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History of Italian Foreign Policy

**The Abyssinian War and the Middle Eastern
aftermath**

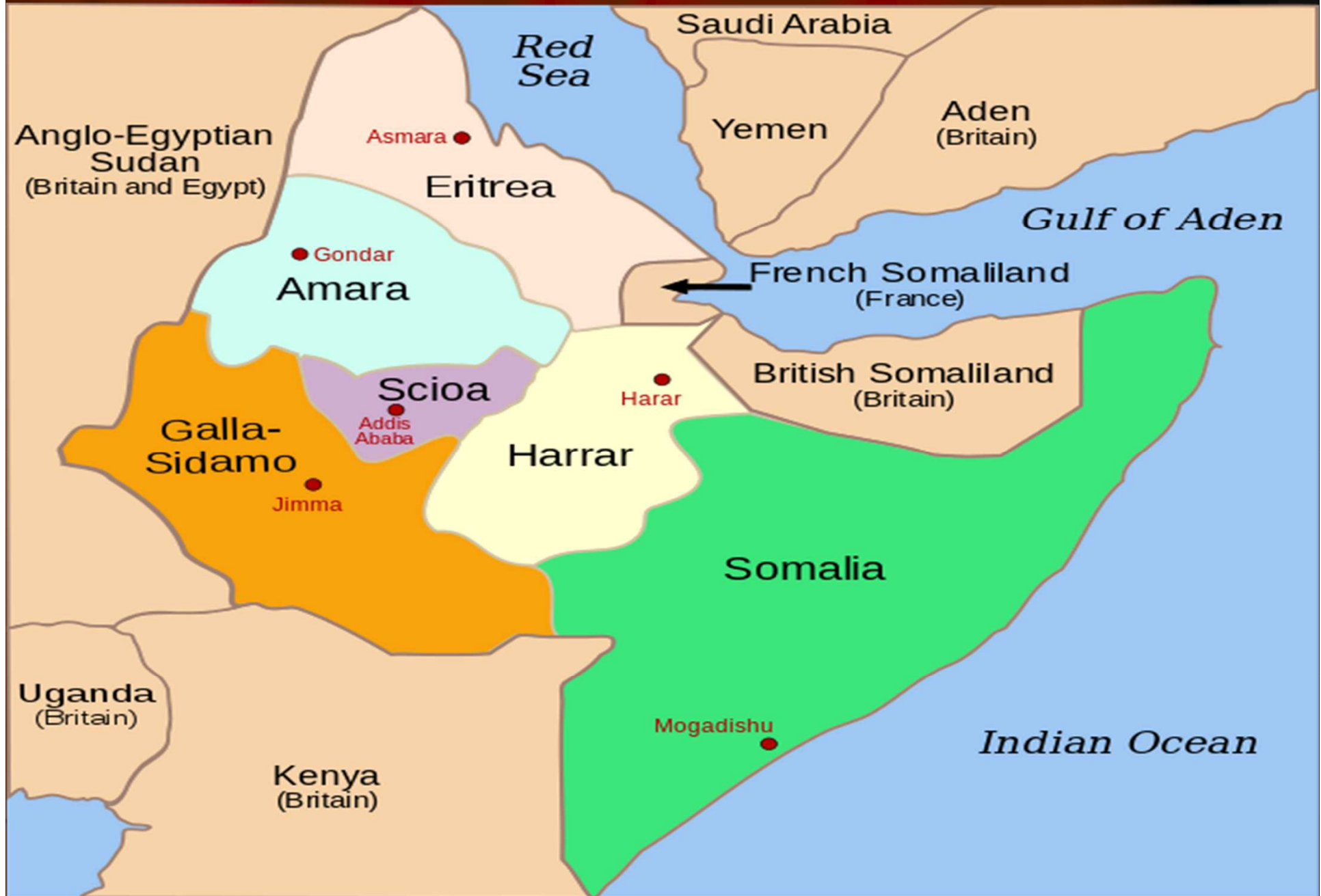
March 17th, 2015



MUSSOLINI'S TRIUMPH

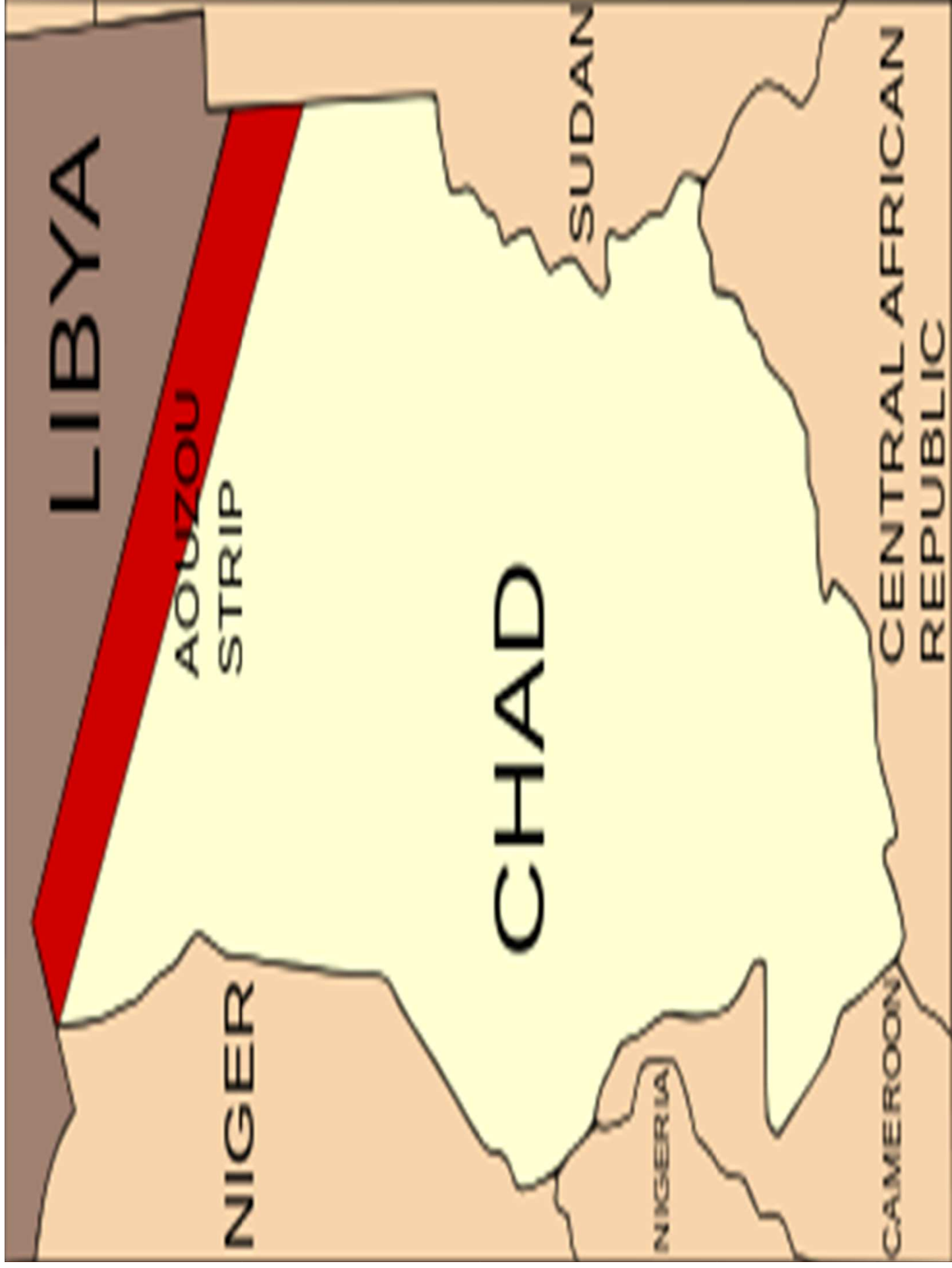


Italian East Africa



Mussolini-Laval Agreements Jan 1935

- **Jan 1935: treaty that defined disputed parts of French Somaliland as part of Eritrea, redefined the official status of Italians in French-held Tunisia, and essentially gave the Italians a free hand in dealing with Ethiopia**
- **Italy was also to receive the Aozuzu Strip, which was to be moved from French-ruled Chad to Libya**
- **In exchange for all these concessions, France hoped for Italian support against German aggression**



Anti-British line: summer 1935

- **Native Policy: Britain to protect native peoples**
- **London had to control Lake Tsana waters and keep stability among Ethiopian populations and those leaving in border and grazing areas**
- **Another colonial war as a threat to stability of area**
- **French had only economic interests in Horn (Djibuti-Addis Abeba railway)**
- **Italy had to reach agreement with London on grazing and watering rights of Somalis in Ethiopia**

Anglo-Italian rivalry

- **Mussolini wanted Britain to give him free hand in conquest of Ethiopia**
- **London wanted Italy to reach compromise with Ethiopia through diplomacy**
- **Maffey Report**
 - A) Question examined only from British point of view**
 - B) London had interests in Ogaden and Harar on grazing and watering rights, while in North-West Lake Tsana waters were pivotal for Sudan and Egypt**
 - C) In case of Italian conquest of all Ethiopia, Sudan would have had more than 3,000 km of border with European power claiming economic expansion.**
 - D) In case of war against Italy, colonial blockade in Horn would have been a serious threat to British strategic positions in Red Sea and Gulf of Aden**
 - E) It was always possible for Fascist regime to seek more glory in the North**
 - F) Independent Ethiopia was better for Britain. However, since the risk of war against Italy was very unlikely, and since a frontier with European power was always safer than one with unstable country, for Britain it did not make any difference if Ethiopia was independent or not**



British Interests in Suez and Red Sea

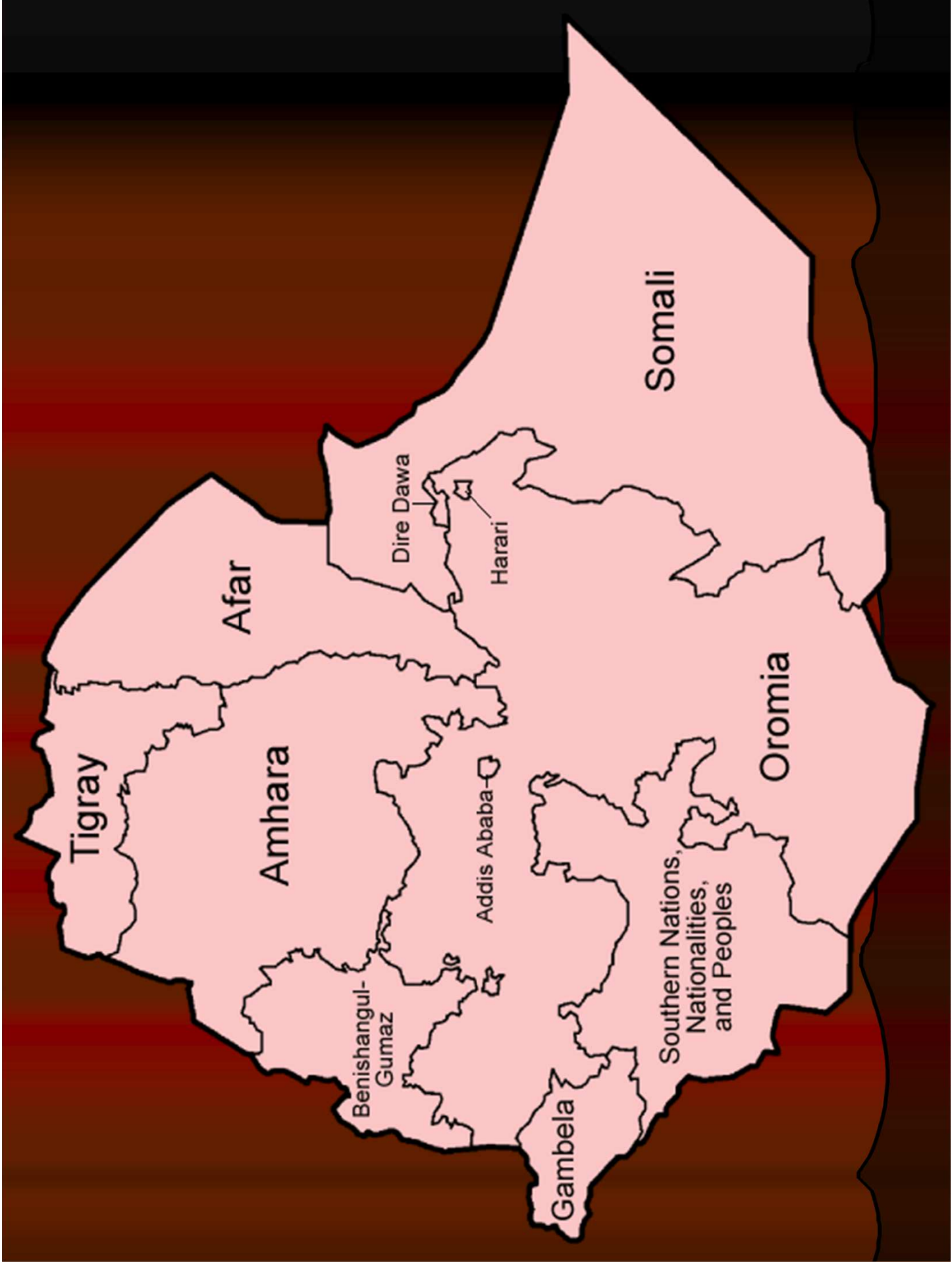


British Interests in Suez and Red Sea

- **Suez Canal as a swinging door of Empire**
- **Shortcut to reach colonies in Indian Subcontinent and Australia**
- **Divergence with France, which put pressure on Addis Abeba to give as many concessions to Italy as possible**

Italian Propaganda in Middle East

- **Abyssinia and slavery**
 - **Abyssians as enemies of Egypt and Islam**
 - **Objective was rallying Arabs and Muslims**
 - **Blue Shirts Movement in Egypt got information on history of fascism**
 - **Luce newreels on agricultural developments in Libya**
 - **Radio Bari denounced British imperialism which subjugated about $\frac{3}{4}$ of Muslim world**
 - **Propaganda on Christian-Muslim rivalry in Ethiopia**
 - **Report on Muslims in Ethiopia**
- 1) **Moslems lacked leadership, had low education and low level of religious awareness**
 - 2) **Moslems excluded from public offices due to Christian fanaticism and low education**



Tigray

Afar

Amhara

Benishangul-Gumuz

Dire Dawa

Harari

Addis Ababa

Gambela

Somali

Southern Nations,
Nationalities,
and Peoples

Oromia

Hoare-Laval Pact

- **Anglo-French proposal approved Dec 8**
- A) Recommendation to Emperor to accept some territorial changes in favour of Italy**
- B) Easter Tigray, Dankalia, Ogaden**
- C) French monopoly on railways**
- D) Italian Economic sphere of influence in South (with military presence?)**
- E) Oil embargo against Italy to discuss in League of Nations. Laval sure that Mussolini could wage war on this, thus he suggested further attempts of reconciliation**
- F) In case of war, Laval did not want to accept precise duties towards Britain**

King Edward VIII

- Secret meeting with Italian ambassador
- King contrary to British Govt policies, while admiring Italian colonial enterprise
- War Britain-Italy could provoke deflagration of Europe
- The conquest of Abyssinia cured the continent from "[...] a secular centre of infection [...]" and make it possible an effective cooperation in that big part of Africa between the colonising mission of Italy and Britain".
- He committed himself personally to avoid any war against Italy, with whom cooperation in Mediterranean was pivotal
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- **[1]** Cfr. *L'ambasciatore a Londra, Grandi, al Capo del Governo e Ministro degli Esteri, Mussolini*, 29 aprile 1936, L.P., in DDI, Ottava Serie, Vol. III, pp. 843-856.
- **[2]** Cfr. *L'ambasciatore a Londra, Grandi, al Capo del Governo e Ministro degli Esteri, Mussolini*, 1° maggio 1936, L.P., in DDI, Ottava Serie, Vol. III, pp. 867-870.

Britain and Egypt

- Ethiopian crisis as catalyst for Egyptian independence
- Lampson (British commissioner) said that only positive outcome of Italian invasion of Abyssinia was that population in Egypt would accept some form of British control
- Mussolini denied that Italy posed a threat to Egypt
- Unilateral formal independence to Egypt Feb 28 1922
- Aug 1936 Treaty of Alliance Britain-Egypt
- A) Britain allowed to build military bases in Suez Canal area and station 10,000 soldiers and 400 *Royal Air Force* men
- B) Egypt had to build infrastructures for communications
- C) In case of war, Egypt to put at British disposal all necessary infrastructures for Canal and country defence

Italians in Egypt

- **Mussolini wanted to show that all Italians, both at home and abroad, supported conquest of Ethiopia**
- **Disciplined but enthusiastic manifestations while Italian ships went through Suez Canal**
- **Contacts between Italian Legation and Young Egypt leaders**
- **Italy to back full Egyptian independence in case of Egyptian support to Italian interests in Ethiopia**

Saudi Reactions

- **Officially neutral**
- **No sanctions implemented against Italy: not a member of League of Nations**
- **As warden of holy places, Saudi Arabia obliged to keep friendly relations with all countries with Muslim subjects**
- **Status of Italy as Red Sea power was cause of concern for Ibn Saud**
- **Britain could not grant military support in case of Italian attack against S. Arabia (Rome Agreement 1927)**
- **Ibn Saud suspicious of Italy: treaty of alliance with Iraq: mutual defence in case of attack by third party**

Yemen

- **Imam Yahya (ruler of Yemen) approached by Ethiopians in Spring 1935 to sign treaty of friendship**
- **Treaty with Ethiopia was to have no effects on good relations with Italy, since it only dealt with trade**
- **Mussolini: any occupation of Yemenite territory would provoke a conflict with UK. Better to improve relations with Yemen**
- **Yemen neutral during war, banning arms both to Italy and Ethiopia**
- **Limited assistance to Italian war effort: civilians labourers sent to Eritrea**
- **Britain could not grant military support in case of Italian attack against Yemen (Rome Agreement 1927)**

Palestine

- **Italy tried to persuade Zionist leaders to influence British not to include Palestine in sanctions**
- **Jewish opposition to war might have induced Mussolini to revise attitude towards Jews**
- **No pressure on Palestinian Arabs, probably not able to influence Britain**
- **However, Radio Bari broadcast propaganda to arouse indignation towards Britain, as sanctions harmed Palestine's economy**
- **Ciano appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs June 1936: connections with Zionism gradually severed. Relations with Palestinian Arab leaders began to flourish**
- **Mufti of Jerusalem appealed to Italian Consul General in Jerusalem to supply arms and money with which he could start revolt against British**

Zionist reactions

- **Mainstream Zionism generally critical towards Italy**
- **Weizmann had no hopes of obtaining anything from Italy and openly sided with British**
- **Revisionist Zionists more sympathetic towards Italy: press articles stating that Negus was a tyrant and that victory of Italy was better for white race. Moreover, Jews of Palestine would benefit from Italian threat to British in Suez Canal area - mandatory power could be induced to give Jews a state**

Syria, Lebanon, Iraq

- **Syrian and Lebanese public opinion more open towards Italy**
 - 1) **Italian threat quite far away**
 - 2) **Benefits from good Italo-French relations**
 - 3) **Opposition to war led by Orthodox clergy, anti-colonialist circles and ultra-religious Muslims**
- **Iraq took a strong stand against Italy and sanctions were implemented**
- **AGIP in 1935 had 52% of shares in Mosul Oil Fields, multinational company with substantial concessions in Northern Iraq**
- **In 1936 Italian govt no longer able to maintain financial support of AGIP commitments in Iraq – all shares sold (expansion in Africa more important than independent access to Iraqi oil)**

Red Line Agreement

- **Signed by partners in the Turkish Petroleum Company (TPC) on July 31, 1928**
- **The aim of the agreement was to bind all partners to a "self-denial clause" that prohibited any of its shareholders from independently seeking oil interests in the ex-Ottoman territory**



MIDDLE EAST

Scale 1:21,000,000
 Lambert Conformal Conic Projection,
 standard parallels 12°N and 38°N
 0 500 Kilometers
 0 500 Miles
 Boundary representation is
 not necessarily authoritative.

Golan Heights is Israeli-occupied Syria.
 West Bank and Gaza Strip are Israeli-occupied with current
 status subject to the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement --
 permanent status to be determined through further negotiation.
 Israel proclaimed Jerusalem as its capital in 1950, but the US, like
 nearly all other countries, maintains its Embassy in Tel Aviv.

