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SANCTIONS AND SECURITY: THE LEAGUE OF NATIONS AND THE ITALIAN-ETHIOPIAN WAR, 1935-1936

George W. Baer

The imposition of limited sanctions against Italy was given fair prospect of success by members of the League. Sanctions were to have a twofold purpose. One was to uphold the Covenant and encourage collective security. The other was to end the war by putting pressure on the Italian government so as to make it amenable to a negotiated settlement. It was expected that economic and financial measures (as opposed to military means) would be sufficient, over a period of time, to achieve this. The timetable was upset by unexpected political events and by the collapse of Ethiopian military resistance. Policies are explained, events discussed, and to illuminate some dilemmas a distinction (not then well perceived) is made between politically important "consumatory" assumptions and diplomatically operative "instrumentalist" and reconciliationist practices.

Raymond Aron described the study of international relations as beginning from an understanding of the "plurality of autonomous centers of decisions, hence from the risk of war, and from this risk [deducing] the necessity of the calculation of means."¹ It is in these terms one should approach the League of Nations, an association of states drawn together by common acceptance of the Covenant of the League. Acceptance was by treaty, so the League had some features of an alliance. But beyond the matter of honor (and treaty obligations can be abrogated, ignored, or violated), nothing in the Covenant made action by these states automatic or collective. The Covenant provided no way to enforce collective action. The governments of these member states acted in consideration of particularist, national interests with referents that might be in sys-

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¹ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War: A Theory of International Relations*, R. Howard and A. B. Fox, trans. (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967), p. 16.

temic accord with the Covenant but which, basically, involved a unilateral perception of internal and external interests, and independent evaluations of risks and opportunities. What the League provided operationally was a structure wherein commonly shared purposes might be translated into common action. Perhaps, as in the hopes of its founders, this would form a system of collective security. In the present case, where Italy's African imperialism offered no direct threat to the security of the leading powers, collective security was only a problematic future benefit. This paper examines the establishment of sanctions against Italy in terms of the potential for collective security among League states.

The main argument for League action in 1935 was to test the association's capacity to stand against Hitler's revisionism. Everyone regretted acting against Italy. The armed services of Great Britain thought that a Mediterranean conflict would weaken imperial defense at a time of renewed Japanese expansionism. The French had a land frontier with Italy, and recently established good relations permitted planners to contemplate the withdrawal of seventeen divisions from the Alps to France's northeast frontier. A conflict, or increased tension, with Italy would necessitate their remaining in the south, and in the event only three divisions were transferred, providing no help to the force maintained against Germany as well as jeopardizing the ability of the French navy to transport four additional divisions from North Africa to Europe. Military advisers urged caution, and one objective of British and French policy became the avoidance of war with Italy. There was, in addition, the fear that a beleaguered Mussolini might turn toward Hitler and the concern that a war might cause the collapse of the Fascist regime, resultant social chaos, and, the favorite argument of the Vatican, the probable triumph of Bolshevism on the peninsula. Much of this was well known to Mussolini. The Italian intelligence service had access to the safe in the British embassy and Hoare, Laval, and Flandin sent constant reassurances. Mussolini's contemptuous evaluation of the feebleness and passivity of Frenchmen, Englishmen, and liberal democracy in general was reinforced.

Italian diplomacy made excellent use of this desire to avoid war. At several critical times the British and French turned aside from imposing increasingly harsher terms of sanctions in response to threats that Italy would assume belligerent rights. Further, the desire not to alienate Italy from its assumed westward orientation meant that Britain and France were susceptible to Mussolini's coincident threats to leave the League.

Despite such qualifications, a formidable collectivist front was established. October and November 1935 were months of confidence

and accomplishment for the League, months in which, for the first time, successful application was made of the enforcement provisions of the Covenant. Economic and financial sanctions were imposed upon Italy by some four dozen states. These sanctions were both indirect, as in the refusal to import goods from Italy, and direct. Direct sanctions prohibited the export of certain goods to Italy, and were meant to be progressive. The second stage, after November, was to embargo additional vital materials of which the most important in its effect on Italy, and the most important in the eyes of the world, would be oil. Direct sanctions went further than the cautious cabinets of Britain and France expected. They were the product, to some extent, of Eden's leadership in Geneva, where he acted as Minister for League of Nations Affairs in fortuitous ignorance of the reservations of his government and according to his assessment that strong and swift action was necessary to save the League from fatuity. This opinion was shared by most other delegates and provided the vigor, unanimity and high expectation that accompanied the judgment on Italy's aggression and the initial sanction proposals. The assumption of most delegations was that Great Britain and France would maintain themselves loyal to the Covenant.

British and French support, in fact, had been made conditional upon such a collective disposition to fulfill the terms of Article 16.² There was circular reasoning involved here, for the British and French were the necessary and natural leaders, and strong action was taken, to the surprise and dismay of London and Paris, mainly because other delegations mistook British and French policies to be more clearly determined than they were. When this support was tendered, the British and French dared not deny their earlier affirmations which, when uttered, had been largely bluff. Support for the League by the British and French was determined only partly by expectations of increased national security that might be drawn from the League system, although the League was the main diplomatic connection of conservative states, and any arrangements, existing or potential, that aimed at preserving territorial security in Europe depended on a sense of international cooperation typified by the Covenant. Matters such as the future of Anglo-French cooperation against Germany, for example, depended on evaluations of the possibilities of joint action, tested just then in terms of sanctions. The impetus for support derived likewise from demands of internal politics. Mussolini guessed wrong when he thought the British would respond only according to imperial considerations that he knew were not regarded in Ethiopia as incompatible with Italian

² Article 16 of the Covenant specifies collective action to be taken should any member of the League resort to war.

control. German rearmament, which Mussolini had not anticipated, changed the focus of the government, and popular enthusiasm for the League made support, however tempered, a political imperative.

Action through the League was the desire of "the central body of opinion" in Britain, Hoare told Laval in September.³ Within days after the invasion, both opposition parties endorsed such a policy, and within weeks the government called and won a general election on a pro-League platform. The Wilsonian hopes that had always surrounded the association were supplemented now by a reaction against the cynical brutality of Fascist militarism, by a growing interest in foreign affairs, and by an escapist fascination with exotic Ethiopians. The Ethiopian cause benefited greatly, then as now, from the grave and dignified demeanor of the emperor. Presentations of Italian propaganda describing Ethiopians as vicious uncivilized barbarians never supplanted the post-imperialist, liberal-romantic sentiment which saw them as free and noble people brutally assaulted by "the Machine Age," as *Time* magazine expressed it when Haile Selassie was named "Man of the Year."⁴ For many, the issue was more than just a question of collective security. Policy became an affair of national honor, of action not only on behalf of the League but also, in a depression-ridden world, of the oppressed. The public would insist on the League's being tried, Hoare told Laval, "even though it might be found to fail."⁵ "Any other course," the cabinet agreed, "would be impossible to explain to the country." If successful, the practice of collective action would be affirmed. If the League failed, added Hoare, "the sooner we know the better."⁶

In October and November, with the imposition of sanctions, the League, in the terms by which it was established, functioned as a system of collective security. Two major revisionist powers, Germany and Japan, were not within the association, and two important independents, the United States and Brazil, acted outside. Thus the totalistic prerequisites of idealized collective security models were not met. But this should not distract us from recognizing, in a diplomatic or operational analysis, the importance of what had been achieved. In mid-November, despite all the reservations and foot-dragging, collective action was launched and wide-spread public opinion, often important in sustaining or motivating collaborating governments, was in support.

The British government had set out to test what Hoare called the League's "virility."⁷ Impelled to act at Geneva for reasons of domestic

³ Meeting on 10 September 1935. F.O. 401/35, part XXIV, no. 146, encl.

⁴ *Time*, 6 January 1936.

⁵ Meeting on 10 September 1935. F.O. 401/35, part XXIV, no. 146, encl.

⁶ Cabinet Conclusion 43 (35), 1, of 24 September 1935 (Cab 23/82).

⁷ To Eden on 13 October 1935. F.O. 432/1, part IV, no. 36.

politics, now closely associated with considerations of national security through the question of rearmament, the British, drawing the French with them and in association with dozens of other states, participated in a common front based upon the imposition of sanctions against Italy. Given the putative strategic goals, the worst that could happen would be the discrediting of this diplomatic and ideological front before it could be developed into a system for use against Germany. Had either the British or the French government clearly established a priority of enforcement over appeasement, the discrediting of the association and its collective security possibilities might have been prevented, and this, surely, would have had a stabilizing influence on international relations in Europe that was thereafter absent.

Neither government established such a priority. From the beginning, there was a functional and theoretical incompatibility between the general needs of collectivist enforcement of a security system and the particularist interests involved in conciliation. The British leaned toward the former and the French toward the latter. Bilateral diplomacy worked overtime to find a common step, often resulting in much bitterness, but basically each followed the double line.

The French governments were beset by grave domestic difficulties. There was a persistent threat of civil conflict between the pro-Fascist leagues and the emerging common front, and an economic crisis which threatened the stability of the franc. Both troubles were exacerbated by the Ethiopian question. Support of the League of Nations was demanded from the left—but few thought this went to the support of a war, even arising from League action. Maintenance of the Italian connection was demanded from the right. The uncertainties bred by the conflict, and played upon by a vitriolic anglophobic anti-sanctionist press, shook public confidence and undermined the expansion of business enterprise essential to the success of the government's financial policy, which in turn was meant to stabilize social unrest. Laval, inclined toward authoritarianism, depended on parliamentary support from the center-left, of which Herriot and Paul-Boncour were representatives in his cabinet, and he could not ignore the pro-League, pro-British sentiments they reflected.

There was, however, also deep suspicion of British motives. For the French, a League policy would be worthwhile, sanctions worth the risk, if the result was a closer, surer defensive agreement with Britain. But how long-lived, how solidly based, was this current British enthusiasm for the League? Was it extendable specifically to aid France? Already three times in 1935 the British had kept secret from the French actions affecting French security interests: Eden's visit to Mussolini, the Anglo-German naval agreement, and the withdrawal of the western naval cover

in the Mediterranean along with the placing of Home Fleet units at Gibraltar. The French tried in September to get a statement of British intentions should Germany use the occasion of Italian involvement in Africa to move against Austria. This request was turned aside, as it was again in February when the question of the Rhineland became acute. In Paris, reliance upon the Locarno agreements now seemed problematic. The British assumed great responsibility in encouraging action against Italy if it was to lead nowhere. At the time of the Rhineland crisis, the head of the French naval general staff stated that the best Great Britain could offer France was "moral support." No common action with Britain and Italy would be possible so long as they were at odds over the Ethiopian affairs.⁸ In this uncertainty, neither Laval nor Flandin wanted to jeopardize their good relations with Italy. Still, from the first, official French opinion was that, as Gamelin wrote, "for us Italy is important; England is essential."⁹ This view was held strongly in the Quai d'Orsay by Léger, Bargeton, and Massigli, and by other military chiefs Weygand and Georges, whatever their opinions of the League.

No official, political or professional, advocated abandoning the League. It was just that the French, like the professional foreign office men and military leaders in London, thought that from a nationalist perspective a full-fledged enforcement policy would, in this case, be unduly and immediately dangerous, and this restrained them from taking risks for the Covenant. There was no worry about losing a war with Italy. The Italians themselves expected to lose, and Italian military chiefs served grave warning on Mussolini against taking a belligerent initiative. What disturbed the British staffs was that the cost of a war, the possible loss of ships, and disturbance in the Mediterranean might drastically impair their ability to fulfill widely dispersed strategic responsibilities, for instance in the Far East. They did not think they could count on the assurances of support from Laval, who took no steps to activate French forces. British ships would need docking facilities, but the anti-aircraft guns at Toulon were not even manned. The French navy would have to contain the western Mediterranean while the British fleet engaged in the east, but the French admiralty had orders to move no ship, to recall no specialists or reserves, to take no action, and indeed, far from being able to control these waters, declared at the end of

⁸ Meeting of senior military and naval officers at Gamelin's house on 8 March 1936. France, Ministère des affaires étrangères, Commission de publication des documents relatifs aux origines de la guerre 1939-1945, *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939, 2e sér.* (1936-1939), t. I (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1963), p. 445.

⁹ Maurice Gamelin, *Servir: Le Prologue du drame, 1930-août 1939* (Paris: Plon, 1946), p. 175.

October they would need British help to transport troops from North Africa.¹⁰ Vansittart warned in the Foreign Office that to publicly reveal these doubts about the reliability or capacity for action of their ostensible ally would do irredeemable harm to public confidence and to Anglo-French relations.¹¹ Corresponding doubts about Britain, suspicions of motive and concern about reliability were current at the Quai. Worry about Germany, about losing the Italian connection, about receiving a preemptive strike, were as active in Paris as was support for Geneva in Whitehall.

Thus, just at the time when collective action seemed to be working, policy makers argued that the very success of sanctions contained risks that were, if not unacceptable, at least such as to be avoided if possible. The Italian general staff was not planning for an offensive war against the British, despite reports, troublesome to Baldwin, of Italian pilots prepared to make suicide bombing runs on London. Contingency plans for the navy stated as *casus belli* not the imposition of the oil sanction but measures such as closing the Suez Canal or otherwise stopping the transport of troops or supplies.¹² But the decision for war was Mussolini's, and his behavior seemed to British and French official eyes to be unstable, impulsive, and irresponsible. Even his logic spelled trouble. To ambassadors Drummond and Chambrun, he made the argument that the decision to impose direct sanctions, which were meant to be progressively restrictive embargoes, must, to be effective, "necessitate the right of searching vessels and ultimately of blockade, which was a military sanction, and definitely meant war."¹³

Mussolini astutely and very successfully played on the fears and hopes of the leaders of the League. He never denied that he might go to war, and this unpredictability gave rise to anxiety about a "mad dog act" on his part. He never denied and often suggested that he was amenable to conciliation. Mussolini's threats and encouragements kept the all too susceptible British and French off balance, and they never jettisoned as unproductive one or the other of their two lines of policy. These lines they rationalized as parallel and supplementary, but, increasingly, they came into opposition. As enforcement of the Covenant and consolidation of the League grew more determined, Mussolini reopened hopes for settlement, and his cues were taken up in Paris and London. At two critical junctures, in December and in March, when, each

¹⁰ Meeting between Admirals Chatfield and Decoux, 30 October 1935. F.O. 432/1, Part IV, no. 58.

¹¹ Minute of 12 November 1935. F.O. 371/19160, pp. 123-129.

¹² Emilia Chiavarelli, *L'Opera della marina italiana nella guerra italo-etiopica* (Milan: A. Giuffrè, 1969), pp. 92-94.

¹³ Interview with Chambrun on 16 October and Drummond on 18 October 1935. F.O. 401/35, part XXIV, nos. 79 and 87.

time, it was planned to set the next stage of sanctions by establishing the embargo on petroleum, the British and French governments agreed, independently and without mandate from any agency of the League, to postpone the oil decision in order to seek a conciliatory solution.

These efforts were not meant to betray faith in the Covenant or in collective security, although in the circumstances irreparable harm was done to both. Conciliation was justified by several arguments, apart from the dominant particularist nationalist considerations noted above with their reserved view of collective action. These justifications were not held by pro-League public opinion that saw the League in more simplistic, moralistic terms, or by governments of smaller states whose support for collective security depended on the firm resolution of the larger powers.

The contradictions in this situation are illuminated by a distinction Ernst Haas has made between social values dichotomized as consummatory or instrumental in nature. "Consummatory values," wrote Haas,

imply a devotion to the integral realization of strongly held beliefs; instrumental values involve a constant calculation of the adjustment of the proper means to achieve limited ends, and a willingness to settle for an approximation to one's beliefs.¹⁴

Pro-League public opinion, and anti-League propaganda in Italy, for that matter, carried a consummatory value. Moralistic qualities were attributed to the League. The League embodied the new diplomacy established as a war aim in the great war. Questions of honor and of credibility were involved.

Fascist perspective, while critical, also took consummatory stance. The League was seen as part of an evangelical, anti-Fascist doctrinal laic-mysticism associated with Jews, plutocrats, Masons, and Bolsheviks, "the extreme incarnation of the enlightenment filtered through one and a half centuries of democratic romanticism."¹⁵

Opposed to seeing the League through the consummatory lens was the instrumentalist position, held by professional diplomats, by officials accustomed to exclusivist, elitist behavior, that assessed national interest on the basis of secret information, secret deliberations, secret conclusions, and hopefully the secret resolution of international problems. These officials paid little heed to the partisans of Wilsonian diplomacy,

¹⁴ Ernst B. Haas, *Collective Security and the Future International System* (Denver: University of Denver, 1968) p. 11.

¹⁵ So spoke Francesco Coppola, editor of *Politica*, on 19 January 1936. G. Volpe, et al., *La ragione dell'Italia* (Rome: Reale Accademia d'Italia, 1936), pp. 45-7.

except for domestic political advantage. Despite the claim that popular enthusiasm for collective security was vital to officially determined strategic goals, public support was regarded with suspicion as being ill-informed or misguided, or, as in France, discounted as minimal. It was not systematically developed or encouraged for defensive or internationalist purposes. Nor was the instrumentalist position adequately explained. For example, one official argument was that a diplomatic settlement would help the League because it would defer, not force, its testing time, thus avoiding at present the strain of sanctions on the association and on the Anglo-French entente—a strain, it was thought in the chancelleries, neither would survive. Whatever merits there might have been to such an argument, the public knew very little about them and the results of a non-enforcement policy were not at all what popular opinion or the many smaller governments had been led to expect.

Against the consummatory assumptions of the association, against the expectations of firm maintenance of the covenant, against the absolutes of aggression and security, against, indeed, the consummatory features being given to and consummatory benefits being gained from the war in Fascist Italy, was opposed what can be described as a reconciliationist perspective. The reconciliationist model, in a typology developed by David Apter and extended in international affairs by Haas, predicates the acceptability of a bargained settlement of disputes. Limited goals are pursued through diplomacy, accommodation, and compromise. Secularized norms and practical satisfactions are widely shared, and, in a reconciliation system, coercion can be kept to a minimum. Each constituent member is assumed to continue to find it worthwhile to act according to well defined and established rules. In short, conciliation was considered desirable, possible, and appropriate.¹⁶

Basic to the reconciliationist view was an instrumentalist definition of the purpose of sanctions, accepted by the traditionalist diplomats of the foreign offices but not fully appreciated outside of official circles. Sanctions were not meant, in October 1935, to destroy Fascism or to topple Mussolini, nor could a government legitimately claim to use the Covenant for such purposes. Sanctions were not meant to punish the Italian people. While Italian citizens would certainly be inconvenienced by their application, such suffering was meant only to awaken Italian popular opinion to the errors of the government, which would then, in the face of domestic and world-wide disapproval, mend its ways. The League was not a moral agency, nor was it a court of law in a civil sense. Strictly viewed, Article 16 was not meant to serve as an arm of righteousness or to concern itself with the internal nature

¹⁶ Haas, *Collective Security and the Future International System*, pp. 11-12.

of regimes. Of course, diplomats acted in a political context, and the unwillingness to unseat Mussolini reinforced a resistance to push the Covenant to its limits. Basically, however, to the official mind, Italy was not guilty of a sin or a crime but of a treaty violation. The purpose of sanctions was to apply such pressure on the aggressor state as would bring an end to a prohibited act of war. In 1935 this was the formal, instrumental aim of collective action by the League.¹⁷

Since this instrumentalist goal could be achieved also by means of a negotiated settlement, the double policy seemed to make sense: sanctions to exert pressure and rally the League to common cause; negotiation to settle the war after pressure made the Italians seek a way out, without broadening the conflict. What the professionals did not see was that reconciliationist assumptions undermined the long-range strategic and political goals stated for a collective security policy. And the alternative was appeasement. The best that can be said for these plans was that they were short-run expedients to deal with a vexing situation without making it worse. A Foreign Office minute of early December concerning the Hoare-Laval plan reads:

Our object is to overcome the immediate dangerous crisis, not to solve the Abyssinian question, which will be with us for years. But if we can stop the war, passions will cool and there will be more chance than at present of reducing all these rather general and perhaps slightly theoretical proposals to shape.¹⁸

What the long-run implications of either enforcement or conciliation might be were not thought through. Appeasement, or the terms of a context for peaceful change, were not developed as substitutes to League policy, and collective security or defensive alliance were not systematically extended for application against the German danger.

What is interesting is why the features of this double line appeared to Hoare and to Laval, to Eden and to Flandin, to stand some chance of success. In the first period, from October to December, there seemed ample time. Every general staff thought the Italian army would take at least two years to conquer Ethiopia, and that in the middle of this period, after six or seven months of what was initially not very successful campaigning, the army would be mired in the mud of the five or six months-long rainy season. Already, within a few weeks of the invasion, DeBono's forces ground to a halt only a short distance from the border, without making significant contact with Ethiopian troops.

¹⁷ See Sir John Fischer Williams, "Sanctions under the Covenant," *British Year Book of International Law*, 1936, pp. 130-149.

¹⁸ Minute by Thompson and Scrivener of 2 December 1935. F.O. 371/19166, pp. 71-6.

Thus it appeared that even limited economic sanctions would have time to work against an already strained Italian economy, and this gradual pressure, especially if supplemented by a victorious battle or two to justify the 200,000 men he sent to Ethiopia, would induce Mussolini to negotiate. Hoare, for example, turned away a Dominions' suggestion that diplomatic relations be broken with Italy, replying that "this would only make conciliation more difficult. And we are bound to consider that prospects of conciliation will be improved by the pressure to be applied."¹⁹

The popular reaction to the secretly prepared Hoare-Laval plan of December revealed how far the official thinking was from the spirit of support that sustained the enforcement policy. Before leaving for Paris to conclude the proposal, Vansittart asked his press officer: "How long will it take to alter public opinion on the Abyssinian issue?" Three weeks, was the reply. "We have only three days," Vansittart said, and then was amazed at the extent of the uproar that followed.²⁰ However disillusioning, the proposal did not destroy the sanctionist front. Eden, conspicuously replacing Hoare, took as his first priority to restore confidence overseas, and this meant a firmer stand.²¹ Agreements of mutual support between Mediterranean countries were affirmed. When the long-delayed question of the oil embargo was to be decided by the Committee of Eighteen, the arguments in its favor made to the cabinet on 26 February stressed several reasons for support. Failure to apply the embargo would put the whole principle of collective security in question. Many countries were now applying sanctions; to do nothing at this juncture would be "most detrimental and discouraging."

As for internal considerations, the cabinet argument reads:

The carrying out of the programmes of the Defence Requirements depended very largely on industrial mobilization, and for this the cooperation and good will of labour was essential. The Trade Unionist section of the Labour Party stood firmly for collective security, and if the application of oil sanctions was shirked by the government, the opposition to the government's defensive programmes would have a moral basis which it at present lacked. In fact, application of oil sanctions was advocated on the ground it might even enable the cooperation of the Trade Unionists to be secured.

As Baldwin said, "a refusal to impose an oil sanction would have a

¹⁹ To Eden on 9 October 1935. F.O. 371/19143, pp. 15-19.

²⁰ Ian Colvin, *None So Blind* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1965) pp. 74-5, 81.

²¹ Sir James Eden (Earl of Avon), *Facing the Dictators* (London: Cassell, 1962), p. 320.

disastrous [political] effect both now and at the General Election." The prime minister continued: "The whole of Europe was entitled to know whether collective economic sanctions would work so that every country could make up its mind as to how far it could cooperate in a collective system." The Dominions, Baldwin continued, "wished to try economic sanctions. Were they convinced of that policy's success, they might be more amenable to cooperation in the Empire for maintaining the peace of the world." The League was the bridge between the island and the continent, and its potential value reached even further, as we see here. As to sanctions' worth to national security, Baldwin concluded: "the cooperation of labour was absolutely vital if the [rearmament] programmes were to be carried out. With that cooperation this country in five years time would fear no-one."²²

But would the British, in the meantime, be willing to give specific help to France with the same willingness they showed in applying the generalizations of the covenant to taking Italy to task? Was collective security extendable to Europe? These were the questions Flandin posed in February and March, and he received discouraging replies. Therefore, as the German threat on the Rhine waxed, French interest in further action against Italy waned. The date for the imposition of the oil sanction was to be determined on March 2. Italians stated that if this embargo was imposed, Italy would leave the League. The reconciliation mode assumes, for successful bargaining, that all players stay in and abide by the rules of the game. Leaving the League would be a decisive turn by Italy away from its western connections. Mussolini warned the French directly that if they joined in the oil sanction, he would denounce the military agreements which, to the French, were now more valuable than ever.²³ Without France, however, even though it was not an oil producing state, the sanctionist front would collapse. Mussolini now, in late February, held out another hope for settlement.

The military situation in Africa had changed since December. Aided by airpower, artillery, and vesicant gas, Badoglio was marching south and Graziani north. In February, Haile Selassie appealed unsuccessfully to the British to take over Ethiopia as a protectorate.²⁴ No one knew how far Italian troops could go before the rains began in May, but Mussolini, in late February, told Chambrun that with an

²² (Cab. 23/82) Cabinet Conclusion 11 (36), 5, of 26 February 1936.

²³ Chambrun to Flandin, 27 February 1936. *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939*, 2e sér., t. I (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1963), pp. 336-7.

²⁴ Cabinet Conclusion 9 (36) of 24 February 1936 (Cab. 23/83), Appendix. The documents are printed in George W. Baer, "Haile Selassie's Protectorate Appeal to King Edward VIII," *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 1969 (Vol. IX, No. 34), pp. 306-12.

Italian offensive imminent, "in six weeks all will be over."²⁵ The argument now made was not how much might satisfy Mussolini but how much of Ethiopia could be saved by a negotiated settlement. Flandin extorted Eden's approval to postpone the decision on oil. France would not support it until another effort at settlement was made, and until the British gave assurances of support concerning the Rhineland.

At this point, in early March, the sanctionist timetable was overtaken by continental events. A new plan of settlement never reached the League, and oil sanctions were never imposed. Within days of the Eden-Flandin postponement, German troops were in the demilitarized zone; no League sanctions followed; there was no British help for France; the French did not act; the Locarno and Stresa fronts buckled. So much for collective security in Europe. In Africa, also within weeks, the emperor's forces were overcome; Haile Selassie fled; in early May, as the rains began to fall, Badoglio entered Addis Ababa and the land became part of the new Italian empire. The sanctions front disintegrated, and international affairs of Europe plunged into disarray.

In 1943, at the time of Mussolini's overthrow, Eden wrote in his diary: "Looking back the thought comes again. Should we not have shown more determination in pressing through with sanctions in 1935 and if we had could we not have called Mussolini's bluff and at least postponed this [second world] war? The answer, I am sure, is yes."²⁶ Perhaps. Stronger action against Italy, stemming from support of Article 16, might well have forced Britain and France into active cooperation into which other sanctionist states would have been drawn. Out of sanctions had come popular and official awareness of the potentialities of the League. Rearmament was now under way. All this might have served to restrain Hitler and resulted in the establishment of some form of effective defensive arrangement for Europe. As it was, the collapse of the leaders of the sanctionist front, their patent irresolution, or apparent inability, discredited the collectivist possibility, above all for the governments of smaller dependent states. The Nordic states, for example, who stayed together under the impress of sanctions so long as Britain was the binding force, now fell apart.²⁷ Disintegration was complete.

This leads to my conclusions. Collective action by the League was a working reality for almost half a year; some four dozen states

²⁵ *Documents diplomatiques français, 1932-1939, 2e sér., t. I, p. 367.*

²⁶ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 311.

²⁷ Nils Ørvik, "From Collective Security to Neutrality. The Nordic Powers, The League of Nations, Britain and the Approach of War, 1935-1939," in K. Bourne and D. C. Watt (eds.), *Studies in International History* (London: Longmans, Green, 1967), pp. 385-401.

participated; large sections of popular opinion throughout the world gave endorsement; this show of muscle impressed the United States and Germany. Within the terms of the Covenant, whether the actions of its adherents came from honor, fear, hope, or diplomatic pressure, the provisions for collective security were being applied, even if only partially. An operational time shorter than envisioned, emphasis on the reconciliation mode, and a technically argued desire to avoid possible military consequences of sanctions weakened but did not destroy this success. Predominant, if not monopolistic, economic, military, and ideological power was arrayed against the aggressor state. The irredeemable failure was that this support was not capitalized upon, was not extended systematically for application against Germany. Such a goal, after all, had been the official rationale for collective action against Italy. When it became clear, in the course of the Ethiopian affair, that the status quo in Europe would not be effectively defended, future possibilities for a collective security system or even for an arrangement other than appeasement to accommodate peaceful change, disappeared. There had been a misinterpretation of circumstances, a failure of leadership in the higher circles of government in Britain and in France. Here is Speer's statement on the lesson Hitler learned: "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 . . . proved themselves weak and indecisive."²⁸

Collective security, then, as a feature of European international affairs was aborted. But if collective action was discredited, conciliation, the forerunner of appeasement, was not. Men explain in the direction of their inclinations, and the lack of success of conciliation was explained by officials as due to the intrusion of unexpected events: the premature and unofficial publication of the August and December proposals, Hoare's resignation, the Rhineland occupation, the success of the Italian army in Ethiopia. They did not discern that the reconciliationist mode was inapplicable because both politically influential pro-League opinion and Italian nationalism held values that were not amenable to instrumentalist reckoning.

One final observation. In his diary in 1943, Eden wrote: "We built Mussolini into a great power."²⁹ This is true. An important consequence of sanctions was that while they were meant to put Mussolini into a mood for conciliation, sanctions were used by the Italian government to intensify militant statism and to consolidate Mussolini's per-

²⁸ Albert Speer, *Inside the Third Reich*, R. and C. Winston, trans. (New York: Macmillan, 1970), p. 72.

²⁹ Eden, *Facing the Dictators*, p. 311.

sonal rule. What was meant to be only instrumental economic pressure to elicit internal protest was transformed by the Italian government into a cause for rapid intensification of integral economic and political nationalism. Far from imposing on the Italian people a desire to reverse their government's policy, sanctions made the Ethiopian war popular. Isolation and condemnation called forth reaction; the occasion to stand up against states hitherto patronizing and now critical of Italy was turned into a rally to the regime. The nationalist response to sanctions was the "safety valve" for the release of accumulated fears, angers, and frustrations.³⁰ But there were somber consequences. For Italians, the period after sanctions brought exaggerated demands for autarchy, increased illiberal state control, foolhardy xenophobia, and, as Mussolini's willful and arrogant policies outstripped prudence, responsibility, and capacity, the Axis and involvement in a futile and hopeless European war.

³⁰ Raffaele Guariglia, *Ricordi, 1922-1946* (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1949), pp. 276-277.