

## CHAPTER 7

# Italy's Imperialist Adventure

## MUSSOLINI PONDERES INVASION

Italian nationalists ever since the great imperialist Francesco Crispi had yearned to acquire Ethiopia as a colony; Mussolini was no exception. But during the 1920s, though given to outbursts that Italy must "reach the Oceans," Mussolini was frustrated by Anglo-French dominance in the Mediterranean and was distracted from an African empire by revisionist projects. As late as mid-1932, when Grandi suggested an invasion of Ethiopia, the Duce made short shrift of the idea. In December 1932, however, after Grandi's departure, Mussolini commissioned General Emilio De Bono, a Fascist comrade of the first hour, to draw up a preliminary war plan while he made the diplomatic preparations along the lines roughed out by Raffaello Guariglia, the Palazzo Chigi's most radical spokesman for African colonization. According to Guariglia, Italy should acquire Ethiopia not by gradual economic or political penetration but by a military campaign "in the grand style." Before embarking on invasion, however, Italy must first gain British and French acquiescence. To prevent any radical break with tradition, Guariglia felt that the Ethiopian enterprise should be made an episode, rather than a dangerous new departure. Once a protectorate had been imposed on a defeated Ethiopia, Italy, in his view, would be a satisfied power and a reliable Concert of Europe partner, rather than a radical revisionist bent on continental expansion.<sup>1</sup>

Guariglia's colleagues in the Palazzo Chigi viewed Ethiopia through nineteenth-century imperialist lenses. Dependent on trade and maritime com-

merce, lacking a strong industrial base, Italy was condemned to be a second-rate power unless it obtained colonies. Ethiopia was the only major African region that had not already been snapped up by the other European powers. Important as a source of raw materials, it possessed highland agricultural areas deemed suitable for Italian emigrants. The economic imperialist persuasion was augmented during the early 1930s by the argument that the unemployment and stagnation of trade caused by the depression could be relieved by imperialist acquisitions. Still, until Italy was ready for a test of arms, it should engage in a peripheral policy by the subversion of Ethiopia and bribery of the border tribal chiefs.

But this *politica periferica*, halfheartedly pursued, yielded no quick or spectacular returns. Growing restless, Mussolini began to ponder invasion. In early 1933, he told Starhemberg that if Italy failed to penetrate the Danube region, "We might even be pushed to Africa."<sup>2</sup> In August, the Duce transferred all matters pertaining to East Africa to the colonial ministry under De Bono. Freed of interference by unimaginative service chiefs and the Palazzo Chigi's diplomatic propriety, De Bono could on his own initiative draw up operational plans and implement them. But events in Europe stayed Mussolini's hand. Rather than behaving like a dutiful Fascist pupil, Hitler stepped up the pressure on Austria, while Dollfuss avoided dependency on Italy. Mussolini therefore had no choice but to place Ethiopia on hold and move cautiously during most of 1933. He refrained from talk of war against the world and strove to preserve the status quo in Europe by means of the Four Power Pact until diplomacy had done its work. Harmony reigned so far between the Palazzo Venezia and the Palazzo Chigi.

By fall 1933, Italy's diplomatic preparations had bogged down. The Four Power Pact had fizzled, and the disarmament talks came to an abrupt end when Germany stormed out of the League in October 1933. Losing patience with diplomacy, Mussolini entrusted De Bono with the practical preparations for an attack on Ethiopia. In a similar spirit, he published a sensational article, entitled "Verso il Riarmo," in March 1934 that scandalized Europe. Bristling with militant nationalism, Mussolini denounced the League and sneered at pacifism. In the real world of arms races and military alliances, he wrote, Italy would have to hasten its rearmament and win quick returns in Africa before other states could move. The Mediterranean must be converted from an Anglo-Saxon lake into a Roman sea. In the same article, Mussolini injected a worrisome ideological component into his Realpolitik. Breaking with the "peaceful" and "European" spirit of the defunct Four Power Pact, he urged Fascist combat against liberal democracy.<sup>3</sup> One month later, he released additional funds for Ethiopian war preparations.

But the shrewd calculator in Mussolini emerged to temper the visceral impulse for war. Since Italy was in no position to defy the Western Powers, careful diplomatic preparation could not be avoided. Although, by autumn

of 1934, a sizable Italian military force had arrived in East Africa, the Duce was still undecided whether he would fight a colonial war, a national war, or any war at all.

## AUSTRIA

After the assassination of Dollfuss, which brought Italian troops to the Brenner and was denounced by the Western Powers, the Germans undertook a new course toward Austria. Momentarily eschewing violence, Hitler appointed Franz von Papen as his personal extraordinary emissary in Vienna. Ostensibly, von Papen's mandate was to restore normal relations between the two governments, but the urbane, silver-tongued aristocrat actually aimed to seduce the new government with a Pan-German program that would culminate in a peaceful Anschluss. The Führer dismissed Habicht from his post as director of propaganda for Austria and closed the border to Nazi traffic. But since there was no letup in Austrian Nazi violence, Rome remained suspicious. Worse still, from the Italian standpoint, political pundits everywhere in the post-Dollfuss era were predicting that a rudderless Austria would quickly slide into Nazism. To reestablish his leadership, Mussolini looked for a reliable minion to steel Austria against further Nazi encroachment. Should it be Kurt von Schuschnigg or Prince Starhemberg? Which one would control the government, the army, and the Fatherland Front?

Starhemberg saved Rome from having to make a choice by stepping aside, which enabled Schuschnigg to be appointed without opposition as the deceased chancellor's replacement.<sup>4</sup> Italy's views of this transition remain unclear. We know that Schuschnigg was not loved in Rome, but the Italians also questioned Starhemberg's competence when he began preaching that the renovation of Austria should be patterned on the encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, which had been issued by the Holy Father in 1931.<sup>5</sup> An angry Suvich decried this as a defection from Fascism to Catholicism, but Starhemberg, unrepentant, justified his apostasy as the only credible counter to the Nazis. Rome retaliated by slashing financial and military aid to the Heimwehr.<sup>6</sup>

Yet Starhemberg continued to carry out Mussolini's directives by applying pressure on Schuschnigg to avoid drawing moderate Nazis and "national" opposition into his entourage.<sup>7</sup> Ignoring this advice, Schuschnigg admitted to Mussolini during a meeting in Rome on 21 August 1934 that he was willing to consult with those Greater Germans if they endorsed the principle of Austrian independence. Hardly raising a protest,<sup>8</sup> Mussolini let Schuschnigg deal with the Nazi problem in his own way. Schuschnigg took advantage of Mussolini's flagging interest by gradually establishing his ascendancy over the prince, whose energies were being dissipated in the high life and in his continued rivalry with Fey over control of the Heimwehr.<sup>9</sup>

Unquestionably, there existed no rapport between Mussolini, the daredevil Fascist revolutionary, and the austere and reserved Schuschnigg, whose stuffy legitimism and Tyrolean associations made for formal meetings devoid of freewheeling discussion. The cloistered college professor and the man on horseback did little more than exchange pious hopes for Austria's capacity to survive the Nazi onslaught.<sup>10</sup>

Mussolini, however, was not yet prepared to give up on Austria. Nevertheless, the assassination of Dollfuss and growing German power convinced him that his previous approaches—meddling in Austrian internal politics or the defense of Austria by Italy alone, in cooperation with Germany, or through the Rome Protocols Bloc—would not suffice. In the search for a guarantee of Austria's independence, he would have to bring in France and the Little Entente, not one by one, but as a bloc.

The Duce was faced with many obstacles. The Little Entente acted as if it preferred Anschluss to a Habsburg restoration and took no initiative in alleviating Austria's economic distress. Thanks to its running feud with Italy, Yugoslavia had moved closer to Germany; Romania was relatively far removed from Pan-German pressures and was preoccupied mainly with minimizing Italian influence in the Balkans; and the Czechs, offended by the Italian role in the suppression of the Austrian Socialists, disliked Schuschnigg's authoritarian regime. The Yugoslavs posed the greatest problem. When Mussolini rushed troops to the Brenner in July, they threatened a move into Carinthia, should the Italians cross the frontier. To a certain extent, Mussolini had brought this Little Entente hostility upon Italy by his association with Hungarian revisionism.

While Mussolini sought a means by which to reduce the tensions in the Danube region between the Little Entente and his troika partners, Austria and Hungary, the French faced disarray in Eastern Europe following Hitler's rise to power. In April, the French foreign minister, Louis Barthou, undertook a fence-mending tour of Eastern Europe to revive French leadership.<sup>11</sup> While solicitous of Poland and the Little Entente, he was not prepared to offer additional French commitments to deter German aggression. Rather, his nuanced diplomacy was aimed at easing the tension in Eastern Europe that had been provoked by France's negotiations with the Soviet Union to contain Hitler. None of this was to Mussolini's liking, not so much because he regarded the Soviet Union as "an evil empire" but because he felt left out.

Austria seemed more manageable as an object of Franco-Italian cooperation. Both Britain and France had expressed gratitude to Mussolini for his forceful defense of Austria, but, to avoid an Italo-Yugoslav military confrontation in the event Hitler stirred up further trouble in the Danube region, they wanted to broaden the little beleaguered country's basis of support. On 31 July, the permanent secretary of the Quai d'Orsay, Alexis Léger, suggested that a tripartite committee be set up in Rome to oversee

Austrian affairs and to recommend joint action should Austrian independence again be threatened.<sup>12</sup> This came at a time when Italy and Austria were working on a military protocol between them.<sup>13</sup> To prevent the Germans from playing on great-power differences over the Anschluss question, the Italians were willing to include Great Britain, France, and Germany in the projected protocol. If Hitler agreed to join, he would be accepting Austrian independence just as Stresemann, at Locarno, had accepted the finality of Germany's frontiers with France and Belgium. In other words, such agreement would insist on no *diktat* on either the Rhine or the Brenner. Such a forum of ambassadors would also grant Italy a mandate to protect Schuschnigg against *Gleichschaltung*. Should Germany refuse participation, this would earn Hitler's regime the opprobrium of France and Britain and would undermine von Papen's gambit of an Austro-German modus vivendi based exclusively on Teutonic unity.<sup>14</sup> Instead, Germany simply ignored the Italian proposal in favor of a waiting game, on the assumption that Austria's independence could not be propped up indefinitely either collectively or by Italy alone.

But the British and French were not finished. In mid-August they proposed a *démarche* to Vienna that urged Schuschnigg to widen his popular support by reconciling with "moderate" Socialists and "national" elements free of Nazi excesses. This proposal was anathema to the Italians, who would have no truck with the hated Austro-Marxists and distrusted Nazis dressed up as respectable bourgeois citizens. Moreover, they feared massive defections from the Heimwehr to the Austrian Nazis should Schuschnigg either admit Socialists into the government or grant amnesty to those jailed in the 12 February government crackdown.<sup>15</sup> Mussolini, willing to join a diplomatic partnership to protect Austria, would simply not accept shared responsibility in Austrian domestic affairs with anyone.

Hounded by the British and French to reconcile with the Austrian Socialists, Mussolini intended to talk with Schuschnigg, during the latter's upcoming visit in Rome on 21 August, about an Italo-Austrian protocol containing military guarantees open to the participation of other countries. London and Paris would be kept in the dark until the Italo-Austrian protocol had been worked out. But Schuschnigg never gave Mussolini a chance, for he, more than Dollfuss, resented Italian tutelage and pressure for greater Heimwehr representation in his government. Moreover, in sore need of loans, he wanted to keep lines open with Paris and London, since there was no gold available in Rome.<sup>16</sup>

Taking the initiative, the Austrians at the end of August presented a proposal that the Italians thought resembled their own. Yet, there would be no Italo-Austrian protocol, and the initiative would be left to Schuschnigg rather than to Mussolini.<sup>17</sup> Austria, France, Germany, Britain, and Italy would be obliged to intervene immediately in the event that Vienna's domestic order and security were threatened. A major absentee was Yu-

Yugoslavia, which bothered the Italians only insofar as no one was doing much to halt Belgrade's growing tilt toward Berlin. Could France restrain the Serbs in case of a German march into Austria? The Austrian government would determine both the nature of the threat and the country to send military assistance.<sup>18</sup> Although not happy at the elimination of the protocol from the Austrian proposal,<sup>19</sup> Mussolini swung behind Schuschnigg's version and let him take the lead in shepherding it through the Geneva back corridors.<sup>20</sup>

All seemed to be proceeding smoothly when the British suddenly declared in mid-September that they would refuse to participate in any guarantee of Austria.<sup>21</sup> Bending to British pressure, Barthou, who had earlier been willing to consider a Danubian organization centered on the states of the Roman Protocols,<sup>22</sup> also declined to be associated with any Great Power assembly outside the League's jurisdiction and without the inclusion of the Little Entente countries as equals. Angered by the very mention of the League, the Italians insisted that Britain and France grant them a mandate to act on their behalf in Austria, reiterated the necessity of a preliminary bilateral accord of guarantee with Schuschnigg, and scorned the Yugoslavs.<sup>23</sup>

This forceful Italian reply placed Barthou in a quandary. So long as France and Italy remained hopelessly snarled in their perennial outstanding disputes—disarmament, Tunisia, and colonies—little progress could be made on the Austrian question. Furthermore, much to Mussolini's chagrin, Barthou's peregrinations in Eastern Europe were stealing the limelight from Rome. For his part, Barthou preferred to downgrade Italy's part in his anti-German front but knew that he could not. Mussolini, after all, was resolved to defend Austria and was on bad terms with Hitler. Barthou therefore decided to accept Italian predominance in Vienna as the most effective safeguard against Nazi pressure. He was indeed a political realist who did not permit ideology to interfere with French national interests. Still, he was discouraged by Britain's refusal to undertake any commitment and by the intransigence of the Little Entente. Moreover, he was susceptible to the argument of the Quai d'Orsay, which held that the Yugoslavs would drift into the German camp if France followed Mussolini's lead on the Austrian question. The Yugoslavs, to be sure, were not facilitating Barthou's endeavor to placate Rome. Indeed, they instigated an irresponsible press war that denigrated the Italian army, belligerently stated their preference for an Anschluss over a Habsburg restoration in Austria, and bragged about marching into Carinthia should the Italians ever venture across the Brenner frontier. Mussolini replied by threatening to break off diplomatic relations with Yugoslavia.<sup>24</sup> Confronted by this mounting Italo-Yugoslav antagonism, Barthou made his choice. Instead of coddling the Italians, he caved in to Britain and the Little Entente in order to pursue negotiations with the Soviet Union and the Danube Convention aimed at the creation of an East-

ern Locarno. Although wanting to crown his *tour d'horizon* of Europe with a successful trip to Rome, Barthou placed his invitation at risk by treating the Italians lightly—on par with Yugoslavia—in the conviction that they would have to agree to French terms in order to prevent Anschluss.

Given these intractable deadlocks, Britain, France, and Italy issued a declaration on 27 September 1934 reaffirming the independence and the territorial integrity of Austria. As empty of force as the declaration of 17 February, this farcical and tardy response to the Nazi assassination of Dollfuss revealed the lack of will and contrasting perspectives of the three signatories. Not surprisingly, it was greeted with derision in Berlin. Although the Italians were worried by the yawning gap between an affirmation of principle and a formula of guarantee for Austria's independence,<sup>25</sup> they were not terribly upset. Yugoslavia would be excluded from Great Power parley and the League left out of the Austrian equation. Similarly, the Western Powers would no longer meddle with the Italian effort to dominate Schuschnigg, notwithstanding Mussolini's diminished confidence in the Austrian chancellor's determination to evade the blandishments of von Papen. Schuschnigg was much less happy with the negotiations leading up to the 27 September declaration. The British had written off Austria, the French had shown partiality to the Little Entente over the defense of Austria, and Schuschnigg himself was under fire in Vienna for his excessive dependency on Italy, which redoubled his resolve to avoid any bilateral military protocol with Mussolini in the future.

On 17 November, Schuschnigg arrived in Rome to talk again with Mussolini. Their exchanges were awkward and underscored by a mutual lack of comprehension. The agenda was the usual one: loans for Austria, the nature of Austria's "nationals," Italian concessions in the Alto Adige, and the dangers of Hungarian revisionism. But these burning issues were run through quickly and handled gingerly. Nothing was said about either the Italo-Austrian military protocol or broader international guarantees to deter a German invasion of Austria.<sup>26</sup> Having merely gone through the motions with Schuschnigg, Mussolini finally had to develop a new approach to keep the peace in Europe while he moved ahead with his plans to invade Ethiopia: a multinational guarantee of Austria negotiated in concert with France against either a nazification of Austria or a German invasion.

## GROUNDWORK FOR WAR

During the last weeks of September, Barthou, in a change of course, authorized the resumption of Franco-Italian talks on colonial questions; these had been suspended since Grandi's departure from the Palazzo Chigi. The Italians presented a set of proposals. To fulfill Article 13 of the London Pact, France should declare its disinterest in Ethiopia, concede the coastline

of French Somalia, with the exception of Djibouti, and make other colonial territorial rectifications along the Libyan frontier. Italy would reciprocate by abandoning its claims in Tunisia and Morocco. As an earnest of goodwill, Mussolini promised to downgrade Italian support for Croatian separatism and to discuss the tangled Albanian question directly with Belgrade. Before an immense throng in Milan on 6 October, Mussolini showed restraint toward the Serbs, though he did boast of Italy's military strength. Aloisi construed his speech as "a clear invitation to Yugoslavia."<sup>27</sup>

Impressed by a less intransigent Italy, Barthou decided to tackle the Yugoslavs head-on by inviting King Alexander to France for a lecture on the importance of Austria's independence to Yugoslav security and the necessity of cooperation with Italy in upholding it.<sup>28</sup> A visit to Rome by Barthou would follow between 4 and 11 November 1934. King Alexander was in a quandary. He took the Italo-Yugoslav entente so ardently espoused by the French as a retreat from their treaty obligations toward Yugoslavia; at the same time, he suspected that Mussolini, with Barthou's connivance, was poised to succeed France as the dominant power in the Balkans. Hence, Alexander spurned Italy's tentative overtures for a *détente*,<sup>29</sup> but he accepted Barthou's invitation. This tentative beginning, however, was aborted when Croatian terrorists, some of whom were known to have resided in Italian training camps, assassinated Alexander and Barthou in Marseille on 9 October.<sup>30</sup>

Many fingers pointed toward Mussolini for ordering the king's murder, but there is still no evidence implicating the Duce directly in the crime, apart from his past support of Croatian terrorism and the camps he provided in Italy to house Pavelić and his henchmen. Why should the Duce suddenly want to stir up a crisis with Yugoslavia when his diplomacy was aimed at the inclusion of Belgrade in his anti-Anschluss front? Notwithstanding a wish to play down the incident, Mussolini stoutly defended himself and Hungary against Yugoslav charges that they together had masterminded the outrage. The resultant quarrel between the two revisionist allies and the Little Entente proved to be more of an obstacle to Franco-Italian rapprochement than their long-standing colonial differences. Whereas the new French government insisted that an African settlement was possible only if Italy would agree to a clause on Austrian independence guaranteed by the Little Entente,<sup>31</sup> Mussolini insisted that Hungary be recognized as a major guarantor. Rather than conciliate Yugoslavia, he would stand by Magyar revisionism.<sup>32</sup>

Pierre Laval, who succeeded Barthou at the Quai d'Orsay, was a man cut from a different cloth. A traditional and ardent republican, Barthou was an intellectual who expressed his ideas forthrightly, whereas Laval was a backstairs intriguer whose devotion to the truth was suspect. Instead of encircling Germany with alliances, the new French foreign minister meant to downgrade Barthou's pactomania and take "little steps" in the direction



of improved relations with Hitler. Laval eschewed blocs in favor of bilateral negotiations with Rome and Berlin. Less anti-German and more comfortable among dictators than Barthou, Laval was eager to please Mussolini by diverting criticism from Italy over the Marseille assassinations. In such an improved atmosphere, the two countries would arrive at a meeting of minds on the contentious issues dividing them and Laval would publicize the rapprochement by a visit to Rome.

But there were major stumbling blocks. The Yugoslavs accused Italy of complicity in the plot to kill their king and of abetting the disintegration of their country. Stung by the criticism leveled at Italy by the Little Entente, Mussolini avoided approaching Belgrade on an Italo-Yugoslav treaty of arbitration and conciliation that the French held to be a prerequisite to Franco-Italian discussions.<sup>33</sup> Laval's projected trip to Rome appeared to have been squelched.

At this point, an incident occurred that seemed to galvanize Mussolini into accelerating his plans to invade Ethiopia. On 5 December 1934, an Anglo-Ethiopian boundary commission clashed with a force of Italian-led tribesmen at the oasis of Walwal in the Ogaden province of Ethiopia. After a fierce battle, the Ethiopians were routed. Mussolini had had no hand in this affair, which was provoked by a trigger-happy Italian commander. Emperor Haile Selassie of Ethiopia brought the Walwal incident to the notice of the League of Nations on 14 December.

Mussolini was thus given a handy pretext for condemning Ethiopia as an irresponsible and barbaric empire, but the incident came at a time when he was becoming increasingly agitated over Germany. Fearing that Hitler would be emboldened to exacerbate tensions in Austria after the anticipated German victory in the upcoming Saar plebiscite,<sup>34</sup> the Duce bent to Laval's demand that Italy cooperate with the Little Entente in defending Austria under the auspices of the League.<sup>35</sup> This meant downgrading Hungarian revisionism. Gömbös lashed back by warning that Hungary would not tolerate any extension by the Little Entente to guarantee the Danubian territorial status quo under the guise of protecting Austria.<sup>36</sup> But since Mussolini was pressed for time,<sup>37</sup> he ignored Gömbös and allowed the Rome Protocols to languish.

On 30 December, without informing the foreign ministry, Mussolini issued a directive to the military for an invasion of Ethiopia. The Ethiopian problem must be solved as soon as possible, he maintained, before Haile Selassie had time to modernize his army with the help of foreign experts. The aim was to be "the destruction of the Abyssinian forces and the total conquest of the country. . . . The empire cannot be made otherwise." A large force (mechanized equipment and gas) was needed for a conquest—the quicker the better, to reduce the diplomatic fallout. Mussolini convinced himself that Hitler was still two or three years away from acquiring

the war machine needed to move on Austria and that Yugoslavia posed no threat to Italy since it was paralyzed by internal division.<sup>38</sup>

But Mussolini knew that he had to have an accord with France before the Ethiopian matter could be addressed. Luckily, at the end of December, Laval discarded the prerequisite of an Italo-Yugoslav détente, which removed the last obstacle to talks with the Duce. The stage was thus set for the historic meeting between Mussolini and Laval, which took place in Rome between 4 and 7 January 1935. After extensive talks, they succeeded in sorting out their conflicting interests and their claims on Africa, armaments, and Central Europe.

The European provisions concerned Germany and the Anschluss threat. In the event that the independence or integrity of Austria was threatened, France and Italy, within the framework of the League (this was a key concession by Mussolini), would consult on measures to be taken; in addition, Austria's neighbors (except Switzerland), as well as France, and perhaps Poland and Romania, would together work out a pact of nonintervention in each other's domestic affairs. As a neighbor of Austria, Yugoslavia loomed large in these plans, but Mussolini showed no disposition to resolve the issues of Croatian terrorism or Albania directly with Belgrade. Finally, in a departure from past practice between their two countries, Mussolini and Laval agreed to cooperate on the question of disarmament and to consult in case Germany broke the restrictions imposed on it by the Versailles Treaty. It was obvious that the ring around Germany that Mussolini and Laval wanted to create had many missing links.

On the subject of Africa, Mussolini and Laval were able to settle most of their differences quite easily. Minor frontier rectifications, between Eritrea and French Somaliland and between Tunisia and Libya, were agreed to in Italy's favor. Italy made a great concession by promising to relinquish the special rights of Italian citizens in Tunisia. It was Ethiopia that posed the greatest problem. After the hard bargaining was over, ambiguity resulted from the exchange of notes, the meetings, the oral exchanges, and what was said and written afterward.<sup>39</sup> But this much is clear: France was prepared to forgo the economic interests in Ethiopia that it had enjoyed under the 1906 agreements, save the zone adjoining Djibouti—the Addis Ababa railway; this ruled out French consent to a total Italian military conquest of Ethiopia. The rest is uncertain. Mussolini claimed that Laval, in using the phrase “free hand,” had granted him French acquiescence in Italian economic domination of Ethiopia; France's political disinterest in the country left him room for war against Haile Selassie. Perhaps Mussolini took this expansive view because, as he revealed later to Anthony Eden, he thought it was fair compensation for his having yielded to France “100,000 Italians in Tunis and received in return half a dozen palm trees in one place and a strip of desert which did not even contain a sheep in another.”<sup>40</sup>

No doubt Laval had conceded Mussolini economic predominance in

Ethiopia and political influence over Haile Selassie—maybe even an Italian-sponsored *coup d'état* to remove him from power. In the absence of any discussion of war, however, Laval thought it unlikely that Mussolini would risk diplomatic isolation by undertaking a hugely expensive and dangerous attack against Ethiopia. Imperial grandeur à la Mussolini and military adventurism were quite foreign to Laval's wheeling-and-dealing nature. Laval later insisted in a self-serving way that French disinterest could not in any case have been equated with a violation of the sovereignty and integrity of Ethiopia. Laval claimed that he had granted a free hand at once as a permission for Italy to undertake a peaceful political penetration of Ethiopia and as a warning to Haile Selassie that he could no longer count on French protection against Italy. It behooved the Negus (one of Haile Selassie's titles), therefore, to make far-reaching concessions to Mussolini. Undoubtedly, differences arose from glib oral exchanges between two men not known for their attention to detail. While Mussolini eventually took a "free hand" and a "wink" as Laval's willingness to ignore Italian use of force, no matter on what scale, the French minister had no such thoughts. Rather, he seems to have believed that the Italians would follow the French example in Morocco: subsidization of internal unrest, guerrilla warfare, and the leisurely conversion of Ethiopia into an Italian protectorate within the European Concert and at no risk to Italy's security on the Brenner—the very *politica periferica* favored by Mussolini's advisers in the Palazzo Chigi.

Was Mussolini bent on conquest in January? Did he seek to avenge Adua and satisfy Fascist pride by a quick military occupation of the Ogaden as a prelude to a dictated peace imposed on Haile Selassie? Or were his gigantic military preparations merely intended as leverage to wrest Italy's claims by diplomatic intimidation? Though inclined toward a "total solution," Mussolini reckoned that the agreements with Laval left open a retreat to a negotiated settlement that would still leave him master of Ethiopia. Since Britain had to be factored into his imperialist equation, the Duce would wait on events and decide accordingly. But no matter what was on his mind, Mussolini had scored a great propaganda victory at home. By coming to Rome to sign bilateral accords, Laval had admitted parity with Italy. The "old and decadent democracy," the cradle of the revolution that had once changed the world, had conferred a patent of respectability on Mussolini, who represented the wave of the future. Armed with what he took to be Laval's blank check for Ethiopia, Mussolini now had to obtain one from the British—a much more difficult task.<sup>41</sup>

Mussolini delayed until 25 January 1935 before instructing Grandi to inform the British government of the 7 January accords, but Grandi was told to seal his lips on the Duce's intention of "resolving the Ethiopian problem in a radical manner" for fear that the British would not be as accommodating as the French.<sup>42</sup> On 29 January, Grandi carried out these instructions, only to discover that Sir John Simon, the British foreign sec-

retary, had already been apprised by Laval.<sup>43</sup> Like Laval, Simon had slight interest in Ethiopia and little faith in the League as an effective peacekeeping device; most of the cabinet had little faith in it as well. Italian vagueness was answered by Simon's lawyerly hair-splitting. His negative reactions to Italy's Ethiopian plans were implicit rather than stated. He accommodated Mussolini by blocking Ethiopia from bringing its case before the League. In cooperation with France, Simon sought to sidetrack the Ethiopians by insisting that they activate their 1928 agreement with Italy, which called on the two signatories to settle their disputes by bilateral arbitration. To avoid the glare of international publicity and scrutiny at Geneva, the Italians readily accepted. The League Council was thereby enabled to defer discussion of the problem until the outcome of arbitration was known. Mussolini drew from Simon's behind-the-scene maneuvers the mistaken impression that Britain had countersigned Laval's blank check and would refrain from taking the Italo-Ethiopian dispute before the League if it came to a test of arms.

While immersed in his Ethiopian preparations, Mussolini could not hide from the problem of Austria. Since Schuschnigg was slipping out of his control, the Duce decided at the end of February to reduce tensions with Yugoslavia by broaching the idea of rapprochement. Italy would repudiate Croatian terrorism and break up the Ustaša gang quartered on the Italian island of Lipari. Following a mutual press truce, a friendship treaty would be signed, topped by a military alliance. The aim was to block German annexation of Austria and, failing that, a German *Drang nach Südosten*.<sup>44</sup>

As might be expected, Mussolini's idea of rapprochement with Belgrade and the inclusion of Yugoslavia in the projected defense of Austria rocked Budapest. Mussolini tried on 23 March to convince Gömbös of the peril of Anschluss. To deter Hitler further, Mussolini urged Gömbös to acquiesce in a mutual security pact in the Danube region, negotiated with France, to include Germany and the Little Entente which, in turn, would concede to both Austria and Hungary the right to rearm.<sup>45</sup> Since there was no room for Hungarian territorial revisionism in this implementation of the Mussolini-Laval accords of 7 January, the plan did not sit well with Gömbös, nor did it with Hitler, who showed no interest in a pact of mutual assistance in Central and Eastern Europe, since such an arrangement would hem in Nazi *Lebensraum*. Bilateral nonaggression pacts with neighboring states represented the Führer's outer limit.

## THE STRESA CONFERENCE

On 16 March 1935, Germany shocked Europe by publicly repudiating the disarmament provisions of the Versailles Treaty. Mussolini was irritated by Hitler's bold stroke and appalled by Britain's weak reaction. Ignoring the dangerous consequences of the German landslide victory in the Saar-

land plebiscite, Simon and Anthony Eden, Lord Privy Seal, traveled to Berlin at the end of March in order to make Hitler a law-abiding European citizen. Mussolini's reaction was more to the point: "I know the Germans only too well."<sup>46</sup> Only by a show of force could they be brought to reason.

Worried about Hitler's intentions, Mussolini called on France and Britain to hammer out a set of agreements based on the commitment to check further unilateral German rearmament, to protect Austrian independence, and to preserve the demilitarized zone of the Rhineland. Laval, having fluctuated between appeasement and encirclement of Germany, in this instance agreed that Berlin needed a clear warning. But would Laval and Mussolini together be able to overcome Britain's equivocation? The omens were not good. Instead of joining a united front against Germany, the British still hoped to persuade the French and Italians to cooperate with them in luring Germany back into a system of collective security under the auspices of the League, with the emphasis on disarmament rather than deterrence. Likewise, the British cared little about Austria's future, as the Italians had long known. Still, Mussolini plunged ahead. At the Stresa Conference, which convened on 11 April at British initiative, he persuasively spoke of the need for concerted action with binding commitments, but Ramsay MacDonald and Sir John Simon would not be moved. Although desiring to follow the Duce's lead, Laval and Pierre Etienne Flandin dragged their feet.

The final result was a bland communiqué that did nothing to deter Hitler and served only to convince Mussolini that the Western democracies were pusillanimous.<sup>47</sup> Germany was spanked for repudiating its disarmament obligations; Britain and Italy reaffirmed their obligations under the Locarno agreements; and all three powers agreed to consult on the steps necessary for the maintenance of Austria's independence—nothing more and nothing less than the pious nullities of 17 February and 27 September. The two most responsible for the loophole on Austria were surely MacDonald and Simon, who made everyone else believe that their hands were tied by their countrymen's aversion to any continental military commitments. Instead of binding themselves to new undertakings in Eastern Europe, they contemplated a naval agreement with Germany.

And what about Ethiopia? While platitudes stood for concerted action on Austria, nothing was said in the plenary sessions about Ethiopia, which made a complete farce out of the so-called Stresa Front. The French avoided the subject for fear of an Italo-British dispute that might wreck their united front against Germany; the British believed that relations with Italy could only worsen if awkward inquiries were made about Italy's war preparations. Moreover, as the British permanent undersecretary Sir Robert Vansittart later admitted, "My real trouble was that we should all have to choose between Austria and Abyssinia, if Mussolini stuck to his mania for fame and sand."<sup>48</sup> Before the convening of the conference, the Italians had expressed the wish to exchange views on "the mutually harmonious de-

velopment of economic interests in Ethiopia,"<sup>49</sup> but they later changed their minds, having decided that the matter would be better decided by direct Italo-Ethiopian negotiations or by unilateral Italian action. Behind the scenes, Ethiopia was discussed and Italian military plans aired among the secondary players, so nobody in London could plead ignorance as to Mussolini's ultimate intentions—even a military showdown between Italy and Ethiopia.<sup>50</sup> Nor could the Italians claim that the British had hidden their opposition to an Italian war against Ethiopia.<sup>51</sup> Nevertheless, frank exchanges by the lesser fry at Stresa were obscured by an important last-minute change made in the final communiqué. The three powers would oppose any unilateral repudiation of treaties that might endanger the peace "of Europe"; this replaced the phrase "of the world" from an earlier draft. Laval smiled, and the British made no objection. Small wonder that Mussolini should take this silence for consent to do as he wished in Ethiopia.

Italian news bulletins crowed that Italy had emerged from Stresa as the power broker of Europe, while the British and French press lavished praise on Mussolini for acting as a responsible European. It did seem as though Mussolini had engineered an astonishing shift from a posturing revisionist to a pillar of the status quo. The purpose behind this, however, was not the high-minded one of preserving peace but of keeping Germany at bay while Italy proceeded with the invasion of Ethiopia, free of the Anschluss incubus and the active opposition of France and Britain.

When it became clear that Britain would remain a passive spectator to German rearmament and Nazi intrigues in Austria, the French and Italians moved quickly to strengthen their Stresa declarations by signing military accords on 28 June 1935. These outlined the various contingencies for Franco-Italian military cooperation in the event of German aggression against either signatory or against Austria. The French started to transfer some ten to fourteen divisions from the Italian border in the Alps to the northeast. This enabled the Italians to remove their troops from the French frontier to the Istrian peninsula and the Brenner.

Whatever credibility the "Stresa Front" had as a deterrent against further German rearmament was destroyed by the Anglo-German Naval Accord of 18 June 1935, which allowed Germany to build up to 35 percent of British naval strength. Britain had once again become an accomplice of Germany in its violation of the Versailles Treaty. Still, that did not stop the British from lecturing Rome on the sanctity of Italy's international obligations. From Stresa onward, both London and Paris implied that Mussolini should eschew war against Ethiopia lest he fail to discharge his European responsibility as watchdog of the Brenner.<sup>52</sup> The Duce resented this kind of moral prompting. Why should he listen to arrogant "Perfidious Albion" pontificate on Italy's duty to police the Nazis on the Anschluss question, when those same high-minded British gentlemen were themselves cutting a naval deal with Hitler behind Italy's back and contributing nothing to the defense of Austria? Laval, too, though worried about the An-

schluss threat, did not want to antagonize Britain by appearing to be too pro-Italian. Mussolini needed no further proof of the Stresa front's fragility.

Never one to tread quietly, Mussolini proceeded by bluster and scare tactics, rather than by chicanery à la Laval. He intensified his pressure on the British with a radio campaign—Radio Bari—aimed at undermining British influence in Egypt, Palestine, and the Yemen, and he tried to tie their hands on the Ethiopian question by publicly keeping a low profile on the Anschluss question. He told the departing German military attaché on 25 May of a “basic reorientation” of Italian policy, perhaps a “gradual and systematic rapprochement between Germany and Italy.”<sup>53</sup> Finally, the ultimate threat. Only Austria stood between Italy and Germany, he told the Fascist Grand Council the following day. “It may therefore not be out of place to address a few words to those who would like to fossilize us on the Brenner to prevent us from moving in any other part of the world.” Rather than sacrifice his Ethiopian policy, Mussolini implied, he would abandon Austria. Was this threat merely a bluff? Would Mussolini be able to scare the British into following Laval's line on Ethiopia by his threat to open up the road to Berlin?

On 11 May, Mussolini met with Schuschnigg in Venice, at which time they broached the subject of Italian military assistance to Austria. Two big impediments were Hungarian opposition and Yugoslav hostility. If Yugoslavia should succumb to German blandishments, Mussolini's military strategy vis-à-vis Austria would be seriously compromised. One way or the other, Mussolini conceded, Yugoslavia would have to be included in Italy's Danubian anti-Anschluss front. Schuschnigg, menaced by armed Nazis encamped in Carinthia, preferred to see Yugoslavia in Mussolini's grip rather than in Hitler's. In spite of this common ground, Schuschnigg was reluctant to accept Italian patronage, no matter what grave perils his country faced. Although aware that Austria alone could not repel a German attack, he favored a European defense over Italian military assistance. Discouraged, Mussolini urged that the restoration of the Archduke Otto be contemplated as a last-ditch measure to unify a divided Austria against Nazi pressure. While not concealing his monarchist leanings, Schuschnigg pointed out that a return of the Habsburgs would encounter formidable opposition in Europe.<sup>54</sup> As Mussolini became increasingly troubled by Schuschnigg's evasiveness, the Hungarians moved closer to Germany. On the threshold of the invasion of Ethiopia, therefore, Mussolini's grip on Austria was loosening, and he was witness to the slow but steady unraveling of his Protocols Bloc.

### *ITALIA FARÀ DA SÈ*

In Britain, a new government came to office in June 1935. MacDonald retired and was replaced as prime minister by Stanley Baldwin in a general cabinet reshuffle. Baldwin made Eden minister for League of Nations affairs

while appointing Sir Samuel Hoare as foreign secretary. Increasingly worried about Mussolini's warlike intentions in Ethiopia, Vansittart decided that veiled warnings were not enough: "Italy will have to be bought off—let us use and face ugly words—in some form or other, or Abyssinia will eventually perish."<sup>55</sup>

Vansittart drew up a proposal, which Eden presented to Mussolini during a visit in Rome on 24–25 June 1935. Great Britain would cede a corridor across British Somaliland to Ethiopia, including the port of Zeila, which would give Ethiopia an outlet to the sea; in return, Ethiopia would grant substantial territory in the Ogaden to Italy, most of which consisted of large tracts of useless desert. Eden presented the plan without first consulting the Ethiopian government, nor were the French apprised. Mussolini summarily rejected the "Zeila Plan," since it would have allowed Ethiopia to enjoy British protection and to become a maritime power, able to import arms and communicate with the outside world. Moreover, since the Italian colonies were small, exposed to attack, and separated by hundreds of miles, he needed a corridor to connect them. When Eden defined Laval's free hand as limited to economic predominance, "Signor Mussolini flung himself back in his chair with a gesture of incredulous astonishment."<sup>56</sup> The Duce replied with two alternatives: (1) a peaceful cession to Italy of all the territories surrounding the region of the old Amharic kingdom conquered by Abyssinia over the last half century, as well as Italian control over the Abyssinian nucleus, where the emperor would be allowed to keep his throne; or (2) a call to Italian arms "to wipe out the name of Abyssinia from the map."<sup>57</sup> The battle lines were drawn. Eden's compromise plan remained on the table down to the Hoare–Laval proposals in December, while Mussolini, having finally apprised the British directly of his warlike intentions, remained firm up to the Italian invasion on 3 October. The Duce left the door barely cracked for a diplomatic solution. Bitterly disappointed by Mussolini's abrupt rejection of the Zeila plan,<sup>58</sup> Eden departed with a distinct dislike of the Duce, a dislike the Italian leader reciprocated by referring to him as "Lord Eyelashes."

During the first months of 1935, the League of Nations Union, a British nonparty organization, prepared for a national plebiscite on the question of whether or not the British people favored the idea of peace through collective security. On 27 June, the results of the Peace Ballot were announced. The majority of the people supported the League, but they did not want war with Italy. Moreover, they did not understand that collective security could probably be enforced only by the adoption of military sanctions. But, since the government felt itself bound by public opinion, its resolve to defend the League Covenant was strengthened. With such a close association with the League, little room was left for diplomacy in a cabinet not renowned for taking clear and open decisions. Better to take heed of the ballot and preach loyalty to the League, hoping that Mussolini would



come to his senses, rather than to take any risky independent initiative. The Cabinet's penchant for inaction was further strengthened when it received on 18 June the report of the interdepartmental committee, chaired by Sir John Maffey, which was mandated to review British interests in Ethiopia. The report, which was supposed to be kept secret, stated that since no vital British interests existed in the area, there was no need for Britain to resist an Italian conquest of Ethiopia.

Mussolini, in contrast, placed a premium on action. Concluding from Eden's visit that Britain could be pushed around, he addressed the Black-shirts on 6 July:

Abyssinia, which we are going to conquer, we shall have totally. We shall not be content with partial concessions, and if it dares resist our formidable strength, we shall put it to pillage and fire. . . . To those who may hope to stop us with documents or words, we shall give the answer with the heroic motto of our first storm troops: "I don't give a damn."<sup>59</sup>

In *Il Popolo d'Italia* on 31 July, Mussolini ruled out compromise. There would be no turning back, only a "total solution . . . with Geneva, without Geneva, against Geneva."<sup>60</sup> Too much money had been spent, and too many troops were under arms. The prestige of the regime was at stake.

Mussolini's determination to defy the League was ably assisted by the League itself. The secretary-general was the pro-Italian Joseph Avenol, whose chief aide was the Italian Massimo Pilotti; throughout the crisis, they bent over backwards in facilitating a compromise on the Ethiopian question favorable to Italy. In a political sense, the League had no existence at all as an independent agency; collective security was a chimera. Furthermore, the League machinery was not geared to dealing with cases of premeditated aggression. Still, the League possessed the important weapon of sanctions to deter would-be aggressors. And Fascist Italy, due to the country's dearth of raw materials, had precisely the kind of economy that the sanctions system was capable of crippling without having to resort to military measures—sanctions on oil and coal. Drawing back from the threat of sanctions, Britain and France chose to activate the League's mechanism of mediation in their search for a peaceful resolution of Italy's dispute with Ethiopia.

As Mussolini hurtled his way toward war, Grandi in early July discussed with the British a convening of the tripartite powers—Britain, France, and Italy—as defined in the 1906 treaty, while Aloisi talked with Laval and Eden. The two Italian diplomats played on the German danger in order to persuade the British and the French to keep Italy's quarrel with Ethiopia outside the competence of the League.<sup>61</sup> Italy gained a respite when, on 1 August, the League Council accepted a scheme sponsored by Britain and France to defer further scrutiny of the Ethiopian question until 4 September

while the tripartite committee attempted conciliation. But Mussolini was in no mood for compromise. When Aloisi left Rome for Paris to represent Italy in the tripartite talks, he was instructed: "You must act as a fighter rather than as a diplomat, as a Fascist rather than as a negotiator. Even if I am given everything I prefer to avenge Adowa. I am prepared."<sup>62</sup> Such an attitude doomed the tripartite meetings to failure and brought talk of sanctions out in the open.

The British were torn. Should they preserve the Stresa Front and respect the Franco-Italian agreements by appeasing Italy with territorial concessions in Ethiopia? What if Mussolini persistently refused to compromise and attacked British forces or territories? On 16 August, the British tried to placate Rome by introducing certain modifications of the Zeila plan. Italy would be granted broad economic concessions but no political control unless Emperor Haile Selassie gave his consent. With the exception of Eden's territorial adjustments in June, Ethiopian sovereignty would be respected. Britain would support the League, avoid use of the deadly word "sanctions," and take no isolated action against Italy. Simon was following Vansittart's advice not to force the pace in Paris with "an unreliable France and an unready England."<sup>63</sup> But Mussolini rejected the British-sponsored proposal and stood firm on his all-or-nothing position. Bending to British pressure, Laval wrote Mussolini on 30 August that France could not ignore the League and implored him to reconsider. Mussolini took this in stride; he knew that Laval was doing good work for Italy at Geneva in polishing a plan with Avenol designed to declare Ethiopia not worthy of League membership because of its brutal slave trade and abuse of dissident tribes within the empire.

When the League Council convened on 4 September, the Ethiopian delegation politely but firmly countered the Italian charge that their government was uncivilized. The Italians replied the next day by walking out of the meeting. To escape the deadlock, the Council set up a Committee of Five to search for a solution. During this crisis, the British appeared ready to assume a more forceful leadership of the League. On 11 September 1935, Sir Samuel Hoare rose before a hushed League assembly and made what appeared to many as an unequivocal declaration to invoke collective security against all acts of unprovoked aggression. Representatives of the small states rushed to shake his hand over Britain's announcement that peace was indivisible and that every nation, large and small, would be protected against military attack. Devotees of the League were sure that Hoare had broken with vacillating British policy toward the peacekeeping mechanisms of the Covenant. Although flattered by all the attention, Hoare had not meant to take a strong stand in opposing Italy's war plans. Rather, he hoped to deter Mussolini from undertaking a "mad-dog" act. Should he achieve that goal, peace would be maintained, Britain would emerge as the champion of the League, and Hoare would be toasted by public opinion

as the hero of collective security without sacrifice or risk of war. The speech was apparently strengthened by the movement of two British battle cruisers, flanked by other ships, to the vicinity of Gibraltar, Alexandria, and Aden. The Duce countered by deploying the Italian navy between the Eastern Mediterranean and the Red Sea and by strengthening his forces in Libya.

On 18 September 1935, the Committee of Five came up with a compromise. The League would be given extensive supervision and control of Ethiopia, Italy would carry out that nation's economic development, and France and Britain would facilitate territorial adjustments between Italy and Ethiopia. Believing that Hoare would not hesitate to use the fleet if necessary, Aloisi, Guariglia, and Grandi urged Mussolini to accept the committee's compromise.<sup>64</sup> After a moment of hesitation, however, the Duce brushed off his chief advisers and rejected the proposals of the Committee of Five outright in the belief that Britain would not go to war for the sake of Ethiopia.

Mussolini could get away with such defiance because Hoare and Laval had tied each other's hands. Laval refused to apply harmful sanctions or promise unconditional commitments against Italy without a firm British guarantee in Europe covering an Anschluss and a German remilitarization of the Rhineland.<sup>65</sup> Failing to gain from the British what he considered as fair compensation for dissociating himself from Italian political domination of Ethiopia, Laval would not give unequivocal assurance of military support if Italy attacked British forces in the Mediterranean. Likewise, he would not sacrifice the security afforded by the Franco-Italian Accords and their military corollaries aimed at the protection of Austria simply to deny Mussolini the rewards of a colonial adventure in East Africa. He would accept only limited staff talks in return for another joint attempt to conciliate Mussolini. Still, if forced to choose between Rome and London, Laval would choose London—and Geneva—a priority forced on him in the French cabinet by Edouard Herriot, a staunch supporter of the League and an outspoken critic of Fascist Italy.<sup>66</sup> So Laval tried to do the impossible—to support the League, Britain, and Italy.

Hoare, however, refused to act on the sanctions question without strong French support. As this was not forthcoming, Hoare made it clear to Rome that Britain had no intention of either imposing military sanctions or closing the Suez Canal; the naval build-up was a purely precautionary measure. Instead of provoking Mussolini into war and permanent estrangement, peace must be preserved and Italy maintained as a guardian of the Brenner against any German move on Austria. Moreover, the British people were quite opposed to any military response to Italian aggression to save a far-away African country. Faced by the façade of a resolute Anglo-French front, Mussolini, it was hoped, would reconsider his warlike attitude. Such were the ingredients of Britain's appeasement of Italy. Hoare was supported in this strategy by the Admiralty, which felt undermanned, overextended,

and incapable of meeting the threats posed simultaneously by Japan, Germany, and Italy. Would armed force or sanctions on oil have stopped Mussolini? That was a question both Hoare and Laval wished to avoid. Feeling militarily unprepared, they determined in advance that there would be no showdown with Mussolini. Hoare's 11 September speech therefore falsely raised public hopes that Britain and France were finally ready to breathe life into the League by stopping Italian aggression in its tracks as an object lesson to Hitler.

While there was bluff among the British and French, there was none in Mussolini. His defiance was based on shrewd calculation informed by purloined British documents. His intelligence service provided him with the Maffey report, which stated that no vital British interest was at stake in Ethiopia; he was also informed by the same unimpeachable source that the British fleet was suffering severe shortages of ammunition, submarines, and aircraft. This knowledge enabled him to ignore chief of staff Pietro Badoglio's dire prophesies of a general war with Britain if Italy continued on its collision course. Mussolini calculated that Britain would be moved to military action only if Italy should try to profit from the war by modifying the status quo in the Mediterranean and the Red Sea.

In his preference for action over compromise, Mussolini disdained diplomacy and its polite usages. In spite of Badoglio's reservations, the second thoughts of his diplomats, and his own genuine alarm over a possible war with Britain, Mussolini feared that, after the propaganda and the arms build-up, anything short of military glory would expose him to ridicule and cause the ruination of his regime. There could be no retreat. On the eve of the war, Sir Eric Drummond, the British ambassador in Rome, read him well:

I need only say in conclusion that I found the Head of the Government calm, affable and unperturbed. If mad, he is a very singular madman; while for one who has set the whole world by the ears, condemned thousands of young Italians to a painful death, and millions of his countrymen to an almost animal level of existence, he seems astonishingly untroubled by the remorse of conscience. The explanation lies probably in his philosophy and creed. He believes in war as the means by which a country can be kept vigorous, young, powerful and progressive. He believes also that Italy is the heritor of the ancient traditions of the Roman Empire. He finds his country lacking space, raw materials and the place in the sun which he holds to be its due. These reasons combined have rendered him oblivious of other considerations such as economic and financial facts and have produced in his mind the impression that he is acting as a predestined instrument.<sup>67</sup>

On the evening of 2 October, the doors of the balcony were flung open, and Mussolini strode out to address a huge throng of Italians assembled in the Piazza Venezia. His face stern and imperturbable, the Duce proclaimed in a harsh and staccato cadence Fascism's indomitable will to seize what

was rightfully Italian. The thousands of Blackshirts packed in the square led the chant, "Duce! Duce! Duce!" Mussolini basked in the glory of defiance and popular acclaim as his troops launched the invasion of Ethiopia the next day.

## NOTES

1. DDI, 7, XII, 223, 27 August 1932.
2. Starhemberg, *Hitler and Mussolini*, 107.
3. Toscano makes this point in his introduction to Aloisi's *Journal*, xiii.
4. DDI, 7, XV, 610, 30 July 1934.
5. ASMAE, AP:A 26: 4549/2399, 22 November 1934.
6. DDI, 7, XVI, 178, 23 November 1934; FRUS, 863.00/1216, 4 October 1935; *ibid.*, 863.001236, 11 October 1935.
7. Edmondson carefully unties the complicated tangle of intrigues in his *The Heimwehr and Austrian Politics*, 245–63.
8. DDI, 7, XV, 722, 21 August 1934.
9. DDI, 7, XV, 722, 21 August 1934.
10. Carsten, *The First Austrian Republic*, 222.
11. For a detailed description of Barthou's diplomacy, see Piotr S. Wandycz, *The Twilight of French Eastern Alliances, 1926–1936* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1988).
12. DBFP, 2, VI, 548, 31 July 1934; DDI, 7, XV, 615 and 616, 31 July 1931.
13. The draft of such a protocol cannot be found in the Italian archives. DDI, 7, XV, 646, 3 August 1934, n. 3.
14. *Ibid.*
15. DDI, 7, XV, 700, 705, and 712, 11, 16, and 18 August 1934.
16. DDI, 7, XV, 722, 21 August 1934; Aloisi, *Journal*, 210–11; FO, R4686/37/3, 23 August 1934.
17. DDI, 7, XV, 788, 9 September 1934.
18. DDI, 7, XV, 741, 776, and 781, 29 August, 6 and 8 September 1934.
19. Aloisi, *Journal*, 213.
20. DDI, 7, XV, 783, 8 September 1934.
21. DBFP, 2, XII, 87, 12 September 1934.
22. Jordan, *The Popular Front and Central Europe*, 28.
23. DBFP, II, XII, 104, 109, and 110, 23 and 25 September 1934; DDF, I, VII, 343, 361, 364, 19 and 25 September 1934; DDI, 7, XV, 839, 859, 870, and 875, 19, 23, and 25 September 1934.
24. Francesco Lefebvre D'Ovidio, *L'intesa italo-francese del 1935* (Rome: Privately published, 1984), 437.
25. DDI, 7, XVI, 23, 7 October 1934.
26. DDI, 7, XVI, 157 and 164, 17 and 19 November 1934.
27. Aloisi, *Journal*, p. 225.
28. William I. Shorrock, *From Ally to Enemy: The Enigma of Fascist Italy in French Diplomacy* (Kent, Ohio and London, England: Kent State University Press, 1988), 49.
29. Sadkovitch, *Italian Support for Croatian Separatism*, 129.

30. There are two excellent summaries of Barthou's policies: Shorrocks, *From Ally to Enemy*, 78–98, and Néré, *The Foreign Policy of France from 1914–1945*, 155–172.

31. DDF, 1, VIII, 235 and 246, 12 and 13 December 1934; De Felice, *Mussolini il duce*, 1: 521.

32. Robertson, *Mussolini As Empire-Builder*, 90–91.

33. DDI, 7, XVI, 247, 277, and 288, 6, 11, and 14 December 1934.

34. GFM, 2700/5737/H029110–17, 23 November 1935.

35. DDF, 1, VIII, 323 and 346, 27 and 29 December 1935.

36. DDI, 7, XVI, 338, 26 December 1934.

37. Mussolini told Aloisi on Christmas day, "it is now necessary to get things moving fast." Aloisi, *Journal*, 239.

38. DDI, 7, XVI, 358, 30 December 1934.

39. The official record of Mussolini's talks with Laval and their exchange of notes can be found in DDI, 7, XVI, 391 and 399, 5 and 6 January 1935. The general declarations, procès verbal, protocols, and correspondence that followed are in DDI, 7, XVI, 403, 7 January 1935. Mussolini and Laval later exchanged letters on the meaning of their accords that can be found in DDI, 8, III, 106, 23 January 1936, and 252, 19 February 1936.

40. DBFP, 2, XIV, 325, 25 June 1935. Enclosure.

41. The literature on the Franco-Italian accords is vast. Most helpful are the works by Robertson, Baer, Shorrocks, De Felice, and C. J. Lowe and F. Marzari, *Italian Foreign Policy 1870–1940* (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1975).

42. DDI, 7, XVI, 492, 25 January 1935.

43. DDI, 7, XVI, 510, 30 January 1935.

44. ASMAE, FL, Reel 10, 26 February 1935.

45. KÜM, 35, 23 March 1935. See also Aloisi's *Journal*, 246–47, for further examples of Mussolini's irritation with the Hungarians.

46. Aloisi, *Journal*, 261.

47. The judgment of Léon Noël, *Les Illusions de Stresa: L'Italie abandonnée à Hitler* (Paris: Éditions France-Empire, 1975), 70–80

48. Sir Robert Vansittart, *The Mist Procession* (London: Hutchinson, 1958), 521–23.

49. DBFP, 2, XIV, 225, 3 April 1935.

50. DBFP, 2, XIV, 230, 12 April 1935. Simon was aware of Italy's plans to invade Ethiopia as far back as January. Richard Lamb, *The Ghosts of Peace 1935–1945* (London: Michael Russell, 1987), 9.

51. *Ibid.*

52. DBFP, 2, XIV, 244, 3 May 1935.

53. DGFP, C, IV, 109, 26 May 1935.

54. ASMAE, FL, 11, 11 May 1935; NPA, 414, 11 May 1935.

55. DBFP, 2, XIV, 301, 8 June 1935.

56. Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators, 1923–1938* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 221–25.

57. DBFP, 2, XIV, 325, 25 June 1935, Enclosure; DDI, 8, I, 431 and 443, 24 and 25 June 1935.

58. Anthony R. Peters, *Anthony Eden at the Foreign Office 1931–1938* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986), 122.
59. Quoted in George W. Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 219 n. 24.
60. OO, XXVII: 110–11.
61. DBFP, 2, XIV, 346 and 365, 5 and 15 July 1935.
62. Aloisi, *Journal*, 294.
63. DBFP, 2, XIV, 434, 9 August 1935.
64. Aloisi, *Journal*, 307–8; Guariglia, *Ricordi*, 264–69.
65. Gaines Post, Jr., *Dilemmas of Appeasement: British Deterrence and Defense 1934–1937* (Ithaca, N.Y. and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 94–96.
66. Shorrocks, *From Enemy to Ally*, 147.
67. DBFP, 2, XIV, 630, 23 September 1935.

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