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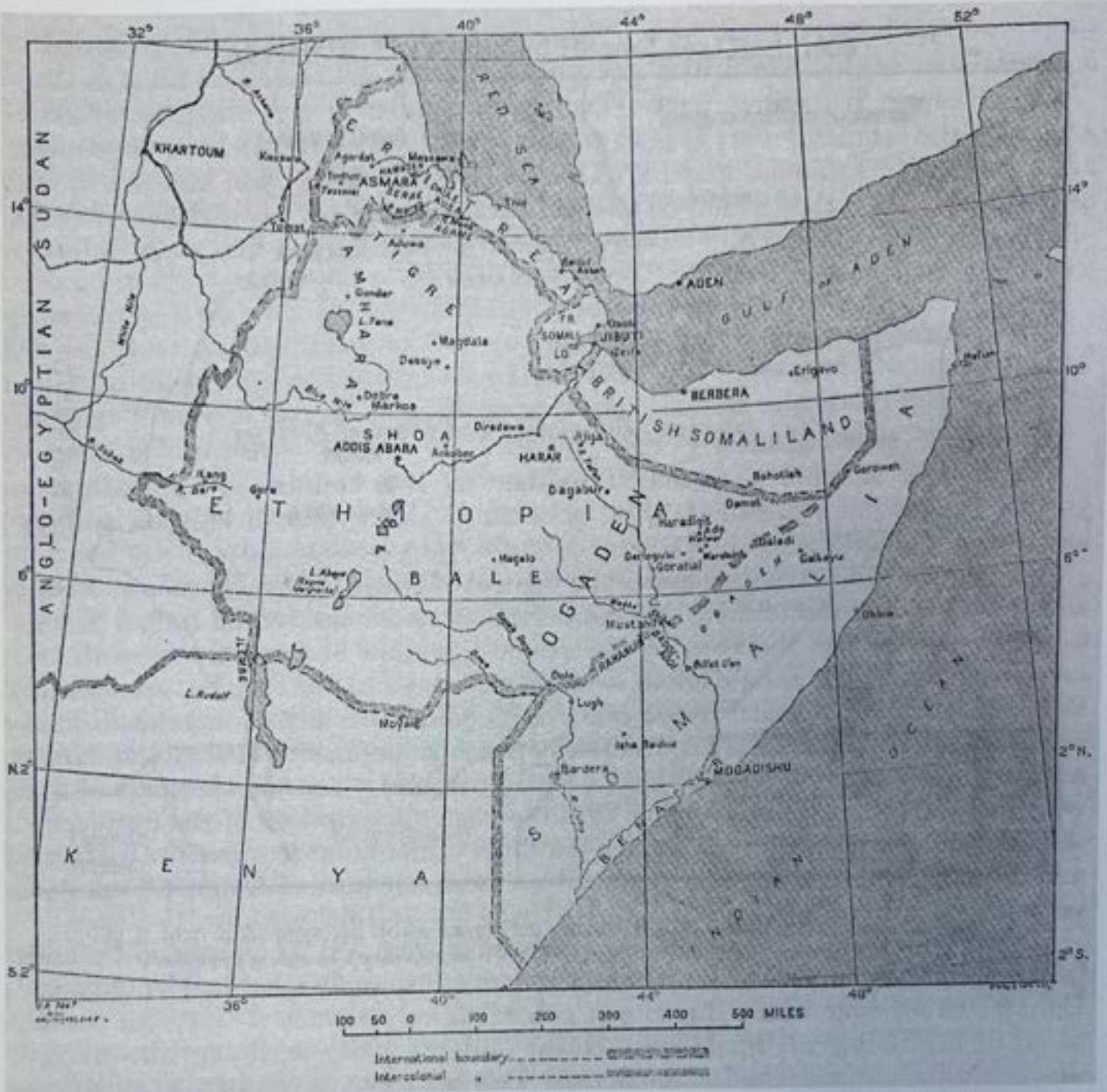


Fig. 1. Map of the Horn of Africa in 1935. Note the location of Laka Tana and the Blue Nile, the Addis Adaba-Jibuti Railroad, and the disputed Ethiopian-Italian boundary near Wal Wal. "The Maffey Report" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy: 1919-1939*, ed. W.N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M.E. Lambert. 2nd ser., Vol. XIV, 746.

Abyssinia: The Proposed Hoare-Laval Pact, 1935

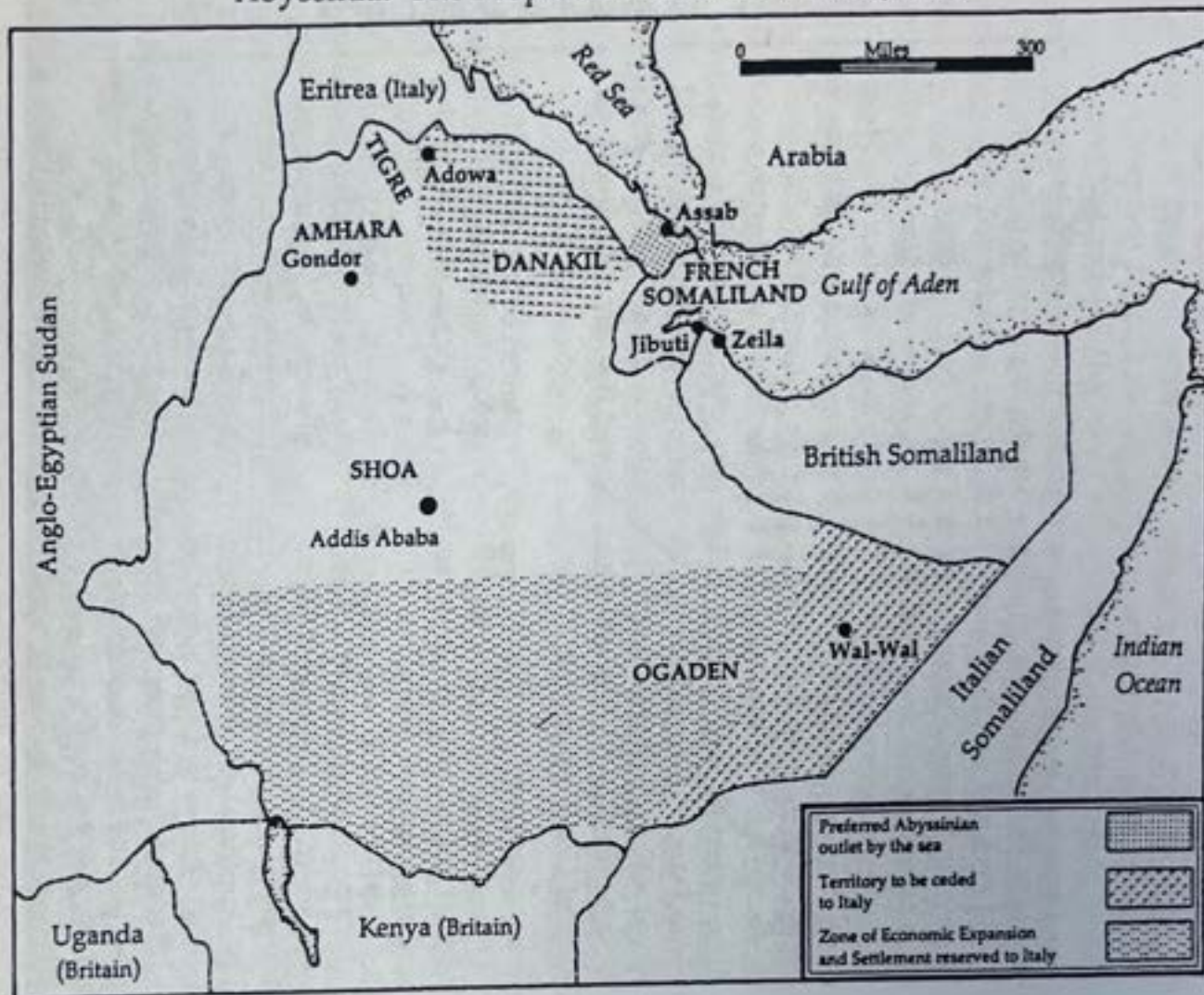


Fig. 2. Map of the proposed Hoare-Laval Plan. Adams, R.J.Q. *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39*. Stanford University Press, 1993, 30.

Fig. 3. Historic map of Italy in 1935 showing the location of the Italian front people. (Caption, Geography, *Africa: The People, The Politics, The Culture*, 2nd ed., 1993, 107)

ETHNIC AND TRIBAL GROUPS OF ETHIOPIA

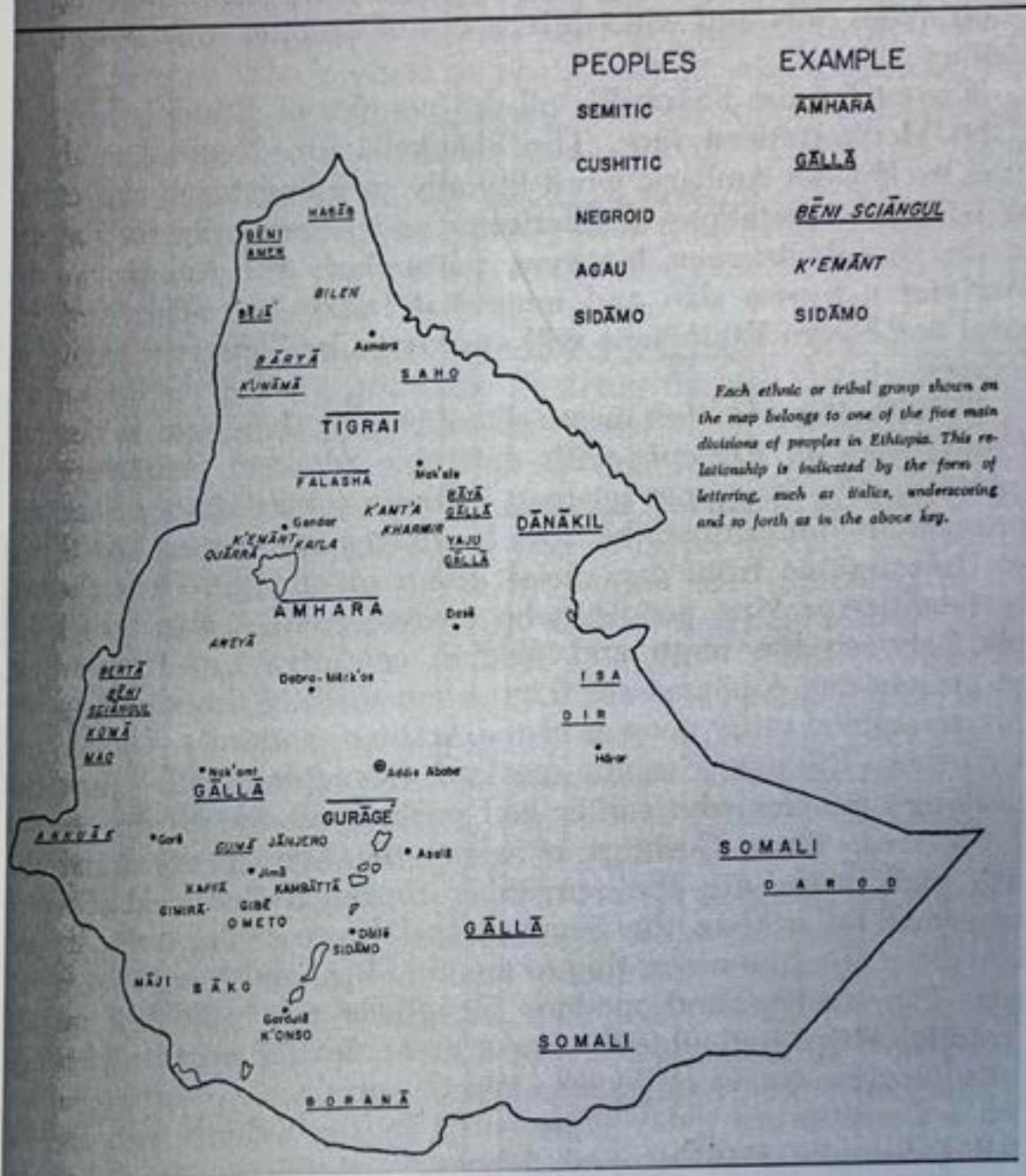


Fig. 3. Ethnic Map of Ethiopia and Eritrea. Note the location of the Amhara-Tigray people. Lipsky, George A. *Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*. New Haven, CT: Hraf Press, 1962, 35.

TOTAL VOTES: LATEST FIGURES

THE TOTAL VOTES for each Question immediately prior to publication were as follows (see page 34) :

Question	YES	NO	Doubtful	Abstentions	Christian Pacifist	Total
1	11,090,387	355,883	10,470	102,425		11,559,165
2	10,470,489	862,775	12,062	213,839		11,559,165
3	9,533,558	1,689,786	16,976	318,845		11,559,165
4	10,417,329	775,415	15,076	351,345		11,559,165
5a	10,027,608	635,074	27,255	855,107	14,121	11,559,165
5b	6,784,368	2,351,981	40,893	2,364,441	17,482	11,559,165

Fig. 5. The Results of the Peace Ballot. Livingstone, Dame A. *The Peace Ballot: The Official History*. London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1935, Supplementary Sheet.

Chapter 1: Genesis

On June 19, 1935, shortly after the Third National Ministry under Stanley Baldwin came to power in Britain, the new Cabinet met to discuss the imminent invasion of Ethiopia by Fascist Italy. The minutes of the meeting recorded the following:

Since the Cabinet had discussed the matter with His Majesty's Ambassador at Rome the situation had deteriorated very seriously. There was no sign, as had then been anticipated, that [Benito Mussolini's] enthusiasm was waning. On the contrary, large Italian forces were proceeding to the Red Sea, and Italian public opinion appeared to have accepted the situation as inevitable. The French Government, who according to previous expectations, should in the last resort have supported the League [of Nations] in the event of a clash, were showing every sign that in that case they would be on the side of Italy. There was every prospect, therefore, of our being placed in a most inconvenient dilemma. Either we should have to make a futile protest, which would irritate [Mussolini] and perhaps drive him out of the League and into the arms of Germany, or we should make no protest and give the appearance of pusillanimity.¹

The Cabinet realized that Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, a member of the League of Nations, and thus entitled to collective security, would force the British Government to choose between two unappealing choices. Opposing Italy would shatter the united front against German aggression and rearmament that existed between Britain, France, and Italy. Doing nothing or taking minor, futile actions would expose the impotence of the League. Britain's troubles were further complicated by the fact that public opinion was overwhelmingly in favor of supporting the League while France, Britain's closest ally, was eager to preserve good relations with Italy at all costs. In order to escape this predicament, the Cabinet agreed to find a third way to deal with the crisis— to seek a deal that would appease Mussolini's demands by giving Italy large amounts

¹ *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Wednesday, 19th June, 1935, at 11.0 a.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-23-82-cc-33-35-1.pdf> (accessed November 2, 2012), 7.

of Ethiopian territory in order to prevent a war.²

Over the next six months, the Baldwin Government was occupied in dealing with the Italian-Ethiopian dispute. Publicly, the Government advocated complete support for the League of Nations and a policy of "all sanctions short of war" against Italy in order to protect Ethiopia.³ Behind the scenes, though, the British secretly attempted to negotiate a deal that would stop Mussolini's invasion by meeting some of his demands.⁴ Various solutions, such as an Italian protectorate over Ethiopia similar to Britain's protectorate of Egypt and a place for Italy in a League-run system for economically developing Ethiopia were debated. These discussions over a possible compromise culminated in the making of the Hoare-Laval Plan in December.

The Plan was named after its primary authors, Samuel Hoare, the British Foreign Secretary, and Pierre Laval, the French Prime Minister. It called for a "rectification" of Italy's colonial frontiers through annexations of Ethiopian land and granted Italy an economic monopoly over southern Ethiopia. In exchange, Ethiopia was granted a narrow strip of Italian Eritrea in order to give the landlocked country access to the sea.⁵ Mussolini himself had given advice as to the contents of the Plan, and it was quite likely that he would have accepted its terms. However, the Plan was leaked to the press and produced such an outcry against it in Britain that Hoare was forced to resign. The momentum and integrity of the sanctions campaign of the League was blunted considerably as a result. No new actions would be taken to stop Italy, who would eventually complete the conquest of Ethiopia in May 1936.

A. J. P. Taylor, author of the controversial work *The Origins of the Second World War*, has

2 Ibid., 11.

3 A. J. P. Taylor, *The Origins of the Second World War* (Ford Village, MA: The Murray Printing Company, 1961), 93.

4 Ibid.

5 Samuel Hoare, *Nine Troubled Years* (London: Collins Clear-Type Press, 1954), 181.

noted that "the real death of the League was in December 1935, not in 1939 or 1945. One day it was a powerful body imposing sanctions, seemingly more effective than ever before; the next day it was an empty sham, everyone scuttling from it as quickly as possible. What killed the League was the publication of the Hoare-Laval plan."⁶ Indeed, the making of the Hoare-Laval Plan and its failure were crucial steps on the road to World War II. Hitler saw Britain's dual failure to either force Mussolini to back down or allow him to take Ethiopia in exchange for preserving Anglo-Italian relations as proof of British weakness.⁷ Germany took advantage of Mussolini's anger with Britain over its opposition to his colonial conquest to secure better relations with Italy. This would eventually lead to the formation of the Axis and the entry of Italy in World War II on the side of Germany. Yet for all the importance of the Plan, historians have neglected to fully explore the reasoning that led to its making. Was the Plan merely a cynical attempt by the British Government to sell out Ethiopia and the League to Italy without losing prestige or was it a legitimate attempt to find a way to preserve the prestige of the League of Nations?

According to Richard Lamb, a historian of the interwar period, the Hoare-Laval Plan was an attempt by the British Government to escape from the unwanted headache that the Italian invasion of Ethiopia had become.⁸ In Lamb's view, the British Government knew full well that Mussolini planned to take Ethiopia and had no desire to get in his way. To do so would only risk a breakdown in the Stresa Front, a loose Anglo-Italian-French alliance that opposed German expansion.⁹ Only once it became known that British public opinion overwhelmingly supported a policy of sanctions against a state that violated the covenant of the League of Nations did the

6 Taylor, 96.

7 George Baer, *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia, and the League of Nations* (Stanford: Hoover University Press, 1976), 77.

8 Lamb's works include *The Drift to War, 1922-39* and *Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce's Italy on the World Stage*.

9 Richard Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat: Il Duce's Italy on the World Stage* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1997), 118-119.

Government intervene in an attempt to protect Ethiopia.¹⁰ From June 1935 until the leaking of the Hoare-Laval Plan, Lamb sees the British Government's policy as a confused one. The Cabinet alternated between the policies of Vansittart, who wanted to end the crisis as quickly as possible by appeasing Italy, and Anthony Eden, who was anti-Mussolini and strongly supported the League.¹¹

Lamb sees the Cabinet agreeing on the basis for the Hoare-Laval Plan well before December 7-8 as a result of the Government's doubts and worries. One of the most significant of these was a strong fear that sanctions would not be able to stop the invasion without leading to a war between Britain and Italy. Exacerbating this, the British suspected that the French Government, which was even more reluctant to oppose Italy than Britain was, would not keep its promises to militarily support Britain if a war broke out.¹² As a result, the British Government had already agreed to the exchange of territories and the exclusive Italian economic zone in Ethiopia that would become the terms of the Plan by December 8. If Ethiopia rejected the terms, Britain was planning to wash its hands of the conflict and allow Italy to have its way with the African nation.¹³ The Plan, then, according to Lamb, was a cynical ploy on the part of a reluctant British Government to assuage public opinion by an outward show of a desire to end the invasion. In thus served to mask Britain's attempts to avoid its obligations to the League and Ethiopia so as to avoid alienating Italy.

George Baer interprets the motivations behind the Hoare-Laval Plan differently.¹⁴ He believes that the British Government was motivated, not by cynicism, but by the conflicting

10 Richard Lamb, *The Drift to War: 1922-39* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 132-134.

11 *Ibid.*, 138-139.

12 Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat*, 142-144.

13 *Ibid.*, 145-146.

14 Baer's works include *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* and *Test Case: Italy, Ethiopia, and the League of Nations*.

desires to preserve the League of Nations while saving the Stresa Front. However, Baer's primary purpose in his books is to describe the entire invasion. He thus relegates the Hoare-Laval plan to merely a few pages without fully exploring the reasoning of the Cabinet in approving of the plan. Like Lamb, he does recognize that a significant impetus to a deal was a genuine fear that further sanctions would lead to war.¹⁵ However, he notices motivations that Lamb fails to, including a desire to preserve the power of the League and the fear that an oil sanction would be completely ineffective due to oil shipments by non-member states.¹⁶ Unfortunately, due to his desire to cover the entire war, he fails to explore these issues on a deep level, and the full motivations of the British for developing the Hoare-Laval Plan are left unclear.

Other historians have generally followed Lamb and Baer, either treating the Plan as a cynical ploy by Britain or recognizing it as a failed effort for peace. Yet most of them only briefly look at the Plan without exploring why the British were eager to have a peace based on appeasement. R. J. Q. Adams refers to the Plan as a "way out" of the unsolvable crisis. He claims, inaccurately, that the Cabinet was willing to turn Ethiopia into an Italian protectorate through the plan in order to avoid risking an alienation of Mussolini.¹⁷ Andrew J. Crozier, in his book *The Causes of the Second World War*, claims that almost none of the British ministers cared about preserving the independence of Ethiopia or the League, but were motivated solely by a desire to be on the side of public opinion.¹⁸

Taylor comes closer than anyone to fully understanding the complex and conflicting motivations that gradually led to the forming of the Plan. He argues that British policy towards

15 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 374-375; Baer, *Test Case*, 121-122.

16 Ibid., 104-106; Ibid., 101-103.

17 R. J. Q. Adams, *British Politics and Foreign Policy in the Age of Appeasement, 1935-39* (Stanford University Press: 1993), 28.

18 Crozier, 108.

the Italian invasion was designed to protect Ethiopia in order to ensure the continued existence and credibility of the League of Nations, which Britain believed was necessary to keep Nazi Germany contained.¹⁹ However, a desire to reconcile with Italy and keep her in the League, combined with fears of French non-cooperation and of a potential war with Italy, led Britain to seek a deal for peace.²⁰ Regrettably, though he clearly sees how complicated the issue was, his book quickly moves on to talk about Germany and thus only skims the surface of the Hoare-Laval Plan.

The makings of the Plan are far from simple to understand. Numerous doubts and fears plagued the British Government as to the best route to take to deal with the crisis. These included French hesitancy, Italian threats of war with Britain, a desire to keep Italy away from an alliance with Germany, and fears that strong action would expose hidden weaknesses of the League. At the same time, there seemed to be many reasons not to support Ethiopia and the League. The British saw the Ethiopians as being uncivilized brutes who might very well benefit from rule by Italy. Further, British strength was waning throughout the world, and it seemed to be foolish to make an enemy of Italy while Germany and Japan were acting increasingly aggressive. There was also a deal of pro-Italian sentiment in Britain, which was strengthened by Mussolini's opposition to Nazi Germany. As Hitler's Reich became more of a threat to European peace, it may have been to the Britain's benefit to let Mussolini have a colonial venture in Africa so that, with the help of Italy, Europe could remain at peace.

Yet for all these complex fears and temptations, historians have traditionally viewed the Hoare-Laval Plan as just one part of the greater picture of the Italian-Ethiopian War. As such,

19 Taylor, 89-92.

20 Ibid., 90-94.

there has not been a detached analysis of the motivations that led to the Plan. This paper attempts to zoom in on the makings of the Plan and determine exactly what reasons the British had for making it. In order to do so, it uses the telegrams, conversations, memoirs, and documents of the members of the Government along with minutes of Cabinet meetings. Through this evidence, which has rarely been studied on its own, the motivations of Britain become clear. It was not a cynical desire to sacrifice Ethiopia, held back only by pro-League British public opinion, that led to the Hoare-Laval Plan. Rather, the British backed the Hoare-Laval Plan in order to preserve the League of Nations for future use against Nazi Germany and to avoid a war with Fascist Italy.

Ambitions in Africa

In order to explore the historical context that led to the Italian invasion and the Hoare-Laval Plan, we must look as far back as 1869. A Genoese shipping firm established a based that year at the Eritrean port of Assab—the same port that would become a major part of the Plan. As Italy had only been recently unified, the nation was too busy focusing on internal matters to spend much time trying to create a colonial empire. It was thus not until 1882 that colonies became an important issue to Italy, who finally annexed Assab in that year. Yet colonial expansion was slow, even with the help of Great Britain, who wanted to strengthen Italy's presence in East Africa in order to help defend Egypt against the forces of the Mahdi in the Sudan. By 1890, Italy had only added the rest of Eritrea and most of Somalia to her Empire. Other European powers had already claimed the rest of Africa, with the exceptions of Liberia, who was under the influence of the United States, and the Ethiopian Empire. Greedy with

ambition, Italy soon set its sights on expanding its influence into this large and unstable country.²¹

Ethiopia was, and remains, a land of stark divisions. Over seventy languages were spoken within its borders, with over 200 dialects. More than eight major ethnic groups, along with huge numbers of other, smaller ones composed the subjects of the Empire. The Amhara and Tigrai, two closely related ethnic groups, dominated the country. Yet together they made up only a third of the population and were not even the largest ethnic groups.²² A long history of conflict and cooperation with the Byzantine Empire, Islamic Sultanates, and the Christian European powers had also left stark religious divides in the country. Further, the traditional borders of Christian Ethiopia had only been recently reunified. From the 17th century until 1889, rival kings had battled over who would be Emperor. It was primarily through the efforts of Emperors Theodore II, John IV, and Menelik II that the old Empire was again given some degree of centralization and security.²³ These Emperors also extended the reach of the Empire into non-Christian lands never before under Ethiopia's rule. However, even the successes of these rulers could not firmly establish the country as a modern nation state or centralize it to the same degree as European states.

In 1889, Menelik gained control of all of Ethiopia and declared himself Emperor. As the Italians had aided him in his struggle, he concluded the Treaty of Uccialli with them, abandoning Ethiopia's claim on Eritrea. Unbeknownst to Menelik, the Italian version of the Treaty claimed that Ethiopia agreed to delegate its authority over foreign affairs to Italy.²⁴ Combined with the agreement of the British in 1891 that nearly all of Ethiopia was in Italy's sphere of influence, the

21 George Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 1.

22 George A. Lipsky, *Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture* (New Haven, CT: Hraf Press, 1962), 34-36.

23 Ibid., 14-17.

24 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 2.

Italian Government soon began to claim Ethiopia as a protectorate. This led Menelik to denounce the Treaty in 1893, breaking off all relations with Italy, who began preparations for an invasion of Ethiopia. Likewise, Menelik began gathering an army to repel the invader. The Emperor was fortunate that the Italians took many years before beginning their invasion, as Ethiopia's army, mimicking the strongly decentralized form of the state, was not a national one. Instead, large areas of Ethiopia were ruled by chieftains, or rases, who levied their own armies in the service of the Emperor in an arrangement similar to feudal Europe in the Middle Ages. During this first invasion, the central government was able to get all the rases on its side. This feat would not be repeated in the 1935-36 invasion.²⁵

When 17,700 Italian troops marched into Ethiopia on March 1, 1896, an Ethiopian force of 100,000 immediately attacked and massacred them. Fought near the town of Adowa, the battle led to the death of over 6,000 Italian troops, constituting the worst defeat any European nation suffered in Africa during the 19th century.²⁶ Mussolini, then a thirteen year old schoolboy, would later claim that he was not able to get over the shock that came when he heard the news of the disaster for over fifteen years.²⁷ The rest of Italy was horrified as well. The Prime Minister resigned, and the Treaty of Addis Ababa, which ended the war, recognized Ethiopia as a sovereign and independent nation. The disaster was a national humiliation that long remained a "shameful scar" for Italy.²⁸ The idea of seeking revenge for the Battle of Adowa soon became a major preoccupation for Italian nationalists.²⁹

The 1896 debacle put Italy's supposed predominance in Eastern Africa into question.

25 Ibid., 3.

26 Ibid., 4.

27 A.J. Barker, *The Rape of Ethiopia*, ed. Barrie Pitt and David Mason (New York: Ballantine Books Inc., 1971), 14.

28 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 4-5.

29 Ibid.

While the Italians may have desired a colonial empire there, both France and Britain had interests in the region as well. Britain, whose protectorate over Egypt and Sudan relied heavily on the continuous flow of the Nile, considered Laka Tana in Ethiopia, the source of the Blue Nile, to be one of their vital interests. France, who controlled only the relatively small colony of Djibouti, also made its voice heard, as Djibouti served as a very profitable port due to its monopoly on railroads to the sea in East Africa.³⁰

In 1906, the three powers forged the Anglo-French-Italian Treaty in order to settle the matter. Emperor Menelik was expected to soon die, an event which was believed would cause anarchy in Ethiopia. This led to the powers making agreements on how to treat the country once it fell apart. Even after Italy's humiliating defeat, it still managed to get the greatest share of the future spoils, as most of the country was agreed to be reserved for an expansion of Italian influence. Italy was also guaranteed a right to seek to connect the territory of its colonies in Eritrea and Somalia. Britain contented itself with a guarantee that the Blue Nile would continue to flow, and France got a guarantee that no other railroad to the sea would be built in East Africa. Additionally, each nation agreed to protect each others' interests within the region and abanned unilateral action there— any military operations were to be done by all three powers.³¹

As the three nations predicted, the death of Menelik led to a period of disorder. Fortunately for Ethiopia, his death did not occur until 1913. World War I thus prevented Italy from launching any new adventures in East Africa until after the stability of the country had been restored under Menelik's daughter. She appointed the young Ras Tafari Makonnen as her successor, who soon deposed her and became the ruler of the Empire.³² Yet the War did give a

30 Ibid., 5.

31 Ibid., 6.

32 Ibid., 7.

boost to Italian claims in the region thanks to the 1915 Treaty of London, which brought Italy's entry into the War against the Central Powers. Britain and France guaranteed in the Treaty that if they enriched themselves by taking Germany's colonies, Italian interests in East Africa would be advanced. Because this promise was not kept during the peace negotiations, Italian nationalists became infuriated. Even the British cession of Jubaland to Italy in 1924 and a British assurance that it recognized Italian interests in Ethiopia did not calm the dissatisfaction of those in Italy who sought a colonial empire.³³

Italy's colonial ambitions and Britain's assurances to support them were complicated by Ethiopia's joining of the newly-founded League of Nations in 1923. Sponsored by France, Ethiopia was set to gain safety from colonialism through the League's system of collective security. Recognizing that their entry would stand in the way of an Italian empire, Mussolini, who had come to power in Italy just a year earlier, initially stood opposed to Ethiopia's joining.³⁴ However, Italy's representative at Geneva and the Italian Minister of Colonies soon convinced him that an Italian vote to deny Ethiopia entry would hurt Italian interests. A Italian vote to deny entry would not prevent the African nation from reaching the two-thirds majority needed and would serve only to damage Italian-Ethiopian relations. Believing that France and Britain would keep their promises from the 1906 Treaty, Italy ended up voting in favor of their admittance. The only nation that vocally expressed concerns over Ethiopian entry was Great Britain. The British delegate warned that the decentralized nature of the Ethiopian state would prevent it from fulfilling its promise to end slavery, which was widespread in Ethiopia. In the end, however, the vote to accept Ethiopia passed unanimously, and Mussolini even sent a telegraph to Ras Tafari

33 Andrew J. Crozier, *The Causes of the Second World War* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1997), 106.

34 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 9.

expressing his support for Ethiopian entry.³⁵

To his horror, Mussolini soon learned that some officials in Britain considered Ethiopia's entry into the League to have invalidated the 1906 Treaty. But Britain was seeking international recognition of their protectorate over Mosul in Iraq, and a diplomatic agreement was struck. In exchange for Italy pressuring Turkey to accept the protectorate, the British Government agreed in 1925 to recognize Italy's right to an economic monopoly on western Ethiopia. This deal was very generous, giving Italy, amongst other things, the right to build a railroad connecting the Italian colonies. Yet it was dependent on a clause that demanded that Italy use its economic influence to prevent Ethiopia from damming the flow of the Blue Nile. This deal led to Ethiopia protesting to the League of Nations, which forced both Britain and Italy to hurriedly claim that neither of them had any plans to harm Ethiopia.³⁶

This fear of breaching Italian-Ethiopian relations, which would have harmed the attempts of Italy to gain influence there, can be seen again in 1927 when Ethiopia gave permission to an American company to look into damming Lake Tana. Because this would lead to a breach of the 1925 agreement, Italy abandoned its previous policy of trying to gain influence in the country by bribing individual rases, which had alienated Ras Tafari. For a brief time, a more congenial tone marked Italian policy towards Ethiopia, and a twenty year Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration with Ethiopia was signed. Such sentiments only lasted until the danger left, however, and by 1929, Mussolini was again giving orders to subvert the rases.³⁷

Italy had thus desired greater control over Ethiopia for more than forty years before Mussolini launched his invasion. Though Italy had been humiliated at Adowa, nationalistic

35 Ibid., 10-11.

36 Ibid., 15-18.

37 Ibid., 19-21.

desires to obtain a colonial empire refused to let the idea of expansion die. Italian ambitions were also encouraged by the British over the years, who recognized that a strong Italian presence in East Africa would be to Britain's benefit. But if Italy had been content to seek gradual economic and diplomatic influence rather than attempting another invasion since 1896, it must be explained why, in the 1930s, Mussolini decided on such a radical shift in policy.

The German Impetus

It is still unknown exactly why Mussolini decided to invade Ethiopia. Relations remained relatively unchanged between Italy and Ethiopia from 1929 to 1933, with the only new element being an increase in French support for Italian colonialism. France and Italy had had very poor relations for most of the 1920s, and France generally tried to frustrate Italian ambitions in East Africa. But by the late 1920s, with the prospect of a resurgence in German power looking likely, France began to seek better relations with Italy. There were suggestions from the French to the British that Italy should be allowed to advance its interests in Ethiopia, and by 1932, the French Foreign Minister was advocating that Italy be given a "free hand" in dealing with Ethiopia.³⁸ With only French support added to the mix, why then did Mussolini choose to abandon the policies of previous decades and attempt an invasion of Ethiopia?

Some historians have suggested that the war was an attempt by Mussolini to distract Italians from the dismal economic situation in Italy with a successful colonial conquest.³⁹ Others have suggested that the Duce was beginning to fear that Haile Selassie's centralizing policies were succeeding in creating a strong nation-state. Over time, then, Ethiopia would grow stronger

³⁸ Crozier, 106.

³⁹ Denis Mack Smith, *Mussolini's Roman Empire* (New York: The Viking Press, 1976), 59.

and make the chances of waging a successful war less likely. This was the view of the Emperor himself, who boasted that "Italy never ceased to look jealously at any act of civilization that was being carried out in Ethiopia."⁴⁰ Yet the most likely theory seems to be the idea put forth by Andrew Crozier and A. J. P. Taylor that the invasion was the result of the changing balance of power in Europe after Hitler became master of Germany.⁴¹

Even though Italy would later become part of the Axis, Mussolini initially found Hitler and Nazism abhorrent, and he was one of the first leaders of Europe to recognize the threat that a militaristic Germany would mean for peace in Europe. Mussolini also suspected that Britain's conciliatory policy towards Germany would lead to Ethiopia being given to Hitler as a colony to repay the theft of German colonies after World War I.⁴² The Italian leader called for a meeting between Great Britain, France, Italy, and Germany in the same year that Hitler came to power in order to form a Four Power Pact. This Pact called on all four nations to preserve peace in Europe, though it was never ratified.⁴³ Regardless, Mussolini's action shows that he feared what the resurgent German nation might do to the status quo in Europe and Africa. Further, Mussolini had a personal dislike of Hitler from their very first meeting on June 14, 1934. Hitler bored and confused Mussolini with a monologue in German at the meeting, a language which Mussolini had not yet completely mastered, for which Mussolini later insulted him in private.⁴⁴

This dislike was reinforced when the Austrian Nazi Party, perhaps on Hitler's orders, murdered Engelbert Dollfuss, the dictatorial Chancellor of Austria, on July 25. This was part of an attempt to overthrow the Austrian Government and unite the country with the German

40 Piers Brendon, *The Dark Valley: A Panorama of the 1930s* (London: Random House, 2000), 268.

41 Crozier, 107; Taylor, 88.

42 Lamb, *The Drift to War*, 132.

43 Crozier, 107.

44 Lamb, *The Drift to War*, 101.

Reich.⁴⁵ Mussolini had considered Austria to be part of his sphere of influence since 1933 and had supplied Dollfuss with financial and military aid to establish a quasi-fascist state. Further, the two dictators were personal friends, as seen by the fact that Dollfuss's family was at Mussolini's estate on their vacation when the Chancellor was killed. This forced Mussolini to bear the unpleasant burden of informing Dollfuss's family of his death, cementing his bitterness towards Hitler.⁴⁶ The murder caused Mussolini to mobilize the Italian army and send Italian forces to the border with Austria to prepare for a war with Germany if it attempted to invade Austria during the confusion.⁴⁷ It is not surprising, then, that Mussolini was soon calling Hitler a "horrible sexual degenerate [and] a dangerous fool."⁴⁸

This fear of Germany's military power and its designs on Austria culminated in Mussolini's calling of the Stresa Conference in April 1935. When Hitler reintroduced conscription in March, Mussolini called for a meeting between France, Italy, and Great Britain in the Italian town of Stresa. Mussolini had been disturbed that this action by Germany, who violated the Treaty of Versailles, did not stop John Simon, the Foreign Secretary of Britain, from making a diplomatic visit to Berlin. The Italian dictator thus wanted to ensure that France and Great Britain were willing to support Italy's protection of Austria and stand up to Hitler.⁴⁹ Both the British and the French agreed to the Stresa Conference, and from April 11 to 14, Italy attempted to convince Britain that only the threat of force would stop Hitler. The meeting also served as a chance to cement military cooperation with France, who was as fearful of Hitler as Italy was. But the British delegation was much more hesitant to adopt a firm policy in regards to

45 Ibid., 102.

46 Ibid., 97-98; Ibid., 102.

47 Crozier, 104.

48 Ibid., 107.

49 Ibid., 105; Pietro Quaroni, *Diplomatic Bags: An Ambassador's Memoirs*, trans. and ed. Anthony Rhodes (New York: David White Company, 1966), 94-95.

Austria or rearmament, exasperating the Italians.⁵⁰ Yet though the Conference was called in response to Germany's actions, as one of the Italian diplomats there later commented, "behind everything loomed the question of Ethiopia."⁵¹

The British definitely knew that Mussolini had already begun plans to invade Ethiopia, as the Cabinet had discussed the impending Italian invasion in January after an incident at Wal Wal in December of 1934 triggered the crisis. Britain also brought Geoffrey Thompson, an expert on East Africa, to the Conference. Thompson informed his country's delegation that the Stresa Conference was the best possible opportunity to discuss the Ethiopian question with Italy and attempted to meet with Simon to discuss the issue.⁵² For all these warning signs, though, the British delegation refused to bring up the matter with Mussolini. The dictator and his diplomats continuously waited for Britain to mention the issue, growing more and more baffled by the fact that they did not. Eventually, as the final draft of the statement that the three powers would put out was being written, Mussolini made his move. Concerning a clause that stated that none of them would recognize a unilateral attempt to alter the borders of existing states, Mussolini decided to add the words "in Europe" to limit which states would be protected. Neither Britain or France protested, and Mussolini took this as a sign that neither would prevent him from conquering Ethiopia.⁵³ This silence, combined with discussions on Austria, leading to the creation of the "Stresa Front," a tenuous British-French-Italian agreement to oppose German aggression.

Desirous to keep Italy out of an alliance with Germany, the British had deliberately refused to bring up the matter of Ethiopia, knowing it would serve as a source of division

50 Ibid., 96-97.

51 Ibid., 97.

52 Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat*, 119-120.

53 Quaroni, 98.

between them and Italy. Yet their silence seems hard to understand— if they knew Italy was preparing to invade, what good could staying silent have done? Indeed, Baer is quite right when he calls this “one of the most inept diplomatic moves of this period... It is impossible to discover what significant benefit [Britain]’s evasiveness could bring.”⁵⁴ Perhaps the British did not know why they had avoided the matter themselves. After the meeting, a reporter asked Ramsay MacDonald, the Prime Minister, whether the matter of Ethiopia had been discussed. MacDonald responded by saying “my friend, your question is irrelevant.”⁵⁵ Britain thus ignored an opportunity to discuss the upcoming invasion in order to keep good relations with Italy in the short term, giving Mussolini false hope that his action would be tolerated.

By 1934 and 1935, then, Mussolini believed that Germany, through its rearmament and policy towards Austria, was becoming a danger. It would not be long before Germany had grown strong enough to make a move towards Austria, and Italy would need to completely focus on European affairs when that time came. Combined with Mussolini’s fears that Hitler might be given East Africa as part of a colonial settlement, he came to the conclusion that if the Ethiopian question was to be settled, 1935 was the opportune moment.⁵⁶ The events that occurred near the town of Wal Wal in December of 1934 were thus welcomed by Mussolini as an excuse to take action.

Lighting the Fuse

Wal Wal had long been an issue of contention between Italy and Ethiopia. A rare source

54 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 126.

55 Cited by Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat*, 120.

56 Crozier, 107.

of water in the midst of a dry plain, the 359 wells at Wal Wal were vital for the survival of the Italian and Ethiopian tribes nears the border between Ethiopia and Italian Somaliland. Though it had traditionally been seen as an Ethiopian possession, there had never been a successful attempt to delimit the borders between Italian and Ethiopian territory. As a result, the Italians had begun to claim it as their own by the 1920s. Italian troops took the wells without incident in 1929, and by 1932, Ethiopia had seemingly acquiesced in Italian possession of the area.⁵⁷ The decline of Italian-Ethiopian relations, however, led to marked hostility on the border between the two nations. Fears of Italian encroachment led Ras Tafari, who had been crowned Emperor and taken the name Haile Selassie in 1930, to seek to resolve who owned Wal Wal.⁵⁸

On November 20, a force of 600 Ethiopian troops arrived on the outskirts of Wal Wal to meet a British commission who was to survey the area and delimit the borders between British Somaliland and Ethiopia. Haile Selassie hoped that the commission would declare the Italian occupation illegal. Tensions quickly grew between the Ethiopian troops, who refused to leave, and the Italian askaris, or colonial troops serving in the Italian army. By December 5, the commission had left and the Ethiopians had increased their numbers to 1,600. The same day, a skirmish broke out, leaving over one hundred Ethiopians and thirty Italian troops dead.⁵⁹

While it was, and still remains, unclear which side started the fight, both Governments immediately put responsibility for the incident on each other. Quickly recognizing the danger from Italy that might arise from the skirmish, the Ethiopians invoked the Treaty of Friendship and Arbitration on December 9 and called for arbitration of the issue. Their suspicions were correct, as Italy issued a demand for a formal apology, recognition of Italian ownership of Wal

⁵⁷ Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 45-47

⁵⁸ Crozier, 106.

⁵⁹ Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 50-54.

Wal, monetary reparations, and for the commander of the Ethiopian troops involved to be turned over to Italy. By this point, Britain and France were pressuring Ethiopia to accept the Italian demands, realizing that there was a good chance the issue would lead to a much wider conflict. Not willing to accept a blow to his country's prestige, Haile Selassie took the issue to the League of Nations on December 14.⁶⁰

Italy immediately seized upon Ethiopian obstinacy as an excuse to go to war, and Mussolini began writing a secret memorandum on December 20 detailing Italian policy. The memo claimed diplomacy would no longer be enough to deal with Ethiopia and that force was needed. It contained a call for the complete destruction of Ethiopia's military capabilities and annexation of the country. Mussolini also expressed the belief that now was the optimal time to act, as Nazi Germany was to busy rearming to make trouble in Austria while Italy was occupied in Africa, and that Britain and France would not intervene.⁶¹ Ethiopia's move to involve the League and Italy's decision to invade began the crisis that would last for the next seventeen months, culminating in the Italian conquest of Ethiopia. But even before the invasion began, the League of Nations and the British Government would attempt to resolve the matter. International sanctions would be applied to Italy, backroom deals would be discussed to appease Italy, and the League machinery of collective security was tested for the first time. It is here that analysis of the motivations that led to the Hoare-Laval Plan must begin.

A Plan is Born

The Plan was developed in meetings on December 7-8, 1935, in the office of Pierre

⁶⁰ Ibid., 56-57.

⁶¹ Ibid., 58-59.

Laval, then the Prime Minister of France. The British delegation consisted of the Foreign Secretary of the Baldwin Government, Samuel Hoare, along with Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, George Clerk, the ambassador to France, and Maurice Peterson, the head of Ethiopian affairs in the Foreign Office. Also present were three French diplomats and, through a hotline to Rome that was used by Laval multiple times during the meeting, the voice of Mussolini himself.⁶² According to Hoare, the Plan was developed in an attempt to end the Italian invasion of Ethiopia while preserving the Stresa Front.⁶³ The final terms of the plan, calling for territorial gains and an economic monopoly for Italy and a passage to the sea for Ethiopia, were to be sent first to Mussolini, and only when he accepted it would it be shown to Haile Selassie and the League of Nations.⁶⁴

Laval, who had called the meeting due to his desperation to preserve the Stresa Front, had no objections to the Plan, and the British Cabinet accepted the terms on December 10.⁶⁵ But when the contents of the Plan leaked to the press shortly after the meeting, opinion both within Britain and the League of Nations was horrified. The delegates of the League in Geneva and the pro-League element of Britain saw the Plan as rewarding Italian aggression and betraying the campaign of sanctions that had marked the previous months.⁶⁶ The Baldwin Government abandoned the Plan and forced Hoare to resign on the 18th.⁶⁷ Yet for all the condemnation the Plan received at the time, Hoare insisted that the plan was the "best possible... or the least bad, in the circumstances" and that Mussolini and the Emperor of Ethiopia would have accepted it.⁶⁸ To

62 Hoare, 179.

63 *Ibid.*, 191.

64 *Ibid.*, 181; Anthony Eden, *Facing the Dictators: The Memoirs of Anthony Eden, Earl of Avon* (Cambridge, MA: The Riverside Press, 1962), 338-339.

65 *Ibid.*, 342-343.

66 *Ibid.*, 345.

67 Hoare, 185-187.

68 *Ibid.*, 188-189.

Chapter 2: The Origins of Appeasement

The period from December 1934 to June 1935, when Baldwin became Prime Minister and Hoare became the Foreign Secretary, was one of little action on the part of the British. Only slight mentions of discussion of the Italian-Ethiopian dispute are seen in the diplomatic records. The MacDonald government mainly attempted to get Ethiopia to drop its appeal to the League and allow outside arbitration of the issue. Due to Italy's seeming willingness to take part in such an effort, Ethiopia agreed to postpone discussion of the matter until the next meeting of the League in March.⁶⁹ This process of arbitration involved discussions in February that led to nothing beyond allowing Italy to gain more time to prepare for an invasion.⁷⁰ At the March meeting of the League, the Ethiopian matter was barely discussed due to Hitler's reintroduction of conscription, which occupied most of the time at the meeting.⁷¹ This dangerous gesture from Hitler led Mussolini to call the Stresa Conference, which further distracted Britain from the Ethiopian dispute. Both the League and Britain thus avoided the issue again until after the Baldwin Government took power. Other than the telegrams and memos sent between two officials in the British Government, these six months were of little consequence in the making of the Hoare-Laval Plan.

The first man to alert the Government to Italy's aggressive intentions was Eric Drummond, the ambassador to Italy.⁷² In response to his alarming letter, Sir Robert Vansittart, the Permanent Undersecretary for Foreign Affairs, wrote a memo on February 25. This document

69 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 105.

70 *Ibid.*, 109.

71 *Ibid.*, 112.

72 "Letter from Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir J. Simon" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy: 1919-1939*, ed. W.N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M.E. Lambert, 2nd ser., vol. XIV, No. 160.

was the first acknowledgment by any British official that Britain must pursue a policy outside of the confines of the League in order to stop the impending war. Vansittart warned that Italy must be, "in the quietest, most friendly way," dissuaded from going to war with Ethiopia. Such a war would deal the League of Nations an extremely damaging, or even fatal, blow. Due to the pro-League opinion of the British public, a war would also greatly damage Anglo-Italian relations. Yet the actions taken must not be too harsh, or else Italy would be "[driven] back into German embraces."⁷³ Though he did not attempt to lay out a comprehensive solution to the matter, Vansittart hinted that the best method would be to allow Italy colonial expansion through giving her British territory in Africa.⁷⁴ Recognizing the enormity of the crisis about to hit the British Government, Drummond and Vansittart began preparing the way for a British program that went outside of the League. By June 7, when Hoare took his place as Foreign Secretary, the two of them had already discussed possible solutions and laid the groundwork for an eventual settlement.

In a lengthy telegram composed by Drummond on June 1 to Vansittart and the African experts in the British Government, the ambassador revealed that he was much more favorably disposed to Italy than Ethiopia. He claimed that the Ethiopian people, "in spite of their Christian beliefs, are in essence barbaric."⁷⁵ He also hinted that Ethiopia's extreme backwardness and the continued existence of slavery there would be good reasons to expel it from the League of Nations. If this was done, Britain could ensure that Italy, who had well-founded and "legitimate [causes] of complaint" against their "unruly neighbours," would receive a protectorate over Ethiopia along the lines of British-ruled Egypt.⁷⁶ Haile Selassie would continue to be the nominal

73 "Minute by Sir R. Vansittart," *Ibid.*, No. 175.

74 *Ibid.*

75 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir J. Simon (received June 6)," *Ibid.*, No. 296

76 *Ibid.*

ruler of Ethiopia while Italy would gain military control over the country and eventually be allowed "colonisation schemes and... every sort of economic advantage."⁷⁷ Britain should immediately seek to assure Mussolini that they sympathized with him and would work with him to help him obtain his goals. Likewise, Britain should attempt to make Ethiopia pliable towards Italian demands by warning that "if the worst comes to the worst, neither [Britain nor France] has the slightest intention of backing her up," thus dispelling any "false hopes of real support" that Haile Selassie might have of Britain protecting Ethiopia.⁷⁸

As cynical as Drummond's proposals might sound, he did make it clear that he did not favor granting Italy a free hand in her conduct towards Ethiopia, nor did he think that the authority of the League of Nations should be ignored in the matter. He considered it repugnant that Italy was attempting to use force to bully a smaller nation into submission and viewed Italian hopes that Britain would aid her as equivalent to blackmail. Yet he justified his proposals to subjugate Ethiopia to Italy by stating that the Italian-Ethiopian dispute was merely a choice between two evils. Loathsome though it might be, assisting Italy at the expense of Ethiopia was necessary lest the League of Nations sustain a fatal blow from the humiliation that would follow one of its member states being annexed.⁷⁹

Vansittart rejected Drummond's suggestions for an Italian protectorate over Ethiopia. Though he admitted that he had, at one time, toyed with the idea, he agreed with the other British officials who commented on Drummond's proposal that an end to Ethiopian independence would be too much of a price to pay. Instead, he briefly mentions that Britain must support giving Italy territory from the Empire combined with some small amounts of Ethiopian territory via "frontier

77 Ibid.

78 Ibid.

79 Ibid.

rectification."⁸⁰ He expanded on this in a telegram he sent to Hoare and Eden the day after the new Government came in, laying forth what would become the basis for the eventual Hoare-

Laval Plan:

The position is as plain as a pikestaff. Italy will have to be bought off— let us use and face ugly words— in some form or other, or [Ethiopia] will eventually perish. That might in itself matter less, if it did not mean that the League would also perish (and that Italy would simultaneously perform *another* volte-face into the arms of Germany, a combination of haute politique and haute cocotterie that we can ill afford just now).

I agree that we cannot trade [Ethiopia]. The price that would now satisfy Italy would be too high for [Ethiopia] even to contemplate.

If we are all clear and in unison about that, it follows clearly that either there has got to be a disastrous explosion— that will wreck the League and very possibly His Majesty's Government too, if the League is destroyed on the eve of an election— or else that *we* have got to pay the price..... with British Somaliland, though payment would clearly have to be deferred, even if promised.

Personally, I opt unhesitatingly for the latter. I have long thought the distribution of this limited globe quite untenable, and quite unjustifiable. Like fools we made it far worse at Versailles. What *has* happened in regard to Japan; what is happening in regard to Italy, and what is about to happen in regard to Germany, should surely confirm this view to anyone with political antennae. We are grossly over-landed (and British Somaliland is a real debit.)...

I should like to see the question of Somaliland considered, at least...⁸¹

This telegram is important, as it is the first recorded instance that anyone in the British Government mentions appeasement of Italy in order to prevent war. The mention by Vansittart of the electoral consequences of ignoring the situation also seems important. This mention appears to lend evidence to the idea of some historians that the British only wanted to save Ethiopia out of fear of losing public support. However, the fact that Vansittart first mentions the death of the League as the primary reason why Britain must stop Italy shows right away that there are reasons outside of public opinion that are motivating his ideas. The first idea put forward to appease Italy was thus to bribe Mussolini with British, not Ethiopian, territory.

80 Ibid., 302.

81 "Minute by Sir R. Vansittart," Ibid., No. 301.

After June 7, Hoare and Vansittart immediately began to work closely together. They held multiple meetings together concerning what to do about Ethiopia, inviting Eden to some of them as well.⁸² On June 16, the three agreed on a deal in which Britain would offer to cede a corridor to the Red Sea and the port of Zeila to Ethiopia. In exchange, Ethiopia would cede land in the Ogaden, the dry Somalian plain where Wal Wal was, to Italy.⁸³ This was the sort of "frontier rectification" that Vansittart had mentioned in his comments on Drummond's proposal. Drummond himself thought the proposal was a good idea. He believed that Mussolini had a good chance of accepting it, and even if it was rejected, it would show the dictator that Britain wanted to help Italy.⁸⁴

The idea of ceding Zeila to Ethiopia was not actually a new idea. Britain had been considering it as part of a grand Anglo-Ethiopian settlement to resolve disputed borders as early as March 1934.⁸⁵ The constant raiding of the frontiers of British Somaliland by Ethiopian tribes had greatly annoyed Britain, and the deal was being considered as a way to gain security for Britain.⁸⁶ Humorously, the British had even considered asking for Wal Wal as part of the deal.⁸⁷ Though the proposal was abandoned in early 1935 due to the Italian-Ethiopian dispute, it was revived by Hoare and Vansittart in their attempt to appease Italy, and the idea of a port cession to Ethiopia would remain part of Britain's strategy all the way until the making of the Hoare-Laval Plan. Though Vansittart had actually proposed giving all of British Somaliland to Italy as part of a deal, rather than Ethiopian territory, the Cabinet rejected the idea of ceding a whole colony

82 Eden, 246.

83 Hoare, 155; Lord Vansittart, *The Mist Procession: the autobiography of Lord Vansittart* (London: Hutchinson & Co. LTD, 1958), 530.

84 Eden, 246.

85 "Sir J. Simon to Sir S. Barton (Addis Ababa)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 1.

86 "Sir S. Barton (Addis Ababa) to Sir J. Simon (Received May 7)," *Ibid.*, No. 2.

87 "Letter from Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir R. Vansittart," *Ibid.*, No. 56.

except as a last resort. However, the Cabinet did approve to promise Italy vague economic concessions in Ethiopia, another point which would become part of the eventual Hoare-Laval Plan. The Government then authorized Eden to go to Rome and present the offer to Mussolini.⁸⁸

The Cabinet's hope that this deal could prevent a war between Italy and Ethiopia was not met. The meeting, which started on June 22 and continued on June 23, accomplished nothing. It went poorly both as a result of the gap between the offer of the British Government and Mussolini's demands and personal enmity between Eden and the dictator. Eden was the most idealistic of the British officials dealing with the Italian-Ethiopian dispute, and this idealism for the League led him to be mocked by the Italian fascists—they called him Paradiso.⁸⁹ Hoare diplomatically referred to the conversation between the two as a "lively interchange of arguments," and at one point Mussolini grew so frustrated with Eden's implacable resistance to Italian expansion that he "flung himself back in his chair with a gesture of incredulous astonishment."⁹⁰

Mussolini objected to the cession of a port to Ethiopia, claiming that this would enable her to import arms. He laid forth a counteroffer in which all the non-Amharic provinces of Ethiopia would be annexed by Italy while the remaining territory would be placed under an Italian protectorate in which Haile Selassie would retain nominal sovereignty. At the same time, however, he hinted that he would accept much less in a deal. He mentioned that he might be willing to accept an Ethiopian corridor to the sea and that his major objection to the plan was that Ethiopia would gain too much prestige from the deal. What he wanted from a compromise, then, was more prestige for Italy.⁹¹

88 *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet. 19th June, 11.*

89 Vansittart, 530.

90 Hoare, 156; Eden, 251.

91 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received June 24, 8.45 p.m.) in *Documents on British Foreign*

This first attempt of the British Government to find a deal that would satisfy Mussolini had similarities to the eventual Hoare-Laval Plan. Just like what would be worked out in the Paris talks in December, Ethiopia would make concessions in the Ogaden to Italy in exchange for getting a port and a corridor to the Red Sea. The economic promises that Britain made would later be turned into the exclusive economic zone that Italy would be given in Southern Ethiopia. The major difference between the two deals is that the Hoare-Laval Plan would also award Italy territory from Northern Ethiopia, though at the price of Italy, not Britain, ceding land to Ethiopia to the sea. Since both plans were fundamentally similar, giving Ethiopian territory to Italy in exchange for Ethiopia getting a concession in return, it stands to reason that the motivations for this plan can be observed to shed some light on the motivations for the eventual Hoare-Laval Plan.

It is clear that at no point did anyone in the Government but Drummond think of "selling out" Ethiopia by, as the Cabinet concluded in its June 19 meeting, "countenanc[ing] any proposal that involved the abolition of the sovereignty of [Ethiopia]."⁹² But why was Britain so opposed to letting Italy have its way with Ethiopia? Why did they not simply wash their hands of the situation, allow Mussolini to gain the prestige that would come with a colonial victory, and preserve the Stresa Front against Germany? If Vansittart's telegram is to be believed, it is because such a policy would mean the death of the League of Nations. But was this motivation an action based on idealism for the system of collective security, an annoyed response to a pro-League British public that would vote the Government out of office if they let the League die, or something else?

Policy, vol. XIV, No. 320.

92 *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 19th June, 7.*

The Irrelevant Ballot

At the same time that the new Government planned their first offer to Mussolini, the national results of the so-called Peace Ballot were being announced. Officially known as “The National Declaration on the League of Nations and Armaments,” the Ballot was an attempt to measure how far the people of Britain were willing to go to protect the League and its member states. Started by the League of Nations Union, a large organization dedicated to preserving and supporting the League, the Ballot was never an unbiased attempt at finding the true thoughts of the British people—it was explicitly formulated as an attempt to prove that the public supported the League.

The idea for the Ballot was developed in April 1934 as a response to the increase of tensions that had begun affecting Europe since the rise of Hitler.⁹³ From November 1934 to June 1935, when the final results were announced, over 10 million responses were received from the public. The results showed, or at least appeared to show, that the British people overwhelmingly supported the League, collective security, and the enforcement of sanctions against any League state that attacked another.⁹⁴ A majority even appeared to support a collective military effort against an aggressor state if necessary.⁹⁵

Histories of the Italian-Ethiopian War commonly hold the results of the Peace Ballot responsible for the refusal of the British Government to let Italy have its way with Ethiopia. As a result of this huge, pro-League outpouring of public sentiment, many historians have assumed that it significantly influenced the conduct of the British Government in the Italian-Ethiopian crisis. “The Government could not ignore [the sentiment from the Peace Ballot]” writes George

93 Dame A. Livingstone, *The Peace Ballot: The Official History* (London: Victor Gollancz LTD, 1935), 5-9.

94 *Ibid.*, 15-18.

95 *Ibid.*, 50-51.

Baer.⁹⁶ Spending over five pages insisting that the Ballot took the Government from a lukewarm approach to the League to a more supportive one, he concludes that

the Ballot did not cause the Government to become the League's champion, for the private skepticism of officials remained as strong as ever. But appeasement of Mussolini now became more difficult for the Government to justify at home, and some increased measure of support for the League was politically expedient. The Government's turn towards the League in the Italian-Ethiopian conflict was insincere and incomplete, then.⁹⁷

Richard Lamb goes even further and claims the Peace Ballot, by itself, completely shifted the policy of the British Government, and that "all might have gone well for Mussolini if it had not been for the Peace Ballot in Britain."⁹⁸ Daniel Waley, Professor of Economics and History at the London School of Economics, writes that the ballot forced the skeptical Government to adopt a pro-League stance. Even A. J. P. Taylor believes that the Peace Ballot influenced the conduct of the Government to make it act more pro-League.⁹⁹ These historians support their claims very scantily, usually relying on merely a quotation from Baldwin upon receiving the results of the ballot in which he said that the League of Nations was the "sheet-anchor of British policy."¹⁰⁰ Beyond that, there seems to be merely an assumption on the parts of these historians that such a massive pro-League response must have necessarily influenced the British Government. However, when the evidence is looked at closely, there seems to be a lack of proof that this is true.

For the purposes of this study, whether the Peace Ballot actually reflected the opinions of the public or whether its biased questions and processes for gathering responses skewed the

96 Baer, *Test Case*, 3.

97 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 207.

98 Lamb, *The Drift to War*, 132.

99 Daniel Waley, *British Public Opinion and the Abyssinian War: 1935-6* (London: Maurice Temple Smith Ltd, 1975), 20; Taylor, 89-90.

100 Cited by Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 207.

results is irrelevant. All that matters is whether the British Government believed the Ballot was accurate and whether it changed its policy as a result. Contrary to the insistence of the traditional interpretation, the records do not show that the Peace Ballot played a role in influencing the Baldwin Government. If the Ballot had been important, one would expect to find multiple mentions of it in. Instead, a search through the Government documents in this period reveals a rather deafening silence. Throughout the hundreds of telegrams, memoranda, and other documents that went through the Foreign Office in 1935, the Ballot is never mentioned. Neither is it ever mentioned in the minutes of the fourteen Cabinet meetings held while Hoare held office. Even in the many meetings of Parliament between June and December, the Peace Ballot is only mentioned on eight occasions.¹⁰¹ Five of these were references to it in passing, and only on July 30, October 22, and October 23 was it discussed in any sort of detail.

The mention of the Peace Ballot on July 30 is the most significant one. When one MP asked whether the results of the Ballot would make the Government adjust their foreign policy to the will of the nation, Baldwin replied that “[The policy of the Government] remains founded upon the League of Nations, and... the Government intend to persist in the policy that they have hitherto pursued.”¹⁰² This might be dismissed as the typical ploy of a politician claiming his policy is already in line with what the people want. Yet the evidence seems to support the idea that the results of the Ballot, in terms of support for the League and collective security, was already largely in sync with the policy the Government had been pursuing. Just as it was never mentioned in the Foreign Office documents or the telegrams, the memoirs of Hoare, Eden, and Vansittart make little reference to the Ballot. Vansittart’s memoirs hardly mention it at all, simply

¹⁰¹ In the Commons Sitings of June 7, July 11, July 30, August 1, October 22, October 23, October 24, and December 4.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 30 July 1935, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcnp-us&rft_dat=xri:hcnp:hansard:CDS5CV0304P0-0017 (accessed January 8, 2013), 2478.

calling it a “free excursion into the inane,” and Eden mentions it only once, in order to claim that the questions were very poorly constructed.¹⁰³ Hoare’s mention of it is also brief, insisting that “the so-called ballot emphasised the already obvious fact that the country stood for peace. The questions had, however, been so poorly worded that they had no bearing on the actual state of the world.”¹⁰⁴

The Baldwin Government, composed as it was of politicians, undoubtedly realized that the Peace Ballot reflected a genuine pro-League stance by the British populace. Yet if the Ballot had any significant effect on the Government’s motivations during the Italian-Ethiopian crisis, we should expect to see some substantial mention of it in the memoirs of the three men who played a central role in developing a compromise. But all that can be seen is silence or complaints about the quality of the questions, which was the same line taken by the right-wing papers of Great Britain, including the *Daily Mail* and the *Morning Post*.¹⁰⁵ Combined with the absence of any mention of the Ballot in Cabinet meetings or in the documents of the foreign office, it cannot be concluded that the Peace Ballot was a significant factor in the motivations of the Baldwin Government. While Baldwin did refer to the League as the “sheet-anchor” of British policy upon receiving the results, this is no reason for believing that the Ballot changed his Government’s policy— as is commonly known, politicians often make empty statements to avoid losing popularity. Without any real evidence to support the idea that the Ballot influenced the Government, then, we must reject the traditional interpretation of why the Government supported the League and look for different causes.

103 Vanistart, 503; Eden, 265.

104 Hoare, 127-128.

105 Waley, 21-22.

A Bothersome Struggle

If the Peace Ballot was not, as has been suggested, the shock to the system that forced the Baldwin Government to pursue a pro-League policy, what was? It certainly was not sympathy for Ethiopia or anti-Italian sentiment in the Government. In Hoare's mind, Ethiopia was a country filled with "wandering gangs, disloyal rases, anti-Christian Moslems, Arab slave traders, and intriguing adventurers, who one and all did much as they liked in this remnant of medieval Africa," where "the Emperor was not in effective control of the country, and [slavery] and the slave trade was still rampant."¹⁰⁶ He was also of the opinion that the Wal Wal incident was started by the Ethiopians and that, had the event occurred in the period before World War I, Mussolini would have been justified in his colonial ambitions.¹⁰⁷

Sydney Barton, the British ambassador to Ethiopia, thought similarly. He actually told the Emperor of Ethiopia that, in the eyes of Britain, his Empire was "chiefly known as a country which raided our frontiers and indulged in slavery."¹⁰⁸ Vansittart would tell the Italian Ambassador to Britain that Britain had an even better case against Ethiopia, a country where conditions were "reprehensible," than Italy did.¹⁰⁹ He also wrote in his memoirs about Mussolini in an almost fond tone, bemoaning the fact that Britain never won him over like it could have.¹¹⁰ The views of Thompson are perhaps the most striking of all, concluding after studying the Italian case while at a sub-committee at Geneva that

this Italian 'case' cannot be ignored. It seems to me to prove what we have long believed ourselves, that Ethiopia is a tiresome and dangerous neighbor; and that however enlightened the 'ruler' of the country may be, it does not lie within his

106 Hoare, 150; *Ibid.*, 151-152.

107 *Ibid.*, 151.

108 "Sir S. Barton (Addis Adaba) to Sir J. Simon (received May 7)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 2.

109 "Note by Sir R. Vansittart of a Conversation with Signor Grandi" in *Ibid.*

110 Vansittart, 328-329.

power as matters stand either to give effect to his treaty obligations, to improve the lot of his people, or to maintain internal security or— what is more important — peace on his frontiers. These objectives can only be secured by... an extensive measure of foreign collaboration and assistance... But I feel that I must add that no real improvements can be secured in Ethiopia without overcoming great resistance on the part of the powerful [rases], priests and others whose cherished privileges will disappear or be curtailed. Whatever... force is used to introduce bit by bit this new order will have to use force of some kind— and this will mean bloodshed. We should be under no illusions on this score.¹¹¹

Yet though the British Government may not have liked Ethiopia, Britain certainly fought to save it. As soon as Eden's trip to Rome on June 26 failed, the ministers of the Cabinet immediately began discussing what measures would be taken against Italy if a war began. Recognizing that "the responsibility of the Powers on which the burden of [imposing sanctions] would fall... would be a heavy one," they went ahead anyway.¹¹² The Government opened a study into whether or not it would be feasible to close the Suez Canal to prevent Italy from pursuing its invasion, a radical measure that would not, in the end, be implemented.¹¹³ They also realized that if they wanted to get the members of the League of Nations to join in any sanctions, the most crucial task would be to secure the support of France. "Without French co-operation, the application of [sanctions] was out of the question, and as yet the attitude of France was uncertain."¹¹⁴ Indeed, while the Cabinet had already expressed doubts as to France's willingness to go against Italy on June 19, a meeting between Laval and Eden on June 27 deepened them.

This meeting was the second of two that the Government authorized in an attempt to calm French fears about the recent Anglo-German Naval Agreement. This infamous deal, which

111 "Note by Mr. Thompson on the meeting of the Sub-Committee of Experts on September 10" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 548.

112 *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Wednesday, 3rd July, 1935, at 11.0 a.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdf/small/cab-23-82-c-35-35.pdf> (accessed November 2, 2012), 2; *Ibid.*, 4.

113 *Ibid.*

114 *Ibid.*, 3.

allowed Germany to have a navy equal to thirty-five percent of Britain's, had been composed and signed by Britain without consulting France or Italy, and angered both of them.¹¹⁵ That part of the discussions occurred on June 21, but on the 27th, the Ethiopian affair monopolized the conversation. Laval had heard what Eden offered Mussolini in Rome, and was quite angry with the British for their offer to give Zeila to Ethiopia. Such an act would have created a rival port to Djibouti, as Ethiopia was not bound by the 1906 Anglo-French-Italian Treaty, and would thus be able to build a railroad to the Red Sea. The French railroad monopoly in the region paid for ninety percent of the upkeep of French Somaliland, and the potential loss of this lucrative asset — “perhaps the only railway in the world which paid a dividend—” threw Laval into a fit.¹¹⁶ This strong opposition of the French to Ethiopia building a railroad to the sea would continue in the planning of later deals, and is why the Hoare-Laval Plan forbid the Ethiopians from building one.

Eden quickly waved away Laval's concerns by promising that the deal would entail “certain conditions,”¹¹⁷ and went on to discuss the terms Mussolini had demanded. Laval immediately suggested that Italy be offered a protectorate over Ethiopia. He hinted that Great Britain and France should apply diplomatic pressure on Haile Selassie to get him to accept such an arrangement. Eden refused to entertain the idea, yet Laval kept bringing it back up throughout the meeting. Perhaps annoyed at Laval's cynicism, Eden confronted him with whether he had, as Mussolini had claimed in his meeting with Eden, secretly promised Mussolini in January that France would not hinder Italian expansion into Ethiopia. Laval denied this, but Eden was not convinced. The French Premier's willingness to sacrifice Ethiopian sovereignty and his

¹¹⁵ Eden, 257-258.

¹¹⁶ “Record of Anglo-French Conversation held at the Quai d'Orsay on Thursday, June 27, at 11.30 a.m.” in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 327.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

insistence that "French policy was to refrain from doing anything which would disturb or make less intimate existing Franco-Italian relations" left Eden with a grim view of the picture.¹¹⁸ On the whole, the meeting would convince him that "Laval's firm convictions, expressed when we had been in Geneva the month before, seemed to me to have evaporated... As a result of this day's conversation, I suspected that more had passed between the Duce and himself than Laval would admit."¹¹⁹

Britain's refusal to sacrifice Ethiopian sovereignty and the Government's attempts at bringing in French support for future sanctions, even while France desperately wanted to avoid alienating Italy, proves that the Government genuinely desired to pursue a pro-League policy. This is further cemented by British concerns in late June and early July that Ethiopia might launch a preemptive attack against the Italian forces stationed in East Africa and Britain's attempts to prevent this. Eden worriedly remarked in his meeting with Laval that the ruses were pressuring the Emperor to attack, Drummond believed that Italian demands might "drive the Emperor to despair and lead him to attempt immediate attack," and Barton was attempting to prevent a "sudden incident on the frontier" that would lead to war.¹²⁰

If Britain had been as cynical and desirous to wash their hands of the matter as the French were, it stands to reason that they would have welcomed such an event. A beginning of hostilities by Ethiopia would have been the perfect excuse by the Government to claim that an Italian invasion would have been justified. The Cabinet could have thus escaped a good deal of any potential pro-League wrath from public opinion. The fact that Britain did not hope for such an

118 Ibid.

119 Eden, 262.

120 "Record of Anglo-French Conversation held at the Quai d'Orsay on Thursday, June 27, at 11.30 a.m." in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 327; "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received July 2, 7.40 p.m.)," in Ibid., No. 339; "Sir S. Barton (Addis Adaba) to Sir S. Hoare (Received July 4, 10 a.m.)," in Ibid., No. 341.

event, and instead tried to prevent it, shows that it was not cynicism or *realpolitik* that drove the Baldwin Government's conduct. In fact, the next few months in the crisis would show that the Government's prime motive was a desire to protect and preserve the League of Nations.

Britain's Vital Interest

July and August were marked by a sluggish and ineffective response of the League towards the impending Italian aggression. The British were eventually able to pressure the League into holding meetings on August 1-3 against the desires of the French Government.¹²¹ The parties at the League meeting seemed to be confused as to what to discuss on the first day of discussion, and all that was agreed to over the next two days was to hold another meeting in September.¹²² This meeting began on September 4, and over the next few weeks, the League finally began to seriously consider the matter. As a session of the whole assembly of the League began, Geneva came alive with idealistic fervor. It was agreed that a Committee of Five, consisting of representatives from Britain, France, Poland, Spain, and Turkey would investigate the dispute and "seek... a pacific settlement."¹²³ While this Committee worked, delegates from many nations made speeches promising to fulfill their obligations under the League Covenant, including the imposition of sanctions, if a member state was attacked.¹²⁴ This meeting of the League culminated with the release of the recommendations of the Committee of Five on September 23.

121 Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 235.

122 The parties only briefly discussed what the agenda would be before adjourning for the first day. "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 1, 9.30 a.m.);" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 410; "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 2, 12 p.m.);" in *Ibid.*, No. 416.

123 Cited by Baer, *The Coming of the Italian-Ethiopian War*, 319.

124 *Ibid.*, 335.

These recommendations made no suggestions as to a transfer of territory, though a document attached to it, signed by the French and British Governments, promised to facilitate any necessary trades. Perhaps caught up in the general spirit of idealism surrounding them, the Committee did not even make a single reference to Italy in their report.¹²⁵ Instead, it made an odd suggestion that, in essence, would have meant a mandate over Ethiopia for the League of Nations. Under the plan, foreign advisers would be placed in every branch of the Ethiopian Government. These advisers would attempt to organize a stable police force for the central Government, assist in the economic development of the country, and reorganize the court system, the education system, and all other public services.¹²⁶

It is unclear exactly why the Committee thought this suggestion would appeal to Italy. Perhaps those on the Committee believed Mussolini would be satisfied with a stable Ethiopian state that would not raid the frontiers of Italian colonies. Regardless, Italy dismissed the suggestions immediately. For all the speeches made at the League, then, little had been accomplished, or even attempted, by the beginning of Italian hostilities on October 3. The League had neither created a deal to preserve peace nor had it even begun discussing what forms of sanctions would be applied to Italy in the event of an attack. In contrast, Britain had been working quite diligently outside of the League over the previous three months, and their efforts reveal the reason they were struggling so hard to prevent war.

In July, the British spent much of their time attempting to arrange a meeting of France, Britain, and Italy along the lines set forth in the 1906 Treaty. Hoare launched the initiative on the suggestion of Dino Grandi, the Italian Ambassador to Britain, who appeared legitimately worried

125 H.L., "Italy, Abyssinia, and the League Committee's Report," *The Bulletin of International News* 12, no. 6 (September 28, 1935) under "League Committee's Report," <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25639452> (accessed January 2, 2013), 3.

126 *Ibid.*, 4.

about the effects the crisis was having on Anglo-Italian relations.¹²⁷ Neither Hoare nor Vansittart had much hope that such a meeting would solve anything, but both thought that it would convince Mussolini that he would be able to obtain some of his demands without going to war.¹²⁸ Though Mussolini refused to agree to a three-power meeting, he did agree for Italian, British, and French representatives to hold informal talks in Paris.¹²⁹ Though no deal was reached during these discussions, the British believed that the talks did have some effect. Drummond reported that when Mussolini heard the British and French wanted to discuss a deal with him, he immediately began hinting he would accept two-thirds of his original demands. The willingness of Italy to engage in talks also excited Hoare, who thought the event was the first "faint ray of hope... on the dark horizon."¹³⁰

Hoare's belief that Mussolini was hinting that he would accept a deal reignited his enthusiasm, and the Foreign Secretary began looking into terms for a future compromise. His communications show that he believed the key aspect of a deal that would get Italy to accept would be a grant of exclusive economic rights to Italy in developing Ethiopia. Though he also hoped that the Emperor of Ethiopia would be willing to engage in a cession of territory to Italy in exchange for monetary compensation, Hoare seemed to think, perhaps as a result of the rejection of the deal in June, that land cessions would not satisfy Mussolini.¹³¹ He may have also been influenced by Drummond's report that Baron Aloisi, the Italian Representative to the League, had advised him that Mussolini would accept a deal if they received an economic monopoly over

127 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir E. Drummond (Rome)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 346.

128 "Sir E. Drummond to Sir S. Hoare (Received July 16, 9.30 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 387.

129 Hoare, 161.

130 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (received July 18, 5.25 a.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 371; Hoare, 161.

131 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir S. Barton (Addis Adaba)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 436.

Ethiopia.¹³²

Hoare asked Barton in early August to get a list of the maximum concessions the Emperor would be willing to make to end the crisis, and he learned the terms within a day. Not only was Haile Selassie fine with a cession of territory in the Ogaden to Italy in exchange for Zeila, but the Emperor was also willing to give up territory in Northern Ethiopia in exchange for financial compensation.¹³³ The territory he offered was land in the Danakil, which would eventually become part of the ceded territory in the Hoare-Laval Plan. However, the Emperor refused to agree to allow any role to be given to Italy in the economic development of his country. Though Barton informed him this was a crucial part of a potential deal, "this was the only point on which [the Emperor] showed intense feeling," absolutely refusing to consider the possibility.¹³⁴ The Emperor at least agreed that any deal involving Ethiopia gaining a passage to the sea would involve him agreeing not to build any railroad along this corridor, thus respecting the French monopoly.¹³⁵

Though this would be the limit as to Hoare's planning of a deal for the next few months, his talks and writings at the time laid out the reason why he was seeking out a deal at all, and here it can be concluded what the British motives were for protecting Ethiopia. In a discussion with the High Commissioners of the British Dominions on July 29, he made it clear that Britain was willing to consider any concessions to Italy that Ethiopia freely agreed to and did not lead to a loss of independence for the country. Further, shattering the idea of historians that Britain's first desire was to preserve the Stresa Front and that they only grudgingly supported the League,

132 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received July 16, 1.30 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 367.

133 "Sir S. Barton (Addis Adaba) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 14, 10.30 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 440; "Sir S. Barton (Addis Adaba) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 15, 10.13 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 446.

134 "Sir S. Barton (Addis Adaba) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 15, 2.30 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 447.

135 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 15)" in *Ibid.*, No. 442.

Hoare explicitly said that "he himself would wish to keep the League alive for Europe even in a crippled state rather than do anything which would have the effect of bringing about its destruction."¹³⁶ Even if the "blow to the League would be very great" if Italy left the League, Hoare desired firstly to preserve the League rather than sustain the Stresa Front.¹³⁷

Stanley Bruce, the Australian High Commissioner, was skeptical of this pro-League stance. He warned Hoare against the Government's policy of "bluffing ourselves... about the real strength of the League," and advised him to encourage the League to avoid challenging Italy.¹³⁸ To this Hoare replied that "if excuses of this kind were adopted, he was afraid of the effect upon Central European Powers. What would become, for example, of the efforts which had been made to encourage the development of collective security as against Germany?"¹³⁹ This view, that failing to preserve the prestige of the League and collective security against Italy would make it unable to stand up to Nazi Germany in the future, is the central factor behind the motivations of Hoare in the crisis.

Hoare's statements over the next months confirm this. He sent a letter to Mussolini in July in which he insisted that Britain's frustrations of Italian ambitions were not due to Britain's own interests in Africa. Instead, Britain was fighting to preserve Ethiopia because the League was the basis of British foreign policy. Without collective security, Britain's influence in Europe would wane and the situation there would be negatively affected.¹⁴⁰ Shortly after, Hoare sent a note to Clerk in Paris, where he laid out the possible courses the Italian-Ethiopian affair might take. If the League did nothing or merely condemned Italy without taking action against her,

136 "Note by Mr. Mason of an Informal Discussion with the Dominion High Commissioners" in *Ibid.*, No. 402.

137 *Ibid.*

138 *Ibid.*

139 *Ibid.*

140 "Sir E. Drummond to Sir S. Hoare (Received July 29)" in *Ibid.*, No. 392.

it would fall into universal and lasting contempt... and there would have been destroyed one of those factors— and that a very important factor— which join the United Kingdom with France in the political and moral leadership of Europe. In such circumstances, the countries of Central and South Eastern Europe, filled already with apprehension at the growing might of Germany, might well be excused for... looking elsewhere than to the League and to the two great conservative democracies for support and guidance.¹⁴¹

In September, seeking a common policy with the French Government, Hoare and Eden met with Laval to discuss the situation. There Hoare made his views even clearer, stating that

throughout the whole Abyssinian conflict, he had been thinking not so much of an Italian dispute with a backward country, as of the reactions of the dispute on the European position, with Germany rearmed and under temptation to make a threat to European security some time during the next ten years...

In the past, [collective security under the League] had been little more than a phrase. Now, the German threat had made it a fact of great importance... He himself was a Conservative with no sentimental or fanatical views, but people like himself had been greatly stirred by the present threat to collective security at a time when the German threat was impending. [The] central body of opinion [in Britain] regarded the League and the Covenant as an instrument of this policy of collective security. If the system were gravely injured or destroyed, he was sure that the mass of opinion would then assume that the system was impracticable and that the bridge uniting Great Britain with the collective system and with the Continent had been broken. Such a development would strengthen the move for British isolation...

He had been strongly pressed to take this opportunity of saying on behalf of His Majesty's Government that there was no collective force behind the League and that it would be better to admit this and to dismiss from their minds any idea of the League as being any other than an advisory body. He had refused to accept this view. If accepted, it would have the great danger of removing a deterrent for Germany in the future.¹⁴²

This statement not only shows that Hoare viewed the continued existence of the League as vital for deterring German aggression, but that he thought himself more convinced of the importance of the League than the British public did. If the idea that Hoare was acting cynically during this time was true, we should not see Hoare decrying a possible strengthening of

141 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)" in *Ibid.*, No. 403.

142 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14)" in *Ibid.*, No. 553.

isolationist sentiment in Britain, yet here such a statement is. Hoare even repeated the sentiment in a later meeting with Laval, saying he feared "that if there were any appearance of failure, the British public—rightly or wrongly, wisely or unwisely—would take the view that the League was of no use, and that the obligations of [collective security] could not be applied."¹⁴³ It can thus be seen that Hoare's pro-League motivations during the crisis were based on a desire to save the League of Nations for later use against German designs in Europe. Only by protecting Ethiopia from Italy in 1935 could Britain protect the small states in Central Europe against Germany in the future.

Vansittart agreed that the League was needed to keep Britain involved in European politics. In a discussion with Grandi in early August, he made it clear that Britain would consider any demands Italy had, but that Italy needed to realize Britain had no interests in Ethiopia for which it was worth stopping an Italian invasion. Rather, the "vital British interest" involved in the conflict was the preservation of the League.¹⁴⁴ He and Eden would explain this to Laval as well, warning that "if once [the League,] that rallying point of British public opinion were... destroyed, the results on effective British participation in international affairs might well be crippling."¹⁴⁵ As late as December 6, Vansittart was insisting on this point in talks with the French. If France and Britain, through the League, could not save Ethiopia, then

many Members of the League who are watching eagerly for the nature of the settlement... would lose all confidence in the future of the League if the settlement went too far. Some members of the League indeed were apprehensive as to their own future. They were going to ask themselves if the League in general... could really be trusted to stand up to Germany, for example, in future, if [Britain, France, and the League were] afraid to stand up to Italy today... these apprehensive and attentive Powers were already asking themselves what, if these

143 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 16)" in *Ibid.*, No. 564.

144 "Note by Sir R. Vansittart of a Conversation with Signor Grandi" in *Ibid.*, No. 430.

145 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 15)" in *Ibid.*, No. 442.

things could be done in the green tree of [Ethiopia], would occur in the dry rot of Europe?¹⁴⁶

We see, then, that the reason Britain was acting to protect Ethiopia and the League was a desire to preserve the guarantee of collective security that the League offered. This was not, as some historians allege, because public opinion was forcing them to do so against their will. Hoare and Vansittart did not want to preserve the Stresa Front at the price of the League, as they viewed the League as necessary to deter Germany and maintain the confidence of the small European states that might fear Germany. It is not surprising, then, that when Robert Cecil, the President of the League of Nations Union and thus the head of the Peace Ballot efforts, met with Anthony Eden on August 21, he said he was "entirely behind the Government" in their policy towards the crisis.¹⁴⁷ Yet this does not fully explain how the Hoare-Laval plan itself came into being. Why did Britain try to force Italy to back down through heavy sanctions and the League's power alone? Why did they offer the terms they did?

146 "Record by Sir R. Vansittart of a conversation with the French Ambassador" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy: 1919-1939*, ed. W.N. Medlicott, Douglas Dakin, and M.E. Lambert, 2nd ser., vol. XV, No. 324.

147 "Record by Mr. Eden of a conversation with Viscount Cecil" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 484.

Chapter 3: Searching for Sanctions

At the same time that Hoare was laying out his reasons for seeking a deal, he was looking into what possible sanctions could be applied against Italy if it attacked Ethiopia. At the time, the Cabinet seemed to be considering either a strategy of appeasement or a strategy of harsh sanctions against Italy. It was not a foregone conclusion that the Government would, in the end, seek to prevent a war via a compromise between Ethiopia and Italy—there was a chance that they might try to get Italy to back down in the face of severe economic pressure. So why did they choose appeasement?

As mentioned above, the Cabinet had already begun studying the feasibility of shutting down the Suez Canal to prevent Italian troops from reaching East Africa. However, a report from the Chiefs of Staff on August 9 warned that closing the Canal would be certain to lead to a war with Italy, for which British forces were not adequately prepared.¹⁴⁸ Such an act would also risk causing significant tensions with the major powers not in the League, namely the United States of America, Germany, and Japan.¹⁴⁹ Though some Labour and Liberal MPs had been pushing for a closing of the Suez Canal, including Clement Attlee, who thought it a “vital matter,” Hoare was publicly stating the Government was no longer considering the option by October.¹⁵⁰

As for sanctions, the Government thought they would be very effective. Eden believed

148 “Annex” in *Committee of Imperial Defense. Chiefs of Staff Sub-Committee. Italo-Abyssinian Dispute. Memorandum*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-24-256-CP-166-2.pdf> (accessed November 2, 2012), 6-7.

149 *Ibid.*, 7-9.

150 United Kingdom, House of Commons, *House of Commons Parliamentary Papers*, 7 June 1935, http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&res_dat=xri:hcnp-us&rft_dat=xri:hcnp:hansard:CDS5CV0302P0-0015 (accessed January 8, 2013), 2194-2195; Cited by Eden, 319.

that "at this stage, it appeared that economic sanctions, if honestly applied by all members of the League, would seriously affect Mussolini's ability to carry on his war."¹⁵¹ An analysis by the Treasury done at the request of Hoare reinforced this view. It concluded that a boycott of Italian goods, if the United States and Germany could be convinced to join, would so harm Italy's financial situation that Mussolini would not be able to wage war for more than six or seven months.¹⁵² Hoare seemed to take this advice seriously, as he informed the Cabinet on September 24 that even mild sanctions would have a noticeable effect on Italy's ability to wage war.¹⁵³ When challenged by Bruce at another meeting of the Dominion High Commissioners on August 21 as to the viability of sanctions, he said that Italy "was extremely vulnerable to economic pressure—even if this was only of a limited nature—and that she was indeed more susceptible to pressure of this kind than any other important country in Europe."¹⁵⁴ Though Bruce continued to warn that sanctions had no chance of being effective, Hoare stood his ground and insisted that such methods must be tested before that conclusion could be reached.¹⁵⁵

Ironically, the Government would decide on a policy of appeasement rather than economic pressure before the minor sanctions imposed upon Italy once the war began were even put into effect. It was a series of doubts and fears that arose in late August and early September that would eventually convince the Government that a policy of sanctions would not be the best course to take in the crisis. One of these was a deepening fear that France would not be willing to support Britain. The events of June mentioned above show that the Government had already

151 *Ibid.*, 318.

152 "Memorandum by Sir R. Phillips (Treasury)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 538.

153 *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet to be Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Tuesday, 24th September, 1935, at 11.0 a.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-23-82-cc-43-35-11.pdf> (accessed November 3, 2012), 5.

154 "Note by Mr. Mason of an Informal Discussion with the Dominion High Commissioners" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 482.

155 *Ibid.*

been wary of this, but such worries only increased over time. In late July, the Cabinet agreed that Laval was not taking the situation seriously enough and that it was "extremely unlikely that France would co-operate in sanctions."¹⁵⁶ There were even worries that Laval would sabotage any British attempts at imposing sanctions on Italy by warning Mussolini about them in advance.¹⁵⁷

Vansittart wrote to Hoare on August 9 that Laval's fears of a breach between France and Italy made the French Premier disposed to "extract the maximum of concession from [Ethiopia] in the hope that that will fill the Italian maw."¹⁵⁸ As a result of France's wavering nerve, British policy needed to be very cautious so as not to alienate the French.¹⁵⁹ Hoare suspected that Laval had secretly promised Mussolini a free hand in his adventures in Ethiopia, and that the "cunning intriguer... and personal friend of Mussolini" was against doing anything that might weaken Franco-Italian relations.¹⁶⁰ Hoare agreed with Vansittart that nothing must be done that would risk France abandoning the British in the crisis.¹⁶¹ Eden also knew that Laval was not at all enthusiastic to support Britain. He had been told that Laval had commented in a French Cabinet meeting on the virility of Fascist Italy and the decadence of Britain, and Laval himself told Eden that he preferred a "moral condemnation" against Italy at the League rather than sanctions.¹⁶²

In January, Laval had held talks in Rome with Mussolini and produced the Rome Accords, filled with secret agreements for military cooperation and negotiations over colonies.

¹⁵⁶ *Meeting of the Cabinet to be Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Monday, 22nd July, 1935, at 11.0 a.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-23-82-c-39-35.pdf> (accessed November 2, 2012), 2.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ "Letter from Sir R. Vansittart to Sir S. Hoare" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 434.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Hoare, 168-169.

¹⁶¹ "Record by Sir S. Hoare of a conversation with Mr. Eden and Sir H. Samuel" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 477.

¹⁶² Eden, 288-289.

During these talks, Laval may have promised to not interfere with Italian ambitions in East Africa.¹⁶³ It was this arrangement that led the British to suspect that France would not go against Italy in the coming crisis, and Laval's attitude seemed to confirm their suspicions. In talks with Clerk, Laval warned that Britain must not take any radical action against Italy, as alienating Mussolini would leave France without a single ally on the continent.¹⁶⁴ What exactly Laval was referring to was made clear on August 27, when he insisted that any sanctions at all would mean the end of the Stresa Front and an Italian-German rapprochement.¹⁶⁵ Beyond these signs of Laval's wavering will, we have more proof that shows that the British was right to suspect his attitude. Before his execution for treason in 1945, Laval would say that "the real crime [of European politicians] was to have broken the Italian agreements. There can be no explanation nor excuse for this blunder."¹⁶⁶

It was not just the hesitation of Laval that made the British Government wary about the French attitude towards the crisis. French public opinion was soon revealed to be just as pro-Italy as British public opinion was pro-League. Clerk had told Hoare in the middle of June that "from my own observation... the sentiment of the bulk of the French public is on the side of Italy, and that a policy of whole-hearted support of [Ethiopia], with whom there is very little sympathy, would be most unpopular."¹⁶⁷ This warning apparently went unheeded, as a Cabinet meeting on July 22 shows that the Government believed at the time that it was only Laval who was against sanctions, and that French public opinion was more pro-League than he was.¹⁶⁸ Clerk again

163 Lamb, *Mussolini as Diplomat*, 116.

164 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 20)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 472.

165 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 28, 2.20 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 498.

166 Pierre Laval, *The Diary of Pierre Laval* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), 164.

167 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received June 17)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 307.

168 *Meeting of the Cabinet, 22nd July, 2.*

warned that the French people were "more and more averse from sanctions" and that Laval, a "strong Prime Minister [who] might have the courage to override this feeling" was actually attempting to do his best to work with Britain while constrained by the boundaries of public opinion.¹⁶⁹ He went on to send more messages warning that it was only the French Left that supported the League, while the centrist and Right-wing parties were pro-Italy:

The attitude of the Centre and the Right being less pro-League is correspondingly more pro-Italian. There is no doctrinal objection to Fascism as such, rather the reverse since important elements of the Right like the Croix de Feu are practically its advocates. Adopting a more sceptical and military view of foreign affairs, the Right and Centre lean to the system of alliances for French security rather than to the generalised collective system of Geneva. They attach more importance to Italy as a military ally in the chain of States stretching round Germany than to the admittedly more powerful but uncertain support of Great Britain. They see no reason to condemn Italian behaviour towards [Ethiopia] on moral grounds although they may deplore it on those of expediency and feasibility. Accordingly all their influence... has hitherto been directed to defending Italy, to urging that she must be allowed her 'colonial war' as 'an operation of police' and to insist that nothing must be done at Geneva which would aggravate Signor Mussolini and jeopardise the Rome agreements and Franco-Italian friendship.¹⁷⁰

Clerk also told the Government that a great deal of the French press was actually in the payroll of Mussolini.¹⁷¹ Eden recalled in his memoirs when he heard of the warnings from Clerk, and realized that "it was time the French were told that Italian talk of our effete-ness and their succession to our position in Africa was dangerous nonsense."¹⁷² Hoare, too, was affected by fears that French public opinion would not allow Laval to act in solidarity with Britain. In his meetings with Laval on September 10 and 11, he agreed with Laval that "French public opinion would repudiate a breach in the Latin front against the Germans."¹⁷³ Even Winston Churchill,

169 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 24, 7.15 p.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 491; "Sir G. Clerk to Sir S. Hoare (Received August 25, 9.30 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 494.

170 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received September 17)" in *Ibid.*, No. 572.

171 *Ibid.*

172 Eden, 288.

173 Hoare, 168.

when Hoare asked him for his opinion as to what should be done on August 21, counseled that unilateral action was impossible. Britain and France needed to work together and "we must realise the extremely difficult position of France and must not make impossible requests to M. Laval."¹⁷⁴ These combined fears on the part of the Government that both Laval and French public opinion would not consent to any harsh measure was one of the doubts that prevented the Baldwin Government from enacting a vigorous policy of economic pressure against Italy.

Beyond France, the British also began to fear that many of the smaller states in the League would also shy away from a policy of sanctions. The Cabinet had worried in their meeting on July 3 that other powers would not go along with sanctions unless France did, and even then other states would only "probably" support them.¹⁷⁵ Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Czechoslovakia, Romania, Chile, Argentina, and Spain were all suspected during this period of either planning on avoiding joining sanctions altogether, only going along with sanctions if France did, or refusing to do anything but mild sanctions. In the end, Britain's fears of member states refusing to join sanctions were unfounded—only Hungary, Austria, and Albania refused to apply them.¹⁷⁶ But this does not change the fact that British officials thought in August and September that many states would not support them. Another worry was that non-members, especially Germany, Japan, and the United States, would refuse to join in sanctions and instead would take advantage of the situation to increase their own trade with Italy.¹⁷⁷ Clerk admitted to Laval that if these states could not be convinced to join in sanctions, "it was clearly doubtful to

174 "Record by Sir S. Hoare of a conversation with Mr. Eden and Mr. Churchill" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 483.

175 *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet*, 3rd July, 3.

176 "Mr. Balfour (Belgrade) to Sir S. Hoare (Received September 2, 5.30 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 517; "Mr. Cavendish-Bentinck (Santiago) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 13, 9.30 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 558; "Mr. Ogilvie-Forbes (Madrid) to Sir S. Hoare (Received September 21, 9 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 597; Baer, *Test Case*, 25.

177 "Note by Mr. Sargent for Sir S. Hoare" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 496.

what extent economic sanctions could be made effective.¹⁷⁸

The final factor that led Britain down the road to appeasement, rather than harsh sanctions, was the concern that Mussolini might declare war on Britain if strong measures were taken against Italy. This fear seems to have come when Britain began receiving reports in August that Mussolini was preparing plans for a "mad dog act" against the British fleet in the Mediterranean. Because the Italian press was launching a vicious campaign against Britain at the time, the British Government took these reports seriously enough to reinforce the fleet.¹⁷⁹ Many members of the Government thus became convinced that any harsh actions against Italy would trigger a war. Eden began to think that military sanctions would provoke Italy and believed Mussolini when the dictator warned that he would rather risk a European war than back down.¹⁸⁰ Drummond warned that "both Signor Mussolini and the Italian people are capable of committing national suicide if this seemed the only alternative to climbing down."¹⁸¹ Hoare was also anxious to avoid anything that might provoke Mussolini.¹⁸²

It might seem strange that the British Government was so worried about a war with Italy. It is well known that the Western democracies shied away from war in the 1930s, but it seems obvious that Britain, with all its might and the resources of its Empire behind it, could have easily beaten Italy. At the time, though, the British did not see a potential war in such a light. The August 9 report from the Chiefs of Staff on the effects of a war with Italy painted a very dark picture. The Chiefs warned that the British Navy, weakened from the disarmament policies of the interwar period, would take such damage from the Italian fleet that "the results of a war with

178 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received September 3)" in *Ibid.*, No. 520.

179 Hoare, 163.

180 Eden, 320.

181 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 12, 9.30 a.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 551.

182 Hoare, 164.

Italy would be to leave the British Fleet temporarily weakened to such an extent as to be unable to fulfill its world-wide responsibilities."¹⁸³ Likewise, the damage the British air forces would sustain would prevent them from maintaining a strong enough force to match German air power.¹⁸⁴

Another effect of war would be the likely event of Japan taking advantage of Britain's distraction to "take action in the Far East contrary to [British] and League interests."¹⁸⁵ A war would also allow the Italian troops in East Africa to easily invade the Sudan, British Somaliland, and Kenya and perform air attacks on Egypt and British shipping in the Suez Canal.¹⁸⁶ With all these dangers of a war with Italy, even if Britain was victorious, it is not surprising that the report concluded that "it is of the utmost importance that in our future negotiations with France and Italy, and at the forth-coming League meeting, no action should be taken likely to precipitate hostilities, and that the application of [sanctions]... likely to cause Italy to take the bit between her teeth, should be delayed until the Services have had sufficient warning in which to make their preparations."¹⁸⁷

This view of a potentially devastating blow to British power in the event of a war with Italy seems to have influenced the members of the Government. Vansittart would later insist in his memoirs that if Britain had gone to war with Italy and lost a good part of its navy, "there is little doubt we should have lost the second world war, and ceased to be a nation."¹⁸⁸ Drummond agreed with the South African Ambassador to Italy that a war would weaken Britain to an extent

183 *Committee of Imperial Defense*, 5-6.

184 *Ibid.*, 6.

185 "Annex" in *Ibid.*, 5.

186 *Ibid.*, 15-16.

187 *Committee of Imperial Defense*, 6.

188 Vansittart, 523.

that would allow Germany and Japan to take advantage of the situation.¹⁸⁹ Hoare said that even King George V was so convinced of the awfulness of a war with Italy that he "could not disguise... his consuming desire for some compromise that would avoid war."¹⁹⁰ The British Government thus feared that harsh measures against Italy would provoke a war that could immensely damage British power just at a moment where all their attention was need to contain Germany and Japan.

All of the anxieties Britain had about pursuing a strategy of harsh economic pressure against Italy can be seen in the minutes of the meetings between Hoare, Eden, and Laval on September 10 and 11. Though these meetings were held to discuss how to coordinate a general Anglo-French front in European affairs, the major issue discussed was how to deal with the Italian-Ethiopian crisis. It was here that Hoare effectively decided to pursue a strategy of mild sanctions against Italy while looking for a compromise. He made it clear multiple times that his goal in the conversations were to secure a joint Anglo-French policy going forward. "Above all a division of opinion between France and Great Britain" was to be avoided if the League was to be preserved.¹⁹¹ Hoare would later explain in his memoirs that he thought Laval was a genuine friend of Britain and a man with "considerable influence in Rome" whose help would be essential in influencing Mussolini.¹⁹² Because Hoare was so eager secure the support of Laval and France after the previous months of worrying about wavering French support, Hoare agreed to most of Laval's suggestions about what policies were to be taken.

Laval insisted that "there ought to be no provocative talk of sanctions" if he was to work

189 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 11, 6.30 p.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 550.

190 Hoare, 159-160.

191 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 553.

192 Hoare, 168.

with Britain.¹⁹³ He did say he was willing to agree to mild sanctions if Italy attacked Ethiopia, but only if attempts at conciliation continued in the meantime.¹⁹⁴ These attempts were to take place outside of the League, and Laval brought up suggestions of gradually turning Ethiopia into an Italian protectorate or resurrecting the Zeila deal.¹⁹⁵ Hoare agreed that the correct policy to adopt would be the mild one of refusing Italian exports, rather than an attempt at an economic blockade of Italy.¹⁹⁶ Here Hoare revealed the anxieties that had been troubling the British Government for the past months:

The question was now... what were the practical steps that could be taken to prevent the League appearing to the world as being futile and incapable of dealing with the present difficulties. He very keenly realised all these difficulties and particularly those of the French Government. He realised the great value attached by M. Laval to Franco-Italian friendship... He would like to disabuse M. Laval's mind of any idea that His Majesty's Government wished to push him or the French Government into an impossible position.

He was also conscious of the difficulties inherent in any measures of economic pressure. One difficulty was that of obtaining the collective support of all Members of the League. Another was the difficulty of adopting a course of action which would not be made futile by non-Member States, particularly Germany and the United States...

If it should come to a question of economic pressure... it might interest M. Laval to know that His Majesty's Government did not at all take the view that it would be wise to begin with extreme measures. This would be impossible for the obvious reason that such measures would not be supported by the League collectively, and one of the basic assumptions was that such action should be collective. In the second place such measures would not obtain sufficient collaboration from non-Member States, especially the United States. On the other hand, if less extreme measures were in question there might well be a sympathetic attitude on the part of the United States...

It should also be made quite clear that all participating Governments stood together and that any 'mad dog' attack upon one of them would be resisted by all... in view of the present state of excitement in Italy, it would be best to make this

193 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XIV, No. 553.

194 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14) in *Ibid.*, No. 554.

195 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14) in *Ibid.*, No. 553; "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 16) in *Ibid.*, No. 564.

196 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14) in *Ibid.*, No. 554.

clear from the start— if only as a deterrent.¹⁹⁷

We thus see that the policies agreed on at the September 10 and 11 meetings were based on the fears that the British Government had that France, other member states, and non-member states would not work with them. Hoare was thus forced to agree to Laval's demands of mild sanctions in order to ensure France's support, the cooperation of the United States, and the support of the rest of the League of Nations. Hoare also agreed that France and Britain should design a new proposal based on the Zeila deal to appease Mussolini.¹⁹⁸ The meetings ended in "complete agreement," though Hoare would later claim that he felt Laval was secretly holding reservations about imposing sanctions on Italy even once a war had begun.¹⁹⁹

Hoare's recommendations to the Cabinet on September 24 also reveal that he had agreed with Laval's reservations. He said that the only policy that would secure the assistance of the rest of the League was one of "sanctions on a moderate basis."²⁰⁰ Though the exact form of sanctions to be imposed would not be decided until October, after the war had started, it was thus in the middle of September that the British Government decided on mild sanctions mixed with appeasement. Any idea of a policy of strangling Italy via economic pressure was dead due to the lack of support the British Government believed it would attract from France, the League, and non-member states, and fears of provoking Italy into war with Britain. In the final weeks before Italian troops marched into Ethiopia, then, the British had already decided that, to save the League, a deal had to be reached.

197 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 14) in *Ibid.*, No. 553.

198 "Mr. Edmond (Geneva) to Sir R. Vansittart (Received September 16) in *Ibid.*, No. 564.

199 Hoare, 169.

200 Interestingly, the original phrase in the minutes was "sanctions on a very mild basis" before it was altered. *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet, 24th September, 5.*

Chapter 4: The War Begins

For all the League's speeches and the British's entreaties to Mussolini, war broke out between Italy and Ethiopia at 5 a.m. on October 3.²⁰¹ The League of Nations had failed in its task to prevent war. This failure did not demoralize the League or the British public, however. Over the next few months, opinion in Britain and at Geneva would grow even more in favor of applying sanctions to ensure collective security until the Hoare-Laval Plan was leaked to the public. During the months of October, November, and December, the League would collectively apply sanctions against Italy, a general election would be held in Britain that resulted in a triumph for the Baldwin Government, and two attempts at finding a compromise deal to end the war would be made.

The British Government first received word that the invasion had begun when Barton sent the Government a telegram informing them that Adowa was being bombed. Laval immediately summoned Eden, who was in Paris, to meet with him, and urged a program of conciliation. Laval urged that the Britain and France should give Italy a mandate over the non-Amharic parts of Ethiopia and allow Italian participation in a League mandate over the rest of the country. Eden responded that "when we had just received reports of Fascist aggression upon [Ethiopia], it was scarcely possible to put forward proposals which went further than those previously offered."²⁰² Indeed, in a meeting of the Cabinet held on October 9, the British decided, as they had promised, to go along with any form of sanctions decided upon collectively by the

201 Barker, 33.

202 Eden, 306.

League.²⁰³ Hoare informed the Cabinet that he was quite satisfied by the League's attitude during the meeting of the General Assembly in September. He also informed them that the Assembly had no objections to the "[League's] recommendations"—a phrase edited into the minutes after the original line "policy pursued by His Majesty's Government" was stricken from the record.²⁰⁴

Yet Hoare knew sanctions would not be enough to stop Italy. "Mussolini's flagrant challenge to the League" would not be the end of his attempts at negotiation.²⁰⁵ In his mind, "a compromise had obviously become much more difficult, but it had also become more than ever necessary, both for preserving European peace and saving [Ethiopia] from total destruction."²⁰⁶ Hoare "therefore increased [his] efforts for finding some sort of compromise that would end the war before it became a universal calamity."²⁰⁷ As a result of this desire, when he heard that Mussolini, in a meeting with the French Ambassador to Italy on October 16, said that he was still open to a compromise, Hoare jumped at the chance to make a deal.²⁰⁸ The demands of the dictator had declined from those in June, when he had demanded annexation of all non-Amharic provinces and a mandate over the Amharic ones. Now he was willing to accept a plan based on the suggestions of the Committee of Five. In such an arrangement, the League would impose a mandate upon the Amharic lands while Italy would establish a protectorate over the rest of Ethiopia. Though having little actual power, Haile Selassie would remain the nominal sovereign of all of Ethiopia. Along with this, the Ogaden and the Danakil would be annexed by Italy. In

203 *Conclusions of a Meeting of the Cabinet Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Wednesday, 9th October, 1935, at 11.0 a.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-24-257-CP-186-2.pdf> (accessed November 3, 2012), 5-6.

204 *Ibid.*, 1.

205 Hoare, 173-174.

206 *Ibid.*, 174.

207 *Ibid.*

208 Eden, 319.

exchange, Italy would give Ethiopia the right to freely use the Italian port of Assab in Eritrea.²⁰⁹

Hoare's willingness to believe this was the right time to try to construct another deal was likely influenced by the recent telegram he had received from the Secretary of State at the Vatican. The message informed Hoare that the Pope was willing to mediate a deal between Italy and Britain. The Secretary wrote that "I cannot think that His Holiness would have gone so far without having first taken soundings of the Italian Government," and the terms the Pope offered were very similar to those Mussolini demanded.²¹⁰ Further, the Italian Ambassador to France had met with Laval recently and informed him of a deal Mussolini was willing to accept that involved similar terms as those put forward by the Vatican.²¹¹ With all of these signals that Italy was willing to end their war with Ethiopia if the right terms of a compromise were put forth, Hoare and Vansittart took action. On October 22, they decided to send Maurice Peterson, the head of the Ethiopian desk in the Foreign Office, to Paris. His duties would be to determine what France's intentions towards Mussolini's offer were and to work on constructing a draft of a new plan to send to Rome. At the same time, he was to make clear to the French "that [Britain] could not agree to holding up the process of sanctions pending diplomatic discussion."²¹²

Peterson was paired with René Saint-Quentin, the head of the African Department in the French Government. The plan they created, which came to be known as the Peterson-St. Quentin Draft, used the recommendations of the Committee of Five as a basis. The Draft gave an exclusive economic zone composing all of Ethiopia that lay below the 8th parallel. In this zone, Italian officials would be placed over every branch of the region's Government. The zone would

209 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received October 18, 9.30 a.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 108.

210 "Mr. Montgomery (The Vatican) to Sir S. Hoare (Received October 16, 4.45 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 88.

211 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received October 17, 1.25 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 91.

212 "Record by Mr. Peterson of a meeting in the Secretary of State's Room" in *Ibid.*, No. 134.

be overseen by the League of Nation to ensure Italian officials were working to economically develop the country. The rest of Ethiopia would be placed under a League mandate, with half of the leading officials being of Italian nationality. The Danakil and the Ogaden would be ceded to Italy along with any additional territory given as part of a rectification of the frontier between Eritrea and Ethiopia. In exchange, Italy would directly give Assab and a corridor to the sea to Ethiopia.²¹³

Many of these recommendations were similar to what was put in the Hoare-Laval Plan, yet Hoare found the Draft unacceptable. He did not believe that the League or Haile Selassie would be willing to accept the exclusive economic zone. In the eyes of Geneva, it would serve as a "thinly veiled Italian annexation" of a good deal of the country, and the Emperor would likely be overthrown by the masses if he accepted.²¹⁴ Hoare thought Italy should be allowed a share in the League mandate over Ethiopia, but that instead of a "clear-cut division of the country," the exclusive economic zone should be replaced by additional territory transfers.²¹⁵ Hoare went further than Peterson, saying that Italy should get the Ogaden and all of the Bale province up to the 40th meridian. Though he said he was willing to allow a "recasting" of the Draft more along these lines, the British never again brought it up as a potential solution. This was largely because the upcoming election made the matter too difficult to "follow at a time when [Ministers] were engaged on speaking tours in the country."²¹⁶ When Drummond met with Mussolini for a long talk on November 5, he never even mentioned the terms of the Draft, showing that the proposal was already dead.²¹⁷

213 "Letter from Mr. Peterson (Paris) to Mr. Scrivener" in *Ibid.*, No. 147.

214 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)" in *Ibid.*, No. 162.

215 *Ibid.*

216 *Ibid.*; Hoare, 176.

217 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received November 6, 9.30 a.m.*)" in *Ibid.*, No. 188.

Yet the Peterson-St. Quentin Draft was important. It established the principal and boundaries of the exclusive economic zone that would be included in the Hoare-Laval Plan. Likewise, the territory it recommended transferring to Italy, the Ogaden and the Danakil, would also be part of the final Plan. Beyond this, it served to keep the hope of making a deal alive. As Vansittart would later mention, "long discussion followed [the rejection of the Draft]. They lasted until December and were well known to the Cabinet in all their stages."²¹⁸ Though the British were dissatisfied with the Draft, it showed the Government that the French were willing to work with them in creating a common policy to confront Mussolini. If not for the fact that the month of November was spent electioneering and dealing with matters of sanctions, it is likely that another plan would have been made well before December 8.

Stanley Baldwin decided on October 19 to call for a General Election on November 14. This was a political decision, as he was gambling that an election in the middle of the crisis would lead to a Conservative victory. His strategy worked, as the people of Britain showed that they approved of the public stance the Government had taken towards the matter.²¹⁹ Though the Conservative Party lost seats, it maintained a large majority with 386 seats. Yet, in the words of Hoare, "the result was that during October and November electioneering greatly complicated and hindered any detailed discussion of the [Ethiopian] negotiation."²²⁰ Though economic issues played a major role in the election, there was "an unusual emphasis given to foreign affairs in the 1935 election in party manifestos and speeches."²²¹ Baldwin's Government emphasized their support for the League of Nations as the "key to peace," and the Government's manifesto said

the League of Nations will remain the keystone of British foreign policy... In the

²¹⁸ Vansittart, 538.

²¹⁹ Hoare, 176.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Waley, 37.

dispute between Italy and [Ethiopia] there will be no wavering in the policy hitherto pursued... We shall take no action in isolation, but we shall be prepared faithfully to take our part in any collective action decided upon by the League and shared by its members. We shall endeavour to further any discussion which may offer the hope of a just and fair settlement, provided that it be within the framework of the League and acceptable to the three parties to the dispute— Italy, [Ethiopia], and the League itself.²²²

On November 18, shortly after the Conservative victory in the election, all League states save for Austria, Hungary, and Albania put sanctions into effect. The League sanctions were based off of the recommendations of the British Government, which composed a study to determine the "maximum of economic sanctions on which agreement could be secured."²²³ The study said that the most effective means by which this could be done was to impose an embargo on all Italian exports among the League states and to deny access to Italian vessels in all ports of League nations.²²⁴ Along with this, a range of raw materials, from aluminum to preserved meat, were studied in order to see what sort of embargo Italy would be especially vulnerable to. The report concluded that Italy would be able to access any embargoed materials by trading with non-member states. Even coal and oil, vital to the Italian war effort, were said to be obtainable from Germany and the United States.²²⁵ But the report warned that these mild sanctions would not prevent Italy from conquering Ethiopia unless the war took many years.²²⁶ In line with these suggestions, the League sanctions forbid the importation of any good produced in Italy. It also prevented member states from selling any transport animals, rubber, bauxite, aluminum, iron ore, scrap iron, nickel, tin and other minor materials to Italy.²²⁷

²²² Cited in *Ibid.*, 38-39.

²²³ *Committee of Imperial Defense: Advisory Committee on Trade Questions in Time of War*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-24-257-CP-186-2.pdf> (accessed November 3, 2012), 1.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-8.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

²²⁷ *Dispute Between Italy and Abyssinia*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-24-257-CP-200-3.pdf> (accessed November 3, 2012), 4-6

The League released the final designs for sanctions on October 19. Even before they went into effect, they were already being criticized as not being strong enough. Walter Riddell, the Canadian delegate to the League, began this criticism when he suggested that oil, coal, iron, and steel be added to the list of forbidden products to be shipped to Italy. This was said at a meeting of the Committee of Eighteen, the body responsible for planning sanctions, on November 2, and the repercussions of his suggestion were immediately felt.²²⁸ In Hoare's words, "the proposal, once made, forced the issue into the forefront of the League discussions."²²⁹ Within Britain, the idea of an oil sanction quickly became the major rallying point of those who were pro-League. Several MPs, including those of Labour, who wished to criticize the foreign policy of Baldwin, demanded that the Government hurry to impose oil sanctions on Italy.²³⁰ By December 2, the Cabinet was fretting over the fact that pro-League sentiment from other countries was beginning to lower Britain's prestige: "All the member states of the League except ourselves had expressed their willingness to support the oil sanction... we were being reproached that we led in sanctions until the moment when our own interests were affected."²³¹

Indeed, the matter of oil sanctions was the biggest dilemma the British faced during the Italian-Ethiopian crisis. Riddell was quickly removed from Geneva by the Canadian Government for his exuberant idealism, "a victim of the fear of involvement and of the risk implied by this expansion of sanctions."²³² However, the attitude he had unleashed could not be stopped. Under pressure from within Britain and without, the British soon realized that an oil sanction would have to be imposed lest the League be seen as weak and fall into disgrace. "The only thing [left]

228 Baer, *Test Case*, 66-67.

229 Hoare, 177.

230 Waley, 45.

231 *Meeting of the Cabinet to be Held at 10, Downing Street, S.W.1., on Monday, 2nd December, 1935, at 3.0 p.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-23-82-cc-50-35-18.pdf> (accessed November 3, 2012), 6.

232 Baer, *Test Case*, 67.

to be done was to settle the date" that such a sanction would go into effect.²³³ The British, who had previously advocated the maximum possible sanctions, and who had seen themselves as dragging along a hesitant League to protect Ethiopia, now found themselves to be behind the other member states.

A meeting of the Committee of Eighteen was called to meet on November 29 to discuss an oil sanction. Laval immediately went to Clerk and begged him to ask Hoare to get the League to delay the meeting.²³⁴ Clerk suspected that Laval feared that Mussolini would declare war on Britain if an oil sanction were imposed.²³⁵ Hoare was happy to agree to this request, and promised "before November 29 no further attempt should be made to fix a date, and that the matter will be reconsidered at some subsequent date at M. Laval's convenience." Hoare also knew that the press would demand to know why Britain was adopting delaying tactics, and immediately began planning excuses.²³⁶ At Britain and France's requests, the Committee agreed to delay a meeting to discuss oil sanctions until December 12.²³⁷

Why were the British suddenly so eager to prevent the League from imposing harsh sanctions on Italy? At first glance, these delaying tactics might seem to be proof that the British Government, like the French, had come to care more about protecting relations with Italy than saving Ethiopia. But if this was true, it would fly in the face of the strategy of preserving the League through protecting Ethiopia that they had pursued until now. In fact, the British were still in favor of keeping the League of Nations afloat and still believed that only if Ethiopia was saved from Italy would the prestige of the League remain intact. As late as December 6, Vansittart was

²³³ *Meeting of the Cabinet, 2nd December, 13.*

²³⁴ "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received November 23, 8.40 p.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 247.

²³⁵ "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received November 23, 8.5 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 248.

²³⁶ "Sir S. Hoare to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)" in *Ibid.*, No. 252.

²³⁷ *Meeting of the Cabinet, 2nd December, 21.*

telling the French Ambassador that Italy must not obtain all it wants in Ethiopia, lest the League "be destroyed or [become] so stultified that its practical existence be terminated."²³⁸ If such an event was to occur, the League would never be able to protect the peace of Europe from an aggressive Germany in the future.²³⁹ No, the British were not abandoning their pro-League policy. Rather, they had come to the conclusion that an oil sanction would very likely doom Britain to fight a war with Fascist Italy.

As mentioned above, the fear of a "mad dog act" from Mussolini had been haunting the British ministers for months. Yet this fear, as evidenced in the frequency it appears in Government documents, became even more acute during this period. Vansittart had a conversation with an Italian general, who repeatedly warned him that Mussolini would attack Britain in an act of desperation if oil sanctions were imposed. Grandi also warned that such an act would lead to an end to all diplomatic relations between Italy and Britain.²⁴⁰ Drummond reported rumors that the Vatican was convinced an oil sanction meant war.²⁴¹ Hoare himself admitted there was a strong possibility of such an attack occurring, and even began to worry that if the mild sanctions already in effect damaged Italy's economy too much, a war would start.²⁴²

Though Eden himself would later insist that he had never thought such fears were anything more than fantasy, he admitted that a belief that a European war would result from oil sanctions caused the British to delay the meeting of the Committee of Eighteen. "Hesitation [was] corroding the British attitude," as Hoare began to believe that an oil sanction, once it went

238 "Record by Sir R. Vansittart of a conversation with the French Ambassador" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 324.

239 *Ibid.*

240 "Record by Sir R. Vansittart of a conversation with General Garibaldi" in *Ibid.*, No. 258.

241 "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received December 6, 9.30 a.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 316.

242 Sir S. Hoare to Sir E. Drummond (Rome)" in *Ibid.*, No. 242; "Sir S. Hoare to Sir S. Waterlow (Athens)" in *Ibid.*, No. 287.

into effect, would make Mussolini less open to a deal.²⁴³ Hoare could thus "not say for certain whether it would be wise to impose the embargo on December 12th."²⁴⁴ Yet for all Eden's later claims, a memorandum drawn up by him and Hoare on November 27 laid out a worried analysis of the effects of oil sanctions. Their analysis insisted that a delay in the next meeting of the League to discuss oil sanctions was necessary to "survey the situation created by the accumulated indications from various source that an embargo on oil might possibly impel Signor Mussolini into an act of aggression on this country."²⁴⁵

This fear did not lead the British into backing down. Hoare was not opposed to the principle of an oil sanction, and was indeed hoping that the threat of one would induce Mussolini to agree to a deal.²⁴⁶ Eden insisted to the Cabinet that they must not let a delaying of the next Committee meeting break the common front of the League.²⁴⁷ Even Vansittart, who thought that an oil sanction would almost certainly lead to a war, admitted that Britain must not, like the French, try to dodge the issue. Britain must not be the one to say no to harsher sanctions, as its refusal would break the League's prestige. But he also warned that oil sanctions would be "suicidal" without a "full and concrete [military] arrangement not only with France but with the other Powers militarily concerned... I must earnestly hope that we shall not allow ourselves to be led on to any definite decision on the faith of anything but a demonstration of readiness for concrete action by all the other Mediterranean Powers."²⁴⁸ This desire to make sure that the French and other League states would be ready to back Britain up in a war with Italy was a

243 Eden, 330-331.

244 Ibid.

245 "Memorandum by Sir S. Hoare and Mr. Eden on an Embargo of Oil Supplies for Italy" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 270.

246 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir R. Lindsay (Washington)" in *Ibid.*, No. 280.

247 *Meeting of the Cabinet, 2nd December, 14-15.*

248 "Minute by Sir R. Vansittart for Sir S. Hoare" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 323.

crucial issue to the British Government. While the British thought an oil sanction was inevitable lest the League die, they were not willing to risk a war that would come from such sanctions without the military backing of France and others.

The British were very clear about the necessity of a French guarantee before supporting oil sanctions. Vansittart thought that France had proven itself to be "impotent for aught but treachery or collapse" as members of the League and was almost certain that the French would "never be able to live up to the assurances they had given us of support in the Mediterranean. The French would argue that we had brought it upon ourselves by our provocative action."²⁴⁹ He also demanded that the support of Spain, Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Romania, and Czechoslovakia be obtained before an oil sanction was considered.²⁵⁰ Hoare worried that promises by France made thus far were inadequate, and that a watertight assurance must be obtained from Laval.²⁵¹ He was also unnerved by reports from Drummond that Mussolini was convinced France would never support Britain in a war with Italy.²⁵² In a "most confidential" dispatch to the Ambassador in the United States, Hoare said that

His Majesty's Government have every intention of persevering with the policy of sanctions. In view, however, of the French political situation and of the resultant uncertainty concerning the extent to which, in the present state of French public opinion, we can rely on effective French co-operation in the event of some act of desperation on the part of Signor Mussolini, it is necessary to explore the ground very carefully before we can decide whether the sanctions already in force can be safely widened or increased.²⁵³

On December 2, the Cabinet met exclusively to discuss the matter of an oil sanction.

Hoare attempted to reassure the ministers that a war with Italy was by no means inevitable, but

249 "Letter from Sir R. Vansittart to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)" in *Ibid.*, No. 229.

250 "Note by Sir R. Vansittart to Sir S. Hoare and Mr. Eden" in *Ibid.*, No. 251.

251 Eden, 334.

252 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 256.

253 "Sir S. Hoare to Sir R. Lindsay (Washington)" in *Ibid.*, No. 263.

that oil sanctions did raise the risk of one. It was thus necessary to ensure that Britain was prepared for a war if oil was embargoed.²⁵⁴ His recommendations were that

on no account should we adopt a negative attitude to [oil sanctions]... or give any appearance of refusing our part in genuine collective action, provided that action was not going to be futile. Having taken the line that we have, and having fought the Election on it, incidentally, any other course of action would, in his view, be disastrous and indefensible. Oil was obviously an effective sanction. The more effective it was the more we should be placed in an indefensible position if, having supported what many people thought were ineffective sanctions, we now opposed an effective one...

We must, however, take every possible precaution, as follows...

We must at once clear up the position with France. [Hoare] had taken action in the manner, with some doubts in his mind as to the result. The question had been put by His Majesty's Ambassador in Paris very explicitly, as to whether we could count on France to assist us if attacked, and whether, in that event, she would regard herself as in a state of war with Italy. M. Laval's attitude had been a categorical affirmative...

At the same time we must check the efficacy of the French undertaking by adopting M. Laval's own suggestion to extend the discussions which had begun between [British and French] Naval Experts to the Army and Air Staffs...

We must press on with the peace negotiations as rapidly as possible, with a view to bringing the conflict to an end. Mr. Peterson, of the Foreign Office, was now in Paris engaged on conversations. Not much progress had been made as of yet. [Hoare] himself, however, had to go away for reasons of health for a short time, and he proposed on his journey to see M. Laval and to try and press on peace talks with him... To give a better chance to the peace conversations, the fixing of the date [of the next meeting of the Committee of Eighteen] should be adjourned for decision at a later meeting... If the discussions were going well-- and later in the meeting he expressed the view that at first this was likely to be the case-- the League Committee might meet and be told that the peace talks were going on satisfactorily, and that for that reason we and the French were not asking for the immediate imposition of an embargo.²⁵⁵

Hoare thus believed that the British Government would be forced to push for an oil sanction lest they face disgrace at home and the League appear weak. But putting oil sanctions into effect would be very dangerous and would increase the risk of war. While military preparations should be made to be ready for such an eventuality, escape from this dilemma could

²⁵⁴ *Meeting of the Cabinet, 2nd December, 4.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-9.

be sought through the making of another attempt a deal, this time by himself and Laval. If such a deal could be made before the next meeting of the Committee of Eighteen on December 12, the British would be able to use this as an excuse to delay the imposition of oil sanctions. After he made his remarks, the First Lord of the Admiralty and the Secretary of State for Air both immediately responded to him. They insisted that Britain was simply not prepared for any war, repeating the argument that Britain would suffer such huge losses as to set back plans for rearmament. Nothing should be done to risk a war until a concrete assurance of French military support was received.²⁵⁶

These two views seemed to have influenced the Cabinet, and it agreed to a policy of joint talks and military preparedness. The ministers agreed "in principle" to an oil sanction if the rest of the League agreed, but only if all possible military precautions were taken.²⁵⁷ Full cooperation between the French and British military forces should be secured, and if France did not prove willing to aid Britain, the question of an oil sanction would be reconsidered by the Cabinet. Hoare was ordered to do everything he could to secure a peaceful settlement between Italy and Ethiopia. If he was able to come up with a deal before the meeting of the Committee on December 12, the British would ask the League to postpone discussion of an oil sanction to an unspecified date in the future.²⁵⁸

Here we see the full effects the possibility of an oil sanction had upon Britain and the eventual making of the Hoare-Laval Plan. The British Cabinet saw this new development as putting them in a no-win situation. Under pressure from pro-League sentiment in Britain and idealists in Geneva, to not take part in oil sanctions would make Britain appear hypocritical. The

256 *Ibid.*, 10-12.

257 *Ibid.*, 23.

258 *Ibid.*, 23-24.

image of the nation that had pressed so hard for mild sanctions, now backing down in the face of sanctions that were sure to be effective, would doom the League to be seen as impotent. This would mark the end of the British policy to preserve the League in the hopes of using it to maintain peace in Europe and contain Germany. Yet if the British did go along with sanctions, they faced a very real possibility of a war with Italy. Such a war, or so they believed, would cripple their navy and air force just at a time when rearmament was needed to protect against the designs of Imperial Japan and Nazi Germany. These military fears were exacerbated by the continued dragging of feet by France, whose willingness to aid Britain in a war was anything but certain.

Yet in the midst of this choice between disgrace and possible war, Hoare thought he saw a way to escape the dilemma. If he was able to try one more attempt to come up with a deal that would satisfy Mussolini, Britain would be able to end the war before it was forced to agree to oil sanctions. Hoare believed the threat of an oil sanction made Mussolini more open to a deal, and the fact that the Italians had been seemingly putting out feelers for a compromise strengthened his hopes. Vansittart received detailed suggestions for a deal from an Italian general that he claimed Mussolini had told him Italy would accept. These demands asked for the same mandate terms that had been previously asked for, but Drummond informed Hoare that Mussolini was "extremely anxious" for a bargain and was willing to accept less than he had asked for previously.²⁵⁹ As a result, Hoare and the British Cabinet agreed that it was time to push with all they had for an attempt at a deal. If Britain could do this, they believed, the war would end, the League would appear to have saved Ethiopia via the principle of collective action, and no oil

²⁵⁹ "Record by Sir R. Vansittart of a conversation with General Garibaldi" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 258; "Sir E. Drummond (Rome) to Sir S. Hoare (Received November 23, 1.20 p.m.)" in *Ibid.*, No. 246.

sanctions would have to be imposed. As Hoare said to the Cabinet, he would soon be taking a vacation, and promised to meet Laval on the way to discuss terms of a new plan. This meeting would take place on December 7 and 8 and would produce the terms of the Hoare-Laval Plan.

What Happened in Paris

Though we know that the British desired a meeting with the French before December 12, how exactly the Paris Meeting came about is shrouded in a fog of misremembered memories. The major British actors all recall the matters of when Hoare decided to go to Paris and for exactly what purpose differently. Their faulty remembrances were likely based off a desire by the members of the Government to distance themselves from the Plan, the extraordinary unpopularity of which would have tarred their reputations. Eden claimed he had no knowledge whatsoever that Hoare was going to meet with Laval to develop plans for a compromise. He also said that Baldwin himself was shocked, and that the Prime Minister had thought of the meeting as a mere stopover for Hoare on his way to Switzerland, where he was having his vacation.²⁶⁰ Vansittart, who was present at the meeting, was in Paris at the time in an attempt to lessen the hostility towards Britain the French press was unleashing. He said he did not know what Hoare's instructions from Baldwin were and implies that Hoare was merely supposed to be sounding out the French, not seriously negotiating with them.²⁶¹ He thus attempted to redeem himself in the eyes of the post-war public from the strongly pro-appeasement line he took at the meeting.

Hoare himself said that he had not planned the meeting with Laval, but was only leaving Britain to get to his vacation in Switzerland. For some time, he had been having health problems,

²⁶⁰ Eden, 335.

²⁶¹ Vansittart, 538-539.

and his doctor insisted that he must take a break from his work immediately. "Only a day or two before" departing London on December 7, Laval contacted him and asked if he could meet with Hoare to discuss the Italian-Ethiopian dispute.²⁶² Hoare went on to insist that he thought the meeting would only be a general discussion and that no final plan would result from the talks. He admitted Baldwin did not give him orders to commit the Government to anything, but did at least claim that the Prime Minister told him to "push Laval as far as you can, but on no account get this country into war."²⁶³

The memoirs of these men thus paint pictures of the Paris Conference as a rather confused affair. The British Government apparently did not know the meeting would produce anything of importance, Vansittart apparently did not know what the purpose of the conference was, and Hoare apparently did not even know that there was to be a meeting until the day before. Thankfully, some evidence exists that allows us to reveal the truth. Hoare wrote a letter on December 2, well before he supposedly received a surprise invitation from Laval, asking for permission to go on his vacation. He had been having bouts of fainting, and his doctor urged him to take a break from his work. Vansittart and Baldwin had already agreed that he should take a vacation sooner rather than later, and if he left soon, he could accept Laval's request for a meeting in Paris. The letter also reveals he knew full well what the purpose of the talk would be:

If I postpone my departure, this talk will be impossible before the important meeting of the League on December 12th. I have, of course, made all arrangements for the conduct of business in my absence. The Prime Minister has decided that Eden should be in charge of the Office, but that he himself will follow any big questions that may arise...

So far as the [Ethiopian] controversy is concerned, it looks to me as though the next few weeks will be a period of intensive negotiation for a settlement. We intend to go all out for bringing the conflict to an end...

262 Hoare, 177.

263 Cited in *Ibid.*, 178.

As my visit to M. Laval on Saturday may be very important, I am proposing to take Vansittart with me. If, as I hope, M. Laval and I agree upon a basis for a peace negotiation, Vansittart will stop on in Paris for a day or two to clinch the details. I hope that His Majesty will approve of this exceptional arrangement. In the normal course the Secretary of State and the Permanent Under Secretary are never absent from London at the same time. The special importance, however, of this meeting makes, I suggest, it necessary for me to take him.²⁶⁴

This letter reveals three important facts. The first is that Hoare definitely knew there would be a meeting between him and Laval as early as the beginning of December. This is reinforced by Hoare's comment at the Cabinet meeting on December 2 that he "had to go away for reasons of health for a short time, and he proposed on his journey to see M. Laval and to try and press on peace talks with him."²⁶⁵ Secondly, the letter reveals that Hoare knew that the meeting would be more than a general discussion, as he later claimed. He recognized that the meeting would likely be important enough to warrant a breach of the normal regulations concerning Cabinet Ministers so that Vansittart might be present with him at the meeting.

Thirdly, the letter shows that Hoare was not at all reluctant to attend the meeting, and indeed, hoped that the meeting would produce a final plan for a deal between Ethiopia and Italy. In his memoirs, he said he only "weakly agreed" to the meeting because he "was so pulled down by overwork that [his] judgment was out of gear."²⁶⁶ Here, though, we see that he wanted to go "all out" in an attempt to find a final settlement and that he thought it was important to have the meeting before the meeting of the League on December 12. Further, Hoare was so enthusiastic about the possibility of a deal that he was already proposing preliminary plans for a compromise to Laval by December 5.²⁶⁷

264 "Letter from Sir S. Hoare to Lord Wigram" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 293.

265 *Meeting of the Cabinet, 2nd December*, 8.

266 Hoare, 178.

267 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Sir S. Hoare (Received December 5, 12.20 p.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 307.

It is thus certain that Hoare planned on producing a settlement at the Paris Meeting. What is less clear is whether anyone besides Hoare realized that the meeting would be so important. Though Hoare claimed that "we" intend to go all out in trying to make a deal, it would be very unusual for Baldwin to let Hoare take his vacation right at the time that the Government supposedly decided to exert its greatest effort in resolving the situation. The fact that even Hoare admits that Baldwin thought Hoare's most important task on his trip was to "get [his] health back," not make a deal with Laval, also reveals this.²⁶⁸ Further, when the Cabinet met suddenly on December 9 to discuss the Hoare-Laval Plan, they found the Plan to go "a good deal further than the earlier proposals of the Committee of Five."²⁶⁹ That there are no mentions of the upcoming Paris Meeting in the documents of the Foreign Office except by Hoare and Clerk also shows that the rest of the Government was not expecting Hoare to produce a full plan for a settlement so early.

Undoubtedly, as shown earlier, the Government wanted serious discussion for a deal to start before December 12 so that it could delay the imposition of oil sanctions. The ministers also knew that there was to be a meeting between Hoare and Laval, but seem to have been surprised that Hoare worked so fast, rather than merely starting discussions. The fact that they went on to accept the terms the Hoare-Laval plan, though, shows that they approved of his work. Their surprise must not be confused with dissatisfaction, as Eden would later claim.²⁷⁰ Baldwin and the rest of the Government, besides Eden, Vansittart, and Hoare, had long kept their distance from the Italian-Ethiopian dispute. The Prime Minister had been, in Eden's words, a "passive listener,

²⁶⁸ Hoare, 178.

²⁶⁹ *Meeting of the Cabinet to be Held in the Prime Minister's Room, House of Commons, on Monday, 9th December, 1935, at 6.0 p.m.*, <http://filestore.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pdfs/small/cab-23-82-cc-52-35-20.pdf> (accessed November 3, 2012), 2.

²⁷⁰ Eden, 343.

rather than an active contributor," to all discussions about the matter.²⁷¹ Hoare said he "received little or no help from other [Cabinet ministers]. Stanley would think about nothing but his holiday and the necessity of keeping out of the whole business almost at any cost." The Prime Minister's suggestions as to what line the British should take "seemed to [Hoare] scarcely adequate to the importance of a comprehensive... policy."²⁷² The Paris Meeting, therefore, went even farther in fulfilling the desires of the British Government than the rest of the Cabinet, in its remoteness from the affair, had expected. While the Government merely desired for serious talks to begin by December 12, Hoare's enthusiasm for settling the crisis as soon as possible led to the producing the Hoare-Laval Plan at the Paris Meeting.

The meeting began at 5:30 p.m. on December 7 in Laval's office. On the British side, Hoare, Clerk, Vansittart, and Peterson were all present, while the French had Laval, St. Quentin, and two others. The discussions began with Laval insisting that an oil sanction would mean war with Italy. France would thus not agree to one unless Mussolini completely rejected any efforts at conciliation. Hoare became convinced that Laval was hinting that no help would be coming from France if Italy attacked Britain. The Foreign Secretary thus asked Laval for a decisive answer as to whether the French would join with Britain in a war with Italy, and although Laval said yes, Hoare was still certain that this aid was dependent on not imposing oil sanctions.²⁷³ Hoare assured Laval that he too wished to avoid oil sanctions and the risking of war with Italy, but that in order to do so, the talks they were to have must prove fruitful. If they were able to come up with the basis for a deal, oil sanctions could be successfully delayed.²⁷⁴ At the same time, "it was

271 *Ibid.*, 335.

272 Cited by Hoare, 164; *Ibid.*, 167.

273 *Ibid.*, 179.

274 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Mr. Eden (received December 9)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 338.

essential... to avoid impression that the League was weakening."²⁷⁵ Any deal that was to be made therefore had to be sure to preserve Ethiopian sovereignty. A compromise that went "too far would lead to the Emperor's overthrow and provoke the accusation that all the League had managed to do was to ruin [Ethiopia]."²⁷⁶

Hoare and Laval both agreed that the advance that the Italian armies had made into Ethiopia had changed the situation. Much of the Tigre province had been occupied, including Adowa. It was decided that most of Tigre would be given to Italy as part of the deal if concessions to Italy in southern Ethiopia would be reduced. Hoare thus decided not to offer the Bale province, as he had thought of doing in late November, to Italy. Both sides agreed that Ethiopia would still be given a port and path to the sea as part of an exchange, but before they could discuss any more, they were forced to retire for the night. Hoare agreed to stay in Paris for another day to continue the discussions.²⁷⁷ The Parisian press and the British Cabinet were informed that night that a meeting was going on and that a basis for a settlement of the crisis was being discussed.²⁷⁸

Discussions continued at 10:30 a.m. the next morning. Hoare insisted that the territorial concessions made by Ethiopia must preserve the appearance of an equal exchange with Italy. As such, it must be Assab, not a British port, that would be offered to Haile Selassie. Zeila would only be given if the Emperor preferred it to the Italian port.²⁷⁹ Frontier "rectifications" would be limited to parts of the Danakil and the Ogaden. The key part of the Plan would be the creation of an exclusive economic zone for Italy. Though Laval had tried to convince Hoare that this zone

275 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Mr. Eden (received December 8)" in *Ibid.*, No. 330.

276 *Ibid.*

277 Hoare, 180.

278 "Sir G. Clerk (Paris) to Mr. Eden (received December 7, 8.30 p.m.)" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 329.

279 Hoare, 180.

should be placed under an Italian protectorate, Hoare successfully convinced him that the League would never accept such an arrangement.²⁸⁰ In the end, plans for this zone were very similar to the proposal put forth in the Peterson-St. Quentin Draft. The zone would be in the south of Ethiopia, in a purely non-Amharic zone, with its borders being the 8th parallel north and the 35th meridian west. Italy would be given an economic monopoly on all large-scale agricultural and industrial ventures within this zone, subject to League oversight and an annual fee it would pay as an "expenditure of a social character for the benefit of the native population."²⁸¹ Hoare was convinced that offering Italy a large zone for economic opportunities would content Mussolini and his desire for colonial expansion.²⁸²

The final terms of the Plan thus gave Italy territorial concessions in Tigre, the Danakil, and the Ogaden, along with an economic monopoly, though not a mandate, over much of southern Ethiopia. In exchange, Ethiopia would receive the port of Assab, or Zeila, if the Emperor preferred, and a corridor to the sea. In line with the terms of the 1906 Anglo-French-Italian Treaty, France's railroad monopoly would be preserved, as Ethiopia would not be allowed to build a railroad to its port.²⁸³ While these terms might seem harsh to an idealistic supporter of international law—after all, Ethiopia, the victim of fascist aggression, was being forced to cede a good deal of territory to its attacker—the terms of the Plan were very much in line with earlier attempts at finding a deal, and a great deal more generous than the demands Italy had pursued. The least harsh terms Mussolini had asked for at that point included a mandate over all of the non-Amharic territory, yet Hoare was able to secure a plan with no mandates whatsoever. While

280 "Note by Sir Samuel Hoare on his conversations in Paris" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 337.

281 "Mr. Eden to Sir E. Drummond (Rome)" in *Ibid.*, No. 356.

282 "Note by Sir Samuel Hoare on his conversations in Paris" in *Ibid.*, No. 337.

283 "Letter from Sir R. Vansittart to Sir G. Clerk (Paris)" in *Ibid.*, No. 385.

a look at a map may make it appear that a good deal of Ethiopian territory was being sacrificed, only the Tigre provinces were of any great value. The Danakil lands were pure desert, the Ogaden was a dry and sparsely populated plain, and both were barely under the control of Addis Adaba anyway. Even the vast expanse of the economic zone Italy was to be given was a land "where no Italian could long survive the climate."²⁸⁴

Further, nothing in the Plan was radically outside of what the British had previously considered. As far back as June, Britain had been willing to give lands in the Ogaden to Italy in exchange for a port, and Haile Selassie had told Barton in early August that he was willing to cede the Danakil. The exclusive economic zone had been developed by Peterson in late October, and though Hoare had not liked the idea then, he now realized that if Italy was to be given much of occupied Tigre, it was better that they receive an economic monopoly than additional territory in the south. Though the British justification for giving Italy most of Tigre was weak—Hoare thought it would be unfair to the traitor rases who had switched to the Italian side if their lands were to be given back to Ethiopia—there was still much to be said for the deal.

The only aspect missing from the final terms was the idea of a League mandate over Ethiopia. Hoare did mention that such a condition could be added to the terms if the British Cabinet so desired, but he did not seem to think it was important to include.²⁸⁵ Mussolini, who had received multiple phone calls by Laval during the Paris talks, had all but agreed to accept the terms of the Plan.²⁸⁶ The Plan would have thus saved Ethiopia while maintaining the full sovereignty of the Emperor, preserved the League from disgrace, and have given Britain a chance to repair its relations with Italy without having to risk an oil sanction. In the colorful

²⁸⁴ Vansittart, 538.

²⁸⁵ "Note by Sir Samuel Hoare on his conversations in Paris" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 337.

²⁸⁶ Hoare, 179.

prose of Vansittart,

they were bad terms... but this was a bad mess, and single-handed war was the only other way out of it.

It could be argued that the proposals ceded to Italy parts already conquered and parts occupied by tribes recalcitrant to [Ethiopians]. Shorn of verbiage they meant that the aggressor was getting more than he had though less than he would take. That was enough for anathema, since the function of critics is not to do better. They could truly say that here was a grievous affair, but so was the League, and so were civilized morals, and French defences and British deficiencies in modern cruisers and submarines.²⁸⁷

As soon as the terms of the Plan were agreed upon, Hoare wrote to the Cabinet that the proposals must immediately be presented to the League. It was no longer necessary to delay the December 12 meeting, though Britain should request that it be the Committee of Five, not the Committee of Eighteen, that meet that day. Britain and France would be able to publicly assure the rest of the League that serious negotiations to end the war were underway and that discussions of oil sanctions could be indefinitely delayed. The Plan would thus preserve the integrity of the League without making it look as though oil sanctions had been abandoned for no reason. Hoare urged the Cabinet to accept his proposals at once so that Mussolini could be informed within twenty-four hours.²⁸⁸

Hoare's swiftness in making a deal caught the Cabinet by surprise. Though it had been informed that serious discussions were going on, Baldwin had to summon an unplanned meeting on December 9 to discuss the terms with the rest of the Government. Eden, for all his later protests that he had found the Hoare-Laval Plan repugnant, was its biggest advocate at the meeting. He warned that if the Plan was not accepted, it would be uncertain as to whether the French would continue to work with Britain. He also pointed out to the Cabinet, as Hoare had,

²⁸⁷ Vansittart, 540.

²⁸⁸ "Note by Sir Samuel Hoare on his conversations in Paris" in *Documents on British Foreign Policy*, vol. XV, No. 337.

that the Plan had the advantage of delaying discussion of an oil sanction.²⁸⁹ There were some criticisms that the terms were too harsh on Ethiopia, but it was agreed that they were so much more lenient than the terms Mussolini had previously demanded that they should be accepted. The Cabinet adopted the Plan with only a single caveat. Whereas Hoare and Laval had agreed to inform Italy of the terms of the Plan immediately, while Ethiopia would not hear of the terms until December 12, the Cabinet insisted that both countries were to be informed at the same time. However, Haile Selassie would be pressured to accept the terms, or at least to not immediately reject them.²⁹⁰

289 *Meeting of the Cabinet, 9th December, 2-4.*

290 *Ibid.*, 4-5.

Chapter 5: Aftermath

By December 10, the terms of the Plan had been leaked to the French press by an unknown source within the French Government. The news quickly traveled across the Channel, where it appeared in the British press and created a public outcry. From the man on the street to King George V, Britons one and all expressed their anger with a plan they saw as a betrayal of the League and the country's honor. The newspapers expressed this resentment vividly, especially *The Times*, who published the following on December 16:

The Emperor, we are told, was to be informed "at a convenient moment" (presumably, once he had recovered from the first shock of dismemberment) that he was forbidden to build a railway along his corridor. It was apparently to remain no more than a strip of scrub, restricted to the sort of traffic that has entered Ethiopia from the days of King Solomon, a corridor for camels... The suggestion seems so incredible, so completely at variance with even the most cynical interpretations of a "civilizing mission," that its origins should be investigated before there is any fresh attempts at peace terms.²⁹¹

Members of Parliament made plain their disgust as well. Labour and the National Liberals lambasted the plan, and a great deal of the Conservative Party also denounced it.²⁹² Many saw it as an explicit betrayal of the policy the National Government had advocated in the election just a month previous.²⁹³ Beyond London, the rest of the world expressed their shock with what they saw as a betrayal of League principles. At Geneva, delegates from the nations of the world felt insulted that such a drastic plan had been negotiated behind their backs. The fact that the British were committed to gaining the League's approval for the plan seemed to be no consolation. Eden was told that members of the Committee of Eighteen were asking what the

291 Cited by Baer, *Test Case*, 143.

292 *Ibid.*, 144.

293 Waley, 58.

point of sanctions had been if Italy was to be offered more than she could have achieved on her own. This might have been an underestimation of the Italian army's ability to defeat Ethiopia, but it shows how the Plan, perfectly sensible when viewed through the lens of *realpolitik*, was a shock to the idealism of Geneva. As the British and French hoped, the Plan did stop the oil sanction from being debated, as the Committee of Eighteen adjourned without action at the suggestion of the two Governments on December 13.²⁹⁴ In Ethiopia, the Emperor turned down the terms of the Plan on December 16, saying that to even consider it would be cowardly to both his people and the system of collective security.²⁹⁵

Ironically, Hoare was isolated from the outcry over his Plan. He was in Switzerland, not enjoying himself, but resting in a hospital. Upon entering an ice rink on the first day of his vacation, he promptly fainted and broke his nose. He was unable to travel for a few days due to the risk of infection, and did not arrive back in London until the damage had been done. He planned on making a speech to the House of Commons explaining the necessity of the Plan, but never got the chance.²⁹⁶ On December 18, shortly after telling Hoare that "we all stand together," Baldwin agreed to remove Hoare from the Cabinet, and the Plan was killed.²⁹⁷ The same day, the Fascist Grand Council was meeting in Rome to discuss the Plan, and was prepared to accept it. As soon as Mussolini heard that Hoare had resigned, the meeting was adjourned, and Ethiopia's fate was sealed.²⁹⁸

Throughout the period until his resignation, Hoare adamantly refused to apologize for his Plan. His final speech to the House before resigning was full of warnings that any stronger

294 Cited by Baer, *Test Case*, 131-132.

295 *Ibid.*, 135.

296 Hoare, 183-185.

297 Cited by Baer, *Test Case*, 145.

298 *Ibid.*, 142.

actions against Italy would likely lead to war, and that only the Plan he had developed with Laval would save Ethiopia and the League. He was "certain that I had done my best for European peace, and that the circumstances had been too strong for me."²⁹⁹ His final defense was made with the publication of his memoirs:

The so-called Hoare-Laval plan was the only practicable basis for a compromise to end the war that had already begun, and for the re-establishment of the Stresa front. The alternatives were either to do nothing or to face the possibility of war with Italy. Public opinion was equally opposed to either. The intensification of sanctions would not have been supported by the French unless it had been preceded by a further joint attempt to reach a settlement. Even then, there were many who believed that increased sanctions would only consolidate Italian resistance. Month by month, the truth had been forced on me that if Governments were not prepared to go to war, they must negotiate. So far as I could judge, there was not a single Government in the League that was prepared to go to war, least of all the French. That being so, it was essential to negotiate for compromise. We ourselves could, of course, have easily defeated Italy... [but] The Naval Staff, considering the crisis from a wider angle, could not have been more insistent with their warnings against diminishing or dissipating our limited strength.

It was considerations such as these that confirmed me in the view that negotiation was the only wise course, and that if it were to succeed, substantial concessions to Italy were inevitable.³⁰⁰

With the death of the Hoare-Laval Plan, no other attempt at finding a peace deal between Ethiopia and Italy was attempted. The Italian war effort, previously sluggish, picked up, and on May 2, Haile Selassie fled the country for exile in Britain. Three days later, Italian forces marched into Addis Adaba. The King of Italy was proclaimed Emperor of Ethiopia and Mussolini took the title of Founder of the Empire. Though the League had ineffectively dithered since December, continuously delaying discussions of oil sanctions while condemning Italy, Hitler's remilitarization of the Rhineland in March diverted the eyes of the world from Ethiopia to Germany. In the words of Taylor, "this was the deathblow to the League as well as [Ethiopia]."

299 Hoare, 187-188.

300 *Ibid.*, 191.

Fifty-two nations had combined to resist aggression; all they accomplished was that Haile Selassie lost all his country instead of only half."³⁰¹

The Idealistic Plan

The Hoare-Laval Plan was hastily constructed by Hoare due to the desire of the British Cabinet to delay a discussion of oil sanctions, which it was sure would mean a war with Italy. But the motivations for developing the Plan were much deeper, as they had been in place since Baldwin's Government took power on June 7. Within three weeks, Hoare, Vansittart, and Eden had agreed to offer Italy much of the Ogaden, planning on compensating Ethiopia with the port of Zeila and a path to the Red Sea. When this was rejected by Mussolini, who demanded annexation of most of Ethiopia and a mandate over the rest, the British spent the next few months preparing for the coming war. At the same time that they were exploring the opinion of France and the League as to what sanctions should be applied against Italy, they were still working on developing a compromise. Though many historians have seen this as proof that the Baldwin Government was only pretending to support the League to keep the support of a pro-League British public, both of these actions had the same desire at their base: to preserve the League of Nations.

Hoare, Vansittart, and Eden all were committed to keeping the League alive, and the only way to do this was to save Ethiopia. If collective security failed and Italy triumphed, the League would be forever disgraced. The nations of Central and Eastern Europe, seeing that economic pressure could not save a weak nation from being swallowed by a strong one, would realize that

³⁰¹ Taylor, 94.

the League, and the British and French Governments behind it, would not be able to protect them from Nazi Germany. The British Government saw the League as a vital interest of Britain's, and without it, the tenuous peace in Europe would again be subject to international anarchy and power politics, rather than international law. At the same time, Hoare came to the conclusion that France, many of the other League states, and powerful non-member states would never support the harsh economic pressure against Italy that could possibly stop her from defeating Ethiopia. The Government thus decided to send Peterson to Paris to attempt another compromise. The Peterson-St. Quentin Draft was quite similar to the Hoare-Laval Plan, but it was largely ignored as a result of the Government's shift in focus to November election.

By the time the election ended, the British had become inclined to believe that harsh sanctions, especially that of oil, would lead to war with Italy via Mussolini committing a defiant and suicidal "mad dog act." At the same time, the idealism of most League states, which had lagged behind the British until November, suddenly and unexpectedly blossomed into strong support for oil sanctions. The British were caught in a dilemma. There was no way they could publicly refuse to join in oil sanctions without humiliating the League, which would kill the doctrine of collective security and British hopes of using it to resist German aggression. But to join in oil sanctions would lead to a war that would weaken British power precisely at the moment, with Japan and Germany making their aggressive intentions clear, that it was needed most. After delaying discussions of oil sanctions at the request of the equally-worried French, Hoare and the Cabinet came to the conclusion that another attempt a deal could save them. If serious talks to end the war began by December 12, the next time sanctions were to be discussed, the British could likely convince the League to delay the imposition of oil sanctions for some

time. Hoare proved even more successful in this task than the Cabinet expected, reaching agreement with the French on a comprehensive deal on the way to his vacation in Switzerland. The Cabinet approved of the Plan unanimously, yet before Mussolini could agree to it, the leak of the Plan caused a public relations disaster that led to Hoare's resignation, the death of the Plan, and a failure to save Ethiopia.

The Hoare-Laval Plan was thus based on an idealistic desire to preserve the League viewed through the lens of pragmatism. Unlike the French, who were much more committed to a military alliance with Italy than the vague promises of collective security, the British were committed to saving the League, and consequently needing to save Ethiopia. At the same time, unlike the idealists in Britain who thought any concessions to Italy would mean rewarding aggression, Hoare realized that unless the British were willing to back up their words with force of arms, Italy need to be negotiated with. It was not cynicism that birthed the Plan, but idealism. To save the peace in Europe, the League needed to be saved. To save the League, Ethiopia need to be saved. And to save Ethiopia, lacking the will to go to war to do so, Britain needed to negotiate a compromise with Mussolini.

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