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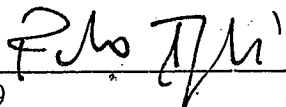
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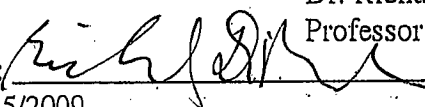
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## **Executive Summary**

**Title:** Military Operations in the Italian East Africa, 1935-1941: Conquest and Defeat.

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**Thesis:** Mussolini sacrificed the Italian East Africa Empire and its armed forces with the expectation of regaining it through the peace negotiations; he therefore opted for limited prestige victories and then ordered the strict defense of Italian East Africa condemning it to death. At the operational and tactical level, the viceroy Duke Amedeo of Aosta introduced an enlightening pacification campaign in the empire but it was too late for the plan to be effective. At the break of hostilities he showed a great insecurity and was not able to translate the incoherent defensive war plan given by Gen. Badoglio and Mussolini into sound tactical decisions and directions to his generals on the ground resulting in the rapid defeat of the Italian forces.

**Discussion:** Mussolini's Mein Kampf conceived a political strategic situation in which Italy could play the role of world power and assume the full control of the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The quick and decisive victory over Ethiopia by the employment of unrestricted resources and means, and the establishment of the East African Empire, allowed the Duce to make the first important step to meet his strategic vision. He also endured and increased his power and prestige internally and on the international scene. For this reason, instead of devolving the administration of the territories in the new Empire to the local leaders as the viceroys had suggested, Mussolini imposed the direct rule of the Italian administration, leaving no power to the local leaders. This created instability and exhausted the Italian armed forces in the empire. The smashing German victories over the democracies in the first months of WW II, urged Mussolini to enter the war beside Hitler even if the Duce was aware of the total unpreparedness of Italian military, economically, and industrial apparatus. Notwithstanding its important strategic position, the Duce denied the viceroy Amedeo of Aosta all the military reinforcements he needed. With the invasion of British Somaliland, the Duce achieved his last and ephemeral prestige victory before the total capitulation of the Italian East Africa.

**Conclusion:** Mussolini neglected the Clausewitzian ends-ways-means supreme paradigm and totally ignored the war's trinity. The Italian people never showed any inherent passion for WWII and the top military commanders assumed the rigidity as a dogma and never demonstrated the capability to learn from the mistakes and adapt to the changing situation. In addition, the Duce's political aims were totally inadequate for Italy's military and industrial capabilities. The East African Empire was the first to pay the price of Mussolini's gamble and thirst of prestige. The Duke Amedeo of Aosta had a leadership style more suited for the pacification phase; he lacked combat leadership and showed uncertainty in every decision. Moreover, the Duke was reluctant to adopt radical measures that the critical situation imposed. He preferred to defend until the sure surrender instead of attempting the risky but hopeful advance to the Sudan to deny the most important strategic base to the British troops.

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## Introduction:

"A nation which does not have free access to the sea cannot be considered a free country; a nation which does not have free access to the oceans cannot be considered a great power: Italy must become a great power"- Mussolini, fall 1926.<sup>1</sup>

The successful invasion of Ethiopia (also known as Abyssinia) carried out by the armed forces of the Kingdom of Italy from October 1935 to May 1936, allowed Benito Mussolini, the Duce of Italy, to add another piece to his dreamed new Roman Empire, based on significant portions of Africa connecting the Mediterranean to the Middle East. In addition to this campaign, an unquestioned Duce reinforced his personal prestige and achieved the international success that he considered essential to endure the Fascist regime.

The overconfident emperor of Ethiopia Haile' Selassie' believed he could emulate the great Negus of the past and smash the Italian forces as Menelik II did at Adowa in 1896 counting on the value and pride of the Ethiopian warriors.<sup>2</sup> Selassie' also advocated his just cause to the League of Nations and had a serious expectation that the major world powers would have provided a big international help in favor of his struggle against the Italian invaders. The *Negus* fled to Great Britain on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May 1936 and eight days later, from the balcony of *Palazzo Venezia* in Rome, the Duce announced to a joyful Italy the birth of the Italian East African Empire, annexing Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Italian Somaliland.<sup>3</sup>

Haile' Selassie' decided to meet the Italian overwhelming military power face to face instead of resorting to guerrilla tactics and having some chances of victory.<sup>4</sup> The guerrilla warfare tactics massively employed by the Ethiopians patriots after the war, heavily shaped and exhausted the Italian divisions. Consequently a large amount of resources were allocated from the motherland in order to preserve the political, economical, and military apparatus of the empire. Up to the beginning of WW II, the casualties sustained by the Italian divisions were

significantly higher than the campaign period. The guerrilla warfare in Ethiopia burned up, initially backed by France then by Britain and was able to last up to the fall of the Italian empire in 1941.

Mussolini declared war on the United Kingdom and France on June 10<sup>th</sup> 1940 even though its armed forces were unprepared in terms of doctrine, training, and modernization. This situation was much more dramatic in the Italian empire in which the complete isolation by land and by sea operated by the British divisions and navy provoked a rapid exhaustion of the military resources and troops. The Duce entered the war beside Germany with the assumptions of a few months' duration and quick Axis victories. The lack of strategic and operational effectiveness of the fascist leadership, the complete isolation of the empire, and most importantly, the huge moral crises of the troops and commands, led to the defeat of the empire within a few months.<sup>5</sup> Already on 5<sup>th</sup> of May 1941 the British coalition victories placed on his throne in Addis Ababa the Emperor Heile' Selassie'. On the 19<sup>th</sup> of May General Platt gave the military honors to the duke Amedeo d'Aosta surrendering to Amba Alagi decreeing the end of the ephemeral Duce's empire.

Mussolini sacrificed the Italian East Africa and its armed forces with the expectation of regaining it through peace negotiations; he therefore opted for limited prestige victories and ordered the strict defense of Italian East Africa, condemning the empire to collapse. At the operational and tactical level, the viceroy Duke Amedeo of Aosta introduced an enlightening pacification campaign in all the empire but it was too late for the plan to be effective. At the break of hostilities he showed a great insecurity and was not able to translate the incoherent defensive war plan given by Badoglio and Mussolini into sound tactical decisions and directions to his generals on the ground resulting in the rapid defeat of the Italian forces.



### The Invasion Phase<sup>6</sup>:

Mussolini carried out a military occupation of the Ethiopia as the first phase of a broader campaign to achieve the control of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> From this enterprise, he could also reaffirm his internal popularity and international prestige and finally to reach world power status for the new fascist country.

The Duce first redesigned his armed forces: he created the Air force as an independent service on the basis of Giulio Douhet doctrinal foundation. Mussolini then created a fascist voluntary paramilitary force called the Black Shirts to give a façade of legality to the “punitive squads” that allowed him to rise to power. Gradually the Duce was able to put his militia side by side to the royal army, navy, and air force. At the beginning of his twenty years dictatorship, he managed to attract the sympathy of the royal army, notoriously loyal to the king, promising to the generals a substantial autonomy from his authority. He also promised the admirals he would build a powerful navy to achieve the total control of the *Mare Nostrum*. Subsequently Mussolini assumed control of the armed forces and appointed himself as Minister of the armed forces.

Moreover Mussolini needed to transform the Italian society, culture and people in a “fascist” way, forged to the moral and physical suffering and strengthened by the war.<sup>8</sup> His foreign policy program was already established with the intention of creating more elbowroom (*spazio vitale*). This would allow the Italian population expand and flourish and economy benefit from the colonial resources. The Italian colonies of Libya, Eritrea, and Italian Somalia were at that time pure “sand boxes” and did not give Italy the expected strategic and economical results.<sup>9</sup> Instead, the conquest of the supposedly rich Ethiopia could have boosted the poor Italian economy, solved the unemployment problem and most importantly could have proven the validity of the fascist regime and the mettle of the generation forged by it. As a consequence of

this, Mussolini was able to undertake and coordinate all the diplomatic, military, economic and propaganda efforts as never made before in Italian history. His strong will to invade Ethiopia justified the risks to remain involved in a war against Great Britain which was the major world power to be affected by Mussolini's strategic plan in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Nevertheless, balancing a threatening and a pleasing behavior toward the European leaders, Mussolini managed to have free access in Ethiopia in return for the preservation of the status quo in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> The partial sanctions imposed by the League of Nations on Italy for the invasion of Ethiopia did not affect the war efforts. On the contrary they increased the popularity of the fascists in Italy whose propaganda portrayed this as a war for the existence of the Italian race that would consolidate Italy's home front.

After several consultations with his generals and admirals, the duce himself dictated the operational objectives of the campaign: the destruction of the Ethiopian armed forces and the total conquest of the country. He wanted to achieve these objectives at any cost employing a large scale mechanical means that included also the chemical weapons. Since 1932, Mussolini gave the *quadrumvir* Gen. Emilio De Bono, the task of drafting a war plan for Ethiopia and consequently the overall military command of east Africa during the operation.<sup>11</sup> Gen. De Bono conceived a *colonial* type campaign with a limited quantity of troops, vehicles and fire support. As a matter of fact, according to the fascist concept, the campaign had to be conducted exploiting only the fascists' moral superiority and the higher motivation to win. On the contrary, the army concept endorsed by Gen. Pietro Badoglio, the chief of supreme general staff, was more pragmatic, based on the overwhelming superiority of vehicles, guns and airplanes to conduct a coordinated European style campaign.<sup>12</sup> Of course at the beginning, Mussolini was inclined to the colonial type campaign; he rapidly changed his mind standing the diplomatic pressures and

the alleged Heile' Selassie's army increased level of efficiency thanks to European advisors, equipment, and weapons. As a parallel measure, the Duce initiated an effective clandestine corruption campaign to subdue Ethiopian military and political leaders and to gain support for the Italian cause.<sup>13</sup>

The campaign plan envisaged an invasion with a main effort of 7 divisions organized in three corps from Eritrea with gen. De Bono commander in chief and a supporting effort of one division of the regular army from Italian Somaliland under the command of gen. Rodolfo Graziani.<sup>14</sup> In support of these divisions there were 126 aircrafts and 150 tanks in Eritrea and 38 aircrafts and 50 tanks in Somalia with an absolute superiority on both the front of artillery and chemical weapons. The plan was to carry out an offensive in the northern front and a strategic defensive on the southern front. The navy also had to maintain an increased operational and security level in order to face a direct confrontation with the British home fleet in case of failure of Mussolini's diplomatic effort. The British fleet's closure of the Suez Canal would have been considered an act of war by the Duce; for this reason by May 1935, he sent a total number of 10 Italian divisions and 3 years of logistic supplies.<sup>15</sup>

The Ethiopian army had the same feudal structure as the Ethiopian society with the different *ras* in command of their own army and most likely without real loyalty toward the emperor himself.<sup>16</sup> A well advised strategy suggested the Negus Heile' Selassie' to concentrate the imperial army in the northern region and waiting until the Italian movement from north hindered on the mountains. The Negus would have infiltrate from West a force able to outflank the Italian right and invade Eritrea cutting out the Italian lines of communication.

On the southern front, where Gen. Graziani's objective was Harar, Selassie' intended to send a force south through the Great Rift Valley. The force would break out into Somaliland.

This was basically a delay strategy to force the Italians to be stopped by the incoming rain season and forcing Mussolini to negotiate a diplomatic solution.<sup>17</sup>

On October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1935 Gen. De Bono received the order to invade Ethiopia from the Duce.<sup>18</sup> By October 15<sup>th</sup>, the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Italian Corps and the Eritrean Corps had already occupied Axum, Enticchio, Adigrat and the meaningful Adowa without a significant opposition by the Ethiopian troops. Gen. De Bono was able to occupy Makale unopposed only the 8<sup>th</sup> of November due to necessity to build the roads on the stride, guaranty the enormous logistic supplies needed and, most importantly, to secure the array flanks.

In spite of operating in an independent way, the royal air force already played the fundamental role of the entire campaign; it carried out several strategic and tactical reconnaissance missions as well as supporting and escorting missions for Gen. De Bono's advancing columns.<sup>19</sup> De Bono opposed another Duce's order for a bold further advance toward the south, and therefore, he was replaced by Gen. Badoglio.

On November 18<sup>th</sup> the League of Nations imposed the general sanctions against Italy. Meanwhile, the Negus decided to attempt the execution of his strategic plan. The unexpected initial success of the Ethiopian counteroffensive and the concern about the oil sanction that would have to be discussed by 12<sup>th</sup> of December almost convinced Mussolini to accept the Hoare-Laval plan.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, the remarkable offensive spirit of the Ethiopian warriors ultimately played in favor of Gen. Badoglio. The Ethiopian bold frontal assaults to the Italian defensive positions, were wiped out by the employment of the Italian superior firepower, aviation and asphyxiating gas.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, the ras were unable to cooperate strategically due to lack of internal communication systems and above all due to considerable internal rivalries.

It was during one of these engagements that the Royal Air Force executed an air drop resupply for troops for the first time in military history.<sup>22</sup>

Gen. Badoglio understood that with the increased number of divisions, fire, and air power from now on he could easily defeat the remaining of the Ethiopian forces. He managed to conquer the strategic strong point of Amba Alagi that blocked the way to Addis Ababa. At the beginning of April, during the battle of Mai Chew, Gen. Badoglio directed the last heavy blow to the Negus Selassie' that decided to personally direct this decisive battle.<sup>23</sup> The emperor escaped to Addis Ababa and then to Djibouti where he embarked for his British exile.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of April, Gen Graziani launched the last offensive on the southern front to reach his final objectives: Harar and Dire Dawa.<sup>24</sup> Once more the air force was decisive to support his maneuver: the cities of Harar and Jijiga were bombed according to Douethian concept to terrorize the population. After fierce fighting the columns of Graziani were able to break out the very effective Ethiopian defensive line.<sup>25</sup> At Dire Dawa units of southern army met with some units of Badoglio who had taken the capital Addis Ababa with a mechanized column a few days prior. The meeting in Dire Dawa, was the final act for the conclusion of the military campaign and the proudest moment of Mussolini's life.<sup>26</sup> The relatively easy Italian victory in Ethiopia gave the Duce the wrong impression on the mighty capabilities of his armed forces and he was convinced of its validity as an instrument of aggressive foreign policy.

#### The Stabilization Phase:

“... no power to the ras ... no govern by sharing ... only we confuse each other with whom look like us, from that the necessity of a clean separation between the two black and white races: that does not mean contempt and humiliation of the blacks but instead differentiation between ones and the others ”

- Letter from Lessona<sup>27</sup> to Gen. Graziani approved by Mussolini, 5<sup>th</sup> of August 1936

Gen. Badoglio's "March of iron will" to reach quickly the Ethiopian capital Addis Ababa and declare the end of the war, was a gesture of high political intuition.<sup>28</sup> He understood the Duce needed a quick victory in Ethiopia in order to normalize the tense relationships with the major powers and put them in front of the "fact accomplished". The Duce himself declared that to pacify the empire it would take less than what needed to conquer it.

Nevertheless the arrival in Addis Ababa signed the end of Italian military initiative and the start of a brutal and costly guerrilla warfare that would last until the end of the empire in 1941 and would cost Italy some 13,000 dead and around 140,000 wounded among national and colonial troops.<sup>29</sup> This type of warfare was better suited for the Ethiopian warriors due to their great tactical mobility on the compartmented terrain, the reduced logistical need to sustain the guerrilla, and an unquestionable physical courage.

On the other hand, the Italians' lack of plans, studies, expenditure estimates, and programs for the stabilization phase of the campaign had a negative impact on the organization, manning and equipping of the troops.<sup>30</sup> Moreover the troops had to switch and adapt to a new style of warfare that would deeply affect the morale and the already flawed cohesion of the troops.

The new *ordinamento* of the Empire issued by Lessona in November 1937 limited the number of troops to 65,000 men.<sup>31</sup> While pressured Gen. Graziani to cut the extraordinarily high expenditure for the empire, the viceroy showed this number to be impracticable due to the pressing military necessity for countering the guerrilla.<sup>32</sup>

In order to establish some reciprocal esteem relationships among the local leaders who mostly came from Ethiopian feudal aristocracy, Gen. Badoglio first and Gen. Graziani later suggested devolving the administration of some territories to some of them. The viceroys, at

least, hoped for it would be possible to adopt the sharing of administration according to the English model of the indirect rule.<sup>33</sup> Instead with the “No power to ras” order, the Duce endorsed the “direct rule” giving to Ethiopian leaders any role for the administration of the new empire; this was due to the natural continuation of the duce’s policy to reaffirm his personal prestige and the perpetuation of his regime.<sup>34</sup> Also the Apartheid practice was applied according to the Duce’s Fascist model where the white race ruled according a verifiable not axiomatic superiority.<sup>35</sup>

The new empire that included Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Somalia, was divided in five territories each administered by one military governor; in addition the capital district of Addis Ababa was directly administered by the viceroy.<sup>36</sup> The governors incredibly had the double dependence from the Minister of Italian Africa and from the viceroy.<sup>37</sup> The latter had direct authority only over the city of Addis Ababa, while the important region of the Showa was divided by three different governors.<sup>38</sup> Under the Negus, the leaders of the Showa and Amhara were very influential and able to exercise their power on the entire country; from these regions in fact, Gen. Graziani faced serious revolts, an attempted assault on the Capital city, and even an attempt to his life concluded with the harshest repressions and brutal retaliations.<sup>39</sup>

“All the perpetrators of violence, looting, and arsons must be executed. All the people found in possession of weapons must be executed. All the people that, after 24 hours, do not deliver their weapons [to Italian authority] must be executed. All the rebels taken prisoners must be executed. I authorize ... to conduct systematically a policy of terror and extermination ... included the employment of poison gases ... against the rebels and all the population supporting them “-1936 Telegrams Mussolini-Graziani for the occupation of territories and subdue of insurgency.

The Duce authorized unrestricted means and ways to complete the occupation of Ethiopia and destroy the insurgency. Gen. Graziani in few months extended the occupation to almost the entirety Ethiopia without a general opposition of the population, except in the area of the strategic railway Djibouti-Addis Ababa where a tight control provoked strong reactions and repressions. The leaders of insurrection like ras Desta’ and ras Immiru’ were what was left among

the commanders of the armies destroyed by Gen Badoglio and Graziani during the invasion.<sup>40</sup> Those chiefs however did not receive the complete support of the civilian population and their movements were severely affected by the supply problem. Therefore, the agile columns of Askari battalions followed by Italian national battalions for an average total of 10,000 or 15,000 troops, with combat aviation and logistic support, included asphyxiating gas, managed to reach the insurgents, usually numbered around 1,500 or 2,000, and destroy them. After the fighting, the troops, mostly Askari or Ethiopian Galla, usually committed looting, devastation and, very often, atrocities toward the villagers.<sup>41</sup>

The strategic railway Addis Ababa-Djibouti was an infrastructure of primary importance because it connected the capital to the eastern part of the empire and was the quickest mean to transport the hundreds of tons of materials sent from Italy by sea. It was obviously a high value target for the rebels that constantly attacked the trains or sabotaged the binaries. Graziani spent enormous resources to face this constant threat employing armored trains, and several fixed presidiums and mobile columns to defend the supply system.

A typical operation aimed to control the railway started on the 21<sup>st</sup> of October 1936; 25 airplanes razed all the villages beside Zuquala' and Debocogio mountains.<sup>42</sup> At the same time the area of Debocogio was gassed. Gen. Gallina and Mariotti unleashed their columns to terrorize the region setting fire to all the *tucul* not hit by the royal airforce and executing hundreds of suspected defenseless peasants.<sup>43</sup> On the morning of the 27<sup>th</sup> four Askari battalions made contact with the enemy and locked themselves on the Debocogio mountain pass. After seven hours of fierce fighting the 1,500 rebels started to give up and abandon their positions leaving 321 dead and higher number of wounded<sup>44</sup>. The Italians reported to have 5 casualties among the young lieutenants.<sup>45</sup> The Italians continued the pursue of the rebels and extended their effort in all



Auasc Valley reinforced by the units of Gen. Mischi and Gen. Cubeddu reaching a total number of 20,000 men. The offensive was conducted employing the same unrestricted ways and means with fire columns to signal the passage of the soldiers. The rebels were mostly disbanded; some of them subdued to the Italians while some others moved away ready to start the rebellion in other regions. For the next few months at least, the railway could insure for regular supply to Addis Ababa.<sup>46</sup>

The military tactics, techniques and procedures employed during the stabilization phase to obtain the control of the empire were basically the same. The Italian columns were preceded by the colonials, Eritrean or Libyan Askari, Somali Dubat or Ethiopian Galla. Moving from their base of departure located at the outskirts of the main cities, the battalions were foot mobile or moved by wheeled or trucked vehicles whenever and wherever available and possible.<sup>47</sup> During the movement to contact, the columns were usually ambushed by guerrilla warriors on the flanks, taking fires by rifles, machine guns, and sometimes old pieces of artillery.<sup>48</sup> Once in contact, the rebels tried to disengage unless forced to fight by the limitations of the terrain or by the encircle maneuvers conducted by the Italian forces. However the execution or imprisonment of all the Ethiopian war veteran commanders, the destruction of their rebel units, and the extensive reprisals against the alleged supporting population, did not bring the guerrilla war to an end and instead fueled the war in the majority of the empire regions.

Graziani's brutal methods, the deportation of notables of the Amhara and Showa to the concentration camp at Danane, the disillusion of the population tired of outrages and violence's required a change in the leadership asset of the empire. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of November 1937, the Duce decided to replace Gen. Graziani with the Duke Amedeo of Aosta and few days later the Minister of Italian Africa Lessona with Gen. Teruzzi. The new viceroy was sided by Gen.

Cavallero that took responsibility for the military operations; a situation that few months later brought to Cavallero's recall to Italy due to the viceroy protests.

The Duke started to carry out a more realistic and enlightening policy and received total approval by his new vice viceroy Gen. Guglielmo Nasi, former governor of Harar, who reached remarkable results giving lots of credits to the chiefs in his regions whom were willing to collaborate. Amedeo of Aosta reaffirmed the Italian domination on the vital regions, but also restored the authority of the great chiefs and Ethiopian aristocracy, praising them with new functions and titles that were fundamental to ending the resistance.<sup>49</sup> Yet throughout 1938, Gen. Cavallero carried out the stability operations in a most efficient and coordinated method and with less deliberate massacres.<sup>50</sup> Unfortunately, it would take Rome more than one year to move towards the tested English policy of "indirect rule" devolving upon the high chiefs the administration and the defense of entire regions: but then was too late.<sup>51</sup>

On the other hand, the revolts have still a well defined territorial dimension with their own geographic and cultural characteristics without a connection with the adjacent revolts; the first serious coordination will be achieved with the British intervention of 1940.<sup>52</sup>

From 1935 to 1940, Italy developed enormous economic efforts to wage the Ethiopian campaign with his pacification and the subsequently military campaigns in Spain (August 1936) and Albania (April 1939). These military commitments took over 51 per cent of Italy's state expenditure of 250 billion lire, having a tremendous impact on the lack of rearmament and modernization in preparation for WW II; in addition, the Armed Forces were already fatigued by years of fighting.<sup>53</sup>

### The War Phase:

“Italy cannot perform a long war, that means she cannot spend hundreds of billions as the other belligerent nations are currently forced to do; our unpreparedness is due to the African and Spanish wars”- Mussolini, March 1940.<sup>54</sup>

Notwithstanding the Duce was fully aware of the lack of general preparation for the war, he considered it impossible and absurd for Italy to remain neutral without resigning his role of power and disqualifying the fascist regime itself.<sup>55</sup> During the nine months of co-belligerence, he was concerned to lose the historic occasion to share the booty with Germany whose smashing victories were provoking the rapid defeat of the democracies.<sup>56</sup> In addition Mussolini believed he could rely, one more time, upon his infallible intuition, timing, and astuteness solving the war at Italy benefit.

On June 10<sup>th</sup> 1940, Mussolini declared war against France and United Kingdom promising his top generals and admirals to wage a short and smart war, just deadly enough to attain advantages and territories from the peace negotiations. For this reason, Mussolini sent Ciano, his foreign minister, to Berlin in order to notify Hitler with the list of territories claimed by Italy at the next and close peace negotiation. The list of desired territories included Corsica, Nice, Tunis, Djibouti, Suez, Egypt, and Sudan.<sup>57</sup>

Nevertheless the Duce wanted to conduct his own dignified and genuine parallel war to the German one. He refused to draft a common strategy with Germany, even refusing military helps and troops that Hitler initially was ready to offer to Italy. Mussolini was eager to achieve Italy's political objectives formulated in what MacGregor Knox called Mussolini's *Mein Kampf*.<sup>58</sup> It confirmed the necessity for Italy to separate with the continental tradition except for Albania and Greece and break the “bars” of the Mediterranean prison trough the Indian Ocean.

The end state was to join Libya with the Italian empire through the Sudan and through French North Africa. Yet, the conceived war plan was designed on the basis of a total disconnection between ends, ways, and means.

Mussolini, unlike Hitler, Stalin, Churchill, or Roosevelt, refused to establish a personal staff that could advise him on general and military affairs and never wanted collaborators who were too influential in order to not undermine his personal prestige. He also refused to establish an executive joint chief of staff and relegated the chairman, Gen. Badoglio to a simple advisory role without any executive power on the different services; Mussolini himself was practically always in personal charge of the three services. The Duce, in this way, favored the autonomy of each of the services and consequently their inter-service rivalries, renouncing to a harmonic coordination and synchronization between the political and the military instrument.<sup>59</sup>

The war production was very low due to the shortages of raw materials and mostly for the missed general mobilization of the society that instead was in place during WW I.<sup>60</sup> The Duce considered it useless being the war already decided by the German crushing victories; yet Mussolini demonstrated his weakness toward the industrial ownership interested only to defend their business and gains without controls on the war production that ultimately remain essentially artisanal. The Minister for War Production (*COGEFAR*) had only a role of coordination of the generic requirements of the services. The Generals and Admirals rarely had the technical capabilities to impact on war production and specifications; neither resources nor impulse was given to the National Research Council with negative consequences for the development of the radar, radio, and special weapons. In October 1940 Mussolini incredibly ordered the demobilization of 600,000 of 1.1 million home army troops in order to meet the demand of national agriculture production, greatly damaging the cohesion and the training of the divisions.<sup>61</sup>

On the whole, according to the Duce and the generals who followed him, there was no need to inflict great sacrifices to the country since the Axis victory was already secured.

An important period of the army preparation for the war was covered by Gen. Alberto Pariani, the army chief of staff from 1936 to 1939. Since 1936 he understood that the future conflict against the democracies would have to be fought and decided in Africa. He started a renovation of the army in order to render the divisions lighter and more flexible than the one that fought in Ethiopia. He introduced the Binary Division with two regiments of three battalions each. Although the number of men dropped from 13,000 to 11,000, the intended purpose was to increase the number of weapons, artilleries and vehicles available to each division. This division would have been more agile and powerful on the battlefield with less logistical and supporting load that would have allowed an immediate employment and an easily maneuver; basically this concept was the Italian version of *Blitzkrieg* or the so called War of Rapid Decision.<sup>62</sup>

Even though by 1940 there were 73 army binary divisions, the promised means available were far less than the ones initially conceived due to financial problems; in the end it was better to count on numbers of men than on the expensive new equipments, weapons, and vehicles. For this reason, Gen. Pariani should not be considered the only scapegoat for the defeat of the Italian armies, but eventually he did fail to make the first move for the development of the Italian medium and heavy tank, believing that Italy could fight the new war with the useless L3 light tank. He also failed to develop a doctrine for the armored and mechanized operations.

The royal navy entered the war without an aircraft carrier and without the naval aviation force; the chief of the navy staff, Admiral Domenico Cavagnari aligned himself on the Duce's thought that considerer Italy an unsinkable aircraft carrier.<sup>63</sup> Even if in possession of a considerable battleship and submarine fleet, the royal navy did not have an effective air cover

and grave technical problems prevented the submarines from performing efficiently. In addition, the lack of radar, radio-localizer, sonar, and valid fire control instrumentations rendered the navy totally blind, especially during night operations. The navy never developed a doctrine for the combined employment of surface vessels and submarines, army-navy amphibious forces, and the tactical aviation cooperation with air force. The light cruisers were designed to develop very high speed but did not provide adequate protection. The *maiali*, the frogmen-guided torpedoes, were the only technologically sophisticated weapon systems that produced successful strategic results, but they were not operational ready in June 1940 due to the fact that they were neglected up to 1935.<sup>64</sup> As a consequence of these inadequacies, the officers, often deprived from necessary initiatives at sea driven by the central command *Supermarina*, were very reluctant to close with the British fleet.<sup>65</sup> The "Fleet in being" was a necessity for a weak fleet in order to preserve the right weight needed at the peace negotiation.

The Air force, fogged by the Douhet theory, continued to perform as an independent instead of integrated collective service except in the isolated East Africa Empire where the cooperation with the other services was much better.<sup>66</sup> Already in the 1939, the Italian bombers (S, BR, CANT Z 1007) were overcome by the German (Heinkel III and JU) and British (Bristol Blenheim and Wellington) models. The Italians' aircraft weren't appropriate for the tactical support for the navy and had low autonomy and load capability to strike distant strategic objectives. The much better fighter MCs and REs had significant autonomy limitations; therefore, the escort missions to the naval forces and the bombers aircraft were severely restricted.<sup>67</sup> Different industrial interests decided to produce three different airplane models with similar performance instead of one model with excellent performance.

The Black shirts, the Duce's personal militia, continued to perform poorly in the different operation theatres due to the lack of mobility and effective military training; they just increased the total number of divisions available to the generals without enhancing their combat capability.

This was the general strategic condition of the Duce's armed forces at the break of hostilities. It is therefore understandable why the services' chiefs and the chief of general staff Gen. Badoglio, suggested Mussolini a defensive strategy on all the fronts. For Mussolini, the mission was to endure everywhere; the peace negotiations would have delivered to Italy all the claimed territories in addition to those already acquired by the solely Italian offensive actions in France, Greece and East Africa.

In 1940, the distant Italian East African was no longer an interest for the metropolitan Italian population; the Italians were no longer inflamed by the passionate feelings of the past war and by the emotions provoked by the new exotic culture.<sup>68</sup> On the other hand, no one in the empire believed that Mussolini, who risked his own regime to give the Italians an empire, would compromise its existence without first obtaining any economic advantages.<sup>69</sup>

The war with Britain provoked the closure of Suez Canal, severely restricting sea supplies to the empire. At the beginning of 1939, the viceroy Amedeo of Aosta performed a study to obtain the self-sufficiency of the empire for the future war. In accordance with the state of total inefficiency of troops, equipment, and vehicles, he asked for 5 billion lire, but that was too much for the already bloodless treasure Minister capabilities.<sup>70</sup> Finally in April 1940, the Supreme Defense Commission allocated 9 hundred million lire to the empire, which was not even enough for the most vital needs, and a few military vehicles and weapons. In other words

the empire had to exclusively rely on its own military and economic resources for the war because it was not the priority in the general strategic plan.

The war plan for the empire, completely disconnected from Gen. Graziani's armies operations in North Africa, was based on the conviction of a short war. It conceived a limited offensive to guarantee the Eritrean and the Sudanese borders, defensive and eventual counter-offensive on the Kenyan border, and offensive on British Somaliland and French Djibouti.

The total amount of 291,176 Italian troops available at the 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1940 seemed impressive at first glance, but the men were already fatigued from 6 years of fighting in Ethiopia and they were not prepared for a conventional war against the British modern combined-arms army.<sup>71</sup> The weapons, equipment, and vehicles were generally old, except 16 of 75/46 model artillery pieces with a total lack of anti-tank and anti-air weapons. The navy in the base of Massaua brought into line 8 modern submarines but also very old torpedo ships, light cruisers, and MAS built from 1917 to 1927.<sup>72</sup> In addition, in the empire there were only 7 months of fuel, 4 months of railway carbon, 1 or 2 months of tires, 7 months of food, 6 days of supplies for ammunition escorts. For all the duration of the conflict the empire would have received as reinforcement only 2 fighter aircraft and, as ordinary resupply, only one Japanese merchant vessel loaded with fuel, oil, food, and wrong sized vehicle tires.<sup>73</sup>

On the other side, Gen. Archibald Wavell, the British Commander in Chief of the Middle East, confirmed the necessity for Britain to take control of the Italian East Africa that represented a threat for the British interests. The effective and authoritarian presence of the British navy in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean generally nailed down the Italian navy in the port of Massaua. President Roosevelt, however, declared the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden as combat



zone and denied that sea line of resupply for the British troops.<sup>74</sup> In his 20 October 1940 clear war plan for the East Africa Gen. Wavell determined to:

... take such action in the Sudan and Kenya as will gradually weaken the Italian position ... ,remove any threat to the Sudan and Kenya, lessen the danger of our communications in the Red Sea, and increase the revolt within Abyssinia to an extent that it will occupy the whole of the Italian effort.<sup>75</sup>

- British Somaliland invasion:

In June 1940, however, the British coalition could count on fewer than 20,000 troops defending on the Sudan and Kenya and only 2,000 on British Somaliland. British Somaliland represented for the Duce another easy and painless prestige victory to achieve in order to praise himself beside Hitler.

The viceroy due to his initial offensive mindset, agreed to invade the British Somaliland colony; he considered the Italian empire an advanced base where to mount an offensive through the Sudan up to Port Sudan in order to deny the British that important port of debarkation. He could then reach the Nile Delta in coordination with Gen. Graziani's advance in North Africa.<sup>76</sup> The Duke of Aosta's plan to advance north towards Sudan and Egypt was rejected by Gen. Badoglio and Mussolini; the latter wanted to wait the negotiation peace to acquire Sudan and Egypt by default from Britain and at the beginning of June ordered the viceroy to adopt a strict defensive.

After the easy conquest of the villages of Kassala and Gallabat at the border with the Sudan and Moyale at the border with Kenya, on 3<sup>rd</sup> of August, a total force of 35,000 troops, 21 artillery pieces and 57 aircraft under the command of Gen. Nasi, begun the invasion of British Somaliland against a force of 5,000 British and coalition troops.<sup>77</sup> After 17 days" ... the vexatious military episode," as Churchill defined it, was over also thanks to the signature of the armistice between Italy and France that allowed the demilitarization of Djibouti.<sup>78</sup> Nevertheless this

episode, that represents the only military success of Italy in her own parallel war with Germany, showed the critical deficiencies and the total unpreparedness of the Italian military. The technical and professional incompetence, the total lack of maneuver and combined arms concept, and the tactical failure of the junior leaders, showed evidence that the Italian divisions were not fit for the modern warfare but still were organized to fight against the poorly equipped and armed Abyssinians.<sup>79</sup> The Italian generals failed to place the military strength against the British weaknesses and bumped into the very well built British defensive positions; in the costly frontal assaults the Italian casualties reached 2,052 men, while the British incurred only 206 casualties. Then, the total confusion among the Italian columns and the rivalries among Blackshirt and regular army officers prevented an effective turning movement for the capture of the bulk of the British troops that could orderly embark in the port of Berbera and evacuate the colony. For the British this was an attempt to uphold their reputation more than a sound military defeat.<sup>80</sup>

This operation in British Somaliland wasted a lot of precious military resources; becoming conscious of the critical military conditions, the viceroy, from September, denied any offensive operation towards the strategic objective of Port Sudan unless Italy granted some reinforcements and resupplies. Any significant military resupplies were provided and the Duke ordered to his generals to assume a strict defensive posture in each assigned area of responsibilities in the empire.<sup>81</sup>

Nonetheless in September the Sudan was still almost totally free from British troops and a bold advance towards north, could have prevented the total retrenchment of the Italian troops on the empire defensive strong points. Totally isolated by land and by sea, the Italian defensive positions would have been quickly overwhelmed by the mounting British military coalition reinforcing from the Sudan and South Africa.<sup>82</sup> If the goal was to gain time until the supposed

German victory, the Duke could have built up a campaign to harass and contain the British troops as the legendary German General Paul Emil von Lettow-Vorbeck did in German East Africa during WWI, instead of surrounding them from untenable defensive positions.<sup>83</sup>

Mussolini, instead, gave more attention to the October 1940 invasion of Greece; he ultimately decided to risk of losing the empire and eventually regaining it in case of Axis final victory.<sup>84</sup>

In October 1940, the Gazelle Force under the command of Col. Frank Messervy was established in the Sudan with the mission to harass and intimidate the Italian forces in order to keep them off balance.<sup>85</sup> In January 1941, the 5<sup>th</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup> Indian divisions under the command of Gen. William Platt in Sudan were ready to launch the assault into Eritrea on the axis Kassala-Agordat-Keren-Massaua.<sup>86</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> South African division and the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> African divisions were in Kenya under the command of Gen. Alan Cunningham ready to attack into Italian Somaliland on the axis Kisimaio-Modun-Mogadiscio-Harar.<sup>87</sup> Those divisions were well equipped and armed with a strong aviation support. A few days prior to the crushing coordinated British counteroffensive, The Duke Amedeo of Aosta and his chief of staff Gen. Trezzani were still dubious whether to defend in sector from the borders or to entrench inland on some strong points.<sup>88</sup> In a few months Wavell's generals would have eliminated the Italian domination in East Africa destroying or capturing an armed force of almost 300,000 men.

The pressure exercised by Gen. Platt and the resonance of the total rout of Gen. Graziani in Libya, convinced the Duke to order the evacuation of Kassala on 18<sup>th</sup> of January; it was too late because the British divisions started to pursue the withdrawing Italians.<sup>89</sup> On the 1<sup>st</sup> of February the Indian Divisions were already in control of the Agordat plain. After 13 days of battle the Italian aviation had already lost 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of his fleet.

- Keren:

The Italians managed to block the British pursuit on the Barca River, making it impossible for the British to cross the only available bridge possible. This operational pause for the British, allowed the Italians to prepare their defense in depth on the natural mountains fortress, which dominated the most important avenue of approach to Keren. The battle of Keren, fought from the 5<sup>th</sup> of February to the 26<sup>th</sup> of March, was one of the best episodes of the Italian military history. The Italian and Askari battalions initially managed to repel Gen. Platt's divisions fighting with great decision and effectiveness.<sup>90</sup> The nature of the terrain made it impossible for the British to effectively use their artillery, tanks and aviation, so confronted by similar weapons, the Italians understood that the Indian divisions were not unbeatable. The presence of some trusted and capable leaders as Gen. Nicola Carnimeo and Gen. Orlando Lorenzini boosted the morale and the confidence among the Italian troops.<sup>91</sup> The Italians generals who were basically lieutenants and captains during WW I, felt more comfortable on the Alpine style defensive operations that were more suited to the royal army's infantry-based tactics.<sup>92</sup> Keren, Gondar, or even the defense on Tunisia mountains, all proved the attrition attitude of the Italian military doctrine.

Yet, Mussolini and the viceroy did not grasp that the Italian strenuous resistance in Keren was compromising the entire British strategy in the Mediterranean. The duke also did not coordinate the reinforcements from all the districts needed for the Keren supreme defensive effort. Fifty days of privations of food, rest, and supply resulted in a breakdown of Italian defensive line; Platt's divisions broke through easily conquering Asmara on the 1<sup>st</sup> and Massaua on the 8<sup>th</sup> of April.<sup>93</sup>

With the seizure of Massaua harbor and the neutralization of the Italian fleet in the Red Sea, the British strategic objective of East Africa was achieved.<sup>94</sup> Soon after president Roosevelt declared the Red Sea free of threats and reopened the British vital sea line of communication.

Platt and Cunningham's offensives were perfectly synchronized; in addition on the 16<sup>th</sup> of March a task force of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Punjab regiment conducted an amphibious landing in Berbera to retake the British Somaliland.

The success of Keren and the easy advance of Gen. Cunningham, allowed Wavell, on 27<sup>th</sup> of March, to redeploy one brigade of the 4<sup>th</sup> division to North Africa.<sup>95</sup>

- Giuba:

On the Somaliland front, the Duke of Aosta ordered a defensive belt of 380 miles on the Giuba lane instead of a wiser defense in depth on the Harar heights; he wrongly assumed that the Giuba lane was insurmountable and that the capital Mogadiscio was very far from the British operational reach.<sup>96</sup> On the 21<sup>st</sup> of January Gen. Cunningham launched his offensive, breaking the Giuba lane in six points. The Italians and colonial troops were completely overwhelmed by the mechanized push of the British divisions and by the lethality of the British aviation. Most of the colonial troops, especially the Somali *Dubats* immediately deserted or surrendered to the adversary; the Italian troops would later fall victims of the same fate. The 14<sup>th</sup> of February, the British were in the port of Kisimaio and the 25<sup>th</sup> they were in Mogadiscio; the Italians did not even have time to destroy the port installations, leaving to the adversary an incredible amount of military equipment and logistic supplies. Gen. Cunningham's advance would neither stop on the lane of Harar heights where 5 years prior Gen. Graziani had to employ a huge force to defeat the Ethiopian harsh defense.<sup>97</sup> The Giuba and South sectors were in total disarray; the British entered

in Addis Ababa the 5<sup>th</sup> of April. The Duke of Aosta had already left the capital in order to complete the final act of the empire on Amba Alagi.

The battle of Giuba lasted only 8 days. It was preceded by 5 months of camping and by 3 of critics and at the end by abandoning of the only defendable terrains. - Gen.Ugo Pini division chief of staff on Giuba.<sup>98</sup>

When Gen. Cunningham's offensive was about to start, Gen. Gustavo Pesenti, the Giuba sector commander, was fired by the viceroy. Gen. Pesenti was in a huge moral crisis, totally unhopeful to the defeat; he was more interested in cultivating his passion for classical music than supervising the training and rehearsal of his troops in preparation for the imminent battle. Gen. Pesenti dared to suggest to the Duke to ask the British for an armistice or a separate peace.<sup>99</sup> With such a commander, the troops in the Giuba sector were totally unmotivated.

The poor training method still based on the trench warfare dogmatic reference, consisted basically of marching drills and weapon handling.<sup>100</sup> The faulted leadership style, based on caste mentality of the officer corps, generally led to disarray and failure. The bad relationship among officers, NCOs, and enlisted had a negative effect on initiative, morale and cohesion.<sup>101</sup> The few NCOs were ill treated since they had low profile carriers and low salaries. The lieutenants were doing the tasks, such as recruit training, that normally the NCOs usually performed in other armies.<sup>102</sup> All the captains and lieutenants were reservists or already retired with almost no training opportunity to learn their job except in combat. In the other ranks, the officers chosen to go to Africa, had no great expectation of carrier progression in the motherland.<sup>103</sup>

- Amba Alagi:

The viceroy chose Amba Alagi at the last moment for his ultimate attempt to delay the reinforcement of the British troops in North Africa; yet, Amba Alagi could be moved around by

British troops with no major problems. Nevertheless, the British mission at that time was to eliminate the duke himself that still represented the fascist political institute to eliminate in order to sanction the end of the empire. The Duke's decision was therefore totally unsound; the defensive position was not prepared in advance, no more aviation support was available, and the 7,000 troops were already fatigued and mostly coming from sectors already overwhelmed by the British offensive.

A viable alternative for the viceroy to choose was to join the South sector in the region of Galla and Sidama where Gen. Pietro Gazzera still had 50,000 men who had not yet committed to the fight or the region of Gondar where the Gen. Guglielmo Nasi was capable to put in place an effective and well prepared defensive position.

After 20 days of aviation and artillery bombing and fierce attacks to the Italian positions often leaded by the Ethiopian partisans, with a dramatic shortages of supplies, Amedeo of Aosta decided to surrender. On the 17<sup>th</sup> of March, the British troops granted the arms honor to the Duke for a surrender that represented the end of the Italian East Africa.

Amedeo of Aosta's surrender did not give any political importance to the resistance of Gen. Gazzera and Gen. Nasi who would have surrendered respectively on the 9<sup>th</sup> of July and the 27<sup>th</sup> of November.

#### Conclusion:

The Duce that always insisted on personally conducting the war on all the fronts never inspected his troops in east Africa. He neither realized the strategic importance of the empire, nor did he comprehend the tactical needs of his generals.

Mussolini neglected the Clausewitzian ends-ways-means supreme paradigm and totally ignored the paradoxical war's trinity.<sup>104</sup> The Italian people never showed any inherent passion for this war wanted by the Duce and, unlike the Ethiopian war, never found any interests in sustaining it. Mussolini declined to define realistic, attainable objectives and put his generals in the condition to play a gamble instead of having a chance of victory.

The top military commanders', more concerned with remaining in the Duce's good grace than improving their leadership style, assumed the rigidity as a dogma and never demonstrated the capability to learn from the mistakes and adapt to the changing situation.

The Duce political aims were totally inadequate for Italy's military and industrial capabilities.<sup>105</sup> Mussolini ignored all the three tendencies of the war's trinity and ultimately destined Italy to the disaster. The African empire was the first to pay the price of Mussolini's gamble and thirst of prestige.

The Duke Amedeo of Aosta had a leadership style more suited for the pacification phase; taking the distance from Gen. Graziani, he managed to redesign the image of the conqueror in a more philanthropic and human way. Ignoring an inflexible Duce, he implemented the indirect rule on the empire, reaching very good results but it was already too late. The Duke, however, did not ignore Mussolini's order to apply a strict defensive posture at the break of hostilities, and subsequently, he demonstrated a lack of combat leadership. He showed uncertainty in every decision and was reluctant to adopt the radical measures that the critical situation imposed. He preferred to defend until the sure surrender instead of attempting the risky but hopeful advance to the Sudan. Moreover, he favored to defend from each military sector instead of personally conducting a coordinated defense on the Ethiopian's strong points of Keren-Massaua-Amba Alagi-Gondar.<sup>106</sup>



Illustrations:

Figure 1 – Map of Ethiopia

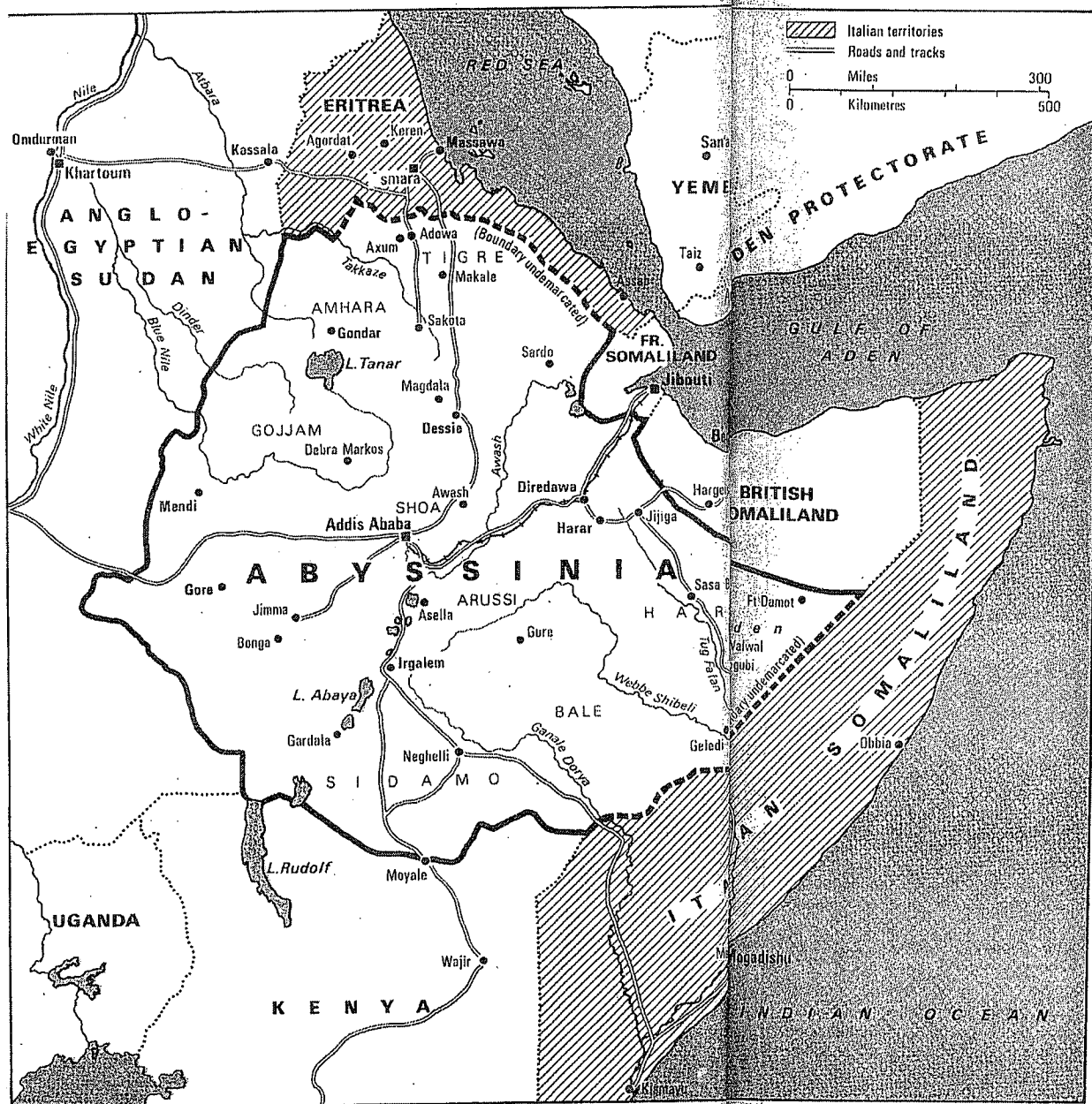


Figure 2 – Map of Gen. De Bono advance

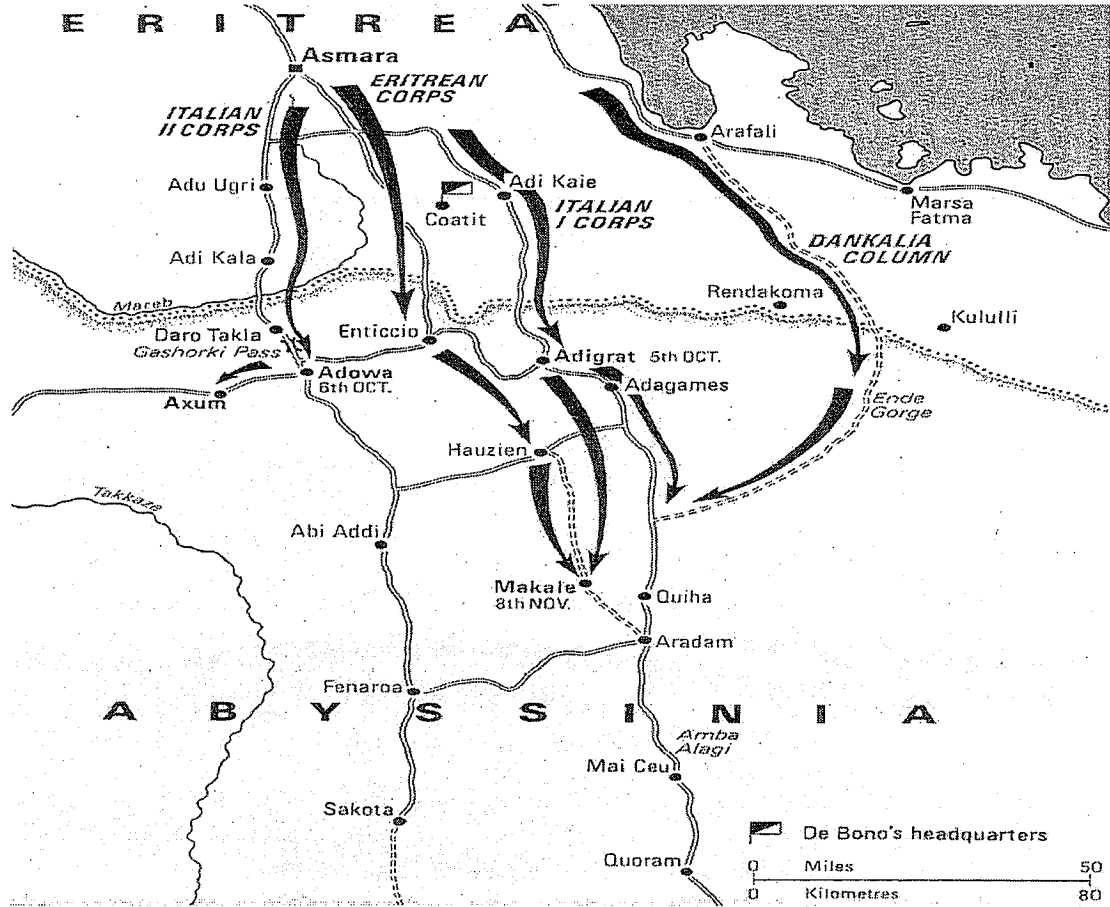


Figure 3 – Map of Gen. Graziani through the Ogaden

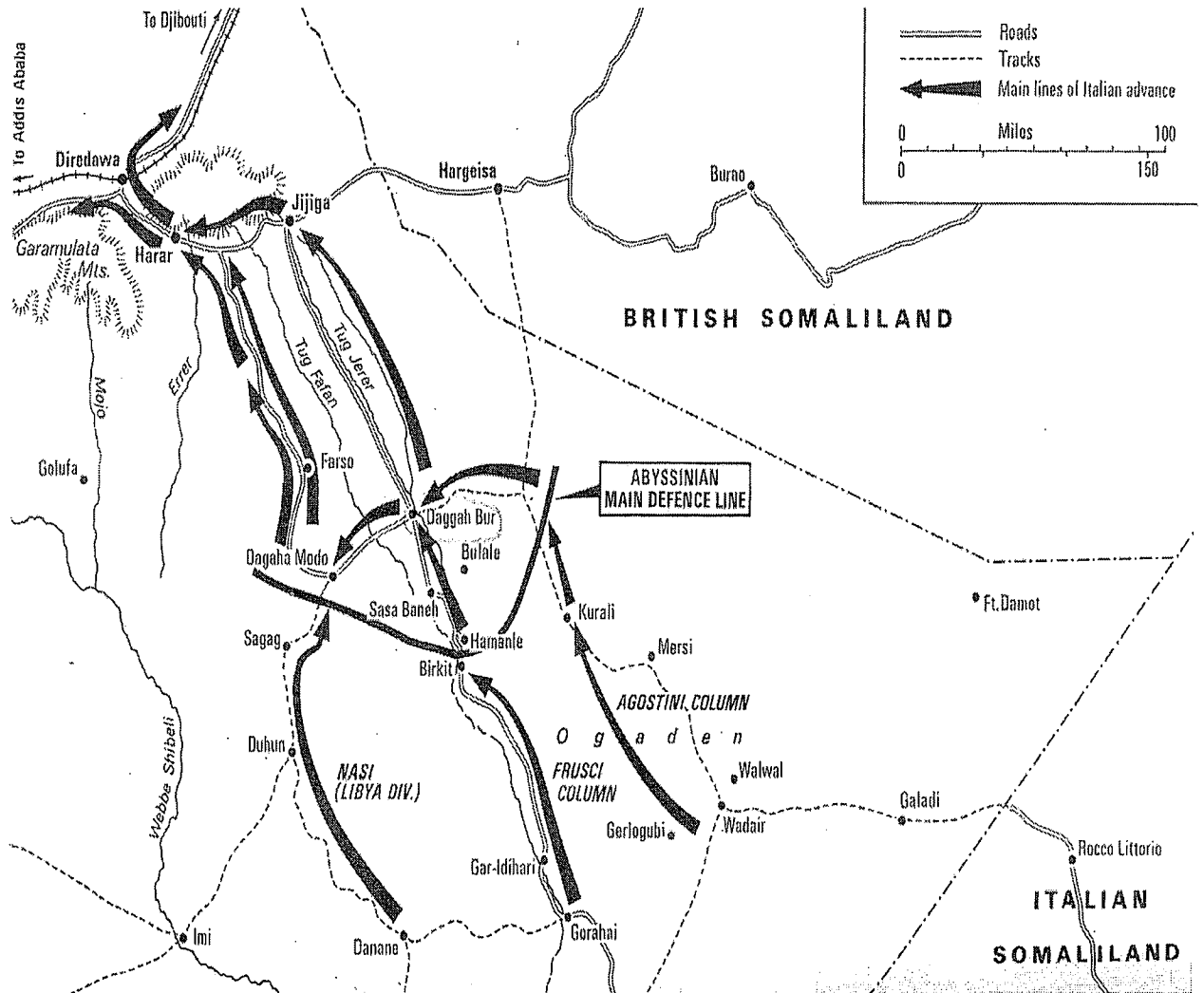


Figure 4: Administrative Division of Italian East Africa

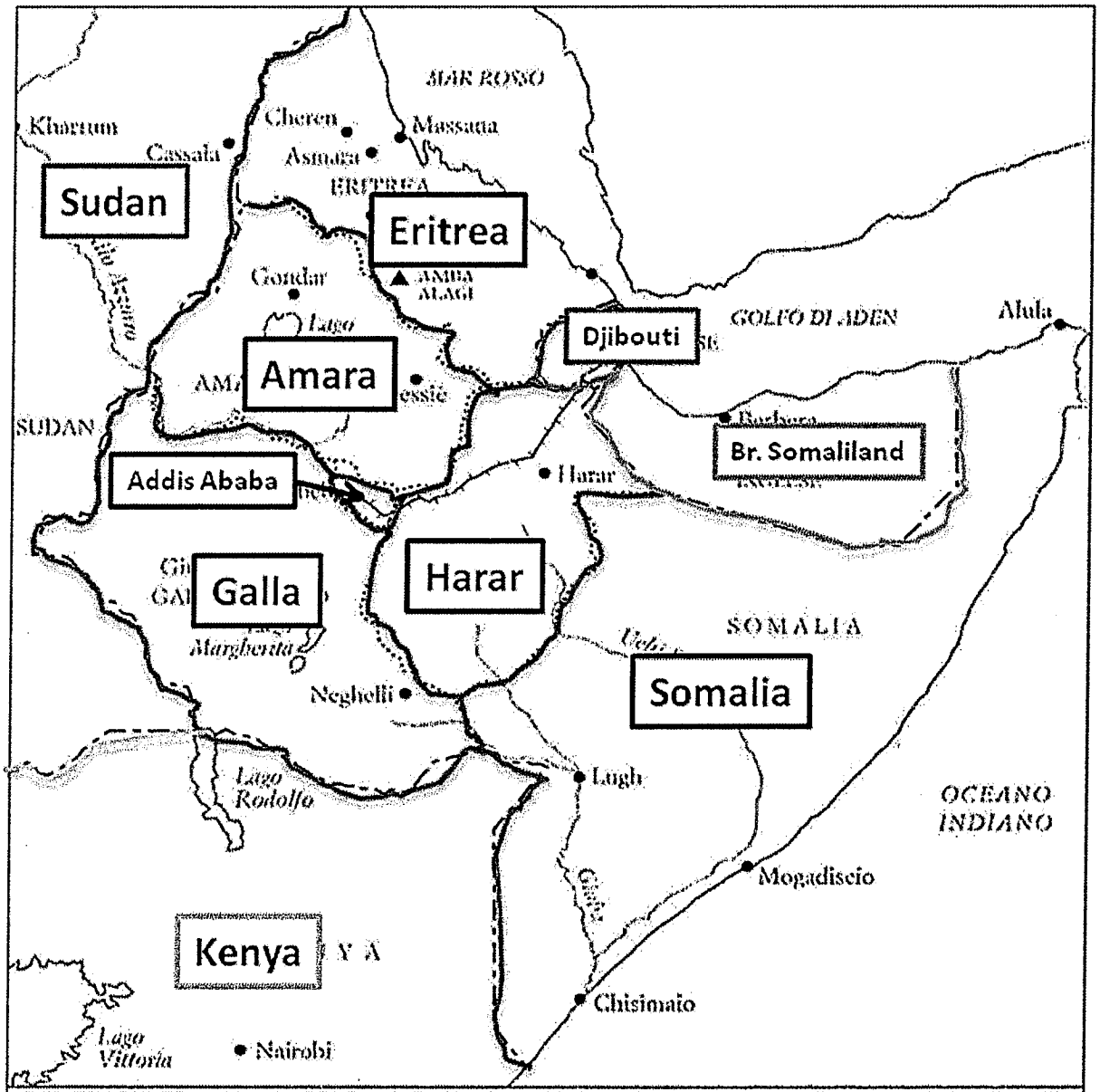


Figure 5: Italian Order of Battle, 1<sup>st</sup> June 1940

Army	Navy	Air Force
91,203 Nationals	6 Submarines	84 Ca 133
199,973 Colonials	2 Coastal Submarines	42 S. 81
3,313 Heavy Machine Guns	7 Cruisers	12 S.79
5,313 Machine Guns	1 Colonial ship	9 Ro 37
672,800 Rifles	2 Torpedo ships	18 CR 32
33,500 pistols	5 M.A.S.	18 CR 42
842 Cannons	1 mine layer	
24 20 mm A/A	2 Gunships	
71 81mm Mortars		
57 45mm Mortars		
24 Medium Tanks		
39 Light Tanks		
126 Trucks		
8,271 Gen. purpose Vehicles		

Figure 6: The Italian invasion of British Somaliland

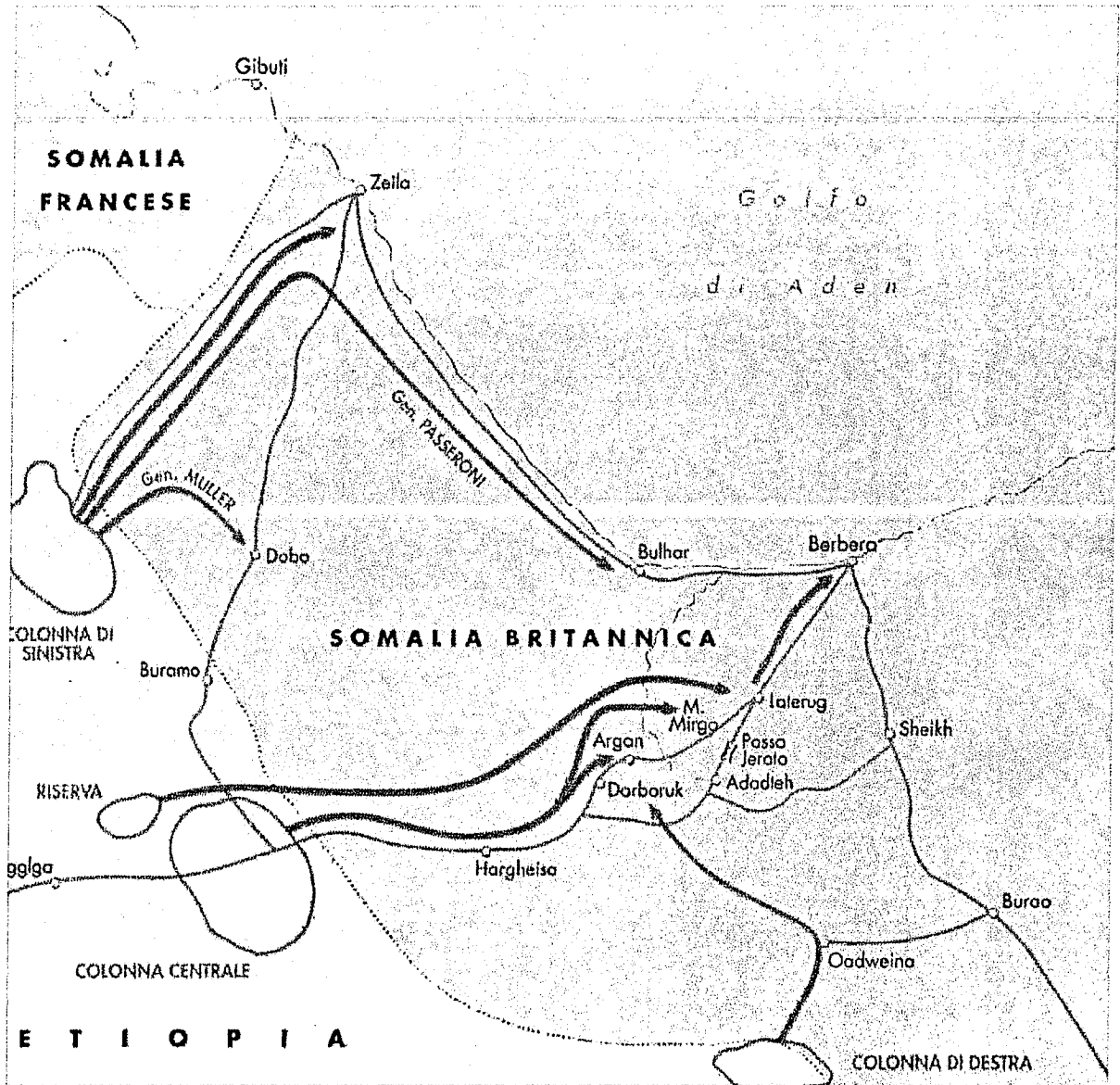
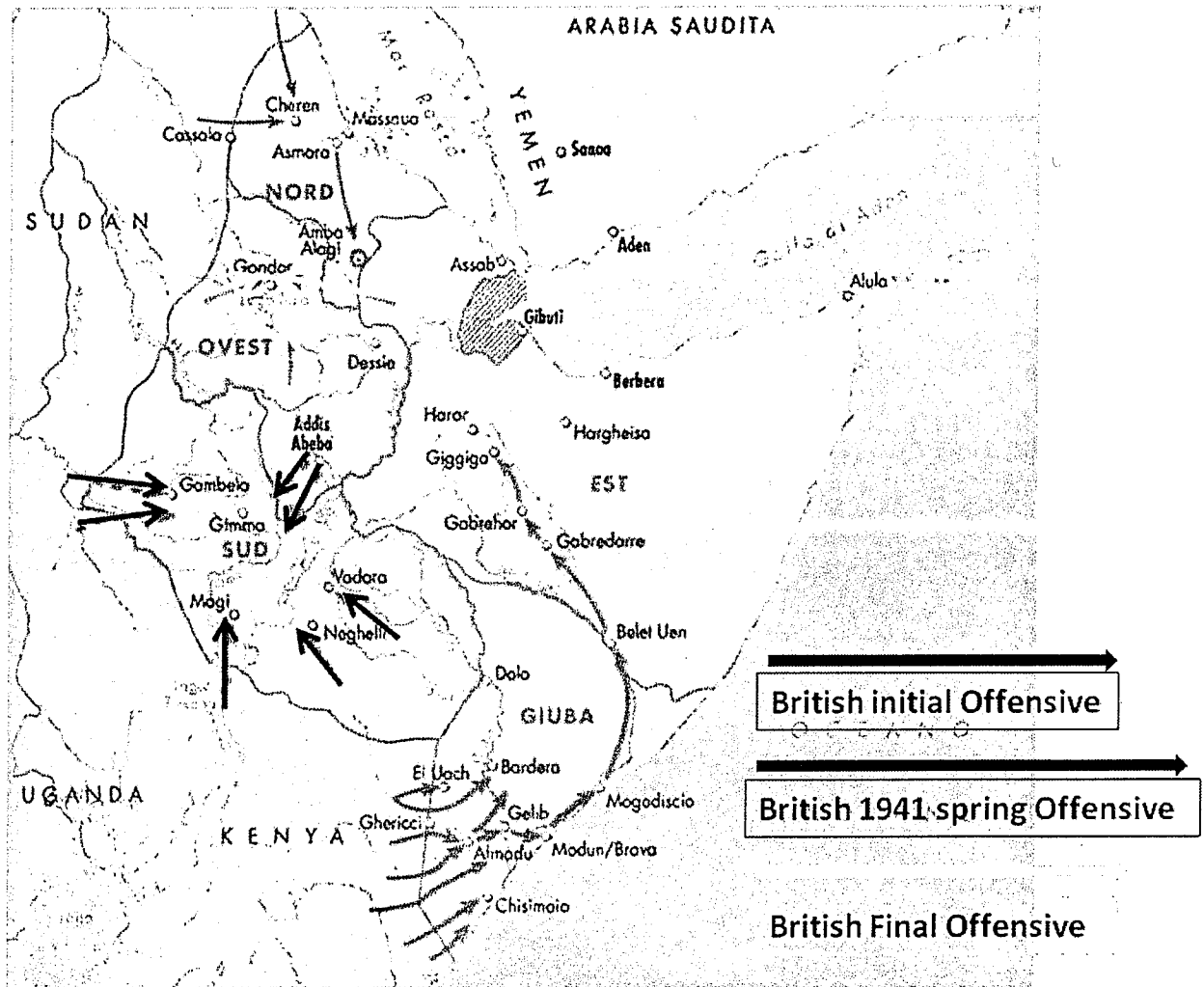


Figure 7: The British Counteroffensive



**Chronology:****1935**

- |                        |  |
|------------------------|--|
| 13 September           | British Home fleet mobilized and sent to Mediterranean                                 |
| 3 October              | At dawn 120000 Italian troops commanded by Gen. De Bono crossed the Eritrean frontier. |
| 7 October              | Adowa is occupied with no opposition   |
| 17 October             | Visit of Badoglio and Lessona on the battlefield                                       |
| 8 November             | Makalle is occupied with no opposition   |
| 18 November            | The negus move his HQ and Guard to Dessie  |
| 19 November            | Imposition of partial sanction on Italy  |
| 26 November            | De Bono is replaced by Badoglio  |
| 9 December             | Hoare-Laval proposal   |
| 15 December-23 January | First battle on Tembien  |

**1936**

- |                |   |
|----------------|---|
| 6-23 January   | Gen. Graziani repels ras Desta attack   |
| 10-15 February | Badoglio attack with 4 divisions on Ambar Adam. Ras Mulugueta encircled                     |
| 27 February    | Ras Mulugueta killed by Raya Galla  |
| 27-30 February | Second battle of Tambien. The Italians scale the high grounds and drive Ras Kassa and Seyum |
| 7 March        | Hitler occupies the Renheland   |
| 31 March       | Battle of Mai Ceu   |
| 1 April        | Gondar in the hand of Starace   |
| 2 April        | The negus orders a retreat  |



14-30 April	Graziani advance in Ogaden
30 April	The Emperor return to Addis Ababa
2 May	The emperor leaves the capital
5 May	Badoglio occupies the capital
8 May	Graziani occupies Harar
9 May	Mussolini announces the born of the new East African Empire
21 May	Badoglio resignation and Graziani appointed military governor of Ethiopia

### 1937

19 February	Assassination attempted on the Viceroy Gen Graziani
November	The Duke Amedeo of Aosta appointed viceroy to replace Gen Graziani
	Italy left The League of Nation

### 1939

7 April	Italy invades Albania
22 May	Pact of Steel signed between Germany and Italy
August	Gen. Wavell takes his post as Commander in Chief of the Middle East
3 September	Britain and France declare war on Germany. Italy remain neutral

### 1940

10 June	Italy declare war on France and Britain
24 June	The Franco-Italian armistice signed in Rome

- 18 August British Somaliland invaded by the Italians
- September Gen. Graziani invades Egypt but stop at Sidi el Barrani
- November British Air force carries out a surprise bombing of Taranto harbor. The Italian Navy suffers a lot of damages
- 9 December Gen Wavell counterattack Gen Graziani in Egypt. Operation Compass.

### 1941

- 19 January British forces recapture Kassala
- 2 February Starts the Battle of Keren
- 11 February Gen Cunningham invades Italian Somaliland
- 24 February Captured Mogadishu, Kisimajo and a large amount of military equipment
- 16 March The Royal Navy recaptures British Somaliland
- 27 March Ends of Battle of Keren
- 19 March Cunningham's Forces enter Harar
- 1 April British occupation of Asmara
- 6 April British occupation of Addis Ababa. Germany invades Greece and Yugoslavia
- 8 April British occupation of Massaua
- 11 April President Roosevelt declares the Red Sea free of threat reopening the traffic in the sea lines of communication.
- 19 May The Duke Amedeo of Aosta surrender on Amba Alagi
- 27 November Gen Nasi surrenders on Gondar

## Notes

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- <sup>1</sup> Sullivan B., *A thirst for glory: Mussolini, the Italian military and the fascist regime 1922-1936*, Columbia University, PhD 1984 Dissertation), p.198
- <sup>2</sup> Vandervort B., *Wars of imperial conquest in Africa 1830-1914*, Indiana University Press), p.158
- <sup>3</sup> Palazzo Venezia located in Rome was Mussolini HQ for all the fascist period.
- <sup>4</sup> Del Boca A., *The Ethiopian war 1935-1941*, Feltrinelli Editore, 1965), p.160
- <sup>5</sup> Lucio Ceva, *Le Forze Armate*, UTET, 1981), p. 297
- <sup>6</sup> See Figure 1: Map of Ethiopia.
- <sup>7</sup> MacGregor Knox, *Mussolini Unleashed, 1939-1941-Politics and strategy in Fascist Italy's Last War*, Cambridge University Press 1982), p.256
- <sup>8</sup> Strang G.B. *On the Fiery March: Mussolini Prepares for War* Praeger Westport, Connecticut London 2003), p.28
- <sup>9</sup> Del Boca A., p.9
- <sup>10</sup> Gooch J. *Mussolini and his generals: the armed forces and fascism foreign policy 1922-1940* Cambridge University Press 2007
- <sup>11</sup> De Bono was one of the four fascist hierarchs to led the March on Rome
- <sup>12</sup> Sullivan B.
- <sup>13</sup> Del Boca A., p.13
- <sup>14</sup> About 250000 Ethiopian troops were allocated to face the invasion of gen. Graziani from south.
- <sup>15</sup> The total equipment for the build-up included 6000 machine guns, 2000 pieces of artillery, 595 tanks and 390 aircrafts plus 10000 strong labor forces, 1 million tons of ammunitions, 6000 donkeys and 2300 motor vehicles.
- <sup>16</sup> Ras was the feudal title highest next to the Emperor. The Ethiopian armies consisting of about 350000 men were poorly equipped and were armed with every type and condition of rifles; they had 290 antiquated artillery pieces, 36 anti-aircraft guns, 30 anti-tank guns and about 1200 machine guns.
- <sup>17</sup> Sullivan B., p.449
- <sup>18</sup> See Figure 2: Map of Gen. De Bono advance in Ethiopia.
- <sup>19</sup> The chief of air staff, Gen. Valle, stressing the Douhet's theory, wanted to conduct an independent air war in east Africa removing the royal Air Force from any possible army control.
- <sup>20</sup> The Hoare-Laval Pact was a December 1935 proposal by British Foreign Secretary Samuel Hoare and French Prime Minister Pierre Laval for ending the Ethiopian War. The Pact offered to Mussolini just a limited portion of Ethiopia. Mussolini, worried by the uncertain military results achieved at that moment,

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was ready to agree to this, but he waited some days to make his opinion public. Meanwhile, the plan was leaked by a French newspaper on 13 December 1935, and denounced as a sell-out of the Ethiopia. Both Hoare and Laval were forced to resign.

<sup>21</sup> Gen Badoglio waited until February 1936 to resume the offensive when the forces available were 392000 men, 1071 guns, 13000 vehicles, and 272 among tanks and armored vehicles.

<sup>22</sup> Giorgio Rochat *Le guerre italiane 1935-1943-Dall'Impero d'Etiopia alla disfatta*, Einaudi, Torino 2005), p. 61

<sup>23</sup> The Negus also knew it was his last chance to maintain his prestige among the population

<sup>24</sup> See Figure 3: Map of Gen. Graziani advance through the Ogaden

<sup>25</sup> The defensive line was known as Hindenburg wall

<sup>26</sup> Barker, A.J., p.131

<sup>27</sup> Lessona was the Minister of Italian Africa, the former Minister of Colonies

<sup>28</sup> The march of iron will is the name of the huge motorized column that Gen. Badoglio formed up from the town of Dessie to reach the capital. It took 10 days to that column to reach Addis Ababa while the Negus was fleeing to Djibouti.

<sup>29</sup> John Gooch, *Re-conquest and Suppression: Fascist Italy's Pacification of Libya and Ethiopia, 1922-39*, The Journal of Strategic Studies, Vol 28, No. 6, 1005-1032, December 2005), p. 1022

<sup>30</sup> Rochat, p. 77

<sup>31</sup> The ordinamento is the Table of Organization and Equipment

<sup>32</sup> Actually the number of Italian and colonial troops reached 223,000 on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1939 opposed by about 50,000 Ethiopian patriots, free to move in the 2/3<sup>rd</sup> of territory not yet occupied by the Italians. Gen. Graziani replaced Gen. Badoglio as Viceroy on the 9<sup>th</sup> of May 1936 after the latter resigned voluntarily to come back to Italy and receive full honor for the victory.

<sup>33</sup> Matteo Dominioni, *Lo Sfascio dell'Impero 1936-1941*, Laterza Bari 2008), p. 71

<sup>34</sup> Rochat, p. 78

<sup>35</sup> Gooch , *Re-conquest and Suppression* , p. 1026

<sup>36</sup> See Figure 4: The East African Empire administrative division.

<sup>37</sup> For this law Gen. Graziani vehemently protested to Minister Lessona. The directives rendered practically impossible the coordination of the operations against the guerrilla and were aimed to limit the power of the viceroy. Lessona wanted to centralize all the power in his hands.

<sup>38</sup> Gen. Graziani had to threaten his resignations to obtain all the Showa under his direct control.

<sup>39</sup> On the 19<sup>th</sup> of February 1937, a ceremony hosted by Gen. Graziani was held to celebrate the birth of the prince of Naples at the presence of top-ranking Italian authority and a large numbers of notables.

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Suddenly around 10 grenades exploded wounding and killing few people; Graziani himself was wounded. An unprecedented reprisal started in Addis Ababa for the next three days in where were executed a total number of around 3,000 people. In addition 1,100 men, women, and children were sent to Danane concentration camp.

<sup>40</sup> Del Boca A., *Gli Italiani in Africa orientale-La Caduta dell'Impero*, Mondadori, Milano 1981), p.48

<sup>41</sup> Ibid, p.50

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p.51

<sup>43</sup> The tucul is the typical house at circular plant made by clay and thatch. Pleased by the good results, Gen. Graziani reminded Gen. Gallina also to loot all the cattle and whatever values goods found in the region.

<sup>44</sup> Among the dead there was also degiac Ficre' Mariam that promised Negus Selassie' to maintain the rebellion alive until the final defeat of the Italians.

<sup>45</sup> See note 74 concerning the opinion of Gen Trezzani on the professional preparation of the Italian young officers.

<sup>46</sup> Del Boca A., 58

<sup>47</sup> Usually the harsh Ethiopian territory just allowed motorized/ mechanized movements on very limited roads and terrain.

<sup>48</sup> There are some reports testifying even the employment of improvised road mines emplaced by guerrilla forces.

<sup>49</sup> Some members of Ethiopic aristocracy were also put on the Italian empire payroll board. Del Boca A., p. 252

<sup>50</sup> Gen. Cavallero extensively applied the mutual defense/support among the bordered regions in order to achieve quicker and decisive results.

<sup>51</sup> Del Boca A., p. 262

<sup>52</sup> Rochat, p. 242

<sup>53</sup> Lucio Ceva, *Le Forze Armate*, UTET, 1981), p. 236

<sup>54</sup> Note written by Mussolini himself in preparation of the meeting with Ribbentrop held the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 1940. Del Boca A., p. 344

<sup>55</sup> Rochat, p.244

<sup>56</sup> Lucio Ceva, *La Condotta Italiana della Guerra*, Feltrinelli Editore, 1975),p.46

<sup>57</sup> Rochat, p. 241

<sup>58</sup> In the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1936 Fascism Grand Council, Mussolini presented a document to orient the Italian policy for the future years.

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- <sup>59</sup> Lucio Ceva, *Le Forze Armate*, UTET Torino, 1981), p.208
- <sup>60</sup> For instance steel production in million tons in 1939 was 2,4 in Italy, 13,4 in UK, and 22.5 in Germany
- <sup>61</sup> Millet and Murray, *Military Effectiveness Vol.III The Second World War*, Boston Allen and Unwin, 1988),p.142
- <sup>62</sup> Macgregor Knox, p. 19
- <sup>63</sup> The naval aviation would have disappeared with the 4<sup>th</sup> of May 1925 Royal Decree
- <sup>64</sup> Millet and Murray, p.155
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.147
- <sup>66</sup> Lucio Ceva, *Le Forze Armate*, UTET Torino, 1981),p.271
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid, p.272
- <sup>68</sup> Giorgio Rochat, p.298
- <sup>69</sup> Del Boca A.,*Gli Italiani in Africa orientale-La Caduta dell'Impero*, Mondadori, Milano 1981), p.343
- <sup>70</sup> Matteo Dominioni, p. 245
- <sup>71</sup> See figure 5 for the complete Italian order of battle at 1<sup>st</sup> of June 1940.
- <sup>72</sup> Ufficio Storico Marina Militare Vol. X *Le Operazioni in Africa Orientale*, Roma 1961), p.16
- <sup>73</sup> Del Boca A.,*Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, p.345
- <sup>74</sup> Harold E. Raugh, Jr., *Wavell in the Middle East 1939-1941- A Study in Generalship*, Brassey's UK, 1993), p.182
- <sup>75</sup> Ibid, p.169
- <sup>76</sup> MacGregor Knox, p.150
- <sup>77</sup> See Figure 6: The Italian invasion of British Somaliland
- <sup>78</sup> Macgregor Knox, p.153
- <sup>79</sup> Gen. Claudio Trezzani, the theatre Chief of Staff commented: "As long as it is a question of risking one's skin, [the junior leaders] are admirable; when, instead, they have to open their eyes, think, decide in cold blood, they are hopeless. In terms of reconnaissance, security, movement to contact, preparatory fire, coordinate movement and so on, they are practically illiterate... Macgregor Knox, p. 154
- <sup>80</sup> A.J.Baker, *Eritrea 1941*, Baldini & Castoldi, Milano 1968), p. 67
- <sup>81</sup> Del Boca A. *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, p.369. After the break of hostilities the empire was divided in four military sectors (Nord, South, East, and Giuba) to facilitate the military operations.

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- <sup>82</sup> The Royal Navy in Massaua was totally ineffective; in the first days of the war the fleet lost 1/3 of his units for technical problems or for enemy actions. By the month of October all the Italian submarines would have been out of action. A weak air bridge was put in place for 7 months, and then the connections were missed because men, equipments and aircraft were diverted for the Albania aggression. At the beginning of October 1941, some undisturbed British warships started to offload artillery pieces, tanks and equipments of Gen. Heath's 5<sup>th</sup> Indian division.
- <sup>83</sup> Gen Lettow-Vorbeck spent the entire WW I harrying the forces of the British Empire, tying down with his band of 3,000 Germans and 11,000 native Askaris and porters, a British Imperial army 300,000 strong.
- <sup>84</sup> Giorgio Rochat, p.299
- <sup>85</sup> Harold E. Raugh, Jr., p.172. The Gazelle Forces was composed by a mechanized Indian regiment, a machine gun regiment, Artillery units, combat, and combat service support units.
- <sup>86</sup> See Figure 7, the British Counteroffensive
- <sup>87</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> of July, the Negus Haile' Selassie was in Khartoum ready to ignite the revolt in Ethiopia from the region of Goggiam. The so called "mission 101" was established supported by the British Colonel Orde Wingate and his Gideon Force.
- <sup>88</sup> In a telegram of the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1941 to Amedeo of Aosta, Mussolini reported: " To abandon territories is always painful, but when the forces are preserved there is a chance to retake those by the victories; if the forces are engaged or defeated to retake the territories became problematic " Del Boca A., p.398
- <sup>89</sup> Harold E. Raugh, Jr., p.175
- <sup>90</sup> Those qualities were lacked in the all east African campaign except in the battle of Gondar and in Amba Alagi.
- <sup>91</sup> Gen. Lorenzini would die in the same battle while leading an Askari unit to an attack. His death was a serious stroke for the troop morale.
- <sup>92</sup> Millet and Murray, p.163
- <sup>93</sup> The only Italian Navy success in Red Sea was the serious damaging of the British cruiser Capetown operated by the Italian MAS 213 torpedo strike. The MAS and the *Maiali*, frogman were the only effective tactical system capable of achieving a strategic results.  
The huge casualties rate in Keren was 12,147 KIA and 21,700 WIA among Italians and colonial troops
- <sup>94</sup> Harold E. Raugh, Jr., p.178
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, p.181
- <sup>96</sup> Del Boca A. . *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, p.443.
- <sup>97</sup> Ibid, p.451.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid, p.449

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p.392

<sup>100</sup> Rochat, p.27

<sup>101</sup> Millet and Murray, p.150

<sup>102</sup> Rochat, p.180

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.91

<sup>104</sup> Clausewitz Von C., *On War*, Edited and translated by Howard M. and Paret P., Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1989), p. 89

<sup>105</sup> Millet and Murray, p.143

<sup>106</sup> Del Boca A. *Gli Italiani in Africa Orientale*, p.392



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