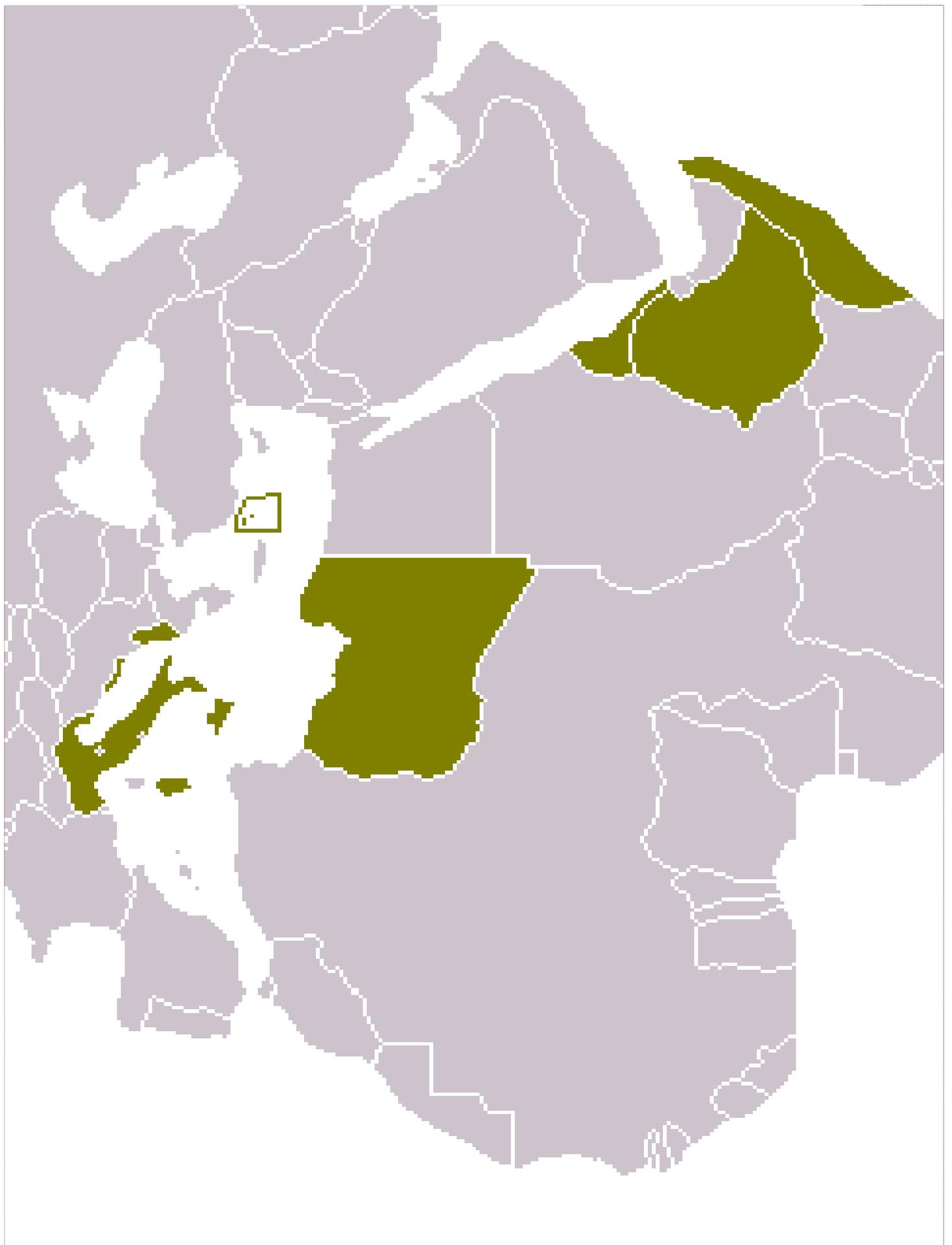


**Prof. B. Pierrri**  
**History of Italian Foreign Policy**

**Fascist Middle Eastern Policy:  
The Protector of Islam**

**March 15th, 2016**



# Fascist Aims

- **Proclamation of Empire May 1936**
- **Three targets to pursue at the same time:**
  - 1) Make use of political developments in Middle East to put pressure on UK to recognise Italian Empire**
  - 2) Expand Italian influence in Middle East**
  - 3) Pacify Italian colonies in Africa while promoting ventures within them**

# Europe and Middle East

- **Italian policy on Middle East dependent on state of relations in Europe**
- **Mussolini did not abandon anti-British stance to play role of bridge between East and West**
- **Ethiopian war, sanctions, and Spanish civil war widened the gap between fascist regime and European democracies**

# Foreign involvement in Spanish civil war

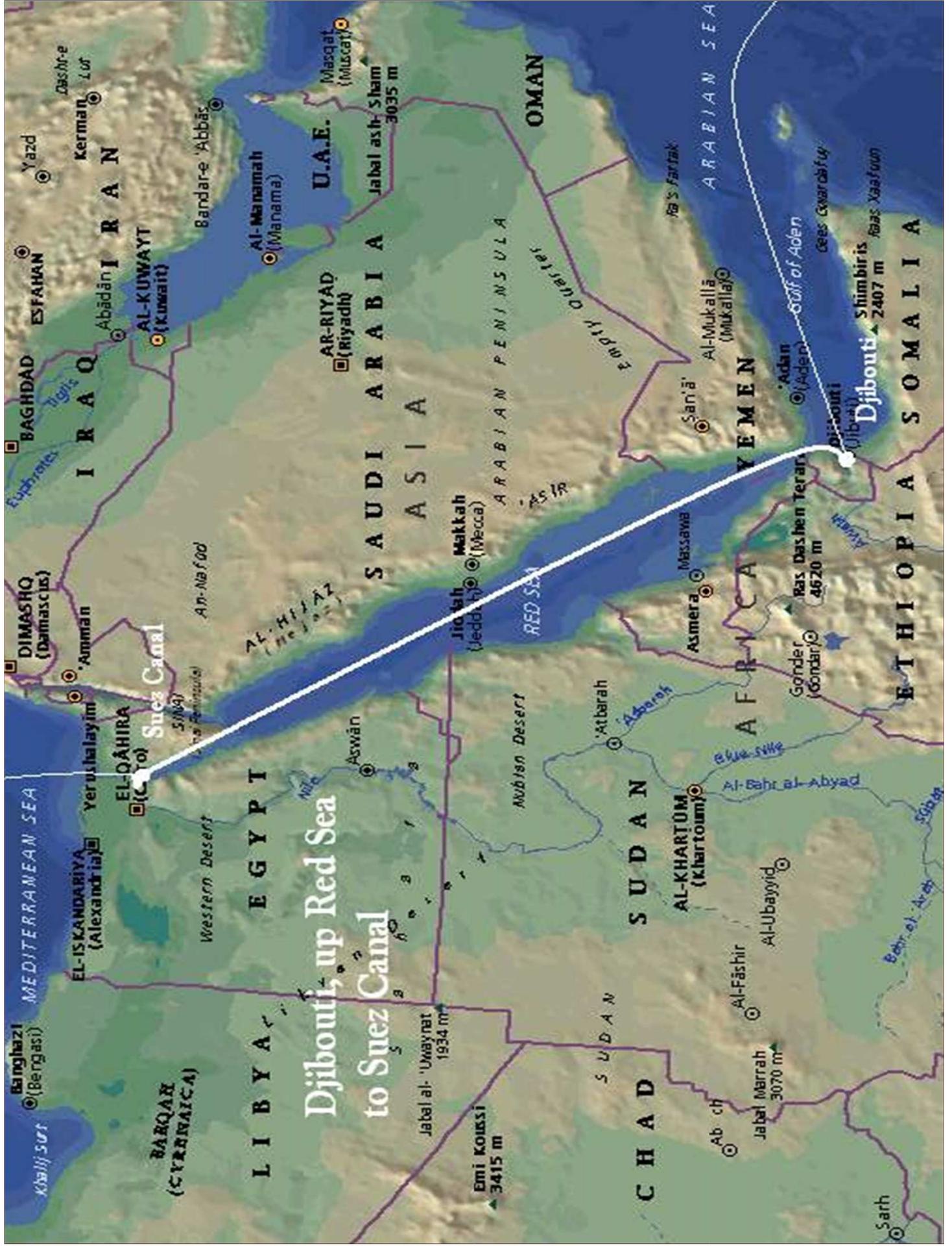
- **Right wing and Catholics supporting Nationalists as a way to stop expansion of Bolshevism**
- **On the left, including labour unions, students and intellectuals, war represented necessary battle to stop spread of Fascism**
- **Germany sent Luftwaffe modern warplanes**
- **Italy sent 100,000 men**
- **Britain and France led a bloc of 27 nations that promised arms embargo to Spain; United States unofficially went along**
- **Germany, Italy and the Soviet Union also signed on officially, but ignored the embargo**
- **France accused of allowing large shipments to Republican troops**
- **Though Stalin had signed Non-Intervention Agreement, USSR contravened League of Nations embargo by providing material assistance to Republican forces**

# Axis Rome-Berlin

- **Summer 1936: conciliatory statements to London and overtures to Berlin**
- **Hitler to Ciano – October 1936: Mediterranean is an Italian sea. Any future modification of Mediterranean balance must be in Italy's favour**
- **Germany had no interests in Middle East. This freed Italy from potential competitor**
- **Italy no longer interested in defence of Austria**
- **Axis Rome-Berlin gave Mussolini free hand in devising Middle Eastern policy**
- **Nov 1, 1936: Axis Speech**
  - 1) Mediterranean for Britain only a shortcut to Empire**
  - 2) Mediterranean for Italy is life**
  - 3) We do not intend to interrupt that road, but we demand that our interests be respected**
  - 4) Clash between powers to avoid through frank agreement and mutual recognition of interests**

# Gentlemen's Agreement

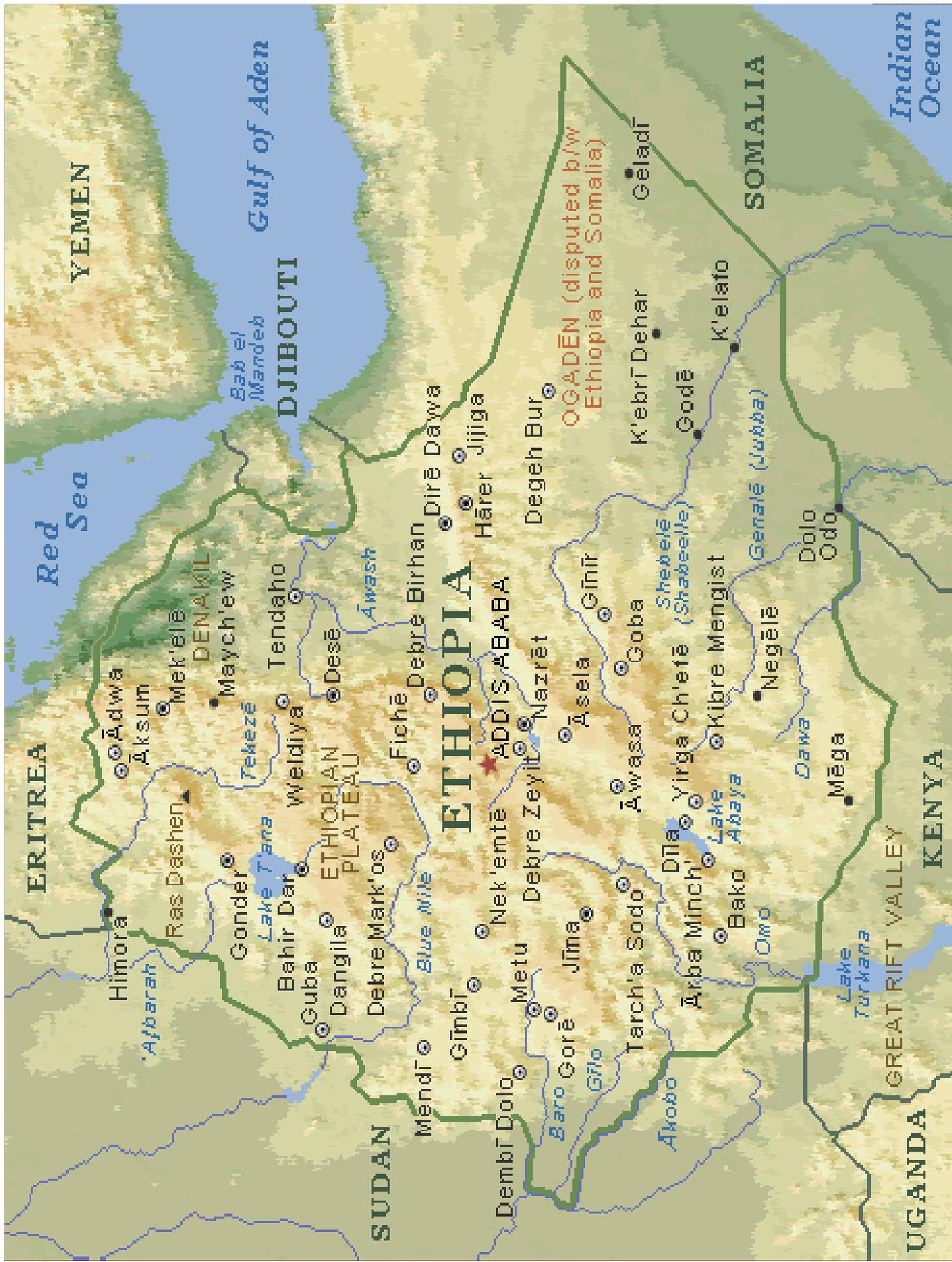
- **Jan 1937 common declaration know as Gentlemen's Agreement**
- **Italy and Britain had equal interests in freedom of passage in Mediterranean and did not want to change status quo as regarded national sovereignty of territories**
- **London de facto, but not de jure, recognised Italian conquest of Ethiopia**
- **Foreign Office wanted to pursue Anglo-Italian detente, in order to gradually detach Italy from Germany**
- **Agreement with Italy only brought military advantages, since dangerous clash on Red Sea and Suez Canal areas had been avoided**
- **From a political point of view no real outcome, as Italy and Germany were getting closer and closer, by both intervening in Spanish War**
- **Eden said he did not want a right wing dictatorship be replaced with left wing one. Democracy, he said, was not fit to pave the way to communism**



# Djibouti, up Red Sea to Suez Canal

# Easter Accords

- **Agreement between UK and Italy April 16, 1938**
- **It ended the Mediterranean and Red Sea litigations and validated *status quo* of territorial sphere of influence in Arabia, Abyssinia and Lake Tsana**
- **British and Italian governments undertook to observe order in the Mediterranean, to refrain from any actions against sovereignty of Saudi Arabia and Yemen**
- **They undertook to uphold freedom of navigation in Suez Canal, and to preserve peace between colonial possessions in East Africa**
- **Ethiopia not named in the agreements, but it was clear British intended to ignore Italian control over that country**
- **Italian government undertook to withdraw forces from Spain**



# Ciano Foreign Minister

- **June 1936 report:**

- 1) Two central interests**

- a) Relations with Arabs could enable Rome to put pressure on Britain and France**

- b) Such relations could increase Italian commercial and cultural influence**

- 2) Avoid support to nationalist movements in French North Africa in order not to cause same problems in Libya**

- 3) Increase contacts with Ibn Saud, Imam Yahya, leaders of Arab Palestine, Mufti of Jerusalem, nationalist Syrian leaders**

- 4) Increase propaganda**

**However, many Fascist hierarchs retained prejudices towards Arabs, speaking about oriental souk and susceptibility of peoples of those regions**

# Anti-semitism

- **Traditional ambiguity**
- **Mussolini had always tailored statements on Jews according to needs of the moment**
- **Second half of 1930s:**
  - 1) Large number of Jews among commentators criticising Ethiopian war**
  - 2) Good number of Jews in Giustizia e Libertà**
  - 3) Leon Blum and Popular Front in France Arab Policy seemed not to have influenced attitude towards Jews**

# Preparation for war

- **Agreements with Yugoslavia 1937, stating beginning of friendly relationship and settling all border issues**
- **Italy reduced troops on Eastern frontier and shipped army corps to Libya**
- **Chiefs of Staff sought rapid victory with light troops in desert, rather than in the Alps**
- **Attack to Sudan from Ethiopia still impossible. Better to concentrate efforts on Libyan front**

# Arms Sales

- **Ciano wanted to increase arms sales:**
  - 1) To increase Italian influence at Britain's expense**
  - 2) To make weapons available for Arab rebels in Palestine**

**Ibn Saud wanted to keep good relations with Britain, without becoming too dependent on one nation**

**Italy wanted to see countries under mandate regime become independent**

**As regarded Palestine, Italy in 1937 had no official position yet, but mandate was important for relations with Arabs**

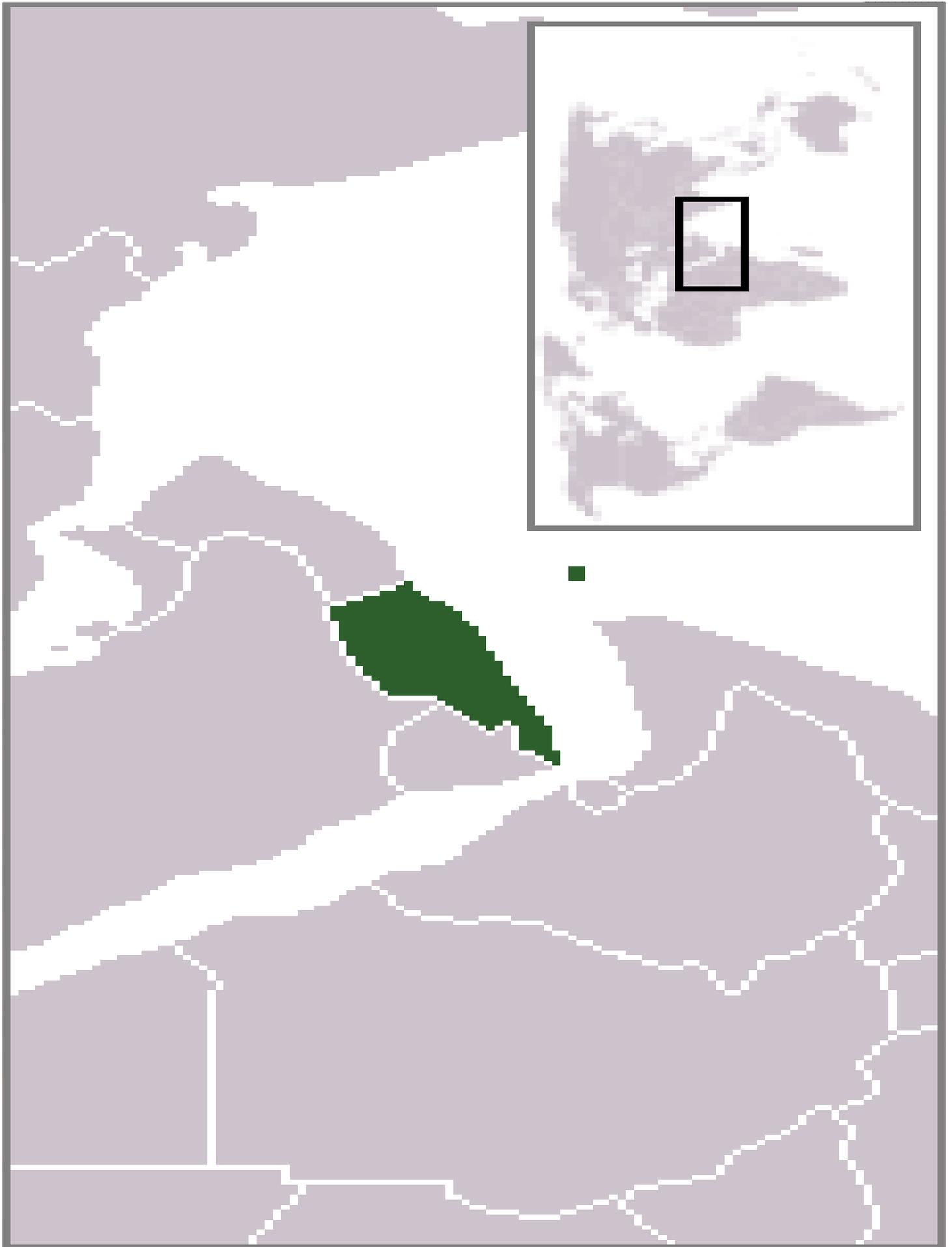
**Ibn Saud started purchasing weapons from Germany, which had no interests in Arabian Peninsula (no rivalry with Britain)**





# Aden and Yemen

- **British interests in Aden Protectorate safeguarded through series of treaties with local sheikhs**
- **Ibn Saud extended sovereignty over tribes in South**
- **Need to find agreement with Saudi Arabia on precise and stable borders**
- **Imam Yahya chose to remain in Italian sphere of influence, beginning negotiations on purchasing of arms and ammunitions**
- **This was a real threat to British maritime communications with India**





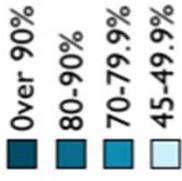
# Fascist Muslim Policy in Ethiopia

- Political and military use of Muslims in Ethiopia
- Mosques built and restored
- Muslims granted full religious freedom
- Arabic became official language in Harar and taught in Muslim schools
- In case of internal unrest, Muslim would constitute valuable reserve of men
- Muslim troops used to crush revolt in Christian Amharic provinces in Oct-Nov 1937
- Muslims good for public relations with Arab world
- Money given for annual pilgrimage to Mecca
- Good coverage in Arab press (no violent press campaign against brutal repressions against Christian population)
- Dec 1937: Duke of Aosta replaced Graziani as Governor: all groups to be treated equally in order not to make France and Britain protectors of Christians in Africa

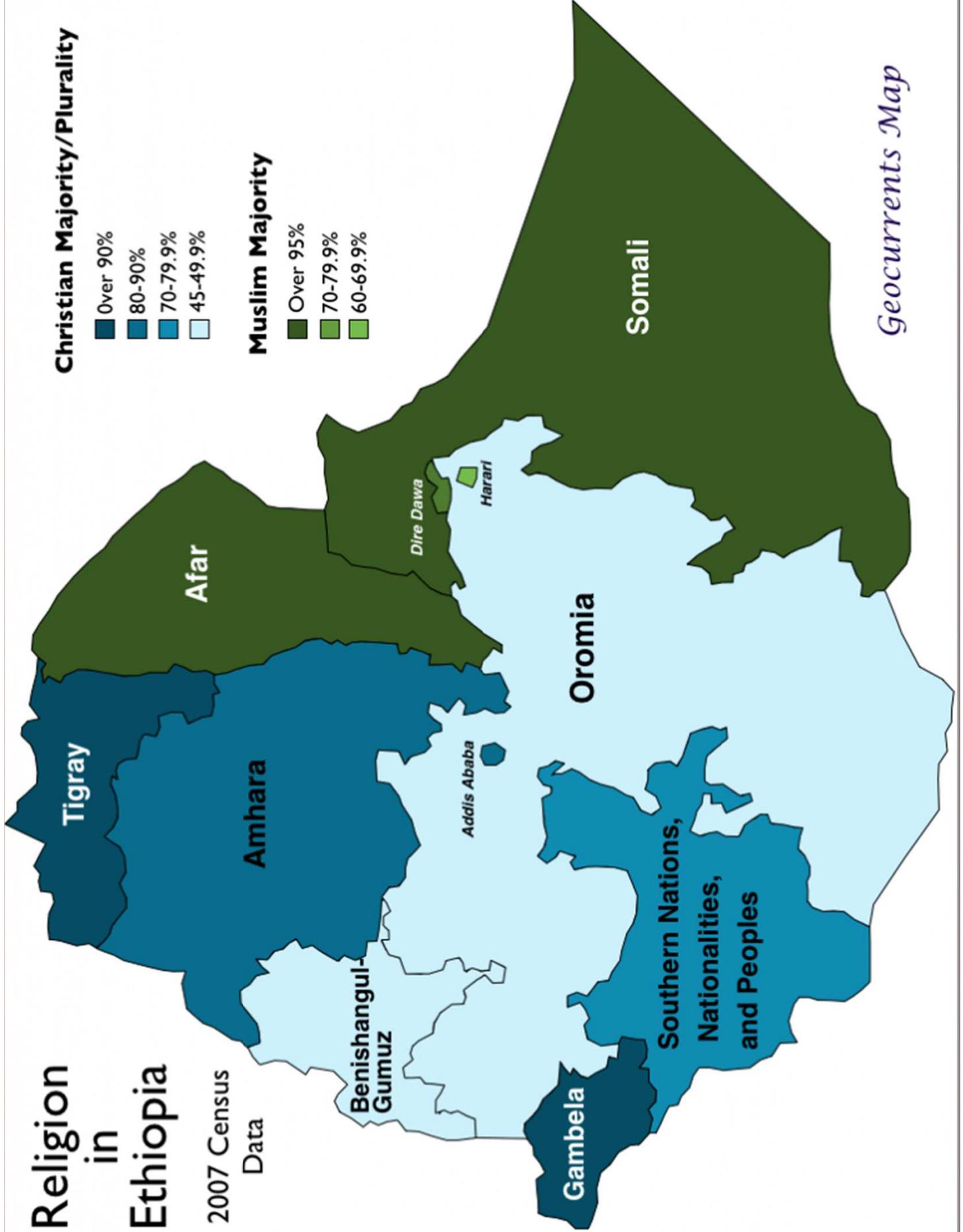
# Religion in Ethiopia

2007 Census Data

## Christian Majority/Plurality

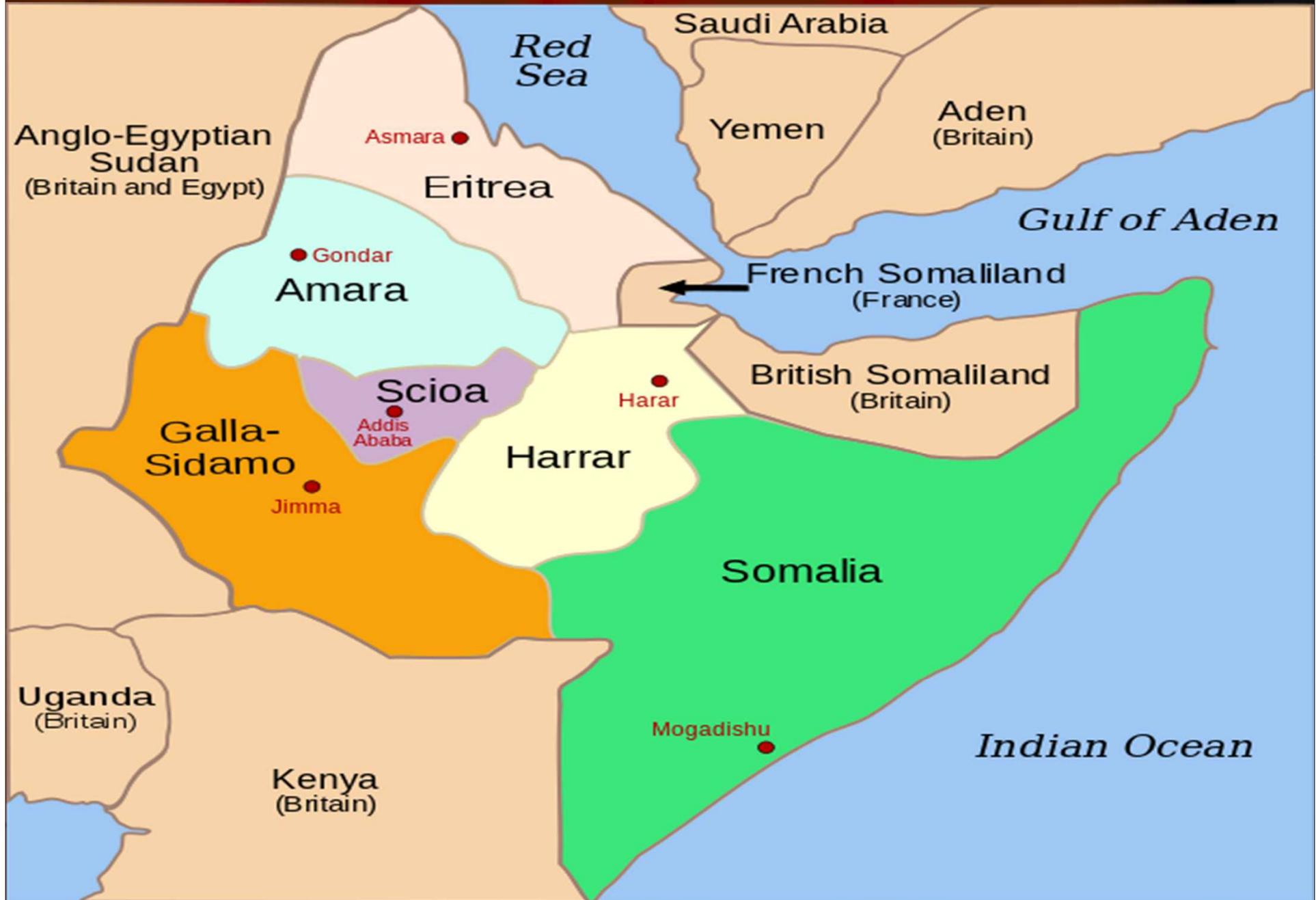


## Muslim Majority



*Geocurrents Map*

# Italian East Africa



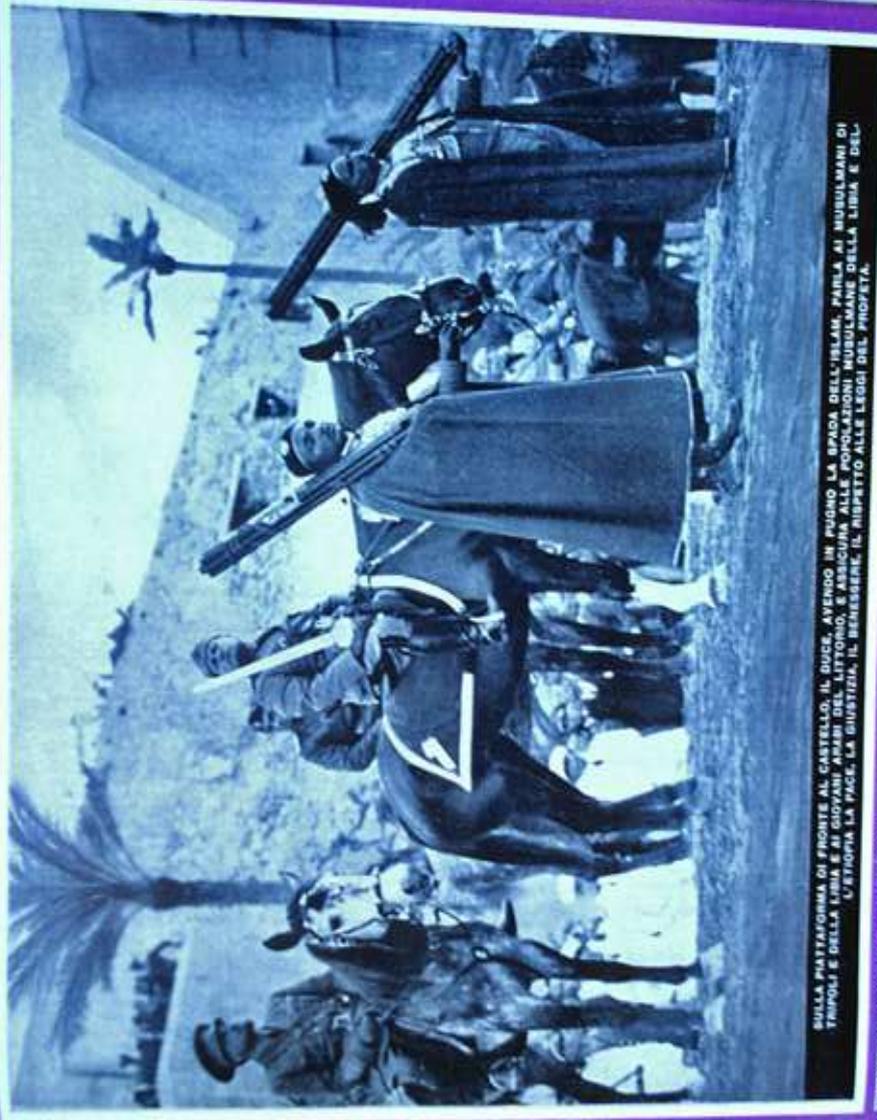
# Muslim Policy in Libya

- **Mussolini's visit Mar 1937**
- **Sword of Islam**
- **Mussolini addressed crowd: Italy intends to ensure Muslims in Libya and Ethiopia peace, justice, well-being, respect for the Prophet**
- **Italian media proclaimed Mussolini as Protector of Islam**

LE DICHIARAZIONI DEL DUCE AL "DAILY MAIL" COMPAGNIA DELLA TECNICA

# L'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA

ANNO XXXV - N. 11 25 MARZO 1937 27



SULLA PIATTAFORMA DI FRONTE AL CASTELLO, IL DUCE, AVENDO IN PUGNO LA SPADA DELL'ISLAM, PARLA AI MUSULMANI DI TANPOLE E DELLA LIBIA E AI GIOVANI MUSULMANI DELLA LIBIA E DELL'ETIOPIA LA PACE, LA GIUSTIZIA, IL BENESSERE, IL RISPETTO ALLE LEGGI DEL PROFETA.

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**CHAMPION**  
 la candela migliore

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# Propaganda war with Britain

- Italian press portrayed difference between Libya, where Italy had brought progress, and India, which had been reduced in poverty
- Foreign Office made BBC transmit in languages other than English, included Arabic
- Italy used Muslim discontent of Britain as a lever to pursue her interests in Arabian Peninsula and Palestine
- Jews of Palestine deterred from collaborating with Italy by links with Nazi Germany
- In Syria, Lebanon and Iraq Italy backed only by peripheral elements of society
- While some Arabs saw Italy as an aid to gain independence, others did not believe that an imperialist power would be better than any other one