AN INFINITE SCORN
THE FAILURE OF ANGLO-FRENCH DIPLOMACY IN THE ABYSSINIAN CRISIS OF 1935-1936

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AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

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Vienna, 19 May 2025

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Abstract

Western nations share an interest in preventing Russian subjugation of Ukraine but have differing and competing priorities for their limited resources, including political capital – and therefore, a collective action problem.

I examine a historical case of what I argue is another (failed) collective action - British and French failure to effectively respond to Italian aggression against Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935-1936. The failure of the League of Nations to implement meaningful sanctions against Italy was seen as a test case for the principle of collective security, and for the willingness or ability of France and Britain to oppose revanchism in Europe.

I use classical realist theories of the effects of actors within states – bureaucracies, public opinion and individual decision-makers – and collective action theory to identify the main causes of Anglo-French policy failure and to draw lessons for today's problem of European security.

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Faults, of course, are mine.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

"Let us have a dagger between our teeth, a bomb in our hands, and an infinite scorn in our hearts."

Benito Mussolini

Western nations share an interest in preventing Russian subjugation of Ukraine. A Russian victory would do grievous damage to the post-1945 prohibition on conquest, embolden revanchist and imperialist states everywhere, and present Europe with an aggressive, militarily powerful threat. But Western nations also have differing and competing priorities for their limited resources, including political capital – in other words, a collective action problem.

In this thesis, I examine a historical case of what I argue is another (failed) collective action – the British and French failure to effectively respond to Italian aggression against Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 1935-1936. Following Italy's 1935 invasion of Abyssinia, a member of the League of Nations, the League responded slowly and ineffectually, so that Italy was eventually able to conquer and annex it. The failure of the League to implement meaningful sanctions against Italy was seen as a test case for the principle of collective security[1], and for the willingness or ability of France and Britain to oppose revanchism in Europe.

The case presents lessons for contemporary policy makers. In contrast to the more studied appeasement of Germany, especially during the Czech crisis, this is a case that has been largely overlooked by IR scholars and, to a lesser extent, historians. As in the case of contemporary Ukraine, multiple levels of analysis are required to understand why the aggressor was neither co-opted nor deterred in 1935. I show how structural realist theories balancing are inadequate to explain the historical outcome, and why the effects of actors

[1] Collective security is a system in which each state accepts that the security of one is the concern of all, and agrees to join in a collective response to threats to, and breaches of, the peace ("Collective Security," 2013).

within states – bureaucracies, public opinion and individual decision-makers – undermined collective security in 1930s Europe.

Why the Abyssinian crisis?

This thesis looks at the Abyssinian crisis because it closely parallels contemporary Europe. Since policy makers often look to history for lessons, the Abyssinian crisis is likely to offer more useful lessons than better-known but less relevant cases.

Of all the crises in the 1930s that led to the Second World War, Italy's threats against Abyssinia, and then its full-scale invasion in October of 1935, represent the closest analogue to Russia's attacks against Ukraine in 2014 and 2022. Other crises of the 1930s either did not actually involve war (German rearmament, reoccupation of the Rhineland, the *Anschluss*, the Czech crisis); were civil wars (Spain); or took place far away where European states could ignore them (Manchuria). In contrast, the large-scale invasion of Abyssinia was, like Russia's attack in 2022, an unambiguous act of open aggression – the first by a European power since the First World War, just as Russia's attack was the first since the Second World War[2]. Then, as in 2014 and still more in 2022, an act of open aggression came as a shock – a challenge to a widely held assumption that war in Europe was unthinkable.

The parallels are deeper: Western powers had allowed their armed forces to atrophy over the preceding decade of peace, leaving them with limited options for response. There is also a parallel in the manner in which the great powers negotiated among themselves and over the heads of the victims of aggression. "An attempt is being made to try to find the minimum demand of Signor Mussolini without the slightest regard to the minimum demands of the people at Addis Ababa. I believe the demands of the people of Abyssinia would be complete

[2] The scale of Russia's aggression in Ukraine – involving hundreds of thousands of invading troops - so greatly exceeds earlier, limited, Russian actions in Georgia and elsewhere that it has no precedent since the Second World War.

independence and complete liberty." (UK Hansard, 22 October 1935). Finally, as in the present Ukrainian crisis, the international community, and especially European states, struggled to act collectively – ruling out military action from the outset and relying on sanctions which were implemented with varying degrees of commitment.

There are of course important differences: Russia's status as a nuclear power today constrains the international community in a way that did not exist in 1935. As well, today Russia is both the aggressor and principal threat, whereas in 1935, those roles were filled by two different states: Italy and Germany, respectively. The possibility of gaining Italy as an ally against Germany was an important consideration in Western (especially French) diplomacy that has no parallel today.

Today, collective security is the basis of NATO and the rationale for Western support to Ukraine. But in the interwar period, it was a new idea. Until 1935, its practical value remained an open question. The Abyssinian crisis was the event in which that question was answered for the next decade. While the League had notably failed to prevent Japanese aggression in China only the year before, the fact that Italy was a European power meant that its aggression against Abyssinia was widely seen as *the* test case – not least in Germany. British Foreign Secretary Hoare put it this way:

> *"A great experiment is being tried in the world.* ***For the first time the system of collective action and collective security is being tested in face of a great crisis****... If it succeeds, an immense gain will have been achieved for the peace of the world... If we can depend upon collective action, let us know it; if we cannot depend upon it, let us also know it"* (UK Hansard, 22 October 1935) (my emphasis).

The Czech or Munich crisis is often invoked as the most important historical parallel to the Ukrainian crisis. But deterrence had already failed long before Munich. Having noted the failure of the Western allies and the League to respond to his previous provocations, Hitler could probably not have been deterred by the Allies in 1938. But he was certainly deterrable

in 1935. Albert Speer writes that it was *the Abyssinian crisis* that persuaded Hitler that the West was weak:

> "*From this[Anglo-French failure to defend Ethiopia] Hitler concluded that both England and France were loath to take any risks and anxious to avoid any danger. Actions of his which later seemed reckless* ***followed directly from such observations****. The Western governments had, as he commented at the time, proved themselves weak and indecisive*" (Speer 1970, 72) (my emphasis).

The consequences of bungled and conflicting Anglo-French diplomacy in the Abyssinian crisis set the stage for the later failures to come: Collective security was tested and found empty, the Western powers were discredited and demoralized, Germany was emboldened, and Italy was pushed from a vaguely anti-German position to becoming an Axis ally (Shirer 1991, 289).

We can only speculate as to counterfactuals, but it seems entirely possible that had Italy been compelled to back down by the Western powers, who certainly had the capability to do so, if not the will, Germany might have been deterred from its later aggression. Alternatively, if the Western powers had blocked action at the League of Nations and given Italy a free hand against Ethiopia, it is possible that Italy would have remained anti-German and *that* might have deterred Hitler. Explaining why neither of these strategies was followed requires an analysis of domestic factors operating inside the two Western powers.

Research question

Why did French and British fail to enforce collective security in the Italian conquest of Abyssinia in 1935-1936?

I approach this question from the framework of neoclassical realist theory to identify the main causes of Anglo-French failure in the crisis, and draw lessons for states seeking to enforce collective security in the case of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Chapter 2 - Literature gap and theoretical explanations

Literature gap. There is a large body of IR literature addressing the problem of appeasement. Unfortunately, almost all of these works are focused on Anglo-German diplomacy, especially over the period of British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain's premiership (1937-1940). Structural realist IR scholars such as EH Carr and John Mearsheimer ascribe the failure of collective security to misplaced idealism – asserting that states will never place the common interest above their own. The Abyssinian crisis, however, presents some difficulties for this interpretation.

As Peter Jackson has explained, French historiography has focused on explaining France's shocking defeat in 1940 and the subsequent trauma of occupation and collaboration (Jackson 2006). These themes naturally situate analysis on the internal workings of the Third Republic – on concepts such as decadence, guilt, betrayal and weakness. Anglo-Saxon historiography has likewise tended to accept the image of a decadent France as being somehow a subordinate player in the 1930s. Shirer's *The Collapse of the Third Republic* is typical. Young's *France and the Origins of the Second World War* devotes just eighteen pages to French diplomacy (hardly mentioning Italy) with the remaining 130 pages examining political and economic decline.

The Abyssinian crisis in particular has received rather little attention from scholars. Treatments by historians include Laurens' *France and the Italo-Ethiopian Crisis 1935-1936*, Frank Hardie's *The Abyssinian Crisis*, with its emphasis on internal League of Nations politics and workings from (again) a British perspective, and George Baer's very good *Test Case – Ethiopia and the League of Nations* – perhaps the only book-length study of Anglo-French diplomacy over this period. Finally, Noel's memoir *Les Illusions de Stresa* covers the first part of the crisis. All of these works, however, are framed as diplomatic history rather than IR analysis.

In addition to these historical works, all more than fifty years old, there are a number of more recent articles covering aspects of the crisis. Again, most of these examine British diplomacy without reference to IR theory (O'Mahoney 2018; McKercher 2023; Roi 1995; Dutton 2005), but Holt, as well as Trubowitz and Harris, have pointed to the influence of domestic politics on British appeasement generally and in the Abyssinian case (Holt 2011; Trubowitz and Harris 2015). Those scholars examining French policy in this period tend to focus on the French military (Thomas 1998; Kier 1995; Geyer 1991) or economic and larger strategic factors (Blasberg & Martinego 2019), ignoring the question of collective security. Haslam has looked at the crisis from a Soviet perspective, taking a realist view that British self-interest defeated collective security (Haslam 1984).

Theoretical explanations of failure

It is important to recall that in 1935 the main strategic threat in Europe was from Germany, not Italy. (Japan represented a second major challenger for Britain, but not for France). The Abyssinian crisis was therefore viewed by both powers in terms of how it affected their ability to confront Germany and, for Britain, Japan. Dutton quotes Austin Chamberlain[3] as declaring in 1936 that "The Italo-Abyssinian dispute is a side-issue, and most of us, whether sanctionist or not, are thinking more of the danger threatening from Germany."(Dutton 2005). There are two main explanations for the failure of collective security in the 1930s:

1. Liberal internationalist theory tells us that the Allies[4] failed to deter Italy (and eventually Germany) because the collective security regime was not credible. Credibility would have required demonstrating the power of the League of Nations to deter or defeat Italian aggression.

[3] Neville Chamberlain's older brother.
[4] France and Britain, once and future allies, were not technically allied in 1935, but the term makes for a useful shorthand.

2. Structural realist theory states that collective security failed because both Britain and France prioritized balancing against Germany (Carr 1940). The Allies blocked meaningful action against Italy at the League hoping to gain Italy for an anti-German coalition.

In the event, neither theory by itself explains the failure. France and Britain each attempted some combination of both policies, with Britain emphasizing collective security and the League, while France prioritized preserving good relations with Italy. The tension between the two policies is obvious. Italy could not be simultaneously confronted and appeased. This is the core reason for Anglo-French failure to enforce collective security. The Allies attempted a blend of two incompatible policies and so failed at both.

While neither liberal nor structural realist theory can account for British and French policy failure, it can be explained by neoclassical realist theory. Neoclassical realism is a theory that, like other realist theories, accepts the primacy of power as the main variable in international relations, but unlike structural realism, sees power mediated through the particular domestic characteristics of states such as perceptions of leaders, bureaucratic influences etc. Structural realism can explain Allied attempts to appease Italy in 1935, but not British efforts to enforce collective security, or French hesitancy to ally with Italy. These require consideration of factors internal to those two states. As well, Britain's unwillingness to impose truly coercive measures on Italy, despite having committed itself to collective security, requires an analysis of domestic factors, bureaucratic interests, and free-riding. Taking these together, I will show that four factors interacted to produce failure in the Abyssinian crisis: a perceived need to balance Germany, domestic politics (including the character and biases of individual leaders), bureaucratic interests, and free-riding. Because I

blend both systemic structural causes (balancing and free-riding) with state-level (domestic political and bureaucratic) influences, this is a neoclassical realist approach.

A perceived need to balance against Germany. Realist theory posits that states in a multipolar system will either balance against a threatening power or bandwagon (align) with it (S. M. Walt 1985). Although there are reasons why states may elect to bandwagon, structural realists argue that balancing is the more common strategy because it is safer (a state that bandwagons remains at the mercy of the power with which it aligns) and because a state may expect more influence inside a balancing coalition (where it is presumably needed) than a junior partner would have in a bandwagoning coalition (where it may not be needed). Balancing is seen as the main strategy of status-quo powers as it is essentially defensive, whereas bandwagoning may be attractive to states which see an opportunity to share in the spoils of a successful aggressor (S. Walt 1987, 5; Waltz 1979, 126).

Domestic politics. Structural realist scholars such as Mearsheimer and Waltz devalue internal factors as drivers of international behavior. But over the last generation or so, significant scholarship has refuted this, arguing that many cases cannot be understood without accounting for domestic drivers of policy - whether individuals or institutions within the polity (bureaucratic or commercial interests, political movements etc.) Schweller has theorized that underbalancing can be explained by elite consensus, regime vulnerability or social cohesion (Schweller 2006). Putnam's seminal article on two-level games with its idea of leaders needing to build domestic support for international policies demonstrates the importance of domestic coalitions (Putnam 2009; Conceição-Heldt and Mello 2017; Lida 1993; Trumbore 1998; Inoguchi 2010). The two level-game concept also meshes well with Fearon's bargaining model of war and crisis, and its concept of audience costs as a form of commitment (Fearon 1995; Partell and Palmer 1999). On the other hand, Trachtenberg tested audience cost theory with a number of historical examples including the interwar period and

concluded that audience costs, while real, were rarely key drivers of state behavior (Trachtenberg 2012). Certainly, audience costs did not deter the British Cabinet from walking back previous statements of strong support for the League in 1935.

Bureaucratic interests. As argued by Allison in his seminal *Essence of Decision*, one way of thinking about governments is as groups of individuals in agencies with some ability to take decisions or influence the decisions of others. Those individuals take different views of issues depending on the perceptions and priorities of the particular segment of the bureaucracy they represent - "Where you stand depends on where you sit". He identifies organizational repertoire as another way of looking at decision-making, but I am persuaded by scholars such as Bernstein who argue that the two ideas are a bit fuzzy and overlap to a significant degree (Bernstein 1999; Bendor and Hammond 1992). Elements within the bureaucracy will have their own habitual ways of thinking and acting, as well as their preferred policy outcomes. State policy therefore becomes a kind of compromise among groups of actors (Allison 1971). The "deep state" image in contemporary populist politics is a reframing of this concept as conspiracy.

Perceptions of free-riding. As noted by Olsen in *The logic of Collective Action*, individuals enjoying a non-exclusive good have an incentive to free ride, if possible, or pass on some of their costs to other members (Olson 1971, 14). Posen has described French and British diplomacy in the Munich crisis as a case of two allies each passing the buck[5] to the other (Posen 1984). Christensen and Snyder have argued that buck-passing was more probable under conditions in which states perceived a defensive advantage – as was the case in the inter-war period (Christensen and Snyder 1990). Mearsheimer has argued that buck-passing

[5] Buck-passing is an attempt to shift costs or risks onto another actor – as opposed to classical free-riding, which is non-payment of one's share of the costs for a public good. For simplicity, I refer to both behaviours as free-riding.

was not only rational, but the most common response to a rising challenger. Closely tied to his theory of the stopping power of water, he argues that offshore balancers such as Britain or the United States had a natural incentive to buck-pass from their relative security behind water barriers. He cites British (and French and Soviet) interwar diplomacy as well as US late entry into both world wars as examples of buck-passing (Mearsheimer 2003).

Combining the critical factors. French policy in the crisis was overwhelmingly driven by the need to balance against Germany and a failure to enforce collective security. Factors such as the interests of the armed services and the personal character of key leaders reinforced this imperative.

For Britain, the opposite choice was made: Domestic political concerns drove *failure* to balance Germany, and a need to show support for the League and collective security. Public opinion won over Cabinet even though every other argument pointed the other way: Strategic considerations – the need to balance Germany and Japan – implied preserving good relations with Italy. The bureaucracy and armed services all counseled appeasement of Italy. With few exceptions, the key personalities were personally either skeptical of the League, or actively seeking to appease Italy. Of all the factors influencing British policy, only public opinion demanded support for the League - and yet that became British policy. I will show, however, that policy *as actually implemented*, continued to be shaped by strategic and bureaucratic pressures to avoid war.

Approach and Methodology

I take the positivist view that there are objective factors that led to the failure of collective action against Italy in the Abyssinian Crisis. The multipolar structure of European security in the 1930s as well as the basic strategic problem of a rising Germany lend themselves well to realist theories, but I also believe that the individual and public or bureaucratic perceptions

were important factors in shaping policy (Waltz 1954). Hence, I combine structural and state levels of analysis in a neoclassical realist approach.

Process-tracing is a method of testing alternative theories against one or more cases to either test theories or, as in this paper, explain historical outcomes. Using historical research, memoirs, and elite discourse of the day as data, I divide the crisis into pre-and-post invasion case periods. I then use process tracing to examine possible explanations for Anglo-French decisions in each case period to show that, while perceptions of free-riding were the proximate causes of ultimate policy failure, theories of domestic influence are needed to understand the complete outcome: First, domestic politics drove Britain's failure to balance against Germany as structural realism would have predicted. Secondly, domestic influences created the perceptions of free-riding that resulted in a failure of collective security.

Finally, drawing on my military experience, I include an actual game as an appendix. In military studies, rigorously designed wargames are routinely used as a tool to study historical problems and test plans. Diplomatic and policy professionals are also increasingly using them. The attached game is a simple model of the policy dilemmas faced by French and British leadership in the Abyssinian crisis.

Chapter 3 – Case study

Background to the crisis. In January 1935, fascist Italy was far from being the German ally it would later become. Rather, Italy presented itself as the guarantor of an independent Austria *in opposition* to Nazi Germany and through the early months of 1935 worked to create an anti-German alliance with France. But Italy was hardly a status quo power. Mussolini's territorial ambitions in the Mediterranean were not secret. Nevertheless, because it had been a wartime Ally and opposed German claims on Austria, Italy was seen as a credible potential partner for France and Britain, especially after Franco-Italian rapprochement began in earnest (Duroselle 1985).

Ethiopia, then also known as Abyssinia, was the only indigenously-ruled state in sub-Saharan Africa and a member of the League of Nations. After taking power in 1922, Mussolini sought territorial acquisitions for Italy as a means of national aggrandizement and Ethiopia appeared to offer the best remaining chance for Italian expansion. The possibility of war was viewed as an advantage by Mussolini. Fascist thought glorified strength, discipline, sacrifice and viewed war as a noble test of these. In Mussolini's words:

> *"Fascism .. discards pacifism as a cloak for cowardly supine renunciation in contradistinction to self-sacrifice. War alone keys up all human energies to their maximum tension and sets the seal of nobility on those peoples who have the courage to face it. All other tests are substitutes which never place a man face to face with himself before the alternative of life or death."* (Mussolini 1932)

A war with Ethiopia offered the possibility for glorious conquest. Serious planning for some form of action began in late 1934, following a series of border incidents (Laurens 1967, 18). Ethiopia took the dispute to the League of Nations, where each side accused the other of aggression. Mussolini believed that European states would view war with Ethiopia as a colonial conflict rather than a breach of European peace, but he nevertheless made an effort to gain the support or at least neutrality of Britain and France as the two leading members of

the League. Since they were fellow colonial powers, wartime Allies, and shared his desire to contain Germany, his expectation was not unreasonable.

For their part, Western leaders were trying to navigate what today would be called a polycrisis: economic catastrophe, revisionist powers challenging the status quo, dynamic new ideologies subverting democracy, and accelerating changes in military technology, science, and culture. As British Foreign Secretary Hoare put it in parliament, "..we are faced with one of the most complicated and difficult situations that has confronted us since the War." (UK Hansard, 1 August 1935). Initially, therefore, Anglo-French leaders saw Mussolini's threats against Ethiopia as merely a distraction from their larger polycrisis – one which they hoped to quickly resolve. After Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, however, the crisis became acute and presented them with a dilemma – a choice between enforcing collective security or balancing against Germany. To trace the path of failure in both of these incompatible policies, I break the crisis into two case periods.

Case period 1 - Early diplomacy in the developing crisis

Britain and France hoped that a friendly Italy would contribute to a balancing coalition against Germany by continuing to oppose German efforts to undo provisions of the Versailles treaty – in particular, Austrian independence from Germany. Italy had in fact played a key role in foiling an attempted Nazi coup in Austria the year before. Moves towards Franco-Italian rapprochement had been developing since 1933 (Duroselle 1985, 39). In July 1934 they gathered momentum after an attempted German-sponsored coup in Austria. In the aftermath, discussions between France and Italy accelerated with a view to containing German expansion. Relations reached their zenith with a visit by the new French Foreign Minister, Pierre Laval, to Rome in January 1935. Agreements were signed on a number of bilateral irritants, and in the course of a private dinner, they reached some unrecorded

agreement on Ethiopia. Mussolini later claimed that Laval agreed to give Italy a free hand in Ethiopia, while Laval claimed that only economic interests were discussed. Given their personalities, either man could have been lying. Equally, given Laval's tendency to ambiguity, they may have genuinely misunderstood each other.

There is extensive evidence that at this stage Italy genuinely sought an alliance with France (and, if it could be had, Britain). Following Laval's visit the French military attaché in Rome reported multiple proposals from the Italian General Staff to deepen cooperation by developing joint plans against contingencies such as German moves on Austria or the Rhineland. The two states began sharing intelligence and agreed to stop spying on one another. In Paris, the Italian Embassy pressed to formalize an alliance (Young 1984). But willing as the French military was, the French government stalled and equivocated. Especially, the bureaucracy at the foreign ministry on the Quai d'Orsay was hesitant. Led by the Anglophile Alexis St-Leger[6], the diplomatic corps worried that an Italian pact would undermine existing French agreements with the "Little Entente" of Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania. Duroselle notes that, on 20 February, Laval told the High Military Committee "It's important not to answer Rome's advances too quickly. We must keep the conversation going… Our position with Italy is excellent. She is ready for every military, naval and economic agreement, but we must be cautious with Belgrade." (Duroselle 1985, 96). Tellingly, Laval took the same coy approach with the Soviet Union. Exactly as he did with Mussolini, he publicly negotiated - even signing a security pact - but refused to commit to full alliance (Steiner 2011, 94).

While Mussolini was pursuing France, he also made overtures to Britain. To obtain from Britain the same free hand he believed he had obtained from France, Mussolini démarched

[6] Winner of the 1960 Nobel Prize for Literature.

London on 27 January seeking to discuss "matters of mutual interest including Ethiopia". He received no reply, and apparently took silence as consent (Baer 1976, 3). To all appearances, the British Cabinet was indeed uninterested. No Cabinet discussions took place. The Foreign Office formed an interdepartmental committee to study the matter *six weeks* after the démarche, and it did not report its findings until June.

Beginning in February, Italian public diplomacy became increasingly threatening towards Ethiopia. In the meantime, Mussolini invited France and Britain to meet with him at Stresa, with a view to formalizing a balancing coalition against Germany. He must have reasonably supposed that if the British government had any concerns over his declared ambitions in Ethiopia, they would be communicated in person at Stresa. Noel, who was present at the conference, writes that the issue was never discussed (Noel 1975, 82). Instead, the British delegation at Stresa, averse to any treaty that might commit Britain to a continental war, was focused on watering down Italian and French proposals for a firm anti-German commitment. Despite press coverage of the important new three-power "Stresa Front", very little of substance was agreed. Nevertheless, Italy came away convinced that it had a free hand in Ethiopia, while the meeting underlined German diplomatic isolation and was seen as worrisome in Berlin.

Because war had not yet broken out, the early months of crisis did not have the public profile they were later to acquire. This meant that a negotiated settlement of some kind (presumably including significant gains for Italy) was still a plausible solution for the Allies. If they had succeeded in deterrence, Italy could have been successfully appeased without the need to unambiguously test the credibility of collective security. League prestige and credibility would still have been damaged, but that of France and Britain less so – certainly far less than they were in the historical outcome.

Through the later spring and summer of 1935, European diplomacy was dominated by the issues of German revanchism and the possibility of Italian aggression in Ethiopia. Italy built up large forces in Africa while rebuffing initiatives from the League, Britain and France aimed at peacefully solving the crisis. As predicted by realist theory, a need to balance against Germany led France to attempt appeasement of Italy (as a means to keep it in an anti-German coalition), while at the same time performatively declaring its support for collective security (as a means to preserve good relations with other allies). Britain, however, committed itself increasingly to support for the League and collective security even though such support risked alienating Italy from an anti-German coalition. Britain's failure to prioritize balancing Germany as structural realism would predict, and to support the League even at the risk of war, requires the inclusion of domestic factors.

Throughout the interwar period, influential actors such as the League of Nations Union, church leaders, major daily newspapers, and the Labour Party advocated for disarmament and support for the League of Nations, which many saw as linked. In 1933, the Oxford Union famously passed the following motion: "That this House will under no circumstances fight for its King and country". And in 1934 the League of Nations Union organized an unofficial referendum, informally known as "the peace ballot" in which 11 million voters expressed overwhelming support for the League, disarmament, and economic sanctions against aggressors (Thompson 1981).

In January of 1935, the government of Britain was dominated by the Conservative Party under Stanley Baldwin[7]. Baldwin had little interest in foreign affairs and, like Chamberlain after him, based his foreign policy on the assumption that British voters were deeply fearful of war. Neither Baldwin nor Chamberlain personally placed much faith in collective

[7] Baldwin would replace MacDonald as Prime Minister in June of that year.

security. Chamberlain in particular was skeptical, and his views were probably representative of many Conservatives. Nevertheless, electoral considerations persuaded the government to publicly declare its support for the League (Strang 2008). Schweller suggests that for Britain's ruling conservatives, fear of class conflict overrode fear of war (Schweller 2006, 71).

While the peace ballot was unofficial, it persuaded Baldwin's Conservatives that electoral success and political stability demanded strong support for collective security and the League. In the Conservative Party manifesto for the 1935 election, the League was therefore the first of 12 policy planks, beginning with the words "The League of Nations will remain, as heretofore, the keystone of British foreign policy." ("Conservative Manifesto" 1935).

As noted by Davidson, in April, the head of Britain's diplomatic corps, Permanent Under-secretary Robert Vansittart, informed the Italian ambassador that "English public opinion would be decidedly against Italy" and so Britain would be obliged to support the League against her. He repeated much the same warnings at a subsequent meeting in May. Davidson notes that despite repeated British efforts to signal resolve, diplomacy was conducted in private. Private diplomacy entails no audience costs. As predicted by bargaining theory when audience costs are low, signaling is weak. Italian leadership therefore underestimated British resolve. Meanwhile, Italian diplomacy – public threats by Mussolini, mobilization etc. - built up significant audience costs and made climb-down more difficult (Davidson 2014).

In June, Britain stunned its Stresa partners with the announcement that it had signed a bilateral naval agreement with Germany in which Germany agreed to limit its future construction of warships[8]. The agreement, which had been negotiated in secret without

[8] In fact, the 'limits' imposed on Germany were far above anything Germany was capable of building in the next ten years, and so were no limits at all.

consulting or even informing France or Italy, produced outrage in Rome and Paris. It was seen as a betrayal of the Stresa Front, especially as it provided that Germany could build a submarine fleet in violation of the Versailles treaty. The move ended German diplomatic isolation at a stroke and seriously damaged Britain's credibility in Paris and Rome[9]. The agreement presents another difficulty for structural realism: Instead of balancing against a rising threat, Britain effectively sided with it in this agreement. Britain's reasons for concluding the naval agreement with Germany are beyond the scope of this paper, but the perception of betrayal and dishonesty that the agreement left in Italy and especially France contributed to later French perceptions that Britain was attempting to pass the buck to France.

Also in June, the British Foreign Office finally received the secret report commissioned to study the Ethiopian issue. The report concluded that "there were no such vital interests in and around Ethiopia as would make it essential for His Majesty's Government to resist an Italian conquest" (Baer 1976, 4). The Italian secret service had obtained a copy of the report[10]. It must have further confirmed to Mussolini that he had nothing to fear from Britain.

A week later, in an effort to mend fences with Italy and avert a choice between Italy and the League, Under-Secretary of State for League of Nations Affairs, Anthony Eden met Mussolini in Rome with proposals for enhanced Italian influence in Ethiopia and economic concessions. He was rebuffed. In the course of his visit, Eden formed a deep dislike for the bombastic Mussolini ("a complete gangster") and became persuaded that fascist Italy must eventually ally with Germany. Mussolini, proud of his working-class roots and disdainful of polished aristocrats like Eden, disliked him in turn (Noel 1975, 31). His regime took to

[9] To add further insult to France, the agreement was signed on the 120th anniversary of the Battle of Waterloo, in which British and Prussian armies had together defeated France.
[10] Fascist Italy had one of the best intelligence services in Europe and was reading British and French diplomatic traffic (Steiner 2011, 698).

referring to Eden as "public enemy number one" (Mallett 2000). Given Eden's role as chief diplomat for the British government during much of the crisis, the mutual hostility between them could only be an obstacle to negotiation.

With the failure of Eden's attempt to negotiate an off-ramp, and forced by domestic politics to support the League, Britain began to consider supporting more coercive measures against Italy in the event of an invasion. The League could impose sanctions, from token to severe, or even take military measures such as a blockade of Italian ports, with the risk of war increasing in proportion to the severity of the sanctions. Domestic politics demanded that Britain support the League, even though strategic and bureaucratic interests required that Britain avoid war with Italy. The compromise policy therefore adopted was to outwardly declare support for whatever the League might decide, while encouraging the League to take only modest measures less likely to provoke war. Nevertheless, British planners considered Mussolini to be unpredictable, and so they began prudent planning in the event that support for the League led to an unintended war with Italy.

Structural realism suggests that foreign policy is driven by inter-state power relationships alone, regardless of the particular domestic character of the state. Yet the dominant effect of domestic politics in forcing British policy towards confrontation with Italy is clear when we consider that bureaucratic interests – the Foreign Office, Treasury, Colonial Office, and the armed services - all argued for the appeasement of Italy over support for the League. At the Foreign Office, Permanent Under-Secretary Vansittart was an ardent anti-German and pro-Italian. He consistently argued for the need to enlist Italy into a coalition against Germany. The other departments had congruent interests and preferences: As Schweller notes, the armed forces had been underfunded throughout the 1920s and the early 1930s for fear of triggering a financial crisis (Schweller 2006, 71). Defence spending did begin to rise in the mid-1930s, but given the long lead times required to refurbish and grow armed forces,

Britian's military was ill-prepared to confront Italy in the crisis. Furthermore, as Holt has detailed, the majority of British generals and admirals were politically conservative - sympathetic to Mussolini personally and to Italian colonial ambitions (Holt 2011). As a result, the British service chiefs, like their French counterparts, favoured the appeasement of Italy.

The Colonial Office saw no conflict of interest with Italy in the horn of Africa. It was principally concerned with the emerging Japanese threat against British possessions in Asia, and saw the preservation of a secure line of communication through the Mediterranean and Suez canal as a strategic imperative (McKercher 2023). In this, it was supported by the navy, which assumed that the bulk of the fleet would be needed in Asia in the event of war with Japan. Since the Italian navy and air force could easily close the central Mediterranean, the Royal Navy viewed the possibility of conflict with Italy as a double disaster: It would cut the short route to Asia, while creating a powerful new enemy against which significant forces would need to be committed (Haggie 1974).

As noted by Roi, in view of the continuing Italian buildup in East Africa, British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare briefly considered closing the Suez canal to Italian traffic. But Hoare lacked experience of foreign affairs and so he leaned heavily on his civil service staff, led by the influential Vansittart. Throughout the crisis (and afterwards), Vansittart argued for firm containment of Germany and appeasement of Italy as a potential ally (Holt 2011). He characterized closing Suez to the Italians as "inconceivable" on the grounds that it would "put Italy for keeps into the arms of Germany, and thereby probably have contributed to the undoing of Europe and of ourselves" (Roi 1995).

On July 6th, in a speech before assembled troops Mussolini declared that "…we are involved in a struggle of decisive importance and that we are immovably decided to follow it through

to the end" (Roi 1995). Italian-Ethiopian arbitration talks in the Hague fell apart. In the beginning of August, British, French and Italian diplomats met in Geneva leading to a proposal including economic and territorial concessions to Italy. These were again rebuffed. An Italian attack on Ethiopia now appeared probable.

As the crisis moved towards war, public awareness of it in Britain grew, increasing pressure on the government to support the League against Italy should she become an aggressor. Since an Italian invasion was likely to result in the League imposing sanctions, and since the Italian reaction to such sanctions was unpredictable, British diplomats pressed France for military and diplomatic support in the event that sanctions led to an unwanted war with Italy. On the 22nd of August, Britain deployed warships from the Home Fleet into the Mediterranean in its first open signal of resolve. At the beginning of September, France reluctantly but privately agreed to support limited sanctions against Italy, should the League invoke them, and to provide military support in the event of war. Aware of the secret French commitment, Mussolini began to hedge his bets by making initial steps towards rapprochement with Germany (Steiner 2011, 129). Britain and France further agreed that sanctions should initially exclude those products most likely to seriously hurt Italy, notably oil, on the grounds that they might provoke war and that limited sanctions would suffice[11] (Baer 1973).

On the 11th of September, with a British election approaching, and increasing public calls to defend the League, British Foreign Secretary Hoare gave a speech at the League assembly in Geneva in which he declared that Britain would be "second to none in its intention to fulfil .. the obligations which the Covenant lays upon it", while pointedly adding that "If the burden is to be borne it is to be borne collectively." (subtext: *Looking at you, France*) (FM Hoare

[11] The consensus assessment at the time was that Italy would need about two years to conquer Ethiopia.

speech to the League, 11 September, 1935). Two days later, under pressure from British, Soviet, and Little Entente diplomats, Laval reluctantly but publicly committed France to support the Covenant alongside Britain. On the 27th, conscious of the imminent election, the British parliament voted unanimously to authorize the imposition of sanctions against Italy in the event of aggression.

On October 3rd, Italian armies invaded Ethiopia.

Analysis of Anglo-French policy in period 1. In Chapter 2, I identified two broad policy approaches which Britain and France could have taken towards the crisis, either of which might plausibly have deterred *German* aggression: support for collective security through the League, or siding with Italy with a view to building a coalition to balance Germany. Structural realist theory suggests that both states should have pursued the second approach and French policy did indeed prioritize it. The Franco-Italian agreement in January and the Stresa Front in April represented important steps in this direction. Right through the crisis, French policy sought a settlement that would provide Mussolini with some kind of a "win" and avoid damaging relations. Only under pressure from Britain (and to a lesser extent, other states) did she commit herself to uphold the Covenant in the event of aggression. Even then, French diplomats continued to delay League decisions where they could by, for example, referring them to committees.

Structural realism cannot explain, however, either Britain's prioritizing of support for collective security, or French failure to follow through with an Italian alliance in January and February. If enlisting Italy against Germany was the aim, why did France slow-walk Italian initiatives towards full alliance in the first months of 1935? Not because it conflicted with support for the League - at that early stage, neither France nor Britain expected a crisis over Ethiopia. The subject was not even raised at the Stresa conference. The French armed forces

and Colonial offices were eager, although the Quai d'Orsay was opposed. The reason provided by the Quai d'Orsay and Laval himself was a need to first reconcile Italy with Yugoslavia, which was hostile to Italy and already allied with France. But this seems a rather weak argument. Italy was a much stronger potential ally than Yugoslavia. While attempting to reconcile the two would be good policy, there is no reason that it could not be pursued at the same time as accepting Italian proposals – none of which were aimed at Yugoslavia or required France to go back on her commitments to the Little Entente. The only factors that seem to explain French hesitation are found in domestic politics.

In France, domestic politics influenced diplomacy by incentivizing equivocation. While 1930s Britain was ruled by large and stable national unity governments, France was a politically divided state constitutionally constrained to weak government – what Duroselle labeled "the structural instability of Executive power in France" (Duroselle 1985, xxx). Between 1932 and 1940, France had sixteen governments, while Britain had just three. The far right and far left were stronger in France than in Britain, giving French politics a more revolutionary character, and social conditions were conducive to revolutionary politics during the Great Depression. Wages were low and urban poverty was deep. Widespread strikes and demonstrations (and counter-demonstrations) against the austerity of the right-wing government took place throughout the summers of 1935 and 1936 (McCaullife 2018, 158).

Schweller has theorized that structural instability meant that French governments were focused more on their own domestic survival than on foreign affairs. They were incentivized to lowest-common-denominator measures, even inaction, as a means to avoid the collapse of fragile coalitions. Excepting the communists, French parties were themselves undisciplined, with the result that individual personalities played an outsized role (Schweller 2006, 76). As predicted by models of two-level bargaining, attempts at forming international alliances were complicated by domestic constituencies that supported different foreign partners –

communists insisted on the Soviets, the hard right hated the Soviets and favoured Italy, liberal centrists preferred to trust in the League, and realist centrists favoured some combination of Britain and smaller allies such as the Little Entente. The armed forces favoured alliance with Italy while the Quai d'Orsay was Italophobic (Noel 1975, 37). A stronger Foreign Minister might have overridden the bureaucracy and rallied public opinion around a balancing strategy. The evidence is that Laval's predecessor, the dynamic Louis Barthou, had done exactly this in working towards a Franco-Soviet alliance in defiance of right-wing opposition[12]. But Laval, while part of the same centre-right coalition as Barthou, was famous for his reluctance to commit to anything, typifying the tentative style in French policy [13].

The personalities and biases of key individuals can have important effects on their decisions. In particular, Pierre Laval was the principal French leader throughout most of the crisis[14]. His character and preferences are highly relevant. Noel, who knew him personally, describes him as undoubtedly intelligent, but a poor diplomat. He gave an impression of cunning, which worked against him: "Largely, he inspired mistrust." (Noel 1975, 158). He was inclined to appeasement by nature and as policy. In 1931, he remarked "We will always be neighbours of Germany. We face the alternative of reaching agreement with her or clashing every twenty years on the battlefield." (Warner 1969, 23)[15]. In pursuing rapprochement with Italy, Laval was also fortunate to enjoy a good personal relationship with Mussolini - they were both from working-class backgrounds with a man-of-the-people persona (Noel 1975, 31)[16]. Unlike Mussolini, however, Laval's style was one of equivocation and imprecision. In the words of Duroselle, "He wasn't a man of clear-cut decisions but rather 'everybody's

[12] Had Barthou not been assassinated in October 1934, it is possible that France would have assembled an impressive anti-German coalition in 1935.
[13] Noel, who worked in his staff, reports that he avoided signing even routine documents (Noel 1975, 34).
[14] First as Foreign Minister and, from June 1935, Prime Minister (while retaining the foreign office portfolio).
[15] Warner's sympathetic biography portrays him as a man ahead of his time whose views then became today's European elite consensus.
[16] Both men had begun as socialists and moved to the right.

friend'" (Duroselle 1985, 87). His unwillingness to sacrifice rapprochement with Italy, and his aversion to clear commitments led British leadership to distrust him and contributed to British perceptions of French free-riding.

The bias towards indecision of the French government and of Laval personally, are the best explanations for French failure to finalize an alliance with Italy in early 1935. The temptation to defer decisions which might invite criticism must simply have carried the day. I can think of no better explanation, and it is consistent with Laval's conduct of diplomacy in other cases.

Domestic policy is likewise needed to explain British diplomacy in the early period. Driven by electoral concerns, and reinforced by the bureaucracy's advice to avoid war, Britain attempted to follow a double policy of support for the League and negotiations to defuse the crisis. As the crisis evolved, warnings were sent to Italy but were made through diplomatic channels in deliberate secrecy. The only signal of resolve sent to Italy was the decision to reinforce the Mediterranean forces in August. Instead of matching Mussolini's threats with firmness, public diplomacy towards Italy emphasized Britain's desire to avoid conflict. Then too, while declaring its support for the League, Britain was at the same time advising Ethiopia to make concessions and offering some of its own - even offering to give up territory in British Somaliland. The Duce ruled a state in which public opinion was managed rather than followed, so it seems likely that he underestimated its effect on British policy. He was aware that the British Foreign Office had secretly determined that Britain had no interests at stake in an Italian Ethiopia. Being well-informed of the preferences towards appeasement of the British bureaucracy in general, Mussolini must have concluded that British warnings were not credible.

British implementation of its double policy was half successful in this early phase. Britain publicly supported the League and earned credit for its principled stance at home and internationally. But she failed to achieve the second half of the double policy, averting war through negotiation, because British diplomatic signaling was weak and inconsistent. The failure to raise the issue of Ethiopia at Stresa, when Italian climb-down was still possible, was a serious error, as later noted by Vansittart (Roi 1995).

Case period 2 - Diplomacy from the outbreak of war to the end of the crisis

Following Italy's invasion, the League declared Italy the aggressor and voted to impose sanctions, initially excluding key commodities such as oil, steel, iron and coal. At the League, a French suggestion supported by Britain referred consideration of additional sanctions to committee. Mussolini threatened that if oil sanctions were approved they would be considered an act of war and British planners took his threats seriously (Parker 1974). The French parliament had been in recess since July, but after it resumed in November, Laval's government was forced to concentrate on domestic politics, where he faced continuous opposition to his austerity measures. Despite having declared French support for the League in September, Laval's government, increasingly unpopular, was teetering and unable to guarantee support for Britain in the event of war. As reported by Parker, on 23 November the British embassy in Rome cabled "there is a strong belief here that if Italy attacks us we shall receive no material help of any kind from the French and that if a French government tried to give us military, naval or air support, civil war in France would ensue." (Parker 1974). As Strang has detailed, British leaders had concluded from their own studies that oil sanctions would not actually cripple Italy's economy[17]. Suspecting that if it came to war France might

[17] The consensus today is that oil sanctions would have severely hurt Italy .

pass the buck and leave Britain alone, they concluded that the risk of imposing oil sanctions did not justify any effect they might have (Strang 2008).

The influence of mutual mistrust. In contrast to structural realism, which discounts individual personalities as irrelevant, neoclassical realism considers that the perceptions of leaders mediate their understanding of the international system. In the case of the Abyssinian crisis, Franco-British cooperation was not helped by personal animosity and bias on both sides. British leaders recognized that France was the most important friendly power in Europe, but broad, if vague, anti-French views were common across the British aristocracy of the time. These were rooted in cultural differences and centuries of historical enmity. Memory of the wartime alliance against Germany could never create myths to compare with centuries of struggle against France in the 100 Years War, or the wars against Louis XIV and Napoleon. Indeed, instead of a shared victory, the Great War was seen as a tragedy for which France was at least partially to blame. Lord and Lady Astor, fascist admirers and owners of *The Times,* were famously anti-French, as was former Prime Minister David Lloyd-George. Baldwin, Chamberlain and Hoare, while not actually hostile, viewed France as unreliable.

For their part, Laval and sections of the French press returned the favour. As Noel reports, Laval "despised the English, who he misunderstood and underestimated." His personal manners, which Noel describes as those of a sly peasant, appalled his British counterparts and were exactly the kind that would least inspire their trust (Noel 1975, 158)[18]. While the French public was not generally Anglophobic, Anglophobia became an increasingly real element in French domestic politics during the crisis. Anger over the Anglo-German naval pact was still fresh. On 16 October, a British diplomatic cable noted "the extraordinarily hostile attitude of a large part of the French press and public" (Parker 1974).

[18] Baldwin is said to have remarked "I like M. Laval. He reminds me of the peasants I meet vacationing in Aix-les-Bains". (Noel 1975, 52)

There were some prominent British leaders with Francophile views such as Churchill and Austin Chamberlain but they were all out of power during the crisis. Duroselle names Eden as the only leading member of the British Cabinet at the time friendly to France (Duroselle 1985, 155). Throughout the crisis, but especially when the question of oil sanctions was being debated, France continued to withhold unequivocal support in the event of war with Italy. Between Laval's personality and latent anti-French views among British leadership, mutual distrust must have reinforced the perception that each power was seeking to pass the buck to the other.

The Hoare-Laval pact. In early December, desperate to resolve the crisis before the League imposed oil sanctions, Hoare and Laval made a final effort to appease Mussolini with an offer that saw Italy annexing half of Ethiopia outright with the remainder turned into an Italian protectorate along the lines of Egypt or Morocco. Mussolini was prepared to accept the pact, but on 9 December the details were leaked[19]. There was public outcry in both France and Britain in reaction. Critics rightly observed that the plan rewarded Italian aggression and had been negotiated in secret without even Ethiopian awareness. Having campaigned only months before on support for the League, the British Cabinet hastily (and falsely) denied it had approved the plan[20]. Hoare took the fall, resigned, and Eden replaced him (Holt 2011).

Path dependency and audience costs (domestic and international) began to make a reversal of policy impossible for either side and effectively killed the hope of keeping Italy within an anti-German coalition. The possibility of oil sanctions, the failure of the Hoare-Laval pact (including the appointment of Eden as the new Foreign Minister), and rising anti-Italian sentiment internationally persuaded Mussolini that he needed other allies. According to Steiner, on 28 December Mussolini declared that the Franco-Italian pact negotiated in

[19] Probably by an official in the Quai d'Orsay.
[20] The British Cabinet unanimously approved the plan on 9 December – the same day the plan was leaked.

January was defunct. On 9 January he spoke with the German ambassador about the possibility of a non-aggression pact that would "bring Austria into Germany's wake" (Steiner 2011, 129). Laval's government, facing growing defections from within its coalition, resigned in January and a caretaker government was appointed pending elections. It had no mandate for any major policy decisions and so was incapable of agreeing to anything, much less the use of force, for the remainder of the crisis.

Dénouement. By January, Italian armies were increasingly gaining the upper hand over Ethiopian forces. British military studies had estimated that Italy would need two years to defeat Ethiopia, but they had not considered the possibility that Italy would use chemical weapons. Now, faced with the increasing prospect of a swift Italian victory and a humiliation for the League, British leadership reversed its previous opposition to oil sanctions. On 25 February, the British Cabinet voted to endorse them at the League and again sought a clear promise of French assistance in the event of war with Italy. French diplomats gave the same answer they had given in the fall – Would Britain be prepared to apply the same principles of collective security in the event of German aggression? In view of the increasing likelihood of a German move to remilitarize the Rhineland, this was, as they suspected, a commitment Britain was unwilling to make[21].

On 7 March, German forces marched into the Rhineland in violation of the Versailles treaty. As reported by Steiner, Hitler was persuaded that the Allies were weak and distracted, and so he moved up his timetable. There is abundant evidence that, had France chosen to oppose the occupation with force, the German High Command would have withdrawn[22]. But France was unwilling to do so without British support. And Britain refused (Steiner 2011, 144).

[21] The British Cabinet was instead hoping to negotiate with Germany, trading reoccupation of the Rhineland for arms limitation agreements.
[22] The initial German occupation force was tiny – just a few battalions.

By the end of April, Ethiopia was defeated. On May 9th, Italy annexed Ethiopia and the war was over. The League had failed spectacularly and was, henceforth, discounted as a factor in European security (Steiner 2011, 131–36). Collective security had been tested and found ineffective. As reported by Steiner, Chamberlain wrote in his diary "Our whole prestige in foreign affairs at home and abroad has tumbled to pieces like a house of cards." (Steiner 2011, 125). One by one, over the month of June, individual members of the League dropped sanctions against Italy. On July 4th, the League voted to abandon all sanctions.

Persuaded that bandwagoning with Germany held more promise than a coalition with a demonstrably weak France and Britain, Mussolini henceforth inclined increasingly towards alliance with Germany. Mack Smith cites his "growing contempt for the French and the British. A contempt that greatly increased when he saw the ineffectiveness of sanctions and their inability to prevent his conquest of Ethiopia." (Mommsen & Kettenacker editors 1983, 261). In July, at the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, the two fascist powers intervened in support of Franco's Nationalists. In October, they signed the Rome-Berlin Axis of diplomatic cooperation.

Analysis of Anglo-French policy in the later phase. The Hoare-Laval pact represented the last opportunity for following the appease-Italy-to-balance-Germany approach to the crisis - the approach *actually* pursued by both Allies up to that point. This was consistent with French policy from the beginning, but was *not inconsistent* with Britain's dual approach (support the League and seek a negotiated settlement) in the lead up to invasion. Until Italy actually invaded Ethiopia, even a pro-Italian settlement could have been framed as a decision of the League. Given Britain's need to keep the Mediterranean open and the strong desire of the bureaucracy to avoid war, proposals like the Pact would have been strategically desirable while still being politically acceptable in Britain. In fact, similar proposals were made several times through the summer of 1935.

Once the League had branded Italy an aggressor, however, even if the Pact could have been cloaked in a League decision, it would clearly have meant a triumph for Italy and the abandonment of collective security by the Western powers. Obviously, the Allies were willing to accept this or they would not have negotiated the pact in the first place. They must have calculated that the domestic political costs could be made acceptable by skillful diplomacy and public relations (Steiner 2011, 124). They were wrong. Instead, public reaction to the leaked details of the pact forced a panicked repudiation.

After the failure of the pact, Italian alignment with the Allies was effectively foreclosed. However, a more limited version of balancing, keeping Italy neutral, still remained as an option. The alternative approach, collective security, also remained an option until Italian victory seemed imminent, but would have required extreme measures on the part of the League such as oil sanctions or closure of the Suez canal to Italy. As it had throughout the crisis, France favoured even a weak balancing coalition against Germany and did what it could to pursue that policy. French diplomats continued to delay discussions over oil sanctions and, since they represented a caretaker government, were unable to promise to support Britain in the event of war with Italy.

As Italian victory loomed, Britain prepared itself to risk war as the cost of preserving the credibility of the League (and its own). The British Cabinet had unanimously approved oil sanctions and proposed them at the League, fully understanding that they might lead to war. The Allies would have won a war eventually, but losses to the Royal Navy in particular would have required years to replace, risking Britain's ability to balance the German and Japanese navies. In the event that a defeated Italy remained hostile, the line of communication through the Mediterranean would need to be protected indefinitely, requiring still more forces.

Yet Britain was prepared to risk this with French support. In the face of French delays at the League, however, and its unwillingness to guarantee military support, Britain declined to bear the costs of fighting alone. In other words, Britain *was prepared to prioritize collective security* but was *forced by a complex set of factors* to reject that option.

The proximate cause was French inability to offer a firm guarantee of support. Had France done so, Britain had been prepared to risk war. In other words, British belief that France was free-riding tipped the scales. I have already shown how the need to balance Germany and the various interests of the British bureaucracy argued for appeasement of Italy rather than war. The perception that France was free-riding was the last straw.

But that perception was to a great extent driven by domestic factors such as British elite bias, the character of Laval, the endemic weakness of French governments, and France's own mistrust of Britain. After the fall of Laval's government, the French caretaker government had absolutely no mandate to support a war alongside Britain, but even under Laval, France was concerned that Britain was in fact the one free-riding.

Overall summary of Anglo-French diplomacy.

Throughout the crisis, by slow-walking oil sanctions and excluding closure of the Suez canal or a military blockade, the Western allies prevented any League measures that might actually have compelled Italy to negotiate a settlement. France's need to build a balancing coalition against Germany is perfectly congruent with this policy. It required that France avoid a breach with Italy (or Britain). But Britain's declared support for collective security and the League seem incompatible with it. The arguments for such a policy made by British leaders and the bureaucracy were above all based on fear of war with Italy, especially in the absence of certain French support. War would be a strategic disaster, creating a new enemy power

astride the Mediterranean route to Asia. And finally, given the strength of pacifist opinion in Britain, war and casualties would be politically disastrous.

In summary, while Britain's *declared* policy was one of support for the League, its de facto policy was one of war avoidance first, and support for the League second. The simplest way to avoid war would of course have been to block any action against Italy at the League and win Mussolini's gratitude. But British public opinion required the government to demonstrate its support for the League and opposition to aggression. *Faute de mieux*, Britain adopted a policy of outwardly strong, but in reality limited, support for the League. That policy did allow Britain to avoid war with Italy in the short term, but could not provide the leadership needed to make collective security work. And by pushing Italy towards alliance with Germany, it failed to avoid war with Italy in the longer term as well.

French policy was likewise conflicted. Forming a balancing coalition against Germany was the dominant strategic objective. Britain, the Soviet Union, and Italy were the most valuable potential allies, and France had reached out to all three in the months before the crisis, although smaller states such as Belgium, Poland, or the Little Entente were still useful allies when taken together. Of these actual or potential allies, however, all supported the League against Italy to some greater or lesser degree. France could not afford to alienate them all by failing to do likewise. It therefore adopted a policy of free-riding: publicly supporting the League, while working to avoid paying the diplomatic and military costs. French hopes that a settlement could be reached without seriously damaging Franco-Italian relations proved empty and, as its free-riding became apparent, it damaged relations with Britain as well.

At the beginning of this thesis, I identified four factors contributing to the failure of Anglo-French diplomacy in the crisis: A need to balance against Germany, domestic politics,

bureaucratic interests and free-riding. The first three drove policy outcomes that led to perceptions of free-riding, which in turn led to policy failure.

Balancing against Germany. French, and to a lesser extent British, efforts to preserve good relations with Italy throughout the crisis were driven by the need to balance Germany (and, for Britain, Japan). The Stresa Front suggested the possibility of creating a strong coalition against an isolated Germany, while losing Italy meant not only a weakened coalition but the possibility (as transpired) of Italy aligning with Germany instead. French diplomacy aimed consistently to keep Italy friendly, but even British diplomacy sought a more limited version of this: As a maritime island power, Britain was less concerned with balancing Germany *on the continent* than avoiding Italy becoming a new enemy astride the Mediterranean route to Asia. Britain deduced that, with French help, it could match the German and Japanese navies without the (powerful) Italian fleet. The addition of Italy *on the other side* of the ledger, however, alongside Germany and Japan, would be a strategic fiasco.

Domestic politics. On the British side, domestic politics in the form of pacifism, liberal ideals, fear of class conflict, and war-anxiety were the dominant forces shaping its (outward) policy. The Baldwin government felt that declaring, and then demonstrating its support for the League was a domestic political imperative overriding other policy concerns.

On the French side, the structural instability of the Third Republic incentivized indecision, and this was reinforced by the character of Laval as the principal French statesman during the crisis. Laval's character also reinforced suspicions of France deceit within the British Cabinet, and inclined him to mistrust British motives in turn. Mutual mistrust reinforced perceptions of free-riding on both sides.

Bureaucratic interests. Laval's dominant influence over French policy through the crisis meant that, with the exception of the Quai d'Orsay, the French bureaucracy had limited

influence. In any case, the policy preferences of the armed forces, the Colonial Office and the Treasury aligned with those of Laval on the major points – rapprochement with Italy and alliance with Britain. Even the Quai d'Orsay was in agreement on the second point, although bilateral relations were harmed by the premature leaking of the Hoare-Laval pact. The leak effectively sabotaged the pact, as was clearly intended, but reinforced mistrust of France within the British bureaucracy.

On the British side, the bureaucracy was more powerful than its French counterpart, but so also was the government. Bureaucratic concerns were therefore unable to decisively shape government policy in the face of political imperatives to support the League. Instead, the bureaucracy's preferences to avoid war with Italy shaped *the implementation* of that outward policy – notably by excluding the most powerful coercive measures.

Free-riding. France and Britain each saw the other as free-riding at a critical decision point in the crisis. Those perceptions drove policy decisions not to risk war with Italy and thus abandon any chance of compelling it. In other words, perceptions of free-riding were a critical factor in the ultimate failure of Anglo-French diplomacy.

France believed Britain wished her to abandon her pact with Italy and share the risk of a war which Britain was provoking; while refusing to promise the same support should France need it against Germany. France would likely have supported Britain against Italy in exchange for moves towards an alliance, but as long as Britain resisted any commitment, France (reasonably) saw it as free-riding behind its island moat – exactly as Mearsheimer states that offshore balancers should normally do. British duplicity in secretly negotiating the Anglo-German naval treaty reinforced this view.

Conversely, Britain believed that France sought to enjoy the benefits of collective security, friendship with Britain, and leadership in the League without sharing the risks and costs.

Britain would have been willing to risk oil sanctions, and possible war, with a firm assurance of French support. But inconsistent and vague French signals convinced Britain that France could not be relied upon. Personal and cultural prejudices reinforced these perceptions.

Summary of theoretical explanations

I have shown that some aspects of Anglo-French diplomacy are consistent with realist theory - in particular, French efforts to win Italy to a balancing coalition against Germany and Britain's reluctance to go to war with Italy. But I have also shown why it is necessary to include domestic factors such as British electoral politics, the perceptions and character of key leaders, and the influence of the bureaucracy to understand the complete historical outcome. French failure to reach a full alliance with Italy in early 1935 and Britain's increasing support for the League, even at the risk of war, can only be understood in these terms. Finally, domestic factors drove mutual perceptions of free-riding between the two Allies, and these became the final link in the chain leading to the failure of collective security. Neoclassical theory improves on purely structural realism by including these domestic factors. It provides the best explanation for the failure of collective security in this case.

Chapter 4 - Conclusion

Lessons for Western states' collective action in support of Ukraine and against Russia

The Abyssinian crisis has at least three lessons for Western states confronting an aggressive Russia today. For the purposes of this paper, I exclude the American Trump administration from "Western states" because of its declared disinterest in Ukraine, its unreliability, and the apparent irrelevance of fact, history or logic to its policy-making, in any case.

Clear signaling. Mussolini discounted Anglo-French warnings in the early phase of the crisis because they were sent privately, with small costs, and because at the same time, British and French diplomats were communicating their desire for good relations with Italy and pressuring Ethiopia to make concessions. Britain failed to even reply to Mussolini's demarche in January 1935. Laval's personal tendency towards ambiguity may also have played an important role in January 1935, by giving Mussolini the impression that he had a free hand. The failure to communicate British concerns at the Stresa conference was a critical mistake - interpreted by Mussolini as a signal he could use force. Finally, the British failure to consult or even inform its Stresa partners of its desire to negotiate the Anglo-German naval pact was an unforgivable diplomatic error. It signaled to Germany, France, and Italy that the Stresa Front was an empty façade, and that Britain's government was unreliable and self-interested.

Today, Western signaling towards Russia must be consistent and unambiguous, unless deliberate ambiguity is desired as policy[23]. Individuals, media, and think tanks will have their own views, but government voices cannot be communicating support for Ukraine at the same time that they undermine it. Pressuring Ukraine to make concessions, proposing peace terms, adopting a tone of conciliation or even friendship with Russia, or engagements with

[23] Examples might include Western responses to a Russian use of nuclear weapons, or the specific Rules of Engagement of any Western forces deployed in Ukraine.

Russia that exclude Ukraine as the principal negotiator, will all strengthen Russian perceptions of weakness in the West and therefore Russian resolve. It should go without saying that credibility starts with honesty among allies. Secret negotiations behind the backs of allies can only be devastating to trust and delightful to Russia.

A generous spirit towards allies. Mutual distrust and prejudice contributed to French and British perceptions that the other was a dishonest free-rider. A willingness to understand and accept an ally's position, even if it conflicts one's own, is a prerequisite to effective collaboration in the long term. Mere diplomatic politeness is not enough (although the Trump administration appears to believe that it is completely unnecessary). Diplomacy must actively seek to reinforce a sense of comradeship among allies – underlining shared values and goals, and highlighting those distinctive characteristics of one's allies that are admirable.

Ignore free riding. Britain ultimately allowed the League to fail because, while capable of acting alone, it was unwilling to do so without France. France allowed the League to fail because Britain was unwilling to support it against Germany. In both cases, a strategic interest in preserving peace was forgotten at least in part because of resentment at being taken advantage of. There was indeed an element of free-riding on the part of both Western allies, and yet had either ignored it and chosen to confront Italy anyway, the League *might* have prevailed, with consequences for deterring Germany.

The lesson is that Western states should not make doing what is in their interest conditional on the actions of other states. It is understandable that states do not like to be isolated. There are diplomatic and practical advantages to numbers. But if a policy is truly advantageous it should be pursued, even if some allies will not. This is particularly relevant to high-risk policy proposals such as the creation of a Western trip-wire force in Ukraine or the provision of a "back-stop" with airpower. In particular, making Western policy conditional on

American commitments would be foolish because the current US administration cannot be trusted. Finally, there is an advantage to showing courage. As shown, for example, by the campaign in Afghanistan and the NATO multinational brigades in Eastern Europe, those states that take a leadership role by accepting some risk usually earn respect and credit for it. As Shakespeare put it, "The fewer men, the greater share of honour." (Henry V, Act 4, Scene 3).

Conclusion

I have argued that France and Britain shared a common interest in preserving peace in Europe by deterring Germany. At the time of the Abyssinian Crisis there were two possible strategies for this: collective security, and a balancing coalition against Germany. Because it was the first open aggression by a European state since the Covenant, Italy's aggression against Ethiopia was seen as the test case for collective security. But defending collective security and the League threatened French and British interests in balancing against other threats. They therefore attempted to protect both the League and the Stresa Front, failing in both cases at the cost of their own credibility and prestige. In the words of Winston Churchill,

> "*We have in this matter fallen between two stools. We have managed to secure all the disadvantages of both the courses without any of the advantages of either. We have pressed France into a course of action which did not go far enough to help the Abyssinians, but went far enough to sever her from Italy, with the result that the occasion was given to Herr Hitler to tear up Treaties and re-occupy the Rhineland*." (UK Hansard, 6 April 1936.)

The failure of Anglo-French diplomacy in the crisis persuaded Hitler that the Western democracies would not fight, beginning a chain of aggression that ran through the Rhineland, Austria, Czechoslovakia, and finally Poland. Each success reinforced his confidence in Western weakness until, of course, he finally miscalculated. But the chain began in Abyssinia. In August 1939, as he threatened war over Poland, Hitler reminded his generals

that Britain had failed to stand up to Italy in 1935 (Steiner 2011, 136). Hitler, at least, believed that the Abyssinian crisis had lessons to teach.

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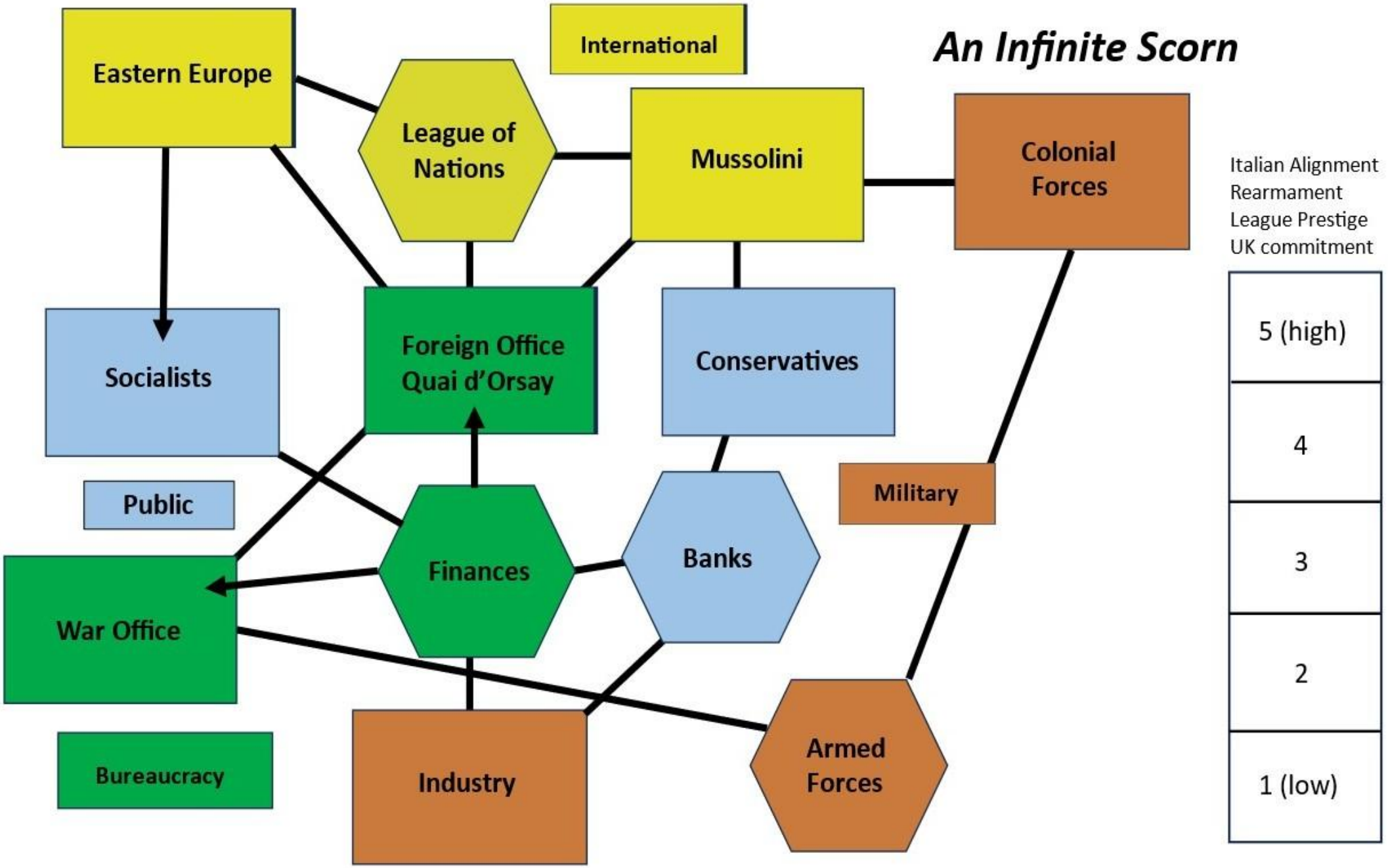
Annex A – An Infinite Scorn Game


An Infinite Scorn
Eastern Europe
International
League of Nations
Mussolini
Colonial Forces
Socialists
Foreign Office Quai d'Orsay
Conservatives
Public
Military
Finances
Banks
War Office
Bureaucracy
Industry
Armed Forces
Italian Alignment
Rearmament
League Prestige
UK commitment
5 (high)
4
3
2
1 (low)

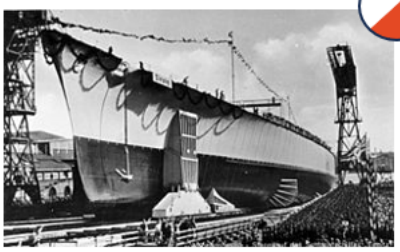
Mid crisis

1

Alexis St-Leger*

- Pay two cubes
- League prestige may not be further lowered this turn.
- The Hoare-Laval pact may not be played as an event

Early crisis



Anglo-German naval agreement*

- Lower either UK commitment or Italian alignment by 1
- If you do not control the League, lower League prestige by 1
- Stresa player may add 1 cube to War Office or Socialists
-

Early crisis

1

Anglo-French talks

- If you control Foreign Office / Quay d'Orsay, you may reveal when *German rearmament* is played as an event, to raise UK commitment by one, paying two cubes

Early crisis

1

Anti-communism

- Add up to two cubes to Conservatives or remove one from Eastern Europe
- For each of Industry and Banks you control, you may add one cube to a Bureaucracy space

Early crisis

Armed forces advise caution

- Add up to three cubes or remove a cube to/from Bureaucracy spaces
- If you control Finances and Industry, you may pay a cube from Finances to raise Rearmament

Early crisis

Bomber fears

"The bomber will always get through"
UK Prime Minister Baldwin, 1932

- Unless Rearmament exceeds the current turn number, lower UK commitment by one.

Early crisis

Anthony Eden

- If you control the League, pay a cube to raise League prestige by one and lower Italian alignment by one
- Stresa player may pay any two cubes to prevent lowering of Italian alignment

Early crisis

France seeks Eastern allies*

- If you control the War Office, you may lower UK commitment or Italian alignment by one
- Add up to two cubes or remove one to/from Eastern Europe

Mid-crisis

France trades support against Italy for British support against Germany*

- Reveal when *UK reinforces Mediterranean* or *Sanctions against Italy* is played for event to raise UK commitment by one
- League player may pay 3 cubes to block this card's effect

Early crisis

Franco-Italian pact*

- *May only be played for event in Early crisis*
- Pay a cube from Socialists or Eastern Europe to raise Italian alignment by one

Mid-crisis

French Mediterranean bases*

- Add a cube to Colonial forces
- If *UK reinforces Mediterranean* has been played as an event, and you control both Colonial forces and Foreign Office / Quay d'Orsay, you may shift Italian alignment

Late crisis

Germany reoccupies Rhineland*

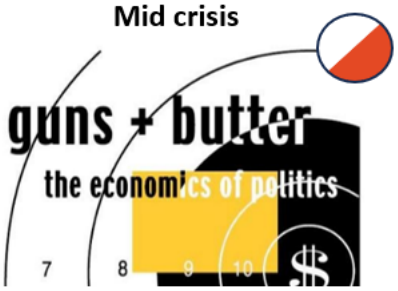
- If you control Eastern Europe you may raise Italian alignment one
- If you control Bureaucracy you may shift UK commitment by one
- You may end the game now

Early crisis

German rearmament

- Add up to two cubes to Military or Bureaucracy spaces
- If you control all Military spaces, League player must pay two cubes from Bureaucracy spaces or raise UK commitment by one

Mid crisis



Guns or Butter*

- If no player controls Finances, add or remove a cube from Finances
- The player controlling Finances must either lower rearmament by one or remove all their cubes from Public spaces

Mid-crisis

Hoare-Laval Pact*

- League player may immediately reveal *Pacifism* or *Left-wing press* to make this card have no effect
- If you control Mussolini and Quai d'Orsay, you may pay a cube from Quai d'Orsay to raise Italian alignment by one
- If you control the League you may end the game now

Late crisis

Italian victories*

- If this is the second play of Italian victories the game ends now
- Otherwise, lower league prestige by one
- You may add two cubes to any single space or remove a cube anywhere

Late crisis

Italian victories*

- If this is the second play of Italian victories the game ends now
- Otherwise, lower league prestige by one
- You may add two cubes to any single space or remove a cube anywhere

Mid-crisis

2

Italian war crimes

- Add up to four cubes to Public spaces or remove up to two cubes from International spaces
- If *UK reinforces Mediterranean* has not been played as an event, lower League prestige by one

Early crisis

3

Pierre Laval

- Add up to three cubes to one International or Bureaucracy space
- If you control the Bureaucracy and Mussolini, you may pay two cubes from Quai d'Orsay to raise Italian alignment by one

Early crisis

League deliberations

- If you control the League, you may pay a cube to raise League prestige by one and lower Italian alignment by one (choosing both or neither)
- Add a cube to an International space

Early crisis

Left wing press

- Add up to three cubes to Socialists or remove two cubes from any Public spaces
- Shift up to two cubes

Mid crisis

"Mad Dog" Mussolini

- If *UK reinforces the Mediterranean* has been played as an event this turn, war with Italy breaks out. The game ends and both players lose.
- Otherwise, add a cube to Mussolini or Colonial forces

Mid crisis

Mussolini loses patience*

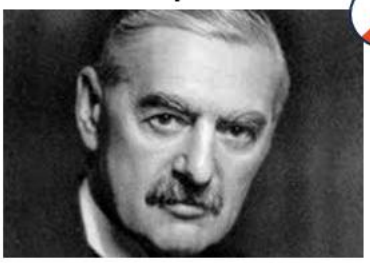
- If *Hoare-Laval pact* has not been successfully played as an event, lower Italian alignment by one

Early crisis

Mussolini

- If you control all International spaces, raise Italian alignment by one

Early crisis 2



Neville Chamberlain

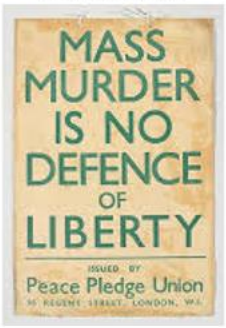
- Add a cube to Finances or Banks
- You may shift one cube
- You may reveal *Anti-communism* to raise rearmament by one
- Rearmament may not be further raised this turn

Mid- crisis 1

Oil sanctions debated

- A player controlling a total of four Public or Bureaucratic spaces may pay 2 cubes to raise League prestige by one and lower Italian alignment by one (choosing both or neither)
- If League prestige is not raised, lower it by one

Early crisis 2



Pacifism and war anxiety

- Add up to two cubes to Socialists
- Remove a cube from a Military space
- You may shift one of your cubes from a Military space

Early crisis

The Peace Ballot*

- The player controlling the League may raise League prestige by one and lower Italian alignment by one (choosing both or neither)
- If neither is chosen, lower rearmament by one

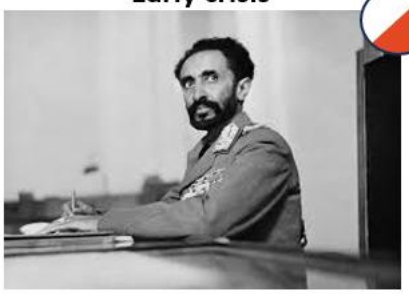
Mid-crisis

3

Sanctions against Italy

- Add up to four cubes to Banks or remove up to two cubes from International spaces
- If *Italian War Crimes* has been played as an event, lower Italian alignment by one

Early crisis



Selassi appeals to the league

- The player controlling the Foreign Office / Quai d'Orsay may pay a cube to raise League prestige by one and lower Italian alignment by one (both or neither)
- Add up to one cube to an International space

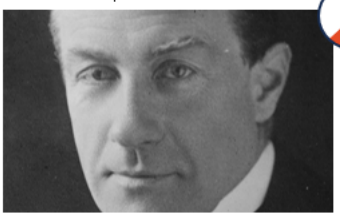
Mid-crisis

3

Stalin supports the League

- Add or remove a cube to/from Socialists
- If you control Socialists and the League, you may raise League prestige and lower UK commitment by one (choosing both or neither)

Mid crisis



Stanley Baldwin*

- If *Hoare-Laval pact* has been played as an event or blocked from being played, lower UK commitment by one
- If *Peace Ballot* has been played as an event, and League prestige is less than 4, lower UK commitment or rearmament

Early crisis

The Stresa Front*

- Raise Italian alignment by one
- If UK commitment is greater than the current turn, raise Italian alignment by an additional one
- Add one cube to Mussolini

Early crisis

2

The Great Depression

- Remove a cube from Finances or Banks
- Add up to three cubes or remove a cube to/from Public spaces
- You may shift one cube
- Rearmament may not be raised further this turn

Early crisis

1

UK White paper on rearmament*

- Add one cube to Industry
- You may shift a cube to or from a Military space
- If you control all Military spaces you may pay two cubes to raise Rearmament by one

Mid-crisis

2

UK reinforces the Mediterranean*

- If you control Colonial Forces you may pay two Military cubes to raise League prestige by one
- If you do, the player controlling Mussolini may pay two Military cubes to shift Italian alignment by one either way

Early crisis 1

Robert Vansittart*

- Pay a cube
- Italian alignment may not be further lowered this turn.

Instructions for assembling the game

1. Print the game board on A4 paper. You may find it helpful to laminate it but this is not necessary.
2. Print the cards onto A4 paper and cut around each card so that it is smaller than an A7 sized index card.
3. Glue the 37 cards onto A7 or larger index cards.
4. Print the rules.
5. You will need distinct small markers such as coins or buttons, paper clips, bottle caps, poker or bingo chips, matches etc. Any small objects will do so long as they will not easily roll on the board.
6. You will require 2 large sets (about 24-30 items) of markers – one for each player – and four unique markers to represent Italian alignment, League prestige, UK commitment, and Allied rearmament.

Rules of play for An Infinite Scorn

Table of Contents

Introduction

An Infinite Scorn is a two-player game, pitting the Stresa Front against the League of Nations in three rounds of diplomatic and political maneuvering during the Abyssinian Crisis of 1935-36. Four victory condition markers are moved up or down during and at the conclusion of each round, based on control of various map spaces. The player who has successfully completed his side's victory condition wins the game, but if neither player succeeds, both lose and fascism wins (the historical outcome).

Components required

- 24+ distinctive token/cubes of one type for each player. The terms cube and token are interchangeable
- 1 token for Italian alignment
- 1 token for League prestige
- 1 token for UK commitment
- 1 token for Allied rearmament
- 1 board
- 1 Rules of play (this manual)
- 37 strategy cards

Important Terms

Stresa ~ This player represents those actors in France (mainly) but also in Britain, who favoured a policy of appeasing Italy in order to win her to an anti-German coalition. Stresa may play events with a red colour circle or split red/white circle.

League ~ This player represents those actors in Britain (mainly) but also in France, who favoured opposing Italy in order to defend the credibility of collective security and the League of Nations. League may play events with a white colour circle or split red/white circle.

Map Spaces ~ Spaces on the board are coded by a colour/shape combination and labeled with an individual name. Each space can hold up to four of each player's tokens.

Crisis Dimension ~ A set of three same-colour map spaces. During scoring at the end of a round, a player gains advantages for each Crisis Dimension they control.

• Blue - Political dimension – the domestic politics of France and Britain (combined)

• Yellow – International dimension

• Brown – Military dimension – the defence capabilities of France and Britain

• Green – Bureaucracy dimension – the internal government politics of France and Britain

Pivotal Space ~ One space of a Crisis Dimension denoted by a hexagonal shape. (Finance, Banks, League of Nations, and Armed Forces). Control of a pivotal space allows a player a bonus movement at the end of the round.

Control ~ A player controls a space if she has more tokens on the space than her opponent. A player controls a Crisis Dimension if they control all three of its spaces.

Victory Track ~ A track on the right side of the game map where victory condition markers move.

Cards ~ A deck of cards, each listing a crisis round (early, middle or late), a title, a value with a coloured circle (red, white, or both), and an event. A card's image is for historical flavour only. Cards are played for their value during a round to add influence tokens. A card can only be played for its event if the value's coloured circle (Red : Stresa, White : League) matches that player's colour or both colours are displayed.

Value ~ The number (1, 2 or 3) at the top-right of each card which indicates the number of influence tokens a player may place on the map for the turn.

Event ~ The text on a card outlining options for the owning player, generally to add or remove influence tokens on the map, or to shift victory condition markers.

Shift ~ Some card events, control of a Pivotal Space, and control of some Crisis Dimensions allow you to move tokens. Movement is just picking up and placing the tokens in adjacent space connected to their current space by a black line. A few lines have an arrow indicating that tokens may only move along the line in one direction.

Influence Tokens ~ a set of pieces used to indicate influence in a space. The term cube is interchangeable.

Set Up

Place the board in the middle of the play area. Place the tokens representing League prestige and Italian alignment on the 3 space of the Victory Track. Place the UK commitment and Allied rearmament tokens on the 1 space.

Sort the cards by early, middle, and late crisis, setting aside the middle and late crisis until later rounds. Shuffle the deck of early crisis cards.

Game Play

The game is played in three rounds: early, middle and late crisis. At the beginning of each round, add the cards labeled with that round to the deck, along with those of previous rounds, excepting any that were permanently

discarded. In the first round, Stresa is the first player. In the second round, League is first player. In the third round, Stresa is first player.

At the beginning of each round, shuffle the deck and deal cards to each player until they have seven. Starting with the first player, players alternate taking turns playing one card either for its value or its event. Play continues back and forth until both players have played six strategy cards. After playing six cards, the remaining seventh card (one for each player) is set aside face down.

Pivotal space bonus actions are then performed in the following order: Banks, Finance, Armed Forces, and League of Nations.

Crisis Dimensions bonus actions are then performed in the following order: Public, Bureaucracy, Military, and League of Nations.

If this was not the third round, each player may elect to keep their unplayed seventh card or discard it. Continue with the next round, adding in the new cards for that round and shuffling them together with the previous round's deck (except those permanently discarded) to make a new deck.

Sequence of Actions Each Round

• Deal cards to each player until they have seven. (ie. Deal six if they retained a card from the previous turn, otherwise deal seven).

• Take turns playing cards for their value or their events until each player has played six cards.

• Set aside the remaining card for each player.

• Perform Pivotal Space bonus actions.

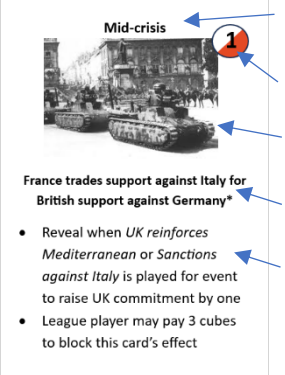
• Perform Crisis Dimension bonus actions.

• Up to three rounds of play are completed, after which the position of tokens on the Victory Track determines the winner.

Playing Cards

When played during a normal round, each card can be used for either its event or its value after which it is discarded. A player *must* play a card if the title is <u>underlined</u> and he must play it for the event (It has no value). He may play it as any one of his six cards but he may not leave it as his seventh card except in the unlikely event that he has a hand of seven must-play cards.

A card with an asterisk* after its title may only be played once per game *for the event*. It may be played any number of times for its value. If played for the event, permanently discard it after play and do not reshuffle it into the deck in later rounds. The card *France trades support against Italy* is discarded permanently if revealed for the event.



Crisis round (early, middle or late)

Value (split box indicates event can be played by either side)

Image

Title (asterisk indicates it is permanently set aside if the event is played)

Event text (may be "revealed" to play the event. Effect may be blocked)

Sample card

Event ~ A player may use an event if the coloured circle of the event's Value box matches that player's color—or if both players' colours are displayed in a diagonally split box (as in sample card above). If a card is played for its event, implement the event text exactly as written in the order it is written, unless the text would violate the rules (for example, by having more than four tokens of a colour in a space). Events can add, shift, or remove tokens from the map or shift victory condition markers.

Value ~ A player may use the value of any card in hand to add up to that number of tokens to the map. Values range from 1 to 3 and indicate the number of her tokens a player may add to spaces on the map.

Adding tokens to the board

When playing a card for value a player may add up to that number of tokens to the board. Tokens may be added anywhere the player already has tokens, or to a space connected by a line to a space where he already had tokens before the card was played (ie you may not daisy-chain tokens in a single card play). Connecting lines with an arrow on them allow placement to adjacent spaces only in the direction of the arrow. *For example, a token in Eastern Europe allows placement of a token into Socialists, but not the reverse.*

Regardless of the presence of tokens, the Stresa player may always add tokens to the Conservative space and the League player may always add to the Socialists space. Both players may always add to the Foreign Office/Quai d'Orsay space.

Event effects which allow the placement of tokens do not require the player to already have tokens in a connected space. *They are often a useful way to expand the player's influence quickly.*

Reminder: There is a limit of four tokens per player per space.

Helpful hints:

When a card says "up to x tokens", you may choose from zero to x.

When a card says "may" the effect is optional. The player named on the card may choose not to do it. If the card does not say "may", the effect must be carried out if possible, even if the player would rather not.

When a card says "pay" the named player must remove that number of tokens from the board or named space(s) if possible. "May pay" is optional.

Tokens removed from the map by either player are placed in the owning player's token pool for later use.

Victory condition markers may not move below 1 or above 5. When a card says to do so, ignore that effect if there is no other option offered. If another option is offered and it is possible, it must be chosen. *For example, if a text says to lower either League prestige or Italian alignment, but League prestige cannot be lowered because it is already at 1, then Italian alignment must be lowered (unless it is also at 1, in which case the text has no effect).*

Some card events prevent other effects (such as raising or lowering a marker) for the remainder of the round or the game. They take precedence over subsequent events. An event text that would violate such a previously played card is ignored.

Some event effects may be blocked or ignored. The event is still considered to have been played.

Reveal ~ When a card says "reveal" a player may play the relevant event text by either showing another named card in his hand, or if another named card has just been played. In most cases, revealing a card does not count as playing it. The player simply reveals the card for the effect, but keeps it in her hand. An exception is the card "*France trades support against Italy..* " (shown above). It is permanently discarded if revealed for the effect. That player will still play a total of six cards in the round, but because she discarded one, she will not have a card left in hand at the end of the round.

Pivotal Space Bonus

After each player has played his six cards for the round, they check for control of each pivotal space in the order: Banks, Finance, Armed forces, League of Nations. If controlled, the controlling player may, from any spaces of that Crisis Dimension:

• Shift any two tokens (yours or your opponent's) to an adjoining space connected by a line; or

• Remove any two tokens (yours or opponent's); or

• Shift one token and remove one token (yours or opponent's).

Crisis Dimension Bonus

After performing all Pivotal space bonuses, check each Crisis Dimension for control (one player controlling all three same-colored spaces) in the order: Public, Bureaucracy, Military, International. Control of a Crisis Dimension allows the controlling player the following actions:

Public: May add a token to Finance and may remove one from any International space

Bureaucracy: May add a token to a Bureaucracy or Military space; **or** shift up to two cubes anywhere on the board (observing the rules for shifting tokens)

Military: 1. May pay a cube from Industry to raise Rearmament by one; **or** shift up to two cubes anywhere on the board (observing the rules for shifting tokens)

2. If the player also controls the Foreign Office/Quai d'Orsay, may pay any 2 cubes to shift UK commitment 1 space in either direction

International: May shift League credibility 1 space in either direction; **or** if (Rearmament + the number of that player's cubes in Colonial Forces > the current round number) may pay any 2 cubes to shift Italian alignment 1 space in either direction

Reminder: Some card plays prevent the movement of certain tokens on the Victory Track for the duration of a round. These card effects take precedence over shifts which would be allowed for control of the Military or International Crisis Dimensions.

End of game and Victory

The game may end immediately when certain cards are played, or will end automatically after scoring Crisis Dimension bonus' on the third round.

If Italian alignment is at 5 at game end, the Stresa player wins.

If League prestige is at 5 at game end, the League player wins. Though unlikely, both can win.

If neither player has won, fascism wins and the Second World War will be fought. (This was the historical outcome). The Allies may, however, at least be better prepared for war based on the value of the UK commitment and Rearmament tokens on the Victory Track: Add the two values together to get a score between 2 and 10. The higher the better representing better pre-war preparation. Any score above 3 is a better than historical outcome. A very high score (7 or more) represents such effective preparation that the game may be considered a draw.

Finally, If UK commitment is higher than Rearmament, the Stresa player, representing France in this case, may take some satisfaction in having persuaded Britain of the need to confront Germany. Both players may have lost, but the League player, representing Britain in this case, must acknowledge the Stresa player as the wiser Ally.

An Infinite Scorn design notes

The game is designed to model the difficulty faced by Britain and France in collaborating in pursuit of a shared interest (deterring German aggression). Players are simultaneously playing against each other while attempting to collaborate against Mussolini and fascism, represented by the game system.

I had initially thought of having a French and a British player but, while Britain largely led the pro-League forces in the crisis, and France strongly favored the "Stresa Front" approach, both powers actually attempted a blend of both policies. And there were actors supporting each policy in each government. I decided, therefore, to have the players represent the two approaches (collective security through the League vs co-opting Italy to balance Germany) rather than states. To underline this, cards supporting each policy approach are found representing actors from both Allies – there are pro-League French cards and pro-Stresa British ones.

The two players are each trying to achieve their own objective, but the system tends to make them work at cross purposes. They also have a common interest in preparing for war if they can manage it. In games where it is not going well, either or both may choose to switch to this strategy as the lesser of two evils. It is of course possible for the players to collaborate towards just one winning approach. One player would win and the other would lose, but at least fascism would not win. Interestingly, one of my playtesters took this approach when it became clear she could not win.

The basic mechanic of cards and crisis dimensions is based on GMT Games' crisis game system used in *Fort Sumpter* and *Red Flag Over Paris*. That system does a pretty decent job of representing complex political situations in a simple and easy-to-play way. I felt, however, that the simple scoring of victory points used in those games was insufficient for my purposes. I wanted it possible that both players lose, as was the historical case. The additional option of losing "less badly" than historically needed to be reflected as well. I therefore added the four victory condition markers and changed the way control of Crisis Dimensions works. The final game is a bit more complex than those that inspired it but still simple enough to learn and play in under an hour. In playtesting, I found that after learning the game, players could play subsequent games in less than 30 minutes.

The four crisis dimensions are intended to model both the *drivers* of French and British policy in the crisis, as well as *the means* by which policy was implemented. The Public, Bureaucracy and Military dimensions represent the domestic politics and bureaucratic interests driving policy of the two states, while the International and Military dimensions represent the diplomatic and military instruments available to implement those policies. (The defence establishment is *both* - an actor shaping policy and a tool of its execution). The fourth major driver of policy, the need to balance Germany, is the Stresa player's objective, so it is represented indirectly by the Italian alignment victory marker.

The spaces which make up the Crisis Dimensions are somewhat arbitrary simplifications of the actual workings of that dimension. The Eastern Europe space, for example, represents both Stalin (which is why it can influence Socialists) as well as France's Little Entente allies. As another example, the Socialist space represents all left-wing and pacifist forces in the Western democracies – a necessary simplification. The dominant influence of economic pressures in both France and Britain is represented by having the Banks as the pivotal space in the Public dimension and Finance as the pivotal space in the Bureaucratic dimension. The Military dimension is highly sensitive to financial pressures and this is reflected in the Industry space being dependent on influence in the Banks and the Finance department.

When a player wins control of specific spaces or Crisis Dimensions, it represents that player's approach "winning the argument" with that actor or set of actors. A space which is not controlled is one in which no consensus for action exists.

The system is designed so that policy tends to “flow” from domestic politics, to the government, and finally to the ultimate objects of those policies (Italy and the League) external to the states. Influencing or supporting the League or Italy is accomplished mainly through the International dimension, although Italy can also be influenced by a strong military posture. The UK commitment and Rearmament victory conditions, however, being domestic decisions, are influenced only by internal-to-government actors.

Finally, I tried to have every significant event, actor or influence on actors represented by at least one card. They needed to be at least recognized even if the limitations of the simple game system often meant abstracting them considerably. Consider the name of the card and the general way in which it works as a nod to that historical force.

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