

Italian Social Republic

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The **Italian Social Republic** (Italian: *Repubblica Sociale Italiana* or **RSI**) was a puppet state of Nazi Germany led by the "Duce of the Nation" and "Minister of Foreign Affairs" Benito Mussolini. The RSI exercised official sovereignty in northern Italy but was largely dependent on the Wehrmacht (German military) to maintain control. The state was informally known as the **Salò Republic** (*Repubblica di Salò*) because the RSI's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Mussolini) was headquartered in Salò, a small town on Lake Garda. The Italian Social Republic was the second and last incarnation of a Fascist Italian state.

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The context of RSI's creation



Italian poster saying: "*Germany is truly your friend*"

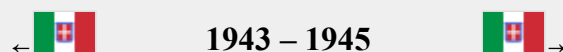
On July 24, 1943, after the Allied landings in Sicily, the Grand Fascist Council, on a motion by Dino Grandi, voted a motion of no confidence in Mussolini. The next day, King Victor Emmanuel III dismissed Mussolini from office and ordered him arrested. By this time, both the monarchy, a number of Fascist government members and Italians in general had grown tired of Italy's futile war effort which had driven Italy into subordination and subjugation under Nazi Germany. The failed war effort left Mussolini humiliated at home and abroad as a "sawdust caesar." The new government, under Marshal Pietro Badoglio, began secret negotiations with the Allied powers and made preparation for the capitulation of Italy. These surrender talks implied a commitment from Badoglio not only to leave the Axis alliance but also to have Italy declare war on Germany.

While the Germans formally recognised the new status quo in Italian politics, they quickly intervened by sending some of the best units of the Wehrmacht to Italy. This was done both to resist new Allied advances and to face the predictably imminent defection of Italy. While Badoglio still swore loyalty to Germany and the Axis, Italian government emissaries had already signed an armistice at Cassibile in Allied-occupied Sicily on 3 September.

On 8 September, the truth finally came out and Badoglio announced Italy's surrender. German Führer Adolf Hitler and his

Repubblica Sociale Italiana Italian Social Republic

Puppet state of Nazi Germany^[1]



Flag



Coat of arms

Anthem

"*Giovinezza*" ("The Youth")¹



From the Gustav Line to the Gothic Line

Capital	Rome (<i>de jure</i>) Salò (<i>de facto</i>)
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Language(s)	Italian
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Religion	None defined
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Government Duce	Single-party state Benito Mussolini
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Historical era	World War II
 - Established	September 23, 1943
 - Disestablished	April 25, 1945

¹ <http://www.nationalanthems.info/it-gio.htm>

staff, long aware of the betrayal, acted immediately by ordering German troops to seize control of northern and central Italy. The Germans disarmed the stunned Italian troops and took over all of the Italian Army's materials and equipment.

Just four days later, on 12 September, a daring German paratrooper action in the mountains of Abruzzo, led by Otto Skorzeny and called *Unternehmen Eiche* ("Operation Oak"), succeeded in liberating Mussolini and forcing him back into power. While in captivity, the new Italian government had moved Mussolini from place to place in order to frustrate any would-be rescuers. Finally, the Germans determined that he was at the Campo Imperatore Hotel at Gran Sasso. After being liberated, Mussolini was safely flown to Bavaria. His liberation made it possible for a new, German-dependent Fascist Italian state to be created.

History of the RSI



War flag of the RSI.

This flag was a prominent symbol of the RSI, even more displayed in propaganda than the official flag which was a plain Italian tricolour. The war flag of the RSI has remained a symbol of Italian Fascism since the war.



RSI propaganda poster.

Upon Mussolini being rescued from arrest in Italy, Adolf Hitler ordered Mussolini to form a new fascist state or Italy would be treated as an enemy. Mussolini obliged, and the Italian Social Republic was proclaimed on September 23.^[2] Although Mussolini desired to return to Rome, the Germans vetoed the idea due to the proximity of the city to Allied lines

and the possibility of civil unrest if the Duce showed himself. Instead, Mussolini established his capital in

a villa at Salo on Lake Garda, midway between Milan and Venice.

Immediately upon the state's creation, it became obvious that it was little more than a puppet state dependent entirely on Berlin. German distrust of the Italian Fascists' ability to control their own territory as well as German territorial claims on Italy, which had been repressed from the 1930s for the sake of alliance with Italy came to the forefront. Germany forced Mussolini to cede Istria, Trieste, Tyrol, and even Venice to be annexed by Germany. Huge portions of Italian-populated territories which had been acquired through years of conflict, were suddenly forced to be abandoned.^[3] Mussolini himself knew he was little more than the gauleiter of Lombardy, even though he stated in public that he was in full control. The finances of the state were completely dependent on German funding, the state had no constitution and no organized economy.^[4] German forces themselves had little respect for Mussolini's failed fascist movement and saw the only use of the regime for maintaining order,^[5] such as repressing the Italian partisans and for persecuting Jews. In addition, Hitler forced the new regime to take revenge against those who had voted against Mussolini on the Grand Council, as well as other suspected traitors. For example, on January 11, 1944, Mussolini had his own son-in-law Galeazzo Ciano executed.

During the existence of the Italian Social Republic, Mussolini, whose government had banned trade unions and strikes, began to make increasingly populist appeals to the working class. He claimed to regret many of the decisions he made in supporting the interests of big business in the past. He promised a new beginning if the Italian people would be willing to grant him a second chance. Mussolini claimed that he had never totally abandoned his left-wing influences, he claimed that he had attempted to nationalize property in 1939-40 but he had to delay them for tactical reasons of the war.^[6] but that with the removal of the monarchy he claimed that the full ideology of Fascism could be pursued, and reversed over twenty years of Fascist support of private property and relative economic independence by ordering the nationalization of all companies with over 100 employees.^[7] Mussolini even reached out to communist Nicola Bombacci, a former student of Vladimir Lenin to help him in spreading the image that Fascism was a progressive movement.^[8] The economic policy of RSI was the "Socialization".

While the RSI remained largely a puppet state, Mussolini maintained personal close relations with Hitler which aided his state. In 1944, he urged Hitler to focus on destroying Britain, rather than the Soviet Union, as Mussolini claimed that it was

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Britain which turned the conflict into a world war and that the British Empire must be destroyed in order for peace to come in Europe.^[9]

As the situation became desperate in late 1944, with Allied forces in control of most of Italy, Mussolini declared that "he would fight to the last Italian" and spoke of turning Milan into the "Stalingrad of Italy", where Fascism would make its last glorious fight.^[10] Despite such strong rhetoric, Mussolini considered evacuating Fascists into Switzerland, but this was opposed by Germany, which instead proposed that Mussolini and key Fascist officials be taken into exile in Germany.^[11] Further disintegration of support for his government occurred as fascist and German military officials secretly tried to negotiate a truce with Allied forces, without consulting either Mussolini or Hitler.^[12]

Around 25 April 1945, Mussolini's republic came to an end. This day is known as *Liberation Day*. On this day a general partisan uprising and the (Western) Allied spring offensive managed largely to oust the Germans from Italy. The Italian Social Republic had existed for slightly more than one and a half years.

On 27 April, Mussolini, his mistress (Clara Petacci), several RSI ministers, and some other Fascists were caught attempting to flee. On 28 April most of the captives were shot at Mezzegra and Dongo by Italian partisans. Fifteen of the bodies were taken to a square in the center of Milan and hanged unceremoniously up-side down in front of a gas station.

RSI military formations

Army



2 RSI Recruitment posters: 1 for the Italian SS Legion and the other for the X Flottiglia MAS

Smaller units like the Black Brigades and the Decima Flottiglia MAS fought for the RSI during its entire existence. The Germans were satisfied if these units were able to participate in anti-partisan activities. While varying in their effectiveness, some of these units surpassed expectations.

On 16 October 1943, the Rastenburg Protocol was signed with Nazi Germany and the RSI was allowed to raise division-sized military formations. This protocol allowed Marshal



Rodolfo Graziani, a highly experienced military officer, was the commander of the armed forces of the RSI.

Rodolfo Graziani to raise four RSI divisions totalling 52,000 men. In July 1944, the first of these divisions completed training and was sent to the front.

Recruiting military forces was difficult for the RSI, most of the Italian army had been interned by German forces in 1943, many Italians had been conscripted into forced labour in Germany and few wanted to participate in the war. The RSI became so desperate for soldiers that it granted convicts freedom if they would join the army and the sentence of death was imposed on anyone who opposed being conscripted.^[13] Autonomous military forces in the RSI also fought against the Allies including the notorious Decima Flottiglia MAS of Prince Junio Valerio Borghese. Borghese held no allegiance to Mussolini and even suggested that he would take him prisoner if he could.^[14]

During the winter of 1944-1945, armed Italians were on both sides of the Gothic Line. On the Allied side were four Italian groups of volunteers from the old Italian army. These Italian volunteers were equipped and trained by the British. On the Axis side were four RSI divisions. Three of the RSI divisions, the 2nd Italian "Littorio" Infantry Division, the 3rd Italian "San Marco" Marine Division, and the 4th Italian "Monte Rosa" Alpine Division, were allocated to the LXXXXVII "Liguria" Army under Graziani and were placed to guard the western flank of the Gothic Line facing France. The fourth RSI division, the 1st Italian "Italia" Infantry Division, was attached to the German 14th Army in a sector of the Apennine Mountains thought least likely to be attacked.^[15]

On 26 December 1944, several sizeable RSI military units, including elements of the 4th Italian "Monte Rosa" Alpine Division and the 3rd Italian "San Marco" Marine Division, participated in Operation Winter Storm. This was a combined German and Italian offensive against the 92nd Infantry Division. The battle was fought in the Apennines. While limited in scale, this was a successful offensive and the RSI units did their part.

In February 1945, the 92nd Infantry Division again came up against RSI units. This time it was Bersaglieri of the 1st Italian

Italia" Infantry Division. The Italians successfully halted the US division's advance.

The RSI Minister of Defense, Rodolfo Graziani, was even able to say that he commanded an entire Army. This was the Italo-German Army Group Liguria.

On 29 April, Graziani surrendered and was present at Caserta when a representative of German General Heinrich von Vietinghoff-Steel signed the unconditional instrument of surrender for all Axis forces in Italy. But, since the Allies had never recognised the RSI, Graziani's signature was not required at Caserta.^[16] The surrender was to take effect on 2 May. Graziani ordered the RSI forces under his command to lay down their arms on 1 May.

Air Force

The National Republican Air Force (Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana or ANR) was the air force of Italian Social Republic and also the air unit of National Republican Army in World War II. Its tactical organization was: 3 Fighter Groups, 1 Air Torpedo Bomber Group, 1 Bomber Group and other Transport and minor units. The ANR worked closely with German Luftwaffe in Northern Italy even if the Germans tried, unsuccessfully, to disband the ANR forcing its pilots to enlist in the Luftwaffe. In 1944, after the withdrawal of all German fighter units in the attempt to stop the increased Allied offensive on the German mainland, ANR fighter groups were left alone and heavily outnumbered, to face the massive Allied air offensive over Northern Italy. In the operation time of 1944 and 1945 the ANR managed to shoot down 262 Allied aircraft with the loss of 158 in action.^{[17][18][19]}

Navy

Very little of the Regia Marina chose to side with the RSI. The RSI's Navy (Marina Nazionale Repubblicana) only reached a twentieth the size of the co-belligerent Italian fleet.^[20] The RSI Navy included the following craft: Four Motor Torpedo Boats (also known as Torpedo Armed Motorboats or *Motoscafo Armato Silurante* or MAS), two anti-submarine vessels, and various other light vessels. There were also five midget submarines stationed in northern Italy and five midget submarines stationed in Romania on the Black Sea. The five submarines stationed in northern Italy all chose to join the RSI Navy. Because of maintenance payment issues, only four of the submarines in Romania were returned to the RSI. Troops of the Decima Flottiglia MAS fought primarily as an army unit of the RSI.



Italian Soldier of the MNR

Paramilitaries

The fall of the fascist regime in Italy and the disbandment of the MVSN saw the establishment of the Guardia Nazionale Repubblicana (GNR), and the emergence of the *brigate nere* or Black Brigades. The 40 Black Brigades consisted of former MVSN, former Carabinieri, former soldiers, and others still loyal to the fascist cause. Alongside with their Nazi and *Schutzstaffel* (SS) counterparts, the Black Brigades committed many atrocities in their fight against the Italian resistance movement and political enemies.

List of RSI Ministers

The following is a list of RSI ministers. Many did not live past the end of World War II.

- Head of State and Minister of Foreign Affairs: Benito Mussolini from 1943 to 1945 (shot by partisans on 28 April 1945).
- Minister of Defence: Rodolfo Graziani from 1943 to 1945.
- Ministers of the Interior: Guido Buffarini Guidi from 1943 to 1945 (shot by partisans on 10 July 1945); Paolo Zerbino in 1945 (shot by partisans on 28 April 1945).
- Ministers of Justice: Antonino Tringali-Casanova in 1943 (died of natural causes on 30 October 1943); Pietro Pisenti from 1943 to 1945.
- Minister of Finance: Domenico Pellegrini Giampietro from 1943 to 1945.
- Ministers of Industrial Production: Silvio Gai in 1943; Angelo Tarchi from 1943 to 1945.
- Minister of Public Works: Ruggero Romano from 1943 to 1945 (shot by partisans on 28 April 1945).
- Minister of Communications: Augusto Liverani from 1943 to 1945 (shot by partisans on 28 April 1945).
- Minister of Labour: Giuseppe Spinelli in 1945.
- Minister of National Education: Carlo Alberto Biggini from 1943 to 1945 (died of natural causes on 19 November 1945).

- 1945).
- Minister of Popular Culture: Fernando Mezzasoma from 1943 to 1945 (shot by partisans on 28 April 1945).
- Minister of Agriculture: Edoardo Moroni from 1943 to 1945.
- Leader of the Republican Fascist Party: Alessandro Pavolini from 1943 to 1945 (shot by partisans on 28 April 1945).

Legacy

In post-war Italian politics

While the RSI was a puppet state of Nazi Germany, its legacy was that after twenty years of Fascist association with the Savoy monarchy of the Kingdom of Italy which at times had serious strain, the RSI allowed the Italian Fascist movement to be able to build a completely totalitarian state which had been held back by the monarchy, it allowed Mussolini to at last be the official head of an Italian state, and it allowed the Fascists to return to their earlier republican stances.

Most prominent figures of post-war Italian far right politics (parliamentary or extraparliamentary) were in some way associated with the experience of the RSI. Among them were Pino Romualdi, Rodolfo Graziani, Junio Valerio Borghese and Giorgio Almirante.

Today, a significant number of far right organizations in Italy, notably the Fiamma Tricolore party, still explicitly take inspiration for their social and political platform from the RSI experience. The RSI is usually seen as the example of what Fascism should have been. As a sign of this legacy, Fiamma Tricolore, for example, guarantees free membership for ex-RSI military.^[21] A communique from the Rome section of the Fiamma said:

[Fiamma Tricolore] is a movement born to closely approximate the ideals of the Social Republic and its fighters. We would surely have fought on the side of this Republic, if only fate had allowed us to have been born during those years. And we would have surely fought to win, because for us the political synthesis originating from the thought of Benito Mussolini is for us the only political, economic, and spiritual system able to bring about the freedom and social justice that are today denied to Italians and all other world populations. [...] [We] relaunch our battle for a better tomorrow, embodying the ideals of the Black Shirts of Alessandro Pavolini.

(Maurizio Boccacci^[22])

In the arts

Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1976 film *Salò o le 120 giornate di Sodoma* was set in the Republic of Salò, using it as an allegory.

See also

- 29th Waffen Grenadier Division of the SS (1st Italian)
- Military history of Italy during World War II
- Operational Zone Adriatic Coast
- Prealpine Operations Zone
- Allied invasion of Italy (1943)
- Italian Campaign (World War II) (1943–45)
- Operation Wintergewitter (Winter Storm) - Italian Front (1944)
- Gothic Line (1944–45)
- "Monte Rosa" Division
- Blackshirts (MVSN)
- Black Brigades
- Decima Flottiglia MAS
- Resistance during World War II
- Italian resistance movement
- Birth of the Italian Republic
- Regia Aeronautica
- Aeronautica Nazionale Repubblicana
- Esercito Nazionale Repubblicano
- Ezra Pound

External links

- Axis History Factbook - Italy
- Comando Supremo
- Historical flags of Italy
- War flag of Italian Social Republic

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4. ^ Pauley, p228.
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7. ^ Smith, p312
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9. ^ Smith, p316
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12. ^ Smith, p317-318
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14. ^ Smith, p308
15. ^ Blaxland, p243
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17. ^ Italian Air Forces 1943-1945 - The Aviazione Nazionale Repubblicana by Richard J. Caruana, 1989 Modelaid International Publication
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