

## Activity

1 Make a judgement on how well Mussolini had met each of his foreign policy objectives by 1939. Fill in a table like the one below.

Objective	Possible example of achievement	Degree of success
Building national prestige		
Increasing domestic support		
Gaining dominance over the Balkans		
Achieving dominance in the Mediterranean		
Establishing an empire		
Spreading Fascism		

- 2 Now consider the strength of Italy's international position in 1939. What has happened in Italy's relations with
- France/Britain
  - Germany
  - its ability to act as a makeweight?
- 3 How did both domestic factors and the international context encourage Mussolini to adopt a more assertive foreign policy in the 1930s than in his first decade in power?
- 4 To what extent is it appropriate to describe Italian foreign policy 1922-39 as 'Mussolini's foreign policy'? To answer this question you will need to consider both the extent to which Mussolini's aims reflected his personal rather than broader Italian objectives, and the extent to which Mussolini was involved in foreign policy. (Look at his official position; the roles of his foreign ministers, and their comparative role in key decisions.) Is there any major decision which was not made by Mussolini?

## FOCUS ROUTE

Concluding essay: 'How successful was Mussolini's foreign policy between 1922 and 1939?'

For this essay you will need to identify what Mussolini's aims were, and the degree to which he achieved them. You could also comment on whether you think his aims were in Italy's interests, as it could be that he was successful in achieving some aims which were not in Italy's best interests.

Although the main focus of the essay will be foreign policy, you will also need to consider the domestic effects of foreign policy, for example:

- Did foreign policy help to consolidate Mussolini's position at home?
- Did the costs of wars harm his domestic policy?

## Key points from Chapter 14

- 1 Mussolini's ambitions in foreign policy were to reinforce domestic support, gain international prestige, and build an empire.
- 2 Mussolini himself increasingly controlled the regime's foreign policy.
- 3 For over ten years Mussolini acted fairly cautiously, aware of Italy's limited opportunities.
- 4 In the mid-1930s Mussolini was able to exploit Italy's position as a 'determining weight' in Europe.
- 5 The conquest of Abyssinia established him at the height of his power.
- 6 Involvement in the Spanish Civil War was a great drain on the nation's resources with little obvious gain.
- 7 The Rome-Berlin Axis brought Mussolini into Nazi Germany's orbit and began a process of subservience to Hitler, shown in his acceptance of Anschluss.
- 8 The Nazi alliance influenced his domestic policy and started to alienate the Italian elite on whom he had so long depended.
- 9 Mussolini was unable to enter the war in 1939, and reluctantly declared Italy non-belligerent.
- 10 By 1939 Mussolini's foreign policy looked fairly successful, but in reality he had wasted Italy's resources for little real gain. Failure lay ahead.

## A look ahead

You will need to consider the events of 1940-43 in Chapter 15 before making a final decision on the success of Mussolini's foreign policy. Some of the themes which contributed to his downfall will be further developed there:

- The unpopularity of the German alliance
- The alienation of conservative groups in Italy
- The pressure on resources caused by his ambitions
- Increasingly desperate decision making without proper evaluation of the likely consequences.

## How successful was Mussolini's foreign policy 1922–39?

### CHART 14A CHAPTER OVERVIEW

#### 14 How successful was Mussolini's foreign policy 1922–1939?

- A** The nature of Mussolini's foreign policy 1922–39 (pp. 208–11)
- B** Key events in Italy's foreign policy (pp. 212–13)
- C** What were the effects of the Abyssinian War? (pp. 214–20)
- D** Was Mussolini's intervention in the Spanish Civil War a success? (pp. 221–23)
- E** 'The fatal friendship'. Why, and with what effects, did Mussolini ally with Hitler? (pp. 224–33)
- F** Why didn't Italy enter the Second World War in 1939? (pp. 234–35)
- G** Review: How successful was Mussolini's foreign policy 1922–39? (pp. 236–37)

### **A** The nature of Mussolini's foreign policy 1922–39

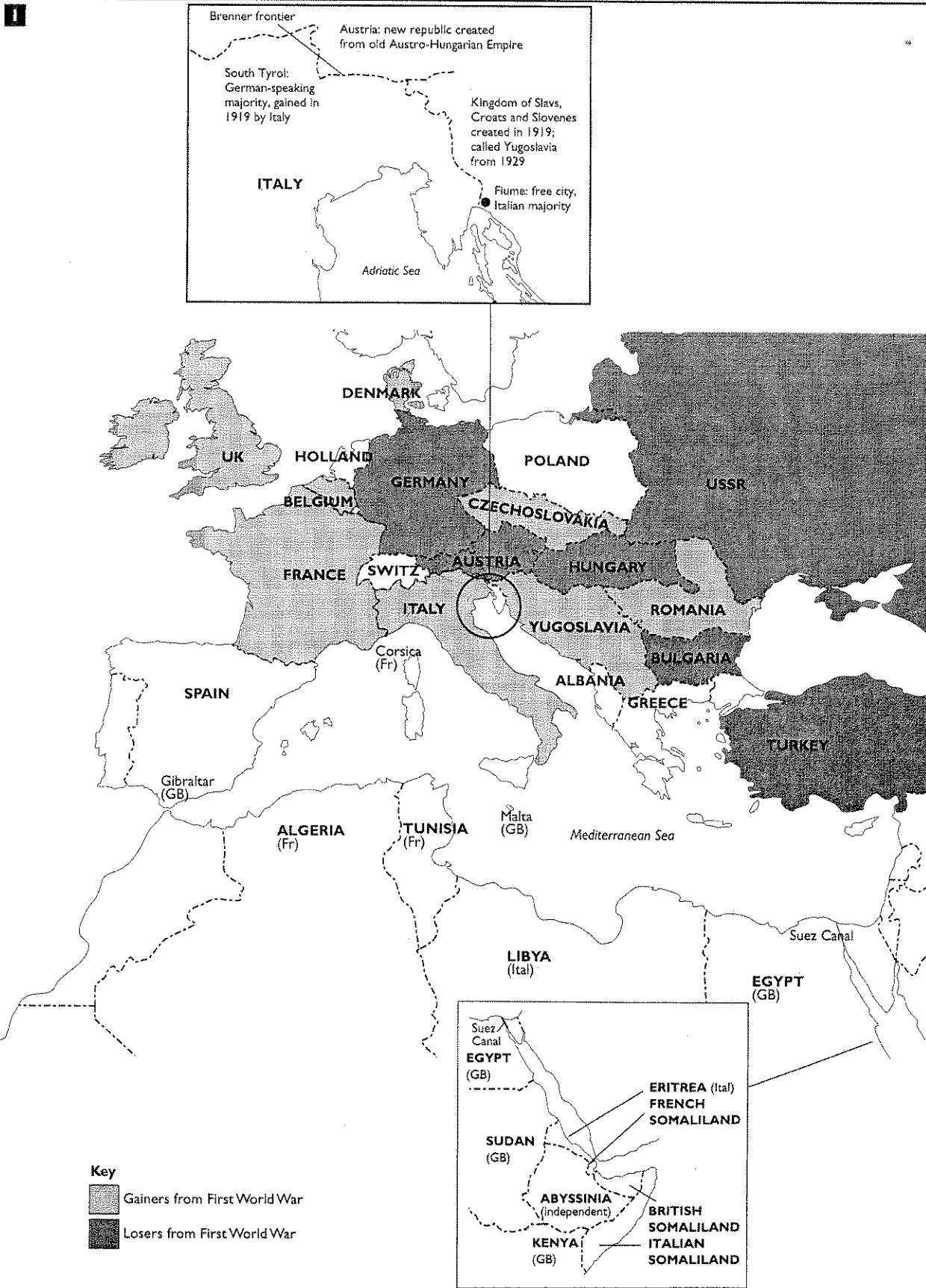
Mussolini's foreign policy aims sounded grand and far-reaching but most of them were not totally new. Furthermore, like all leaders he had to work in the environment in which he found himself. Initially, he relied on the foreign office staff he inherited (Contarini as Foreign Ministry Secretary-General, for example). They shared his belief in Italy's right to gain territory and spheres of influence in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Africa. Mussolini's style might be different, but the actual substance would be along familiar lines. By the 1930s, however, Mussolini became less restrained, and pursued a more assertive policy. He was convinced the future lay with 'young', virile states like Italy and Germany, and not 'decadent' ones like Britain and France. From the mid-1930s he took what he saw as good opportunities at last to establish Italy as a major power.

Study Charts 14B and 14C to discover what else, besides the leader's aims, would determine the nature of Italy's foreign policy.

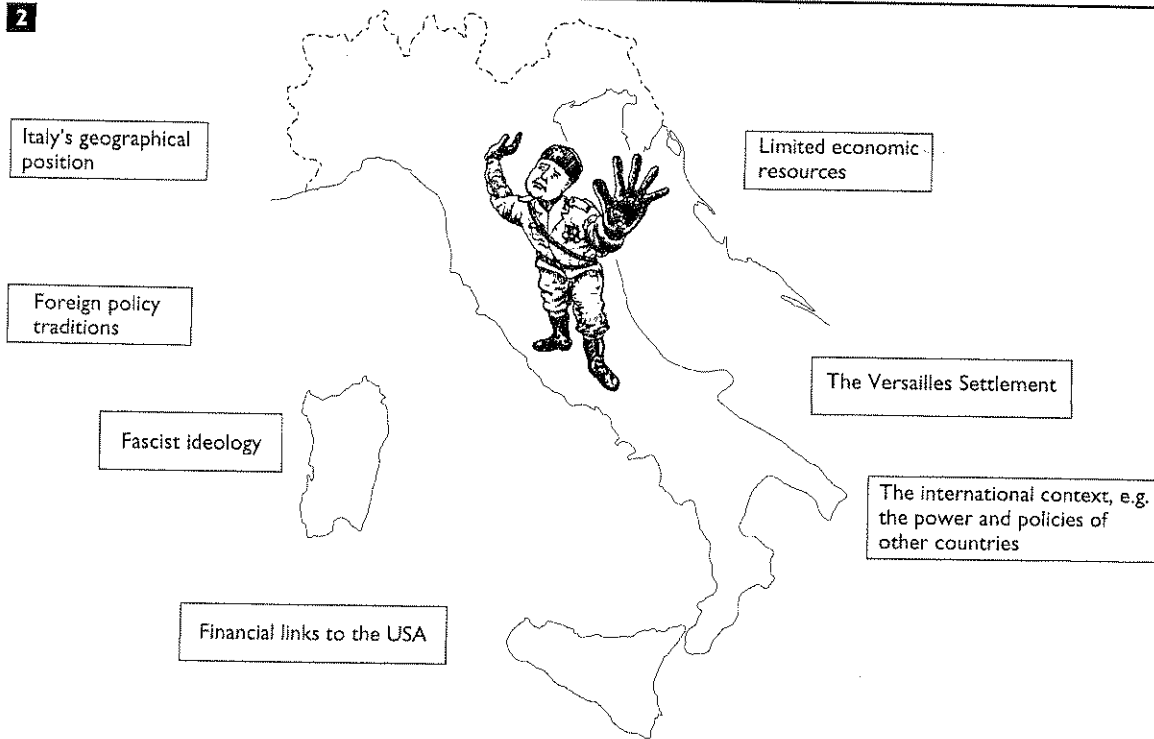
#### Activity

- 1 Below are six objectives for Mussolini's foreign policy. Discuss which you think would be easiest, and which hardest to achieve.
  - a) Building national prestige
  - b) Increasing domestic support for the regime
  - c) Gaining dominance over the Balkans
  - d) Achieving dominance in the Mediterranean
  - e) Establishing an EMPIRE
  - f) Spreading Fascism abroad
- 2 How different do these seem compared to the foreign policy aims of Liberal Italy? (Refer back to page 15.)

**CHART 14B** Europe in 1919. The broader determinants of Italy's foreign policy



2



### Activity

- 1 Identify:
  - a) countries which gained from the peace treaties
  - b) countries which lost territories from them.
- 2 List what Italy gained from the settlement, and what it claimed and failed to get. (Refer back to page 26.)
- 3 Some countries' attitudes towards the Versailles Settlement are described as 'conservative', and some as 'REVISIONIST'. What do you think is meant by these terms?
- 4 Which term, if any, would best suit Italy's attitude? Why?
- 5 Study the map in Chart 14B. Why might Italy be particularly interested in the following areas?
  - a) Austria
  - b) The Balkans
  - c) The countries around the Mediterranean Sea
  - d) Abyssinia
- 6 How would you expect Mussolini to react to the following situations:
  - a) The murder of Italians working in a foreign country
  - b) An attempt by Germany to incorporate Austria
  - c) Condemnation of Italy for aggression by the League of Nations
  - d) A RIGHT-WING revolt against a SOCIALIST government in a country bordering the Mediterranean?

### Activity

- 1 Explain Graham's view of Mussolini's probable foreign policy.
- 2 How useful is such a source to the historian?

### Talking point

Do you think a country's foreign policy should just be based on 'sacred egoism' (self-interest)?

**SOURCE 14.1** Sir Ronald Graham, British ambassador in Rome, in dispatches to the British government

#### a) January 1923

*To understand the situation here one must remember that omnipotent [all-powerful] as [he] is, his position is full of difficulty and some striking success in foreign policy is of vital importance to him ... He is having serious trouble with sections of his own followers ... In any case his foreign policy will be pure OPPORTUNISM, and Italian friendship is on offer to the highest bidder. My impression is that he would prefer to work with Great Britain, at a price ... It is a policy of sacred egoism carried to extremes. Possible economic necessities of Italy and those of his own political position afford some extenuating [justifying] circumstances.*

#### b) June 1923

*It must be remembered that Italian foreign policy is not based upon principles similar to those which actuate His Majesty's Government. It is frankly opportunistic and egotistic ... Signor Mussolini ... has proclaimed from the first, and has since emphasised it, that his foreign policy will be in the sole interests of Italy and one of 'nothing for nothing'.*

### Talking point

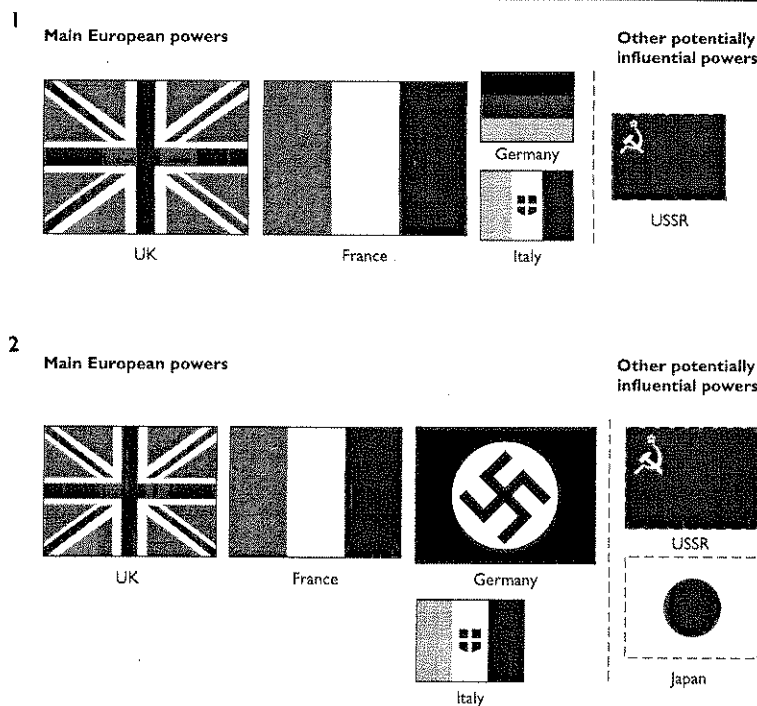
What do you understand by the term 'balance of power'?

#### Italy's 'makeweight' policy

Ever since Italy was unified, it had tried to establish its status as a great power. Its limited economic and military resources made this difficult. Many Italian statesmen realised Italy's best strategy for making territorial gains was to exploit the rivalry of the major powers and their alliances. Italy could offer to join one side or the other in return for concessions. This required a rough balance of power between rival blocs in which Italy's intervention could determine the outcome. This policy, classically favoured by Mussolini's most able diplomat Grandi, was known as the 'determining weight' or 'makeweight' policy.

The chart below tries to represent the relative position of the major powers in Europe, first in the 1920s, then in the mid-1930s.

**CHART 14C** Europe in the mid-1920s (1) and the mid-1930s (2)



#### Explanation

##### 1 1920s

- Germany was potentially powerful, but was hemmed in by the newly imposed Versailles Settlement.
- The USSR was initially involved in civil war, and was then trying to recover.

##### 2 1930s

- Britain was weaker because it was overstretched. France was politically weak, with unstable governments and political divisions.
- Germany had been rearming despite Versailles; and was now led by a determined NATIONALIST, Hitler, who aimed to reassert German might.
- Italian rhetoric suggested it was a great power; but reality showed otherwise.
- France and Britain were becoming more concerned about the growing might of the USSR, and of the threat to their empires in the East from militaristic Japan.

### Activity

Study Chart 14C. In which situation, 1 or 2, might Italy be able to assert more influence? Explain your answer.

## **B** Key events in Italy's foreign policy

Mussolini's war with Abyssinia in 1935 is often regarded as the pivotal point in his foreign policy. We will study this event in detail, but meanwhile it will be helpful to gain an overview of Mussolini's foreign policy up to 1939. We have divided the period in two, separated by the crucial Abyssinian War.

### ■ Activity

- 1 These two pages explain the key events in Italian foreign policy 1922-39. You will find an imaginary Italian headline for each event. Write a hostile headline to counter each Fascist one.
- 2 Use as many historians' accounts as possible to do detailed research on

one of the events in foreign policy 1922-39. Make notes as described below. Be prepared to report your findings to the rest of the class. Events 8, 9 and 10 are studied in depth later in this chapter.

### Making notes

As you look at each event, examine the following key areas for historical enquiry:

- **What** happened?
- **Why?**
- **How** successful was it for Italy?

These will all help you to assess its historical **significance**.

### 1922-35

Most of the events in this period can be seen as relatively minor affairs, which were presented by the regime's propaganda as great successes. Undoubtedly, however, they helped to consolidate Mussolini's domestic position and created an image, more myth than reality, of a new Italy as a rising great power.

#### 1 **Mussolini shows you don't mess with Italy**

##### **Corfu 1923 – Mussolini forces compensation payment from Greece**

An Italian official was killed whilst trying to resolve a Greek-Albanian border dispute. Mussolini demanded that Greece should apologise, and pay 50 million lire [around £25 million today] in compensation. Greece was conciliatory but Italy invaded Greek Corfu. The League of Nations condemned Italy and demanded its withdrawal. Britain threatened naval intervention, and Mussolini withdrew after Greece paid the 50 million lire. Italian propaganda proclaimed the incident a great success!

#### 2 **At last, Italy gains its beloved port**

##### **Mussolini gains Fiume, 1924**

Mussolini sent an Italian military commander to rule the disputed territory of Fiume. In January 1924 Yugoslavia agreed to give Fiume to Italy. This was portrayed as another great Italian success, but Fiume's importance as a port gradually declined as Yugoslavia developed a rival port, Split.

#### 3 **Mussolini resolves European frontiers**

##### **The Locarno Pacts, 1925; Mussolini guarantees Germany's western borders**

Mussolini was persuaded to attend the Locarno meeting and join Britain in guaranteeing the Locarno Pacts whereby Germany, France and Belgium accept their existing boundaries. Mussolini's attempt to get Italy's Brenner border with Austria included in the guarantee failed.

#### 4 **Italy gains client state**

##### **Albania becomes an Italian protectorate, 1926**

Mussolini extended Italian influence and declared Albania an Italian PROTECTORATE.

#### 5 **Mussolini brings all major powers together**

##### **Four-Power Pact, 1933**

The leaders of Germany, Britain, France and Italy met in Rome. Mussolini hoped to build a rival to the League of Nations to sort out European affairs. Four-power co-operation and spheres of influence, with agreed revisions, were discussed. This was portrayed by the Italian press as displaying Italy at the centre of European diplomacy, but nothing concrete came of the meeting.

#### 6 **Mussolini saves Austria**

##### **Mussolini warns Hitler to stay out of Austria, 1934**

Austrian Nazis, wanting union (Anschluss) with Germany, assassinated Austrian Chancellor Dolfuss. Mussolini MOBILISED his troops on Italy's Austrian border and claimed that this deterred Anschluss. Hitler was probably not intending to take over Austria then anyway.

#### 7 **Mussolini, Guarantor of European Order**

##### **Stresa Front, 1935. Mussolini is offered a free hand in Africa in return for support against the growing menace of Hitler**

Britain, France and Italy protested against Hitler's rearmament, which violates the Versailles Settlement. They agreed to prevent any future changes in Europe. Mussolini believes he has French and British consent for expansion into Abyssinia.

**1935-39**

In this period Italy was at war virtually all the time. This ironically contributed to Mussolini's reluctant decision not to join Germany in war in 1939

8

**Italian Empire established**

**October 1935-April 1936, Mussolini conquers Abyssinia**

After a border clash with Abyssinia, Mussolini sent in troops. The League of Nations imposed some sanctions. These led to a growth of nationalist support for the war in Italy.

Britain and France failed to arrange a compromise. In May 1936 Italy defeated Abyssinia. King Victor Emmanuel was crowned Emperor of Abyssinia.

9

**Mussolini leads anti-Bolshevik Crusade**

**Mussolini intervenes in the Spanish Civil War, July 1936**

Mussolini sent planes and troops to help the nationalist General Franco's revolt against Spain's Socialist government. He expected a short war, but it lasted three years. Italian troops were defeated at Guadalajara, but eventually Franco won.

10

**Italy and Germany unite to control the future**

**The Rome-Berlin Axis. Mussolini joins Hitler, 1936**

Mussolini announced a 'Rome-Berlin Axis'. This was a vague alliance with no formal commitment. In November 1937 Italy joined Germany and Japan in the Anti-COMINTERN Pact, directed against the USSR.

11

**A common border with our ally Germany**

**Mussolini accepts Hitler's invasion of Austria**

In March 1938 Hitler gave Mussolini twelve hours' notice of his invasion of Austria. Mussolini accepted Anschluss. This was unpopular in Italy.

12

**Mussolini, Arbiter of the World**

**Mussolini hailed as European peacemaker, Munich, September 1938**

Mussolini took a high profile at the conference giving the Czech Sudetenland to Germany and averting the threat of European war, but really did little.

13

**Major territorial gain in key area**

**Mussolini invades Albania, March 1939**

Mussolini imitated Hitler's seizure of Czechoslovakia by invading Albania, which he already virtually controlled. King Zog fled, and there was little resistance.

14

**Firm Treaty. Nothing can stop us now**

**Pact of Steel, May 1939. Two great countries joined together**

Mussolini proposed a pact with Germany. They agreed to cooperate fully in the event of war. Italy said it would not be ready to fight until 1943, but this was not written into the agreement.

15

**Italy awaits the right moment**

**September 1939. Italy declares herself non-BELLIGERENT**

Mussolini accepted that Italy was not ready for war and stayed out of the Second World War.

**FOCUS ROUTE**

1 Having looked at the events of Mussolini's foreign policy in chronological order we will now reorganise our thoughts to assess them thematically. On your own copy of the table below, place the events in the correct place in the blank column. (Some events may appear more than once.)

**Events**

Fiume Corfu Austria 1934 Stresa Abyssinia Axis Spain Anti-Comintern Pact Austria 1938 Munich Pact of Steel

Mussolini's foreign policy		Examples
Aims	• Search for empire	
	• Distraction from domestic problems	
	• Revising Versailles	
	• Revenge for earlier defeat	
	• Trying to match Hitler's success	
	• To put on a show	
	• Ideological	
Methods	• Use of troops	
	• Diplomacy	
Effects, Significance	• Increased domestic prestige	
	• Sacrificing Italy's real interests	
	• Waste of Italian resources	

- 2 'From Corfu to Stresa Mussolini's foreign policy was remarkably successful.' Explain with supporting evidence whether you agree with this comment on Italian foreign policy 1922-35.
- 3 Mussolini has been called a bully. What evidence is there for this?

**FOCUS ROUTE**

As you study pages 214-20 make notes on the Abyssinian War focusing on:

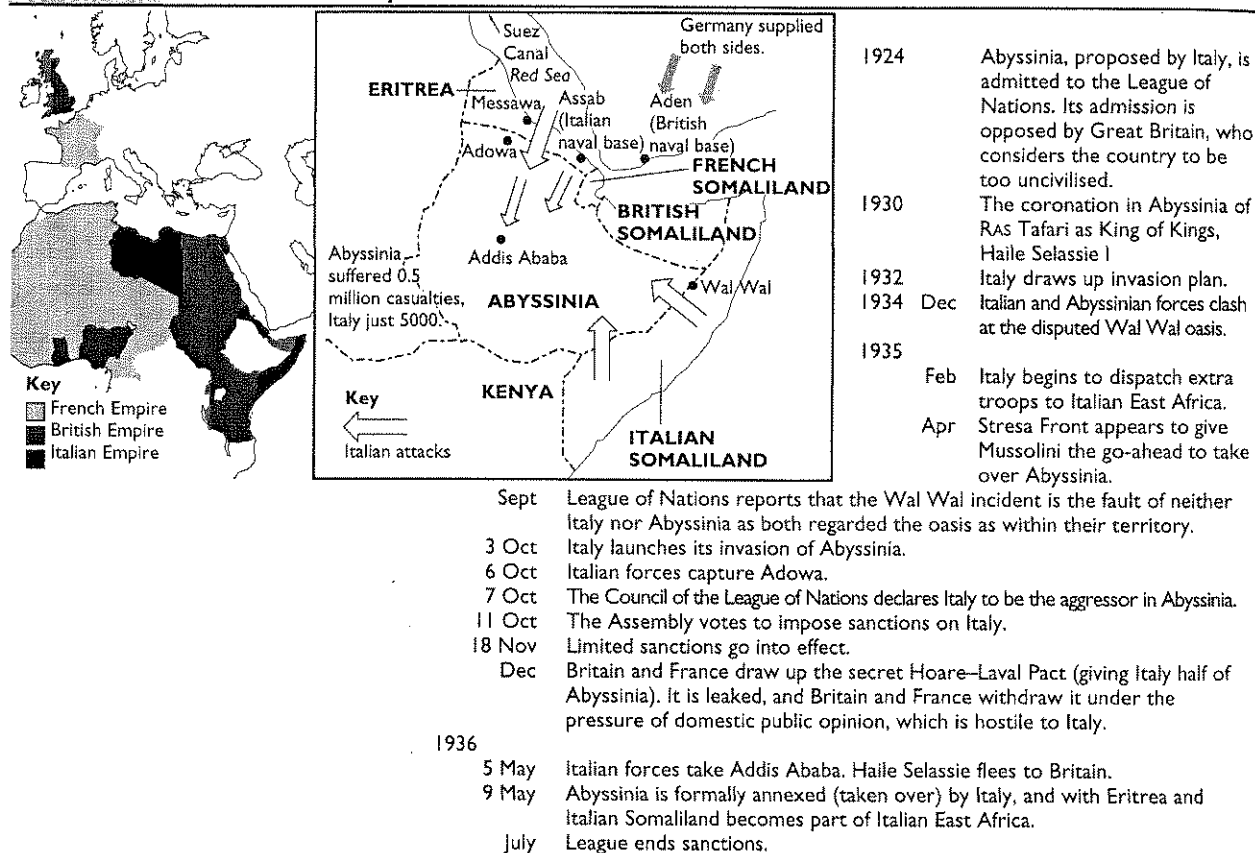
- why it happened
- what Mussolini gained from the war
- actual and potential problems resulting from the war.

## C What were the effects of the Abyssinian War?

You have probably never been involved in a war. Nor have we. It was very different for Mussolini. War played a major part in his career. He had leapt to dominance in the Italian Socialist Party through his emotive opposition to the Libyan War. He then split with that party when he supported the First World War. He fought in that war, and founded the Fascist movement largely from rebellious fellow ex-combatants. Mussolini exploited the expectations, fears and turmoil caused by the First World War to gain power.

Given all this, it is perhaps surprising that Fascist Italy did not embark on a war until 1935. Most historians locate the reasons in the international context. But from then on, Italy was engaged in wars until 1945, with a brief interlude from July 1939 till June 1940. We will now explore two of Mussolini's wars which illustrate the benefits and the problems that war caused for the regime.

**CHART 14D** Timeline of the Abyssinian War



**SOURCE 14.2** Memorandum from Marshal Badoglio, Chief of General Staff to Mussolini, December 1934

*The problem of Italian-Abyssinian relations has very recently shifted from a diplomatic plane to one which can be solved by force only . . .*

*The object . . . is nothing more or less than the complete destruction of the Abyssinian army and the total conquest of Abyssinia. In no other way can we build the Empire . . .*

*The speedier our action the less likely will be the danger of diplomatic complications. In the Japanese fashion there will be no need whatever officially for a declaration of war and in any case we must always emphasise the purely defensive character of operations. No one in Europe would raise any difficulties provided the prosecution of operations resulted rapidly in an accomplished fact. It would suffice to declare to England and France that their interests would be recognised.*



### Activity

Read Sources 14.2 and 14.3. Explain the different views as to whether Italy should conquer Abyssinia and the possible effects of its action.

### Why are Rastafarians so called?

You might be surprised to see such a question raised in a book on Fascist Italy, but there is a link. You have already come across the word 'ras' to mean an Ethiopian leader. Haile Selassie's original name was Tafari, hence he was Ras Tafari.

When some American blacks in the early twentieth century were seeking to establish their cultural identity, they looked back to their African origins, and were attracted by Ethiopia, then one of only two African states that were independent.

Rastafarians have developed a distinct culture, including wearing dreadlocks. They look upon Haile Selassie as a Messiah figure, and expect one day to return to their promised land in Africa.

### Abyssinia/Ethiopia

Both names were used at the time for the country we now call Ethiopia. We have used the first term as it was more generally called Abyssinia at the time.

### The Italian Empire

This had developed in East Africa from the 1880s. Italy's control was limited. Attempts to encourage thousands of Italians to settle as colonists failed. In 1935 there were only 250 Italian settlers in Somaliland; by 1937 only 1300 families had emigrated to Libya.

**SOURCE 14.3** Margherita Sarfatti to Mussolini, 1935

*You have enough already to colonise in Apulia, in Sicily and in Calabria. There's positive work to do here. If you go into Ethiopia you will fall into the hands of the Germans and then you will be lost. If we have to pay for the Empire with the ruin of Europe we will pay too high a price.*

## Why did Mussolini attack Abyssinia?

### General long-term reasons

#### a) International

- A long-held Italian NATIONALIST dream
- To avenge the 1896 Adowa defeat
- To consolidate Italy's position in East Africa
- To show Italy as an IMPERIAL power like Britain and France
- To increase Italian prestige

#### b) Political

- To develop the cult of the DUCE
- The desire to act, to keep Fascism on the boil
- To have a war to foster excitement; Fascism favoured war
- To rally support at home

#### c) Economic

- To develop emigration and export markets
- To find oil

### Why at that time?

- To divert attention from the failings of the Corporative State, and the Depression
- To exploit the favourable international situation
- To show Hitler Italy's power, and to get war over before Germany got too strong
- At Stresa and on other occasions Mussolini gained the impression that the British and French would have no objection to Italy making gains in Abyssinia.

### What did Italy gain?

- A great victory, avenging Adowa
- Consolidated its territory in 'Italian East Africa'
- Sanctions rallied the nation; the Queen Mother led the campaign to give gold rings to finance the war effort.
- The Church praised the civilising mission.
- Mussolini's finest hour? Mussolini at the peak of his popularity?

### But:

- Bred complacency in Mussolini; boosted his already inflated ego
- Drain on economic and military resources
- Budget deficit rose from 2.5 billion to 16 billion lire.
- Settlement of 130,000 Italians in Abyssinia was costly
- Needed 250,000 occupying troops, dependent on supplies 2000 miles away
- In October 1936 the lira was devalued by 40 per cent.
- By 1939 only two per cent of Italian trade was with its colonies.
- Italian rule was repressive and corrupt.
- Italy only fully controlled a few areas.
- Italy had to fight a guerrilla war until Abyssinia was lost to the British in 1941.
- Fascist Italy gained a reputation for brutality.
- Upset Britain and France
- Sanctions forced trade shift to Germany.
- Showed weakness of the League of Nations, which encouraged Hitler's ambitions
- Allowed Hitler to remilitarise without foreign intervention, thus increasing German influence

## What was the war actually like?

War gave Mussolini the opportunity to indulge in propaganda glorifying Italy's military prowess, which masked the death and destruction caused by a brutal conflict between a modern industrial state and a near-feudal African kingdom.

The language of justification began on 4 September when Italy alleged that Abyssinia was a barbarous and uncivilised state which 'by its conduct openly placed itself outside the Covenant of the League [the statement of principles accepted by all members in 1919]'. A month later the world was told that Abyssinia's 'warlike, aggressive spirit' had 'imposed' war on Italy. Four hundred thousand Fascist fighters were mobilised. 'These happy Italian troops' who were observed by the *Times* correspondent 'singing joyously' as they embarked for Abyssinia from Naples were made the unlikely promise that the 'modern methods' of warfare to be employed (tanks, aircraft and gas) would 'guarantee a war without tears'.

In reality, the Italians' use of mustard gas and vast numbers of aircraft made for a brutal subjugation of the African troops. The Abyssinians were ill-equipped and psychologically ill-prepared for the sort of war with which they were faced. Haile Selassie's ragged army, with its spears and 1874 vintage rifles never really had any hope of stemming the advance of the Blackshirt militia and regular Italian troops with their Fiat machine guns and overwhelming preponderance of modern weapons. Mussolini's son Vittorio was exhilarated by the war. In his snappily titled book *Flying over Ethiopian Mountain Ranges* he described the war as a period of 'magnificent sport... one group of horsemen gave me the impression of a budding rose unfolding as the bombs fell in their midst, and blew them up. It was exceptionally good fun.'

The war should have been over in a matter of weeks. Yet it took seven months for the two Italian armies to meet their objectives. Although Italian troops were used extensively, it was the Eritreans from Italy's first colony who bore the brunt of the fighting against the Abyssinians. Mussolini's critics observed that the Italians had built the roads, and the natives had done the fighting.

Yet by May 1936 Mussolini had generated great popular support in Italy, and had perhaps reached the zenith (high point) of his career. While he gloried in his victory, the Abyssinians reeled from the Italian conquerors' brutal pacification tactics. Orders were given for ten Abyssinians to be killed for every Italian casualty. Some villages were gassed, and all the male inhabitants killed in others. Adowa was avenged!

### Source activity

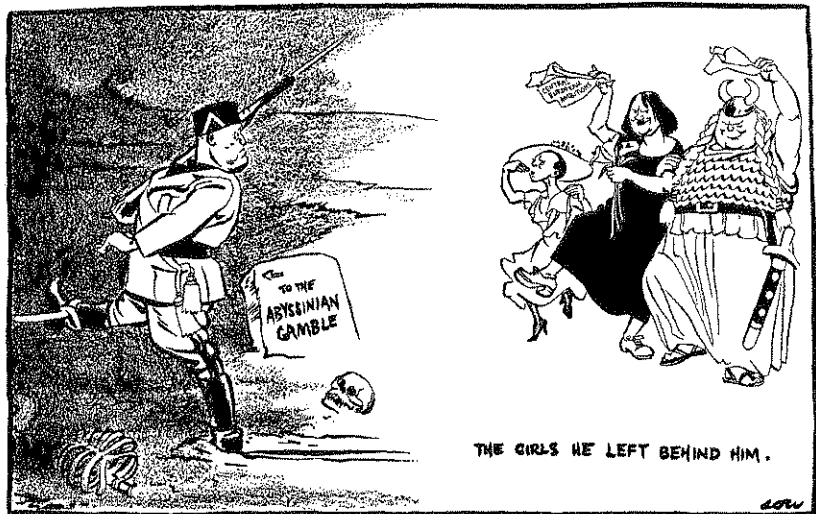
- 1 What do Sources 14.5 and 14.7 predict will be the effect of Mussolini attacking Abyssinia?
- 2 a) How far does Source 14.6 support the view of Source 14.7?  
b) How might this be explained?
- 3 Look at Source 14.4. What might be the reaction of Mussolini, an avid reader of the foreign press, to such cartoons?
- 4 Explain the contrasting views of the effects of the Abyssinian War in Sources 14.8-10.
- 5 What are the advantages and disadvantages of cartoons like these as historical sources?

**SOURCE 14.4** A cartoon by David Low

THE LEAGUE ? PAH!  
THE LEAGUE IS CONTEMPTIBLE!  
THE LEAGUE CAN DO NOTHING!



**SOURCE 14.5** A cartoon by the British cartoonist David Low, May 1935. The figures on the right are Goebbels, Hitler, and Goering



## How popular was the Abyssinian War?

**SOURCE 14.11** Mussolini's speech launching the war, October 1935

*Blackshirts of the Revolution, men and women of all Italy, Italians scattered throughout the world, across the mountains and across the oceans, listen!*

*A solemn hour is about to strike in the history of the fatherland. Twenty million men are at this moment gathered in the piazzas throughout the whole of Italy. Never in the history of mankind has there been seen a more gigantic demonstration. Twenty million men. a single heart, a single will, a single decision. This demonstration is meant to show and it does show to the world that the identity between Italy and Fascism is perfect, absolute, and unchangeable...*

*For many months the wheel of destiny, under the impulse of our calm determination, has been moving toward the goal. In these last hours the rhythm has become faster and cannot be halted. Not only is an army marching towards its objectives, but 44,000,000 Italians are marching in unison with this army, because there is an attempt to commit against them the blackest of all injustices, to rob them of their place in the sun.*

*When in 1915 Italy united its lot with those of the Allies, how many shouts of admiration and how many promises! But after the common victory, to which Italy had brought the supreme contribution of 670,000 dead, 400,000 disabled, and 1,000,000 wounded, when it came to sitting around the table of the stingy peace, to us were left only the crumbs from the sumptuous colonial booty of others. For thirteen years we have been patient while a ring was being tightened ever more rigidly about us to suffocate our overflowing vitality. With Ethiopia we have been patient for forty years. Now, that's enough!*

*At the League of Nations, instead of recognising the just rights of Italy, they talk of sanctions... I refuse to believe that the true people of Britain want to spill blood and push Europe on the road to catastrophe in order to defend an African country universally stamped as a barbarous country and unworthy of taking its place with civilised peoples...*

*Let nobody delude himself that he can deflect us without first having to defeat us. A people which is proud of its name and its future cannot adopt a different attitude...*

*Never more than in this historic epoch has the Italian people revealed the force of its spirit and the power of its character. And it is against this people to which humanity owes the greatest of its conquests, it is against this people of heroes, poets, artists, navigators and administrators that they dare to speak of sanctions.*

*PROLETARIAN and Fascist Italy, Italy of Vittorio Veneto and of the Revolution! To your feet! Let the cry of your decision fill the heavens and be a comfort to the soldiers who are about to fight in Africa, and let it be a spur to our friends, and a warning to our enemies in all parts of the world, a cry of justice and a cry of victory!*

**SOURCE 14.12** 'For the Sanctity of the Cause': a poster showing women giving up wedding rings to support the war effort



**SOURCE 14.13** Mussolini announcing the Empire, May 1936





THE AWFUL WARNING.

FRANCE AND ENGLAND  
(together!).

"WE DON'T WANT YOU TO FIGHT,  
BUT, BY JINGO, IF YOU DO,  
WE SHALL PROBABLY ISSUE A JOINT MEMORANDUM  
SUGGESTING A MILD DISAPPROVAL OF YOU."



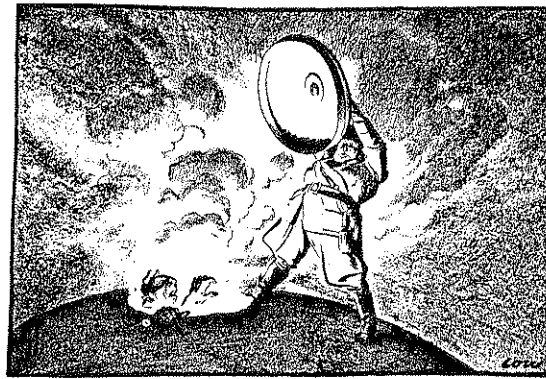
"BY THAT SIN BELL THE ANGELS."

THE EXILE OF DOORS: "THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU DEFEY WORLD-OPINION. I TRIED  
IT ONCE, AND FOUND IT DIDN'T PAY."

SOURCE 14.8 An Italian army poster, showing the freeing of Abyssinians

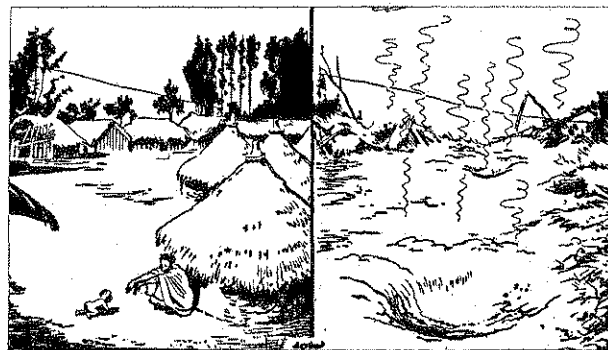


SOURCE 14.9 A cartoon by Low entitled 'The Man who took the Lid Off', October 1935



THE MAN WHO TOOK THE LID OFF.

SOURCE 14.10 A British cartoon entitled 'Barbarism. Civilisation.'



**SOURCE 14.14** An Italian Senator to a British diplomat

*You have achieved the miracle of uniting the whole of Italy behind Mussolini.*

**SOURCE 14.15** British Foreign Minister Hoare

*No one doubts that Italy is behind Signor Mussolini.*

**SOURCE 14.16** Barzini, an Italian journalist in the 1930s, describes the effect of the war

*[Mussolini's] pictures were cut out of newspapers and magazines and pasted on the walls of the poor peasant cottages, at the side of the Madonna and Saint Joseph. Schoolgirls fell in love with him as a film star. His more memorable words were written on village houses for all to read. One of his collaborators exclaimed, after listening to him announce from the balcony that Abyssinia had been conquered and that Rome had again become the capital of an Empire, 'Is he like a god?' 'No,' said another, 'He is God.'*

**SOURCE 14.17** Peasant reaction to the Abyssinian War, as recounted in *Christ Stopped at Eboli* by Carlo Levi, a writer banished to the South. The book was written in 1944

*The peasants were not interested in war . . . War they considered just another inevitable misfortune, like the tax on goats. They were not afraid to go; 'To live like dogs here or to die like dogs there is just the same,' they said. But no one except Donna Caterina's husband enlisted. It soon became clear that not only the purpose of the war, but the way it was being conducted as well, was the business of that other Italy beyond the mountains, and had little to do with the peasants. Only a few men were called up, two or three in the whole village, besides those who had reached the age for military service . . . 'The war is for the benefit of those in the north. We're to stay at home until we starve. And now there's no chance of going to America.'*

*3 October, which marked the official opening of the war, was a miserable sort of day. Twenty or twenty-five peasants, roped in by the CARABINIERI and the Fascist scouts, stood woodenly in the square to listen to the historical pronouncements that came over the radio. Don Luigi [the Fascist schoolmaster] had ordered flags to be displayed over the town hall, the school, the houses of the well-to-do; their bright colours waving in the breeze made a strong contrast to the black death-pennants on the doors of the peasants' huts . . .*

*The war so light-heartedly set in motion in Rome was greeted in Cagliari with stony indifference. Don Luigi spoke from the balcony of the town hall. He enlarged upon the eternal grandeur of Rome, the seven hills, the wolf that suckled Romulus and Remus, Caesar's legions, Roman civilisation, and the Roman Empire that was about to be revived. He said that the world hated us for our greatness, but that the enemies of Rome would bite the dust . . . because Rome was everlasting and invincible. In his falsetto voice he said a great many more things about Rome which I no longer remember, then he opened his mouth and started to sing Giovinezza [the Fascist anthem], motioning imperiously with his hands to the schoolchildren in the square below to accompany him in the chorus. Around him on the balcony were the sergeant and everyone of importance; all of them sang (except one) . . . Huddled against the wall below, the peasants listened in silence, shielding their eyes with their hands from the sun and looking, in their black suits, as dark and gloomy as bats.*

**SOURCE 14.18** Fascist journalist Pini in 1937

*Having made the Empire, we must make imperialists.*

### Source activity

(Marks are given in brackets.)

#### Source 14.11

- 1 Explain the references to 'Vittorio Veneto' and 'Revolution'. [2]
- 2 How does Mussolini try to boost a sense of nationalism? [2]
- 3 How does he justify Italy's cause? [3]
- 4 What impression of the popularity of the war is given? [3]

#### Sources 14.17 and 14.18

- 5 What evidence is there even now of the gap between 'real' and 'legal' Italy that had existed in Liberal Italy? [3]
- 6 Does this seem apparent in Source 14.11? How can you explain the difference? [3]
- 7 What is the peasants' attitude to the war? [3]
- 8 What do you think Pini meant in Source 14.18? [2]

#### Overall

- 9 What do each of Sources 14.12-16 show about the popularity of the Abyssinian War? [3]
- 10 Referring to the provenance, dates and contents of at least three of the sources, explain the different impressions that emerge of Italians' reactions to the war. [6]
- 11 Using these sources and your own knowledge, assess how the Abyssinian War affected Mussolini's popularity. [10]

(Total: 40 marks)

### Activity

- 1 Read Sources 14.19-22. Draw up two lists; one of the beneficial effects for Mussolini of the Abyssinian War, and one of the harmful effects.
- 2 For Mussolini what do you consider were the most significant
  - a) gains of the war
  - b) lessons for the future
  - c) shifts in his European relations?
- 3 Structured essay.
  - a) Explain why Mussolini invaded Abyssinia.
  - b) What were the consequences of the Abyssinian War for Italy?

### Talking point

Can you think of other examples of wars which have helped win support for the victorious government?

## Historians' assessments of the effects of the Abyssinian War

**SOURCE 14.19** Carocci, p. 103

*In response to League of Nations' sanctions for a few months the identification of 'Italian' with 'Fascist', which had been proclaimed for about the last ten years, seemed a true one.*

**SOURCE 14.20** Clark, p. 282

*It was his finest hour. Mussolini had triumphed contra mundum [against the world]. The Empire was popular, so was the Duce . . . But in every other respect the conquest of Ethiopia was a disaster. The economic cost was huge; militarily the victory led to complacency. Diplomatically, Italy was left isolated in a hostile world . . . the British, Italy's traditional ally, never forgave Mussolini.*

**SOURCE 14.21** P. Bell, *Origins of the Second World War*, 1986, pp. 63-64

*The immediate effects of victory were exhilarating. Mussolini had succeeded where the old Italy had failed. He had defeated not only the Abyssinians but the League of Nations. He abandoned his former cautious approach to foreign affairs and looked for new worlds to conquer.*

**SOURCE 14.22** Whittam, pp. 110-15

*The colonial war in Ethiopia proved to be the crucial turning point in the history of the Fascist regime and in the diplomatic history of inter-war Europe . . . In the short term it mobilised the Italian nation, enhanced [increased] the prestige of the regime and raised the cult of the Duce to dizzying heights. Yet in less than ten years his corpse was hanging upside down . . . reviled [scorned] by the mob . . .*

*This war was the most popular war in the history of modern Italy . . . The Italians had defied the world. Their leader had confirmed the truth of the writing on the wall proclaiming 'Mussolini is always right'. Despite Badoglio, the King, and the diplomats Mussolini had pressed ahead with his campaign and proved them all wrong. In another sense, however, the writing was on the wall.*

*The euphoria [great happiness] of 1935-36, partly manufactured and partly genuine, was short-lived. The problem with euphoria is that it is hard to sustain and once dissipated [disappeared] leaves behind a sense of disillusionment and anticlimax . . . Mussolini and Ciano believed that a dynamic foreign policy would maintain the momentum. These efforts proved to be counterproductive. The increased emphasis on racism was a product of the Ethiopian war . . . Mussolini became over-confident, scornful of the advice proffered by professional soldiers and diplomats, and too prone to believe his own propaganda. The war had been very expensive and there had been high wastage . . . of weapons and transport . . . There was almost continuous guerrilla warfare until the British liberated the country in 1941, and this was a heavy burden for a faltering economy and overstretched military establishment . . . Mussolini's African adventure also led to grandiose [over-ambitious] schemes for marching to the oceans. This concentration on breaking out of the Mediterranean not only meant confrontation with the western DEMOCRACIES but also abandonment of other spheres of influence . . . Mussolini realised he could no longer act as the protector of Austria . . .*

*In 1936 Mussolini had basically three choices: he could try to act as mediator between Germany and the western democracies, he could rejoin the British and French in a revived Stresa Front, or he could align himself with the Third Reich. The impact of the Ethiopian war made the last alternative seem the most attractive.*



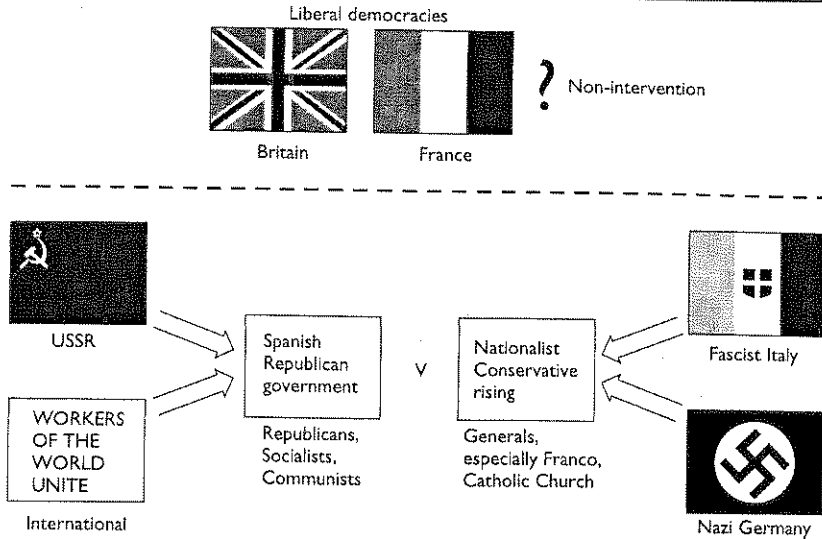
# D Was Mussolini's intervention in the Spanish Civil War a success?

### FOCUS ROUTE

As you read pages 221-23:

- 1 Make notes on the advantages and disadvantages for Mussolini of involvement in the Spanish Civil War.
- 2 Decide whether you think his involvement was a poor decision.

### CHART 14E The sides in the Spanish Civil War



In July 1936 Mussolini responded to a request from RIGHT-WING rebels fighting the Spanish Republican government. He sent twelve planes which together with 30 German planes were crucial in allowing General Franco to transport his Army of Morocco to Spain. This helped sustain a revolt which otherwise might have collapsed. Spain was split in two, in an increasingly bitter war which was to last three years. By its end Mussolini's initially small assistance had turned into a major deployment of resources.

**SOURCE 14.23** Italian prisoners of war. Far from being volunteers, many of these soldiers had been pressured into going to Spain by their officers



## Reasons why Mussolini intervened

### International

- To stop French, LEFT-WING influence in Spain
- To cultivate an ally in a strategic area
- To establish greater Italian influence in the Mediterranean
- To demonstrate Italy's might

### Ideological

- To fight against decadent democracy and SOCIALISM
- To help spread Fascism

### Domestic

- To maintain the momentum for fascistisation at home

### General

- To stay in the limelight
- To have another war
- He had become overambitious after the Abyssinian victory.

Mussolini considered the conflict would be over quickly. The decision to get involved was very much his own; few others favoured it, given the potential costs and little anticipated gain.

## What effect did Italy's intervention have on the country?

### a) Economic

- Disrupted Italian trade and reinforced the trend of increasing trade with Germany
- 'Bled Italy white', as Mussolini said. It cost fourteen billion lire (half a year's tax revenue), and required special levies.
- The lira was devalued.
- Italy lost half its foreign currency reserves.

### b) Political

- Made the government unpopular, apart from with the Church

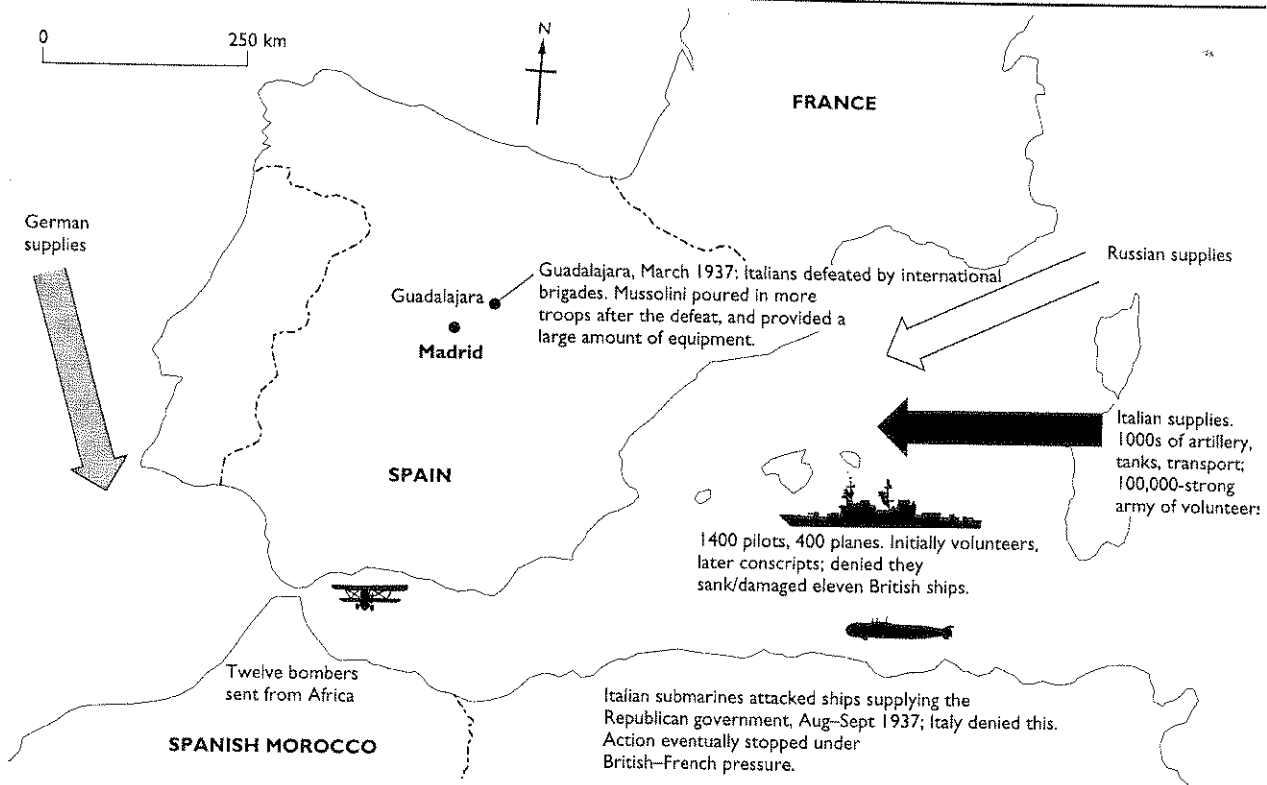
### c) Military

- Italy was on the winning side, and claimed a great victory.
- Prevented Italy consolidating its strength after the Abyssinian conflict
- Used up much needed weapons and ammunition
- Italy's military strength was less in 1939 than in 1936; it was unprepared for a major war in 1939.
- Humiliated at Guadalajara; Italian weaknesses were exposed.

### d) International

- Italy gained a potential supporter in a strategic position, facing France and Britain.
- Helped establish another Fascist regime
- Italy gained little of real value; just Spanish neutrality.
- Diverted Italian attention from the German threat to Austria
- Increased Italy's links with Nazi Germany
- It reinforced Italy's quarrel with Britain and France (but they still wanted Italian friendship).





**Activity**

- 1 What does von Hassell (Source 14.25) consider the effect of the Spanish War could be?
- 2 How valuable is this source as evidence of the effects of Italy's foreign policy?

**SOURCE 14.24** One of the 'Garibaldi brigades', who fought for the Republic



**SOURCE 14.25** A report to Berlin by the German Ambassador in Rome, Ulrich von Hassell, 18 December 1936

*Germany has in my opinion every reason for being gratified if Italy continues to interest herself deeply in the Spanish affair. The role played by the Spanish conflict as regards Italy's relations with France and England could be similar to the Abyssinian conflict, bringing out clearly the actual, opposing interests of the powers and thus preventing Italy from being drawn into the net of the Western powers and used for their machinations [intrigues]. The struggle for dominant political influence in Spain lays bare the natural opposition between Italy and France: at the same time the position of Italy as a power in the Western Mediterranean comes into competition with that of Britain. All the more clearly will Italy recognise the advisability of confronting the Western powers shoulder to shoulder with Germany.*

## E 'The fatal friendship'. Why, and with what effects, did Mussolini ally with Hitler?

### FOCUS ROUTE

As you work through pages 224-233

#### Either:

Note down the key factors in favour and those against Mussolini making an alliance with Hitler.

#### Or:

Write a government memo advising Mussolini on the best future course in foreign policy. Either explain why you recommend strengthening Italian ties with Britain and France, or why you favour a link with Nazi Germany.

When Mussolini invaded Abyssinia he believed that he had at least the tacit (silent) support of the Western democracies. In April 1935 at the so-called Stresa Front Italy had aligned itself with Britain and France against German expansionism in Europe. Britain and France made no comment about Italian expansionism in Africa. However, relations had soured during the Abyssinian War, not least because of sanctions, and Italy had moved closer to Germany. Mussolini's intervention in Spain from July 1936 was to reinforce this trend.

However, there were still possibilities for Fascist Italy to exploit the growing tension between Britain/France and Nazi Germany to make gains. Italy could try to indulge in 'makeweight diplomacy'. Other factors pointed to Italy's reinforcing its links with the West to counter the growing power of Germany. Alternatively, Mussolini could associate Italy with the growing might of Germany. He had to consider which would be the best way to advance further his ambition of making Italy a great power. Should Mussolini have allied with Germany or the Western democracies?

### Activity

#### Should Mussolini ally with Germany or the Western democracies?

Study Chart 14G which looks at:

- aspects of Italian affairs in 1936
- issues relevant to relations with Britain and France
- issues relevant to relations with Nazi Germany.

1 Divide into groups. Look at the various issues, and decide whether each issue favours a German alliance, a Western alliance, or could operate either way. You might use a chart like the one below, or work on a copy of Chart 14G.

Issue	Favours German alliance	Favours British/French alliance	Not clear-cut case for either side

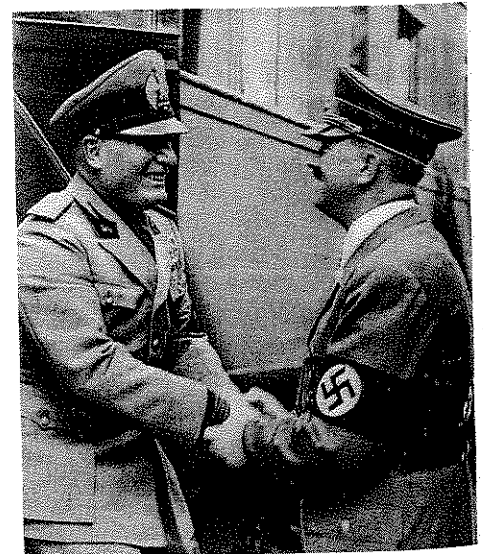
- 2 Some groups should now prepare for a debate arguing the case for closer ties with Nazi Germany. Others should do the same for a Western alliance.
- 3 Debate the issue.
- 4 Did you agree with the decision Mussolini made?
- 5 Why do you think he made this decision?
- 6 What alternative was there to Italy committing itself to either side? What might be the advantages and disadvantages of this?

**SOURCE 14.26** Mussolini and Neville Chamberlain at the Munich Conference, 1938



### Which way to go?

**SOURCE 14.27** Hitler greeting Mussolini at the Brenner Pass, 1940



**Britain and France**

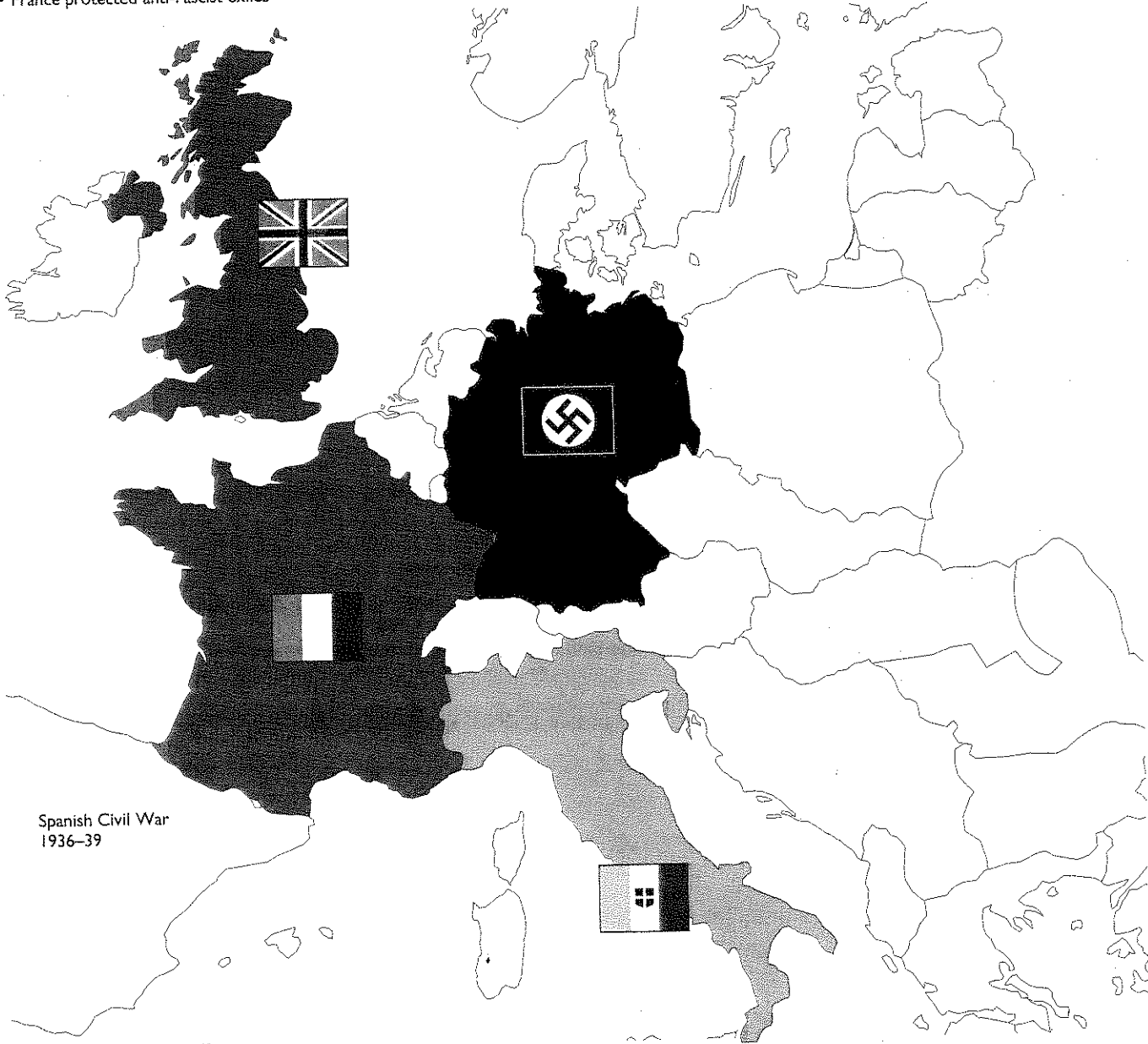


- Democratic states
- Mussolini considered them declining states
- Sections in their elites admired Mussolini for his actions against the threat of Communism
- Supported status quo; major powers in League of Nations
- Favoured a peaceful Europe
- Closely linked to powerful USA
- Imposed sanctions (but omitting coal, oil and steel) over Abyssinia
- Dominated Mediterranean
- Had the largest number of African colonies
- Had blocked previous Italian colonial expansion
- Wanted support against Hitler
- Britain had the world's largest fleet
- France was Italy's neighbour
- France protected anti-Fascist exiles

**Italy**



- Traditional Italian hostility to 'uncivilised' Germans
- King and elite traditionally friendly with Britain
- German alliance unlikely to be popular
- Little evidence that Fascist propaganda had created a warlike nation
- Economy not yet self-sufficient
- Vulnerable to naval attack
- Resources had been used up in Abyssinia, and now in Spain
- Military power more impressive on paper than in reality
- Mussolini wanted to keep fascistisation momentum going following war with Abyssinia
- Mussolini wanted to dominate Mediterranean



Spanish Civil War  
1936-39

**Nazi Germany**


















- Fellow Fascist state
- Dynamic, vigorous state
- Accepted Mediterranean as Mussolini's sphere of influence
- Like Italy, Germany had visions of living space (*Lebensraum/spazio vitale*)
- Hitler favoured Italian alliance in *Mein Kampf*
- Favoured war
- Hitler wanted to unite with Austria

- Italy contained a quarter of a million German speakers in South Tyrol, but Hitler had made no claims on this territory
- Had left League of Nations in 1933
- Hitler refused to apply sanctions against Italy during the Abyssinian crisis
- Became a major supplier of materials and energy crucial to Italy
- Had supplied both sides with arms during the Abyssinian War
- Was helping Franco in the Spanish Civil War

## How did the Axis develop?

**CHART 14H The development of the Axis**
**Key**

-  Moving closer to Nazi Germany  
 Moving towards Britain/France

1923	Hitler imitates Mussolini's March on Rome; fails	
1933	Hitler comes to power in Germany Germany withdraws from League of Nations	
← 1934	Mussolini moves troops to stop possible Anschluss	
← 1935	June Hitler meets Mussolini in Venice Italy joins Stresa Front v Germany	
	Abyssinian War; big shift	
1936	July Both Germany and Italy independently give help to Franco in Spanish Civil War. This continues until 1939	
	Oct Mussolini talks of an Axis after agreements with Hitler. Italian initiative.	
← 1937	Gentleman's Agreement with Britain accepting Mediterranean status quo	
	Sept Mussolini visits Germany; impressed	
	Nov Italy joins Anti-Comintern Pact with Germany and Japan	
← 1938	Dec Italy withdraws from League of Nations	
	April British agreement with Italy; recognises Italian Abyssinia	
	May Hitler visits Italy; Italy rejects military alliance	
	Mussolini accepts Anschluss	
	Anti-semitic decrees in Italy	
	Munich conference; Mussolini plays an apparently prominent role. He is impressed by the power of Germany, contrasted to the feebleness of the West.	
←	Mussolini is seen by the West as helping to restrain Germany and keep the peace	
1939	Feb Mussolini announces his long-term programme	
	March Hitler breaks Munich agreement and seizes Bohemia without consulting Mussolini	
←	Mussolini briefly toys with idea of a new Stresa Front to resist German domination	
	April Italy invades Albania to show its power	
	May Mussolini sends Ciano to negotiate military alliance; terms left to Germany; Pact of Steel signed	
	Aug Germany signs Nazi-Soviet Pact, breaking the Anti-Comintern Pact	
	Aug Mussolini wavers continually between joining Germany if war breaks out in the hope of gains, and declaring Italy neutral	
←	1 Sept Germany attacks Poland; Mussolini declares Italy non-belligerent	
	3 Sept Britain and France declare war on Germany	
	3 Sept Mussolini tries to arrange another Munich-style conference to avoid war	
1940	June Italy declares war on France and Britain	

### Talking point

Can you think of any other international agreements which are based on the shared political beliefs of the participants?

### Activity

- 1 Compare Mussolini's view of Germany in 1934 and 1937. How can the differences be explained?
- 2 What occurred between the Axis agreement and the signing of the Pact of Steel to confirm Mussolini in his alliance with Germany?
- 3 How does Mussolini's aim, as shown in Source 14.30, help explain why he decided to ally with Germany?
- 4 What evidence is there, however, that Mussolini had not committed himself to full support for Nazi Germany before 1940?

**June 1934 Venice First meeting**

Tense. Hitler not wearing uniform; felt inferior to uniformed Mussolini.

Mussolini insisted on using his poor German. Dismissed Hitler as 'just a garrulous [talkative] monk' and a 'silly little clown'.

**SOURCE 14.28** Hitler and Mussolini meeting in 1934



**SOURCE 14.29** Mussolini speaking in September 1934

*Thirty centuries of history allow us to regard with supreme indulgence certain doctrines taught beyond the Alps by the descendants of people who were wholly illiterate in the days when Caesar, Virgil and Augustus flourished in Rome.*

In September 1937 Mussolini visited Germany and was very impressed. In Berlin he spoke to a crowd of 900,000. He was deeply moved by what he described as 'the most powerful nation in modern Europe rising magnificently to greatness'.

In 1938 Hitler said he would 'never forget' what Mussolini had done by allowing Anschluss.

**SOURCE 14.30** Mussolini announcing his long-term programme to the Fascist Grand Council, 4 February 1939

*Those states which do not have free access or are trapped inside inland seas are semi-independent... Italy is in an inland sea which is linked to the oceans by the Suez Canal... and by the Straits of Gibraltar, dominated by the guns of Great Britain. Italy therefore does not have free access to the oceans; Italy therefore is truly a prisoner in the Mediterranean (Corsica, Tunisia, Malta, Cyprus, Greece, Turkey, Egypt encircle Italy). We must draw the following conclusions:*

- 1. It is the aim of Italian policy, which cannot have and does not have territorial ambitions in continental Europe, except for Albania, to begin by breaking the bars of the prison.*
- 2. Having broken the bars, Italian policy has just one basic aim: to march towards the ocean. Which ocean? The Indian Ocean through linking up the Sudan, Libya and Ethiopia or the Atlantic Ocean through French North Africa.*

*In either case we find ourselves confronted by the French and the British. To attempt to solve such a problem without securing our rear in the continent would be stupid. The policy of the Rome-Berlin Axis is therefore the answer to this fundamentally important historical problem.*

**Pact of Steel: a major blunder?**

- Mussolini initially wanted a defensive alliance.
- He allowed Germany to draw up the terms.
- Each side committed itself to support the other.
- It tied Italy to German decisions; assumed a four-year breathing space before war.
- Ciano told Germany Italy would not be ready for war until 1945, but this was not written into the terms. The Germans implied acceptance of this delay, but were secretly planning to attack Poland. The day after the Pact was ratified (given formal approval), Hitler told his generals, 'Secrecy is an essential condition of success. Italy and Japan will not be told of our plans.'
- Mussolini should have been more aware of German dynamism; the Axis partners were moving at different speeds.
- The Italian press proclaimed that the Pact was popular as it would enable Italy to realise its great dreams; none of this was correct.

In August 1939 Ribbentrop (the German foreign minister) and Hitler told Ciano they were planning to attack Poland, and negotiating for an alliance with the USSR; they insisted it would be a localised war and accepted Italy was free to stay out. Ciano was horrified, and felt Italy had been duped. Ciano commented in his diary, 'I return to Rome completely disgusted with the Germans, with their leader, and their way of doing things. They have betrayed us and lied to us.'

## Contemporary comments on the Axis

**SOURCE 14.31** Mussolini's announcement of the Rome-Berlin Axis, Milan, 1 November 1936

*This vertical line between Rome and Berlin is ... an axis around which all the European states animated [inspired] by the will to collaboration and peace can collaborate. It is not a matter for surprise that today we hoist the flag of anti-BOLSHEVISM ...*

*We have in common many elements of our Weltanschauung [way of looking at the world]. Not only have National Socialism and Fascism everywhere the same enemies, in the service of the same master, the Third INTERNATIONAL, but they have many conceptions of life and history in common. Both believe in will as the determining power in the life of nations and the driving force of their history ... Both are based on young people, whom we train in discipline, courage, resistance, love of the fatherland, and contempt for easy living ... Germany and Italy follow the same goal in the sphere of economic AUTARKY. Without economic independence the political independence of a nation is doubtful.*

**SOURCE 14.33** Extracts from Mussolini's directive to Ciano, passed on to Ribbentrop 4 May 1939, and then to Hitler

*It is my definite opinion that the two European Axis powers need a period of peace of not less than three years.*

*It is only from 1943 that a warlike effort can have the greatest chance of success. A period of peace is necessary for Italy for the following reasons:*

- a) *To settle Libya and Albania militarily and to pacify Ethiopia, where an army of half a million men must be recruited*
- b) *To finish the building or reconstruction of the six battleships now proceeding*
- c) *For the renewal of all our heavy and medium-calibre artillery*
- d) *To carry out autarkic plans calculated to avert all attempts at a blockade by the wealthy democracies*
- e) *To hold the Exposition scheduled for 1942 [see page 116], which, besides presenting a record of what Italy has achieved in the last twenty years, may secure for us a reserve of foreign currency*
- h) *To strengthen ever more firmly the bonds, not only between the Axis governments, but also between the various peoples.*

*For all these reasons Fascist Italy does not desire a premature war of a European character, although convinced that it is inevitable. It may also be possible that within three years Japan will have brought the war in China to an end.*

**SOURCE 14.34** The Pact of Steel, May 1939

*Firmly united by inner affinity [similarity] between their ideologies and the comprehensive solidarity of their interests, the German and Italian nations are resolved in future to act side by side with united forces to secure their living space and to maintain peace.*

*Article 1: The contracting parties will remain in standing contact with each other in order to come to an understanding on all questions touching common interests of the European situation as a whole ...*

*Article 3: If, contrary to the wishes and hopes of the High Contracting Parties, it should happen that one of them became involved in warlike complications with another Power or Powers, the other High Contracting Party would immediately come to its assistance as an ally and support it with all its military forces on land, at sea and in the air.*

**SOURCE 14.32** Italy joins with Germany and Japan in the Anti-Comintern Pact; part of the protocol (agreement) signed in 1937

*Considering that the Communist International continues constantly to endanger the civilised world in the West and East, and disturbs and destroys peace and order ... Considering that, Italy, which since the beginning of the Fascist government has combated this danger with inflexible determination ... has decided to take its place against the common enemy side by side with Germany and Japan.*

### ■ Talking point

What are the possible dangers of two countries making a commitment to support each other if one becomes involved in war?

### ■ Activity

(Marks are given in brackets.)

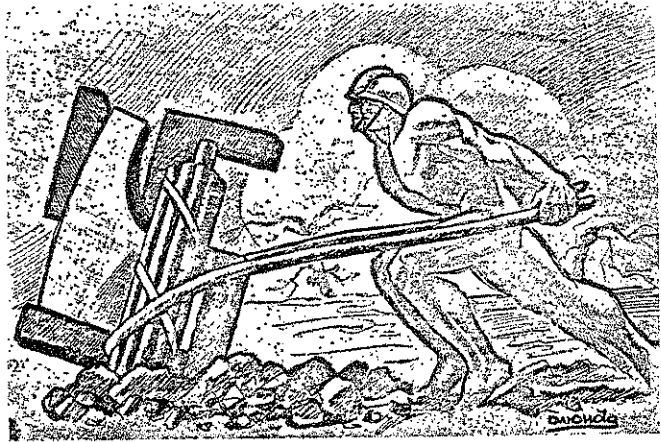
- 1 Explain the reference in Source 14.34 to
  - a) 'High Contracting Parties'
  - b) 'another Power or Powers'. [2]
- 2 What, according to Sources 14.31, 14.32 and 14.33, do Italy and Germany have in common? [5]
- 3 What weight would you put on their reference to peace? [2]
- 4 What differences do Sources 14.31 and 14.34 show between the terms of the Axis and the Pact? [4]
- 5 What can be deduced from Source 14.33 about the limited success of some Fascist policies? [6]
- 6 Referring to Sources 14.33 and 14.34, and your own knowledge of discussions between the Italians and Germans at the time, explain how wise you consider it to have been for Mussolini to sign the Pact. [6]

(Total: 25 marks)

**SOURCE 14.35** A 1938 Italian cartoon. Asse is 'axis'. The characters in the foreground are labelled Masonry, Communism, PLUTOCRACY, Anarchy, CAPITALISM and MARXISM



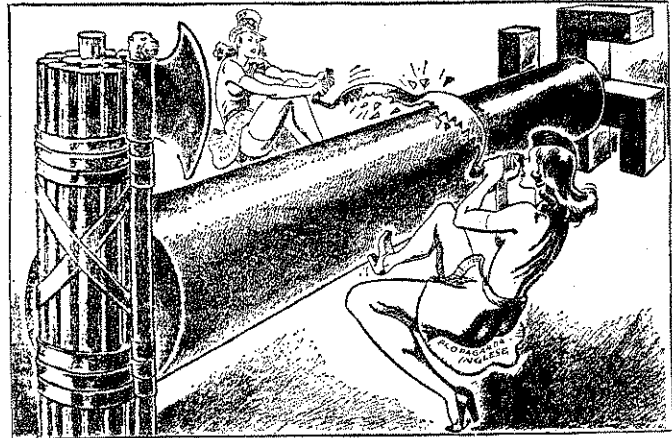
**SOURCE 14.36** A 1938 Italian drawing entitled 'The Founding of Europe'



**SOURCE 14.38** A 1938 Italian underground cartoon entitled 'Roman Welcomes'



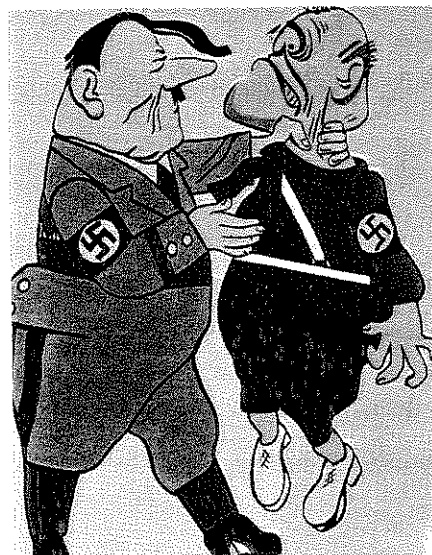
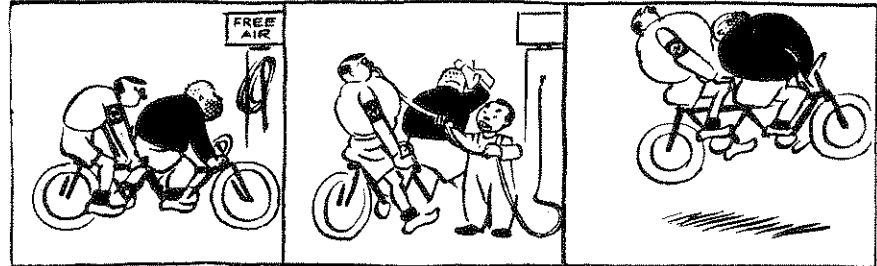
**SOURCE 14.37** An Italian cartoon. The caption was 'It's no good - we can't cut through it!'



**SOURCE 14.39** A 1937 British cartoon

**HIT AND MUSS ON THEIR AXIS**

**OUR COMIC STRIP**



**SOURCE 14.40** A 1940 Russian cartoon

**Source activity**

- 1 Explain as fully as possible, referring to both text and image, the message of each of Sources 14.35-40.
- 2 What perspectives on the Axis emerge from these sources?



## What were the effects of the Axis?

### Austria: the first victim of the Axis?

Mussolini's decision to link himself with the growing might of Germany entailed a major shift in his attitude to Austria. Let us compare Mussolini's actions in 1934 and 1938.

#### CHART 141 Mussolini and Austria

##### Austria 1934

(after the murder by Austrian Nazis of the Austrian Chancellor Dollfuss)

- Mussolini sent troops to Italy's Brenner frontier. This may have stopped Hitler taking over Austria.
- Mussolini earned prestige at home and abroad for standing up to Germany.



CONSULTING THE ORACLE  
(As recorded by Rev. Frack's "magic microphone")

Miss Hitler: "WHAT IS YOUR MESSAGE FOR GERMANY?"  
 Signor Mussolini: "TELL HER SHE MUST BE CAREFUL TO KEEP ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF ITALY."  
 Miss Hitler: "AND HOW CAN SHE MAKE SURE OF BEING THERE?"  
 Signor Mussolini: "BY KEEPING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF AUSTRIA."

##### SOURCE 14.41

A Punch cartoon, 20 June 1934

##### Austria 1938

- In June 1936 Mussolini had told Austria to deal directly with Germany, implying that he was not prepared to defend Austria. He was thus giving up one of Italy's most important strategic gains from the First World War.
- In March 1938 Hitler told Mussolini he was invading Austria; Mussolini accepted this.
- Hitler promised not to forget this support.
- There was considerable (private) concern amongst some Italian ministers.
- Many saw this as a humiliation for Italy; Mussolini's policy was unpopular with Italians.



SOURCE 14.42 A Punch cartoon, 23 February 1938

Whatever the international effects of the Axis, it would be hard to argue against the view that domestically it weakened the regime. Italy's growing dependence on Germany was viewed uneasily by many Italians. The historian Carocci (p. 154) argues: 'There was no liking between the two peoples, only fear and constraint on the one hand, contempt on the other.' The 'loss' of Austria was resented by many educated Italians, and the apparent domestic effects of the Axis alienated more. We have already seen the negative domestic response when Mussolini sought to implement Nazi ideas in the Reform of Customs and in the introduction of anti-semitic policies (see pages 185-84).

### Did the Axis commit Mussolini to Germany, and cut Italy off from the West?

Mussolini's decision in 1936 to link Fascist Italy with Nazi Germany in the Axis has been seen as his greatest mistake, and the cause of his ultimate downfall. Some historians argue that for both IDEOLOGICAL and GEOPOLITICAL reasons such a step was virtually inevitable, and that once the Axis agreement was signed, Mussolini's fate was sealed.

Others argue that even after the signing of the agreement in 1936 there were alternative courses open to Mussolini. There was pro-Western sympathy amongst many of the Italian elite. In 1937 the King put gentle pressure on Mussolini to modify his enthusiasm for Germany; and stressed the traditional Italian friendliness towards Britain. Contacts were maintained with the West. Mussolini might still be following a policy of equidistance, and certainly the diplomatic situation from 1936 to 1940 was very fluid. Italian historian de Felice argues that right up to 1940 Mussolini seriously considered the option of joining Britain and France against Germany. It was only in 1940 when Hitler had shown his great might by conquering much of Europe that Mussolini finally decided to commit himself to the Nazi side. The conservative Italian

#### Activity

- 1 What relationship between Mussolini and Hitler is portrayed in Source 14.41?
- 2 How is the relationship portrayed in Source 14.42?
- 3 What difference in Mussolini's attitude to Austria is conveyed?
- 4 Was Mussolini's lack of action over the Anschluss in Italy's best interests?
- 5 Do Hitler's actions in Austria in 1938 support Ciano's comment on the Axis (see page 260)?



historian Quartararo, and the British historian Lamb in a recent study *Mussolini and the British* argue that it was only Britain's arrogant attitude to the Italians that prevented Mussolini from joining them in an alliance.

However, most historians would agree with Morgan, who believes that 'in both timing and content, the Axis of 1936 indicated that Mussolini had made a choice. It was a statement of perceived division in Europe between the DICTATORSHIPS and the democracies, which was accentuated [strengthened] by Mussolini's actions in both foreign and internal policy thereafter.'

### Historians on the nature of the Axis

**SOURCE 14.43** Wiskemann, p. 65

*From 1936 until the end nothing can be discerned that deserves the name of Italian foreign policy... nothing but a surrender to the pressure from Hitler with no regard for Italy's interest or capacity.*

**SOURCE 14.44** Cassels, p. 91

*Mussolini... contrived a special relationship with Germany of his own free will. At the outset, the Rome-Berlin Axis was in no sense a concrete political arrangement... In Mussolini's eyes, it was vague enough to be jettisoned if need be. But within 18 months, the Axis became for Fascist Italy an obligation dictated by harsh necessity, from which there was no exit... The beginning of the end of Fascist Italy can be dated from the Anschluss of March 1938... Fascist Italy became, in fact, a satellite of Nazi Germany.*

**SOURCE 14.45** Blinkhorn, p. 48

*The Axis of October 1936, a loose association initiated and named by Mussolini, marked the first step in what was to prove a fatal relationship: the die was cast in 1938 with Mussolini's adoption of a neutral stance over Germany's absorption of Austria... Henceforth the relative positions of the two dictators were reversed. Mussolini, bedazzled by German military strength during a visit in September 1937, was becoming indisputedly the lesser figure and Italy the junior partner in the new relationship. Subsequent events re-emphasised Italy's subordinate status.*

**SOURCE 14.46** Clark, p. 283

*In 1938-39 Mussolini was still playing along with Hitler, in order to wring concessions from France and Britain, and to extend the new empire. It was a dangerous game.*

**SOURCE 14.47** R. Overy and A. Wheatcroft, *The Road to War*, 1989, p. 169

*During 1936, as a direct result of Ethiopia and Spain, Italy moved out of the Western camp and closer to Hitler's Germany. This was a product of necessity rather than intention... As one German diplomat put it: 'The new German-Italian friendship was created not by the spontaneous inner urge of two countries which are similar in nature... but ad hoc [bit by bit, with no plan], on rational grounds as the result of necessities confronting both of them.' What they both had in common was the fact that 'they were have-nots in contrast to the powers which were satiated [satisfied] by the peace treaties... Mussolini could never reconcile himself fully to the fact that although he was demonstrably the senior Fascist in Europe, Hitler had greater national power behind him... The fact that they were both Fascist powers gave the relationship a gloss of ideological brotherhood and dictatorial solidarity, but co-operation between them was always more cautious and formal. Italy was useful to Hitler as a Fascist outpost in the Mediterranean keeping Britain and France away from Central Europe. Germany was useful to Mussolini as a source of economic assistance for rearmament, and as a power to divert the attention of Britain and France from Italian adventures in the Mediterranean. Each saw the other as an instrument in his own power game; manipulation rather than friendship bound them together.*

#### Activity

- 1 Study Sources 14.43-45. What does each historian see as the determining moment in Mussolini's relationship with Hitler?
- 2 To what extent does Source 14.46 differ from the earlier three sources?
- 3 What does Overy in Source 14.47 see as the main reasons for the close relationship of Italy and Germany?
- 4 To what extent do Overy and Bell (Source 14.48) agree on the importance of ideological factors in the Axis?
- 5 What different emphasis does Lamb provide (Source 14.49)?

SOURCE 14.48 Bell, p. 67

*Ideology was called in at a late date to consolidate an alliance which began with political and economic matters: German support for Italy during the Abyssinian conflict; the supply of German coal, on which Italy became increasingly dependent; and co-operation in the Spanish Civil War. Above all, the objectives which Mussolini set for his foreign policy, amounting to Italian domination in the Mediterranean, could only be attained in opposition to France and Britain, and therefore only in alliance with Germany.*

### FOCUS ROUTE

Structured essay.

- Why and how did Mussolini move closer to Hitler between 1936 and 1939?
- What were the effects of this on Italy?

To tackle the first part, you could examine events (mainly from the Abyssinian War to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939), to analyse the trend. Consider the role various factors played in the developing relationship, e.g:

- ideological
- economic
- geopolitical/strategic
- personal (i.e. how the leaders viewed and treated each other; were they drawn to each other more by mutual attraction or common interests?).

To tackle the second part, you should concentrate on the effect it had on Italy's foreign policy, in particular:

- policy towards Austria
- relations with the West
- Italy's determining weight strategy.

You could then consider domestic effects, and assess the overall impact on Mussolini's position.

SOURCE 14.49 R. Lamb, *Mussolini and the British*, 1997, pp. 7, 14-15

*There is strong evidence to suggest that with co-operation from Eden [Britain's Foreign Secretary] Mussolini could have been kept out of Hitler's camp and the balance of power in Europe preserved.*

*The evidence is conclusive that once he had conquered Abyssinia, Mussolini wanted to renew friendship with Britain. He both feared and disliked Hitler, and was intent on preserving Austria from the Nazis. The British policy of appeasing Hitler and opposing Mussolini was disastrous. Abyssinia and the Spanish Civil War were mere side-shows compared with Hitler's fanatical determination to use his enormously powerful armies for aggression. Unfortunately, Eden could never see this.*

*Mussolini would have been a slippery and treacherous ally, but in the face of the Nazi menace his goodwill was essential for peace in Europe. Like all dictators, he was temperamental. His obsession with DE JURE recognition by Britain of the Italian conquest of Abyssinia may have been unreasonable, but the British Ambassador in Rome made it clear what a priority it was in Mussolini's mind - yet, because of public opinion at home, the Baldwin and Chamberlain governments delayed from Spring 1936 until Autumn 1938 before giving in. There can, surely, be little doubt that if this recognition had been granted in 1936, Mussolini would have stayed out of Hitler's arms. On such small things great events depend.*

### Who controlled Italy's foreign policy?

Right from the beginning Mussolini was determined to exercise overall control of foreign policy, whether he was Foreign Minister himself or not. In the 1920s he was ably assisted by Grandi, and then, as Mussolini desired a more assertive policy, he appointed his ambitious son-in-law Ciano as Foreign Minister. Ciano favoured closer links with Germany, but soon became disillusioned with Hitler's treatment of Italy. In 1943 Grandi and Ciano combined to try and rescue Italy from the German alliance by supporting the coup against Mussolini.

### Dino Grandi (born 1895, died 1988)



Grandi was one of the ablest Fascists and played a particularly significant role in foreign policy.

An ex-Socialist, he joined the Fascists in September 1920, and his rise was extremely rapid. Although he disagreed with some of Mussolini's policies, he realised that the Duce was indispensable for the movement. He was a key leader in the March on Rome.

As undersecretary in the Foreign Ministry from 1925, Grandi had a major influence on Mussolini's involvement in the Locarno Pacts, and

in 1929 was appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs. He gave foreign policy a unity and consistency of goals that it had previously lacked. His two basic goals were to challenge French dominance and to create a vast colonial empire in Africa. Grandi felt this had to be done without a European war, which Italy could not survive. He favoured working through the League of Nations, and acting as a 'determining weight' between France and Germany.

In the early 1930s Mussolini favoured a more dynamic foreign policy, and he himself took control in July 1932. Grandi was sent as ambassador to London 1932-39. There he was very helpful to the Italian cause, and had a great deal to do with League of Nations sanctions not being extended to oil during the Abyssinian War. He developed some independence from instructions from Rome, but was also a skilful presenter of Italy's policy. He helped persuade Chamberlain to ask Mussolini to arrange the Munich conference in 1938.

Although he became more critical of Mussolini's foreign policy, he considered his rule necessary, and maintained his post by flattering Mussolini.

Grandi was convinced that in the event of a European war Italy's place should be on the Anglo-French side. Even after the Pact of Steel, he thought Italy could switch sides as in 1915. He was recalled from London in July 1939, when Mussolini had to show the Germans his good faith, and became Minister of Justice. He tried to prevent Italy's entry into the war until France's impending military collapse made it inevitable.

After experiencing military disaster in Greece, he decided the King must reassert his position and take Italy out of the war. His opportunity came after the Allied landing in Sicily, when he persuaded Mussolini to call the Fascist Grand Council. He presented a motion which implied Mussolini should be replaced, and it was passed by nineteen votes to seven. He then tried to organise an armistice. The Americans insisted that he should not be included in the new Italian government. Grandi was condemned to death in his absence by the Salo Republic for organising the anti-Mussolini coup. In 1947 he was tried and acquitted by the High Commission for the Expurgation (Destruction) of Fascism.

### Count Galeazzo Ciano (born 1903, died 1944)



Son of an aristocrat, he trained as a lawyer, and briefly became a journalist. He entered the foreign service in 1925. After marrying Mussolini's daughter Edda in 1930, his career took off, much to the disgust of others who saw him as a man of indiscretion and ambition. In 1933 he became Chief of Mussolini's Press Office and in 1936 Minister for Press and Propaganda. He then fought in the Abyssinian War as a bomber pilot. In 1936 he was named Minister for Foreign Affairs at the age of 33. Ciano centralised the foreign office and pursued a personal style of diplomacy based on his own friendships and dislikes. He certainly lacked Grandi's perceptiveness, and is generally characterised as a shallow character.

His early policies were similar to Mussolini's: penetration into the Balkans, intervention in the Spanish Civil War, and friendly relations with Nazi Germany.

However, he began to differ with Mussolini on his policy towards Hitler, becoming more critical of the German alliance. He opposed the Pact of Steel, and wanted a barrier in the Balkans against the Germans – and so was a major advocate of the invasion of Albania. He helped keep Italy out of the war in 1939. He went out of favour in 1940 because of his anti-German stance at a time when Germany was doing so well. Eventually he accepted the logic of joining Germany at war, and was involved in the disastrous Greek campaign. He kept his post but not his power until he was dismissed in February 1943.

He voted with Grandi in the Fascist Grand Council meeting which overthrew Mussolini in July 1943. He was imprisoned by the new government, but escaped to Germany. He was then sent to the Salo Republic, and was tried and shot as a traitor, despite the pleas of his wife. Ciano's diaries have been a major source for historians since (see pages 260–61).

He lacked Grandi's wisdom, and was resented for his success. Muggeridge, who edited his diaries, has said of him, 'The focus of his life and thought was power. Mussolini represented power, and therefore he attached himself to Mussolini.'

#### Activity

- 1 Note down the major contributions of Grandi and Ciano.
- 2 How far did their policies differ from the Duce's?
- 3 What do their careers show about the nature of the Fascist regime?
- 4 If they had had more power how might events have taken a different course?

## F Why didn't Italy enter the Second World War in 1939?

### FOCUS ROUTE

- 1 List reasons in Sources 14.50-56 explaining why Italy did not join the war.
- 2 List reasons why it might have done.
- 3 Do you consider Mussolini's decision was wise? What do the extracts generally suggest about Mussolini's qualities as a ruler by 1939?
- 4 What does Mussolini's decision not to join the war suggest about the impact of his policies?

'The Italians are behaving exactly as they did in 1914.' So remarked Hitler on 25 August 1939 when told that Italy would not join in the approaching war. Much to Mussolini's disappointment, Fascist Italy repeated Liberal Italy's policy - to stay out of a major war. When war broke out in September 1939 over Hitler's invasion of Poland, Mussolini reluctantly declared Italy 'non-belligerent'. At first sight this looks a real puzzle:

- One of Mussolini's major aims was to build up the military strength of Italy, and develop a warlike people.
- He believed that war helped forge a strong nation.
- By 1939 Mussolini had had seventeen years of power to prepare Italy for war.
- He was bound by the Pact of Steel to join Hitler in any war.

Read the following sources explaining Italy's non-belligerence in 1939.

**SOURCE 14.50** A German interpreter describing Ciano's explanation on 11 August to German Foreign Minister Ribbentrop as to why Italy could not join a war in 1939

*It was impossible materially and politically, militarily and psychologically for Italy to participate in a war at this early stage. She had in effect been waging war for years on end. What with intervention in the Spanish Civil War and the conquest of the Abyssinian Empire, the Italian people had been pushed into one armed conflict after another, and the result was a pronounced degree of war weariness. In addition these years had virtually exhausted Italy's scant stock of materials.*

**SOURCE 14.51** Extracts from Ciano's diary, August-September 1939. Ciano argued strongly for Italy to stay out of the war in 1939

- a) Recounting a conversation with the King, 24 August  
*In his judgement we are absolutely in no condition to wage war. The Army is in a 'pitiful' state ... The officers of the Italian Army are not qualified for the job and our equipment is old and obsolete. To this must be added the state of mind of the Italians, which is distinctly anti-German.*
- b) Ciano asked Party Secretary Starace  
*... not to keep from Il Duce the country's true state of mind, which is clearly anti-German ... The Italian people do not want to fight alongside Germany in order so to enhance German strength that one day will menace us.*
- c) Police chief Bocchini told Ciano  
*If there should be demonstrations in favour of neutrality, the CARABINIERI and the regular police would make common cause with the people.*

#### d) Mussolini's feelings

13 August *At first he agreed with me. Then he said that honour required him to march with Germany. Finally he said he wanted his share of the loot in Croatia and Dalmatia.*

15 August *[Mussolini said] it would not be good to irritate the Germans, because we ought to get our share of the spoils too.*

16 August *[Mussolini said that] this time it was war, and we could not take part in it because we were in no position to do so.*

26 August *The Duce was really out of his wits. His military instinct and his sense of honour were leading him to war. Reason has now stopped him. But this hurts him very much. In the military field he was badly served by his advisers who, under the illusion of eternal peace, have fostered dangerous illusions in him. Now he has had to confront the hard truth. This, for the Duce, is a great blow.*

**SOURCE 14.52** Mussolini to Hitler, 25 August

*Given the state of military preparations in Italy, I cannot take the initiative in any warlike operations. The war was planned for 1942 and at that date I should have been ready.*

**SOURCE 14.53** A letter sent on 26 August by Mussolini with a list of immediate needs from Germany – including 1.75 million tons of petrol, coal, and steel. (Seventeen thousand freight train journeys would have been required to transport all of this.)

*Führer, I would not have sent you this list if I had had the time (on which we had agreed) to accumulate a stockpile and to accelerate the growth of self-sufficiency.*

**SOURCE 14.54** A telegram from Hitler to Mussolini, read out on Italian radio

*Duce, I offer my heartiest thanks for the diplomatic and political assistance that you have recently given to Germany and to her just cause . . . I do not expect to need Italy's military aid. I thank you also, Duce, for everything that you will be able to do in the future for the common cause of Fascism and National Socialism.*

**SOURCE 14.55** The text on posters which appeared briefly in several Italian cities in September 1939

*Italian workers will never fight alongside the butchers of their Polish brothers.*

**SOURCE 14.56** The historian Gallo, p. 303, comments on Mussolini's behaviour in late August 1939

*. . . a man rocked between one decision and another by events that he had not anticipated, a man whose mind could be changed by whoever talked to him cleverly enough, a nervous man who had no plan and who with every day lost more of his grasp on reality.*

*It was a reality that he refused even to see. The facade was cracking in every direction: the military position was disastrous and the myth of the 'Fascist grand army' was evaporating . . .*

*After seventeen years of Fascism the situation was in every respect worse than in 1915: though 42 divisions had been mobilised, in actuality there were only 37, or the equivalent; on paper there was a figure of 73, but in order to make 37 it had been necessary to reduce the number of regiments in each. In the air force, which was the best branch of the Fascist armed services, there were 700 modern planes, but not all were in flying condition, and, besides, no one knew where they were based.*

*The industrial backing for this army was laughably understocked: on 1 September 1939 there was enough steel for two weeks, iron ore for six months, nickel for twenty days. Furthermore, the equipment produced by Italian industry was indescribably inefficient: the grenades did not explode, the nails fell out of the shoes, and the soles wore through within miles.*

The fact that neither the Italian economy nor armed forces were ready for war can be seen as indicating the failure of much of Mussolini's domestic policy. He had also failed to produce a nation of warlike subjects as suggested by the Italians' positive reaction to the peace at Munich and to non-intervention in 1939. However, for all the criticism that can be made of Mussolini, it is hard to deny that in 1939 he made the correct choice. Whether his change of policy in 1940 was equally wise remains to be seen.

### ■ Talking point

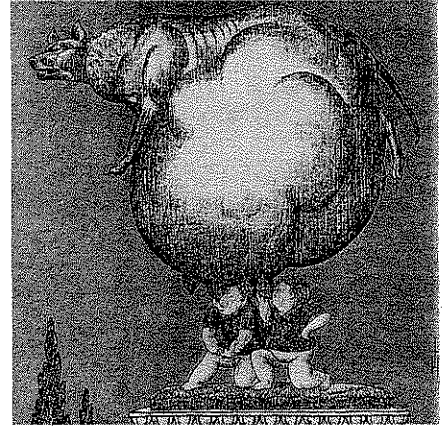
How valid is it to talk of 'the Italians' reaction' to an event?

## G Review: How successful was Mussolini's foreign policy 1922-39?

**SOURCE 14.57** An American cartoon, 13 March 1938



**SOURCE 14.58** A cartoon from a RADICAL German magazine, November 1922. The caption read: 'Just blow hard - Italy has to get bigger!'



### Activity

- 1 What criticism of Mussolini's approach to foreign policy is made in Source 14.57?
- 2 What common theme do Sources 14.58 and 14.59 highlight?
- 3 To what extent does Villari agree with Mack Smith's view?

Consider the following evidence about Mussolini's foreign policy.

**SOURCE 14.59** Mack Smith in *Mussolini's Roman Empire*, 1977, pp. vi, viii

*By his own standards he was certainly successful in much of what he tried to do. In so far as he aimed to make Italy feared and hated in the world, he achieved his purpose, even though he also provoked the additional and unexpected reaction of scorn and contempt. He used to say that he wanted to test the mettle [courage] of Italy in war, and here too he succeeded. He meant to assert Italy's 'rights' to territorial expansion... He was as good as his word... he prided himself on being a realist who saw life as struggle and perpetual combat. The fact that he incidentally brought economic ruin and civil war to Italy... was unintended.*

*Any history of Mussolini's foreign policy has to be also, or even mainly, a history of propaganda. By persuading foreign governments that he was the strong leader of a strong country, he made it possible to pursue a belligerent foreign policy without having to waste scarce money on providing the material sinews [resources] of war.*

**SOURCE 14.60** Italian historian L. Villari, *Foreign Policy under Mussolini*, 1956, p. 374

*Mussolini's conduct of Italy's foreign relations conferred on the country a position of prestige such as it had never enjoyed before. No Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs since Cavour had achieved such success, and never before had Italy been so greatly respected abroad. Not only did its diplomats realise this, but even its humblest emigrants felt at last that they could hold up their heads and say, 'Civis Italicus sum' [I am an Italian citizen].*

In 1939 Italy had a brief respite from war. Most Italians were probably relieved. They had been concerned about the German alliance, but at least their ruler had not joined Hitler in war. In some respects, if you were to judge his foreign policy from the position in 1939, Mussolini had been quite successful, with the Abyssinian adventure the highlight of his regime to date. When you examine what Italy actually gained from his policies you might be more critical. Furthermore, there was growing evidence that his economic and military resources were not as powerful as his future ambitions were to require. Mussolini could not resist further aggression, and the next four years were to see a virtually continuous series of setbacks, which partly stemmed from his policies in the late 1930s.

You should now be able to assess the success of Mussolini's foreign policy to date. You could do this by assessing either his major actions, or the extent to which he fulfilled his aims.