

**Prof. B. Pierri**  
**History of Italian Foreign Policy**

**Fascist Middle Eastern Policy: Towards  
the War, 1938-1940**

**April 5th, 2016**

# **Eastern Accords and Suez Canal**

- **Italian ships amounted to 20% of traffic across Canal, second only to British, but no Italian was member of Suez Canal Company**
- **British stated Canal was essential mean of communication between UK and India as well as Italy and Italian colonies, fearing that Italy would seek co-responsibility in canal defence**
- **Annex 8 was only reaffirmation of 1888 Constantinople Convention**

# **Convention of Constantinople**

- **Article I, guaranteeing passage to all ships during war and peace**
- **Article X allowed the Khedive to take measures for "the defence of Egypt and the maintenance of public order"**
- **The latter clause was used by the British in WW2 and by Egypt against Israel after 1948**
- **At the beginning of WW1, Egypt declared Canal would be open to ships of all nations, but Britain converted occupation into Protectorate, and barred Canal access to enemy ships**



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# Libya and Egypt

- According to Easter Accords, Italy to reduce garrisons in Libya
- Due to Spanish crisis and Italian involvement, Mussolini ordered to double garrison in Libya, while some British troops were moved from Palestine to Egypt
- After Munich agreement, Mussolini appeared as European mediator
- Accords ratified Nov 16, 1938, after withdrawal of Italian volunteers from Spain
- Mussolini to Ciano: Italian policy does not change:
  - A) In Europe, Axis fundamental
  - B) In Mediterranean, collaboration with UK as long as possible
  - C) France is out, due to specific Italian claims

# **Anti-French tide**

- **Italians encouraged Turks to seize port of Alexandretta, despite later French recognition of Italian Empire**
- **Ciano spoke about Italian aspirations on Tunisia, Nice, Savoy, Corsica, Djibuti**
- **Mussolini-Laval agreements denounced**





Ankara

Diyarbakir

Kahramanmaraş

**TÜRKİ**

Incirlik Air Base

Iskenderun

Aleppo

**SYRIEN**

Homs

Damaskus

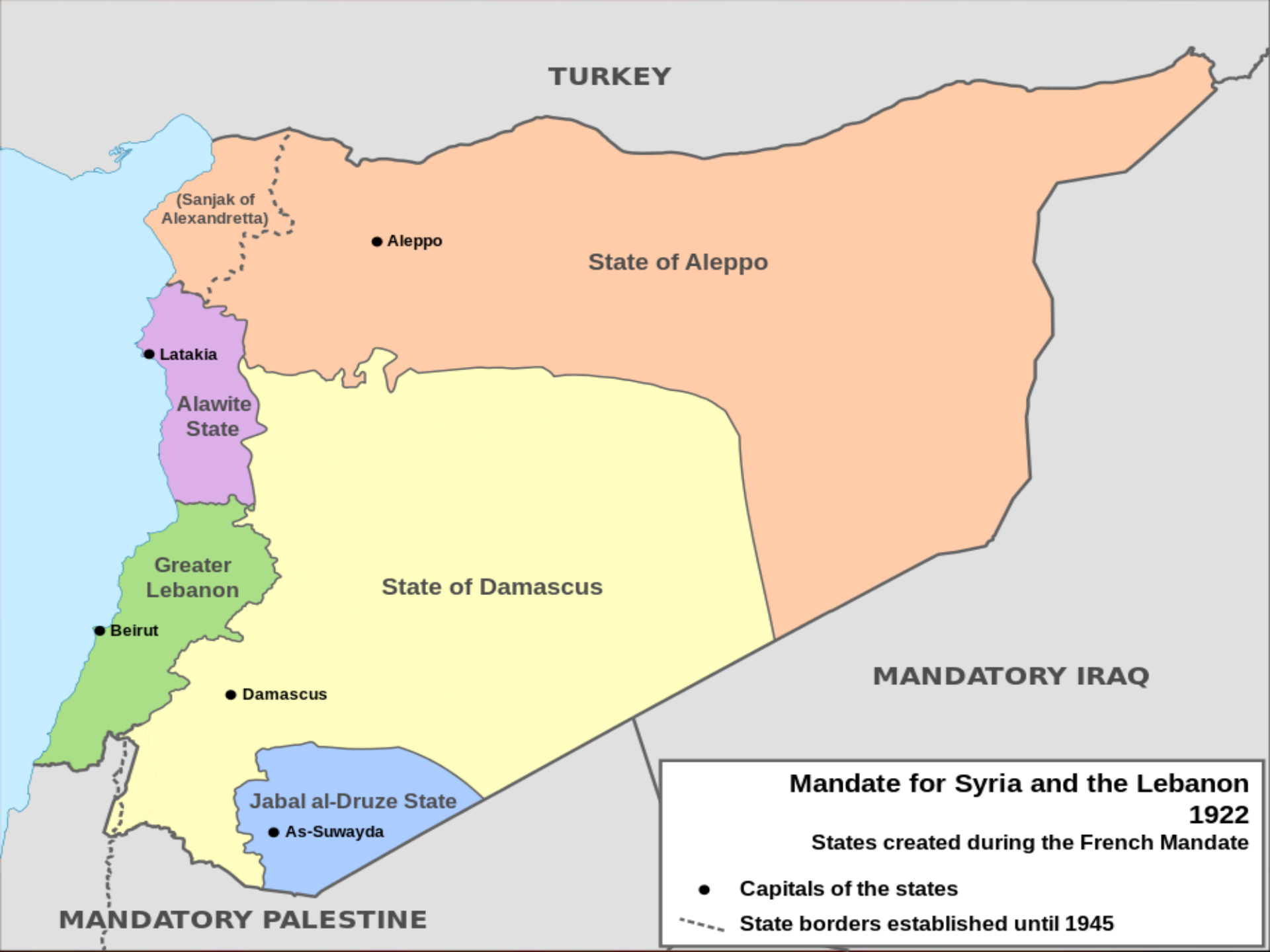
**IRAK**

**LIBANON**

**JORDANIEN**

**ZYPERN**







# **Impero and military planning**

- **Nov 1938: Iraq, S. Arabia, Egypt recognised Italian Empire**
- **Italian East Africa unable to support large scale attack against Sudan and Egypt**
- **In case of war, defensive strategy on Tunisian border and offensive from Cyrenaica towards Egypt**
- **Libya depended on support from the sea, as it was surrounded from three sides**
- **Little could be done in Mediterranean against UK bases in Gibraltar, Egypt, Cyprus, Malta**
- **Mussolini's appetite shifted towards Balkans by taking advantage of Hitler's evident intention to crush Poland**
- **Apr 1939 Italian occupation and annexation of Albania and preparation of invasion of Greece**
- **Mass emigration of new settlers to Libya**





MEDITERRANEAN SEA  
0 km 100 200 300 km  
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- over 1,000,000
  - over 200,000
  - other main city
  - National Capital
- KOSOVO under provisional administration.  
FYROM, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.  
The formal designation KOSOVO is used for the status of this city, however, it is not the status of the city, but the status of the city.





# Racial Policies

- **Jul 1935: fascism acknowledged existence of races and their differences and hierarchy, but Italy did not claim segregation and racial hatred**
- **May 1936 proclamation of Empire: Fascism to defend racial prestige and prevent madamismo - settlers living more uxorio with indigenous women. The “madamas” were a colonial adaptation of contractual marriages or concubinage. On a higher level than prostitutes but the relationship was always one of “master – slave”**
- **Jan 1937: Italians in Empire – full and absolute separation of races**
- **Racial laws in Italian East Africa**
- **1938 Balbo’s proposal to grant full Italian citizenship to Libyans opposed by Fascist hierarchies**



# **Informazione Diplomatica n. 18**

- **While other powers were able to rule colonies through small number of officials, Italy obliged to send settlers to Libya and Eastern Africa**
- **To prevent catastrophic creation of bastard race not only through laws, but also through racial consciousness**
- **Sort of apartheid established in East Africa**
- **In Libya Balbo, though still racist, differed from Mussolini**
- A) Low opinion of Black in Fezzan**
- B) Inhabitants of coast viewed as descendants of great ancient civilization**

**Balbo aware of nationalist revolt outlook. He showed respect for religious customs and collaborated with local elite**

**Muslim population to elevate morally and socially to be integrated in Fascist schemes**

**Libyans could be appointed podestà of local communities, but not of mixed ones**

**Balbo's policy defeated. In 1939 Libyans could not even touch Italian women – violation of racial prestige**

# Anti-Semitism

- Available sources do not confirm theory according to which Mussolini implemented racial laws in Oct 1938 to please Arabs
- Sept 1938: Dux personally drafted "Declaration of Race": Grand Council does not exclude possibility of allowing free and controlled immigration of European Jews into some areas of Ethiopia. Ciano added that Italy had to avoid emigration of Jews to Palestine
- Anti-Semitism was intended only for Jewish element

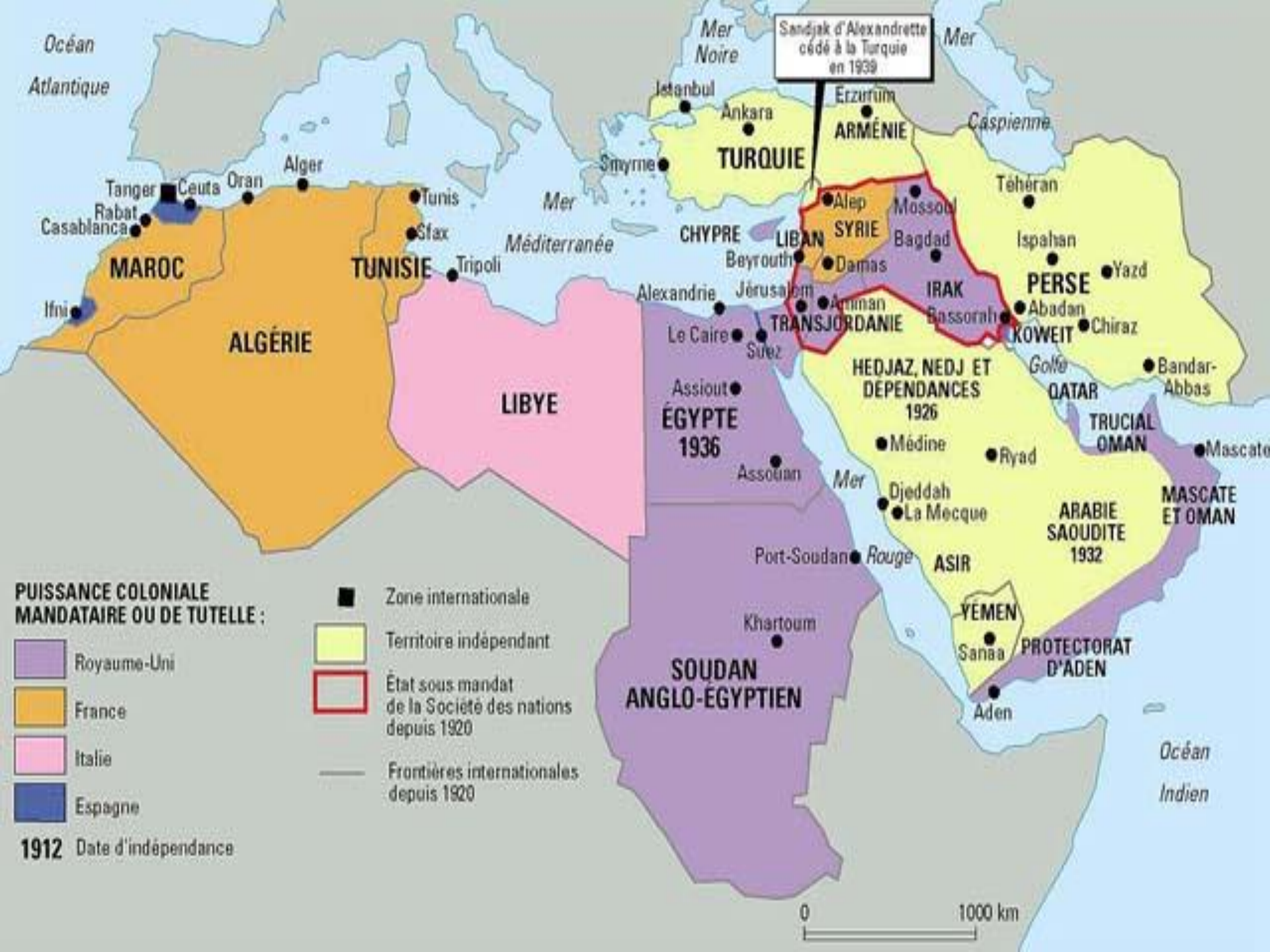
# Albania

- **Apr 7, 1939: occupation**
- **Half population of Albania was Muslim**
- **Ciano said they would be happy to benefit from Italian civilization**
- **Muslims in the world criticised annexation: King of Egypt had Albanian origins, Tunisian and Syrian nationalists ridiculed Mussolini, who claimed to be protector of Islam, while conquering Muslim populations**
- **Germany made no claims to Arab territory!**



# British and French Moves in Middle East

- Late 1938-early 1939:
  - A) UK managed to quell Arab revolt through combination of force, encouragement of intra-Arab rivalries and policy of appeasement (restriction of Jewish immigration to Palestine)
  - B) France handed Syrian coastal district of Alexandretta to Turkey to ensure Turkish goodwill in case of European war
  - C) French PM Daladier visited Tunisia in Jan 1939 and met local leaders, recalling Tunisians died in WW1
  - D) Mar 1939: Daladier's speech in Algeria honouring attachment of Muslims to France



# **Italian Prestige in Middle East**

- **Italy eclipsed by Nazi Germany**
- **In Egypt Italy's sympathisers restricted to extreme right wing Young Egypt**
- **Anti-British Egyptian military in touch with Italians:**
  - A) Egypt to adopt racial policy to banish coloured elements to Sudan**
  - B) Egypt to make sure that Italy had no intention of conquest**
  - C) May 1940: Egyptian Premier expressed sympathy with Italy's claims on Tunisia and administration of Suez Canal**
  - D) British put pressure on King to replace Premier and Chief of General Staff**
- **Egyptian lower classes did not feel sympathy for Italy: colonisation of Libya and Albania as evidence of domination on Islam**



# WW2 Breakout

- **Most Arab countries chose to support Britain and France**
- **Egypt and Iraq severed diplomatic relations with Germany**
- **Anti-British press in Palestine moderated tones towards UK and denounced Nazi racial ideology**
- **Italy's decision not to join war applauded**

# Fascist Grandeur

- **1939: Dux convinced that Italy could never become world power if confined in Mediterranean**
- **Italy to break Mediterranean prison and march to Oceans**
- **Decisions vague and broad: which ocean should Italy march on?**
- **However, Dux hoped war would not break out before 1942-43**

# War Theatres

- Middle East as war theatre where Dux tried to enlarge Italian possessions
- A) De Felice – Arab policies only central to Mussolini's strategy after intervention in war
- B) Anglo-Saxon historiography: Middle Eastern ambitions as logical outcome of previous policies in new warfare conditions – colonial stability now far less important
- Once French Empire out of game (with armistice, France had kept colonies), only way for Italy to enlarge possessions was either at British expense, or independent Arab States

# **Territorial Guarantees**

- **Feb 1940: Dux confident allies would lose war**
- **Need for Italy to gain access to open seas – only then will Italy be a real empire**
- **Mar: allied blockade of German coal, on which Italy depended**
- **Apr 2: Dux told his ministers he wanted to join war with Germany, but with her own aims:**
  - A) Mediterranean Empire**
  - B) Access to oceans, but he did not specify which one**
  - C) Unlike 1915, war started without specifying definite territorial compensations**

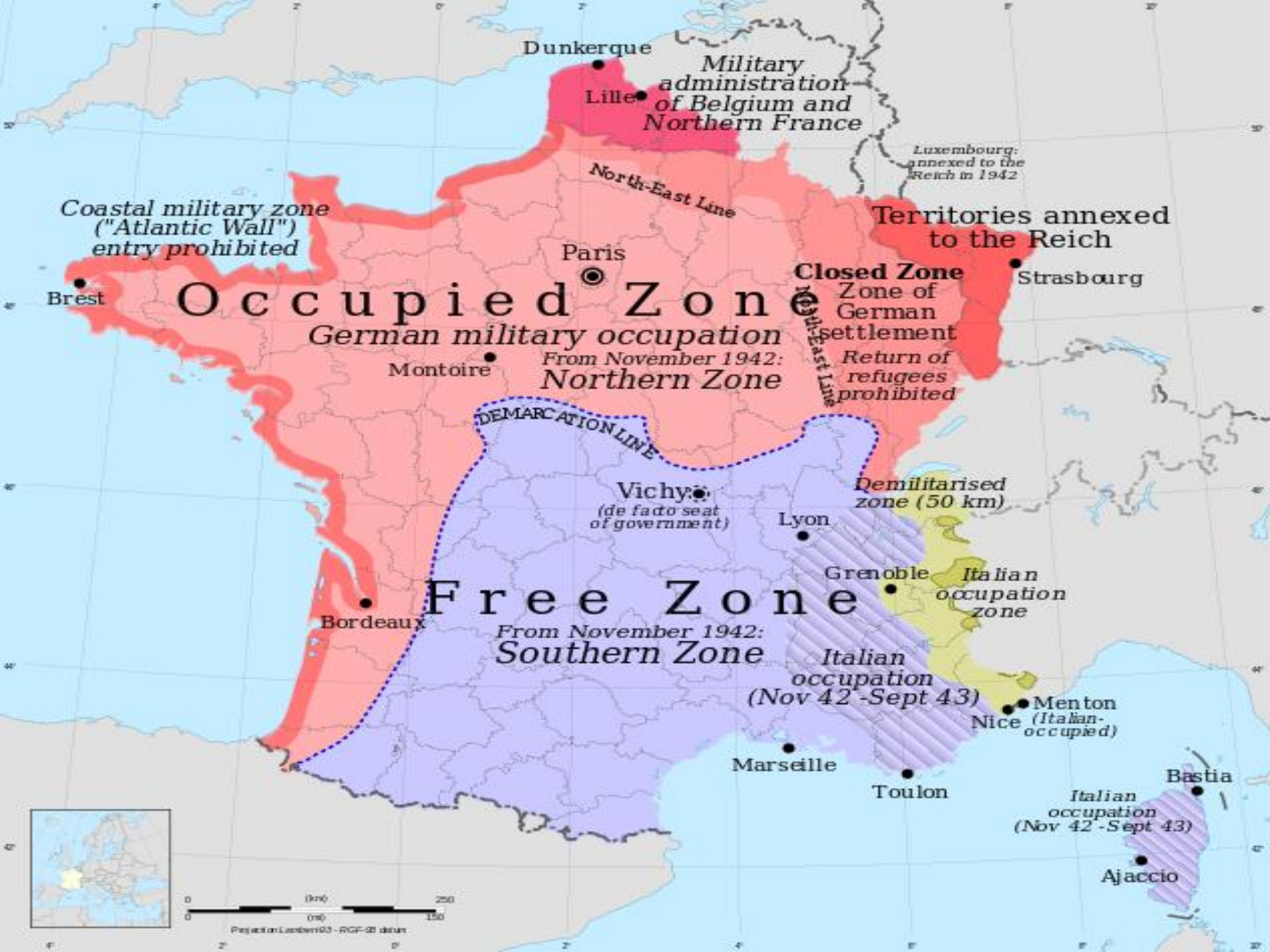


# Ciano's Design

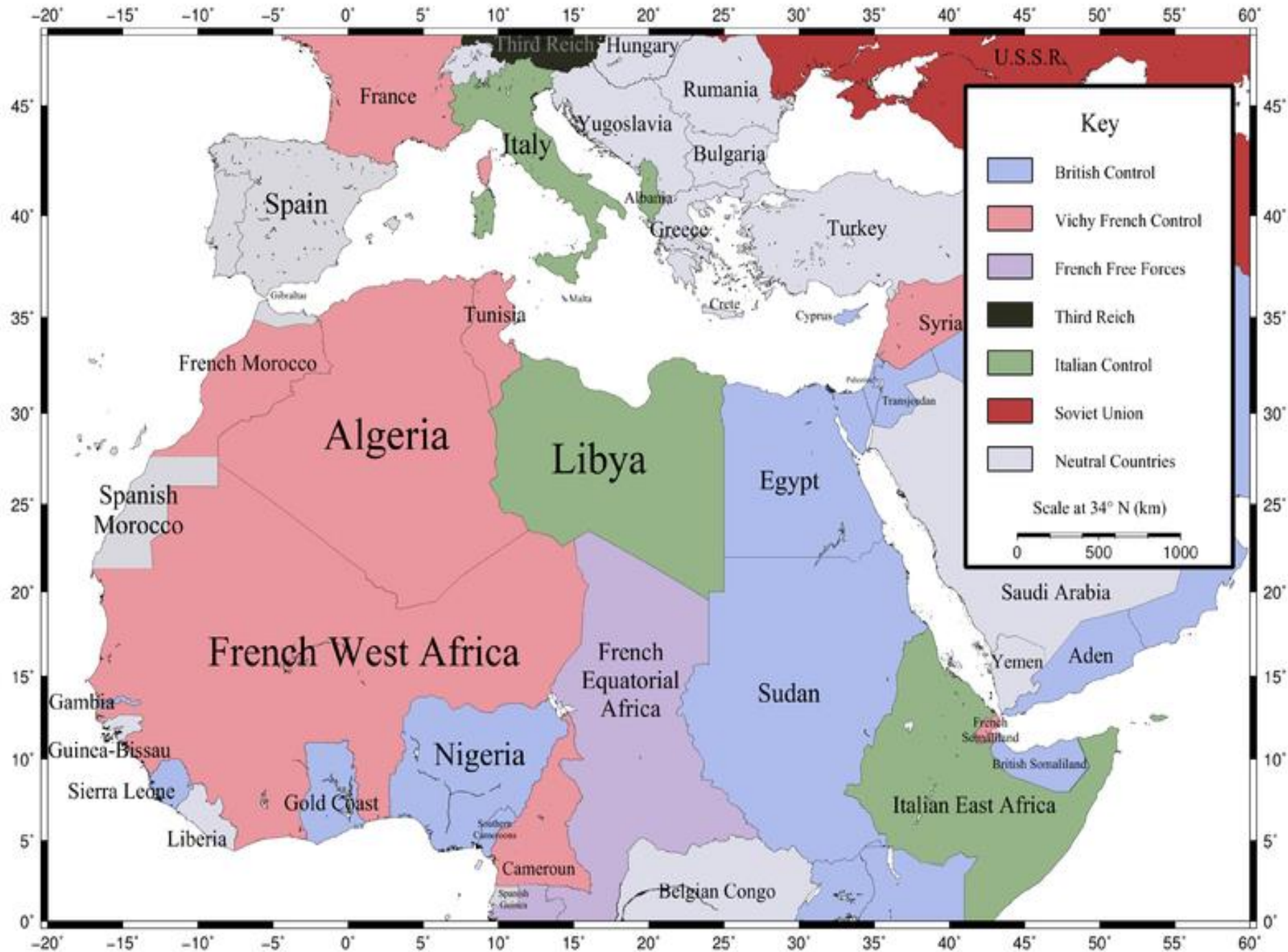
- A) Enlarging Albania at expense of Yugoslavia**
- B) Corsica**
- C) Protectorate over Greece, Egypt, Algeria, Morocco – French availability to talk on Algeria and Tunisia too late**
- D) Necessity to reach written agreement with Hitler on Italy's conditions to enter war**
- Jun 10, 1940 – Italy's entrance into war without any promise of territorial compensation from Germany**

# Italian Armies

- **Mussolini: only territories conquered by Italian arms were certain to come under Italian rule**
- **Order to attack France on Jun 15, hoping to capture Nice, Corsica, Tunisia**







# Claims against Britain

- **Ciano to Ribbentrop: from UK Italy would claim:**
  - A) Malta**
  - B) Dismantling of British bases in Mediterranean**
  - C) Replace of Britain in Sudan and Egypt**
  - D) Syria, Lebanon and Palestine to become independent and sign mutual assistance treaties with Italy**
- **Hitler: Mediterranean and Adriatic belong to historical Italian sphere of influence, but too much appetite might induce French navy to join British**
- **Franco-Italian armistice signed Jun 24 without any significant battle**

# **Plans for Post-war Middle East**

- **War soon to be won**
- **Focus not on military plans to secure victory, but on geo-political plans for post-war period**
- **Huge African Empire and wide zone of influence in Middle East**



# Africa

- **Sudan to come under direct Italian control, as indispensable link between North and East Africa**
- **Egypt would accept loss of nominal control on Sudan in return for full independence from UK and some territorial expansion**
- **Sinai to be ceded to Italy, in order to be able to exercise influence on Palestine and Arabian Peninsula**
- **Suez Canal to be possessed by Italy, at least Eastern shores**
- **Egypt to remain independent, as important Muslim country: attempt to annex Egypt would cause negative repercussions in colonies and Arab world**
- **Egypt would have no choice but to collaborate with Italy, as it would be surrounded by Italian territories**



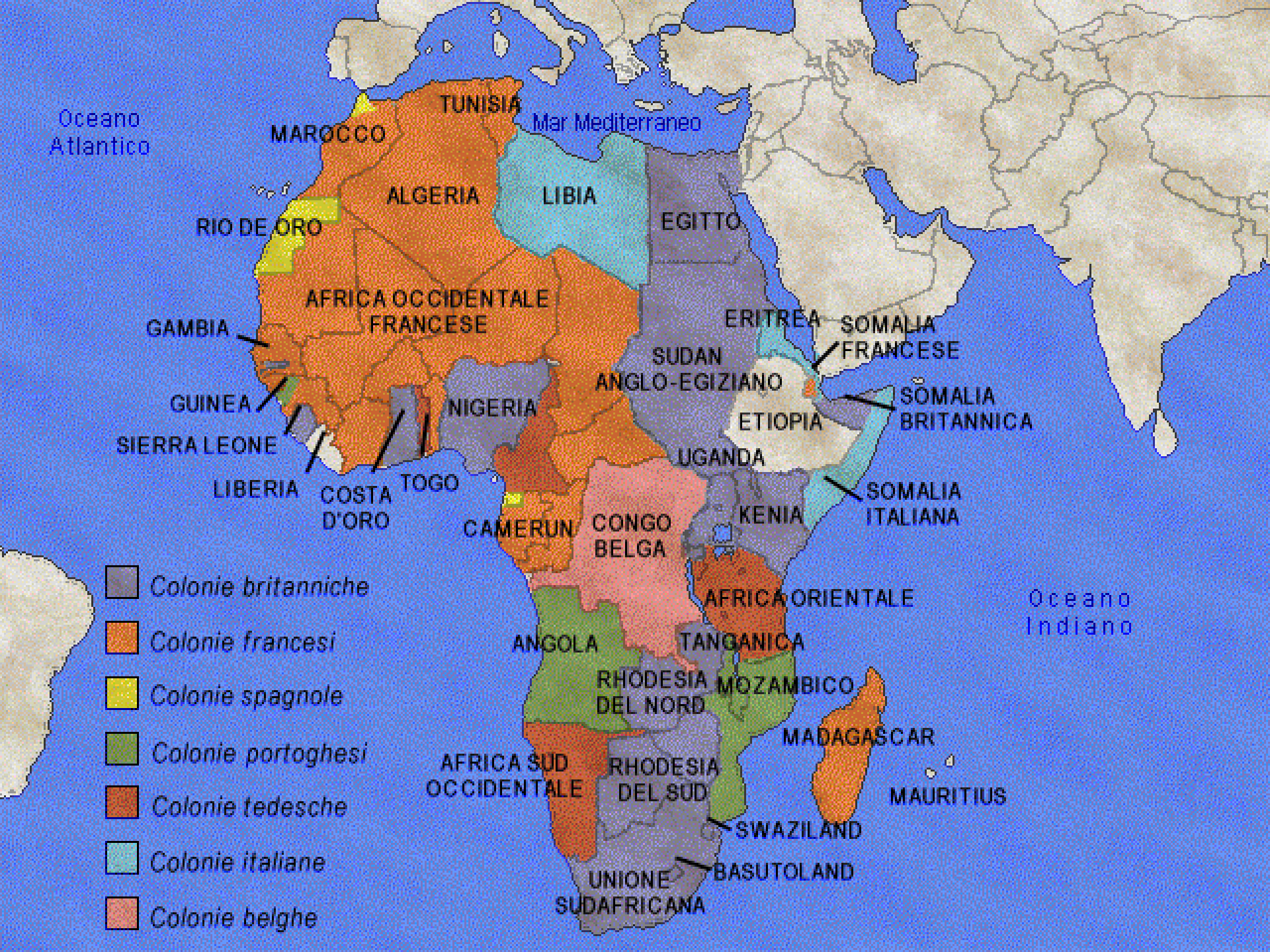






# Africa

- **Whole Africa turned into German, Italian, Spanish and Portugues sphere of influence, except independent Egypt and South Africa**
- **Total removal of Belgium**
- **Nearly total removal of Britain and France**
- **Small African territory to be set aside for Jews of Europe**
- **Italy to gain Horn, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, Northern Chad, and Tunisia in order to secure access to Indian and Atlantic Ocean, as well as satisfy economic needs**



Oceano  
Atlantico

Mar Mediterraneo

Oceano  
Indiano

-  *Colonie britanniche*
-  *Colonie francesi*
-  *Colonie spagnole*
-  *Colonie portoghesi*
-  *Colonie tedesche*
-  *Colonie italiane*
-  *Colonie belghe*

TUNISIA  
MAROCCO  
ALGERIA  
LIBIA  
EGITTO  
RIO DE ORO  
AFRICA OCCIDENTALE FRANCESE  
GAMBIA  
GUINEA  
SIERRA LEONE  
LIBERIA  
COSTA D'ORO  
TOGO  
NIGERIA  
SUDAN  
ANGLO-EGIZIANO  
ERITREA  
SOMALIA FRANCESE  
SOMALIA BRITANNICA  
ETIOPIA  
UGANDA  
KENIA  
SOMALIA ITALIANA  
CAMERUN  
CONGO BELGA  
AFRICA ORIENTALE  
ANGOLA  
TANGANICA  
RHODESIA DEL NORD  
MOZAMBICO  
MADAGASCAR  
MAURITIUS  
AFRICA SUD OCCIDENTALE  
RHODESIA DEL SUD  
SWAZILAND  
UNIONE SUDAFRICANA  
BASUTOLAND



**ALGERIA**

**LIBYA**

**EGYPT**

**NIGER**

**CHAD**

**SUDAN**

**NIGERIA**

**CAMEROON**

**CENTRAL AFRICAN REP.**

LIBYA & DESERT

Tropic of Cancer

Aozou

Bardai

Zouar

Qunianga Kebir

Faya Largeau

Feda

Koro

Toro

Biltine

Abeche

Oum Hadjer

N'Djamena

Mao

Ati

Bol

Marduguri

Maroua

Sarh

Koumra

Ndélé

Garoua

Lai

N'Gaoundéré

Bozoum

Bossangoa

Bria

Batouri

Wāw

Rumbek

Nyala Ubayyid

Maradi

Hadejia

Kano

Zaria

Abuja

Makurdi

Enugu

Aba

Bamenda





# **Juridical Reasons**

- **Claim for French and British territories as implementation of colonial compensations promised in Treaty of London 1915**
- **Claim on Chad due to Ottoman declaration 1880, according to which Libyan territory extended all the way to Lake Chad**
- **Claims on Tunisia due to assertion that before 1881 the country had been dominated by Italians, who had turned it into blossoming garden**