**Italian Foreign Policy**

**1922-1939**

**Introduction**

Fascists initially had little in the way of a coherent foreign policy.

As a result they relied on the established Italian diplomatic community

The fascists were also influenced by the Italian Nationalist Association, which had long advocated imperialist expansion in the Balkans and in Africa

Mussolini also equated national vitality with imperialist expansion and continually used aggressive foreign policy to stabilize his own authority

During the 1920s France was the strongest continental power and Great Britain controlled the Mediterranean Sea

Italy could not tolerate a strong power on its northern border and was therefore happy to keep Austria autonomous but weak

In dealing with European affairs Italy had to either negotiate with he victors of Versailles or play France and Britain off against each other, the whole while keeping a wary eye of Germany

Relations with the Western Powers

Italian relations with the USA was dictated by its war debt to the Americans and its need for loans

After 1923 Britain became more friendly with Italy which hoped to use this to garner concessions in Africa

France and Italy did not get along so well. They shared a border and both had interests in North Africa

**The Balkans**

Friction between Yugoslavia and Italy over the city of Fiume which had been an independent city since 1920

Italy and Yugoslavia came to an agreement over Fiume in 1924 - annexed to Italy for other concessions

Yugoslavia and Italy then drifted apart and friction arose over Albania

Albania will later sign an treaty with Italy making it a semi protectorate of Italy

Italy sought to surround Yugoslavia and indirectly the Little Entente (Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, and Rumania) by creating a treaty system with Albania, Bulgarian and Hungary. This also served to threaten France who depended on the Little Entente as a counter weight to a resurgent Germany

In the end, Fascist Italy gained little in the international arena during the 1920s. Mussolini was unable to exploit any advantages such as good relations with Great Britain. In colonial matters it looked as though Italy was losing influence, especially in Africa.

**1930s**

In 1932 Mussolini took the position of foreign minister and began to assert his own ideology and personality in matters of diplomacy.

He looked to Germany and supported a more active role for Hitler’s Germany in Europe. He saw Italy as the mediator between Germany and France and great Britain

When Engelbert Dollfuss became Austrian chancellor, Italy supported him - even when he outlawed the Nazi party. Dollfuss established a corporative state in 1934, but was assassinated the same year.

Mussolini moved Italian troops to the Brenner frontier to dissuade Hitler from any aggressive move into Austria

Abyssinia (Ethiopia)

Timing was important - Germany had begun to rearm, but was not a threat as yet. A rising Germany made France more inclined to cooperate with Italy by looking the other way in Africa.

Mussolini’s regime was moribund at home. All that remained was the cult of personality that surrounded Mussolini himself. There was an appetite for expansion among common Italians. certain special interest groups ie. those industrialists who supplied the army were also in favour of military activity.

On October 3, 1935 Italian troops invaded Abyssinia. Four days later the League of Nations voted sanctions against Italy. A compromise deal was brokered by British Foreign Secretary Sir Samuel Hoare and French Foreign Minister Pierre Laval (Hoare-Laval Pact) whereby Mussolini would get most of Ethiopia in return for a cease fire. Public opinion killed the deal.

The sanctions were largely ineffective because petroleum products were exempted from the sanctions and non-League countries such as the USA, Japan, and Germany refused to obey the boycott. Great Britain likewise refused to close the Suez Canal to the Italian.

By may, 1936 the Italians had conquered Abyssinia.

The war was popular within Italy

**Agreement with Germany**

In July 1936, Austria and German signed an accord which established Austria as a German state - Anschluss

At the same time Germany concluded a pact with Italy

* Coordination of policy on the League of Nations and Spain
* Italian recognition of Austro -German agreement
* German recognition of Italian Ethiopia
* Called by Mussolini the “Rome-Berlin Axis”
* Neither a political nor military alliance

**The Spanish Civil War**

July 1936 - Republican Gov’t of Spain overthrown by military led by Francisco Franco who asked immediately for air and naval support from Italy.

Intervention motivated by:

* Fear of Soviet influence
* Dissatisfaction with Spanish republican gov’t.
* Vague ideas about expanded influence in the Mediterranean
* Not particularly ideological

Italy sent 72,000 troops

The campaign diverted Italy from other foreign policy objectives and increased friction with Great Britain and France. Italy got little in return.

Arms producers made money. Unemployment was temporarily relieved.