is highly ridiculous to count on the eventual moral breakdown of the Italian people. This will never happen. To speak of a separate peace is idiotic.

Churchill has not the least idea of the spiritual forces of the Italian people or of what Fascism can do. We can understand Churchill's ordering the shelling of industrial plants at Genoa to disrupt work, but to shell the city in order to break down its morale is a childish illusion. It means that the British do not at all know the race temperament of the Ligurian people in general and the Genoese in particular. It means that they are ignorant of the civilian virtues and proud patriotism of the people who gave the fatherland Columbus, Garibaldi and Mazzini.

Sixth, Great Britain is alone. This isolation pushes her toward the United States, from which she urgently and desperately seeks aid. The industrial power of the United States certainly is great, but for aid to be useful supplies must safely reach England and also be of such quantity as not only to replace the destruction already inflicted and that which will come to the industrial plants of Britain, but also to bring about superiority over Germany. This is impossible because Germany now works with the men, machines and raw materials of the entire European Continent.

Seventh, when Great Britain falls, then the war will be ended, even if by any chance it should die out slowly in other countries of the British Empire. Unless-and it is possible-these countries, where already something is fermenting, do not Teach their independence once the metropolitan area is conquered. This would bring about a change not only in the European political map, but also in the world's map.

Eighth, in this gigantic struggle Italy has a first-class job. Our war power also improves daily in quality and quantity. Two of the three great ships damaged at Taranto are already in the way of complete repair. Technicians and workers toiled day and night, giving a convincing demonstration not only of their professional capacity but also of their patriotism. When the war is over, in the world's social revolution that will be followed by a more equitable distribution of the earth's riches, due account must be kept of the sacrifices and of the discipline maintained by the Italian workers. The Fascist revolution will make another decisive step to shorten social distances.

Ninth, that Fascist Italy dared measure herself against Great Britain is a matter of pride that will live through the centuries. It was an act of conscious daring. People become great by daring, risking and suffering, and not by placing themselves by the wayside in parasitic and vile expectancy. The protagonists of history can revindicate their rights, but simple spectators never can.

Tenth, to beat the Axis, Great Britain's armies would have to land on the Continent, invade Germany and Italy and defeat their armies, and this no Englishman, no matter how insane and delirious by the use and abuse of drugs and alcohol, can even dream of.

Let me say now that what is occurring in the United States is one of the most colossal mystifications in all history. Illusion and lying are the basis of American interventionism-illusion that the United States is still a

democracy, when instead it is a political and financial oligarchy dominated by Jews, through a personal form of dictatorship. The lie is that the Axis powers, after they finish Great Britain, want to attack America.

Neither in Rome nor Berlin are such fantastic plans as this prepared. These projects could not be made by those who have an inclination for the madhouse. Though we certainly are totalitarian and will always be so, we have our feet on hard ground. Americans who will read what I say should be calm and not believe in the existence of a big bad wolf who wants to devour them.

In all cases it is more likely that the United States, before it is attacked by Axis soldiers, will be attacked by the not well known but very warlike inhabitants of the planet Mars, who will descend from the stratosphere in unimaginable flying fortresses.

Rome comrades! Through you I want to speak to the Italian people, to the authentic, real, great Italian people, who fight with the courage of lions on land, sea and air fronts; people who early in the morning are up to go to work in fields, factories and offices; people who do not permit themselves luxuries, not even innocent ones.

They absolutely must not be confused or contaminated by the minority or well-known poltroons, anti-social individuals and complainers, who grumble about rations and regret their suspended comforts, or by snakes, the remains of the Masonic lodges, whom we will crush without difficulties when and how we want.

The Italian people, the Fascist people deserve and will have victory. The hardships, suffering and sacrifices that are faced with exemplary courage and dignity by the Italian people will have their day of compensation when all the enemy forces are crushed on the battlefields by the heroism of our soldiers and a triple, immense cry will cross the mountains and oceans like lightning and light new hopes and give new certainties to spirit multitudes: Victory, Italy, peace with justice among peoples!

[1] New York Times, February 24, 1941.