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**History of Italian Foreign Policy**

**Italian Foreign Policy: A  
Historiographical Analysis, 1922-  
1960**

**January 27th, 2016**

# Mussolini 1940

- ▶ **If war goes on, impossible for Italy to stay out**
- A) Italy not relegated in corner of Europe as Spain**
- B) Italy not semi-Asiatic like Russia**
- C) Italy not far away like US or Japan**
- D) Italy at centre of war theatre. Even on side of UK, war against Germany would be unavoidable**
- E) Italy to keep role of great power, not of Switzerland**

# Emilio Gentile

- ▶ **Fascism is a mass nationalist movement with party as militant organisation**
- ▶ **To replace parliamentary democracy with New State, authoritarian and hierarchical**
- ▶ **Idolatry of primacy of politics**
- ▶ **Will to power as supreme ideal**

# De Felice

- ▶ **No Mussolini's creed, like Mein Kampf**
- ▶ **Fascism lacked original international programme**
- ▶ **Foreign policy manipulated for domestic purposes**
- ▶ **Mediterranean aims in war were rational, but were betrayed by German fanaticism about war in the East**
- ▶ **Parallel War was nothing deplorable**

# Rosaria Quartararo

- ▶ **Until 1940, foreign policy independent from domestic policy**
- ▶ **Any flirtation with Germany aimed at putting pressure on UK and finding an accord: Mussolini as frustrated potential ally of UK**

# McGregor Knox

- ▶ **Fascist war, characterised by brutality, expansionist ambition**
- ▶ **Italy comparable to Germany**
- ▶ **Only difference in strength, not in ideology**

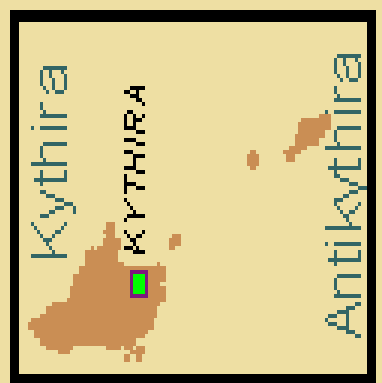
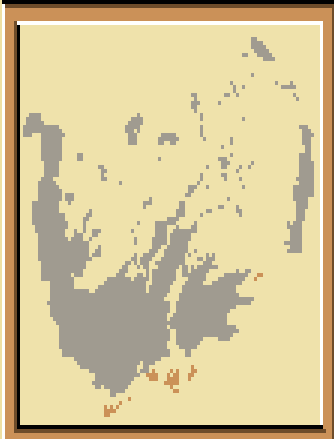
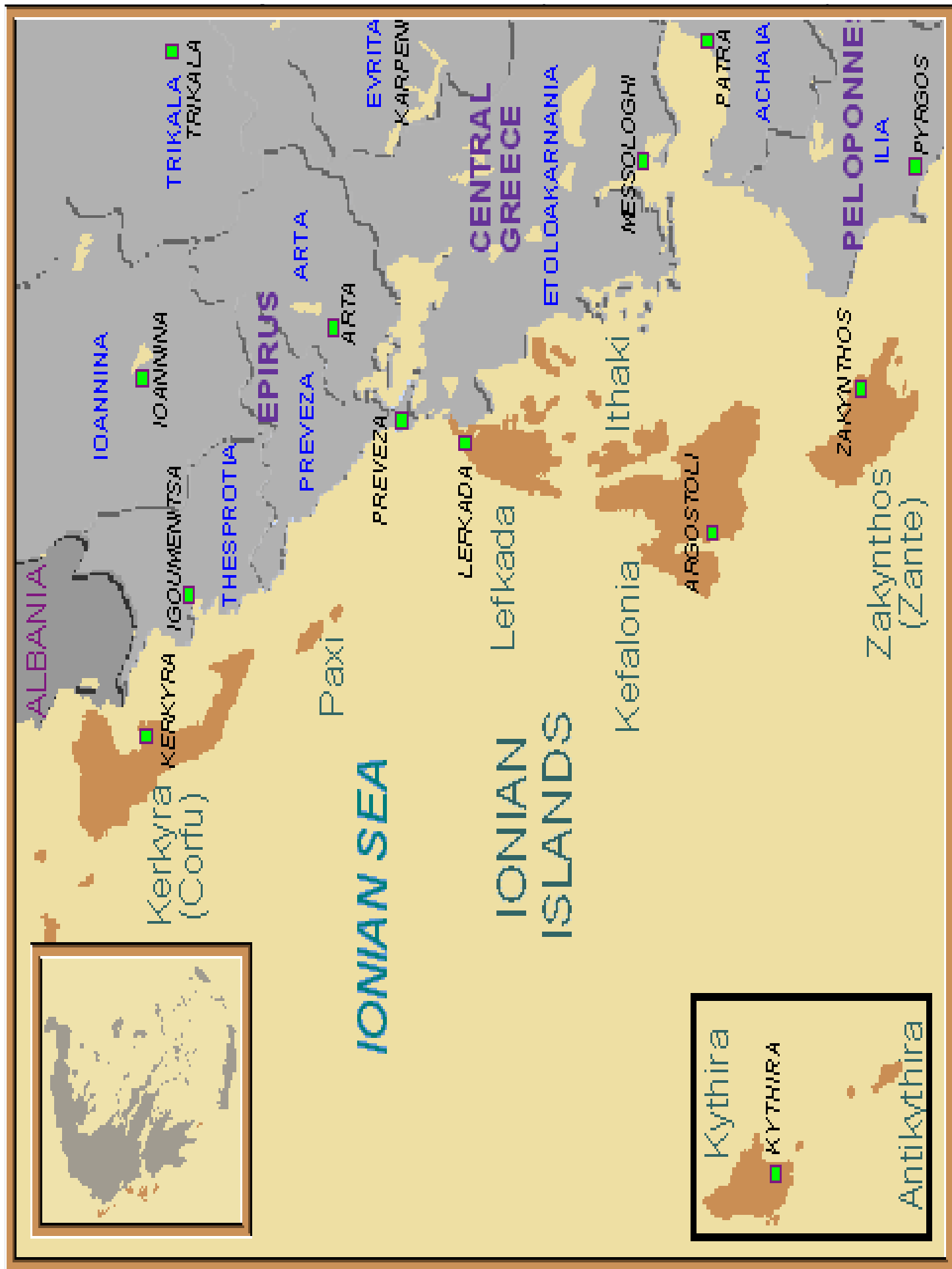
# Di Nolfo

- ▶ **Before March on Rome, Mussolini did not possess any foreign policy**
- ▶ **Imperialism as eternal law, and Italy should be on lookout for advantage**
- ▶ **Rome fated to be leading city of civilisation**
- ▶ **Britain as interlocutor**

# Early Fascist Foreign Policy

- ▶ Foreign policy for domestic purposes and search of consent
- ▶ Corfù 1923
- A) Italian diplomats, members of international delegation to Greco-Albanian border, assassinated in Greece
- B) Mussolini blamed Greek Govt
- C) Corfù bombed and occupied as manifestation of power and to safeguard Italian prestige
- ▶ Occupation, though presented as temporary, looked as aimed at submitting Greece to Italy
- ▶ International public opinion alarmed for the first time of Fascist aggressive intentions
- ▶ Britain avoided discussion in League of Nations in order to speed up Greek reparations to Italy and consequent withdrawal from island
- ▶ France avoided discussion in League of Nations in order not to create precedent regarding League competence on border questions: Ruhr occupied with Mussolini's consent
- ▶ Mussolini obtained satisfaction by allies, but not for the reasons he thought
- ▶ Occupation of Corfù was not something new. Liberal politicians had already done the same in Asia Minor





# Nationalism

- ▶ **Nationalism strongly influenced Fascist foreign policy**
- ▶ **Many sympathisers among younger diplomats**
- ▶ **Lack of modesty and moderation in international affairs**

## **First Fascist decade**

- ▶ **Italy behaved in predictable manner**
- ▶ **Italy looked at Balkans, Albania became commercial satellite**
- ▶ **Croatians opposing new Yugoslavia were financed**
- ▶ **Hungary and Bulgaria persuaded to back Italian-led bloc opposing France's clients in the region (Greece, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia)**
- ▶ **France remained public enemy number two, in absence of public enemy number one**

# The Mediterranean Basin



# Balance of Power

- ▶ Italy pursued more balanced and sensible policy towards USSR than other nations
- ▶ Tension with Britain at minimum
- ▶ Mussolini was not totally Euro-centric. In the areas of finance and culture, he understood the rising power of USA, which Italians abroad had already realised
- ▶ By 1933, only two differences between Fascist regime and Liberal Italy
  - A) Home front with rhetoric of Italian greatness and inevitability of war
  - B) In any crisis, Italy must be there, while Liberal statesmen, apart from Crispi, had the option of inaction

# First reactions to National Socialism

- ▶ Mussolini wanted to be the tilt of the scale among great powers, in order to be paid for that and make Italy resume primacy in the world



# Four Power Pact 1933

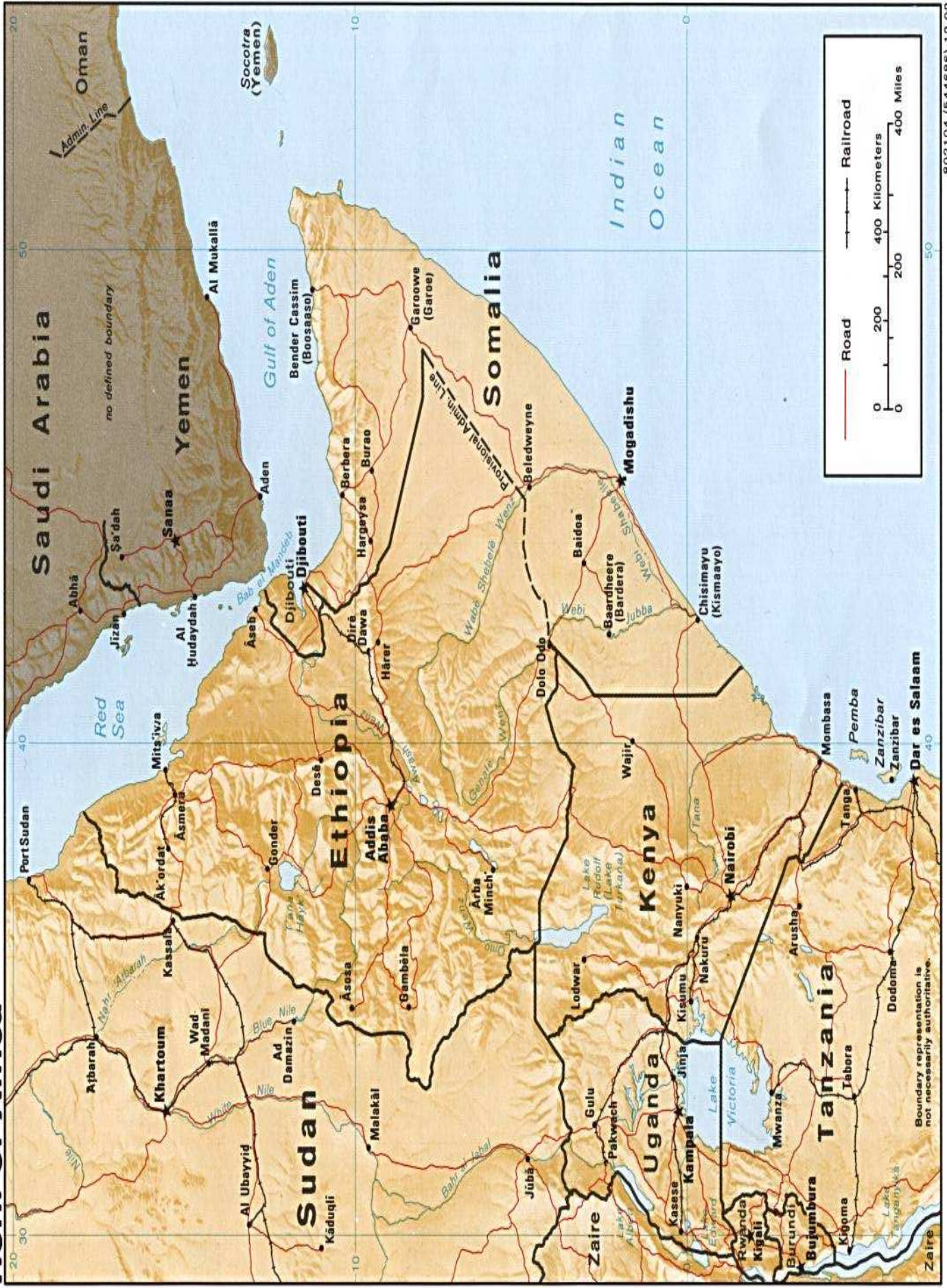
- ▶ Representatives of Uk, Germany, France and Italy signed a diluted version of Mussolini's proposal
- ▶ Mussolini's chief motive in suggesting the pact was the wish for closer Franco-Italian relations. If Mussolini's purpose of the pact was to calm Europe's nerves, he achieved the opposite result
- ▶ The Pact was intended to be the solution of how sovereign powers could come together and operate in an orderly way. Mussolini's goal was to reduce the power of the small states in the League of Nations with a block of major powers
- ▶ The exploitation of the balance of power was at interest to Italy and also appealed to the British.
- ▶ Weak point was exactly the exclusion of smaller nations, who would preferably listen to Britain or France, rather than to Italy

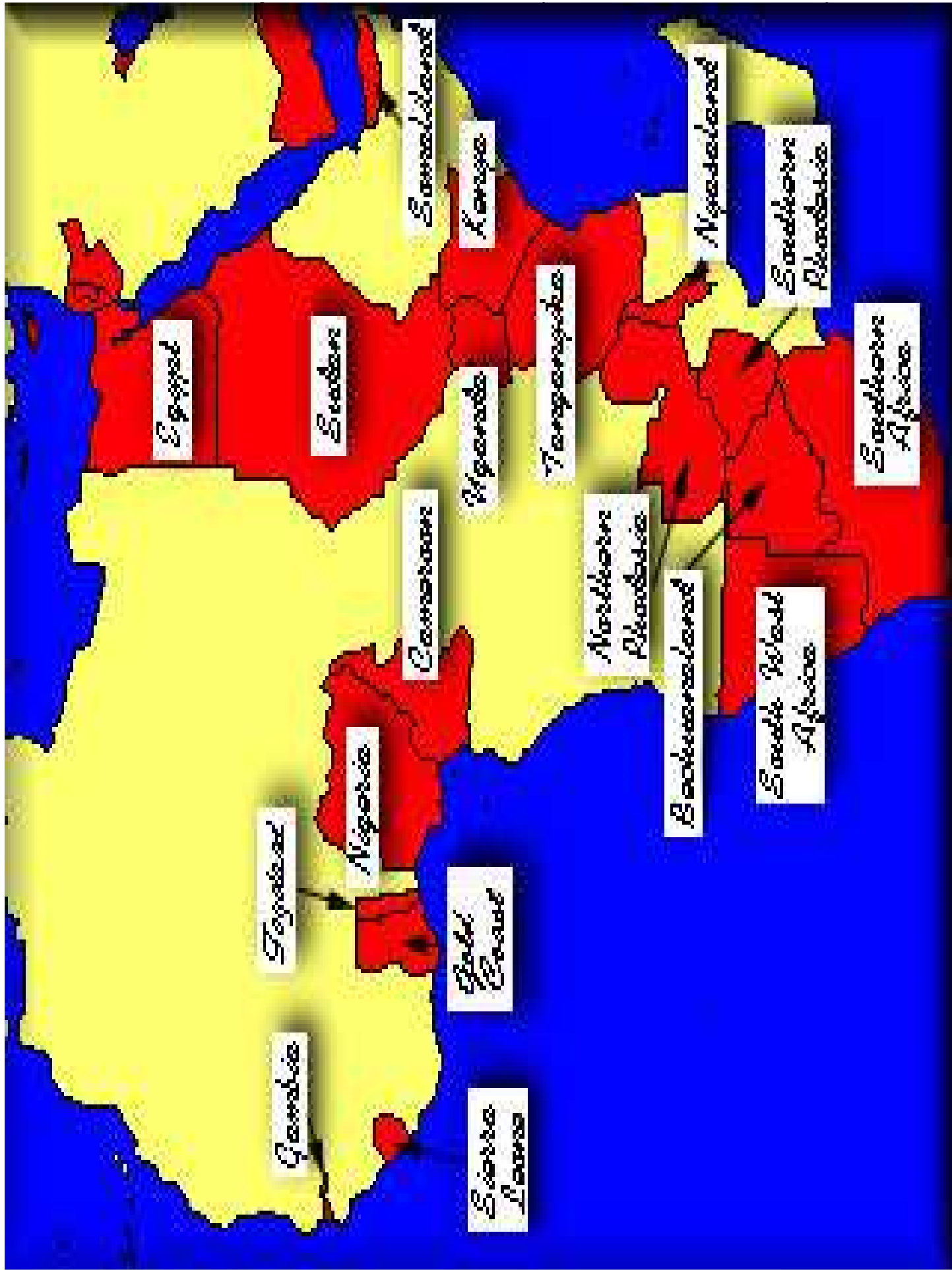
## **Ethiopian War**

- ▶ **Seizing an African colonialist empire seemed old-fashioned in 1935**
- ▶ **N. Chamberlain, Chancellor of Exchequer: It is not Italy's colonial aspirations which worry us, but the proposal to achieve them by war**
- ▶ **Imperial aims not to publicised in circles where mass opinion was involved**



# Horn of Africa







# Italian East Africa



# Mussolini-Laval Agreements

- ▶ **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 living 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 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







- Area drained by the Nile River and its tributaries
- 1 Aswan High Dam
  - 2 White Nile Dam
  - 3 Sennar Dam
  - 4 Khashm el Qirba Dam
  - 5 Roseires Dam
  - 6 Owen Falls Dam

0 500 Miles  
0 500 Kilometers



# 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**

# Hoare-Laval Pact

- ▶ Anglo-French proposal approved Dec 8
- A) Recommendation to Emperor to accept some territorial changes in favour of Italy
- B) Eastern 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



# Italy's Flaws in Ethiopia

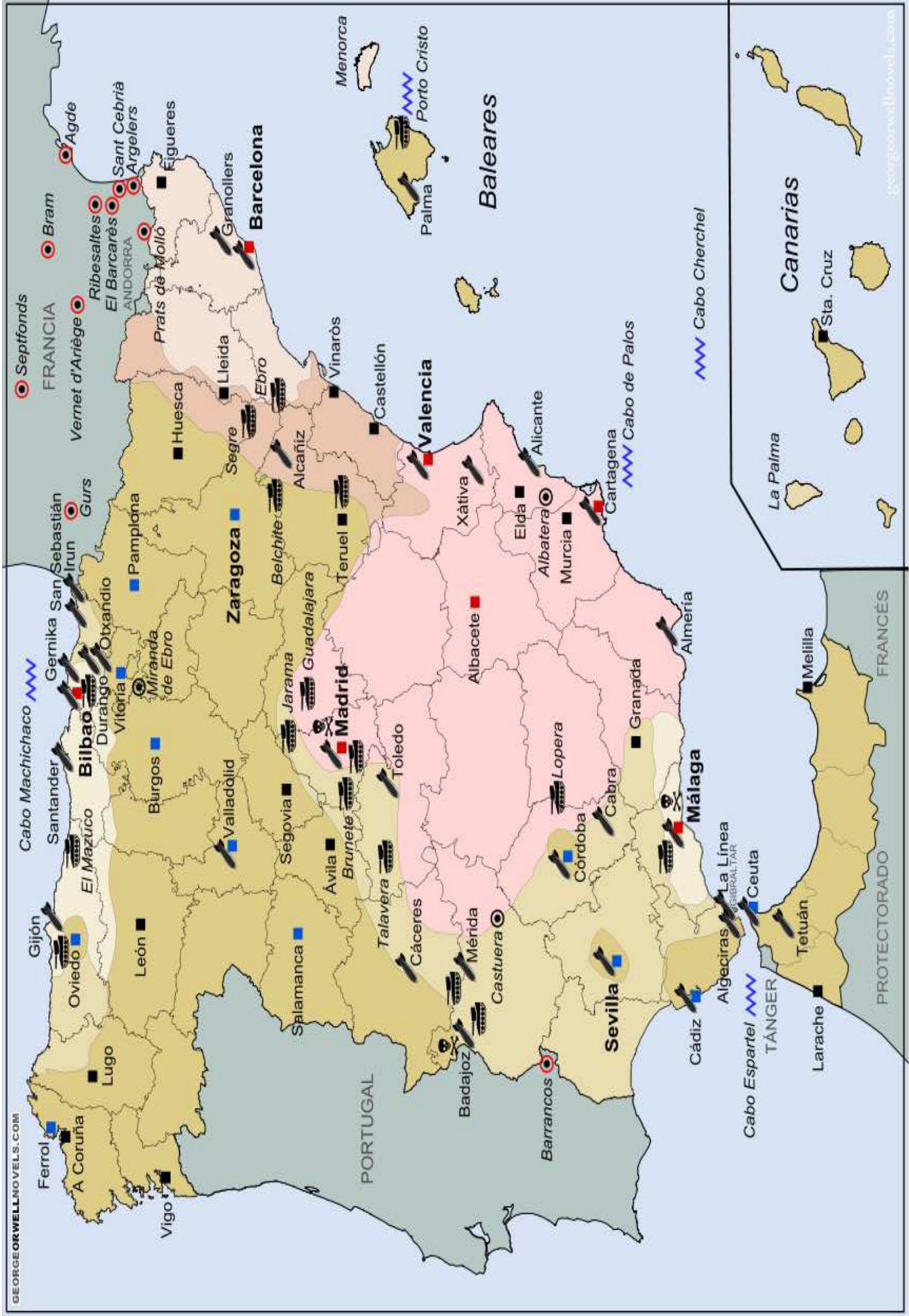
- ▶ **Economic:** to overwhelm backward Ethiopian armed forces, Mussolini had marshalled the best of Italian technology and more than 500,000 troops
- ▶ Taking Addis Abeba by no means implied pacification of the country
- ▶ Italian economy, despite propaganda about autarky, steadily deteriorated over the following years
- ▶ **Brutality:** War did not alter Italian reputation abroad
- A)** Left and moderate right appalled by use of gas which made Mussolini most morally detestable dictator
- B)** Salvemini: War in Ethiopia as prelude to WW2, since it started a process impossible to stop

# 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!**

# Spanish Civil War

- ▶ **High clergy delighted that Mussolini had joined anti-communist crusade**
- ▶ **War costly in finance, men, and material**
- ▶ **Neither Franco, nor Spanish public opinion displayed much gratitude**
- ▶ **Guadalajara another Caporetto, with Fascist forces equipped with old material**
- ▶ **Mussolini thought of something else when war in Spain was over: Italian people to be moulded through fighting**
- ▶ **April 1939: occupation and annexation of Albania**



Initial Nationalist zone - July 1936  
 Nationalist advance until September 1936  
 Nationalist advance until February 1939  
 Last area under Republican control



Nationalist advance until November 1938  
 Nationalist advance until February 1939  
 Last area under Republican control

Main Nationalist centres  
 Main Republican centres  
 Land battles  
 Naval battles  
 Bombed cities  
 Concentration camps  
 Massacres  
 Refugee camps



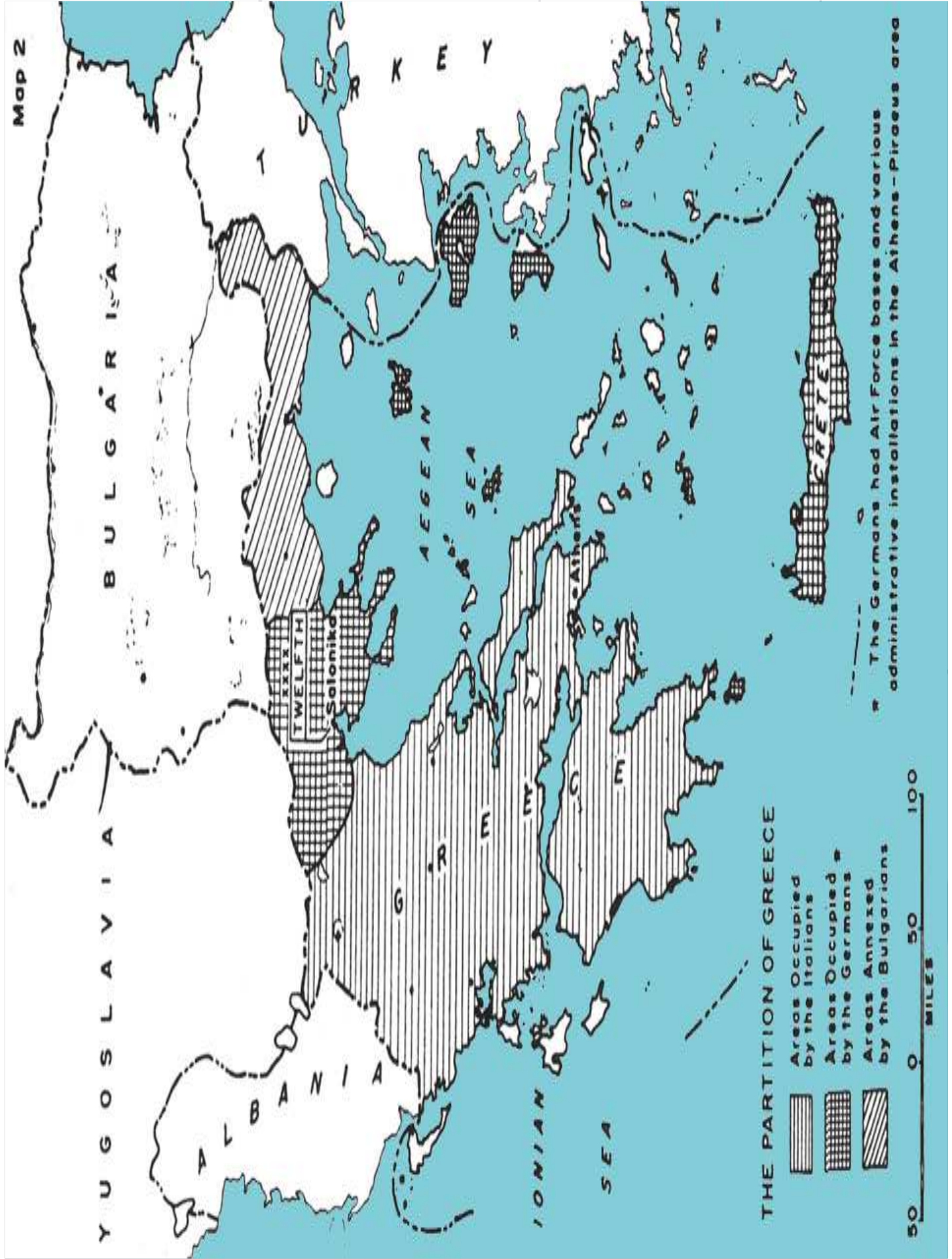
# Pact of Steel

- ▶ **Italy ready to join war effort only by 1943**
- ▶ **No serious war aims and no economic and military preparation for combat**
- ▶ **Only policy to adopt was non-belligerency, resuming very much position of 1914**
- ▶ **All depended on what happened on front**
- ▶ **Nazi said what they meant, while Italy joined war when it was supposed to be over, in order to get something at peace-table**
- ▶ **No widespread popular backing**
- ▶ **Ciano: may God help Italy!**

# Disaster in Greece

- ▶ **After failure of Greek campaign, Italy became political puppet of Germany**
- ▶ **No more space to pursue independent foreign policy**
- ▶ **Hitler, Sept 1943: Italy never was a power, is no Power today and will not be a Power in the future**

Map 2



# Early Italian Republic

- ▶ Even communists were not averse to what conservatives called unjust peace
- ▶ Italy should retain some presence in Africa, due to rapid resumption of emigration
- ▶ Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza (1947-1951): in foreign policy, it is better to help the inevitable
- ▶ European policy pushed ahead
- ▶ Two myths:
  - A) The Resistance as spontaneous rising of anti-Fascists. Since Fascism had meant aggression and racism, Republic meant peace, fraternity and international arbitration
  - B) Fascism as a parenthesis in national history. Liberal Italy had been a democracy in the making. Entry into WW1 was just and proper for a nation State.