

Introduction

Literature on alliance and coalition warfare has generated a tendency to consider alliances in an aggregate manner, blurring the distinction between multilateral and bilateral partnerships, and especially overlooking the impact of the latter within the context of the former.¹ However, alliances are rarely symmetric and coherent wholes. This calls into question the capacity of traditional approaches to coalition warfare to understand the root dynamics of intra-alliance management in conflict.

World War I offers a patent example. The conflict, which began on 28 July 1914, initially saw the Triple Entente of Great Britain, France and Russia – aligned with Serbia – facing the Central Powers of Germany and Austria-Hungary. Almost immediately, Belgium was forced into the western Allied block by a German invasion. In time, about twenty countries joined one side or the other – though many sustained little or no fighting, whilst some belligerents such as Russia dropped out before the war ended on 11 November 1918. Among those who joined the heaviest fighting were the Ottoman Empire and Bulgaria (on Germany's side), and Italy, Romania and the United States (on the Allies' side). Some, like Italy and Romania, did so by shifting their pre-war alliances. Each country entering the conflict brought with it its own expectations, prejudices, preferences and reservations, especially regarding allies with whom they had never previously cooperated. Inevitably this led the belligerent countries to form special bilateral or multilateral partnerships within their alliances which were particularly important for those countries, which sustained heavier fighting. War in 1914–1918 became so complex and so multifaceted that strategy had to balance the demands of competing theatres of war, to coordinate the frequently divergent aims of allies and to stir each country's social and economic resources. Finally, the belligerents had to consider how to address these issues not only at war but also in

¹ H-Y. Yang, 'A study on role-based approach to bilateral alliances in Northeast Asia', *Journal of International and Area Studies*, XXIII, 1, June 2016, pp. 33–57.

2 Introduction

the peace that would follow. A British maritime strategist, Julian Corbett, in 1911 called this ‘major strategy’ in order to distinguish it from ‘minor strategy’, which was the art of campaigning. He also occasionally used the descriptor ‘grand strategy’, and the latter term gained currency.²

In this context, the study of bilateral relations as a special lens through which to understand the workings of alliances at war provides a focus on the balance of power within allied blocks and illuminates how preferential partnerships affect allied grand strategies. Keith Neilson, Kathleen Burk, Elizabeth Greenhalgh, Gary Shanafelt, Holger Herwig, Alexander Watson, Ulrich Trumpener and Jehuda Wallach took this approach to World War I studying Anglo-Russian, Anglo-American, Anglo-French, Austro-German and German-Turkish relations, respectively.³ The present volume fills a gap in this field, by providing a study of Anglo-Italian relations during the Great War and the Paris Peace Conference. It argues that Britain was Italy’s main partner within the Entente, and that Rome sought to make London the guarantor of the promises upon which Italy joined the Allies. This expectation assumed that Britain and Italy enjoyed special geopolitical, economic, cultural and historical ties. A widespread idea in the Italian governing class, this was a minority feeling in Britain, which expected Italy to be an important contributor to the Allied victory and a stabilising force in the post-war settlement, but which continued to see France – and later the United States – as its main partner. The expectations that each country had of their alliance were largely unfulfilled, casting a shadow on their relations in the post-war period. I argue that this happened because of Anglo-Italian incompatibility in three key areas: war aims, war strategy and peace-making. These areas, which together constituted the grand strategy of both countries, have been studied in the past but never fully assessed as a whole.

The first issue, which is also the main focus of this book, is the uneasy and ultimately insufficient overlap of Britain’s strategy for imperial defence

² H. Strachan, ‘The Strategic Consequences of the World War’, *The American Interest*, IX, 6 June 2014.

³ K. Neilson *Strategy and Supply: the Anglo-Russian Alliance 1914–17* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1984); K. Burk, *Britain, America and the Sinews of War, 1914–1918* (London: Routledge, 1985); E. Greenhalgh, *Victory through Coalition: Britain and France during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); G. W. Shanafelt, *The Secret Enemy: Austria-Hungary and the German Alliance 1914–1918* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); H. H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914–1918* (London: Arnold, 1997); A. Watson, *Ring of Steel: Germany and Austria-Hungary at War, 1914–1918* (London & New York: Allen & Basic, 2014); U. Trumpener, *Germany and the Ottoman Empire 1914–1918* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968); J. L. Wallach, *Anatomie einer Militärhilfe: die preussisch-deutschen Militärmissionen in der Türkei 1835–1919* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1976). Luca Micheletta studied Anglo-Italian relations in the post-war years: *Italia e Gran Bretagna nel primo dopoguerra. Le relazioni diplomatiche tra Roma e Londra dal 1919 al 1922*, 2 vols. (Rome: Jouvence, 1999).

and Italy's ambition for imperial expansion. Hew Strachan, David Stevenson, John Gooch and David French, among others, have studied British strategy in World War I at length and, though with different hues, they share a conclusion that Britain's main reason for fighting in the war was to defend its Empire and its supremacy among the great powers from the threat posed by German military ambitions.⁴ French added that such supremacy was to be defended against Britain's allies too.⁵ Analysis of Anglo-Italian relations during the war and its immediate aftermath proves him right, but the real problem is to put this British strategic principle into perspective. Britain was not initially fighting for conquest, but the developments of the war convinced its policymakers that the Empire's security and supremacy would be better achieved by gaining control of vast territories belonging to their enemies. The fact that the British possessed many of these by the end of the war – having conquered them first-hand with only limited support from their allies – was a not insignificant stimulus to that conclusion. Britain was still thinking defensively, but what changed were the means to achieve its security, as defeating German militarism was now deemed insufficient. So British war aims were not fixed at the opening of the conflict, rather they developed progressively in a flexible approach to war and peace diplomacy.

For Italy, the 'least of the great powers',⁶ World War I was, from the beginning the opportunity for which many Italian statesmen had been waiting, to complete national unification through the annexation of the 'unredeemed lands' – Italian territories under Habsburg rule – and to gain a place among the major powers through imperialist expansion in the Balkans, Asia Minor and Africa. For many years, this was not fully recognised by Italian historians. Afflicted by an intellectual narrow-mindedness, and possibly by an inferiority complex, Italian scholarship has rarely looked at other schools, limiting itself to enlightening Italy's actions only to Italians. In the years following the war many authors, including Gaetano Salvemini, Francesco Tommasini and Luigi Salvatorelli⁷ set to track a reasonable, progressive and honourable shift

⁴ Strachan, 'The Battle of the Somme and British Strategy', *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, XXI, 1, 1998, pp. 79–95; D. Stevenson, *1917. War, Peace, and Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); J. Gooch, *The Plans of War: The General Staff and British Military Strategy c.1900–1916* (New York: Wiley & Sons, 1974); D. French, *British Strategy and War Aims, 1914–1916* (London & Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

⁵ French, *The Strategy of the Lloyd George Coalition, 1916–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).

⁶ R. Bosworth, *Italy, the Least of the Great Powers: Italian Foreign Policy before the First World War* (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁷ G. Salvemini, *La politica estera italiana dal 1871 al 1915* (Milan: Barbera, 1944), p. 20; F. Tommasini, *L'Italia alla vigilia della guerra: la politica estera di Tommaso Tittoni*

4 Introduction

in alliances from Vienna and Berlin to London, Paris and Petrograd, justified by the hostile attitude of the old allies and legitimate Italian national claims. Some, like Mario Caracciolo, argued explicitly that Italy's war had not been imperialistic.⁸ Later Mario Toscano and Brunello Vigezzi stressed the need for a broader analysis of Italy's geopolitical competition with its former allies, but even these scholars did not manage to get to the heart of the imperialist urges of a part of the Italian political elite.⁹ They were indirectly supported by Arno Mayer when he argued that Italy's choice between war and peace was one of domestic rather than foreign policy.¹⁰ The present volume, on the other hand, argues that Italy's imperial ambitions played a crucial role in the Italian intervention and in the shaping of its war aims.

Such ambitions did not escape Anglo-Saxon historians. Richard Bosworth linked Liberal and Fascist Italy's foreign policies,¹¹ arguing that the break between the two periods emphasised by Italian historians¹² is in fact less clear-cut than Italians like to think; Gooch stressed the impact of Italian Balkan appetites in Italy's choice to enter the fray in 1915.¹³ Once again, the problem is to put the Italian imperialist thrust into perspective. In fact, it did not reflect a coherent plan for expansion: it was a somewhat schizophrenic impulse of conservatives and nationalists, which produced a dramatic confrontation with Italian democrats and neutralists. The lack of a coherent design, as well as a significant gap between imperialist ambitions and the real potential of the country, would impact negatively on Italy's efforts to become a genuine great power. Furthermore, this increased Italy's claims throughout the war and the Peace Conference. By taking a wider and comparative perspective, this book aims to show how the geopolitical goals of Britain and Italy, which in 1914–1915 seemed compatible and

(Bologna: Zanichelli, 1934), pp. 35 ff.; I. Bonomi, *La politica italiana da Porta Pia a Vittorio Veneto (1870–1918)* (Turin: Einaudi, 1944), p. 206; L. Salvatorelli, *La Triplice Alleanza. Storia diplomatica 1877–1912* (Milan: Istituto per gli Studi di Politica Internazionale, 1940), p. 17; E. Decleva, *L'Italia e la politica internazionale dal 1870 al 1914. L'ultima fra le grandi potenze* (Milan: Mursia, 1974), p. 167.

⁸ M. Caracciolo, *L'Italia e i suoi Alleati nella Grande Guerra* (Milan: Mondadori, 1932).

⁹ M. Toscano, *Il Patto di Londra* (Pavia: Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Scienze Politiche, 1931); B. Vigezzi, *L'Italia di fronte alla Prima guerra mondiale (1914–1915)*, vol. I, *L'Italia neutrale* (Milan & Naples: Ricciardi, 1966).

¹⁰ A. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Peacemaking. Containment and Counterrevolution at Versailles, 1918–1919* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1967), p. 675.

¹¹ Bosworth, *Italy, the Least*, pp. 18–19.

¹² B. Croce in *Il Giornale d'Italia*, 9 July 1924; Bosworth, *Italy and the Approach of the First World War* (London & Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983), pp. 28–50.

¹³ Gooch, *The Italian Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

even mutually supportive, grew increasingly irreconcilable by the end of the war. This discrepancy hinted at possible future conflict.

Connected to the problem of war aims is the debate on how the Italian intervention was brought about. As mentioned, the issue of involving neutral countries in the fighting was recurrent in World War I, yet negotiations over Italy's entry were arguably the most complex of all. Italian and non-Italian historians have interpreted them oppositely. Whilst the former have either justified Italy's shift in alliance with the need to complete national unification,¹⁴ or welcomed it as a model-pragmatism,¹⁵ the latter described Italy as a bargainer which, in true Machiavellian fashion, offered its services 'for sale to the highest bidder'.¹⁶ This left a historiographical gap which the present volume aims to fill, taking into account the feelings and complex dynamics running through the Italian ruling class and public opinion, which motivated Italy's ambiguous attitude, as well as the often-forgotten yet crucial part played by Britain in forcing Italy out of its neutrality – not least by what some have termed 'coercive diplomacy'.¹⁷ The way in which such negotiations were conducted indicated a trend in inter-Allied relations in the years that followed. Of the Entente nations, Britain was the most determined to have Italy in the Alliance and encouraged Italian imperialist ambitions with the Treaty of London, which promised Rome substantial territorial gains in exchange for Italy's support. Rome thus saw Britain as the guarantor of the London Treaty.

Other problems in Anglo-Italian relations emerged during the war as a result of conflicting evaluations of Italy's contribution to the final victory. Those writers on British strategy devoted little attention to the importance of Italy in Britain's strategic thinking, while Italian scholars such as Mario Isnenghi and Giorgio Rochat, authors of the best volume on Italy's war, did not grasp the degree to which Italy's experience was shaped by its 'special partnership' with Britain, especially in the maritime and financial spheres. Yet Italy proved recalcitrant to abide when Britain, which remained the leading power in the Entente until America

¹⁴ See above-mentioned authors, and especially Caracciolo.

¹⁵ M. Isnenghi, G. Rochat, *La Grande Guerra, 1914–1918* (Florence: La Nuova Italia, 2000).

¹⁶ Strachan, *The First World War: A New Illustrated History* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p. 120; C. J. Lowe, F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy, 1870–1945* (London & Boston: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1975), pp. 133–150; Stevenson, *1914–1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin, 2012), pp. 110–112; W. Gottlieb, *Studies in Secret Diplomacy during the First World War* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1957), pp. 146–149, 198; M. Thompson, *The White War. Life and Death on the Italian Front (1915–1919)* (London: Faber, 2008), p. 25.

¹⁷ B. A. Ellman, S. C. M. Paine eds., *Naval Coalition Warfare. From Napoleonic Wars to Operation Iraqi Freedom* (London & New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 154.

6 Introduction

overshadowed it, tried to coordinate the Allied war effort: Rome saw in British attempts to dictate Allied strategy, an intention to preserve British resources at the expense of Italy. Such strategic contrasts spurred James Burgwyn to conclude that Italy's alignment with the Allies 'was always a *mésalliance*'.¹⁸ Some Italian historians share that view. Luca Riccardi, author of the main work on Italian war diplomacy, holds that Italy found in its new Entente partners 'allies' but not 'friends';¹⁹ Salvemini called Italy a 'provisionary ally',²⁰ a term re-evoked by Maria Grazia Malchionni as 'occasional travel companion'.²¹ This reading needs integrating with an account of the efforts made – largely by Britain – to bridge differences and an evaluation of the ambiguous results. Furthermore, historians have so far been oblivious to the fact that Italy's entry did not present only an obvious coordination problem, but it also provided the original allies with an opportunity to manipulate the newcomer in their own disputes. A deeper analysis of Anglo-Italian relations during the war, then, can shed light on how the Entente functioned, and how the ups and downs in this bilateral relation shaped Allied global strategy.

A corollary to British complaints that Italy was little cooperative was the criticism about the efficacy of Italy's war. It is all too familiar, thanks to the remarkable number of works that downplay Italy's contribution. These reflect Allied frustration at realising that Italy's entry did not deliver the final blow to the Central Powers as initially hoped. Italy was accused of fighting only where it served its empire project, and Allied criticisms encroached upon the operational and tactical levels. More recently, scholars such as Gooch, Stevenson and Vanda Wilcox have challenged the traditional view of the Italian front as a marginal and almost peaceful war theatre, by revealing to non-Italians how destructive that front really was and how cardinal was Italy's support for the Entente. Not only did Italian intervention prove to be the major diplomatic success for the Allies, but it also changed the geopolitical chessboard of the conflict, depriving the Central Powers of just the support they would have needed to win the war before the United States joined. Indeed, any military expert asked to consider a hypothetical what-if Italy had

¹⁸ H. J. Burgwyn, *The Legend of the Mutilated Victory: Italy, the Great War, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1915–1919* (Westport, CT & London: Greenwood, 1993), p. 2.

¹⁹ L. Riccardi, *Alleati non amici. Le relazioni politiche fra l'Italia e l'Intesa durante la prima guerra mondiale* (Brescia: Morcelliana, 1992).

²⁰ Salvemini, 'La diplomazia italiana nella grande guerra', in *Dal Patto di Londra alla Pace di Roma. Documenti della politica che non fu fatta* (Turin: Gobetti, 1925), pp. 750–752.

²¹ M. G. Melchionni, *La vittoria mutilata. Problemi ed incertezze della politica estera italiana sul finire della Grande Guerra (ottobre 1918–gennaio 1919)* (Rome: Ed. Storia e Letteratura, 1981), p. 147.

remained neutral or had joined Germany's allies, would perhaps conclude total or partial victory for the Central Powers. Without the Italo-Austrian front, Vienna could probably have crushed Serbia earlier than 1916 and could have contributed significantly to an earlier downfall of Russia. These consequences of prolonged Italian neutrality would have been aggravated by an Italian attack on France in the south, by a joint Italo-Austrian naval effort hampering Allied operations and trade routes in the Mediterranean, and by a potential Italo-Turkish offensive in Egypt from Italian Libya and Ottoman Palestine, had Italy joined the Central Powers. Finally, the performance of the Italian army (*Regio Esercito*) and navy (*Regia Marina*) was worthier than usually appreciated, given the means at their disposal and the geographic features of their operational theatres.²² To understand why this was never grasped by Italy's allies, one needs to look at the persistent stereotypes by which any country tended to look at its partners, and to analyse the different propaganda techniques each Ally used to promote its cause. Alliances, of course, consist of individuals from different cultures, including military subcultures. Thus, a war of coalition 'demands compromise, the sacrifice of cherished assumptions, and a deep understanding of Allied concerns, aims, and fears'.²³ Britain and Italy had different understandings of this problem, as we shall see. Inefficient inter-Allied communication was indeed one of the main faults in the Entente's war. It hampered Allied solidarity and mutual understanding, no less than military coordination. Italy's failure in this respect had a notable impact on its relations with its allies – especially Britain.

The Peace Conference at Versailles (Paris) provided the stage where differences mounted throughout the war converged and collided. Traditionally, there has been a tendency to analyse the war and the making of the peace as two separate things. Studies of the Paris Peace Conference, including works of excellence by Margaret MacMillan and Leonard Smith²⁴ follow this approach. Mayer did consider how domestic politics from 1917 onwards influenced the peace talks,²⁵ but the process of peace-making began earlier than 1917, at least in Britain. It was in the summer of 1916 that a reflection on the British scheme for peace-making

²² Stevenson, 1917, p. 213; V. Wilcox, *Morale and the Italian Army during the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016); Gooch, *Italian Army*, *cit.*

²³ W. Murray, R. Hart Sinnreich, J. Lacey eds., *The Shaping of Grand Strategy. Policy, Diplomacy, and War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 28.

²⁴ M. MacMillan, *Peacemakers. The Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: Murray, 2001); L. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

²⁵ Mayer, *Political Origins of the New Diplomacy, 1917–1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959).

8 Introduction

began to develop as part of a broader debate on British war aims. The scope of Britain's war, the military strategy necessary to achieve it, and the diplomatic tactics needed to capitalise on victory, were a continuum, rather than three successive steps, in the minds of British policy- and strategy-makers. Each of the three elements influenced the others. This does not mean that the process of preparing for peace while waging war was coherent. But it does mean that, in the case of Britain, peace-planning was approached in an increasingly systematic way and Versailles was just the implementation phase – not even the culmination of the process, for the peace settlement continued to be adjusted in the years that followed. In other words, when approaching the issue of warfare and peace-making, we ought to bear in mind that history is a living process. The present book thus follows the approach of Burgwyn and Erik Goldstein. The former was the first to examine Italy's grand strategy from the intervention to the Peace Conference, seeing the result of the latter as a direct outgrowth of Italy's wartime disputes with its allies. The latter author studied British peace-making from 1916 to 1920.²⁶ This book complements those works, expanding the analysis into new aspects such as naval developments, financial negotiations and propaganda, and at times proposing a different reading of events. My aim is to show how the diverging approaches to peace-making in Britain and Italy shaped their war strategies as well as their diplomacy at Versailles – and, more specifically, how the absence of an early peace-planning phase in Italy weakened Rome's position. In turn, this wrenched Italy's liberal institutions. The domestic policy–foreign policy interplay highlighted by Mayer, when it works in one direction because of the repercussions of the former on the latter, also works in the opposite direction because international success or failure, can consolidate or crumble a country's political and institutional system.²⁷

Finally, a longer perspective on peace-making leads to a partial revision of the literature on the Italian failure at Versailles. Traditionally, the claim of the British, American and French statesmen that the unsatisfactory – to Italy – result was caused by Italy's wild demands and stubborn refusal to come to a 'just' compromise at the peace talks have been accepted by historians. It seemed coherent with the widespread and solid prejudice that saw Italian foreign policy, from the unification onwards, as unreliable by nature – made of repeated 'diplomatic conjuring'.²⁸ So, little credence

²⁶ E. Goldstein, *Winning the Peace. British Diplomatic Strategy, Peace Planning, and the Paris Peace Conference, 1916–1920* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).

²⁷ Decleva, *L'incerto alleato. Ricerche sugli orientamenti internazionali dell'Italia unita* (Milan: Angeli, 1987), p. 8.

²⁸ Bosworth, *Italy, the Least*, p. 297.

has ever been given to the assertion of Italian statesmen that they had good reasons to believe Italy had been deceived.²⁹ While critics of the Italian position argue that the Italian ‘mutilated victory’ was pure myth invented by frustrated nationalists deprived of imperialist booty, Burgwyn holds that ‘the notion of the mutilated victory was at least a half-truth that grew out of the stresses and strains of Italy’s wartime diplomacy’.³⁰ Now, however, discovery of the private papers of the Italian and British ambassadors, Guglielmo Imperiali and Sir Rennell Rodd provides new insights into this question, which had tremendous consequences for Europe in the years to come.

The structure of the book is meant to find a balance between a purely chronological order and a thematic order. In the case of Anglo-Italian relations in World War I, this is facilitated by the fact that various diplomatic issues became urgent in sequence. That is where the chapter division originates, though there is a limited movement back and forth in time in some chapters, which bows to topic consistency – this, I hope, need not be confusing for the reader. The first part of the volume details how Britain and Italy turned their traditional friendship into an alliance, bringing Italy into the Entente. It highlights how contested this process was, both domestically and internationally, and on what premises it was accomplished. The second part studies how such differences influenced the Entente’s war. The third part of the volume is dedicated to the decline in Anglo-Italian relations in the final act of the war and the Peace Conference, the battle of Caporetto in October 1917 being taken as the turning point, which marked a significant shift in Italy’s position within the Entente.

The end of the story presented difficulties in its own right. There was no official end to the Peace Conference; the signature of the German Treaty on 28 June 1919 is taken as a symbolic conclusion of the conference, but work continued on the Austrian and Turkish Treaties, and a final Near East settlement was achieved only at Lausanne in 1923. Then the Versailles Treaty was revised at Locarno in 1925. Italy and Britain had interests in all these treaties – in fact, Italy was more involved in the Austrian and Turkish treaties than in the German. Thus, ending the story with the grand ceremony of 28 June 1919 seemed unsatisfactory. On the other hand, stretching the narrative to the Lausanne and Locarno Conferences would have risked losing sight of the connection between war and peace-making strategies, which the volume aims to emphasise:

²⁹ S. Sonnino, *Diario (1916–1922)*, 3 vols. (Bari: Laterza, 1972); V. E. Orlando, *Memorie (1915–1919)* (Milan: Rizzoli, 1960).

³⁰ Burgwyn, *The Legend*, p. 1.

10 Introduction

later treaties, though assessing problems that originated in the war were motivated by post-war politics, and they were dealt with by an altogether different group of European political leaders. This is particularly true in the case of Italy, where the rise of Benito Mussolini in 1922 is generally taken as a turning point between World War I and post-war periods. The latter argument is debatable, a point made by Bosworth and others.³¹ Indeed, the fascist overthrow of Liberal Italy had little impact on the protracted negotiations for a final European and Mediterranean settlement, as it largely failed to reverse Italy's downgrade. The book ends when Italy's imperial ambitions were shattered with the official rejection of the London Pact, made by Italy's Entente allies in June 1919. Coupled with the earlier rejection of the 1917 colonial treaty, this 'mutilated' Italy's victory. It also coincided with the downfall of Italy's last War Cabinet, and the eclipsing of the last statesmen who had led Italy into the war and the Peace Conference. The Epilogue links this showdown with a less crucial yet not insignificant event, which had continuity with the peace talks that cannot be ignored – the apparent end of the Fiume crisis with the expulsion of the legion of Italian nationalist occupants of the city under Gabriele D'Annunzio. It was a symbolic close of Italy's wartime aspirations.

By looking at the Anglo-Italian 'special partnership', I seek to offer an original account of how bilateral relations modelled coalition warfare in World War I. The book aspires to go beyond classic diplomatic history by giving greater attention to the implementation – not just the shaping – of war strategies. The volume contextualises these strategies within the social and political backdrop of the period, including its cultural aspects – though this is not a work of cultural history; this book is primarily about the grand strategy of war and peace – with some intrusions into operational and tactical details – where the three main issues of war aims, war strategy and peace-making are put into perspective and analysed in their evolution. For each of the three areas, the book highlights how the different approaches of Britain and Italy generated expectations that conflicted with reality, creating disappointment and mutual recrimination and ultimately corroding Anglo-Italian relations. It is also pregnant with considerations on the making of strategy today.

Because of the centrifugal forces that were at play, the Entente-Italy 1914–1915 talks have still much to say about the relations between belligerent and neutral countries, as well as about the turning of longer-lasting alliances into heterogeneous ad hoc fighting groups. That of Britain and Italy is also an emblematic case study of how first-class powers

³¹ Bosworth, *Italy, the Least*, pp. 18–19; Burgwyn, *The Legend*, p. 319.