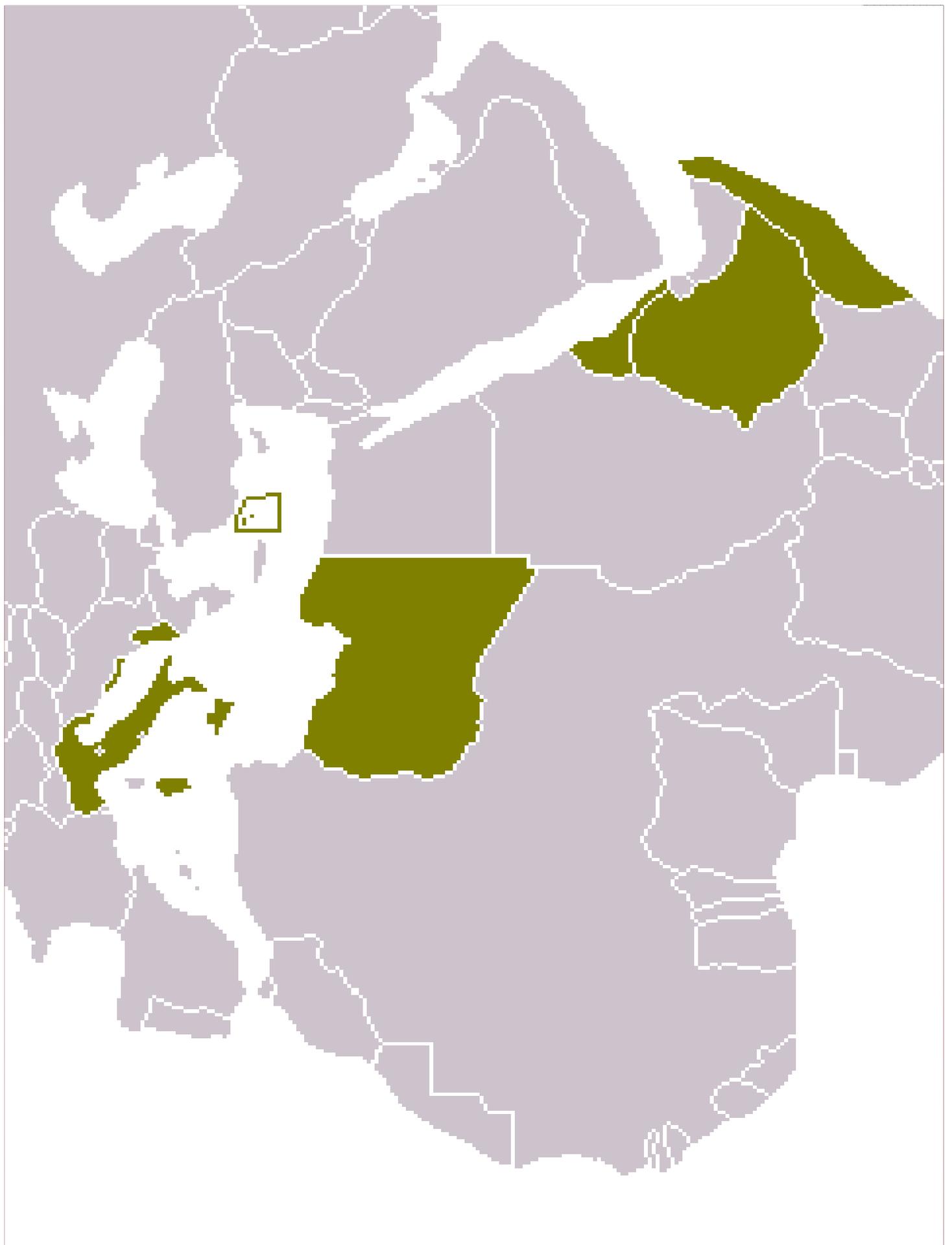


Prof. B. Pierrri
History of Italian Foreign Policy

**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

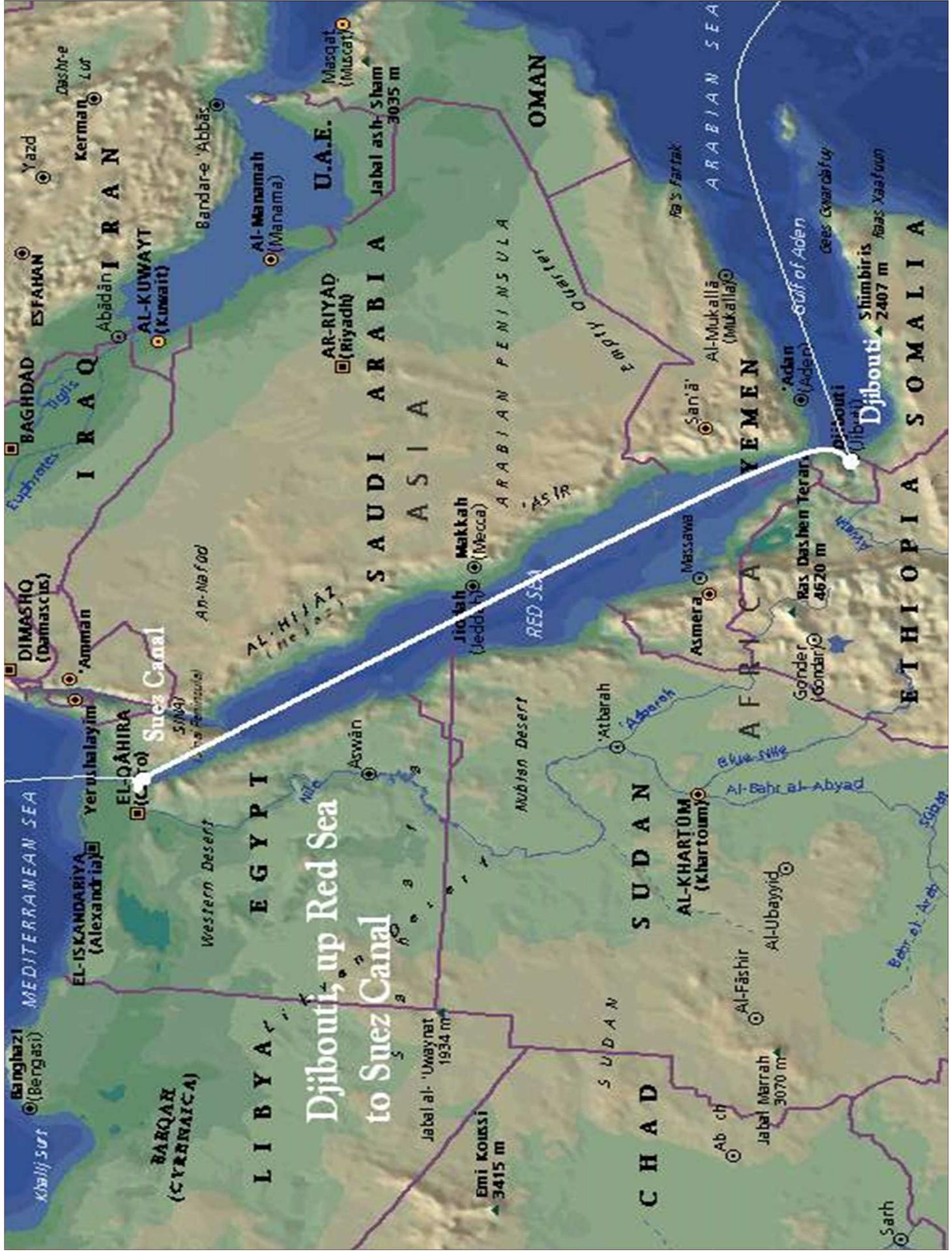
- Right wing and Catholics supporting Nationalists as a way to stop expansion of Bolshevism
- On the left, including labour unions, students and intellectuals, war represented necessary battle to stop spread of Fascism
- Germany sent Luftwaffe modern warplanes
- Italy sent 100,000 men
- Britain and France 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**



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

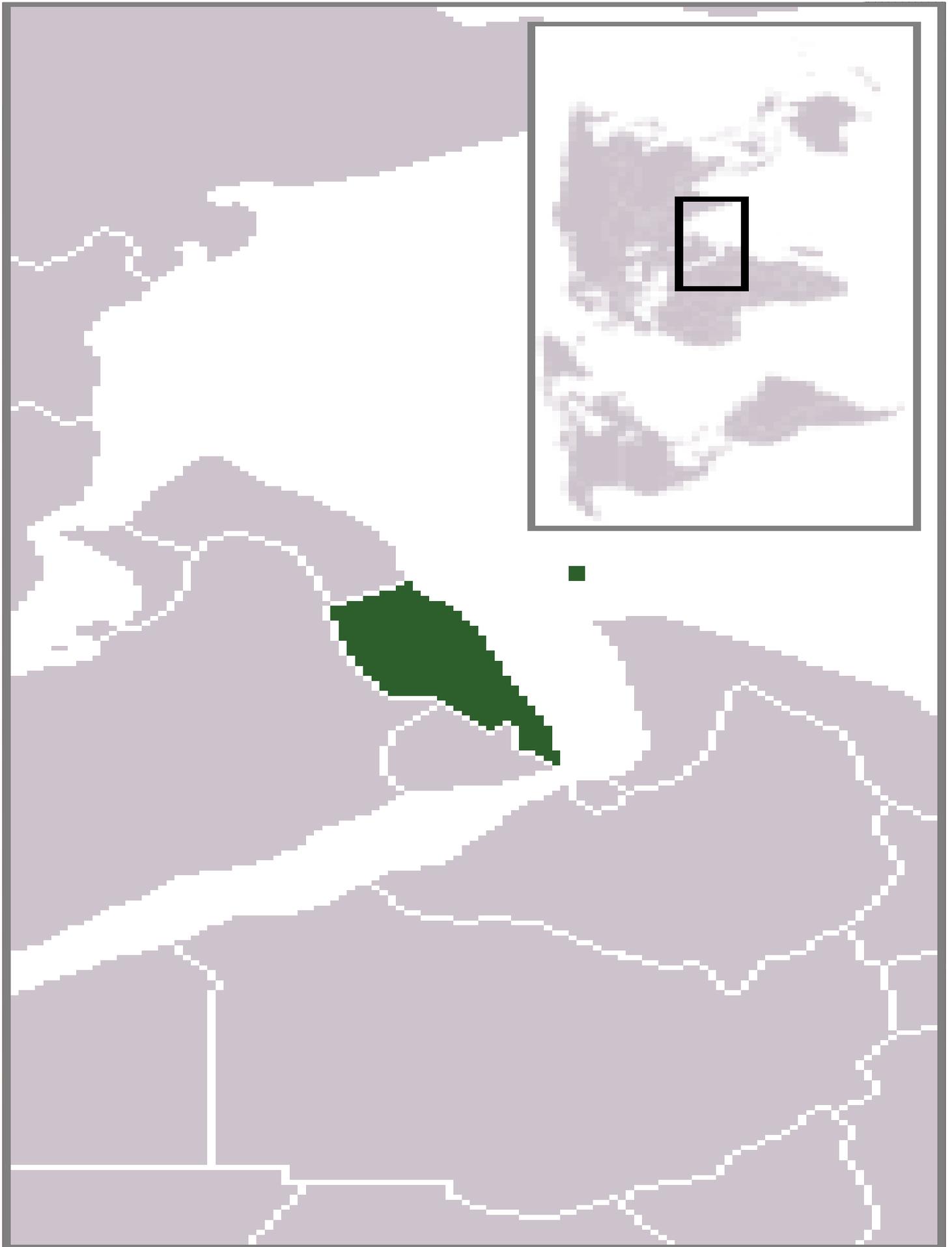
Italy wanted to see countries under mandate regime become independent

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**



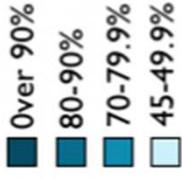
Fascist Muslim Policy in Ethiopia

- 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

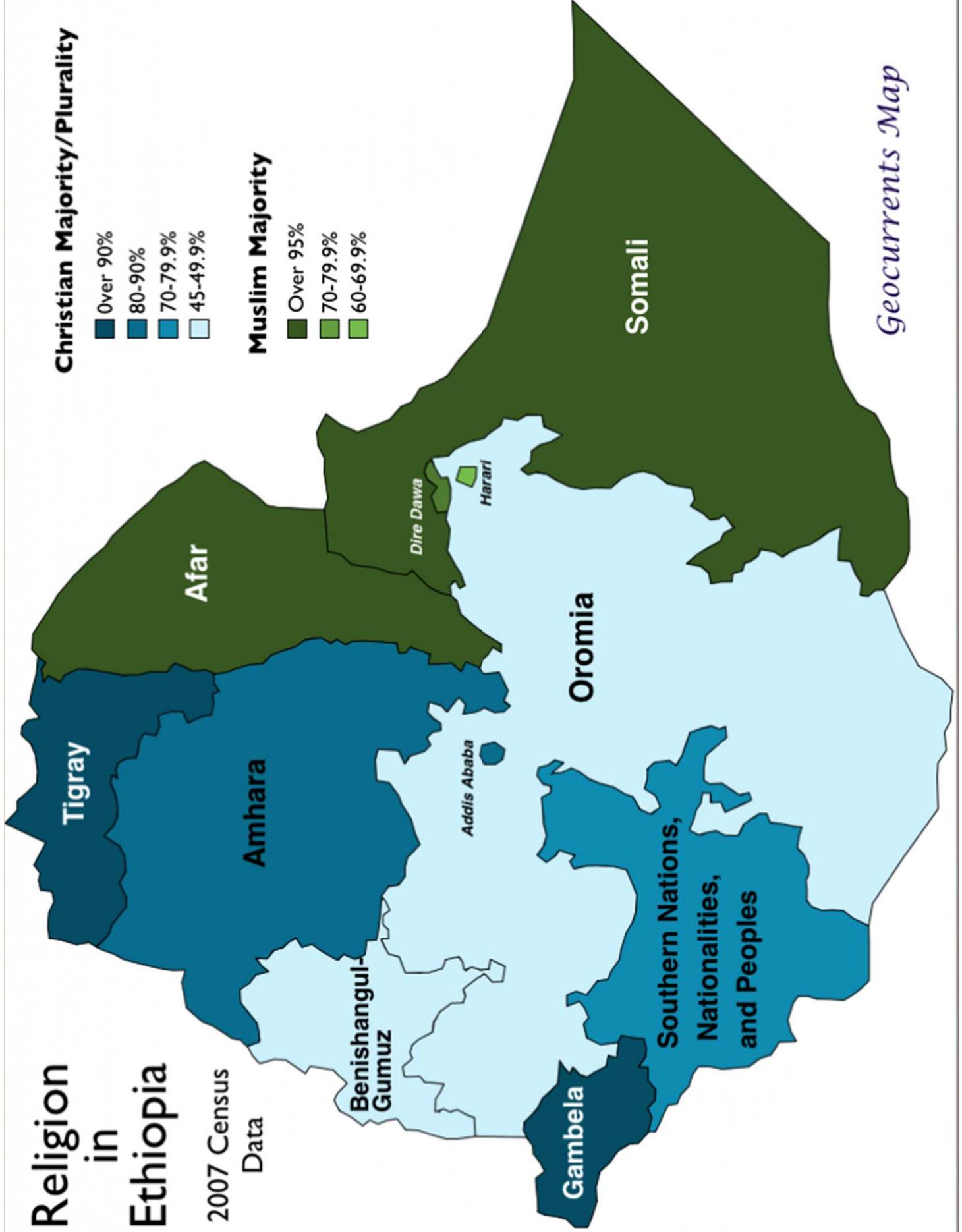
Religion in Ethiopia

2007 Census Data

Christian Majority/Plurality

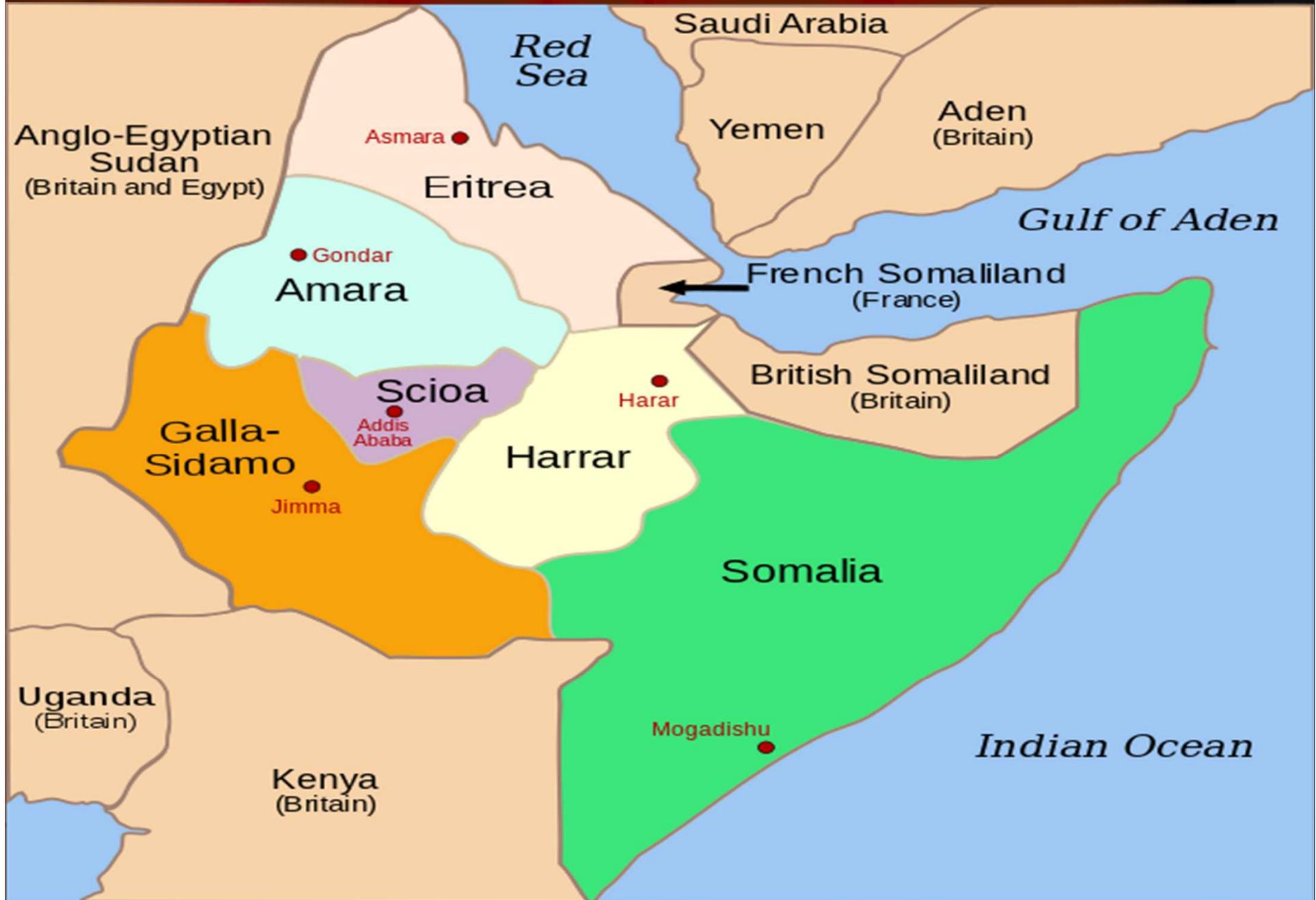


Muslim Majority



Geocurrents Map

Italian East Africa



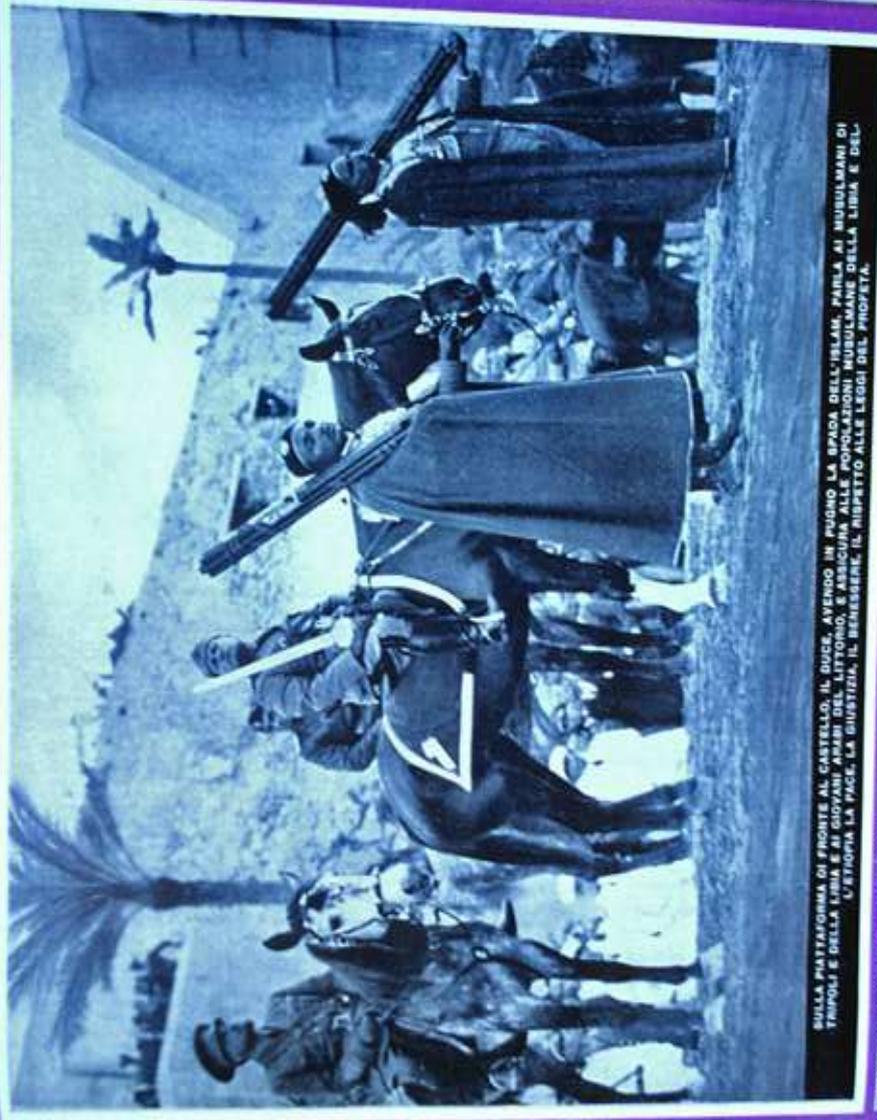
Muslim Policy in Libya

- **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 TELEVISIONE

L'ILLUSTRAZIONE ITALIANA

ANNO XXXV - N. 11 25 MARZO 1937 27

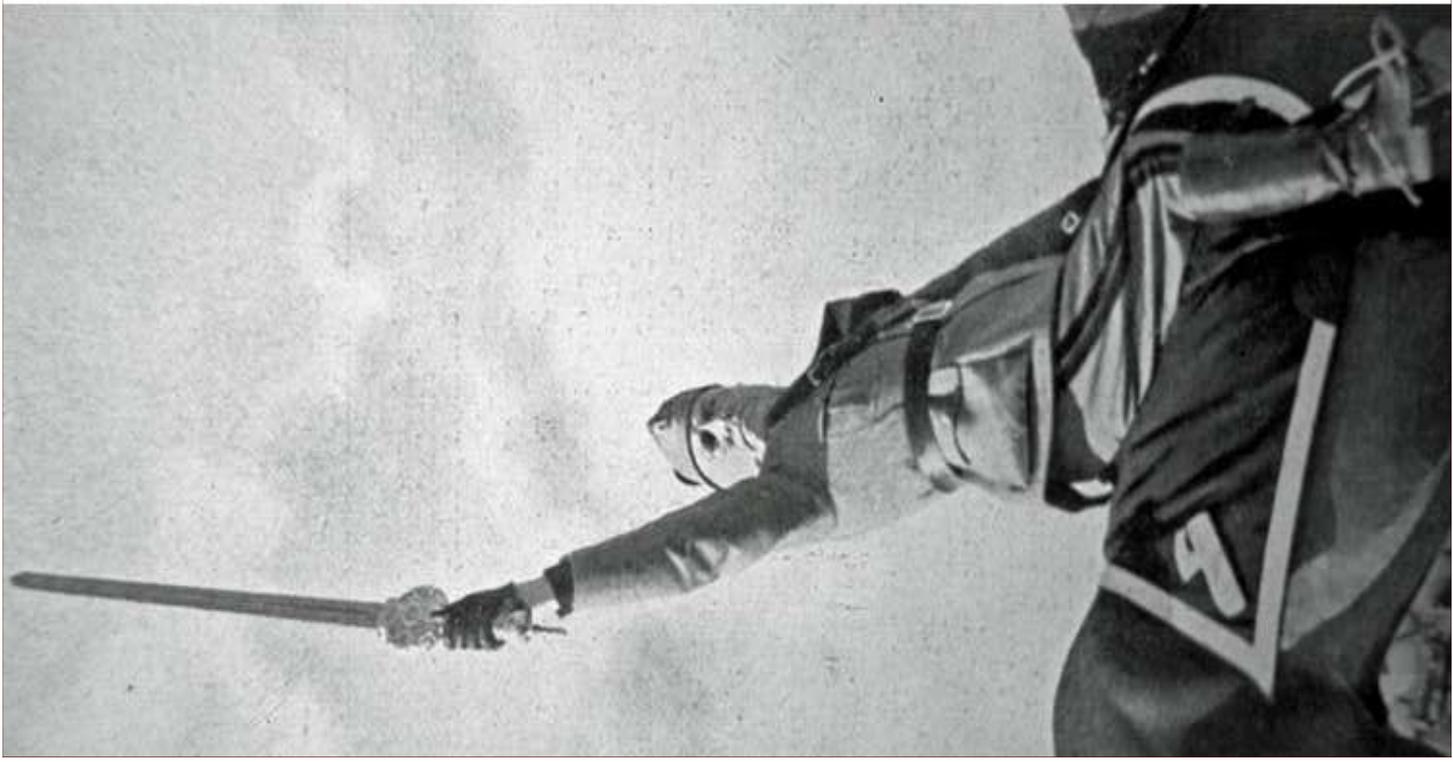


SULLA PIATTAFORMA DI FRONTE AL CASTELLO, IL DUCE, AVENDO IN PUGNO LA SPADA DELL'ISLAM, PARLA AI MUSULMANI DI TANPOLE E DELLA LIBIA E AI GIOVANI MUSULMANI DELLA LIBIA E DELL'ETIOPIA LA PACE, LA GIUSTIZIA, IL BENESSERE, IL RISPETTO ALLE LEGGI DEL PROFETA.

per tutti i motori
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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