

ITALY

BETWEEN THE WARS



Benito Mussolini



Anthony Eden



Neville Chamberlain

**How Tensions in the Mediterranean Sea
led to the Second World War**



ITALY BETWEEN THE WARS

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INTRODUCTION

A favorite human past-time is playing “What if...” Regarding the Second World War, the most popular what if is “What if the British didn’t pursue appeasement in the 1930s?” Neville Chamberlain has been the personification of that policy in the underlying belief that Britain and France should have stopped Hitler from every aggressive move he made – from remilitarizing the Rhineland, to rearming, to demanding the Sudetenland. Instead, the British rationalized each Nazi move as rectifying the onerous terms of the Versailles Treaty. As Hitler accomplished these goals without serious challenge he was emboldened to expand upon them. His last unchallenged move was to annex Austria in 1938 – the keystone in his master plan for German expansion.

The 1930s are no mystery to anyone willing to research them. But 90% of the real story has been distilled out of our education system in order to create the aura of “good guy vs. bad guy.” Professional historians and pop culture have participated in this distillation process in order to boil the decade down to an ideological concentrate – the democracies versus the dictatorships. In so doing, they have limited the “what if” options regarding humanity’s worst blood-bath.

This report examines the road to war from a Mediterranean perspective. That vital sea may have lost its importance to Europe with the Portuguese spice trade and the opening of the Americas. However, with the completion of the Suez Canal in 1869, the Mediterranean became a strategic global pathway. For the British Empire it shortened maritime communications with India and Asia by three weeks. For Italy, the British presence and control of Gibraltar and Suez was viewed as choke points which threatened its free access to the oceans.

How irreconcilable differences between Great Britain and Fascist Italy in the Mediterranean led to unleashing Hitler, who had no designs on it, will be explained in a clear and documented format. To understand

these events, the reader must first discard any stereotype of Italians and Benito Mussolini. This will be the most difficult prerequisite.

Political realities at the time leave little choice but to consider the differences over the Mediterranean as “irreconcilable” because it is our belief that Britain and Italy could never have reached accord on their status in the Mediterranean without a conflict. As it turned out, that conflict came with the German invasion of France in 1940.

You will see how Britain, an Atlantic power, came to possess all the choke points of the Mediterranean, effectively boxing Italy, even before Fascism, into that inland sea. You will understand why Britain had less concern for Nazi acquisitions of German-speaking regions in eastern Europe than it had for Italy’s attempts to share control of Suez.

Most importantly, the reader will be asked to suspend the dogmatic belief that Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany were inevitably drawn to each other as dictatorships. It is a common misconception that these two nations were locked into an alliance with the creation of the *Axis* in 1936. In fact, the *Axis* was a term coined by Benito Mussolini to describe an “understanding” between his country and Germany. It was the *Pact of Steel*, another Mussolinian phrase, in May, 1939 that tied the two nations into a military alliance.

History repeated itself in the years 1914 and 1939. At the start of the First World War the Kingdom of Italy was locked into a defensive alliance with Germany and Austria, but declared neutrality in 1914 because its erstwhile allies were aggressors. The very same thing occurred in 1939 when Germany, again was the aggressor. Mussolini refused to march with Hitler.

The lesson: Italy was among the more rational of nations. But its quest for unrestricted access to the world’s oceans was considered by the British as an existential threat. That attitude closed off an alternative bulwark to Nazi expansion, and eventually cost the British the empire they sought to protect.

TWO NATIONS TWO CHARACTERS

LATIN VS ANGLO-SAXON

THERE IS A DISTINCT DIFFERENCE IN CHARACTER AMONG NATIONS



The Battle of Lepanto in 1571, was a mainly Latin/Catholic victory. Resisting one thousand years of Islamic invasions, from the battle of Tours in 732 to the defense of Vienna in 1622 fell to Latin or Catholic peoples.

LATIN DEFENSE OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA WAS LONG-STANDING

The Anglo-Saxon and other Germanic peoples came on the European scene at the expense of the Latin peoples - those Romanized populations that would become France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy. The barbarian invasions finalized the collapse of the western Roman Empire, ushering in the Medieval period.

However, these Germanic invaders eventually adopted much of Roman culture including Christianity as well as the Latin language for religious and academic unity. With the Reformation and the rise of national languages, whatever unity Europeans had soon eroded.

Latins regained European hegemony in the 1500s as a result of the Age of Exploration, when Latin mariners opened the Americas and the Far East to become financially and militarily powerful.

On a cultural level, there has always been a gulf between the Germanic north and the Latin south. To this day, even the common man recognizes the distinct differences be-

tween the two. The Latins - French, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese are considered to be less industrious and more whimsical than Englishmen and Germans. Both industrialization and warfare were much more advanced in Germanic cultures.

The tensions and conflicts between Latins and Germanics became the saga of western European history from the Reformation in the 1500s to the 1930s. Realistically, the Anglo-French alliance of 1914 on the eve of the First World war was an anomaly in light of their conflict filled relations over the previous one thousand years.

Until the 18th Century, the Mediterranean Sea was of no English concern. Italian city-states and Spain plied its water in trade and resisted Muslim encroachments along its seaways and coasts. Had the Italians and Spanish lost the great battle of Lepanto against the Turks in 1571, the Mediterranean might have become a Muslim lake for centuries.

RACE CONSCIOUSNESS



The Murder of David Riccio by John Opie.

"Almost overnight, and by a masterful propaganda exercise, the unfortunate Rizzio [sic] was transformed into the Queen's illicit lover," wrote historian John Guy.



Britain's Foreign Minister Anthony Eden readily described Mussolini as a gangster. There were plenty of Italian stereotypes to help plant those thoughts.



JUDGING ONE ANOTHER WITH A CLASS MENTALITY

It has been observed that Protestantism differs decidedly from Catholicism in the former's emphasis on individual responsibility. For example, Roman Catholic doctrine does not encourage its members to interpret the Bible or even access it without priestly guidance. Luther's Protestant rebellion, based on his interpretation of Christ's teachings, led to multiple sects with divergent doctrines. But, it has also been credited with promoting "rugged individualism" and industrial innovation.

Protestant England has, since Henry VIII, seen the Pope and his Latin followers as dogmatic and lacking free thought. Of course, this is nonsense in light of Italy's perennial leadership in science, the arts, music, and political thought. Still, British politicians such as Anthony Eden, raised in a class-conscious society, similarly held on to an attitude of superiority over Mediterranean peoples.

The shady Renaissance Borgias (actually Spanish-Ital-

ians) were Italian stereotypes enjoyed by the even-shadier English of those days. The crafty Italian was a staple villain of the English upper class.

A classic example of the 'evil' Italian occurred in 1566 when David Riccio, private secretary to Mary Queen of Scots, was accused of bedding Mary and conniving to restore Catholicism to England. He may have figured in future Shakespeare plots, like the plotting Iago in *Othello*.

Then of course, the Sicilian Mafia and southern Italian *banditti* made their impression on the English as well as our language. By the 20th Century, Al Capone and gangster movies solidified the stereotype. Anthony Eden famously described Mussolini as "...a complete gangster." Even President Franklin Roosevelt's famous characterization of Italy's entry into the Second World War as France was failing, as a "*stab in the back*."

The irony of all this is that both the British and Americans connived with and later restored the Mafia in 1943.

EDEN AND MUSSOLINI WERE POLAR OPPOSITES



**Robert Anthony Eden (left)
First Earl of Avon (1897 - 1977)**

Eden, who labeled Mussolini “a gangster,” wanted to have Egypt’s Gamel Nassar (r) whacked.

[see End Notes for source]



Benito Amilcare Andrea Mussolini

The dictator, as a rational diplomat, is not part of the narrative of most historians.

THE TWO WERE NOT WHAT THEY SEEMED

Eden’s biographers believe the man had an “obsessive hatred” for Mussolini that stemmed from their first meeting in Rome on June 24, 1935. Britain had secretly negotiated a Naval Treaty with Hitler without consulting Italy or France (see p. 28). Mussolini, no doubt, took Eden to task for the deceit. Moreover, Eden refused to accept Mussolini’s compromises to resolve the Abyssinian tensions.

This personal animosity played a key part in destroying any British-Italian *entente*. This cannot be underestimated in the tragic run-up to the Second World War.

Eden’s resignation from the Cabinet in February, 1938 was not about Neville Chamberlain appeasing Hitler. Rather, Eden was against talks with Mussolini that the Prime Minister considered crucial in preventing a German-Italian alliance. Among the concessions to satisfy Mussolini was recognition of Italy’s new empire in Africa.

Within a month, Hitler annexed Austria with Mussolini’s grudging acceptance, the end of Italy’s five-year lonely struggle to keep Hitler out. [see pp 45 & 46]

Eden was not a true internationalist but cut from the same imperial cloth as his fellow Conservatives. His true colors were later revealed in the 1956 Suez Crisis in which he stage-managed a response to Egyptian nationalism, suborning Israel to invade Egypt, and then sending British troops to “restore” the peace. The entire charade was doomed by President Eisenhower’s intervention.

Eden’s personal disdain for Egypt’s Nassar, the same attitude he had for Mussolini thirty years earlier, says much about the man. Just as Eden drove Italy into the Pact of Steel, his shenanigans at Suez spurred Egypt’s embrace of the USSR.

Numerous diplomats have attested to Mussolini’s sociability and reasonableness, off the balcony. A dictator needs to project strength and steadfastness, but the *Duce* showed at summits in Locarno [p. 19] and Stresa [p. 24] that he was an active participant in European peace and security.

Both Neville Chamberlain and his older brother Austen had no problems dealing with *il Duce*. Like Eden, Mussolini spoke multiple languages and had diplomatic skills.

THE OLD SYSTEM IN SHAMBLES

1917 - 1923

THE FIRST WORLD WAR DID NOT END IN 1918



**"WE SHALL HAVE TO FIGHT ANOTHER WAR AGAIN
IN 25 YEARS TIME." - BRITISH PRIME MINISTER LLOYD GEORGE**

ON THE VERSAILLES TREATY

November 11, 1918 was only a halt in fighting on the Western Front - an armistice. The Allies had not reached the German border or even overrun German lines. While the German military surrendered its artillery, tanks, and airplanes, German troops marched in formation back to their prewar barracks. The German High Command did not consider the war a military defeat. Rather, it was a collapse of the home front caused by Communists and Jews exacerbated by the Allied naval blockade which brought German civilians to the point of starvation. The Kaiser abdicated for political reasons.

This mindset was shared by the future Nazis. German cities were spared the horrors of aerial bombardment that would visit them in the next war. Germany's defeat was a political one and, in reversing von Clausewitz, it called for a political struggle as an extension of the war by other means.

In contrast, Germany's ally Austro-Hungary was

soundly defeated by the Italian military in October, 1918, days before the Armistice on the Western Front. Some 450,000 Austro-Hungarian troops surrendered to the Italians. The Hapsburg monarchy fell and its multi-ethnic empire shattered into separate countries. Austria, now alone, would enter Italy's orbit.

The Versailles Treaty (1919) was not negotiated with Germany - it was rather a *diktat*. Among its provision, Germany was never to join with Austria (Article 80), a fact crucial to this report.

The Austro-Hungarian Empire was dismantled by the Treaty of St. Germain with the same ban on an Austro-German union. Such was the ultimate fear of the Allies.

Hitler's *Mein Kampf* specifically required a union with Austria before settling scores with the Allies. He would attempt that union within one year of coming to power. It was Italy that would prevent it in 1934. [see p. 37]

NEW STATES CREATED NEW MINORITY PROBLEMS



Italy's victory gave it Austria's South Tyrol, renamed Alto Adige, with its German-speaking population. In 1938, with the Nazi takeover of Austria, Hitler was at Italy's door.



The Treaty of Versailles converted the German city of Danzig into a "free state" with Polish administration. It granted Poland access to the Baltic Sea by creating a "Polish Corridor" through Germany.

CZECHOSLOVAKIA & YUGOSLAVIA NEVER EXISTED UNTIL 1919 - NOR DO THEY NOW.

With the breakup of the Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires, new nations were born or recreated. Unfortunately, their new borders were often geographically convenient (eg., defensible terrain) but contained a neighbor's ethnic population. Some new states were cobbled together by the Allies, such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia, without consideration for nuances of religion or ethnicity.

Both Yugoslavia and Czechoslovakia never existed in history but were created by the treaties of Versailles and St Germain. Originally part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Slovaks, Slovenes, Czechs, Serbians, and Croats share Slavic roots but are distinct nations, which politically they are now.

The Allies also incorporated German-speaking natives of the Sudetenland into the new Czechoslovakia. This would come back to haunt the Allies in 1938.

Probably the biggest plunder made by the Allies was delineating Poland's borders. To give the Poles a seaport on the Baltic Sea, they separated East Prussia from the rest of Germany creating the Polish Corridor and the Free State of Danzig under League of Nations authority with Polish administration.

There were some 1.1 million German living in the Corridor, of which 575,000 were to emigrate to Germany, still leaving a sizeable population under Polish rule. Danzig stayed overwhelmingly ethnic German and another logical target for Nazi demands.

Italy took possession of Austria's South Tyrol, with its ethnically German population as war booty. Mussolini soon began to italianize the region. After his takeover of Austria in 1938, Hitler grudgingly agreed to an ethnic population transfer from the Tyrol in order to build a military alliance with Fascist Italy. An amazing concession.

AGGRESSION WAS NOT THE MONOPOLY OF LARGE NATIONS



The Munich Agreement of 1938 allowed Poland and Hungary, as well as Germany, to dismember Czechoslovakia. Even the Slovaks declared their independence.



The Greek Army invaded Turkey 1919-1922. Its goal was to acquire Greek-populated areas. In the process both Greeks and Turks committed atrocities.

HISTORY IS CONDENSED FOR EASY CONSUMPTION

No sooner were the guns silenced on the Western Front in 1918 than the nations of eastern Europe went on a hunt to expand their borders.

Egged on by the British, who wanted to block an Italian expeditionary force that had landed in Turkey for a land grab, the Greek army invaded the Anatolia region in 1919 to absorb the minority Greek population. In light of this, the Italians wisely withdrew. The brutal Greek-Turk war that followed was marked by massacres and scorched earth ending in a Greek retreat in 1922. An amazing exchange of minority populations between Greece and Turkey eventually ended the regional bloodshed.

The years 1919-20 also saw invasions and annexations throughout eastern Europe. Romanians, Hungarians, Czechs, and Poles all partook of the Versailles chaos to claim ethnic enclaves in neighboring countries or to snatch “traditional” regions not granted to them by Versailles.

Another new motive for invasion was exemplified by Romania’s invasion of Hungary (see p. 11) where a Communist government was imposed by Lenin’s new Comintern for world revolution. Communism would embroil the major powers in localized conflicts even before the First World War ended.

Academia diverts students from this multi-ethnic aggression to play up Italy’s occupation of Fiume by proto-Fascist Gabriele D’Annunzio. This ethnic Italian city was given to Yugoslavia at Versailles. Italian aggression must be put in context with the rest of Europe and Asia Minor.

In 1938, on the heels of the Munich “sell-out,” Poland and Hungary, not just Germany, took portions of Czechoslovakia - a little known fact. The Munich settlement also allowed Slovaks to declare their independence from the Czechs- a marriage invented by the Allies - which they did and repeated in 1993.

COMMUNISM THREATENS WESTERN CIVILIZATION



Romanian cavalry entering Budapest, Hungary to oust Bela Kun's new Communist regime



The Soviets murdered Czar Nicholas and his family. Communism saw religion as "the opium of the people," and slated the Orthodox Church for destruction.

PRIVATE PROPERTY, CHRISTIANITY, AND CAPITALISM ARE THE PILLARS OF EUROPEAN TRADITION

Those who believe Communism is just another re-arrangement of civil society do not fully understand the comprehensive nature of Marxist-Leninism. It is intent on destroying all tradition in order to build anew. Russia was the very first nation to fall into Communist hands. The rest of Europe saw immediately what Communism was in practice. It was the first revolution based on an abstract ideology - neither about human rights as the French Revolution nor constitutional rights as the American Revolution. Communism is about changing human nature itself.

Until 1917, only Anarchism struck fear in general society; but Anarchism by definition had little organization. Lenin and his comrades now had Russia as a laboratory to implement a "workers' paradise," but also as a base to carry out international subversion.

Soon, the Russian contagion spread to defeated Germany in 1918, and later to Hungary. Lenin established the Comintern in March, 1919 to foment revolutions around the globe. Communist and Socialist delegates

from around Europe attended, including Italians.

Ostensibly, Communism was preaching the end of war by the destruction of capitalism and rule by the workers. But, all the Allies saw was murder and turmoil in Russia, including the execution of the Czar and the overthrow of the democratic Kerensky government. Communism was not looking to share power, but to take it violently.

In 1918, there was no Fascism, Nazism, or any ultra-right ideological movement. There was no counter ideology to Communism, only the various forms of democracy and dictatorship.

An Allied expeditionary force was formed to aid the White Russian Army combatting Trotsky's Red Army. Italy joined that Allied coalition. An expeditionary force of 2,500 soldiers (*Legione Redenta*) was sent to fight in Siberia until November, 1919. They were withdrawn as part of the general Allied retreat from Russia.

Communism was now free to expand, and Italy was a prime target.

WAS ITALY ON THE VERGE?



Leftist militants sought to paralyze Italy, seizing factories and using violence to cow workers and peasants. Fascist “bully boys” had their leftist equivalents.



MOST HISTORIANS WHITEWASH THE COMMUNIST, SOCIALIST, AND ANARCHIST THREATS

Italian Communists were just as ruthless as their Bolshevik masters in Russia. In fact, there was a tidal wave of violent Communism sweeping Europe during and after the First World War. The Italian Socialist Party aligned itself in support of the Bolshevik movement in Russia and called for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie.

The murder of the Czar in July, 1918, was not lost on Italy’s King Victor Emanuel. The Russian Orthodox Church, the aristocracy, and middle class were being destroyed by Lenin, also not lost on the Pope and Italy’s traditional society. Still worse, the new Soviet policies caused horrific famines, killing millions even in 1921 and 1922. The world knew the misery Communism produced.

Anarchist Enrico Malatesta, was a major leader of Anarchists in Italy during this period. He adhered to the principle that all political power must be destroyed. [In 1900, King Umberto was assassinated by an Anarchist.]

During this period, Amadeo Bordiga and Antonio Gramsci were leaders of the Communist Party of Italy, whose members engaged in civil violence against Fascists and the business class.

Post-war Italy was hit with many strikes often accompanied by violence, both in the factories and the countryside. Workers who refused to join the strikes or crossed picket lines were beaten and sometimes killed. The num-

ber of strikers rose from less than 2,000 in 1918, to 1.5 million in 1919, and over 2.5 million in 1920.

In September 1920, 600,000 metal workers seized factories from Milan to Naples. Red flags flew over 600 factories for one month. The workers appointed "Red Guards" to protect them. People spoke of an imminent Bolshevik revolution.

On July 30, 1922, the Socialist trade unions called a general strike to begin at midnight on July 31st. Fascists broke the strike throughout Italy in less than a day.

“The rash of strikes over the land played havoc with the Italian economy, causing prices to soar while food shortages grew, basic public services broke down, and railroads – hindered by labor disputes – ran hours, and sometimes days or weeks, behind schedule. Meanwhile, tens of thousands of discharged combat veterans returned home only to be heckled instead of honored and frozen out of jobs that the trade unions had already locked up.

Italy was on the verge of falling apart. Parliament was regarded even by its own members as a corrupt bazaar where favors were divvied out to those with political and social connections.”

[*Fascism: A Warning*, Madeleine Albright, p.19]

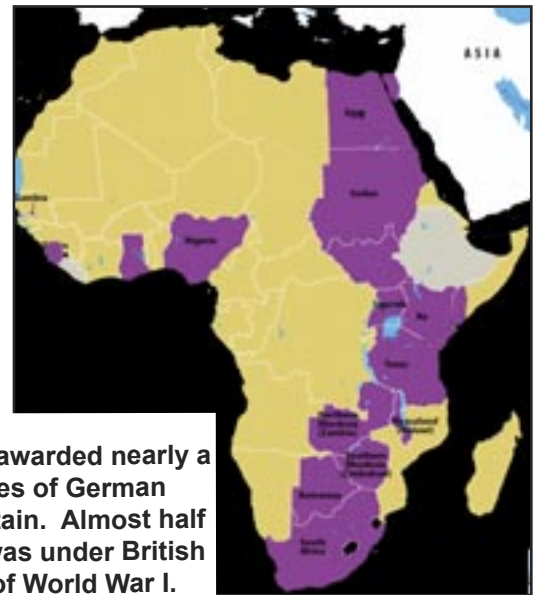
OLD EMPIRE
NEW EMPIRE

BEFORE NEWSREELS/AFTER NEWSREELS

THE OLD ORDER EXPANDED QUIETLY



U.S. conquests in the Pacific and Puerto Rico in the Caribbean were termed territories, not colonies.



The Versailles Treaty awarded nearly a million square miles of German colonies to Great Britain. Almost half of Africa (in purple) was under British control at the end of World War I.

“The white man’s burden” DIDN’T APPLY TO ITALIAN COLONIALISM

By the 20th Century, India became even more indispensable to Britain. According to the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, over 1 million Indian troops were used to support British efforts in the First World War. Some 36,000 Indians died fighting for the Union Jack. An estimated \$400 million (1918 dollars) in military stores, 5 million tons of wheat and vast resources, from cotton to steel, came out of India. Before the war ended, the government of India presented a “gift” of \$500 million to the British government. In terms of today’s dollars, these figures would be in the billions. In terms of trade balances, India suffered a 60% negative balance to sustain its master.

“...India was, indeed, the jewel in Britain’s imperial crown...” - *20th Century Britain* by Paul Johnson.

Every member of the British Cabinet knew that the entire Empire hinged on India. There was a cabinet position as Secretary of State for India and Burma, separate from the Colonial or Dominion portfolios. Even Winston Churchill, who realized the dangers of Hitler earlier on, resisted any efforts to change India’s status as a tributary

colony. He despised Mahatma Gandhi; called him a “naked fakir” and wished him trampled by elephants. He voted against the liberalizing Government of the India Bill of 1934. To Churchill India was the Empire, and the Mediterranean passage was sacrosanct.

With the Versailles Treaty, the British Empire grew by almost one million square miles with thirteen million new subjects – colonies taken from Germany and Turkey: Southwest Africa, Tanganyika, Iraq, Transjordan, and Palestine made the Mediterranean even more vital.

A desperate Churchill later committed a major strategic blunder when he endorsed Franklin D. Roosevelt’s *Atlantic Charter* in 1941, calling for the independence of all colonies. Winny did not realize FDR also meant British colonies. The U.S. had already promised the Philippines independence in 1947, to set an example.

Churchill's focus was only on resisting Hitler and getting war material to combat Italy in North Africa and the Mediterranean.

THE BRITISH MEDITERRANEAN



The Suez canal cut three weeks from the voyage to India and other British colonies. This made control of the Mediterranean and Egypt vital interests to the British Empire.



The Italian Navy and Air Force were a looming threat to Great Britain's unfettered use of the Mediterranean Sea.

“[ITALY]...HAS MADE A DETERMINED BID FOR SEA-POWER ON A GRAND SCALE...”

- Robert Seton-Watson, 1938

“Britain has now possessed vital interests and maintained her naval power, in the Mediterranean for the best part of three centuries... Sometimes France, sometimes Spain, ...sometimes Turkey...has been her chief rival..But never until the last few years has she been confronted with a situation in which the Italian peninsula, united in a single state, in conjunction with an expansive colonial policy.”

[*Britain and the Dictators*,
by Robert Seton-Watson, p.395.]

The 1939 pamphlet by journalist Louis Bromfield, titled *England: A Dying Oligarchy*, listed how appeasing the dictators, including Mussolini, would lead to “*Foreign domination of the Mediterranean, so vital to the life of the British Empire.*” That Italy, located in the heart of the Mediterranean, was considered “foreign” to that sea, while Britain was not, speaks volumes of Britain’s attitude toward its monopoly.

Great Britain ruled the strategic islands of Malta and Cyprus prior to the war. In fact, there are still British naval bases in these independent nations. And, of course, the First World War delivered “mandates” to the victorious British which included Palestine on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean.

A British Mediterranean was more vital with the coming of the petroleum age. The vast oil reserves in Iraq, which was also a British mandate and in Saudi Arabia, were managed by British companies. In 1913, at the urging of Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, the British navy undertook to convert its warships from coal to oil. Middle East oil became a military necessity.

In short, oil and India made the Mediterranean Sea a British lifeline and Fascist Italy an existential threat.

BOTH SIDES SOURED ON THEIR FIRST DEAL IN 1915



The Italian defeat and rout at Caporetto in 1917 was never forgotten by the British. French and British troops were diverted to Italy to stem the crisis. Even though Italian arms were vindicated later, Italy's reputation suffered.

THE BRITISH FELT ITALY'S EFFORTS WEREN'T WORTH THE CONCESSIONS. ITALIANS CONSIDERED WW I A 'MUTILATED VICTORY'

When Italy entered the First World War, in 1915, there were two major fronts in Europe: in France and Russia. The struggle had become a stalemate and the Allies needed a third front to draw off Austro-Hungarian armies.

With the secret Treaty of London, Italy was enticed to enter the fray. The Italians immediately launched a series of attacks on the Isonzo River against Austro-Hungarian forces with mixed success. In 1916, Italy declared war on Germany. In solidarity, it sent four divisions to assist the Allies on the Western Front. Meanwhile, the Germans sent combat divisions (including Lt. Erwin Rommel) to support its faulting Austro-Hungarian ally.

Unlike the Western or Eastern fronts, the Italian Front was a geographic nightmare of mountain combat - artillery, ammunition, and supplies had to be hauled up huge vertical distances, often by mules and men. Frostbite was common winter and summer at these heights. Still, the

Italians managed to fend off the two Central Powers until 1917.

With the collapse of Russia in 1917, German and Austro-Hungarian troops were transferred to the Italian Front. In October, 1917 the Italian line at Caporetto was breached, with some 300,000 Italians captured. However, on their own, the Italian Army stopped the enemy advance at the Piave River. But, Caporetto became the byword for Italian military incompetence.

One year later, with the Austro-Hungarian kingdom in turmoil, the Italians swept their enemies to defeat at Vittorio Veneto. With Austro-Hungary out of the war, Germany's southern flank was now open. One week later, Germany agreed to an armistice on the Western Front.

At war's end, the Allies diminished Italy's efforts and renege on promises contained in the London Treaty. Italy felt cheated and their victory "mutilated." (see p.8)

MUSSOLINI'S VISION 1933 - 1935

EUROPE AND AN EMPIRE

EUROPE NEEDED A NEW MECHANISM FOR PEACE



Conceived by Mussolini before Hitler took power, the 4-Power Pact was signed by Nazi Germany in June, 1933. The British and French put all their chips on the flawed League of Nations, in contrast, this pact was a more practical way to renegotiate the onerous terms of the Versailles Treaty.

MUSSOLINI ANTICIPATED A RESURGENT GERMANY BEFORE HITLER

The Versailles Treaty of 1919, ending the First World War, was dictated to Germany which had no say in its terms. To make amends in restoring Germany's place in Europe and to close loose ends in the treaty, a conference was held in Locarno, Switzerland in 1925. It soon became apparent to the major powers and the newly formed nations of eastern Europe that the "Spirit of Locarno" was merely that. The actual terms of the conference only confirmed the borders of France and Belgium and called for arbitration of Germany's eastern borders.

Polish diplomat Józef Beck put it this way: "Germany was officially asked to attack the east, in return for peace in the west." However, it was Locarno that committed France and Britain to defend Poland and Czechoslovakia, which would come to haunt the Western powers in 1938 and 1939.

Although the Spirit of Locarno allowed Germany into the League of Nations, that body was heavily Anglo-French and diluted with minor nations. What Europe needed in Mussolini's eyes was a select forum for the major powers. In 1932, before Hitler's ascension to power, Mussolini outlined his 4-Power Pact.

It was to be a method to renegotiate, at the expense of the smaller states, the terms of Versailles in order to keep the peace of Europe. However, the British feared enhancing Italy's and Germany's power so insisted that the new Pact be subordinated to the League. Albeit not to his liking, Mussolini signed the Pact in 1933, as did Hitler. However, it was never fully ratified.

Ironically, the infamous Munich Conference of 1938 was a *de facto* implementation of the 4-Power Pact, and gave Europe one more year of peace.

ITALY WANTED A GLOBAL REACH



In 1936, Britain took military control of the Suez Canal



British naval base and airpower at Gibraltar

“...TO BE REALLY INDEPENDENT, A NATION MUST HAVE DIRECT ACCESS TO THE OCEANS.” - MUSSOLINI

Mussolini was obsessed with Italy being locked into the Mediterranean, citing Britain’s possession of the only exits at Gibraltar and Suez. To be a truly global power, Italy required unfettered access to the Atlantic Ocean and the Red Sea.

Britain took Gibraltar from Spain in 1713 and later fortified it with a naval station and land-based artillery. It remains a British fortification to this day. But it was Suez that galled Fascist Italy more. Britain secured its Mediterranean passage to India by first foreclosing on Egyptian shares in the Suez Canal corporation in 1875 and then seizing Egypt itself in 1882, as a “protectorate.”

In 1936, with the trappings of an independent Egypt, Britain established a military base in the canal zone. (It was not until 1956 that Britain was dispossessed of the canal when Egypt nationalized it.)

Italy claimed that Italians had not only been early investors in the Suez project but provided technical support. Moreover, by international accord in 1889, the Board of

Directors of the Canal had to represent the major users, of which Italy was clearly among. Yet, no Italian was ever accepted to the Board. Instead, by 1938 the Board was made up of 21 Frenchmen, 13 Britons, 1 Dutchman, and 2 seats reserved for Egyptians. The British held 44% of the corporate stock, France and smaller investors held the rest.

In 1938, during the Spanish Civil War, the Anglo-Italian Accords were signed to stabilize relations in the Mediterranean and colonial Africa. Fair use by Italy of the Suez Canal was affirmed but no seat on the Board was offered. Nor did the British offer to recognize Italy's new empire in Abyssinia - a major sticking point in relations.

According to the late American conservative Angelo Codavilla:

“The Italo-British interactions of [from] 1935 might qualify as the 20th century’s dumbest, most tragic diplomatic démarche. Hitler was the only winner. [Claremont Review of Books, Spring 2020]

A NEW ROMAN EMPIRE



The arrival in Libya of 20,000 Italian colonists in 1938. Governor Italo Balbo vetted each family to weed out slackers and criminals. Colonists were provided everything to begin a new life including infrastructure and livestock.



With empire came the fear of race-mixing. Italy's 1938 Racial laws were as much aimed at Africans as Italian Jews.

A HAMMER NOT AN ANVIL

Italy did not call itself an empire until 1936 with the conquest of Abyssinia. Prior to that, the Kingdom of Italy held coastal Libya, Eritrea, Somaliland, and the Dodecanese Islands off Turkey.

Mussolini clearly saw opportunities in making the Mediterranean an Italian preserve, *Mare Nostrum*, at the expense of the British and French.

The successful end of the Spanish Civil War in 1939 gave Italy a neutral* Spain at the Gibraltar gate. French Tunisia had a sizeable Italian population reaching 100,000, including future actress Claudia Cardinale. Libya was “pacified” by 1929 and thousands of colonists shipped there in 1938.

* There was no formal alliance with Franco's Spain after the civil war, nor any bases on Spanish territory leased or granted to Italy.

Egypt and Sudan were eyed not merely for the Suez

Canal but to create a contiguous landmass to connect Libya with newly won Abyssinia.

The pacification of Libya and the conquest of Abyssinia has always been treated by historians and the media with racist overtones - Italians butchering primitive populations of Arabs, Berbers, and black Africans. Neither Britain, France nor the U.S. had the moral high ground in such judgements which should be obvious to any student of history. Italy's 1938 Racial Laws were partly inspired by the increasing fraternization of native peoples by Italian soldiers and colonists. Historians focus only on the anti-Semitic portion of these laws.

The anti-slavery war song *Faccetta Nera* (“Little Black Face Girl”) was discouraged by the Fascist regime for lyrics that included: “*I shall take you to Rome freed from slavery where our sun will kiss you*” - clearly, the sentiment was proclaiming immigration in the wrong direction.

ENGLISH - GERMAN ATTRACTIONS

ETHNIC COUSINS

A BRITISH AFFINITY FOR NAZIS



Anthony Eden (left)
with *der Führer*



The royal Windsors were ethnic Germans. here former King Edward VIII and his American wife meet Hitler in 1937.



Journalist George Ward Price
with Hitler, 1938



Lord Rothermere, George Ward Price, Adolf Hitler, Fritz Wiedemann, Joseph Goebbels, with Princess Stephanie and Magda Goebbels in January, 1936)

SOME WERE EMBARRASSINGLY PRO-NAZI

Popular history tars Neville Chamberlain as a dupe of Hitler outside the context of what was clearly substantial British admiration for the Nazi regime.

Hitler had a voice in *The Daily Mail's* correspondent George Ward Price who has been characterized as “embarrassingly pro-Nazi.” The BBC Director General John Reith assured Hitler that “*the BBC was not anti-Nazi*” and would fly the swastika if Goebbels visited London. Labour Party leader George Lansbury wrote in 1936 excusing Nazi persecutions of Jews and others as similar to acceptable British repression in Ireland and South Africa.

Historian A.L. Rowse observed that among many British elites and press “...*nothing Hitler did, however immoral, was to be resisted.*”

[*The Avoidable War*, J. Kenneth Brody, p.153]

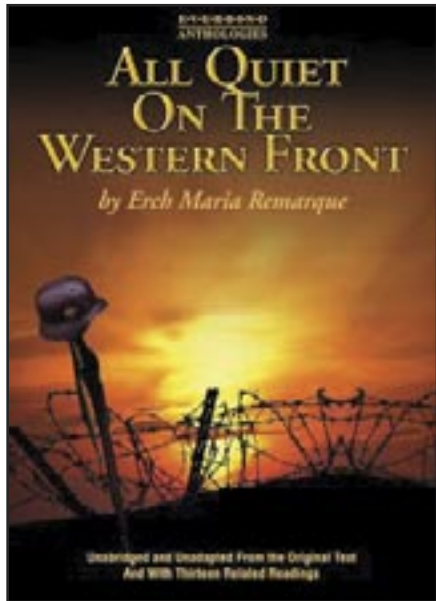
During talks with Hitler over German rearmament in

1935, Sir John Simon, Foreign Secretary, asked the Führer not to make public their naval negotiations for fear that Britain’s Stresa Front allies Italy and France would interfere. [ibid, p. 257]

Germany – imperial or Nazi – was never considered a mortal enemy of Great Britain. The British entered the First World War to punish Germany for violating Belgian neutrality, which it had guaranteed since 1839. As an Anglo-Saxon nation with a royal family of German ancestry and speaking a Germanic language, many British elites saw Germany as a hedge against France and the USSR. There was little conflict with Germany on the high seas or in colonial Africa and Asia. And, this is important: there was no rivalry with Germany in the Mediterranean Sea, Britain's pathway to India.

The English elite often visited Hitler, coming away with feelings of understanding and trust.

MANY BRITONS FELT GERMANY WAS PUNISHED TOO MUCH FOR WW I



This book and film gave the English-speaking world during the 1930s an image of German humanity, very much in contrast to previous Allied wartime propaganda.

HATRED WAS TEMPERED BY COMPASSION

The First World War ended with an armistice, not a surrender of German forces. Both sides were exhausted on every level. For the Germans, President Wilson's Fourteen Points represented the spirit of the armistice. It was France that sought revenge, having been the battleground of the Western Front. Even in victory it feared the German character, no matter the form of government. Wilson's insistence on ethnic self-determination was to divest Germany and Austria of many German-speaking regions – a source of confrontation in the 1930s.

The Treaty of Versailles in 1919 was not a negotiated settlement with Germany. All the terms were laid out by the victors, and the German Republic was ordered to sign it. Essentially, it was a *diktat*, just as the Germans described it then.

A good many sympathetic Britons saw immediately that the Treaty was “*built on punishment and revenge*,” as Labour leader George Lansbury called it. *The London Times*, as well as Conservative, Socialist, and Pacifist

leaders sounded the alarm and promoted sympathy for Germany. This wave of revulsion for the degradation of the German people carried from the Weimar Republic into the Nazi era, almost until Hitler's invasion of Poland. The harsh terms of the Versailles Treaty were blamed for Hitler's rise and his aggressive policies.

It is also noteworthy that the book (1928) and movie *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) reassured the British and American public that Germans were not all Prussian militarists but “*...decent, trusting, loyal German youth with whom the Anglo-Saxon public could readily identify.*”
[*The Avoidable War*, J. Kenneth Brody, p.48-49]

Nevertheless, both the book and the movie were banned by the Nazis for their fraternization theme. Yet, the Nazis were open to amicable relations with the English as future partners in global dominance. The possibilities of restoring German colonies in Africa was considered by both nations right up to 1938.

CHURCHILL'S WAS NOT THE ONLY WARNING ABOUT HITLER



Sir Horace Rumbold
British Ambassador in Berlin



Sir Robert Vansittart
of the Foreign Office knew Italy
was the key to peace

ITALY WAS TO BE PART OF THE SOLUTION

Standing in the House of Commons in May, 1932, six months before Hitler assumed power, Winston Churchill gave his first warning against allowing German rearmament:

“[It] would bring us to within practical distance of almost measureless calamity.”

However, he was preceded in 1925 by Sir James Headlam-Morley, an academic and government advisor, who predicted a dire future if Germany sought to reverse the new borders the Versailles Treaty created: *“The whole of Europe would at once be in chaos.”*

As Nazism took hold of Germany the predictions were fleshed out with firsthand observations. Britain’s ambassador in Berlin Sir Horace Rumbold wrote on June 30, 1933, in his *“Mein Kampf”* dispatch six months after Hitler assumed power, that the new Chancellor, Goering and Goebbels were *“notoriously pathological cases.”* Disarmament negotiator Brigadier General A.C. Temperly characterized Nazi Germany as a *“mad dog”* in his

report to the British Cabinet on May 10, 1933. At the rate Germany was rearming, he warned, war was inevitable in five years. Also in May, 1933, Foreign Office Undersecretary Sir Robert Vansittart accurately forecast the sequence of German aggression: *“Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, then West or East or both.”*

Vansittart summed up his best advice in August, 1934: to maintain the friendship of Fascist Italy in order to protect Austria, which was already in Hitler’s sights. Only a week before, the world witnessed Hitler’s first defeat when Fascist Italy prevented a Nazi takeover of Austria (see page 37). He counseled Anglo-French-Italian cooperation as *“the only real bulwark of peace.”*

[*The Mist Procession*, R. Vansittart, p. 479-80]

Churchill clung to the hope that Mussolini could be kept friendly or neutral as the Allies faced Hitler, even in the late 1930s. Churchill then was anti-Nazi, not anti-Fascist.

[*Churchill: A Study in Greatness*, Geoffrey Best, 2001]

BRITAIN AND GERMANY HAVE ALWAYS SEEN ITALY AS AN UNRELIABLE NATION



Italy's defeat at Adowa by Ethiopians in 1896 was not the only European loss. However, Italy never lived it down. Defeated Italian General Oreste Baratieri

“IT’S YOUR TURN, WE HAD THEM IN THE LAST WAR... “

- An English joke on the Italo-German alliance in World War II

Italians have a reputation for independent thinking. It should not be a negative characteristic in diplomacy since national interests do change. Prior to the First World War, Italy joined a defensive alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary in 1882. Originally to counter a dispute with France over African colonies, the Italians also had an interest in keeping a lid on the volatile Balkans, which bordered on Italy and Austria-Hungary.

When Austria-Hungary's Archduke Ferdinand was assassinated by a Serbian in Bosnia in 1914, the Austrians attacked Serbia. Italy remained neutral, as this was not a defensive war. Her Teutonic partners considered this a dishonor and later a betrayal when Italy joined France and Britain in 1915 against them.

The British and French welcomed the Italian alliance, which not only relieved them of manning their southern flank but kept Austro-Hungarian troops away from the Western Front. Moreover, four Italian divisions served on that Front throughout the war distinguishing themselves

at the Second Battle of the Marne.

However, in 1917 German and Austro-Hungarian forces broke through Italian lines at Caporetto sending the Italian Army in wild retreat and capturing some 300,000 prisoners. On its own, the Italians stopped the advance at the Piave River. Although the Allies sent reinforcements after the fact, they believed they saved Italy from collapse.

Not only was this a distorted view but Italy's later victory at Vittorio Veneto in October, 1918, in which it captured 450,000 prisoners and opened Germany's southern flank, was later downplayed by Britain and France. (This happened two weeks before the Armistice on the Western Front.) At the time, however, British Lt. General Sir Maurice Hankey wrote, *"I shall not easily forget the scene of enthusiasm"* as Clemenceau, Lloyd George, and President Wilson's representative Col. House congratulated Italy's Prime Minister Orlando on Italy's victory.

[*No Man's Land*, John Toland, p.506]

ANTHONY EDEN: AN ODD FELLOW



Eden admitted that he was too soft on Hitler and should have listened to his French allies and stopped Hitler's Rhineland reoccupation.



Eden as an officer in the First World War

UNDER HITLER'S SPELL

In February, 1934, Hitler offered Eden a reduction of the SA (Brown Shirts) by two-thirds, and that the remainder would not become Waffen ("armed") SA. When SA leader Roehm was later murdered and the SA disbanded, for internal reasons, Eden must have felt confirmed in his trust of Hitler.

There is enough extant documentation to demonstrate Eden's willingness to trust Hitler and to rationalize the momentum of the Third Reich. He believed that Nazi violations of the Versailles Treaty would be unlikely, as Hitler needed time for internal consolidation.

Not so with Fascist Italy which had been entrenched since 1922 and was a world power. "*Eden's references to Mussolini - the 'anti-Christ' - display a depth of animosity never matched in his attitude towards Hitler.*"

[*Anthony Eden, A Life and Reputation*, David Dutton, p 69]

Eden was charmed by Hitler, according to author Tim Bouverie. He is "...much more than a demagogue," "*I find it very hard to believe that the man himself wants war.*" By the way, Eden was fluent in German.

[*Appeasement*, Tim Bouverie 2019, p.43]

Eden cultivated a reputation for the primacy of international law. His reliance on the League of Nations may appear altruistic but the League never intruded into British imperialism and, as a deliberative body, it was no substitute for the old system of collective security.

Eden readily admitted in 1961 "*I should have been more responsive to what the French appeared to want to do [in the Rhineland in 1936] and stiffer to Hitler.*"

[*Anthony Eden, A Life and Reputation*, David Dutton, p11]

It was Allied inaction in the Rhineland that Hitler solidified his hold on the German military and whetted his appetite for bolder actions.

And here is Eden's opinion of Stalin:

"*(Stalin's) personality made itself felt without exaggeration. He had natural good manners, perhaps a Georgian inheritance. Though I knew the man was without mercy, I respected the quality of his mind and even felt a sympathy I have never been able to analyse. Perhaps it was because of the pragmatic approach. I cannot believe he had any affinity to Marx. Certainly no one could have been less doctrinaire.*" [Eden, Anthony. *Memoirs*, "Facing The Dictators."]

BRITISH MORTAL FEAR OF FIGHTING GERMANY AGAIN



Chairman Major Francis Fetherston-Godley and a six-man delegation from the British Legion (akin to our American Legion) made a trip to Nazi Germany in July 1935 to honor WW I dead.

Eden and Hitler hit it off at their first meeting in 1935.

No such cordiality existed between Eden and Mussolini, whom he called a "gangster."



BRITISH LEADERS TRIED TO FIND COMMON GROUND WITH THE NAZIS

Anthony Eden lost two brothers in the First World War. He was an officer on the Western Front. During a lunch meeting with Adolph Hitler in 1935, the two determined that they were across from each other in the trenches. Drawing the opposing trench lines on a menu the Brit and Nazi discovered a comradeship which evidently tempered Eden's critical view of the dictator from that point on.

He remarked to Prime Minister Baldwin in 1934 about Hitler, "*poor man...he was badly gassed by us and blind in consequence for three months.*"

[Anthony Eden, *A Life and Reputation*, David Dutton, p 35]

The First World War had taken nearly 900,000 British lives and destroyed some 9 million tons of naval and civilian ships. The British famously spoke of "The Lost Gen-

eration" to lament the decimation of its youth in the war and the post traumatic stress it caused the survivors.

Germany was still considered a civilized nation despite the wartime propaganda. Accommodation, as "appeasement" would be defined, was thought to be a way to resolve European tensions and be even-handed.

Hitler was thought to be a leader who would mellow with his responsibilities. Before Munich, his demands to redeem pre-war German territories - the Saar, the Rhineland - were reasonable. Perhaps, the thinking was that Hitler's harsh public *persona* hid a more cultivated side that would reveal itself with personal contact.

With good intentions, many Brits lived in hope.

GERMANY WAS A BULWARK AGAINST USSR EXPANSION



During the First World War, Germany had brought the Russian giant to its knees. After the war the British believed Hitler's Germany could blunt the Communist threat to Western Europe.



Only two months after agreeing to remain united against a resurgent Germany with the Stresa Accord, the British cut a separate naval treaty with the Nazis.

THE BRITISH AND FRENCH PURSUE CONTRADICTIONARY POLICIES

The French rightfully considered Germany their existential threat. Russia was seen as their logical ally positioned on Germany's eastern border. Russia and France were allies in the First World War, successfully dividing German's military until the Russian collapsed in 1917.

When Bolsheviks overthrew the Kerensky Government and proclaimed the USSR, the British and French sent expeditionary forces to support the anti-Communist White Army in Russia. Both allies rightly feared a world-wide Communist revolution.

However, with the rise of Nazi Germany, the French considered even a Communist Russia as an ally against a resurgent Germany. In May, 1935 they signed the Franco-Soviet Treaty of Mutual Assistance, more of a symbolic than actual alliance. However, Hitler used it as a pretext to reoccupy the Rhineland in 1936.

Meanwhile, the British pursued their own crafty outreach to Nazi Germany with the Anglo-German Naval Treaty of June, 1935. The treaty flew in the face of the March, 1935 Stresa Accord with France and Italy, that had agreed to a "united" front against German rearmament.

What neither the French nor British knew was that pre-Hitler Germany had made a secret deal in 1922 to establish German military training schools in the USSR. The Versailles Treaty did not allow German rearmament, so the Weimar Republic did so on Russian soil. Nazi Germany's future military leaders in the Panzer Corps and Luftwaffe learned their trades in the USSR. The schools were all shut down by 1933 when Hitler came to power. Ideological differences were clearly the cause, but the new Nazi regime had no fear of rearming on German soil.

Only Fascist Italy was diplomatically transparent.

BRITISH PACIFICISM TAKES HOLD

THE PEACE BALLOT
AND
THE OXFORD UNION

BRITAIN DEFERS TO THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS



This cartoon revealed the doubt that the new League could carry the heavy load of world peace.



In 1933, Japan walked out of the League when condemned for its invasion of Manchuria. It was the first major blow to the organization.

THE LEAGUE BECOMES A TOOL OF FRENCH AND BRITISH DOMINION

At Versailles, France and Great Britain felt obligated to grant President Wilson's demand for a League of Nations. No doubt, they felt the new League might inspire world peace, even without teeth, and undertake humanitarian initiatives. Soon, they found it a convenient way to add additional colonies to their empire via its "mandate" power.

The League immediately granted "temporary" mandates to the war's victors: to Britain (Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq, Ghana, Nigeria, and Tanzania), to France (Syria, Lebanon, Cameroon, Togo), to Belgium (Rwanda, Uganda, Burundi) and to Japan and Australia (Pacific island chains). Victorious Italy, a founding member of the League, received no mandates at all.

Wilson's failure to secure U.S. membership in the League further weakened the organization, but enabled France and Britain to dominate it. Only French, English, and Spanish were the official languages.

In 1923, Ethiopia was accepted as a League member de-

spite its tolerance of slavery. At first the British opposed admission on those grounds, but saw the African state's membership as a means to discourage future aggression from Italian colonial Eritrea and Somaliland. British Kenya was also adjacent to Italian colonies. Africa was now mainly a British and French preserve.

Into the 1930s, the League's weaknesses became obvious. In 1933, Japan quit over the League's condemnation of its invasion of Manchuria. Though no longer a member, the League was powerless to take back Japan's mandates in the Pacific - island chains that would cost American blood in World War II. In 1935, when Fascist Italy invaded Ethiopia, the League voted for sanctions. However, neither France nor Great Britain forced the inclusion of an international oil embargo with the sanctions as they might provoke unintended European conflicts.

These examples strongly demonstrate that the League's power and will emanated solely from France and Britain. The League was merely an appendage of those powers.

A NEW GENERATION REJECTS WAR



Sometimes a free society can reveal too much in a hostile world.



A standard recruitment poster from the First World War, echoed in the Oxford Union resolution

BRITISH STUDENT DEBATE GOES VIRAL

On February 9, 1933 a famous resolution was passed by students of the Oxford Union (275 votes to 153) that *"this House will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country."*

The Oxford Union is often seen as a bellwether of British society. This particular vote was particularly controversial coming during the age of dictators. The horrors of the Great War were still fresh, and the major powers were at odds over disarmament. Japan was waging a war of aggression in Manchuria, and Adolph Hitler had come to power only a scant one week before the debate.

Young Britons understandably had no desire to be cannon fodder. An entire generation of their relatives had been sacrificed on the Western Front. Unfortunately, this

minor debate echoed throughout the decade among the nations of the world. Young Jack Kennedy considered the vote proof that Britain had become decadent. Some American publications incorrectly described the academic resolution as an 'oath' not to fight for king and country.

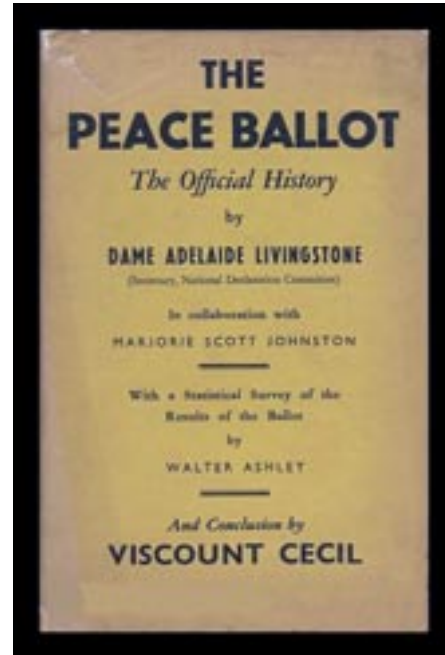
Winston Churchill credibly observed: *"One can almost feel the curl of contempt upon the lips of the manhood of these peoples (Germany, Italy, France) when they read this message sent out by Oxford University in the name of young England."*

Mussolini surely knew of this debate and resolution from his ambassador and the press. It would have confirmed his belief in the decadency of the democracies.

THE PEACE BALLOT PARALYZES BRITISH LEADERS



Lord Robert Cecil,
promoter of the
Peace Ballot



A NONSENSICAL NATION-WIDE POLL LEAVES EVERYTHING TO CHANCE

Around the same time in 1933 as the Oxford Union resolution against war (previous page), Lord Cecil of Chelwood, head of the League of Nations Union, conceived of a nation-wide poll of registered voters to respond to questions on national defense and foreign policy.

Britons had become frustrated with failed disarmament talks and weakening support of the League by their own government. The poll came to be called the Peace Ballot. From late 1934 to early 1935, 11.6 million British voters, nearly half the electorate, were polled door-to-door. The results confirmed that the British people no longer felt that enforcing world peace was a national responsibility. They wanted the League of Nations to be the ultimate guarantor of peace, and to shield British foreign policy.

The fallacy behind the Peace Ballot was that no one was asked how the League was going to confront aggressors beside using economic sanctions. It was as though voters assumed the League had other methods that would not re-

quire British boys to be called to be mobilized.

The Peace Ballot was scoffed at by many leaders in the country, but it had a profound effect on Anthony Eden the soon-to-be Minister to the League. He also believed in the League as the ultimate enforcer.

Coincidentally, 1935 witnessed two events that would please British voters. Their government had just inked the Anglo-German Naval Treaty, a bi-lateral agreement that bypassed the frustrating international disarmament talks, as well as the recent anti-Nazi Stresa Accord with France and Italy. The other, later in the year, was the imposition of League sanctions on Italy for its invasion of Ethiopia, which gave "cover" to Britain and France.

The Peace Ballot vilified military collective security and discouraged Britain, especially Eden, from reaching any bilateral accommodation with Fascist Italy, an aggressor nation. Mussolini would have to deal with the League.

GERMAN - ITALIAN REPULSIONS

NATURAL ENEMIES

THE ALPS DEFINED ITALY SINCE 222 BC



Marcus Claudius Marcellus (above) extended Roman Italy to the Alps in 222 B.C. Julius Caesar later extended the Roman domain to Gaul and the Rhine River. German tribes would be held at bay for another 400 years. Note the 3-legged symbol to the left. It represented Marcellus's later capture of Syracuse, Sicily during the 2nd Punic War



German Emperor Henry IV supplicates to Pope Gregory VII at Canossa in AD 1077. This imperial vs. papal rivalry weakened Germanic power in Italy after the fall of the Roman Empire.

THE ITALIC PEOPLE HAVE ALWAYS TEMPERED GERMANIC POWER

It was Germanic tribes that eventually breached the Roman Empire and the walls of Rome. However, by sheer numbers and superiority of culture, Italy was able to absorb the influx of Teutons, acculturating them. For example, the Lombards became an integral part of the DNA of northern Italians.

It was the Latin church that continued the struggle against Germanic power. Barbarians became Christian and the Italian popes commanded their loyalty even outside of Italy. The famous example occurred in 1077, when Henry IV, king of the Germans was excommunicated. He walked across the Alps into Italy in penance to beg forgiveness, to restore his authority among his own subjects.

In the late Middle Ages, those favoring papal authority were called Guelphs (originally “*Welf*” in German); those

siding with German secular rulers were Ghibellines (“*Weiblinger*” in German.)

Fortunately, this competition between the Church and the “Holy Roman” (actually secular German) emperors in Italy had the effect of leaving many cities and regions to their own devices. Consequently, Italian city-states like Venice, Milan, Genoa, and Florence rose to self-governing status by the 1200s.

Italic people further contributed to the evolution of the French nation through 400 years of Roman occupation and interbreeding, which fended off German incursions.

Even the legend of King Arthur of England is based upon Roman general Artorius who resisted the Germanic Angle, Saxon, and Jute predations on the Britons after the Roman evacuation of that island in AD 410.

TRIPLE ALLIANCE WAS A WARNING WW I WAS THE PROOF



The Triple Alliance 1882-1915
Emperor Franz-Josef of Austro-Hungary, Kaiser Wilhelm
of Germany, and King Victor Emanuel II of Italy



The Germans and Austrians were not
rational allies for the Italians. The First World
War was the result of botched diplomacy.

THE LONG-TERM INTERESTS OF THE TEUTONIC NATIONS WERE NOT ITALY'S

When Italy was partly reunified in 1861, France was led by Napoleon III, a distant son of Italy. In 1866, France became an ally of the new Italy in a war against Austria-Hungary, which still occupied parts of northern Italy. The war succeeded in redeeming those parts, leaving only the city of Rome under "foreign" occupation i.e., Papal rule. The Pope's protector was none other than Napoleon III. The Italians wisely bided their time.

In 1870, Prussia provoked a war with France. The Italians took advantage of this distraction to capture Rome by force while the French were engaged in a life or death struggle with Prussia.

A decade later, France recovered from the Franco-Prussian War and pursued conquests in Africa. In 1881, the French seized Tunisia, which the new Italian state coveted. Where once Austria-Hungary was the enemy of Italy, France now assumed that role.

In consequence, in 1882, Italy entered into a Triple Alliance with Germany and Austria-Hungary. Strictly a defensive alliance, Italians learned how its Teutonic allies

could easily go off the track. When Archduke Ferdinand of Austria was assassinated by a Serb in 1914, a full scale European war broke out when Austria-Hungary attacked Serbia. The Italians were never consulted, but were expected to join in as a partner in the Triple Alliance. Clearly, Italy was not obligated,. It remained neutral. However, in 1915, Britain and France seduced Italy into joining the war on their side, promising colonial and European booty. Her erstwhile partners, Germany and Austria-Hungary considered Italy a traitor at that point.

Italy had more to gain as Austria-Hungary's enemy than its ally. Austria held the Italian alpine region of Trentino and the Istrian peninsula, traditionally Roman and Venetian. Moreover, Germany had a long-standing relationship with the Ottoman Turks, an enemy that Italy had fought to victory only three years before in Libya and the Mediterranean.

Clearly, Italy's future now lay with France and Great Britain, if they were true to their words. They were not, as time would tell.

HITLER IMPLEMENTS MEIN KAMPF

W YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, JUNE 18, 1933. XX 3

DOLLFUSS DECLINES



**AUSTRIA'S BATTLE WITH NAZIS
HOLDS ATTENTION OF EUROPE**

Neighboring States See Their Interests Involved in the Fight of Chancellor Dollfuss for His Small Republic's Independence

By EMIL LENGYEL.

THE diplomatic tension between Austria and Germany, the country of birth and the adopted country of Chancellor Hitler, found dramatic expression last week when Chancellor Dollfuss, the smallest and youngest of the dictators of Europe, informed the leading powers of the precarious position Austria was in as a result of the menace of Hitlerism. He was reported to have asked the great powers to exert diplomatic pressure to compel Berlin to desist from further aggressive acts and to induce their nationals to stand by Austria lest the republic be forced to its knees by the German tourist boycott.

This appeal has called attention to the dangerous situation along the Austro-German frontier. How are the lines drawn in this struggle of the two German countries, allies in the World War? What events led up to the crisis? What are the international repercussions of the Austro-German conflict and, particularly, what is its effect on the perennial problem of the Anschluss, the proposed union of the two countries?

Border Guards Strengthened.

Schutzbund. The Christian Socialists, too, had their fighting organization, the Home Defense Force, or Heimwehr. The stage was set for a possible three-cornered fight.

Then came the appointment of Hitler to the Chancellery of Germany, and the Nazis in Austria assumed the offensive. The German Nazis aided them by every means; bombings and assaults were common. It became obvious that the government could not go on governing democratically. At the beginning of March, Chancellor Dollfuss took advantage of confusion in a parliamentary session to send his members home. The Social Democrats did not want to be caught napping, as their German friends had been, and sent out a general alarm to their protective league. They were the largest party in Parliament and they felt they were entitled to seize dictatorial power.

Socialists' Hands Tied.

But the Social Democrats were handicapped. What had been their strength—the concentration of their power in Vienna, the "Red city"—had become their weakness. The provinces were opposed to them and the proclamation of a Socialist di-

reminded his fellow-citizens the other day: "In the Reich the Catholic newspapers are suppressed, priests are being persecuted and the Catholic parties have been shorn of power." Finally, Austria does not want to suffer the fate of Bavaria and of the other German States which have been "coordinated" with Prussia, deprived of their nationhood and placed directly under the orders of Berlin.

Hitler's Goal.

Why is Hitler's Germany so anxious to obtain control of Austria? The answer is given in the first point of the official Nazi program, demanding "the union of all Germans in a greater Reich in accordance with the right of self-determination."

In the official National Socialist Year Book Austria is listed among the German provinces outside of the Reich. There is no separate Austrian National Socialist party; there is only one organization for both German countries. The supreme leader of the entire movement, both in Germany and in Austria, is Adolf Hitler.

In the calculations of the German Reichstag Austria has a special role.

WITHIN SIX MONTHS OF ASSUMING POWER, HITLER EYED HIS AUSTRIAN HOMELAND

Hitler's plans for Austria and the German minorities throughout Europe were announced in *Mein Kampf* for all to see:

"The German people will have no right to engage in a colonial policy until they shall have brought all their children together in one state." [i.e., into the Third Reich]

Austria, in short, was to be Hitler's first victim.

Only a few days after signing the "stabilizing" 4-Power Pact (see p. 18), the Nazis set their sights on destabilizing Austria in preparation for an *Anschluss*, the annexation of Austria. However, Austria's Chancellor Dollfuss modeled his regime on Fascist Italy and become an implacable foe of Hitler and Austrian Nazis.

Austrian Nazis had their own uniformed militia, bombings and assaults were common. Hitler even starved the flow of German tourists into Austria by charging travelers 1,000 Reichmarks for an exit visa. Dollfuss fought back. When he banned militia uniforms the Nazis began wearing dress suits and top hats to get around the ban. No matter, Dollfuss had them arrested anyway. Then, he went to Rome to see Mussolini for back-up.

As the *NYTimes* reported, *"Rome cannot tolerate any form of Anschluss, hot or cold, which would bring a powerful Reich to the gates of Italy."*

Dollfuss returned home and assured his people that Italy would defend Austrian independence.

CONFRONTING HITLER IN AUSTRIA



On March 17, 1934, the Rome Protocols are signed. Italy further isolates Austria and Hungary from Nazi Germany



Just four months after the Rome Protocols linking Italy, Austria, and Hungary - Hitler attempts to subvert Austria.

IT WAS HITLER'S FIRST DEFEAT; BUT ITALY STOOD ALONE

It didn't take long for Hitler to lose his patience with Austria's Chancellor Dollfuss for resisting an *Anschluss*. *Der Führer* had him assassinated. Over one hundred of his followers were also murdered, and more than two hundred suffered serious injuries.

Enraged by Germany's duplicity, Mussolini dispatched 75,000 Italian troops to the Brenner Pass. The Italian military had a complete plan (Plan K) to occupy southern Austria and to deal with both Austrian Nazis and German military units if need be. But Hitler ignominiously backed down and ceased all Nazi depredations in Austria.

Neither France nor Great Britain reacted militarily. Mussolini took note of their hesitation. They could have acted based on the Treaty of Versailles, Article 80:

“Germany acknowledges and will respect strictly the independence of Austria within the frontiers which may be fixed in a treaty between that State and the Principal Allied and Associated Powers; she agrees that this independence shall be inalienable, except with the consent of the Council of the League of Nations.”

Histories of the 1930s rarely inform students of what should be considered Hitler's first defeat.

BEHIND THE BUDDING FRIENDSHIP 1937 - 1938



Mussolini addressing a German audience, in German, during his 1937 visit to the Third Reich. The speech was non-committal, reflecting the informal relations between the two nations.

THERE WAS NO ALLIANCE, ONLY POSITIONING

Mussolini's visit to Germany in 1937 was a propaganda coup for Hitler that meant to impress the man who halted his move to take over Austria three years earlier. Despite the pomp and fellowship Mussolini's mega speech to a rain-soaked throng in Nuremburg, delivered in German, committed Italy to nothing. Later that year, in November, Italy signed on to the Tri-partite anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Japan. This was a defensive pact aimed at the USSR, more form than substance.

A year before, on November 1, 1936, Mussolini first used the word "Axis" (an imaginary line connecting Berlin and Rome) to describe the common interests of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy at the start of the Spanish Civil War. Italy was just beginning to send troops and equipment to that zone in support of Franco's right-wing rebels. Hitler had sent aircraft to transport Franco's troops.

It is also important to note that Nazi Germany did not support the League of Nations sanctions that had been slapped on Italy for its invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. Clearly, Hitler saw an opportunity to separate Italy from France and Great Britain to achieve his goals

By 1937, Italy and its old allies had split politically over the Abyssinian War and now over Spain. Yet, Mussolini had not ruled out some kind of accommodation with them.

In 1938, Hitler came to Italy for a reciprocal visit. Again, the grand reception was not a message of alliance, for the Pact of Steel (the military alliance) wasn't signed until May, 1939. Rather, Mussolini wanted to show Hitler an Italy disciplined and armed. It would be correct to assume on one hand Mussolini wanted to show he would be a strong ally, but also a strong adversary.

THE SPLIT BEGINS 1935

THE MEDITERRANEAN COMES BETWEEN THEM

ABYSSINIA AND LAKE TANA



In a last minute attempt to stop an Italian invasion, the British concocted a way to drag the U.S. into the cal-dron.

Oil promoter Francis Rickett talked Haile Selassie into deeding mineral rights to Standard Oil, an American corporation.

The plan assumed that Mussolini would not dare invade an American concession.



LAKE TANA WAS DEEMED VITAL TO BRITISH EGYPT INTERESTS

Lake Tana is the source of the Blue Nile which feeds the Nile River, Egypt's very essence. Since 1882, Egypt had been a protectorate of the British to insure the security of the vital Suez Canal.

In 1935, when Mussolini's designs on Ethiopia became apparent, the British government formed the Maffey Commission to identify its vital interests in that nation. The commission reported that Lake Tana was vital to the Nile River, and therefore to British Egypt.

As a result of this concern, machinations to thwart an Italian invasion were set in motion. On the diplomatic side, Under Secretary Anthony Eden visited Rome to placate Mussolini with some barren stretch of Somali desert. The dictator responded that he was not a collector of deserts. Meanwhile, surreptitiously, the British ambassador to Ethiopia and confidant to Emperor Haile Selassie, Sir Sydney Barton, apparently introduced that ruler to Francis Rickett, a British oil promoter. After weeks of se-

cret negotiations, Selassie found his rescue in deeding over the mineral rights to half his country to Standard Oil of New Jersey, an American company. Mussolini, it would seem, was now checkmated in his invasion plans.

Unfortunately for Selassie and the British, the United States Congress had recently passed the Neutrality Act. When Congress heard of the Standard Oil contract it quickly barred the company from such a deal.

Rickett, ever the promoter, eventually tried to sell his Ethiopian contract to the Italians for \$5 million after the invasion and annexation of Ethiopia. Suffice it to say, Mussolini had no need of Rickett's contract at that point.

A postscript: on February 9, 2020, *The New York Times* headline story was about the tension between Egypt and Ethiopia over a nearly completed dam on the Blue Nile which is fed by Lake Tana. Britain's past fear is now Egypt's. Will the dam decrease the Nile's volume?

BRITISH LEADERS WERE DIVIDED OVER MUSSOLINI



Alfred Duff Cooper served as Britain's Secretary for War and later First Lord of the Admiralty. In his book *Old Men Forget* (1953), he expressed regret for not taking a stronger stand in Cabinet to favor Italy.



Sir Samuel Hoare served as Foreign Secretary in 1935. He tried to settle the Italo-Abyssinian War in Italy's favor. Labeled an appeaser, he was replaced by Anthony Eden, who despised Mussolini

“THE ITALO-GERMAN ALLIANCE WAS AN ANOMALY.” – Duff Cooper

Mussolini's defense of Austria in 1934 (see p. 37) demonstrated that the two dictators were not of like minds. Moreover, Fascist Italy exhibited none of Hitler's later designs of conquest. Many British leaders admired the Duce's intelligence and accomplishments, including Winston Churchill. Italy's stand against Hitler in 1934 had a lasting effect on Neville Chamberlain who considered Mussolini a check on Hitler right up to 1939.

However, with Italy's saber-rattling in Africa, Brits were divided over pragmatic or ideological approaches to Italian relations. Losing Italy over a colonial issue would destroy collective security against German resurgence. Italy's invasion of Abyssinia in 1935 was pivotal.

British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare authored the secret Hoare-Laval Pact (1935) with French Prime Minister Pierre Laval. This would offer part of Abyssinia

(modern Ethiopia) to Italy, but Hoare was forced to resign in the ensuing public outcry. According to diplomat/author Sir Ivone Kirkpatrick, Hoare's resignation was “*the last chance to maintain a united front against German aggression.*” [Mussolini: A Study in Power, p.330]

As late as 1938, British leader Neville Chamberlain sought to keep Mussolini in the Allied fold. But Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden considered even the thought of pandering to Mussolini as immoral and resigned in protest in February 1938. Ultimately, his view won out.

Wrote former Cabinet Minister Duff Cooper:

“...we should never have driven Mussolini into the arms of Hitler, and that it might not have been too late to regain him...- [Duff Cooper, *Old Men Forget*, 1953]

As a post-war assessment, this is an amazing statement.

THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR DROVE ITALY AND ALLIES FURTHER APART



Mussolini with Generalissimo Francisco Franco. Although Franco admired Mussolini, he steered a very different course.



Italy poured vast resources into the Spanish Civil War. It sent an army of 70,000 men and an air force of some 700 planes.

Mussolini's anti-Communist efforts drained the Italian treasury and depleted the Italian military just before the outbreak of World War II.

BUT STALIN LOST A FOOTHOLD IN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

In 1941, a rather frustrated Mussolini published an invoice in Italian newspapers detailing the financial debt Franco's Spain owed Italy for its help during the Spanish Civil War. The bill came to \$4 billion in today's money. Not a *peseta* was ever repaid to Italy, nor even one military base leased to the Italians.

Britain and the Allies ultimately benefitted from Franco's victory. Communism was stopped in Western Europe; Gibraltar was retained by Great Britain; the USSR never got a base in the Mediterranean; Franco's Spain was too exhausted to join the Axis; and Italian military resources were severely drained.

Italian submarines torpedoed Soviet supply ships arming the Republican side, which paid for supplies in gold. By war's end, Spain's gold reserves were in Stalin's hands, a Communist victory of sorts.

During the war in June, 1937, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden refused to agree with PM Neville Chamber-

lain that the Spanish civil war was a side-show compared to the danger of German aggression and the need to keep Mussolini independent of Hitler. Eden continued to see Mussolini as the main enemy, according to historian Richard Lamb.

[*Mussolini as Diplomat*, p.8]

Only a month later Anthony Eden famously announced at a Cabinet meeting that an agreement with Hitler might have "a chance of reasonable life...whereas Mussolini is...a complete gangster." [*ibid*]

The majority of Eden's Conservative Party leaders were on Franco's side, seeing him as a shield against Communism, according to Lamb. [*ibid*, p.7]

The war also made Italians and Germans "comrades in arms" as they both battled the Communist dominated Republican government. It was during this time that Mussolini spoke of an "axis" of common interests between Rome and Berlin.

MUSSOLINI CONCEDES

AUSTRIA REDUX

THE SAAR EXPERIENCE



German troops enter the Saar 1935



Saarland (lower left, under Rheinland-Pfalz) was occupied after the First World War by the Allies, including Italy, until a plebiscite was held in 1935.

Nahum Goldman of the World Jewish Congress sought Mussolini's intercession on behalf of German Jews in the Saar.



MUSSOLINI RESPONDS TO A JEWISH APPEAL

After the murder of Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss in July, 1934 and Italy's prompt response to Hitler's threat of annexation, Mussolini was seen by the leaders of the world Jewish community as a counterbalance to the Nazi regime.

As a result of the First World War, the German region of Saarland was occupied by the Allies. A plebiscite was scheduled for 1935 to determine if the inhabitants wished to return to German control. Approximately 5,000 Jewish Germans living in Saarland planned to leave if the Nazis gained control. The Nazis, however, would confiscate their assets, including homes, bank accounts, and cash.

Nahum Goldmann of the World Jewish Congress sought

Italy's help in protecting the assets of Jewish residents from Nazi confiscation. He met with Mussolini on November 13, 1934 in Rome. Mussolini promised to help.

As it happened, the League of Nation's commission for the Saar was headed by an Italian at that time. What became the "Resolution of Rome of 1934" did, indeed, "persuade" Hitler to allow Jews to leave the Saar with their assets. Clearly, Mussolini's good will and world public opinion also mattered to him; the summer Olympics were to be held in Berlin in 1936.

Such financial protection was not extended to the Jews of Germany proper, nor to Austrian Jews after the Nazi annexation in 1938.

WILSON'S CALL FOR ETHNIC SELF-DETERMINATION PLANTED THE SEEDS OF ANSCHLUSS



Wilson opened the door to ethnic consolidation.

A German takeover of Austria was a logical extension of ethnic consolidation.



AN ANSCHLUSS WOULD BRING HITLER TO THE ITALIAN BORDER

At Versailles, France's premier Georges Clemenceau told President Wilson and Britain's Lloyd George that he was haunted by the specter of a defeated Germany combining with defeated Austria based on Wilson's program of self-determination. "*You are sheltered, both of you, we are not.*" As a result, such a Teutonic combination was forbidden by the final treaty. (see p.37)

The breakup of the Hapsburg Empire left Austria alone, the only German-speaking territory within the Empire. From that point, a union with Germany was a logical step. In 1926, before Hitler came to power, German General Stuelpnagel listed *Anschluss* as one of four policies to restore German might, just as Clemenceau feared.

Moving Nazi Germany's border to Italy would have disturbing consequences. No longer would Italy have a buffer state between them. The newly conquered *Alto Adige* (South Tyrol) would be at risk as would northeast-

ern cities such as Trieste, which were historically part of Austria-Hungary.

The Rome Protocols (see p.33) were signed on March 17, 1934 with Austria and Hungary to protect Austrian independence and secure Italy's economic ties to both countries, a clear warning to Hitler, who visited Italy later that June. That visit was anything but friendly.

On September 27, 1934, after the assassination by Nazis of Austria Chancellor Dollfuss [p. 37], Italy, France, and Britain agreed to protect Austrian independence. Anti-Fascist activist Gaetano Salvemini reported this prediction by Mussolini in 1934: (written after the war.)

"Hitler will create an army. Hitler will arm the Germans and make war possibly, even in two or three years. I cannot stand up to him alone. We must do something, we must do something quickly."

[*Prelude to World War II*, 1953]

AUSTRIA IS LOST



Hitler enters Vienna a day before the plebiscite that anti-Nazi Austrians hoped would fend off union with Germany.

Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg with Mussolini, a final visit. Italy was Austria's last hope.

"ITALY'S PROTECTION OF AUSTRIA WAS INCAPABLE OF PRACTICAL REALIZATION..."

- BRITISH JOURNALIST George Ward Price quoting Schuschnigg, *Ciano's Diaries* 24 Feb 1938

"...if one Italian soldier sets foot on Austrian territory, the result would be an union sacree against us," continued Ciano's quote (above) of George Price Ward.

By 1938, the Austrian situation had changed considerably from 1934. Mussolini still feared Nazi Germany appearing at the Italian border, but he also knew Italy was no longer capable of protecting Austrian sovereignty. The pan-Germanic movement, fueled by Hitler's astounding transformation of Germany, infected much of Austrian society. The days of Dollfuss's fascist independence from Nazism gave way to an ethnic solidarity pressed on by Seyss-Inquart's Austrian Nazi faction. The Germanic people were coalescing across Europe.

Austrian Chancellor Kurt Schuschnigg was at his wits end in staving off a Nazi takeover. Hitler's easy recovery of the Saar and the Rhineland, as well as his rearmament, bode well for an eventual *Anschluss*. Summoned to Bertessgarten to explain his mistreatment of Austrian Nazis

and resistance to *Anschluss*, Schuschnigg thought he could placate Hitler by promising a plebiscite on *Anschluss* to be held on March 13th. Instead, he was harangued and threatened by the *Führer* who opposed a plebiscite.

Mussolini also warned Schuschnigg against such a vote, fearing the act would actually provoke a German reaction instead of buying time. Sure enough, Hitler decided not to risk a vote, as he feared either losing the vote legitimately or that Schuschnigg would rig it. German troops crossed the border on March 12th with no opposition.

All Mussolini could do was accept the *fait accompli*. Ciano records last minute appeals from the French for a concerted reaction. But, he scoffs,

"After sanctions, the non-recognition of the Empire (Abyssinia) and all the other miseries inflicted on us since 1935, do they expect to rebuild Stresa in an hour, with Hannibal at the gates? Thanks to their policy, France and England have lost Austria." [*Diaries*, March 11, 1938]

NON-BELLIGENCY 1939 - 1940

ITALY BETWEEN THE TITANS

MUSSOLINI FACES THE REALITY OF HITLER'S LIES



The Soviet (Molotov, left) - German Pact (Ribbentrop, center) just before Hitler's invasion of Poland was a shock to Mussolini.



In his decline, Mussolini learned that Hitler planned to annex Italy's Alpine and Adriatic regions (in green)

THE NAZI-SOVIET PACT AND INVASION OF POLAND WERE RUDE AWAKENINGS.

Joseph Stalin was upset by the results of the Munich conference in September, 1938. The Soviets, who had a mutual military assistance treaty with Czechoslovakia, felt betrayed by France, who also had a mutual military assistance treaty with Czechoslovakia.

Stalin faulted the West for actively colluding with Hitler to hand over a Slavic country to the Nazis, and was concerned that the Allies would betray the Soviet Union in the future. This belief, and the promise of a Nazi-Soviet partition of Poland, eventually led to the signing of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact in 1939.

This Pact took France and Great Britain by surprise, not merely because Nazis and Communists made a deal, but because the "encirclement" of Germany no longer existed with the USSR now neutralized. Hitler's next move to reclaim Danzig and eliminate the Polish Corridor (see p.9), appeared to be inevitable with the Pact.

Mussolini knew nothing in advance of the Nazi-Soviet Pact. But, he knew Poland would be Hitler's next victim.

Count Galeazzo Ciano's diaries (Mussolini's son-in-law and Foreign Minister) paint a picture of a tormented *Duce* wavering between avoiding a Polish war, honoring his new alliance with Hitler ("Pact of Steel"), and being left out of war booty. However, Italy's new military alliance with Germany did not require joining German aggression.

To seek cover from *der Führer*, Mussolini submitted a list of material needs for his participation in any war, seventeen million tons, "enough to kill a bull if a bull could read it." as Ciano records.

When the war did break out, and Mussolini receives reports of German atrocities in Poland, he instructs Ciano to inform the foreign press of them: "the world must know." [*Diaries*, 4 Dec 1939]

On November 9, 1939, word that Hitler had survived an assassination attempt in Munich elicited this sentence in Ciano's diary: "...no Italian feels any great joy over the fact that Hitler had escaped death — least of all the *Duce*."

HITLER GETS TOUGH



The region known as Alto-Adige was conquered and made part of metropolitan Italy under Augustus. Evidence can be seen in its Roman ruins.



With its defeat of Austria-Hungary in the First World War Italy took possession of the South Tyrol, an ethnic Germanic region adjacent to the ethnic Italian region of Trento. The combined region was named *Trentino-Alto Adige*.

ALTO ADIGE AGREEMENT STALLS

As part of his seduction of Mussolini Hitler offered to remove the German-speaking community in Italy's *Alto Adige* region (formerly Austria's South Tyrol). This was an amazing offer considering Hitler's goal in *Mein Kampf* was to reunite all ethnic Germans throughout Europe along with the lands they occupied.

As part of the Italo-German understanding, in October, 1939, some 200,000 Germanic people in *Alto Adige* were offered relocation to Greater Germany or dispersion to southern Italy, where the Fascists would Italianize them. It was a cruel choice for abandoning their ancestral home. Nevertheless, about 75,000 German-speakers opted to leave the region.

However by November 21, 1939, Italy's Foreign Minister Galeazzo Ciano noted in his diary that Hitler was delaying the exodus by stretching it out to three years. No doubt, Italy's decision to remain neutral when Germany invaded Poland the previous September influenced Hitler's action. Mussolini was clearly disturbed by the delay, considering it a major point of conflict with Hitler. He continued to forfeit the Brenner Pass, Germany's pathway to Italy.

The news worsened. Ciano notes on December 23, 1939 that he spoke to the German ambassador complaining about a lecture in Prague by the German vice-mayor that called for an eventual German seizure of *Alto Adige*, Trieste, and the Lombardy plain.

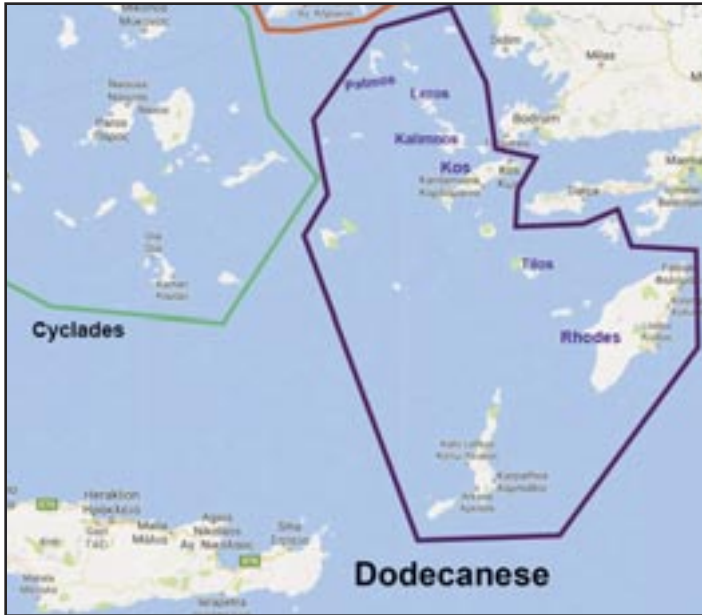
Mussolini was so upset by this revelation, which also mentioned Nazi intentions to violate the new Soviet pact, that he ordered Ciano to send anonymously the Soviet reference in that lecture to the Soviet ambassador in Paris.

If Ciano did as ordered, Stalin had a early warning of Hitler's intentions. Such was Mussolini's anger at his erst-while German ally that he would warn the Communists.

In 1943, when Mussolini was arrested by the King, but later rescued by Hitler to head the puppet state of Salo', Hitler returned German-speakers to *Alto Adige*. Moreover, as German troops occupied northern Italy, Hitler planned to detach Italy's northeast regions and incorporate them into the Reich, just as predicted (see map on p.48).

Today, the Germanic portion of *Alto Adige* is autonomous with guarantees of language and cultural independence.

THE MEDITERRANEAN BECOMES A PRISON



The British and French embargo of neutral Italy would have been enough cause for Italy to declare war on them.

Churchill's quest for Mediterranean dominance at the expense of Italy included a botched invasion of Italy's strategically unimportant Dodecanese Islands in 1943.

EMBARGO AND HARRASSMENT

In the nine months (Sept, 1939 - June, 1940) from the start of World War II and Italy's entry on the side of Germany, Britain and France harrassed Italian shipping within the Mediterranean. Beside the chokepoints of Gibraltar and Suez, the British created a new one at the Dardenelles, entrance to the Black Sea.

Italian merchant ships were regularly stopped and directed to a French or British port for contraband searches. There, the ships would be held for days or weeks. Italian ships were often unloaded for inspection. Sometimes, a ship would undergo British inspection at one port and a French inspection at a different port. Wasted time and fuel were borne by the Italian ships. Perishable cargoes were often lost in the delays. To add insult, the ships had to pay for the port fees as well as the unloading costs. No liability claims were allowed.

In 1939, Italy imported 10 million tons of coal. Most came by ship from Germany. Once the war broke out, the Allies embargoed all German coal by sea - yet another blow to Italy's neutrality.

In some cases, the Allies placed armed guards on Italian ships being delayed to prevent radio communication with Italy. Even mail was impounded and searched, and no doubt read. [see End Notes for embargo information source]

For Mussolini, this treatment was proof that the British had made the Mediterranean a prison. In his declaration of war on June 10, 1940 he stated his case:

"We want to break the territorial and military chains that confine us in our sea. Because a country of 45,000,000 souls is not truly free if it does not have free access to the ocean."

After Italy's entry into the war, Churchill's goal was to crush Italy as a Mediterranean power. It was he that sent Allied troops into the quagmire of the Italian campaign. He further forced his British generals to simultaneously take the Italian Dodecanese Islands off the coast of Turkey (won by Italy in the Italo-Turk War of 1911-12). Like the Italian mainland, the Dodecanese were a graveyard for British soldiers who faced German not Italian defenders.

FASCIST ITALY BECOMES A REFUGE FROM THE HOLOCAUST



Not all internees were housed in barracks. Many were given monthly stipends to rent rooms in rural Italian towns near the camps.

Families remained together and had access to social and religious activities within camps.



Some 9,000 Jewish European refugees sought safety in Fascist Italy. Unlike the ill-fated St. Louis which was turned away by the U.S.

DESPITE THE PACT OF STEEL, ITALY OPENED ITS DOORS TO JEWS

When Fascist Italy enacted the Racial Laws of 1938, some 6,000 Jewish citizens opted to leave their native land, including nuclear scientist Enrico Fermi whose wife was Jewish.

Ironically, even after Italy entered the war, European refugees saw Italy as a temporary safe haven from German occupation elsewhere in Europe. By 1941, approximately 3,000 Jewish refugees from Germany, Austria (including actress Hedi Lamarr), Poland, Yugoslavia and other war-torn areas were allowed into Italy without visas, despite the Racial Laws. These refugees joined the 6,000 foreign Jewish students, tourists, and temporary workers that were previously stranded in Italy by the war. Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi referred to these refugees as

"that flood of thousands of foreign Jews who had found hospitality, and a brief peace, in the paradoxical Italy of those years, officially anti-Semitic."

Foreign Jews were required to relocate to internment

camp or allowed restricted mobility within municipal areas (*"confino libero"*). Internees were usually given living expenses, access to synagogues, as well as entertainment and libraries, and occasional travel passes. These camps were totally different from the German variety and even from the bleak prison barracks used by the United States to confine its 100,000 Japanese American citizens from 1942-1945. Scholar Carlo Spartaco Viterbo notes the absence of physical abuse in the camps. But he suggests that idleness had a demoralizing effect on internees.

There was even a provision in the Racial Laws to allow Jewish immigration to newly conquered Ethiopia, to dissuade Jews from flooding Arab Palestine. Mussolini was sensitive to Arab concerns.

It was only after Italy changed sides during the war in Sept, 1943, and the Germans occupied central and northern Italy, that Jews in that zone were at risk of deportation and death. [The full story is contained in Institute report *Italy and the Holocaust*]

INTERNAL CABALS



Journalist Luigi Barzini, Jr was caught red-handed spying for the British.



King Victor Emmanuel with Britain's King George V in 1923 on a state visit to Italy. European royalty often functioned on its own level.

FASCIST ITALY WAS NOT A TOTALITARIAN STATE, THERE WAS ALSO A KING AND POPE

Mussolini was certainly not a ruthless dictator. He believed in "internal exile" and imprisonment more than liquidation of political opponents. He often walked a tightrope between the Savoy monarchy, which had ultimate control of the military, and the Pope (first Pius XI, then Pius XII) who set the moral tone of the nation. Blind obedience rarely affected Italy's elite society.

Mussolini's relations with King Victor Emmanuel were *"always cordial but never friendly"*, according to *il Duce*. That stemmed from 1925, when the Fascist Grand Council became the highest authority in the kingdom. In 1928, it was authorized to determine the royal succession, a genuine slap at traditional monarchy. Things got worse in 1938, after the conquest of Ethiopia, when the Senate and Chamber of Deputies made Mussolini a Marshal of the Empire. The king was livid, as he was the traditional bestower of military titles. Mussolini dated his later overthrow to this clash in his *Memoirs 1942-43*.

Speaking of the King's parallel universe, Mussolini had this to say: *"That the Crown had a diplomacy of its own, beside that of the government, is certain; not only through the diplomats who always came to report at the Quirinal [King's residence] when they returned to Rome*

but also through the connections of the royal or princely families...of the [international] reigning houses..."
[Mussolini Memoirs, p 157]

Dealing with Italy's elite was also problematic. On April 26, 1940, weeks before Italy's declaration of war against France and Britain, journalist Luigi Barzini, Jr, was arrested by Fascist security for secretly communicating with the British embassy. Barzini was accused of tipping off the embassy that Italian spies were planted in their building. He further informed the Brits that he and other Italian journalists were compelled to support the regime in news articles. In another report he was overheard saying, *"Mussolini is insane."*

Barzini was a popular figure in Italy. His father was a war correspondent and participated in the 1907 Peking to Paris auto race. The younger Barzini was aboard the USS Panay in 1937 when it was attacked by Japanese planes in China. Punishing the popular Barzini for treason was a dilemma for Mussolini.

Nevertheless, Barzini was "punished" with internal exile and sat out the war at Porto Santo Stefano on the scenic Tuscan coast. He never admitted how lucky he was.

THE SIREN OF NAZI SUCCESS



The success of the *blitzkrieg* shocked the world and put fear in Mussolini.



Poland fell in six weeks in 1939. By the spring of 1940, France was on the ropes.

CHOOSING SIDES BECAME LESS A RISK FOR MUSSOLINI

Hitler's amazing victories in 1939 and early 1940 weighed heavily on Mussolini. Back channel appeals from the British and French for him to mediate a cease fire depressed him rather than flattered him. He felt worse with the image of a peacemaker than a warrior. Besides, saving the two allies from total defeat would leave them subservient to Nazi Germany, and Italy alone with little or no material gain.

Mein Kampf already outlined Hitler's plan to leave the British Empire intact, which meant that nation would continue to be a Mediterranean power with continued command of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Moreover, it would remain an African rival in possession of Egypt and Sudan.

Remaining neutral would confirm an image of Italy as a useless Axis partner and leave Italy surrounded by a Nazi-dominated Europe.

The British/French embargo in the Mediterranean had now awakened the House of Savoy to the precarious position Italy was in. The nation was vulnerable to coal shortages and import interruptions (see p.50). On March 14, 1940, three months before Italy entered the war,

Count Ciano was approached by a minister of the King warning him that the King may have to change foreign policy if the embargo worsened. That could only mean dropping out of the Pact of Steel. It appears that Ciano did not share this with Mussolini, but the King was still a major factor in domestic and foreign politics.

Historians see Mussolini as a jackal, entering the war at the last minute to pick up scraps. True to a point, but this myopic view fails to appreciate Italy's dilemma: the Nazi-Soviet Pact and the collapse of the Allies in mid-1940 opened Hitler's way into the Balkans as well as Italy's *Alto-Adige* region and Istria (see p.49).

On the other hand, as Hitler's ally, Italy would preserve its northern borders and preserve its sphere of influence in both the Balkans and the Mediterranean. France and Britain would be diminished and contained.

All things considered, Mussolini made the only practical choice by entering the war. Eventually, the King concurred. They did not foresee Hitler's 1941 invasion of the USSR, Germany's fatal mistake, or the U.S. entry into the war when Axis partner Japan attacked Pearl Harbor.

THE LURE OF SUEZ



It took an angry President Eisenhower to call Eden out on his blatant aggression in 1956.



PM Antony Eden meets with his French co-conspirators during the Suez Crisis in 1956

EVEN AFTER THE WAR, THE CANAL WAS THE NEXUS OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE AND COMMONWEALTH IN AFRICA AND ASIA.

In 1940, Eden stood heroically against appeasement. But it was a less than noble gesture. Historians uniformly equate Eden's stand against Italian expansion as one for world order and justice, to enforce the spirit of the League of Nations. However, above all, Eden was a British imperialist. His motives were always on behalf of his Empire. In 1940, that empire was at its peak and the Mediterranean and the Suez Canal were undeniably the nexus of British operations. To understand this we only need to witness Eden's actions to foment the Suez Crisis in 1956, an attempt to retake the Canal from Egypt, goading Israel to invade Egypt, to protect his Empire and Commonwealth.

Anthony Eden's obsession with Mussolini was transferred to Gamal Abdul Nasser. Eden saw any threat to the Suez Canal as the death-knell of British power, whether it was from Italian expansion in the 1930s or the anti-colonial movement in the 1950s.

The man who called Mussolini "*a gangster*" wanted Nasser "whacked" in 1956. [see End Notes] Few times in history do democratic leaders reveal their true nature.

India may have departed the Empire after the war, but Britain retained oil interests on the Arabia peninsula and in Iraq, as well as a military presence in Jordan. There was also a strategic need for the Canal to reach Kenya Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand.

Before the war, Fascist Italy's access to colonial Eritrea, Somaliland, and Abyssinia was dependent on the Suez Canal. The other sea route would require passage through British Gibraltar and circumnavigating Africa. An alternate land route to these colonies from Italian Libya would have to pass through British Egypt and Sudan.

There can be no question as to the Canal being a major obstacle to any British-Italian *entente*. On this the British refused to compromise.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CONCLUSION

Our contention that the loss of Fascist Italy as an ally in the confrontation with Hitler may still be far-fetched for some historians. Yet, the haunting words of former British Cabinet Minister Duff Cooper, a participant in the politics of the 1930s, but written in 1954, must give pause for reflection. His opinion was shared by Sir Robert Vansittat, also a Cabinet member, as well as many French statesmen at the time.

If we were to accept the premise that the annexation of Austria was the most crucial part of Hitler's master plan — just as he himself wrote on Page 1 of *Mein Kampf* — before the conquest of eastern Europe, would he have invaded Poland in 1939? If Austria were the “red line” agreed upon by France, Britain, (and Italy), instead of Poland, which was unaccessible, what options would Hitler have had? Just as he had a deal with Stalin to launch his campaign into Poland, Hitler made a deal with Mussolini to pave the way into Austria.

Enough mainstream historians concur in describing the relationship between Mussolini and Hitler. It was not so much one of fellow travelers as one of pragmatism — “a brutal friendship,” as Ivan Kirkpatrick wrote. The Pact of Steel, signed in May, 1939 was not the final act in linking the two men, only the penultimate. Italy did not go to war in September, 1939. The nine months between the Hitler's invasion of Poland and Italy's declaration of war on June 10, 1940 tells us much about the relationship between these two men. There was still a gap between them and their respective national interests. Mussolini was not the totalitarian master of Italy, only one of three ruling powers within that nation, including the King and Pope.

Perhaps there are still British documents to be uncovered, to give us insight into the last minute machinations of Churchill to keep Italy non-belligerent. But it is safe to assume the British never intended to radically change their attitude toward the Italian Empire, the *sine quo non* of Mussolini's foreign policy.

In this regard, the British preferred taking their chances with Hitler on a bilateral basis — signing agreements without consulting France, Italy, or the Soviet Union. An Italian Mediterranean was just too much for Britain to bear. In a perverse way, the British welcomed a final showdown with Italy. And although their empire was ultimately lost, they succeeded in relegating Italy to a minor role in the Mediterranean to this day, while Britain still holds strong points on each end of that sea — on Gibraltar and at sovereign bases on Cyprus.

We need to address the idea that appeasement stemmed from the pacifist movement in Britain (see pages 17-20) as expressed in *The Avoidable War* by J Kenneth Brody. While partly true, not all British politicians gave up the heritage of empire so easily. Just as later American politicians justified wars in the Middle East ostensibly for “democracy” the unspoken motivation was oil dependence. Few British politicians in the 1930s spoke openly of their motives to safeguard their empire via the Mediterranean. Instead, we believe, they took the more noble approach in generalities like League justice and disarmament. This report clearly demonstrates that the British had motivations beyond what they preached.

WHAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN

What would the Mediterranean, and ultimately the world, have looked like if Britain and Italy had reached detente? Oddly, historians have never bothered to speculate on such a scenario.

The case has been made many times that Hitler's sole focus was on *lebensraum* in eastern Europe. Holland, Belgium, France, and Britain were not his enemies of choice. Had the Mediterranean and the Balkans remained stable, would the worse scenario have been a German-Soviet War, as Patrick Buchanan offered in *The Unnecessary War*?

In such a case, would Japan have invaded the colonies of unconquered Holland, France, or Britain in 1941? Clearly, Tojo and his military clique took advantage of the collapse of those European mother countries

It is conceivable that colonialism would not have dissolved as quickly as it did if Europe hadn't collapsed on itself. Colonialism may have continued for decades more and evolved into a more structured commonwealth system, allowing Africans and Asians to become self-governing without rebellions, suppression, and mass migrations to Europe and the U.S.

In terms of European populations which were annihilated by global war, the world would probably not today have such an influx of Third World immigrants to make up for the losses. Commonwealth rules may have restricted permanent immigration from colonies, allowing the rise of colonial elites and professionals, educated in the Mother country, to stay within their homelands to elevate the economies and social well being of their own people, colonial corruption and tribalism closely monitored.

We shall never know.

ITALY BETWEEN THE WARS

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End Notes

Page 6: ("I was horrified to get a telephone call over an open line.... in which Anthony Eden said, '*What's all this poppycock you've sent me about isolating and quarantining Nasser. Can't you understand - and if you can't understand it will you come to the Cabinet and explain why - that I want Nasser*', and he actually used the word '*murdered*'." - Anthony Nutting, British Foreign Office Minister of State 1956 in an interview 30 years later "Suez - The Missing Dimension" BBC Radio 4, 28 October 2006

Page 50: "*Mediterranean Highway or Prison?*" Italian Library of Information, NYC, May, 1940

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