Axis

(in German, *Achse*), the military, ideological, and political alliance of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. Later the alliance grew to include Japan, and during World War II, the term "Axis countries" came to refer to other countries allied with Germany such as Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and Bulgaria.

When the Nazis first came to power in Germany in 1933, the Italian Fascists, who had risen to power in 1922, did not share Hitler's political aspirations, despite many shared elements in their ideology. In fact, Fascist leader Benito Mussolini was so concerned about Hitler's desire for territorial expansion that he made a pact with Great Britain and France against Germany. However, when the League of Nations condemned Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, Mussolini broke off with the two countries and improved his relationship with Germany. The reconciliation was further boosted when both countries supported the same side in the Spanish Civil War. Mussolini first used the term "Rome-Berlin Axis" in 1936. In the beginning, although Italy and Germany both opposed democracy, Mussolini was not ready to adopt Hitler's racist and antisemitic views. Nonetheless, in 1938, after Germany had grown very powerful, Italy initiated anti-Jewish measures. Germany and Italy formally signed the military "Pact of Steel" in May 1939.