



# 04

Chapter 4: Italian expansion and its consequences

This chapter focuses on the causes, events, and responses to Italian expansion up to 1937. In particular, it will:

- examine the reasons why Italy had ambitions for new territory
- assess the impact of Italy's foreign policy on European diplomacy and on the move to global war.

The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini inspecting a regiment of Blackshirts leaving for Eastern Africa on April 27, 1936.

## 4.1 Causes of expansion

When World War I (1914–18) broke out, Italy was a relatively new European country facing many challenges; the concept of national identity was still in the making and Italians were more loyal to their regions than to their new country. There was conflict between the Catholic Church and the national government: as a result of the annexation of the Papal States to Italy in 1870, the pope refused to recognize the legitimacy of the Italian state. Italian Catholics, a vast majority of the population, saw themselves torn between political citizenship and their religious beliefs. Industrial centres had developed in the north, but agriculture continued to be the main economic activity in the south, where the levels of poverty, illiteracy, and malnutrition were high. In order to gain access to more raw material and markets, Italy tried to colonize parts of Africa before World War I but was limited to Libya, Eritrea, and part of Somaliland. None of these territories provided Italy with relevant resources or with prestige.

As a treaty partner of the **Central Powers** at the time of the outbreak of World War I, Italy remained neutral in the conflict until it joined the side of the Allies in 1915, under the Treaty of London (also known as the London Pact). The treaty had promised Italy territories including South Tyrol, Istria, Trentino, Trieste, part of the Dalmatia coast, plus indemnities corresponding to war efforts, and possible gains in Africa. Although Italy did receive a big part of what had been agreed upon in 1915, the **Treaty of St Germain** (1919) made Dalmatia a part of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Furthermore, although Germany was stripped of its colonies, none went to Italy. This lack of colonial gains and the loss of Dalmatia became main sources of frustration for Italians, who were dissatisfied with the treaty and claimed they had ‘won the war but lost the peace’.

After the war, Italy demanded territories, such as the port of Fiume, which had not been included in the Treaty of London. In protest against the postwar settlement, Gabriele D’Annunzio led a group of war veterans to occupy Fiume by force in 1919, thus sparking a wave of nationalism.

### Gabriele D’Annunzio and the Blackshirts

Gabriele D’Annunzio was an Italian nationalist who opposed the postwar territorial arrangements for Italy, and who referred to the situation as a ‘mutilated peace’. It was also D’Annunzio who seized Fiume with Italian volunteers wearing black shirts, an event that inspired the paramilitary group that came to be known as the Blackshirts. The Blackshirts eventually played a part in bringing Benito Mussolini to power. The occupation of Fiume was short-lived, however, as D’Annunzio was forced to abandon it in January 1921.



A map of the Kingdom of Italy in 1919 and its surrounding states.



Postwar Italy faced a number of other problems:

- **Economic issues:** Italy owed large sums of money to Britain and the United States – money used to finance the war effort. Inflation and unemployment caused much unrest across the country.
- **Social issues:** There were repeated workers' strikes and riots as well as peasants' attempts to take over land in the south.
- **Political issues:** As a country with limited democratic experience, the coalition governments that ruled Italy after the war were inefficient. Industrialists and landowners feared the influence of **Bolshevism** and turned to paramilitary organizations, offering them financial support in exchange for protection from left-wing groups.

The period between 1919 and 1920 was a violent one in Italy. Former soldiers, who, like D'Annunzio, were discontented with the results of the war for Italy, organized themselves to intimidate communists and socialists. One of these groups in Milan was led by Benito Mussolini, who was appointed prime minister in 1922 for the National Fascist Party (*Partito Nazionale Fascista*, PNF) under the principles of 'order, discipline, hierarchy'.

## CHALLENGE YOURSELF

**ATL** Thinking, research, and social skills

Now that you have an understanding of Italy's situation after World War I, carry out some research in groups to find out how and why Mussolini came to power. You may wish to consider the following questions: How did Mussolini propose to solve the problems facing Italy after the war? Which social groups felt represented by the Fascists and why? Explain how Mussolini came to power by analysing the events leading up to his appointment as prime minister in October 1922, including the March on Rome.

The name of the National Fascist Party was inspired by ancient Roman history. The term 'Fascist' derives from the word *fasces*, meaning a bundle of rods tied about a lictor's axe, a symbol of Roman authority. A bound bundle is also a symbol of strength through unity, given that the rods would be much stronger when bundled together. Mussolini's vision of an ideal Italy was said to be inspired by the ancient Roman Empire at the height of its prosperity and glory.

## Impact of Mussolini's Fascism on Italy's foreign policy

As you work through this next section, analyse the continuity and change in Italian foreign policy under Mussolini. To what extent were such changes a response to Mussolini's pragmatic considerations? What elements of continuity can you identify?

In order to understand the impact of Mussolini's Fascist ideology on his foreign policy, you should first analyse what Italian **Fascism** stood for. It is difficult to provide a single, accurate definition of Italian Fascism from its establishment in 1922 to its collapse in 1945. Mussolini himself considered Fascism a movement and a concept that was constantly changing. In the same way Fascism moved from being anti-monarchic to working with the monarchy, or from being liberal to becoming highly protectionist; in foreign policy Italy experienced dramatic changes as Mussolini refused to compromise to any set principle, acting at times as an 'honest broker' and at others like a 'mad dog'.

Ideologically, war was considered a necessary stage in the development of great nations. Mussolini himself claimed that,

“War alone brings to its highest tension all human energy and puts a stamp of nobility upon the peoples who have the courage to meet it [...] Thus a doctrine which is founded upon this harmful postulate of peace is hostile to Fascism.

*My Autobiography, Dover Publications, 1996, p. 230*

But Mussolini was also a pragmatic leader whose foreign policy was shaped by considerations relating to domestic issues as well as changes in the international situation.

Many children joined the Fascist group *Balilla*. This photograph shows a group of children in Rome, attending a speech by Mussolini. What does this image say about the significance of war to Fascist ideology?



### Activity 1

#### ATL Thinking and research skills

#### Source A

Below is an extract from a speech delivered by Benito Mussolini in the Chamber, 16 November 1922.

“The fundamental principle upon which our foreign policy is based is that treaties of peace, once signed and ratified, must be carried out, no matter whether they are good or bad. A self-respecting nation cannot follow another course. Treaties are not eternal or irreparable; they are chapters and not epilogues in history; to put them into practice means to try them. If in the course of execution they are proved to be absurd, that in itself constitutes the possibility of a further examination of the respective positions.

*Our foreign policy, which aims at the protection of our interests, respect of treaties and the settling of our position in the Entente, cannot be described as adventurous and imperialist, in the vulgar sense of the word. We want to follow a policy of peace that will not, however, be at the same time suicidal.*

#### Source B

Christopher Duggan is a British historian specializing in Italian history. Below is an extract from his book *Fascist Voices. An Intimate History of Mussolini's Italy*.

“After the March on Rome, Mussolini was careful to indicate that he did not intend to embark on any new or independent path in foreign policy. He had no experience on the international stage [...] He talked repeatedly of the need for overseas 'expansion' in order to meet the requirements of Italy's fast-growing population. He denigrated the recently constituted League of Nations as little more than a 'Franco-British duet' [...] And on the few occasions that he travelled abroad, he made it clear that he was determined to uphold Italy's right to be regarded as a great power.

*Christopher Duggan, Fascist Voices, 2012, Vintage Books, pp. 73–74*

Question 2 asks you to analyse the value and limitations of a source by referring to three elements: its origins, purpose, and content. An effective structure for this question is to treat the value and limitations separately and link each of these to the origins, purpose, and content.



1. In Source A, what is the meaning of the sentence 'we want to follow a policy of peace that will not, however, be at the same time suicidal'?
2. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, analyse the value and limitations of Source B for a historian studying the aims of Mussolini's foreign policy.

## Activity 2

ATL Thinking skills

Look at the following question:

**Compare and contrast what Sources A and B in Activity 1 reveal about the aims of Mussolini's foreign policy.**

Below is an extract from a sample answer.

### Student answer - Jane

Both sources show that Mussolini considered Italy to be a great power. In Source A he acknowledged Italy to have a 'place in the Entente' and Source B says 'he was determined to uphold Italy's right to be regarded as a great power'. Also, both sources show a certain readiness to cooperate at an international level. This is shown when Source B mentions that Mussolini did not intend to embark on any new or independent foreign policy, which is consistent with the message in Source A about Italy following a policy of peace.

However, Source B states that Mussolini denigrated the League of Nations, and Source A shows him very willing to cooperate in the peaceful solutions of conflicts that may arise from treaties. Also, Source B mentions Mussolini's desire to expand overseas, while in Source A Mussolini seems to be more interested in a peaceful revision of treaties that do not work.

### Examiner's comments

Jane makes some explicit comparisons and contrasts between the sources. She has written two paragraphs: one for comparisons and one for contrasts. It is an effective way to show the examiner she has approached both parts of the question. Also, see how her points are supported with specific reference to each source, either by briefly quoting from a source or by paraphrasing it.

However, Jane's answer does not contain enough comparisons and contrasts to obtain full marks (6 marks). To gain full marks, you need to identify six points about the sources: you may include three points for comparisons and three for contrasts, though if you find more of one than the other that would be fine.

Now, complete Jane's answer by addressing any other comparisons and contrasts that have not yet been mentioned. Once you have done this, find a partner and swap your answers. Mark each other's work using the markbands for the third question on page xv.

## An expansionist foreign policy – a right and a necessity

It could be argued that Mussolini saw an expansionist foreign policy both as a *right* and a *necessity*.

It was considered a right because of the following:

- Echoing the feelings of many Italians, Mussolini saw a need to revise the postwar treaties in order to revert to the 'mutilated peace' of 1919.
- Mussolini believed in Italy's 'imperial destiny': as heir of ancient Rome, Italy had a historical right to the Mediterranean region.
- As his rule progressed, Mussolini defended Italy's right to claim more territories with racial arguments.

It was considered a necessity because of the following:

- Given that propaganda was an important characteristic of Fascism, territorial expansion was used to increase Italy's prestige and to enhance the cult of the leader.
- Mussolini claimed Italy needed colonies to provide arable land in order to expand the economy as well as new territories to resettle a growing Italian population.
- As Mussolini's regime met increasing challenges at home, a successful foreign policy was sought as an opportunity to move attention away from his domestic policies.

## How did Mussolini plan to achieve these aims?

Although Mussolini was appointed head of a coalition government, he obtained dictatorial powers very quickly by using methods such as coercion and intimidation of the opposition. He founded a secret police, implemented censorship, and reformed the state with the aim of having direct control over all areas. By 1925, formal opposition to Fascism was banned and Mussolini began to rule by decree the following year. Known as Il Duce (meaning 'The Leader'), Mussolini became the centre of a personality cult campaign that encompassed education, propaganda, and indoctrination.



In the background of this propaganda poster of the *Fasci di Combattimento* you can read the Fascist motto 'Believe, Obey, Fight'. What do you think the significance of this poster was in terms of communicating Mussolini's aims?

## Impact of domestic economic issues on Italy's foreign policy up to 1929

Mussolini understood that, until Italy's economic issues were solved, opportunities for an aggressive foreign policy were limited. The Italian economy was relatively small and depended on imports. When Mussolini came to power, Italy was burdened by unemployment, a huge gap between the agrarian countryside and the industrial north, and a dependency on foreign products.

Until 1925, Mussolini had implemented liberal economic policies to encourage private investment and the reactivation of the economy. By 1925, unemployment had dropped from 500,000 to 122,000, and Italy even enjoyed a budget surplus. After 1925, the Italian economy became **protectionist**. Here, Mussolini's aim was to make Italy self-sufficient (that is, to achieve **autarky**) and not depend on imports. With the aim of increasing national production, he placed import duties on many goods. He also introduced the Battle for Grain and the Battle for the Lira. The Battle for Grain aimed at increasing the production of cereals to achieve self-sufficiency; although Italy did achieve self-sufficiency in wheat, it was at the expense of other agricultural products: the exports of traditional Italian products, such as wine and olives, dropped. The Battle for the Lira revalued the currency to increase Italian prestige, which also worked as propaganda. While imports benefited from the new terms of trade, exports suffered as

they became more expensive to other countries. This contributed to a decline of Italian exports and of tourism.

### Activity 3

ATL Social, thinking, and communication skills

#### Source A

This is an extract from a public speech by Mussolini in Pesaro, 1926.

“We will conduct the economic battle for the defense of the lira with the utmost resolve. From this square to the entire civilized world I say that I will defend the lira to the last breath, to the last blood... The Fascist regime is ready, from its leader to its last follower, to require all the necessary sacrifices needed. Our lira, the symbol of our nation, the mark of our wealth, the symbol of your struggles, our efforts, our sacrifices, our tears, our blood, must be defended and will be defended.

#### Source B

John Pollard is a British historian. Below is an extract from his book *The Fascist Experience in Italy* (1998).

“What Fascist foreign policy lacked in the 1920s was not ambitious aims but the means and, above all, the opportunity to achieve them [...] Economic difficulties also played a part. Until the 1930s, Italy was too closely tied into the world economic system, and in particular too dependent on other powers, notably the United States and Britain, for its financial stability, to be able to indulge in military adventures. Above all, until the early 1930s, the international situation was not conducive to the success of Fascism’s ambitious, expansionist foreign-policy aims. Thanks to American isolationism, the international boycott of Soviet Russia and the weakness of Weimar Germany, Britain and France ruled the international roost, dominating European affairs and effectively controlling the League of Nations; hence Mussolini’s suspicion, sometimes hostility, towards that organisation. Forced to continue playing the junior partner to the Western powers, Mussolini had little room for diplomatic manoeuvre or to flex his international muscles.

1. What does Source A say about the reasons for the revaluation of the Lira?
2. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, analyse the value and limitations of Source A to a historian studying Mussolini’s aims.
3. In pairs, identify the reasons provided in Source B to explain why Mussolini did not execute an aggressive foreign policy in the 1920s.

Question 1 is the type of question you will get as the first to answer in your exam. It is worth 3 marks. Find three points that could be made about the source in relation to the question and state them briefly. You will not receive any marks for outside knowledge, so limit yourself to the material within the source.



### ATL Communication skills



Think of other examples you have studied that proposed an expansionist foreign policy to solve their economic problems. For example, what did you learn in Case Study 1 about the relations between the Japanese economy and its foreign policy? What are the similarities and differences between what happened in Japan and what happened in Italy?

## CHALLENGE YOURSELF

ATL Research and social skills

In groups, find more information about the Italian economy and Mussolini’s policies up to 1929. In particular:

- What did Italy import and what did it export? How does this information help you understand the challenges of the Italian economy?
- Consider other battles, such as the Battle for Land and the Battle for Births. What were their aims and results?
- What was the ‘corporate state’? To what extent did it contribute to the organization of the Italian economy?

Mussolini’s Italy never became self-sufficient. This was partly due to a combination of both the nature of the Italian economy and Mussolini’s policies. Later in this chapter, you will analyse the influence of another important event on Italy’s economy and foreign policy: the Great Depression of the 1930s.

## 4.2

## Italian expansion and international response

In the previous section you have studied Mussolini's aims in foreign policy. You have also read about the methods he implemented to consolidate power, and the ways in which the economic policies of Italy related to Mussolini's foreign policy. This section analyses Mussolini's foreign policy and assesses the responses of the international community. As you work your way through it, think of the key concept of *significance*. Which events in this section do you consider as having contributed the most to the move to global war? Also, consider the key concept of *perspective*. How far did the changes in the diplomatic alignments respond to Mussolini's foreign policy? What other explanations have you been able to find?

## Italian foreign policy between 1922 and 1933

Although the case study focuses on events from 1933, it is useful to have some background information on Italy's foreign policy in the 1920s. Mussolini had limited opportunities to expand before the 1930s, but he attempted to gain some territory in the Mediterranean by attacking Corfu (1923) and Fiume (1924). As mentioned in the previous section, Mussolini believed Italy had a right to control the Mediterranean Sea; he therefore challenged Britain and France, which also had interests in the region.

## The Corfu Incident, 1923

In 1923, Mussolini blamed Greece for the murders of four Italian diplomats working for the **Conference of Ambassadors** on the Greek–Albanian border. When Greece refused to offer official apologies and pay economic compensations to Italy, Mussolini bombarded and invaded the Greek island of Corfu. The League of Nations attempted to settle the dispute but its terms were rejected by Mussolini, who threatened to leave the organization if his demands were not met. The Conference of Ambassadors then ruled that Greece had to pay reparations to Italy, and, after threats of intervention by the British, Mussolini finally withdrew from Corfu. Although the invasion was advertised in Italy as a huge success, the country was forced to withdraw from Corfu; relations with Britain and France were damaged.

## Activity 4



## Thinking, communication, and social skills

## Source A

Here is an extract from a speech by Mussolini to the Italian Senate, November 1923.

*“You must not believe that the occupation of Corfu was carried out only as a sanction; it was also carried out to increase the prestige of Italy... Italians have never been much interested in the League of Nations; they believed it was a lifeless academic organization of no importance... In point of fact, the League is an Anglo-French duet... Italy's position so far has been one of absolute inferiority.”*

## Source B

The following cartoon was published in *Punch*. It shows Mussolini setting foot on Corfu. The caption reads: ‘The Latest Caesar. Sig. Mussolini (a bit above himself). “I do bestride the narrow world like a colossus.” After *Julius Caesar*, Act 1, Scene 2.’

A cartoon caption can offer much valuable information to help you understand the message of the cartoon. Make sure you consider the captions when answering cartoon-based questions. In pairs, explain the meaning and significance of this particular caption. Discuss how it relates to the cartoon. Then write up your answers individually.



1. What is the message of Source B?
2. To what extent does the message in Source B support the view in Source A?



The term 'Little Entente' was coined by the French. The use of 'little' implied that France did not think the alliance of Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia was as strong as the Triple Entente, an association between France, Russia, and Britain formed before World War I.



## Fiume, 1924

Earlier in the chapter you have read about the Italian claims to Fiume, a territory under Yugoslavia, and about Gabriele D'Annunzio's brief occupation of it. Shortly after the Corfu Incident, Mussolini invaded Fiume. The king of Yugoslavia handed over Fiume to Italy and signed the Pact of Rome with Mussolini. Both countries promised mutual neutrality in case of an attack by a third party.

France disliked Mussolini's intimidation of Yugoslavia and how he tried to expand in the Balkans. In the 1920s, France signed military and political agreements with the members of the Little Entente – a defensive alliance between Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Yugoslavia – to prevent them undermining the Paris Peace Settlement in the Balkans. Britain, for its part, did not want Mussolini to extend his influence in the Mediterranean. Mussolini kept Fiume, but clashes with France and Britain over the Mediterranean and the Balkans were to continue.

## Italy and collective security in the 1920s

In the mid-1920s, the European nations came to the conclusion that it was impossible to expect the postwar treaties to be upheld by the use of force. Consequently, they promoted international treaties to maintain **collective security**. Several treaties were signed to guarantee the frontiers established at Versailles, and to reject using war as a means to solve conflicts. Mussolini, aware of the alarm raised in Europe by his attacks on Corfu and Fiume, chose this opportunity to show himself as a more conciliatory character.

There were two reasons why Mussolini became more conciliatory after Fiume:

- Joining the efforts of collective security was perceived as a good way of diffusing British and French suspicions.
- Neither the Italian economy nor the Italian armed forces were ready to engage in an armed conflict.

## The Locarno Pact, 1925

The Locarno Pact was a series of treaties signed in 1925 by France, Germany, Britain, Belgium, and Italy. The pact guaranteed the frontiers between Germany, France,

and Belgium as set up by the Treaty of Versailles. Britain and Italy acted as the underwriters, agreeing to defend any signatory that became the victim of a violation of the terms of the pact. Although Italy was able to sit at the high table among the great powers, Locarno was not the diplomatic success Mussolini had hoped for: since the pact did not guarantee Germany's eastern frontiers, it did not allay Italy's concerns over a potential expansion of Germany into neighbouring Austria.

The treaties signalled the beginning of a decade in which Mussolini appeared to behave as a 'good European': in 1928, he signed the Kellogg–Briand Pact to ban war as an instrument to resolve conflicts. However, while promoting collective security in Europe, Italy secretly supported separatist forces in the Balkans, such as the Croats in Yugoslavia, in stirring up unrest among the Little Entente members and, consequently, offsetting French influence.

### Activity 5

#### ATL Thinking and communication skills

The paragraph below tells us Mussolini's view of the Locarno Treaty.

“It would have been a colossal blunder not to have underwritten the Locarno guarantees. Had we abstained, we should have had no part in the agreement which is at the basis of the relations between the great European Powers. In the second place, we should have been isolated. In the third, we should have lost an opportunity to put ourselves on an equal footing with England on a memorable occasion.

**From Gaetano Salvemini, *Prelude to World War II*, Gollancz, 1953, p. 67.**

1. According to the source, why did Italy sign the Locarno Treaties?
2. What does the source reveal about a) the aims and b) the methods of Mussolini's foreign policy in the late 1920s?

#### Student answer to Question 1 – Rhidian

Italy signed the Locarno Treaties firstly to be part of the great European powers; secondly, to avoid Italian diplomatic isolation; thirdly, so it could be on an equal footing with England.

#### Examiner's comments

Rhidian has identified three reasons why Italy signed Locarno. The answer is brief but addresses the question effectively. The reasons are clearly signposted, using linking words like 'secondly' and 'thirdly'. This is an effective way of showing you are addressing different points.

## Italian foreign policy in the 1930s

The 1930s saw a series of significant changes in European relations – changes that influenced Italy's foreign policy and accelerated the move to global war.

Firstly, Europe was hit by the **Great Depression**. This world economic crisis had a negative impact on international trade, affecting Italy and cutting its access to foreign loans. In an attempt to solve economic problems, Mussolini's foreign policy became more aggressive than it had been in the 1920s. A second factor that modified the European state of affairs was the rise of Adolf Hitler in Germany in 1933. Even though Hitler and Mussolini were to fight on the same side in World War II, Hitler – at the time of his appointment as German chancellor – was viewed by Mussolini with much suspicion; the latter had feared that Germany would try to revise the Treaty of Versailles, in particular with regard to Germany's ambition to unite with Austria, Italy's neighbour.

Italian foreign policy in the 1930s could be roughly divided into two periods, with 1935 as the turning point. Before 1935, Italy continued to show some cooperation with Britain and France. In 1935, its foreign policy became openly aggressive and the country remained in a state of constant war until the end of World War II.

## The impact of the Great Depression on Italy's economy and foreign policy

The Italian economy was already experiencing some difficulties as a result of Mussolini's policies (such as the revaluation of the Lira), when the Great Depression created an additional burden. International trade was severely affected and Italian exports were no exception. Like the rest of Europe, Italy lost international financial support from the United States. Mussolini first saw the crisis as an American problem and considered that Italian policies aiming at autarky would protect his country from the Depression. But the revaluation of the Lira, as well as high levels of public spending, had not prepared the Italian economy well. With a decrease in international demand, industrial production fell by 25 per cent between 1929 and 1932. This had a negative impact on wages and employment levels: by 1932, unemployment had reached 1 million.

Mussolini responded to the effects of the Depression by increasing state intervention. He introduced policies to limit unemployment, such as the expansion of public works and rearmament. The navy and the air force rapidly expanded as a result. Mussolini also saw the Depression as an opportunity for expansion since the foreign powers were preoccupied with finding solutions to overcome the crisis. He believed that a successful revision of the postwar treaties – by expanding Italian territory – could help mitigate the effects of the Depression on Italy; additionally, short and successful wars could divert attention away from Italy's domestic problems.

### Activity 6



### Thinking and social skills

The following extract is from a speech by Mussolini addressing the workers of Milan in 1934. It highlights the relationship between a Fascist economy and a Fascist foreign policy.

*“ This is not a crisis in the traditional sense of the term. It is the passage from one phase of civilization to another. It is no longer an economy aiming at individual profit, but an economy concerned with collective interests [...] The future cannot be planned like an itinerary or a timetable. One must not take out a mortgage too long into the future. Indeed, as we have said before, we are absolutely convinced that fascism is bound to become the standard type of civilization of our century for Italy and for Europe.*

1. What does this source reveal about Mussolini's views of the 1930 crisis?
2. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, analyse the value and limitations of this source for a historian studying the impact of the Great Depression on Mussolini's foreign policy.

Below is an answer to Question 2 from Jim. Read it and see what you think.

#### Student answer - Jim

This is a contemporary source as it is from a speech by Mussolini to Italian workers given in 1934. It is therefore a useful document in providing insight into the impact of the Depression in Italy. It shows Mussolini is aware that the crisis imposes the need to make changes in Italian foreign policy. It demonstrates his ambition to expand Fascism beyond Italy. Because he is addressing Italian workers, it also shows he is aware of the need to have the support of Italian men if Italy is to embark on a more aggressive policy.

However, because this is a public speech, it may be intended as propaganda and may not reveal Mussolini's real plans for Italy after the Depression. It does not offer any indication of the reactions of the workers or of foreign countries to the speech. Additionally, Mussolini does not explain how he intends to bring about the necessary changes. Finally, because the speech is from 1934, it can only focus on the short-term effects of the Depression on Italian foreign policy.

3. In groups, discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Jim's answer above.

## The rise of Hitler in Germany

Hitler's appointment as chancellor of Germany in 1933 contributed to a number of changes in diplomatic alignments in Europe. Many nations reacted to the rise of Hitler by reinforcing collective security. In order to curb Hitler's ambitions, Mussolini proposed a treaty between Italy, Germany, France, and Britain in June 1933. The Four-Power Pact, an agreement of understanding and cooperation, was signed to promote collaboration and maintenance of peace. Although the pact contributed to the cult of Mussolini as a successful international leader within Italy, it did not last long. In October that year, Hitler withdrew Germany from the League of Nations and the Disarmament Conference; cooperation between the four countries thus became more difficult to sustain.

### Activity 7

#### ATL Communication and thinking skills

This is a cartoon published by *Punch* in 1933. The caption reads: 'Dealing with Gulliver. The Leading Lilliputians (all at once): "Now, boys, if the Geneva strings burst before we've finished with him we'll use this rope to tie him down."'



1. What is the message conveyed by this source?

As mentioned earlier, Mussolini had concerns over Hitler's intentions in Austria. South Tyrol, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was handed to Italy in 1919 under the terms of the Treaty of St Germain. Although the union between Germany and Austria (known as **Anschluss**) was banned under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, nationalism was strong and the rise of Hitler in Germany was becoming a

## CHALLENGE YOURSELF

### Thinking and research skills ATL

The cartoon in Activity 7 is based on Jonathan Swift's novel *Gulliver's Travels*. Find information about the story. Who was Gulliver? What happened during his trip to Lilliput? In what ways do you think the novel relates to the cartoon?



## Thinking and research skills



What other examples in history in which a group tried to impose its beliefs on others are you familiar with? Can you think of a contemporary example of this? What is your reaction to these events? How far can the study of history contribute to the protection of cultural diversity?

threat to Italy's authority in South Tyrol. During the 1920s, Mussolini tried, with limited success, to 'Italianize' this largely German-speaking territory by banning the use of the German language and promoting the migration of Italians to the region.

In July 1934 Austria's chancellor, Engelbert Dollfuss, was murdered by Nazi agents in an attempt to bring about an Anschluss between Austria and Germany. Italy quickly threatened to intervene in defence of Austrian independence by mobilizing troops to the Austrian border, the Brenner Pass. Germany, not yet strong enough to face Italy, backed down. This was a great triumph for Italian diplomacy and served to put forward the idea of a strong Italian military. However, the murder of Dollfuss demonstrated the vulnerability of Austrian independence. When Hitler introduced conscription and announced rearmament in 1935, Mussolini proposed a conference with Britain and France to discuss ways to control German revisionism. The three countries signed the Stresa Front by which they reinforced their commitment to the 1925 Locarno Pact of preserving the 1919 German western frontiers. They also pledged to consult each other if the independence of Austria was threatened.

## Activity 8



## Communication and social skills

Professor A William Salomone was a specialist in modern Italian history. Below is an extract from his published work *Readings in Twentieth-Century European History* (1950).

“At the beginning of 1935, despite the lack of any formal diplomatic agreements, there existed among France, Great Britain, and Italy a certain solidarity of views in regard to the 'German Problem.' [...] The Nazi Putsch in Vienna in July, 1934, was checked by Italy's quick and perhaps decisive reaction through the dispatch of Italian divisions to the Brenner. On September 27, 1934, had come the Three Power Declaration reasserting 'the common policy' of France, Britain, and Italy 'regarding the necessity of maintaining the independence and integrity of Austria.' The question, however, remained for Italy: when would the next step of a German drive for the Alpine frontier and Southeastern Europe come and for how long could Mussolini alone stand in Hitler's path? Germany seemed at present occupied with European territorial questions. But for Britain the query was: when would naval and colonial problems assume the form of a threat against her supremacy? [...] The Stresa Conference of April, 1935, proved decisive but not as expected.

1. According to this source, why were Italy and France worried about Germany in 1935?
2. In pairs, study the map of Europe in 1919 on page 90. Identify the countries that would have felt threatened by the political changes taking place in the 1930s.

Similar to the fate of the Four-Power Pact, the Stresa Front – the last attempt by Europe to use collective security against German revisionism – collapsed. The failure of Stresa can be attributed to the fact that by 1935 national interests were put above collective security: for even before Stresa, Mussolini had started to mobilize troops in his African colonies in preparation for an invasion of Abyssinia (see next section); as for Britain, it actually helped Germany break the Treaty of Versailles by signing the Anglo-German Naval Agreement in June 1935, which allowed the German navy to be one-third of the size of Britain's (see page 129). France and Italy were outraged by the fact that Britain did not consult them before signing the agreement.

## Activity 9

## ATL Thinking and communication skills

Here is an extract from a speech by Mussolini to the Italians, 11 October 1935.

“For the past thirteen years I have been asking, begging, threatening so that the Italian people get their own place within lawful boundaries. I want the Italians to be able to earn their own bread and to be liberated from having to work for starvation wages at the arbitrary wishes of foreign powers [...] What I could achieve on Italian soil by improving this earth, I have already done. This cannot be forced any further [...] We need territories, otherwise we shall explode [...] We shall do everything in our power, we shall sacrifice everything we must, but we shall not surrender our aims!

1. What does the source reveal about the relationship between domestic economic issues and foreign policy in Italy in 1935?
2. What did Mussolini consider to be 'Italy's lawful boundaries'? On what grounds did this include Abyssinia?

## Italian expansion in Abyssinia, 1935–36

Abyssinia (known today as Ethiopia) was an independent monarchy located between the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. Attempting colonial expansion, Italy invaded Abyssinia towards the end of the 19th century; it was defeated in 1896 at the Battle of Adowa, during the First Italo-Ethiopian War. The 'Adowa scar' became a source of national humiliation for Italians. Haile Selassie, who became emperor of Abyssinia in 1930, ruled the country as an absolutist. The country's constitution, drafted after the model of the Japanese one, declared the emperor sacred. Haile Selassie wanted to modernize his empire and initiated reforms such as the building of railways. After the Great Depression, he strengthened trade with Japan.

Both Abyssinia and Italy joined the League of Nations after World War I. Article six of the League Covenant had stated that, should any member declare war on a member state, it would be treated as an attack on the entire organization requiring collective action. Additionally, Italy and Abyssinia had signed the Italo-Ethiopian Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration in 1928, declaring that territorial disputes between the two countries would be solved by impartial arbitration. However, neither the Treaty of Friendship nor the League of Nations prevented Italy's annexation of Abyssinia in 1935.

## Activity 10

## ATL Thinking and research skills

Here is a map of Abyssinia in 1934.



1. What can the map reveal about the reasons behind Mussolini's interest in Abyssinia?

## Why did Italy invade Abyssinia in 1935?

- **Historical factors:** Mussolini had an ambition to redress the humiliation of Adowa and conquer an empire for Italy.
- **Economic factors:** Mussolini hoped that Abyssinia would provide access to raw materials and markets, as well as creating new territory for a growing Italian population. Evidence showing that plans to attack Abyssinia were ready as early as 1929 seems to support this argument. Also, the effects of the Great Depression had put Italy under additional pressure to lift itself out of an economic crisis.
- **Political factors:** A successful campaign in Abyssinia would divert the attention of Italians away from the economic problems and affirm Mussolini's image as a successful leader.
- **The 'Abyssinian' factor:** According to Piers Brendon (for more information, see page 103), Mussolini viewed Abyssinia's attempts at modernization with suspicion. He feared that unless he moved immediately, a modern Abyssinia could become a threat to the Italian colonies of Eritrea and Somaliland. It is also true that that Mussolini criticized the feudalism of Abyssinia and, above all, the prevalence of slavery.
- **International factors:** Mussolini thought Britain and France would give him a free hand to do as he pleased in Abyssinia, as a way of keeping on good terms with Italy in view of German rearmament. Also, given that Italy felt threatened by German ambitions in Austria, a victory over Abyssinia would show the Germans the strength of the Italian military.



This is an official stamp from 1975 with the image of Emperor Haile Selassie.

## The invasion

In December 1934, Italian troops provoked Abyssinia into a border clash with Italian Somaliland near the Walwal oasis. These borders had never been clearly set. Both Italian and Abyssinian nationals were killed in the confrontation and, like with Corfu, Mussolini began preparations for an invasion and demanded compensation for the Italian casualties as well as formal apologies from the Abyssinian government.

Often, a memorandum can offer a more personal (or revealing) view on an event or a situation than a public speech. In this specific source, Mussolini explains to his chief of general staff that Italy needs to move against Abyssinia immediately, for he is worried about the speed at which Abyssinia's forces are growing and developing. It is unlikely that Mussolini would have used this argument to justify the invasion before the Italian citizens. Therefore, we may say that the purpose of a source (in this case, to whom it is directed) conditions its content and affects its value and limitations.



### Activity 11

ATL Thinking and communication skills

This is an extract from a memorandum by Mussolini to Marshal Badoglio, Italian chief of general staff, 30 December 1934.

*I decide on this war, the object of which is nothing more nor less than the complete destruction of the Abyssinian army and the total conquest of Abyssinia. In no other way can we build the Empire [...] For our arms to achieve a rapid and decisive victory, we must deploy on a vast scale the mechanised forces, which are now at our disposal, and which the Abyssinians either do not possess at all or do so in insufficient degree, but which they will possess within a few years...*

**Anthony Adamthwaite, *The Lost Peace: International Relations in Europe 1918–1939*, The Camelot Press, 1980, p. 165**

1. According to the source, why did Mussolini decide to provoke Abyssinia in December 1934?
2. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, analyse the value and limitations of the source for a historian studying the causes of Italian expansion.

Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations to mediate in the conflict, but the League refused to discuss issues of sovereignty as the borders between Abyssinia and Italian Somaliland were still in dispute. The League agreed to place an arms embargo on both countries in the hope that it would prevent an armed escalation of the conflict while a diplomatic solution was sought. The embargo significantly affected Abyssinia as it deepened the gap with Italy, a country that was able to produce most of its armaments at home.

In October 1935, Italian forces launched an invasion of Abyssinia. Partly because of its economic limitations and partly because of the arms embargo, Abyssinia could not confront the Italian army and air force. Once again, Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations, this time demanding the arms embargo to be lifted for his country so that his troops could obtain weaponry to fight the Italian advance. He was unsuccessful.

Despite the Italian forces being technologically superior (as shown by the use of tanks and aircrafts), they still employed illegal fighting methods, such as attacking civilians and ambulances and using chemical weapons against the Abyssinian population. The League formed a special committee to investigate the use of chemical weapons but claimed to be unable to reach a verdict; Britain and France never confronted Italy about this issue.

## CHALLENGE YOURSELF

### ATL Research and self-management skills

Both Italy and Abyssinia signed the 1925 Geneva Protocol, which prohibited the use of poisonous gas and other bacteriological methods of warfare. Find out why this protocol was signed, and how it proposed to deal with members breaking it.

## Activity 12

### ATL Thinking and communication skills

This is an illustration depicting the Battle of Amb Aradam (1936) by Achille Beltrame. It was published in the Italian weekly newspaper *La Domenica del Corriere* on 1 March 1936.



1. What message is this source trying to convey?
2. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, analyse the value and limitations of this source for a historian studying the nature of warfare in Abyssinia between 1935 and 1936.

## TOK

In his account of the Abyssinian crisis, historian Piers Brendon notes how, in 1934, Haile Selassie asked Germany for supplies of conventional and chemical weapons, and how Hitler sent him rifles and machine guns. How does knowing that Haile Selassie tried to obtain chemical weapons from Hitler influence the way you evaluate this event? To what extent does the rightness of an action depend on the context? What does this reveal about the role of emotions in the study of history?

## Ending the conflict

In an attempt to end the conflict between Italy and Abyssinia, the international community implemented two methods: economic sanctions and diplomacy.

### Economic sanctions

After the invasion, the League declared Mussolini an aggressor and imposed a series of economic sanctions on Italy to force him out of Abyssinia. However, the sanctions were ineffective for the following reasons:

- The sanctions, which did not include trading of coal, oil, and steel (essential to the Italian economy and war effort), took a long time to implement
- When finally implemented, the sanctions only lasted from November 1935 to June 1936 – not long enough a period to have a significant impact on Italy
- At the time, Britain's naval priorities were focused on the protection of British possessions against Japan in the Far East. Britain did not want to engage in a conflict in the Mediterranean and, therefore, did not close the Suez Canal. This allowed Italy to continue to send forces and supply the troops in Africa.

#### Activity 13

#### ATL Thinking and communication skills

This is a Fascist poster against the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations, 18 November 1935, following Italy's invasion of Abyssinia. The poster reads: 'November 18: Sanctions. Italians, remember!' (translated by author).



1. What is the message of this source?
2. To what extent can this poster be considered as propaganda? How far can it be viewed as government information?

Without the full commitment of non-member countries like the United States, Japan, and Germany to economic sanctions, it was very difficult to cripple Italy's economy. Given the size of the Italian army and the resources it had access to, Italy would have defeated Abyssinia regardless of the sanctions. The closure of the Suez Canal, on the other hand, would have had a more immediate impact on the Italian supply lines.

### Activity 14

#### ATL Thinking and communication skills

#### Source A

Cristiano Andrea Ristuccia is an economics professor. This is an extract from his article entitled '1935 Sanctions against Italy: Would coal and crude oil have made a difference?'

“An embargo on coal starting in November 1935 and ending in June 1936 would have had little effect on the Italian economic condition [...] The standard of living would have been lowered but probably not to a level that could have eventually forced the fascist leadership to back down. Coal sanctions would not have altered the outcome of the war. If prolonged after the Italian military victory over the Ethiopian army, the sanctions would have started to produce results only by the end of 1936.

#### Source B

Here is an extract from a speech made to the House of Commons in May 1936 by Anthony Eden, British secretary of state for foreign affairs.

“There was only one sanction that could be immediately effective and that sanction was to deny to Italy the use of the Suez Canal. That sanction must have inevitably entailed military action; there is no doubt of it. That military action must, in my judgement, have led to war [...] We imposed sanctions that could not be immediately effective, and we knew it; but if the war had lasted a year they would certainly have played their part in the final settlement. If Honourable Gentlemen wish to take military action I must warn them that you cannot close the Canal with paper boats.

**From Steven Morewood, *The British Defence of Egypt, 1935–1940: Conflict and Crisis in the Eastern Mediterranean*, Frank Cass, 2005, p. 80**

1. Why, according to Source A, were the sanctions imposed by the League of Nations inefficient?
2. What is the meaning of 'you cannot close the Canal with paper boats' in Source B?
3. Compare and contrast what Sources A and B reveal about the effectiveness of economic sanctions on Italy.



Question 3 asks that you focus on the views expressed in the sources. Do not compare and contrast issues related to the origins and purpose of the sources but on the content of the sources.

## Diplomatic negotiations

Acting independently of the League of Nations, Britain and France opened negotiations with Italy to end the conflict by making territorial concessions in Africa. This decision was due to a number of factors.

Firstly, as shown with the crisis following the murder of Austrian chancellor Dollfuss in 1934, Italy had become strategically more important to Britain and France as Hitler rose to power in Germany. By 1935, the German economy was recovering very quickly and Hitler reintroduced conscription. In 1936, while the Abyssinian crisis was taking place, Hitler remilitarized the Rhineland, alarming France and Britain. Good relations with Italy ensured that France could assist the Little Entente allies quicker through Italian territory, and could guarantee safety for the French Mediterranean coast. Also, in the event of war against Germany, a neutral Italy would not require France to protect the Alps.

Secondly, the willingness of these two countries to negotiate with Italy behind Abyssinia's back was in part a response to British and French public opinion, since significant numbers of their citizens had refused to go to war for a country so removed from what they considered their national interests.

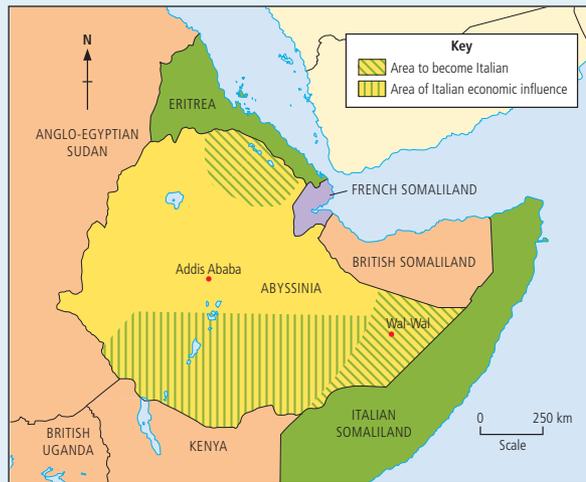
## The Hoare–Laval Pact

In December 1935, British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare and French Prime Minister Pierre Laval proposed to offer Mussolini two-thirds of Abyssinia, partly through direct political control and partly through economic influence. Abyssinia would also gain some land from British Somaliland that contained an outlet to the sea. Before negotiations began, however, details of the pact were leaked by the French press. This caused a political crisis, one that forced Samuel Hoare to resign.

### Activity 15

ATL Thinking and social skills

Here is a map outlining the proposed territorial division by the Hoare–Laval Pact.



1. In groups, study the map and compare it with the map of Abyssinia in 1934 on page 101. Discuss the potential impact of the Hoare–Laval proposal on both Italy and Abyssinia.

## Impact of the invasion

### Effects on Abyssinia and Italy

Abyssinia was devastated by the Italian campaign and eventually surrendered in 1936. In May that year, Haile Selassie went into exile in Britain, from where he continued to campaign for the liberation of his nation. Two months later, the League abandoned its economic sanctions on Italy.

### Activity 16

ATL Thinking and communication skills

Here is an extract from a speech by Emperor of Abyssinia Haile Selassie to the League of Nations, 30 June 1936.

“The very refinement of barbarism consisted in carrying ravage and terror into the most densely populated parts of the territory, the points farthest removed from the scene of hostilities. The object was to scatter fear and death over a great part of the Ethiopian territory. These fearful tactics succeeded. Men and animals succumbed. The deadly rain that fell from the aircraft made all those whom it touched fly shrieking with pain. All those who drank the poisoned water or ate the infected food also succumbed in dreadful suffering. In tens of thousands, the victims of the Italian mustard gas fell [...] I... come myself to bear witness against the crime perpetrated against my people and give Europe a warning of the doom that awaits it, if it should bow before the accomplished fact.

1. With reference to its origin, purpose, and content, analyse the value and limitations of this source for a historian studying the effects of the invasion of Abyssinia on its population.

The Italian occupation had a significant impact on Abyssinia. Resistance groups fought the Italian forces with guerrilla tactics and the fighting extended throughout the country, impacting on the lives of Abyssinian civilians. Italy opened concentration camps for the prisoners of war, which also kept opponents to Italian rule. Consistent with the introduction of racial policies in Italy, Abyssinia became a racially segregated country.

When Italy entered World War II in June 1940 it began attacking British colonies in Africa but its success was short-lived; Abyssinia was liberated from Italian rule in 1941.

As for Italy, in May 1936, King Victor Emanuel III was proclaimed emperor of Abyssinia. Abyssinia, Eritrea, and Italian Somaliland became known as Italian East Africa. Although Abyssinia provided Mussolini with a domestic triumph, the cost of war had an impact on the Italian economy; Italian troops continued to clash with the guerrillas and were unable to go home; Abyssinia did not offer Italy the raw materials it had been after; and the resettlement projects failed: disappointed by the conditions in Abyssinia, many Italians soon returned home.

### Effects on international relations and the Spanish Civil War

The invasion of Abyssinia proved that collective security was ineffective against international aggression, and it confirmed that the League of Nations was unable to solve disputes involving the bigger nations. Britain and France no longer perceived Mussolini as a leader who could be trusted, and Italy sank into a kind of diplomatic isolation. That being said, German–Italian relations developed: partly as a response to Italy's isolation, Mussolini drew closer to Hitler and both leaders signed the Rome–Berlin Axis in October 1936 (for more, see page 131). In 1936, Italy and Germany both intervened in the Spanish Civil War on the side of the Nationalists.



Haile Selassie returned to Abyssinia after the country was liberated by the British in 1941. He ruled his country with mixed results, attempting to modernize it but refusing to grant citizens political rights. In 1974, a *coup d'état* ousted Haile Selassie from power. He died, in rather unclear circumstances, the following year.



### The Spanish Civil War

The Spanish Civil War (1936–39) started as a military revolt against the Popular Front coalition government by General Francisco Franco, who led the Nationalists against the Republicans. Both groups appealed to foreign help for their cause. The Nationalists were supported by Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, while the Soviet Union supported the Republicans who were also aided by foreigners joining the International Brigades. The war came to an end with a Nationalist victory in March 1939.

This poster from 1937 reads: 'Stand up against the Italian invasion of Spain!'

## CHALLENGE YOURSELF

ATL Research, social, and self-management skills

1. Divide the class into groups. Each group should make a brief presentation on one of the causes leading to the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War:
  - a. The weakness of the Republicans
  - b. The role of the Spanish army
  - c. The role of the Church
  - d. Economic causes
  - e. Regionalism
2. Each group should find out about the role of one the following in the conflict:
  - a. Italy
  - b. Germany
  - c. France
  - d. Britain
  - e. The Soviet Union
  - f. The International Brigades
3. Discuss the reasons why the Spanish Civil War is often referred to as a 'dress rehearsal for World War II'. To what extent do you consider this civil war a contributing factor to the move to global war?



▲ This photograph shows Mussolini on board a train, bidding farewell to Hitler after a meeting in 1937. By then, both leaders had become allies through the Rome–Berlin Axis and the Anti-Comintern Pact.



▲ An Italian parade welcoming Mussolini after an official visit to Germany. You can see a banner in the background that reads: 'Europe will be Fascist'. What is the message of this image?

## Changing diplomatic alliances

Despite supporting opposing sides in the Spanish Civil War and despite Italy allying with Nazi Germany, an opportunity to improve Italo-British relations after Abyssinia arose. Throughout the 1930s, Britain was reluctant to fight against Italy, given that Germany and Japan were both viewed as more significant threats to British interests. Under the Gentlemen's Agreement of January 1937, Italy and Britain pledged themselves to maintain the territorial status quo in the Mediterranean.

Later that year, however, Italy made a number of decisions that contradicted the Gentlemen's Agreement:

- Mussolini increased Italy's military presence in Africa, threatening both British and French colonies as well as Spain. Moreover, he announced that he would not withdraw from Spain until Franco defeated the Republicans. This was a source of concern as it threatened to change the status quo in the Mediterranean.
- Mussolini made another attempt to approach Germany by joining the Anti-Comintern Pact (1937), an anti-communist alliance.
- Italy left the League of Nations by the end of the year.
- Italy signed another treaty of economic cooperation with Yugoslavia that guaranteed mutual neutrality in case of a conflict. This treaty threatened France, which had been up until that point the leading great power in the Balkans through its alliance with the Little Entente countries.

Russian writer Leo Tolstoy believed that great men did not shape history according to their own will; rather, he thought their actions were shaped by the course of history. In what ways does Tolstoy's view shape our thinking on the changing diplomatic alignments in Europe between 1936 and 1937? For example, were Mussolini's decisions in this period led by his political views, or was he responding to an international context beyond his control? What are the implications of Tolstoy's view for the study of history?

To find out more about the works of Tolstoy and the circumstances in which he made the point above, see *Building Tomorrow's Leaders Today: On Becoming a Polymath Leader* by Michael A. Genovese, Routledge, 2014, p. 7.

TOK

## Activity 17

ATL Thinking, research, and social skills

### Source A

The extract below is taken from Reynolds M. Salerno's book, *Vital Crossroads: Mediterranean Origins of the Second World War, 1935–1940* (2002). In order to produce this work, the author carried out extensive research in 28 archives in five different countries.

“Italy's new relationship with Yugoslavia, however, represented an overt attempt to install Italian preeminence in the Adriatic region at France's expense. The potential loss of Yugoslavia as a French ally meant not only the sudden evaporation of France's influence in the Balkans but also the beginning of the end for France's network of central European allies and the eastern front – one of the most important deterrents to German aggression. By defecting from the French-sponsored Little Entente, Yugoslavia could indirectly destroy France's relationship with Czechoslovakia and Romania.

### Source B

Here is an extract from *The Second World War: Ambitions to Nemesis* (2004) by educator and writer Bradley Lightbody.

“Mussolini's obsessive goal was the establishment of an Italian empire in North Africa and the domination of the Mediterranean region. The power-brokers were Britain and France. At first Mussolini assiduously courted both powers in attempts to win empire advances for Italy. Mussolini also courted the smaller nations of Eastern Europe and assumed the mantle of a Great Power in the Balkan region. Treaties of Friendship were established with Albania in 1926, Hungary in 1927 and Austria in 1930. The treaties acted as a counterbalance to France's 'Little Entente' treaties with Romania, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

1. In groups, find out why the Balkans was strategically important to France.
2. Chose one country in the Balkans and research its situation in 1937. For example: What type of ruling government did it have? What political and social issues did it confront? Why was this country viewed as an important strategic ally to the West?
3. Why, according to Source A, were Italy's relations with Yugoslavia a source of concern for France?
4. Compare and contrast what Sources A and B reveal about relations between Italy and France before the outbreak of World War II.

## The invasion of Albania, 1939

In 1912, Albania declared its independence from the Ottoman Empire. However, after World War I many Albanians continued to live outside the borders of their own country (in Greece, for example). Albania had limited arable land but had some valuable resources, such as oil and minerals. Albania attracted the interest of a number of countries: Yugoslavia and Greece, two neighbours that shared borders with Albania, were both keen to expand their territories into Albania; France and Italy, two rival powers in the Balkans, were aware of the importance of Albania for the control of the Mediterranean. Unsurprisingly, Albania was involved in several border clashes with

both Yugoslavia and Greece. It was the conflict with the latter that led to the Corfu Incident, as manipulated by Mussolini (see page 95).

Mussolini wanted to control Albania for a number of reasons:

- He wanted control of the oil and mineral deposits to assist in his policy of autarky.
- Albania had access to the Mediterranean Sea, which he saw as his 'Italian lake'.
- Control of Albania would give Italy a foothold in the Balkans and would keep Yugoslavia in check.

A map of the Balkans in 1920.



For most of the interwar years Albania was ruled by Zogu, a conservative chieftain who, with Mussolini's assistance, became King Zog I of Albania in 1928. Since 1925, Mussolini had exercised a policy of economic and political penetration of Albania that ended with its annexation in 1939.

In 1926 and 1927, Italy and Albania signed the Treaties of Tirana, establishing Italy's political influence over Albania in exchange for Italian economic assistance that contributed to keeping Zogu in power. Italy gained access to Albanian minerals, founded the Albanian national bank, and controlled several areas of the transport industry. According to the pact of 1927, Italy also gained control over the Albanian armed forces which continued to grow into the next decade.

During the Great Depression, Mussolini applied pressure on Albania to further increase Italy's control of the country. In the 1930s, Italy gained further access to the much-needed Albanian oil and, in exchange, gave King Zog new loans. In 1934, Mussolini even sent warships into Albania to pressure King Zog into accepting further demands – a potential crisis that was averted with help from Britain: wishing to keep in good terms with the British, Mussolini withdrew his navy.

Finally, in April 1939, Mussolini ordered the invasion of Albania and the deposition of King Zog (who fled the country). King Victor Emmanuel of Italy succeeded Zog as the new king of Albania.

## Reasons for Mussolini's invasion of Albania

Mussolini had a number of reasons to invade Albania in 1939. Firstly, he wanted a military alliance with Hitler, and saw the situation with Albania as an opportunity to showcase the strength of the Italian military (even though, as with Abyssinia, the Albanian forces at the time were no match for the Italians anyway). Secondly, by the time of the invasion in 1939, Hitler had regained control of the Rhineland, annexed Austria, received part of Czechoslovakia at the Munich Conference, and moved into the Czech provinces of Bohemia and Moravia (you will find out more about these events in later chapters) – Mussolini was therefore determined to demonstrate that he could also build a Mediterranean empire. Thirdly, the fact that the world's eyes were on Hitler's movements and the growing tensions between Germany and Poland meant Mussolini could invade Albania without much intervention from the other nations.

### Activity 18

ATL Thinking and communication skills

#### Source A

This photograph shows Italian military troops entering Tirana, the capital of Albania, in April 1939.



#### Source B

Laura Fermi (1907–1977) was an Italian-born writer and political activist. Below is an extract from her book *Mussolini* (1966).

“The reaction of the Western democracies to the Albanian coup was mild, as was to be expected after the moderate reactions to German action in Bohemia and Moravia. Mussolini took upon himself the task of reassuring Greece and England. In his early years in government he had once shelled and occupied the island of Corfu. Now both Greece and her ally, England, feared that the occupation of Albania meant a second occupation of Corfu, if not an invasion of Greece. Furthermore, the British thought the occupation of Albania a breach of promise, for with a gentlemen's agreement in January, 1937, and an Easter pact in the spring of the following year, Italy and England had pledged to respect the status quo in the Mediterranean. The foreign office, however, seemed to be satisfied with Mussolini's explanation that since Albania had been in the Italian sphere of influence for many years, occupation had not changed matters at all.

**Source C**

Zara Steiner is a British historian specializing in 20th-century European and US histories. Below is an extract from her book *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933* (2005).

“ [Austen] Chamberlain accepted Mussolini’s 1926 treaty with Zogu, the crafty Albanian leader, preferring the Italians to the Yugoslavs as underwriters in Albania. There were, however, limits to his willingness to countenance Italian revisionism. Chamberlain’s first loyalty was to Briand, and he had no wish to see major conflicts in the Balkans. He took umbrage [offence] at the second Treaty of Tirana in 1927 and the reduction of Albania to the status of an Italian protectorate [...] Chamberlain’s relations with the Duce turned cool. There was an attempted reconciliation between the two men, but Anglo-Italian relations were not restored to their former standing before the Labour victory in London in 1929.

**Extract from Zara Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919–1933*, Oxford University Press, 2005, p. 499**

1. To what extent can Source A help you to understand why it took Italy a week to take total control of Albania?
2. Compare and contrast what Sources B and C reveal about Britain’s reaction to the Italian invasion of Albania.

## Results of the invasion

As you have seen, Italy had already had access to minerals, oils, and other Albanian resources since the late 1920s, so in this regard, the invasion did not make a significant contribution to the acquisition of resources for Italy. However, Mussolini did have fortifications built on Albanian territory. These came into use when, in October 1940, he launched an invasion of Greece from Albania – an attack that turned out to be a disaster for Italy.

## A review of Chapter 4

This chapter has focused on Italian expansion up to 1937. It has discussed the effects of World War I and the peace treaties on Italy, and the rise to power of Benito Mussolini and the Fascist Party, including the aims of Mussolini’s foreign policy. It has also analysed the methods used to achieve these aims, including the role played by domestic policies as well as the international response to events in Europe.

### Activity 19



### Self-management and communication skills

Now that you have read through this chapter, answer the following question:

**Using the sources in this chapter and your own knowledge, evaluate the contributions of Mussolini’s foreign policy to the move to global war between 1930 and 1937.**



This is very similar to the kind of mini essay that you would get asked to write in the fourth question of the Prescribed Subject exam paper. It isn't a good idea to try and start your exam by answering this question first (even though it carries the highest marks). Always answer the questions in the order they are written in the exam: in other words, start with the first question and work your way through to the fourth. By doing so, you become familiar with the sources and are better prepared to tackle this mini-essay question. Don't forget that the question asks you to include references to the material in the sources as well as your own knowledge. To write a good answer, you need to include references to all the sources (there are always four sources included in the exam), and use your own knowledge as well as the sources to support your argument. You can use your own knowledge to either support the message of a particular source, to argue against it, or even to start a new argument. Allow yourself around 20 minutes of the exam time to answer the fourth question – and don't forget to plan your answer before you start writing. Always include a brief introduction and conclusion that address what the question is asking.

Remember, your answer should only focus on the specific time period of the question. For this particular question, a discussion on Corfu and Fiume is therefore not relevant. You will not have time to discuss everything you have studied in this chapter, but here are some relevant points you may wish to focus on:

- Mussolini's aims in foreign policy
- Italy's diplomatic alliances and treaties signed
- the invasion of Abyssinia and Italy's withdrawal from the League of Nations
- the invasion of Albania.

Are there other points you could add to this list?



To access websites relevant to this chapter, go to [www.pearsonhotlinks.com](http://www.pearsonhotlinks.com), search for the book title or ISBN, and click on 'Chapter 4'.