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MASTER THESIS

Titel der Master Thesis / Title of the Master's Thesis

„The Geopolitical Significance of Small Island Nations:
Malta's Role in the Mediterranean Strategy of the Second
World War“

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Advanced International Studies (M.A.I.S.)

Wien 2023 / Vienna 2023

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt
Postgraduate programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

A 992 940

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt
Postgraduate programme as it appears on the
student record sheet:

Internationale Studien / International Studies

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Professor Thomas Row



diplomatische
akademie wien

Vienna School of International Studies
École des Hautes Études Internationales de Vienne

Abstract:

This thesis proves the importance of small island nations in a geopolitical context. The examination of small island nations as geopolitical entities is done through the employment of traditional international relations theoretical frameworks. These frameworks are applied to the case study of Malta during the Second World War. Before the Second World War Malta had been continuously invaded by global empires since the prehistoric period. During the Second World War Malta was part of the British Empire and served a stronghold for the Allied side in the Mediterranean. As an important port it was continuously attacked by the Axis side in an attempt to attain control of the island, but the defenders held their ground. As a result, the island was used as a launching point for various operations throughout the Mediterranean culminating in the invasion of Italy. After the war Malta gained its independence and joined the European Union within which it serves as a tourism and cultural hub alongside the important trade port of Malta. This thesis uses the theoretical frameworks of realism, liberalism, and constructivism to prove that Malta and small island nations by extension are important geopolitical entities. Major powers during major historical events cannot accomplish their national interests in key regions of the globe without the support of these small island nations.

Abstrakt

In dieser Masterarbeit wird die Bedeutung kleiner Inselstaaten in einem geopolitischen Kontext nachgewiesen. Die Untersuchung der kleinen Inselstaaten als geopolitische Einheiten erfolgt durch die Anwendung traditioneller theoretischer Rahmenwerke der internationalen Beziehungen. Zur Erforschung dessen wird Malta als Fallbeispiel genutzt. Diese Insel wurde seit der prähistorischen Zeit immer wieder von globalen Imperien überfallen. Während des Zweiten Weltkriegs war Malta Teil des britischen Weltreichs und diente den Alliierten als Festung im Mittelmeer. Als wichtiger Hafen wurde Malta regelmäßig von den Achsenmächten angegriffen, welche versuchten, die Kontrolle über die Insel zu erlangen, jedoch hielten die Verteidiger stand. Infolgedessen wurde Malta als Ausgangspunkt für verschiedene Operationen im gesamten Mittelmeerraum genutzt, die schließlich in der Invasion Italiens gipfelten. Nach dem Krieg erlangte Malta seine Unabhängigkeit und trat der Europäischen Union bei, in der es neben dem wichtigen Handelshafen Malta auch als touristisches und kulturelles Zentrum dient. In dieser Masterarbeit werden die theoretischen Rahmen des Realismus, Liberalismus und Konstruktivismus verwendet, um aufzuweisen, dass Malta und kleine Inselstaaten im weiteren Sinne wichtige geopolitische Einheiten sind. Großmächte können bei großen historischen Ereignissen ihre nationalen Interessen in wichtigen Regionen der Welt nicht ohne die Unterstützung dieser kleinen Inselstaaten durchsetzen.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The geopolitical landscape has always been shaped by the largest and most powerful political entities. Depending on which international relations theory one subscribes to these entities can be states with massive arsenals and huge networks of military bases worldwide, or they are international organizations that allow for collaboration between the states. These collaborations eventually lead to the connection of these countries and the best use allocations of their resources and abilities. These international entities could also be the cultural systems and belief systems that large populations group subscribe to. Historically the largest of these entities have driven the global narrative and humanity tends to remember their actions as the most important and key in driving the historical development of geopolitics. However, there are certain states and entities that, although not the largest in any sense of the word, have the ability to influence the major powers and how they make their decisions. These entities tend to become forgotten in the history books or simply relegated to a few sentences in chapters speaking about specific events involving the larger powers. Small island nations are among these entities.

Although small island nations are small and limited due to their geographical constraints, they are influencers of global conflicts and events. Historically these small entities have been the places where humanity has connected in various ways. Either through trade in the vital ports that many of these island nations provide or culturally as these islands are used for travelers to rest and explore. Malta is one of these entities. As a small island nation in the center of the Mediterranean, it has been a hub for human progress and conflict throughout history. Malta has shown its importance through some of the bloodiest conflicts ever fought in the region. It has been a crossroads for large groups of people and the interesting mix of architecture and language on the island is a clear demonstrator of this. Malta is a mixture of cultures and religions but also of historical tragedies and suffering. The most obvious of these tragedies that can be used to illustrate the importance of Malta and other small island nations is the Second World War.

As a conflict the Second World War engulfed almost every country and geopolitical entity in Europe and much of the world. While it was primarily a conflict characterized by the fighting of the largest global powers, it involved every entity large

and small throughout Europe. Arguably the most important of the smaller actors was Malta. After the war Malta has become the most bombed place on Earth and the sacrifices of the Maltese people earned the entire the George Cross for valiantly defending the island and providing to the British war effort. With these clear involvements of Malta, it must have had a role that went beyond simply being an island colony. This thesis aims at proving the geopolitical importance of Malta and by extension other small island nations. The thesis will attempt to do so by highlighting the events that Malta was the staging ground for during the Second World War specifically, in order to show that it deserves to be considered one of the key players in Major historical conflicts. In doing so the belief is that small island nations will be further investigated and will enter the global historical memory as key players in geopolitics.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

When it comes to theoretical frameworks when analyzing historical events or geopolitical outcomes globally there are very few that can truly be employed. The ones that immediately come to mind are those that are used in the usual analysis of international relations in the traditional sense. These frameworks can be used to understand the political world in which we live and can be applied to almost any place or people in the world. International relations theory can be used to quantify and explain the way that human beings interact with their political and geopolitical world and why those in power choose to do what they do. The decisions that are made by individuals that control areas or groups of people that come to agreements on their actions in a collective manner usually tend to act, more or less, based on one of these frameworks. These frameworks as such can thus be applied to reasoning why small island nations are important in the grand scheme of geopolitics and more specifically why Malta as an island nation itself embodies importance within each of these frameworks. The three primary frameworks in international relations theory that can best show the widespread importance of small island nations are those of realism, liberalism, and constructivism. In order to understand the outcome of this thesis it is important for the reader to be informed of these theories. Without these geopolitical themes it would be difficult to quantifiably understand the key role that the small island nation entities play in the grander scheme of global events and the outcomes that occur from them.

Realism is one of the most popular and most widely used international theory concepts that can be applied to this particular case. In many instances it can be considered as a straightforward method of describing the way that our political world functions. In this specific case the biggest key element of why a nation or geopolitical entity is important is due to its physical military or strategic power. For example, this method of describing power in geopolitical terms can be attributed to the number of nuclear weapons a nation holds. The more weapons and the higher its capabilities in deploying them the more power it has under the realist world view. This concept also concludes that moral high ground is extremely difficult to achieve in the global push for dominance and the need to advance the interests of a particular geopolitical entity. Morality does not always allow for leaders and peoples to gain what they need in order

to succeed in the global race for success and dominance. When these moral methods fail as they inevitably all do, nations are forced to fall back on the traditional methods of deceit and violence that have been the major tools used throughout history to push for international success and dominance. Wars have been fought historically for many reasons. These reasons have been for resources, wealth, power, the need to expand, however all of these reasons can be simplified down to the need for one civilization to succeed in maintaining its goals at the eventual detriment of the others. Realism, simply put, identifies that the strategic power of nations is what gives them the dominant edge in progressing it's world view and it's national interests. Nations that can be considered as truly powerful are those that are able to enforce their will on others through physical means. If one builds up its arsenal of weapons and homeland defenses, then it is able to pursue its foreign policy without the intervention of any others. With this in mind small island nations do not necessarily have what it takes to be important themselves in the realist perspective, however, if one views geopolitical entities as not simply one nation against another but potential groups of nations vying for influence in endless alliances and treaties then small island nations hold the key to these larger nations becoming powerful under this particular theoretical framework. One can see an example of this during the Cold War. One of the most dangerous events of the Cold War was the Cuban Missile Crisis. During this event the United States caught wind of an agreement between the Soviet Union and the Communist Government of Cuba led by Fidel Castro in which the Soviet Union would station nuclear ballistic missiles on the island of Cuba. Although the island of Cuba itself was not a major geopolitical player in the realist sense, as it did not have a major army or military presence that could threaten the United States or its allies, the positioning of the island so close to the mainland of the United States made it one of the most serious threats to the global power position that United States held. If the Soviet Union were to successfully place ballistic missiles on the island, then it would have the power to annihilate key targets throughout the United States in seconds. This would give the Soviet Union a clear advantage on the global stage and thus reduce the realist power that the United States had. The Soviet Union would be able to pursue much more aggressive international foreign policy and the threat of nuclear weapons in such a proximity would force the United States to allow for these foreign policy shifts and movements. In a simpler sense the realist point of view is that if one nation has the

physical, militaristic, and strategic upper hand over other states then it can do whatever it please when it comes to pursuing its own national interests. Small island nations come into play as pawns of these nations but provide key strategic positions for the placement of these physical weapons and thus cannot be discounted as clear important players on the world stage. The decisions of these island nations to allow or not allow the placement of weapons or military bases on their soil changes the game when it comes to the realist view of geopolitical movements.

The next most popularly used international relations theory point is that of liberalism. The liberalist perspective can be summed up in a way that instead of geopolitical and international stemming from the dominance of one nations over others it comes from the collaboration and cooperation of all nations and geopolitical entities. Liberal theorists posit that the use of force only weakens the international system and eventually leads to a breakdown of the world order. In simpler terms, if countries attack each other or impose their will on others through the use or threat of force then eventually that use of force will backfire and simply cause the whole system to self-destruct. In this context then the true international power and the way for nations to pursue their national interests is to collaborate through international systems and international organizations. An example of a liberal perspective in the modern world is the creation of the United Nations. Through the United Nations all countries, no matter their size or physical power, are able to collaborate and solve issues through their combined strength. Whether or not this system is successful is in fact arguable, however, the fact that there is a platform in which the delegations and representatives of these entities can come together to discuss their solutions to problems is a way for entities to use their strengths to further their international goals and interests. With this in mind, another clear example of the liberal theory at work is the European Union. This entity works a bit more successfully than the United Nations and allows for the nations of Europe to collaborate on economic and social terms to create a more powerful economy. The fact that there are European Union delegates that can sway votes and participate in negotiations in global politics such as at the United Nations and the Organization for Security Cooperation in Europe show that membership in these groups can help all entities gain an ability to further their own national interests with the power of other states behind it. In this context again the small island nation entities play a key role. As will be further delved into later on in this thesis, small

island nations such as Malta have been a key point of trade throughout human history and have played a major role as transmitters of goods globally. The ports that have been built on these islands have allowed for the flourishing of international trade and the connections between cultures and peoples. Islands have always been an important player in not only trade relations but also in the spreading and interconnection of cultures. With this the liberal view of what allows countries to further their national interests on the geopolitical field is clearly present in the small island nations of the world. Liberalists would consider Islands to be an important place to further the bond that allows all entities to form the bonds that can create a lasting peaceful order. Island nations can work as integral parts of international organizations to help bridge the divides between other entities, to come to compromises that would have previously been unfathomable, and the connect the world both metaphorically and physically through their ports and their trade routes. The way in which Malta itself was a key player in the liberal theoretical framework will be further developed in this thesis, however, it is clear that even through this ideology small island nations are key in the geopolitical sphere.

The final theoretical framework from international relations theory that is hugely popular is constructivism. This theory can also be summarized clearly and concisely in that it focuses on the belief that the most important element of international geopolitical progress is the belief systems and cultural connections between entities. Countries movements and national interests along with the ways in which they attempt to pursue these interests rests on their cultural and historical backgrounds. Constructivism also tends to argue that the most important player in the international geopolitical sphere is not the nations themselves or the political entities that represent them but rather the cultural groups that reside within them and change the ways in which they pursue their interests. In this particular context the small island nations importance lies in a very similar aspect to that of liberalism. The cultural and historical heritage of small nations tend to be quite rich. Their position as connection hubs between different cultures serves of key importance for the connections between different cultures and belief systems. This is as true in Malta as anywhere else on the planet. Although this will be further developed throughout the thesis the history of the island is one full of changes. The significant number of cultures and major powers that have made their mark on Maltese history have caused it to be a melting pot of different

cultures and shows the different ways that different cultures can be woven into the fabric of a nation. In the constructivist sense the small island nations are a clear example of the importance of cultural changes and places like Malta have always played a significant role in the influence of different cultures throughout the globe. Without these points of international trade and the meetings of different peoples there would not be the spread of cultures and beliefs.

The different international theories that have been presented here are simply three of the most popular when it comes to explaining why geopolitical actors and entities what do they do. The reality is that that there an infinite number of ways that human interaction can be explained. Although this is just the tip of the iceberg, it is important to keep these in mind when reading the history of small island nations and their contributions to the global political order that has developed throughout human history. Specifically, when it comes to this thesis and the historical story that will be explained over the next pages it is important to maintain these theories in mind and consider the actions of the powers that have and their influence over Malta and the actions of the Maltese themselves.

Chapter 3: The Brief History of Malta

Small Island Nations have for the majority of human history been considered as somewhat insignificant. The resources, space, and territory had almost always been too small for major groups to consider as vitally important and worth fighting over. Until the advent of ships and naval faring civilizations the majority of islands were always simply places where some groups had become stranded one way or another and began to create small civilizations and nations. While the actual context in which these island nations had grown and developed did not change much due to the restrictions in territory and population size, the importance changed through a significant number of other factors. Island nations began to specialize. The island in the Mediterranean became ports of increasing economic and strategic value while islands like those in the Caribbean became locations for the production of goods that were not really able to be produced elsewhere. The importance of these island nations increased heavily but the impact these places had on the common human consciousness continued to stay quite small. This Thesis will attempt to use the case of Malta and its deep involvement in the Second World War to answer the question of why it is that these small island nations continue to go overlooked in the global historical memory.

3.1: The Phoenicians

The Island of Malta and Gozo have been passed around by every major, and some of the minor, empires that had a presence on the Mediterranean Sea. From the earliest forms of megalithic buildings to British Empire these small islands have gone through major shifts in culture, history, government, and military, strategic control. With such a deep and convoluted historical background Malta is the perfect place to delve deeper into and understand the importance that these empires have placed upon such a small place. Malta itself is comprised of two main islands, Malta itself and Gozo. These two islands together have a human history that goes back to the 3rd century B.C. and the first major conflict that involved the control of Malta came with the Phoenicians and their attempts at control over the Mediterranean trading routes. At this time Malta was an important harbor that would allow the Phoenicians to trade with

cultures and societies that lay on the furthest parts of the Mediterranean Sea and, in some cases, even along the ocean coasts of Europe. In this case Malta was mainly used for peaceful trading purposes, however the strategic importance of the islands would become clear during the Punic wars and the reign of Carthage over the region¹.

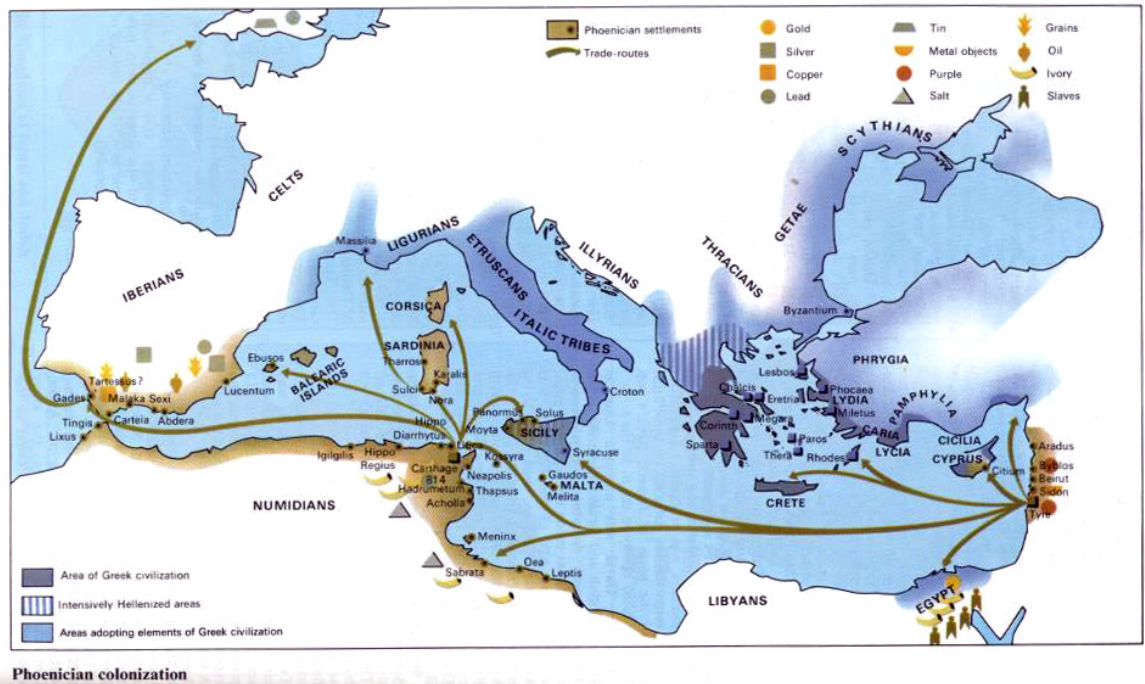


Figure 1. “Phoenician Colonization – Mapping Globalization.” Accessed December 9, 2022. <https://commons.princeton.edu/mg/phoenician-colonization/>.

3.2: Carthage

Carthage was one of the most powerful Phoenician trading cities and came out of the major period of Phoenician rule as the strongest and most economically successful entity of the time. Due to this clear economic and military success Carthage became the dominating power in the Mediterranean. As a powerful port island, Malta was at the center of its Mediterranean trade strategy. During the Punic wars (264 – 146 B.C.), in which Carthage fought against the Roman Empire, Malta transitioned from an important port island for continued trade throughout the Mediterranean and became

¹ *Who Were the Phoenicians? Phoenician History*, 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvzXRtAe0Mw>.

a clear military and strategic point for either side. Located in between North Africa and Sicily it was an important staging ground and fortress for the navies sailing from Carthage towards Rome and Sicily and the Roman naval ships travelling from Mainland Europe to North Africa. Additionally, Malta was an important unsinkable floating fortress of sorts able to blockade the seas in either direction and force invading naval fleets to retreat².



Figure 2. “Punic Wars | Summary, Causes, Battles, & Maps | Britannica.” Accessed December 13, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Punic-Wars>.

² Delile, Hugo, Elisa Pleuger, Janne Blichert-Toft, Jean-Philippe Goiran, Nathalie Fagel, Ahmed Gadhoun, Abdelhakim Abichou, Imed Ben Jerbania, Elizabeth Fentress, and Andrew I. Wilson. “Economic Resilience of Carthage during the Punic Wars: Insights from Sediments of the Medjerda Delta around Utica (Tunisia).” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 20 (May 14, 2019): 9764–69. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821015116>.

3.3: The Knights of Saint John

Next comes the arrival of the Knights of Saint John on the island and formation of the Knights of Malta (1530 A.D.). During the period of the knights, the importance of Malta continues as a military staging point for the crusades and the religious conflicts between the Christian powers of mainland Europe and the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Malta during this time came under the great siege of Malta (1565 A.D.) in which the Ottoman forces attempted to take control of the island but were defeated by the Knights of Malta and thus the Ottoman forces could not take hold of the Mediterranean and mainland Europe was kept safe from invasions by sea. During this time the island was also used as a hospital for those that had fallen ill on their way to fight in the holy land or those that had returned injured or ill from the battles for Jerusalem³.



Figure 3. Museum of the Order of St John. “Siege_of_Malta.” Accessed December 13, 2022. <https://museumstjohn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/1565-Siege-of-Malta.jpg>.

³ *The Great Siege of Malta - Ottoman Turks vs. Knights of St. John*, 2019. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF4uz_oDHjQ.

3.4: The British Empire

The next most important period of Maltese history is control of the British empire. This period also coincides with the main focus of this thesis which is the Second World War. Malta was under British rule from 1800 A.D. onwards and was one of the most important British naval ports in the Mediterranean. The port of Malta was used for British ships to reach colonies in Africa, the Middle East, and maintain British naval superiority throughout the Mediterranean. The Second World War will be a focus of this thesis as during this time Malta was the focus of majority of Global Superpowers and thus the importance of the island and small countries in general can be seen with the widest lens. Additionally, because the Second World War was so recent there is a wealth of detailed information both about the specific military events and the personal stories of the citizens of the Island. There is also much more information about the way the global superpowers saw the island and why they felt that taking Malta, or defending it, would be worth all the sacrifices they made. Through this the thesis will be able to prove the importance of small countries in major historical events and answer the question of why Malta was so important throughout history, despite its military and economic insignificance⁴.

⁴ “North Africa Campaigns | Maps, Battles, Combatants, & Significance | Britannica.” Accessed January 23, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/North-Africa-campaigns>.

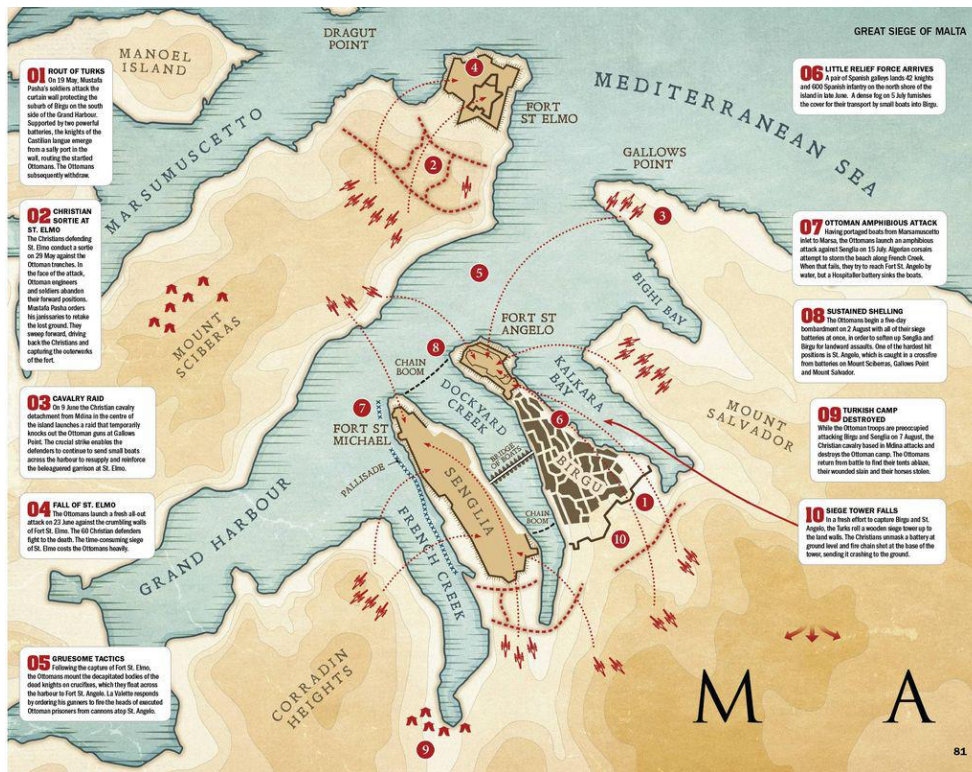


Figure 4. Williamson, Mitch. “The Great Middle Sea : The Siege of Malta in World War Two.” *The Great Middle Sea* (blog), May 7, 2015.

<http://medditerrahistory.blogspot.com/2015/05/the-siege-of-malta-in-world-war-two.html>.

Chapter 4: The Mediterranean Theatre and Malta

4.1: Malta during The Second World War

The Mediterranean theatre was one of the most important yet little spoken of battlegrounds of the Second World War. The primary reason for this lack of fame is that it was actually the combination of 3 major fronts. The first of the three is the Southern European front primarily characterized by the invasion of Italy towards the end of the war. The second of the three fronts is the naval and air battles of the Mediterranean sea itself, this is characterized by the battles in and around Malta, as well as the various naval battles between the Allied and Axis forces. The third and final front of the war is the Middle-East and North African front in which allied forces fought to maintain control of their colonies and keep the axis forces from extend their grasp past Europe⁵.

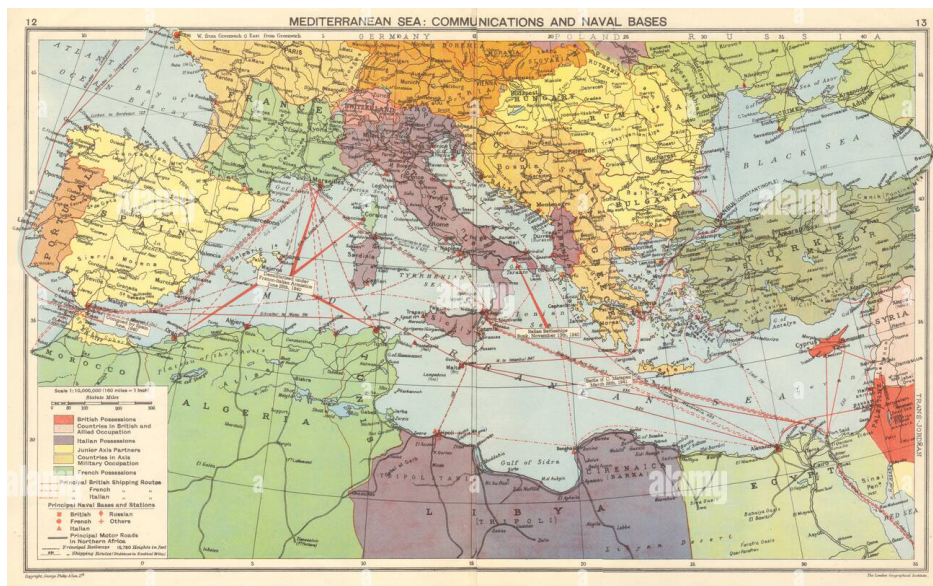


Figure 5. Limited, Alamy. “WW 2 mediterrane Marinestützpunkte. Achse Vichy Frankreich. Italienische Albanien 1942 alte Karte Stockfotografie - Alamy.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.alamy.de/ww-2-mediterrane-marine-stuetzpunkte-achse-vichy-frankreich-italienische-albanien-1942-alte-karte-image242594346.html>.

⁵ “North Africa Campaigns | Maps, Battles, Combatants, & Significance | Britannica.” Accessed January 23, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/event/North-Africa-campaigns>.

The Italian focus during the Second World War the idea of imperial expansion that had been previously unsuccessful. During many of Mussolini's speeches he had preached of a need to expand due to the surplus population which needed an outlet. The best outlet for this surplus population would be the expansion of the Italian dominion onto the continent of Africa and into the Middle-East. The only issue with this plan is that during the mad dash to grab as many colonies as possible during the 19th century, the majority of land in the world that was up for grab had already been consolidated into one of the major empires that dominated global politics. The Second World War thus allowed a clear opportunity for Italian expansion and to push into Africa through the Mediterranean and take control of the areas that Mussolini believed was owed to them. The way that Italy was planning on achieving this outcome was to become the dominant power in the Mediterranean by taking control of the Balkans, Greece, and every island throughout the region from the Balkans to the straits of Gibraltar. One of the primary attempts of the Italian navy to achieve this was the attack on Malta. As a strategic island in the middle of the sea it would provide not only a powerful staging point for Italian forces in their battles throughout the theatre but it had also come to act as a strong fortress for the Allies that blockaded the Axis advance⁶.

The second primary actor in the Mediterranean from the opposite side to the Italians was the British. The British goal had remained more or less the same throughout their history as a global empire: maintaining naval dominance around the world. With the creation of the British navy and its increase in prominence throughout global harbors the British military policy of doing all possible to maintain their control over the seas had been somewhat successful. This would be threatened by the Italians and the other Axis powers during the events of the Second World War. Their control over the Mediterranean had largely hinged on three primary points: Alexandria, as a port to their North African and Middle Eastern Colonies, Gibraltar which had historically allowed the British to control who entered and exited the Mediterranean Sea into the Atlantic, and finally their stronghold in the middle of the Mediterranean:

⁶ O'Hara, Vincent P. *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945*. Annapolis MD. USA: Naval Institute Press, 2015. P. 35

Malta. This small Island had allowed them to maintain a fleet in the center of the sea allowing quick mobility to any and every point necessary. Additionally, Malta allowed them to control the naval lanes from mainland Europe to the North of Africa and limit the reinforcements brought to the Axis forces during their campaigns throughout Northern Africa and the Middle East. With this in mind, their primary focus throughout the conflict was to maintain their control over these three points and fought valiantly to maintain these strategic positions over the course of the global conflict⁷.

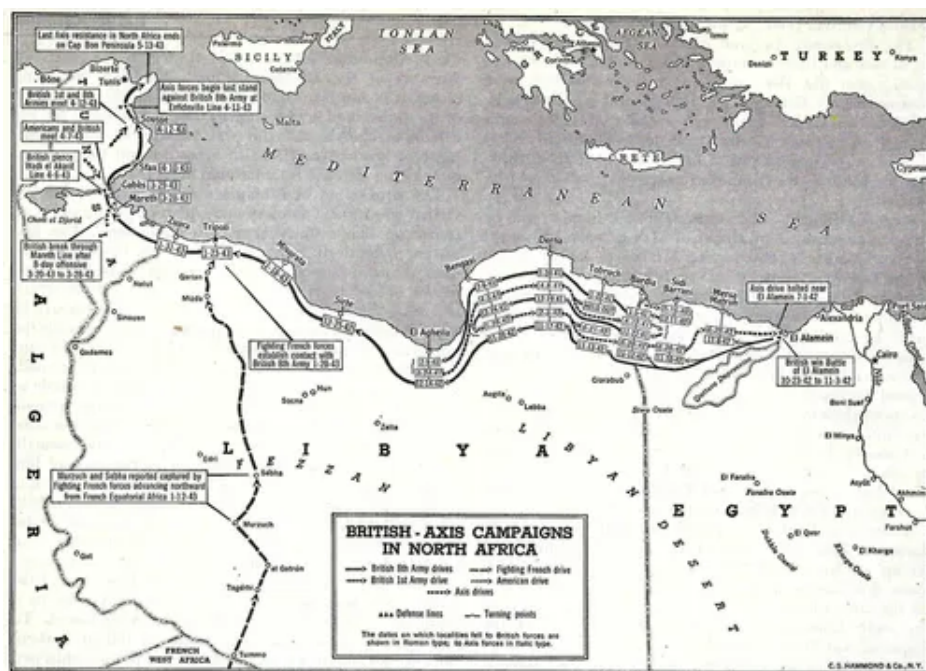


Figure 6. “Allied Invasion of Sicily | Significance, Summary, & Map | Britannica,” May 28, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Allied-Invasion-of-Sicily>.

The third large force in the Mediterranean and key player is Germany. As the focus of the Axis powers and the leader of the struggle against the Allies, Germany provided crucial aid to the Italians during the war and had clear designs on colonies in Africa. Since the German army and naval fleet was engaged in other locations throughout the war with a clear focus on the British Isles and the Atlantic, the majority of German actions in the Mediterranean was focused on U-Boat warfare assisting the

⁷ O’Hara, Vincent P. *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945*. Annapolis MD. USA: Naval Institute Press, 2015. P. 40

Italian navy in their operations. Though the Germans had heavy campaigns in Africa infamously led by Erwin Rommel. These U-Boat campaigns were mainly centered around cutting off the previously mentioned Allied strongholds in the Mediterranean, primarily Malta as it had the ability to block lanes of shipping which the Axis used to deliver vital ammunition and other supplies to the front in Africa. Germany would be one of the biggest thorns in the side of the Allies when they attempted to resupply their harbors and fleets or when they planned to launch and naval offensives from their main harbors⁸.

The primary goal of this thesis is to prove the importance of small states in major historical events through the lens of Malta. Historically speaking small states have been quite overlooked in terms of their contributions to major historical events, however, they have usually played a large role in specific aspects of these events. This thesis aims to answer the question of why these states tend to be overlooked and why Malta specifically has been robbed of its global importance.

The Mediterranean theatre is one of the most important and yet underrated aspects of the Second World War. The battle for the various islands of the Mediterranean Sea, along with naval supremacy over the body of water was absolutely vital to both the Allied and the Axis powers. The primary reason for this importance is twofold, the first reason is that the Mediterranean Sea allows access to Italy and other points of entry into continental Europe, which would allow for the Allied armies to enter the war from fronts other than the Western one. The second reason for the importance of the Mediterranean Sea's key role is that whichever alliance had naval control of the Sea has permanent access and control over shipping lanes to other parts of the globe. The North African fronts come to mind in this case along with the middle East and the Atlantic Ocean. The islands of the Mediterranean were of key importance to this need for naval supremacy as they provided unsinkable support for naval and air-based forces in order to carry out campaigns throughout the previously mentioned fronts. Control over any island in the Mediterranean allowed for safe harbor along for strategic planning locations for these various campaigns. One of the greatest examples for this is Malta. As previously discussed, Malta had always served this role of the

⁸ O'Hara, Vincent P. *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945*. Annapolis MD. USA: Naval Institute Press, 2015. P. 52

unsinkable Island fortress throughout history. The most important reason for this was its location; centrally located in the sea and between Italy and North Africa, Malta was able to block access to the straits of Gibraltar from the rear of the sea additionally to blocking access from the mainland of Europe and Italy to Northern Africa. From a more positive standpoint the island of Malta also allowed for Allied ships and aircraft to be repaired and reassigned to the different battles and operations throughout the sea and the coasts touching it. Additionally, and arguably most importantly, it presented the Allied naval and military fleets with a place for the sailors and soldiers to relax and unwind before and after being deployed. With all of these key aspects, Malta was a definitely key strategic location for all of the key players within the Mediterranean Sea. Arguably, however, the most important antagonist in the global historical narrative when it comes to the island of Malta was Italy.

4.2: Italy

The Italian priorities over the final half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century shifted quite drastically. The final half of the 19th century in Italy was dominated by the effects of unification⁹. The difficulties and various growing pains that come with the unification of various small states into one truly affected the Italian experience. These effects were manifested themselves most clearly in that Italy had fallen quite behind all the other European powers in many ways. Due to the lack of unity during the age of exploration in which the other major European powers were fighting to gain as many global colonies as possible, Italy was not able to fight through its internal conflicts enough to truly expand its reach and colonize¹⁰. With this in mind however Italy was able to grab a few colonies in Africa. These colonies were primarily located within the horn of Africa and Libya and quite limited in terms of resources and connection to other parts of Africa and Europe¹¹. While other countries like the United Kingdom, France, and Spain were expanding their global reach, importing resources

⁹ “Unification of Italian States - Countries - Office of the Historian.” Accessed April 5, 2023. <https://history.state.gov/countries/issues/italian-unification>.

¹⁰ Haines, C. Grove. “The Problem of the Italian Colonies.” *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 4 (1947): 417–31.

¹¹ Haines, C. Grove. “The Problem of the Italian Colonies.” *Middle East Journal* 1, no. 4 (1947): 417–31.

and goods from all over the world. The Italian empire meanwhile was fighting wars to hold on to the few colonies it had¹². These issues created the atmosphere in which Mussolini's rise to power and the Italian push to join the alliance with Germany was inevitable. The primary Italian motivation at the time was catching up with the rest of the European powers and gaining what the Italian leadership under Mussolini felt that it had been owed¹³. Part of this campaign strategy was the control of the Mediterranean Sea. With the majority of the Italian mainland and most of its colonies having direct coastlines onto the Mediterranean it was a clear need for the Italian empire to expand its naval and military influence throughout the islands between it and its colonies and near its shores. As is visible in the figure below Malta is directly below Sicily and through simple geographical analysis one can observe that Malta lies directly between Italy and Libya. As Malta had been a British colony for a significant period of time it is clear that the dominoes were set to create a strong conflict during the already major conflict of World War 2. However, before entering the direct Maltese aspect of the Italian campaigns during the Second World War it is important to clearly set up the other activities that the Italian Empire had been focusing on within the Mediterranean theatre during the Second World War.

¹² Sbacchi, Alberto. "The Italians and the Italo-Ethiopian War, 1935-1936." *Transafrican Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (1976): 123–38.

¹³ Williamson, Mitch. "The Great Middle Sea : The Siege of Malta in World War Two." *The Great Middle Sea* (blog), May 7, 2015. <http://medditerrahistory.blogspot.com/2015/05/the-siege-of-malta-in-world-war-two.html>.



Figure 7 “Malta | History, Language, Map, People, & Points of Interest | Britannica,” June 1, 2023. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Malta>.

The Italian navy had become extremely strong on paper. The Italian Regia Marina had over double the physical number of vessels in the Mediterranean than any of the other European powers at the time¹⁴. Their fleet was made up primarily of submarines and destroyers capable of attacking and crippling allied shipping and naval routes with relative ease. The viability of submarines during major conflicts had been tested by the German navy during the First World War and had proved to be one of the most clear gamechangers in the war to dominate the open seas¹⁵. With this powerful naval ability, the ease of Italian control over the Mediterranean should have been obvious. However, the number of ships and vessels is not necessarily relevant when the navy itself is underdeveloped and not trained as well as the enemy it is fighting. The expansion of the Italian navy and naval power in the Mediterranean was key for the creation of a new Roman Empire that Mussolini had envisioned for the

¹⁴ National Naval Museum of the United States. “WWII: Italian Ships.” Accessed April 5, 2023.

<http://public2.nhhcaws.local/content/history/museums/nmusn/explore/photography/wii/wwii-europe/italian-campaign/italian-ships.html>.

¹⁵ National WWI Museum and Memorial. “Unrestricted U-Boat Warfare.” Accessed April 5, 2023. <https://www.theworldwar.org/learn/about-wwi/unrestricted-u-boat-warfare>.

future of Italy¹⁶. Establishing control over the major fortresses and naval bases throughout the sea was of crucial military importance in this context. Therefore, the moment that Italy declares war on Britain and France on the 10th of June 1940 the plan to bomb Malta into submission begins¹⁷.

4.3: Malta and Britain

The second primary actor when it comes to the history of Malta during the Second World War is the British Empire. Malta was one of the most important strongholds for the British in the Mediterranean rivaling the importance of Gibraltar. Without this island the British desire for naval dominance throughout the globe would have been severely diminished as it would have allowed another naval power to take control of the sea and potentially gain access to the Atlantic Ocean. With this access to the Atlantic other naval power could have grown to be competent rivals to the British in their quest to colonize much of the world. European nations such as Italy along with Middle Eastern counterparts like the Ottoman Empire had strong navies that could have easily escaped the confines of the Mediterranean and began to colonize parts of the globe that the British had their sights set on or began to create an empire of their own creating further conflicts for the British globally. With this in mind it is clear that Malta would be a central element to the British control over the Mediterranean and would block them from relying purely on Gibraltar in their naval strength.

As previously discussed in this thesis Malta was part of the British Empire since 1800. Prior to the British occupation of the island Malta had been controlled by the French. In 1798 the French landed on the island and were at first welcomed by the Maltese¹⁸. However, this welcoming sentiment faded quickly as the Order of Saint John did not agree with the revolutionary idea presented by the French and more

¹⁶ Brown, John. "The Siege of Malta in WWII: Holding on to the Island Fortress." *Warfare History Network*, January 8, 2019. <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/the-siege-of-malta-holding-on-to-the-island-fortress/>.

¹⁷ Brown, John. "The Siege of Malta in WWII: Holding on to the Island Fortress." *Warfare History Network*, January 8, 2019. <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/the-siege-of-malta-holding-on-to-the-island-fortress/>.

¹⁸ Visit Malta. "French Occupation." Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/a/french-occupation/>.

specifically by Napoleon¹⁹. Napoleon had focused on invading Malta for the primary reason of controlling the fortified harbors and using them in his campaign to take over Egypt and set sail further towards India and the other Far East colonies of the British Empire. Napoleon gathered support throughout the Maltese population and among some of the members of the Order of Saint John which allowed him to form a popular movement that dismantled the Order's government and control over the island in a few days²⁰. Having achieved this capitulation from the French side Malta became another successful conquest in Napoleon's campaigns throughout Europe. This success, however, was short lived as the Maltese began to see the new laws and regulations promoted by the new French rulers as excessive and even began to view some of them as attacks on the church and their way of life²¹. This Prompted the Maltese to revolt against their new rulers and forced Napoleon's troops to withdraw behind the city walls of Valletta²². The French troops remained there until September of 1800 when the British ships, that had been called by the Maltese to help regain their freedom, arrived into the Grand Harbor²³. The French capitulated quickly and Malta began its century and a half long period of British rule.

The British took control over the island after the French capitulation but, at first, had no real desire to maintain the island. They had underestimated the value of this piece of land at first until the treaty of Amiens. The treaty of Amiens was an attempt between the British and the French to end hostilities in the early 1800s. Signed on the 25th of March 1802, the Treaty of Amiens attempted to ease the tensions between both sides by renegotiating some of the territories that they had gained during the Napoleonic wars²⁴. Among these possessions was the question of Malta. The Treaty had concluded that both sides were to surrender claims over the island and

¹⁹ Visit Malta. "French Occupation." Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/a/french-occupation/>.

²⁰ Visit Malta. "French Occupation." Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/a/french-occupation/>.

²¹ Vella, Yosanne. *Once upon a Time in 1798, 1799, 1800; Forgotten Stories From The French Period in Malta*. Malta: Midsea Books, 2022. P. 78

²² Vella, Yosanne. *Once upon a Time in 1798, 1799, 1800; Forgotten Stories From The French Period in Malta*. Malta: Midsea Books, 2022. P. 78

²³ Vella, Yosanne. *Once upon a Time in 1798, 1799, 1800; Forgotten Stories From The French Period in Malta*. Malta: Midsea Books, 2022. P. 77

²⁴ "The Treaty of Amiens | History Today." Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/treaty-amiens>.

return it to the rule of the Order of Saint John, however, due to the short-lived nature of the treaty the island was quickly thrust back into the hands of the British who were forced to act as defenders of the island²⁵. The Treaty of Paris signed in 1814 solidified British rule over the island and thus Malta became an official part of the British Empire and remained as a British dominion throughout the First and Second World Wars until the eventual independence of the Island on September 21st of 1964²⁶.

Malta under British Rule became one of the central British naval ports in the Mediterranean. The Grand harbor of Malta continued to be outfitted with more modern and advanced weaponry. Technological advances in ship building allowed Malta to become a point in which ships were not only repaired and upgraded but also manufactured. These factors along with its proximity to North Africa allowed the British to utilize the island of Malta as a landing point in their campaigns in North Africa and the Middle East along with keeping an eye on potential naval competitors on the high seas. Malta was of key importance in the British administration of its colonies in Egypt which used the island as a trading point from which goods and military could be sent to Egypt and could be received from Egypt. With all of this prowess Malta became a jewel among British colonies and the Island that had previously been simply a tool taken away from the French to stop Napoleon from expanding his reign any further became an important element of the British control over its colonies and the sea.

4.4: Maltese Economy Under British Rule

The importance of the islands faded, however, and the views that people have towards small island nations won out. Larger ports with connections to land began to grow in importance and Malta, with its small workforce was overlooked in the British empire. The British government spent little economic and physical resources in growing the island in influence and the local workforce and government could not keep up. The consolidation of French power in Algiers grew the capacity and the

²⁵ “The Treaty of Amiens | History Today.” Accessed April 25, 2023. <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/treaty-amiens>.

²⁶ “Treaty of Paris 1814.” Accessed April 25, 2023. https://www.napoleon-series.org/research/government/diplomatic/c_paris1.html.

interconnectedness of the city allowing for it to become the new major trading power in the Mediterranean. Another clear competitor to Malta was Naples which allowed for direct land access to the European mainland. The unification of Italy also gave Naples a leg up as Italy could put its resources directly into aiding the city with resources from the entirety of the country. The British however did not put similar investment into the island of Malta and thus the island lost its ability to compete as an economic powerhouse in the Mediterranean. The industry on the island was not developed and the harbor was only used as a place for the British Mediterranean fleet to garrison during the first few decades of the 20th century. This caused an economic decline on the island. Even the employment at the shipyards was not stable as the ships tended to come and go thus forcing Maltese workers to rely on extremely inconsistent income and left much of the Maltese population in a constant struggle to make a living. Even during the First World War the shipyards were not invested into, and the British admiralty made continuous widespread changes to the policies and structure of the navy with no real thought about how this would affect Malta. The underestimation of the small island nation continued to grow among the British government and the population²⁷.

²⁷ Bland, Yana. "The Economics of Imperialism and Health: Malta's Experience." *International Journal of Health Services* 24, no. 3 (1994): 549–66.



Figure 8 Colour my Travel. “5 Reminders of the British Army in Malta,” May 25, 2020. <https://www.colourmytravel.com/post/5-reminders-of-the-british-army-in-malta>.

These economic burdens came to a head after the First World War when the majority of the Maltese shipyard staff was laid off. The jobs that they had held were given to travelling members of the British Navy that would be sent to Malta to work under their obligations to the navy thus not contributing whatsoever to the economy of the island. The British had not given the citizens of Malta any sort of social network or aid in managing their growing poverty. This led to a major series of riots among the Maltese population. The high taxation of food items and necessary rations that the British needed to fund their growing difficulties in maintaining their widespread empire added to the anger that the Maltese felt in their relationship with the ruling British government. In response the government in London decided to give constitutional rights to upper class Maltese citizens and essential wash their hands of the issues. The continued underestimation of the Importance of Malta persisted and the British decision to virtually remove their control over the island and give it to the local citizens proved that in reality there was no real belief in the island as anything more than a rock to have ships moored to when needed and repaired when needed.

Table 1

**Employment at the docks,
Malta, 1914–1987^a**

Year	No. employed^b
1914	23,000
1919	10,000
1926	5,000
1940	15,000
1945	12,000
1959	5,940
1968	4,850
1987	6,000

^aSources: reference 15; Malta DryDocks Workers' Council.

^bIncludes employees at Malta Ship-building Corporation.

The economic troubles continued and the production of anything on the islands virtually ceased. Farmers left their land as the production of agricultural was not needed in the area and the lack of investment from outside provided them no income or anywhere to send their goods to. Emigration became widespread leading to an abundance of Maltese workers in cities like Detroit. Due to the British inequality when viewing the importance of Malta, instead of investing in the island, Maltese workers were given subsidized fares to move to other parts of the British Empire. The number of Maltese dock workers in Australia alone, for example, vastly outnumbered the population of Maltese in Malta. Even with this vast amount of emigration the unemployment on Malta remained high and the islands infrastructure and prowess as the fortress it had once been began to dwindle. Working hours on the island began to increase and child labor was widespread leading to major outbreaks of disease. The conditions in the few factories and productions institutions on the island were represented as being similar to at least 100 years prior at the advent of industrialization in Europe.

Table 2

Comparative infant mortality rates (deaths per 1,000 live births), 1932–1947^a

Year	Algeria (Europeans)	Cyprus	Italy	U.K.	U.S. (all)	Malta
1932	120.6	155.7	110.5	68.3		257.5
1933	113.6	132.7	100.1	66.4	60.4 ^b	253.3
1934	119.9	128.9	98.7	61.4		277.0
1935	108.8	120.9	101.2	60.4		285.7
1936	107.9	105.3	100.4	62.1		190.3
1937	125.1	159.4	108.8	61.1	53.2 ^c	242.7
1938	—	129.9	106.3	55.5		224.8
1939	94.1	98.2	97.0	53.6		227.0
1940	102.7	89.1	102.7	61.0	47	276.5
1941	105.9	107.7	115.2	63.3	45.3	303.5
1942	102.7	184.7	112.4	52.9	40.4	345.2
1943	132.6	120.8	112.8	51.9	40.4	210.0
1944	107.1	81.8	101.6	47.6	39.8	116.3
1945	108.5	81.0	98.1	48.8	38.3	144.0
1946	91.9	70.9	87.3	42.7	33.8	130.8
1947	—	65.5	82.4	43.5	32.2	120.3

^aSources: U.N. Statistical Office Demographic Yearbook, Kraus Reprint, New York, 1975, Table 24; Annual Reports of the Health Conditions of the Maltese Islands, Government Printing Office, Valletta; Vital Statistics of the U.S., 1987, Vol. II, Pt. A, Section 2, p. 1.

^bAverage for 1930–1934.

^cAverage for 1935–1939.

The British government did not make adequate changes to help in these scenarios. There were countermeasures taken for the British military garrisons present on the island however the Maltese were denied access to any of these preventative measures. The British Governor of the island sent a series of dispatches to the central government in London, but the majority of the concerns were not addressed by the politicians. The reasoning was that there had to be a focus on other locations within the British Empire. Alexandria and Gibraltar were considered to be the most important strategic and economic zones in the region and while Malta was actively failing, it served the clear purpose of hosting the British fleet in between journeys from one part of the sea to the other. Supplies were delivered to the island but were kept out of the hands of locals and were reserved for the garrisons and the ships along their journey. While Malta was still the primary host to the majority of the British Mediterranean fleet it did not serve any other purpose. Even though these failings of importance were clear and the British obviously did not even try to put any importance on Malta in terms of maintaining the citizens healthy and the economy functioning, the Maltese military infrastructure began to falter.

The Island of Malta had always been considered to be one of the most well defended island fortresses of the Mediterranean. As mentioned in previous chapters of this thesis many Empires had tried and failed to lay siege to Malta and had failed. While the ancient walls and defensive fortresses still stood, they had begun to crumble, and their defensive prowess was continuously brought into question. The British government had always seen the island as undefendable in the modern era. With the advent of aircraft, it seemed as though Malta would be an easy target for bombing campaigns and other modern forms of weaponry. While this had been somewhat of an accurate assumption, the response to this was to simply surrender the island to inevitably grim fate. Instead of pouring investment into outfitting the island with stronger defenses and more advanced weaponry the British admiralty and military leadership simply left the ancient fortifications standing and attempted to assemble a few defensive artillery and anti-aircraft cannons on these previously standing structures. The lack of investment and continued economic turmoil along with widespread disease and civil unrest did not allow for the Maltese themselves to repair the infrastructure that had kept them safe throughout the past. The only real defensive lines that Malta had to rely on was the ever-changing array of British navy ships that had docked in the grand harbor of the island. The British government had clearly given up on the importance of Malta in any of the key elements that the island had previously been known for. Its economy and position as a trading post in the Mediterranean had disintegrated bit by bit being overcome by new competition from the French ports in Algeria, the Italian ports along the southern Italian coastline and islands like Sicily, and finally within the British Empire in the use of Alexandria as their primary trading point with North Africa. The Maltese citizens had also been neglected. Hit with continuous heavy taxation and a lack of social help from the government along with continuously spreading diseases had caused the previously strong Maltese population to either leave or become disheartened with their position within the British Empire. Finally, the one element that had been a given for Malta throughout its history; its strategic importance in the Mediterranean along with its heavy fortifications that had protected it from hundreds of years of potential invasion had begun to falter. This set up one of the most obvious potential defeats of the British side during any major conflict and the moment that the Second World War broke out the entirety of the British naval fleet was relocated to Alexandria. This left Malta without defenses, a

disintegrating economy, a fatigued, angry, and disease-ridden population, and crumbling defenses shored up by little more than a few anti-aircraft batteries and planes that had been outdated when they were originally stationed on the Island. The setup for a major defeat in the Mediterranean was clear. Clearly the neglect of small island nations was clear and continued to throughout the mentality of populations throughout the globe. History had seemingly not yet taught enough lessons about the importance that small island nations play in major historical events; however, the largest lesson would come in a little more than a decade.

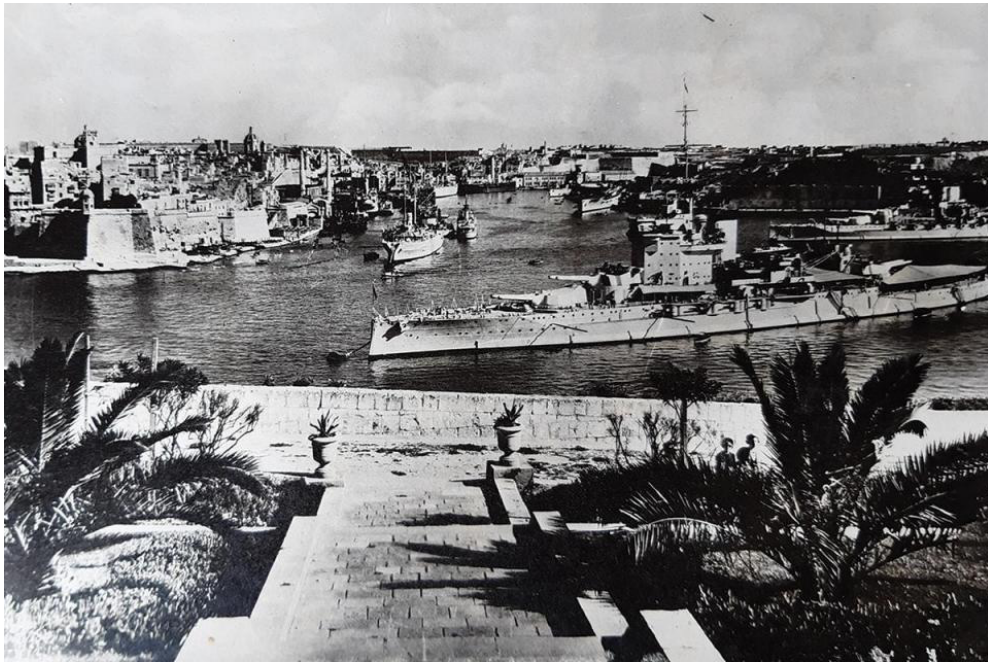


Figure 9 Times of Malta. “Leo Amery’s Visit to Malta in 1919.” Accessed April 26, 2023. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/leo-amerys-visit-to-malta-in-1919.820600>.

4.5: Alexandria and Malta

In clear contrast to the way that the British dealt with Malta was the case of Alexandria. As the central port city in Egypt the Egyptian colony of the British Empire was centralized around it. In Egypt the British spent innumerable resources in cultivating a thriving and successful economy. During the early period of colonization of Egypt by the British, the investment of capital was extensive leading to a thriving economy based largely around the supply of cotton to Europe. The irrigation systems in Egypt were largely expanded in a clear bid to increase the cotton yield from Egypt as the cotton supply from the Americas had virtually completely collapsed due to the American civil war²⁸. This increase in spending and investment into the agricultural sector of Egypt allowed for the expansion of not only the cotton trade but also the continued development of other agricultural enterprises in the colony. With this clear development the employment in Egypt was high and the flow of resources was extremely beneficial to Egypt. Additionally, to the investments made into the Egyptian economy and agricultural sector, the public and private investments into the railroads and other forms of infrastructure was booming. With this economic success the Egyptian populous did not contend with the same level of dissatisfaction as the Maltese and the policies presented by the British government were more or less accepted as is. While the First World War led to a brutal draining of Egyptian resources and unrest within the populous the British continued to develop the Egyptian colony and pour vast amounts of capital investments into the infrastructure²⁹. This further allowed for the development of the port of Alexandria and the defenses stationed in the city. While it is clear that Egypt is larger and more important to maintain as a colony than Malta the strategic importance of the city in a major conflict was deemed to be significantly higher than that of Malta. Defenses were increased and the moment war was declared in Europe the bulk of the British Naval fleet was deployed to defend the shores of the Egyptian colony. While the rest of the British possessions throughout the sea were left somewhat defenseless, there was a clear sentiment that they could be defended from

²⁸ Shukla, R.L. "Presidential Address: British Colonialism at Work in India and Egypt A Comparative View." *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 48 (1987): 603–19.

²⁹ Keogh, E. G. "Allied Strategy in World War II —A Rejoinder." *The Australian Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1949): 12–18. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20633124>.

Alexandria and as long as the Egyptian city did not fall into the hands of the Axis powers, the Mediterranean would be safe.

It is this clear overestimation of the importance of Alexandria and the Underestimation of the importance of Islands like Malta that could have led to a major defeat on the part of the British. In the Mediterranean between Alexandria and the strait of Gibraltar there was no point other than Malta that could serve to diminish the Axis control over the sea. If the island of Malta would fall there would be very little ability for the Allied powers to resupply Alexandria and with the island in the control of the Axis, it would give them another avenue from which to send invasions and air raids towards the North African and Middle Eastern British colonies. While at first it would be feasible for the British fleet to launch counteroffensives from Alexandria into other parts of the Mediterranean, they would eventually lose supply lines and be forced to maintain their navy purely from the land. This would have theoretically led to a scenario in which Alexandria would have been encircled. In this instance, with the loss of Malta, any form of reinforcements would have had to make it through the majority of Mediterranean, controlled by the axis, without anywhere to stop and resupply or repair the ships. Viewing the events that occurred during Operation Pedestal (discussed further in this thesis) this would have been disastrous. Additionally, the Axis forces would have had a base from which they could launch aircraft to scout any naval convoys headed to Alexandria or other Allied colonies and perform air raids for which these convoys were not prepared for. On the other side, in the Axis powers could gain control over Malta they would have a place from which to launch offensive against the Allied possessions in North Africa and the Middle East. The Maltese harbors and airports would provide a staging ground for any assault towards these colonies. Not only would the British fleet and colonial possessions be effectively cut off from any aid, but they would also be in danger of constant raids reinforced from Maltese harbors and airports. It is clear through these simple conjectures that Malta was of key importance in the fight to defend and maintain any of the British colonial possessions in North Africa and the Middle East, however, the neglect of Malta over the course of the past century forced the British to rely heavily on the fortified cities on the North African mainland and consider Malta effectively lost. As per the theme of this thesis, the neglect of such islands due to their small size

and population could have been disastrous when it comes to the maintaining of the strategically and economically significant British colonies.

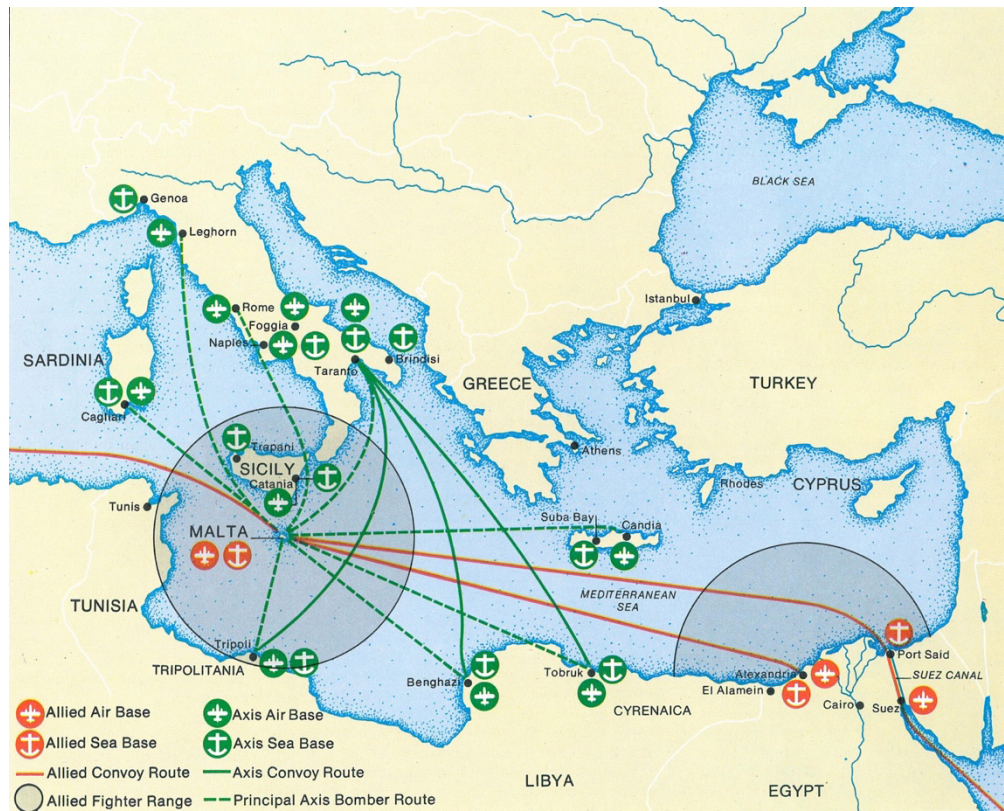


Figure 10 “British Empire Timeline.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/timeline/medbases.htm>.

4.6: Germany

Arguably the most important actor when it comes to any actions during the second world war is the German Third Reich. The military power behind the majority of the Second World War was Germany and, though it was aided by Italy, on the majority of occasion The Third Reich had to be the one who added most of the military might to the conflict. The Mediterranean was primarily the territory of Italy. As the only major power out of the Axis side that had any sort of outlet onto the Mediterranean and the largest Mediterranean fleet out of the Axis side Italy was the main opponent of the Allies within the confines of the sea. However, once the

continuous naval failures of the Italian fleet became clear and could not be ignored, the Germany army was brought in to attempt at aiding in the Mediterranean front.

The Involvement of Germany came after the clear failures of Italy in its initial campaigns in the Mediterranean, Balkans, and North Africa. The Italian attempt to invade Albania stalled along with its attempt to invade the British colony in Egypt. At this point in the summer period of 1940 the German leadership had no choice but to send reinforcements in order to aid the embattled Italian forces³⁰. The largest form of aid in the region was the appointment of Erwin Rommel as the head of the newly created Afrika in the Northern Africa theatre in February of 1941. This along with the German seizure of Greece was a large show of support to the Italian side. Without this the Italians would have all but failed in this segment of the conflict. With relation to Malta and the central topic of this thesis however, the most important element of the German support in the Mediterranean was the parachute invasion of Crete.

4.7: Germany and Crete

Crete was heavily garrisoned by the British army in October of 1940 when the Italians attacked Greece. With Greece no longer having to worry about defending the island, they could create a new division of their armed forces to help with the defense of the country against the Italian advance. As a small island nation itself, Crete was an additionally useful set of harbors from which the British navy could maintain its Mediterranean fleet. Its location in the Eastern Mediterranean would allow for another set of harbors near Alexandria to maintain its control over the Egyptian colony and other parts of North Africa. The importance of this island became clear to the Axis side however as the Romanian oil fields would be within range of British bombers leaving the island³¹. Due to the aid the British gave the Greeks in garrisoning the island of Crete the Italians would be pushed back and the Greek mainland would not be

³⁰ “Mapping History : World War II: The European Theater - The Mediterranean Front: 1940-1943.” Accessed May 2, 2023.

<https://mappinghistory.uoregon.edu/english/US/US35-03.html>.

³¹ Suciu, Peter. “Hitler’s Invasion of Crete – The First Airborne Invasion in Military History.” Text. The National Interest. The Center for the National Interest, June 6, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/hitlers-invasion-crete-%E2%80%93-first-airborne-invasion-military-history-161376>.

invaded initially³². It was at this point that the desperately needed German reinforcements would come and aid the Italian side. While the island was garrisoned by over 25 thousand British and dominion troops the work on Royal Airforce Bases had just begun and thus the air defenses were sparse at best³³. Although the British government had attempted to continue resupplying the garrison, after and ships passed Malta on their way through the Mediterranean or left the shores of the Egyptian colony they were easily targeted by German Luftwaffe operating from the newly conquered mainland of Greece³⁴. The garrison slowly got smaller as aid was needed to be delivered to various part of the North African campaigns and the German army saw this as the perfect opportunity to attack the island and cut of any help that the British could provide from this island to North Africa. The German aim was also to cut off any ability of the British to interfere within the mainland of the Balkans and on the Eastern flank of the Italian coasts. With this clear objective in mind the German invasion of Crete was born. The operation which was codenamed Operation Mercury would be one of the largest paratrooper assaults during the war.

The British Royal Navy had still been able to maintain control over the waters directly around the Island while being mostly cut off from aid by the German U-boats and Axis naval mine fields that had peppered the rest of the Mediterranean. As a result of this control the German leadership concluded that the thoughts of an amphibious assault on Crete would be impossible. Having learned their lesson from the Italian attempted siege in Malta and subsequent failure of any sort of invasion the previous summer, Germany decided that due to the lack of Royal Airforce infrastructure on the island the simplest method and the most easily executable would be a parachute offensive³⁵. The German parachute divisions that were used for this operation were mainly the ones that had already been stationed in the area during the invasion of

³² Suci, Peter. "Hitler's Invasion of Crete – The First Airborne Invasion in Military History." Text. The National Interest. The Center for the National Interest, June 6, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/hitlers-invasion-crete-%E2%80%93-first-airborne-invasion-military-history-161376>.

³³ Porch, Douglas. *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*. New York, New York, USA: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005. P. 27

³⁴ Porch, Douglas. *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*. New York, New York, USA: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005. P. 43

³⁵ Porch, Douglas. *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*. New York, New York, USA: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005. P. 44

Greece along with reinforcements brought in from divisions that were eventually destined to carry out operation Barbarossa³⁶. The German leadership believed that with these troops aiding in the invasion the Axis side would be ensured of a victory.

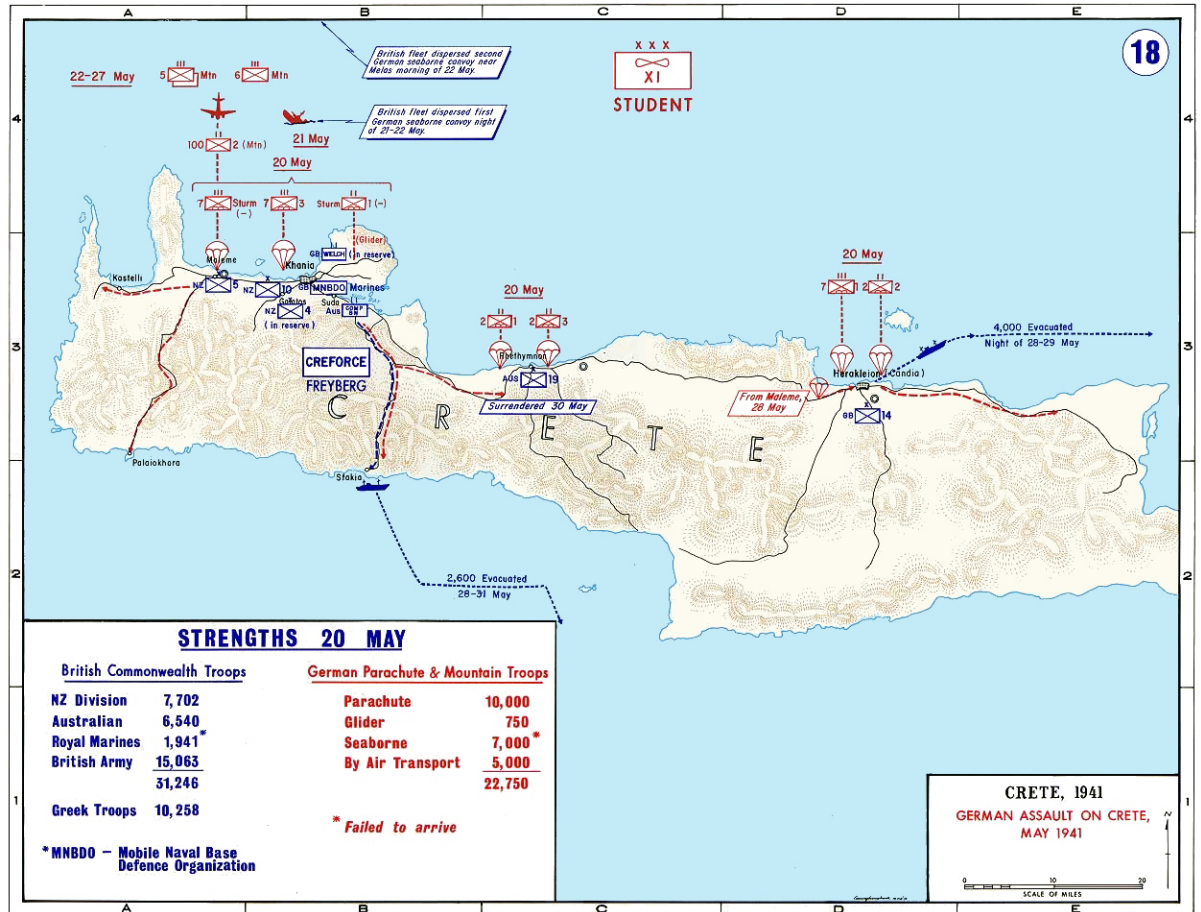


Figure 11 “A Második Világháború: Kréta Csata.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://hu.eferrit.com/a-masodik-vilaghaboru-kreta-csata/>.

The invasion officially went into effect in the early morning hours of 20th of May 1941 when dozens of Junker Ju 52 paratrooper aircraft dropped launched troops onto the Maleme airfield which had been one of the only operational airfields on the island at the time³⁷. At first the German troops suffered heavy losses in the fighting. The British troops, mainly consisting of battalions from New Zealand, were able to

³⁶ Porch, Douglas. *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*. New York, New York, USA: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005. P. 52

³⁷ Porch, Douglas. *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*. New York, New York, USA: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005. P. 53

hold the airfield despite suffering heavy losses themselves. Although the fighting continued well throughout the day and the German side continued to sustain heavy losses, the British troops were not able to call for any reinforcements or resupply and thus began to be pushed back by the Axis side. A second wave of German paratroopers landed in the afternoon supported by air attacks from the Italian air force along with the German Luftwaffe. With this newly deployed force, and the fact that the Greek battalions were under resourced, the German side was able to break through defensive cordons around Heraklion. This then allowed the Germans to seize the Greek main barracks on the island leaving the Australian, New Zealand, and British troops without any sort of aid. At this point the Germans had cut the communications running from one end of the island to the other. Thus, the individual groups of troops fighting to defend the various barracks and airfields were cut off from one another, fighting a losing battle. The New Zealand platoons were pushed back over the course of the night and into the 21st of May. They had lost various key strategic hills and were forced to withdraw from these positions that had been previously held under the first few waves of German paratroopers. The only glimmer of hope for the allied side came in the form of a counterattack, meant to destabilize the German landing force, and reclaim the Maleme airfield in order to possibly get air-based reinforcements from British aircraft carriers. This counterattack failed; however, due to the length of time it took for the forces to reach the staging area. They had been pushed back for too long and by the time they had been able to begin the offensive the Axis air support was able to easily repel them in the daytime. The German offensive continued, and the British troops were not able to withstand the continuous inflow of German and Italian airborne troops. As a result, the island was lost by the British and the troops from New Zealand were forced to surrender on the 1st of June 1941. The remaining British and dominion troops on the island made an attempt to evacuate using the British royal navy ships that were still able to hold the waters around the island. The primary destinations of the evacuation were Egypt and Malta. Although the troops successfully made it onto the ships, the evacuation efforts had taken too long, and the Luftwaffe was able to establish itself on the island. These planes along with some from the Greek mainland conducted raids on the escaping ships. Around 6 thousand British troops were able to leave the island and only about 4 thousand reached their destination. The Axis dive bombers were able to kill 2 thousand of the retreating British troops.



Figure 11 History, Military. “Hitler’s Airborne Elite and the Battle for Crete | The Past,” May 11, 2022. https://the-past.com/feature/___trashed-6/.

The Aftermath of the Battle of Crete led to the reevaluation of the German Luftwaffe. The amount of transport planes that had been lost during the battle was significantly higher than had been expected and though the operation was successful, the lack of infrastructure built by the British on the island forced the German side to invest heavily³⁸. This considerable loss of air force resources along with the heavy investment needed into the building up of air bases and the repairing of harbors on the

³⁸ Suci, Peter. “Hitler’s Invasion of Crete – The First Airborne Invasion in Military History.” Text. The National Interest. The Center for the National Interest, June 6, 2020. <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/hitlers-invasion-crete-%E2%80%93-first-airborne-invasion-military-history-161376>.

island of Crete was a clear reason for the delay in Operation Barbarossa³⁹. Although the operation was not delayed a direct result of the Operation Mercury alone, it contributed to the delay which was a potential reason for the invasion of the Soviet Union to have failed. With this in mind it is clear that the invasion of Crete and the island itself had a deep and unintended geopolitical influence.

The Successful Axis victory over the island of Crete showed the strength that Germany was able to bring into the Mediterranean to help the Italians in their campaign. The loss of Crete and the importance that Germany had put on it along with the heavy fighting put up by the British to attempt to maintain the island clearly shows that the island nation was deeply valued on both sides of the conflict. With the losses sustained by both the axis and the allies it is clear that the strategic importance of the island was not underestimated, however the historical impact of the battle continues to be overlooked. It is this phenomena that appears with Malta as well. The battles that take place on islands lead to heavy casualties and loss of strategic points throughout the Second World War however they are continuously overlooked in the history books and further mentality.

³⁹ Porch, Douglas. *The Path to Victory: The Mediterranean Theater in World War II*. New York, New York, USA: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2005.

4.8: The Siege of Malta 1940-1942



Figure 12 “A II. Világháború Fegyverei, Járművei.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://2vilaghaborufegyverei.blog.hu/tags/mussolini>.

The Siege of Malta began the day after Italy declared war on the Allied powers. As previously discussed, at this time Malta was an important part of the British empire and played a key role in the British supremacy over the oceans and mainly within the Mediterranean. The port of Malta played host to the majority of the British naval fleet in the Mediterranean at one point or another and held key strategic and resource-based infrastructure to resupply and regroup Allied soldiers before, after, and during campaigns throughout the sea and in North Africa. This was not a secret however and the Italian naval command knew this all too well. The siege of Malta began during a time when the defenses of the island were extremely bare bones. As previously discussed in the section describing Malta’s position, the island itself was defended only by a number of British submarines along with the British monitor known as “Terror”⁴⁰. The primary defenses of the island were focused around six outdated Gloster Sea Gladiator biplanes and a large number of anti-aircraft guns manned by the British and

⁴⁰ Military Wiki. “Siege of Malta (World War II).” Accessed April 11, 2023. [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Siege_of_Malta_\(World_War_II\)](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Siege_of_Malta_(World_War_II)).

Maltese soldiers present⁴¹. The majority of the soldiers tasked with the defense of the island were those that had been given leave from other campaigns and operations and thus were tired and unprepared for the fight that was awaiting them⁴². The defenses of the island were meager due to the British justification that the island could be defended from Alexandria where the majority of the British naval might that had patrolled the Mediterranean had been moved. This move was ordered due to a need to prioritize the defense of the Suez Canal which had been believed to be one of the key locations that the Axis powers, primarily Italy, would attack in order to fulfill the Italian demand for colonial territory⁴³. The scene was set for a clear victory on the Italian side leading to the British loss of Malta and a heavy blow to the shipping lanes that allowed for allied resupply of troops and fleets.

The first bombs fell in the early morning hours of the 11th of June 1940⁴⁴. The three pilots present were ordered to scramble in the three out of six Gladiators that were operational, and the siege of Malta began. The first wave of Italian aircraft were ordered to attack the airbase at Ħal-Far to prevent any more British aircraft from taking off and resisting the Italian attacks⁴⁵. The secondary waves of Italian aircraft targeted the shipyards and ports of Malta with a clear focus on destroying and opportunities for the British naval defenses from leaving port and moving against the eventual Italian naval and amphibious invasion of the Island. These waves were made up mainly of bombers escorted by squadrons of fighters that had clear objectives to destroy any defensive positions and disrupt the abilities of the British and Maltese soldiers from putting up a major defense against an Amphibious landing operation⁴⁶.

⁴¹ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 15

⁴² Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 18

⁴³ Military Wiki. "Siege of Malta (World War II)." Accessed April 11, 2023. [https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Siege_of_Malta_\(World_War_II\)](https://military-history.fandom.com/wiki/Siege_of_Malta_(World_War_II)).

⁴⁴ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 24

⁴⁵ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 33

⁴⁶ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 34

The majority of the first waves were unsuccessful in destroying any major military objectives during their bombing runs. This was due in part to the successful flying from the pilots in the Gladiators along with the heavy anti-aircraft barrages from the artillery gunners on the Maltese mainland⁴⁷. The defenders of the Island had a distinct advantage, due to the position of Malta and the climate at the time the horizon was clear, and all Italian aircraft were visible to radar and observers searching for targets. With these clear lines of visibility, the anti-aircraft gunners along with the fighter pilots were able to plan their defenses without too much trouble and succeed in their efforts to destroy Italian planes efficiently⁴⁸. After the first few barrages, the majority of Italian bombers that had successfully dropped their payload near their military targets had been unsuccessful in causing any major damage. The military infrastructure had survived while the bombs that had fallen mainly impacted civilian or empty areas⁴⁹. With these clear failures by the Italian aircraft bombardments the island had shown its resilience and ability to withstand major attack by large air-based forces. The Italian military command continued its efforts to bombard the island with little success⁵⁰. The Maltese defenses over performed their expected abilities and with this success they were able to push back almost all of these Italian attacks that were thrown their way. This caused the Italian command to reevaluate their situation and begin to devise a new plan. In the meantime, the allied operational command considered the importance of the Island and allowed the importance that the Italian government had put into the island to open their eyes to the clear value that Malta posed⁵¹.

With this in mind, they began to increase the defenses of the island and delivered a convoy of cruisers to the island from Alexandria accompanied by

⁴⁷ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 48

⁴⁸ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 50

⁴⁹ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 50

⁵⁰ (240) *Surviving The Siege Of Malta | Battlefield Mysteries | Timeline - YouTube*. Accessed December 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/>.

⁵¹ (240) *Surviving The Siege Of Malta | Battlefield Mysteries | Timeline - YouTube*. Accessed December 6, 2022. <https://www.youtube.com/>.

Hurricane Mark 1s that would relieve the over-extended Gladiators in the air⁵². The Italian air raids continued and were successful in destroying some of the ships that had been sent to reinforce Malta including the HMS Dainty and the HMS Cornwall⁵³. Although these were clear victories for the Italian attackers, it did not cause a big enough blow to the British Admiralty and did not lead to any major advances on the Italian side. However, the supplies from Malta were beginning to dwindle and the Axis powers switched from a strategy of invasion to a strategy of encirclement and siege⁵⁴. The Italian and German navies used their fleets of submarines to cripple incoming supply vessels to bleed the island dry before mounting their invasion called Operation Herkules⁵⁵.

⁵² Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 63

⁵³ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 64

⁵⁴ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 64

⁵⁵ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

4.8: Operation Herkules, July 1942

At this point in the war the majority of Europe had either fallen to the axis offensives or was embroiled in fighting the offensives⁵⁶. Alexandria was on the verge of falling to axis control during the campaigns in the middle east and resupply of Malta was looking significantly more grim. It was at this time that the German and Italian plan to invade the island was born. The Maltese defenses at this point had grown significantly in size with over 15 infantry battalions supported by an armored battalion and a field artillery regiment meant to repel any amphibious invasion⁵⁷. Two aircraft carriers arrived at the island as well carrying squadron of spitfires and air technicians that would allow for air raids to be pushed back from the island. In April of 1942 Hitler and Mussolini met in Salzburg to discuss and ultimately approve the plan to invade Malta⁵⁸. Their plan for this invasion was codenamed Herkules and hinged on the invasion of Alexandria and Libya ending in the annexation of Malta as a strategic point to supply axis forces in the North African territories. The plan hinged on the use of aircraft and airborne troops as the Italian and German commands knew that the coastal guns along with the infantry regiments and armored battalions would make it virtually impossible to invade Malta from the sea⁵⁹. The primary elements of the plan were to invade the smaller islands of Gozo and Camino and using these locations as staging areas for the larger invasion of the main island. The plan would use about 29 thousand axis troops in the invasion⁶⁰. While the plan was heavily in motion in April of 1942, where the German Luftwaffe heavily bombed the island attempting to decrease troop morale and destroy the fighting spirit of the soldiers stationed in Malta, many of the planes destined for the invasion had to be diverted to Libya and the Suez Canal that

⁵⁶ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

⁵⁷ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

⁵⁸ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

⁵⁹ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

⁶⁰ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

had been seen as more important than the invasion of the island⁶¹. This decision limited the amount of available air and naval force at the disposal of the axis powers and thus operation Herkules was never implemented leaving Malta, once again, in the hands of the allies and a thorn in the side of axis operations throughout the Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Middle East.

4.9: Operation Pedestal, August 1942

The Allied powers tended to see the value of Malta bit more than the Axis powers as the war continued. This is the most visible in Operation Pedestal which was carried in 1942 and attempted to carry vital supplies through the Axis naval blockades that attempted to choke Malta into surrender. At this point, Malta was at its strongest in terms of air, sea, and land defenses⁶². The massive amounts of troops and planes that had gathered on Malta in advance of any major invasion by the Axis consumed resources at an alarming rate and the Allies were forced to consider how they would send supplies to the island. The German navy along with the Italian navy had not put into action any plan to invade the island and instead had decided to encircle the Allied strongholds in the Mediterranean Sea in order to block any form of resupply operation⁶³. Their strategy was to bleed the islands dry and stop them from aiding in the campaigns of North Africa and the Middle East along with stopping them from being staging grounds for invasions of the European mainland in the hope of opening up a new front in the war⁶⁴. Planning of the operation began in July of 1942 by the British Admiralty with aid from American merchant ships. This would be one of the largest naval convoys of the Second World War and would employ 14 American Merchant Navy ships under British flag and using a crew of British Merchant Marines⁶⁵. This convoy would be defended by two battleships, the H.M.S. Nelson and

⁶¹ *The Most Bombed Place on Earth - Operation Herkules vs. the Undefeated WW2 Island*, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HzK-aVvgQ4g>.

⁶² Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 47

⁶³ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 87

⁶⁴ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 53

⁶⁵ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 54

the H.M.S. Rodney, and three aircraft carriers, the H.M.S. Eagle, H.M.S. Victorious, and the H.M.S. Indomitable⁶⁶. These vessels would escort the merchant ships from the straights of Gibraltar through the Mediterranean and through to Malta to deliver the desperately needed supplies⁶⁷. The sail through the straights were uneventful and allowed the convoy to quickly enter the area controlled by the submarines of the Italian and German navies. The next day, however, the strikes on the convoy began. The H.M.S. Eagle was torpedoed on the morning of the 11th and sunk off the coast of Cape Salinas⁶⁸. This was the first major blow to the convoy destroying one of its much-needed aircraft carriers. On the 12th of August the attacks from the Axis side continued through continuous waves of aircraft raids ending in the flight deck of the indomitable being irreparably damaged⁶⁹. This then left the convoy with only one operational aircraft carrier and forced the convoy to pick up speed in its approach towards the island of Malta. On the 13th of August the raids from the Italian planes continued along with attacks from E-Boats sinking a number of the merchant marine vessels and damaging the Ohio which had been the largest and most densely packed of the trading vessels⁷⁰. Additionally the convoy had to sail through the minefields that littered the area between Sicily and the North African coasts, again costing a few of the merchant ships. While the convoy had suffered heavy losses, on the 14th of August the remaining ships, many of them damaged and barely afloat, sailed into the Maltese harbor⁷¹. The convoy had been met by fighters from the squadrons assigned to defend Malta for the final portion of the journey⁷². The Ohio had made it to Malta with the majority of its cargo intact and the Maltese defensive forces had been successfully resupplied. The costs to the British admiralty had been heavy but the sacrifices made to relieve the

⁶⁶ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 57

⁶⁷ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 57

⁶⁸ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 57

⁶⁹ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 85

⁷⁰ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 86

⁷¹ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 87

⁷² Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 90

island and its inhabitants showed the importance that the Allied side had attributed to the maintenance of Malta. Operation Pedestal became one of the central elements of the Maltese history of the Second World War and showed the Italian and German navies that they had major deficiencies in their control over the Mediterranean⁷³.

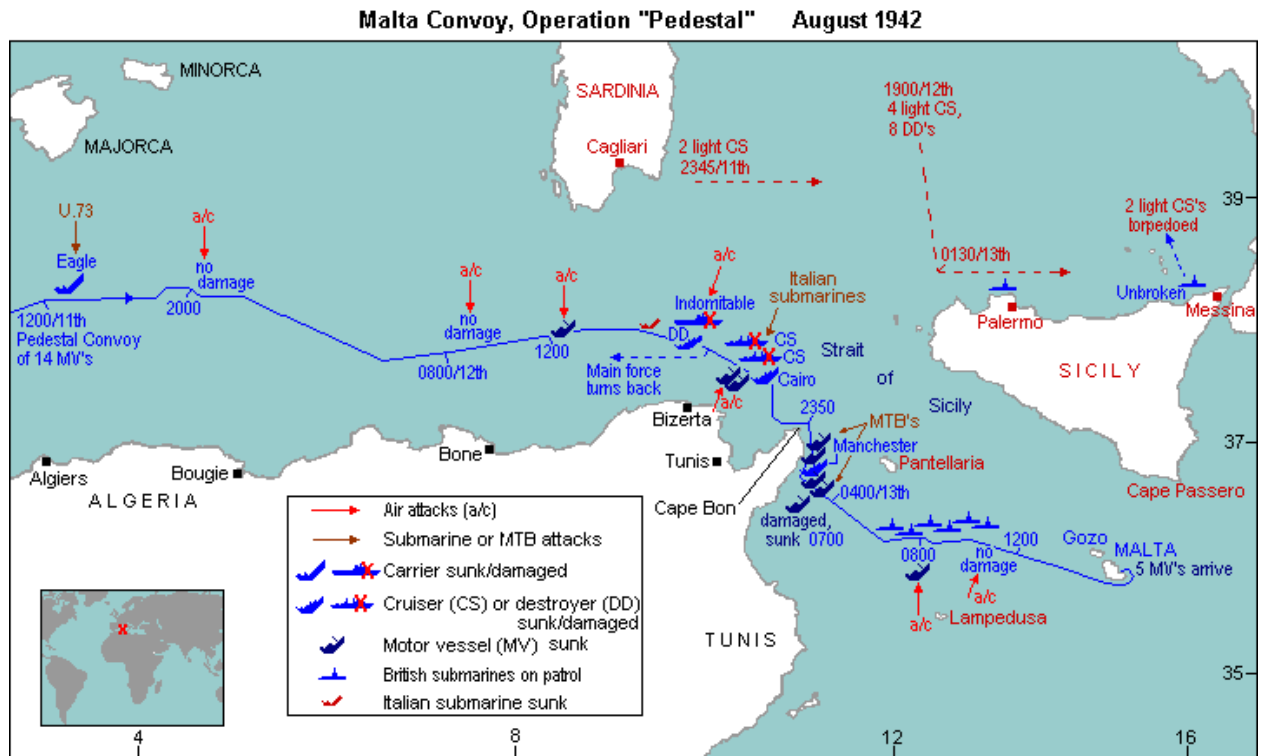


Figure 13 "Italian Navy in World War 2." Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.naval-history.net/WW2CampaignsItalianNavy2.htm>.

4.10: Malta and the Culmination of the Second World War

The period after Operation Pedestal saw Malta continuing its defenses against various air raids from the Axis side. The Allies although continuously losing ships in the Mediterranean were able to maintain a constant flow of supplies to the island of Malta. With the supplies that had been brought through Operation Pedestal as well Malta was able to defend readily against any form of Axis attack. The biggest break for Maltese importance came in the form of the Allied invasion of Sicily. This campaign, which then lead to the Allied invasion of the rest of Italy and the opening

⁷³ Hastings, Max. *Operation Pedestal: The Fleet That Battled to Malta, 1942*. New York City, USA: Harper, 2021. P. 92

up of the front on the southern European mainland, is arguable one of the many significant reasons for the end of the Second World War.

4.11: Operation Husky 9 July – 17 August 1943

Operation Husky was the codename given to the Allied invasion of the Island of Sicily. The strategy was thought up by the American President Franklin D. Roosevelt and the British Prime Minister Winston Churchill. They met in Morocco in 1943 to discuss how to take advantage of what they called the “soft underbelly of Hitler’s Europe”⁷⁴. During this meeting they decided on the date and the strategy of the invasion. The strategy was key in order to open the Allied sea lanes and regain full control over the Mediterranean in order to eventually launch a full invasion of the Italian mainland. Thus, opening the front on another side. Planning for the invasion began immediately after the conference in Morocco and the date was set for the beginning of the invasion. The major issues with the invasion were that Sicily has a terrain of mainly large rocky outcrops which are easily defensible from land. This would be a clear issue when the Allies would begin to launch their invasion. These difficulties would require the Allies to employ the use of amphibious and further naval forces to attack the island while also using air power stationed in Northern Africa. It was at this point that Malta would be one of the most important elements of the Allied strategy for this invasion. Malta would provide an important harbor for the operation as it is extremely close to Sicily and can provide a landing pad for troops to be loaded onto ships and planes to be taken to Sicily. With all of these elements, the importance of Malta in one of the pivotal moments of Second World War history was set.

⁷⁴ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019. P. 74

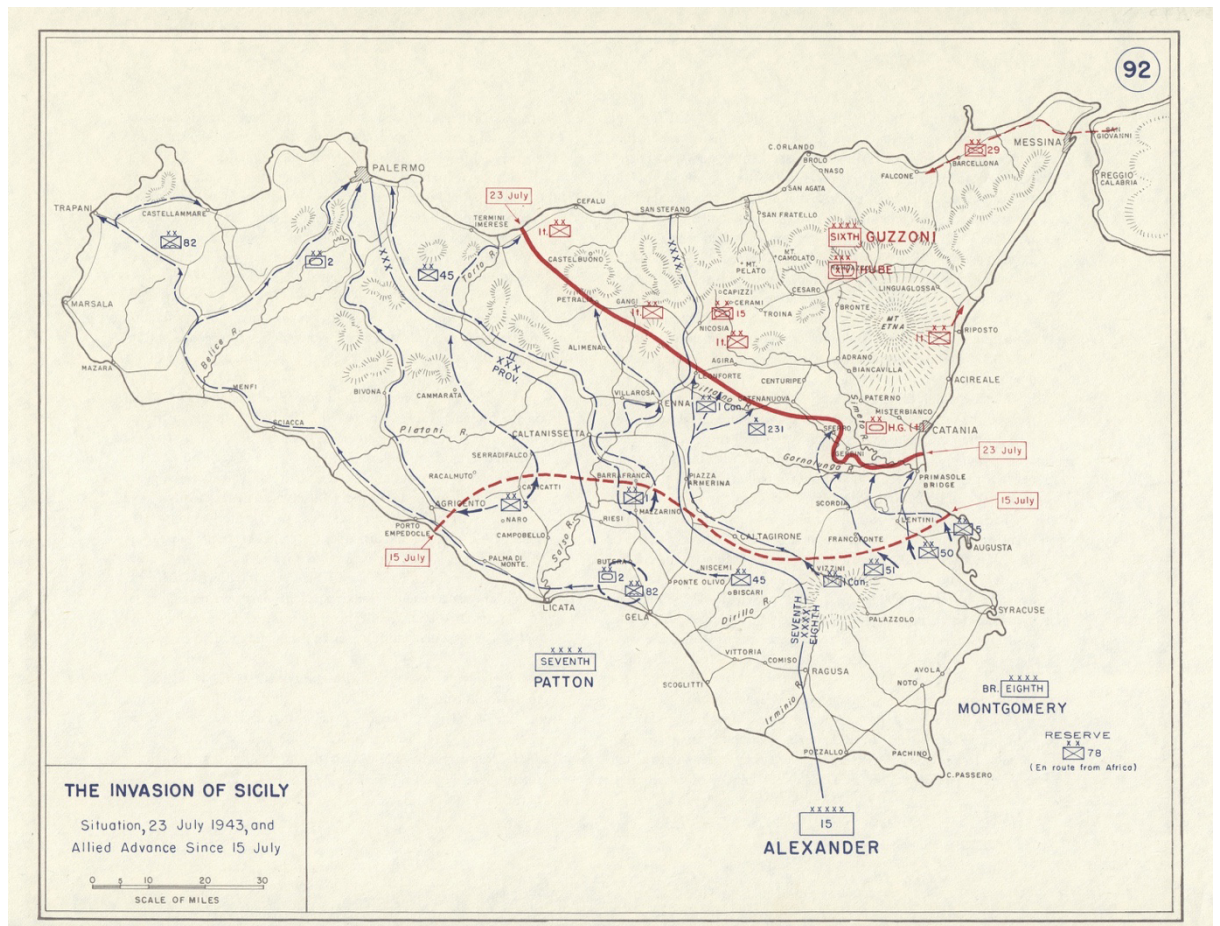


Figure 14 "The West Point Atlas of American Wars", compiled by the Department of Military Art and Engineering, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York. Chief Editor Colonel Vincent J. Esposito. Frederick A. Praeger publishers - New York

The operations in the strategy began overnight on the 9th of July 1943, however the gale force icy winds lowered visibility and put a large dent in the Allied plans by lowering the morale of the soldiers destined to land on the Sicilian coast. The winds not only caused trouble amongst the sailors and soldiers but also whipped the sea into a stormy frenzy endangering many of the smaller ships that made up the convoy. Although none of them sank, many of them were damaged and some were forced off course. In an operation that required all the hands the Allies could get and pin point precision it was a major loss when these vessels were not able to make it the way that they were intended to during planning. Another major initial blow to the Allied plans was the wind's effect on the air force that had assembled from North Africa to cover the invasion. The major winds confused the aircrafts and force many of them to fly

either too high or too low. If the planes were flying too low they would not be able to accurately drop their ordinance or platoons of paratroopers, while if the planes flew too low they would be majorly vulnerable to the Axis air defenses on the island. Unfortunately, the aircraft were not as lucky as the sea crafts in evading damage from the wind. Out of the 144 gliders carrying paratroopers to Sicily, only 12 made it to the target while 69 were forced to crash into the sea⁷⁵. It was in these cases that Malta came into its major role of importance. Although the Island was still not very well supplied, due to the lack of control of shipping lanes in the Mediterranean, the proximity to Sicily made its airports and harbors indispensable for the crafts that were forced back by the winds. Even though some would not be able to land with the first wave, they would be able to wait at Malta in relative proximity for the consequent waves of invading forces. The Axis had also spotted the Allied invasion significantly in advance and was able to prepare their troops on high alert before the brunt of the invasion was able to hit the island. Even though the entirety of the Axis troops present were put on alert almost immediately when the invasion began, the lack of training and resources that the Italian troops were given showed clearly. The British and American troops were able to take a foothold within the island without too many too issues. Even though the invasion had not gone entirely to plan, the majority of air-based landing vehicles and many of the sea-based landing vehicles had not made it to their drop-off zones, the Italians were not able to hold off those troops that had landed. They were able to take an immediate foothold over the island's southern beaches and thus the Allied forces were able to begin their push towards the interior of the island.

⁷⁵ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019.



Figure 15 Woody, Christopher. “A Year before the D-Day Invasion, the Allies Took the Fight to the Axis in ‘the Soft Underbelly of Europe.’” Business Insider. Accessed May 5, 2023. <https://www.businessinsider.com/photos-of-operation-husky-july-1943-allied-invasion-of-sicily-italy-2018-7>.

Although the beachheads had been established on the island, the heavy losses and continuous Axis counterattacks caused the situation to be perilous and the potential for a breakthrough by the Axis side was imminent. At this point the Allied leadership decided to reinforce the beachheads with paratroopers from North Africa. Flying over Malta these planes were able to be escorted by fighters, first, from the North African mainland and then Malta. The tragedies of the invasion continued however, although the Allied planes were clearly marked and the information of the incoming support had been relayed to the soldiers within the beachheads, the constant German air raids had caused the anti-aircraft gunners to become weary and paranoid. This mixture caused them to immediately open fire on the allied planes bringing the much-needed support. When the shooting stopped the anti-aircraft, gunners had shot down 23 of the

144 planes that were sent to deliver them aid. Although this loss was devastating, the reinforcements had arrived and the beachheads could be held despite the continuous Axis onslaught. The armies that had landed pushed for the next couple days through the rocky and hilly terrain of Sicily, fighting the under resourced Italian troops along the way. Although the Allied push seemed relentless and the progress was made almost minute by minute, the Germans had begun to send the elite 1st parachute division from France which slowed the advance. It was at this point that the British military leadership decided to shift the front lines West in order to circumvent the areas that had a concentrated level of resistance to the Allied invasion in order to maintain momentum and gain control over the majority of the island. Although the push as difficult and the German and Italian counterattacks continuous, the cities of Sicily fell steadily one by one. By the 11th of August of 1943 the Axis side had begun a total evacuation of the island to the Italian mainland⁷⁶. It was at this point that the army engineers of the Allied side were ordered to expedite their activities in order to catch the retreating axis soldiers and prevent them from adding reinforcement to the Italian mainland and potentially launching a counter invasion in the future⁷⁷. Although the military engineers were able to speed up their operations, the Axis evacuation was extremely efficient and the Allies could not catch up to them. Although the island of Sicily was now firmly in the British and American hands, the infrastructure, both military and civilian, that had been destroyed during the days and weeks of heavy fighting had to be rebuilt. And the speed at which these needed to be rebuilt had to be quick as the plan to attack the “soft underbelly” of Europe was already put into motion. The allies needed to reinforce Sicily to primarily block it from being invaded and fall back into the hands of the Germans and Italians but it also had to be prepared to be one of the primary launching points for the major invasion of the entirety of the Italian mainland. This operation is another testament to the importance of Malta and Sicily in the major conflicts that surrounded the years of the Second World War.

⁷⁶ O’Hara, Vincent P. *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945*. Annapolis MD. USA: Naval Institute Press, 2015. P. 123

⁷⁷ O’Hara, Vincent P. *Struggle for the Middle Sea: The Great Navies at War in the Mediterranean Theater, 1940-1945*. Annapolis MD. USA: Naval Institute Press, 2015. P. 127

Without the Maltese contribution to the invasion of Sicily the operation, codenamed Husky, would have surely been lost. The difficulties at the beginning of the campaign with the weather changes and the unfortunate losses of air and sea-based landing crafts would have been significantly more disastrous had the allies been forced to fly all the way back to North Africa. They would have been even more disastrous had the island of Malta been under Axis control as this would have either forced the Allies to reinvade Malta first and then Sicily most definitely losing significantly more personnel. Either they would have been forced to reinvade Malta or they would have been forced to go around the Island to invade Sicily. This would have dramatically added to the travel time and the potential hazards along the way along with adding to the potential reinforcements that the Axis could have sent to Sicily from Malta causing further loss of life and potential failure of the invasion. It is clear that without Malta the invasion of Italy would have been at worst lost but at best delayed and costing significantly more resources and human life. With this clearly in mind it is obvious that Malta served a deep and undeniable purpose in the invasion of Italy. Without this small and often times overlooked island the Allies would not have been able to open the Italian front in the Second World War and potentially might have resulted in an extremely different outcome in the war. During the invasion of Italy, the island of Malta continued to serve its purpose as a staging ground for air raids on the southern end of Italy along with a place for ships to station before being sent to reinforce Sicily or to further attack the Italian mainland. Malta's importance in this campaign cannot be overlooked, however, in many cases it unfortunately is.



Figure 16 Times of Malta. “Malta and the 1943 Invasion of Sicily,” July 11, 2012. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/Malta-and-the-1943-invasion-of-Sicily.428113>.

Chapter 5: Modern Malta

5.1: Post Second World War Malta

The Second World War left Malta devastated, although the victory of the Allies and the fact that Malta had never been taken by the Axis earned the island and its inhabitants the George cross, which is still displayed on their flag to this day, the devastation of the infrastructure was an extreme challenge for the Maltese. The proud citizens that had survived through the war and fought almost constantly in the face of little to no supplies and lack of economic stability against the almost daily air raids from Axis were left to pick up the pieces of their homeland. The air raids from the Axis side had rendered Malta the most bombed place of the Second World War and this was visible in almost every way on the Island. The British also had many of their own issues to worry about. Many of the commonwealth and Empire colonies had become restless and began to push for independence. This destabilized the economy which had previously been built on the resources and markets that were available to the British through their massively expansive empire and the need for resources only grew with the various investments that needed to be made to control the areas that had been captured during the war and were under British administration. Additionally, the British mainland itself had suffered a massive loss of eligible workforce due to the war along with heavy damage during the Blitz. These various reasons did not allow the British to present too much aid to the Maltese after the war. The island was more or less left to fend for itself during the post war rebuilding of its infrastructure and society.

5.2: Maltese independence process

The process for the independence of Malta began in 1957 when the Prime Minister at the time, Dom Mintoff, presented a bill in the parliament to break with the British Empire⁷⁸. Until this time Malta received little economic and resource-based aid from Britain and had to fend for itself in the reconstruction of its functioning society after the war. The benefit for Malta, however, was that due to the strategic importance

⁷⁸ Parliament of Malta. "Historical Background," May 23, 2014. <https://parlament.mt/menues/about-parliament/how-parliament-works/historical-background/>.

of the harbor of Malta it had been kept under relatively competent working order by the British and other Allied powers throughout the war. Additionally, due to the location of Malta, the harbor was a key point through which trade was more or less forced to pass. With the rebuilding happening throughout North Africa, Europe, and the other parts of the European region that had been affected by the conflict business was booming. Malta was situated right in the middle of it and was able to capitalize on this location. The economy slowly began to pick up and the island began to rebuild its society into a functioning nation. By 1957 the majority of the island had been rebuilt and the population began to grow⁷⁹. Unemployment dropped and the parliament was looking towards a future away from the empire that had continuously gone through periods when it underestimated the importance and power of Malta to the detriment of the local population. With these various elements of the current situation it was no surprise that the government was itching to act on the mumblings of independence that had come from the various parties of the Maltese parliament.

The proposal of the bill in the parliament was the first step in a 5-year process that would allow Malta to finally be independent. After almost a thousand years of continuous conquest and domination by every major power present in the Mediterranean, the time had come for Malta to forge its own political and international future. The bill was seconded by the leader of the opposition within the parliament clearly showing the widespread agreement of the Maltese population on these aspirations of independence. Support for the bill was further mustered by the labor party that organized demonstrations throughout the island to gain the popular support. The demonstrations were attended by more and more Maltese citizens which sent the British government a clear symbol that Malta was on its way out. Alongside the campaign of the Labor Party to gain the popular support of the Maltese for independence, the Prime minister began to take delegations throughout the globe to gain international support for the independence movement. The Maltese government knew that without the support of the international community, the British would see no real reason to surrender the island and grant them their full independence.

This flurry of action from the Maltese, the British government was taken off guard and decided to begin taking away political rights from the Maltese government

⁷⁹ Debono, Charles. *Malta During World War II: The Strategic Role of the Island During the Conflict*. Malta: BDL Book Publishing, 2019.

furthering the tensions between the Maltese and their colonial rulers⁸⁰. This caused the call for independence to increase heavily and in the general election all of the major parties put the push for independence as their most central campaign promise⁸¹. The nationalist won the election and the petition for independence from the British government was almost immediately handed in. The petition was met with heavy resistance from inside the British government and was pushed back on with help from the Catholic Church⁸². The belief from inside the church was that they would lose some of the benefits that they had had under the British constitution within Malta. This caused them to try and preach for the Maltese to remain within the confines of the British Empire. The Archbishop of Malta quickly changed his position however, when the Maltese government published the proposed constitution which would give the church the same rights and powers that they had had under the British⁸³. Therefore, in order to maintain their popularity among the citizens of the island, the church began to support the push for independence.

The British government had lost their greatest local ally in the fight to maintain Malta under their flag and thus could do nothing more but to propose a defense agreement in which Malta would gain its political independence and sovereignty but would remain a military ally and asset to the British navy and military. This proposed agreement was denied by the Maltese government as they knew that they held all the cards. The British influence on the island had been very little since the end of the Second World War and had diminished year by year up until this point. This meant that the British had nothing to really bargain with⁸⁴. Additionally, the delegations that

⁸⁰ Parliament of Malta. "Historical Background," May 23, 2014.

<https://parlament.mt/menues/about-parliament/how-parliament-works/historical-background/>.

⁸¹ Parliament of Malta. "Historical Background," May 23, 2014.

<https://parlament.mt/menues/about-parliament/how-parliament-works/historical-background/>.

⁸² MaltaDaily. "Here Are Some Facts about Malta's Independence Day." *Malta Daily* (blog), September 21, 2022. <https://maltadaily.mt/here-are-some-facts-about-maltas-independence-day/>.

⁸³ MaltaDaily. "Here Are Some Facts about Malta's Independence Day." *Malta Daily* (blog), September 21, 2022. <https://maltadaily.mt/here-are-some-facts-about-maltas-independence-day/>.

⁸⁴ MaltaDaily. "Here Are Some Facts about Malta's Independence Day." *Malta Daily* (blog), September 21, 2022. <https://maltadaily.mt/here-are-some-facts-about-maltas-independence-day/>.

had been sent out throughout the international stage by the prime minister of Malta had been successful in gaining support for independence.

The prospect that the strategically and economically perfect location of the Maltese harbor would cease to be monopolized by the British was a clear opportunity for many of the up and coming powers of the post-war international stage. The ability to have a shipping point and a shipyard so close to the European mainland would be a clear asset to any country that wishes to trade across the Mediterranean. With this support in hand and the ability of the British to maintain control over Malta undeniably slipping away, the constitution of Malta was signed on the 20th of September 1964 by the prime minister. The Duke of Edinburgh was present at the signing showing the capitulation of the British claim to Malta. With the signing over and the official documentation of the independence of Malta having taken place, the British flag was officially removed and replaced by the flag of independent Malta.

The independence movement preceded by the post war period in Malta is another clear example of the underestimation that great powers have of small island nations. The British government could have maintained control over the territory by simply committing to aiding in the rebuilding of the society after the war. However, it is clear that they firstly did not see too much importance in developing the island nor did they see just how strong willed the citizens of Malta would be in pushing through the claims at independence. The loss of Malta is one of the clearest examples of the topic of this thesis, in the sense that it shows a large power focusing on the problems at hand and not investing in the small island that could have been an integral part of future prosperity.

5.3: Malta and the European Union

One of the most important points in the modern history of Malta is when it joined the European Union. Since the island nation had always been a forced part of one empire or another, it was finally time for the independent island to join international organizations on its own terms. Membership in the European Union allows for Malta to create its own relationships with the international community and allow it to contribute to the global systems with its strengths. Additionally, it would allow the Maltese citizens and leadership to have a say in the way that the global

system functions and progresses. Instead of large international entities having a say in the way that Malta functions and the moves that it makes, Malta is the one that has a say in the way that one of the most economically powerful international entities functions and the policies that it pursues on the geopolitical scene.

The Maltese relationship with the European Union actually began around the time of Maltese independence. Having only been independent for 6 years in 1970 Malta was looking to actively join the international community and begin to play an integral part in international politics on its own terms. In order to pursue this self-determination, the Maltese government signed an Association Agreement with the European Economic Community in December of 1970. This agreement allowed Malta access to the vast network of economic trade and markets that Europe accounts for. This would give Malta and Europe the ability to use the ports of Malta as an arrival points for goods coming through the Mediterranean into Europe and beyond. With the signing of this agreement Malta began its journey towards an eventual full membership into the European Union. The formal application to the European Union was submitted in July of 1990 and was finally put into action on the 1st of May 2004 after 4 years of formal negotiation and a national referendum that ended in a clear vote of “yes” from the Maltese citizenry. With this Malta had officially become a member of the European Union and gained access to all of the rights and responsibilities this entails. Malta additionally acceded to the Schengen open borders agreement in 2007 allowing for the island nation to be the port of entry for many goods entering and exiting the European Union without further customs checks. This again made the ports of Malta indispensable for a major geopolitical entity. The accession of Malta to the European Union allowed for the island nation to gain a say in the way that this major geopolitical entity conducts its foreign policy and gave Malta power over much of the goods entering and exiting the economic area. While this is a clear benefit for all members of the Union it has also presented some challenges.

While the accession of Malta to the European Union allowed for many benefits for both the island nation itself and the European Union as a whole it also led to some controversy. As a full member of the European Union, Malta is clearly allowed to pursue its own national interests through its own foreign policy as well as that of the European Union. While the majority of the time these actions are aligned, Malta implemented a method of citizenship that led the European Commission to take the

nation to the European Court of Justice. This policy was entitled “the golden passport scheme” and it was a method in which investment into the Maltese economy could earn an individual a Maltese passport. While the citizenship through investment scheme is prevalent in many countries throughout the world, Malta was the first to implement such a scheme in the European Union. While the methods to citizenship are simply a domestic political affair the fact that a Maltese passport would give a person access to living and working throughout the European Union creates a larger conflict. Citizenship by investment in Europe has been criticized as leading to increased levels of corruption and potential money laundering schemes in and out of the European Union. As a small island nation within the Mediterranean Malta and through what has been discussed throughout this thesis it is clear that Malta has been a hub of international trade. Port cities and small islands as hubs of trade are also clear targets to be used for international organized crime. With this in mind the European Union had a clear worry that if Malta were to continue its scheme of gaining passports by investment it would give international crime organizations greater access to the European Union through the Maltese economy and citizenship. This forced the European Union to rush to condemn the scheme and take Malta to court over it. Although the European Union launched infringement proceedings against Malta in 2020 there have been no clear gains in either side of the legal battle. It is estimated that this scheme has allowed for Malta to gain over 800 million euros in profit from the investments stemming from this scheme⁸⁵. The Maltese government has shown no intentions of giving up on the scheme and continues to offer the ability to more or less purchase a European Union passport through investment for all nationals. Since the war in Ukraine began the Maltese government has suspended the citizenship scheme for those nationals from Belarus and Russia in order to comply with sanctions and to limit the number of nationals from these countries entering the European Union. Even with this move the court case against Malta has not been stopped and the European Union continues to worry over the potential crime related growth this would mean within the Union. As a member of the European Union Malta has been both a clear

⁸⁵ euronews. “EU Refers Malta to Court over Controversial ‘golden Passport’ Scheme,” September 29, 2022. <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2022/09/29/eu-refers-malta-to-court-over-controversial-golden-passport-scheme>.

benefit for the Union as well a major potential problem. This further shows the importance that small island nation can imply for global powers and shows that Malta continues to affect the global conversation and trends in geopolitics.

Chapter 6: Theoretical Framework Applied

In order to bring this thesis full circle and prove the geopolitical importance of small island nations one must bring the international relations theories to bare on the history presented throughout this thesis. As has been introduced at the beginning of the story there are three primary and most popular international relations theoretical frameworks. These are realism, liberalism, and constructivism, and with the help of these three frameworks it is simple to prove the importance of the small island nations. In this chapter this thesis will apply these three frameworks to the historical stories that have been previously presented.

The very first most popular theoretical frameworks that would apply to this particular is realism. As was previously discussed in this thesis realism is the theory that the majority of political and geopolitical decisions are and should be made through the consideration of physical hard power. The most important element of a country's international political power comes from the size and efficiency. Additionally, it comes from the ability for the countries to project this power and deploy its military. With this in mind and the stories previously presented in this thesis it is obvious to see how Malta, and by extension, small island nations provide clear geopolitical power to the major powers of the world. In the Maltese case the realist theorists would look at the military relevance of Malta during the Second World War. The clear importance of the island to both the Axis and the Allies visible through the operations that have taken place with the goal to invade or support the island of Malta shows the key role it plays to these major powers. Additionally, the use of Malta as a rally point for the Allied military forces during the invasion of the Italian strongholds towards the end of the war clearly portrays the importance of these small island nations in geopolitical events. Without Malta there would have intensive difficulties with the successes of the allied powers within the Mediterranean theatre and the strategies of the various navies within the sea. Realists would consider Malta as of key importance in the sense of power projection for major geopolitical powers. As a small island nation without much military power itself, one would tend to disregard Malta and, by extension, other small island nations however the focus should not be on the island itself but the ability of the island to sway the major conflicts one way or another through their geographical position and their ports. Without the island and the will of the island to continue

fighting, these major geopolitical powers would not have the ability to project this power. Therefore, it is clear that even through the realist theoretical framework the small island nations have an important role to play. Even during peace times and even on islands that might not have such key geographical positioning the ability for major powers to project their power through military bases and ports on these islands. Realists would clearly consider small island nations as not major geopolitical entities themselves but as clearly important elements in the global struggle for geopolitical power and interaction.

The next theoretical framework of international relations that should be applied to show the geopolitical importance of the small island nations is liberalism. As was previously introduced during the earlier parts of this thesis, liberalism is the theory that argues that the most important key elements that drive the geopolitical power structures and order are the international organizations that form together to push international cooperation. As previously discussed, some of the clearest examples of this are the creation of the United Nations and the European Union. These are the most well known and most closely knit international organizations in the world as of right now. The freedom of movement created by the European Union among some of the most powerful economies on the globe along with the global order and the platforms for global discussion created by the United Nations show the prevalence of the liberalist ideology. With this in mind and with the developments discussed within the body of this thesis, the importance of small island nations is clear. Malta has been a member of the United Nations since its independence and a member of the European Union for more than 20 years. Through their membership in these organizations and the key trade and cultural hub that Malta presents it has an obvious benefit for the international organizations that adhere to the liberal world view. The importance of the island nation can be seen in the positive aspects of it as a port for the European Union along with a tourism hub for international travelers, but it can also be seen by some of the negatives. As was discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis, the passport for sale scandal that Malta has brought into the European Union conversation is of key importance and shows the widespread effect that a small island nation that many deem negligible can have on the liberal international world order. Malta is a small economy with little influence on world events but has caused a massive stir among the European community. This shows that even the smallest members of

international orders can have a profound impact on the way that the organizations work and, by extensions, on the global conversation through these powerful international organizations. In summary the liberal world view presents geopolitical power and the main method of pursuing the national interests of a nation by joining and participating in international organizations. As a member of some of the major international organizations, Malta has been a key player in the way that these organizations grow and develop and has even caused significant controversies within these organizations. Through these memberships it is clear to see that small island nations can be significant geopolitical characters in the liberal world view.

The final most popular international relations theories that should be applied to the developments of this thesis in order to prove the importance of small island nations is constructivism. This theory promotes the idea that the most important elements providing geopolitical power and influence do not stem from the power of states or the international organizations they are members of but instead the social, cultural, and belief systems of the world. Malta and other small island nations have thus again proven to be important players in this theory. During the background history of Malta, the interculture aspect of small island nations was made clear. Although Malta is small and the population as well, the historical intermingling of major and minor global populations and belief systems have made Malta the mix of cultures it is even in the present day. The constant invasion and defense stemming from cultural and religious conflicts show the key importance that Malta played on the global stage. Some of the largest interculture and interfaith conflicts have had major battles and campaigns fought on the island of Malta leading to the clear influence of these cultures on the island and the shifts of cultural norms throughout Europe and the world. Even during the Second World War the culture of Malta shifted and could have caused the cultural beliefs of mainland Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa to change. With these influences in mind, it is clear that Malta and other small island nations are deeply influential during the major global conflicts and in the constructivists view of what the geopolitical power struggle is. As a small and sometimes overlooked element of geopolitical power structures, small island nations do not often get the recognition they deserve when being discussed in the international political arena. However, in the constructivist sense it is clearly a major part of the geopolitical world.

The three most popular international relations theories show the way that the geopolitical world of the international political stage is shaped. They seek to define and quantify the way that politics and international relations shape our world. Although small island nations are often seen as insignificant during debates between the major political powers of the world, this thesis has attempted to show that they are in fact key in shaping the way that these debates end. Small changes on these small island entities, and more specifically Malta, can lead to major changes through all three of these international relations theoretical frameworks.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

The goal of this thesis at the outset was to prove the importance of Malta and other small island nations during major historical events. As was shown throughout the body of the work the Second World War was a clear and strong demonstrator of this importance. Malta had been at the center of Mediterranean strategy throughout the conflict. The Italian strategy had been to capture the island but due to their incompetence and the valiance of the defenders of the island they had failed. At the outset of the war the British government had failed to see the importance of the island as many do with relation to small island nations. With this in mind they moved their fleet entirely to Alexandria only returning once the Italian failed invasion forced the British to see the importance. The next years of the war saw the Allied powers risking heavy losses to resupply and defend the island while the Axis forces created lofty plans risking their own heavy losses in the meantime. These risks show that although the island itself was not a military strongpoint it was a strategic location that could sway the war in anyone's favor.

The theoretical framework from the three main international relations theories further proves the importance of the small island nations. The outcome of the application of these frameworks is that no matter whether viewing the importance of small island nations in classic physical geopolitical context or a more abstract cultural context, they are important. Malta has been important and will continue to be no matter the events going on in the geopolitical world stage. The actions of the government of Malta or of the people of Malta can influence the way that major political powers end up in their global struggle for dominance. With this in mind it is clear that Malta along with other small island nations of the world are important and should not be overlooked in a historical or present context.

As a small island nation Malta was the crossroads of the Mediterranean throughout history. Way before the Second World War Malta had an importance that transcended the simplified ways of describing what makes a state powerful. This thesis has attempted to show this significance and importance through the description of Maltese history and the central events of the Second World War. Additionally, the application of the international relations theories has all come together in order to provide an overview that proves that Malta is a key geopolitical entity. Not only that

Malta is or has been this key player but that it should not be underestimated even in the present day. By extension, small island nations have been and always will be of key importance. These small island nations cannot be ignored when debating future changes in global balances of power. Small island nations have never had prominent roles in the history books, but it is the aim of this thesis to prove that these entities, though small, should be discussed whenever historical conflicts arise. Small island nations, Malta specifically, have not gotten the recognition they deserve but this thesis should show that in geopolitics all entities should be considered.

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Annexes:

a. Chronologies⁸⁶

- a. 5200 B.C. First recorded arrival of humans on Malta
- b. 3200 B.C. Building of the megalithic temples on the island
- c. 2000 B.C. Invasions of more advanced Bronze Age peoples
- d. 800 B.C. Phoenician colonization of the island
- e. 480 B.C. Carthaginian rule begins on the island
- f. 218 B.C. Success during the Punic Wars leave Romans in control of the island
- g. 60 A.D. St. Paul is shipwrecked on the island
- h. 395 A.D. Byzantine Empire takes over Malta
- i. 870 A.D. Arabic peoples occupy Malta
- j. 1090 A.D. Norman occupation of the island
- k. 1194 A.D. Swabian occupation
- l. 1266 A.D. Angevin occupation
- m. 1283 A.D. Aragonese Occupation
- n. 1350 A.D. Creation of Maltese Noble class
- o. 1485 A.D. Peter Caxaro passes away
- p. 1530 A.D. Order of the Knights of Saint John arrive on the island
- q. 1561 A.D. The Inquisition begins
- r. 1565 A.D. The Great Siege of Malta by the Ottoman Empire takes place
- s. 1566 A.D. The City of Valletta is founded
- t. 1798 A.D. Napoleon Bonaparte seizes the island from the Knights of St. John
- u. 1799 A.D. The British Empire takes the Island
- v. 1802 A.D. The Peace of Amiens is signed

⁸⁶ Maltese National Tourism Board. "Timeline." Visit Malta. Accessed December 7, 2022. <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/a/timeline/>.

- w. 1814 A.D. Malta officially becomes a Colony of the British Crown
- x. 1914-1918 A.D. Malta is involved in the First World War
- y. 1919 A.D. Sette Giugno riots against the rule of the British Empire
- z. 1921 A.D. Amery-Milner constitution grants Malta self-government
- aa. 1939-1945 A.D. Malta is involved in the Second World War
- bb. 1947 A.D. Self-government is restored.
- cc. 1964 A.D. Malta gains its independence as a part of the British Commonwealth
- dd. 1974 A.D. The Maltese Republic is established.
- ee. 1979 A.D. Last British military services leave Malta.
- ff. 2004 A.D. Malta becomes a full member of the European Union
- gg. 2008 A.D. The Euro is adopted in Malta.

b. Second World War Mediterranean Theatre⁸⁷

- a. 28th June 1940: Battle of Espero Convoy
- b. 9th July 1940: Battle of Calabria
- c. 19th July 1940: Battle of Cape Spada
- d. 12th October 1940: Battle of Cape Passero
- e. 11th November 1940: Battle of Taranto
- f. 27th November 1940: Battle of Cape Spartivento
- g. 6th – 11th January 1941: Operation Excess
- h. 26th March 1941: Action of Suda Bay
- i. 27th – 29th March 1941: Battle of Cape Matapan
- j. 16th April 1941: Battle of the Tarigo Convoy
- k. 20th May – 1st June 1941: Battle of Crete
- l. 24th May 1941: SS Conte Rosso Sunk
- m. July 1941: Operation Substance

⁸⁷ Maltese National Tourism Board. "World War II." Visit Malta. Accessed December 6, 2022. <https://www.visitmalta.com/en/a/world-war-2/>.

- n. September 1941: Operation Halberd
- o. 8th November 1941: Battle of the Duisburg Convoy
- p. 13th November 1941: HMS Ark Royal sunk.
- q. 25th November 1941: HMS Barham sunk.
- r. 13th December 1941: Battle of Cape Bon
- s. 17th December 1941: First Battle of Sirte
- t. 19th December 1941: Raid of Alexandria
- u. 22nd March 1942: Second Battle of Sirte
- v. 15th June 1942: Operation Harpoon and Operation Vigorous
- w. 15th August 1942: Operation Pedestal
- x. November 1942: Operation Stone Age
- y. 2nd December 1942: Battle of Skerki Bank
- z. 11th December 1942: Raid of Algiers
- aa. 16th April 1943: Battle of the Cigno Convoy
- bb. 3rd – 4th May 1943: Battle of Campobasso Convoy
- cc. 2nd June 1943: Battle of the Messina Convoy
- dd. 17th July 1943: Operation Scylla

c. Glossary

a. megalithic temples

The two islands, Malta and Gozo, have 7 different megalithic temples situated on them. These temples show evidence of human habitation from the 3rd century B.C. and are primarily built from resources entirely from the island.

b. Phoenicians

The Island of Malta and Gozo have been passed around by every major, and some of the minor, empires that had a presence on the Mediterranean Sea. From the earliest forms of megalithic buildings to British Empire these small islands have gone through major shifts in culture, history, government, and military, strategic control. With such a deep and convoluted historical background Malta is the perfect place to delve deeper into and understand the importance that these empires have placed upon such a small place. Malta itself is comprised of two main islands, Malta itself and Gozo. These two islands together have a human history that goes back to the 3rd century B.C. and the first major conflict that involved the control of Malta came with the Phoenicians and their attempts at control over the Mediterranean trading routes. At this time Malta was an important harbor that would allow the Phoenicians to trade with cultures and societies that lay on the furthest parts of the Mediterranean Sea and, in some cases, even along the ocean coasts of Europe. In this case Malta was mainly used for peaceful trading purposes, however the strategic importance of the islands would become clear during the Punic wars and the reign of Carthage over the region⁸⁸.

⁸⁸*Who Were the Phoenicians? Phoenician History*, 2018.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvzXRtAe0Mw>.

c. Carthage⁸⁹

Carthage was one of the most powerful Phoenician trading cities and came out of the major period of Phoenician rule as the strongest and most economically successful entity of the time. Due to this clear economic and military success Carthage became the dominating power in the Mediterranean. As a powerful port island, Malta was at the center of its Mediterranean trade strategy. During the Punic wars (264 – 146 B.C.), in which Carthage fought against the Roman Empire, Malta transitioned from an important port island for continued trade throughout the Mediterranean and became a clear military and strategic point for either side. Located in between North Africa and Sicily it was an important staging ground and fortress for the navies sailing from Carthage towards Rome and Sicily and the Roman naval ships travelling from Mainland Europe to North Africa. Additionally, Malta was an important unsinkable floating fortress of sorts able to blockade the seas in either direction and force invading naval fleets to retreat⁹⁰.

d. Punic Wars⁹¹

The Punic Wars were a series of three major conflicts fought between the city-state of Rome and the powerful Carthaginian Empire from 264 BCE to 146 BCE. These wars were primarily driven by a struggle for dominance and control over the Mediterranean region. The first Punic War began as a result of territorial disputes and competition for

⁸⁹ Appleton, Sarah. "Carthage | National Geographic Society." Accessed December 13, 2022. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/carthage>.

⁹⁰ Delile, Hugo, Elisa Pleuger, Janne Blichert-Toft, Jean-Philippe Goiran, Nathalie Fagel, Ahmed Gadhoun, Abdelhakim Abichou, Imed Ben Jerbania, Elizabeth Fentress, and Andrew I. Wilson. "Economic Resilience of Carthage during the Punic Wars: Insights from Sediments of the Medjerda Delta around Utica (Tunisia)." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 116, no. 20 (May 14, 2019): 9764–69. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1821015116>.

⁹¹ The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica. "Punic Wars | Summary, Causes, Battles, & Maps | Britannica." Accessed December 13, 2022. <https://www.britannica.com/event/Punic-Wars>.

Sicily, leading to a long and costly naval conflict. Rome emerged victorious and gained control over Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica.

e. St. Paul⁹²

Saint Paul, also known as the Apostle Paul or Paul the Apostle, was a prominent figure in early Christianity and one of the most influential individuals in the spread of the religion. Born as Saul of Tarsus in the first century CE, he initially persecuted Christians but experienced a profound conversion on the road to Damascus, where he claimed to have encountered the resurrected Jesus Christ.

f. Byzantine Empire⁹³

The Byzantine Empire, also known as the Eastern Roman Empire, was a continuation of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean region. It emerged in the fourth century CE after the division of the Roman Empire into eastern and western halves. The capital of the Byzantine Empire was Constantinople (present-day Istanbul), strategically located at the crossroads between Europe and Asia.

g. Norman⁹⁴

The Normans were a medieval ethnic group originating from the region of Normandy, located in present-day northern France. They emerged as a distinct group in the 10th century and played a significant role in European history.

h. Swabian⁹⁵

The Swabians were a Germanic ethnic group that emerged in the early medieval period and played a significant role in the history of the

⁹² Online, Catholic. "St. Paul - Saints & Angels." Catholic Online. Accessed June 7, 2023. https://www.catholic.org/saints/saint.php?saint_id=91.

⁹³ Ramazanova, Ainur, Assyl Sabitova, Raissa Orsayeva, Gulmira Bairkenova, and Indira Smailova. "Financial Sector Components in a Religious Context: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam." *Journal of Behavioral and Experimental Finance* 34 (June 1, 2022): 100656. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbef.2022.100656>.

⁹⁴ "The Normans - English History," January 27, 2022. <https://englishhistory.net/middle-ages/the-normans/>.

⁹⁵ Karayam, Hasan. "LIBYAN-AMERICAN RELATIONS, 1951-1959: THE DECADE OF WEAKNESS," n.d.

region known as Swabia, located in present-day southwestern Germany.

i. Angevin⁹⁶

The Angevines, also known as the House of Anjou, were a medieval dynasty that originated from the region of Anjou in present-day France. They rose to prominence in the 13th century and played a significant role in the political landscape of Europe.

j. Aragonese⁹⁷

The Aragonese were a medieval dynasty and ethnic group associated with the Kingdom of Aragon, a historical region in northeastern Spain. They rose to prominence in the 11th century and played a significant role in the political and cultural development of the Iberian Peninsula.

k. Order of the Knights of Saint John⁹⁸

Next comes the arrival of the Knights of Saint John on the island and formation of the Knights of Malta (1530 A.D.). During the period of the knights, the importance of Malta continues as a military staging point for the crusades and the religious conflicts between the Christian powers of mainland Europe and the Islamic Ottoman Empire. Malta during this time came under the great siege of Malta (1565 A.D.) in which the Ottoman forces attempted to take control of the island but were defeated by the Knights of Malta and thus the Ottoman forces could not take hold of the Mediterranean and mainland Europe was kept safe from invasions by sea. During this time the island was also used as a hospital for those that had fallen ill on their way to fight in the holy land or those that had returned injured or ill from the battles for Jerusalem.

⁹⁶ “Sicily, the Glossary.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://en.unionpedia.org/i/Sicily>.

⁹⁷ “Sicily, the Glossary.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://en.unionpedia.org/i/Sicily>.

⁹⁸ *The Great Siege of Malta - Ottoman Turks vs. Knights of St. John*, 2019.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dF4uz_oDHjQ.

l. The Great Siege of Malta⁹⁹

The Siege of Malta refers to the historic event that took place in 1565 when the Ottoman Empire launched a massive invasion against the island of Malta, which was held by the Knights Hospitaller. The siege was a pivotal moment in the struggle for control over the Mediterranean between the Christian powers and the expanding Ottoman Empire.

m. The City of Valletta¹⁰⁰

Valletta is a historic city located on the island of Malta in the Mediterranean Sea. It is the capital of Malta and is known for its rich history, architectural beauty, and strategic significance. The city was founded by the Knights Hospitaller in the 16th century, specifically by Grand Master Jean de Valette, following the successful defense of Malta during the Siege of Malta in 1565.

n. The British Empire¹⁰¹

The next most important period of Maltese history is control of the British empire. This period also coincides with the main focus of this thesis which is the Second World War. Malta was under British rule from 1799 A.D. onwards and was one of the most important British naval ports in the Mediterranean. The port of Malta was used for British ships to reach colonies in Africa, the Middle East, and maintain British naval superiority throughout the Mediterranean. The Second World War will be a focus of this thesis as during this time Malta was the focus of majority of Global Superpowers and thus the importance of the island and small countries in general can be seen with the widest lens. Additionally, because the Second World War was so recent there is a wealth of detailed information both about the

⁹⁹ History of War Magazine. "Read 1565 Great Siege Of Malta Online." Scribd. Accessed December 13, 2022. <https://www.scribd.com/article/391923286/1565-Great-Siege-Of-Malta>.

¹⁰⁰ Centre, UNESCO World Heritage. "City of Valletta." UNESCO World Heritage Centre. Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/list/131/>.

¹⁰¹ "British Empire Timeline." Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.britishempire.co.uk/timeline/medbases.htm>.

specific military events and the personal stories of the citizens of the Island. There is also much more information about the way the global superpowers saw the island and why they felt that taking Malta, or defending it, would be worth all the sacrifices they made. Through this the thesis will be able to prove the importance of small countries in major historical events and answer the question of why Malta was so important throughout history, despite its military and economic insignificance.

o. The Peace of Amiens¹⁰²

The Peace of Amiens was a significant diplomatic agreement reached on March 27, 1802, between the French Republic and several European powers, primarily Britain. It marked a brief period of peace during the tumultuous era of the Napoleonic Wars.

p. Amery-Milner constitution¹⁰³

The Amery-Milner Constitution was a significant constitutional reform enacted by the British Parliament for British India. It was introduced by Leo Amery, the Secretary of State for India, and Sir Samuel Wilson Milner, the Governor-General of India, and it received royal assent in 1935.

q. British Commonwealth¹⁰⁴

The British Commonwealth, officially known as the Commonwealth of Nations, is an intergovernmental organization consisting of 54 member countries, almost all of which are former territories of the British Empire. The Commonwealth was first established in 1931 with the signing of the Statute of Westminster, which granted self-governing dominions within the British Empire full autonomy in their internal affairs.

¹⁰² “The Treaty of Amiens | History Today.” Accessed June 7, 2023.

<https://www.historytoday.com/archive/months-past/treaty-amiens>.

¹⁰³ Eshraghi, F. “Anglo-Soviet Occupation of Iran in August 1941.” *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 1 (January 1, 1984): 27–52.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208408700570>.

¹⁰⁴ “The Commonwealth.” Accessed June 7, 2023.

<https://www.royal.uk/commonwealth-and-overseas>.

r. Battle of Skerki Bank¹⁰⁵

The Battle of Skerki Bank refers to a naval engagement that took place during World War II in the Mediterranean Sea. The battle occurred on November 28-29, 1942, and involved naval forces of the United States and Italy.

s. Operation Vigorous¹⁰⁶

Operation Vigorous was a World War II military operation conducted by Allied forces in the Mediterranean theater. It took place between June 12 and June 16, 1942. designed to take resources from Egypt tot he besieged island of Malta.

t. Second Battle of Sirte¹⁰⁷

The Second Battle of Sirte was a naval engagement that took place during World War II in the Mediterranean Sea. It occurred between March 22 and March 24, 1942.

u. Battle of Cape Bon¹⁰⁸

The Battle of Cape Bon, also known as the Battle of Tunis, was a naval engagement that took place during World War II in the Mediterranean Sea. It occurred on December 13, 1941.

v. HMS Barham¹⁰⁹

HMS Barham was a British battleship that served during World War II. She was a Queen Elizabeth-class battleship and one of five ships of her class built for the Royal Navy.

¹⁰⁵ Smith, Kevin. "Maritime War: Combat, Management, and Memory." In *A Companion to World War II*, 262–77. John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2012.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118325018.ch16>.

¹⁰⁶ "Vigorous (Ii) | Operations & Codenames of WWII." Accessed June 7, 2023.
<https://codenames.info/operation/vigorous-ii/>.

¹⁰⁷ "Alexandria - Unionpedia, the Concept Map." Accessed June 7, 2023.
<https://en.unionpedia.org/i/Alexandria>.

¹⁰⁸ "Battle of Cape Bon | World War II Database." Accessed June 7, 2023.
https://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=11.

¹⁰⁹ "Battle of Cape Bon | World War II Database." Accessed June 7, 2023.
https://ww2db.com/battle_spec.php?battle_id=11.

w. HMS Ark Royal¹¹⁰

HMS Ark Royal was a renowned British aircraft carrier that served during World War II. She was the third ship to bear the name and was commissioned in December 1938.

x. Operation Halberd¹¹¹

Operation Halberd was a World War II military operation conducted by Allied forces in the Mediterranean theater. It took place between September 25 and October 2, 1941.

y. Operation Substance¹¹²

Operation Substance was a World War II military operation conducted by Allied forces in the Mediterranean theater. It took place between July 25 and August 11, 1941.

z. SS Conte Rosso¹¹³

The SS Conte Rosso was an Italian ocean liner that operated in the early 20th century. It was launched in 1922 and served as a passenger ship for the Italian shipping company, Navigazione Generale Italiana.

aa. Battle of Cape Matapan¹¹⁴

The Battle of Cape Matapan was a naval engagement that took place during World War II in the Mediterranean Sea. It occurred between March 27 and March 29, 1941.

¹¹⁰ “HMS Ark Royal R 09 Audacious Class Aircraft Carrier Royal Navy.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.seaforces.org/marint/Royal-Navy/Aircraft-Carrier/R-09-HMS-Ark-Royal.htm>.

¹¹¹ “Halberd | Operations & Codenames of WWII.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://codenames.info/operation/halberd/>.

¹¹² “Halberd | Operations & Codenames of WWII.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://codenames.info/operation/halberd/>.

¹¹³ “NH 91277 S.S. CONTE ROSSO (Italian Passenger Ship 1922-1941).” Accessed June 7, 2023. <http://public2.nhhcaws.local/our-collections/photography/numerical-list-of-images/nhhc-series/nh-series/NH-91000/NH-91277.html>.

¹¹⁴ History, Military. “Cape Matapan, 27-29 March 1941 | The Past,” May 11, 2023. <https://the-past.com/feature/cape-matapan-27-29-march-1941/>.

bb. Action of Suda Bay¹¹⁵

The Action of Suda Bay, also known as the Battle of Crete, was a significant military engagement that took place during World War II. It occurred between May 20 and June 1, 1941, primarily around the area of Suda Bay on the northern coast of the Greek island of Crete.

cc. Operation Excess¹¹⁶

Operation Excess was a series of naval operations conducted by the British Royal Navy in the Mediterranean Sea during World War II. It took place in January 1941 and aimed to disrupt Axis shipping and supply routes in the region.

dd. Battle of Cape Spartivento¹¹⁷

The Battle of Cape Spartivento was a naval engagement that took place during World War II in the Mediterranean Sea. It occurred on November 27, 1940, between the British Royal Navy and the Italian Regia Marina.

ee. Battle of Taranto¹¹⁸

The Battle of Taranto was a significant naval engagement that took place during World War II on the night of November 11-12, 1940. It occurred in the harbor of Taranto, located in southern Italy.

¹¹⁵ “Commander, Navy Region Europe, Africa, Central > Installations > NSA Souda Bay > About.” Accessed June 7, 2023.

<https://cnreurafcnt.cnicy.navy.mil/Installations/NSA-Souda-Bay/About/>.

¹¹⁶ “Excess | Operations & Codenames of WWII.” Accessed June 7, 2023.

<https://codenames.info/operation/excess/>.

¹¹⁷ “About: Battle of Cape Spartivento.” Accessed June 7, 2023.

https://dbpedia.org/page/Battle_of_Cape_Spartivento.

¹¹⁸ Navy Wings. “Battle of Taranto.” Accessed June 7, 2023.

<https://navywings.org.uk/portfolio/battle-of-taranto/>.

ff. Battle of Cape Spada¹¹⁹

The Battle of Cape Spada, also known as the Battle of Spada Island, was a naval engagement that took place during World War II in the Mediterranean Sea. It occurred on July 19, 1940, off the coast of Crete, near Cape Spada.

gg. Battle of Calabria¹²⁰

The Battle of Calabria, also known as the Battle of Punta Stilo, was a naval engagement that took place during World War II on July 9, 1940, in the Ionian Sea off the coast of Calabria, southern Italy.

¹¹⁹ Guild, History. "The Battle of Cape Spada: The Australian Navy Proves Its Mettle." *History Guild* (blog), July 13, 2021. <https://historyguild.org/the-battle-of-cape-spada-the-australian-navy-proves-its-mettle/>.

¹²⁰ warhistoryonline. "Lots of Bark but No Bite - WWII Naval Battle of Calabria," August 20, 2018. <https://www.warhistoryonline.com/world-war-ii/battle-of-calabria.html>.

d. Dramatis Personae

a. Peter Caxaro¹²¹

Peter Caxaro, also known as Pietru Caxaro, was a Maltese poet who lived in the late 15th century. He is considered one of the pioneers of Maltese literature and is known for his epic poem "Il-Kantilena."

b. Jean de la Valette¹²²

Jean de La Valette, commonly known as Grand Master Jean de La Valette, was a French knight and the 49th Grand Master of the Order of Knights Hospitaller, also known as the Knights of Malta. He is primarily remembered for his leadership and heroic defense during the Great Siege of Malta in 1565.

c. Hannibal¹²³

Hannibal Barca, often referred to simply as Hannibal, was an ancient Carthaginian military commander and one of history's most famous military strategists. He was born in 247 BCE in Carthage, a city in present-day Tunisia.

d. Suleiman I¹²⁴

Suleiman I, commonly known as Suleiman the Magnificent or Suleiman the Lawgiver, was the tenth Sultan of the Ottoman Empire, ruling from 1520 to 1566. He is considered one of the most significant and influential rulers in the history of the Ottoman Empire.

¹²¹ Times of Malta. "It Happened in August: Peter Caxaro and His Cantilena," August 22, 2021. <https://timesofmalta.com/articles/view/it-happened-in-august-peter-caxaro-and-his-cantilena.894994>.

¹²² "6 Little-Known Facts about Jean de Valette - The Malta Independent." Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-06-28/local-news/6-little-known-facts-about-jean-de-valette-6736224639>.

¹²³ "Hannibal—Facts and Information." Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/hannibal>.

¹²⁴ Press, Oxford University. "Suleiman the Magnificent." World History Encyclopedia. Accessed June 7, 2023. https://www.worldhistory.org/Suleiman_the_Magnificent/.

e. Archibald Wavell¹²⁵

Archibald Percival Wavell, 1st Earl Wavell, was a British military commander who played a prominent role in World War II. He was born on May 5, 1883, in Colchester, England, and had a distinguished military career.

f. Claude Auchinleck¹²⁶

Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck was a British military commander who served during World War II.

g. Harold Alexander¹²⁷

Harold Rupert Leofric George Alexander, 1st Earl Alexander of Tunis, was a British military commander who played a significant role during World War II.

h. Albert Kesselring¹²⁸

Albert Kesselring was a German military officer who served as a field marshal in the Luftwaffe (German Air Force) during World War II.

¹²⁵ “Archibald Wavell: Hero and Scapegoat - Warfare History Network.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <https://warfarehistorynetwork.com/article/archibald-wavell-hero-and-scapegoat/>.

¹²⁶ *The Military Papers of Field Marshal Sir Claude Auchinleck, Volume 1: 1940-42*. Boydell & Brewer, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv2524xh7>.

¹²⁷ Langworth, Richard. “Great Contemporaries: Sir Harold Alexander, Churchill’s Favorite General.” *The Churchill Project - Hillsdale College* (blog), June 18, 2020. <https://winstonchurchill.hillsdale.edu/alexander-great-contemporary/>.

¹²⁸ “Ki Kicsoda? – Kesselring.” Accessed June 7, 2023. <http://www.bibl.u-szeged.hu/bibl/mil/ww2/who/kesselring.html>.

e. Figures and Charts¹²⁹

i. **270,000** Population of Malta and Gozo during the war.

ii. **1,581** Civilians killed as a result of enemy action.

iii. **3,780** People injured.

iv. **50,000** People made homeless as a result of enemy bombings.

This equates to 18.5% of the total population.

Table 2

Comparative infant mortality rates (deaths per 1,000 live births), 1932–1947^a

Year	Algeria (Europeans)	Cyprus	Italy	U.K.	U.S. (all)	Malta
1932	120.6	155.7	110.5	68.3		257.5
1933	113.6	132.7	100.1	66.4	60.4 ^b	253.3
1934	119.9	128.9	98.7	61.4		277.0
1935	108.8	120.9	101.2	60.4		285.7
1936	107.9	105.3	100.4	62.1		190.3
1937	125.1	159.4	108.8	61.1	53.2 ^c	242.7
1938	—	129.9	106.3	55.5		224.8
1939	94.1	98.2	97.0	53.6		227.0
1940	102.7	89.1	102.7	61.0	47	276.5
1941	105.9	107.7	115.2	63.3	45.3	303.5
1942	102.7	184.7	112.4	52.9	40.4	345.2
1943	132.6	120.8	112.8	51.9	40.4	210.0
1944	107.1	81.8	101.6	47.6	39.8	116.3
1945	108.5	81.0	98.1	48.8	38.3	144.0
1946	91.9	70.9	87.3	42.7	33.8	130.8
1947	—	65.5	82.4	43.5	32.2	120.3

^aSources: U.N. Statistical Office Demographic Yearbook, Kraus Reprint, New York, 1975, Table 24; Annual Reports of the Health Conditions of the Maltese Islands, Government Printing Office, Valletta; Vital Statistics of the U.S., 1987, Vol. II, Pt. A, Section 2, p. 1.

^bAverage for 1930–1934.

^cAverage for 1935–1939.

¹²⁹ “The World War Two Siege of Malta in Numbers - The Malta Independent.” Accessed December 14, 2022. https://www.independent.com.mt/articles/2020-05-31/newspaper-lifestyleculture/The-World-War-Two-Siege-of-Malta-in-numbers-6736223694?fbclid=IwAR0COLQIRAligrG10CKQrW_qkuC1awryWRHeiHNLbM7patvcWWL5sbiIJb8.

Table 1

Employment at the docks,
Malta, 1914–1987^a

Year	No. employed ^b
1914	23,000
1919	10,000
1926	5,000
1940	15,000
1945	12,000
1959	5,940
1968	4,850
1987	6,000

^aSources: reference 15; Malta DryDocks Workers' Council.

^bIncludes employees at Malta Shipbuilding Corporation.

About the Author

György Erik Paller was born in Budapest, Hungary. He completed a Bachelor of Arts in European Studies at the Boston University Pardee School of Global Affairs. During his Bachelor studies he had a heavy focus on Eastern European Affairs and study of the Cold War power structures. Directly after completing his Bachelor's degree, he began a Master's program in Advanced International Studies at the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna. During these studies György completed an internship with the State Department of the United States at their Mission to the United Nations in Vienna. After the completion of his Master's studies, György will continue working at the Mission of the United States as Public Engagement Assistant to the Public Diplomacy Section of the Mission.

This thesis is dedicated to Ferenc, Shiela, and Marta. Without their help and support it would not have come together.

*On my honour as a student of the Diplomatische Akademie Wien,
I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received
unauthorized assistance on it.*

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "György Erik Paller". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent "G" and "P".

György Erik Paller