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The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia

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DOCUMENT

The Secret Laval-Mussolini Agreement of 1935 on Ethiopia

On January 5, 1935, the French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, and the Italian dictator, Mussolini, met in Rome. Two days later, on January 7, 1935, the two men concluded eight separate agreements. Four of these were published:[1] a general declaration; a treaty regulating Franco-Italian conflicts of interest in Africa; a special protocol on the status of the Italian minority in French-occupied Tunisia; and a *procès-verbal* proposing a collective non-aggression pact of all the states in Europe bordering on the Republic of Austria, then gravely threatened by Nazi Germany. The contents of the other four agreements, which were kept secret, proported to be covered by a communiqué issued the same day.[2] On three of these four agreements, the communiqué was, to say the least, misleading. They comprised a protocol providing for joint consultation in the event of Nazi Germany denouncing the restrictions still imposed on her by the 1919 Treaty of Versailles; a protocol protecting the *status quo* at the mouth of the Red Sea; and two exchanges of letters, proclaiming French disinterest in the economic sphere in Ethiopia, and promising Italian capital participation in the share capital of the Addis-Ababa—Jibuti railroad, the one avenue for Ethiopian trade with the outside world.[3]

Around these last two agreements and the private conversations between the two men which accompanied them, mythology has clustered ever since their signature. They marked the first, or rather the second stage in the Italian attack on Ethiopia, and the last major part of a sinister deal between an unscrupulous and self-seeking politician, Laval, and the personification of Fascism in Mussolini. Since 1945, historians have been aware from the evidence produced at the treason trials of Laval and Marshal Pétain in France, that the agreements were more complicated than that. The main intention of Laval in concluding the agreements was to bind Mussolini into an alliance in all but name against the renascent power of Nazi Germany. But somehow the stigma of underhand dealing which surrounded the agreements have never been quite cleared away, and the actual texts of the agreements remained unknown.

The Franco-Italian agreements concluded on January 7, 1935, are best understood as an illustration of the interplay, visible even in the classic period of European imperialism, between European and "colonial" considerations. In this barter of interest for interest without even any pretense of a relation to the views of the local inhabitants, they mark perhaps the

1. For the texts of these agreements see *British Foreign and State Papers,* vol. CXXXIX, pp. 946-48, 948-50, 950-51.

2. The communiqué is published in *Documents on International Affairs, 1935,* vol. I, p. 18.

3. The copies here printed are taken from photostats of the copies found by German Foreign Office researchers in 1940, in the files of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the French Senate, to whom they were sent by the French Foreign Office for information. They were incidentally very badly copied by the typists of the French Foreign Office, the Italian texts being full of misspelling, grammatical errors, typos, etc. These photostats were sent back to the German Foreign Office and placed, to complete the record in this file, closed in 1935, which dealt with the Laval-Mussolini meeting. The originals are now again in the custody of the German Foreign Office in Bonn, but photostats were made by the Allied historians who screened them for publication after their capture in 1945. They are filmed on serial M90, frames M003175-93.

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last major example of classical imperialism in action in the Middle East. While France's position was secure in Europe, between 1920 and 1933, colonial and naval rivalries had embittered Franco-Italian relations. Conversations had several times been initiated to end the actual causes of friction between the two countries in Africa, but they had always ended in renewed discord, since the real issue between the two countries was one of prestige, of Italy's claim to the status of a great power. Sharing the primacy of Europe with France—a claim the French either dismissed contemptuously or chose to take as a personal insult. But with the advent of Hitler to power in Germany and still more with the Nazi threat to Austria which culminated in June 1934 with the attempt to take over Austria by putsch and the murder of the Austrian chancellor, Dolfuss, threatened both countries equally. France had every incentive to reach an agreement with Italy. While to Mussolini it seems to have fired him with his first ideas of reaching his long-standing aims in Ethiopia.

The recently published diaries of Baron Pompeo Aloisi,[4] Mussolini's Under Secretary of State for League of Nations Affairs, throw a good deal of light on the origins of the agreements. From these, it appears that the idea of a French visit to Rome, and a general all-round settlement of Franco-Italian differences was mooted before Laval's appointment as French Foreign Minister in October 1934, by his predecessor, Barthou, so tragically assassinated in Marseilles by a Croat terrorist. Barthou is recorded as mentioning such a plan in May and June 1934; it was at the same time that Mussolini first began his preparations for stirring up trouble in Ethiopia. On June 30, 1934 Aloisi noted:

> Conversation with the explorer Franchetti, who told of his last meeting with the Duce and how the Duce had engaged him to arrange at once the policy of acting on Abyssinia's frontiers . . . I said that . . . in my opinion without a serious preparation in Europe one could not undertake anything in Abyssinia without leading to a disaster. He confided that when de Bono[5] goes with the King to Eritrea in October he will stay as Inspector-General of the Colonies.

The visit continued to be discussed throughout the summer. To judge from Aloisi's diary notes the Italians were insisting on negotiation on the various points at issue in Africa before Barthou's visit could take place. After the September meeting of the League Council, however, the Italian position weakened, largely because the Austrian question and difficulties made by Jugoslav enmity for Italy, came to the forefront of Franco-Italian negotiations. On October 1, Aloisi noted:

> I informed Suvich[6] of our international position in Geneva and we recognized that it is necessary to arrive at once at an entente with France and to make Barthou come to Rome. Then we spoke of rumors of wars in Abyssinia and said that nothing could be done without adequate international preparation. He said that the Duce had counted on this for two years, that is why it is very possible it will never take place.

From this point one can follow the negotiations from the French side in the contemporary notes[7] of Edward Herriot, the Radical Socialist leader, then in the Flandin Cabinet. On November 15, Laval read to the French Cabinet the instructions he was sending to Chambrun, the French Ambassador in Rome, for the coming negotiations. The instructions covered the provision of a consultative pact in the event of German decision to free herself from the Versailles' restrictions on her re-armament, a general non-intervention agreement on Austria, and the provision of an "Economic Statute" for Central Europe. On Africa, Laval noted that the Italians were demanding the abandonment of the French Somali Coast Colony except for Jibuti. Herriot's notes continue:

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4. Baron Pompeo Aloisi, *Journal, (25 Juillet 1932—14 Juin 1936),* ed. Mario Toscano, (Paris 1957).
5. Marshal de Bono, subsequently in command of Italian forces operating in Ethiopia. See his *Anno XIII, the Conquest of an Empire,* (London 1937).
6. Fulvio Suvich, Italian Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.
7. See Edouard Herriot, *Jadis,* (Paris 1952), vol. II.

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> In reality Italy seems likely to content herself with less; she is interested above all in the railway line, on the subject of which there exists an arrangement of 1906.[8] The danger which has appeared since then, is the question of Ethiopian independence. If these matters are settled, a declaration of Franco-Italian friendship will be drawn up and signed. The two countries will engage themselves to defend together their general interests, without concluding a treaty of alliance.

As Laval realized, the African question was to prove much less sticky than the question of Italian hostility towards Jugoslavia and *vice versa,* the repercussions this had on the question of a general agreement on non-intervention in Austria. Laval said as much to the French Cabinet on December 20 and again on January 2, the day he actually left for Rome. Aloisi's diary makes it clear that the negotiations might very well have broken down had Mussolini not been determined on an agreement "at all costs." In the event, both men were forced to abandon some of their demands, and to postpone some questions for further negotiation, notably that on Italy's demand for all of the French Somali Coast Colony.

What then did the two signatories obtain from the Treaty that each set such high value on it? Laval obtained in the protocol on disarmament a direct Italian promise of Italian support and consultation should Germany denounce the armament clauses of Versailles. But he obtained in private more than this. He obtained Mussolini's agreement to Franco-Italian staff talks envisaging joint military action in the event of a German attack upon either France or Austria. And staff agreements involving the appearance of a French army corps in the Italian order of battle, an Italian corps on the Franco-Swiss frontier and Italian air bases in Southern France were concluded between the French and Italian air ministries, and between General Gamelin and Marshal Badoglio in June 1935.

In return, Mussolini obtained a clear statement of French "disinterest" in Ethiopia. Compared with this all the other provisions of the Agreements were of minor importance. The questions of Tunis and of the frontiers between Eritrea and the French Somali Coast were, it is true, long-standing Italian grievances. But the Italian failure in Ethiopia was felt far more deeply. After the defeat of Adowa, itself a national humiliation, Italians believed that Britain and France alternately had intrigued with the Ethiopians to defeat Italy's ambitions and exclude her from a position of predominance in Ethiopia. Suvich's remarks to Aloisi, and the note in Aloisi's Diary of January 23, 1935:

> The importance of the day was in the decision taken by the Duce on the subject of Abyssinia, which appears irrevocable and which we must study. Wherefore meetings with Suvich who reads me the Duce's project, in my opinion it is a decision which puts at stake the future of the régime. . . .

make it clear that the Duce can have had no motive other than Ethiopia in his mind in making the Agreement. If further proof were wanted, it would lie in the Italian initiative in London on January 29, six days later, inviting the British government to exchange ideas on "these respective interests in Ethiopia . . . with

8. The reference is to the tripartite Anglo-French-Italian agreement of December 13, 1906 respecting Ethiopia. For the text see *B.F.S.P.,* vol. XCIX, pp. 486-89. From the Italian point of view the vital provision of the Agreement was Article IV which divided Ethiopia into spheres of influence alloting to Britain the headwaters of the Nile and its tributaries, to France the hinterland of the French Somali Coast protectorate and "the zone necessary for the construction and working of the railway from Jibuti to Addis Ababa," and to Italy, the hinterland of her possessions "in Erythrea [sic] and Somaliland" and "the territorial connexion between them to the west of Addis Ababa." This arrangement was only to take place in the event of a disturbance in the *status quo* in Ethiopia, which the three powers pledged themselves to uphold. The British government denounced this agreement in 1923, but it remained binding on France and Italy. There is a very considerable documentation in French and Italian on this agreement. See *Documents Diplomatiques Françaises,* Série 2e, vols. VI, VII and VIII *passim.* For the most recent Italian discussion see Carlo Giglio, "La Questione del lago Tana, (1902-1941)" in *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali,* Anno XVIII, No. 4, Ottobre-Dicembre 1951, pp. 643-86; this is extensively footnoted. The only British reference is in *British Documents on the Origins of the War, 1898-1914,* vol. VIII, document No. 9.

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the aim of examining the possibility of the development of those interests in a manner mutually agreeable to both parties;" a mission which left the British Foreign Office in no doubt that the Italian's "ultimate end" was not an

> economic predominance pure and simple but . . . the virtual absorption of whatever part of Ethiopian territory can be secured without prejudice to Italian interests and influence in other parts of the world.[9]

The question that remains unanswered in these documents is how far Laval realized and deliberately condoned Mussolini's ambitions. His enemies have advanced the theory that Laval by some wink or nod in his private conversation with Mussolini led him to understand that France would not oppose an open Italian attack on Ethiopia. Mussolini himself alleged this to Eden in June 1935, when Eden came to Rome to propose the establishment of an Italian protectorate in the non-Amharic south of Ethiopia in return for an Ethiopian opening to the sea through British Somaliland. But he did it in such terms that a misunderstanding is not altogether ruled out. Eden reported him remarking:

> Since he had yielded to France 100,000 Italians in Tunis and had received in return half a dozen pinetrees in one place, and a strip of desert which did not contain a sheep in another, it must be clear that he had understood that France had disinterested herself in Abyssinia. I contested this, telling Signor Mussolini that when M. Laval had described in Geneva his interview with Signor Mussolini, he had insisted that France had only given a free hand to Italy in economic matters and that he had added to Signor Mussolini 'vous avez des mains fortes. Faites attention,' making it clear that French goodwill did not apply to other than economic enterprises. At this Signor Mussolini flung himself back in his chair with a gesture of incredulous astonishment.[10]

At Pétain's trial after the war Laval repeated this description in slightly different terms, but insisting nevertheless that he had warned Mussolini not to abuse the free hand France had given him by resorting to force, "Imitate," he alleged he had counselled Mussolini, "the example of Marshal Lyautey."[11]

The Count de Chambrun who attended the meetings between the two men as French Ambassador in Rome throws some light on the matter in the detailed account given of Laval's visit to Rome in his memoirs.[12] According to his account, direct talks between the two men only took place on January 5 and 6. The first day was taken up with an exchange of views in which Laval insisted right from the start on very substantial Italian concessions in Tunis. Mussolini showed himself most conciliatory on this; on Ethiopia he remarked that he sought only

"an outlet for the economic activity of an over-populated Italy."

The second day was devoted to discussing the draft agreements. Here the lead was taken in voicing Italian objections by the Italian Under Secretary of State, Fulvio Suvich. Laval's reply was "most direct and decisive;" he pleaded a decision by the French Cabinet which made further concession impossible. Equally bitter discussion followed on the clauses dealing with the Italian schools in Tunis. No part was taken in this by Mussolini. But, continues M. de Chambrun,

> the terms in which M. Laval spoke of the cessation of French economic activity in the regions of Ethiopia other than the Hinterland of French Somalia and the railway zone, made a visible impression on Mussolini and effectively prepared the entente which established itself in the evening following long discussions between MM. Léger, de Saint-Quentin and Cherguerand on the one hand, and M. Suvich and the Italian experts on the other.

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9. The quotations are from a Foreign Office letter of March 6, 1935, itself quoted in the report of the inter-departmental committee set up in March 1935 under the chairmanship of Sir John Maffey to report on British interests in Ethiopia. The report, dated June 18, 1935, fell into Italian hands and was published in Italian translation in the *Giornale d'Italia,* February 20, 1936.

10. Eden's report is quoted in Viscount Templewood, *Nine Troubled Years,* (London 1953) pp. 155-56.

11. For Laval's evidence see *Le Procès Pétain,* ed. Geo. London (Lyon, n. d., 1946), p. 439.

12. Charles de Chambrun, *Traditions et Souvenirs,* (Paris 1952), pp. 192-97.

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Herriot's notes shed a little light on the discussion in the French Cabinet. On January 10, when Laval submitted the Agreements for approval, he noted:

> we take note . . . and Laval does not deny that this agreement on Abyssinia is alarming for the future. Laval qualifies the agreements reached as holding promise, *(prometteurs)*.

And again on January 12:

"we abandon Ethiopia whom we have introduced into the League. I am not resigned."

Léger himself was always inclined to believe that Laval had given Mussolini some kind of silent assent. Chambrun by contrast maintained that the two men were never sufficiently alone for such a private understanding to have been possible. A little light is shed on the question by an Italian Foreign Office report drafted at the end of 1935, summarizing the political developments in France in that year.[13] The vital passage reads as follows:

> The fate of Ethiopia and of all the French position on the question of East Africa was *virtually* already decided at the end of the Mussolini-Laval talks at Rome. With the draft of the letter of January 7[14] and *Laval's verbal assurances,* the French government was bound to accord Italy a free hand for the satisfaction of her needs of expansion in East Africa and for the settlement once and for all of any questions with the Abyssinian government.

At first sight this evidence seems conclusive. But the report needs to be interpreted with care in the light of the word "virtually;" as the entry earlier cited from Aloisi's diary shows, the political decision to go ahead in Ethiopia was not taken until after Laval's "assurances" had been given.[15] It was only in June, according to the same report, that Mussolini revealed to Laval his pet scheme for annexing the Galla and Danaqil-speaking areas of Ethiopia, and proclaiming a protectorate over the central Amharic-speaking plateau. Clearly Mussolini had been contemplating some action against Ethiopia for some time. Equally clearly Laval, conscious of the advantage to France of Italian support in Europe, was not the man to discourage him; but discourage him from doing what? If in June Mussolini was thinking of dismembering rather than annexing Ethiopia, his plans were probably a great deal less concrete or coherent in January. The extension of Italian influence, Italian predominance in the zones recognized as appertaining to Italy's zone of interests by the 1906 Treaty, an end to Ethiopian evasions of her treaty obligations; he can hardly have spoken to Laval in terms more concrete than these. There is room for a good deal of misunderstanding here. One is led even to wonder if the question was not tacitly left in that grey and cloudy limbo where one assumes one has been understood for fear that direct enquiry may show that one has not.

In any case the question presented itself to Laval in a very different light from that in which his detractors have always seen it. Whatever Mussolini did, so he must have thought, French interests were safeguarded. In return he was obtaining an ally against Germany in Europe, an end to Franco-Italian rivalry in the Mediterranean, possibly even in the Balkans. Like Mussolini he had not much time for the League of Nations except as a kind of twentieth-century Congress System, where the Great Powers could meet to their mutual understanding and benefit. Moreover France had never had much difficulty in managing the League in the past. He seems in fact less the sinister Machiavellian conspirator of mythology, than silly and shortsighted; a clever man overreaching himself, striving to catch a favorable constellation of forces, without realizing their essential incompatibility. No one but a very

13. The vital extracts have been published from the microfilm of the original now in the American National Archives by William C. Askew, "The Secret Agreement between France and Italy on Ethiopia, January 1935," *Journal of Modern History,* vol. xxv, No. 1, March 1953, pp. 47-48.

14. Document (iv) in the Annex.

15. Marshal de Bono gives the date December 20, 1934, in his memoirs, (*op. cit.,* p. 116), but in the light of Aloisi's categorical statement in his diary, (entry of January 27, 1935, *op. cit.*), and the instructions that de Bono himself took with him when he sailed for Eritrea on January 7, 1935, (de Bono, pp. 57-58), we must assume this to refer to the military rather than the political side of action against Ethiopia.

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self-confident and short-sighted man could have believed that British opinion could be reconciled to a major Italian economic expansion in Ethiopia, or that this was all Mussolini wanted, or that it could have been achieved without the use of force in view of Ethiopian suspicion of Italy. It would have been equally silly to imagine that British opinion could be reconciled to the use of force or pressure of any kind capable of being represented as incompatible with the Covenant of the League, or that Mussolini could be controlled once his actions had begun to attract international censure. Whether he did, or did not, tip the wink, his judgment either way appears to have been faulty to the point of ruining his own schemes and causing his exclusion from power until the hour of France's disaster. He forgot, or took a chance on, public opinion; not until the end of 1935 could he begin to hint in public at what he felt he had gained from the January agreement. His full defense only came in the hour of France's defeat, in his speech to the Senate of July 10, 1940.[16] Even then the Senate was in secret session. The Agreements of January 1935 were in fact the agreements of dupes. Neither signatory could deliver on his concessions, neither could cash in his gains unopposed. At least Mussolini got Ethiopia. Laval lost all, including, ultimately, office. Mussolini's hatred for France thereafter drove him headlong into the arms of Germany.

16. The full record of the secret session of the French Senate of July 10, 1940 is printed in *Les Evénements survenues en France, 1936-1940,* (Paris 1947), *Rapport,* pp. 488 ff.

[ANNEX]

(i)

Alexis Léger to Senator Henri Berenger[1]

REPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE
Paris, le 16 Janv. 1935[2]
Ministère
des
Affaires Etrangères
Direction
des
Affaires politiques
et commerciales

EUROPE

Monsieur le Président et cher Collègue

J'ai l'honneur de vous faire parvenir ci-joint, pour votre information personnelle et confidentielle, copie des divers accords signés à Rome le 7 de ce mois.

Je crois devoir attirer particulièrement votre attention sur le caractère rigoureusement secret du Protocole sur les armements, du Protocole annexe au Traité entre la France et l'Italie relatif au règlement de leurs intérêts en Afrique et des échanges des lettres relatifs à l'Ethiopie et au chemin de fer Djibouti-Addis Abeba. /.

Veuillez agréer, Monsieur le Président et cher Collègue, les assurances de ma haute considération.

Monsieur Henry BERENGER
Senateur
Ambassadeur de France
Président de la Commission des
Affairs Étrangères du Sénat
Palais du Luxembourg

PARIS

pr le Ministre des Affaires Etrangères[2]
et par délégation
L'AMBASSADEUR DE FRANCE
SECRÊTAIRE GENERAL
Alexis Léger
M003178

1. This document carries the following handwritten marginal notes:

a. At the head of the document in the top right hand corner, in German: Original is to be found with the files of the Archive Commission, Prince Bismarck Street 2 under the file serial, Special Section Krummer, Number 969 of 22.10.40.

b. Below the date line in two different hands, both in French: (i) Agreements of Rome, (ii) Italy. Personal and confidential.

In the original: *"Original bei den Akten Archivkommission Fürst Bismarckstr(asse) 2 unter den Aktenzeichen Sonderreferat Krummer Nr 969 v(on) 22.10.40."*

"Accords de Rome"

"Italie"

"Personnel et confidentiel"

2. The date and M. Léger's titles are rubber-stamped onto the document.

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(Translation)

Dear President and Colleague,

I have the honor to communicate to you by the enclosure, for your personal and confidential information, a copy of the various agreements signed at Rome on the 7th of this month.

I believe that I should particularly draw your attention to the rigorously secret character of the Protocol on armaments, the Protocol annexed to the Treaty between France and Italy relating to the regulation of their interests in Africa, and of the exchange of letters relating to Abyssinia and to the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway. /.

Please accept, dear President and Colleague, the assurances of my highest consideration,

Mr. Henry BERENGER
Senator
Ambassador of France
President of the Committee
of Foreign Affairs
of the Senate
Palais Luxembourg

PARIS.

For the Minister of Foreign Affairs
and by delegation
AMBASSADOR OF FRANCE
SECRETARY-GENERAL
Alexis Léger

(ii)

Protocol on Disarmament

PROTOCOLE

Le ministre des Affaires Etrangères de la République française et le Chef du Gouvernment italien se déclarent d'accord pour estimer que l'Allemagne, non plus qu'aucune autre Puissance dont le statut d'armements a été défini par traité, ne peut modifier par voie unilatérale ses obligations en matière d'armement, le principe de l'égalité des droits tel qu'il est defini par la Déclaration du 11 décembre 1932[1] demeurent par ailleurs intact. En conséquence, les deux Gouvernements conviennent de procéder de la manière suivante:

Au cas où l'Allemagne voudrait se libérer unilatéralement du traité en se réservant une complète liberté d'armements, les deux Gouvernements, animés du désir de procéder d'un commun accord, se concerteront sur l'attitude à adopter.

Au cas où les circonstances permettraient une reprise des négociations internationales en vue de la conclusion d'une convention générale des armements, les deux Gouvernements associeront leurs efforts pour que les chiffres de limitations qui seront inscrites dans la convention assurent aux deux Pays, par rapport à l'Allemagne, les avantages qui seraient justifiés pour chacun d'eux.[2]

Fait en double exemplaire,
Rome, le 7 Janvier 1935
(signé) PIERRE LAVAL MUSSOLINI

M003183

(Translation)

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the French Republic and the Head of the Italian Government declare that they are agreed in the view that Germany cannot, any more than any other Power whose level of armament is defined by treaty, modify by unilateral action her obligations in the matter of armaments, the principle of equality of rights as defined in the Declaration of December 11, 1932, remaining generally intact. As a result, the two Governments agree to act as follows:

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1. For the text of the declaration see *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945,* Series C, vol. I, Editors' Note on pp. 18-20.

2. The official communiqué on this merely said that the two governments agreed "that no country could modify by unilateral action its obligations in the sphere of armaments, and that if such an eventuality should materialize, they would consult together." Suvich subsequently denied to the German Ambassador in Rome that this document made any specific reference to Germany. *Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945,* Series C, vol. III, document No. 417.

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In the event of Germany wishing to free herself unilaterally from the treaty and reserving to herself complete freedom to rearm, the two Governments, animated by the desire to act by common agreement, will consult together on the attitude to be adopted.

In the event of circumstances permitting a resumption of international negotiations with a view to the conclusion of a general Disarmament agreement, the two Governments will concert their efforts so that the figures of limitation inscribed in the agreement will ensure the two countries, in relation to Germany, the advantages which will be justified for each of them.

Done in duplicate,
Rome, January 7, 1935.
(signed) PIERRE LAVAL MUSSOLINI

(iii)

Protocol Additional to the Treaty on Africa

PROTOCOLE ANNEXE AU TRAITÉ ENTRE LA FRANCE ET L'ITALIE RÉLATIF AU RÈGLEMENT DE LEURS INTÉRÊTS EN AFRIQUE[1]

Le Gouvernement italien, soucieux comme le Gouvernement français d'assurer le libre passage du détroit de BAB-EL-MANDEB, s'engage à maintenir dans l'état actuel, en ce qui concerne les fortifications et ouvrages stratégiques, la zone côtière du territoire visé à l'article 4[2] du traité auquel le présent Protocole est annexé, ainsi que les îles et îlets visés à l'article 8[3] dudit Traité.

Fait à Rome en double exemplaire,
le 7 janvier 1935
(S) Pierre LAVAL MUSSOLINI
M003188

1. For the French text of this treaty see *British and Foreign State Papers*, vol. 139, pp. 948-50.

2. Article 4 redefined the frontier between Eritrea and the French Somali Coast established in the Franco-Italian agreements of January 24, 1900 and July 10, 1901 somewhat in Italy's favor.

3. Article 8 recognised Italian sovereignity over the island of Dumeira and its adjacent and nameless islets.

PROTOCOL ANNEXED TO THE TREATY BETWEEN FRANCE AND ITALY RELATING TO THE REGULATION OF THEIR INTERESTS IN AFRICA

The Italian Government, anxious, as is the French Government, to ensure the free passage of the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, binds itself to maintain in their present state, in so far as fortifications and strategic works are concerned, the coastal zone of the territory mentioned in Article 4 of the Treaty to which the present Protocol is annexed, as also the islands and islets mentioned in Article 8 of the said Treaty.

Done at Rome in duplicate,
January 7, 1935.
(signed) Pierre LAVAL MUSSOLINI

(iv)

Mussolini to Laval

SEGRETO ROMA,/sic/, le 7 Janvier 1935

Signor Presidente,

Ho l'onore di accusare ricevuta a Vostra Eccelenza [sic] della lettera in dat [sic] odierna cosi redetta [sic]:

"J'ai l'honneur de faire à Votre Excellence la communication suivante:

Après examen de la situation de l'Italie et de la France en Afrique orientale, particulièrement en ce qui concerne les intérêts de l'Erythrée et de la Somalie italienne, d'une part, de la Côte française des Somalis, d'autre part, et dans le désir de pratiquer la politique de collaboration amicale que les deux Gouvernements poursuivent au voisinage de leurs possessions africaines, le Gouvernement français déclare au Gouvernement italien que, dans l'application de l'arrangement du 13 décembre 1905[1] [sic] et de tous les accords cités à l'article 1er dudit arrangement, le Gouvernement français ne recherchera en Ethiopie la satisfaction d'autres intérêts que des intérêts économiques rélatifs au trafic du chemin de fer Djibouti à Addis-

1. For the tripartite Anglo-Franco-Italian agreement of December 13, 1906, see *B.F.S.P.*, vol. XCIX, pp. 486-89.

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Abeba dans la zone telle qu'elle est définie à l'annexe ci-jointe. Toutefois, le Gouvernement français ne renonce pas par là aux droits que ses ressortissants et protégés tiennent du Traité franco-éthiopien du 10 Janvier 1908,[2] ni aux concessions qu'ils ont obtenus sur les parties du territoire éthiopien situées en dehors de la zone ci-dessus visée, non plus qu'au renouvellement desdites concessions.

Le Gouvernement français attacherait du prix à ce que le Gouvernement italien voulût bien lui confermer son accord sur ce qui précède et s'engageât à faire respecter, en ce qui le concerne, les droits et intérêts définis ci-dessus."

Il Governo italiano, confermando il proprio accordo su quanto precede, prende atto delle dichiarazione fattagli dal Governo francese circa l'applicazione dell'Accordo del 13 dicembre 1906[1] e di tutti gli accordi citati all art. 1 di detto Accordo;[2] e si impegna a rispettare gli interessi economici relativi al traffico delle ferrovia Gibuti-Addis-Abeba nella zona quale definita nell' annesso qui unito, comme pure i diritti dei cittadini. . . .[3] coloniali e protetti francesi menzionati nella communicazione di Vostra Eccellenza.

Gradisca, signor Presidente, i sensi della mia alta considerazione.

(S) MUSSOLINI

AL SIGNOR PIERRE LAVAL
MINISTRO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI DI FRANCIA

M003191, 193

(Translation)

SECRET Rome, January 7, 1935.

Dear President,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt from Your Excellency of a letter of today's date in the following terms:

"I have the honor to make to Your Excellency the following communication:

After an examination of the situation of Italy and France in East Africa, particularly so far as the interests of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland, on the one hand, and of the French Somali Coast, on the other hand, are concerned, and in the desire to practice the policy of amicable collaboration which the two Governments pursue in the region of their African possessions, the French Government declares to the Italian Government that, on the application of the arrangement of December 13, 1905 [sic], and all the agreements mentioned in Article I of the aforesaid Treaty, the French Government does not look in Abyssinia for satisfaction of any interests other than those economic interests relating to the traffic of the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway in the zone defined in the annex thereto. Nevertheless, the French Government does not by this renounce the rights which its subjects and protected persons enjoy under the Franco-Abyssinian Treaty of January 10, 1908, nor the concessions which it has obtained over parts of Abyssinia situated outside the zone mentioned above, nor the renewal of the aforesaid concessions.

The French Government would esteem it highly should the Italian Government be willing to confirm its agreement on the above and bind itself to respect the rights and interests defined above, in so far as it is concerned."

The Italian Government, confirming its own agreement on the above, takes note of the declaration made by the French Government on the application of the Agreement of December 13, 1906 and of all the agreements cited in Article I of the said Agreement; and it binds itself to respect those economic interests relating to the traffic of the Jibuti-Addis Ababa railway in the zone defined in the annex thereto, as also the rights of the French citizens, . . . colonists and protected persons mentioned in Your Excellency's communication.

Accept, Mr. President, the expression of my highest consideration,

(S) MUSSOLINI

2. For the Franco-Ethiopian Treaty of January 10, 1908, see *B.F.S.P.*, vol. CI, pp. 997-1000. The Treaty bound the Ethiopian Government to keep open for trade the route to Jibuti, and to allow French subjects and protected persons full liberty of entry into, trade in and service for the Ethiopian state.

3. Here a word is illegible; possibly it has been exed out and is merely a typing error.

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Mussolini to Laval

SEGRETO Roma, 7 Gennaio 1935.

Signor Presidente,

Ho l'onore di accusare ricevuta a Vostra Eccellenza della lettera in date [sic] idierna [sic] così redatta:

"J'ai l'honneur de faire connaître à Votre Excellence que le Gouvernement français, désireux de faciliter une collaboration plus étroite des intérêts français et italiens dans le chemin de fer de Djibouti à Addis-Ababa, s'est assuré que la groupe française de la Compagnie concessionnaire de cette ligne cèdera [sic] deux mille cinq cents (2,500) actions à une groupe italien.

Dans le même esprit, le Gouvernement français prêtera ses bons offices en vue d'élargir la représentation italienne dans les organismes directeurs de ladite Compagnie."

Ho l'onore di prendere atto delle [sic] cortese communicazione dell' Excellenza [sic] Vostra.

Gradisca, Signor Presidente, i sensi delle [sic] mia alta considerazione.

(S) MUSSOLINI

AL SIGNOR PIERRE LAVAL
MINISTRO DEGLI AFFARI ESTERI DI FRANCIA

M003192

(Translation)

SECRET Rome, January 7, 1935.

Mr. President,

I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt from Your Excellency of a letter of today's date in the following terms:

"I have the honor to inform Your Excellency that the French Government, desirous of facilitating a more intimate collaboration of French and Italian interests in the railway from Jibuti to Addis Ababa, is assured that the French group of the Company holding the concession for this line will cede two thousand five hundred shares to an Italian group.

"In the same spirit, the French Government will proffer its good offices with a view to enlarging the Italian representation on the directorial boards of the said Company."

I have the honor to take note of Your Excellency's most courteous communication.

Accept, Mr. President, the expression of my highest consideration.

(S) MUSSOLINI

◇ Translation and comment are by D. C. WATT. Mr. Watt was from 1951 to 1954 and again, part time, from 1958 to 1959, a British Assistant Editor of the series, "Documents on German Foreign Policy, 1918-1945." Since 1956 he has been Lecturer in international history at the London School of Economics and Political Science and is now doing research in Washington, D. C. under a Rockefeller Foundation Fellowship in the Social Sciences.

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