2.3: Italian Expansion, 1933-1940

I. Factors leading to Italian expansionism
   a. Fascism
      i. Glorification of war
      ii. Imperial expansion
      iii. Anti-internationalism
   b. Economic Crisis
      i. Loss of outside investors (USA)
      ii. Crashing grain prices hurting Italian farmers
      iii. Growing unemployment
      iv. The Italian government responds by taking a greater role in managing the Italian economy
         1. The Italian government will ultimately control over 20% of capital resources
         2. Wages will be cut further
      v. Mussolini would attempt to distract the public from their economic woes by fostering the fascist 'revolutionary spirit'
         1. Drive towards Autarky (economic self-sufficiency) and foreign war further harmed the Italian economy

II. Mussolini's foreign policy
   a. Four Power Pact signed in July 1933 with Britain, France and Germany
      i. Smaller nations should have less say than the great powers
      ii. Ultimately did little, but it did give Italians the impression that they were one of the four great powers of Europe
   b. Support of Austria
      i. Mussolini supported an independent Austria and was in opposition to an schluß with Germany
      ii. July 1934, Austrian Chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss was murdered by Austrian Nazis leading Mussolini to mobilize troops on his northern border.
         1. Hitler ultimately did not intervene in the Austrian political crisis
   c. Response to German rearmament
      i. Stresa Conference in April 1935 between Italy, France and Britain establishing the Stresa Front looking to maintain the status quo in Europe and preventing Germany from further violations of the Treaty of Versailles.
   d. Invasion of Abyssinia, 1935-36
      i. Reasons
         1. Expand his Empire in Africa
         2. Gain support for his regime with successful military conquests
         3. Avenge the defeat of Italy in the 1890s
         4. Gain colonial troops for future military actions
         5. Export markets for Italian goods
6. Despite German rearmament, the Stresa front offered safety should Germany grow aggressive
7. Demonstrate Italian strength to Europe (and Germany especially)

ii. The Invasion
1. December 1934, Italian forces clashed with Abyssinians in the disputed Wal Wal oasis resulting in 30 Italians dead
   a. Mussolini demanded an apology and compensation
   b. Abyssinian Emperor Haile Selassie requested a Loaf investigation which Mussolini refused, instead calling for a conquest of Abyssinia.
      i. 500,000 Italian soldiers invaded Abyssinia launching a full invasion on 3 October
2. League of Nations condemned Italian Aggression and placed economic sanctions on Italy
3. Italy took Addis Ababa on 5 May 1936 and on 9 May it formally annexed Abyssinia.

iii. Results
1. Relatively few Italian losses (1,000 casualties)
2. Increased tensions with Great Britain who saw their Mediterranean fleet threatened and Italy was not yet prepared to compete with the British Navy
3. Costly war exacerbated Italian economic problems
4. Guerilla combat with Abyssinians would continue for years
5. League of Nations again rendered impotent in the face of aggressor nations
6. End of the Stresa Front and closer relations with Germany
   a. Italy agreed that it no longer objected to Austria becoming a German satellite (while still independent)
   b. Agreed to German rearmament of the Rhineland
      i. Locarno obligations are out the window

e. Spanish Civil War
   i. When Civil War broke out in Spain in 1936, Mussolini saw it as another opportunity to flex his military might and expand Italian influence
      1. Support of Fascist Francisco Franco against the socialist government and its communist supporters
      2. Hopes to gain naval base concessions on the Mediterranean
      3. 70,000 Italian troops joined the war
         a. More than any other nation sent
   
ii. Results
1. High economic costs
2. Depletion of arms leaving Italy weaker moving forward
3. Increased tensions with Britain and France
4. Italy pushed even closer with Germany
   a. 25 October 1936 signing of the Rome-Berlin Axis
f. Forming of the Axis and a push to WWII
   i. Joining of the Anti-Comintern Pact in November 1937 with Germany and Japan
      1. Directed against the Communist International
   ii. December 1937, Italy left the League of Nations
   iii. Support of German Anschluss in 1938
      1. This cost Mussolini some popularity in Italy
   iv. Support of German occupation of Sudetenland region of Czechoslovakia in the Munich Agreement
   v. Invasion of Albania
      1. Following Hitler’s violation of the Munich Agreement, he ordered his army to invade Albania (which was already a satellite) as Albanian King Zog was pushing for greater independence from Italy.
         a. Hopes of dominating the Adriatic
         b. Albanian resistance was weak and ultimately futile and the King fled to Greece.
         c. Albanian parliament voted on 12 April to unite with Italy and a new fascist government was established.
   vi. Signing of the Pact of Steel between Germany and Italy 22 May 1939
      1. Declaration of trust and cooperation between the two nations
      2. Union of military and economic policies
   vii. German Invasion of Poland 1 September 1939
      1. Italy informed Germany it was not ready for a general War; Italy remained a non-belligerant
   viii. Joining the War in June 1940
      1. Avoid further embarassment for not joining the war earlier
      2. Did not want to be seen as anything less than a great power
      3. Avoid a Europe dominated by Germany
      4. Territorial gains through war.
      5. Economic reasons
         a. Germany was Italy’s greatest trading partner and that relationship was in jeopardy
   ix. WWII
      1. Mussolini pushed the war into the Mediterranean and North Africa
         a. Invaded Egypt from Libya
         b. Greece from Albania
         c. Each were ultimate failures and Italy required German assistance drawing German forces further South than originally intended.