

## Origins of the Battle Handout

After the surrender of the Axis forces in North Africa in May 1943 the Allies were left with the decision of where to strike next. Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of Great Britain, favored chasing the enemy across the Mediterranean Sea through Sicily and into Italy, taking the fight into the Axis Powers' home territory. He felt that this strategy would lead quickly to the surrender of the Italian forces and Mussolini's fascist regime in Italy. Churchill called the Italian Peninsula "the soft underbelly of Europe." The strategy would also keep the German forces engaged in action so that they could not be committed elsewhere, specifically against the Russians on the Eastern Front.

The Americans favored a different strategy. They opposed any actions that might divert resources away from the Normandy operation or weaken the cross-channel D-Day invasion planned for the spring of 1944.

Churchill wanted to keep pressure on the Axis forces. He did not feel the Allies could just sit back and wait for the planned invasion of France. An attack on the Italian Peninsula would give the Allies a base of operations in mainland Europe. Churchill felt that the Allied forces could move their way up the Italian Peninsula quickly and ultimately benefit the Normandy campaign. The Allied leaders finally agreed to Churchill's strategy and attacked Sicily in July 1943.