

Prof. Bruno Pierrri

History of Italian Foreign Policy

Liberal Italy's Middle East Policy
March 11th, 2015



Historiographic Debate

- ▶ Italian school of thought

- ▶ Renzo De Felice:

Fascism pursued opportunistic policy, using Arab nationalism as a lever towards Britain and France making concessions – Arabs sacrificed on altar of agreements with London

- ▶ Rosaria Quartararo:

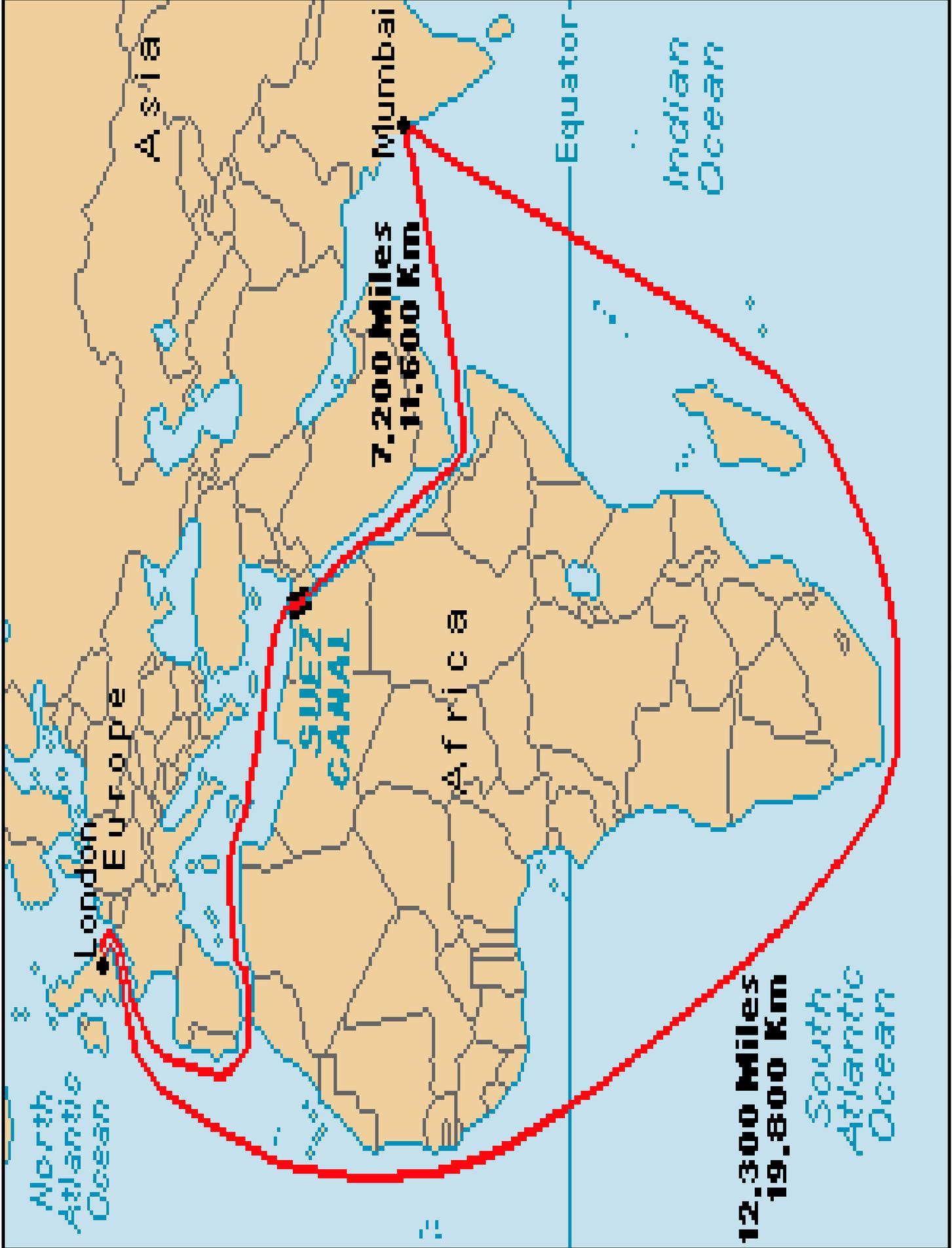
despite Mussolini's attempts to influence Middle East and Red Sea areas, he was always aiming at reaching agreement on Europe. Had it not been for British and French refusals, the Duce would have not joined Hitler

Anglo-Saxon Historiography

- ▶ **Territorial Expansion and Ideology: Italian Lebensraum in Mediterranean and Middle East**
- ▶ **Mussolini aimed at making up a real Empire, stretching from East Africa and Red Sea, through North Africa up to the Balkans: in order to achieve this, Italy had to confront democracies**
- ▶ **Myth of Rome and social Darwinism**

Triangle of Aims

- A) Traditional foreign policy: Mussolini inherited Libyan and Ethiopian issues; Balkan aims always claimed by Italy**
- B) Fascist expansionist policies**
- C) Colonial and economic considerations**
- ▶ Triangle broken with WW2: expansion through military conquest, leading to other annexations at peacetable**
- ▶ Fascist foreign policy rarely influenced by domestic considerations: top down policy decided by élite of nation**
- ▶ Politics not really influenced by economy, despite some Italian financial and commercial interests, and despite need of Middle East oil**



London

Europe

Asia

Mumbai

7,200 Miles
11,600 Km

SUEZ
CANAL

Africa

Equator

Indian
Ocean

12,300 Miles
19,800 Km

South
Atlantic
Ocean

Pre-Fascist Interests

- ▶ **Northern Industrial imperialism: quest for markets, raw materials and investment opportunities**
- ▶ **Southern demographic policies: search for land where surplus population could be settled in prosperity under Italian flag**
- ▶ **Unlike European colonial powers, in Italy the State had to encourage capitalists to invest in colonies**

Beginning of colonial policy

- ▶ **Italy aimed at controlling Tunisia, but French initiative turned her into protecorate in 1881**
- ▶ **Italian colonialism shifted to Horn of Africa, by gaining Assab and Massawa on Red Sea (1882-1885)**
- ▶ **Some Italian entrepreneurs already working there**
- ▶ **Italian aspirations backed by UK, but not towards Sudan**





Crispi

- ▶ **Revolutionary spirit and strong patriotism**
- ▶ **Power politics and civilization mission**
- ▶ **Rivalry with France and Mediterranean expansion**
- ▶ **Austria as a stronghold against Russian expansionism in Balkans and Slavic hegemony over Adriatic**

Treaty of Wuchale (Ucciali)

- ▶ Agreement through which the whole of Ethiopia could be turned into Italian protectorate
- ▶ May 2, 1889 Treaty of Wuchale: according to Italian interpretation, Ethiopia not only recognised Italian control on Eritrea, but also became an Italian protectorate
- ▶ 1890 Eritrea became Italian colony



Wuchale

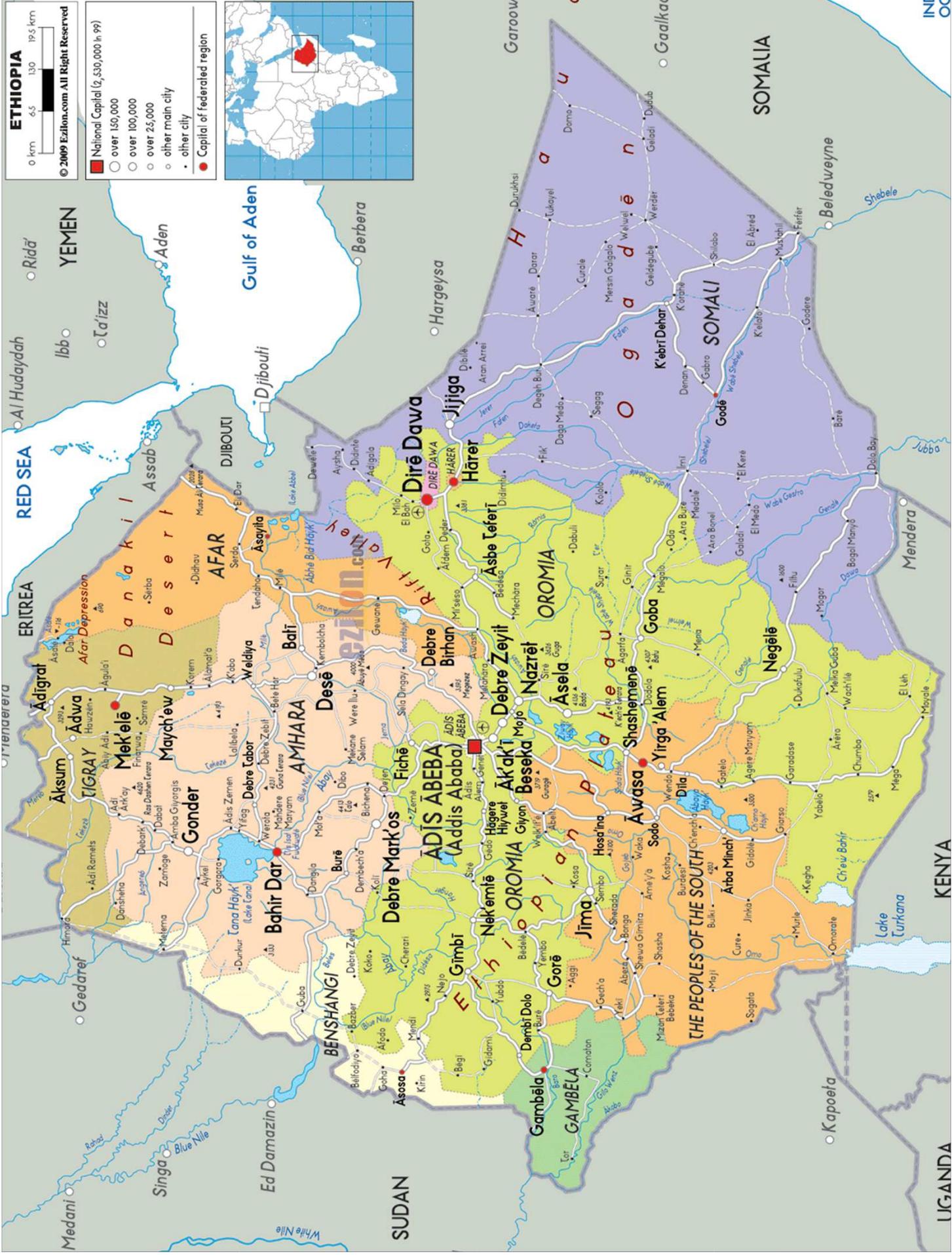
Ethiopia

Problems of Interpretation

- ▶ **Italian translation obliged Ethiopian Government to use Italian diplomacy to have relations with all other European nations**
- ▶ **Ethiopian text provided only the faculty for Addis Abeba to use Italian diplomacy in foreign relations**
- ▶ **In 1890 Menelik had invited Russian and British Sovereigns to his own coronation: He was replied that they could not directly answer him, due to the treaty undersigned**
- ▶ **Ethiopia started purchasing weapons and military operations against Italy began**

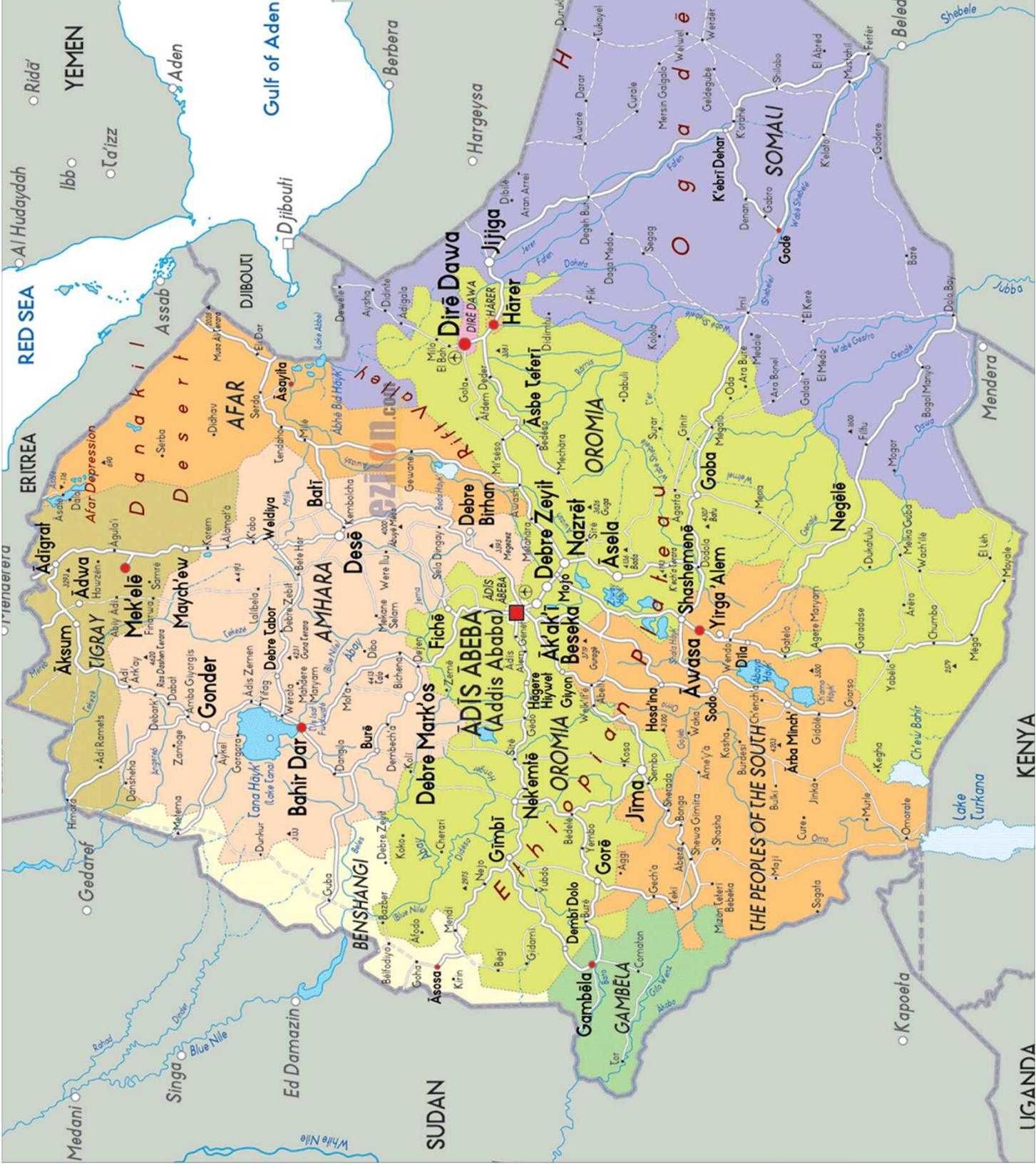
Adwa

- ▶ **January 1895: Italians occupied Tigray, formally part of Ethiopian empire, but autonomously ruled by a rival of Menelik's**
- ▶ **Italy hoped to gain a position of strength from which negotiate with Negus**
- ▶ **Menelik broke the treaty and waged war on Italy**
- ▶ **March 1, 1896: Italian troops scattered and with bad liason**



ETHIOPIA
 0 km 6.5 13.0 19.5 km
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- National Capital (2,430,000 in 99)
- over 150,000
- over 100,000
- over 25,000
- other main city
- other city
- Capital of federated region



ERITREA **YEMEN** **SOMALIA** **KENYA** **LUGANDA** **SUDAN** **GAROO** **GAALKA** **IND OCEAN**

The aftermath

- ▶ **Crispi resigned**
- ▶ **October 1896 treaty of peace: negus acknowledged Italian sovereignty on Eritrea, but treaty of Wuchale was abrogated and Italy gave up any interference in Ethiopian politics**

Italo-Turkish War 1911-1912

- ▶ **French and British control on Northern Africa**
- ▶ **France tempted to extend influence along the whole African coast**
- ▶ **In order to pursue her interests, Italy decided to occupy Libya**
- ▶ **Economic penetration already on for years**
- ▶ **Constantinople tries to harm Italian projects and backs German trade**
- ▶ **Italian allies thought war against Turkey might weaken Ottoman Empire, thus favouring nation States in the Balkans, as well as Russian influence**



The War

- ▶ **Declaration of war 29.09.1911**
- ▶ **Austria thought of prehemptive war against Italy, but at the same time objected departure of Turkish ships (better to localise conflict)**
- ▶ **However, no action taken to stop war: neutrality to gain Italian amity**
- ▶ **Dodecanese islands occupied (Apr 1912). Austria worried about widening of conflict towards Turkish shores**
- ▶ **France and Britain aimed at Mediterranean entente with Italy**
- ▶ **Spring 1912 alliance Serbia-Bulgaria-Greece-Montenegro**
- ▶ **8.10.1912: war against Turkey**
- ▶ **18.10.1912 Peace of Lausanne and assignment of Libya to Italy: immediate great powers' recognition**